

Girls twice as likely as boys to remain victims of bullying

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Girls targeted by bullies at primary school are two and a half times more likely to remain victims than boys, according to research from the University of Warwick and University of Hertfordshire.

Researchers found girls being directly victimised by bullies (being beaten and suffering physical or verbal threats) at six years old were significantly more likely to still be a direct victim at age ten.

The study also revealed that the nature of bullying changes as children grow older, from direct victimisation (physical bullying and threats) to relational victimisation (spreading of malicious gossip or the withdrawal of friendships leading to social exclusion).

The research team, led by the University of Warwick Professor of Developmental Psychology Dieter Wolke, interviewed 663 children aged 6-9 about their bullying experiences. They also examined the peer hierarchies amongst the children by asking them to nominate the three children they liked most in their class. A follow-up questionnaire was then issued when the children were aged 10-11.

The study also revealed interesting information about the affect of bullying on the 171 children who dropped out of the study because they had actually moved schools. Professor Wolke examined the data collected for all the original participants in the study and found that those who moved schools were actually 9% more likely to have been victims of relational bullying. Professor Wolke noted that these children

had significantly fewer friends and were in more hierarchically-organised classes.

Professor Wolke said: "These findings indicate that even at an early age some victims of bullying remain victims over a long period of time. The development and implementation of intervention programmes that help victims to escape further victimization in primary school are called for."

He added that the findings suggested school professionals, health practitioners and parents should be aware of children showing signs of both physical and emotional health problems, as these appeared to be important risk factors for becoming and remaining a victim.

Source: University of Warwick

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