

Chapter 2

School Bullying in Different Countries: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Short-Term Outcomes

2.1 Definitions, Types, and Roles in Bullying

School bullying is a specific kind of aggression in which students display frequent and long-term aggressive behavior toward their peers. This aggressive behavior is intentionally perpetrated on a student who cannot easily defend himself or herself and, therefore, there is an imbalance of power between the two (Smith and Brain 2000). It has been pointed out that, with time, this complex psychosocial phenomenon includes also a dominance–submission scheme in which students assume certain behaviors as perpetrators or victims and that this occurs under the “law of silence” (Ortega 2010). This means that there are many students who know about bullying in their school, but do not report this to teachers or parents because they feel afraid of becoming victims themselves or think that reporting is not the right thing to do. This book is concerned specifically with school bullying, not with school violence or peer aggression in general.

Research on bullying focuses on different roles of students. The most salient roles are bullies and victims. The former are the children or adolescents who display aggressive behaviors toward others and the latter are the students who persistently suffer harm. Some students are both victims and perpetrators, usually described as bully/victims. Nevertheless, bullying is not only a dyadic interaction between two students or groups. Less salient but equally important, there is also a group of bystanders who witness the phenomenon and play an important role in its nature and dynamics. Salmivalli et al. (1996) stated that some of them act as defenders, that is, they help the victim; others are outsiders, that is, they do not intervene and withdraw from this situation. There are also reinforcers of the bullies who respond to their aggressive behavior in a positive way such as cheering or laughing and assistants of the bullies who join them in the perpetration. Bystanders and not involved children are very important, taking into account that bullies have been described as children who are motivated by the possibility of achieving high status in the peer group by means of their aggressive behaviors. Thus, it is the whole peer

group that responds in a way that would make it impossible for the perpetrators to achieve this goal (Salmivalli 2010).

Bullying is a very complex phenomenon and might occur in many different forms and among different groups of students (e.g., ethnic-cultural or sexual minorities and majorities—Llorent et al. 2016). Rivers and Smith (1994) defined direct bullying, in which a confrontation takes place in face-to-face situations, and also indirect bullying that occurs mediated by other people. The indirect form of bullying is more commonly perpetrated verbally, although verbal bullying itself can be direct or indirect (Rivers and Smith 1994). Thus, behaviors, such as pushing, kicking, insulting, or name-calling, would be considered direct aggression, whereas spreading rumors or telling other students not to relate to the victim and to exclude them from the group would be considered indirect bullying.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new form of bullying called cyberbullying has become intensively studied. This is defined as aggression that is repeatedly perpetrated by individuals or groups through electronic devices on victims who cannot defend themselves (Smith et al. 2008). Research has found that there is a significant overlap between bullying and cyberbullying (Baldry et al. 2016; Del Rey et al. 2012), but there is still no agreement on whether cyberbullying should be treated as a separate phenomenon or as an extension of bullying. Most of the studies on cyberbullying use specific instruments to evaluate this form of aggressive behavior (Berne et al. 2013). Given its particular characteristics (Baldry et al. 2015; Nocentini et al. 2010), it is usually studied as a specific topic within research on bullying. Therefore, research on cyberbullying is mentioned in this book but it is beyond the scope of the book to discuss it in detail. This book focuses on face-to-face school bullying.

2.2 A Short History of Research on Bullying

The first studies on bullying were conducted in Scandinavia by Olweus (1973) although a similar concept called “mobbing” was mentioned by a school physician Peter-Paul Heinemann in the late 1960s (Heinemann 1969). The topic became popular in the communication media after a series of suicides committed by students in different countries which were attributed to bullying. This was the case in Norway, where three adolescent boys who were victimized by their peers committed suicide in the 1980s; this triggered the development of the first national campaign against bullying in Norway (Olweus and Limber 2010). Similar cases were reported in different geographic areas. Since the publication of the first studies on bullying, the number of publications has been increasing exponentially, with a total number of about 11,000 documents published in journals included in the Web of Science up to 2015. A review of these studies throughout the history of the field has been recently published in the journal *Aggression and Violent Behavior: A Review Journal* (Zych et al. 2015a), and a short summary of this review is included below.

