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ABSTRACT

Pursuant to a European teachers' seminar on bullying in school held in Stavangar, Norway in 1987, a comparative research project in Scotland identified variations in the incidence of bullying in Scottish secondary schools and investigated and described successful coping strategies. Bullying was defined as "long standing violence, mental or physical, conducted by an individual or a group against an individual who is not able to defend himself or herself in that actual situation." Questionnaires were distributed to 942 students from 10 secondary schools, ranging from the inner city to the agricultural periphery. The data showed that 50 percent of the students had been bullied at school at least once or twice; 44 percent admitted that they had bullied someone else; and 32 percent said they had never been involved, either as bully or victim. Other reported findings include a breakdown of the recent bullies and victims by age and sex; demographic and family characteristics of bullies; incidence of forms of bullying ranging from ostracism to violence or extortion; school location of bullying incidents; and the data on taboo against telling authority figures about bullying incidents. Three prerequisites for a successful anti-bullying policy are discussed: recognition by the school that the problem exits; openness in discussing it; and ownership, i.e., giving parents, teachers, and pupils a vested interest in making the anti-bullying policy succeed. Eight references are included. (TE)

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SCRE SPOTLIGHTS 23

ED 323476

Bullying in Scottish Secondary Schools

Andrew Mellor

In 1987, a European teachers' seminar on Bullying in School was held in Stavanger, Norway. It aimed to draw attention to Scandinavian research and to encourage similar work elsewhere. The Norwegian government had sponsored a nationwide campaign against bullying, an indication of the level of concern in that country. The seminar was successful in encouraging interest and research in the UK. Three books on bullying were published in England and Wales in 1989. The author (a practising teacher) approached the Scottish Education Department for a grant which allowed him to carry out the small-scale project which is the focus of this report. The incidence and pattern of bullying revealed was almost identical to that in Norway. It should be noted that the sample was much smaller than those used in Norwegian studies and was not fully representative of the Scottish secondary school population. However, the findings do call into question recent press reports which declared that 'Britain is the bullying capital of Europe'. (The Guardian 28-09-89)

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THE BULLYING STUDY

Bullying was defined as 'longstanding violence, mental or physical, conducted by an individual or a group against an individual who is not able to defend himself or herself in that actual situation'. In order to allow comparisons, a Norwegian definition and methodology were adopted.

The project was exploratory. It set out to do two main things - to identify variations in the incidence of bullying in Scottish state secondary schools and to investigate and describe successful coping strategies. The sample chosen was intended to represent a cross-section of the school population stretching from the inner city to the agricultural periphery of the country. It was not a national sample. The social mix differed in detail from that in Scotland as a whole. The study took place in two Regions: ten secondary schools agreed to take part and were visited in February and March 1989. They were chosen to include a variety of schools and locations: rural, urban, large, small, non-denominational, Roman Catholic, prosperous and deprived. The questionnaires were all administered personally by the researcher so that there was as much consistency as possible in the pupils' understanding of the terms used. 942 questionnaires were completed by pupils - approximately 25 from each of years

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Secondary 1 to Secondary 4 in each school. Information was collected in two ways: to get a general picture, pupils were asked whether they had ever been bullied at school; they were also asked whether they had been bullied 'sometimes or more often' that term. In addition, two teachers were interviewed in each school: one member of the management team and one guidance teacher. Other information was gathered by observation and from written material such as school handbooks and inspectors' reports.

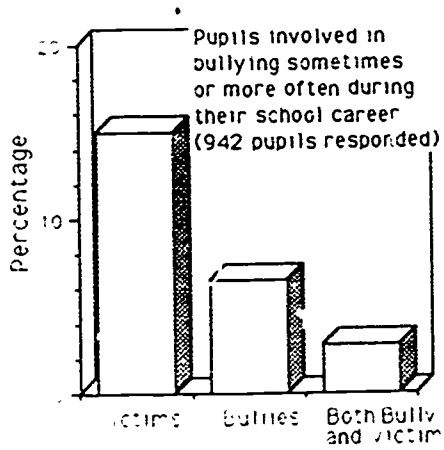
HOW COMMON IS BULLYING?

"We only see the tip of the iceberg." (Headteacher)

General experience

Of the total of 942 pupils, 50% said that they had been bullied at school at least once or twice during their school careers. Slightly fewer (44%) admitted that they had bullied someone else. Less than a third (32%) said that they had never been involved either as bully or victim. It would be easy to use the fact that two thirds had been involved with bullying to create headlines but this would be misleading. Most pupils had only been involved once or twice and had successfully avoided it since. However, a quarter (25%) said that they had been involved 'sometimes or more often'. A small number (3%) had been both bully and victim but most belonged to only one category.

