Understanding young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying: A mixed methods study

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Abstract

Aim

This research sought to understand the experience and perception of relational bullying among young people in England.

Background

Bullying among young people has been widely acknowledged as a public health concern. Bullying behaviours can be categorised as physical, verbal, relational and cyber. Relational bullying causes harm through the systematic manipulation and damage of peer relationships and may include behaviours such as rumour spreading and social exclusion. Evidence indicates relational bullying can be detrimental for young people's wellbeing, but it is often considered to be less harmful than other forms of bullying. Wider perceptions among adults and young people suggest these behaviours are commonly not defined as bullying, particularly in a UK context. Further, relational bullying has traditionally been perceived as a female form of aggression. The way in which relational bullying is perceived is likely to influence detection and intervention efforts; considering the potential negative outcomes for young people, relational bullying warranted further exploration from the perspective of young people themselves. The social-ecological theory has been applied within the study of bullying as it acknowledges the social context in which these behaviours happen; the social-ecological theory may be particularly pertinent to the study of relational bullying which often occurs among friendship groups.

Methods

The social-ecological theory was adopted as a guiding theoretical framework, positioning young people central in the research. A sequential mixed methods approach was employed, with the quantitative methodology playing a dominant role. Secondary analysis of data from 5335 young people (aged 11, 13 and 15 years old) who participated in the 2014 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in England was undertaken. Descriptive statistics established the prevalence and demographic picture of relational bullying. A series of three multilevel regression models examined the association between relational bullying and three health and wellbeing outcomes: general self-rated health, health related quality of life (HRQL) and life satisfaction. A fourth multilevel regression model identified factors from the ecologies of young people which helped them to successfully navigate relational bullying. The quantitative findings informed 11 face-to-face interviews with young people (aged 12-18 years), providing a unique opportunity to gain in-depth

insight into young people's perspective of relational bullying and the factors which they perceived as influencing the navigation of relational bullying.

Results

The quantitative analysis identified 16.6% of the young people (13.7% of boys and 19.7% of girls) had experienced relational bullying in the 'past couple of months' prior to the survey. Multilevel regression models identified a significant association between experiencing relational bullying and reporting poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, whilst controlling for other forms of bullying and demographic variables. Possessing positive attributes in relation to body image, general self-efficacy, family activities and family support significantly increased the odds of reporting improved wellbeing amongst those who experienced weekly relational bullying. Thematic analysis of qualitative data resonated with the quantitative findings, also illustrating the harmful effects of relational bullying and identifying internal (e.g. personal wellbeing) and external (e.g. the family) resources which young people perceived as supporting them through relational bullying. Further, the qualitative findings provided insight into the perspectives and experiences of young people, including the role of social media and friends in relational bullying. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings were united in order to inform the development of the Young People's Relational Bullying model, which provides a visual illustration of how young people experience and perceive this form of bullying.

Conclusions

Relational bullying is significantly associated with the health and wellbeing of young people. Bullying interventions, and those which help enable young people to manage friendships and peer relationships successfully, are likely to have considerable reach in terms of improving the health of young people. The results challenge the assumption of relational bullying as a female problem, with both boys and girls reporting equal levels of distress from relational bullying. The research identifies factors from the young person's perspective which may help and hinder the navigation of relational bullying - the family plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects, supported by both the quantitative and qualitative results. The Young People's Relational Bullying model provides a framework for understanding relational bullying, with a focus on the young person's perspective. Considering wider inconsistent understandings of relational bullying it was important to recognise how young people themselves experience these behaviours. While this study specifically focused on relational bullying, the results are likely to have relevance to other forms of bullying.

Dedicated in loving memory to my Dad.

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Abbreviations

A number of key abbreviations used throughout the dissertation are detailed below:

ABA	Anti-Bullying Alliance
ALSPAC	Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
CI	Confidence interval
CRIPACC	Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAS	Family Affluence Scale
FSM	Free school meals
HBSC	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children
HRQL	Health related quality of life
HSCIC	Health and Social Care Information Centre
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LSYPE	Longitudinal Study of Young People in England
No.	Number
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
RB	Relational bullying
ROBVQ	Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire
SD	Standard deviation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
SES	Socio-economic status
UH	University of Hertfordshire
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
WAY	What About Youth
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1: Introducing the research

1.1 Introduction

This doctoral research was concerned with understanding young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying by drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data. This introductory chapter presents the rationale for the study, including the broader context of bullying and my own personal motivations for conducting the research. The overall research aim and objectives are outlined, before presenting the research approach and underpinning theoretical framework. The chapter concludes by defining the key terms and detailing the structure of the dissertation, including a brief overview of each of the eight chapters in this dissertation.

1.2 Context and rationale for this study

Bullying is a familiar concept within the United Kingdom (UK). A search of the BBC News website[1] identified the following nine headlines published in a one-week period (19th-26th June 2019):

- *NHS Scotland must tackle bullying problems 'head-on'* – 26th June 2019
- *SB Cares staff suspended amid bullying claims* – 26th June 2019
- *Lexi Rave: 7-year-old Avengers actress says "please don't bully me"* – 25th June 2019
- *Cyber-bullying affects more girls than boys in Northern Ireland* – 25th June 2019
- *Guernsey Home Affairs Committee president 'bullied staff', report says* – 24th June 2019
- *Dr Marijuana Pepsi: The woman who refused to let her bullies win* – 21st June 2019
- *NHS Highland plan to tackle bullying claims* – 21st June 2019
- *'Bullying' issues found at Norfolk fire service* – 20th June 2019
- *Cyber-bullying 'worst in England schools'* - 19th June 2019

The above headlines, taken from a single news source, illustrate the frequency with which bullying is discussed in the public domain. This study focuses specifically on young people; however a number of the headlines refer to bullying among adults too – otherwise known as workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is a common phenomenon which has been

[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news

identified across a range of employment sectors (Verkuil, Atasayi, & Molendijk, 2015). Bullying is also frequently portrayed in television shows, films and books. For example, the literary classic "Tom Brown's School Days" (Hughes, 1857) is commonly referenced; however the 2017 television series "13 Reasons Why" is a more recent illustration which depicts bullying (among other experiences) as a precursor to a young person's suicide.

