

The Annual Bullying Survey

Introduction and background

Ditch the Label is one of the largest anti-bullying charities in the UK. It works in partnership with schools and colleges to provide support to thousands of young people aged between 13 and 25. It also provides a range of free resources to help teachers to tackle the root causes of bullying behaviour. These can be downloaded from: www.DTLED.org.

The Annual Bullying Survey is the charity's key piece of research which is published annually; it examines rates of bullying across the UK. The survey on which this report is based was conducted between November 2018 and February 2019. There was a total of 7,347 respondents. After eliminating incomplete and low quality responses, a survey sample of 2,347 was achieved. Eighty-four per cent of the young people in the sample were aged between 12 and 15.

Key points

Bullying experiences

- In the 2019 survey, respondents were asked about their experiences of bullying in the last 12 months rather than in general. Within this timeframe, 22 per cent of the young people said that they had been bullied, 27 per cent had witnessed bullying and 2 per cent had bullied someone.
- Of those who reported having been bullied in the last 12 months, the largest group (35%) could not recall how frequently the bullying had occurred. Forty-five per cent said it had occurred at least once a month and 31 per cent said that it had occurred at least once a week. Nine per cent said it had happened daily.
- Young people experienced bullying in a large range of different forms. The most common form was verbal bullying which was experienced sometimes by 30 per cent, often by 8 per cent and constantly by 5 per cent. Physical assault was less common; it was experienced sometimes by 8 per cent, often by 2 per cent and constantly by 2 per cent.
- Eighty-seven per cent of those bullied in the last 12 months had rarely or never experienced cyberbullying. Thirteen per cent had experienced cyberbullying often or constantly.
- Intimidation and social exclusion were fairly common and were experienced sometimes, often or constantly by over a third of those who had been bullied in the last 12 months.
- Respondents were asked why they thought they had been bullied. The most common reasons were attitudes to high grades (20%), attitudes to mannerisms (19%) attitudes to either high or low household income (17%). Less common reasons were attitudes to gender identity (5%), attitudes to religion (8%), culture (9%) or race (9%). Ten per cent felt that they had been bullied because of their sexuality.
- It is interesting that only 35 per cent of the 524 respondents who had been bullied were targeted because of only one characteristic – the rest identified two or more categories. For example, 20 per cent of the sample selected both “appearance” and “the clothes I wear” as reasons for being bullied. This indicates that appearance is, overall, the most common reason for being victimised.

- Respondents were asked who had bullied them over the past 12 months. The most common perpetrators were a classmate (63%), someone at school whom they did not know (37%), or an ex-friend (34%). Surprisingly, 30 per cent reported having been bullied by a close friend.

The impact of bullying

- Being bullied had a significant impact on young people's lives. It had led to feelings of depression (45%), or anxiety (41%). Over one third (33%) reported having had suicidal thoughts as a result of bullying and 11 per cent had attempted suicide. Twenty-six per cent had self-harmed. Other consequences of being bullied were truanting (20%), developing anti-social behaviour (13%) or developing and eating disorder (12%). Smaller numbers had run away from home (9%), abused drugs and/or alcohol (6%) or indulged in risky sexual behaviours (4%) as a consequence of bullying.
- Thirty-four per cent of those who had been bullied in the last 12 months reported that it had had a significant or extreme impact on their mental health.
- Respondents were asked to give detail about how they had been mentally affected by bullying. Forty-four per cent reported a significant or extreme impact on their confidence and 43 per cent reported a significant or extreme impact on self-esteem. Other areas which were strongly affected were optimism, home life, social life and studies.
- Of those who had been bullied in the last 12 months, 72 reported it and 28 per cent never told anyone. Bullying was most commonly reported to a teacher (92%), a family member (92%) or a friend (79%). Almost a quarter (24) reported the bullying to the police. In all cases, a majority of respondents were satisfied with the support which they received after reporting the bullying.



- The most common reasons for not reporting bullying were being scared of it getting worse (38%) or being called a snitch (38%) Other common reasons were an unwillingness to be seen as a victim (31%) and being embarrassed (34%). Just under a third (30%) said it had not affected them enough to report it.
- Sixty-one per cent of respondents who had been bullied said that their parents or guardians know about all the bullying and 8 per cent said they did not know about any of it.

Assessing prejudice

- Bias-based bullying and cyberbullying have a significant impact on the mental health of victims. One study found that US teenagers who were harassed online because of their race, ethnicity or sexual orientation were about 8 times more likely to report a suicidal attitude as those who were not harassed.
- Survey respondents were presented with a series of statements which reflected certain attitudes. They were asked to state a level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.
- The item with the strongest level of agreement was, 'People with physical disabilities are just as intelligent as people without physical disabilities.' Seventy-six per cent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that this was the case. Similarly, in response to the statement 'I would feel awkward around someone in a wheelchair', 86 per cent expressed disagreement or strong disagreement.
- To test attitudes towards LGBT+ persons, one benchmark statement was 'many LGB+ people use their sexuality to obtain special treatment or privileges'. For this statement, only 9 per cent agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 61 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The other statement was 'celebrations like gay pride are ridiculous because they assume that an individual's sexual orientation is something to be proud of'. Seventy-four per cent strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. Just 9 per cent agreed or strongly agreed.
- There was an interesting response to the statement 'unattractive people need to make more effort with their appearance'. Forty-five per cent strongly agreed or agreed, with levels of agreement much higher amongst females (53%) than amongst males (37%). This would appear to demonstrate that physical appearance is something very important for teenagers.
- A large proportion of respondents (42%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'people are either men or women'. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed.
- There were 2 benchmark statements designed to measure levels of xenophobia. The first was 'if people move here from another country, they should have to adapt to our way of life and culture'. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this whereas 52 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The second statement was 'people who weren't born in the UK have no right to be here'. Seventy-one per cent strongly disagreed with this and a further 13 per cent disagreed. Just 5 per cent expressed agreement or strong agreement.
- Respondents tended on the whole to reject gender stereotypes. Fifty-eight per cent strongly disagreed or disagreed that 'men should be strong and in control'. Twenty-eight per cent were somewhere in the middle. Forty-six per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'women should be gentle and caring' with a further 35 per cent somewhere in the middle.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.ditchthelabel.org/research-papers/the-annual-bullying-survey-2019/>