Social Norms Research on School Violence in England: Another Look at Misperceived Peer Norms as the Biggest Bully of All

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Abstract

An online survey has been developed for use in assessing bullying in UK secondary schools and for conducting social norms interventions. The survey reveals attitudes about bullying, incidence levels of bullying, and perceived norms regarding peers. Results from 2,745 students attending 17 schools in the Greater London area in 2006 show that while bullying is substantial, it is not the norm. The most common (and erroneous) perception is that the majority engage in and support such behavior. This pattern of massive misperceptions is found across school settings with varying sizes, age distributions, and ethnic composition. These misperceptions are confirmed as the strongest predictor of personal bullying behavior and more influential than actual school-wide norms in the local school setting.
Web-based Survey Instrument

http://www.socialnormsurveys.org/bullyA_UK
(Enter test for the username and password)
# UK School Sample Demographics

## School Characteristics
- **Number of Schools**: 17
- **School Size - mean (range)**: 482 (77 – 1,049)
- **Sample Sizes from Target Grades - mean (range)**: 162 (18 – 750)
- **Cohort Response Rate - mean (range)**: 73% (26% – 100%)

## Respondent Characteristics
- **Number of Respondents**: 2,761
- **Females / Males - %**: 57% / 43%
- **Grade Levels**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **Race/Ethnicity**
  - White: 42%
  - Asian: 15%
  - Black: 23%
  - Mixed Race: 12%
  - Other: 8%
- **Age – mean (range)**: 12.0 (7 – 19)
- **Geographic Area**
  - Urban: 17%
  - Suburban: 63%
  - Urban/Suburban: 20%
UK Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days:
Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms
(N=2,761)

Pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, or tripping...

Teasing in an unfriendly way...

Calling hurtful names...

Excluding someone from a group to make them feel bad...

Legend:
- actual norm
- misperceived norm
- accurately perceived norm
UK Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms (N=2,761)

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!

Taking or damaging someone else’s belongings

Spreading unkind stories or rumors about someone else

Threatening to hurt someone

Making someone do something they did not want to do

Legend: 
- Actual norm
- Misperceived norm
- Accurately perceived norm
Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Comparison of UK to US Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

(UK N=2,761 US N=10,586)

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Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Comparison of UK to US Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

(UK N=2,761 US N=10,586)

Taking or damaging someone else’s belongings

- Actual Behaviors
- Perceptions of Norm

Spreading unkind stories or rumors about someone else

- Actual Behaviors
- Perceptions of Norm

Threatening to hurt someone

- Actual Behaviors
- Perceptions of Norm

Making someone do something they did not want to do

- Actual Behaviors
- Perceptions of Norm

Legend:
- actual norm
- misperceived norm
- accurately perceived norm
- US comparison

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!
Distribution of Bully Behavior Index
(N=1,656)*

Bully index computed as sum of eight measures on a 0-3 scale. Those that never bully would score a 0 while those that frequently bully on all eight items would score 24.

*Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.
Distribution of Bully Perception Index (N = 1,633)*

Bully Perception Index clearly shows massive misperceptions.

*Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.
Distribution of Bullying Misperception (N = 1,633)*

*Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.
Standardized regression coefficients predicting bullying behavior in the last 30 days (N=1,432 a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient (Beta)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of bullying (index)</td>
<td>.36 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual bullying norm at school (index median)</td>
<td>.07 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male vs. female)</td>
<td>.14 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Asian/Chinese vs white)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Black vs white)</td>
<td>.06 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Other/mixed vs white)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School population size</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status category of school b</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perception of bullying is strongest predictor of whether an individual will bully!

*a* Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

*b* Subjective assessment of school administrator coded 1=below average, 2=average, or 3=above average.

* Coefficient is significant at p < .05: ** p < .001.