

SCHOOL BULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH: DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

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Bullying is delineated from other aggressive acts involving repeated negative behaviour intended to harm a person in an interpersonal relationship where there is an imbalance of power. Exposure to bullying varies across countries, with estimates ranging from 4% to 45%. Developmentally in Western countries there are decreases in self-reported victimization across childhood to adolescence. Being a victim of bullying is associated with suicide ideation, mental health difficulties, anxiety, depression, psychosomatic symptoms and peer problems. Bullies, victims and bully-victims are more likely to score in the abnormal range of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Theory utilized to understand bullying, include ethological, systems, social learning, cognitive behavioural, and resilience frameworks. An important caveat is addressing bullying particularly amongst young children is the very real risk of unduly labelling children, with all the associated unfortunate consequences. Amongst young children there is no doubt that early childhood is characterized by rapid developmental change and consequently many parents and professionals believe that early social-emotional and behavioural problems are developmentally transient (e.g., the 'terrible twos') and likely to diminish as children grow older. However, this view conflicts with a growing body of evidence that for a small group of especially vulnerable children some early-emerging social-emotional and behavioural problems persist. A promising line of therapeutic inquiry developed in Australia calls upon social systems theory highlighting a whole school approach focussing on cognitive skill acquisition including self-regulation, social skills development and organizational support. This presentation will report on findings from developmentally adapted school-based interventions from several hundred schools involving several thousand students in Australia, Greece, Malta and Japan which have reduced the incidence of school bullying improving the mental health and coping skills of the students being victimized.

Biography

Phillip T Slee is a Professor in Human Development in the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work at Flinders University South Australia. He is a trained teacher and Registered Psychologist. He has published over 100 papers and 15 books in the fields of child development, bullying, school violence and mental health. Statistical analysis skills include multi-level modelling and qualitative data analysis. He has a particular interest in the practical and policy implications of his research. He has presented his work nationally and internationally in workshops and lectures. His research team has undertaken national and international consultancies and evaluated the KidsMatter primary mental health initiative (<http://caef.flinders.edu.au/kidsmatter/>) and the KidsMatter early childhood mental health initiative. He is the Director of the Flinders Centre for 'Student Wellbeing and Prevention of Violence' (SWAPv), international research projects have involved the countries of Japan, Korea, China, Canada, Malta, Greece, India and the USA.

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