Table 1: Pupils involved in bullying...during their school career



Note: Each category is exclusive

Recent experience

It was important to get a more accurate indication of the extent of bullying. Having established the children's total experience of bullying they were then asked how often they had been involved with bullying since Christmas. This was chosen as an occasion which all could remember well, thus providing a more accurate measurement of recent events. In effect, they were being asked about their experience over the last six to ten weeks. Those children who anwered 'once or twice' were disregarded as not fulfilling the definition of bullying as 'longstanding violence'. This left 6% (58 pupils) who had been recent victims and 4% who had recently bullied others at school.

For comparison the following table shows the results, for the same age group, of the very large surveys carried out in Norway by Dan Olweus in 1983 and by Erling Roland and Elaine Munthe in 1987; and also the results of the small survey of two Sheffield comprehensive schools carried out by Colin Yates and Peter Smith in February 1989. All used similar definitions.

Table 2: Pupils who said they had been bullied or bullied others recently

	Scotland	Norway 1983	Norway 1987	Sheffield
	%	%	%	%
Victims 'sometimes or more often'	6	6	-	22
includes 'once a week or more often'	3	2	3	10
Bullies 'sometimes or more often'	4	7	-	12
includes 'once a week or more often'	2	2	3	4

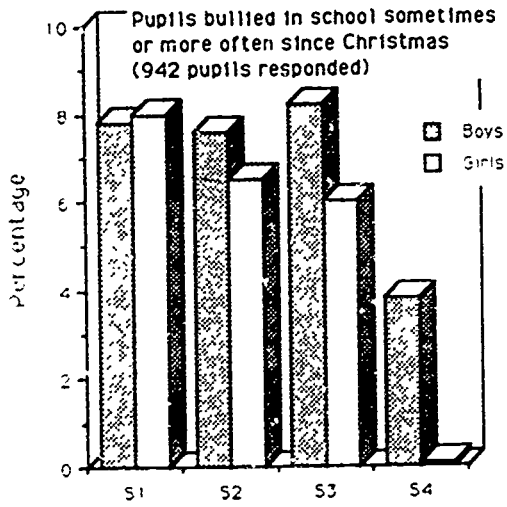
sources - Author, Roland and Munthe 1989, Tattum and Lane 1989

THE VICTIMS

"Sometimes you feel like dying because you can't face up to it." (15 year old boy)

During their school career as a whole, boys and girls were equally likely to be the victims of bullying. But when pupils were asked how often they had been bullied since Christmas there was seen to be an increasing gap between the number of boy and girl victims in the older age groups, as well as an overall decrease in the number of older victims.

Table 3: Pupils bullied since Christmas



In an attempt to determine the characteristics of victims and bullies, social and family information was collected. Although the children involved came from all backgrounds, there were some variations. The following statements must be regarded as tentative because of the relatively small sample.

Two groups of children were more likely to be victims of all the types of bullying that were measured -

- those living with their father only
- those living with someone other than their parents.

Only children were slightly less likely, and children with two siblings were least likely, to be victims. Children from larger families were more likely to feel rejected by others. Social class did not seem to be an important factor, although children of parents with professional and managerial jobs were less likely to be bullied, while those whose parents had skilled manual jobs were more likely to be victims.

Statements from teachers and pupils suggested that there was usually some distinguishing factor which made certain individuals liable to be bullied -

> *"I would say that bullying usually happens to people who are different (eg colour, religion, or some disability). People who are shy or have a weak character are usually the ones who are bullied." (15 year old girl)*

Children from ethnic minorities said that racism was a major cause of bullying. There were also suggestions that children who usually successfully avoided bullies could become victims at certain times, for example, when changing schools or during a marriage break-up.

> *"I was bullied by my so called best friend. She called me names and turned my other friends against me. I was having enough trouble at home with my mum and dad splitting up..." (13 year old girl)*

Although certain children are picked on more than others, it is clear that at certain times and in particular situations virtually any child may become a victim.

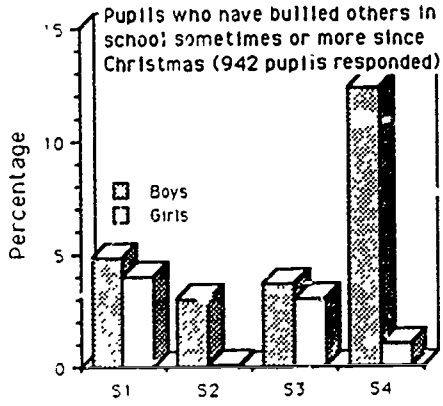
THE BULLIES

Half the boys and just over a third of the girls admitted having bullied others at some time. It may be worth noting that Scandinavian researchers have found that 'girls, more than boys, are unwilling to answer truthfully to questions concerning their own involvement in violent interactions' (Roland 1989).