After the first studies conducted in the Nordic countries and the attention paid to bullying in the communication media after a series of tragic events attributed to this kind of violence, research on bullying flourished in the 1990s. During these years, Peter K. Smith and colleagues started to study bullying in the UK, describing the phenomenon on broad samples of 6000 (Whitney and Smith 1993) or 7000 (Rivers and Smith 1994) participants, and distinguishing its direct and indirect forms. Rigby and Slee (1991) started to study bullying in Australia. Also in the early 1990s, the main results of the Olweus anti-bullying programs were described (Olweus 1994).

Although it had already been mentioned in previous studies, the first highly cited and widely accepted article on bullying as a group process was published by Salmivalli et al. (1996). In this article, the phenomenon was described as a complex psychosocial interaction among the students, taking into account roles such as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (outsiders, defenders, assistants, and reinforcers). An ecological approach was applied to bullying taking into account contextual factors that influence in its nature and dynamics by Debra Pepler and colleagues in Canada (Atlas and Pepler 1998). In the 1990s, studies on bullying were published in many different parts of the world including our research line in Spain (Ortega 1997) and in the UK (Farrington 1993).

Although international studies had been conducted before, the 2000s was a decade with many cross-national comparisons among the geographic zones, such as the research conducted by Due et al. (2005), in which they compared 28 countries. During the first half of the decade, studies on cyberbullying started to be published in the US (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004a, b) and, during the second half, their number started to increase very quickly around the world. Many of these studies focused on the relationship between bullying and cyberbullying (e.g., Dooley et al. 2009; Raskauskas and Stoltz 2007; Slonje and Smith 2008), trying to establish whether cyberbullying is another type of bullying or whether it should be treated as a different phenomenon. The number of intervention studies also increased in the 2000s and a meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs was conducted by Farrington and Ttofi (2009), finding that these programs can be effective in reducing bullying and that certain characteristics and components are more effective than others.

The number of studies on bullying and cyberbullying in the 2010s continued to grow. Some projects have focused on the long-term impact of bullying. Longitudinal studies on bullying versus later offending and being a victim of bullying versus later depression (Ttofi et al. 2011a, b) were also published. Interventions against cyberbullying are also being conducted all over the world (see for example Della Cioppa et al. 2015, Zych et al. 2017).

2.3 Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses on Bullying

The classical narrative literature reviews are useful to describe research on different phenomena according to the criteria of their authors. These documents include primary empirical studies chosen by the person who is writing the review. If this

person is an expert on the topic, their description and arguments can be very useful for the further advancement of the field, and can draw the attention of the scientists toward certain aspects of the phenomena that were otherwise neglected or suggest improvements in the theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

The nature of systematic reviews and meta-analyses is different from classic narrative literature reviews. Systematic reviews approach a field of knowledge with the objective of including and synthesizing all the studies on the topic. Systematic reviews use rigorous methods for locating, appraising, and synthesizing evidence from existing studies. They have explicit objectives, explicit criteria for including and excluding studies, and a structured and detailed report (Farrington and Petrosino 2000). Systematic searches are conducted in databases and journals, using specific keywords and inclusion criteria. Then, studies are coded and, in meta-analyses, overall effect sizes are calculated to find out statistically, for example, if the selected group of interventions is effective, or the results are different for different moderating variables.

For example, if a relationship between variables is reported in dozens of articles based on thousands of participants surveyed in different settings and parts of the world, each article would usually report different results. Some studies could report a positive significant relationship, while others could report no relationship at all or even a negative significant relationship. If a meta-analysis is conducted, it is possible to summarize this relationship for the whole set of studies, taking into account all the articles, settings, and participants, providing also information on the strength of the relationships. Therefore, systematic reviews and meta-analyses are particularly useful to provide a global vision on a field of research, maximizing objectivity and replicability and minimizing bias (Lipsey and Wilson 2001). These studies are helpful in evaluating intervention programs and naturally occurring predictors and outcomes of different phenomena (Murray et al. 2009). This is why the following parts of this introductory chapter will include much information based on meta-analytic findings.

