



Bullying Within School-Age Girls

Bullying is a common occurrence within school-age boys and girls. However, there may be gender differences in the way it occurs. More specifically, while boys tend to be direct in their bullying, girls may engage in more indirect covert bullying. To this end, on average, school-age girls tend to be more relational in their bullying, often relying on gossiping and spreading rumors.

School-age girls tend to use their social networks in order to protect themselves from bullying. To form friendships, girls may turn to bullying in order to bond with other students by gossiping and spreading rumors. In turn, this excludes and socially ostracizes students that are targets of bullying and protects the perpetrators from being on the receiving end of bullying.

Socially constructed gender differences affect the way in which bullying is observed among young girls. Hellstrom and Beckahm found that girls who engage in physical aggression to bully are viewed more negatively as opposed to boys engaging in physical aggression as their form of bullying. In addition, girls in the study described expectations on them did not only concern being more restrained and not getting into fights, but also to be nice, calm, proper, neat, and to care about their looks.

In addition, school-age girls gravitate towards using groups both as a protection against bullying and also to engage in bullying. That is, girls seldom engage in one-on-one bullying. Bullying among girls often includes smaller groups bullying each other or someone within their group. Thus, girls use groups as a source of social support and as a buffer to protect against bullying.

There may be cultural and social forces outside of our awareness that serve to influence and maintain the covert nature of girl bullying. Schools and teachers may prioritize dealing with the overt physical nature of bullying in boys over the covert nature of girl bullying. Results from studies on bullying found that teachers and school counselors may view girl bullying as “harmless teasing” and teachers may choose to deal with “more important issues”.

This indirect nature of school-age girl bullying behavior is consistent across cultures. A study by Smith et al. (2019) found that cross-national surveys show that, globally, girls engage in indirect bullying through the use of technology. More specifically, the difference between girls and boys regarding online bullying begins to increase at around age 13 and this difference continues as age increases. Girls are more likely to be perpetrators of bullying, and the victims of online bullying.

Resources:

1. [Hellström, L., & Beckman, L. \(2019\). Adolescents' perception of gender differences in bullying. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 61\(1\), 90–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12523>](https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12523)
2. [Smith, P. K., López-Castro, L., Robinson, S., & Görzig, A. \(2019\). Consistency of gender differences in bullying in cross-cultural surveys. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 45, 33–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.04.006>](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.04.006)
3. [SOOHOO, S. \(2009\). Examining the Invisibility of Girl-to-Girl Bullying in Schools: A Call to Action. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, \[s.l.\], v. 13, n. 6, 2009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iej.2009.04.006)