

Pupils' definitions of bullying

Suzanne Guerin

Eilis Hennessy

University College Dublin, Ireland

Although there has been a growing interest in research on bullying in the last decade the majority of studies have used definitions of bullying and victimisation derived from researchers' perceptions of the problem. The aim of the present study was to examine pupils' definitions of bullying in school. The participants were 166 pupils in the top two years in five primary schools in Ireland (two in urban areas and three in rural areas). There were 89 male and 77 female participants, with a modal age of 12 years. An interview was designed to elicit pupils' perceptions of the defining characteristics of bullying behaviour including (I) the behaviours described as bullying, (II) the importance of repetition, (III) the importance of intention, (IV) the effect on the victim, (V) the role of provocation and (VI) imbalance of power. The results suggest that repetition, intention, and a lack of provocation may not be central to pupils' definitions of bullying. These results indicate some differences between pupils and researchers on what constitutes the most important defining characteristics of bullying. This suggests that approaches to bullying intervention programmes may need to be reconsidered in light of these findings.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great increase in research on bullying and in particular on the prevalence of bullying in schools (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 1997). In a large number of these studies the data has been collected by means of anonymous self report questionnaires on pupils' experiences of bullying and victimisation. In these studies pupils are typically presented with a definition of bullying behaviour and are then asked to indicate whether they engage in such behaviour or have been treated in such a way.

Although the findings from these studies are treated as comparable studies of bullying, in practice there are frequently differences in the definitions that have been presented to the pupils. For example, Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (1989) informs participants, "We

The authors would like to thank the staff and pupils from the five schools for their support and involvement in this study.

say a student is being bullied when another student, or a group of students, say nasty or unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, and things like that. These things may take place frequently and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a negative way" (p. 3). However, Hoover et al. (1992) told participants "You can think of bullying as any activity from teasing to physical attacks where one or a group of youngsters pesters a victim... over a long period of time. Bullying here refers to behaviour occurring at school but can include episodes on the playground or going to and from school" (p. 8).

Even when researchers use the same questionnaire the definition of bullying has frequently been modified in a variety of ways. For example, many researchers have made use of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (1989) but not all have consistently used the same definition as the original version of the instrument (e.g. Whitney & Smith, 1993; O'Moore, Kirkham, & Smith, 1997). Olweus himself revised his original definition to include forms of intimidation and psychological bullying such as exclusion and spreading rumours (Olweus, 1999).

Acknowledging the variety of definitions used by researchers, Farrington (1993) argued nevertheless that a number of criteria were necessary to define behaviour as bullying. These criteria include a broad range of behaviours (physical, verbal, or psychological), the intention to cause harm, repetition over time, the absence of provocation and the presence of an imbalance of power favouring the bully. However, not all definitions include all of these criteria. In the sections that follow, each of Farrington's criteria are examined in turn in relation to recently published research on bullying behaviour.

Types of bullying behaviour

Most definitions of bullying in recent publications agree with Farrington (1993) that bullying can take the form of physical, verbal, or psychological actions. Olweus (1997) included "physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or mean gestures, spreading rumours, and intentional exclusion from a group" (p. 171). Roland (1989) also included these varied forms of bullying in his definition of the behaviour. However, Besag (1989) used an even wider definition including what she calls "social" bullying. She described this as "socially acceptable behaviour, as in a highly competitive approach to academic, sporting or social success, which, by intent, makes others feel inferior or causes distress" (p. 4). The inclusion of forms of competitive behaviour, which may be encouraged by a school's ethos, is uncommon in definitions of bullying.

Although most researchers consider name-calling to be a form of verbal bullying, teasing is not necessarily included. Olweus (1997) tried to clarify this relationship by stating, "teasing of a playful and friendly nature... in most cases cannot be considered bullying. On the other hand, when the repeated teasing is of a degrading and offensive character, and, in particular, is continued in spite of clear signs of distress or opposition, on the part of the target, it certainly qualifies as bullying" (p. 171). The revised version of the "Bully/Victim Questionnaire" used a definition designed to clarify this distinction for pupils and stated that "we don't call it bullying when the teasing is made in a friendly and playful way" (p. 31, Olweus, 1999). According to Olweus, therefore, not all teasing is bullying. However, Roland (1989) included teasing as a form of psychological bullying, defining it as "to humiliate the victim through the use of words or gestures" (p. 22). Thus, with the exception of teasing, most researchers agree on the variety of behaviours that can be classified as bullying.

