

Gender Differences in Bullying

Despite the popular understanding that “Men are from Mars, and women from Venus”, there are more similarities than differences between boys’ and girls’ experiences of bullying and victimization. Researchers across several countries have investigated gender differences in bullying and victimization and come to similar conclusions.

Key Research Findings

- Boys reports of bullying others, being victimized, or both bullying and victimization ranged from 8.6% in Sweden to 45.2% in Lithuania. Among girls, the prevalence of exposure to any bullying experience ranged from 4.8% in Sweden to 35.8% in Lithuania.¹
- Boys are more likely to bully others than girls. This finding is consistent across grade level, as well as across many countries and cultural groups^{2,3,4}
 - Bullying prevalence rates were higher among boys than girls in 40/40 countries; these differences were observed in each age group in the majority of countries.⁵
 - Boys tend to engage in physical forms of bullying⁶ and sexual harassment more than girls.^{7,8}
 - Girls and boys exhibit similar levels of electronic, verbal, and social bullying.^{9,10}
 - In dating relationships during adolescence, there are no gender differences in the prevalence of physical or social aggression to the partner.¹¹
- Boys and girls tend to experience different forms of victimization
 - Boys tend to report higher levels of physical victimization compared to girls.^{12,13}
 - Girls report being victimized by bullying more than boys in the majority of 40 countries surveyed, but this trend was inconsistent across age.¹⁴
 - Girls are victimized by sexual harassment and emotional aggression more frequently than boys.¹⁵
 - Boys are more likely to be victimized by physical bullying than girls.^{16,17,18}

Key Themes

- Across 40 countries, as well as age groups, boys tend to engage more often in bullying others and are more likely to be physically victimized than girls.
- Girls may be more likely to experience victimization than boys; however, this pattern was not consistent across age groups.

Implications

Education

- Teachers, parents, and students need understanding about the different forms of bullying and their negative impacts on youth.
- Some education may need to be tailored to highlight the specific forms of bullying in which boys and girls are involved.

Assessment

- Bullying assessments should index all forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, social, electronic, etc; see fact sheet on Types of Bullying for more information), to ensure that the presence of bullying and/or victimization is accurately detected for both boys and girls.
- Assessments of bullying problems should include a range of relationships (e.g., peer, romantic).

Prevention and Intervention

- Bullying prevention and intervention strategies should focus on all forms of bullying, and should be gender-sensitive but also inclusive, recognizing that specific experiences are not limited to only one gender (e.g., boys also experience sexual harassment and girls also engage in physical bullying).
- Bullying prevention and intervention strategies need to be developmentally relevant with coverage of sexual harassment and dating aggression as boys and girls approach puberty.

Policy

- All forms of bullying need to be specifically identified within the school policy with clearly articulated prevention and intervention strategies.
- Roles and responsibilities for boys and girls, as well as for all adults in the school community, should be similar with expectations for respectful relationships.

¹ Currie, C. et al., eds. Inequalities in young people's health: HBSC international report from the 2005/2006 Survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2008 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 5).

² Gruber, J. E., & Fineran, S. (2007). The impact of bullying and sexual harassment on middle and high school girls. *Violence Against Women, 13*(6), 627-643.

³ Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. E. (2006). Bullying and the gifted: Victims, perpetrators, prevalence, and effects. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(2), 148-168.

⁴ Scheithauer, H., Hayer, T., Petermann, F., & Jugert, G. (2006). Physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying among German students: Age trends, gender differences, and correlates. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*(3), 261-275.

⁵ See note 1 above.

⁶ Williams, K. R., & Guerra, N. G. (2007). Prevalence and predictors of internet bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*, S14-S21.

⁷ DeSouza, E. R., & Ribeiro, J. (2005). Bullying and sexual harassment among Brazilian high school students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 20*(9), 1018-1038.

⁸ Pepler, D. J., Craig, W. M., Connolly, J. A., Yuile, A., McMaster, L., & Jiang, D. (2006). A developmental perspective on bullying. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*(4), 376-384.

⁹ See note 4 above.

¹⁰ Woods, S., & White, E. (2005). The association between bullying behaviour, arousal levels and behaviour problems. *Journal of Adolescence, 28*(1), 381-395.

¹¹ See note 6 above.

¹² Delfabbro, P., Winefield, T., Trainor, S., Dollard, M., Anderson, S., Metzger, J., & Hammarstrom, A. (2006). Peer and teacher bullying/victimization of South Australian secondary school students: prevalence and psychosocial profiles. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 76*(1), 71-90.

¹³ See note 3 above.

¹⁴ See note 1 above.

¹⁵ Dao, T. K., Kerbs, J. J., Rollin, S. A., Potts, I., Gutierrez, R., & Choi, K. et al. (2006). The association between bullying dynamics and psychological distress. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 39*(2), 277-282.

¹⁶ See note 4 above.

¹⁷ See note 10 above.

¹⁸ See note 3 above.