Recently conducted assessments of systematic reviews and meta-analyses on bullying and cyberbullying (Farrington et al. 2016; Ttofi et al. 2014; Zych et al. 2015b) included dozens of research syntheses on the topic. Zych et al. (2015b) synthesized findings from 66 systematic reviews and meta-analyses on bullying and cyberbullying. They found that face-to-face bullying is more prevalent than cyberbullying and that differences between genders or age groups are unclear. The relationship between bullying and cyberbullying was found to be significant and strong. It was concluded that bullying is a serious problem with damaging consequences among students in minority groups. This review also focused on anti-bullying programs, showing that most of the meta-analyses find them effective in reducing bullying, although this effectiveness depends on nature of a program and its components. Thus, it was concluded that it is important to choose a program that has been scientifically validated and is included among evidence-based interventions.

A recent assessment of systematic reviews of community-based programs to prevent different forms of antisocial behavior has been conducted by Farrington

et al. (2016). They included and described six systematic reviews of anti-bullying programs and found that, overall, these programs were effective in reducing bullying. Ttofi et al. (2014) analyzed six meta-analyses of anti-bullying programs. They reported that these meta-analyses differed greatly in their search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria and methodological approach. After analyzing these criteria, they concluded that the meta-analysis conducted by Farrington and Ttofi (2009) was the most detailed and would probably yield the most exact results. This meta-analysis reported an overall decrease in perpetration of about 20–23% and a decrease in victimization of about 17–20% for anti-bullying programs. These are optimistic findings, and choosing the right program is crucial to successfully prevent and intervene in bullying. Detailed descriptions of anti-bullying programs and program components are described in Chap. 5.

Interested readers can find more information about the meta-analyses on bullying in our publications on the topic described above. In this chapter, we will include the most important meta-analytic findings relating to the prevalence of the phenomenon, risk and protective factors, and short-term outcomes.

2.4 Evaluation and Prevalence of Bullying in Different Countries

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is present in schools around the world. Given its complex nature and dynamics, it is very difficult to measure and, therefore, its prevalence is very difficult to determine. Evaluating prevalence in a population requires working with representative samples, which involves gathering a great amount of data usually recruiting thousands of participants. In most cases, this can be done by means of surveys, usually with self-report questionnaires, which are the most popular evaluation tools in the field. Nevertheless, these self-reports also vary among the studies and the results depend on the criteria established in each assessment.

Some systematic reviews have been conducted to compare bullying measurement instruments. Evans et al. (2014) analyzed the tools used to assess anti-bullying interventions. They found that about one quarter of the studies used a one-item evaluation whereas about three quarters used a multi-item assessment. The results of the studies using these two forms of evaluation varied, with one-item tools showing a desirable effect of interventions on victimization and perpetration in 83 and 67% of the studies, respectively, and with multi-item scales showing desirable effects in 57 and 44%, respectively. Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014), in another systematic review, found that some studies used the term “bullying” or even included its definition whereas other studies did not, and that timeframes also varied among the studies. Our recent systematic review of research on cyberbullying in Spain shows that the prevalence reported through multi-item instruments is about twice as

high as the prevalence measured with one-item questions (Zych et al. 2016). This was also found in studies focused on bullying (Baldry and Farrington 2004).

