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ETHNICITY, GENDER, BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING IN ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Abstract. Smith Peter K., Thompson Fran, Bhatti Saba, *Ethnicity, Gender, Bullying and Cyberbullying in English Secondary School Pupils* [Bullying i cyberbullying a pochodzenie i płeć wśród uczniów angielskiej szkoły]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 23, 2012, Poznań 2012, pp. 7-18. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-2520-1. ISSN 1233-6688

This study investigated the effect of gender and ethnicity on both bullying and cyberbullying in English secondary school pupils. Although previous research had been carried out looking at the effect of ethnicity on bullying, no research has yet been carried out looking at the effect of ethnicity on cyberbullying. A sample of 2,268 pupils aged 11 to 16 years from 14 schools, filled in anonymous questionnaires. Gender differences were found in both bullying and cyberbullying with boys bullying others more than girls. However, no ethnicity differences were found. Some secondary school pupils discussed their opinions and views on these findings. Results are considered in relation to previous research and the nature of cyberbullying.

Key words: cyberbullying, bullying, gender, ethnicity

Bullying is often defined as an act of aggression that is intentionally carried out, repeatedly over time, by an individual or a group against another who cannot defend him/herself easily.[1] There have been many forms and styles of bullying; as well as traditional bullying, which includes physical, verbal and indirect bullying[2], cyberbullying is also evident which can be carried out through mobile phones and the internet.

There has been some discussion of the nature of cyberbullying, and of whether the standard definition of bullying is satisfactory for cyberbullying.[3] Particular aspects of cyberbullying are that it is difficult to escape

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[1] I. Whitney, P.K. Smith, *A survey of the nature and extent of bullying in junior/middle and secondary schools*, Educational Research, 1993, 35, p. 3-25; D. Olweus, *Sweden*, [in:] *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, eds P.K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, P. Slee, London-New York 1999, p. 7-27.

[2] K. Rigby, *Bullying in schools, and what to do about it*, Jessica Kingsley, London 1997.

[3] J.J. Dooley, J. Pyżalski, D. Cross, *Cyberbullying versus face-to-face bullying: A theoretical and conceptual review*, Journal of Psychology (in press).

(in fact more prevalent out of school than in school[4]); that the perpetrator or bully does not directly see the effect on the victim; and that often the victim does not know the identity of the perpetrator.

In this article we examine gender and ethnic differences in bullying and cyberbullying.

Gender. There has been considerable research on gender differences in bullying.[5] Generally, although males engage in more physical aggression and bullying, the difference is less pronounced for verbal bullying and is sometimes reversed for indirect bullying. Victim rates tend to be either somewhat similar for boys and girls, or with boys experiencing slightly higher rates.

As regards cyberbullying, the picture is less clear.[6] In some respects cyberbullying is more like traditional indirect bullying (not done face-to-face), and thus one might expect more female involvement. Some studies have found this. Smith et al. (2008; Study One) found that girls were significantly more likely to be cyberbullied than boys. Vandebosch (2007) reported higher cyber victimisation of girls in Belgium. Slonje and Smith (2008) found that girls more than boys were victims of email bullying, in Sweden. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) found that girls were more likely to be bullied by emails in comparison to boys. However many studies report no differences.[7] Olweus (personal communication) reported boys as more likely to be victims, in Norway; as did van der Eijnden, Vermulst, Van Rooij, and Meerkerk (2006) in the Netherlands.

Regarding doing the cyberbullying, some studies again report no gender differences; this in itself is interesting, given the usual preponderance of boys in traditional bullying. However some studies do report boys doing more cyberbullying. Li (2006) found that cyberbullying others in Canada was nearly twice as high in boys than girls; while in Norway, Olweus (per-

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[4] P.K. Smith, J. Mahdavi, M. Carvalho, S. Fisher, S. Russell, N. Tippett, *Cyberbullying: its nature and impact in secondary school pupils*, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2008, 49, p. 376-385.

[5] P.K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, P. Slee, *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, London-New York 1999.

[6] P.K. Smith, R. Slonje, *Cyberbullying: the nature and extent of a new kind of bullying, in and out of school*, [in:] *The handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective*, eds S.R. Jimerson, S.M. Swearer, D.L. Espelage, N.J. Mahwah (in press).

