

HOW TO TACKLE BULLYING AND PREVENT SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN EUROPE

Keynote Presentation, Austrian Ministry of Education Conference,
Vienna,

Prävention und Intervention bei (Cyber)mobbing“ Die Bedeutung einer
umfassenden Schulstrategie für das physische und psychische
Wohlbefinden

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Downes, P. & Cefai, C. (2016). *How to tackle bullying and prevent school violence in Europe: Evidence and practices for strategies for inclusive and safe schools*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/how-to-prevent-and-tackle-bullying-and-school-violence-pbNC0415454/>

Aim/Scope of Report:

To inform policy-makers and practitioners at EU, national, regional and local level on strategies and practices for prevention of bullying and violence in schools across the EU.

Combines European legal and policy focus with international empirical research

A particular focus on bullying and violence with regard to age, ethnicity and migrants, disability, social inclusion, sexual orientations and gender.

* Examines evidence from European and international research on bullying in schools, aggression and violence, developmental psychology, and school health promotion.

*Informed also by responses on current national strategies in Europe from Members of the ET 2020 School Policy Working Group coordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, international researchers from ENSEC (European Network for Social and Emotional Competence) and a number of NGOs across EU Member States.

Supplemented by :

Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaite, V. (2017). *Structural Indicators for Developing Inclusive Systems in and around Schools in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/structural-indicators-for-inclusive-systems-in-and-around-schools-pbNC0116894/>

Serious Consequences of Bullying

There is a growing recognition of the serious impact of school bullying – on mental health, physical health and early school leaving

Victims are likely to experience low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Gladstone et al., 2006; Klomeck et al., 2009; Nansel et al., 2001; Radliff et al., 2015; Juvonen and Graham, 2014; Ttofi et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012; Biereld, 2014).

Victimisation (i.e. being bullied) has also been linked to lower academic achievement and other behaviours such as disengagement, absenteeism and early school leaving (Fried and Fried, 1996; Glew et al., 2005; Nakamoto and Schwartz, 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Green et al., 2010).

Victims are more likely to experience worse concentration in class (Boulton et al., 2008) and more interpersonal difficulties (Kumpulainen et al., 1998).

Beran (2008) concluded that preadolescents who are bullied are at some risk for demonstrating poor achievement, although this risk increases substantially if the child also receives little support from parents and is already disengaged from school.

The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (Green et al., 2010) age 16 young people who reported being bullied at any point between ages 14-16 are disproportionately likely to not be in education, employment or training.

A study of over 26,000 Finnish adolescents found that involvement in bullying was associated with a range of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and psychosomatic symptoms (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000)

Frequent victimisation at age 8 predicted later suicide attempts and completed suicides for both boys and girls, while frequent bullying perpetration at age 8 also predicted later suicide attempts and completed suicides for boys (Klomek et al., 2009).

Ttofi et al. (2011) reported that the probability of depression up to 36 years later was much larger for victimised students when compared to non-bullied peers, even after controlling for other factors.

In a recent large-scale study with 14 500 participants in the UK, Bowles et al. (2015) reported that peer victimisation in adolescence is a significant predictor of depression in early adulthood; about 1 in 3 cases of depression among young adults may be linked to peer victimisation in adolescence.

The worst off group however, appears to be the bully-victims, who experience higher levels of both internalised (depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms) and externalised (behaviour problems, delinquency) difficulties than either the victims or the bullying perpetrators (Nansel et al., 2004; Ivarsson et al., 2005; Kokkinos and Panayiotou, 2004; Houbre et al., 2006; Swearer et al., 2012).

Bully-victims are also more likely to come from dysfunctional families or have pre-existing conduct, behaviour or emotional problems and it has been suggested that these factors, rather than bullying per se, may explain adult outcomes (Sourander, Ronning et al., 2009).

The Finnish population based, longitudinal birth cohort study of 2551 boys from age 8 years to 16–20 years (Sourander et al., 2007) found that frequent bullies display high levels of psychiatric symptoms in childhood.