While bullying features regularly in both the news and entertainment media, it is important to consider whether media depictions are an accurate reflection of how young people experience bullying behaviours (National Children's Bureau, 2015). The media presentation of cyberbullying in particular has been subject to criticism for the inaccurate presentation of cyberbullying as an especially frequent and increasing form of victimisation (Olweus, 2012). However, this could reflect a wider sensationalist approach to young people's use of social media; for example, news stories caused panic after reporting unsubstantiated claims that viral social media challenges[2] were linked to violence and suicide among young people.

Within research bullying is commonly defined as intentional harmful behaviours carried out repeatedly over time against an individual with less physical or psychological strength (Olweus, 1995). This definition has also been employed in national policy (Department for Education, 2017) and among anti-bullying organisations e.g. Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA). However, while the term bullying is frequently used in everyday conversation, the understanding of bullying has been shown to vary across individuals. Research demonstrates that parents, teachers and young people hold varying conceptualisations of what constitutes bullying behaviour (Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010; Smorti, Menesini, & Smith, 2003).

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is a traditional adage in response to bullying behaviours. The expression was published nearly 150 years ago (Cupples, 1872) and emphasised the harm of physical actions over the spoken word. These days the detrimental and long-lasting consequences of bullying are widely acknowledged (S. E. Moore et al., 2017). Furthermore, within the public domain the traditional expression has been subject to amendments including: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but heartless words cut deeper; for wood and stone harm flesh alone, but language costs are steeper"[3]. Such quotes illustrate a change in public understanding, recognising the harmful effects of verbal bullying behaviours as well as physical.

[2] For example, the 2019 Momo Challenge: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/28/viral-momo-challenge-is-a-malicious-hoax-say-charities

[3] https://themindsjournal.com/sticks-and-stones-may-break-my-bones/

1.2.1 Relational bullying

Relational bullying describes behaviours which cause harm through the manipulation and damage of friendships, peer relationships and social status (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational bullying behaviours can include the spreading of rumours and lies to damage a person's social standing, excluding an individual from socialising with peers and encouraging others to do so. Examination of the literature (see Chapter 2) identified discrepancies in defining and understanding this form of bullying among academics (Björkqvist, 2001; Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006) and the public (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002; Smorti et al., 2003). Relational bullying is also subject to wider gendered and normative perceptions across society (Simmons, 2011). Further it may be particularly difficult to intervene in cases of relational bullying (Ofsted, 2003), and research indicates that other forms of bullying behaviours (particularly physical behaviours) often take precedence when school staff respond to incidents of bullying (Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles, & Simmonds, 2014; Kahn, Jones, & Wieland, 2012).

1.2.2 The focus on young people

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) stipulates that all children should be protected from harm, including both physical and mental acts of violence. Bullying is a form of violence which causes harm to young people; however, it has only received recognition in international policy and discussion in recent years. For example, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 69/158 "Protecting Children from Bullying" in December 2014, with further revisions in December 2016. The 2016 and 2018 UN Secretary-General reports on bullying were submitted at the request of the UN General Assembly. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by UN Member States outlines that education facilities should be safe, non-violent and inclusive environments (SDG no. 4, Target 4.A); in 2018 bullying prevalence was adopted as a new indicator for monitoring the successful implementation of SDG no. 4[4]. International attention was further evidenced through the publication of two global reports (UNESCO, 2017, 2019).

Young people's experiences during childhood and adolescence can have repercussions later in life. Adolescence is a period of development marked by a number of changes, including the establishment of social networks and relationships. Bullying may hinder a young person's social development: those who have been victimised are at risk of re-victimisation in the future (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007), have fewer social ties in later life (Takizawa,

[4] https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/10/1022562

Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014) and are more likely to report social anxiety (Boulton, 2013). Similarly, young people who have victimised others are likely to continue aggressive acts into adulthood, including violent behaviour (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011) and criminal offending (Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, & Loeber, 2011).

Furthermore, early health behaviours appear to determine a trajectory for later health outcomes. For example; mental health illnesses in adulthood are often preceded by mental health illnesses in adolescence (G. C. Patton et al., 2014, 2015) and health risk behaviours such as poor diet and alcohol consumption during early years are likely to track into adulthood (Bonomo, Bowes, Coffey, Carlin, & Patton, 2004; Niemeier, Raynor, Lloyd-Richardson, Rogers, & Wing, 2006; Whitaker, Wright, Pepe, Seidel, & Dietz, 1997). Bullying has been associated with both poorer mental health (Bowes, Joinson, Wolke, & Lewis, 2015) and an increase in risk behaviours (S. E. Moore et al., 2017), demonstrating the long-term implications of involvement in bullying behaviours.

Considering the potential long-lasting and detrimental impacts of bullying it may also generate economic implications. Young people involved in bullying are likely to make fewer economic and social contributions in adulthood (Brimblecombe et al., 2018). Further, bullying poses an increased economic cost to societies at the expense of the health, education and judicial systems (Richardson & Fen Hiu, 2018). Investing in young people and the prevention of bullying is likely to have long-lasting societal gains.

Experiencing relational bullying specifically has been associated with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016), however it is often considered less serious and receives fewer interventions in schools compared with other forms of bullying (Boulton et al., 2014). The contrast between the negative impacts associated with relational bullying and the wider normative perception of this behaviour suggests a gap in the current understanding of relational bullying among young people, which this research aimed to address.