[7] E.g. P.K. Smith, J. Mahdavi, M. Carvalho, S. Fisher, S. Russell, N. Tippett, *Cyberbullying: its nature and impact*; Q. Li, *Cyberbullying in schools: A research of gender differences*, School Psychology International, 2006, 27, p. 157-170; J.W. Patchin, S. Hinduja, *Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: A preliminary look at cyberbullying*, Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 2006, 4, p. 148-169; M.L. Ybarra, K.J. Mitchell, *Online aggressor/targets, aggressors, and targets: a comparison of associated youth characteristics*, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2004, 45, p. 1308-1316.

sonal communication) found boys rates to be three times as high as girls. Slonje and Smith (2008) found boys more engaged in text message bullying, in Sweden; and Gradinger et al. (in press) found boys more at risk of both bullying and cyberbullying in Austria. Vandebosch and van Cleemput (in press) report higher rates in boys, in Belgium.

It is likely that gender differences will vary by different media of cyberbullying. In Greece, Kapatzia and Syngollitou (2007) found more boys involvement in mobile phone bullying (bullying only), but girls more involved in internet bullying (bully and victim). There may well be appreciable cultural differences in use and practice in relation to electronic technologies, and also rapid historical changes.

Ethnicity. Compared to gender, there is a much smaller literature on differences in bully or victim rates by race or ethnicity. As regards traditional bullying, the most general finding is of little or no difference. Such was the case in the Netherlands (Junger, 1990), where no differences were found between Dutch, Turkish, Moroccans and Surinamese in bully or victim rates; in Germany, where no differences have been reported in bullying between "foreign and German youth"[8]; and in one study in the U.S., where no differences in victim and bullying nominations were found in a study involving four ethnic minority groups.[9]

However another study in the U.S. (Hanish & Guerra, 2000) found that European and African American children were at higher risk of victimisation than Hispanic immigrant children. A study in Austria[10] similarly found that native Austrian children experienced higher rates as victim and perpetrator, than did immigrant children (from former Yugoslavia, Turkish/Kurdish etc.).

Conversely in England, two studies have indicated that pupils of non-White (mainly Asian) ethnic origin have been shown to experience more racist name-calling (though not necessarily other forms of bullying) than White children of the same age and gender.[11] Racist harassment has been

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[8] F. Lösel, T. Bliesener, *Germany*, [in:] *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, eds P.K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, P. Slee, London-New York 1999, p. 224-249.

[9] J. Juvonen, A. Nishina, S. Graham, *Self views versus peer perceptions of victim status among early adolescents*, [in:] *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized*, eds J. Juvonen, S. Graham, New York-London 2001, p. 105-124.

[10] D. Strohmeier, C. Spiel, *Immigrant children in Austria: Aggressive behavior and friendship patterns in multicultural school classes*, [in:] *Bullying, victimization, and peer harassment: A handbook of prevention and intervention*, eds J.E. Zins, M.J. Elias, C.A. Maher, New York-London 2007, p. 103-120.

[11] S. Moran, P.K. Smith, D. Thompson, I. Whitney, *Ethnic differences in experiences of bullying: Asian and white children*, British Journal of Educational Psychology, 1993, 63,

quite a high profile issue in England, and there is specific guidance on ra-
cial harassment or racial bullying, available to teachers (http://www.teach-
ernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tackling-bullying/racistbullying/).

A study by Siann (1994) on 1,139 secondary school pupils found that
pupils thought that ethnic minority pupils were more likely to be bullied
than ethnic majority pupils; however no significant differences were found
between ethnic groups when looking at the actual experience of being bul-
lied, or of bullying others. Another study also found similar results with
boys involved with bullying more than girls, and with no effect of ethnicity
on bullying.[12] Perhaps when individuals of an ethnic minority think of the
negative experiences of their community as a whole with the ethnic major-
ity, they are more likely to perceive it be bullying than when reflecting on
their own personal experiences.

We could not locate any prior studies on ethnicity in relation to cyber-
bullying. There are now a considerable number of studies reporting on
prevalence, and age and gender differences.[13] However these studies do
not mention, or else do not analyse, ethnicity as a factor. Clearly a large
sample, from a number of schools, is needed to make any generalisations
about ethnic differences on any kind of national basis.

Here, we present data on gender and ethnic differences, as both perpe-
trator and victim, in both traditional and cyberbullying. The data is from
a large sample across a number of English secondary schools. We did not
hypothesise any ethnic differences in cyberbullying, but we did wish to
explore ethnic differences in both traditional and cyberbullying, especially
as most of the previous research on this issue for traditional bullying is
some 15 years old. We also analysed gender as a comparison, and to see if
gender might interact with ethnicity in this domain. The results obtained
from the analysis of this data were then compared to information collected
from focus groups consisting of secondary school pupils.

