

Is there a link between childhood bullying behaviour and anti-social behaviour in later years?

A few studies have found a link between bullying and aggressive behaviour in childhood and later problem behaviour such as criminality and alcohol abuse (for example Loeber and Dishion, 1983; Magnusson, Stattin and Dunér, 1983). A Swedish study by Dan Olweus in 1993 supported this link. He found that approximately 60% of boys described as bullies in grades 6-9 had been convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24.

What is more, 35% - 40% of these boys who had bullied in school, had, by their mid twenties, three or more criminal convictions.

Article details

D Olweus (1999) 'Sweden' in P K Smith and others (editors) 'The Nature of School Bullying: a cross-national perspective', London: Routledge. Click the book graphic to buy this book online.

Author details

Professor Dan Olweus was the first person to carry out a thorough research project on bullying. This large, long term study which began in Sweden in 1970, was to provide the inspiration for many who felt that bullying in schools should be challenged rather than accepted. Since the 1970s, his work in this area had continued with force. Indeed, in 1997-99, he led a group in a large project which introduced the widely respected Olweus (anti-bullying) programme to schools in Norway. Professor Olweus is based at the Research Centre for Health Promotion, University of Bergen, Norway.

Scandinavian studies found that children (especially boys) who bullied others were particularly likely to be involved in other anti-social behaviour such as shoplifting and drug abuse. The studies also found that this anti-social behaviour often continued into adulthood. Approximately 60% of boys who were described by teachers and peers as being bullies had at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24 compared to 23% of boys who had not been described as bullies. Even more disturbing was the finding that 35-40% of these bullies had 3 or more criminal convictions by this age, compared to 10% of those who had not been described as bullies.

Article details

D Olweus, S Limber and S F Mihalic 'History and Description of the Bullying Prevention Program' in 'Blueprints for Violence Prevention', The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder, USA.

The information in this paper was taken from D Olweus, S Limber and S F Mihalic (1999) 'Blueprints for Violence Prevention. Book Nine: Bullying Prevention Program', Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

A 5 year UK study found a possible link between bullying behaviour in school and later violent behaviour. It was found that from a group of 50 pupils (boys and girls) who were disruptive but not bullies, 17 had criminal convictions (with a total of 33 offences, including 4 which involved violence). However, a group of 50 pupils who were disruptive and bullies, had a much higher number of criminal convictions - 31 had 162 convictions and 36 of these offences involved violence. A 22 year study carried out in the US found that boys who were described by peers as being very aggressive (displaying bullying behaviour), have a much higher chance of becoming criminals by the age of 30 (a 1 in 4 chance) than others (who have a 1 in 20 chance). It was also found that in later life, these boys were aggressive towards their wives and children and tended to have children who behaved aggressively.

Article details

D Tattum (1993) 'Child, school and family', in 'Understanding and Managing Bullying', edited by D Tattum; Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Why You Should Take Bullying Seriously

Bullying is a pattern of activity intended to cause harm or distress to others. Bullies tend to target students who are the most vulnerable.

The Facts on Bullying

The fear of being bullied may keep as many as **160,000** students out of school on any given day. (National Association of School Psychologists)

Fifty-five percent of 8- to 11-year olds and **68 percent** of 12- to 15-year-olds say bullying is a big problem. (Kaiser Family Foundation)

Nearly **30 percent** of all youth aged 11 to 18 have been a victim or perpetrator of bullying. (Journal of the American Medical Association)

One in four children who bully will have a criminal record by the time they reach 30. (U.S. Department of Education)

Youth who bully others frequently behave badly in school. Bullies are also more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and get bad grades. (Journal of the American Medical Association)

Sixty percent of boys who were bullies in middle school had at least one criminal conviction by 24; 40 percent had three or more convictions. Bullies were four times as likely as their peers to have multiple convictions. (Olweus Bullying Prevention Group)

Boys more likely than girls to bully, but it is a problem for everybody. Girls are more likely to bully by excluding, while boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying. Both boys and girls engage in frequent verbal bullying. (Olweus Bullying Prevention Group)

(source: "Stop Bullying Now," a collaboration between the National Association of Broadcasters and the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Take a Stand. Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched a multi-year National Bullying Prevention Campaign-"Take a Stand. Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!"-to address this critical problem. The campaign's goal is to actively engage 9-through 13-year-old youths-and those who shape their world-in a comprehensive, research-based effort to change the environment in which bullying occurs.

Everyone in the community - parents, teachers, school officials, students, and others - has a stake in putting a stop to bullying and a role to play in bullying prevention efforts. Visit www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov for more information.