



**Racist and Faith
Targeted Bullying
in the UK:
a review of
existing literature
2020**

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This literature review examined the existing literature on peer-on-peer racist and faith targeted bullying among children and young people in the UK.

The review specifically looked at bullying through the lenses of race/ethnicity and religion. By extension, the review did not look at the general prevalence of racism, xenophobia and prejudice among children and young people in the UK in schools. Not that these issues are not important, they very much are, but they were beyond the scope of this targeted review.

Furthermore, the review only looked at children and young people being bullied, not at those bullying. Again, this was not because this is not an important issue, but firstly, there was very limited research on this and second, it was beyond the scope of the review.

KEY MESSAGES

- There is a lack of recent research, particularly since the 2016 Brexit referendum.
- If you look at BAME groups and religious minorities in the research as a whole, it appeared that overall they are not more likely to be bullied than others.
- Whilst it is difficult to undertake research on racist and faith targeted bullying in the UK due to low numbers of BAME children in some schools, it is not appropriate to consider BAME as one group when looking at bullying. This is due to the wide variation of experiences across these groups which has been identified in the research.
- Among the groups more likely to be bullied were Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, asylum seeker/refugee and mixed-race children and young people.
- The type of racist and faith targeted bullying most often reported was name calling.
- Several studies suggested that being bullied in terms of one's background and identity could have profound negative consequences compared to other types of bullying.
- There were research gaps, including cyberbullying, specific ethnic and religious groups, those with English as an additional language and the nature and impact of racist and faith-targeted bullying.



When considering bullying it is important to define it. The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:

THE REPETITIVE, INTENTIONAL HURTING OF ONE PERSON OR GROUP BY ANOTHER PERSON OR GROUP, WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP INVOLVES AN IMBALANCE OF POWER. IT CAN HAPPEN FACE TO FACE OR ONLINE

METHOD

To identify relevant studies and reports, this review took a systematic approach using combinations of the following search terms in different databases and search engines:

"BULLY*"; "BULLI*"; "HARASS*";
"RACE*"; "RACI*"; "ETHNI*";
"ETHNO*"; "FAITH"; "RELIGION";
"BELIE*"; "CHILD*"; "YOUNG";
"ADOSLESCEN*"; "YOUTH"; "UK";
"UNITED KINGDOM"; "BRITAIN";
"BRITISH"; "SCOTLAND";
"SCOTTISH"; "WALES"; "WELSH";
"IRISH"; AND "IRELAND".

This list of search terms was devised to identify research that 1) focussed on bullying, 2) focussed on race, ethnicity and religion, and 3) focussed on the

UK and its nations. The terms were put into databases, including PubMed, Medline Ovid, APA Psychinfo, ASSIA and Sociological Abstracts. Furthermore, the terms were entered into Google Scholar, Google and ABA expertise to expand on the database results and find further examples of studies and, particularly, grey literature.

The first search gave 339 results, which after eliminating duplicates resulted in 250 studies. After reviewing titles, this was reduced to 98 studies, which was further reduced to 35 after reading abstracts and executive summaries. After reading the full texts, a total of 21 studies were included in the review.

TERMINOLOGY

BAME: at the point of writing the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) is widely used and broadly understood in the UK for monitoring and planning diversity. For this reason, we think it's appropriate for us to use it as a descriptor. However, we do recognise that it is problematic and some of the reasons for this are outlined within this document.

Mixed-race: throughout this document we refer to people whose parents are of different ethnicities or races as 'mixed-race'. This term is widely used as a survey race/ethnicity question response option (see e.g. Government Statistical Service, 2015), and we have used it because it is widely used and understood. We are, however, very aware of the ongoing conversation about the appropriateness of the term.

FINDINGS

The 21 studies included academic research, newspaper articles, and reports published by the government (including devolved governments) and the third sector. The oldest study was from 1993 and the newest from 2020, but the majority of the research (13 studies) had been published in the past ten years, with most data pre-dating 2015. Most of the reviewed studies focussed on one or two United Kingdom nations, and England in particular was found to be well covered by the research, although there were also studies looking at Scotland, Northern Ireland and, in one case, Wales.

