

SociAl competences  
and FundamEntal Rights  
for preventing bullying



# safer

## D.5.2 Bibliographic Revision



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## Deliverable 5.2 – Bibliographic Revision

### Document information

**SAFER**  
Project number 621528-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

**Output number: 5.2**

**Title: Bibliographic Revision**

**Type: Deliverable**

**Version: 1**

**Author(s): Universidade do Algarve**

**Dissemination level: All partners**

### Revision history

**Version 1**



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of the European Union



## **1. Some crucial elements of the bibliographic review about bullying**

According to the OECD (2015), school - along with the family and the community - is one of the contexts that contribute to the development of social and emotional competencies, which are defined as skills involved in achieving personal goals, working in groups and emotional control. Group work involves sociability, respect, and attention to others, while emotional control refers to dimensions involved in the processes of emotional management and regulation, such as self-esteem, optimism, and confidence in one's abilities.

For parents and educators, it is noticeable that children who possess these characteristics perform better in school, have more positive relationships with their peers and with the adults with whom they relate, and have better emotional adjustment skills and mental health (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

According to the model presented by Jones and Bouffard (2012) the school and classroom context, namely the culture and climate experienced, and the implementation of an approach based on the presentation of emotional and social skills, affects the emotional processes, relational skills, and cognitive regulation of young people. In the short term, positive results are expected in terms of aggressive behaviors, depression - with its decrease - and an increase in social competence and attention; in the long term, improvement in mental health, positive behaviors, and school performance are expected. The model also considers that the relationship between the school context, the acquisition of socioemotional skills, and the outcomes they promote is moderated by the background of the professionals (teachers) and the community context and policies in place.

Participation in programs that develop their personal and social skills leads to improved motivation, academic performance, social and emotional well-being. On the other hand, they seem to lead to a reduction in mental health problems, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004 cit in Barry et al., 2018).

For example, Barry et al. (2018) observed that community-based programs developed in the UK follow the improving trend observed in school-based programs in the USA (e.g. Durlak et al., 2011): they facilitate the development of social and emotional skills of school-aged youth, particularly those whose conditions are more disadvantaged. They

also suggest the importance of comprehensive evaluation of these interventions, especially in assessing outcomes using valid and reliable measures to understand which output variables are affected at the level of well-being.

In their review of programs that focus on learning socioemotional skills, Jones and Bouffard (2012) report that the ones with the best results are those that include four elements represented in the acronym SAFE. This refers to the Sequence of activities that led in a coordinated way to the skills, the Active forms of learning, the Focus on developing one or more social skills, and the Explicit way of focusing on specific skills. The authors further noted that learning social-emotional skills is most effective in school-based approaches. They mention that continuity and consistency are necessary for the development of this type of competence and that social contexts are essential for its evolution. They also point out the interdependence between social-emotional skills and academic achievement, and that classrooms and schools operate as systems for their promotion.

Gaffney et al. (2021) developed a systematic review and meta-analysis to answer the question about the effect of anti-bullying programs on reducing these abuse behaviors in school settings. The results show a modest effect in reducing bullying victimization and perpetration (regardless of the type of aggression). However, this study highlights that there are negative effects for both perpetrators and victims. Associated with the perpetration of bullying are mental health problems such as suicidal ideation, but also the use of weapons, drug use, and lifelong use of violent and offensive behaviors. The negative effects on victimization relate to suicidal ideation, anxiety, low self-esteem, and loneliness.

The previous study focused on the generality of measures that aim to reduce bullying, but there is one model that stands out in the development of social-emotional skills, observed in the child, school, community relational complex: whole-school approach programs.

Acosta et al. (2019) showed the importance of multi-level programs based on a whole-school approach to promote positive behaviors and reduce bullying, especially cyberbullying. The authors base their research in the field of intervention on restorative practices that are based on: 1) maximizing positive affect, to increase emotional connection between youth; and 2) minimizing negative affect, by empowering offenders' responsibility and reintegrating them into community. Restorative practices

involve regulated emotional expression through coaching, ensuring improved multi-level relationships.