In their systematic review of 28 longitudinal studies, Ttofi et al. (2011b) and Farrington et al. (2012) reported that bullying perpetrators are likely to offend and to engage in violent behaviour six years later

Bullying perpetrators and bully/victims had the lowest connection to school and poorest relations with teachers (Raskauskas et al., 2010).

Frequent victimisation is associated with suicide attempts and completion, anxiety, depression, self-harm. Bullying perpetrators



are at risk of subsequent psychiatric symptoms, violent behaviour, anti-social personality disorder. International studies also associate bullying experiences with early school-leaving.

Bullying prevention is a child welfare and child protection issue (Downes & Cefai 2016).

Internationally Above Average Prevalence of Being Bullied in Austria

25% of 13 year old boys are bullied. 32% of 15 year old boys and 28% of 13 year old boys bully their peers (Currie et al. 2012)

Country		11 years		13 years		15 years		Range		Total	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	Range	
Austria		16	20	16	25	9	19	9-16	19-25	9-25	
Denmark		7	7	7	7	4	5	4-7	5-7	4-7	
Germany		11	11	10	9	8	12	8-11	9-12	8-11	
Greece		7	8	7	9	9	12	7-9	8-12	7-12	
Hungary		8	13	8	9	4	5	4-8	5-13	4-13	

TABLE 1. Peer Victimisation in Europe, % (i.e. those reporting being a victim of bullying)

Downes, P. & Cefai, C. (2016). How to tackle bullying and prevent school violence in Europe: Evidence and practices for strategies for inclusive and safe schools. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

BULLYING: A HIDDEN PROBLEM (Downes 2004)



“I’d have guards to guard me to stop anyone starting on me”
(4th class, M, FG)

“I would put cameras on the walls so they would know who is bullying”
(4th class, M, Q)

“bullys, blow up the school” (5th class, M, Q)

“I would make all the school a bullyfree zone” (6th class, M, Q)

“I would change all the bullies in my school to geeks” (6th class, F, Q)

“One of the biggest problems” in the school is bullying (5th class, M, FG)
but “you don’t wanna be a rat” (5th class, M, FG)

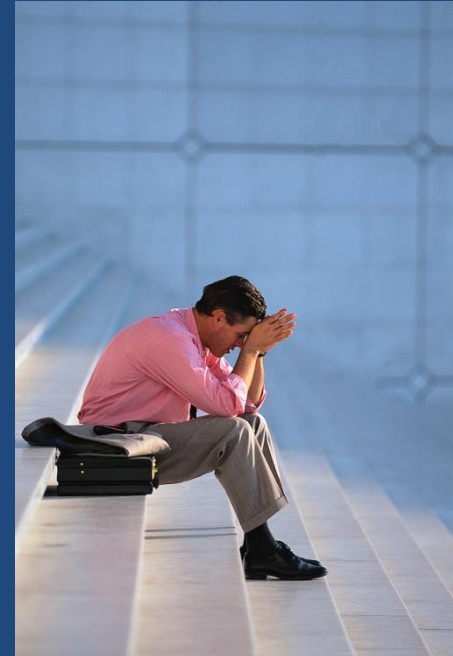
“I would be absent because sometimes I get bullied” (5th class, M, Q)

– “No-one will end up in school if they keep getting bullied” (6th class,
M, FG)

Teachers' and Wider Support Services Role in Preventing the Consequences of Bullying (Downes & Cefai 2016): Building on Students' Experiences

Given the seriousness of the long-term impacts of bullying (Mental Health, Early School Leaving) a prevention strategy needs to encompass not only prevention of the bullying but ***prevention of the consequences*** of bullying through system level emotional and social supports

Supports could intervene at an early stage to prevent the escalation of experiential processes, such as selfdoubting and double victimising, described in a Swedish context (Thornberg et al., 2013).



Radliff et al. (2015) hopelessness as a mediator for bullying.
-469 US middle school students, victims reported the highest levels of hopelessness and significantly higher scores compared with students not involved in bullying.
Hopelessness was a mediator for victims, but not for bully-victims.