Intention

Almost all researchers agree on the importance of intention in relation to bullying behaviour. Olweus (1993) defined a negative action as "when someone intentionally inflicts,

or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort on another" (p. 9). Besag's (1989) account of "social" bullying emphasises the intentional nature of the harm caused by some forms of competitive behaviour. Stephenson and Smith (1989) described bullying as "aggressive behaviour which is intended to and does, in fact, cause distress" (p. 45). Some researchers have gone further in their account of the role of intent in bullying by removing the need for actual harm. Thus, Tattum (1989) described bullying as the "desire to hurt another" (p. 10), rather than actually harming and hurting. However, Tattum (1997) argued that it was the victim's perception of an incident rather than the intention of the other that was important in defining an incident as bullying "an accidental or unwilling hurtful action would not constitute bullying – unless it was perceived to be so by the victim" (p. 223). Most researchers continue to assert, however, that bullying behaviour is intentional.

Repetition

Bullying as behaviour repeated over time is part of most, if not all research definitions of bullying. Olweus (1999) says that his definition of bullying "emphasises negative actions that are carried out "repeatedly and overtime". The intent is to exclude occasional non-serious negative actions that are directed against one student at one time and against another on a different occasion" (p. 11). While many researchers agree on the importance of repetition in defining bullying many also acknowledge that occasions may arise when behaviour that is not repeated can be considered bullying. Tattum (1989) argued that bullying involved a desire to put a person under stress that this stress "is created not only by what happens but by the threat and fear of what may happen" (Tattum, 1997, p. 223). This account appears to imply that if the incident happens just once, but the fear is lasting, it may be defined as bullying. In fact, Olweus (1993) stated that "a single instance of more serious harassment can be regarded as bullying under certain circumstances" (p. 9). However, these circumstances were not described but it is possible that they related to the fear caused, as mentioned above.

Provocation

The idea of bullying as unprovoked is another criterion included by Farrington (1993). However, this was not part of the definition used in Olweus's questionnaire, either in the original (Olweus, 1989) or the revised version (Olweus, 1999). Indeed, it was not explicitly stated in other definitions, including those of Besag (1989), Rigby (1997), Roland (1989), or Tattum (1989).

In spite of this, it is clear that in most research it is understood that the behaviour has not been provoked. Swain (1998) described "the general absence of provocation" (p. 359) as a key element in defining bullying. Also, according to Olweus (1997) bullying "often occurs without provocation" (p. 172). However Stephenson and Smith (1989) identified 'provocative victims' whose own behaviour provoked the bully. Olweus (1994) reported that these individuals "behave in ways that may cause irritation and tension around them" (p. 1174). The existence of provocative victims would question the necessity of behaviour being unprovoked to be classified as bullying.

Imbalance of power

Bullying is commonly defined in relation to power. Smith and Sharp (1994) described bullying as "the systematic abuse of power" (p. 2), while Askew (1989) stated that bullying involved "the attempt to gain power and dominance over another" (pp. 61-62). This imbalance makes one pupil "the bully" and another "the victim". Olweus (1997) described the difference between the two as "an asymmetric power relationship" and reported that "the student who is

exposed to the negative actions has difficulty in defending himself or herself and is somewhat helpless against the student or students who harass" (p. 171). However, what needs to be clarified is the source of the power, and the origins of the imbalance.

One obvious source of power is physical strength. Olweus (1997) referred to the common image of the "weak" victim, and explains that this may be the victim's perception, even if it is not the reality. The bully may also derive power from a "gang", or group of supporters. However, the physical strength of an individual or the combined strength of a group is not the only way to characterise power. Olweus (1997) also considered the power of "mental strength" (p. 171) to be important. He argued that a power imbalance may be the result of the type of bullying used, particularly when "the 'source' of the negative actions is difficult to identify or confront as in social exclusion from the group" (p. 171)

Another possible source of power or influence in the classroom is social status or popularity, however, the findings regarding bullies' social status are inconsistent. Olweus (1993) and Farrington (1993) both stated that bullies were of average or above average popularity. However, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Berts, and King (1982) reported that both bullies and victims were unpopular, and victims more so. Glow and Glow (1980) also reported that bullies were seen as unpopular. These findings suggest that popularity is unlikely to be the source of power for the majority of bullies.

