

Institution: University of Chester
Unit of Assessment: Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Title of case study: Protecting school pupils from bullying and its harmful effects
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Bullying occurs when pupils persist in being physically or psychologically abusive to less powerful peers. While it used to be seen as 'just part of growing up' and 'character-building', it is now recognised as a serious societal problem that demands attention, and schools must take active steps to combat it. Professor Boulton's research contributed to this shift and has ensured bullying continues to be taken seriously. His work has produced novel findings on the damaging psychological impact of bullying, why pupils become involved, and has guided policy and advice offered by governments in the U.K., U.S. and elsewhere, and by other national bodies (NSPCC).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>At the time Boulton's programme was initiated around 1990 at the University of Sheffield, research on bullying was at a very early stage and largely focused on determining how many pupils were involved. Virtually no school targeted bullying per se and there was no policy guiding what they should do. Indeed, a prevailing view was that bullying was 'just part of growing up' and 'character-building'. Boulton's programme was instrumental in shifting the research agenda to include examination of how victims might be affected, and identifying the precipitating factors for perpetrators and victims. Research Boulton conducted at his previous universities (Sheffield, 1989-1993, and Keele, 1993 - 2004), including a very highly cited meta-analysis (Hawker, D.S.J and Boulton, M.J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment. A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. <i>Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry</i>, 41, 441-455, 661 citations on Scopus on 14.10.13; current journal impact factor = 5.422) has been substantially built upon at the University of Chester since he joined it in 2004 as Senior Lecturer (now Professor). This work has consistently broken new ground in the topics investigated. For example, Boulton was the first to directly compare pre-service teachers' view of traditional and cyber forms of bullying (Reference 1), to show that victims experienced disrupted classroom concentration (Reference 2) and he was the first to use an experimental paradigm (that allows firmer conclusions about what is cause and what is effect) to show that social isolation is a risk factor for becoming a victim (Reference 3). The breadth of these topics, and the fact that a range of methods were employed by Boulton in work conducted in several different countries, have made a compelling case that bullying in schools should be taken seriously, and led to it being taken up by practitioners and influential advice-providers.</p> <p>Importantly, Boulton's work at the University of Chester is in the vanguard of attempts to identify moderator and mediator variables. This recent extension of his work is important because it reveals which sub-groups of pupils are most at risk of the negative effects of bullying as well as the psychological mechanisms that underlie bullying-related phenomena. Examples of this work have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * showed that the links between bullying and disrupted classroom concentration arose because pupils felt unsafe in school and had a relatively poor relationship with their teacher (Reference 4). * provided evidence to support a new hypothesis to explain why many victims receive little if any help from their peers; put simply, peers hold the view that associating with victims is risky because it could lead bullies to target them (Reference 3). * showed that the negative effects of different types of bullying extend beyond the schools years into adulthood, and that self-blaming beliefs contributed to (i.e. mediated) these distal effects (Reference 5) * revealed that hostile beliefs associated with aggressive behaviour can be modified with relatively simple interventions (Reference 6)

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The wider impact of Boulton's work at the University of Chester has already been felt and it is still emerging. His research is allowing us to refine and improve anti-bullying policy and interventions on an on-going basis.

Through dissemination of his work, Boulton has been able to influence the policies of governments and other organisations directed at eradicating bullying from schools. By identifying who becomes bullies and victims and why, and the pernicious effects it can have, this work is leading to a change in teacher and student behaviour and concomitant improvements in well-being.

