

**CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON FAMILIES AND
RELATIONSHIPS (CRFR), UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

**Written Submission to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee,
Scottish Parliament**

**Scoping Session on Bullying and Harassment of Children and Young
People in Schools**

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Introduction

We know from children and young people that bullying and harassment, by their peers as well as by others, is all too frequent and problematic. Research shows us that it is not only children and young people who are victims of bullying who are detrimentally affected -- so are those who witness bullying and those who do the bullying.¹ Children and young people with certain characteristics disproportionately experience bullying, such as those with disabilities, from certain black and minority ethnic groups, from gypsy traveller groups and who are LGBT.

This is a children's human rights issue. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently noted the problems that children and young people experience, in relation to bullying and harassment. It is thus commendable that the Equalities and Human Rights Committee is undertaking this scoping work.

The submission is primarily based on secondary research undertaken for the Scottish Government,² which summarises and presents evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people in Scotland in relation to implementing the CRC. The scope of the project was to consider research, consultations, reports and other relevant data undertaken by government, the then Scotland's

¹ E.g. see <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/330753/0107302.pdf> and Salmivalli, C. (2010) Bullying and the peer group: a review, *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15(2): 122-120.

² Elsley, S., Tisdall, E.K.M. and Davidson, E. (2013) Children and young people's experiences of, and views on, issues relating to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00427287.pdf>

Commissioner for Children & Young People (SCCYP), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and the public sector on children. This information is further supplemented by more recent research and the ongoing partnership between Young Edinburgh Action (YEA) and Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR). YEA is an innovative approach of action research, undertaken by young people, to implement the City of Edinburgh Council's Young People's Participation Strategy.³ While drawing on this collaborative work, this submission reflects the author's views and not necessarily of others.

This submission primarily addresses question 1 of the scoping session: The nature and extent of prejudice and bullying in schools?

Recognising children's human rights

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee will be aware of the 2016 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, for the UK. Bullying has been conclusively recognised as a form of violence against children and thus against their human rights. Paragraph 48(a) states:

Bullying, including cyberbullying, remains a serious and widespread problem, particularly against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, children with disabilities and children belonging to minority groups, including Roma, gypsy and traveller children.

The Committee then makes two related recommendations: the first advising intensified efforts in schools and the second addressing cyberbullying.

The Committee's Concluding Observations are supported by the oral and written evidence provided to the Committee, by children and young people themselves, the UK Children's Commissioners and NGOs, referring both to the UK generally and to Scotland in particular.⁴

While there has been policy and practice developments in relation to bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools, these improvements have not adequately addressed the continuing problems children and young people experience.

What we know about bullying and harassment of children and young people

Bullying and harassment are not consistently defined across people nor across research. As contained in the 2010 Scottish Government and Scottish Anti-Bullying Steering Group policy:

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<https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/16875/CRFR%20briefing%2085.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴ See

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/countries.aspx?CountryCode=GBR&Lang=EN

...definitions of bullying abound, most commonly including terms of aggression, intentional harm recurring over time and characterised by an imbalance of power. Children, however, extend those definitions to include more subtle rejections such as name calling, teasing, being ignored or excluded from a group as equally distressing. Some children experience bullying that is unintentional, arbitrary and may define a single event as bullying. (page 4, quoting McKenna 2009)⁵

The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey provides authoritative evidence for Scotland, due to its well-based methodology.⁶ From its 2014 survey, 13% of boys and 15% of girls (aged 11-15 years) had been bullied at school at least two times a month in the past two months. Between 2002 and 2010, there was little change in the prevalence of being bullied. But between 2010 and 2014, there was an increase: amongst girls, bullying increased from 9% in 2010 to 15% in 2014; amongst boys, bullying increased from 10% to 13%. The survey now has questions about forms of cyber bullying. Just under 1 in 5 (18%) of girls aged 13 reported being bullied via electronic media pictures at least once over the past couple of months.⁷

As we wrote in 2013 report for the Scottish Government, children and young people are aware of school-based initiatives generally to tackle bullying but initiatives are not always successful. To quote from the relevant section:

Research undertaken by the Scottish Borders Youth Commission found varied practice across schools, in prevention, management and recording of bullying incidents. Young people undertook the research for the Commission, which involved a range of methods and over 500 children and young people. Key recommendations and findings of the Youth Commissioner were:

- To amend current definitions of bullying that require intent and aggression. Labelling people as ‘bullies’ and ‘victims’ was unhelpful.
- To include parents, pupils and school staff⁸ in a whole school approach.
- To target prejudice-based bullying specifically and to promote diversity positively.
- To explore appropriate consequences and responses for children and young people demonstrating bullying behaviour.
- To develop understanding of cyber bullying. Staff and young people were not confident discussing cyber bullying.

Responding to a respectme survey of children and young people aged 8 to 19 across 29 Scottish local authorities, 16% reported being cyberbullied. Most

⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/330753/0107302.pdf>

⁶ HSBC defined bullying as “when another individual or group of individuals says or does nasty things, when an individual is teased repeatedly in a way that they do not like, or when they are deliberately left out of activities” (page 85).

⁷ http://www.cahru.org/content/03-publications/04-reports/hbsc_nr14_interactive_final.pdf

(63%) knew who had done this and in 40% of these occasions the bullying carried on into school. A quarter of respondents were worried about cyberbullying when they were online.