From this consideration, it is clear that while researchers agree that an imbalance of power is necessary to define an incident or behaviour as bullying, the root or nature of this imbalance is not always identified.

Alternative approaches to defining bullying

While the majority of researchers have presented pupils with a definition of bullying others have sought to understand the pupils' perceptions of what constitutes bullying behaviour. Smith and Levan (1995) examined six- and seven-year-olds' definitions. The six- and seven-year-olds in their study endorsed a much wider definition of bullying than is typically used by researchers. For example, 87% said that "fighting with someone" was bullying, while 47% said that if someone "shouts at you because they are cross", they are bullying. This is consistent with a study by Madsen (1996) that used a cross-sectional design to explore developmental changes in definitions of bullying from early childhood to young adulthood. Madsen (1996) found that younger children had a much broader definition of bullying, while older groups were more likely to cite examples of indirect bullying.

Researchers and pupils not only disagree on the range of behaviours that constitute bullying. Hoover et al. (1992), suggested that the high school pupils in their sample in the USA may have been reporting non-repeated events as bullying. Madsen (1996) found that pupils placed less emphasis than researchers on bullying as repeated, and intentional. For example, only 3% of pupils mentioned repetition as a defining feature of bullying and the intention of the bully was only mentioned as a defining factor by 5% of pupils. Madsen's (1996) research also suggested that pupils had a different view of the role of provocation in bullying. In her study, only 7.5% used lack of provocation as a defining criterion in bullying. This study also looked at the importance of an imbalance of power, and only 16% reported that the bully must be stronger or perceived as stronger. However, it is unclear whether this referred to physical strength, or some other aspect of power.

Indeed the only area of agreement between pupils and researchers (aside from the types of behaviours involved in bullying) seems to be in the importance of the effect of bullying on the victim. The effect of bullying is included in the majority of research definitions and was mentioned by 40% of Madsen's sample.

The findings of the Smith and Levan's (1995) and Madsen's (1996) studies of pupils' definitions of bullying would suggest that older pupils' reports may be inconsistent with researchers' definitions. However, to date no research has systematically explored the level of agreement between the features of bullying most commonly agreed upon by researchers and

children's perceptions of what constitutes bullying behaviour. The primary aim of the present research was to fill this gap in the empirical literature. Farrington's (1993) criteria were taken as the starting point for the comparison as they appear to be representative of views on the nature of bullying held by many researchers in the field.

Method

Participants

Five primary schools in the Republic of Ireland took part in the study, two in urban areas, and three in rural areas (classified by the Central Statistics Office (1992) as those areas with a population of under 2800 people). A number of schools were contacted based on location (i.e. rural/urban classification) and accessibility to public transport. Five responded. In total 166 pupils in the top two classes of primary school (90 in 5th class and 76 in 6th class) were interviewed. Ninety-two were from rural schools and 74 from urban schools. There were 89 male and 77 female participants. The age range was 10-13 years, with a modal age of 12 years.

Interview design

A semi-structured interview was designed for this study. Farrington's (1993) criteria were used to structure the interviews. Also, as Madsen (1996) had reported that the negative effect of bullying was important in pupils' definitions, this criterion was also included. Participants were initially asked about "things that happen at school that can hurt and upset other pupils". No reference was made to bullying in this open question as Arora and Thompson (1987) suggest that the word bullying may influence the responses.

From this point the interview took one of two directions. If bullying was mentioned as a hurtful and upsetting behaviour participants were asked to indicate what behaviours they would classify as bullying. This provided a list of behaviours that had been described as bullying. However, if they did not use the word bullying, a list of behaviours considered hurtful and upsetting was elicited. Participants were then asked which, if any of these could be considered forms of bullying. Again, this provided a list of behaviours that had been described as bullying.