Boulton was the first or sole author on all but one of the references cited here, and was the lead researcher. All of the work was carried out at the University of Chester since 2004 with the exception of the meta-analysis (referenced above) that was conducted at Keele University in 2000.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

As evidence of the quality of the research, the following references are all peer-refereed journal articles. Boulton's research was supported by a grant of £9,870 from the NSPCC (1.10.2008 to 31.3.2009)

1. Boulton, M.J., Hardcastle, K., Down, J., Fowles, J., & J.A. Simmonds (2013). A comparison of preservice teachers' responses to cyber versus traditional bullying scenarios: Similarities and differences and implications for practice *Journal of Teacher Education* 0022487113511496, first published on November 11, 2013 as doi:10.1177/0022487113511496.
2. Boulton, M.J., Trueman, M., and Murray, L. (2008). Associations between peer victimisation, fear of future victimisation and disrupted classroom concentration among junior school pupils. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78, 473- 489. (26 citations on Scopus on 14.10.13; current journal impact factor = 2.093).
3. Boulton, M.J. (2013). The effects of victim of bullying reputation on adolescents' choice of friends: Mediation by fear of becoming a victim, moderation by victim status, and implications for befriending interventions. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 114, 146-60. (Current journal impact factor = 2.377).
4. Boulton, M.J., Woodmansey, H., Williams, E., Spells, R., Nicholas, B., Laxton, E., Holman, G., & Duke, E. (2012). Associations between peer bullying and classroom concentration: evidence for mediation by perceived personal safety and relationship with teacher. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 32, 277-294.
5. Boulton, M.J. (2012). Associations between adults' recalled childhood bullying victimization, current social anxiety, coping and self-blame: Evidence for moderation and indirect effects. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping: An International Journal*, 26, 270-292. (Current journal impact factor = 2.108).
6. Boulton, M.J. (2012). Children's hostile attribution bias is reduced after watching realistic playful fighting and the effect is mediated by prosocial thoughts. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 113, 36-48. (Current journal impact factor = 2.377).

4. Details of the impact

For some time, bullying has been recognised as a serious problem within schools. The impact of Boulton's programme has been to keep bullying on the policy agenda, and to influence and inform the on-going anti-bullying work of practitioners working with young people, notably teachers, and hence to ensure that as many young people as possible are protected from the negative effects of bullying. That impact can be traced from Boulton's research findings in scientific journals via policy initiatives and documents to public benefit. Here, we focus on the latter two links in the impact chain.

Influence on policy: intermediate impact

As noted above, the underpinning research has been original, high quality and wide in scope. It has informed many UK and overseas government and NGO policy initiatives and documents, and hence has considerable reach and significance. The sheer number of references made to Boulton's work attests to its substantial influence. These references are contained in documents that are widely available via the internet to all interested members of the public, including school staff, other professionals, parents and young people themselves. These documents and resources allow people to enact the provider organisation's anti-bullying policy directives; in short they inform people about bullying, how to tackle it, and support victims. They include:

1. *Characteristics of bullying victims in schools*. A document on the **U.K. government's Department for Education** website that makes reference to Boulton's finding that social skill deficits may put pupils at risk of being bullied (page 20).
2. *Respecting others: Anti-bullying guidance*. The main **Welsh Assembly government** document, available via its website, to disseminate its anti-bullying policy and to guide anti-bullying action by schools and other interested parties. It refers to Boulton's work showing that bullying is not related uniformly to all types of maladjustment (pages 10 and 46).
3. *Bullying Prevention and Response Base Training Manual* published by the **U.S. government** via its stopbullying.gov website. It makes two explicit references to Boulton's research (pages 41 and 50), that have revealed the self-perpetuating association between being bullied and psychological distress, and the tendency of many children not to tell anyone when they are bullied. In addition, the manual makes numerous points about bullying that stem from other work carried out by Boulton.
4. *Research briefing: School bullying*. A **UK-wide NSPCC** resource that underpins the charity's commitment to an anti-bullying policy. It cites Boulton's work that has shown: (i) how teachers often fail to recognise all forms of bullying (page 6), (ii) the relative frequency of different sub-types of bullying (page 7), (iii) the potentially serious effects of being bullied (page 9), and (iv) the importance of underlying attitudes (page 11).
5. *Keeping safe: Establishing the need to teach "keeping safe" messages in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. An **NSPCC** document for practitioners in **Northern Ireland** and beyond that highlights to professionals and others the role of anti-bullying initiatives in wider attempts to keep all children safe from harm. It refers to Boulton's finding that relationship abuse compromises a broad range of wellbeing indicators, including self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness and depression (pages 7 and 42).
6. *Keeping safe: The views of principals, teachers and other school staff in relation to teaching "keeping safe" messages in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Another **NSPCC** resource (there are others not listed here) that refers to Boulton's work on associations between bullying and psychological adjustment (pages 7, 63, 69).
7. *Bullying prevention is crime prevention*. A policy document and anti-bullying practitioner guide that acknowledges the synergy between bullying and crime. It is available from the influential **U.S. charity Fight Crime: Invest in Kids**. It cites Boulton's work on the effects of bullying on victims and draws parallels with the effects of crime (page numbers not provided, but see citation 13).