For most of the 35 participants (aged 11 to 18 years) speaking to Young Scot on child Internet safety, the term 'cyberbullying' was familiar. Some had experienced it and most felt they knew how to report concerns online.

In contrast to generalised bullying initiatives in schools, initiatives to address homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were not well known to young people. When responding to a questionnaire for LGBT young people, less than one third (31%) were aware that anti-phobia education had been introduced in schools. Just under half of the young people said they would not feel confident reporting such bullying.

Certain groups of children and young people were particularly concerned about being bullied. Over two-thirds (69%) of LGBT young people responding to a survey⁹ had experienced homophobic or biphobic bullying at school. The results for transphobic bullying were even higher. This negatively impacted on their education and employment experiences.

Looked after children reported bullying. Of the 30 young people interviewed in one local authority, just under half said they had been bullied.¹⁰

LGBT Youth Scotland and others have been instrumental in raising recognition of the bullying and harassment experienced by a significant number of LGBT children and young people. Young people from LGBT Youth Scotland, speaking at the Children's Rights Seminar in March 2014, pointed out how the reification of traditional gender roles in schools negatively impacted on their own developing identities.¹¹ This has been an issue taken up by YEA, where one action research group has led to young people co-designing a storybook aimed at under 5 year olds to tackle gender stereotypes.¹²

Recently, Together (the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) has received concerns from its members about the implications of the Prevent Duty on children and young

¹⁰ Elsley, S., Tisdall, E.K.M. and Davidson, E. (2013) Children and young people's experiences of, and views on, issues relating to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00427287.pdf> - paragraphs 8.22-8.28. References can be found in this report.

¹¹ See

<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Portals/50/ias%20documents/Reports/Childrens%20Rights%20Seminar%20Briefing.pdf>. See also http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/24370546/Marlies_Kustatscher_CERES_briefing.pdf

¹² <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Portals/50/ias%20documents/Reports/Childrens%20Rights%20Seminar%20Briefing.pdf>

people. This was taken up by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which recognised the potential discriminatory or stigmatising impact that the Prevent Strategy could have.¹³ The Equalities and Human Rights Committee could usefully explore this, as part of their scoping and further work.

Cyberbullying has grown as a particular form of bullying, enhanced by the ever-increasing accessibility and use of associated technologies. Livingstone and colleagues' international review of literature and evidence, on cyberbullying, further supports the stance that cyberbullying should be considered within the context of bullying rather than separately.¹⁴ Cyberbullying underlines the importance of *not* focusing on a particular geographical site but on behaviours and relationships. Schools are key places for peer relationships, as well as for preventing and addressing bullying and harassment. But bullying is not constrained by schools' physical boundaries and research repeatedly demonstrates how it can go beyond the school gates, both physically and online. Thus it would be advisable not to concentrate solely on bullying and harassment of children and young people *in schools*, but recognise the important roles schools can play in preventing and addressing any bullying and harassment.

In summary

The bullying and harassment of children and young people is a significant children's human rights issue, which continues to be problematic in Scotland. Survey results from 2014 shows that prevalence is increasing rather than decreasing.

Some children and young people are more likely to experience bullying and harassment than others. Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to have such experiences. Children and young people with disabilities, from black and ethnic minority groups and who are looked after are disproportionately more likely to experience bullying and harassment, than others. Discrimination and equalities are thus core issues to address within bullying and harassment of children and young people.

Such issues are unfortunately familiar. Three issues have been recognised more recently: first, the extent of bullying and harassment experienced by LGBT children and young people; second, the potential implications of the Prevent Duty; and, third, cyberbullying, which underlines that bullying and harassment easily and frequently crosses physical boundaries of school and elsewhere.

¹³ <http://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/detail/?news=1124>

¹⁴ Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M. and Kelly, A. (2016) *Cyberbullying: incidence, trends and consequences*. In: *Ending the Torment: Tackling Bullying from the Schoolyard to Cyberspace*. United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, New York, USA, pp. 115-120.
<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68079/>

It is commendable that the Equalities and Human Rights Committee are considering this issue. Children and young people over and over again tell adults, in research and consultations, about the negative impacts of bullying and harassment. From their perspectives, this is significant problem that many of them experience and/or witness in their daily lives.

About CRFR

The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) was established in 2001 as a consortium research centre based at The University of Edinburgh, with partners at the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian, Highlands & Islands and Stirling. CRFR also works in collaboration with the School of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Durham.

Our aims are to:

- Produce high quality, collaborative and inclusive research relevant to key issues in families and relationships.
- Act as a focal point, and promote and facilitate a network, for all those with an interest in research on families and relationships.
- Make research more accessible for use by policy makers, practitioners, research participants, academics and the wider public.
- Enhance the infrastructure to conduct research on families and relationships.

Our consortium approach allows us to develop a multi-disciplinary work programme that reflects current issues and trends from across the country. Our Co-Directors are drawn from various schools within the University of Edinburgh and our Associate Directors from each of the consortium universities. We also have long-standing Associate Directors from other institutions who have strong disciplinary links with CRFR. All of our Directors offer academic expertise and guidance relating to our research strategy.