In both cases, the behaviours described as bullying were used to examine the participants' views on the roles of intention, repetition, provocation, imbalance of power, and negative effect. For example, participants were asked if an incident could be considered bullying if the harm was accidental (intention), and if the behaviours had to happen once or twice or more often to be classified as bullying (repetition).

Provocation was examined using vignettes, as pilot research had suggested that pupils' understanding was facilitated by the presentation of concrete examples. Participants were presented with two vignettes. In the first they were told that a pupil had been hit, called names, etc. by another pupil (defined as active provocation) and had reacted with behaviours the participant had earlier described as bullying. In the second they were told that a pupil considered a classmate's behaviour annoying and had reacted, again in a way the participant had described as bullying. In both cases the participant had to identify whether the reaction could be considered a form of bullying or not.

In relation to the issue of the bully's power, the interview focused on power as a result of physical size, or as a result of the bully's popularity. Participants were asked what sort of children bullied others, whether you have to be bigger than others to bully them, and whether bullies had more friends than other children. Finally, participants were asked how they would judge an incident where a pupil was not upset (negative effect).

Procedure

The interview procedure was explained to the pupils involved. Participants were interviewed individually, while another participant sat in the room listening to music using headphones, (schools had requested that participants should not be interviewed alone). Once the interview had ended participants were asked not to discuss it with other pupils until all the interviews had been completed. All interviews were taped and then transcribed. The same researcher carried out all interviews.

Analysis

Content analysis was used to develop a coding frame for frequency analysis. Firstly, the interviews were reviewed and the full range of responses in each section was recorded. These responses were then reviewed by the first author and grouped into mutually exclusive categories. Finally these categories were adapted for use as a coding frame. This framework was used to code all the interviews and to carry out a frequency analysis on the entire sample. In order to determine the reliability of the classification a 10% sample of interviews was selected at random from each of the five schools for independent coding. Using the same framework, the second author independently analysed the sample interviews. Seventy percent agreement was taken as the minimum acceptable level of agreement. Levels of agreement were also adjusted to give Kappa coefficients.

Results

Inter-rater agreement

The percentage agreement between two independent raters was calculated. Table 1 below reports both the percentage agreement and the kappa-adjusted coefficients.

Table 1

Levels of inter-rater agreement

Category		Percentage Agreement	Kappa coefficient
Bullying behaviours		80%	0.76
Intention		95%	0.93
Repetition		70%	0.60
Provocation		90%	0.87
Imbalance of Power:	Physical size	75%	0.67
	Popularity	100%	1.00
Negative effect		70%	0.55
Average agreement		82%	0.77

As the agreement for the categories fell within acceptable levels, in the case of disagreements, the initial coding was left unchanged.

Bullying behaviours

Six categories of behaviour were identified, they were classified as verbal actions,

physical actions, exclusion, taking things or stealing, psychological actions, and other actions. Table 2 shows examples of behaviours included in each category.

Table 2

Classification of bullying behaviours

Category	Behaviours Included
Verbal bullying	Name-calling, slagging*, teasing
Physical bullying	Hitting, kicking, pulling/pushing, tripping, physical hurt
Exclusion	Excluding from games or groups, not talking to someone
Psychological bullying	Threatening, spreading rumours, intimidation, blackmail
Taking things	Stealing, taking another's belongings
Other	Picking on, provoking, fighting with, chasing, annoying

Note. * Refers to a term commonly used to describe teasing.

The proportion of pupils who reported each of these behaviours when describing bullying is reported in Table 3. Table 3 also includes sample quotations from the interviews.

Table 3

Frequency of behaviours described as bullying by over 10% of the sample

Response	Example from interviews	%	<i>n</i>
Verbal Bullying	"The main one would be calling names" (girl, 11 years)	83.1%	138
Physical Bullying	"Punching them" (boy, 11 years)	76.5%	127
Psychological Bullying	"Threatening to do stuff" (boy, 12 years)	19.3%	32
Taking things	"Take all their money and all" (boy, 10 years)	15.1%	25
Exclusion	"Like leaving them out of games" (boy, 11 years)	12.7%	21
Other types	"Starting fights with you" (boy, 11 years)	22.9%	38

As we can see from the table the most commonly reported forms of bullying were verbal and physical behaviours. The next most common was psychological forms of bullying (intimidation etc), followed by stealing and taking things.

