

# WJEC Psychology A-level

# Bullying Behaviours

Notes



### Part 1: Bullying Genes

- As reported by <sup>1</sup>The Telegraph in 2007, research conducted by King's College London appeared to show that 73% of children's risk of being a victim of bullying could be explained through genetic influences, whilst 61% could be explained through genes in terms of being a bully.
- <sup>2</sup>Data produced by the study of 1500 pairs of Swedish and British twins also appeared to demonstrate the partially innate basis of aggressive antisocial behaviour. The researchers concluded that "Aggressive behaviour can be inherited, but social environment plays a highly significant role in non-aggressive antisocial behaviour. Boys learn non-aggressive antisocial behaviour more from the environmental influences they encounter, while girls get it more from their genes".
- Research conducted by Silva et al (2013) has also concluded that <sup>3</sup>"boys and girls are both victims and aggressors, and there are significant differences in involvement in bullying between genders and the roles played. Boys are victims more often when considering different types of bullying, although significant differences were only found for physical aggression". Therefore, the fact that there are key gender differences in bullying behaviours is strongly supportive of a genetic predisposition due to the different types and levels of hormones in males and females.
- <sup>4</sup>Research has also pointed towards the role of the 5-HTTLPR gene, which is associated with serotonin transport and also mediates the link between stress and depression, which may affect the likelihood of a child suffering from bullying or becoming a bully themselves. The biological predisposition for psychopathy or criminality, as suggested by Lange and Christiansen, may also contribute to the overall outcome of bullying.
  - The research above has demonstrated that genes are not purely to blame for bullying behaviour, but rather predisposes certain individuals towards being bullies. This genetic predisposition must be accompanied with environmental risk factors, such as aggressive or bullying role models (the mechanism through which can be explained by social learning theory). Therefore, it is important not to take a biological determinist view, but rather adopt the integrationist diathesis-stress model!
  - The theories above may ignore the role of hormones and, more specifically, hormonal differences between males and females. For example, males have a greater concentration of testosterone than females, and this may leave them more susceptible to aggressive behaviour and so be at an increased likelihood of being a bully. However, this then means that there are few candidate genes specifically geared towards bullying, since the vast majority of men have a higher level of testosterone than females. This implies that there may be a stronger link between aggression and bullying, as opposed to biological candidate genes and bullying.
  - There has been little direct links made between candidate genes and bullying, but rather there seem to be genetically-predisposed risk factors which increases the likelihood of an individual being involved in bullying, and so is more of an indirect link. This promises little practical value because it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between these different risk factors and their relative importances, which should be noted when designing bullying intervention programmes.

### Part 2: Evolutionary Explanations

- Sexual jealousy is stronger in males (compared to females) due paternity uncertainty, which may lead to cuckoldry i.e. a male raising a son which is not his own. This is an evolutionary disadvantage, due to the male wasting his resources which he could have otherwise used on raising his own children. Therefore, anti-cuckoldry behaviours, in the form of male retentive strategies, are adaptive because they reduce the risk of cuckoldry.