1.2.3 Personal motivation

The focus on young people specifically was further developed through my employment in the Health, Young People and Family Lives Research Unit at the Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care (CRIPACC), University of Hertfordshire (UH). Being a member of this research team fostered my interest in young people's health and wellbeing. The research team frequently considers the social determinants of young people's wellbeing (Brooks,

Chester, Smeeton, & Spencer, 2016; García-Moya, Brooks, Morgan, & Moreno, 2015; Klemera, Brooks, Chester, Magnusson, & Spencer, 2017), which further promoted my motivation to examine young people's social relationships.

My primary role is to assist with the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in England. HBSC is an international survey-based study which brings together researchers from across 49 countries. Researchers from the HBSC international network form topic-related focus groups; members of each focus group are responsible for the development of the research area including devising and proposing topic-specific measures to be incorporated in the HBSC survey, analysis of data and the publication of findings. I am a member of the Violence and Injury Prevention focus group, which fuelled my interest in bullying behaviours among young people. The focus group has allowed for international and interdisciplinary collaboration with academics who have expertise in researching bullying behaviours among young people, helping to develop my subject knowledge and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, in my academic role I have been able to pursue the topic of bullying outside of my doctoral research, resulting in two peer-reviewed articles (Chester et al., 2015; Chester, Magnusson, Klemera, Spencer, & Brooks, 2019) and a commissioned report for Public Health England (Brooks, Chester, Klemera, & Magnusson, 2017).

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this doctoral research was to understand the experience and perception of relational bullying among young people in England.

This was fulfilled through investigation of the specific research objectives outlined below:

1. To identify prevalence rates of relational bullying in English young people aged 11 - 15 years and build a demographic picture of those who are victimised in this way.
2. To examine the health and wellbeing consequences of experiencing relational bullying.
3. To identify factors that young people perceive may help them to navigate the experience of relational bullying.
4. To understand how young people perceive relational bullying.

1.4 Research approach

> *"Research approaches are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. It involves the intersection of philosophical assumptions, designs, and specific methods."* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 250)

The quote from Creswell and Creswell (2018) illustrates the series of complex and related decisions which contribute towards determining a research approach, and the way in which they are informed and shaped by the researcher's philosophical stance. This research was shaped by a theoretical framework which positions the 'young people' at the centre of the research, and culminated in a mixed methods design. Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatical representation of the research approach in this study. The diagram depicts the interconnected relationships of the theoretical framework, the central positioning of young people and the methodological approach; culminating in the 'Young People's Relational Bullying model' which arose from the research findings. The components of Figure 1.1 are explained in further detail in the following sections.

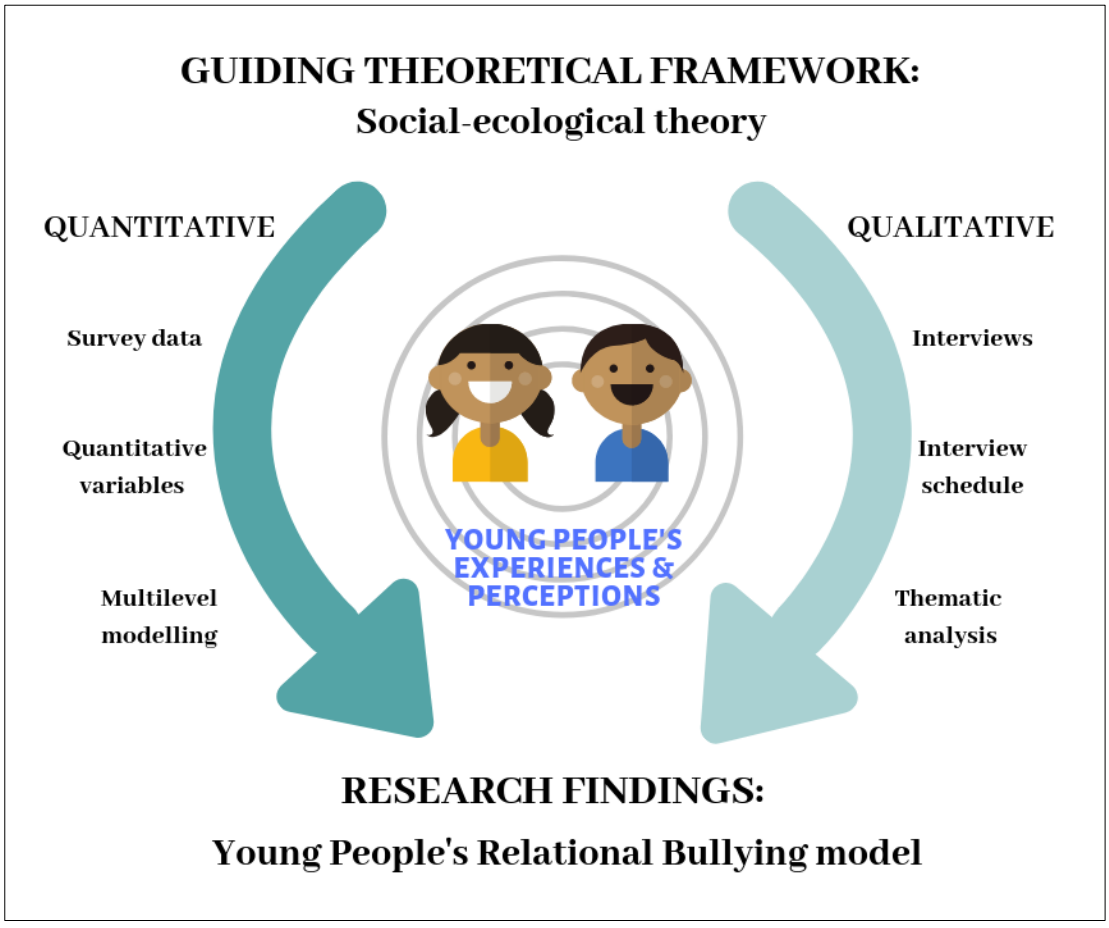


Figure 1.1 *Diagrammatic representation of the research approach*

1.4.1 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework can be thought of as "the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 12). It plays an important role in guiding and structuring research, ensuring coherence across the research process. This study adopted the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) as a guiding theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) social-ecological theory was originally proposed as a theory for understanding human development through consideration of a person's social environment. (See Section 2.6 for a detailed description of the social-ecological theory).

