Experience of bullying and bullying behaviours in childhood and adolescence

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EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING AND BULLYING BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
DCDE	Department of Children, Disability and Equality
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland
HBSC	Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children
LD	Learning difficulties
LGBQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning
MHI5	Mental Health Inventory-5
PCI	Per Capita Income
PG	Poverty Gap
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SDQ	Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socio-economic status
SMFQ	Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Bullying among children and young people remains prevalent in Ireland and is regarded as an important policy area, with recent initiatives (such as the Department of Education's *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* and Bí Cineálta Procedures) to prevent and address school-based bullying. To date, much of the research has been based on cross-sectional analyses and has focused on school-based and online bullying rather than behaviour in other domains. The Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study provides the opportunity to look at how bullying experiences (at or outside school) may change between middle childhood and adolescence and the relationship between being a victim of bullying and young people's wellbeing. This report draws on data on 9- and 13-year-olds collected from the members of Cohort '08. The main research questions addressed are:

1. What groups of young people are more likely to experience bullying behaviour at 9 and 13 years of age?

2. What behaviours do 13-year-olds consider to be bullying?

3. How likely are young people to tell someone about the bullying and what factors predict doing so?

4. How is experience of bullying associated with wellbeing?

EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING AT AGE 9

At age 9, children were asked if they had been 'picked on' (by a child or adult) in the past year. Four-in-ten indicated they had been picked on, a level that did not differ by gender. However, gender differences were evident in the type of bullying behaviour experienced, with girls more likely to report being excluded and boys more likely to indicate they had been physically pushed. Bullying is found to be equally prevalent across social groups. Children who have a disability, who self-report being overweight or underweight ('skinny'), and who have no religious affiliation are more likely to be picked on. There is little systematic variation by school type. However, higher rates of being picked on are found among children who are less positive about their teacher.

EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING AT AGE 13

At age 13, two sets of measures were collected: a direct question about having been 'bullied' in the previous three months; and for all adolescents, questions about their experience of bullying-type behaviour. Eight per cent indicated they had been bullied in the previous three months, with little variation by gender or social background. Those with a disability, those who indicated they are attracted

to the same gender, both genders or no-one[1] and those who are overweight are more likely to have been bullied. Those in second-level[2] DEIS schools are more likely to have been bullied than those in non-DEIS schools and those in second rather than first year are also more likely to have been bullied. Young people with more close friends are less likely to be bullied than those with fewer friends. Those who were picked on at age 9 are more likely to be bullied at age 13.

When given a list of bullying experiences (such as being hit, being called names or excluded), most 13-year-olds (62 per cent) had experienced at least one of these behaviours on one or more occasion, while 37 per cent experienced at least one type of repeated behaviour. Looking at different types of bullying behaviours, girls are less likely to be hit but more likely to experience being socially excluded or called names. Girls are also more likely to have had nasty things said to or about them online or by text. Those with a disability, who are gay, bisexual or questioning, and who are overweight also appear to be the focus of more social kinds of bullying, including exclusion and name-calling, rather than physical bullying. Socialising with older peers is a risk factor for experiencing all types of bullying behaviour, in keeping with previous research on greater exposure to risk among this group. Previous experience of being picked on at age 9 emerges as an important risk factor for all types of bullying behaviours at 13 years of age, highlighting the importance of early prevention and response.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED BULLYING?

Eight per cent of 13-year-olds indicated they had been 'bullied' in response to the direct question on bullying but most (62 per cent) had experienced one of a list of bullying behaviours on one or more occasion. What accounts for this difference? Thirteen-year-olds are more likely to see a behaviour as bullying if it is more frequent, it involves the same person or people, and they experience harm – especially anger – as a result. Certain types of behaviour, especially online or name-calling, are more likely to be labelled as bullying than other types, particularly being excluded by others.

REPORTING BULLYING

Seventy per cent of those who feel they have been 'bullied' tell a parent, teacher or other adult while this is the case for only 42 per cent of those who experienced bullying behaviour. Telling an adult is more common if the behaviour is interpreted as bullying and if it involves greater harm, particularly upset. Girls, those with a disability and those who are overweight are more likely to tell someone than other groups. Young people are more likely to tell someone about hurtful material

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[1]   For ease of discussion, this group is referred to as 'lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning' (LGBQ) throughout the report, while recognising that the young people may not themselves identify as such.
[2]   Second-level refers to secondary schools in Ireland; the term secondary is not used to avoid confusion with voluntary secondary schools, a distinct sector.

posted online than other types of behaviour and are less likely to tell someone about being hit or shoved. They are more likely to tell an adult if they see their mother as responsive, but reporting does not vary by the quality of relationships with teachers or peers.

BULLYING AND ADOLESCENT OUTCOMES

A number of outcomes are explored, including whether the bullying behaviour was seen as causing fear, upset and/or anger as well as the relationship between bullying experience and wellbeing and depressive symptoms scores at age 13. Most young people who experience bullying behaviour report feelings of anger and upset, with between one-in-six and one-in-five indicating a lot of impact. Girls are more likely to say they felt anger, upset and/or being afraid than boys. Harm is seen as greater where there is more frequent bullying behaviour, where it is by the same person/people and where it involves exclusion, name-calling, hurtful texts or online posts and gossip.

Those who were picked on at age 9 are found to have poorer wellbeing and higher depression scores at age 13, though the relationship with depression is explained by higher rates of current bullying. Poorer wellbeing and higher depression are found among those who have experienced more frequent bullying behaviour and behaviour that involves the same person. Exclusion is linked to both poorer wellbeing and greater depression. However, these patterns must be interpreted with caution, as wellbeing and depression are measured at the same time as the bullying experience. Bullying victimisation may lead to depressive symptoms but it also may be the case that those who experience depression become a target for bullying.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

A new policy to prevent and address school-based and online bullying, the *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying*, has been developed by the Department of Education for primary and second-level schools, with a related implementation plan and procedures for schools (Bí Cineálta). Bullying does not only take place within school or online and many sports and other youth organisations now have anti-bullying policies in place. The study findings have important implications for policy and practice to address bullying. The findings point to ongoing challenges to the inclusion of children and young people with a disability who report higher rates of social exclusion and name calling. The more negative experiences of 13-year-olds who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning point to the importance of specifically targeting homophobic behaviour within schools and youth organisations. Perhaps the most striking finding is the difference between how bullying is defined by many young people and by schools and other organisations. A significant proportion of young people experience bullying-type behaviour which causes them to feel upset or anger but do not define it as bullying and so are less

likely to tell an adult about it. It is important therefore that the language used within school and organisational policy be sufficiently inclusive to encompass behaviours like social exclusion that young people find particularly upsetting. In keeping with the increasing understanding of bullying as embedded in broader social dynamics, the findings highlight the importance of addressing bullying behaviour in tandem with broader measures to enhance the social climate in schools and other organisations working with young people.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Bullying at school has remained an issue across Europe and beyond. Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that despite a decrease in bullying among 15-year-olds compared to 2018 figures, bullying remains pervasive overall (with 20 per cent of students reporting being bullied at least a few times a month) (Piacentini, 2024). A widely-cited definition of bullying refers to intentional, repeated negative and hurtful behaviour that is often directed to a person who has difficulties defending themselves (Limber and Olweus, 2010). However, this definition has increasingly been challenged, with research pointing to the need to see bullying behaviour in the context of broader social dynamics (see, for example, Donoghue and Pascoe, 2023). Parents and children may themselves vary in their understanding as to whether fighting and teasing constitute bullying (Ely and Campbell, 2020; Mills and Carwile, 2009).

More recent work on bullying has adopted a more inclusive definition and views school bullying as:

> *a damaging social process that is characterized by an imbalance of power driven by social (societal) and institutional norms. It is often repeated and manifests as unwanted interpersonal behaviour among students or school personnel that causes physical, social, and emotional harm to the targeted individuals or groups, and the wider school community* (UNESCO, 2024, p.4).

Furthermore, bullying is a social construct with interpretations and behaviours as well as coping mechanisms likely to vary across cultures (Yin et al., 2024). Children and young people can be exposed to bullying as perpetrators, victims, bystanders or upstanders – the latter attempting to help the victim of bullying (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). Some can be both perpetrators and victims of bullying (Juvonen and Graham, 2014). Bullying can take different forms such as verbal bullying (e.g. name-calling, threatening), social bullying (e.g. excluding someone, spreading rumours), and physical bullying (e.g. physical attacks) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). While such activities often take place at school, including the classroom, playground areas, corridors, cafeteria and outside on school grounds (Pew Research Centre, 2023), bullying can also happen outside school in local neighbourhoods (Bowes et al., 2009), at organised activities like sports clubs (Kalina et al., 2024) and online (Henares-Montiel et al., 2022). Although cyberbullying (bullying that involves the use of technology such as phones or the internet) can happen inside school, it is more likely to take place

outside school as young people have an opportunity to spend more time on the internet and phones after the school day (Lasher and Baker, 2015). The nature of bullying can change over time, with some authors noting that there has been an increase in cyberbullying in recent years (Fischer and Blitz, 2024).

There is some concern that much bullying behaviour remains unreported. For example, data from the US show that less than half (46 per cent) of middle and high school students who had experienced bullying notified a teacher or another adult about this, while younger students and those who experienced bullying more frequently (more than ten days during a school year) were more likely to do so (Pew Research Centre, 2023). While much of the existing research has focussed on the factors related to bullying victimisation, a number of studies have also highlighted the adverse effects of bullying on individuals both in the short- and long-term (Johansson et al., 2022).

As in many other countries, bullying has been a policy concern in Ireland. A sizable number of children and young people experience such behaviour, though the estimated prevalence depends on the methods used, the timeframe specified and the definition of bullying (Foody et al., 2017). In a meta-analysis of Irish research on bullying, levels are found to be higher in primary than in second-level education. The Tomorrow Starts with Us survey, an online volunteer survey open to second-level students conducted by the Ombudsman for Children's Office, indicates that 47 per cent of students have experienced bullying.[3] Based on a survey of 106 primary, special and second-level schools, one-in-four of the children and young people surveyed and 29-30 per cent of the parents reported at least one incidence of bullying at school (Department of Education, 2023). Nationally representative data from the HBSC[4] study in 2022 show that a third of students in third and fourth class at primary level have experienced bullying at school in the past couple of months (Gavin et al., 2024).

Reflecting the findings of international research on the topic, children experiencing school bullying in Ireland are more likely to come from a lone-parent family, find it difficult to talk to their parent(s), not like school and feel pressured by schoolwork (HBSC, 2018). An overview of existing Irish research (D'Urso and Symonds, 2023) pointed to a number of risk factors for bullying victimisation, including being seen as 'different' because of sexual orientation, language, ethnicity, religion, disability or weight status as well as low levels of self-esteem and more emotional and peer problems. HBSC data for 2018 showed higher levels of bullying among those from working-class backgrounds but no significant variation by social class background

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[3]   No reference period was indicated so presumably this reflects 'ever' having been bullied.
[4]   The Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study is a WHO collaborative cross-national study conducted every four years in over 40 countries/regions in Europe, Canada and Israel.

was found in the 2022 survey (Gavin et al., 2024). Girls are more likely to have experienced bullying compared to boys in second-level education (51 per cent vs 41 per cent, Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2024). However, findings at primary level differ: the frequency of reported bullying tended to increase more for girls between second and sixth classes (approximately 8 and 12 years of age) than for boys (Sloan et al., 2024), while survey data on third- and fourth-class students (8-9 years of age) indicate no gender differences (Gavin et al., 2024). There is some indication that gender composition may also matter, as seen in a longitudinal study of primary school children (Devine et al., 2024), which showed that girls in an all-girls' schools in second class in 2023 reported higher levels of being bullied than in any other school type.

Cyberbullying has been found to be a significant issue for young people in Ireland. For example, a study by Sanmartín Feijóo et al. (2023) showed that a sizable proportion of the participants in the study (45 per cent) had witnessed this behaviour over the last months prior to the survey. The reasons for being targeted included: being LGBQ, being overweight or obese, being female, having any kind of disability, being an immigrant or a child of an immigrant, being trans, having a different skin colour, having special needs, having a different religion, having few financial resources, having better grades than others, having an eating disorder, being a member of a Traveller community, or being Roma (ibid.). Bullying online or through social media can start at a young age with a small number experiencing this behaviour around once a week or more already in second class in primary school (Sloan et al., 2024). When witnessing cyberbullying, children seem to be more likely to confide in their parents and friends than their teachers (Sanmartín Feijóo et al., 2023). According to the Department of Education (2023), the vast majority of primary and second-level students surveyed think that teachers look out for signs of bullying. At the same time, a large number of students (69 per cent) want increased action from schools on bullying, including having more teacher involvement in preventing bullying, having harsher punishment for bullying and promoting kindness (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2024).

In Ireland there have been a number of initiatives in recent years to address bullying behaviour, not least the Department of Education's *Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying*. While there have been a number of Irish studies on the prevalence of bullying (Callaghan et al., 2015; Corcoran and McGuckin, 2014; Meehan and Laffan, 2021; Sanmartín Feijóo et al., 2023), much of this research has generally been cross-sectional in nature (D'Urso and Symonds, 2023) and has focused on bullying within the school context. A contribution of this study is that the use of Growing Up in Ireland data allows us to examine bullying behaviour in general, potentially covering school, local neighbourhood and organised settings like clubs. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of the study means that experience of bullying and adolescent outcomes at age 13 can be related to earlier experiences

of bullying at age 9 and, even further back, to difficulties in interacting with peers on school entry. Detailed questions on the perceptions of harm resulting from bullying and standardised measures of wellbeing allow us to tap into the lived experiences of young people who have experienced bullying. The aim of this study is to document the individual, neighbourhood, classroom and school factors associated with experiencing bullying, thus providing an evidence base for policy implementation to address the issue.

The main research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What groups of young people are more likely to experience bullying behaviour at 9 and 13 years of age?

2. What behaviours do 13-year-olds consider to be bullying?

3. How likely are young people to tell someone about the bullying and what factors predict doing so?

4. How is experience of bullying associated with wellbeing?

Before discussing the precise measures of bullying used and the individual and school factors analysed, Sections 1.2 and 1.3 place the study in the context of previous research, international and Irish, as well as the Irish policy context.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Bullying victimisation

There is now a wealth of international research on the experience of being bullied, focusing on the characteristics of perpetrators, victims or those who are both (Juvonen and Graham, 2014). This overview of the literature focuses on findings related to bullying victimisation, given the focus of the study.

1.2.1.1 Individual and family characteristics

Findings on the links between socio-economic status (SES) and bullying have been varied, possibly due to the way SES is measured in various studies on the topic (Tippett and Volke, 2014). However, there is a strong indication that bullying victimisation is more prevalent among children who come from lower income households (Campbell et al., 2019; Jansen et al., 2012), who experience social poverty[5] (Chen et al., 2024), resource deprivation (family- and neighbourhood-level metrics) (Perino et al., 2025), and experience problems with neighbours (Bowes, 2009). Bullying victimisation is associated with a violent family context

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[5] Social poverty is measured by indicators such as monthly household per capita income (PCI) and Poverty Gap (PG).

(Foshee et al., 2016) and higher levels of familial neglect (see D'Urso et al., 2022 in Ireland).

Several studies have explored gender patterns in involvement in school bullying. Findings on gender differences in the experience of bullying have been mixed but given the dominance of same-sex friendships in childhood and adolescence, the type of bullying experienced would be expected to differ by gender.

Some studies have focussed on the link between socio-emotional difficulties and bullying. Olweus (1993) emphasises the salience of certain personality traits in victims, being passive, anxious and insecure. Existing evidence suggests that adolescents experiencing social and emotional difficulties are more likely to be cyberbullied and bullied in person (such as hitting or teasing), than those bullied in person only (Cross et al., 2015). These authors also noted that those targeted in both ways experienced more harm and stayed away from school more often than those bullied in person only (ibid.). Experiencing socio-emotional difficulties can have long-term consequences. For example, in Finland, having early emotional problems was associated with both bullying and victimisation eight years later (Sourander et al., 2000).

Existing research has shown that bullying can take place at any age. However, the results on the severity of bullying among older and younger students have remained inconclusive. For example, Zhao et al. (2024) in China did not find any significant differences in being bullied between students in primary school, junior high school, and high school. However, the severity of bullying was found to be more pronounced among primary school students than their secondary school counterparts. In Sweden, Hellström and Lundberg (2020) found that older students tended to rank behaviours taking place offline as more severe, compared with bullying taking place online. Bullying in public settings was also more pronounced among older students.

1.2.1.2 The social ecology: peers, neighbourhoods, schools and the societal context

Increasingly, research has been criticised for its emphasis on bullying as reflecting only individual characteristics and its assumption that the roles of 'bully' and 'victim' are fixed rather than fluid (Horton, 2021; Schott, 2014). Instead, researchers argue that bullying must be seen as embedded within broader social dynamics, generated within the social environments within which children and young people interact (see, for example, Forsberg and Thornberg, 2016; Lyng, 2018; Schott and Søndergaard, 2014). Bullying can therefore reflect the playing out of social hierarchies and the construction and reconstruction of in- and out-groups (Smith and Payne, 2022). This perspective points therefore to the salience of the

contexts within which children and young people spend their time, namely, peer groups, neighbourhoods and schools, and how these environments shape experiences of bullying. Bowes et al. (2009), for example, found that school, neighbourhood, and family factors are independently associated with any likelihood of being bullied, above and beyond socio-demographic factors. This perspective also goes further than the immediate context to highlight the role of the broader societal context in influencing bullying behaviours.