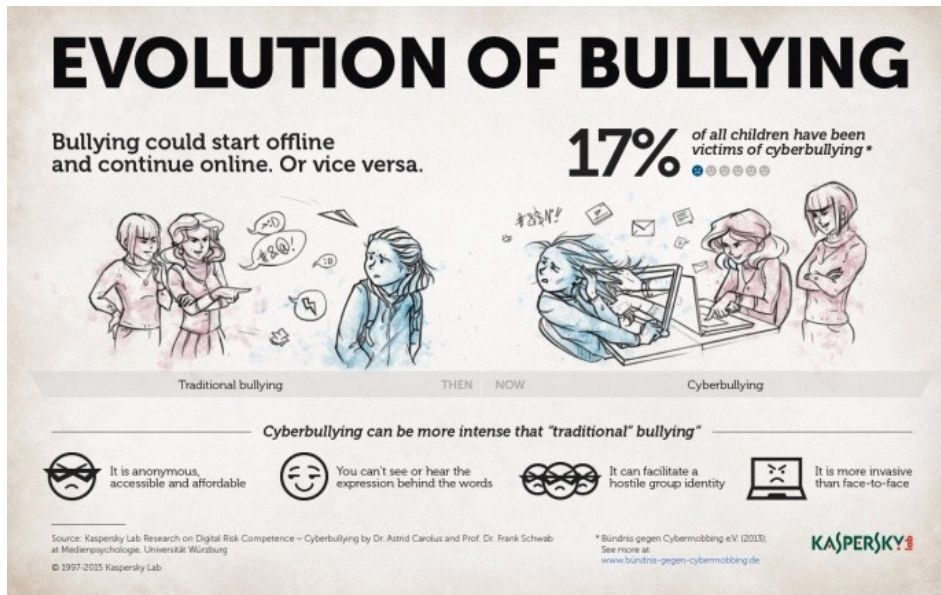
<sup>1</sup> Bullying is in the genes, study suggests, The Telegraph, Alok Jha, Published on 27.12.07, Accessed on 24.08.17, Accessed through <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2007/dec/27/genetics.bullying>

<sup>2</sup> Eley, T.C., Stevenson, J. And Lichtenstein, P., Bullying Behaviour: Blame It On Bad Genes?, ScienceDaily, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Silva, M.A.I., Pereira, B., Mendonça, D., Nunes, B and Abadio de Oliveira, W. The Involvement of Girls and Boys with Bullying: An Analysis of Gender Differences, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2013, 10(12), pp.6820-6831.

<sup>4</sup> Swearer, S.M. and Hymel, S., Understanding the Psychology of Bullying, Moving Toward a Socio-Ecological Diathesis-Stress Model, American Psychological Association, June 2015.





- Wilson and Daly (1996) suggested that there are two types of male retention strategies - direct guarding (e.g. insisting on knowing where your partner is and who she is with) and negative inducements (e.g. threats of suicide to avoid infidelity).
- Therefore, there is a clear link between male retention strategies and aggression, the latter of which is usually used to implement such strategies. This idea is supported by Shackelford et al (2005) who found that when 107

couples, who'd been married for less than a year, individually completed the Male Retention Inventory (husbands) and the Spouse Influence Report (wives), there was a positive correlation between increasing scores on these two measures, which translated to being an important predictor of the use of aggression in such married relationships. This was further supported by Wilson et al (1995), who found that male retention strategies left 53% of respondents fearing for their lives.

- Bullying may not be the product of poor social skills or dysfunctional upbringing as previously thought, but may have an evolutionary advantage. For example, in evolutionary terms, men who bullied other men through reinforcing a power imbalance, were more likely to have their pick of resources and to mate with more females (due to the influence of fewer competing males), and increasing the likelihood of their genes being passed onto as many offspring as possible. Female bullying is more likely to occur within relationships to ensure fidelity (e.g. through threats or monitoring), as opposed to aiming to acquire new relationships (which is the male perspective). Therefore, the aggressive act of bullying may be considered as adaptive, as suggested by Volk et al (2012).
- It may be difficult to differentiate between the effects of hormones and evolutionary explanations for bullying. For example, <sup>5</sup>Hansen et al (2006), in a study of workplace bullying, concluded that “bullied respondents had lower social support from coworkers and supervisors, and concentrations of cortisol in the saliva were lower at awakening in bullied respondents compared with non bullied respondents”. This suggests that hormonal and evolutionary explanations of bullying are closely related.
- + **However**, there is evidence to support the evolutionary basis of bullying and that such behaviours provide an evolutionary advantage. For example, Volk et al (2015) demonstrated that <sup>6</sup>“the data for sexual behaviour more clearly supported our hypothesis that bullying behaviour predicts an increase in sexual opportunities even when accounting for age, sex, and self-reports of attractiveness, likeability and peer victimization. These results are generally congruent with the hypothesis that bullying perpetration is, at least in part, an evolutionary adaptive behaviour”.
- + **This** is a refreshing approach to explaining bullying, rather than blaming dysfunctional people or dysfunctional parents (and thus increasing the amount of blame which has been placed upon them). This means that the failures and successes of anti-bullying programmes can be re-evaluated in terms of evolutionary (and thus biological) terms, hence increasing their scope for effectiveness!

