# Bullying impacts victims and perpetrators alike with lasting psychological effects



Research indicates that both bullies and their victims share psychological and social challenges, including heightened anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, academic difficulties, increased absenteeism, and elevated suicidal ideation. This connection underscores the dual impact of bullying on all parties involved, highlighting a complex, reciprocal relationship.

Robin Kowalski, a psychology professor at Clemson University and an author specializing in bullying, described the relationship as "bidirectional." She told Deseret News that longitudinal research confirms the involvement in bullying exacerbates existing issues like anxiety and depression, yet these pre-existing conditions can also increase the likelihood of a child becoming a bully. Kowalski further noted that bullying's effects are not confined to childhood or adolescence but can continue into adulthood, manifesting in settings like the workplace or at home. One study highlighted that 80% of siblings had experienced bullying from each other, indicating prevalence beyond schools.

Bullying manifests in two primary forms: traditional bullying—such as physical or verbal abuse occurring face-to-face—and cyberbullying, which takes place online or via digital platforms. Kowalski emphasised the dynamic between these forms, noting that children subjected to traditional bullying might retaliate through cyberbullying, identifying digital spaces as outlets for regaining a sense of power where anonymity is possible. This interplay creates a cycle where individuals might be perpetrators or victims of one or both types of bullying.

While both forms produce similar harmful outcomes, there are notable gender differences in bullying behaviours. Boys tend to engage more in physical bullying, whereas girls often use indirect methods such as gossiping or spreading rumours. In the cyber realm, however, bullying behaviour does not clearly skew towards one gender; gaming activity appears to be a more significant factor than gender in predicting cyberbullying involvement.

Ron Kerbs, CEO of cybersecurity company Kidas, which provides real-time monitoring of online gaming environments, explained that many parents underestimate or dismiss the potential for their children to be involved in bullying. He noted that competitive gaming environments often trigger bullying behaviour. Kerbs observed that an unusual but telling sign a child might be bullied online is an increased amount of time spent gaming in an effort to improve skills and avoid being targeted.

Christine Waanders, a psychologist linked to Kidas and the Center for Violence Prevention at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, clarifies the distinction between toxic behaviour and bullying in cyberspace. Bullying is characterized by repetitive targeting of the same individual, creating sustained distress. Waanders added that cyberbullying could have a more profound emotional impact than traditional bullying because victims cannot easily escape it—the harmful content can be replayed, shared, and persist across different schools or social settings.

Many children do not disclose bullying incidents to their parents, often out of fear that their online privileges will be restricted. Kowalski highlighted that children might not always recognise bullying behaviour themselves, either as victims or perpetrators, particularly online where harmful actions might be minimised. Parental awareness of these behaviours is often limited by a lack of understanding and digital literacy concerning children’s online activities.

Monitoring children's online behaviour is seen as a preventative measure, but it requires balance. Kowalski mentioned focus group findings indicating children prefer supervision over covert monitoring or “snoopervision,” which can feel punitive. Recognising bullying behaviours within peer gaming culture can be complicated, as aggressive interactions may be treated as normal social dynamics.

Teaching sportsmanship and social skills is another approach to mitigating bullying, Waanders explained. She suggested that children need guidance to distinguish between playful competition and destructive behaviour that targets personal character. Removing children from digital social environments as a punishment could exacerbate feelings of isolation, particularly for victims, according to Kowalski.

Central to addressing bullying is the concept of “psychological mattering”—helping individuals feel significant and valued. Kowalski, who specialises in this area, believes fostering this sense of importance among children could reduce bullying and more extreme acts of violence. Although bullying may never be fully eradicated, promoting psychological mattering in schools could substantially lower its incidence.

Parents are encouraged to actively engage with their children’s online lives, setting clear boundaries and understanding the digital worlds their children inhabit. Waanders advised against using screen time merely as a convenience tool, noting it is crucial for parents to demonstrate interest and provide guidance on safe online interactions. Keeping gaming areas and devices in shared spaces allows parents to monitor conversations and interactions more effectively.

Kerbs underscored the legitimacy of gaming as a growing cultural and educational phenomenon, noting many schools and universities now offer competitive gaming scholarships. He encourages parents to appreciate the skills their children can develop through gaming while remaining vigilant against bullying behaviours.

The Deseret News reports these insights with the intent to present a comprehensive view of bullying’s dynamics, manifestations, and impacts, alongside expert perspectives on strategies for recognition and intervention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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