Over the last decade the social-ecological theory has emerged as a valuable theoretical framework in the study of bullying (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage, 2014; Rose, Nickerson, & Stormont, 2015; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Bullying behaviours occur in complex social situations and an individual's involvement with bullying has been shown to vary across contexts (Ryoo, Wang, & Swearer, 2015), which supports the focus on a person's social environment as advocated by the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979).

The social-ecological theory acted as a guiding framework in this study of relational bullying, informing the research approach which was adopted. The framework resonated with young people being positioned central in the research (see Section 1.4.2) and informed the methodological approach (see Section 1.4.3). Furthermore, the theoretical framework guided the data analysis of variables in the quantitative component of the study and directed the thematic analysis of the qualitative data (as depicted in Figure 1.1).

Section 2.6 provides a thorough discussion of the social-ecological theory and, more specifically, its application to the study of bullying behaviours among young people.

1.4.2 The young person's voice

As detailed in Section 1.2.2 the focus on young people is fundamental considering bullying experiences during childhood and adolescence may have detrimental repercussions in later life (S. E. Moore et al., 2017). However this research moves beyond *focusing on* young people, and facilitates the 'voice' of the young person. Relational bullying is understood in varying ways across school staff, parents and young people (Maunder et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2002; Smorti et al., 2003). This research recognised that young people themselves are the ones who are involved in relational bullying, and are therefore best positioned to articulate how this behaviour is experienced and perceived.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) social-ecological theory situated the individual at the centre of their social environment and the focus on the individual was maintained throughout this study. Positioning young people as central to the research did not only resonate with the social-ecological theory, but also acknowledged that young people have the right to express their views, and for those views to be taken seriously, in matters which affect them (Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; UN General Assembly, 1989). This stance has been reiterated in UK policy (for example, the Children Act 2004) and government reports (including "Our children deserve better: Prevention pays" (Department of Health, 2013)). Unfortunately, however, the voice of the young person is not always fully captured in research that focuses on areas that have a direct impact on their lives, often due to methodological challenges which are unique to conducting research with young people (Fleming, 2011; Warner & Little, 2016). Studies relating to bullying have been subject to such criticism; Teräsahjo and Salmivalli (2003) stated that few studies have made "an effort to reveal children's point of view on bullying" (p. 136), while more recently bullying research has been critiqued for adopting an adult-led perspective (Canty, Stubbe, Steers, & Collings, 2016).

The central role of young people in this research is depicted in Figure 1.1, and evidenced by the overall research aim: "To understand the experience and perception of relational bullying among young people in England." As such, the data collection approaches employed in this study were designed for, and informed by, young people.

Section 2.5 offers a critical discussion of the young person's voice in bullying research.

1.4.3 Methodological approach

The guiding theoretical framework shaped the methodological approach which was employed. The social-ecological theory acknowledges that "both objective and subjective elements are posited as driving the course of human development; neither alone is presumed sufficient" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797) and recognises the importance of varying research methods for the acquisition of different types of knowledge. Furthermore, the decision to position young people as central in this research commanded methodology which facilitated the voice of young people.

Consequently, the objectives of this study (see Section 1.3) spanned both quantitative and qualitative research approaches in order to develop a comprehensive and complete picture of young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying. For example,

identifying prevalence rates of relational bullying required quantitative data, while qualitative data was most appropriate for understanding young people's perceptions. Mixed methods was deemed a necessary approach to successfully achieve the research objectives: secondary analysis of quantitative data from 5335 young people who participated in the 2014 HBSC study in England, followed by 11 qualitative face-to-face interviews with young people. The quantitative element of the study was dominant – as noted by the bold emphasis on the quantitative arrow in Figure 1.1. Section 3.3 provides a detailed description of the mixed methods approach in this study.

1.5 Key terms

Key terms utilised throughout the dissertation are defined below:

Young people refers to those up to 18 years old coinciding with legal regulations in England, including marking the end of compulsory education and the move into adult health care services. There are a variety of terms which capture those within this age bracket including 'children', 'teenagers', 'adolescents' and 'youth'; however 'young people' will be used throughout this dissertation for clarity. Furthermore, adopting the term young people recognises an unforeseen discussion between myself and Joe (17 years old) which occurred prior to our qualitative interview concerning relational bullying:

Joe: *"I hate 'young adult'…."*
KC: *"You don't like it?"*
Joe: *"No."*
KC: *"We tend to use 'young people' – is that worse?"*
Joe: *"I don't mind that…because it doesn't show the responsibility of it all."*
KC: *"Okay. Yeah, cause 'adolescence' is difficult to define…young people covers everyone..."*
Joe: *"And it's difficult to say…adoles…errrr!"*

Adolescence has been defined as falling between the ages of 10-19 years (World Health Organization, 2014), however this has been subject to debate (S. M. Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, & Patton, 2018). Adolescence in this study is operationalised as a period of development, spanning physical, cognitive, social and emotional competencies, which occurs between childhood and adulthood. This study has not imposed age boundaries on adolescence however it is likely that the young people in this study were in the period of adolescence.

Bullying refers to intentional harmful behaviours carried out repeatedly against an individual who is unable to easily defend themselves. Bullying is often described in a variety of ways, including phrases liked 'picked on', 'teased' or 'tormented'. For consistency, the term bullying will be used throughout this dissertation. Section 2.2.1 offers a critical discussion of the current approaches towards defining bullying.

Relational bullying describes bullying which causes harm to an individual through the systematic manipulation and damage of peer relationships, friendships and social status.

