

‘Awful, mentally draining and heartbreaking.’ What is the impact on parent mental wellbeing of having a child be bullied?

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BACKGROUND

- Bullying is a widely recognised experience that sadly many children will encounter in their school lives.
- Positive parent child relationships have been suggested to act as a buffer from some of the harms of associated with bullying (Rudolph et al., 2020).
- Previous research has highlighted the negative feelings parents may have with regards to their own efficacy and inability to effectively advocate for their child (Humphrey & Crisp 2008).
- Bullying negatively impacts parents as well as children but the extent of this remains unclear, as does how this in turn could influence parents access to support (Harcourt et al., 2014).
- Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the impact of having a child bullied on parent well-being and mental health.
- Further parents’ experiences of navigating the bullying, particularly in terms of their experiences of accessing school and other support and the impact this had on parental wellbeing.

METHOD

Participants

- Participants were 31 parents who completed an online survey.
- All parents had a child who was being bullied in school.

Materials

- The questionnaire included: questions capturing parent reports on their child’s experiences of bullying. A section on parents’ access of support services. A copy of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was also included to measure parental wellbeing.
- Open questions were also included in the survey, providing parents with the opportunity to expand on their answers. This poster focuses on the qualitative data collected.

Procedure

- Ethical approval was granted by the Department for Education Ethics Committee at the University of York. The questionnaire was distributed online using Qualtrics via social media, through communications with local schools and via national anti-bullying charities.

KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT ON PARENT WELLBEING

Parents were provided with the opportunity to share how their child’s experiences of bullying had impacted on them. Several themes were identified included:

- **Feeling stressed:** *“I was very stressed and felt I had let my child down”* and *“my experience was recent and I could not believe how bad it was. It was one of the most stressful experiences of my life”*
- **Impact on mental health:** *“I felt very depressed and helpless”* and *“At times felt like I was going mad”*.
- **Upset:** *“It is heartbreaking and distressing”*
- **Worry for their child:** *“stressed, angry, worried for child every day”*

Parents also reported the bullying impacting on family relationships:

- **Being the focus of everything at home:** *“It ruled our lives”, “It became the main thing we talked about”*.
- **Changed family activities:** *“we stopped having fun.”*
- **Impact on siblings:** *“took focus away from other sibling”*.

EXPERIENCES WITH SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL

Parents were provided with the opportunity to share their experiences of seeking support from school.

- As Figure 1 shows, the majority of parents reported that their school had not taken any action to address the bullying, as one parent reported: *‘said the right things but did not take effective action.’*
- The majority of parents also reported that there was little supportive action taken by the school, as one parent reported: *‘school took action but action was counter-productive, made child feel worse and that it would better to just stay quiet’*

Figure 1: Has the school taken any action to address the bullying?

| | % |
|----------------------|----|
| No | 53 |
| Yes but insufficient | 27 |
| Yes | 17 |
| Unknown | 3 |

Figure 2: How supportive did you find the school in dealing with the bullying?

| | % |
|------------|----|
| Not at all | 53 |
| Moderately | 17 |
| Slightly | 13 |
| Very | 7 |
| Unknown | 10 |

PARENT ACTION

Parents shared their experiences of what action they took to try and support their child with their experiences of bullying. Such action included: taking time off work, changing schools and efforts to educate themselves in order to advocate for their child.

- Many of the parents reported taking time off work to support their child with their experiences of bullying, see Figure 3.
- Several parents reported that they had to leave their job.
- Some parents reported finding out more about bullying to better support their child: *“went on anti bullying course in London”* and *“having previous discussions about this with other parents”*.
- Moving schools was also a common response to addressing bullying, e.g. *“spent hours talking to teachers and finding a new school”*.

Figure 3: How many days parents have taken off work

| Time off range | % |
|--------------------|----|
| 1-5 days | 23 |
| 5-10 days | 39 |
| 2 weeks to 1 month | 15 |
| 1-2 months | 8 |
| 3-6 | 8 |
| Over a year | 8 |

WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED?

The survey also asked parents what they felt would have helped them and their child to manage the bullying.

- Participants felt school action and support was something that would have benefitted them on their journey: *‘Teachers to not ignore persistent subtle abuse (and even exacerbating it such as reading out test scores to whole class and making comments) and immediately tell children it is harmful and to think how it would feel the other way around.’*
- Parents called for greater school contact, interest and engagement in finding workable solutions and called for greater teacher training in recognising and resolving bullying and understanding the psychological impact on victims :

‘Long term plan to prevent.’
‘Effective action from the school.’

DISCUSSION

- The findings of this study highlight the negative impact their child being bullied can have on their well-being, their family well-being and work.
- Such findings highlight how bullying can impact on others not directly involved in the bullying behaviour.
- The findings highlight the need for greater support for parents and the need for more work on how schools and parents can work together to tackle bullying behaviour.



References
Please scan this QR code to access the references for this poster and to find out more about this study.

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