

Bullying gets worse as children with autism get older

12 June 2019



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Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more likely to experience bullying than children without ASD and this bullying gets worse with age, according to new research from Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Hannah Morton, a graduate student in the clinical psychology Ph.D. program at Binghamton University, aimed to conceptualize bullying in [children](#) with ASD in order to specifically identify different bullying and behavior types. Her research also emphasizes the need to establish better definitions of bullying behaviors.

"This research is important because it contributes to our understanding of how bullying is nuanced," said Morton. "This variability means it is crucial to establish a definition for bullying and have standard assessments to know when and what types of bullying are occurring."

Morton, along with Binghamton psychologists Jennifer Gillis, Richard Mattson and Raymond Romanczyk, focused this study on teachers and parents of children with ASD, and community

members without an ASD child. Participants took a survey containing 80 scenarios of interactions between two [school-aged children](#). The scenarios varied from children ages four to fifteen. Sixty-four of these scenarios contained a type of bullying behavior (i.e. physical, verbal, interpersonal and cyber). The participants were randomly presented with 16 scenarios, and were asked to rate the severity of the interaction between the two children, as well as indicate which types of bullying were present.

Results showed that a child's increased age predicted higher bullying severity ratings. The findings also showed that bullying among [older children](#) with ASD is viewed as especially problematic by their parents, and that perceived bullying severity differed according to the type of bullying behavior (i.e., physical, verbal, interpersonal, and cyber).

"This paper emphasizes that bullying is a really broad construct," said Morton. "What any two people might be referring to when they use the term 'bullying'—regardless if they are parents, teachers, researchers, etc.—likely differs, and perhaps in subtle ways."

Morton plans to further her research on this topic by focusing specifically on the bullying behaviors that children with ASD experience compared to children without ASD.

This research was conducted through Binghamton University's Institute for Child Development, which offers early intervention services, speech services and more to children and families in the Binghamton region.

The paper, "Conceptualizing bullying in children with [autism spectrum disorder](#): Using a mixed model to differentiate behavior types and identify predictors," was published in *Autism*.

More information: Hannah E Morton et al,
Conceptualizing bullying in children with autism
spectrum disorder: Using a mixed model to
differentiate behavior types and identify predictors,
Autism (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1362361318813997](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318813997)

Provided by Binghamton University

APA citation: Bullying gets worse as children with autism get older (2019, June 12) retrieved 23
September 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-06-bullying-worse-children-autism-older.html>

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