Bullying and Adverse Childhood Experiences

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Background

- 40% of young people report being bullied in the UK (Department of Education)
- 6% of all young people experienced bullying daily
- Around half of all adults in England have experienced at least one ACE
What is bullying?

The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online’.

- ANTI-BULLYING ALLIANCE
Types of bullying

Direct bullying ("traditional bullying")

*Physical bullying*: Pushing, hitting, kicking

*Verbal bullying*: Name calling, belittling, teasing
Types of bullying

Indirect bullying

Relational bullying: Excluding, spreading rumours, ridicule

Online bullying/cyberbullying: Posting on social media, social exclusion, nasty messages
Adverse childhood experiences

“Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence”

- Young Minds
Adverse childhood experiences

Graphic from Liverpool CAMHS
Should bullying victimisation be considered an ACE?
Bullying & ACEs - similarities

1. High co-occurrence
2. Links with poor mental health
3. More common in disadvantaged youths
Bullying & ACEs – co-occurrence

• Victims of bullying are more likely to report history of ACEs compared to non-victims (Reisen et al., 2019)

• Same pattern is evident for cyberbullying (Nagata et al., 2022)

Cycle of victimization?
Bullying & ACEs - outcomes

- Heightened anxiety & depression
- Lower school attendance
- Higher levels of substance use
Bullying & ACEs - prevalence

1. Both more common in areas of disadvantage (Choi et al., 2021)

2. Both more common in low SES households (Dosanjh et al., 2023; Hosozawa et al., 2021)

3. Both linked with lower education (Dosanjh et al., 2023; Hosozawa et al., 2021)
Bullying & ACEs - differences

Context

Timing
Bullying & ACEs - context

ACEs = Family context

Bullying = Peer context
Bullying & ACEs – timing
Where does that leave us?
Bullying & ACEs – types of associations

Cumulative = Both contribute independently to poorer outcomes

Multiplicative = Bullying exacerbates poor outcomes of ACEs
Empirical study: Trompeter et al., 2023

- 8,085 early adolescents from the ABCD study
- Mean age: 12 years; 52% male
- 55.9% White, 16.8% Latino, 16.9% Black, 6% Asian, 3.5% Native American, 0.9% Other
- Self-report measures on bullying
- Parent-reported mental health (CBCL) and ACEs
Results – sample characteristics

- Number of ACEs:
  - 0: 36%
  - 1: 13%
  - 2: 19%
  - 3: 28%
  - 4+: 4%
Results – sample characteristics

Bullying victimization prevalence

- Cyber
- Overt
- Reputational
- Relational
- Any bullying

Graph showing the prevalence of different types of bullying.
Results – cumulative effects

Both ACEs and bullying victimisation were associated with internalising & externalising problems.
Results - multiplicative

No significant interactions emerged
Bullying & ACEs – types of associations

**Cumulative** = Both contribute independently to poorer outcomes

**Multiplicative** = Bullying exacerbates poor outcomes of ACEs
What can we learn from this?
Implications for practice

1. Include bullying in screening for ACEs/adversity

2. Raise awareness of bullying & ACE overlap

3. Provide extra support for both disadvantaged youth and bullied youth
Should bullying be considered an ACE?

Probably yes – but maybe a peer-specific ACE
Bullying & ACEs

Supported by some emerging evidence (Karatekin & Hill, 2019) → more evidence needed
Next steps for research

• Need more longitudinal studies
• Grouping of ACEs into composite measure → look at ACEs separately to further understanding
Questions?

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Want to learn more?

Other resources


