

Bullies and victims face mental health risks

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Credit: Dr James Scott.

(Medical Xpress)—Young teenage bullies and their victims face increased risks of developing mental health and substance use problems later in adolescence, a University of Queensland study has found.

The study examined the [mental health](#) outcomes of 17-year-olds who had been involved in peer aggression and [bullying](#) at 14 years of age.

UQ Centre for Clinical Research Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Dr James Scott said the results showed peer aggression was an [independent risk factor](#) for mental illness.

"With 40.2 per cent of participants reporting involvement in some form of peer aggression – either as the victim, perpetrator or victim-perpetrator – bullying is clearly a serious public health issue," Dr Scott said.

Results showed that victims of bullying had a higher chance of developing "internalising behaviours" such as depression, anxiety and social withdrawal.

The bullies themselves were found to have an increased risk of developing "externalising behaviours" such as alcohol and other substance abuse problems and interpersonal violence.

"Bullies are also more at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviours in later years" Dr Scott said.

Victim-perpetrators were found to have the highest risk of developing later psychological problems and to have poor psychosocial functioning.

"Victim-perpetrators were at risk of developing a wide range of [mental health issues](#), such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse and anti-social behaviours."

Dr Scott said parents of adolescents who had been involved in peer aggression and bullying should monitor their teenagers and look for warning signs of [mental health problems](#).

These could include a loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed, decline in academic performance, social isolation or changes in their sleeping or eating patterns.

"Just because the bullying has stopped doesn't necessarily mean everything is going OK," he said.

"Every school should have a strategy in place to reduce bullying.

"Teenagers who have been victims or are engaged in bullying behaviours need ongoing monitoring of their mental health."

Key Findings

- 40 per cent reported involvement in bullying
- 10 per cent reported being victims of bullying
- One in five adolescents identified themselves as perpetrators of peer aggression
- Females were twice as likely to report depression than males
- Both [victims](#) and perpetrators of peer aggression at 14 years were significantly more likely to suffer from depression at 17 years

More information: Sophie E. Moore, Rosana E. Norman, Peter D. Sly, Andrew J.O. Whitehouse, Stephen R. Zubrick, James Scott.

"Adolescent peer aggression and its association with mental health and substance use in an Australian cohort." *Journal of Adolescence*, Volume 37, Issue 1, January 2014, Pages 11-21, ISSN 0140-1971, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.10.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.10.006)

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