Relationships with peers become a more important buffer against stress relative to relationships with parents as children grow older (Stadler et al., 2010; Stahel et al., 2024). The quality of relationship with peers plays an important role in whether a young person experiences bullying or not (Stahel et al., 2024; Foody et al., 2019a; 2019b). Having fewer caring classmates has been found to be a risk factor for being victimised (D'Urso et al., 2022), while having close friends tends to provide a form of social support and protection from bullying for children (Strindberg and Horton, 2022).

Relatively little research has focused on neighbourhood effects on bullying, most likely reflecting the emphasis of existing work on school-based bullying. Greater neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage has been found to be associated with an increased risk of being a victim of bullying, but this effect is explained by family SES, with no additional effect of the concentration of neighbourhood disadvantage (Jansen et al., 2012). Some research has indicated that students in rural areas report higher rates of bullying than those in urban areas (Crouch et al., 2025).

School characteristics as well as student experiences of school have been considered in existing research on bullying. The concentration of disadvantage at school level has been found to be a risk factor for school violence (Lleras, 2008). Research on the relationship between school size and the incidence of bullying is inconclusive (Fletcher and Dumford, 2023). However, there is some indication that school size is associated with an increased risk of being a victim of bullying, over and above other socio-environmental factors and children's behaviour problems (Bowes, 2009). Research on the association between school climate and bullying has shown that schools characterised by a safe and orderly school climate and good discipline were found to have lower bullying prevalence in most of the countries in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) study (Johansson et al., 2022). However, also drawing on TIMSS data, Bokhove et al. (2022) found that the school effect on bullying was weak to moderate. There is a lacuna in relation to research on the likelihood of being bullied and school type (e.g. gender composition and religious ethos of the school).

Sociological work on bullying has increasingly indicated that bullying behaviours in school or local communities can reflect broader societal inequalities and the labelling of some groups as 'different'. Indeed, bullies can be seen as playing a role in constructing and maintaining social norms within a school or other setting (Ellwood and Davies, 2014; Forsberg and Horton, 2022; Smith and Payne, 2022). There is some indication that coming from a migrant background or speaking a non-native language increases the likelihood of being bullied (Caravita et al., 2019; Sapouna et al., 2022; Stevens et al., 2020). However, contrary to some previous studies on the topic, Bracegirdle et al. (2023) found levels of interethnic bullying to be low, a pattern they attributed to the segregation in social networks found in the British schools they studied. This may indicate that other contextual factors have a stronger impact on bullying. In Ireland, the Children's School Lives study has pointed to greater victimisation among children and young people from the Traveller community (Devine et al., 2025). Irish research has also pointed to greater victimisation among non-English-speaking groups (Pitsia and Mazzone, 2020). Devine et al. (2025) point to no simple relationship between patterns of bullying and migrant background across primary school years, though interviews with children point to experiences of racialised name-calling. A growing number of studies have focussed on the impact of body size/weight. Children who are overweight or obese are at a heightened risk of bullying and peer victimisation (Thompson et al., 2018; Morales et al., 2019; Taylor, 2010), with similar findings in Ireland (Reulbach et al., 2013).

A number of studies have indicated that young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual are more likely to be bullied, with homophobic language often firmly embedded in day-to-day discourse within schools (Pascoe, 2022; Schubotz and O'Hara, 2011). Furthermore, adolescents who identify as gender diverse have also been found to be more likely to report bullying experiences (Fischer and Bilz, 2024). Potential differences by religious background have been less frequently studied in existing research (Chan and Stapleton, 2021), though one systematic review points to the interplay of minority religion and ethnicity in increasing bullying victimisation (Sapouna et al., 2022). Another study of Muslim young people in the UK indicated they felt their religious identity was a more common basis for their victimisation than their ethnicity (Francis and McKenna, 2018).

Another strand of research has explored the association between bullying and disability. A cross-cultural meta-analysis by Park et al. (2020) found that the risk of victimisation in students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was significantly higher than that in neurotypical students and students with other disabilities. Elsewhere, children with special educational needs (SEN) and learning disabilities (LD) have been found to have more difficulties in social participation and may hence be at higher risk of being bullied compared with their classmates (Berchiatti et al., 2022). Ziyan and Kadri (2025) explored the impact of bullying on students

with SEN, highlighting both academic and socio-emotional consequences. SEN students, particularly those with learning disabilities, face significantly higher rates of bullying compared to their neurotypical peers. This victimisation leads to severe academic repercussions, including decreased concentration, lower grades, and reduced engagement in school activities. Socially and emotionally, bullying results in heightened levels of anxiety, depression and social withdrawal, with long-term implications for mental health. Irish research has also pointed to the connection between having a disability and being bullied (Gallagher et al., 2020; Sentenac et al., 2011).

1.2.2 The impact of being bullied on young people's outcomes

Bullying is a widespread issue, with serious consequences for the individuals who experience it. The seriousness of the issue is reflected in a number of research studies on the impact of bullying on outcomes among children and young people. Children who are subjected to bullying have been found to experience negative psychosocial and academic outcomes, including increased depression, anxiety, fear and social withdrawal (Zych et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2024; Ladd et al., 2017; Wolke et al., 2013), lower life satisfaction (Yin et al., 2024; Katsantonis et al., 2024), increased peer rejection, poorer school performance and school connectedness, non-attendance, school avoidance and dropping out of school (Halliday et al., 2021; Armitage, 2021; Jan and Husain, 2015; Foody et al., 2019a; 2019b). Bullying has been found to have a stronger effect on mental health and psychosocial outcomes for females than males (Man et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2013) and victimised females tend to suffer worse outcomes than victimised males, specifically for symptoms of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Halliday et al., 2021).

Bullying can have serious consequences for wellbeing, including alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders (Moore et al., 2017; Low et al., 2025). It can also lead to physical health issues (Momose and Ishida, 2024). Childhood bullying experiences can increase the risk of health problems, including weight gain and obesity (Thompson et al., 2018). Dupont (2021) indicated that bullying had an adverse impact on Traveller and Roma students, particularly their emotional wellbeing, ability to concentrate, sense of inclusion and belonging, attendance, wish to complete school, experience of sanctions (if fighting back), and their mental health. There is also some indication that the occurrence of psychological problems among victims is related to the extent of their exposure to bullying but not the type of bullying (Zhao et al., 2024), although verbal bullying tends to be of the highest prevalence and has the most significant negative effect on adolescent mental health (Man et al., 2022). Childhood bullying has been found to have a long-term impact on those involved, particularly regarding adulthood depression (Sigurdson et al., 2015; Armitage, 2021), subjective wellbeing as an

adult, and a lower probability of having a job in adulthood (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2024).

1.3 POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN ADDRESSING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

Considering the serious consequences of bullying for children's outcomes, various guidelines have been developed over time to address this issue in Irish schools. In order to revise the 1993 Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools, a working group of education partners developed new procedures for schools. These procedures (Department of Education and Skills, 2013) centred on the development of a respectful and inclusive culture and ethos in schools and outlined approaches to be adopted by schools and staff in preventing and tackling school-based bullying, as well as how to address any negative impact of bullying that has taken place outside of school. All schools were required to formally adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that adhered to the procedures issued. The procedures identified different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic and racist bullying). The 2013 Action Plan on Bullying identified 12 key actions to help prevent bullying in schools, broadly focussing on support for schools, teacher training, research and awareness raising. Further developments included the establishment of a National Anti-Bullying Research Centre in 2014, funded by the Department of Education, as well as a UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying at Dublin City University.

Recognising the need to develop the procedures outlined in the 2013 Action Plan on Bullying, taking account of the changing social composition of the Irish society and an increasing use of technology and social media among children and young people, a Steering Committee was established in 2022 to review the progress made in combating bullying, and to identify areas that needed further improvement. Following the work of the Steering Committee and an extensive consultation process with children and young people, including young people with special educational needs, Traveller and Roma children, children from Ukraine and refugees as well as a wide range of stakeholders, teachers, principals and parents, the Department of Education's *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* was adopted. The Action Plan defined bullying as:

> *…targeted behaviour, online or offline that causes harm. The harm caused can be physical, social and/or emotional in nature. Bullying behaviour is repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power in relationships between two people or groups of people in society.*

The Action Plan acknowledged that an individual can be bullied based on their race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, additional educational need, or some other characteristic. The Action Plan adopted a child-rights-based approach

to ensure that the rights of children and young people are protected by promoting the following principles: prevention, support, oversight, and community. It was recognised that the development of empathy and recognition of the importance of equality and inclusion, allied with putting in place tangible and targeted supports, having a strong leadership and whole school approach, including all members of school communities, is essential in preventing and addressing bullying behaviour in schools.

As a result of the review of the 2013 Action Plan on Bullying (Department of Education and Skills, 2013) and following the publication of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* (Department of Education, 2022), the Bí Cineálta ('Be Kind') procedures were published by the Department of Education in 2024, following an extensive consultation process including consultations with children and young people in both primary and post-primary mainstream schools, DEIS and special schools as well as Traveller and Roma children and children in the international protection system. The procedures take effect from the beginning of the 2025/26 school year. Adopting a whole-education and a children's rights-based approach, Bí Cineálta outlines new procedures and approaches to prevent and address bullying behaviour for primary and post-primary schools. It is envisaged that all members of the school community which includes school staff, parents and students, collaborate in developing a Bí Cineálta policy for their school which outlines how bullying behaviour will be prevented and addressed. Implementation of the procedures is being supported by a suite of professional learning resources and information sessions for school staff, Board of Management members and parents.

The procedures focus on bullying on the basis of sexual orientation,[6] gender identity, ethnicity and/or sex, cyberbullying and sexual harassment. The policy must indicate the teacher(s) in the school who are responsible for addressing bullying issues (Department of Education, 2024). The procedures highlight the need to acknowledge that bullying behaviour can also take place when children are coming to school or leaving the school premises. Bullying behaviour that takes place in the wider local area can sometimes spill over into school (Department of Education, 2024). Furthermore, bullying can occur in organised groups and clubs outside school as well as online (Department of Education, 2024). Irish policy development, evident in Cineáltas and Bí Cineálta, highlights the importance of adopting a whole-education approach in preventing bullying that not only engages schools, but recognises the connection of schools with the wider community including education, technological and societal systems (O'Higgins-Norman et al., 2022).

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[6] Under Cineáltas, the Department of Education has commissioned a review and update of the 'Being LGBT In School' bullying resource, co-funded by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. The updated resource will be published later in 2025.

1.4   METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

1.4.1   Data

The study uses data from Cohort '08 of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study. It focuses on data collected at primary level (age 9) and at second-level education (age 13). The families were selected to be nationally representative on the basis of Child Benefit records. They were first interviewed when the child was 9 months and then followed up at 3 and 5 years. The children themselves were surveyed for the first time at 9 years of age and followed up with an online survey during the pandemic (when they were 11/12) and a full wave of data collection at age 13.

1.4.2   Measures of bullying

The measures of bullying behaviour changed across waves. At age 9, children were asked: 'Thinking back over the last year, would you say that anyone (either a child or an adult) picked on you?'. If the child responded 'Yes', they were then asked 'how did they pick on you', with the list covering:

- By shoving, pushing, hitting;

- Name calling, slagging;

- Text messaging, emails, online, etc.;

- Written messages/ notes, etc.;

- Leaving me out of games or chats.

The 9-year-olds were also asked how often someone picked on them, with responses ranging from 'once or twice' to 'almost every day'. The children answered these questions through a self-complete, paper-and-pencil questionnaire which meant that their parents or the interviewers were not aware of their responses. The 9-year-olds were not given any definition of being picked on, but their interpretation may have been coloured by the list of potential behaviours presented below that question.[7]

At age 13, two sets of measures were collected. The first asked directly: 'Have you been bullied in the last 3 months?'. Regardless of how they responded, young people were asked 'Have you experienced any of the following from a child or young person in the last 3 months?'. The list covered:

- Been hit, kicked or punched;

- Been pushed, shoved or slapped;

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[7]   We are grateful to Aisling Murray of DCDE for this observation.

- Name-calling, hurtful slagging;

- Been sent hurtful message by text, email or other message app;

- Had something hurtful posted online about you;

- Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you;

- Someone taking/ damaging your personal possessions;

- Exclusion (being left out);

- Gossip, spreading rumours about you;

- Threatened/ forced to do things you don't want to.

Response categories comprised 'never', 'once' and '2 or more times'. Analyses focus on the two sets of outcomes: having been bullied and having experienced specific types of bullying behaviours. In order to capture overall exposure to different types of bullying behaviours, these measures were summed into a scale ranging from 10 to 30; this scale has a reliability of 0.828.

Because fieldwork for the 13-year wave began during the period of ongoing pandemic-related restrictions, the mode of data collection shifted from face-to-face to phone interview. Phone interviews were conducted with 6,655 primary caregivers (usually the mother) and 6,375 young people. For more sensitive questions, parents and young people were sent a link to an online survey. Only 32 per cent of the 13-year-olds completed this online survey so analyses are restricted to the 3,033 young people who answered the questions on bullying experiences. Data have been reweighted to take account of patterns of non-response.

1.4.3 Explanatory variables

Drawing on the existing literature on factors related to bullying outlined in Section 1.2, three sets of factors have been explored: individual, family background and neighbourhood factors; primary school and classroom factors; and second-level school factors.

GUI collected rich information on family background, so the analyses look at whether the experience of bullying varies by gender, social class, family structure (whether a lone-parent family or not) and financial strain (that is, having difficulty making ends meet) (for descriptive statistics on the explanatory variables, see Table 1.1). There has been relatively little research on neighbourhood factors and bullying (see Section 1.2), perhaps not surprising given the predominant focus on school-based rather than area-based experiences. However, neighbourhood factors have been found to influence other types of adolescent behaviour (such as

involvement in anti-social behaviour) (Smyth and Darmody, 2021), so might be expected to influence exposure to bullying. As a result, the analyses take account of whether the family lives in an urban or rural location, and the scale of neighbourhood disorder, as reported by the mother (e.g. prevalence of public drinking/drug-taking, graffiti etc.).

The review of the literature in Section 1.2 points to the way in which bullying may reflect being labelled as different by peers ('othered') on the basis of certain characteristics. The analyses therefore look at the effect of being from a migrant-origin family, religion (based on maternal reports), whether the young person has a disability which hampers their day-to-day life at least to some extent, self-described weight status[8] and whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning (LGBQ)[9] at age 13. Because of small numbers, gender identity is not explored in this study but could usefully form the basis for future research. Friends may serve as an important buffer to bullying. The analyses therefore explore whether experience of bullying varies by number of close friends and whether socialising with older friends is a risk factor (as it is for other risky behaviour, see Nolan and Smyth, 2020).

International research has pointed to differences in bullying prevalence by the concentration of disadvantage at school level. The analyses therefore distinguish by DEIS status[10] at primary and second level, with fee-paying schools distinguished as a separate group of second-level schools. Because of the persistence of a sizeable single-sex sector in Ireland, particularly at second level, the analyses distinguish between coeducational, boys' and girls' schools. Almost a third of primary students in Ireland are taught in multigrade classes (e.g. a mixture of third and fourth classes), which is likely to impact on their peer dynamics and self-image (Quail and Smyth, 2014). The analyses therefore include a measure of whether the class is multigrade or not. In order to capture interaction with adults, the 9-year-old's report of whether their teacher treats all of the students fairly is taken into account, which may capture the teacher's modelling of fair or unfair behaviour and/or contribute to a more cohesive classroom climate. Research has shown that peer dynamics can vary by ability group (Smyth, 2016). There is very little between-class ability grouping at primary level in Ireland, but within-class grouping is common and can lead to children being labelled by their peers as 'smart' or 'not smart' (Devine et al., 2023). The reading group to which the child is assigned is

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[8]   This measure is based on weight status as reported by the young person. Response categories at age 13 comprised 'very skinny', 'a bit skinny', 'just the right size', 'a bit overweight' and 'very overweight'. These were recoded into underweight (skinny), about right and overweight. It is possible that the child may see themselves as overweight (or underweight) because of bullying, especially name-calling.

[9]   The wording in the questionnaire refers to being attracted to the same gender, both genders or no-one. The term lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning (LGBQ) is used throughout this report for ease of discussion and it is noted that this term may not reflect young people's own identities.

[10]   The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme directs additional resources and supports to schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged populations.

therefore used to capture this dynamic. Second-level schools in Ireland are typically larger than primary schools and have more formal structures for student support. The analyses therefore examine differences between schools where the student support team is the main source of socio-emotional support and the small group where that is not the case. Principal reports of the incidence of misbehaviour and the school response in terms of discipline are summed to give scales of the school disciplinary climate at both primary and second-level. This measure ranges from 11 to 44, where a higher score indicates greater prevalence of the use of disciplinary methods.

TABLE 1.1   DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

	%	Mean (SD)
Social background factors		
Female	47.9	
Social class:		
Professional	12.9	
Managerial	34.5	
Other non-manual	17.8	
Skilled manual	14.2	
Semi/unskilled manual	11.4	
Non-employed	9.1	
Lone parent family at 9	15.4	
Lone parent family at 13	17.5	
Financial strain at 9	12.3	
Financial strain at 13	8.9	
Urban location	43.1	
Neighbourhood disorder at 9		7.95 (2.82)
Neighbourhood disorder at 13		6.80 (2.45)
Dimensions of difference		
Migrant-origin family	10.6	
Religion (of mother):		
Catholic	73.1	
Minority religion	8.4	
No religion	18.5	
Disability at 9	12.3	
Disability at 13	19.4	
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning (LGBQ)	22.2	
Weight status at 9:		
About right	66.1	
Underweight	28.6	
Overweight	5.3	
Weight status at 13:		
About right	60.6	
Underweight	28.1	
Overweight	11.4	
N		3,033

Contd.