The conceptual model that organized the meta-analysis was the consideration that the presence of restorative practices of the quality of relationships, favors relationships between staff and students, increases student voice in school settings, improves youth relationships, and develops individual socioemotional skills. Ultimately, it favors a decrease in bullying victimization. The authors therefore suggest that in addition to the perceptual experience of restorative practices, i.e. the perception of the intervention from the perspective of the beneficiaries, school connectedness and climate, influence and attachment of peer relationships, outcomes on social skills, assertiveness and empathy, and outcomes on reduction of victimization should be measured.

The study by Acosta et al. (2019) showed that although there are problems in the conceptualization of these programs, which do not allow to observe differences between experimental and control group, it is possible to observe that, across the board, there is an effect of whole-school programs on individual outcomes, peer relations, and school dimensions affected by restorative practices. Their impact should be assessed not only on the dimension of reduction of victimization and perpetration, but also on the levels of school climate, school proximity, peer bonding, individual social and emotional competencies, all of which contribute to the positive outcomes that the school and community should help children to promote.

More recently, Rapee et al. (2020) shown concern about the difficulty in understanding the statistical effect of these models in reducing victimization among their beneficiaries. The authors suggest that applying these programs earlier (at school ages such as preschool and elementary school) may constrain the statistical effects, diminishing the impact of the program. Another important aspect to consider in interpreting the effects of these programs, is that their absence is also due to the reduction of victimization in the control group, concomitant to the experimental group, resulting from the contamination of the program between intervention group and statistical control. There has also been a cross-cutting, political effort to reduce bullying, resulting in a set of universal measures applied in schools, which may affect the actual results of the program. Despite these and other limitations, related to the design of the studies, the similarity of the base groups, and the interpretation of data around the mean, the authors consider that levels of bullying remain worrying in schools and that the

whole-school approach remains the best solution to decrease victimization, and it is appropriate to consider it the standard model for intervention, and its effect should be measured rigorously to increase confidence in this methodology.

## **2. A brief annotated bibliography about bullying**

**Undheim, Anne Mari and Sund, Anne Mari. “Bullying—a hidden factor behind somatic symptoms?.” *Acta Paediatrica*. Vol. 100, Issue 4. Karolinska University Hospital, April 2001. 496-498.**

The title was promising because it alluded to the idea that bullying can have psychological effects that manifest as actual physical ailments. This would have been an interesting aspect to explore, since the source itself notes that: “In a cross-national study of 113 000 students between the ages of 11 and 15, from 25 countries, approximately 11% were identified as victims and an average of 10% as bullies.” (496). I wonder why such a ripe topic for exploration was barely looked into by these authors. They are writing in a pediatrics journal. It would just make sense to research psychosomatic effects of bullying, no matter whether it’s from a physical or online source. But instead they regurgitate the same old information: “Many children are less likely to tell their paediatrician about being bullied than about a somatic symptom like headaches, difficulty sleeping, abdominal pain, bedwetting feeling tired and anxiety. Yet, these very symptoms might be the consequences of bullying. In some cases, being bullied is also the reason the child wants to avoid going to school entirely. Also, unexplained bruises or traumas should raise the paediatrician’s suspicion about bullying.” (497). That is far from providing an elucidating revelation on the subject. But even though it disappointed me, I can cite this source to highlight how little this area is being studied. If stress can kill an office worker, what physical effects can bullying lay in to our nation’s children? And vice-versa, how does being the bully affect people? Are there physical reactions to such things? I will keep an eye out for this as I continue to find sources.