The difference between the sexes was most marked amongst 15 year olds. An alarming 12% of fourth year boys said that they had recently bullied others and 5% said that they had bullied someone every day. No doubt some of this is due to an element of bravado but it does seem to warrant further study.

Bullies came from virtually all social classes and family backgrounds but children who had three or more siblings, or who lived with someone other than their parents were slightly more likely to bully others. Children whose parents had professional and managerial jobs were less likely to be bullies while those whose parents had skilled manual jobs were more likely to be bullies. However, the small sample size means that these findings must be treated with caution.

Table 4: Pupils who have bullied others



Many girls expressed regret for past bullying -

> *"I didn't really like bullying others. I thought it would make me feel proud of myself but it wasn't like that at all." (15 year old girl)*

Boys tended to say it was all the victim's fault -

> *"Bullying is brought upon the person by himself... He might start acting smart and the group might keep on slagging him and hitting him...." (14 year old boy)*

WHAT FORM DID BULLYING TAKE?

The pupils were told that being deliberately excluded from a group and being forced to be alone was a kind of bullying. They were asked how often they had been rejected in this way since Christmas. Another question asked if they had been hit or kicked, picked on or called names, or had suffered from extortion. They were also invited to write about any other types of bullying that had happened to them -

- 5% of the sample had been rejected at school 'sometimes or more often' since Christmas and 1% 'every day'.
- 15% had been picked on or called names since Christmas, 8% had been hit or kicked and 2% had suffered from extortion.

In terms of numbers, this means that of the 942 pupils questioned, 145 had been recently picked on or called names, 71 had been hit or kicked, 49 had been rejected and 15 had suffered from extortion. It was interesting that many children who, in answer to earlier questions, had said that they had not been bullied, did admit that they had suffered from specific types of bullying in response to these questions.

The type of bullying found in any one school seemed to depend on local traditions and circumstances. Thus, in some schools 'slagging', which was described by one teacher as 'verbally pulling someone to pieces', was common. In others, initiation ceremonies, threatening and various types of gang bullying were described.

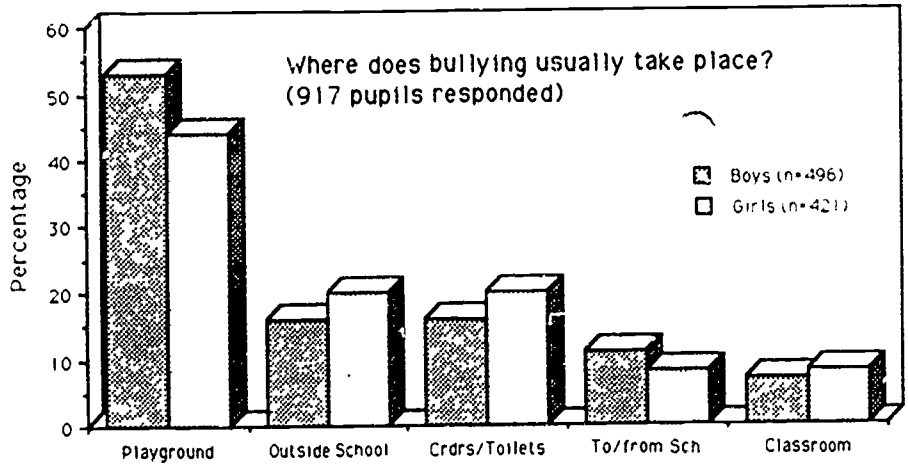
Some of the most poignant comments came from children who had been rejected or 'sent to Coventry'. A 15 year old girl said that she had lost nearly all her self confidence and had cried herself to sleep every night for two years:

> *"I'd hate to think this was happening to anyone else. I have a fear that if one girl doesn't talk to me they will all start again and it will never stop. I don't want it to go on for the rest of my school life. I couldn't cope."*

WHERE DOES BULLYING TAKE PLACE?

