1.2 The phenomenon of School based bullying

In recent decades, there has been a significant development in the research investigating the phenomenon of bullying involving children and young people (CYP). Addressing issues which affect the well-being of CYP in school settings has become an increasing priority internationally, with a link being proposed between access safe and inclusive schooling and societal wellbeing and prosperity and by the United Nations in their recent report (O'Higgins-Norman et al., 2022). Indeed, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mandates countries focusing on the management of issues such as bullying in school settings as a priority and ensure access to equitable and inclusive education. These principles are relevant to supporting access to safe settings for all CYP in the pupil populations with SDG 16 promoting the role of education in supporting the development of peaceful and inclusive societies. According to Olweus (2013 p. 770), "being bullied by peers represents a serious violation of the fundamental rights of the child or youth exposed" and management of this phenomenon is a priority for the provision of appropriate education.

Given the priority given to the study of bullying among CYP within both the research literature and international policy priorities, it is a concern that there remains disagreement regarding how bullying is defined and conceptualised (Cornu, Abduvahobov, Laoufi, Liu, & Séguy, 2022; O'Higgins-Norman et al, 2022). Traditionally, bullying has been heavily influenced by the **definitions developed by Olweus** (1993) whose definition comprised **three criteria:**

1) **Intentionality** (desire or goal of inflicting harm, intimidation, and/or humiliation),

2) **Some repetitiveness**, and most importantly,

3) **A power imbalance** between the individuals in a shared social environment (Olweus, 1993; 2013).

The particular form of the power differential is understood as being diverse and dependent on contextual factors, such as physical disparity in strength, social group status within a peer group, or economic factors, for example. Incidence of bullying can take place during direct (i.e., face-to-face) or indirect (i.e., not involving physical proximity or direct engagement in person) interactions. It can take a range of forms such as physical (e.g., punching, kicking), relational (i.e., actions meant to damage reputations or relationships), property damage (i.e., destruction or theft of personal property), and verbal (i.e., oral or written communication meant to harm). Incidences of bullying may also occur across a range of divergent contexts such as at school, in the community (but involving CYP who know each other from school), and online in the form of cyberbullying.

Recent literature has led to disagreement among researchers regarding aspects of this definition, however. For example, some have suggested interactions may be similar but may not meet the criteria to be categorised as bullying, with conflict between equally matched individuals across the salient factors of power being proposed as a “conflict between equals” (Elliot et al., 2010, p. 534) or interpersonal aggression rather than an episode of bullying. In addition, there has also been disagreement regarding the role repetition of incidences of interactions in order to meet the criteria of being considered bullying (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). These limitations in traditional definitions of bullying are amplified given the greater prevalence and focus on the phenomenon of cyberbullying which takes place via online platforms or media. The proliferation of video content and the ability to repeatedly share messages or video files among social groupings adds to the social complexity of the bullying phenomenon and how it is conceptualised.

UNESCO’s scientific committee have recently attempted to revise the definitions of school based bullying towards a perspective they have identified as a whole-education approach (Cornu et al., 2022). This approach situates the school within the wider social context in which it exists, inclusive of the wider education community, within society more broadly and considers the technologies that support relationships in this broader conceptualisation. This approach takes a broader perspective regarding bullying and is heavily influenced by a social-ecological framework perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Espelage & Swearer, 2004). The definition they developed defines school bullying as in-person and online behaviour between students within a social network that causes physical, emotional or social harm to targeted students. It is characterized by an imbalance of power that is enabled or inhibited by the social and institutional norms and context of schools and the education system. School bullying implies an absence of effective responses and care towards the target by peers and adults (Cornu et al, 2022).

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