

# Bias-based bullying does more harm, is harder to protect against

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Credit: Diego Grez/Wikipedia

A new study finds that bias-based bullying does more harm to students than generalized bullying, particularly for students who are targeted because of multiple identities, such as race and gender. What's more, the study finds that efforts to mitigate these harms are less effective against bias-based bullying.

"Bias-based bullying is when children are bullied because of some aspect of their social identity, whether that's race, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation," says Kelly Lynn Mulvey, an assistant professor of psychology at North Carolina State University and corresponding author of a paper on the work. "Multiple bias-based bullying is when children are targeted because of two or more aspects of their social identity. These both differ from generalized bullying, in which kids are targeted because of things like their academic interests, being the new kid at school or their fashion choices."

"We wanted to know whether the effects of bullying varied depending on why a child was bullied," says Elan Hope, an assistant professor of psychology at NC State and a co-author of the paper. "Specifically, we wanted to know if outcomes differed when kids are targeted because of social biases."

The researchers looked at data on 678 students between the ages of 12 and 18 from around the country. The data stem from the School Crime Supplement to the Department of Justice's 2015 National Crime Victimization Survey. Four hundred and eighty seven of the students reported generalized bullying. One hundred and seventeen students reported experiencing one type of bias-based bullying, with gender, race and disability being the most common categories targeted. Sixty-four students reported multiple bias-based bullying, with race and ethnicity being the most commonly targeted categories.

The researchers evaluated a suite of adverse outcomes, as well as protective factors that may help mitigate those outcomes.

"We found that victims of multiple bias-based bullying had the worst outcomes in three areas: fear of being harmed, school avoidance, and negative effects on their physical, psychological and academic well-being," Mulvey says. "Victims of one type of bias-based bullying fared

second worst. Victims of generalized bullying still suffered adverse outcomes, but to a lesser extent than the other two groups."

The researchers also found that the effectiveness of protective factors also varied across the groups.

For example, social support from teachers, family, community members and peers did nothing to help victims of bias-based or multiple bias-based bullying – though it did help victims of generalized bullying. And school safety and security measures did not alleviate adverse outcomes for victims of multiple bias-based bullying – but did mitigate harms for victims of single bias-based bullying and generalized bullying.

"These findings show that a one-size-fits-all approach to anti-bullying campaigns is not very effective," Hope says. "Bias-based bullying and multiple bias-based bullying have different effects on students, and interventions are needed to focus on those underlying biases."

The paper, "Understanding Experiences with Bullying and Bias-Based Bullying: What Matters and for Whom?" is published in the journal *Psychology of Violence*. The paper was co-authored by Seçil Gönültaş, a Ph.D. [student](#) at NC State; Adam Hoffman of the University of Michigan; and Shauna Cooper of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**More information:** Kelly Lynn Mulvey et al. Understanding experiences with bullying and bias-based bullying: What matters and for whom?, *Psychology of Violence* (2018). [DOI: 10.1037/vio0000206](https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000206)

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