Bullying others among schoolchildren in Ireland

Priscilla Doyle, Aoife Gavin and the HBSC Ireland Team, Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway.

**Summary**

HBSC Ireland has found that 22% of schoolchildren in Ireland report having bullied others at school (29.4% of boys and 14.3% of girls). This figure has remained relatively stable since 2002 (20.2%). The percentage of boys that have bullied others is highest among 15-17 year olds (32.1%). The percentage of girls bullying others is highest among 12-14 year olds (15.4%). Children who have bullied others are less likely to: find it easy to talk to their parents or best friend, live with both parents, like school, report excellent health or feel happy about their lives. They are more likely to spend four or more evenings out with friends and feel pressured by schoolwork than those who do not report bullying others. Bullying others in this factsheet refers to children who have reported taking part in bullying another student(s) at school once or more in the past couple of months.

**Why this topic?**

Bullying is viewed as a problem in Irish schools and includes such behaviours as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, exclusion and extortion. A large proportion of bullying is thought to be conducted by ‘popular’ group leaders who feel good about themselves and who bully others to maintain social dominance over their peers. It is not uncommon to find that these students have also been bullied.

**Trends 2002-2006**

Overall the percentage of children who report having bullied others has remained stable between 2002 (20.2%) and 2006 (22%). Bullying others is more common in boys (29.4%) than girls (14.3%). There has been a slight increase over time in the number of 15-17 year olds who report bullying others (20.4% to 23.1%).

Children who have bullied others are less likely to:

- find it easy to talk to their mother (74.8% vs. 82.1%), father (56.8% vs. 65.8%) and best friend (84.1% vs. 88.7%) than those who have not.
- live with both parents (77% vs. 81.5%).
- like school (57.3% vs. 71%).
- feel pressured by schoolwork (45.1% vs. 39.7%) and spend more than four evenings per week with friends (48.2% vs. 40.4%) than those who have not.
- report excellent health (28.2% vs. 34.6%) and feeling happy about their lives (40.3% vs. 52%) than those who have not.
- have bullied others are more likely to feel pressured by schoolwork (45.1% vs. 39.7%) and spend more than four evenings per week with friends (48.2% vs. 40.4%) than those who have not.
- have bullied others are less likely to report excellent health (28.2% vs. 34.6%) and feeling happy about their lives (40.3% vs. 52%) than those who have not.
- bullying others is not associated with social class.
Bullying others among schoolchildren in Ireland

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 28th among 39 countries in Europe and North America, with 25% reporting having bullied others. Overall 17% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 34th) and 23% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 34th) report having bullied others once or more in the past couple of months.

Implications

The percentage of young people in Ireland that report having bullied others has remained relatively stable since 2002. This figure is relatively low in comparison to other European and North American countries. These data suggest that strong family relationships are associated with lower prevalence of bullying, while strong peer relationships may be related to such behaviour. Furthermore those who bully others appear to be more susceptible to feeling pressured by schoolwork, lower levels of feeling happy with life, and poor subjective health. Future attention needs to focus on researching the motivations of those who bully and what initiates bullying.

References


This factsheet was prepared by Priscilla Doyle, Aoife Gavin, Siobhan O’Higgins, Graham Brennan, Pauline Clerkin, Aingeal de Róiste, Colette Kelly, Michal Molcho, Brenda Murphy, Larri Walker and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn.