

## The Impact of Bullying on a Child's Development: A Gender Based Analysis

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**Annotation:** It probably comes as no surprise, but bullying has been linked to an enormous amount of developmental issues in children – both in those who have been bullied and those who have bullied others. In fact, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), bullying has a lifelong impact on the social and emotional development of children that puts them at risk for everything from severe mental health issues to stunted professional growth later in life.

According to the NICHD, children who are involved in bullying experiences (on either side of the situation) are at an increased risk of developing issues such as:

- Depression and anxiety
- Low self-esteem and personal drive
- Trouble focusing and falling grades
- Behavioral problems
- Social and relationship issues
- Substance abuse later in life
- Self-harming behaviors

Bullying can also affect other children who witness the acts – even if they aren't directly involved – by leaving them feeling insecure in their environments and fearing they could be next. The long-term effects of bullying go well beyond the initial instances and the people at the center of it and can often stay with a person for the remainder of their life. Since bullying can essentially destroy a child's self-esteem, it can manifest itself in ways that will jeopardize future opportunities for years to come.

**Keywords:** bullying, child, gender, analysis, human, development, social, growth, mental, self-esteem, insecure.

### Introduction

As explained by ViolencePreventionWorks.org, “Nearly one in five students in an average classroom is experiencing bullying in some way,” but the effects are not limited to those involved directly. While it may seem obvious that those who are bullied have a higher risk of developing developmental issues, what's less obvious is that bullying also affects the on-lookers.

Bullying brings negative affects to everyone who witnesses the act by way of creating what feels like an unsafe environment. It can make children feel as though they are helpless, planting a deep seed of insecurity and disdain for their classroom (and classmates) as a whole. Bullying also makes kids feel as though they can't be protected by those they trust (teachers, aides, parents, etc.) which can lead to withdrawal and a failure to thrive.

Often times it is this withdrawal that is the first and most obvious sign that bullying is taking place, apart from actually seeing the incident in person. Over time, if bullying continues, those who witness it will likely begin to show other signs such as attention issues, fear of participating in normal activities, and acting out or other behavioral problems such as vandalism or destroying toys or objects.

The effects of bullying are so debilitating, in fact, that researchers have linked it to a lower rate of success and quality of life decades later. According to Psychology Today, the low self-esteem and attention issues of youths who had been bullied translated to lower incomes and a greater risk for becoming involved in criminal acts as adults.

Research showed that individuals who had been “involved in bullying had poorer educational attainment and less income than adults who had not been involved in bullying,” the Psychology Today report explained. Not only do children involved in bullying suffer from mental and behavioral issues throughout childhood, but the research shows it deeply affects their cognitive and emotional development in ways that long outlast the actual incident.

Thankfully, bullying prevention has been put in the spotlight in recent years and has gained momentum in educational facilities across the country. Many schools and childcare providers now implement some variation of an anti-bullying policy, which has had a major impact on developing minds everywhere.

Most anti-bullying policies include tips such as keeping a watchful eye, utilizing activities that encourage kids to speak up about their experiences, and keeping an open line of communication with youngsters to ensure they are comfortable with sharing any unwanted behaviors by others. If you’re in need of some tips on implementing an anti-bullying policy in your facility, check out the US Department of Health and Human Services website, [StopBullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov) for more information.

Being bullied is both heartbreaking and miserable for those targeted. But many adults, unless they too have been bullied, have a hard time understanding just how much kids can suffer. They fail to realize that the consequences of bullying are significant and can have a lasting impact.

This lack of understanding is often called the “empathy gap.”<sup>1</sup> Working to close this empathy gap is one of the best ways to improve bullying policies and prevent bullying.

In fact, efforts to advocate on behalf of victims will not be effective unless people truly comprehend how painful and traumatic bullying can be. Here is an overview of the effects of bullying and how victims can recover.

Kids who are regularly targeted by bullies often suffer both emotionally and socially. Not only do they find it hard to make friends, but they also struggle to maintain healthy friendships.

Part of this struggle is directly related to low self-esteem. A lack of self-esteem is a direct result of the mean and hurtful things that other kids say about them. When kids are continually called “fat” or “losers,” they begin to believe these things are true.

Bullying victims also tend to experience a wide range of emotions. They may feel angry, bitter, vulnerable, helpless, frustrated, lonely, and isolated from their peers. Consequently, they may skip classes and resort to drugs and alcohol to numb their pain. And if bullying is on-going, they may develop depression and even contemplate suicide.

There’s no single cause of depression, according to research. Brain chemistry, hormones, genetics, life experiences and physical health can all play a role.

If no intervention takes place, eventually kids can develop what is known as “learned helplessness.” Learned helplessness means that the targets of bullying believe that they cannot do anything to change the situation. As a result, they stop trying. Then, the cycle down into depression becomes more severe. This leads to a feeling of hopelessness and the belief that there is no way out. As bullied kids grow into adults, they may continue to struggle with self-esteem, have difficulty developing and maintaining relationships, and avoid social interactions. They also may have a hard time trusting people, which can impact their personal relationships and their work relationships. Aside from the bumps and bruises that occur during physical bullying, there are additional physical costs. For instance, bullied kids often experience anxiety. This stress on their bodies also will result in a variety of

health issues, including being sick more often and suffering from ulcers and other conditions caused by persistent anxiety. Bullying affects the emotional, social, physical development of children in various ways. Bullied children have high emotions because of their high vulnerability and low resilience to misfortunes. They often lack quality friendships at school because they lack trust in people and fear being victimized because of their imperfections. Play and social interaction have a crucial role in the way a child develops physically.

The investigations of bullying have been of the characterization of the processes involved and the intervention roles developed by different actors (students and teachers, for example). These studies are justified by the increased prevalence of occurrences of the phenomenon in schools and the impact they have on the lives and health of children and teens. Specifically, on the prevalence of bullying in the locale studied, a study conducted in northern Portugal with a sample of 360 public school students (53.3% boys and 46.7% girls, with an average age of 12.36 years) identified an average rate of involvement in bullying situations in schools at 27.5% of students. Another study, conducted in the north and south of the country with 4,092 students, aged between 10 and 16 years (53.1% boys and 46.9% girls), verified that in the north the rate of students who reported having bullied other students was 21.6% and 15.4 had intimidated their fellow students. In the South, 19.3% reported being bullied and 16.0 practiced bullying. These high rates of the occurrence of bullying in children's and teens' lives can contribute to the development of physical and emotional problems, particularly stress and a risk of decreased self-esteem. They can also develop anxiety and depression, feel unhappy and, in more severe cases, even develop suicidal ideas

### Discussion

Additionally, bullied kids may skip school or classes in order to avoid being bullied. This practice also can result in falling grades. And when grades begin to drop this adds to the stress levels the bullied child is already experiencing.

Table 1. Percentage of children who reported being bullied according to gender.

Group	Boys		Girls		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Were not victims	83	45.1	118	60.8	201	53.2
Were bullied 1 or 2 times	45	24.5	41	21.1	86	22.8
Three or 4 times	19	10.3	19	9.8	38	10.1
Five or more times	37	20.1	16	8.2	53	14.0
Total	184	100.0	194	100.0	378	100.0

One of the main challenges faced by learning institutions and students across the world is bullying. Bullying refers to the act of physically, verbally, or emotionally, intimidating a weaker person to make them do something. Examples of acts that qualify as bullying include mockery, cruelty, intentional frightening, annoying thumping, pinching, and intentional exclusion, among others (Smith & Hart, 2010). Bullying is deep-rooted in schools, and experts argue that there is an urgent need to develop effective strategies for eliminating it.

Studies have shown that the vice is evenly spread among boys and girls, although the latter applies indirect methods compared to the former. While boys use more physical means to bully their victims, girls use verbal and emotionally oriented means that include spreading rumors. Psychologists argue that bullying has numerous negative impacts on schools and students because it creates an unsuitable environment for education and child development (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

Table 2. Percentage of children who reported being bullied or bullying others according to gender.

	Boys		Girls		Total		Chi-Square	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Being bullied							9.37	0.002
no	83	45.1	118	60.8	201	53.2		
yes	101	54.9	76	39.2	177	46.8		
Bullying others							9.84	0.002
no	100	54.6	137	70.3	237	62.7		
yes	83	45.4	58	29.7	141	37.3		

Research shows that bullying affects three sets of individuals in schools. First, there are those children who are bullied. This category of victims suffers the most serious effects that include physical, emotional, and mental abuse. Second, there are the children who bully others. The effects suffered by this category start showing in adulthood when the individuals involved start recalling their unethical acts (Smith & Hart, 2010).

Third, some people witness cases of bullying. Psychologists say that children in this category can start showing the effects of bullying immediately after witnessing the first incident. They also argue that bullying affects child development, with the consequences spreading through a certain part of their adult life (Smith & Hart, 2010).

Research shows that bullying involves the application of both direct and indirect means of intimidation. Intimidation acts repeatedly occur, leading to victims suffering serious physical and emotional scars (Georgiou, 2008). School administrators have for several years, unsuccessfully tried to reduce the growth rate of bullying among children.

Reports indicate that close to a third of children in schools get involved in bullying as victims, witnesses, or violators. The reports also indicate that cases of direct bullying are more compared to indirect bullying, as boys become more physical as they progress through various levels of education (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

The boys reach a point in life when they stop bullying others because the effects of their actions during the formative years are too costly to deal with. A big percentage of students who are bullied in schools are boys. The extent and causative factors of bullying are not very clear, as the two elements continue to dominate studies in contemporary society.

Psychologists have identified factors such as the location of schools, size, cultural diversity, and racial composition to contribute towards the high rate of bullying in the United States (Georgiou, 2008). They also argue that bullies are often insecure people who find happiness and satisfaction in making people weaker than them to suffer.

Table 3. Percentage of children who were being bullied, bullied others or both.

Group	Boys		Girls		Total	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
Neither being bullied nor bullying others	112	62.2%	151	77.8%	267	70.6%
Being bullied	38	21.1%	32	16.5%	70	18.5%
Bullying others	14	7.8%	8	4.1%	22	5.8%

Group	Boys		Girls		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Being bullied and bullying others	16	8.9%	3	1.5%	19	5.0%
Total	180	100%	194	100%	378	100%

A study conducted by the University of Virginia showed that kids who attend a school with a severe climate of bullying often have lower scores on standardized tests. Bullying even impacts students who witness it. For instance, kids scored lower on standardized tests in schools with a lot of bullying than kids in schools with effective anti-bullying programs. One possible reason for the lower scores in schools with pervasive bullying is that students are often less engaged in the learning process because they are too distracted by or worried about the bullying.

Additionally, teachers may be less effective because they must spend so much time focused on classroom management and discipline instead of teaching. The good news is with proper support and intervention, most kids targeted by bullies will overcome bullying and things will get back to normal. But left unchecked, bullying can cause the victim to pay a high cost in long-term consequences. When a child is bullied, it is not uncommon for the parents and siblings to also be affected. Parents often experience a wide range of consequences including feeling powerless to fix the situation. They also may feel alone and isolated. And they may even become obsessed with the situation often at the expense of their own health and wellbeing.

The truth is that no one can predict who bullies will target. Parents can do everything right and still find out that their child is being bullied. As a result, they should never feel responsible for the choices a bully makes. Instead, they should place the blame where it belongs and focus on helping their child heal from bullying.

Research shows that the effects of bullying last well into adulthood. In fact, one study found that the consequences of being bullied by peers may have a greater impact on mental health in adulthood than originally thought. What's more, the impact may be even more significant than being mistreated by adults.

Remember, the experiences that people have while they are children help mold them into the adults that they later become. So it is not surprising that the effects of bullying linger well into adulthood. This then helps to influence their future mindset, including how they view themselves and others.

When a child is bullied, the road to recovery may be more challenging than you might originally think. In fact, the effects of bullying can stick around long after the bullying has ended.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, if bullying is not addressed right away, then it can cause problems for your child later in life.

In order for your child to heal from bullying, there are several important steps you must take. These include not only changing the way your children think about the situation, but also how they view themselves after being bullied.

You want to be sure your child does not allow the bullying they experienced to define them. Instead, they should focus on what they learned and what their future goals are. To start, your child needs to acknowledge what happened to them but not focus on it. Instead, they should be focused on taking care of themselves and growing as a person.

It's also important to help your child find closure for the situation. And as counterintuitive as it sounds, forgiving the bully goes a long way in freeing your child from the pain of the experience. Remind them that revenge will not make them feel better. Instead, they should let go of what happened to them and focus on the things they can control in their life.

Having a counselor help your child with the recovery process may speed things along. Talk to your child's pediatrician for suggestions about who to contact in your area.

When a child is bullied, they can experience a psychological impact that does not go away simply because the person grows up.<sup>6</sup> If you were bullied as a child and are still experiencing the side effects, the first step toward recovery from childhood bullying is acknowledging what happened to you.

Do not dismiss what happened to you or minimize the severity. Be truthful with yourself about the pain you experienced.

You also need to make healing a priority. Take time to take care of yourself and consider talking with a counselor about your experience. A counselor can help you make sense of your feelings and move past the negative experience of bullying. He also can help you reframe your thinking and reclaim control over your life.

While it may be painful to think about the bullying you experienced as a kid, if it is still impacting your everyday life and the way you view yourself, then it is best to face the issue head-on. Once you have come to terms with what you experienced and changed the way you view yourself and others, you will be on your way to recovery.

It may take some time. So be patient with yourself. With a little hard work, though, you will be well on your way to a healthier way of thinking.

## Results

Bullying in childhood is a major public health problem that increases the risk of poor health, social and educational outcomes in childhood and adolescence. These consequences are felt by all those involved in bullying (bullies, victims and bully–victims) and are now recognised to propagate deep into adulthood. Cyberbullying is a relatively new type of bullying in addition to the traditional forms of direct physical, direct verbal and indirect bullying. Children who are perceived as being ‘different’ in any way are at greater risk of victimisation, with physical appearance being the most frequent trigger of childhood bullying. Globally, one in three children have been bullied in the past 30 days, although there is substantial regional variation in the prevalence and type of bullying experienced. The consequences of childhood bullying can be categorised into three broad categories: educational consequences during childhood, health consequences during childhood and all consequences during adulthood. Many dose–response relationships exist between the frequency and intensity of bullying experienced and the severity of negative health consequence reported. The majority of victims of cyberbullying are also victims of traditional bullying, meaning cyberbullying creates very few additional victims. Overall, adverse mental health outcomes due to bullying in childhood most severely impact on bully–victims. Bullying prevention is vital for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with whole-school cooperative learning interventions having the strongest evidence base for successful outcomes. Clear management and referral pathways for health professionals dealing with childhood bullying are lacking in both primary and secondary care, although specialist services are available locally and online.

Bullying affects young people in many ways. It can impact on their self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, education, and life outside of school. Young people experiencing bullying may feel that they aren't worth help or that nobody likes them. They may feel self-conscious or embarrassed lots of the time. They may also feel scared, sad, or overwhelmed, and find it difficult to sleep or eat. Many young people who have been bullied find it hard to ever feel safe or confident in anything they do, leading them to isolate themselves from others and to give up the things they enjoy doing.

Being bullied has a detrimental impact on how children and young people see themselves and can cause scars that stay with them throughout life. It can also lead to very poor outcomes in other areas of their life. It can have a massive impact on mental health, both now and in the future. In fact, research has shown that if you're bullied as a child or teenager, you might be twice as likely to use mental health services as an adult.

If your child is struggling, they may feel unable to attend school and this can cause many issues. It is crucial to speak to the school straight away to get some support in place. It doesn't matter if you're being bullied at school, at home or online, bullying can mess with your head.

When you're being bullied, it can make you feel constantly insecure and you may feel on edge all the time. Children and young people may feel unaccepted, isolated, angry, and withdrawn. They may be thinking of ways of how to make themselves invisible so the bully doesn't notice them. They may also miss out on opportunities of friendships or social engagements because of the pressure they are under.

Bullying can and does affect children and young people physically. They may have little or no appetite, have issues with their sleep and feel constantly stressed out which can have an impact on their health. It is important to speak to your GP if you are worried so a support plan can be put in place to help them.

Helping our children build resilience and confidence is one of the most important gifts we can give them. We all understand how life can bring you many challenges throughout and how important it is on how we manage this. Resilience is being able to manage stress, challenges, trauma or adversity that life brings and bounce back from it. When children and teens are resilient, they are going to be more confident, curious and adaptable to the world around them.

Bullying has three elements: it is an act is aggressive and intended to do harm; these are repeated over time; and, they occurs within the context of power imbalance. In other words, it is a series of acts intended to hurt another child, committed by a child to gain or to assert greater power over another child. The definition is important because it distinguishes bullying from rough and tumble play and other aspects of young children's developing social skills. This article explores the difference between rough and tumble play and fighting, for example. Bullying can be physically aggressive, but can also be verbal (name calling), or social (social exclusion) in nature. Researchers who study bullying use specific terms to describe the roles children tend to fill in social settings. The bully/aggressor is the dominant child acting against one or more other children. The victim is the clear target of the bullying, and the bully-victim tends to of fill both roles at different times, with different peers. Of course, there are some children not involved in bullying at all, and some how are not directly involved in the bullying act (children who comfort a victim after an act, for example).

Studies that quantify how many children are bullies, victims, or bullying victims are rare. Data from one study of children's experience with violence showed that 20.4% of children ages 2-5 had experienced physical bullying in their lifetime and 14.6% had been teased (verbally bullied). Vlachou's paper provides some estimates suggesting that bullying is more common among young children than school aged children. They report one study of 4-year-olds showing 25% of children as bullies and 22% as victims, and 2% as victim/bully. In other words, just about half of children studied were involved in bullying – as aggressor or victim. By contrast, data for older school-age children, show 7-15% as bullies, 10% as victims and up to 10% as bully-victims. The limited data also suggest that the roles children assume in preschool are less stable than they are among older children – so a child who is a bully today may be a bully-victim or victim later in the year.

While the prevalence data show more bullying occurring among younger children, the data also show less bullying, overall, as children grow older. This general decline in bullying occurs even while the nature of bullying changes from more overt, physically aggressive behaviors to other forms of bullying, such as verbal attacks and social exclusion, both of which become more common as children grow older. The limited data that exist also suggest, though, that even as young as 4-years, there are sex differences in the nature of bullying, with boys more likely than girls to use physical aggression in their bullying.

While early research suggested a "type" of child who was a bully and who was a victim, recent research suggests much more diversity in the social and emotional experiences of bullies and victims of bullies. This diversity is

only beginning to be teased apart for older children, and not yet undertaken among younger children. One finding that emerges in studies of bullying among preschool-aged children is that bullies tend to be well embedded in social networks (that is, they have many friends), though they also tend to associate with other bullies. There is an interesting gender difference – girls who are bullies are more likely to be socially isolated. It seems like bullying is more acceptable for boys than it is for girls. By contrast, victims of bullies tend to have fewer reciprocal friends in the social group. Whether victims' social isolation is the result of bullying or a contribution to it is unclear – having few friends makes children vulnerable to a bully, but bullies tend to enjoy higher status among their peers than do victims.

It may not be surprising that bullying activity occurs in some parts of the child's setting but not others. Research shows that aggression is more common in areas that include activity spaces (e.g., block corner, water table) and playgrounds. Aggressiveness is also more common in spaces that are open and less clearly defined, possibly because the expectations for children activity is less defined.

