

# Teens' take on bullying

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Both the bully and the victim's individual characteristics, rather than the wider social environment, explain why bullying occurs, according to Swedish teenagers. The new study, by Dr. Robert Thornberg and Sven Knutsen from Linköping University in Sweden, also shows that 42 percent of teenagers blamed the victim for the bullying. The study is published online in Springer's journal, *Child & Youth Care Forum*.

In one of the rare studies investigating young people's views on why [bullying](#) takes place in school, Thornberg and Knutsen explored how [teenagers](#) explain bullying to better understand their actions as participants or bystanders in bullying situations. The authors also looked at whether teenagers attribute bullying to the characteristics of the individuals involved rather than to society in general, whether there are any differences in explanations depending on their own previous bullying experiences, as well as potential gender differences when deciding who is to blame - the bully or the victim.

A total of 176 15- and 16-year-old high school students in Sweden participated in the study. The students filled out a questionnaire asking them about their own school bullying experiences (bystander, victim and/or bully) as well as why they thought bullying occurs.

The authors found that 69 percent of teenagers attributed the cause of bullying to the bully. The bullies' inner flaws (e.g. insecurity and low self-esteem) and their desire to maintain or enhance their power, status, and popularity were the two most common explanations given for why they bullied others. Interestingly, 42 percent of teenagers blamed the victim

for the bullying, and their deviance from the norm (e.g. 'different' or 'odd') as the reason why. More girls than boys blamed the bully rather than the victim.

In contrast, only 21 percent of teenagers attributed the cause of bullying to the peer group, 7 percent to the school setting and fewer still to human nature or society in general.

The authors conclude that, "Teenagers explain bullying significantly more in individualistic terms, that is, the bully or victim is to blame, than in non-individualistic terms where peers, [school](#) or society are to blame. These findings have important implications for prevention and intervention efforts designed to reduce bullying among children and adolescents. Bullying prevention efforts should investigate and target teenagers' conceptions of the causes of bullying."

**More information:** Thornberg R & Knutsen MA (2010). Teenager's explanations of bullying. Child and Youth Care Forum.

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