

Bullying: Cross-Cultural Consistency

Bullying is a problem that transcends culture. Although the individual characteristics and dynamics that underlie social value and power may vary across cultures and countries, the abuse of power to distress or control another person is consistently observed.

Key Research Findings

- Students (n = 202,056) from 40 countries participated in the 2005/06 HBSC survey¹. Of these, 21,192 (10.7%) reported bullying others ≥ 2 or 3 times a month, 24,919 (12.6%) reported being victimized ≥ 2 or 3 times a month, and 7,138 (3.6%) reported dual involvement (both bullying others and being victimized.) The following findings emerged from this study:
 - Boys' bullying involvement (i.e., bullying others, being victimized, or dual involvement) ranged from 8.6% in Sweden to 45.2% in Lithuania. This represents a 5-fold difference between these countries. The midpoint prevalence rate for boys' bullying across all 40 countries was 23.4%.
 - Among girls, the prevalence of bullying involvement (i.e., bullying others, being victimized or dual involvement) ranged from 4.8% in Sweden to 35.8% in Lithuania, a 7-fold difference between these countries. The midpoint value across all 40 countries was 15.8%.
 - Seven countries were notable in that boys and girls both reported high prevalence rates of victimization relative to other countries (both genders were in top 10 of 40 countries by rank: Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, Greenland, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine). For bullying, 9 countries were among the top 10 countries for both genders (Latvia, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Greenland, Ukraine, Russia, and Austria).
 - With respect to the lowest reported rates, 8 countries (Hungary, Norway, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Czech Republic, and Wales) were among the bottom 10 countries for both boys and girls.
 - There were no clear patterns in terms of the highest and lowest ranked countries by language or regional geography.
 - Consistent age-related patterns were observed among boys in all countries, with a significant increase in the prevalence of bullying by age, and a significant decline with age in victimization.
 - Age-related patterns were less consistent for girls, although in the majority of countries, victimization decreased with increasing age, and the prevalence of dually involved children (i.e., those who both bully and are victimized) showed no age-related trends.
- Japanese students are more likely to bully others, be victimized, and be dually involved when compared to South African and American students.²
- In India, 31.4% of youth report being bullied, and boys report more bullying than girls.³
- Canadian students are four times more likely to report electronic bullying than students from China.⁴
- Chinese students are more likely to report electronic victimization than Canadian students.⁵

- Across 25 countries, children involved in bullying report greater levels of health problems and lower levels of psychosocial adjustment than children who are not involved.⁶
- Across 25 countries, youth who bully others and youth who are victimized report poorer relationships with classmates than children who are not involved. Both children who bully others and dually involved children report greater alcohol use and weapon carrying.⁷
- In Korea, 40% of students are involved in bullying: 17% bully others and 14% are victimized. More male than female students are involved in bullying.^{8,9}

Key Themes

- The prevalence of bullying varies across countries and cultures, but involvement in bullying and/or victimization is consistently present.
- Male students appear to be at an increased risk for bullying across many cultures.
- Across many countries and cultures, bullying others and being victimized are associated with many negative psychological, social, and physical problems.
- Bullying and victimization represent a global social health problem.

Implications

Education

- Health promotion strategies that teach about bullying prevention are necessary in all countries.

Assessment

- More research is needed to look at commonalities and differences in the development of bullying and victimization across cultures in order to identify how cultural factors may be related to bullying involvement, with a view to learning effective strategies to promote children's healthy relationships.
- International collaboration is required to address this problem.

Prevention and Intervention

- There may be valuable lessons to be learned from prevention and intervention strategies in countries where the reported prevalence is low, which could be adapted for use in countries with higher prevalence.
- Prevention and intervention strategies should be tailored to and evaluated in the cultural group and country in which they are delivered.

Policy

- International comparisons of the prevalence of bullying involvement can be used for benchmarking and national policy decisions.

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- ¹ Currie C. et al., (Eds.) (2008). Inequalities in young people's health: HBSC international report from the 2005/2006 Survey. Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 5. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- ² Dussich, J. P., & Maekoya, C. (2007). Physical child harm and bullying-related behaviors: A comparative study in Japan, South Africa, and the United States. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *51*, 495-509.
- ³ Kshirsagar, V Y. Agarwal, Rajiv. Bavdekar, Sandeep B. (2007). Bullying in schools: prevalence and short-term impact. *Indian Pediatrics*, *44*, 25-28.
- ⁴ Li, Q. (2007a). Bullying in the new playground: Research into cyberbullying and cyber victimization. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, *23*, 435-454.
- ⁵ See note 3 above.
- ⁶ Nansel, T.R. Craig, W., Overpeck, M. D., Saluja, G., Ruan, W. J. & Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Bullying Analyses Working Group. (2004). Cross-national consistency in the relationship between bullying behaviors and psychosocial adjustment. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. *158*, 730-6.
- ⁷ See note 6 above.
- ⁸ Kim, Y. S., Koh, Y., & Leventhal, B. (2005). School bullying and suicidal risk in Korean middle school students. *Pediatrics*, *115*, 357-63.
- ⁹ Kim, Y. S., Koh, Y., & Leventhal, B. L. (2004). Prevalence of school bullying in Korean middle school students. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, *158*, 737-741.