TABLE 1.1   CONTD.

	%	Mean (SD)
Friends		
No. close friends at 9:		
0/1-2	2.8	
3-5	18.1	
6-10	20.5	
>10	58.6	
No. close friends at 13:		
0/1-2	11.5	
3-5	52.0	
6-10	28.2	
>10	8.4	
Some/all friends older at 13	35.5	
Peer problems at 5 (SDQ)		1.07 (1.36)
School characteristics		
DEIS school at 9	19.1	
School social mix at 13:		
Fee-paying	5.7	
Non-DEIS	73.5	
DEIS	20.8	
School gender mix at 9:		
Coeducational	84.9	
Boys	8.9	
Girls	6.2	
School gender mix at 13:		
Coeducational	68.3	
Boys	14.8	
Girls	16.9	
Multigrade class at age 9	31.0	
Teachers treat students fairly (age 9):		
Always	58.8	
Sometimes	31.9	
Never	9.3	
Within-class reading group (age 9):		
Mixed	30.1	
Higher	31.1	
Middle	29.8	
Lower	8.9	
Student support team as main support for students (age 13)	87.8	
School disciplinary climate (age 9)		22.21 (3.27)
School disciplinary climate (age 13)		19.03 (3.22)
N	3,033	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

1.4.4 Outcome measures

The analyses presented in Chapter 4 focus on the relationship between experience of bullying and adolescent outcomes. Young people who indicated they had experienced any of the listed bullying behaviours were then asked the following question:

- When these things happened, how did this make you feel: Upset? Afraid? Angry? (Not at all/ a little/ a lot).

The analyses explore the relationship between feelings of upset, fear and anger and type of bullying behaviour experienced as well as whether responses to bullying vary by individual characteristics. As well as looking at these responses separately, the three measures are summed to give an overall scale of perceived harm, which has a range of 3 to 9 and a reliability (alpha score) of 0.693.

Two other outcomes are analysed: wellbeing and depressive symptoms. Wellbeing is measured using the Mental Health Inventory-5 (MHI5), an internationally validated instrument which consists of five items. Young people were asked by the telephone interviewer how often in the past four weeks they felt certain ways (e.g. 'felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up'; 'felt calm and peaceful'), on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 'All of the time' to 'None of the time'. Higher scores indicate better wellbeing. Depressive symptoms were measured using the Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (SMFQ) (Angold et al., 1995). The SMFQ is a 13-item self-report questionnaire, completed online by the GUI sample, and focuses on symptoms of depression (e.g. 'I felt miserable or unhappy', 'I didn't enjoy anything at all'). Statements are rated as 'true', 'sometimes true', or 'not true' over the past two weeks. Higher scores mean greater risk of depression. The analyses explore the relationship between experience of bullying at 9 and 13 years of age and these outcomes. At 13 years of age, bullying, wellbeing and depressive symptoms are captured at the same timepoint so the direction of causality cannot be established. Bullying may lead to poorer wellbeing and greater depression, but it may also be the case that those with poorer mood become the target of bullying behaviours.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 explores the experience of bullying at 9 and 13 years of age, looking at how patterns vary by individual, school, classroom and neighbourhood factors. Chapter 3 looks at whether young people label certain behaviours as bullying and in what instances. It also examines the extent to which young people inform an adult about their experiences of being bullied. Chapter 4 outlines the relationship between bullying and adolescent outcomes such as wellbeing and depression. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the main findings and discusses the implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Experience of bullying at 9 and 13 years of age

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 has outlined the different ways in which 9- and 13-year-olds were asked about their experience of bullying behaviours in the GUI study. This chapter looks at the prevalence of bullying, using these different measures, and the individual, family background, and school factors associated with the likelihood of being bullied. Section 2.2 looks at experiences among 9-year-olds while Section 2.3 looks at experience of being bullied and of a range of bullying behaviours at age 13.

2.2   EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS

At 9 years of age, GUI respondents were asked whether they had been 'picked on' by anyone (child or adult) and, if so, what kind of behaviour was involved (see Chapter 1). In order to take account of longitudinal patterns, these analyses are limited to those who responded to questions on bullying at age 13 rather than the full sample of 9-year-olds.[11] Forty-one per cent of the cohort indicated they had experienced this behaviour, with no significant difference by gender in its prevalence (Figure 2.1). The behaviours most frequently experienced were being called names or being excluded, both reported by over a fifth of the group. The prevalence of being pushed or experiencing other physical violence was reported by about one-in-six 9-year-olds. Four per cent reported being picked on through text messaging, emails, online, etc. or through written messages or notes; this figure cannot be disaggregated by gender because of small numbers.

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[11]   Looking at all those who participated at age 13 (not just those who completed the sensitive online survey), overall bullying rates are 39 per cent while rates for exclusion and being pushed are 21 per cent and 15 per cent respectively.

FIGURE 2.1 FREQUENCY OF BEING 'PICKED ON' AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS BY GENDER
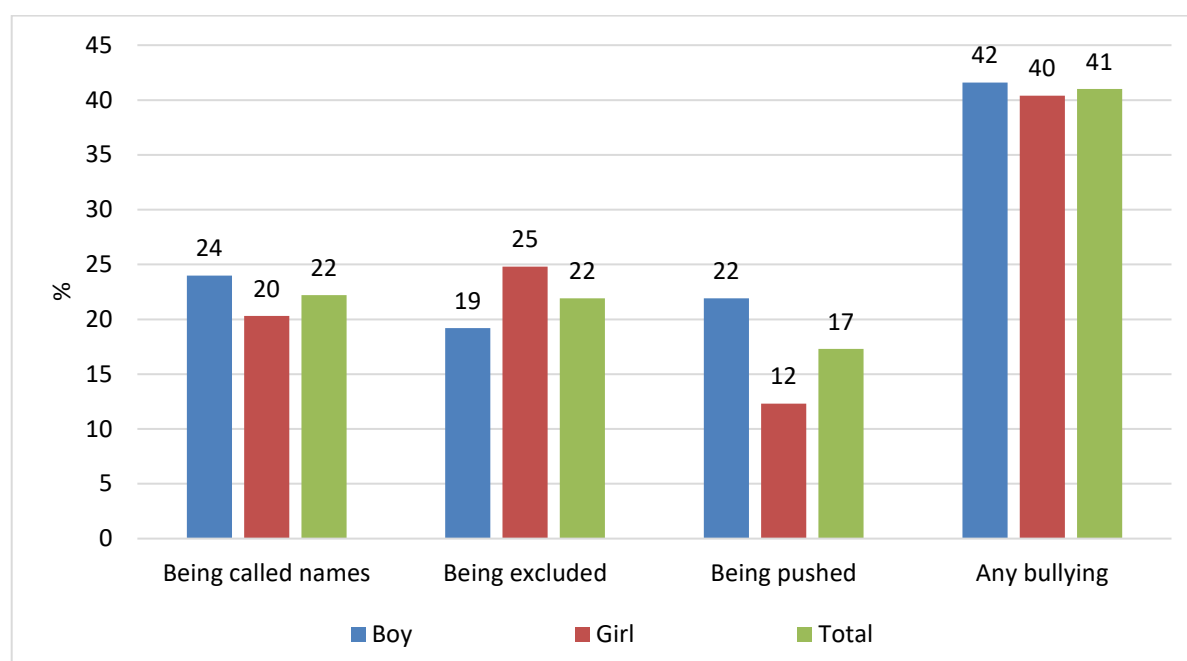
Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Gender differences in being pushed or excluded are significant at the p<.001 level while differences in being called names are significant at the p<.05 level.

While girls and boys at primary school level do not differ in their overall levels of being picked on, they differ in the type of behaviour experienced, with boys significantly more likely to be pushed while girls were more likely to experience social exclusion and, to some extent, being called names (Figure 2.1). The extent to which these gender differences hold when taking account of other individual and background factors is explored below.

In order to explore the factors associated with being picked on, Table 2.1 presents a series of logistic regression models, which progressively take account of: family background; group-based differences; peers and neighbourhood; school type; and classroom type and experiences. The final model controls for peer problems measured at five years of age to assess whether experiences of being picked on at age 9 have their roots in early childhood. The coefficients are reported in terms of average marginal effects so can be interpreted as the percentage point difference in the likelihood of being picked on between a child with that characteristic and the base category. These analyses relate only to those young people who completed the sensitive questionnaire at 13 years of age. As a robustness check, the analyses were conducted using the full sample at 13 years of age (see Table A2.1).[12] Any differences found are referred to in the remainder of the section.

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[12]   The models were the same except sexual orientation at age 13 could not be included as it was collected as part of the self-complete questionnaire.

In keeping with the descriptive analyses, there is no significant difference in overall levels between girls and boys in experiencing bullying, even taking account of family background factors (Model 1). There is no systematic variation by social class or being in a family experiencing financial strain. Children from lone-parent families are more likely to report being picked on, with a difference of 10 percentage points in Model 1. This is no longer significant when other factors such as disability are taken into account. A number of group-based differences are found to predict being picked on (Model 2). Thus, children with a disability, those whose mother has no religion, and those who see themselves as underweight ('skinny') or overweight are more likely to report being picked on. However, unlike other Irish research, no differences are found between migrant- and Irish-origin children.[13]

In the main model, contrary to expectations, there is no relationship between the size of the close friendship group (as reported by the child's mother) and being picked on (Model 3). However, using the full sample, those with more than four or five friends are less likely to be picked on (Table A2.1). There is little systematic variation by neighbourhood characteristics, though there are slightly higher rates in urban areas (Table A2.1).

Model 4 looks at the influence of type of school. At a descriptive level, no significant difference is found between those in DEIS and non-DEIS schools in the likelihood of being picked on. However, Model 4 indicates that nine-year-olds attending DEIS schools are less likely to be picked on, by a difference of 10 percentage points, than children with similar characteristics in non-DEIS schools. This pattern must be interpreted with some caution as there is only a slight difference (at the 10 per cent level) using the full sample (Table A2.1). A summary measure of the school disciplinary climate was also included; as it was found to have no significant relationship with prevalence, it was dropped for Models 5 and 6.

Model 5 looks at classroom characteristics and the interaction between the child and the classroom setting. Although the children in the cohort were the same age, they were not all in the same class level, due to variation in age starting school and potentially in patterns of grade retention (being kept back a year). There is no significant variation by class group. A significant minority of the children are in multigrade classes, for example in a class where third- and fourth-class students are taught together. This might be expected to be linked to being picked on as children may be exposed to older peers. However, no such difference is found.

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[13]   Migrant-origin children in the GUI sample may differ to the total group of migrant children in Ireland as they were almost all born in Ireland. This may account for the lack of difference found, though other research (Devine et al., 2025) shows variation across primary year groups in migrant-native experiences of bullying.

Children who feel that their teacher is not always fair to students in the class are significantly more likely to report being picked on, with a difference of 9 to 14 percentage points. Further analysis suggests that this might be related to greater school disengagement and poorer relationships with teachers among this group of children.[14] Previous research on second-level education has pointed to variation in classroom climate by ability grouping (Smyth, 2016). Between-class ability grouping at primary level is too rare to be considered separately using these data. However, information was collected from the teacher on whether children were grouped by ability for reading within the class. The patterns vary between the restricted and full samples so should be interpreted with caution.

The final model includes a measure of peer difficulties, based on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire[15] (SDQ), reported by mothers when the child was five years old. This allows us to see whether longer-standing difficulties in interacting with peers shape being picked on later on. However, no significant relationship is found, and the effects of other factors are robust to the inclusion of this measure (compare Models 5 and 6, Table 2.1).

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[14]   Those who have been picked on are less likely to 'always' look forward to going to school (25 per cent compared with 30 per cent) and are more likely to say their teacher always or sometimes gives out to them (58 per cent compared with 47 per cent).

[15]   The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief screening questionnaire for emotional and behavioural problems in children and young people aged 4–17 years of age, which can be completed by parents, teachers and/or young people themselves (Goodman and Goodman, 2009). The 25 items form five subscales relating to emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial behaviour.

TABLE 2.1 **LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING PICKED ON AT AGE 9 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Female	-0.018	-0.013	-0.016	-0.026	-0.023	-0.015
Social class:						
Professional	-0.012	-0.033	-0.026	-0.036	-0.018	-0.018
Managerial	0.004	-0.010	-0.003	-0.007	0.006	0.002
Non-manual	-0.013	-0.003	-0.005	-0.005	0.000	-0.000
Skilled manual	0.104	0.118±	0.121±	0.121±	0.113±	0.117±
Non-employed	0.113	0.055	0.051	0.065	0.021	0.006
(Base: Semi/unskilled)						
Lone parent family	0.097*	0.066	0.063	0.064	0.083	0.076
Financial strain	0.055	0.038	0.032	0.030	-0.015	-0.033
Migrant background		-0.008	-0.010	-0.004	-0.009	-0.008
Religion:						
Minority religion		0.006	0.006	0.001	0.007	0.009
No religion		0.073*	0.070±	0.067±	0.080*	0.072±
(Base: Catholic)						
Disability		0.098*	0.088±	0.088±	0.056	0.048
LGBQ (at 13)		0.048	0.045	0.042	0.070*	0.069±
Body image:						
Underweight		0.129***	0.125***	0.127***	0.112**	0.120***
Overweight		0.166*	0.161*	0.166*	0.052	0.059
(Base: About right)						
No. close friends:						
2-3			-0.004	-0.002	0.040	0.024
4-5			-0.038	-0.040	-0.028	-0.042
6+			-0.067	-0.073	-0.053	-0.073
(Base: 0-1)						
Urban location			0.018	0.019	0.035	0.035
Neighbourhood disorder			0.010±	0.012*	0.013*	0.015*
DEIS school				-0.097*	-0.089*	-0.093*
School gender mix:						
Boys				-0.026	-0.033	-0.022
Girls				0.071	0.058	0.009
(Base: Coed)						
School disciplinary climate				0.002	-	-
Multigrade class					0.048	0.054
In 4th class					-0.015	-0.014
Teachers treats fairly:						
Sometimes					0.089**	0.091**
Never					0.132*	0.142**
(Base: Always)						
Reading group in class:						
Higher					-0.069*	-0.075*
Middle					0.029	0.019
Lower					0.130*	0.114±
(Base: Mixed)						
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5						-0.008
Pseudo R²	0.015	0.033	0.038	0.044	0.061	0.062
N	2,955	2,664	2,655	2,655	2,305	2,257

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 2.2 repeats the same models but this time distinguishing between the type of behaviour experienced; being called names, being excluded and being pushed.[16] Girls are less likely than boys to report being physically pushed around or (to some extent) being called names but more likely to report being excluded (Tables 2.2 and A2.2). There is little systematic variation by family background or migrant status. The patterns by disability, body image and religion differ between the restricted and full samples so any differences should be interpreted with caution. Those who are LGBQ (as reported at age 13) are somewhat more likely to have been called names. There are only marginal differences by neighbourhood characteristics, though, using the full sample, all three types of bullying are somewhat more common in urban areas.

In descriptive terms, DEIS students are less likely to report being excluded than those in non-DEIS schools (19 per cent compared with 23 per cent). This pattern holds when other factors are taken into account. This may reflect additional supports to foster school belonging in DEIS settings. Alternatively, students in DEIS schools are more likely to live in the local area[17] so there may be more developed social networks that help protect against social exclusion. The gender mix of the school does not matter consistently across the two samples. Type of class does not make a significant difference but again perception of teacher unfairness is associated with higher rates of all three types of behaviour. Children allocated to the higher reading group are somewhat less likely to experience physical bullying than other children.

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[16] As a robustness check, these models were also estimated on the full sample (see Table A2.2).
[17] Growing Up in Ireland Cohort '08 data, own analyses.

TABLE 2.2   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NATURE OF THE BEHAVIOUR AT AGE 9 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Being called names	Being excluded	Being pushed
Female	-0.050±	0.057*	-0.089***
Social class:			
Professional	-0.027	-0.058	-0.063
Managerial	0.012	-0.024	-0.048
Non-manual	0.003	-0.037	-0.051
Skilled manual	0.048	0.077	0.006
Non-employed	-0.053	0.007	-0.116*
(Base: Semi/unskilled)			
Lone parent family	0.051	0.047	0.090±
Financial strain	0.064	0.006	-0.026
Migrant background	0.010	0.034	-0.009
Religion:			
Minority religion	0.046	-0.021	0.056
No religion	0.035	0.061±	0.051
(Base: Catholic)			
Disability	0.040	0.005	-0.095***
LGBQ (at 13)	0.062±	0.047	0.015
Body image:			
Underweight	0.052*	0.061*	0.052
Overweight	0.023	-0.071±	0.063
(Base: About right)			
No. close friends:			
2-3	-0.001	0.021	0.054
4-5	-0.060	-0.042	0.029
6+	-0.061	-0.059	0.035
(Base: 0-1)			
Urban location	0.010	0.047±	0.016
Neighbourhood disorder	0.009±	0.004	0.009±
DEIS school	-0.069*	-0.095**	-0.056±
School gender mix:			
Boys	-0.037	-0.097*	0.025
Girls	0.054	-0.072±	0.011
(Base: Coed)			
Multigrade class	-0.016	-0.022	0.006
In 4th class	0.016	0.003	0.005
Teachers treats fairly:			
Sometimes	0.059*	0.084**	0.053*
Never	0.117*	0.111*	0.134**
(Base: Always)			
Reading group in class:			
Higher	-0.039	-0.020	-0.061±
Middle	0.004	0.030	0.003
Lower	-0.032	0.041	0.087
(Base: Mixed)			
Pseudo R²	0.057	0.072	0.092
N	2,305	2,305	2,305

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

2.3   EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING AT AGE 13

Two types of measures were collected at age 13: whether the young person reported having been bullied and whether they had experienced bullying-type behaviour (such as being pushed or called names), even if they did not characterise this as bullying. This section considers the factors associated with both sets of experiences, while Chapter 3 looks at what young people themselves characterise as bullying.

