Part I

Issues in Studying Cross-National Differences

1   Introduction

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This chapter gives a brief overview of previous work carried out internationally on school bullying and cyberbullying, including evidence for their negative effects. The relatively limited research base in India is then considered. In the second half of this chapter we summarize the kinds of school systems in the four European countries represented in this book (England, France, Germany, the Netherlands), Australia, and India (especially in the states of Punjab and Tamil Nadu). This is to provide a context for the chapters that follow.

Brief History of Research on School Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is generally defined as a form of aggressive behavior (with an intent to harm others) characterized by repetition and imbalance of power (Olweus, 2013). In Western societies, the image of a larger child attacking a smaller one, not just once but on a regular basis, epitomizes this kind of bullying or harassment during the school years.

The origins of research on *bullying* in Western societies (Smith, 2016), as also of *ijime* in Japan (Toda, 2016), have centered on schools and on children and young people. Children at school can be in a vulnerable position; they normally have to attend school, yet they may not have the same awareness of their rights and protections against attacks that adults usually have and expect (Greene, 2006). The majority of research on bullying has been on pupil-pupil bullying in schools, which is also a main focus of this book. However, bullying and related forms of abuse and harassment can occur in many contexts and throughout the lifespan (Monks & Coyne, 2011). Even in schools, bullying between teachers and pupils or between teachers (or other adults) in the school is an important consideration.

Bullying can take many forms. Besides physical attacks (either on a person or by damaging their belongings), verbal threats and insults can be hurtful and frightening; in fact, verbal bullying is usually the most common form (Smith, 2014). These are direct forms of attack, and they have been reported on since the origins of research on bullying in the 1980s. Since the 1990s it has been recognized that aggression, and thus also bullying, can take more indirect (Björkqvist, 1994), social (Galen & Underwood, 1997), or relational (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) forms. A main form of indirect bullying can be by spreading nasty stories or rumors about someone (to others, rather than face to face). A main form of relational bullying is systematic (direct or indirect) social exclusion, for example from playground games or classroom activities.

Since the 2000s, cyber aggression and cyberbullying have become important issues. This has become noticeable through the increasing penetration of the Internet and the convergence of mobile phones and more recently of smartphones. These of course have brought enormous opportunities and benefits (Costabile & Spears, 2012; Spears et al., 2013), but also risks and dangers (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Starting with emails and text messages, but now increasingly on social networking sites/platforms and across various devices, multiple kinds of cyber aggression and bullying have been documented. These include attacks and threats, denigration (put-downs), flaming (online verbal fights), cyber-stalking (persistent online intimidation), exclusion (from an online group), masquerade (pretending to be someone else to send/post material to damage someone), outing (sharing embarrassing information or images of someone), and putting up false profiles and distributing personal material against someone's wishes (Willard, 2006).

Definitional Issues

The definition of *cyberbullying* is often taken as being parallel to that of what is now often called *traditional bullying* (i.e., bullying occurring offline rather than online). However, cyberbullying has its own characteristics, and the defining criteria of repetition and imbalance of power are certainly more complex, and arguably more problematic, in the cyber domain. Regarding repetition, one action by a perpetrator (such as putting an insulting or threatening comment on a website) can lead to repetition in the sense of (multiple) viewings or further comments by others. Regarding imbalance of power, the traditional criteria (physical strength, numbers, peer popularity) may be bypassed if the perpetrator is anonymous to the victim, as can often be the case. However, anonymity itself can bestow power on the perpetrator, such that the

protective shield provided by being online ensures the victim is helpless in responding. Some researchers regard these issues as sufficiently intractable that they prefer to use the term *cyber aggression* rather than *cyberbullying* (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013), although the use of the cyberbullying construct has also been defended (Smith, Del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013).

Definitional issues are not unique to cyber forms of bullying. For traditional bullying too queries have been raised as to the importance of repetition. It can be argued that one significant attack by a more powerful person may leave the victim so fearful of future attacks that there is an implicit fear of repetition, and that imbalance of power can take many forms and be difficult to assess. Furthermore, Finkelhor, Turner, and Hamby (2012) suggest that the focus on bullying may draw attention away from other serious forms of violence that are not repeated or do not involve a power imbalance.