Intention

In examining the role of intention in bullying, three main themes were identified. The largest group of pupils (63.3%, $n=105$) believed that intent was not necessary for a behaviour to be defined as bullying. As one 11-year-old girl reported "*Its still bullying if he doesn't think they're not doing anything wrong.*" An additional 3.6% ($n=6$) reported that the effect of the bullying was more important (e.g. "*If you are upsetting the other person, if you are messing and it is still upsetting the other person its bullying*" girl, 11 years). Only 13.3% of the group ($n=22$) agreed that the behaviour had to be intentional.

Repetition

When examining the importance of repetition, the most frequent response was that behaviours occurring once or twice were bullying (43.4%, $n=72$). As one 12-year-old boy said

"Even if it happens once it is still bullying". Combining that with those who report that frequency of occurrence was not important (e.g. "It just doesn't have to happen for a certain amount of time" girl, 11 years), just over 50% reported that behaviours did not have to be repeated over time to be considered bullying. As one 12-year-old boy said "It doesn't really matter like it could happen once and he'd get away with it and he thinks he can do it again". In examining the reasons for this, 14% ($n=24$) of pupils reported that it was due to the fact that a pupil could be upset even if a behaviour occurred only once.

However, only just over 25% (27.7%, $n=46$) believed the behaviours must occur with some frequency. For example, one 12-year-old boy reported that "It has to happen more often than that", while a ten-year-old boy reported that "If it just happened once or twice I wouldn't take it seriously". Also 8.4% ($n=14$) reported that it has to occur regularly. As one 12-year-old boy said "It depends on... like they keep doing it". Finally, 7.8% felt that other factors were more important in defining behaviour as bullying. As one 12-year-old girl said "It depends on what way you are bullying someone".

Provocation

In examining pupils' responses to the two vignettes described earlier, only 20.5% ($n=34$) of pupils believed that reacting to physical or verbal provocation (i.e. where an attack actually takes place) was bullying. For example, one 11-year-old girl responded "I'd say you were bullying each other". On the otherhand, 47% ($n=78$) felt it was not bullying, and considered it more of a fight or argument, or self-defence (e.g. "I'd say you were just sticking up for yourself" girl, 12 years).

However, 50.6% ($n=84$) reported that reaction to "passive" provocation was bullying. As one 12-year-old boy put it, "That's still bullying 'cause that's his way of doing things (the victim's behaviour) and that's his business". Only 2.4% ($n=4$) stated that response to this type of provocation was not a form of bullying. These results might reflect Stephenson and Smith's (1989) idea of the provocative victim. Also, it may support the idea that bullying is not necessarily unprovoked. However, it should be noted that response rates were low due to the number of ambiguous answers in this section.

Imbalance of power

Pupils were asked questions relating to a bully's physical size, and popularity. One quarter ($n=41$) reported that bullies were bigger and stronger than others. For example, "Big kids bully smaller kids" (girl, 10 years). However, almost 60% ($n=99$) reported that a physical advantage was not important in bullying. One 12-year-old girl reported that, "It's mostly bigger kids but small ones can as well", while a 13-year-old girl responded "I think all the bullies in our class are real small".

Pupils' responses to questions about popularity were not as clear-cut. There was very little difference between the number of pupils who reported that bullies had more friends than other pupils (39.8%, $n=66$), and the number reporting that they had fewer friends (30.1%, $n=50$). In addition, 15% believed that there was no difference between bullies and victims.

Negative effect

At the outset of the interview when asked to describe behaviours that were "hurtful and upsetting" over 55% of pupils ($n=94$) spontaneously mentioned bullying, suggesting that they defined bullying as behaviour that has a negative effect.

Pupils were also asked about bullying situations and whether the effect on the victim or the bully's intention was more important in defining the situation. Just over 40% (40.4%, $n=67$) of pupils felt that it was important to look at the effect of the behaviour on the victim.