<sup>5</sup> Hansen, A.M., High, A., Persson, R., Karlson, B., Garde, A.H. and Øebaek, P. Bullying at work, health outcomes, and physiological stress response, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 2006, 60(1), pp.63-72.

<sup>6</sup> Volk, A.A, Dane, A.V., Marini, Z.A. and Vaillancourt, T. Adolescent Bullying, Dating, and Mating, Testing an Evolutionary Hypothesis, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 2015: 1-11.



### Part 3: Cognitive Biases

- Research has suggested that <sup>7</sup>“aggressive victims were characterised by impairments in self-regulation as well as difficulties across domains of functioning. In contrast, bullies tended to exhibit aggression-related biases in social-cognitive processing, but did not suffer from other adjustment problems”. This suggests that cognitive biases can, on occasion, be more influential in the development of bullying behaviours compared to environmental influences.
- Hostile attribution biases may also be particularly important in the development of bullying behaviour, due to the strong link between HAB and aggression/criminality, as demonstrated by Pornari et al (2009). These researchers found that in relation to 339 secondary school children, in a study of peer and cyber aggression, that <sup>8</sup>“children’s moral justification, euphemistic language, displacement of responsibility and outcome expectancies were negatively associated with hostile attribution bias. Moral justification also related positively to cyber aggression”. This strongly supports the idea of faulty information processing/cognitive biases in the development of bullying.
- Further support was given by Crick et al (1996) who concluded that <sup>9</sup>“the reactive-aggressive children would demonstrate hostile biases in their attributes of peers’ intentions in provocation situations and only proactive-aggressive children would evaluate aggression and its consequences in relatively positive ways”. This further supports the link between aggression and bullying behaviours, as mediated by cognitive biases.
  - Many of the studies which investigate different types of aggression, such as reactive and proactive types, have been conducted on animals. This suggests that the findings have low ecological validity because they cannot be readily generalised to humans who have different aggression systems and limbic systems. This, alongside the issue of linking aggression with bullying behaviour, suggests that the validity of some studies as an explanation for bullying may be tenuous.
  - The focus on cognitive biases does not take into account the role of biology in the development of bullying, such as genes which increase this likelihood and evolutionary differences between men and women. This suggests that if bullying has at least a partial biological basis, then hostile attribution biases and cognitive biases may also have a partial biological basis, which is not accounted for in the current versions of the theories.

### Part 4: Narcissistic Personality

- It has been suggested that narcissistic personality traits have an indirect effect on the development of bullying behaviours. For example, by studying the internet usage patterns of 508 high school students in Istanbul, Fusun (2012) demonstrated that <sup>10</sup>“entitlement significantly predicts deprivation and controlling difficulty internet addiction whilst superiority predicts significantly social isolation in internet indirection”, thus supporting an indirect link between narcissism and bullying, even in the modern age.
- However, it has also been suggested that both bullies and victims may display such narcissistic personality traits. For example, Linton et al (2013) demonstrated that <sup>11</sup>“being a victim was

<sup>7</sup> Toblin, R.L., Schwart, D., Gorman, A.H. and Abou-ezzedine, T. Social-cognitive and behavioural attributes of aggressive victims of bullying. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 2005, 26(3), pp.329-346.

<sup>8</sup> Pornari, C.D and Wood, J. Peer and cyber aggression in secondary school students: the role of moral disengagement, hostile attribution bias, and outcome expectancies, *Aggressive Behaviour*, 2010, 36(2), pp. 81-94.

<sup>9</sup> Crick, N.R. and Dodge, K.A. Social Information-Processing Mechanisms in Reactive and Proactive Aggression, *Child Development*, 1996, 67(3), pp.993-1002.