Victimisation refers to the experience of being bullied.

Perpetration is the act of bullying another individual.

Navigate in this study is used to illustrate the way in which young people are supported through relational bullying; the process of young people moving beyond the experience. Navigate is often used to describe a challenging route, for example the Oxford English dictionary definition includes: "sail or travel over (a stretch of water or terrain), especially carefully or with difficulty"[5]. The arduous nature of navigation resonates with the experience of relational bullying, which can be an emotionally difficult situation.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters, together with a reference list and a selection of relevant appendices. This chapter (Chapter 1) has outlined the importance of studying relational bullying among young people. The research approach has been presented and the research aim and objectives of this study have been introduced.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the current literature. The literature search strategy is outlined initially, before critically reviewing relevant literature including that on bullying and relational bullying specifically, and anti-bullying efforts at national and local level. Current research which has incorporated the voice of young people will be discussed. Finally, the literature review evaluates the use of the social-ecological theory in application to bullying. The chapter identifies the current gaps in knowledge, leading to the justification of the proposed research.

[5] https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/navigate

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach employed in the current project. This section provides a rationale for employing a mixed methods approach. Subsequently, the quantitative and qualitative research phases are described in detail. The quantitative component involved secondary analysis of data collected as part of the 2014 HBSC study in England. The qualitative component comprised of face-to-face interviews with young people.

Chapter 4 describes the analytical approach in relation to both the quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in the analysis of the HBSC England data set. Thematic analysis was utilised in the analysis of the qualitative interview data.

Chapter 5 details the findings from the quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics captured the prevalence of relational bullying and the demographic picture of young people experiencing this form of bullying. Three multilevel regression models examined the association between relational bullying and health outcomes. A further multilevel logistic regression identified factors which may help young people to navigate relational bullying through the identification of variables which increased the chances of high life satisfaction among victims of relational bullying.

Chapter 6 presents the qualitative findings. The thematic analysis resulted in seven overarching themes, which are each outlined in detail and illustrated by drawing on quotes from the young people. The chapter concludes with a diagrammatical interpretation of the qualitative findings.

Chapter 7 discusses methodological considerations arising from this research. The chapter unites the quantitative and qualitative findings, presenting the Young People's Relational Bullying model as a new theoretical approach for understanding relational bullying. Current literature is drawn upon to facilitate discussion of the findings and the Young People's Relational Bullying model. The social-ecological theory as a guiding framework is also examined.

Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation by summarising the contribution to knowledge and implications for policy and practice stemming from the research. The methodological limitations are discussed and suggestions for future research are outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

A literature review should be "the logical point of departure for the research questions and the method" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 45); the evaluation and critical discussion of current research presented in this chapter leads to the justification for this study. The literature search technique will initially be outlined. The chapter will then present and critique the current literature specific to the aim and objectives of this doctoral study. Initially, an overview of bullying and current national efforts to prevent bullying is provided. The review then concentrates on the central topic of relational bullying, highlighting current discrepancies and 'gaps' in understanding. The importance of young people's voice in bullying research is considered, before examining the role of the social-ecological theory in understanding bullying.

2.1.1 Literature search strategy

Considering the part-time nature of this doctoral study, relevant literature has been gathered and critiqued over a six-year period. The process of reviewing the literature has been ongoing, occurring simultaneously with data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, a systematic and thorough literature search approach has been applied, following guidance outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Searches of relevant databases were performed (PubMed, PsycArticles, Scopus and Google Scholar) using Boolean operators and truncation. Bullying is a broad area and search terms varied depending upon the specific focus. For example, key words such as bully*, victim* and aggress* were combined with different search terms when scoping the literature for prevalence rates compared with anti-bullying initiatives. E-mail alerts were created in line with key search terms so that recently published literature was highlighted.

Grey literature refers to evidence not published commercially, and can include doctoral dissertations, conference papers and research reports (Paez, 2017). Grey literature was sought and reviewed in this study and proved to be particularly pertinent to understanding the current national stance towards bullying through UK government reports and legislation documents.

Supplementary literature search techniques were also employed. The reference lists of already accessed literature were examined to identify additional relevant material as

advocated by Greenhalgh and Peacock (2005). Further, the 'cited by' and 'related articles' function of online databases proved a useful tool for the identification of further applicable resources. Networking opportunities at conferences and events provided another route of gathering information, particularly grey literature including relevant doctoral dissertations and conference abstracts.

The literature on bullying, and relational bullying more specifically, was central to this study. However, at relevant points throughout the research process additional literature searches were employed. For example, literature on the social-ecological theory beyond the context of bullying was examined, during the developmental stage guidance was sought from literature on mixed methodology and undertaking research with young people, and in preparation for qualitative data analysis the literature on thematic analysis was reviewed.

A literature search is never exhaustive as knowledge continues to be generated, and this is particularly true for the field of bullying research; Volk et al. (2017) recorded over 5000 peer-reviewed articles in a six year period, averaging at over two publications every day. However, the literature has been continually reviewed throughout this doctoral study to ensure understanding is current and well-informed, encompassing both academic peer-review publications and grey literature to ensure a balanced and comprehensive perspective (Paez, 2017).

2.2 Bullying: An overview

While bullying behaviours can occur among adults (Verkuil et al., 2015) the aim of this research was to understand the experience of young people, consequently this will be the focus of the literature review. The study of bullying among young people originated from Scandinavia with the publication "Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys" by Dan Olweus (1978). Over the last two decades research in this area has grown substantially, with academics from across the globe studying bullying among young people (Volk et al., 2017). This section will provide an overview of the current context of bullying research, including consideration of the issues surrounding the definition and measurement of bullying.