All in all, 21 studies that specifically examine racist and faith targeted bullying is a relatively high number, given the specialised nature of the sub-field, which suggests that the topic has received at least some degree of attention, particularly since 2010. 13 of the studies employed quantitative methods, mostly to try and assess the prevalence of racist and faith targeted bullying. The majority of the survey-based studies used an adapted version of Olweus' Bully/Victim questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). The use of Olweus' framework also meant that many studies implicitly incorporated his definition of bullying, which has also informed ABA's current definition. A further five studies employed qualitative methods, or mixed methods with small samples, mostly to examine experiences of racist and faith targeted bullying.

Three publications used secondary data to either present news stories or recommend policies. The methods ranged from small and focussed qualitative studies to large-scale studies with thousands of participants, such as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), the Crime Survey from England and Wales (Department for Education, 2018b), the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), as well as smaller study-specific samples.

Several studies (e.g. Department for Education, 2018a; Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Human Rights Committee, 2017) noted how separating race/ethnicity and faith/religion can be difficult in practice, as the categories to some degree overlap. This complexity, for instance, is reflected in the Department for Education and Skills' working definition of racist bullying from 2005:

"THE TERM RACIST BULLYING REFERS TO A RANGE OF HURTFUL BEHAVIOUR, BOTH PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL, THAT MAKES A PERSON FEEL UNWELCOME, MARGINALISED, EXCLUDED, POWERLESS OR WORTHLESS BECAUSE OF THEIR COLOUR, ETHNICITY, CULTURE, FAITH COMMUNITY, NATIONAL ORIGIN OR NATIONAL STATUS"

Department For Education And Skills, 2005: 33)

PREVALENCE OF RACIST AND FAITH TARGETED BULLYING

The overall prevalence of bullying is an area which has attracted attention for some time, as it can give useful indications of the level of the problem. In general it appeared that around 22-30% of all children and young people report being bullied (Department for Education, 2018a; Ditch the Label, 2019). The reviewed literature touched on different aspects, including prevalence of racist bullying, the prevalence of racist cyberbullying, and the prevalence of faith targeted bullying.

The one finding that came through in all studies examining prevalence based on large samples was that, although racist and faith targeted bullying does happen, if you consider BAME children and young people as a whole group they are generally *not* more likely to be bullied than their white peers

(Department for Education, 2018a, 2018b; Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Green et al., 2010; Moran et al., 1993; Przybylski, 2018; Sweeting & West, 2001; Tippett et al., 2013; Wolke et al., 2001). These studies base their findings on children and young people's self-reporting of bullying, usually by employing a version of Olweus' (1996) questions that ask about perceived bullying as well as concrete incidences. In a report based on the LSYPE dataset, the Department for Education noted:

"YOUNG PEOPLE FROM AFRICAN, PAKISTANI, BANGLADESHI, INDIAN AND OTHER ASIAN BACKGROUNDS WERE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS LIKELY TO REPORT BEING BULLIED THAN WHITE AND MIXED ETHNICITY STUDENTS. (...)"



However, it is important to take a critical look at these findings and the report was clear that:

"THERE COULD BE A NUMBER OF REASONS BEHIND THIS. FOR EXAMPLE, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES MAY EXIST, PERHAPS IN TERMS OF WHAT IS CLASSIFIED AS BULLYING, OR WHETHER YOUNG PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS ETHNICITIES ARE AS LIKELY TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND REPORT IT. THERE MAY ALSO BE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE PLACES IN WHICH THEY LIVE WHICH INFLUENCE THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING IN DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS"

Department for Education, 2018a: 27

Several studies noted how the finding that BAME children and young people might be less likely to be bullied was surprising, as it contradicted a lot of anecdotal evidence and observations. However, the recurrence of this finding across studies, methods and populations does indicate that it is difficult to dismiss entirely. This finding of course does not mean there is no reason for concern. As examined further below, there are differences between groups and racist bullying can have a significant impact on the victims. However, in terms of prevalence the research suggests that ethnic minority children and young people as a whole are not at increased risk of being bullied.

