hbsc
ENGLAND

HBSC England Factsheet series: BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Findings from the 2021-2022 HBSC study for England

HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN:
World Health Organisation Collaborative cross-national study (HBSC)

CHSS
University of Kent

Hrytsenko, V., Eida, T., Ferris, E., Hulbert, S., Pomplun, R., Kendall, S. (2024).
Bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents. HBSC England 2022 data: Factsheet series. University of Kent.
https://hbscengland.org/

KEY MESSAGES

- **Nearly 1 in 6 adolescents had bullied others and over 1 in 3 adolescents had been bullied.**
- BULLYING OTHERS:
  - most common among 13 year olds, boys and girls
  - fell between 2002 and 2022, boys especially, though boys were still more likely to report bullying others.
- BEING BULLIED:
  - most common among younger adolescents and those from low FAS* families
- **1 in 8 adolescents admitted to cyberbullying their peers and 1 in 6 adolescents reported being cyberbulled.**
- CYBERBULLYING OTHERS:
  - increased between 2018 and 2022.
  - this rise was largest for boys.
- BEING CYBERBULLIED:
  - rose between 2018 and 2022
  - most common among 11 year olds, especially girls

**Family affluence level (high, medium, low) was assessed through the Family Affluence Scale (FAS).*

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

Young people from poorer families can be seen as 'easy targets' for bullying – without being able to afford the 'right' things and standing out. Claudia, 14.

I witnessed young people with disability being bullied, namely verbally insulted, in my school. So I can imagine that it happens a lot. Mark, 16.

I think that low level bullying/name calling is quite common but it is difficult to report about and difficult for schools to do anything about. Max, 14.

I think people cyberbully because they can hide behind a keyboard. Youth café member

The people bullying others often acts as a cry for help, attention. Youth café member

MEASURES

We asked our 11, 13 and 15 year old participants to respond to separate questions on:

- HOW OFTEN HAVE THEY TAKEN PART IN BULLYING ANOTHER PERSON(S) AT SCHOOL IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS? (I have not; once or twice; 2 or 3 times a month; once a week; several times a week).
- HOW OFTEN HAVE THEY BEEN BULLIED AT SCHOOL IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS? (I have not been bullied; once or twice; 2 or 3 times a month; once a week; several times a week).
- IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU TAKEN PART IN CYBERBULLYING (e.g. sent mean instant messages, email or text messages; wall postings; created a website making fun of someone; posted unflattering or inappropriate pictures online without permission or shared them with others)? (I have not; once or twice; 2 or 3 times a month; once a week; several times a week).
- IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU BEEN CYBERBULLIED? (I have not been cyberbullied; once or twice; 2 or 3 times a month; once a week; several times a week).
- HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU BEEN BULLIED AT SCHOOL IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS IN THE WAYS LISTED BELOW? (I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way. Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or ignored me. I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors. Other students told lies or spread false rumours about me and tried to make others dislike me. Other students made sexual jokes, or gestures to me. Other students made fun of me because of my illness or disability. Other students made fun of me because of my ethnicity (for example skin colour, language, culture, ancestry or family history). I have been called names like gay, lesbian, faggot, dyke etc. in a way that upset me.)

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Bullying in young people has been classified by the World Health Organisation as a public health problem [1].

Bullying is associated with poor educational outcomes [2].

A wide range of bullying victimisation experiences, including 'traditional' as well as identity-based and cyberbullying, have also been associated with poorer mental health and feelings of sadness and hopelessness in young people [3].

Bullying perpetration has been positively associated with substance misuse [4].

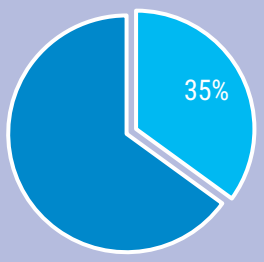
WHAT IS HBSC?

The HBSC survey is a WHO collaborative cross-national study that has been run every four years since 1983 in a growing number of countries. In 2022, 51 countries and regions in Europe, Central Asia and North America took part. HBSC monitors the health behaviours, health outcomes, well-being and social environments of school-aged children across a range of indicators, the role of gender, age and social inequality, and how adolescent health and well-being have changed over time.

