

Virtual reality games could help bullying victims

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Virtual reality games could help children to escape victimisation and bullying at school, according to researchers at the University of Warwick.

Children who took part in a three-week anti-bullying virtual learning intervention in schools in the UK and Germany showed a 26% decrease in victimisation.

In the study, published in *The [Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry](#)*, Maria Sapouna and Professor Dieter Wolke from Warwick Medical School and the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick led a team of researchers to examine the effects of an anti-bullying virtual learning intervention called FearNot!

The team recruited 1,129 children aged between eight and nine from 27 primary schools across the UK and Germany. They split the children into intervention and control groups. The intervention group took part in three sessions, interacting individually with the FearNot! software. Each session lasted around 30 minutes over a three-week period. The children were assessed on self-report measures of victimisation before and after the intervention.

The software was a virtual school with 3D pupils who assumed the roles that children take when [bullying](#) occurs, either as the bully, victim or bystander. These characters were then used to improvise real-life bullying incidents and pupils could interact with the characters and

suggest ways to cope with or resolve the situation. Although the effect was only short-term, researchers suggest longer interventions could have a more sustained impact.

Professor Wolke said this was the first study to investigate the efficacy of a virtual learning intervention for victims of bullying. He said: “We found that the FearNot! intervention significantly increased the probability of victims escaping victimisation, especially among those children who interacted with the characters more and explored the advice. The effects we found were only short-term, but we believe a longer term intervention integrated in the curriculum would be more beneficial.

“Our findings suggest for the intervention to be effective, they need to be of appropriate duration and include booster episodes over time. Virtual interventions could be most effective as part of a wider anti-bullying curriculum.”

Provided by University of Warwick ([news](#) : [web](#))

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