Method

The main data set came from a cross-national questionnaire study
(England, Spain, and Italy) funded by the European Commission under
the DAPHNE project. Here, only data from English pupils are reported.

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p. 431-440; M.J. Boulton, *Patterns of bully / victim problems in mixed race groups of chil-
dren*, Social Development, 1995, 4, p. 277-293.

[12] D. Seals, J. Young, *Bullying and victimization: Prevalence and relationship to gen-
der, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression*, Adolescence, 2003, 38, p. 735-747.

[13] P.K. Smith, R. Slonje, *Cyberbullying: the nature and extent* (in press).

Participation was voluntary, questionnaires were anonymous, and procedures were approved by the institutional ethics committee.

Sample. The questionnaires were given out in 14 different secondary schools in various parts of England. Data was gathered in early 2008. Altogether, satisfactory responses were received from 2,298 pupils, aged 11 to 16 years. The frequencies for gender showed a good balance: males (1151) and females (1143), with only 4 missing values.

The options given to describe ethnicity group used the U.K. census format, and were detailed and varied enough to provide a good compilation of the different ethnic origins of the pupils. Ethnicity information was missing for thirty pupils. The remaining 2,268 pupils were put into four main ethnic groups, to ensure sufficient numbers for statistical analysis. The detailed ethnic breakdown was as follows:

White (1,555) [White British 1,454; Irish 37; other European community 20; any other white background 44];

Asian (437) [Asian or Asian British including Indian 333; Pakistani 48; Bangladeshi 13; Chinese 11; any other Asian background 32).

Black (116) [Black or Black British including African 65; Caribbean 46; any other black background 5];

Mixed (160) [White and Black Caribbean 59; White and Black African 18; White and Asian 49; any other mixed background 34].

This is a reasonably representative ethnic mix for pupils in England generally.

Questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three separate sections with a total of eighty-two questions. The first section covered demographic aspects, including gender and ethnicity. The third section included questions regarding bullying and cyberbullying. Brief definitions of bullying and of cyberbullying was given at the beginning of this section so that pupils had a clear understanding of the behaviours classified as bullying and cyberbullying and did not confuse them with other aggressive behaviours:

> Bullying is behaviour carried out by an individual, or a group, which is repeated over time in order to hurt, threaten or frighten another individual with the intention to cause distress. It is different from other aggressive behaviour because it involves an imbalance of power which leaves the victim defenceless.
>
> Cyberbullying is a new form of bullying which involves the use of mobile phones (texts, calls, video clips) or the internet (e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, websites) or other forms of information and communication technology to deliberately harass, threaten, or intimidate someone.

Questions were then asked about four kinds of bullying, two traditional and two cyber, introduced and defined as follows:

Traditional types of bullying (this doesn't include cyberbullying). Direct forms of bullying include hitting, tripping up, taking belongings, name calling and taunting (perhaps about race, gender, sexuality or disability) to someone in person, face to face. Indirect forms of bullying include telling lies or spreading false rumours about someone behind their back, sending mean notes to try and make someone disliked, or excluding someone from a social group on purpose. Again, this doesn't include cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying using a mobile phone includes sending or receiving upsetting phone calls, taking, sending or receiving unpleasant photos and/or videos using mobile phones (e.g. being flamed, happy slapping etc), sending or receiving abusive text messages by mobile phone. Cyberbullying using the internet includes malicious or threatening emails directly, or about someone to others, intimidation or abuse when participating in chat rooms, abusive instant messages (MSN; Yahoo; AIM etc), websites where secret or personal details are revealed in an abusive way or where nasty or unpleasant comments are being made (e.g. social networking websites (myspace, facebook, bebo, piczo etc); file sharing websites (YouTube, flickr etc); blogs (blogger, blogspot, LiVEJOURNAL etc).

Data from the following eight questions were then analysed:

(1) Have you been directly bullied in the last two months?

(2) Have you directly bullied someone in the last two months?

(3) Have you been indirectly bullied in the last two months?

(4) Have you indirectly bullied someone in the last two months?

(5) Have you been bullied through mobile phone use in the last two months?

(6) Have you bullied anyone else using your mobile phone in the last two months?

(7) Have you been bullied on the internet in the last two months?

(8) Have you bullied anyone else using the internet in the last two months?

