

How bullying affects a child's emotional well-being.

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time and may have serious, lasting problems (Gov.uk). Bullying takes many forms, including verbal, physical, and cyberbullying and Laith & Vaillancourt, T., (2022) state that bullying is recognised as a significant problem that negatively impacts school-aged children worldwide. The Anti-Bullying Alliance (2023) state that children who are bullied in school are more likely to develop long-term emotional difficulties. In a case from a local Welsh School, a 12-year-old boy was hospitalised after being punched in the head. The boy was a victim of persistent bullying. He was targeted with verbal and physical abuse and excluded from peer activities. The boy's mother said he also had his shoes stolen from him before being headbutted among other cruel taunts and just didn't feel safe in school. The mum had to withdraw the boy from school despite having nowhere else to go. (Wales Online, 2024). In another case in a Welsh school a 14-year-old boy was found hanged at his school after what his father claims was "horrific" bullying. In an inquest his father stated that his son had become withdrawn and was easy to wind up and he had to leave one school after his clothes were thrown around the grounds by older pupils and other incidents of alleged bullying. The father also added that his son's mobile phone had been stolen and smashed in school (Wales Online, 2024).

Graham & Juvonen (1998) state that being a target of bullying has been found to be linked to loneliness, anxiety, low self-worth. Van Geel *et al* (2018) have also found that children who are bullied by their peers may have a negative attitude toward school. Kearney (2008) states that children who are frequently absent from school are at risk of dropping out of school leading to poor outcomes later in life.

Reflecting on these two boys experiences, It is so upsetting and deeply concerning that bullying is still happening in schools and leading to such devastating consequences. It is clear that bullying can have major consequences on a child's confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Kowalski & Limber (2012) suggest that many children who are bullied feel isolated, fearful, and powerless.

Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory explains how children in the latency stage (ages 6-12) need to develop a sense of industry versus inferiority and that when children experience repeated bullying, they may struggle to develop competence, leading to feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs highlights the importance of belongingness and love. A child who is bullied may struggle to form meaningful social connections, leaving their psychological and emotional needs unmet, which can further impact their self-esteem and overall well-being (McLeod, 2024).

The cases of the boys being bullied and not being able to access education in a safe and supportive environment also goes against Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) protecting the right to education, stating that no person shall be denied the right to an education (Fredman, 2021).

Bullying may have a wide range of effects on a child's mental health. Shyness and lack of confidence are social factors that may make children more susceptible to bullying, and repeated victimisation can exacerbate these tendencies (Lund *et al.*, 2010). Smith *et al* (2020) found that children who are bullied can struggle to build stable relationships in childhood also struggle later on in life. Furthermore, bullying victims frequently experience mental health difficulties such as stress and sadness. Stapinski *et al.*, (2014) found that children who were bullied were more likely to acquire persistent anxiety problems later in life. Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory explains how bullying conduct is reinforced. Children learn behaviours by observation and imitation; if they see bullying rewarded with social dominance or peer approval, they may internalise it as an effective way to interact with others. Bullying victims, on the other hand, may develop learned helplessness, believing they have no control over their condition, which exacerbates their emotional distress (Seligman, 1972).

Bullying has long-term effects on mental health. Gibb *et al* (2011) in their study found that victims of bullying had an increased risk for mental health issues and anxiety disorders in adult years. Beduna and Perrone (2019) in their study found that many people who were bullied as children also struggled with emotional regulation in adulthood, which Wolke & Lereya, (2015) claim leads to issues with future relations and even employment prospects.

The Welsh Government has established the "Rights, Respect, Equality" guidance, which provides schools and local authorities with comprehensive strategies to address and prevent bullying. This guidance emphasises the importance of creating a respectful and inclusive school environment.

The "Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being" framework also encourages schools to evaluate and enhance their emotional and mental well-being culture. This approach involves self-assessment and the development of action plans to promote a supportive atmosphere for both students and staff (PHW.NHS.Wales, 2024).

Schools have responsibilities in preventing bullying and according to research, preventative approaches like emotional intelligence training and inclusive activities can help to mitigate the long-term impacts of bullying (Ouyanget et al 2022). It suggests that youngsters build confidence and strong social bonds with the encouragement of team sports, peer support programs, and empathy training. The Early Intervention Foundation report published in 2021 also emphasises the effectiveness of school-based bullying prevention programs. It found that implementing a whole-school strategy that prioritises social and emotional skills can significantly reduce bullying and its long-term effects. It does however insist that teachers

need to have the right training to be able to deliver these programs. Effective preventative strategies include better anti-bullying policies in schools, implementing zero-tolerance standards, and teaching educators on how to deal with bullying. (Casebourne, 2021)

Upon reflection, it is clear that bullying has a huge effect on a child's emotional health and can result in long-term social and psychological challenges. The theories of Bandura, Maslow, and Erikson all emphasise the significance of emotional stability, social belonging, and learnt behaviour in understanding the long-term effects of bullying. Teachers must receive the necessary training in order to effectively confront bullying, foster resilience, and encourage healthy coping mechanisms in the classroom.

It is surprising that youth bullying is not more widely recognized as a serious public health concern given the well-established detrimental impacts of bullying and the fact that by the time they are eighteen, children will have spent a lot more time with their peers than with their parents.

As bullying in schools can mean children refusing or skipping school, it is important that all professionals take responsibility and measures to address this issue in order to reduce mental and physical health problems and stop self-harm.

There are several strategies that schools could use to lessen the impact of bullying. Firstly, teachers should receive training on how to spot bullying behaviour's and provide victims with the support they require (Rigby, 2020). Schools could also use emotional resilience programs like peer mentoring and mindfulness training to help pupils acquire coping skills. Pupils could be encouraged to participate in team sports to reduce feelings of isolation. Bullies can be deterred by establishing clear anti-bullying policies with a zero-tolerance stance. By creating a welcoming and supportive environment, schools may help children who are bullied develop the resilience they need to overcome challenges and lead healthier, more confident lives. References

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