In defense of the research program on bullying, it can be pointed out that imbalance of power can be defined and has been assessed in a number of studies. Furthermore, such studies generally indicate that when imbalance of power is present in an attack, the effects are generally more serious (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2007; Turner et al., 2014; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2014). Indeed Ybarra, Espelage, and Mitchell (2014) concluded that 'Both differential power and repetition are key in identifying youth who are bullied and at particular risk for concurrent psychosocial challenge' (2014, Abstract, p. 293).

Growth of the Research Program on Bullying

Controversies and arguments on definitional issues and on the focus on bullying can be taken as signs of healthy debate. What is indisputable is that the study of bullying, especially among children and young people, has become a major research program over the past 40 years (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Olweus (2013, figure 3) used the PsycINFO database to locate articles with keywords 'bully', 'bullying', or 'bullied'; these increased from 5 in 1990 to 104 in 2000 and 566 in 2010. Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, and Del Rey (2015) reported a systematic study of publications on bullying and cyberbullying from 1978 to 2013. They used the ISI Web of Science and selected journal articles on school bullying that explicitly referred to and were concerned with bullying (including cyberbullying). This yielded 44 results in 1995, 126 in 2000, 165 in 2005, 438 in 2010, and 689 in 2014. Articles on cyberbullying increased from 4 before 2005 to 41 in 2010 and 139 in 2013.
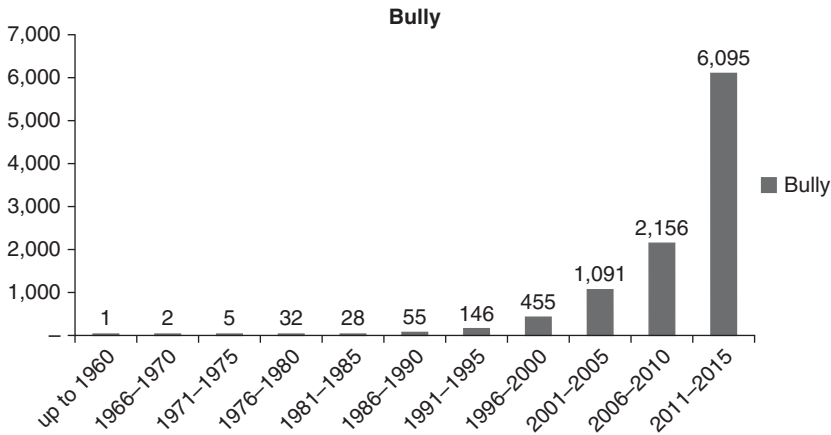
Figure 1.1 Number of articles from keyword 'bully' in searching ISI
Web of Science, up to end 2015

Figure 1.1 shows findings using 'bully' as a search keyword in the ISI
Web of Science. From a trickle of publications up to the 1980s, there is
then an exponential increase, such that more than 6,000 articles appeared
in the 5-year period from 2011 to 2016.

Negative Effects of Bullying and Cyberbullying on Pupil Well-Being and School Climate

Much of the research on bullying has focused on its effects. For victims,
bullying hurts, and the longer it lasts, the worse the impact. It is well
established that being bullied leads to psychosomatic symptoms, poor
sleep, and nightmares in the short term, and to such long-term effects as
emotional isolation, where a dark picture of oneself and others in relation-
ships emerges, as well as increased difficulties in maintaining friendships,
when compared to those not victimized in school (Schäfer et al., 2004).
Meta-analyses of many reports from longitudinal studies (Ttofi,
Farrington, & Lösel, 2011) show that even after adjustments for a range
of other factors, victims at school are at greater risk of later depression.
These effects can be substantial and long term (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).
Victims are higher on suicidal ideation (Schäfer et al., 2004), and the
Environmental Risk Study in the United Kingdom found that exposure to
frequent bullying in 12-year-old children predicted higher rates of self-
harm, even after taking account of prior emotional problems (Fisher

et al., 2012). Suicide, although rare, can be an outcome to which victim experiences can be a significant contributor (Kim et al., 2009).

