

Study looks at why the bullies carry on bullying

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Young male bullies are aware of the damage that they cause their victims but carry on to guarantee their own personal gain, according to findings of preliminary research at the University of Sussex.

Developmental psychologists David Smalley and Dr Robin Banerjee presented the findings of their research at the recent annual conference of the British Psychological Society's Developmental Section in Plymouth.

Previous research has shown that bullies tend to be aware of the damage that their behaviour has on their victims. This study investigates why they continue to victimise their peers despite this understanding.

Fifty-five children aged seven to nine were assessed on their social understanding of specific social situations and then scored for bullying/victimisation.

The study found that bullying by both boys and girls could occur despite the fact that they understand the feelings of the person they are bullying. In particular, the results showed that male bullies had a general tendency to focus on their own personal gain in these situations.

Mr Smalley says: "Previous research has found that bullies may have mature social understanding and therefore know the upset and damage that they cause to their victims. We are now investigating why they continue with this behaviour.

"Findings of this preliminary research suggest that bullies may have different goals in social situations compared with other children, focusing especially on self-gain.

"By studying the way bullies reconcile their awareness of the harm they do, we hope to be able to help anti-bullying initiatives understand this behaviour - and benefit bullies and victims alike."

Source: University of Sussex

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