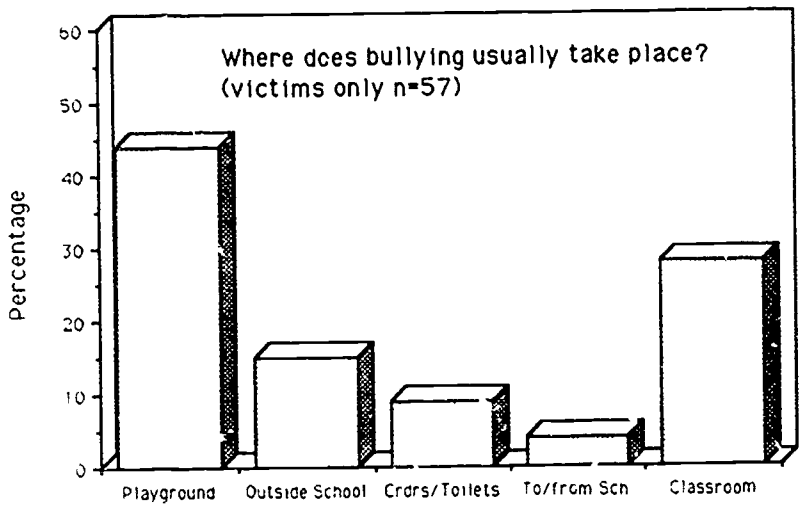
Children were asked 'Where does bullying usually take place?' Some wanted to make more than one response but were told to choose the place they thought it was most common.

Table 5: Where does bullying usually take place?



The most common location for bullying reported by the sample as a whole was the playground (48%). However, since half of these pupils have never been bullied, the views of recent victims were examined. 44% of them said that bullying usually takes

Table 6: Where does bullying usually take place? (Victims only)



place in the playground while 28% cited the classroom. 4% of the sample had been bullied on their way to or from school since Christmas. This was most likely to happen to younger children and those who travelled by school bus.

TELLING

A great taboo against telling exists in Scottish schools. Half of the victims had told no one. Of the victims who had told, 47% had told a parent and 31% a teacher. Children were asked, 'If you were being bullied now, who would you tell?' The number who would tell a guidance teacher varied from 13% in one school to 47% in another. The latter had a head teacher who gave guidance a very high priority.

> *"I would tell anyone bar the teachers. They do nothing for you."*
> *(12 year old boy)*

However -

> *"If you are being bullied tell someone. If you don't you'll be miserable. I did and I feel great now." (a different 12 year old boy)*

SCHOOLS AND STRATEGIES

This study did not set out specifically to match the extent of bullying against school strategies but some pointers can perhaps be given as to how schools might proceed.

There is no simple solution to bullying. It is a complex and variable problem so each school must develop its own policy. Of course this would be easier if there was a national climate of concern similar to that in Norway. Despite this, it is clear that some Scottish schools are succeeding in containing the level of bullying. In three schools in the study, less than 3% of children said that they had been recently bullied: one school was in a rural area but two were in inner-city areas of multiple deprivation. After studying the available literature and noting good practice in such schools, I would suggest that there are three pre-requisites for a successful anti-bullying policy.

Recognition:

The school must acknowledge that a problem might exist. Guidance teachers in two schools had been alerted to a bullying problem by a pupil questionnaire. But staff in other schools, including those with a high incidence of bullying, were reluctant to give the matter much attention.

Openness:

Victims will not tell unless bullying is unequivocally condemned and individuals are encouraged to discuss their worries freely without fear of rebuff or retribution. Achieving this is not easy in an educational system which traditionally spurns 'tell-tales' - and it will bring problems. Younger children could overwhelm teachers with trivia. Also children may make revelations about other types of violence, perhaps involving adults, which will require very delicate handling. But openness requires that the agenda be unrestricted.

Ownership:

If parents, teachers and pupils are involved in formulating an anti-bullying policy they will have a vested interest in making sure it succeeds. In Norway special meetings about bullying are held. This could only happen in Scotland if the level of interest increased but meanwhile bullying could be discussed in staff meetings, pupil councils, guidance classes, tutor groups, and at PTA or school board meetings.

In choosing anti-bullying strategies, schools could start by investigating who is involved and where it happens. A confidential pupil survey administered by the guidance staff could achieve this. Efforts could then be directed at particular age groups by including bullying as a topic at appropriate places within the curriculum. Subjects such as English, Drama, Modern Studies or Religious and Social Education could be involved.

Supervision arrangements could be reviewed if bullying was noted in particular places. Interviews with teachers revealed that in none of the ten schools visited were children effectively supervised in the playground. In two schools children said that bullying happened a lot in corridors and toilets: both, had, seemingly, miles of corridors with few doors off. One school which had problems on school buses had improved matters by briefing drivers about disciplinary procedures and by encouraging companies not to swop drivers too often.

The development of anti-bullying strategies has hardly begun and will depend upon further research using a fully representative sample to establish the true scale of the problem, and comparative studies of the efficacy of different remedies. In the meantime, some helpful publications are listed below (*see* Besag or Tattum and Lane) and others are in preparation.

Bullying has been ignored for too long. Individuals are powerless before its insidiousness but schools can adopt collective remedies which will not only help the victims but also strengthen the relationship between parents, teachers and pupils.

***READING* overleaf**
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READING

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