2.2.1 Defining bullying

Olweus has played a leading role in defining bullying, proposing that:

> *"…a student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.…An additional criterion of bullying is an imbalance in strength (an asymmetric power relationship): The student who is exposed to the negative actions has difficulty defending himself or herself."* (Olweus, 1995, p. 197)

Negative actions may refer to any act causing discomfort including, but not limited to, verbal abuse and threats, acts of physical violence and deliberate social exclusion. The definition proposed by Olweus (1995) is widely referenced throughout the literature on bullying and is utilised when conducting research on this topic, either in its complete form or used as the foundation for modified definitions.

Essentially bullying is defined by three distinguishing elements: 1) intentional harmful behaviours, 2) carried out repeatedly over time, 3) within a relationship characterised by a power imbalance. Bullying can be viewed as a distinct sub-type of aggression, with the features of repetition and an imbalance of power differentiating from other forms of aggressive acts (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010; Smith et al., 2002). Monks and Smith (2006) also highlight how the varying methods of non-physical bullying separate it from physical fighting alone. Furthermore, bullying refers to behaviours which occur between individuals of approximately the same age; aggressive acts between young people and adults would be considered child abuse or maltreatment (Arseneault et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2002).

While the definition proposed by Olweus (1995) is generally accepted, it is not without its flaws. In particular, the stipulation of the behaviour needing to be repeated over time has caused some disagreement. The description is vague; for example, how many times should it be repeated and for how long should it be endured? Moreover, how are these repetitions and the duration measured, especially considering the often hidden nature of these behaviours? Sullivan (2000) admittedly described the often repetitive nature of bullying, but additionally focused on the frequency of the bullying behaviour exhibited by the perpetrator, as opposed to the frequency of victimisation experienced by one individual: "... a random but serial activity carried out by someone who is feared for this behaviour" (p.11). Guerin and Hennessy (2002) also argued that bullying does not have to be repeated to be considered bullying, especially if the incident resulted in fear of repetition.

More recently, the defining element 'intentional harm' has been critiqued (Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). Intent is a difficult concept to define and Volk et al. (2014) proposed that bullying should instead be distinguished by 'goal-directed behaviours' – bullying is a

proactive behaviour which has been associated with social gains (Ettekal & Ladd, 2015; Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). This criterion still reflects intent but offers a more objective indicator. Additional defining characteristics have also been suggested, for instance bullying tends to occur without provocation (Olweus, 1994) and is often organised (Sullivan, 2000; Sullivan, Cleary, & Sullivan, 2004) which resonates with the concept of goal-directed behaviours proposed by Volk et al. (2014).

Guerin and Hennessy (2002) proposed a definition which relies entirely on the interpretation of the victim, suggesting a behaviour not intended as bullying should be considered as such if the victim deems it so. Wolke et al. (2000) also referred to the importance of perception, suggesting that the core element of power imbalance may not need to be real but simply perceived as so by the victim.

Introducing the subjective notion of perception complicates the process of defining bullying. Definitions have been shown to vary among the public. In particular, research has highlighted the stark contrast between young people and adult's perceptions and understandings of bullying. This will be discussed in further detail in Section 2.5, however in general adults tend to recognise the characteristics of intent, repetition and a power imbalance more frequently than young people (Vaillancourt et al., 2008).

While there are elements of ambiguity surrounding the term bullying, a consensus exists concerning the fundamental elements that characterise bullying and distinguish the behaviour from other forms of aggression. Consequently, the majority of bullying definitions are grounded in the three core factors Olweus (1995) highlighted: 1) intentional harmful behaviours, 2) carried out repeatedly over time, 3) within a relationship characterised by a power imbalance. This includes definitions outside of academia, such as those proposed nationally by the Department for Education (2017), and internationally by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) and UNESCO (2017, 2019).

2.2.2 Types of bullying

Bullying can include a broad range of behaviours and these have been classified in several ways, for example bullying behaviours may be described as indirect, verbal or homophobic. The use of such terms is helpful in understanding the variety of bullying behaviours, however there is often overlap between these types of bullying which can be unclear (Fluck, 2017). Figure 2.1 was developed as a logical approach to synthesise and understand the great array of terms that are currently used to describe bullying, and the relationship between those

terms. After reviewing the literature, the majority of terms which describe bullying behaviours explain: a) the subtlety of the bullying, b) the method of the bullying behaviour or c) the nature of the bullying. While most bullying behaviours can be classified at each level, it is not always possible – in particular, it is often difficult to identify the nature of bullying.