One 11-year-old boy reported *"I think its more important to find out if it upsets the person that's being bullied,"* while a 12-year-old girl said *"If the person takes it serious and like then they get upset over it, it is bullying then"*. Also, just under a third (29.5%, $n=49$) felt that both perspectives were important (e.g. *"First of all finding out if it upsets them (the victim) but I'd still what to find out why they're (the bully) doing it as well"* girl, 13 years).

Information on the importance of negative effect can also be seen in other sections of the interviews. When talking about the role of repetition, approximately 14% of pupils reported that it was the effect of the behaviour that led them to define unrepeatable behaviour as bullying. Fourteen percent ($n=24$) also reported that the effect on the victim was the reason they defined unintentional harm as bullying (e.g. *"Cause they are hurting other people's feelings"* boy, 11 years).

Gender differences

As part of the examination of pupil's comments, possible gender differences in each section were examined using Chi-Square tests. However, no significant differences were identified between boys and girls.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify whether pupils' definitions of bullying concurred with those used in the research literature. The results suggest that there is some agreement between pupils' and researchers' definitions of bullying. Pupils and researchers agree that bullying can be physical, psychological, or verbal. Madsen (1996) found that the three most commonly reported forms of bullying were physical, verbal and psychological bullying. This is supported by the present study.

Pupils and researchers also agree on the importance of the negative effect of bullying on the victim. Over half of the sample mentioned bullying when asked about hurtful and upsetting things that can happen in school. The results of the present study also suggest that pupils focus more on the effect on the victim and the victim's interpretation of the incident than the intention of the bully. When asked how they would assess an incident 40% said that it is more important to assess whether the victim is upset by the incident than the bully's intention. Even when assessing the role of intention and repetition, pupils were aware of the effect on the victim. Madsen's (1996) study showed that 40% of pupils emphasise that bullying must have a negative effect on the victim.

The present research findings also support the idea that there are differences between pupils' and researchers' definitions of bullying. In contrast to most research definitions of bullying, pupils in the present study believed that bullying need not be intentional and may be done because bullies think they are "funny". Again, this supports the results from Madsen (1996), where only 5% of pupils saw intention as central to defining bullying. Also, pupils did not see repetition as a central factor in defining an action as bullying. Indeed, the review of definitions presented in the introduction suggests that the role of repetition is an area that even researchers do not agree on.

With provocation, the picture is not completely clear. When pupils were presented with scenarios where a pupil saw another pupil's behaviour as annoying, retaliation was seen as bullying. This may be because the incident identified as provocative (i.e. the annoying behaviour), is not necessarily intentional. However, where the behaviour was provoked through actual harm (either verbal or physical), less than one quarter described the behaviour as bullying. So it would appear that where there is intentional provocation (i.e. name calling, physical acts), retaliation is often seen as more of a "fight".

The final aspect of bullying definitions addressed by this study is the presence of an imbalance of power favoring the bully. Pupils were asked specifically about aspects of the

bully's size and popularity, two factors that may contribute to a sense of being more powerful. The findings do not reflect any imbalance, with 60% of the group reporting that a physical imbalance is not important, and the issue of popularity being unclear. However, other factors that could contribute to the bully's power were not examined and it is clear that this area needs to be examined in more detail.

It is important to recognise the possible methodological factors at play here. The present study focused on a very small age range and a developmental trend in pupils' definitions has already been identified in the research literature (Madsen, 1996). However when Madsen discussed her sample's definitions of bullying, other than in relation to the type of behaviour involved, the groups were collapsed and age differences in definitions of bullying were not considered.

On a practical note, the results of the present study have potentially significant implications for research and intervention with bullies and victims. If, as the present findings suggest, there are differences between pupils' and researchers' definitions of bullying then it is appropriate to ask which definition pupils use when responding to questionnaires about their involvement in bullying behaviour. Do they comply with the instructions to complete the questionnaire with the stated definition in mind, or do they use their own definition? If they do in fact refer to a personal definition, even studies that have used the same questionnaire may not be comparable. It may also be necessary to consider possible cultural or national differences in pupils' definitions of bullying.