Thornberg's (2015) Swedish ethnographic fieldwork in two public schools (age 10 to 12 years):
Resignation and a range of escape or avoidance behaviour, such as social withdrawal and avoiding others, as well as trying to be socially invisible in the classroom and other school settings.

- Also prevent consequences of aggressive communication for perpetrators through early Intervention (Downes & Cefai 2016)



Beyond Authoritarian Teaching and Discriminatory Bullying

Teacher discriminatory bullying of students in a sample of 1352 immigrant and Roma students as part of a wider sample of 8817 students across 10 European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain) (Elamé 2013).

Elamé's (2013) 10 country European study regarding 'the fundamental importance' of teacher influence on discriminatory bullying

- Those immigrant and Roma students who think the teacher exhibits similar behaviour towards 'native' and immigrant and Roma children in the class are those bullied least in the last 3 months.

In contrast, 'those who declare that their teacher favours native children over immigrant/Roma students are more vulnerable to suffer some form of bullying.

Frequent victimisation is associated with suicide attempts and completion, anxiety, depression, self-harm. Bullying perpetrators are at risk of subsequent psychiatric symptoms, violent behaviour, anti-social personality disorder. International studies also associate bullying experiences with early school-leaving.

- Greek study (Kapari and Stavrou, 2010) of 114 secondary school students (58 female, 56 male) drawn from three Greek public middle schools.
- In schools with high levels of bullying, students consider their treatment by adults to be unequal, the rules to be unfair, and student participation in decision-making to be very limited.



Authoritarian Teaching

WHO (2012) Modifications that appear to have merit include:

- establishing a caring atmosphere that promotes autonomy;
- providing positive feedback;
- **not publicly humiliating students who perform poorly;**

Cefai & Cooper (2011), Malta review of qualitative research: 'the autocratic and rigid behaviour management approach adopted by many teachers in their response to misbehaviour. Their blaming and punitive approach was seen in many cases as leading to an exacerbation of the problem...It looks...that perceived victimisation by teachers was more prevalent and had more impact than victimisation and bullying by peers'



Homophobic Bullying Directly Addressed in National Anti-Bullying Strategy

Austria	No
Belgium (Fl)	No, but some focus in anti-discrimination law
Bulgaria	No
Cyprus	No
Czech Republic	No
England	No, but in individual schools
Estonia	No
Finland	No
France	No, not directly but it is on the Ministerial agenda
Greece	No
Hungary	No
Ireland	Yes

- * Homophobic bullying lacks a strategic focus in many EU Member States. According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' survey, the highest levels of hostility and prejudice towards LGBTI groups recorded in the EU are in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.
- * It is notable that very few of these countries address prevention of homophobic bullying in schools in a strategic manner.
- * The prevention of discriminatory bullying in school (against groups such as Roma, minorities, migrants, as well as against those experiencing poverty and socio-economic exclusion) needs a stronger strategic focus in many EU Member States.

Holistic Systemic Issues: Percentage of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students who Agree/Disagree with the Following Statements: School Belonging and Feeling Like an Outsider (PISA 2012)
(OECD 2012)

Countries	I feel like I belong at school, % Agree (S.E)	I feel like an outsider (or left out of things at school), % Disagree (S.E)
Austria	82 (1.6)	89.9 (1.1)
Belgium	63.5 (1.6)	88.4 (1.0)
Czech Republic	73.6 (1.9)	80.5 (1.6)
Denmark	69.3 (1.6)	90.3 (1.0)
Estonia	78.2 (1.8)	90.0 (1.3)
Finland	80.5 (1.1)	89.2 (1.0)
France	38 (1.7)	73.2 (1.8)
Germany	83.8 (1.6)	89.7 (1.4)
Greece	87.8 (1.2)	83.9 (1.4)
Hungary	83.5 (1.1)	85.6 (1.6)
Ireland	76.7 (1.5)	91.6 (1.0)
Italy	75 (0.9)	89.3 (0.6)
United Kingdom	74.9 (1.5)	86.9 (1.1)
OECD Average	78.1 (0.3)	86.2 (0.2)

A Holistic Curricular Focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Bullying Prevention: Emotional Awareness and Students' Voices



A study of more than 213 programs found that if a school implements a quality SEL curriculum, they can expect better student behaviour and an 11 point increase in test scores (Durlak et al., 2011).