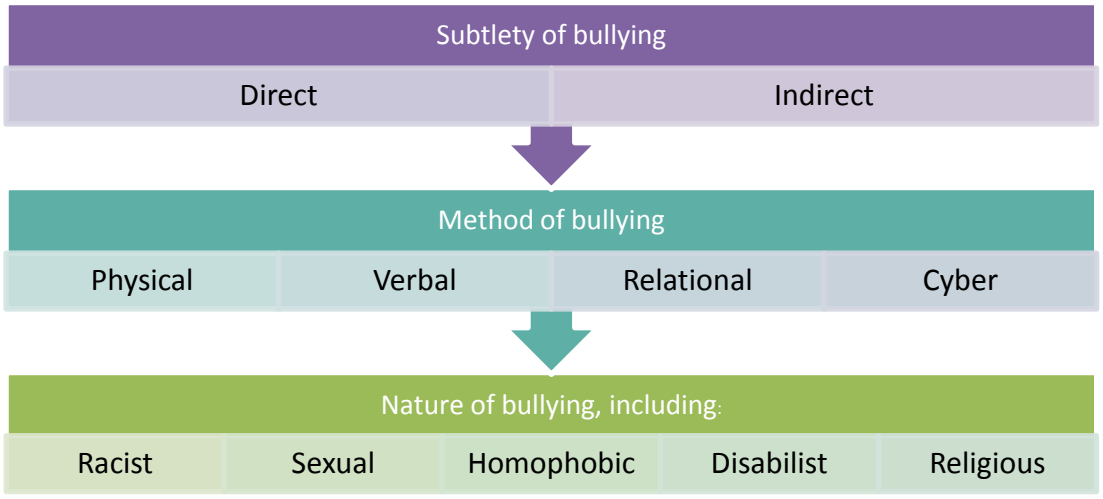


Figure 2.1 *Types of bullying behaviours*

At the first level, bullying behaviours can be considered as being direct or indirect (Fluck, 2017; Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Direct bullying behaviours would usually involve face-to-face conflict with the victim, such as a physical fight, threats or insults (van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). In cases of indirect bullying the perpetrator often remains unknown; this could be fulfilled through conducting the behaviours in a secret manner, by causing harm in a way that the victim or bystanders believe there was no intention to cause harm or through using others as a means to cause harm (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Direct and indirect bullying behaviours are sometimes referred to as overt and covert (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Terranova, Morris, & Boxer, 2008).

The second level of categorisation in Figure 2.1 reflects the different methods utilised by the perpetrators of bullying: physical, verbal, relational or cyber bullying. These four typologies are most commonly used (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015; Fluck, 2017; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012). Physical bullying refers to a number of behaviours including hitting, kicking, damaging property and theft, while verbal bullying encompasses such behaviours as name calling, teasing and making verbal threats (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015; Gladden et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012). Physical and verbal bullying are often stated as being direct forms of bullying

(Fluck, 2017). In most instances this is the case, however it is worth noting that there are indirect methods of physical and verbal bullying; including theft, damage of property and the use of sarcasm (Fluck, 2017). Relational bullying describes causing harm through the systematic manipulation and damage of peer relationships; essentially it describes "behaviours that are intended to significantly damage another child's friendships or feelings of inclusion by the peer group" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p711). The term relational bullying is frequently used interchangeably with indirect bullying as these behaviours are often indirect in nature (discussed in more detail in Section 2.4). Physical, verbal and relational bullying are often described as 'traditional' bullying behaviours when compared to cyberbullying (Przybylski & Bowes, 2017; Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015).

Cyberbullying describes "the use of electronic communication technologies to bully others" (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014, p. 1074), including mobile phones, computers, laptops, tablets and game consoles. It may include behaviours such as sending harmful messages, creating a derogatory online group about a victim and editing photographs to cause embarrassment. Within the literature there is some debate over the definition of cyberbullying (Englander, Donnerstein, Kowalski, Lin, & Parti, 2017). Cyberbullying is often perceived as an extension of the more traditional bullying behaviours; encompassing the main characteristics of bullying (intentional harm, repetition and a power imbalance) but conducted via a different method of delivery (Griezel, Finger, Bodkin-Andrews, Craven, & Yeung, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014; Olweus, 2013). However, it has been suggested that the defining characteristics of bullying are not applicable to cyberbullying (Englander et al., 2017). In particular, the stipulation that the behaviour must be repeated over time has been debated in an online context where a single online post may be viewed and shared multiple times (Menesini, 2012; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015); the specific act of bullying may not be repeated but the victim will continue to re-live the experience (Dooley, Pyżalski & Cross, 2009).

The final level at which bullying behaviours can be classified is based upon the reason or meaning underpinning the bullying behaviour. While it is not always possible to identify motive, there is evidence to suggest that victims of bullying are often perceived as 'different' (Hopkins, Taylor, Bowen, & Wood, 2013; N. O'Brien, 2009). Furthermore, the Department for Education (2017) guidance to schools suggests bullying is "often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual

orientation, or because a child is adopted or has caring responsibilities" (p. 4). Consequently, the literature may refer to forms of bullying as: sexual, racist, faith-based, homophobic and disability-based. Essentially these types of bullying are prejudice driven and based on discrimination (Bucchianeri, Gower, McMorris, & Eisenberg, 2016).

It is important to acknowledge the variety of behaviours that bullying encompasses, and the terms which are used to throughout the literature. The model depicted in Figure 2.1 is a useful tool for understanding the multiple ways in which bullying behaviours are described. However, the terms are often used inconsistently, for example Owusu et al. (2011) adopted the terms physical and non-physical bullying; while Hertz et al. (2015) referred to in-person and electronic bullying. Moreover, in real life, victims are often subjected to a number of bullying behaviours across these typologies (Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010). Despite some flaws, the categorisations presented in this section provide a way of conceptualising the great magnitude of behaviours which can be considered bullying.

2.2.3 Prevalence and measurement of bullying

Reported prevalence rates of bullying among young people vary greatly across studies. Moore et al. (2017) noted that the prevalence estimates from eight peer-reviewed publications spanning a variety of countries ranged from 10-35%. A meta-analysis synthesised findings from 80 studies from across the world, identifying a mean prevalence rate of 35% for involvement in traditional bullying behaviours (both perpetration and victimisation) and 15% for cyberbullying behaviours (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014).

The variability in prevalence rates across studies most likely arises due to methodological issues (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Studies utilise different reference periods when measuring bullying, for example Wang et al. (2012) referred to bullying in the past couple of months whereas Undheim and Sund (2010) captured bullying across the past six months. The measurement tools which have been used to calculate the prevalence of bullying also vary across studies, including self-reported measures and peer or teacher nominations (Vivolo-Kantor, Martell, Holland, & Westby, 2014). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest the inclusion of the word 'bullying' may influence response rates (Kert, Codding, Tryon, & Shiyko, 2010). See Modecki et al. (2014) for a thorough discussion of the methodological inconsistencies which hinder the comparison of prevalence across studies.

Recent evidence has highlighted the difficulties of making cross-national comparisons of bullying. Smith et al. (2016) compared the prevalence rates of four international survey based studies and established little agreement between the survey findings; correlations between surveys were considered moderate to zero, with 0.57 noted as the highest correlation. Differences in methodology may in part explain the low levels of external validity. However, language and linguistic differences have also been acknowledged (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004; Sittichai & Smith, 2015). In some countries there is not a direct translation of the word bullying and the adopted words may have their own cultural connotations, for example the Italian alternatives 'prepotenza' and 'violenza' have been shown to relate most closely with the more physical bullying behaviours (Smith et al., 2002).

