

New research reveals extent of family and sibling bullying

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Children who are slapped and shouted at by their parents are more likely to bully their brothers and sisters. Findings from 'Understanding Society', a study of 40,000 UK households funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, reveals a significant link between parental behaviour and the prevalence of bullying in the home, regardless of the parents' wealth or how educated they are.

Researchers from Warwick Medical School and the University of Essex found that in a sample of 2,146 young people aged 11 to 15 years old, nearly 50% of children admitted to being involved in [bullying](#) at home. Of these, nearly 42% of children who are slapped by their [parents](#) and 37% who are shouted at, admitted that they bullied their siblings and were subject to bullying themselves. In contrast, if children are never slapped or shouted at the percentage of those who bully and those being bullied falls to 32% and 25% respectively.

The research is being presented at the biennial Understanding Society/ British Household Panel Study (BHPS) conference from 30 June to 1st July and was conducted jointly by researchers at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Warwick and University of Essex.

It examines a range of family factors and behaviour by parents and their effect on bullying among their children.

It found that, unlike bullying at school, a family's social standing such as

level of education and income, had little effect on whether siblings bullied each other, except in cases of extreme poverty. In contrast, parents who spend more leisure time with their children and who argue less with them have offspring that are less likely to bully each other.

Professor Dieter Wolke, from Warwick Medical School and an expert on childhood bullying, said: “Bullying among siblings is widespread and frequent with up to 50% involved in sibling bullying every month, and between 16%-20% involved in bullying several times a week. We know that experience of sibling bullying increases the risk of involvement in bullying in school. Children who are involved in bullying at home and at school are 14 times more likely to suffer behaviour and emotional problems; they have no place that is safe for them.

“Here is a link between parents’ behaviour toward their children and bullying between the children. Strengthening families and parenting skills and increasing sibling support is likely to reduce bullying in school and increase wellbeing.”

The research also shows that the type of family a child is brought up in, i.e. with both natural parents or with a step-parent, has less association with sibling bullying than the number of children and the child’s position in the family. Having more than one sibling, and in particular, having brothers or a mixture of brothers and sisters increases the chance of being involved in some sort of sibling bullying.

Surprisingly, middle children are slightly more likely than the eldest to be involved in bullying behaviour and the youngest child is the least likely to be involved in any kind of bullying behaviour. The eldest child is also more likely to be a pure victim of bullying within the home and least likely to be a pure bully than the middle or youngest siblings.

Dr Alexandra Skew, joint researcher at ISER, comments: “There is an assumption that the eldest child is most likely the strongest and biggest in

the sibling group and will do most of the bullying. In reality it is the middle [children](#) who are competing for their parents' attention and for use of games and toys with both their elder and younger siblings that display a greater propensity to bully their brothers and sisters.”

More information: The paper ‘Family factors and bullying victimization at school’ By Alexandra J Skew and Professor Dieter Wolke is being presented at the Understanding Society/ BHPS conference 2011 on 30 June 2011. For further information on the conference please visit www.essex.ac.uk/understand...bhps-conference-2011

Provided by University of Warwick

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