The gains that schools see in achievement come from a variety of factors—students feel safer and more connected to school and academic learning, children and teachers build strong relationships.

Durlak et al. (2011) highlight a range of SEL benefits indirectly related to bullying and school violence, for outcomes on SEL skills, Attitudes, Positive Social Behaviour, Conduct Problems, Emotional Distress and Academic Performance.

Durlak et al (2011) classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted SEL programs so these can be incorporated into routine educational activities and do not require outside personnel.

Sklad et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis of recent, school-based, universal programs concentrated on ones that promote development rather than prevent specific problems such as bullying.

-SEL programs showed statistically significant effects on social skills, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement and prosocial behaviour.

Downes (2010) SEL across curricular areas: empathy in history, language and emotion in English, conflict role play in drama etc.

4. Indicated Prevention: Speech and Language Therapists as Part of Multidisciplinary Teams

The need for speech and language therapists to be linked with schools, as part of multidisciplinary teams to engage in targeted intervention for language development, emerges from international research regarding language impairment as a risk factor for engagement in disruptive behaviour.

Eigsti and Cicchetti (2004) found that preschool aged children who had experienced maltreatment prior to age 2 exhibited language delays in vocabulary and language complexity. The mothers of these maltreated children directed fewer utterances to their children and produced a smaller number of overall utterances compared to mothers of non-maltreated children, with a significant association between maternal utterances and child language variables.

Rates of language impairment reach 24 % to 65 % in samples of children identified as exhibiting disruptive behaviours (Benasich et al., 1993), and 59 % to 80 % of preschool- and school-age children identified as exhibiting disruptive behaviours also exhibit language delays (Beitchman et al., 1986; Brinton and Fujiki, 1993; Stevenson et al., 1985).

A study of children with communication disorders found that children with language impairments, who were more widely accepted, seemed to be protected from the risk of being bullied (Savage, 2005).



The particular lack of speech and language therapists (SLTs) in European schools as part of multidisciplinary teams, highlighted in the Eurydice report (2014) on early school leaving, is of real concern here for students at the chronic need, indicated prevention level, where maternal language difficulties may be affecting their violent behaviour

The level of maternal language difficulty does not have to be at a clinical level of difficulty for it to centrally contribute to a range of school-related problems, potentially including aggression and bullying, as well as hindering social relationships and sense of belonging to school.

A Differentiated Approach to Involving Parents for Bullying Prevention: Family Support Services for High Risk Chronic Need

Systematic review by Lereya et al. (2013) involving 70 studies which concluded that both victims and bully/victims are more likely to be exposed to negative parenting behaviour, including abuse and neglect and maladaptive parenting.



Cross et al.'s (2012) Australian study - all grade levels from 1 (5–6-year olds) to 7 (12–13-year olds).

The family level activities worked in partnership with parents by building their awareness, attitudes and self-efficacy to role model and help their children to develop social competence and to prevent or respond to bullying. These activities also encouraged school and parent communication and parents' engagement with the school to reduce student bullying.

The high intensity intervention (wholeschool, capacity building support and ***active parent involvement***) is somewhat more effective than the moderate intensity intervention (whole-school and capacity building support only), and substantially more effective than the low intensity intervention (the standard school program with no capacity support).

Langford et al.'s (2014) Cochrane Review for the WHO on health promoting school interventions highlighted that 'The majority of studies only attempted to engage with families (rather than the community), most commonly by sending out newsletters to parents. Other activities included: family homework assignments, parent information evenings or training workshops, family events, or inviting parents to become members of the school health committee'.

Downes & Cefai (2016): Again this emphasis is overwhelmingly one where the parent is a passive recipient of information, with the exception of the example of the invitation for them to be members of the school health committee.

