

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Research and History

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THE *OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM*?

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) has been more thoroughly evaluated than any other bullying prevention/reduction program so far. Six large-scale evaluations involving more than 40,000 students have documented results such as¹:

- Average reductions by 20 to 70 percent in student reports of being bullied and bullying others. Peer and teacher ratings of bullying problems have yielded roughly similar results.
- Marked reductions in student reports of general antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy.
- Clear improvements in the classroom social climate, as reflected in students' reports of improved order and discipline, more positive social relationships, and more positive attitudes toward schoolwork and school.

For students in grades 4-7, most of these positive results can be seen after only eight months of intervention work, given reasonably good implementation of the program. For students in grades 8-10, it may take somewhat more time, maybe two years, to achieve equally good results.

Please see the end of this document for a list of *OBPP* research articles.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY BEHIND THE *OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM*?

Although bullying problems among students have been around for centuries, it wasn't until the early 1970s that Dan Olweus initiated the first systematic research study in the world on these problems. The results were published in a Swedish book in 1973 and in the United States in 1978 under the title *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. For a considerable period of time, up to the early 1990s, there was very little attention to and research on the topic of bullying outside of Scandinavia.

In 1983, after three adolescent boys in northern Norway committed suicide, most likely as a consequence of severe bullying by peers, the country's Ministry of Education initiated a national campaign against bullying in schools. In that context, the first version of what has later become known as the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* was developed.

The program was carefully evaluated in a large-scale project involving 40,000 students from 42 schools followed over a period of two and a half years.⁴ The program has since been refined, expanded, and further evaluated with successful results in five additional large-scale projects in Norway. Since 2001, as part of the Norwegian government's plans for the prevention and reduction of delinquency and violence among children and youth, *OBPP* has been implemented on a large-scale basis in elementary and lower secondary schools throughout Norway.

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Dr. Olweus has for a long time seen the phenomenon of bullying in the context of human rights.⁵ Already in 1981, he proposed enacting a law against bullying in schools. He argued early that it is a fundamental human right for a student to feel safe in school and to be spared the repeated humiliation implied in bullying. In the mid-1990s, these arguments led to legislation against bullying by the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments. Similar legislation has been adopted in more than 28 states (at the date of publication) in the United States and in several other countries.

During the 1990s, Dr. Olweus worked closely with American colleagues, notably Dr. Susan Limber now at Clemson University in South Carolina, to implement and evaluate the program in the United States, also resulting in positive though somewhat weaker outcomes. Since then, hundreds of schools in most every state in the United States have used the program and the number is growing. Additional studies of these efforts are being conducted by the authors of *OBPP* and other researchers. For summaries and citations of this research visit www.clemson.edu/olweus.

RESEARCH ARTICLES ABOUT THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM

Limber, Susan P. "Implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in American Schools: Lessons Learned from the Field." In *Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention*, edited by Dorothy L. Espelage and Susan M. Swearer, 351–63. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

"Peer Victimization: The Nature and Prevalence of Bullying Among Children and Youth." In *Handbook of Children, Culture, and Violence*, edited by Nancy E. Dowd, Dorothy G. Singer, and Robin Fretwell Wilson, 313–30. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.

Limber, Susan P., Maury Nation, Allison J. Tracy, Gary B. Melton, and Vicki Flerx. "Implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in the Southeastern United States." In *Bullying in Schools: How Successful Can Interventions Be?* edited by Peter K. Smith, Debra Pepler, and Ken Rigby, 55–79. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Nansel, Tonja R., Mary Overpeck, Ramani S. Pilla, W. June Ruan, Bruce Simons-Morton, and Peter Scheidt. "Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association with Psychosocial Adjustment." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285, no. 16 (April 25, 2001): 2094–2100.

Olweus, Dan. "Bullying/Victim Problems in School: Facts and Intervention." *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 12, no. 4 (1997): 495–510.

"Norway." In *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, edited by Peter K. Smith, Yohji Morita, Josine Junger-Tas, Dan Olweus, Richard Catalano, and Phillip Slee, 28–48. London, UK: Routledge, 1999.

"Sweden." In *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, edited by Peter K. Smith, Yohji Morita, Josine Junger-Tas, Dan Olweus, Richard Catalano, and Phillip Slee, 7–27. London, UK: Routledge, 1999.

"A Useful Evaluation Design, and Effects of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program." *Psychology, Crime, and Law* 11, no. 4 (Dec. 2005): 389–402.

Solberg, Mona E., and Dan Olweus. "Prevalence Estimation of School Bullying with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire." *Aggressive Behavior* 29 (2003): 239–68.

Notes

1. Dan Olweus, "Bully/Victim Problems among Schoolchildren: Basic Facts and Effects of a School-Based Intervention Program," in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, ed. D. Pepler and K. Rubin (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991), 411–48; Dan Olweus, "A Useful Evaluation Design, and Effects of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 11(2005): 389–402; Dan Olweus and Susan P. Limber, *Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Bullying Prevention Program* (Boulder: Program Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 1999); Jan Helge Kallestad and Dan Olweus, "Predicting Teachers' and Schools' Implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: A Multilevel Study," *Prevention and Treatment* 6 (2003): 3–21. Available on the Internet: <http://www.journals.apa.org/prevention/volume6/pre0060021a.html>.

2. C.B. Fleming, K.P. Haggerty, R.F. Catalano, T.W. Harachi, J.J. Mazza, and D.H. Gruman, "Do Social and Behavioral Characteristics Targeted by Preventive Interventions Predict Standardized Test Scores and Grades?" *Journal of School Health* 75 (2005): 342–349.

3. Dan Olweus, "Bully/Victim Problems among Schoolchildren: Basic Facts and Effects of a School-Based Intervention Program," in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, ed. D. Pepler and K. Rubin (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991), 411–48.

4. Dan Olweus, "Vad skapar aggressive barn?" [What creates aggressive children?], in *Normkrise og oppdragelse* [Norm crisis and child rearing], ed. A.O. Telhaug and S.E. Vestre (Oslo, Norway: Didakta, 1981); Dan Olweus, "Sweden," in *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, ed. P.K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, & P. Slee (London: Routledge, 1999), 7–27.

5. Standards are taken from John S. Kendall and Robert J. Marzano, *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education*, 3rd ed. (Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning [MCREL], 2000).