**Adams, Frank D. and Lawrence, Gloria J. “Bullying Victims: The Effects Last Into College.” *American Secondary Education*. Vol. 40, Issue 1. September 2011. 4-13.**

This source is interesting because it looks at bullying with a scientific eye. Even the format of the published paper supports this. The methods used to collect the data are delineated, definitions are specified, and there are conclusions based on the disclosed data results. An interesting quote from this paper is: “The Center for Disease Control (2011) reported bullying continues to occur at all levels within the educational environment.” (9). It is interesting because the Center for Disease Control has done a study on bullying, which suggests that it is a negative phenomenon that spreads in an outbreak pattern. More research regarding “bullying as contagious illness” could yield interesting results. Another excerpt from this paper: “These data do not support previous data suggesting that bullying decreases as grade level increases to approximately 5% in the 9th grade (Olweus, 1999).” (8). It would seem that this study scientifically disproves the idea that bullying “sorts itself out” in the long run. In fact, the social impact can last for a lifetime.

**Gillespie, Alisdair A.. “Cyber-bullying and Harassment of Teenagers: The Legal Response” *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law*. Vol. 28, No 2. June 2019. 123-136.**

This source is interesting because it describes various cyber-activities that can be easily construed as banal humor. We’ve all heard of the “for a good time call...” joke where you write a person’s phone number on a wall. But in this paper, it is labeled as bullying: “The NCH also found bullying taking place via mobile telephone. This can be a serious form of bullying; where, for example, the details of a person’s telephone number are mis-used by placing the telephone number on internet websites that advertise sexual services.” (124). If the authors are suggesting that this behavior is always bullying, my reaction will firmly cemented into the “eye-roll” category. Context becomes excruciatingly urgent in matters such as these. Of course we should protect children from any intensely misguided individuals who would ever consider targeting them like this, but we should also consider that this type of behavior in its lighter forms is an integral part of certain groups’ socio-dynamics. That is not to advocate this behavior, but to heavily mandate it would also be to advocate the removal of freedoms from those who are willing. This inspired the thought that bullying is not bullying unless it is unwanted. With all these new delineations of what is and is not OK, are we redefining

social interaction for this brave new millennial world? Another example of “bullying vs. joking” lies in this quote: “The abuse of images is not restricted to the taking of photographs. Other examples include cases where a person (frequently an adult) will take an innocent picture (often posted by the victim) and use graphic manipulation software to morph it onto a pornographic picture.” (124-125). Making legal proclamations around these scenarios should be done with a generous heap of qualifying language.

**Li, Quing. “Cyberbullying in Schools: A Research of Gender Differences” *School Psychology International*. Vol. 27, Issue 2. May 2020. 157-170.**

This paper’s study results reveal that: “Over half of the students knew someone who had been cyberbullied. Further, over a quarter of the students in this study experienced being cyberbullied, and one in six students had cyberbullied others.” (165). And it also states: “This study shows that, just like in the real world, the vast majority of the students who were cyberbullied or knew someone being cyberbullied chose to stay quiet rather than to inform adults.” (164-165). From the title, gender differences in cyberbullying and regular bullying are studied, but the two above quotes are of interest because it sets a baseline of what is known to occur in the field. The paper also goes on to explain that the numbers are up from earlier studies, suggesting that this type of problem is on the rise, and thus should be addressed so as to keep children emotionally healthy and safe.

**Chibbaro, Julia S.. “School Counselors and the Cyberbully: Interventions and Implications” *Professional School Counseling*. Vol. 11, Issue 1. October 2017. 65-67.**

“Traditional bullying behaviors can be categorized into two broad categories of behavior, direct and indirect (Quiroz, Arnette, & Stephens, 2006). Direct bullying tends to be more physical in nature than indirect bullying behavior and includes behaviors such as hitting, tripping, shoving, threatening verbally, or stabbing. Indirect and direct bullying includes behaviors such as excluding, spreading rumors, or blackmailing

(Willard, 2006a). Male bullies tend to engage in direct bullying whereas female bullies tend to engage in indirect bullying (Crawford; Hazier, 2006; Quiroz et al.).” (66)