When the prevalence is described, participants are classified as involved (i.e., as victims, perpetrators or bully/victims), or not according to an established cutoff point. In some studies, reporting an aggressive behavior even once could be enough to be classified as involved, whereas other studies would require answers such as “frequently,” “2–3 times a month,” “once a week,” etc. The timeframes also vary among the studies, with some asking about behaviors that “ever” happened and others asking about the past year or the past couple of months. The one-item evaluations would usually include a definition of the phenomenon and ask the participants if they have been bullied or perpetrated bullying. Multi-item scales would usually include items that describe different bullying behaviors (e.g., insulting, name-calling, kicking, pushing), and ask about their frequency and/or duration. Participants are then classified as involved or uninvolved depending on their average score on the scale or on their answers to each item within the scale. All these evaluation issues are discussed in our recent review on cyberbullying in Spain (Zych et al. 2016) and can be also applied to the evaluation of face-to-face bullying.

Taking into account these differences in measurement, it is very difficult to compare prevalence among studies. This is even more complex if these studies have been conducted in different geographic areas and with participants from different cultures and in different languages. Given the fact that many of these difficulties are related to terminology, and the term bullying is difficult to translate and can be understood in different ways, Smith et al. (2002) conducted a study in which they compared 67 terms related to bullying in 14 different countries. The results show that there are some differences among the countries in defining the phenomenon (e.g., in focusing more or less on social exclusion or fighting), but it is present in all the geographic areas.

A meta-analysis conducted by Modecki et al. (2014) synthesized studies on the prevalence of bullying in different contexts. A total of 80 studies from different geographic zones were included, and it was found that the mean prevalence rates of involvement in bullying, across these reports, were 35% (35% for perpetration and 36% for victimization). It is worth mentioning that the criteria used to calculate the prevalence rates differed greatly among the included studies, with some of them classifying children as involved who reported even very mild forms of bullying and others, on the other hand, requiring more severe forms. Thus, the results of the meta-analysis show that 35% of students are involved in some form of bullying, including its mild or severe forms.

In Asia, a review of studies in China shows victimization rates ranging from 2 to 66% and perpetration rates ranging from 2 to 34% (Chan and Wong 2015). Another review shows that bullying exists also in Southeast Asian Countries with prevalence rates of having been bullied on more than 10 days during the past 30 days between 1 and 7.7% (Sittichai and Smith 2015).

In the UK, a recent report released by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (2015) reviewed research on bullying conducted in the country since 2010. Among the

research on the prevalence rates of bullying, a study conducted with 11,000 secondary education students in England and Wales showed that 33% of the participants reported having been bullied sometimes and 11% a lot (BIG 2015). Similar studies were conducted in Scotland and Northern Ireland and more details can be found in the Anti-Bullying Alliance report (2015).

Examples of empirical studies on the prevalence of bullying in different countries are reported in summary Table 2.1. Here we include mostly research with broad and representative samples and, when possible, studies that compare different countries using similar methodologies.

The study conducted by Ortega et al. (2012), comparing the UK, Italy, and Spain reported the highest rates of direct victimization in the UK, followed by Italy and Spain. Indirect victimization was the highest in Italy, followed by the UK and Spain. A comparison of 40 different countries (Craig et al. 2009) showed the lowest rates of involvement for boys in Sweden, the Czech Republic and Spain and for girls in Sweden, Iceland, and Malta. The highest rates for boys were reported in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and for girls in Lithuania, Latvia, and Greenland. Eslea et al. (2004) compared seven different countries finding the highest rates of perpetration in Japan and Spain, of victimization in Italy and Portugal, and of bully/victims in Spain and Italy. The lowest rates of perpetration were reported in China and England, of victimization in Ireland and Japan and of bully/victims in China, England, and Ireland. A study with Swiss and Australian adolescents (Perren et al. 2010) showed higher rates of involvement in any bullying role in Switzerland. Research conducted in the US showed relatively high rates when compared to other western countries (Guerra et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2009).

Most of the studies on bullying have been conducted in Europe, North America, and Australia (Zych et al. 2015a); more studies are needed in other geographic zones. The number of projects on the topic in Latin America is still few. In Nicaragua, Romera et al. (2011) found that the prevalence of involvement in any bullying role was high when compared to other countries. This high prevalence, especially of bully/victims, could be related to the high level of violence in this region, difficulties in the education system and the low income in the country. In Colombia, victimization, perpetration, and bystanding rates were also relatively high (Chaux et al. 2009). On the other hand, the prevalence in Asian countries is similar to or lower than in Europe (Cheng et al. 2010; Eslea 2004; Sittichai 2014).