2.3.1   Being bullied

Eight per cent of the 13-year-olds reported having been bullied in the previous three months, a figure that does not vary by gender. Table 2.3 looks at the individual, family and school factors associated with being bullied at age 13. As was the case for being picked on at age nine, little systematic variation was found by gender, social class, experience of financial strain or family structure. The prevalence does not vary significantly by migrant background but those from a minority religion are less likely to report being bullied than those who are Catholic or have no religion. Those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning are significantly more likely to be bullied, with a difference of 6 percentage points from their heterosexual peers. Those who are overweight are also more likely to be bullied, with a difference of 8 percentage points. Those who are underweight indicate a greater likelihood of being bullied when other school and neighbourhood factors are taken into account (Model 3).

Those with a disability are significantly more likely to be bullied than their peers, with a difference of 8 percentage points. Additional analyses (Table A2.3) distinguished between those with a long-lasting condition (who were not hampered by that condition), those who were hampered by a condition at least to some extent, and those without a condition. No significant difference is found between those with a long-lasting condition and all others but those with a disability (i.e. those hampered by a condition) are more likely to report having been bullied. There is little systematic variation by type of condition separately, but this is likely to reflect the small size of some of the groups.

Looking at peer and neighbourhood factors (Model 2), those who have more close friends are less likely to report being bullied while those who have a network of older friends are more likely to be bullied (though the difference is only significant at the 10 per cent level). This is consistent with previous research which shows that those socialising with older peers tend to be exposed to more risky behaviour (Negriff et al., 2011; Nolan and Smyth, 2020). Bullying prevalence does not vary systematically by area characteristics, such as urban or rural location and level of neighbourhood disorder.

Model 3 looks at school factors. Some of the cohort are still in first year while most are in second year at the time of the survey. Those in second year have a four-percentage point higher prevalence of being bullied than those in first year. This pattern is consistent with previous research which has shown greater disengagement and behaviour issues with second year students (Smyth, 2016). The prevalence of being bullied is higher in DEIS schools (by 6 percentage points), most likely reflecting greater levels of school misbehaviour overall (Smyth and Darmody, 2021), but there is no difference between fee-paying and other non-DEIS schools. There is no variation by the gender mix of the school, the school disciplinary climate or the reliance on the student support team as the main source of support.

Models 5 and 6 explore whether being bullied at age 13 has its roots in earlier experiences. Those who reported being picked on at age 9 are more likely to be bullied four years later. Furthermore, there is a relationship between having difficulties interacting with peers at age 5 and later bullying experiences. Even taking account of earlier experiences, 13-year-olds who have a disability, are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning, or are overweight are more likely to experience bullying than their peers.

TABLE 2.3   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING BULLIED AT AGE 13 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	-0.002	-0.000	-0.005	-0.009	-0.005
Social class:					
Professional	-0.051	-0.044	-0.031	-0.023	-0.024
Managerial	-0.044±	-0.047	-0.037	-0.034	-0.035
Non-manual	-0.035	-0.032	-0.030	-0.026	-0.027
Skilled manual	-0.062±	-0.057	-0.051	-0.050	-0.054
Non-employed	-0.046	-0.055	-0.047	-0.044	-0.042
(Base: Semi/unskilled)					
Lone parent family	0.007	0.012	0.011	0.008	0.005
Financial strain	0.002	-0.000	0.000	-0.001	-0.006
Migrant background	-0.022	-0.024	-0.029	-0.031	-0.033
Religion:					
Minority religion	-0.041*	-0.040*	-0.039*	-0.046**	-0.047**
No religion	-0.004	-0.011	-0.009	-0.009	-0.010
(Base: Catholic)					
Disability	0.077**	0.072**	0.074**	0.066**	0.068**
LGBQ	0.056*	0.062**	0.060**	0.050*	0.053*
Body image:					
Underweight	0.028	0.032±	0.034*	0.028±	0.027
Overweight	0.083**	0.074*	0.077**	0.071*	0.064*
(Base: About right)					
No. close friends		-0.018*	-0.021**	-0.021**	-0.021**
Whether most/all friends are older		0.027±	0.022	0.026±	0.027±
Urban location		-0.015	-0.014	-0.012	-0.013
Neighbourhood disorder		-0.004	-0.004±	-0.004±	-0.005*
In 2nd year			0.035**	0.038**	0.039**
School social mix:					
Fee-paying			-0.011	-0.008	-0.009
DEIS			0.059*	0.059*	0.064*
(Base: Non-DEIS)					
School gender mix:					
Boys			0.030	0.025	0.036
Girls			0.014	0.023	0.033
(Base: Coed)					
School disciplinary climate			-0.001	-	-
Student support team main support for students			-0.017	-0.009	-0.006
Picked on at age 9				0.048**	0.048**
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5					0.011*
Pseudo R²	0.080	0.101	0.128	0.148	0.157
N	2,896	2,867	2,866	2,787	2,725

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

2.3.2   Experience of bullying behaviours

Whether or not they reported having been bullied, 13-year-olds were asked about their experience of different bullying-type behaviours in the previous three months, including being hit, pushed, threatened, having their property damaged, being called names, excluded, gossiped about, receiving malicious texts, being bullied online and by having photos circulated (see Chapter 1). Figure 2.2 shows that the most frequent types of behaviour experienced related to being socially excluded and being called names, with around a third of the cohort reporting at least one such instance. A fifth of young people reported two or more occasions on which they were called names. Almost a third experienced at least one occasion of being pushed while almost a quarter had been hit on one or more occasions. Although there has been a good deal of policy and media focus on online bullying, and almost all of the young people in the GUI sample have smartphones at the age of 13, the proportion reporting these experiences is smaller than for many 'traditional' forms of bullying. Nine per cent indicated they had been bullied online at least once, 15 per cent had been bullied by text and 6 per cent had had photos of them circulated. Taking these three measures together as capturing cyber- or technology-related bullying, 19 per cent of 13-year-olds had experienced at least one instance in the previous three months.

FIGURE 2.2 FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT TYPES OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR BY 13-YEAR-OLDS
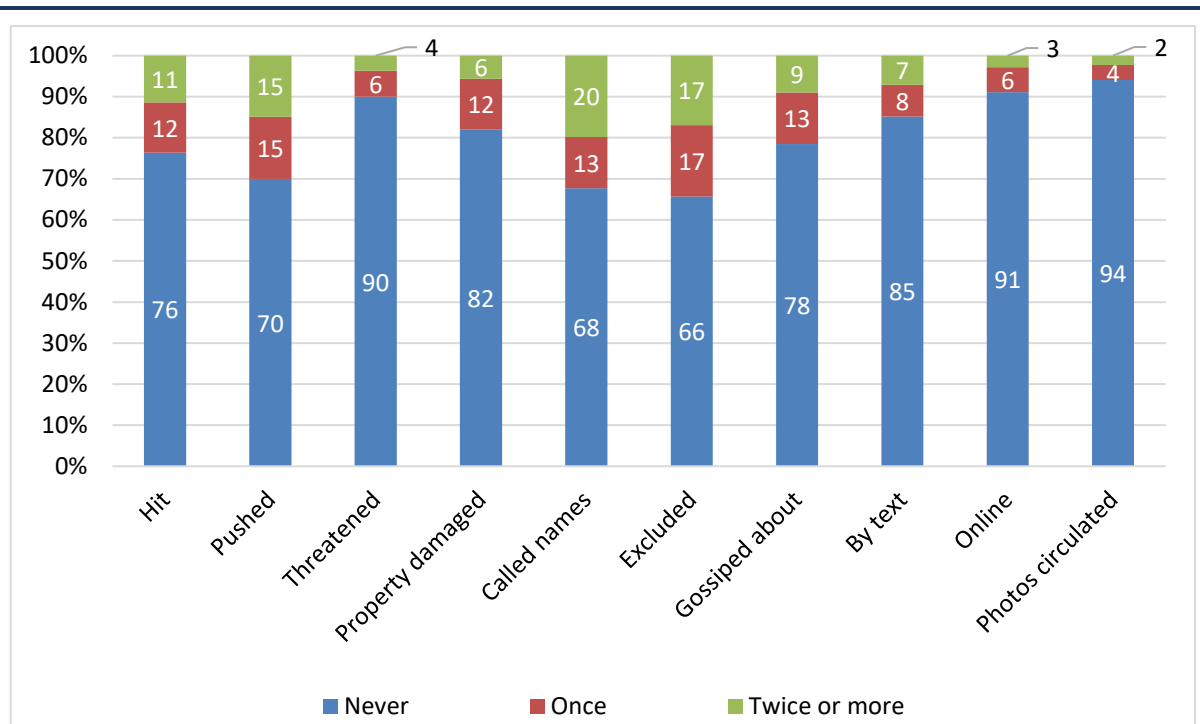
Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Looking across these measures, the majority (62 per cent) of 13-year-olds had experienced a bullying behaviour on one occasion, though many had experienced one incident across a number of different behaviours (e.g. being called names and socially excluded). Looking at repeated behaviours, 37 per cent of the cohort had experienced at least one behaviour two or more times. For ease of interpretation, these behaviours were summed into a scale ranging from 10 to 30; this scale has a reliability of 0.828. Table 2.4 looks at the factors associated with more experience of bullying behaviours while Tables 2.5 and 2.6 look at the separate dimensions of behaviour.

Table 2.4 presents the results of a Poisson model;[18] the coefficients are presented as average marginal effects which can be interpreted in terms of changes in scores on the bullying behaviours scale for each unit change in the predictor variable. Girls are more likely to report experiencing such behaviours than boys, although there is little marked differentiation by family background factors. Those with a disability, those with no religion and those who are underweight or overweight reported more bullying behaviours (Model 1). Separate analyses (Table A2.4) indicate that young people with an emotional disability are the most likely to experience bullying behaviours. Young people with more close friends are less likely to report bullying behaviour but socialising with older peers emerges as a risk factor. Experience does not vary between urban and rural areas or by level of neighbourhood disorder. Unlike direct reports of bullying, experience of bullying behaviours does not vary by year group. There is no variation by gender mix or social mix of the school. Students in schools with a student support team as the main support experience lower rates of bullying behaviours. Those who had been picked on at the age of nine are more likely to experience bullying behaviours at age 13 but peer difficulties at age five have no additional effect.

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[18]   A Poisson model is used because the distribution of the data is right-skewed.

TABLE 2.4   **POISSON REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCING BULLYING BEHAVIOURS AT AGE 13 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	0.755**	0.738***	0.773**	0.710**	0.749***
Social class:					
Professional	-0.632	-0.524	-0.545	-0.419	-0.486
Managerial	-0.420	-0.0342	-0.282	-0.174	-0.245
Non-manual	-0.500	-0.447	-0.436	-0.334	-0.394
Skilled manual	-1.343*	-1.342*	1.333*	-1.267*	-1.337*
Non-employed	-1.159±	-1.264±	-1.204±	-1.030	-1.047
(Base: Semi/unskilled)					
Lone parent family	0.015	-0.019	0.041	0.097	0.021
Financial strain	-0.219	-0.169	-0.211	-0.470	-0.471
Migrant background	0.086	0.055	0.073	0.203	0.180
Religion:					
Minority religion	-0.043	-0.130	-0.109	-0.194	-0.184
No religion	0.671*	0.586±	0.559±	0.492	0.470
(Base: Catholic)					
Disability	1.296***	1.167**	1.104**	0.799*	0.833*
LGBQ	0.393	0.400	0.419	0.386	0.339
Body image:					
Underweight	0.838**	0.843**	0.841**	0.785**	0.819**
Overweight	1.128**	1.033**	1.054**	1.008**	1.002*
(Base: About right)					
No. close friends		-0.266**	-0.261**	-0.288*	-0.290**
Whether most/all friends are older		0.797**	0.784**	0.781**	0.761**
Urban location		-0.073	-0.082	-0.100	-0.102
Neighbourhood disorder		0.002	-0.005	0.001	0.002
In 2nd year			0.117	0.136	0.144
School social mix:					
Fee-paying			0.365	0.545	0.537
DEIS			0.454	0.550	0.586
(Base: Non-DEIS)					
School gender mix:					
Boys			0.184	0.192	0.207
Girls			-0.063	0.019	0.009
(Base: Coed)					
Student support team main support for students			-0.866*	-0.861*	-0.874*
Picked on at age 9				0.964***	0.952***
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5					-0.006
N	2,241	2,219	2,218	2,151	2,105

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Tables 2.5 and 2.6 present a series of ordered logit regression models of the factors associated with the different types of bullying behaviours. For each type of behaviour, the responses consisted of 'never', 'once' or 'two or more times'. Coefficients with a value of more than 1 are associated with more frequent bullying while values below 1 are associated with a lower likelihood. Girls are less likely to experience physical bullying such as being hit (Table 2.5). There is little systematic variation by family background. Those with a disability are no more likely than their peers to report physical-type bullying. Similarly, experience of physical bullying does not differ significantly by sexual orientation, though LGBQ young people are more likely to report having had their property damaged. There is little systematic variation by religion, though those with no religion are more likely to indicate they had their property damaged. Those who are underweight are more likely to be report being pushed or (to some extent) hit, while those who are overweight are somewhat more likely to have been hit. Number of close friends has no protective effect for physical bullying but having older friends is a risk factor across all types of physical bullying, especially being threatened. There is little variation by local characteristics. Physical bullying does not vary by year group, school gender mix, school social mix or the role of the student support team, though both those in fee-paying and DEIS schools are somewhat more likely to report having had their property damaged. Those who were picked on at age 9 are more likely to experience all types of physical bullying at age 13 but there is no long-term relationship with peer difficulties at age 5.

TABLE 2.5   ORDERED LOGIT REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE PHYSICAL BULLYING BEHAVIOURS AT AGE 13 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Being hit	Being pushed	Being threatened	Property damaged
Female	0.771	0.707*	1.494±	1.234
Social class:				
Professional	0.964	0.905	0.775	1.101
Managerial	1.096	1.168	0.920	1.288
Non-manual	0.933	0.813	1.164	0.959
Skilled manual	0.602	0.565±	0.759	0.775
Non-employed	0.535	0.356*	0.874	0.928
(Base: Semi/Unskilled)				
Lone parent family	1.030	1.398	1.308	1.157
Financial strain	1.077	0.746	0.857	0.696
Migrant background	0.980	0.960	0.945	1.131
Religion:				
Minority	1.399	1.260	1.126	1.121
No religion	1.271	1.321	1.117	1.420±
(Base: Catholic)				
Disability	1.226	1.088	1.440	1.126
LGBQ	0.792	1.171	1.245	1.553*
Body image:				
Underweight	1.321±	1.319*	1.242	1.213
Overweight	1.484±	1.322	1.198	1.205
No. close friends	0.927	0.950	0.915	0.926
Whether most/all friends are older	1.454**	1.359*	1.928**	1.594**
Urban location	1.013	0.767±	1.085	0.806
Neighbourhood disorder	1.039	1.025	1.013	1.025
In 2nd year	1.064	1.177	1.002	0.988
School social mix:				
Fee-paying	1.181	1.062	1.375	1.742±
DEIS	1.329	1.221	1.159	1.546±
(Base: Non-DEIS)				
School gender mix:				
Boys	1.295	1.141	1.148	1.417
Girls	0.813	1.108	0.962	0.693
(Base: Coed)				
Student support team	0.971	0.835	0.793	0.728
Picked on at age 9	1.509**	1.755***	1.761**	1.406*
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5	0.990	1.002	1.034	1.002
Pseudo R²	0.036	0.041	0.046	0.038
N	2,563	2,530	2,543	2,556

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 2.6 looks at more social aspects of bullying behaviour, such as being excluded or called names. Girls are more likely to experience all of these behaviours, with the exception of photos being circulated which does not differ by gender. The

gender gap is particularly marked in experience of being socially excluded. Once again, there is little systematic variation by family social background. Those with a disability are more likely to indicate they have been bullied by text, been excluded, gossiped about or called names and, to some extent, been bullied online. Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning are more likely to indicate they had been called names and, to some extent, received hurtful texts but less likely to say they had been gossiped about. There is little systematic variation in social bullying by religion, though those with no religion are somewhat more likely to report being gossiped about. Young people who are overweight are more likely to experience being excluded and called names but less likely to indicate online bullying. Those who are underweight are also more likely to be excluded and, to some extent, called names.

Having more close friends emerges as a protective factor in being excluded, gossiped about, bullied online or having photos circulated, while socialising with older peers is a risk factor for all types of social bullying behaviour. There is little variation by area characteristics except for somewhat more exclusion in urban areas. These is little variation by school characteristics, except for much lower rates of exclusion in DEIS schools. Having been picked on at age 9 is a risk factor for all types of social bullying behaviour. As with physical bullying, there is no relationship between early peer difficulties and greater social bullying at age 13.