“Cyberbullying behaviors also can be both indirect and indirect, and Willard (2006a) provided examples of each. Flaming is an indirect form of cyberbullying and was defined by Willard as an argument between two people that includes rude and vulgar language, insults, and threats. Examples of direct cyberbullying include harassment, exclusion, and denigration. An individual victimized by online harassment may receive constant hurtful messaging through various forms of technology. Online exclusion occurs when victims are rejected from their peer group and left out of technological communications. Finally, denigration occurs most frequently by students against school employees. Students who are angry with an administrator or teacher may create a Web site designed to ridicule their chosen victim. One of the primary purposes of denigration is to damage the reputation of the victim (Long, 2006).” (66)

Both of the above quotes are quite lengthy and I would break them up when writing the paper, but I wanted to include them in their whole forms because these define even further the differences and similarities of cyber bullying. It also seems obvious when reading these definitions that bullying and cyber bullying are used to encapsulate a whole range of behaviors that are already identified negatively and have laws pertaining to them. I feel that victims are justified in seeking redress for the ills done to them, but I also find this “new” danger and it’s classification and legalization alarming as it can easily pendulum swing into being an abusive tool of the legal system. These quotes are useful in that they provide firm definitions to argue against. We have laws against libel, slander, harassment, stalking, and assault. I wonder why there is this sense of “newness” around cyberbullying, as opposed to simply considering the “old” negative behaviors in this new context of a digital world.

**Wagner, Cynthia G.. “Beating the Cyberbullies.” *Futurist*. Vol. 42, Issue 5. October 2018. 14-15.**

This article defines cyberbullying from a different angle. It provides the same facts available from many sources, but it also brings new insight by considering the online habits of girls vs. boys. And it identifies the obvious and odious difference between

regular bullying and cyber bullying: “Cyberbullying can be far more insidious than traditional bullying, because there is no escape from it, says Muscari. Cyberbullying runs 24/7 and, like many other phenomena today, is global in its reach.” (14) This article also offers insight into why cyber bullying is so much more of a problem than its non-digital counterpart. And it offers advice on how to combat the problem: “But one psychiatrist argues that telling the authorities about a cyberbullying problem might not be a kid’s best strategy. In fact, school psychologist and speaker Izzy Kalman says anti-bully programs and policies often make the problem worse. ‘Don’t try to get kids in trouble for cyberbullying,’ says Kalman, whose Bullies to Buddies Web site offers a wealth of tips for youth, parents, teachers, and others. ‘If you tell the school or the police on them, they will hate you and want to be even meaner to you.’” (15) This advice has its pros and cons, but the article is packed with information that can be used to reference and spring ideas from.

### **3. From Olweus to today’ bullying: a critical review**

Following the pioneering work of Olweus (1978, 1999, 2001), the more recent literature and researches that need to be taken into account for the SAFER project are:

Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2019 in relation to the bullying definitions;

Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2021, in relation to new forms of assessment tools;

Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2020 in relation to the distinctions between bullying and other forms of aggressions;

Cornell & Cole, 2018; Swearer, Siebecker, Johnsen-Frerichs, & Wang, 2020 with their measurement issues heralded as the “Achilles heel” of bullying research and practices;

Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2021 about the psychometric adequacy of bullying measurement;

Pellegrini, 2020, about the social aspects of bullying;

Aceves, Hinshaw, Mendoza-Denton, & Page-Gould, 2020; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2018 about bullying vs cyberbullying;

DeVoe & Bauer, 2011; Vaillancourt, Trinh, et al., 2020 about cyberbullying among girls;

Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2021 about the growing body of evidence on the concurrent and long-term consequences of bullying for both bullies (see also Rodkin et al., 2019) and victims (see also McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2020).

Swearer and Hymel (2020) explore the utility of a social-ecological model for understanding bullying as a systemic problem, with efforts to address bullying by impacting the contexts in which such behaviors occur.

Finally, Bradshaw (2020) who provides a critical analysis on how schools can best address the problem of bullying, reviewing evidence for the effectiveness of school-wide antibullying programs.

These analysis can give a contribution to our understanding of the complexity of the problem as well as the challenges we face in addressing it. The SAFER WSCA can take into account the data gathered from the critical review.

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