



## Ethnicity and bullying involvement in a national UK youth sample



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### A B S T R A C T

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This study investigated ethnic differences in bullying involvement (as victim and bully) among a UK wide sample of adolescents, controlling for potential confounders, including age, gender, economic situation, family structure and parent–adolescent relationships. 4668 youths, aged 10 to 15, who participate in the UK Household Longitudinal Study were assessed for bullying involvement. Binary logistic regression models were used to estimate ethnic differences across bullying roles while controlling for potential confounders. Overall, ethnic minority youths were not more likely to be victims; African boys and girls were significantly less likely to be victimised than same sex White youths. Pakistani and Caribbean girls were significantly more likely to have bullied others compared to White girls.

Further research is necessary to explore why Pakistani and Caribbean girls may be more often perpetrators of bullying than girls in other ethnic groups.

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### Introduction

Bullying is characterized by aggressive behaviour, engaged in repeatedly, by an individual or group of peers with more, actual or perceived, power than the victim (Olweus, 1993). The aggressive behaviour may be overtly physical, verbal or relational (Nansel, 2001). Peer victimisation or bullying perpetration in childhood is associated with, and a precursor of, a range of psychosomatic (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009) and mental health problems (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010) including suicide ideations and behaviour (Fisher et al., 2012; Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini, & Wolke, 2012). Decreased school performance (Woods & Wolke, 2004) or involvement in crime (Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, & Loeber, 2011) have also been reported as consequences of bullying.

To reduce and limit the negative impact of bullying, research must identify the factors most strongly associated with youths being bullied or engaging in bullying behaviours. Demographic characteristics such as age and gender have emerged as significant risk factors; among adolescents, bullying victimisation steadily declines with age, while bullying perpetration slightly increases (Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). Furthermore, boys are more often victims and perpetrators of bullying than girls (Nansel, 2001).

Ethnicity is another key demographic factor that may contribute to exposure to peer victimisation; however, there is continuing debate over whether rates of bullying differ between ethnic groups. While there has been substantial discussion in both academic and policy literatures relating to the prevalence of racist bullying and stereotyping in schools (Abrams, 2010;

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Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007), small sample studies in the UK which compared single or mixed ethnic minority groups to majority White children have found no difference in the prevalence of bullying among ethnic groups (Durkin et al., 2012; Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Moran, Smith, Thompson, & Whitney, 1993); although ethnic minority children are more likely to identify their race or culture as the reason for them being bullied, they appear no more likely than white majority children to be victimised or to bully others (Boulton, 1995; Monks, Ortega-Ruiz, & Rodríguez-Hidalgo, 2008). Outside of the UK, findings are more mixed. Several European studies comparing immigrant and native-born children find immigrant children are more likely to report being bullies or victims (Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009; von Grunigen, Perren, Nagele, & Alsaker, 2010; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), although this appears somewhat dependent on children's language competence (von Grunigen et al., 2010) or the ethnic mix of the school they attend (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). In contrast, other European studies find no difference in bullying between ethnic groups (Monks et al., 2008), or show native born children to be more often bullies than immigrant children (Strohmeier, Spiel, & Gradinger, 2008). More consistent findings have been reported in the United States, where large datasets have been used to compare rates of bullying among White, African American and Hispanic children. The results suggest African American children are less likely to be victimised than those from other ethnic groups (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007), however children from ethnic minority groups appear more likely to participate in bullying others (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; Nansel, 2001; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

The consistency of the findings notably differs between Europe and the US, and this may result from use of differing sampling methods; research in the US mostly employs large-scale representative surveys, whereas European studies tend to rely on smaller classroom or school-based convenience samples (Durkin et al., 2012). In addition, the US represents a different context, with higher levels of overall group segregation than in the UK (Johnston, Wilson, & Burgess, 2004). Bullies and victims are therefore more likely to come from the same ethnic group, rather than bullying crossing ethnic divides.

Where differences have been observed between ethnic groups, these have mostly been explained as a result of differing parenting practices, such as parental communication (Spriggs et al., 2007), discipline (Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004), and supervision (Peeples & Loeber, 1994). Bullies are more likely to report greater physical discipline, poorer family cohesion (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000) and less secure caregiver attachment (Walden & Beran, 2010) than youths not involved in bullying, while victims more often experience maltreatment (Holt, Kaufman Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2008) and poorer or inconsistent supervision at home (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994). Thus, differences in parenting behaviours across ethnic groups may partly account for the variations in bullying involvement by different ethnic groups.

Similarly, economic factors merit consideration, as ethnic minorities tend to experience greater poverty and deprivation than ethnic majorities (Platt, 2007). Victims of bullying show greater deprivation at home (Wolke & Skew, 2012), and come from families of lower affluence (Due et al., 2009). Given the economic disparities between ethnic groups, and the relationship this may have with bullying, such factors should be controlled for when examining ethnic differences in bullying.

This study investigates whether there are differences in bullying involvement (as victim and bully) according to ethnicity in a UK wide sample of adolescents. Identifying risk factors which increase the likelihood of youths becoming bullied or bullying others is the first step towards preventing bullying and reducing the adverse outcomes it can bring. While certain demographic characteristics have been repeatedly researched, few studies have explored the relationship between ethnicity and bullying, providing contradictory findings over whether ethnic minority children are more likely to be bullied or to engage in bullying at school. Building on previous research, this representative UK household study will identify ethnic differences in bullying victimisation and perpetration, and examine whether any observed differences in bullying continue to be present when controlling for potential confounders, specifically age, gender, economic situation, parental qualifications, family structure and parent-adolescent relationships.

## Method

### Sample

The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) is a longitudinal household panel survey in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). Data from wave 1 comprised two samples; a general population sample, and an ethnic minority boost sample. The general population sample is a stratified, clustered, equal probability sample of residential addresses drawn to a uniform design throughout the whole of the UK. In Great Britain the recruitment process entailed selecting 2640 postal sectors from nine regions within England, Scotland and Wales, stratified by population and minority ethnic density. In each sector, 18 addresses were systematically selected to give an equal-probability sample. In Northern Ireland, addresses were selected using the Land and Property Services Agency list of domestic properties. A total of 45,325 households were identified, and each was then visited and invited to participate in the survey. The household response rate (where at least one member of the household agreed to participate) was 57.6%, with lower response rates observed in areas of high fulltime employment and high proportions of single-person households (Lynn, Burton, Kaminska, Knies, & Nandi, 2012). Among households that agreed to participate, the individual response rate (i.e. completed data collection) for adults was 81.8%, and 77.0% for youths (Lynn et al., 2012). Further details on the design of the general population sample can be found elsewhere (Buck & McFall, 2012).

The ethnic minority boost sample aimed to recruit adults from the five largest ethnic minority groups in the UK: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Caribbean and African. To achieve 1000 respondents from each of the five target ethnic minorities, 771

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