TABLE 2.6   ORDERED LOGIT REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER TYPES OF BULLYING BEHAVIOURS AT AGE 13 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Being called names	Being excluded	Being gossiped about	By text	Online	By photos being circulated
Female	1.401*	3.619***	2.317***	1.679*	2.200**	1.406
Social class:						
Professional	0.816	0.868	0.853	0.642	0.534	0.741
Managerial	1.053	0.940	0.840	0.640	0.434*	0.772
Non-manual	0.974	0.904	0.822	0.584	0.476±	0.887
Skilled manual	0.763	0.657	0.380*	0.378*	0.453±	0.582
Non-employed	0.821	0.239	0.578	0.498	0.467	0.509
(Base: Semi/Unskilled)						
Lone parent family	0.722	1.031	1.018	1.287	1.382	1.658
Financial strain	0.748	1.228	1.502	1.107	0.705	1.101
Migrant background	0.951	0.882	1.365	1.458	0.896	0.733
Religion:						
Minority	1.042	0.973	0.616±	0.379**	0.400	0.916
No religion	1.120	1.182	1.382±	0.940	0.952	1.201
(Base: Catholic)						
Disability	1.393*	1.702**	1.633*	1.954***	1.591±	1.602
LGBQ	1.598**	0.972	0.658*	1.471±	1.229	0.907
Body image:						
Underweight	1.262±	1.371*	1.312	1.448±	1.205	0.908
Overweight	1.508*	2.006**	1.140	1.459	0.459*	1.211
No. close friends	0.913	0.828**	0.850*	0.954	0.711**	0.764*
Whether most/all friends are older	1.464**	1.413**	1.309±	1.413*	1.569*	1.630*
Urban location	1.149	1.274±	1.214	1.080	0.947	0.973
Neighbourhood disorder	1.006	0.974	1.005	1.003	1.028	0.995
In 2nd year	1.187	0.960	1.063	1.177	1.005	1.019
(Base: In 1st year)						
School social mix:						
Fee-paying	1.143	1.057	1.060	1.438	1.173	1.304
DEIS	1.188	0.602*	1.153	1.253	1.766±	0.829
(Base: Non-DEIS)						
School gender mix:						
Boys	1.480	0.967	0.955	0.910	1.123	0.994
Girls	0.851	0.882	0.827	1.222	0.601	0.876
(Base: Coed)						
Student support team	0.733	0.868	0.982	0.896	0.742	0.712
Picked on at age 9	1.759***	1.434**	1.798***	1.642**	2.064**	1.854**
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5	1.055	1.017	0.935	0.928	1.000	0.867
Pseudo R²	0.042	0.080	0.061	0.070	0.091	0.052
N	2,532	2,526	2,457	2,577	2,560	2.545

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

2.4   CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored the individual, family, class and school characteristics associated with experiences of bullying at ages 9 and 13. Different measures of bullying are used at the two time-points and the reference periods differ (12 months compared to three months), while two separate measures are used at age 13. Four-in-ten 9-year-olds indicated that they had been 'picked on' (by a child or adult) in the previous year. The overall prevalence does not vary by gender, but the kinds of behaviour do, with girls more likely to report being excluded and boys more likely to indicate they had been pushed. In keeping with other recent Irish findings (Gavin et al., 2024), bullying is equally prevalent across different social backgrounds. However, group-based differences appear important, with disability, religion and weight status associated with the likelihood of being picked on. Local context makes little difference. Experience of being picked on varies by some school and classroom characteristics, being higher for children who are less positive about their teacher. Being picked on at age 9 does not reflect having greater problems interacting with peers at age 5.

At age 13, much fewer young people indicate they have been 'bullied' than have experienced various types of bullying behaviour, a disparity explored in Chapter 3. Eight per cent indicated they had been bullied in the previous three months. As at primary level, there was little variation by gender or family background. Those with a disability, those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning, and those who are overweight are more likely to have been bullied. Those who are in second year are more likely to be bullied, reflecting previous findings on student disengagement and misbehaviour at this stage (Smyth, 2016). Those attending DEIS schools are more likely to have been bullied. Experience of being picked on at age 9 is a risk factor for being bullied at age 13 but having more close friends operates as a protective factor.

Looking at different types of bullying behaviours, whether they are defined by the young person as bullying or not, provides more insights into the experiences of young people. Group-based differences, such as disability, sexual orientation and weight status, appear to be the focus of social bullying, including exclusion and name-calling, rather than physical bullying. Previous experience of being picked on and socialising with older peers emerge as important risk factors for all types of bullying behaviours at 13 years of age.

TABLE A2.1   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING PICKED ON AT AGE 9 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS), FULL SAMPLE

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Female	-0.028±	-0.021	-0.025	-0.028	-0.011	-0.012
Social class:						
Professional	-0.004	-0.024	-0.026	-0.033	-0.019	-0.019
Managerial	0.017	0.009	0.010	0.003	0.018	0.017
Non-manual	0.024	0.021	0.020	0.015	0.026	0.026
Skilled manual	0.064	0.055	0.056	0.055	0.040	0.040
Non-employed	0.035	0.019	0.018	0.020	-0.010	-0.010
(Base: Semi/unskilled)						
Lone parent family	0.079*	0.062±	0.059±	0.062±	0.053	0.054
Financial strain	0.003	0.003	-0.009	-0.008	-0.032	-0.032
Migrant background		-0.022	-0.035	-0.033	-0.036	-0.036
Religion:						
Minority religion		0.046	0.040	0.037	0.031	0.031
No religion		0.055*	0.048*	0.049*	0.035	0.035
(Base: Catholic)						
Disability		0.056*	0.046±	0.048±	0.026	0.027
Body image:						
Underweight		0.047*	0.046*	0.047*	0.036±	0.036±
Overweight		0.093*	0.088*	0.089*	0.041	0.041
(Base: About right)						
No. close friends:						
2-3			-0.051	-0.051	-0.055	-0.056
4-5			-0.098*	-0.099*	-0.109**	-0.100**
6+			-0.120**	-0.120**	-0.131**	-0.132**
(Base: 0-1)						
Urban location			0.040*	0.044*	0.057**	0.057**
Neighbourhood disorder			0.001	0.002	0.001	0.001
DEIS school				-0.043±	-0.029	-0.028
School gender mix:						
Boys				-0.037	-0.028	-0.028
Girls				-0.010	-0.012	-0.011
(Base: Coed)						
School disciplinary climate				0.003	-	-
Multigrade class					0.013	0.013
In 4th class					-0.005	-0.005
Teachers treats fairly:						
Sometimes					0.112***	0.112***
Never					0.181***	0.182***
(Base: Always)						
Reading group in class:						
Higher					-0.037±	-0.037±
Middle					0.022	0.022
Lower					0.035	0.035
(Base: Mixed)						
Peer problems (SDQ) at 5						-0.002
Pseudo R²	0.004	0.009	0.014	0.015	0.030	0.030
N	5,837	5,384	5,364	5,364	4,637	4,637

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

TABLE A2.2 **LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NATURE OF THE BEHAVIOUR AT AGE 9 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS), FULL SAMPLE**

	Being called names	Being excluded	Being pushed
Female	-0.050**	0.067***	-0.072***
Social class:			
Professional	-0.019	-0.018	-0.056±
Managerial	0.003	-0.000	-0.030
Non-manual	0.025	-0.021	-0.001
Skilled manual	0.025	0.055	0.022
Non-employed	-0.068±	0.009	-0.073*
(Base: Semi/unskilled)			
Lone parent family	0.023	0.038	0.068*
Financial strain	0.020	-0.009	-0.043*
Migrant background	-0.009	-0.031	-0.003
Religion:			
Minority religion	0.051±	0.052±	0.000
No religion	0.019	0.011	0.020
(Base: Catholic)			
Disability	0.012	0.018	-0.021
Body image:			
Underweight	0.021	0.026	0.024
Overweight	0.065±	0.011	0.022
(Base: About right)			
No. close friends:			
2-3	-0.048	-0.045	-0.006
4-5	-0.109**	-0.097**	-0.043
6+	-0.094*	-0.097**	-0.024
(Base: 0-1)			
Urban location	0.036*	0.034*	0.030*
Neighbourhood disorder	0.002	0.000	0.001
DEIS school	-0.011	-0.052**	-0.013
School gender mix:			
Boys	-0.003	-0.028	0.002
Girls	-0.002	-0.004	-0.018
(Base: Coed)			
Multigrade class	-0.009	-0.011	-0.008
In 4th class	0.035*	0.017	0.005
Teachers treats fairly:			
Sometimes	0.082***	0.093***	0.042**
Never	0.149***	0.153***	0.105***
(Base: Always)			
Reading group in class:			
Higher	-0.030	-0.035±	-0.029±
Middle	0.003	0.002	-0.011
Lower	0.002	0.012	-0.004
(Base: Mixed)			
Pseudo R^2	0.043	0.044	0.048
N	4,637	4,637	4,637

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

TABLE A2.3   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH REPORTING BEING BULLIED AT AGE 13, DISTINGUISHING BY TYPE OF DISABILITY (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Disability status:		
Long-term condition	0.030	
Hampered by long-term condition	0.082**	
(Base: No condition)		
Type of disability:		
Sensory		-0.018
Physical		0.050
Intellectual		-0.012
Learning		0.081
Emotional		0.035
Other		0.011
(Base: No condition)		

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: These models control for gender, social class, family structure, financial strain, sexual orientation, body image, migrant status and religion. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

TABLE A2.4   POISSON MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AT AGE 13, DISTINGUISHING BY TYPE OF DISABILITY (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Disability status:		
Long-term condition	-0.226	
Hampered by long-term condition	1.259***	
(Base: No condition)		
Type of disability:		
Sensory		1.040
Physical		-0.144
Intellectual		-0.337
Learning		1.003
Emotional		1.794**
Other		-0.342
(Base: No condition)		

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: These models control for gender, social class, family structure, financial strain, sexual orientation, body image, migrant status and religion. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

CHAPTER 3
Labelling and reporting of bullying

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 outlined the prevalence of bullying and bullying behaviours among 9- and 13-year-olds. This chapter delves further into these patterns to discern the types of behaviours labelled as 'bullying' by 13-year-olds. Section 3.2 looks at whether designating an experience as being bullied relates to the type of behaviour, frequency and impact, and whether it is interpreted differently by different groups of young people. Section 3.3 looks at whether young people told an adult about their experiences and explores whether this is driven by the type of behaviour experiences, the characteristics of the young person themselves and/or by their family, school and classroom context.

3.2   WHAT IS CONSIDERED BULLYING?

Previous research has highlighted a discrepancy between children and researchers regarding what constitutes bullying, with children less likely to include intentionality and repetition in their definition of bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2008; Byrne et al., 2016). Adolescents seem to have a more differentiated understanding of the concept in terms of aggression and social exclusion than younger children (Smith et al., 2002), and are more likely to point to the emotional harm caused by bullying (Byrne et al., 2016). Eight per cent of 13-year-olds indicated that they had been bullied in the three months prior to the survey while over a third had experienced recurrent bullying-type behaviour over the same period. The questions on experience of bullying behaviour were asked directly after the question as to whether they had been 'bullied'. Looking at those who indicated they had not been bullied, 59 per cent had experienced one instance of bullying behaviour while 31 per cent had experienced such behaviour on two or more occasions. What accounts for this discrepancy?

Table 3.1 presents a series of models looking at the nature of the behaviour that is labelled as bullying by young people.[19] These models do not include any other factors, but later analyses explore whether the patterns differ across groups. The 13-year-olds are more likely to consider behaviour as bullying if it is more frequent, if the same person or people are involved and if they see the behaviour as causing greater harm (Model 1). When the three dimensions of harm are considered separately (Models 2 to 4), being made angry by the behaviour has the largest effect on the likelihood of labelling it as bullying; the difference is sizeable with

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[19]   It is highly unlikely that the young people are thinking of a different form of bullying (given the list of bullying behaviours is fairly exhaustive) or that there could be reverse causality. It is clear from the findings that only a subset of those who have experienced bullying behaviour consider themselves to have been 'bullied'. The focus is therefore on trying to unpack what criteria matter in making this designation.

those who felt the behaviour made them angry 'a lot': 10 percentage points more likely to label this as bullying than those who were not angered.

TABLE 3.1   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH REPORTING BEING BULLIED (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Experience of bullying behaviour (scale)	0.015***	0.018***	0.019***	0.017***
Same person involved	0.122**	0.126**	0.149***	0.112***
Scale of harm reported	0.041***			
Nature of harm:				
Upset		0.059***		
Afraid			0.037±	
Angry				0.098***
Pseudo R²	0.372	0.339	0.316	0.380
N			1,294	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

The ten types of bullying behaviour are considered separately in Table 3.2,[20] with these models also controlling for whether the same person was involved and the scale of harm caused. All of the behaviours, with the exception of being pushed, threatened or excluded, are significantly more likely to be labelled as bullying. The strongest relationships are found for someone circulating an upsetting photo, name-calling and having something hurtful posted online. Thus, those who have experienced having an upsetting photo or note circulated about them are 14 percentage points more likely to label this as bullying.

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[20]   They are considered separately because of intercorrelation among the behaviours. Considering them simultaneously (not shown here) shows significant positive effects for being called names and being gossiped about.

TABLE 3.2   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AND REPORTING BEING BULLIED (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

Model number	Type of behaviour	Coefficients	Pseudo R^2
Model 1	Being hit, kicked or punched	0.072**	0.332
Model 2	Being pushed, shoved or slapped	0.031	0.320
Model 3	Being threatened/ forced to do things don't want to	0.051	0.319
Model 4	Someone taking/damaging personal possessions	0.088***	0.339
Model 5	Name-calling, hurtful slagging	0.137***	0.388
Model 6	Exclusion (being left out)	0.028	0.316
Model 7	Being gossiped about/ spreading rumours	0.098***	0.348
Model 8	Being sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app	0.071**	0.336
Model 9	Had something hurtful posted online about you	0.131***	0.351
Model 10	Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you	0.143***	0.339

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: All of the models control for whether the same person was involved and the scale of harm reported. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

The next set of analyses looks at whether the designation of behaviour as bullying varies across social groups, namely, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and weight status.[21] Table 3.3 shows that there is a significant interaction effect between gender and the frequency of experiencing bullying behaviour, as well as with the harm scale. Thus, boys are more likely to describe lower incidence behaviour as bullying than girls; for more frequent experiences, no gender difference is found. Among those who report the greatest negative impact from bullying behaviour, boys are more likely to designate this as bullying than girls (see Figure 3.1). The extent to which these patterns may reflect gender differences in reported experience of harm is explored in Chapter 4.

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[21]   Average marginal effects cannot be calculated for interaction terms.

TABLE 3.3   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR, INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND REPORTING BEING BULLIED (ADDITIVE COEFFICIENTS)

Type of behaviour	Coefficients	Pseudo R²
Female	-0.776	0.413
Frequency of bullying behaviour	0.088	
Frequency *female	0.195*	
Same person involved	1.763**	
Same person*female	-0.055	
Scale of harm	0.909***	
Harm*female	-0.602*	
Disability	-0.164	0.389
Frequency of bullying behaviour	0.148**	
Frequency *disability	0.182*	
Same person involved	1.462*	
Same person*disability	0.167	
Scale of harm	0.657***	
Harm*disability	-0.452*	
LGBQ	-0.813	0.378
Frequency of bullying behaviour	0.207***	
Frequency * LGBQ	-0.049	
Same person involved	1.119*	
Same person* LGBQ	2.933*	
Scale of harm	0.581***	
Harm* LGBQ	-0.168	
Religion:		0.391
Minority	-6.939*	
No religion	-2.102	
Frequency of bullying behaviour	0.146**	
Frequency * Minority	0.651**	
Frequency * No religion	0.105	
Same person involved	1.626**	
Same person* Minority	-3.092*	
Same person* No religion	0.793	
Scale of harm	0.590***	
Harm* Minority	-0.461	
Harm* No religion	-0.112	
Weight status:		0.412
Underweight	-2.670	
Overweight	0.331	
Frequency of bullying behaviour	0.156**	
Frequency * Underweight	0.232*	
Frequency * Overweight	-0.067	
Same person involved	1.982***	
Same person* Underweight	-0.886	
Same person* Overweight	-0.810	
Scale of harm	0.460***	
Harm* Underweight	-0.072	
Harm* Overweight	0.467	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, ± $p<.10$.