<sup>10</sup> Fusun, E. Examination of Narcissistic Personality Traits’ Predicting Level of Internet Addiction and Cyber Bullying through Path Analysis, *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 2012, 12(3), pp.1694-1706.

<sup>11</sup> Linton, D.K. and Power, J.L., The personality traits of workplace bullies are often shared by their victims: Is there a dark side to victims? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2013, 54(6), pp. 783-743



## NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

① Grandiose sense of self-importance

I AM ridiculously good looking + my famous comics are a form of art!



② Requires excessive admiration

Excuse me! Where's the red carpet + fanfare to greet me??



③ Believes she is "special" + unique with high status

whatever. These stupid ugly non-artistic people will never understand how truly great my comics + I are.



④ Sense of entitlement

I have to wait in line?? This is bullshit!!



⑤ Lacks empathy

I lost my job... Speaking of jobs, I got a raise the other day!



⑥ Envious of others

\*Gasp!\* Her cat is cuter than mine! Well, I hope it dies soon!



positively associated with the same Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychoticism, aggression, and disinhibition".

•Narcissistic personality traits also seem to be immune to both negative and positive views of aggression, as suggested by Ang et al (2009), who found that <sup>12</sup>"narcissistic exploitativeness was significantly and positively associate with both bullying behaviour and approval-of-aggression beliefs".

+An interactionist approach is best suited to explaining the role of a narcissistic personality in bullying behaviours and its original development, which appears to have both biological and environmental influences. Therefore, such a personality is not the single cause of bullying behaviour but should rather be considered within the context of the individual's social environment, the existence of social hierarchies, genetic predispositions and gender.

– Several of the studies above have only discovered an indirect link between a narcissistic personality and bullying, whilst direct links have been reserved for the role of aggression and social hierarchies. This means that although individuals with such personality disorders may be more likely to engage in bullying behaviours, this does not necessarily mean that a 'cause and effect' relationship can be established between the two outcomes.

+An increased understanding of the maturational progression of narcissism, such as its spike between the ages of 14 and 18 according to

<sup>13</sup>Carlson et al (2009), has a real-life application in terms of developing more thorough bullying intervention programmes which are suited towards particular age groups and genders!

### Part 5: Cultural Differences in Bullying Behaviours

• There are significance differences between cultures in terms of the extent to which bullying behaviours are tolerated. For example, <sup>14</sup>researchers have demonstrated that bullying rates in Austria are significantly higher compared to Japan, which may be explained by the lower reporting rates of Japanese students compared to Western standards. This implies that despite cross-cultural research showing differences in rates of bullying, this may be skewed by social desirability bias (i.e. how acceptable bullying is in different cultures) and the likelihood of individuals reporting bullying.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca P. Ang, Eileen Y.L. Ong, Joylynn C. Y. Lim and Eulindra, W. Lim. From Narcissistic Exploitativeness to Bullying Behaviour: The Mediating Role of Approval-of-aggression Beliefs, *Social Development*, 2010, 19(4), pp.721-735.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin, S. Carlson and Per F. Gjerde, Preschool Personality Antecedents of Narcissism in Adolescence and Emergent Adulthood: A 20-Year Longitudinal Study, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 2009, 43(4): 570-578.

<sup>14</sup> Elfriede Greimel and Makiko Kodama, Bullying from a cross-cultural perspective: A comparison between Austria and Japan, Accessed on 24.08.17, Accessed through [https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/files/public/3/31504/20141016181724342790/JEducSci\\_4\\_29.pdf](https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/files/public/3/31504/20141016181724342790/JEducSci_4_29.pdf)



