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# Bulling On Teenage Years

## The Effects of Bullying on Adolescence

“Courage is fire, and bullying is smoke.” Conflict between individuals has existed for an extremely long time now; but the term “bully” only has been around since 1693. In fact, bullying didn’t become a major problem until the 1970s. Up until that time, many individuals in society viewed bullying as a childhood rite of passage. What is bullying? Bullying is “a blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing act that habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people.”(Dictionary, Collins English Dictionary) While bullying exists in many countries, the United States has the worst effect as a result of it not being made illegal in many states; although, almost every state requires anti-bullying policies in schools. The mentioned behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated, and lead to serious lasting problems. What are the effects of bullying on adolescence?

“The bully has more power than the victim. This could be through larger size, greater strength, superior confidence, or force of numbers (i.e., many kids ganging up on a victim).”(Langman, 12) In 1973, Dan Olweus published *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. His point of view being that bullying was an important situation in schools, paved the way for many new anti-bullying policies to come. Bullying will ultimately destroy a child’s life as a result of physiological effects, decreases in academic achievement, and higher suicidal rates.

Both, children bullying others and the children being bullied seems to destroy a child’s life due to the increased impact on physiological effects. A previous study in *JAMA Psychiatric* chose to acknowledge the long-term aftermath for children by following up with its cohort as they grew into adulthood, which can give a better sense of information. Researchers collected data from over 1,400 children in North Carolina, ages 9, 11, and 13, and once again at an older age; asking about their experiences being bullied, bullying, or partaking in both roles. Five percent were exclusively bullies, twenty one percent were entirely victims, and four and a half percent straddled the fence of playing both roles. Receiving the second amount of information between the ages of 19 and 26, determined whether they suffered mental health disorders including, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, substance dependence, and antisocial personality disorder. Adolescence who were victims had a greater chance of developing depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety, panic disorder and agoraphobia as adults. Although not surprisingly, children experiencing both roles encountered all types of depressive and anxiety disorders, and more severely from suicidal thoughts, depression, generalized anxiety and panic disorder.

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The previously mentioned research provides strong evidence that encountering bullying as a victim or a perpetrator is a largely important risk factor for serious emotional issues separate from preexisting problems. William E. Copeland, professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University says: "This psychological damage doesn't just go away because a person grew up and is no longer bullied. This is something that stays with them."(Walton, Forbes)

A new collection of data portrays that serious illness, struggling to keep a regular job, and poor social relationships are all just some of the negative outcomes in adulthood due to the exposure of bullying as a child. The following study published in Psychological Science, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, highlights the risk of issues related to health, poverty, and social relationships are increased by the exposure to bullying. The following study assessed almost 1,500 individuals four to six times between the age of nine and sixteen, and adult outcomes between twenty-four and twenty-six years old.

A 'bully-victim' was at higher risk for health problems such as, over six times more likely to be diagnosed with major illnesses, smoke addictively, or develop a psychiatric disorder compared to those individuals not involved. The study also reveals that this group of individuals, bully-victims, are most vulnerable causing them to turn to bullying as a resolution due to the lack of emotional regulation or support needed to cope with the hardship. Bullies seem to be children with predominant tendency of anti-socialness, who know exactly how to get under someone else's skin. Psychological scientist, Dieter Wolke of the University of Warwick explains: "It is important to find ways of removing the need of these children to bully others and, in doing so, protect the many children suffering at the hand of bullies – they are the ones who are hindered later in life."(CBS NEWS, Association for Psychological Science) In addition, bullies and bully-victims showed indications of having trouble forming and holding onto social relationships, especially when maintaining long term friendships or relationships with parents in adulthood.

Joined with the previous study, "About 20 percent of U.S. students in grades 9 through 12 were bullied at some point in 2011, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey."(Castillo, CBS NEWS) Psychologist Guy Winch explained to TIME that emotional trauma can be as harmful as someone dealing with physical injuries. One specific study using brain portrait scans displays that people who are rejected activate the same areas of the brain as those who are experiencing physical pain. Winch's selection, Emotional First Aid: Practical Strategies for Treating, Failure, Rejection, Guilt, and Other Everyday Psychological Injuries explains "The intensity of the emotional pain bullying elicits, and the fact that other people underestimate how much hurt they feel makes being bullied an incredibly traumatic experience that can leave significant emotional scars,"(Castillo, CBS NEWS). Areas to focus to prevent further damage should include increasing their self-esteem, managing their anger and aggression, excelling with the healing process of emotional pain, and aiding them through

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understanding they belong and are wanted. “Some people are more resilient and tend to do some of these healing and curative things naturally. They might seek out their close friends and get emotional support from them, and by doing so remind themselves that they’re accepted and appreciated.”(Castillo, CBS NEWS)

Not only are children effected by bullying with physiological results, but also a decrease in academics in the school setting. Students who encounter bullying regularly do extensively worse in school. UCLA psychologists have reported data in an issue of the Journal of Early Adolescence, which is responsible for academic performance and social relationships. The following study was constructed with 2,300 students and their teachers in eleven Los Angeles public middle schools. Researchers asked students to report whether or not they are bullied on a four point scale, and lists students who encountered bullying more often being physically, verbally and the subject of nasty rumors.

With the results collected, a high level of bullying was linked with lower grades all years of middle school. Students who were shown to be the most bullied performed drastically worse academically than their peers. Reporting the information collected on grade point averages of all three year, one point higher on the four point bullying scale resulted in a one and a half point drop in GPA for one academic subject like Math or English.