FIGURE 3.1 PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF LABELLING A BEHAVIOUR AS BULLYING BY LEVEL OF HARM EXPERIENCED AND GENDER
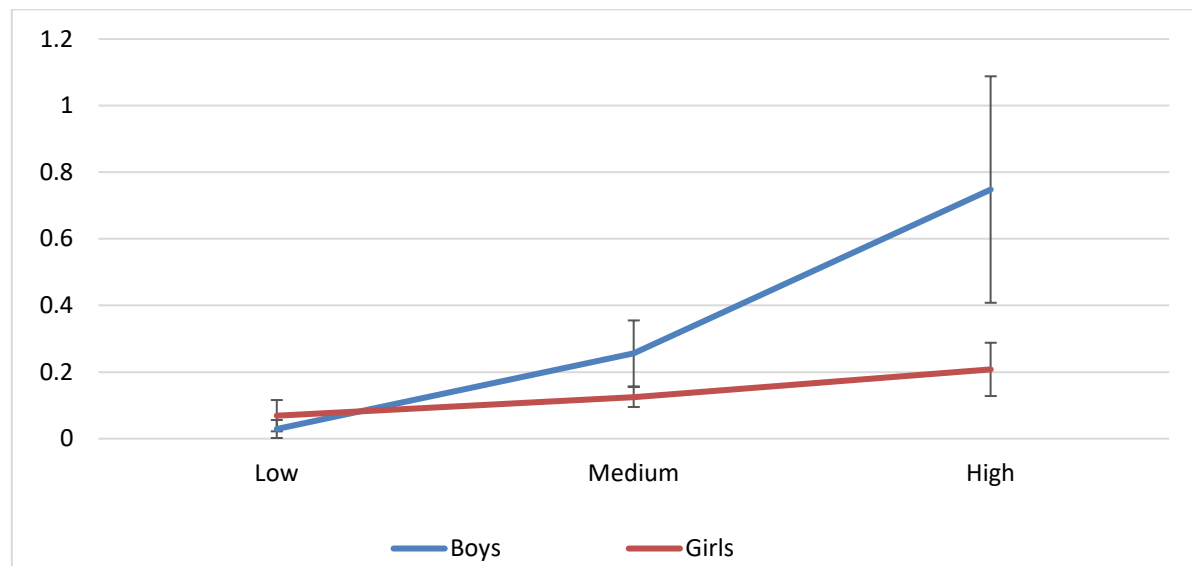
Source: Calculated from the models in Table 3.3.

There is a significant interaction effect between disability and the bullying behaviour scale and the harm suffered (Table 3.3). Among those with more frequent bullying experiences, those with a disability are more likely to describe this as bullying than others (Figure 3.2). Those with a disability are more likely to report behaviour as bullying at lower levels of harm but this pattern reverses at higher levels of harm, with labelling much more responsive to harm among those without a disability.

FIGURE 3.2 PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF LABELLING A BEHAVIOUR AS BULLYING BY FREQUENCY OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR EXPERIENCED AND DISABILITY
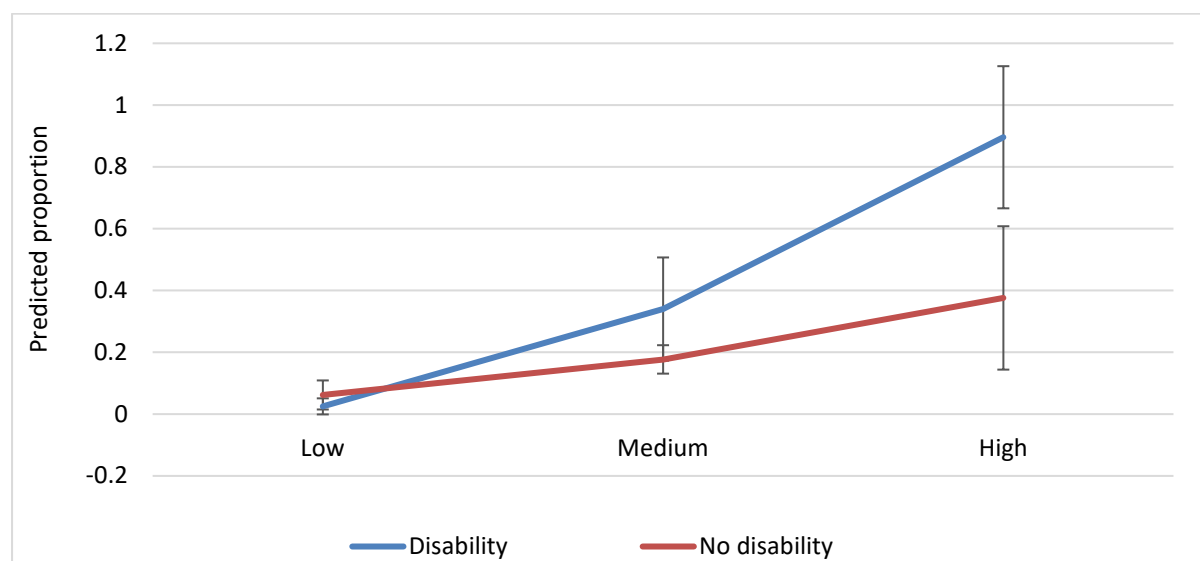
Source: Calculated from the models in Table 3.3.

The relationships between frequency of behaviour, harm and labelling as bullying do not vary significantly by sexual orientation. However, LGBQ young people are more likely to consider behaviour by the same person as bullying compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Table 3.3). There is a significant interaction between being from a minority religion and the bullying behaviour scale as well as whether it is by the same person. These patterns suggest that, among those with frequent bullying experiences, those from a minority religion are more likely to designate the behaviour as bullying than others. However, behaviour by the same person makes less of a difference to designation for those from a minority religion than those from a Catholic or no religion background. There is no significant interaction between having no religion and any of the bullying measures. In terms of weight status, there is a significant interaction between being underweight and the bullying behaviour scale, with some tendency for this group to be more likely to label it as bullying at higher levels of frequency.

3.3   TELLING AN ADULT

Among 13-year-olds who had experienced at least one type of bullying behaviour, 42 per cent told 'a parent, teacher other adult' about their experience. Where young people reported that they had been 'bullied', they were more likely to tell an adult, with 70 per cent of them doing so.

Model 1, Table 3.4 looks at the individual and family factors associated with telling an adult about their bullying experiences while Model 2 adds in school factors. Girls are much more likely to tell someone, with a gender gap of 13 to 16 percentage points (Models 1 and 2). There is little systematic variation by social background but those living in a lone-parent family are much more likely to tell an adult, with a difference of 20 percentage points. Reporting bullying is less common among those from a minority or no religion background than among their Catholic counterparts. Those who are underweight are less likely to report bullying, while those who are overweight are more likely to do so (Model 2). Those with a disability are 10 percentage points more likely to tell an adult than those without a disability. Looking at the patterns by type of disability, those with a learning disability are 21 percentage points more likely to tell an adult than those without a disability (Table A3.1). There is no systematic variation by school social or gender mix. Those living in an urban area are more likely to report any bullying experienced, with a difference of 11 percentage points.

TABLE 3.4   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TELLING AN ADULT ABOUT BULLYING EXPERIENCES AT AGE 13 (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Female	0.164***	0.131**
Social class:		
Professional	-0.099	-0.142±
Managerial	-0.041	-0.073
Non-manual	-0.091	-0.145
Skilled manual	-0.070	-0.116
Non-employed	-0.064	-0.246*
(Base: Semi/unskilled)		
Lone parent family	0.200**	0.200**
Financial strain	0.070	0.078
Migrant background	-0.012	-0.044
Religion:		
Minority religion	-0.108±	-0.173*
No religion	-0.085±	-0.123*
(Base: Catholic)		
Disability	0.099*	0.101±
LGBQ (at 13)	-0.037	-0.019
Body image:		
Underweight	-0.078*	-0.087*
Overweight	0.096±	0.130*
(Base: About right)		
School social mix:		
Fee-paying		-0.094
DEIS		0.012
(Base: Non-DEIS)		
School gender mix:		
Boys		0.005
Girls		-0.068
(Base: Coed)		
Urban location		0.107*
Pseudo R²	0.067	0.077
N		1,583

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 3.5 looks at the relationship between the type of bullying behaviour experienced and whether a young person tells an adult about it. Those who indicated that they had been bullied are 23 percentage points more likely to tell an adult about it than those who had experienced bullying behaviour but did not label it as bullying (Model 1). However, there is no relationship between experiencing more frequent bullying behaviours and the likelihood of telling an adult (Model 2). Interestingly, likelihood of reporting it to an adult varies by type of behaviour,[22] with those experiencing hurtful online material or texts, gossip, name-calling and exclusion more likely to tell an adult, while those who had been hit or pushed are

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[22]   Looked at simultaneously, those experiencing hurtful postings online and, to some extent, being called names, are more likely to tell an adult, while those who had been pushed or shoved are less likely to do so.

less likely to do so (Models 3a-j). Those who report a greater negative impact of bullying on them are more likely to tell an adult (Model 4), especially if they feel upset as a result of the behaviour (Model 5). Model 6 looks at whether the likelihood of telling someone is responsive to the family, peer or school context. Only the perceived responsiveness of the young person's mother makes them more likely to tell someone. However, peer relations, relationships with teachers and the presence of a student support team as the main support at school do not make a difference to the likelihood of reporting bullying.

TABLE 3.5   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING EXPERIENCE AND TELLING AN ADULT (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

Model number	Type of behaviour	Coefficients	Pseudo R^2
1	**Was bullied**	0.232***	0.096
2	**Frequency of experiencing bullying behaviour**	0.008	0.078
	Type of behaviour:		
3a	Being hit, kicked or punched	-0.058*	0.090
3b	Being pushed, shoved or slapped	-0.069**	0.087
3c	Being threatened/ forced to do things don't want to	-0.033	0.075
3d	Someone taking/damaging personal possessions	-0.028	0.078
3e	Name-calling, hurtful slagging	0.061**	0.090
3f	Exclusion (being left out)	0.055*	0.082
3g	Being gossiped about/ spreading rumours	0.079**	0.083
3h	Being sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app	0.083**	0.085
3i	Had something hurtful posted online about you	0.131**	0.092
3j	Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you	0.076±	0.077
4	**Scale of harm experienced**	0.088***	0.128
5	**Type of harm:**		0.145
	Afraid	-0.194	
	Upset	0.207**	
	Angry	0.037	
6	**Social context:**		0.162
	Mother seen as responsive	0.032***	
	Positive interaction with teachers	0.008	
	Negative interaction with teachers	-0.018	
	Student support team as support	0.015	
	No. of close friends	-0.018	
	Can rely on friends for help	-0.061	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: All of the models control for the background and school factors used in Table 3.4. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

3.4   CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored how young people interpret behaviour as bullying and whether they tell an adult about their experience. Eight per cent indicated they had been 'bullied', but the majority (62 per cent) had experienced a bullying

behaviour on one or more occasion, with 37 per cent experiencing at least one type of repeated behaviour. What behaviour is therefore labelled as bullying? Young people are more likely to characterise behaviour as bullying if it is more frequent, the same person or people are involved and they experience harm, especially anger, as a result. Whether young people consider behaviour as bullying is found to vary by gender, disability and sexual orientation. Certain types of behaviour, especially cyber-related or name-calling, are more likely to be labelled as bullying than other types, particularly being excluded by others.

Seventy per cent of those who have been 'bullied' tell a parent, teacher or other adult while this is the case for only 42 per cent of those who experienced any bullying behaviour. Girls, those with a disability and those who are overweight are more likely to tell someone. Telling an adult is more common if the behaviour is interpreted as bullying and if it involves greater harm, particularly feeling upset. Young people are more likely to tell someone about hurtful material posted online than other types of behaviour and are less likely to tell someone about physical behaviour. They are more likely to tell someone if they see their mother as more responsive but reporting patterns do not vary by the quality of teacher-student interaction or the size and quality of the peer network.

TABLE A3.1   LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TELLING AN ADULT ABOUT EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AT AGE 13, DISTINGUISHING BY TYPE OF DISABILITY (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Disability status:		
Long-term condition	0.037	
Hampered by long-term condition	0.105*	
(Base: No condition)		
Type of disability:		
Sensory		0.002
Physical		0.070
Intellectual		-0.114
Learning		0.208*
Emotional		0.048
Other		0.043
(Base: No condition)		

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Note: These models control for gender, social class, family structure, financial strain, sexual orientation, body image, migrant status and religion. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

CHAPTER 4

Bullying and adolescent outcomes

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the relationship between experiencing bullying behaviour and a selection of adolescent outcomes. Section 4.2 looks at the degree of harm reported by the bullying behaviour experienced, what types of behaviour are seen as most harmful and which groups of young people report greatest negative impact. Section 4.3 looks at the relationship between experience of bullying and two outcomes: wellbeing, measured using the Mental Health Inventory-5 (MHI5) and depression, measured using the Short Moods and Feelings Questionnaire (SMFQ).

4.2   BULLYING AND HARM

Young people who experienced at least one instance of bullying behaviour in the previous three months were asked about the harm caused by that behaviour (see Chapter 1). Almost two-thirds of the 13-year-olds indicated that the behaviour had made them angry or upset 'a little' or 'a lot' (Figure 4.1). A fifth reported it had made them angry 'a lot' while 16 per cent were upset 'a lot'. Young people were less likely to report being afraid, with 22 per cent saying this was 'a little' and 3 per cent 'a lot'.

FIGURE 4.1 LEVELS OF HARM REPORTED BY 13-YEAR-OLDS WHO EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
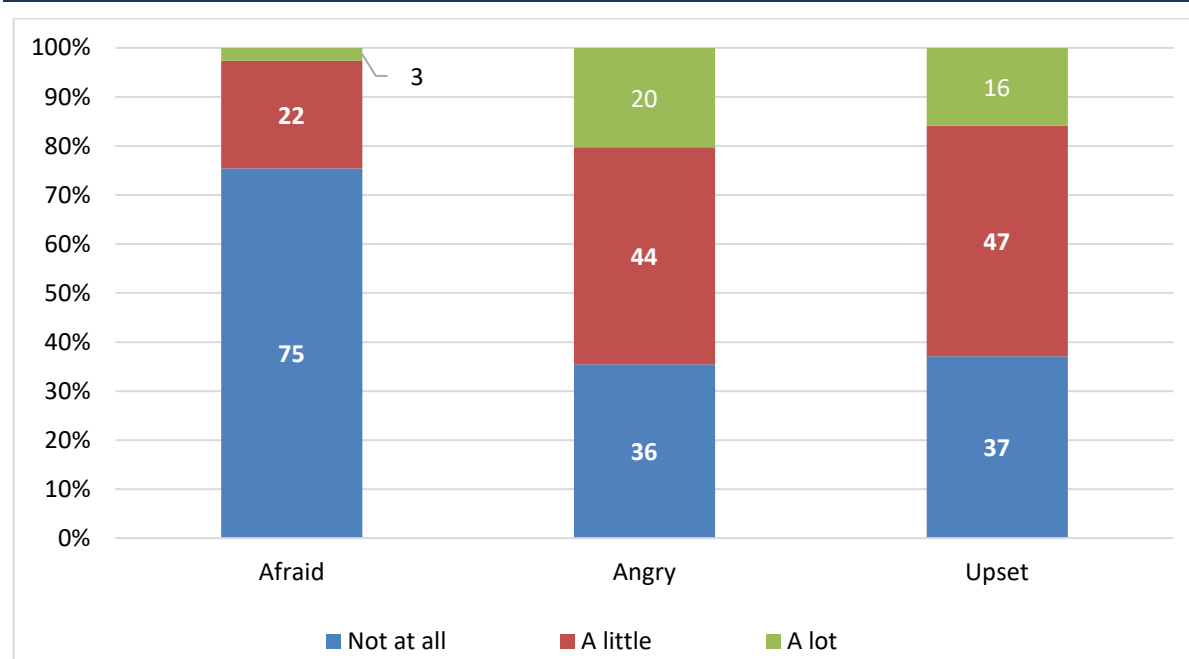
Reactions to bullying behaviour are found to be highly gendered. In Figure 4.2, a little and a lot of impact are grouped together because of small numbers for being afraid a lot. Girls report feeling more afraid, angry and upset than boys, though over half of boys feel angry and almost half feel upset.

FIGURE 4.2 LEVELS OF HARM REPORTED BY GENDER
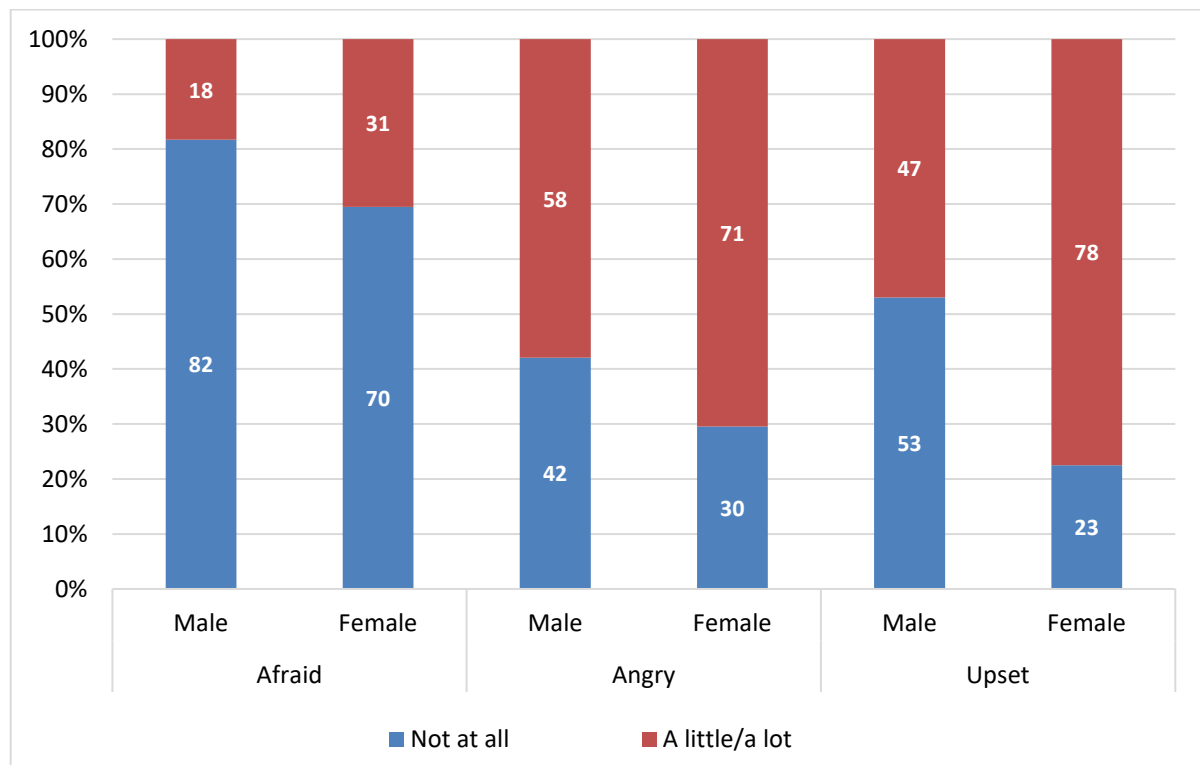
Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Table 4.1 shows the relationship between different types of bullying experience and the perceived harm caused. As indicated in Chapter 1, perceived harm is a composite of feelings of upset, anger and being afraid. The coefficients reflect points on the scale of harm, which ranges from 3 to 9. Those who defined their experiences as bullying indicate much greater harm, a difference of 1.9 points, more than a standard deviation (Model 1). Experiencing more frequent bullying behaviours, even if they are not labelled by the young person as bullying, is associated with greater harm (Model 2). Separating out different types of behaviour, harm is seen as greater for actions that involve being socially excluded, including being called names and being gossiped about, and online behaviour, such as a hurtful text or post (Model 3). In contrast, more physical forms of bullying behaviour are not seen as being as harmful.