Although there are great differences among the studies, all of them show that bullying is present in schools across countries and contexts. Mostly in relation to the tragic cases of suicides of students attributed to school bullying, the media frequently report that the phenomenon is on the rise. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that research shows that there is actually some decline in the prevalence of bullying over the last decades, although it seems that the prevalence of cyberbullying has increased (Rigby and Smith 2011). However, this possible increase in cyberbullying cannot be confirmed because the evaluation strategies differ greatly among the studies, leading to different prevalence rates and making it difficult to compare time points (Zych et al. 2016). The decline in the prevalence of bullying could indicate that the great efforts of the scientific community and policy makers to

Table 2.1 Empirical studies that report prevalence of bullying in different countries

Study	Country	Participants	Main findings
Chaux et al. (2009)	Colombia	A representative sample of students in grades 5 and 9 with 53,316 students enrolled in 1000 schools	Victimization—29.1%, perpetration—21.9% and having witnessed bullying— 49.9% Cutoff: dichotomous (yes/no) response to single questions regarding the past 2 months
Cheng et al. (2010)	China	A representative sample of 9173 middle school students, grades 7–1	Victimization reported by 25.7% of the students Cutoff: 1 or more days of the past 30 days
Craig et al. (2009)	40 different countries	A total number of 202,056 adolescents in grades 6, 8, and 10, about 4500 per country	Overall, 10% reported perpetration, 12.6% victimization and 3.6% bully/victims The lowest percentages of involvement (victimization or perpetration) for boys were found in Sweden (8.6%), the Czech Republic (9.7%) and Spain (10.2%). The lowest percentages of involvement in girls were reported in Sweden (4.8%), Iceland (5.4%) and Malta (6.3%) The highest percentages of involvement in boys were found in Lithuania (45.6%), Latvia (43.5%) and Estonia (42.8%) and for girls in Lithuania (35.8%), Latvia (32%) and Greenland (32%) Cutoff point: at least 2 or 3 times a month during the past 2 months
Eslea et al. (2004)	China England Ireland Italy Japan Portugal Spain	A total number of 47,992 children in primary and secondary schools in 7 different countries	Perpetration: China (2%), England (National—2.2%, Sheffield— 5.3%), Ireland (2.4%), Italy (Cosenza—9.9%, Firenze— 7.4%), Japan (11.4%), Portugal (10.5%), Spain (16.9%) Victimization: China (13.3%), England (National—11.5%, Sheffield— 13.6%), Ireland (5.2%), Italy (Cosenza—23.1%, Firenze— 25.6%), Japan (7.9%),

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Table 2.1 (continued)

Study	Country	Participants	Main findings
			Portugal (14.9%), Spain (12.8%) Bully/victims: China (1.5%), England (National—0.8%, Sheffield—2.5%), Ireland (1.5%), Italy (Cosenza—9.5%, Firenze—9.1%), Japan (6%), Portugal (6.7%), Spain (19.6%) Cutoff point: more than just once or twice during this term
Guerra et al. (2011)	USA	A total number of 2,678 children and adolescents from Colorado enrolled in 59 schools (21 elementary, 30 middle and 8 high schools)	Perpetration of any frequency was reported by 50% of the elementary school students, 71% of middle school students and 72% of high school students. Perpetration of moderate to high frequency was found in 8% of the elementary school pupils, 15% of middle school students and 12% of high school students Cutoff point: any—more than once during the previous year; moderate to frequent—several times or more during the previous year
Ortega et al. (2012)	Spain Italy UK	Adolescents in secondary education schools (age $M = 14.20$, $SD = 1.77$). Spain ($N = 1671$), Italy ($N = 1964$), and the UK ($N = 2227$)	Frequent direct victimization: Spain—3.2%, Italy—4.3%, UK—7.1% Occasional direct victimization: Spain—7.5%, Italy—10.7%, UK—11.6% Frequent indirect victimization: Spain—3.4%, Italy—7.3%, UK—6.2% Occasional indirect victimization: Spain—12.4%, Italy—15.7%, UK—14% Cutoff point: occasional—once or twice during the past 2 months, frequent—“more frequently” during the past 2 months