HBSC BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING FINDINGS 2022

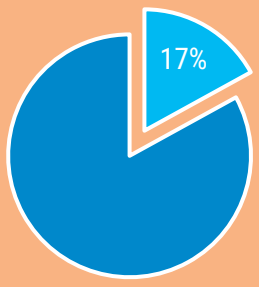
BEING BULLIED

Overall, **35%** of young people reported that they had **BEEN BULLIED AT SCHOOL** in the past couple of months.



- Figures in 2022 were **almost the same as in 2018**.
- **Girls were more likely** than boys to report being bullied.
- The proportions reporting **bullying reduced with rising age** among both boys and girls.
  - **Nearly half (47%) of 11-year-old girls reported being bullied**.
- It was **more common for low FAS** adolescents to be bullied than high FAS adolescents.

BULLYING OTHERS

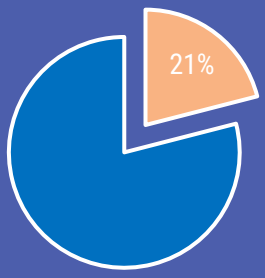


Overall, **17%** of young people reported **BULLYING OTHERS** at school in the past couple of months.

- Figures in 2022 were the **same as in 2018**.
- **Boys were more likely** to report bullying others than girls (20% vs 14%).
- Bullying others **peaked for both boys and girls at 13 years old**, reducing for girls more than boys after that.
- **High FAS adolescents were more likely to report bullying others** than low FAS (24% vs 14%), especially among 15-year-old boys.

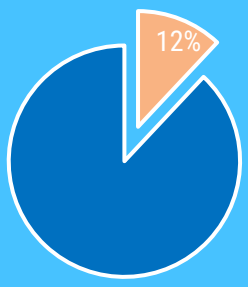
BEING CYBERBULLIED

Overall**, 21%** of respondents reported they had **BEEN CYBERBULLIED** in the last two months.



- This marks a **rise from 18% in 2018**.
- **Girls were more likely** than boys to report being a victim of cyberbullying (23% vs 18%).
- Being cyberbullied was **most common among 11-year-olds**, particularly girls, and reduced for both boys and girls with age.
- **Low FAS adolescents were more likely to report being cyberbullied**: 13-year-old girls from low FAS families were nearly twice as likely to report being cyberbullied as their high FAS peers.

CYBERBULLYING OTHERS

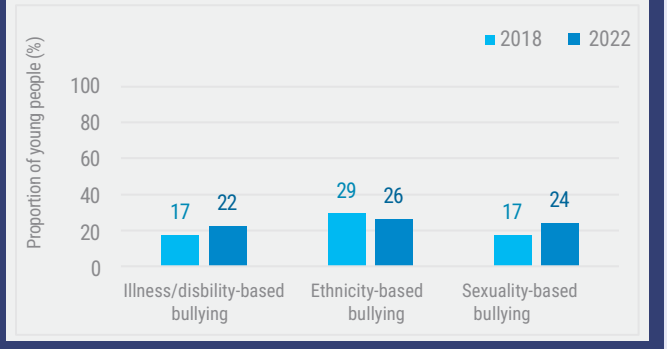


Overall, **12%** of young people reported **CYBERBULLYING OTHERS** in the last two months.

- This represents a **rise from 10% in 2018**.
- **Differences between boys and girls increased with age**, with boys more likely than girls to report cyberbullying others (13% vs 10%).
- By the age of 15, the proportion of boys reporting cyberbullying others was twice that of girls.
- **Girls from high FAS families were the least likely to report cyberbullying others**. Conversely, 11 and 15-year-old boys from high FAS families were slightly more likely than those from low FAS families to report cyberbullying others.

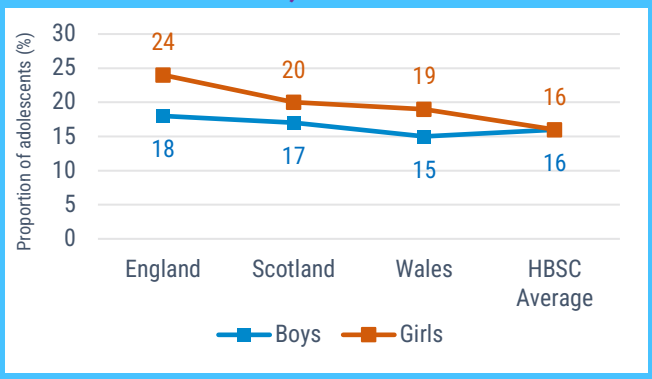
SPECIFIC TYPES OF BULLYING IN THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS, 2018-2022

- Nearly a quarter of young people said that they had experienced **sexuality-based bullying** (24%). This marked a rise from 17% in 2018.
- Of those who identified as having a long-term illness or disability, **22%** reported **illness/disability-based bullying**. This marked a rise from 17% in 2018.
- Of those who identified as being from an ethnic group other than White British, **26%** reported **ethnicity-based bullying**. This marked a fall from 29% in 2018.