TABLE 4.1   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING EXPERIENCE AND REPORTED HARM

Model number	Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
1	**Recorded being bullied**	1.934***	0.199
2	**Scale of bullying behaviour**	0.201***	0.260
3	**Type of behaviour:**		0.379
	Being hit, kicked or punched	-0.062	
	Being pushed, shoved or slapped	-0.091	
	Being threatened/ forced to do things don't want to	0.163	
	Someone taking/damaging personal possessions	0.091	
	Name-calling, hurtful slagging	0.424***	
	Exclusion (being left out)	0.424***	
	Being gossiped about/ spreading rumours	0.269**	
	Being sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app	0.433***	
	Had something hurtful posted online about you	0.328*	
	Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you	-0.152	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 4.2 explores whether some groups of young people report greater harm from bullying, once the frequency of that bullying behaviour is taken into account. Those from a semi/unskilled background appear to report less harm but this is due to differences in the frequency of bullying behaviour experienced and whether it involved the same person. Girls and LGBQ young people report greater levels of harm than others. Interestingly, those from a minority religious background report lower perceived harm, but there is no ready explanation for this pattern. Perceived harm does not vary systematically by different dimensions of family background, migrant background, weight status, urban/rural location or type of school attended. Perceived harm does not vary by disability status; additional analyses (Table A4.1) indicate no significant variation across different conditions in the level of perceived harm.

TABLE 4.2   LINEAR REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEIVED HARM FROM BULLYING EXPERIENCES AT AGE 13

	Model 1	Model 2
Frequency of bullying behaviour		0.141***
Behaviour by same person		0.535***
Female	0.721***	0.545***
Social class:		
Professional	-0.527*	-0.261
Managerial	-0.725**	-0.471±
Non-manual	-0.592*	-0.461
Skilled manual	-0.727*	-0.366
Non-employed	-0.722±	-0.314
(Base: Semi/unskilled)		
Lone parent family	0.201	0.032
Financial strain	0.022	0.144
Migrant background	0.008	0.018
Religion:		
Minority religion	-0.680**	-0.512*
No religion	0.102	-0.017
(Base: Catholic)		
Disability	0.336±	0.087
LGBQ (at 13)	0.435*	0.323±
Body image:		
Underweight	0.105	0.089
Overweight	0.069	-0.052
(Base: About right)		
School social mix:		
Fee-paying	0.154	0.257
DEIS	0.302±	0.284±
(Base: Non-DEIS)		
School gender mix:		
Boys	0.132	-0.014
Girls	0.039	0.151
(Base: Coed)	0.034	-0.005
Urban location		
R²	0.160	0.367
N	919	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: The N is smaller than previously as only those who experiencing any bullying or bullying behaviour were asked these questions.
              Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 4.3 looks at whether the greater harm perceived by girls and LGBQ young people differs by the frequency of experiencing bullying behaviour. No significant interactions are found, indicating that there are no differences in perceptions of harm regardless of whether they have more or less frequent exposure to this behaviour.

TABLE 4.3   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND PERCEIVED HARM

Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
Female	0.153	0.368
Scale of bullying behaviour	0.126***	
Scale*female	0.027	
Behaviour from same person	0.523***	
LGBQ	0.258	0.367
Scale of bullying behaviour	0.140***	
Scale* LGBQ	0.004	
Behaviour from same person	0.536***	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
*Note:*   Significance levels: *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, ± $p<.10$.

4.3   WELLBEING AND DEPRESSION

Two types of outcomes are analysed in this section: wellbeing and depressive symptoms. As discussed in Chapter 1, wellbeing is measured using the Mental Health Index-5 (MHI5), an internationally validated instrument which consists of five items, with higher scores indicating better wellbeing, which was administered by interviewer. Depressive symptoms were measured using the Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (SMFQ) (Angold et al., 1995), with higher scores meaning greater risk of depression, which was self-completed. The two measures should be regarded as complementary rather than measuring the same phenomenon (with a moderate negative correlation of -0.56). Furthermore, patterns of response may be affected by mode as young people may be less likely to disclose negative feelings to an interviewer than in an online survey.

4.3.1   Wellbeing at 13

Figure 4.3 shows mean wellbeing scores at age 13 broken down by whether they were picked on at age 9, bullied at 13 and by the level of bullying behaviour experienced. Given that wellbeing is measured at the same time as bullying behaviour, the direction of the relationship cannot be determined; young people may have poorer wellbeing because they have been bullied and/or those who have poorer wellbeing may be more vulnerable to being targeted. The figure shows that those who were picked on at age 9 have poorer wellbeing than those who were not, four years later. Not surprisingly, there is a larger difference in wellbeing between those who were bullied at 13 and others, with a wellbeing gradient also evident by the level of bullying behaviour.

FIGURE 4.3 MEAN WELLBEING SCORE AT AGE 13 BY WHETHER EXPERIENCED BULLYING AT AGE 9 AND/OR 13
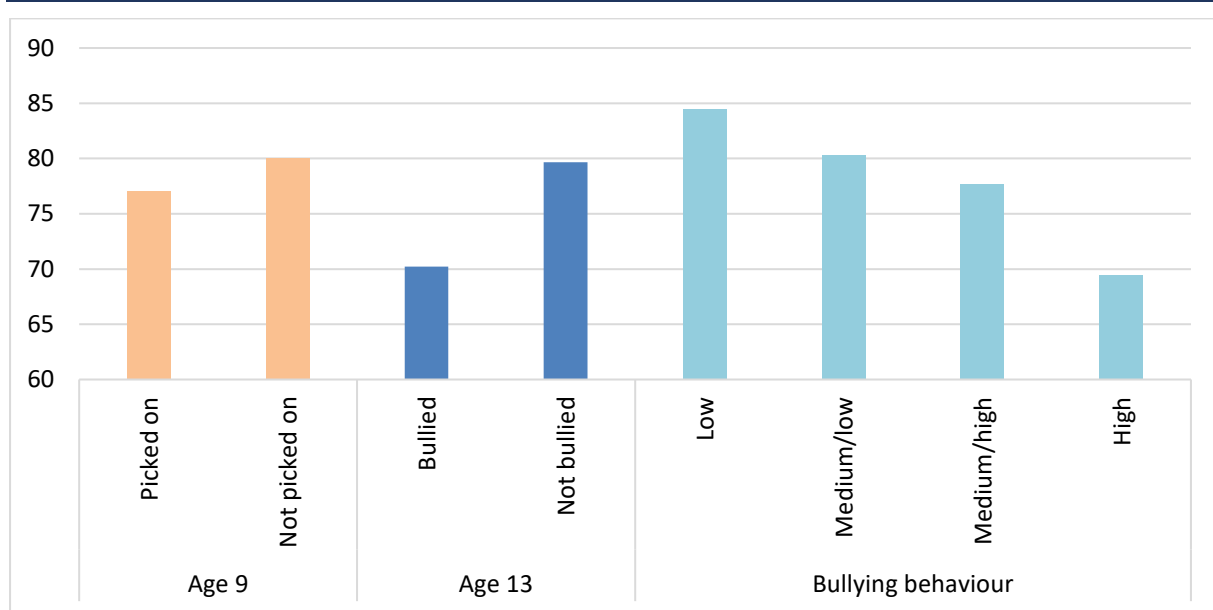
Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Frequency of experiencing bullying has been grouped into quartiles for ease of presentation.

These relationships are analysed in a series of linear regression models presented in Table 4.4. The coefficients represent points on the wellbeing scale. Those who were bullied at age 13 had much poorer wellbeing (by 9 points on the scale) at the same timepoint, a sizeable difference of over half a standard deviation. Even taking account of current bullying, those who had been picked on at age 9 had poorer wellbeing at 13 (by over 2.6 points) (Model 1). Model 2 controls for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) total difficulties scale at age 9 in order to partial out pre-existing emotional difficulties. Both the frequency of bullying behaviour at age 13 and being picked on at age 9 are significantly negatively related to wellbeing, even taking account of SDQ. There is no significant relationship with behaviour from the same person/people when these other factors are taken into account. Model 3 looks at the different types of behaviour at age 9, again controlling for SDQ scores. Here being socially excluded at age 9 has the strongest relationship with poorer wellbeing. In terms of types of behaviour at age 13 (Model 4), exclusion and having property taken or damaged emerge as having the strongest relationships with poorer wellbeing.

TABLE 4.4   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING EXPERIENCE AND WELLBEING AT AGE 13

Model number	Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
1	**Was bullied at 13**	-9.003***	0.035
	Was picked on at 9	-2.650**	
2	**Frequency of bullying behaviour at 13**	-0.923***	0.135
	Behaviour by the same person at 13	-1.088	
	Was picked on at 9	-4.984**	
	SDQ total difficulties at 9	-0.229*	
3	**Type of behaviour at 9:**		0.033
	Being pushed	-0.287	
	Being called names	-0.056	
	Being sent hurtful text	0.324	
	Being sent hurtful notes	1.031	
	Being socially excluded	-3.351**	
	SDQ total difficulties at age 9	-0.420***	
4	**Type of behaviour at age 13:**		0.166
	Being hit, kicked or punched	0.322	
	Being pushed, shoved or slapped	-0.509	
	Being threatened/ forced to do things don't want to	-1.712	
	Someone taking/damaging personal possessions	-3.228*	
	Name-calling, hurtful slagging	-1.275	
	Exclusion (being left out)	-4.638***	
	Being gossiped about/ spreading rumours	-0.741	
	Being sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app	-2.493	
	Had something hurtful posted online about you	2.311	
	Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you	-1.234	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Table 4.5 looks at the individual, family and school factors associated with wellbeing before and after taking account of bullying experiences. Those who experience more frequent bullying behaviours have poorer wellbeing, even after taking account of a range of other factors (Model 2). Girls have poorer wellbeing, with part of this difference explained by experiences of bullying (compare the coefficients for gender in Models 1 and 2). A very small part of the effect of having a disability on wellbeing is due to bullying, with bullying playing a more important role in poorer wellbeing among lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning young people and among those who are overweight.

TABLE 4.5   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WELLBEING AT AGE 13

	Model 1	Model 2
Frequency of bullying behaviour		-0.913***
Behaviour by same person		-2.374
SDQ total difficulties at age 9		0.001
Female	-6.265***	-5.086***
Social class:		
Professional	-2.126	-2.492
Managerial	-1.165	0.003
Non-manual	-0.541	0.384
Skilled manual	1.028	1.047
Non-employed	-3.126	-4.400
(Base: Semi/unskilled)		
Lone parent family	-2.226	-1.381
Financial strain	2.596	1.728
Migrant background	-2.618	-2.013
Religion:		
Minority religion	-1.764	-3.116
No religion	-2.453±	-3.194*
(Base: Catholic)		
Disability	-5.742***	-5.197***
LGBQ	-7.426***	-5.513***
Body image:		
Underweight	-2.886**	-2.575*
Overweight	-4.796**	-3.680*
(Base: About right)		
School social mix:		
Fee-paying	-3.307	-2.128
DEIS	-0.360	0.321
(Base: Non-DEIS)		
School gender mix:	0.643	0.447
Boys	-0.693	-0.572
Girls	-1.133	-1.784±
(Base: Coed)		
Urban location		
R²	0.192	0.267
N		1,655

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 4.6 explores further whether the impact of bullying on wellbeing varies by other characteristics. The findings indicate that the relationship between bullying experience and wellbeing does not vary significantly by gender, disability or sexual orientation.

TABLE 4.6   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR, INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND WELLBEING

Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
Female	1.035	0.270
Scale of bullying behaviour	-0.648*	
Scale*female	-0.484	
Behaviour by same person	-2.370	
Disability	-4.864	0.267
Scale of bullying behaviour	-0.905***	
Scale* Disability	-0.025	
Behaviour by same person	-2.384***	
LGB	0.357	0.268
Scale of bullying behaviour	-0.815***	
Scale* LGB	-0.448	
Behaviour by same person	-2.366	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: These models control for the individual and school factors included in Table 4.4. Significance levels: *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, ± $p<.10$.

4.3.2   Depressive symptoms at age 13

Figure 4.4 shows mean depression scores by bullying experiences. Depressive symptoms are more prevalent among those who were picked on at age 9 but there is a larger difference between those who were bullied at age 13 and others. Depressive symptoms have a clear gradient by frequency of bullying behaviour, with an especially large increase between the medium/high and high groups.

FIGURE 4.4 MEAN DEPRESSION SCORE AT AGE 13 BY WHETHER EXPERIENCED BULLYING AT AGE 9 AND/OR 13
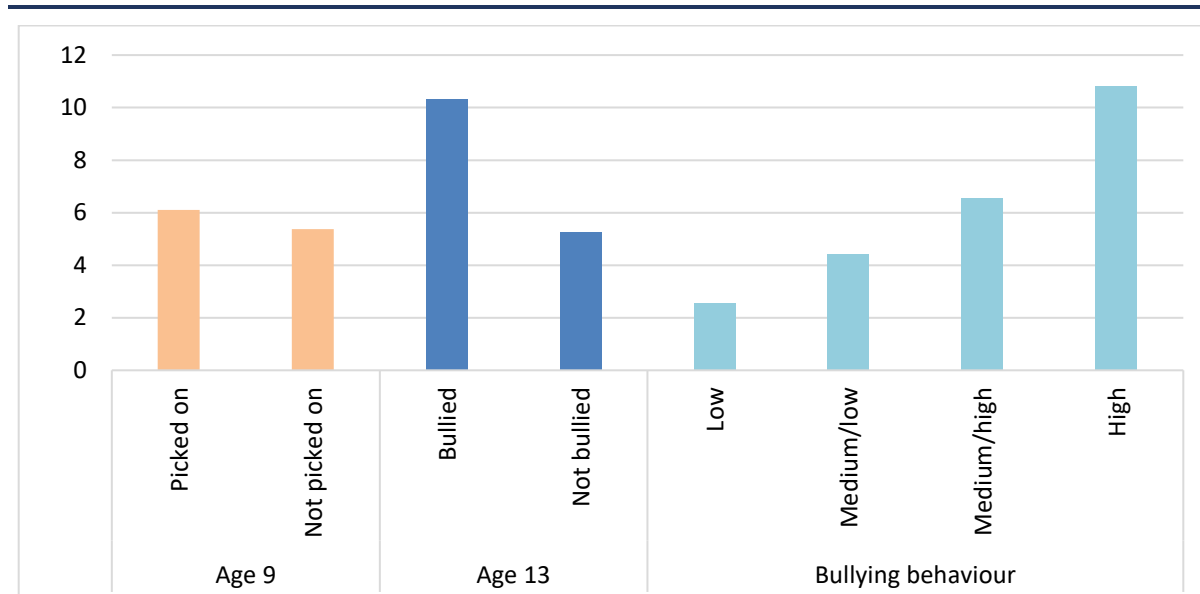
Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Frequency of experiencing bullying behaviour has been grouped into quartiles for ease of presentation.

Table 4.7 looks at the relationship between bullying experience and depressive symptoms using a series of linear regression models. Depression scores are much higher among those who were bullied at age 13, over four-fifths of a standard deviation. There is only a marginally significant relationship with earlier experiences of being picked on when current bullying is taken into account (Model 1). However, being socially excluded at age 9 is linked to greater depression at age 13 (Model 3). As with wellbeing, it should be noted that the direction of the relationship cannot be established as they are measured at the same timepoint. The frequency of bullying behaviour at age 13 and the same person/people being involved are strongly associated with depression scores (Model 2). Exclusion, being threatened, name calling and being pushed or shoved at age 13 are most strongly related to depression scores (Model 4).