In contrast, a smaller number of studies indicated that BAME groups are generally *more* likely to be bullied. In two cases it was not clear how this claim was supported by the data (Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Human Rights Committee, 2017; Myers & Bhopal, 2017), but two other publications stand out. One survey of teachers (Department for Education, 2020) found that 18% of teachers had witnessed bullying targeting race or ethnicity either 'often' or 'very often' (the only types of bullying observed more often were sexist and homophobic bullying).

The other publication was a Guardian article, which found that schools' reporting of racial abuse was growing (Marsh & Mohdin, 2018), although it was not clear whether the authors distinguished between abuse and bullying. It was interesting to note, however, that none of the publications arguing that BAME are more at risk of being bullied used self-reporting. This could suggest a discrepancy between how children and young people and their teachers report bullying.

18% OF TEACHERS HAD WITNESSED BULLYING TARGETING RACE OR ETHNICITY EITHER 'OFTEN' OR 'VERY OFTEN' (THE ONLY TYPES OF BULLYING OBSERVED MORE OFTEN WERE SEXIST AND HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING)

In terms of online bullying, few of the reviewed studies touched directly on this aspect. The most notable was an examination of bullying in mobile games in Scotland (Przybylski, 2018), which found that BAME children and young people were not more likely to be bullied online than their white peers. The study did, however, find that the nature of the bullying was different, and that BAME children and young people were more likely to report serious and repeated online bullying.

Although many studies conflated racist and faith targeted bullying, a few studies specifically mentioned the prevalence of this type (BeatBullying, 2008; Department for Education, 2018a; Ditch the Label, 2019; Green et al., 2010; Human Rights Committee, 2017). As with bullying related to race and ethnicity, it would appear that religious children and young people are not at increased risk of being bullied. Beat Bullying's Interfaith Report from 2008 thus noted:

Furthermore, the LSYPE dataset implies that children and young people to whom religion is very important (regardless of which religion) are overall less likely to report being bullied (Department for Education, 2018a), which could indicate that in some cases being religious can work as a remedying factor in terms of bullying. As with racist bullying, these findings do not mean that faith targeted bullying is not a problem to be addressed, but overall being religious does not seem to make children and young people more likely to be bullied.



"OF THOSE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PRACTICE A RELIGION (47%), 23% REPORTED BEING BULLIED BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH. ONE IN FOUR YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTING FAITH-BASED BULLYING, ALTHOUGH NO HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL TRENDS CONCERNING OTHER ASPECTS OF BULLYING, IS WORRIINGLY HIGH WHEN YOU CONSIDER OUR BASE IS THE 48% OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO REPORTED SUBSCRIBING TO A RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND THE 37% WHO PRACTICE"

Beatbullying, 2008: 11

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ETHNICITIES AND FAITH GROUPS

There was generally very little research examining bullying levels across different groups, as also noted by other researchers:

"There is a large variation in what is currently known about different forms of identity-based bullying. Homophobic, racial and disablist bullying are comparatively well researched, but very little is known in regard to bullying related to gender identity, asylum seekers and refugees, or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children" (Tippett et Al., 2010: iv)

Most often, comparisons were simply made between 'white' and 'BAME', glossing over differences within these groups. In the case of quantitative survey studies, the reason for this omission was often the sample sizes, which would lead to significantly weakened statistical power if divided into sub-groups. However, reporting on overall tendencies glossed over variations within the groups.

Some BAME groups, such as children and young people of African, Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage, appeared to be *less* likely to be bullied (Department for Education, 2018a, 2018b; Tippett et al., 2013). This, however, appeared to be outweighed by other BAME groups, such as those with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, asylum seeker/refugee and mixed-race backgrounds, who in some cases were found to be significantly *more likely* to be bullied, as explained further below.



