

Bullied primary school children are falling behind in learning

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Credit: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

New work from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has uncovered that one in three boys and one in four girls aged 8 to 9 years are experiencing weekly bullying at their primary school.

The new results, published in *Academic Pediatrics*, showed that the high level of frequent bullying is having an impact on children's [academic performance](#).

The study found that children who experienced bullying had poorer academic performance and the detrimental effect was stronger for girls than boys.

The study, which is one of the largest of its kind, surveyed 965 primary school children. It is the first research to look at child reported bullying and using NAPLAN as the marker of academic achievement.

Bullying can take many forms, including physical victimisation (pushing and hitting) and verbal victimisation (teasing and threatening), as well as [relational bullying](#) (spreading rumours and being left out).

Children who were physically victimised were found to be around 6 to 9 months behind their peers on measures of academic performance.

This provides strong evidence to highlight the importance for education systems to invest in the prevention of bullying and promotion of positive peer relationships from the earliest years of school.

Boys were more likely to be physically victimised, whereas there were no gender differences for teasing and name calling.

The consequences of bullying are serious, with victims at increased risk of [mental health](#) problems, including self-harm and suicide. The impact of childhood bullying can persist into later life, potentially affecting not only mental health but also success in education.

Bullying is most common during primary school with rates peaking during the mid to late primary [school](#) years. We call this the 'juvenile phase of development' as it's the time just before puberty said the study's lead author, Dr Lisa Mundy from MCRI.

"This is the stage where peers become more important to kids and they start to become aware of group hierarchies, which may explain why there is such an increase in bullying at this age," Dr Mundy said.

The findings provide compelling evidence for the benefits of more bullying prevention in primary schools.

"Teachers have an essential role in maintaining good relationships between children in [primary school](#) and the tackling of bullying. Their success in doing so will determine not only the future mental health of these children but also their success in education." Prof Patton, the study's senior author, said.

The study used data from MCRI's Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS) which is a unique longitudinal study of children as they

approach adolescence. The study began in 2012 and is following more than 1200 children from Grade 3 (8 to 9 years of age). The study aims to improve understanding of the many influences on the health and emotional adjustment of [children](#) as they approach their teens.

"Bullying is a worldwide [health](#) problem. We need to better equip schools and teachers to deal with the prevention of bullying to minimise the potential long term effects it can have on a child's social and emotional development," Dr Mundy said.

Provided by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

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