The response options for each question were on a 5 point scale (scored 1 to 5): 'I haven't been bullied/I haven't bullied anyone'; 'it has only happened once or twice'; 'two or three times a month'; 'about once a week'; and 'several times a week'.

Focus Groups. Five focus groups with six participants each were formed at a local youth centre which was attended by pupils from surrounding secondary schools. Participants were of mixed gender, and corresponded in age range to those who had answered the questionnaires (11-16 years). However, the area in which the youth centre was located had a high population of Asians, therefore this ethnic group was over-

represented compared to the questionnaire sample. The focus groups were led by the third author, herself of Asian origin.

Informed consent was obtained and participants were assured that all information would be confidential and anonymous and that they could leave at any time. Any names given were purely to aid the discussion and no personal experiences were discussed. While the discussion was informal, encouraging each participant to give their own opinions and viewpoints, it was focussed around the eight questions above regarding bullying and cyberbullying, and whether they thought there would be any gender and ethnicity differences in responses to these.

Results

A MANOVA was carried out with gender (2 factors) and ethnicity (4 factors) as independent variables and the eight bullying and cyberbullying questions as dependent variables.

Gender. An overall significant effect was found between gender and bullying and cyberbullying; $F(8, 2199) = 2.054$, $p = .037$; boys scoring higher Further analyses showed that this difference was located in three of the four questions regarding bullying others:

Have you directly bullied someone in the last two months? (boys: mean = 1.26; girls: mean = 1.11), $F(1,2199) = 11.86$, $p = .001$;

Have you bullied anyone using your mobile phone in the last two months? (boys: mean = 1.09; girls: mean = 1.03), $F(1,2199) = 6.53$, $p = .011$;

Have you bullied anyone using the internet in the last two months? (boys: mean = 1.09; girls: mean = 1.04), $F(1,2199) = 4.83$, $p = .028$.

There was no significant gender difference for indirectly bullying someone; nor any significant differences on any of the four questions regarding being bullied.

Ethnicity. There was no overall significant effect found for ethnicity. Nor was there any significant gender by ethnicity interaction. Nevertheless we did explore the trends as regards the different types of bullying. There was marginal significance ($p<.10$) for 2 questions:

Have you been directly bullied in the last two months? (means: white = 1.37; asian = 1.28; mixed = 1.27; black = 1.20), $F(3,2199) = 2.62$, $p = .049$;

Have you bullied anyone using the internet in the last two months? (means: mixed = 1.10; asian = 1.09; white = 1.05; black = 1.03), $F(3,2199) = 2.53$, $p = .055$.

Neither result is strongly significant on standard criteria, and the trends are different for the two sets of findings; thus the overall conclusion must be that there is no clear evidence for ethnic differences, either in traditional bullying or in cyberbullying.

Focus groups. The responses from the focus groups generally agreed with the quantitative findings. In each of the five groups, the general consensus was boys bullied others more than girls; although many pupils generalised this to stating that boys were also more often victims of bullying than girls ("boys get bullied and bully more than girls ...always pushing and shoving").

In contrast to the opinions about gender, in all the focus groups the majority of pupils stated clearly that bullying did not depend on ethnicity. Only a few pupils thought that there were ethnicity differences in bullying, for example saying "it depends on the situation". One pupil thought that Asians were bullied more than other ethnicity groups. One girl said that "boys bully asian girls more because of they were scarves and how they look". Another boy thought that girls bully more between ethnic groups because "...girls don't like other girls from different groups". However the great majority of the 30 participants in the groups took the position that there were not such ethnic differences.

One surprising finding was that pupils in the focus groups did not think cyberbullying was a very important issue. The general response throughout the focus groups was that direct bullying was prevalent, but that the pupils had neither been cyberbullied or heard about others being cyberbullied. Some thought this was because mobiles were not allowed within the schools and internet access was also restricted. When it was mentioned that most cyberbullying occurs outside school, one pupil responded by saying that no one would waste their credits on bullying, while others said that they had other things to do once they were out of school and wouldn't waste their time on cyberbullying others. The general consensus was that not much cyberbullying occurs.

Discussion

This study was carried out on a reasonably large and reasonably representative sample of English secondary school pupils. Analysing gender and ethnic differences in four types of bullying (two traditional, two cyber), the findings are fairly clear. There is a significant gender difference in bullying others – boys higher for 3 out of 4 kinds. There is no gender

difference in being bullied, on any of the 4 kinds. Looking at four major ethnic groups (White, Asian, Black, Mixed), there are no significant ethnic differences for either bullying others or being bullied, for any of the 4 kinds of bullying.