There was overall little research on the bullying of children and young people with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. However, what little evidence there is suggested that this group is significantly more likely to experience bullying, as noted in a report by the Welsh government:

"There are indications that racist bullying is a highly common experience for Wales' Traveller and Gypsy children and young people. In a Save the Children survey of Traveller and Gypsy children and young people (...) half the respondents said that school would be better if they weren't picked on" (The Welsh Government, 2011).

THOSE WITH GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER, ASYLUM SEEKER/REFUGEE AND MIXED-RACE BACKGROUNDS, ... WERE FOUND TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO BE BULLIED

Particularly name calling appeared to be a prevailing form of bullying of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people (Lloyd & Stead, 2001), and whilst a 2010 study found that while around 75% of schools had anti-racist bullying policies in place, less than 40% had policies that focussed on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people (Tippett et al., 2010).

Asylum seekers and refugee children and young people appeared to be both susceptible to bullying and under researched. This situation was commented on in some of the publications reviewed, such as BeatBullying's interfaith report:

"[The BeatBullying Interfaith pilot programme] highlights the differences experienced by young people of differing faiths, those who are new exiles and those who are seeking asylum" (BeatBullying, 2008: 17).

IN A NUMBER OF STUDIES, MIXED RACED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SEEN AS A SUB-GROUP WITHIN THE 'WHITE' CATEGORY, BUT A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DATA SUGGESTED THAT THE EXPERIENCES OF THE TWO GROUPS ARE DIFFERENT

However, none of the studies examined here looked at asylum seekers and refugees as a separate group in terms of bullying, which meant there was a gap in the research regarding asylum seekers and refugee children and young people.

Another group to stand out in terms of experiencing racist bullying is mixed-race children and young people. In a number of studies, this group was seen as a sub-group within the 'white' category, but a closer look at the data suggested that the experiences of the two groups are different. Indeed, in the LSYPE data, the 'mixed' ethnic group comes out as the one most likely to be bullied (33% as compared to 32% for the 'white' group) (Department for Education, 2018a). This was also observed in a previous wave of the data:

"White and mixed-race pupils were the most likely to have been bullied in the last three years (66 per cent and 67 per cent respectively), while Indian and Bangladeshi pupils were the least likely to have been bullied (49 per cent and 54 per cent)" (Tippett et al., 2010: 19).

THERE WAS A GAP IN THE RESEARCH REGARDING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

However, it remains unclear why mixed-race children and young people appear to be much more likely to be bullied.

Several minority groups were not mentioned much in the reviewed research, if at all. This included children and young people with Jewish, Eastern European and Asian heritage.

A NUMBER OF STUDIES FOUND THAT NAME CALLING WAS A PARTICULARLY COMMON TYPE OF BULLYING EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BELONGING TO ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

TYPES OF BULLYING

Although BAME groups on the whole are not more likely to be bullied, the types of bullying they experience differ. Building on Olweus (1996), most of the research referred to five types of bullying: name calling, social exclusion, theft, threats of violence, and actual violence, with some recent studies adding cyberbullying as a sixth type. A number of studies found that name calling was a particularly common type of bullying experienced by children and young people belonging to ethnic and religious minorities (Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Green et al., 2010; Moran et al., 1993; The Welsh Government, 2011). In an early study from 1993, Moran et al. noted:

"Given this general similarity [in terms of bullying prevalence], one contrast does stand out. Only Asian children report name-calling on the basis of race. (...) The qualitative responses suggested that some of the names and statements could be very hurtful to the recipient" (Moran et al., 1993: 439).

Other studies found that name calling was also experienced by many religious children and young people, regardless of which particular religion they practiced. For example, both Muslim (BeatBullying, 2008; Human Rights Committee, 2017) and Christian (Department for Education, 2018a; Moulin, 2016) children and young people have reported being called names because of their faith.

EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING

Several of the reviewed publications mentioned how race and faith targeted bullying has the potential to be more impactful than other types of bullying because it targets not just the individual but their entire family, heritage, and culture:



"WE ALSO FOUND THAT NOT ALL BULLYING HAS THE SAME IMPACT. BULLYING AROUND FAITH OR RACE HAD THE POTENTIAL TO HOLD DEEPER IMPACT FOR INDIVIDUALS AS IT EXTENDS TO THEIR COMMUNITY, CULTURE OR FAITH. DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITIES ARE THUS CORE ISSUES TO ADDRESS WITHIN BULLYING AND HARASSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE"

Human Rights Committee, 2017: 19

Some of the publications included very disturbing cases of racist and faith targeted bullying, which clearly had serious consequences for the victims, sometimes repeated though multiple generations in the same family (BeatBullying, 2008; Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Lloyd & Stead, 2001; Moulin, 2016; The Welsh Government, 2011). However, it was not clear from the data whether the individual experiences of racist and faith targeted bullying was worse than other types of bullying, and in all circumstances such judgements would be very difficult to make.



NORTHERN IRELAND

In terms of racist and faith targeted bullying, Northern Ireland appeared different to the rest of the UK on two accounts. Firstly, the proportion of BAME people is relatively small, around 1%, and has a different composition from the rest of the UK, with the largest group being Chinese (Connolly & Keenan, 2006). Secondly, the Troubles and the historic divide between Catholics and Protestants appeared to overshadow many other religious differences (McGuckin & Lewis, 2003).

There are few findings on the prevalence of racist and faith targeted bullying in Northern Ireland, although one study found that over 90% of students thought it was 'wrong' to bully because of race or skin colour (RSM McClure Watters, 2011). However, another study argued that children and young people in Northern Ireland experienced higher levels of bullying compared to others within and outside the UK. The study

linked this to ethnic and religious conflict, although it is worth noting that the study was conducted in 2003 and thus closer to the Troubles:

"AS HIGHLIGHTED, NORTHERN IRELAND IS A REGION IN TRANSITION FROM A LENGTHY PERIOD OF ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICT. AS THE INFLUENCE OF 'THE TROUBLES' ON CHILDREN IN THE PROVINCE HAS NOT BEEN FULLY RESEARCHED OR UNDERSTOOD, DETAILED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SCHOOL BULLYING MAY OFFER AN INSIGHT TO A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN COST OF THE CONFLICT"

McGuckin & Lewis, 2003: 284).

Furthermore, a qualitative study suggested that 13% of the interviewed BAME children parents had experienced some degree of racist harassment, often in the form of name calling (Connolly & Keenan, 2006).



CONCLUSIONS

In general, the evidence base on racist and faith targeted bullying was found to be better than expected, with 21 focussed studies covering prevalence, specific groups, the character of the bullying, experiences of being bullied, and the case of Northern Ireland. **However, all of the data used by the research had been collected prior to 2016 and the Brexit referendum, the aftermath of which may well have impacted on how racist and faith targeted bullying occurs.** Furthermore, there was a gap in the research around cyberbullying, with only one study exploring this aspect in depth.

Whilst, as discussed, more up to date research is needed the main finding in terms of prevalence was that BAME groups and religious minorities are *overall* not more likely to be bullied than others. **This does not mean that racist and faith targeted bullying is not a problem, it only means that it overall does not seem to be more prevalent than other types of bullying. It would also appear that this overall tendency conceals important differences, where some groups were significantly less likely to be bullied while others were significantly more likely to be bullied. Among the latter were groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, asylum seeker/refugee and mixed-race children and young people, although the research on these groups was patchy. For Jewish, Eastern European children and**

East Asian children and young people, there was little to no research.

These findings suggested that the blanket term 'BAME' might not be very useful in the context of bullying, as it covers a range of different ethnicities and experiences.

To fully understand the reality of racist and faith targeted bullying, it is important to distinguish between different groups, although this would require both quantitative studies with significant sample sizes and a larger body of ethnicity-specific qualitative studies to explore experiences in depth.

The type of bullying most often reported was name calling, and several studies suggested that being bullied in terms of one's background and identity could have profound consequences compared to other types of bullying. This is an area that requires more research, both in terms of the nature of the racist and faith targeted bullying and in terms of its impact, including its impact over time.



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