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Table 2.1 (continued)

Study	Country	Participants	Main findings
Perren et al. (2010)	Australia Switzerland	Adolescents in Switzerland (374) and Australia (1320) (age $M = 13.8$, $SD = 1.0$)	Frequent victimization: Australia—9.6% of girls and 9.1% of boys, Switzerland—11.1% of girls and 13.8% of boys Frequent perpetration: Australia—4.2% of girls and 11.5% of boys, Switzerland—11.6% of girls and 17.8% of boys Frequent Bully/victims: Australia—2.8% of girls and 4.4% of boys, Switzerland—2.5% of girls and 5.2% of boys Cutoff point: at least once a week in the past 3 months
Romera et al. (2011)	Nicaragua	A representative sample of 3042 pupils from 46 elementary schools (age $M = 11.3$, $SD = 1.6$)	Involvement in any bullying role was reported by 50% of the students. Frequent perpetration by 6%, frequent victimization by 25.3% and there were also 18.7% of frequent bully/victims Cutoff point: at least many times in the past 3 months
Sittichai (2014)	Thailand	A total number of 1200 adolescents (14 and 17 years old) in 12 secondary schools	Occasional victimization: 16% Frequent victimization: 6% Cutoff point: occasional—once or twice, or more, in the past couple of months; frequent—two or three times a month or more, in the past couple of months
Wang et al. (2009)	USA	Nationally representative sample of 7508 US adolescents, grade 6–10	Perpetration: physical (13.3%), verbal (37.4%), social (27.2%) and electronic (8.3%) Victimization: physical (12.8%), verbal (36.5%), relational (41%) and cyber (9.8%) Cutoff point: at least once in at least 2 months

eradicate this kind of violence are actually bearing fruit. Nevertheless, taking into account the highly damaging consequences of bullying for individuals and societies, new research and programs are necessary to continue with this effort and decrease the rates even further.

2.5 Risk Factors and Short-Term Outcomes

Many studies have focused on risk factors related to bullying. Most of them are correlational and cross-sectional and focus on short-term relationships among variables. Thus, it is important to take into account that although we call these variables risk and protective factors on theoretical basis, most of the studies are cross-sectional and, therefore, cannot confirm causal relationships. Nevertheless, these studies are very useful to describe variables that are related to bullying. Protective factors are also studied, although this research line is still in a relatively early stage. Thus, this section will focus on risk factors and short-term outcomes of being involved in bullying. This description is based on our systematic review of the systematic reviews and meta-analyses on bullying (Zych et al. 2015b), providing information from the research syntheses. Further details of the personal and contextual protective factors are described in Chaps. 3 and 4. Chapter 6 will focus on long-term consequences of bullying and how children involved in the phenomenon can be protected against these negative outcomes.

Gender and age have been broadly studied to find out whether girls and boys are at different risk of being involved in bullying and whether certain age groups are more involved than others. A meta-analysis performed on 153 studies by Cook et al. (2010) showed that, overall, boys were more involved than girls in perpetration, victimization and as bully/victims. Age groups ranging from early childhood (3–4 years) to adolescence (15–18 years) were compared and there was a weak, but significant positive relationship between age and perpetration. However, the relationship between age and victimization or bully/victim status was not significant. A narrative review conducted by Farrington and Baldry (2010) showed that gender differences varied according to the different types of bullying. Perpetration is more common in boys, but this applies mainly to direct bullying. On the other hand, indirect bullying seems to be more common among girls. These authors also found that victimization seems to decrease with age but this was not clear in the case of perpetration. Thus, some gender differences and age trends in involvement in bullying have already been described but it would be useful to conduct new meta-analyses and longitudinal prospective studies to provide more details on on these topics.

