

Researchers identify the families with the most sibling bullying

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Sibling bullying does have an effect on mental health later in life for both the victims and the bullies, it needs to be taken more seriously by parents and healthcare professionals. There are families where sibling

bullying is more likely and can be prevented, say researchers in the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick.

Prof Dieter Wolke and Ph.D. student Slava Dantchev have [previously found](#) that [sibling bullying](#) does have an effect on [mental health](#) later on in life in previous research, but now they have identified the factors in a family that sibling bullying is more likely to occur. Their paper, titled "Trouble in the Nest: Antecedents of Sibling Bullying Victimization and Perpetration," is published in *Developmental Psychology*.

Using the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), they identified factors in families that may predict sibling bullying, as the victim and the perpetrator.

The factors fell into four categories:

1. Structural family characteristics—e.g. birth order, number of children in the household, number of older brothers/sisters, marital status in the family, [education level](#) and financial difficulties.
2. Parental and parenting characteristics—e.g. postnatal mental health, maternal bonding, conflicting partnerships or domestic violence.
3. Early [social experiences](#) – e.g time spent with siblings, aggression between them and peer bullying
4. Individual differences – e.g. gender of child, child temperament and IQ



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There were three different types of bullying monitored: Physical, psychological and social. A total of 6,838 children participated, and 28.1% of them were involved in any kind of sibling bullying. Psychological bullying was the most reported type of bullying, and males bullied their siblings more often than females.

Those who most often perpetrated bullying against siblings were first-born children, those growing up in families with more children at home, who had [parents](#) who did not effectively parent or themselves had conflicts with each other and the children showed early on aggressive tendencies.

Most interesting, whether the [family](#) experienced [financial difficulties](#), came from a higher or lower social class, two or single parent household or whether mothers had higher or lower levels of education did not predict sibling bullying. Findings suggest sibling bullying is an evolutionary driven strategy toward maintaining or achieving social dominance, and older siblings are at particular risk of initiating sibling bullying.

Professor Wolke and Slava say parents may benefit from education about how to deal with resource losses for first-borns, and how to manage them in fostering improved sibling relationships. Interventions that may help both parents and children reduce aggression and bullying might be useful for affected families.

Professor Dieter Wolke of the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick says, "This is the first study that has looked at risk factors for sibling bullying from pregnancy to early adolescence. Sibling aggression is driven by loss of resources for firstborns and later born defending their need for resources such as parent attention or material goods. Sibling bullying has a class blindness: it is as much an issue in well to do families as those who are financially just getting by."

First author Slava Dantchev adds: "This and our previous findings of the adverse effects of sibling bullying on mental health make it clear that parents may benefit from information on how to identify and deal with [sibling](#) bullying."

More information: "Trouble in the Nest: Antecedents of Sibling Bullying Victimization and Perpetration" by Slava Dantchev, B.Sc., and Dieter Wolke, PhD, University of Warwick. *Developmental Psychology*. Published online Feb. 14, 2019.

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