The gender differences are not unexpected. A greater involvement of boys in bullying others is a commonplace finding, albeit sometimes less marked for indirect compared to face-to-face bullying. In this study too, the gender difference was significant for direct (physical or verbal) bullying, but was not significant for indirect bullying such as rumour spreading. What is interesting here is that the gender difference (boys bullying more) was found for both types of cyberbullying, even though cyberbullying is generally thought of as more indirect in nature (it is clearly not face-to-face). The greater involvement of boys may reflect the considerable overlap usually found between traditional and cyber bullies.[14] In particular, in an Austrian sample[15], boys have been found to be over-represented in those who are both traditional and cyber bullies. Thus it may be that many cyberbullies are also involved in traditional (often direct) bullying, and are mainly boys; even though cyberbullying is indirect in the sense of not being face-to-face, nevertheless the actions are often targeted to the victim rather than third parties as in rumour spreading. The balance of targeted versus third party actions in cyberbullying might interact with gender differences, and deserves further investigation.

No ethnicity differences were found in either bully or victim rates, for either traditional or cyber bullying. This was not unexpected, as the consensus of findings from traditional bullying has been that ethnic differences in traditional bullying and victim rates are not very appreciable. Even though racist bullying and harassment can occur, in many contexts it is a relatively minor part of all bullying, and also is not the province of any one ethnic group. Nevertheless most such studies are from some 15 years ago, so it is of interest to see that this lack of significant ethnic differences appears to be maintained, at least amongst English secondary school pupils.

The lack of ethnic differences in cyberbullying is, so far as we know, a new finding. It is not surprising, given the substantial overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. It is also perhaps somewhat reassuring that the new arena of cyberbullying is not, by and large, being used to disproportionately target any particular ethnic group. Our statistical

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[14] P.K. Smith, J. Mahdavi, M. Carvalho, S. Fisher, S. Russell, N. Tippett, *Cyberbullying: its nature and impact*.

[15] P. Gradinger, D. Strohmeier, C. Spiel, *Traditional bullying and cyberbullying: Identification of risk groups for adjustment problems*, Journal of Psychology (in press).

findings are supported too by the focus group participants, very few of whom thought there would be ethnic differences in cyberbullying.

Some qualifications to this generalisation should be noted. First, although the sample was a sizeable one, it certainly did not sample all areas of the U.K. Ethnic groups are unequally distributed across the U.K., and although the ethnic mix we obtained was reasonably representative, clearly different results might be fond in certain areas. Also, we had to collapse a very varied ethnic population into four main groups. While there is no reason to suppose that any particular sub-group would be different in respect to cyberbullying, this remains a possibility. Finally, while the focus groups were useful as a corroborative source of information, they were only taken from one area of London and over-represented pupils of Asian origin.

In summary, both gender differences and ethnic differences in cyberbullying, in this sample of English secondary school pupils, are similar to those in traditional bullying: boys bully others more (except for indirect traditional bullying); boys and girls are equally often victims; and there are no appreciable ethnic differences in this.

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Bullying i cyberbullying
a pochodzenie i płeć wśród uczniów angielskiej szkoły

Streszczenie

Bullying definiowany jest często jako agresja, realizowana intencjonalnie oraz w sposób powtarzalny przez grupę lub jednostkę wobec kogoś, kto nie może się łatwo obronić. Istnieje wiele sposobów realizacji takiej agresji, jak np. znęcanie się fizyczne, werbalne lub pośrednie (*bullying*) oraz za pomocą Internetu lub telefonów komórkowych (*cyberbullying*).

W badaniach podjęto problem związków bullyingu i cyberbullyingu z płcią oraz pochodzeniem wśród uczniów angielskich szkół. Są to ważne dane, jako że dotychczas analizowano związki tradycyjnej agresji rówieśniczej z bullyingiem. Badań nad takimi zależnościami w kontekście cyberbullyingu dotychczas nie prowadzono.

W badaniach kwestionariuszowych wzięła udział grupa młodych ludzi, wśród których znalazło się 2268 uczniów w wieku 11-16 lat z 14. szkół. Pod względem płci, chłopcy okazali się częściej sprawcami zarówno bullyingu, jak i cyberbullyingu. Nie wykazano związku tych zjawisk z pochodzeniem uczniów.

Słowa klucze: cyberbullying, płeć, pochodzenie