- These differences are not exclusive to face-to-face bullying, but also extend into cyberbullying, as suggested by Barlett et al (2013). These researchers found that <sup>15</sup>“higher levels of cyberbullying change for the U.S. sample compared with the Japanese sample. Follow-up analyses showed that cyberbullying reinforcement and interdependent self-construal moderated this effect.”
- In terms of the workplace, there usually exists a U-shaped curve signifying the relationship between workplace satisfaction and bullying behaviours, as suggested by Giorgi et al (2014). Thus, this implies that there are significant differences in the way that different cultures tolerate bullying behaviours, and that sometimes this may even be beneficial for workplace satisfaction!
- Research conducted by Craig et al (2009) concluded that, whilst assessing adolescents across 40 different countries, <sup>16</sup>“adolescents in Baltic countries reported higher rates of bullying and victimisation, whereas Northern European countries reported the lowest prevalence. Boys reported higher rates of bullying in all countries”. The continual finding that boys are more likely to be involved in bullying behaviours suggests that there are significant gender differences and so may even be a biological basis.
- + **An** increased understanding of the cultural differences in bullying behaviours means that bullying intervention schemes can be more carefully planned and be specific to certain cultures and age groups which are particularly susceptible to bullying. However, the evidence showing a relatively high level of tolerance of bullying behaviours in some cultures is unnerving.
- + **Evidence** of cultural differences in bullying behaviours may also give further credit to the effectiveness of intervention projects. For example, Craig et al (2009) noted that countries with the lowest prevalence of bullying behaviours, such as Scandinavia, also had the largest and most integrated bullying prevention schemes. This gives merit to the idea that bullying can be tackled and reduced through specific and effective interventions.
- + **The** fact that bullying prevalence is likely to half as adolescents grow up suggests that the influence of culture on bullying behaviours is less than the influence of peer pressure and the social climates which adolescents find themselves in. Therefore, this suggests that cultural influences should be addressed more consistently in adolescence as opposed to, for example, the workplace.

### Part 6: Moral Disengagement Theory

- <sup>17</sup>Bandura’s 1999 Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Agency aimed to explain why ‘good people do bad things’, through blaming faulty self-regulation in individuals as the primary cause for bullying. The 4 main aspects of moral disengagement are cognitive restructuring (i.e. describing the event as less negative than it really is or by justifying the act by saying that “it could have been much worse”), minimising one’s agentive role (i.e. shifting responsibility from oneself to the person who the individual is acting on behalf of, as their agent), disregarding negative impact and dehumanising the victim (e.g. blaming the victim for putting themselves in such a position).
- Hymel, Rocke-Henderson and Bonanno (2005) demonstrated surprising student approval ratings for such mechanisms. For example, over 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that “bullying is just a normal part of being a kid”, whilst 87% justified their actions by agreeing with the statement that “kids get bullied because they are different” or, even more shockingly, “some kids get bullied because they deserve it” (a 67% agreement rate!).
- + **Moral** disengagement appears to be a useful and reliable indicator of future bullying behaviours, as suggested by Wang et al (2017). These researchers concluded that such a theory could be

<sup>15</sup> Christopher P. Bartlett, Douglas A. Gentile, Craig A. Anderson, Kanae Suzuki, Akira Sakamoto, Ayuchi Yamaoka and Rui Katsura. Cross-Cultural Differences in Cyberbullying Behaviour A Short-Term Longitudinal Study, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2014, 45(2).

<sup>16</sup> Craig, W., Harel-Fisch, Y., Fogel-Grinvald, H. et al. *Int J Public Health* (2009) 54(Suppl 2): 216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-009-5413-9>