Research on the consequences of cyberbullying shows similar effects as for traditional or offline bullying. It affects the victims' self-esteem, confidence, and mental health (Kowalski et al., 2014). This is easily understandable since bullying and cyberbullying share some common characteristics (repetition, intention to harm, power imbalance). Also, victims online are quite often also victimized offline, which makes their lives especially challenging since there is no respite (Blaya, 2013). One of the specificities of cyberbullying is that it is difficult to escape. Moreover, the anonymity of the cyberbully is facilitated since the aggression is not face to face, and this can bring some young people to adopt behaviors they would not take on ordinarily. The victim who does not know who is willing to harm them can find it even more challenging to cope with the situation. However, as stressed by Smith and colleagues (2008), the type of cyberbullying may impact the way the victims feel affected.

Given the essential importance of peers for cognitive, emotional, and social development, the victim experience can be devastating for those isolated in the group, including learned helplessness and blaming oneself for the bullying, fueled by peer reactions due to moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996). Apart from the effects on mental health, there is some evidence that victims have poorer academic achievement and that bullying contributes to school failure and dropout (Raskauskas & Stolz, 2007; Rothon et al., 2010).

But beyond effects on the victim, bullying causes reduced well-being for classmates who feel stressed by the social polarization in their daily environment (e.g., 'whom should I side with', 'whom do I have to side with'), which also might distract their attention from classwork. Friendships might descend into loyalty conflicts for some while observing the bullying might lead to personal distress for empathetic others (Eisenberg, 2014). Observers of bullying often feel upset and the school climate is adversely affected (Rivers et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, bullying can be functional for the perpetrator (Olthof et al., 2011). It enables the bully to become empowered through the class dynamic, where the goal is power and dominance through achieving elevated status among the peer group. The longer bullying lasts, the more social rejection is reported by the victim, and, at least in secondary school, victims are more rejected than bullies. The bullies are not often high on being liked by classmates (social preference), but typically they are high on perceived popularity. This implies that peers look at and learn from them. In puberty they can serve as a role model for antisocial and norm-breaking behaviors (Moffitt, 1993).

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Cultural Issues in Research on Bullying

The great majority of research on bullying that has been carried out, and especially that abstracted in PsycINFO or Web of Science, has been in Western countries – Europe, North America, and Australasia. To some extent this also represents the dominance of the English language in terms of citation analyses. Since the 1980s researchers have conducted significant numbers of studies in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Mainland China, and Hong Kong (see Kwak & Lee, 2016; Lin & Lai, 2016; Toda, 2016; Zhang, Chen, & Chen, 2016), many in the national languages. Some studies have been conducted in Southeast Asian countries (see Sittichai & Smith, 2015). There have also been studies across the globe, in South America, Africa, and other Asian countries. Bullying is an international issue and a worldwide phenomenon. Nevertheless most of the research and intervention base remains Western in origin.

This kind of imbalance was illustrated by Smith and Berkkun (2017) in an analysis of the Web of Science database for articles on cyberbullying. They found a total of 538 articles over the period 2000–2015. Looking at the national affiliation of lead authors, by continent these were North America (n = 197), Europe (including Israel) (n = 190), Asia (including Turkey) (n = 106), Australasia (n = 40), and Other (Africa and South America) (n = 5). Of the Asian contributions, most came from South Korea (52) and Turkey (27). India was represented by only one article.

History of Research on Bullying and Cyberbullying in India

The phenomenon of school bullying is not new in India, and it is a part of the culture of Indian schools (Jaishankar, 2009). Indeed, bullying is embedded in caste hierarchy in India. Those of the 'upper caste' have often bullied the 'lower castes' verbally and physically and by alienating them from the social mainstream (Judge, 2013).

School bullying was traditionally considered a predominantly rural phenomenon, but it has become part of urban Indian culture. Name-calling, threatening, damaging property, and hitting are common ways in which bullying occurs in India. Bullying is known by various names in urban regions (see also Chapters 4 and 13). Two common terms in the English-language media are *ragging* and *Eve teasing*.

Ragging refers to senior students bullying junior students, for example in colleges, where new students are insulted and forced to do things for senior students. Although to some extent accepted as a part of college life in the past, it is now recognized by the Indian government as an 'act that

violates or is perceived to violate an individual student's dignity', and in order to eradicate it, the Honourable Supreme Court issued guidelines in 2009 for the setting up of the Central Crisis Hotline and Anti-ragging Database (www.antiragging.in/).

