

Bullying: A Human Rights Issue

When children are victimized, whether the perpetrator is an adult or a peer, their rights are being violated. Every human deserves and is entitled to respect and protection from discrimination and harassment. As a vulnerable population within society, children are at an increased risk for victimization and depend on adults to protect them and advocate for their human rights.

Key Research Findings

- Several countries in Europe and many states within the US have instated anti-bullying legislation regarding peer victimization in schools.^{1,2}
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights within the Charter of the United Nations (UN) represents the first modern international statement of human, and more specifically children's rights.³ The document states that, "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."
- Subsequent to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has further defined children's rights⁴:
 - Article 2(2) states that children's rights entitle them to protection from, "all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members."
 - Article 19(1) states that children's rights entitle them to protection from, "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child."

Key Themes

- Given that bullying entails the intent to repeatedly harm or cause distress to another individual, and that the perpetrator possesses tangible or perceived power, it follows that the safety and well-being of the child who is being victimized is threatened in a manner that violates the protections delineated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵
- Adults who care for children have a responsibility to protect children from harm, including peer victimization, and to advocate for their human rights.

Implications

Education

- Education regarding the rights of children and youth can form the foundation of bullying prevention initiatives.
- Education should promote respect for rights and freedoms and understanding of the link between bullying and the rights to be free from discrimination and

“all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.”

Assessment

- Regular assessments of students’ experiences of bullying and victimization provide a critical index of the extent to which their rights are being upheld.

Prevention and Intervention

- Teachers, principals, and school administrators have a responsibility to protect children from discrimination and/or harassment perpetrated by peers.
- They require training in bullying prevention and intervention to be able to uphold their students’ rights to a safe learning environment.

Policy

- National and international policy makers have a moral and ethical obligation to protect children, as they are entitled to such protection based on their human rights.

¹ Greene, M. B. (2006). Bullying in schools: A plea for measure of human rights. *Journal of Social Issues, 62*, 63-79.

² Limber, S. P., & Small, M. A. (2003). State laws and policies to address bullying in schools. *School Psychology Review, 32*, 445-455.

³ See note 1 above.

⁴ United Nations. (1989, November). The convention on the rights of the child UNCRC.

⁵ See note 1 above.