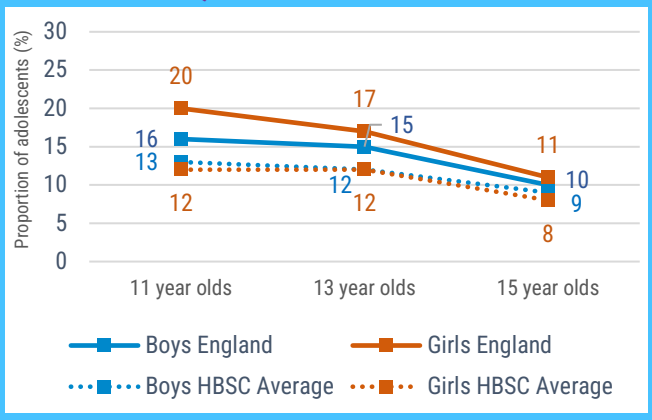
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

BEING CYBERBULLIED, BY GENDER AND COUNTRY

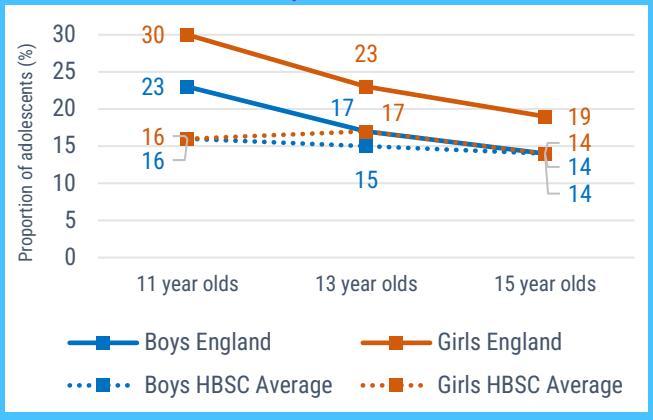


- **The proportion of adolescents being bullied and cyberbullied was higher in England** than the rest of Britain and above the international HBSC average.
- **BEING BULLIED was more common among all age groups in England** compared with the international HBSC average, in particular among younger age groups and girls especially.
- **BEING CYBERBULLIED was more common among English girls of all ages and boys at 11 and 13 years** old compared with the international HBSC average. The difference was most apparent in girls, and younger adolescents.

BEING BULLIED, ENGLAND vs. HBSC AVERAGE



BEING CYBERBULLIED, ENGLAND vs. HBSC AVERAGE



Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (2023), Data browser (findings from the 2021/22 international HBSC survey): https://data-browser.hbsc.org

BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING IN CONTEXT

Statistical analysis showed associations between adolescents BEING BULLIED AND CYBERBULLIED, their body image, some school variables and their mental health. The strength of the correlations was weak but statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Adolescents who reported BEING BULLIED were:

… less likely to report feeling that they BELONGED AT SCHOOL (-.27)
… less likely to have a positive BODY IMAGE (-.26)
… more likely to score low on the WHO-5 scale, indicating poor mental well-being (.21)
… more likely to report they felt LONELY (.29).

Adolescents who reported being CYBERBULLIED were:

… less likely to report feeling that they BELONGED AT SCHOOL(-.20)
… less likely to have a positive BODY IMAGE (-.23)
… more likely to report they felt LONELY (.20).
… more likely to report DELIBERATE SELF-HARM (.21).

REFERENCES

1. Currie C et al., eds. Social determinants of health and well-being among young people. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2009/2010 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 6. https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/326406
2. Armitage, R. (2021). Bullying in children: Impact on child health. BMJ Paediatrics Open, 5(1), e000939. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2020-000939
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4. Vrijen, C., Wiertsema, M., Ackermans, M. A., van der Ploeg, R., & Kretschmer, T. (2021). Childhood and Adolescent Bullying Perpetration and Later Substance Use: A Meta-analysis. Pediatrics, 147(3), e2020034751. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-034751

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