

Almost one-third of school students bullied

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Adolescent boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds are most likely to be the victims of bullying, according to the first comprehensive study of school bullying around the world.

The study, led by University of Queensland researchers, investigated the

prevalence of bullying victimisation during [school](#) years among more than 310,000 students.

The data was collected from students aged from 12 to 17 years in 83 low, middle, and [high income countries](#) across much of South East Asia, Africa, and parts of South America and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Researcher Tuhin Biswas of UQ's Institute for Social Science Research said the study, which is based on data collected from Global School-based Health Surveys between 2003 and 2015, revealed 30 percent of the students had experienced bullying, with younger males from poorer backgrounds most at risk.

"Bullying is a serious global public [health](#) problem, but has predominantly been studied only in high income countries," he said.

"Our findings show a large proportion of adolescents are victims of school bullying in all countries—irrespective of income status.

"However wide variation between countries suggests that social and cultural factors may influence national prevalence.

"We found in all countries, increased peer and parental supports helped lower the risk of bullying."

The international research team examined all six World Health Organisation regions and determined the highest prevalence of bullying in the Eastern Mediterranean area at 45.1 percent, followed by Africa at 43.5 percent, with the lowest rate in Europe at 8.4 percent.

The study also revealed the country with the highest prevalence of school bullying was Samoa at 75 percent and the lowest was Tajikistan at seven percent.

Director of the Life Course Centre at UQ Professor Janeen Baxter said bullying victimisation during [school years](#) could have many negative flow-on impacts across a person's life course.

"Adolescents experiencing bullying have an increased risk of physical, cognitive and mental health issues, including higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicidality," Professor Baxter said.

"They are also more likely to experience difficulties in their academic performance, which can lead to long-term employment and financial consequences for both the individual and their family.

"Any interventions to address this global problem will also address the major social and economic costs in lost productivity and life opportunities."

Researcher Professor James Scott from the QIMR Berghofer Mental Health Program said the study provided an important insight into the global extent of school bullying and potential solutions to address it.

"The variation between countries and regions, along with the findings that peer and parental supports reduce the risk of bullying, can inform strategic interventions," Professor Scott said.

"Reducing the prevalence of school bullying will also help to reduce the global burden of disease associated with mental illness in adolescents."

UQ Associate Professor Abdullah Mamun said culturally appropriate skills training for parental and peer support could be important protective factors against bullying.

"Increased parental involvement may enable early detection of problematic relationships and opportunities to assist adolescents with

problem solving, peer interactions and intervention, if required," Associate Professor Mamun said.

The study suggested culturally appropriate skills training for parental and peer support could be important protective factors against bullying.

The study was conducted in collaboration with QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Metro North Mental Health, Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research, Harvard Medical School and Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

This research appears in *EClinicalMedicine*.

Provided by University of Queensland

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