

Editorial

School bullying and later criminal offending

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Early longitudinal research on school bullying suggested that it predicted later offending. For example, in his follow-up study of over 700 Stockholm boys, Olweus (1991) reported that 36% of bullies at age 13–16 were convicted three or more times between ages 16 and 24, compared with 10% of the remainder. However, there have been surprisingly few more recently published longitudinal studies of the relationship between school bullying and later offending. Therefore, the main aim of this special issue is to present such results from major longitudinal studies, and also findings from a systematic review and meta-analysis, in order to advance knowledge about the link between school bullying and later offending.

Bullying may predict offending because both are behavioural manifestations of the same underlying construct, such as an antisocial personality. Alternatively, bullying may predict offending because bullying is an earlier stage in a developmental or causal sequence that leads to offending. If bullying causes an increase in the probability of later offending, then interventions that reduce bullying should be followed by a reduction in offending. On the other hand, if bullying and offending are merely symptoms of the same underlying disorder, it is less clear that eliminating an earlier symptom would reduce the probability of a later symptom.

In order to establish whether bullying *per se* is followed by an increase in offending, it is important to investigate whether bullying predicts offending after controlling for earlier risk factors that predict both bullying and offending (Murray et al., 2009). All contributors to this special issue were asked to investigate: (1) the strength of the relationship between bullying and later offending, and (2) the strength of this relationship after controlling for earlier risk factors (e.g. child, parental, child-rearing, peer, school, socioeconomic, and neighbourhood). They were not asked to study whether changes in bullying predicted changes in offending, partly because this would have required more data waves, and partly because such change variables are likely to have great variability.

It is a particular strength of this special issue that we contacted investigators of major longitudinal surveys and asked if they had unpublished information on the relationship between bullying and later offending. Longitudinal investigators of 28 studies carried out special analyses for us, and papers from eight studies are included in this special issue. In order to maximise our use of the available space, we asked all longitudinal authors to limit their papers to 2000 words of text and three to four tables, and to present mainly the methods and results, with very short introductions and conclusions.

In the first paper, Ttofi and her colleagues report the results of a systematic review and meta-analysis. They found that the summary odds ratio (OR) effect size for bullying predicting offending was 2.50 (95% CI: 2.03–3.08), and that this OR decreased only to 1.82 (95% CI: 1.55–2.14) after controlling for up to 20 risk factors. Importantly, they concluded that the relationship between bullying and later offending would still be significant after controlling for numerous early risk factors. Farrington and Ttofi then report findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, which is a prospective longitudinal survey of over 400 South London males from age 8–10 to age 48–50. They found that bullying at age 14 predicted later offending and adverse life outcomes up to age 48, and that these results held up after controlling for explanatory and behavioural childhood risk factors at age 8–10.

In a study in Bavaria, Germany, Bender and Lösel followed up 63 males from age 15–25. They concluded that bullying was a strong predictor of antisocial outcomes, and that most of the relationships remained significant after controlling for individual and family risk factors. The effect sizes in this study were particularly strong because they are based on an oversampling of bullies and victims. In Victoria, Australia, Hemphill and her colleagues tracked nearly 1400 students and found that bullying perpetration at ages 12–13 and 15–16 predicted psychosocial outcomes at age 16–17, but the age 12–13 relationships became non-significant after controlling for gender and early risk factors. Similar results were obtained in another study in Victoria. Renda and her colleagues followed up over 1000 children and showed that bullying at age 13–14 predicted official criminality at ages 19–20 and 23–24, but only the former relationship was still significant after controlling for family and peer risk factors.

In Toronto, Canada, Jiang and his colleagues tracked over 900 children and found that bullying at ages 6–11 predicted official delinquency at ages 12–17 even after controlling for early risk factors. Similarly, in Washington State (USA), Kim and colleagues followed up over 900 children and reported that bullying at age 10–11 predicted antisocial outcomes at age 21 even after controlling for early risk factors.

In the Netherlands, Bijleveld and her colleagues studied three samples of institutionalised juvenile offenders and found that bullying perpetration in their records did not predict their reconvictions. Possibly, these results were obtained because these high-risk samples, with high conviction rates, were much more