In addition to the previous study, teachers provided data on how engaged students were including, participating in class discussion and activities, showing interest in the instructed material and completing assignments like classwork, homework and projects. Students who are repeatedly bullied tend to not participate in class discussions; sometimes leading to them being labeled as low achievers because of their shyness to speak up in class due to fear of being bullied. Many teachers misinterpret this silence as students not being motivated to engage themselves in learning. “Instruction cannot be effective unless the students are ready to learn, and that includes not being fearful of raising your hand in class and speaking up,” (Wolpert, UCLA Newsroom) Juvonen explains, who has studied bullying for about a decade.

In almost 300 high schools in Virginia, research was conducted in addition to investigate student behavior, and proved that high schools with escalated bullying had lower passing rates on Virginia’s standardized tests. High schools with higher levels of reported bullying received lower passing rates by an average of three to six percent across tests when being compared with fewer reported bullying schools. The previously mentioned gap was shown on state exams like Standards of Learning tests in algebra, world history and earth science. “The likely explanation is that students are less engaged in school, and perhaps more are distracted. Teachers are probably burdened with more discipline problems, and there is just less goodwill and motivation in a school where students experience a lot of bullying and teasing.”(George, the Washington Post) Also, schools that used the ‘authoritative’ model linked to parenting which includes, firm

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and demanding in discipline but rather comforting and supportive towards students; had the least amount of bullying and teacher victimization.

"But the link between bullying and achievement can work both ways. The students who are doing poorly are at higher risk for getting bullied, and any student who gets bullied may become a low achiever. Whether bullying happens on school grounds or after school hours on the Internet, it can paralyze students from concentrating on academics."(Wolpert, UCLA Newsroom)

Also, bullying can destroy an adolescent's life due to an increase in suicides. "Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death among 12- to 19-year-old youths and fourth in New York State."(LeVasseur, Kelvin, and Grosskopf, American Journal of Public Health) Bullying is an important risk factor for suicide thoughts of other suicide risk factors. Youths who report involvement in bullying are more likely than those not involved to report strongly considering or attempting suicide. A survey of the literature on bullying and suicide suggested that there are different effects between bullying and suicide among different minority groups, and even sexual preferences.

April 6, 2009, Sirdeaner Walker found her son Carl, only eleven years old dead. By using an extension cord, Carl Joseph Walker hung himself in the family's home. In a note to his mother, he apologized for taking his own life and passed on Pokémon cards to his younger brother. But, in the months and days before Carl's death, he encountered emotional and physical abuse by his fellow classmates. At school, Carl's peers threatened him time and time again to hurt and shun him, calling him gay. The only reasons these youth were mistreating Carl was because he dressed and talked differently than other boys, which usually is the case. Carl became a part of the long and still-growing list of adolescents whose lives ended under the circumstances of "bullycide".

Even though many acts result to bullycide, many cases, including ones like Carl's, result from bias-motivated violence targeting individuals who identify themselves or are portrayed as queer. These bullycide cases are closely linked back to the other various forms of bias-motivated violence that result in deaths of many youth every day. "GenderPAC (2007) reports that the majority of the cases of gender-motivated violence resulting in death are against gender nonconforming queer people of color."(Pritchard, 321)

Furthermore, some individuals in society believe that bullying has no effects or only positive ones with adolescents. For generations youth made their way through the trials and obstacles of the 'crosses we have to bear' without a lot of psychological effects. As days go by, and the taunting and teasing that comes along with it, made kids stronger, more stable and well adjusted. Presently, we live in a therapeutic world where everything has to be safe and surely protected. So, even though it seems to be the correct ideal that living without having to

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encounter bullying, you will turn out missing a part of the maturation process. “Those who fight against bullying hold an invalid worldview of man, believing he is, by his nature, good and perfectible.” (Kalahar, Freedom Choice Cost) Of course it would be the perfect idea if everyone would love his fellow man, but in the reality of the world, human nature has its harsh, brutal side. All hope in the world for man to change his universal nature is a waste of time.

When it comes down to our children’s safety and security, we have laws in place against assault and battery. But, protecting and hiding our youth from the reality of the human condition does not prepare them for life itself and its many issues. “Bullying is seen as abusive and gratuitous when resources are abundant and warfare unnecessary, but aggressive human behavior always lies just under the surface.”(Kalahar, Freedom Choice Cost) Some research may conclude and display that hyper-aggressive males would not exist if they did not come in contact with some evolutionary advantage on their species. Natural instincts and economic realities tied to self-reliance may lead us to act in a certain way. In *The Moral Animal*, Robert Wright explains, “Throw a bunch of hens together, and, after a time of turmoil, including much combat, things will settle down.”(Freedom Choice Cost) The pecking order provides a hierarchy that restrains members of a group from continuously competing for power and control, keeping the strongest members from wasting energy, and weaker from continually being torn apart emotionally.

In the article, *Words that Wound*, the author states that, “Theories vary on why children become bullies, but most agree that bullies gain power and enjoy the control they have over others.”(Freedom Choice Cost) Bullying is mostly about having power and control over your peers, which can eventually affect the way a bully thinks of himself. Scientists also believe that the personal benefits of a bully include higher self-esteem, greater access to resources, and avoidance of the aggressive actions of peers. “The subject of bullying within a culture is a dynamic question that not be taken lightly.”(Kalahar, Freedom Choice Cost) Research and child safety concerns must be a priority one, but we cannot jump to assumptions regarding bullying simply because it feels or sounds bad.

In conclusion, bullying will ultimately destroy a child’s life as a result of physiological effects, decreases in academic achievement, and higher suicide rates. Hopefully one day this will no longer be an issue in America.

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