Downes (2014) Parental involvement is a dimension of children's rights

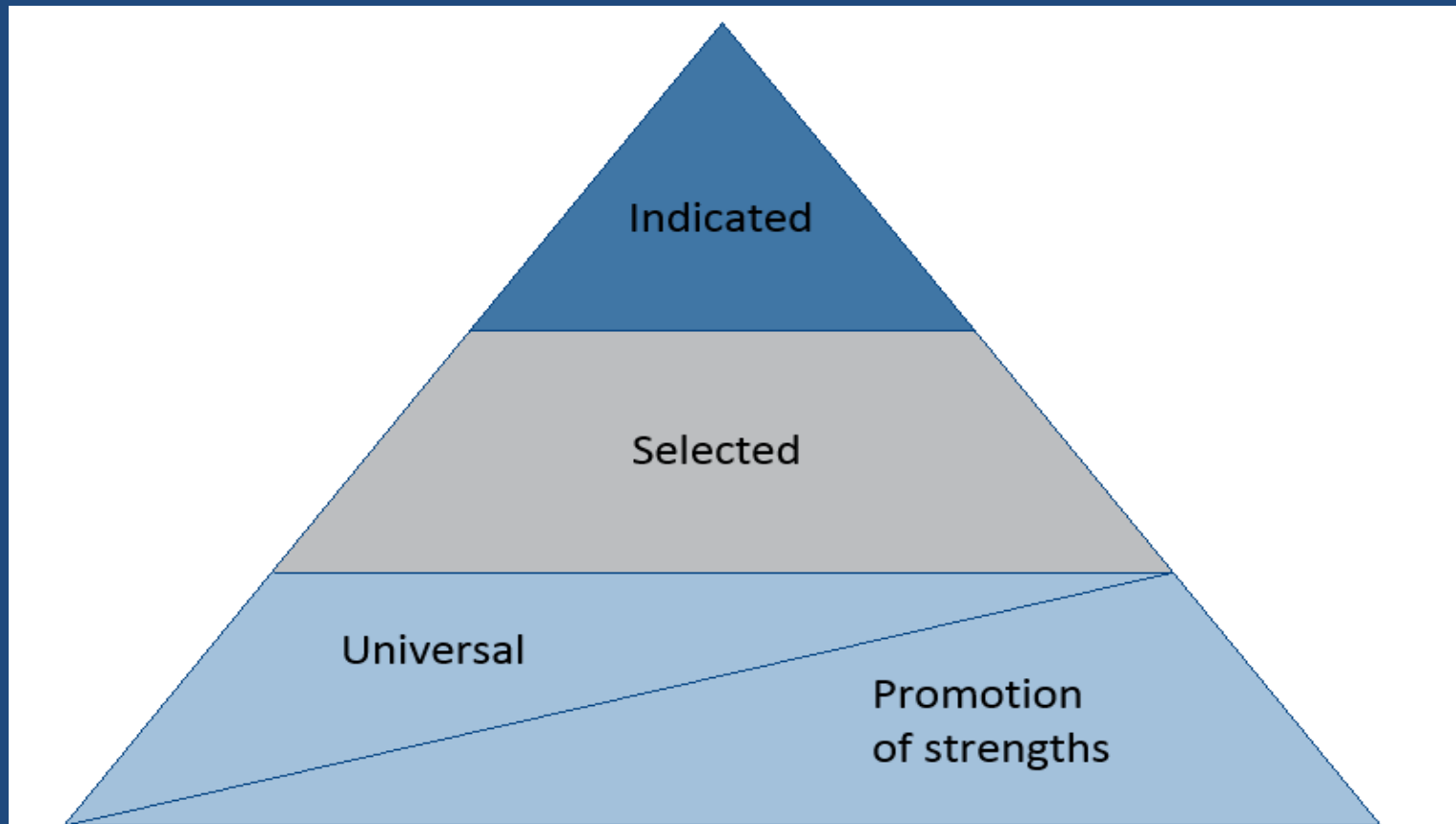


Differentiated Needs – Selected Prevention Focus Neglected

Universal – *All*

Selected – *Some, Groups, Moderate Risk*

Indicated – *Individual, Intensive, Chronic Need*



5. Limited Quality of Research – Older Students' Voices and Co-Construction of Resources for School Bullying and Violence Prevention

Yeager et al. (2015) raise a concern about the limitations of intervention strategies for older adolescents that rely on adult authority or that imply that they lack basic social or emotional skills.