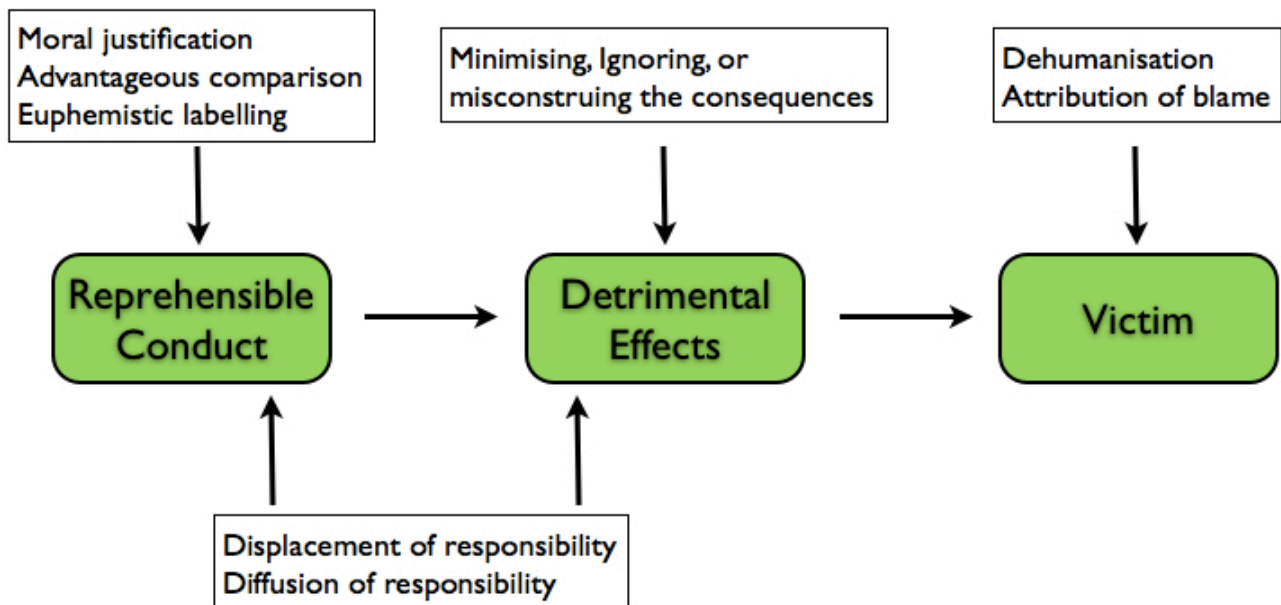
<sup>17</sup> Bullying and Moral Disengagement, Shellet Hymel (Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, UNL Think Tank), June 2011, Accessed on 24.08.17, Accessed through <http://cehs.unl.edu/BRNET/ThinkTank/2011/2-504-Hymel%20-%20Bullying%20and%20Moral%20Disengagement.pdf>



used to predict bullying behaviours 6 months prior to the actual acts, and that <sup>18</sup>“older students and males utilised more moral disengagement than younger students and females and younger students and males engaged in greater bullying perpetration”. Therefore, this suggests that an increased understanding of the mechanisms underlying moral disengagement could result in more effective bullying intervention plans.

– Defending may be a more important predictor of bullying, as opposed to moral disengagement as a whole. For example, Thornberg et al (2013) demonstrated that <sup>19</sup>“diffusion of responsibility and victim attribution were significantly and negatively related to defending, while the other dimensions of moral disengagement were unrelated to defending”. Therefore, this suggests that more specific parts of the moral disengagement theory should be targeted in an attempt to develop more effective bullying intervention strategies.

– There are gender differences which exist, considering that <sup>20</sup>research has demonstrated that boys are significantly less likely to use moral disengagement as justification for their actions. Therefore, this suggests that such a theory cannot be used to explain all examples of bullying behaviours, and so may be considered a limited explanation.



### Part 7: Creating A Peaceful School Learning Environment (CAPSLE)

- Twemlow et al (2001) used the CAPSLE project in two schools who had been matched for (social) demographic characteristic, and the results were monitored over a 4 year period, and then statistically compared to a control group. The researchers found that <sup>21</sup>“the experimental school showed significant reductions in discipline referrals and increases in scores on standardised academic achievement measures”.
- The scheme was developed on the basis of the academic attainment scores of 1,106 students both before and after the scheme was implemented, and whose results were matched to 1,100 students in another school within the same district, as a control group. There was a positive

<sup>18</sup> Wang, C., Ryoo, J.H., Swearer, S.M. et al. J Youth Adolescence (2017) 46: 1304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0577-0>

<sup>19</sup> Thornberg, R. and Jungert, T. (2014), School bullying and the mechanisms of moral disengagement. Aggr. Behav., 40: 99–108. doi:10.1002/ab.21509

<sup>20</sup> De Caroli, M.E. and Sagone, E., Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement: An Analysis from Early Adolescence to Youth, Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2014, 140(1), pp.312-217.

