Chapter 19
School Bullying and Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

School bullying research began in the 1970s through seminal research conducted on these experiences among Norwegian boys. From this initial research, multiple studies have been conducted over the past forty years, revealing the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of school bullying. More recent investigations have also focused on cyberbullying, bullying using information and communication technologies (e.g., cell phones). Little attention has been given to school bullying involvement among students with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. These studies suggest that these students experience internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, loneliness) and externalizing (e.g., aggression, antisocial behaviors) difficulties associated with their involvement in school bullying. The aim of this chapter is to review multidisciplinary research concerning school bullying among students with intellectual disabilities and to make recommendations for public policy and prevention programs as well as future research.

INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities benefit from inclusion in the same schools as their nondisabled peers. Research findings also suggest that nondisabled peers benefit from this inclusion as well (Buckley, Bird, Sacks, & Archer, 2002; Lindsay & McPherson, 2012; Richardson, 1996; Sailor, Wolf, Choi, & Roger, 2009; Tomasik, 2007). Therefore, disabled and nondisabled students benefit from having an inclusive school environment where there is potential for social interactions among a variety of students with different backgrounds. There is also evidence that such inclusion does not reduce test scores, grades, or instructional time, further suggesting the necessity of inclusion for students with disabilities (Sirlopu et al., 2008; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992).

The total number of students with disabilities in inclusion education varies based on students' location within the United States. In particular, students from the Eastern United States are more frequently assigned to segregated classrooms (Kurth, 2014). In addition, some states (e.g., Iowa, Minnesota, West Virginia) favor inclusion, while other states (e.g., Florida, New Jersey, South Carolina) prefer the restrictive setting for students with disabilities. Overall, 50% of disabled students from the ages of 6 to 11 are in regular classrooms around 80% of the day, while 30% of disabled students from the ages of 12 and higher are in such classrooms (Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2011). Regardless of the differences in these rates, it is clear that a variety of students with disabilities spend some time learning in the regular classroom.

Although there are benefits to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the school environment, additional attention is needed to promote a more welcoming environment as these students are often victims of school bullying (Mishna, 2003). Welcoming school environments are not always something students with disabilities experience as bullying is frequently a direct result of their disability, especially if the students' disability is more visible in inclusion environments (Verdugo, Bernejo, & Fuertes, 1995; Waldman, Swerdloff, & Perlman, 1999; Whitney, Smith & Thompson, 1994). In addition, students with disabilities are also rejected by their peers, a risk factor associated with victimization and bullying perpetration (Fox, 1989; Kistner & Gatlin, 1989; Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Morrison, Furlong, & Smith, 1994). Being rejected by one peers can lead to isolation and other consequences, such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety. Furthermore, peer rejection can affect academic engagement and achievement, which are vital to the long-term functioning of these students.

Some students with disabilities are also vulnerable to school bullying involvement because they have inadequate protection in the inclusion environment and due to their tendency to react aggressively (Lagerheim, 1986; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993; Sprafkin & Gadow, 1987). Many times this inadequate protection stems from these students being socially rejected by their peers, which diminishes their odds of having good quality friendships, a protective factor associated with reduced bullying incidences. Reacting aggressively to benign situations or in situations when it is not warranted increases children's and adolescents' risk of being rejected by their peers. This increased risk also makes them vulnerable to victimization and aggression. Students with intellectual disabilities are also at risk for victimization because they have fewer resources to cope with this experience (Cunningham, Clark, Heaven, Durrant, & Cunningham, 1989; Lagerheim, 1986; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993; Zeitlin & Williamson, 1990).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine school bullying perpetration and victimization among students with intellectual disabilities in elementary, middle, and high schools. The chapter utilizes multi-disciplinary qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-design research methodologies drawn from psychology, special education, sociology, social work, and criminology to review research on students with intellectual disabilities' involvement in school bullying, incorporating both cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs. This chapter has six main purposes, including describing:

1. **The Nature of School Bullying:** Discussion of the definition, forms and types, prevalence rates, and associated psychosocial adjustment difficulties;
2. The prevalence and consequences of school bullying among students with disabilities;
3. The predictors of school bullying among students with intellectual disabilities;
4. **Solutions and Recommendations:** Description of public policy and school bullying prevention programs concerning students with intellectual disabilities;

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