Secondary school students may resist being literally 'programmed' into particular modes of behaviour and thought. A shift in conceptualisation is needed to make these students subjects of policy rather than simply objects of policy and programmes.

In a US context, Yeager et al. (2015) question state mandates regarding anti-bullying programmes for high schools – though not for middle schools. They recognise the need for new interventions to be developed and shown to be effective for older adolescents.

A notable aspect of their conclusion is that it is not sufficient to 'age up' existing materials that are tested with younger children, e.g. by switching out the examples or the graphic art used in the activities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child may be less influential in US school and research contexts, given that it is not ratified by the US, unlike all EU countries. This would invite consultation with young people in the design of materials for anti-bullying, building on Art. 12, with increasing input from older students.

Avoiding intervention for older students would be a legal abdication of responsibility.

Classroom Climate and Bullying: Questioning A Peer Defenders Approach in KiVa, Finland (Downes & Cefai 2016)

-Empirical evidence of increased bullying for peer interventions in some international contexts, evidence of student fear of the consequences of intervening.

-Recognition of bullying as a child welfare and child protection issue renders it problematic that responsibility may be displaced onto other children to provide support and active defending.

-Schools have a duty of care to the individual and not simply to the aggregate of children, so that even gains in the aggregate do not justify disproportionate risk to an individual

‘defender’ from a perpetrator entrenched in bullying behaviour and likely to target defenders that challenge him/her.

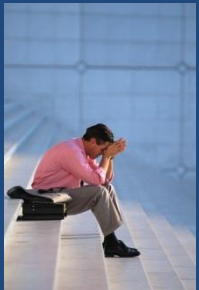
-*primum non nocere* (first do no harm)



- **Common Strategic Approach for School Bullying, Violence Prevention and Early School Leaving Prevention through common system responses for inclusive systems.**

Quiroga, Janosz and Bissett (2013) 493 high-risk French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal

*depression symptoms at the beginning of secondary school are related to higher dropout mainly by being associated with pessimistic views about the likelihood to reach desired school outcomes; student negative self-beliefs are in turn related to lower self-reported academic performance and predict a higher risk of dropping out.



Quiroga et al. (2013) “interventions that target student mental health and negative self-perceptions are likely to improve dropout prevention”.

Common system supports needed for bullying and early school leaving prevention (Downes & Cefai 2016)

School Climate, Teasing, Bullying

In a sample of 276 high schools, Cornell et al. (2013) found that risk of early school leaving increases if a student experiences an atmosphere of teasing and bullying even if s/he is not personally bullied.



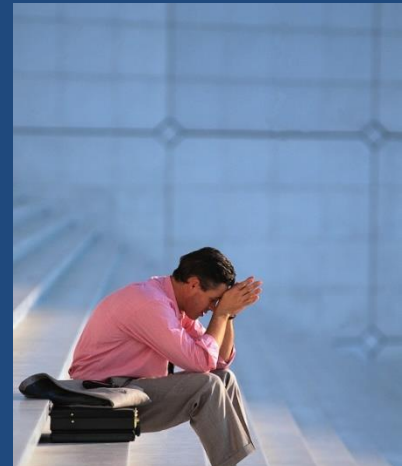
Cornell et al. (2013) “ Notably, the increased dropout count that was associated with Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying was quite similar to the increases that were associated with FRPM [i.e., poverty] and academic failure”.

6. Common system supports needed for bullying and early school leaving prevention (Downes & Cefai 2016)

A striking commonality of interests with regard to strategic approaches for bullying prevention in schools and early school leaving prevention:

- Direct and indirect effects of bullying on early school leaving relevant to perpetrators, victims (school absence, negative interpersonal relations with peers and conflict with teachers, low concentration in school, decreased academic performance, lower school belonging, satisfaction, and pedagogical well-being, with the effects of bullying exacerbated for those already at risk of early school leaving, negative school climate influences).