<sup>21</sup> Twemlow, S.W., Fonagy, P., Sacco, F.C., Gies, M.L., Evans, R. And Ewbank, R. Creating a peaceful school learning environment: a controlled study of an elementary school intervention to reduce violence, The American Journal of Psychiatry, 2001, 158(5):808-10.



correlation between increased participation within the programme and an increased score of academic attainment.

- + **This** CAPSLE programme has the added advantage of not interfering with other educational processes within the school, and so increases the likelihood that schools will choose to adopt this scheme.
- + **A** review conducted by<sup>22</sup>Fonagy et al (2005) found that the CAPSLE programme also led to significant improvements in student's academic performance, as well as being flexible through adapting to the financial and organisational circumstances within each school. Psychiatrists can also easily be introduced into the scheme to improve its effectiveness and reduce the organisational pressure on schools. Such a flexibility further increases the likelihood that schools will adopt such schemes.
- + **The** scheme can also be considered as cost effective because the resources it utilises are already present within the schools, where the greatest potential financial burden is the time required from the school's staff. Therefore, this suggests that although financial sacrifices have to be made for the upkeep of the scheme, this can be counterbalanced by the improved grades within the school and the financial benefits that comes with this!

### Part 8: Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme

- The <sup>23</sup>OBPP aims to reduce existing bullying problems, prevent the development of new problems and to focus on the development of improved peer relations within an educational setting. The programme is geared towards children between the ages of 5 and 15 years, and is compulsory for all students. The whole school is included in the programme in an attempt to improve relations between students and also between students and staff.
- The program addresses both risk factors (such as early antisocial behaviour, bullying others, and challenging positive attitudes towards antisocial behaviour) and protective factors (establishing clear standards for behaviour and developing problem solving skills).
- + **The** compulsory nature of the OBPP is an advantage because it means that all children are aware of the warning signs associated with bullying, and more time and energy can be spent focusing on the identified bullies and victims. This suggests that such a scheme is flexible.
- + **The** OWPP is effective, as suggested by the <sup>24</sup>Violence Prevention Works scheme, which reported an excess of 50% reductions in incidences of bullying within schools, alongside reductions in antisocial behaviour and improvements in social climates. Therefore, this implies that such desirable outcomes can be achieved by the majority of schools if the OWPP is successfully implemented.
- However, research has also suggested that the OWPP is significantly affected by individual differences associated with students, as suggested by <sup>25</sup>Bauer et al (2007). These researchers suggest that culture, race and family influences all contribute towards the effectiveness of the OWPP and that future larger-scale intervention plans should bear this in mind.

<sup>22</sup> Fonagy, P., Twemlow, S.W., Vernberg, E., Sacco, F.C. and Little, T.D. Creating a peaceful school learning environment: the impact of an anti bullying program on educational attainment in elementary schools. *Medical Science Monitor*, 2005, 11(7).

<sup>23</sup> What is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program? Hazelden Foundation, Published in 2007, Accessed on 24.08.17, Accessed through [www.violencepreventionworks.org/.../olweus\\_bullying\\_prevention\\_program\\_overview](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/.../olweus_bullying_prevention_program_overview)

<sup>24</sup> The World's Foremost Bullying Prevention Program, Violence Prevention Works, Hazelden Publishing, Published in 2016, Accessed on 24.08.17, Accessed through [http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus\\_bullying\\_prevention\\_program.page](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_bullying_prevention_program.page)

<sup>25</sup> Nerissa S. Beauer, Paula Lozano and Frederick P. Rivara, The Effectiveness of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in Public Middle Schools: A Controlled Trial, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2007, 40(3), pp.266-274.

