

# Young people ignored in bid to stop bullying

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There is a disconnect between young people's perspectives and how school bullying is treated in practice and policy in Australia, a leading expert has warned.

"School bullying attracts significant research and resources globally, yet critical questions are being raised about the long-term impact of these

efforts," says Dr. Ben Lohmeyer, a researcher in youth violence and bullying in Flinders University's College of Education Psychology and Social Work.

"From my research, I've found young people are less interested in shaping their experiences into technical definitions and are more interested in the need to prevent harm.

"However, young people are routinely ignored simply because they are young, yet they are the ones that experience the bullying and can provide helpful insights into the behavior that occurs and how to prevent it."

Dr. Lohmeyer conducted in-depth interviews with a small group of South Australian high school students who had experiences of bullying.

Through discussions around bullying and the context it occurs in, the study found young people view the phenomenon very differently to the prevailing themes that usually occur in research and policy in Australia.

"Bullying is often focused on psychology-based adult-derived technical definitions that ignore broader social and cultural dynamics," says Dr. Lohmeyer.

"In holding discussions with young people, I found they were less concerned with definitions—and in some cases didn't know how bullying was technically defined—but were more concerned with harm more generally.

"This approach meant they were more likely to identify forms of bullying and violence that were being overlooked or had become less noticeable as the nature of bullying changed. The students also came up with new ways to describe bullying including 'PG13 version of violence,' 'tactical violence' and 'emotional torment.'"

Rather than seeking to better educate young people about adult-determined features of bullying, Dr. Lohmeyer's research suggests young people have a lot to contribute in conversation with adults about what bullying is and how it is trivialized and transformed in schools.

"By listening to young people in this study, the complex nature of the harm that results from [school bullying](#) was able to emerge and highlighted that whether or not it fit into a neat definition didn't matter to them—they saw it as negative behavior that needed to change," says Dr. Lohmeyer.

"Young people's experiences of bullying are connected to their experience of being young and they have important insights into their lives and should be equal partners in the design and implementation of bullying research and interventions.

"We need to consider youth as more than just a demographic but as a broader social phenomenon within which bullying operates. By doing so it will focus on what is important to those most affected and have the greatest chance of actually having an impact."

The paper is published in the *British Educational Research Journal*.

**More information:** Ben A. Lohmeyer, Social violence and the trivialising effects of youth in school bullying: Extended listening to South Australian young people on bullying and violence, *British Educational Research Journal* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/berj.3835](https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3835)

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