Influence on practice: ultimate impact

It is through such documents and resources that Boulton's research has continued in the REF census period to inform and update the anti-bullying knowledge and practice of potentially thousands of teachers, other professionals working with young people, parents, children

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themselves etc. It is recognised that tracing explicit links between any given piece of disseminated research and a change in practice in relation to something as complex as bullying is difficult. However, as noted above, it is the breadth of Boulton's research outputs that have been cited in such a wide range of influential policy documents and resources that corroborate a claim to that impact. Moreover, the 'user-friendly' resources aimed directly at young people, parents, teachers, etc. do NOT cite academic references. However, the content of those resources clearly IS based on the kinds of publications that do cite Boulton's work, listed above.

In addition to the aforementioned broad impact, we offer the following examples of how pupils continue to be protected from bullying as a result of Boulton's work via the training for school staff it has led to. Central to any school's efforts to address bullying is an anti-bullying policy (ABP). To be effective, an ABP must be updated regularly. A series of events and meetings, attended by senior managers, have been hosted by Boulton (e.g., <http://www.chester.ac.uk/anti-bullying>). Informed by his recent research at the University of Chester, these addressed several key themes that have been taken up by schools as they renewed their ABPs. Themes included:

- (i) the central importance of the teacher-pupil relationship in tackling bullying and supporting vulnerable victims, and how these can be nurtured
- (ii) why, despite our best efforts, many pupils do not befriend or support victims of bullying, and what can be done to change this
- (iii) how some attempts by adults to help victims may have unintended consequences that leave victims feeling even worse, and how to avoid these

By making sure their ABPs are abreast of current research, schools offer their pupils optimal levels of 'protection' against bullying and its pernicious effects. Current projects being carried out by Boulton are examining more directly how these kinds of policy changes impact on pupils' bullying behaviour and well-being.

Boulton's research with pre-service teachers (Reference 1, above) revealed important deficits in their confidence and competence in dealing with cyber bullying. As a direct result of this work, all initial teacher training programmes at the University of Chester now incorporate training and personal reflection exercises that are designed to prepare them to deal effectively with cases of online bullying among pupils. The latter provides a clear link between Boulton's research and the social support that these trainee teachers can provide to bullied pupils when they take up posts within schools.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The following web links corroborate the claims made in the numbered paragraphs of Section 4:

1. <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR001.pdf> (retrieved: 25.3.12; see page 20).
2. <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090119nafwc2303en.pdf> (retrieved: 25.3.12; see pages 10 and 46).
3. www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/in-the-community/community-action-planning/training-module-speaker-notes.pdf (retrieved: 25.3.12; see pages 41 and 50).
4. http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/school_bullying_pdf_wdf73502.pdf (retrieved: 25.3.12; see pages 6,7,9,11,15 and 16).
5. http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforteachers/publications/effective-preventative-ed-ni-schoolstaff_wdf85811.pdf (retrieved: 25.3.12; see pages 7 and 42).
6. http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforteachers/publications/effective-preventative-ed-ni-schoolstaff_wdf85811.pdf (retrieved: 25.3.12; see pages 7, 63, 69).
7. <http://www.pluk.org/Pubs/Bullying2.pdf> (retrieved: 25.3.12; page numbers not provided, but see citation 13 in Endnotes).

A senior manager who may be contacted regarding impact of attendance at the event detailed at: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/anti-bullying>