The general consensus among researchers is that bullying is in part driven by children's developing social skills and behavior and emotion regulation skills. These skills are very fluid among young children, with the result being a range of challenging behaviors, which may include bullying. As children build social and regulatory skills, challenging behaviors and bullying tend to decline. This research paper examined predictors of bullying or being victimized by bullying. The broadest finding is that children who bully, and children who tend to be victims, score on the extremes using measures of behavior problems. Bullies score extreme on externally – acting outwardly in extreme ways, while victims score high on internalizing, such as withdrawal and passivity. Bully-victims score high on both. In short – all have poor social and behavioral skills. So programs that focus on building children's social skills are often considered to be one broad bullying prevention measure.

Research shows that bullying in schools involves children as young as seven years old. This is usually the formative stage in a child's growth and development when they start developing social skills, experience physical growth, and emotional development (Harris, 2009). Experts argue that one of the most problems that people struggle dealing with is the effects of bullying. The reason for this is that technological advancements have allowed bullies to extend their acts beyond school environments.

In contemporary society, bullying happens over the internet, especially through social media. The group that has the most trouble managing the effects of this vice is children. Children affected by bullying experience difficulties in having normal childhood experiences because of emotional and physical scars (Harris, 2009).

Psychologists argue that bullies often target children who appear weak and different. For example, in the United States, bullies target children based on their ethnic background, social groups, sexual orientation, disabilities, and economic class (Smith & Hart, 2010). Bullying affects the emotional, social, physical development of children in various ways.

Emotionally, bullying affects children by causing stress-related disorders such as anxiety and depression. Children often develop a relatively permanent state of worry and nervousness occurring in a variety of mental disorders (Georgiou, 2008). Anxiety is often accompanied by compulsive behavior or panic attacks. Psychologists say that bullying makes children to experience a vague and unpleasant emotion because they always anticipate a misfortune.

## Conclusions

Children also go through a mental state characterized by a pessimistic sense of inadequacy and a despondent lack of activity (Georgiou, 2008). Use of social media makes it hard for children to get a break from bullies because they will extend their acts through social networking sites.



Bullying also affects the ability of children to concentrate in school because they are always on the lookout for the bullies. Children develop emotional issues relating to their safety, with some even contemplating committing suicide (Harris, 2009). These children have high emotions because of their high vulnerability and low resilience to misfortunes.

Bullying also affects social development in children. Social challenges in bullied children have a close relation to the emotional experiences they go through. Bullies instill fear in their victims and make them feel undesirable (Griffiths, Wolke & Harwood, 2006). First, the children lose their connection to school because they have bad memories from their hostile environment. The children begin to withdraw from various social groups for fear of meeting with bullies (Harris, 2009).

Children who are bullied often lack quality friendships at school because they lack trust in people and fear being victimized because of their imperfections. The social challenges can develop out of emotional effects such as depression and anxiety, as the children can feel lonely.

Feelings of loneliness make the children isolate themselves from others and avoid engaging in conflicts because they fear they are likely to feel less accepted by others. Bullying affects the ability of children to acquire and develop social skills because they are always anxious, restless, isolated, and highly suspicious of others (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

Psychologists also argue that bullying influences a lot on a child's physical development. According to experts on child development, play, and social interaction have a crucial role in the way a child develops physically (Smith & Hart, 2010). One of the main effects of bullying on children is the development of conditions such as depression. Depression generally affects the ability of children to have normal physical development because children lose interest in any form of activities.

The lack of interest in physical activity often develops when the bullied children begin to withdraw themselves socially (Griffiths et al., 2006). This means that even opportunities for playing pass them when they are in isolation.

Physical activity plays a crucial role in mental development. It helps to relieve stress and expand the mental capacity of an individual. Children who lose their opportunity to play often end up being depressed and experience a lot of trauma. Children also avoid engaging in physical activities for fear of being targeted by bullies (Griffiths et al., 2006).

Bullying is one of the many school vices that have negative effects on the growth and development of children. This vice affects the ability of children to have normal social, emotional, and physical growth. Bullying involves three categories of individuals, namely the bullies, the victims, and the witnesses. All three categories suffer their unique effects from getting involved in bullying. Some of the common effects of bullying on children include lack of friends due to social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, trauma, and poor academic performance.

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