Personal and contextual risk and protective factors and outcomes have been reported in thousands of articles on bullying. Many of them have been included in meta-analyses that were synthesized in a recent article (Zych et al. 2015b). In this chapter, only the variables with the largest effect sizes are described but there are many other variables with smaller but significant effects that are also important in explaining bullying and its consequences. Interested readers can find more information in the meta-analyses included in our systematic review. A summary of risk and protective factors and outcomes with the largest effect sizes is shown in Fig. 2.1.

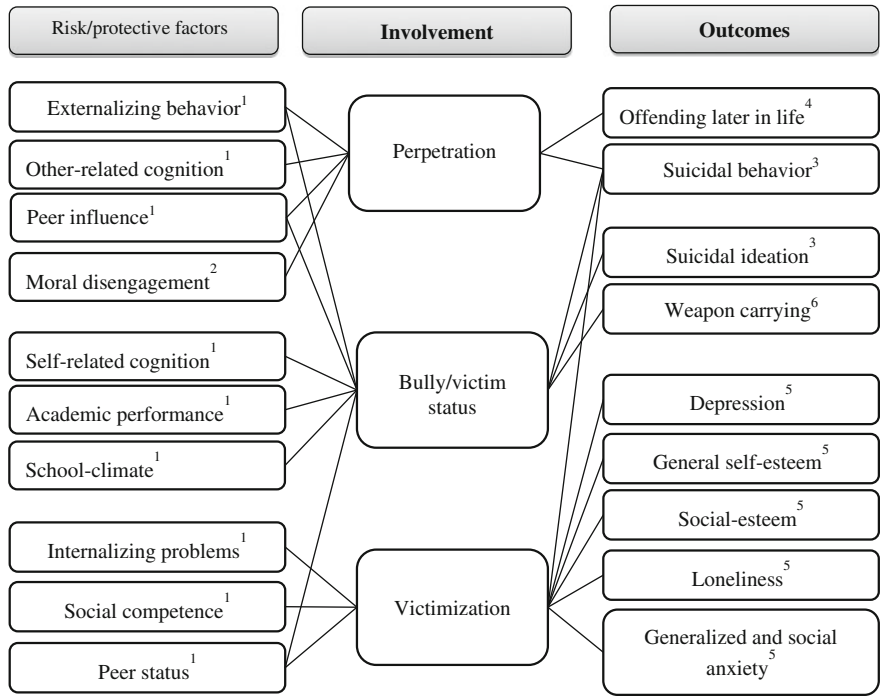


Fig. 2.1 Risk and protective factors and outcomes of bullying involvement with the largest effect sizes according to meta-analyses. *Notes* 1 Cook et al. (2010); 2 Gini et al. (2014); 3 Holt et al. (2015); 4 Tofi et al. (2011b); 5 Hawker and Boulton (2000); 6 Van Geel et al. (2014)

2.5.1 Perpetration

Some studies have investigated risk and protective factors for perpetration. Cook et al. (2010) reported risk and protective factors with moderate effect sizes for perpetration such as externalizing behavior, peer influence, and other-related cognitions. Externalizing behavior was defined as aggressive, defiant, or disruptive undercontrolled acts and was positively related to perpetration. Peer influence was also an important predictor with lower levels of perpetration in children affiliated to prosocial peer groups that reinforce positive rather than negative behaviors. Other-related cognitions, that is, cognitions about other people including normative beliefs, empathy and perspective taking, also predicted less perpetration. Gini et al. (2014) focused on moral disengagement. This was defined by Bandura et al. (1996) as a mechanism through which people justified the transgression of moral rules, being able to convince themselves that these rules do not apply to certain situations. Applying this idea to bullying, it could be possible that the aggressors understand and have internalized moral principles according to which hurting other people is not right but, at the same time, disconnect morally, thinking that this should not be

applied to certain people or groups who become their victims, finding excuses to justify their behavior. In their meta-analysis, Gini et al. (2014) found that moral disengagement was an important predictor of perpetration.