TABLE 4.7 LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING EXPERIENCE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AT AGE 13

Model number	Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
1	**Was bullied at 13**	4.578***	0.053
	Was picked on at 9	0.526±	
2	**Scale of bullying behaviour at 13**	0.638***	0.287
	Behaviour by the same person at 13	2.216***	
	Was picked on at 9	-0.204	
	SDQ total difficulties at 9	0.035	
3	**Type of behaviour at 9:**		0.022
	Being pushed	-0.675	
	Being called names	0.478	
	Being sent hurtful text	-1.089	
	Being sent hurtful notes	0.255	
	Being socially excluded	1.263**	
	SDQ total difficulties at age 9	0.104**	
4	**Type of behaviour at age 13:**		0.337
	Being hit, kicked or punched	-0.294	
	Being pushed, shoved or slapped	1.146**	
	Being threatened/ forced to do things don't want to	1.956**	
	Someone taking/damaging personal possessions	0.454	
	Name-calling, hurtful slagging	0.722**	
	Exclusion (being left out)	2.554***	
	Being gossiped about/ spreading rumours	0.475	
	Being sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app	0.619	
	Had something hurtful posted online about you	-0.130	
	Someone circulating upsetting note/ photo/ video or graffiti about you	-0.044	
	SDQ	0.039	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

Table 4.8 looks at the relationship between individual and school factors and depression scores, before and after taking account of bullying experiences. As above, more frequent bullying behaviour and the same person/people being

involved are linked to higher depression scores. Bullying experiences explain part of the higher depression found among girls, those with no religion and LGBQ young people. For both disability and being overweight, depression scores no longer differ when bullying is taken into account. Further models (Table 4.9) found that the relationship between bullying and depression does not vary by gender or sexual orientation.

TABLE 4.8   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DEPRESSION AT AGE 13

	Model 1	Model 2
Scale of bullying behaviour		0.589***
Behaviour by same person		1.767**
SDQ total difficulties at age 9		0.023
Female	3.127***	2.414***
Social class:		
Professional	-0.216	-0.406
Managerial	-0.465	-0.665
Non-manual	-0.111	-0.398
Skilled manual	-1.702*	-1.072
Non-employed	-0.616	0.405
(Base: Semi/unskilled)		
Lone parent family	0.243	-0.557
Financial strain	-1.090	-0.886
Migrant background	0.021	0.011
Religion:		
Minority religion	0.132	0.121
No religion	1.318*	1.040*
(Base: Catholic)		
Disability	1.442**	0.549
LGBQ (at 13)	2.901***	2.542***
Body image:		
Underweight	0.734±	0.328
Overweight	1.557**	0.818
(Base: About right)		
School social mix:		
Fee-paying	0.718	0.405
DEIS	0.299	-0.205
(Base: Non-DEIS)		
School gender mix:		
Boys	-0.201	-0.012
Girls	0.523	0.715
(Base: Coed)	0.181	0.371
Urban location		
R²	0.219	0.423
N	1,651	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

TABLE 4.9   LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TYPE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR, INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND DEPRESSION

Type of behaviour	Coefficients	R^2
Female	0.012	0.427
Scale of bullying behaviour	0.485***	
Scale*female	0.190	
Behaviour by same person	1.767**	
LGBQ	-1.188	0.429
Scale of bullying behaviour	0.526***	
Scale* LGBQ	0.285	
Behaviour by same person	1.760**	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: These models control for the individual and school factors included in Table 4.4. Significance levels: *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, ± $p<.10$.

4.4   CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the harm that young people feel bullying causes, as well as differences in wellbeing and depression scores by experience of bullying. For most young people who experience any bullying behaviour, they report feelings of anger and upset, with between one-in-six and one-in-five indicating a lot of impact. Girls report more feelings of anger, upset and being afraid than boys, though it is not clear whether this reflects gender differences in acknowledging these feelings or not. Greater harm is evident where the experience is framed as bullying, where there is more frequent bullying behaviour and where it is by the same person/people. Greater harm is indicated by exclusion, name-calling or hurtful texts as well as online posts and gossip. In contrast, physical bullying is not seen as causing (emotional) harm to the same extent by the 13-year-olds.

Those who were picked on at age 9 have poorer wellbeing and higher depression scores at age 13, though the relationship with depression is largely explained by higher rates of current bullying. Experiencing more frequent bullying behaviour and behaviour that involves the same person at age 13 is linked to poorer wellbeing and higher depression, though the direction of causality must be interpreted with caution as they are measured at the same timepoint. Exclusion is linked to both poorer wellbeing and greater depression, but some other types of behaviour are linked to wellbeing and not depression (or vice versa). Experiences of bullying are found to explain at least some of the differences in wellbeing and depression by gender, disability and sexual orientation.

TABLE A4.1   **REGRESSION MODEL OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EXPERIENCING HARM FROM BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AT AGE 13, DISTINGUISHING BY TYPE OF DISABILITY (AVERAGE MARGINAL EFFECTS)**

	Coefficient
Type of disability:	
Sensory	-0.079
Physical	-0.065
Intellectual	0.106
Learning	-0.679
Emotional	0.375
Other	0.296
(Base: No condition)	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: These models control for gender, social class, family structure, financial strain, sexual orientation, body image, migrant status and religion. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ± p<.10.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and implications for policy

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Bullying continues to be a feature of the lives of children and young people in Ireland, as elsewhere. A meta-analysis of studies conducted on the island of Ireland points to higher rates of bullying in primary schools than at second-level (Foody et al., 2017), patterns that are confirmed by HBSC data for 2022.[23] Increased use of technology by children and adolescents has meant potential exposure to cyberbullying.[24] Much of the existing research has focused on school-based bullying and cyberbullying, with less attention paid to the potential for bullying in local neighbourhoods and at structured activities such as sports[25] and youth clubs.[26] Similarly, the policy response has tended to concentrate on school-based approaches, though individual sports and youth organisations generally have anti-bullying policies in place. National procedures for schools to address school-based bullying were issued in 2013 (Department of Education and Skills, 2013), with a revised action plan, Cineáltas, issued by the Department of Education in 2022 following consultation with stakeholders, including children and young people.

This study builds upon existing research to take a broad view of bullying comprising experiences outside as well as within school. Drawing on Growing Up in Ireland data from Cohort '08 at 9 and 13 years of age, it takes a longitudinal perspective looking at how the level and profile of bullying victimisation change from middle childhood to adolescence. It also explores the consequences of bullying experiences for perceived harm, wellbeing and depression. This chapter presents the main findings of the study and discusses the implications for policy and practice.

5.2   THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

International research has indicated that estimates of the prevalence of bullying depend on the definition and question format used, with more behaviourally-specific questions (e.g. were you called hurtful names?) yielding higher estimates than more direct questions (e.g. were you bullied?) (Sjogren et al., 2025). Importantly, studies have pointed to a mismatch between young people's view of bullying and those of researchers, school principals or teachers (Vaillancourt et al.,

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[23]   https://data.cso.ie/table/SCA07.

[24]   https://data-browser.hbsc.org/measure/cyberbullying-being-bullied/. Cyberbullying was defined as 'anyone sending mean instant messages, wall postings or emails or someone posting or sharing photos or videos online without their permission'.

[25]   For an exception, see O'Reilly et al. (2023) who look at bullying in sports based on the perspectives of younger and older players as well as coaches.

[26]   Involvement in sports and other organised activities may also serve as a buffer against bullying, an issue that could usefully be explored in future research.

2008; Byrne et al., 2016). Similarly, the different measures of bullying used in the GUI survey yield different estimates of the extent of victimisation. At age 9, children were asked if they had been 'picked on' in the past year and were specifically prompted that this could include a child or an adult (but were not asked which they were referring to). Forty-one per cent of 9-year-olds indicated that they had been picked on. At age 13, two different measures were used, with a different timeframe from that used at age 9, namely three months: one based on a direct question as to whether they had been bullied;[27] and a set of items on experience of bullying-type behaviour. Not surprisingly, the two sets of measures yield different estimates for 13-year-olds; 8 per cent had been 'bullied' but 64 per cent had experienced at least one bullying-type behaviour, with 37 per cent indicating they had experienced at least one such behaviour on two or more occasions.

Comparing the two measures allows us to explore further what young people consider as bullying. Young people are more likely to consider behaviour as bullying if it is more frequent, is done by the same person or people and causes them harm, especially anger. Labelling as bullying also reflects the type of behaviour, being more likely for cyberbullying (hurtful online posts or circulation of material like photos or videos) and for name calling.

5.3 PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE BULLYING

There are differences as well as similarities in the profile of those who experience bullying behaviour at 9 and 13 years of age. There is no overall difference in the prevalence for boys and girls, but the types of behaviour are gendered, with physical forms like pushing and shoving more likely to be experienced by boys while other social forms like name calling and exclusion are more commonly reported by girls. Contrary to some international research findings (Campbell et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2024), there is no systematic variation found by family background, including social class, experience of financial strain and family structure. Stevens et al. (2020) reported higher rates of being bullied among first-generation immigrant students in Ireland than among their native peers, using 2013/14 HBSC data. GUI analyses show no significant difference in experience of bullying by migrant background; the difference from the HBSC findings may reflect the fact that the GUI sample were almost all born in Ireland so may have had different experiences.

Other identity-based differences are found to make a difference to victimisation. In keeping with international research (Eldred et al., 2025), those with a disability[28]

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27   In contrast to the 9-year-old wave, no specific prompts were given as to whether this should include adults or only other young people.
28   Those with a disability includes young people with any long-term illness or condition that hampers them in their day-to-day life at least to some extent.

are more likely to be picked on at age 9 and experience more bullying behaviour at age 13, that tends to take the form of social bullying like name calling and exclusion. Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning are more likely to be bullied at age 13, especially by name calling. Those who are overweight or underweight at age 9, or overweight at 13, are more likely be picked on or bullied (in keeping with international research, see Thompson et al., 2018). A pattern that is more difficult to explain is that young people who have no religious affiliation are more likely to be picked on or experience bullying behaviour. A potential explanation is that these children are made to feel different by not participating in sacramental preparation within predominantly Catholic primary schools. However, children from a minority religion would presumably share this experience, though a strong religious identity may counter the effect. Further research is needed to explore this pattern.

Peer group is found to make a stronger difference in adolescence than in middle childhood, with having more close friends being a protective factor and having more older friends emerging as a risk factor, most likely reflecting the power inequalities within such networks. Only some school and classroom factors make a difference to the prevalence of bullying. No difference is found by the gender mix of the school, which may reflect the gendered nature of friendship groups and patterns of interaction even within coeducational schools (see Devine et al., 2024). Young people attending DEIS second-level schools experience more bullying behaviour. This may reflect disengagement from school and related misbehaviour over the course of the junior cycle (Smyth, 2016) spilling over into interpersonal conflict.

The value of taking a longitudinal perspective is seen in the strong relationship between being picked on at age 9 and experiencing bullying behaviour at age 13, even taking account of a range of individual and family factors. Interestingly, these experiences do not appear to be rooted in difficulties interacting with peers at age 5.

5.4   TELLING AN ADULT

The majority (70 per cent) of those who report they have been 'bullied' at 13 tell a parent, teacher or other adult, while this is the case for only 42 per cent of those who experienced any form of bullying behaviour. Young people are more likely to tell someone if the behaviour is interpreted as bullying and if it involves greater harm, particularly upset. Girls, those with a disability and those who are overweight are more likely to tell someone than other groups. Perhaps reflecting the attention in broader society to the risk of cyberbullying, young people are more likely to tell someone about hurtful material posted online than other types of behaviour. Young people who see their mothers as more responsive are more likely

to tell an adult, but the likelihood of telling someone does not reflect the quality of relationships with peers or teachers.

5.5 BULLYING AND OUTCOMES

Young people were asked whether the bullying behaviour they experienced caused them to feel fear, upset and/or anger. Most young people who experience bullying behaviour report feelings of anger and upset, with between one-in-six and one-in-five indicating a lot of impact. Clear gender differences are evident, with girls more likely to say they felt anger, upset and/or being afraid than boys. Harm is seen as greater where there is more frequent bullying behaviour, where it is by the same person/people and where it involves exclusion, name-calling, hurtful texts, online posts or gossip.

The analyses also looked at the relationship between bullying experience and wellbeing and depressive symptoms scores at age 13. Those who were picked on at age 9 have significantly poorer wellbeing and higher depression scores at age 13, a pattern which indicates persistent effects from early bullying. The relationship with depression is largely explained by higher rates of current bullying (at 13) among those who were picked on at age 9. Poorer wellbeing and higher depression are found among those who have experienced more frequent bullying behaviour and behaviour that involves the same person or people. These patterns must be interpreted with caution as bullying, wellbeing and depression are measured at the same timepoint; bullying may cause depression, or those who are depressed may be a target for bullying. Looking at different types of behaviour, exclusion is linked to both poorer wellbeing and greater depression. Future research could usefully explore longer-term outcomes, given international research points to an effect on adulthood depression (Armitage, 2021).

5.6 LIMITATIONS

Like all research, this study has limitations. In keeping with other, even largescale, surveys, the numbers from a Traveller or Roma background are too small to examine separately. Similarly, the numbers attending special schools or classes are too small to be analysed here. Because of the nature of the sample (with families first contacted when the child was nine months old), almost all of the young people were born in Ireland, so the results are not generalisable to the national population of 13-year-olds from a migrant background. Perhaps the most important lacuna is that GUI did not collect information on where the bullying took place. GUI has the advantage of moving beyond asking about school-based bullying only, but we cannot determine how much bullying is taking place in local neighbourhoods or organised settings like youth clubs or sports teams.

5.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

International research shows that school-based anti-bullying programmes reduce victimisation and perpetration. One systematic review (Gaffney et al., 2021) indicated that bullying programmes were effective in reducing perpetration by 18 to 19 per cent and victimisation by 15-16 per cent. Programmes that aim to foster a positive school climate and prosocial behaviour more generally are also found to help reduce the incidence of bullying (Moreno and Jurado, 2024). It is too early to assess the potential impact of Cineáltas and the Bí Cineálta procedures. However, research on the 2013 anti-bullying procedures shows the way in which implementation of national policy can vary across contexts. An expectation by some parents that principals deal with bullying behaviours outside school and the need to ensure consistency across staff added to the challenges reported by principals; they also reported experiencing feelings of isolation in dealing with bullying (Gorman, 2024; Gorman and O'Higgins Norman, 2024). Principals in DEIS schools pointed to the need to focus on more positive programmes around relationship building rather than prevention strategies. The principals interviewed pointed to a need for greater emphasis on strategies to counter bullying within initial teacher education and continuous professional development as well as better guidance for parents. Another study of principals (Murphy et al., 2017) pointed to challenges around having sufficient resources to appoint a relevant teacher to deal with bullying and to the lack of qualified counsellors. Further research is needed on the prevalence of bullying in other settings (including unstructured settings such as parks and on the way/to from school and structured settings such as sports and youth clubs), and on effective approaches to tackling this behaviour.

Consultation conducted with young people (DCU Anti-Bullying Centre, 2025) indicates a preference for anonymous reporting systems within schools, to avoid escalation and being labelled a 'snitch', better communication of school policy and students being involved in its co-creation, learning more about coping strategies in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and a need for access to counselling supports. In relation to cyberbullying, young people highlight the need for better reporting systems, and stronger monitoring and blocking by platforms. They would like their parents to support them around online engagement but are wary of being over-monitored.

The study findings have implications for policy and practice not only in schools but also for neighbourhood facilities and organised activities such as sports and youth clubs. Experience of bullying at age 9 emerges as a risk factor for all types of bullying behaviour four years later, and has long-term consequences for wellbeing and depressive symptoms, highlighting the importance of preventing and addressing bullying from an early age. In particular, the study highlights potential differences between how bullying is defined by young people and by schools and

other organisations. A significant proportion of young people experience bullying-type behaviour which causes them upset or anger but do not define it as bullying and so are less likely to tell an adult about it. Young people are less likely to label exclusion as bullying but report greater harm as a result; those who have experienced social exclusion are also more likely to have depressive symptoms and lower levels of wellbeing. Further research is needed to explore the processes of exclusion and inclusion at play for young people and the extent to which this reflects face-to-face and/or digital encounters. It is important therefore that the language used within the policies of schools and other organisations be sufficiently inclusive to encompass behaviours like social exclusion that young people find particularly upsetting. In this context, a school's anti-bullying policy, that focuses on repeated behaviour, and its code of conduct, which encompasses one-off incidents, should be complementary and developed in tandem to foster a positive school community. Involvement of young people in the development of anti-bullying policies in schools and elsewhere is likely to better reflect the lived experience of bullying and its impact on young people.

Much of the media and popular discourse focuses on cyberbullying as the most salient dimension. The study findings point to 'traditional' in-person bullying, either physical or social, being more prevalent, though almost one-in-five have experienced at least one hurtful post, message or circulation of material. Coimisiún na Meán's (2024) Online Safety Code places obligations on video-sharing platforms to protect children, prohibiting cyberbullying and providing parental controls for content for under 16s. It is too early to assess its impact and there are countervailing international trends towards looser regulation of some platforms. This is an evolving space, with tensions for young people who seek digital agency but can have negative encounters, some with longer-term effects, and parents who seek to support and manage their children's digital engagement (Humphry et al., 2025). As with bullying more generally, young people's input is crucial in ensuring measures at family, school and national level reflect their lived experiences.

The findings point to ongoing challenges to the inclusion of children and young people with a disability who report higher rates of social exclusion and name calling. There has been a lack of research internationally on successful bullying interventions for those with disabilities (Eldred et al., 2025), and further research is merited on what approaches might be most effective. The more negative experiences of 13-year-olds who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning point to the importance of specifically targeting homophobic behaviour within schools and youth organisations. Research has pointed to effectiveness of a whole-school approach and the fostering of shared values of respect, pro-sociality, and inclusion as a means of countering this, and other group-based, prejudice (Amadori et al., 2023).

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