- Common systems of supports (transition focus from primary to post-primary, multiprofessional teams for complex needs, language support needs, family support services and education of parents regarding their approaches to communication and supportive discipline with their children, outreach to families to provide supports, addressing academic difficulties).
- Common issues requiring an integrated strategic response, including the prevention of displacement effects of a problem from one domain to another, such as in suspension/expulsion which may make a bullying problem become an early school leaving problem.
- Common causal antecedents (negative school climate, behavioural difficulties, trauma)



- Teacher professional development and pre-service preparation focusing on developing teachers' relational competences for a promoting a positive school and classroom climate, including a focus on teachers' conflict resolution and diversity awareness competences
- Early warning systems.



Selected and Indicated Prevention

Even apart from poverty related depression,
emotional distress contributes to early school leaving:
LONELINESS: Frostad et al. 2015 – intention to drop out



Quiroga et al. (2013) 493 high-risk French-speaking adolescents
living in Montreal

*depression symptoms at the beginning of secondary school are
related to higher dropout mainly by being associated with pessimistic
views about the likelihood to reach desired school outcomes; student
negative self-beliefs are in turn related to lower self-reported
academic performance and predict a higher risk of dropping out.

Quiroga et al. (2013) “interventions that target student mental health
and negative self-perceptions are likely to improve dropout prevention”.

The downward spiral of mental disorders and educational attainment: a systematic review on early school leaving Pascale Esch, Valéry Bocquet, Charles Pull, Sophie Couffignal, Torsten Lehnert, Marc Graas, Laurence Fond-Harmant and Marc Ansseau. BMC Psychiatry 2014 14:237

When adjusted for socio-demographic factors, mood disorders (e.g. depression) were significantly related to school dropout

Among anxiety disorders, after controlling for potentially confounding factors, social phobia was a strong predictor of poor educational outcomes

...as indicated by early school leavers themselves, were feeling too nervous in class and being anxious to speak in public, both representing symptoms of social phobia

School Climate, Teasing, Bullying



Cornell et al. (2013) “a climate of teasing and bullying in the school also deserves consideration. Notably, the increased dropout count that was associated with Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying was quite similar to the increases that were associated with FRPM [i.e., poverty] and academic failure”.

Cornell et al. (2013) note that dropout programs often focus too narrowly on changes in individual students, without considering broader peer and school influences.

Supports could intervene at an early stage to prevent the escalation of experiential processes, such as selfdoubting and double victimising, described in a Swedish context (Thornberg et al., 2013), hopelessness in a US context (Radliff et al. 2015) .

National Ministries of Education (Structural Indicators – Yes/No) – Whether for a right to health approach or a quality in systems approach to address system blockages

- Existence of a national school bullying and violence prevention strategy.
- Existence of a national coordinating committee to implement this strategy as part of an inclusive systems approach.
- Representation of minority groups/NGOs on national coordinating committee for inclusive systems.
- Representation of students on national coordinating committee for inclusive systems.
- Representation of parents on national coordinating committee for inclusive systems.
- Cross-department scope of national coordinating committee for inclusive systems to include health and social services.

- Bullying prevention built into school self-evaluation processes.
- Bullying prevention built into school external evaluation processes
- Explicit strategy to address bullying together with early school leaving.
- Explicit strategy to directly address discriminatory bullying in schools.
- Explicit strategy to directly address homophobic bullying in schools

(Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017) Promoting Inclusive Systems

Inclusive systems in and around schools invites concern with supportive, quality learning environments, on welcoming and caring schools and classrooms, and on preventing discrimination.

It addresses the needs of students in a holistic way (their emotional, physical, cognitive and social needs), and recognises their individual talents and voices.

It is open to the voices and active participation of parents, and also wider multidisciplinary teams and agencies. Inclusive systems in and around schools particularly focus on the differentiated needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups, including those at risk of early school leaving, bullying and alienation from society.

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