Perpetration was found to be related to very damaging outcomes. Holt et al. (2015) found that perpetration was associated with more suicidal behavior such as suicidal attempts and self-injury. A systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies conducted by Ttofi et al. (2011b) reported that perpetration predicted offending later in life, and this issue is described and analyzed in Chap. 6.

2.5.2 *Victimization*

There are also factors that increase the risk of victimization or protect children from being victimized. Cook et al. (2010) found that victimization was predicted by internalizing behaviors, social competence and peer status. Internalizing problems include depressive, anxious, withdrawn, or avoidant responses and are inwardly directed. These responses were related to more victimization. Social competence, defined as skills that help in interacting with other people and avoiding socially unacceptable behaviors, was related to lower levels of victimization. Peer status, that is the quality of peer relationships taking into account rejection and isolation on the one hand and popularity and likeability on the other hand, was also related to less victimization.

The outcomes of victimization are very harmful. The largest effect size was reported by Hawker and Boulton (2000) in relation to depression. These authors also found that victims showed lower general self-esteem and social esteem. Children who were victimized by their peers were also lonelier and had higher levels of general and social anxiety. Holt et al. (2015) discovered that suicidal behavior was also more common in victims. The consequences of victimization are reviewed in Chap. 6.

2.5.3 *Bully/Victims*

Bully/victims share some of the risk and protective factors and outcomes with perpetrators and also with victims, but there are some variables that are related more to this status. Cook et al. (2010) reported that bully/victim status was predicted by peer influence, externalizing behavior, social competence, and peer status. It was also predicted by self-related cognitions, with less involvement in this role among children who display more positive cognitions about themselves such as self-respect, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Better academic performance also predicts a lower likelihood of being a bully/victim. Finally, these authors also found that school climate, defined as a sense of belonging to the school, respect and fair treatment, was also related to fewer bully/victims.

Damaging consequences were also reported for students involved in bullying as bully/victims. Some of these consequences are very serious. The strongest effect sizes were found by Holt et al. (2015), who reported that bully/victims had more suicidal behavior and also more suicidal ideation. Also, Van Geel et al. (2014) found that bully/victim status was strongly related to weapon carrying. More research is needed on bully/victims, especially to investigate whether victimization leads to bullying and viceversa.

2.6 Summary

Bullying is a specific kind of aggression in which some students intentionally show frequent and long-term aggressive behavior toward their peers who cannot easily defend themselves. There are different forms of bullying and these can be classified as direct and indirect. There are also different roles of students, where some of them become perpetrators, others become victims, and others are bully/victims. Moreover, there is a group of bystanders who witness this kind of violence.

Although research on bullying started in the 1970s, there is a broad literature on the topic. There are thousands of studies on the nature and dynamics of the phenomenon and many risk and protective factors have been described. Anti-bullying programs are also being implemented and evaluated throughout the world. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses on the topic provide very thorough insights and a global vision on the field. Taking into account the complex nature of the phenomenon and differences in the methodologies across the studies, its prevalence is very difficult to compare among contexts and countries. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that bullying is important all over the world.

Meta-analytic findings provide information on many risk and protective factors and outcomes taking into account the different roles of involvement in bullying. Perpetration is predicted by externalizing behavior, other-related cognitions, peer influence, and moral disengagement; and, it is related to offending later in life and suicidal behavior. Victimization is predicted by internalizing problems, social competence, and peer status and its outcomes are very damaging, including depression, social and self-esteem, loneliness, and generalized and social anxiety. The predictors of bully/victims include externalizing behavior, peer influence, self-related cognition, academic performance, school climate, and peer status. However, many of these findings are based on cross-sectional studies, where the time ordering is not clear. More prospective longitudinal studies of risk and protective factors for bullying and victimization are needed.

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Consequences

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2017, XII, 83 p. 2 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-53027-7