The finding that pupils do not agree with researchers as to the importance of repetition and intention in defining bullying has potentially far reaching implications for our definitions of bullies and victims. If behaviour that unintentionally causes hurt or upset or that happens only once or twice is regarded as bullying then many more children will be classified as bullies and victims. Indeed if such a definition were to be adopted it might be more helpful to regard "bullying behaviour" as part of the repertoire of behaviours which most children exhibit to a greater or lesser extent. By implication most children would also have some experience of victimisation. It is interesting to note that researchers have gone beyond the idea of a simple dichotomy of bullies and victims. Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Osterman, and Kauliainen (1996) identified a variety of ways in which a child can be involved in bullying, describing bullies, victims, defenders of the victim and assistants to the bully, among others.

Changes in the definition of bullying, and by implication in our definitions of bullies and victims, also have implications for the design of school-based intervention programmes. If each pupil's involvement in bullying falls somewhere on a continuum then programmes designed as specific interventions for bullies or victims may be less helpful than those which involve all the pupils in the school.

Madsen (1996) has also highlighted the implications of differences between pupils' and researchers' definitions of bullying. Firstly, she stresses the possibility that some pupils may fail to report themselves as being bullied, as it does not fall within the operational definition presented to them. Secondly she suggests that even incidents where the behaviour is unrepeatable may have a significant negative effect by creating a sense of fear. Finally, discrepancies in definitions of bullying may lead to an inefficient attempt to tackle the problem, particularly if there are differences between the behaviours that researchers and pupils believe need to be addressed.

Overall, these factors combine to suggest that the current information available on the extent of bullying and the effectiveness of intervention may be affected by these discrepancies. The results of the present research as well as Madsen's (1996) suggest a need to examine and understand the possible developmental changes in perceptions of bullying. The age range of the pupils who participated in the present study was limited, and studying age-related differences may help us to understand some of the developmental differences in bullying considered in the introduction. More generally, this study has also highlighted some of the benefits of examining pupils' experiences and perceptions of bullying.

References

- Arora, C.M.J., & Thompson, D.A. (1987). Defining bullying for a secondary school. *Education and Child Psychology*, 4, 110-120.
- Askew, S. (1989). Aggressive behaviour in boys: To what extent is it institutionalised? In D.P. Tattum & D.A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in school* (pp. 59-72). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Besag, V. (1989). *Bullies and victims in schools*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Central Statistics Office (1992). *Census 91*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.
- Farrington, D.P. (1993). Understanding and preventing bullying. In M. Tonry & N. Morris (Eds.), *Crime and justice: An annual review of research* (vol. 17, pp. 381-458). Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Glow, R.A., & Glow P.H. (1980). Peer and self-rating: Children's perception of behaviour relevant to hyperkinetic impulse disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 8, 471-490.
- Hoover, J.H., Oliver, R., & Hazler R.J. (1992). Bullying: Perceptions of adolescent victims in the midwestern USA. *School Psychology International*, 13, 5-16.
- Lagerspetz, K., Björkqvist, K., Berts, M., & King, E. (1982). Group aggression among school children in three schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 23, 45-52.
- Madsen, K.C. (1996). Differing perceptions of bullying and their practical implications. *Education and Child Psychology*, 13(2), 14-22.
- O'Moore, A.M., Kirkham, C., & Smith, M. (1997). Bullying behaviour in Irish schools: A nationwide study. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 18(2), 141-169.
- Olweus, D. (1989). *Bully/victim questionnaire*. Unpublished questionnaire. University of Bergen, Norway.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Olweus, D. (1994). Bullying at School: Basic facts and effects of a school-based intervention programme. *Journal of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry*, 35(7), 171-1190.
- Olweus, D. (1997). Bully/victim problems in school. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 18(2), 170-190.
- Olweus, D. (1999). Norway. In P.K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, & P. Slee (Eds.), *The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective* (pp. 28-48). London: Routledge.
- Rigby, K. (1997). Attitudes and beliefs about bullying among Australian school children. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 18(2), 202-220.
- Roland, E. (1989). Bullying: The Scandinavian research tradition. In D.P. Tattum & D.A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in school* (pp. 21-32). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Salmivalli, C., Lagerspetz, K., Björkqvist, K., Osterman, K., & Kauliainen, A. (1996). Bullying as a group process: Participant roles and their relations to social status within the group. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 22, 1-15.
- Smith, P.K., & Levan, S. (1995). Perceptions and experiences of bullying in younger pupils. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65, 489-500.
- Smith, P.K., & Sharp, S. (1994). The problem of school bullying. In P.K. Smith & S. Sharp (Eds.), *School bullying: Insights and perspectives* (pp. 2-19). London: Routledge.
- Stephenson, P., & Smith, D. (1989). Bullying in the junior school. In D.P. Tattum & D.A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in school* (pp. 45-57). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Swain, J. (1998). What does bullying really mean? *Educational Research*, 40(3), 358-364.
- Tattum, D.P. (1989). Violence and aggression in schools. In D.P. Tattum & D.A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in school* (pp. 7-19). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Tattum, D.P. (1997). A whole-school response: From crisis management to prevention. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 18(2), 221-232.
- Whitney, I., & Smith, P.K. (1993). A survey of the nature and extent of bullying in junior/middle and secondary schools. *Education Research*, 35, 3-25.