Eve teasing refers to girls bullied by boys, with or without sexual connotations; it is a euphemism used throughout South Asia for public sexual harassment or molestation of women by men.

Recently *groupism* has been recognized as the latest bullying technique, involving groups of students ganging up on classmates whom they consider different by the group's standards; a child may be targeted for being of a different religion, economic background, or social standing.

The dangers of school bullying were first noted by the Raghavan Committee (Jaishankar, 2009) that was constituted to control and prevent ragging in educational institutions. The committee described ragging as a form of bullying, and considered that it started in schools and residential hostels. However, in comparison to the developed countries, school bullying is not well understood in India and is often considered a part of the normal schooling process. Even most teachers and parents fail to understand the seriousness of school bullying. Most bullying cases go unreported, and even if they are reported, the majority of such cases are mediated at an individual level by teachers or die down within a short space of time, rather than being dealt with systematically.

There is a relatively small literature on the prevalence of bullying in Indian schools, but there have recently been alarming headlines, such as 'Every third child is bullied in school, shows study' (*Times of India*, September 3, 2015). In fact, an early study by Kshirsagar, Agarwal, and Bavdekar (2007) assessed the prevalence of bullying among 500 children aged 8–12 years in three schools in the Mumbai area and found 31.4% had been bullied. Teasing was most common, most victims did not tell parents, and victims were more likely to experience psychosomatic symptoms.

A Bullying Research Initiative in Training and Education (BRITE) study at 12 English-medium schools across Dehradun, Munsoorie, and Chandigarh surveyed 1,200 students (aged 14 to 18) and 600 teachers between 2002 and 2005. Some 59% of boys and 65% of girls felt that bullying was present on campus. Common bullying behavior among boys was reported as fights or using abusive language, while in girls it was teasing, name-calling, or avoiding someone (*Daily News & Analysis – Bangalore*, 2008).

Srisiva, Thirumoorthi, and Sujatha (2013) surveyed 300 students aged 11 to 18 years from four schools in Coimbatore City, Tamil Nadu. Only

7% of pupils did not report being bullied; the very high proportion of victims may be because the definition of bullying in this study appeared to include any aggressive acts. Common forms were teasing, intimidating, excluding from the group, and spreading rumors and lies. Common reasons for being bullied were poor performance in studies, appearance, and skin color/complexion.

Jamir and colleagues (2014) surveyed 165 students aged 12 to 17 years in Imphal, Manipur. Again a very large proportion of pupils (about 84%) reported being bullied. Scores for being a victim correlated negatively with self-esteem and positively with depression.

Malhi, Bharti, and Sidhu (2014) assessed physical, verbal, rumor spreading, and extortion forms of bullying among 209 students aged 13–16 years from schools in Chandigarh. About 20% were reported as victims, 13% as bullies (more boys), 20% as bully-victims (more boys), and 45% as controls (more girls). Verbal was the most common form of bullying, followed by physical. The bully-victims scored much worse on academic attainment than the other groups (controls being best). Bully-victims and victims also generally scored the worst on measures of psychosocial adjustment.

One issue with these studies is the varying and often uncertain criteria used for assessing bullying, which could affect the apparently very high prevalence rates. Another common issue is the lack of reporting of the language used in the surveys, and if not English, what words were used to translate bullying. However the general findings regarding types of bullying, sex differences, and negative outcomes of being a victim appear similar to those in Western studies.

As in some European and North American countries, in the past decade, school bullying has extended to extreme forms such as shooting. India's first school shooting took place in December 2007 in an elite school at Gurgaon (near New Delhi), where a student was shot from point blank range by two of his schoolmates. This incident was a planned murder provoked by bullying of the victim (*Times of India*, 2007). A number of school shooting cases have been reported since.

Cyberbullying in India

India is currently one of the most dynamic information and communications technology (ICT) markets in the world and Indians have demonstrated exceptional interest in adopting ICT, particularly mobile phones, spurred by their growing affordability and the convenience they offer in many spheres of life. The ongoing evolution and rapid adoption of social media in this century is affecting Indian society as a whole, including