

Gender, age divide in new bullying study

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Students' emotional resilience is linked to their chances of being victimized, with less resilient students more likely to suffer from harassment, new research shows.

The research, led SWAPv researchers at Flinders University and the University of Thessaly in Greece, also found that female students display lower emotional resilience, along with older students.

Resilience is thought of as how easily students bounce back from emotional difficulties such as bullying. It is also assumed to provide a buffer from the harmful effects of peer victimization and harassment and allow for recovery.

Higher levels of resilience and wellbeing tended to go with being bullied less often, being a boy, and being younger.

These results are troubling for female and older students, since existing research suggests that resilient adolescents are less likely to be either victims or bullies, and to suffer less emotional damage from bullying scenarios.

"These results show that bullied adolescents may develop different ways of protecting themselves from bullying, depending on their age and gender," say researchers from Flinders University, Dr. Grace Skrzypiec and visiting research fellow Dr. Eleni Didaskalou.

Lead author, Dr. Eleni Andreou, from the University of Thessaly, says the study is part of a transnational research project and involved 558 students from grades 6-10.

The students were given a questionnaire developed by Dr. Skrzypiec about their experiences with victimization and resilience.

Resilience plays a strong role in [student](#) wellbeing, which in turn has academic and social outcomes.

"Research shows that adolescents with an optimal level of wellbeing are more likely to demonstrate appropriate academic skills, have higher levels of school attendance and pro-social behavior, and be less likely to bully others," says Dr. Skrzypiec, co-director of the Student Wellbeing and Prevention of Violence (SWAPv) research group at the Flinders

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

The study also found that gender and year level did not affect how often a student becomes a victim of bullying, and that boys and girls are likely to experience different types of harassment.

"Overt physical and verbal aggression appears to be more common among boys, whereas girls are more likely to experience underhanded bullying like spreading rumors," the researchers say.

"There is some recent evidence that during adolescence, boys are more vulnerable to victimization across different contexts, whereas girls' victimization may take place partly in their close friendships"

The researchers identify a need for schools and policymakers to address well-being and harassment support to students in a manner informed by their age and gender, noting that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work.

"Resilience-based anti-bullying interventions cannot be developed in the sense of an approach that suits everyone's needs. Potential [resilience](#)-based anti-bullying interventions should take into account that adolescents' adjustment after being victimized may be affected by their age and gender."

The researchers also call for a shift away from thinking about bullying in terms of the victims' limits and deficits, and towards their strengths and perceived wellness.

More information: Eleni Andreou et al. School bullying, subjective well-being, and resilience, *Psychology in the Schools* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/pits.22409](https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22409)

Provided by Flinders University

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