Bien qu'il y eu un intérêt croissant dans la recherche sur le "bullying" dans les dix dernières années, la majorité des études ont utilisé des définitions de bullying et de s'anarcher en permanence sur une même personne, dérivent sur la perception du problème par les personnes menant cette recherche. Les études menées actuellement visent à comparer la définition de bullying dans le milieu scolaire à ceux utilisées dans la recherche. Le projet était de faire participer 166 élèves des deux dernières années de l'école primaire parmi 5 écoles irlandaises (deux dans les milieux urbains et trois dans les milieux ruraux). Un total de 89 garçons et 77 filles y ont participé avec une moyenne d'âge de 12 ans. Un entretien a été élaboré pour obtenir la perception des élèves sur les caractéristiques de la définition de bullying comportant (1) les attitudes qui définissent le bullying, (2) l'importance de l'attention dirigé par le bullying, (3) l'importance de la répétitivité, (4) le rôle du provocateur et (5) l'inégalité de pouvoir influencer sur les autres et la conséquence des effets négatifs. Les résultats suggèrent que la répétition, l'intention et la non-provocation ne soient pas communs à la définition que se font les élèves du bullying. Les résultats montrent des différences entre la définition que se font les élèves et les chercheurs sur ce qui constitue les caractéristiques les plus importantes de la définition de bullying. Cela suggère que les programmes de lutte contre le bullying devrait être revu à la lumière de ces découvertes.

Key words: Bullying, Children's views, Definition.

Received: May 2001

Revision received: April 2002

Suzanne Guerin. Dept. of Psychology, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland, E-mail: suzanne.guerin@ucd.ie, Website: www.ucd.ie/~psyindex

Current theme of research:

School-based bullying interventions; Involving children in research; Research in child and adolescent mental health.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

Guerin, S., & Hennessy, E. (1998). Student Perceptions and Definitions of Bullying: A Question of Methodology. In D. Hogan & R. Gilligan (Eds.), *Researching Children's Experiences: Qualitative Approaches*. Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.

Guerin, S., & Hennessy, E. (2001). Examining reported involvement in bullying in Irish primary schools. *Journal of Child-Centred Practice*, 8(1), 55-68.

Guerin, S., & Hennessy, E. (2000). Aggression and Bullying. *BPS Parent, Adolescent and Child Training Skills Series*. London; Blackwell.

Eilis Hennessy. Department of Psychology, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland, E-mail: eilis.hennessy@ucd.ie, Website: www.ucd.ie/~psyindex

Current theme of research:

Children's experiences in after-school care; Children's evaluation of their experiences in hospital; Children's understanding of psychological problems.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

- Hennessy, E. (1999). Children as service evaluators. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry Review*, 4, 153-161.
- Hennessy, E., & Hayes, N. (1997). Early childhood services in Ireland. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 5, 211-224.
- McGurk, H., Caplan, M., Hennessy, E., & Moss, P. (1993). Controversy, theory and social context in contemporary day care research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 34, 3-23.
- Rhodes, S., & Hennessy, E. (2000). The effects of specialized training on caregivers and children in early-years settings: An evaluation of the Foundation Course in Playgroup Practice. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, 559-576.