In the UK, the National Children's Bureau (2015) highlighted the lack of national data on bullying in general. Furthermore recent work shows great variations, for example, two England-based studies conducted at similar times and both capturing bullying experiences within the past 'couple of months' reported largely differing figures; the HBSC study identified 28-30% of 15 year olds experienced bullying, compared to the What About Youth (WAY) study which identified a prevalence rate of 55% (Brooks et al., 2015; HSCIC, 2015). The WAY study could be considered a more representative sample – presenting data from over 120 000 young people, compared with the smaller sample size of 1600 in the HBSC study. However, the discrepancy in prevalence may be explained by the differing methods used to measure bullying: the HBSC data was collected via a single question following a definition of bullying whereas the WAY study utilised a checklist of behaviours. The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) (Department for Education, 2018a) supports this notion; the LSYPE collected data at a similar time from approximately 10 000 young people and reported a prevalence of 30% in line with the HBSC England study (Brooks et al., 2015).

Additionally, the prevalence of bullying has been shown to vary across demographics and type of bullying (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Involvement in the more 'traditional' forms of bullying (physical, verbal and relational) as either a perpetrator or victim is thought to peak in early adolescence (Inchley et al., 2016), while cyberbullying is thought to increase with age (Cross et al., 2015). Gender differences are mixed (see Section 2.4.4 for further discussion), however boys are more likely to engage in physical forms of bullying compared with girls (Wang et al., 2009). Studies have shown that minority groups such as young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Chatzitheochari, Parsons, & Platt,

2016) and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2016) are more likely to experience victimisation.

The prevalence of bullying is generally presented as the proportion of young people who have experienced bullying and the proportion of young people who have perpetrated bullying behaviours, for example, both the HBSC and WAY studies report data in this way (Brooks et al., 2015; HSCIC, 2015). However, it is important to acknowledge that this approach overlooks a subset of young people who identified as having been bullied and bullying others and would consequently fall into both categories; these young people are frequently termed 'bully-victims'. A recent cross-sectional study of over 2500 young people in the UK combined both self-report and peer-report measures, establishing 10.3% were bullies, 23.9% were victims and 14.3% were bully-victims (Guy, Lee, & Wolke, 2019). The overlap between victimisation and perpetration prevalence is noteworthy; interpretation of prevalence data should be mindful of those young people identifying as 'bully-victims'.

Evidently, establishing the prevalence of bullying is fraught with methodological challenges. The variety of ways bullying can be measured, including varying reference periods and cut-off points for distinguishing victims from non-victims, are likely to produce differing results (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). However, studies which capture data across multiple time points using consistent methodology provide an opportunity to consider bullying prevalence over time. Trends analysis has suggested that the rates of bullying victimisation may have decreased in a number of countries over the last decade (Chester et al., 2015; Waasdorp, Pas, Zablotsky, & Bradshaw, 2017). While the rates of victimisation in England have decreased since 2002, the proportion of young people being bullied has remained fairly unchanged since 2006 (Chester et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that despite reductions in prevalence rates a considerable proportion of young people continue to experience victimisation.

2.2.4 Consequences of bullying

Historically bullying has been viewed as an inevitable feature of childhood; a traditional rite of passage assumed to be character building (Sullivan, 2000). However, the detrimental and often enduring impact of bullying has now been well documented and bullying is widely viewed as a public health concern (Anthony, Wessler, & Sebian, 2010). Extensive research has demonstrated the potentially negative impacts on emotional wellbeing and mental health, physical health, engagement with health risk behaviours and social outcomes. Furthermore, the negative effects of bullying are not limited to the victim; evidence has

shown negative associations for both the perpetrators (Copeland et al., 2015; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini, & Wolke, 2012) and bystanders of bullying (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009; Werth, Nickerson, Aloe, & Swearer, 2015).

Poorer emotional wellbeing and mental health has been well documented among both victims and perpetrators of bullying (Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd, & Marttunen, 2010; S. E. Moore et al., 2017; Noret, Hunter, & Rasmussen, 2020; Takizawa et al., 2014; Winsper et al., 2012). In the UK, analysis of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) has demonstrated that victims of bullying are more likely to report psychotic experiences and internalising symptoms including anxiety, depression and self-harm (Bowes et al., 2015; Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015; Stapinski et al., 2014; Wolke, Lereya, Fisher, Lewis, & Zammit, 2014). Lereya et al. (2015) examined the association between bullying victimisation in childhood (at age 8, 10 and 13 years) and mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, suicidality) in adulthood and established significant association; with the largest effects noted for depression. While analysis of data from the 1958 British Birth Cohort study demonstrated that those who experienced bullying at school were more likely to access mental health services through to midlife (Evans-Lacko et al., 2017), including a 153% increase in the odds of accessing mental health services at the age of 16.

Further, longitudinal studies have noted an association between bullying and physical health reports (Biebl, Dilalla, Davis, Lynch, & Shinn, 2011; Hager & Leadbeater, 2016; Takizawa et al., 2014). Due et al. (2005) established a strong, consistent association across 28 countries between being bullied and experiencing physical health symptoms including head ache and back ache. A meta-analysis further documented the increased risk of developing psychosomatic symptoms such as bed wetting and stomach aches among both victims and perpetrators of bullying (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). As part of their study, Gini and Pozzoli (2009) conducted separate meta-analyses on studies that were deemed ‘high’ quality (i.e. those using randomised sampling and with a response rate greater than 80%); this meta-analysis identified victims of bullying were 90% more likely to report psychosomatic symptoms compared with those not involved in bullying.

Experiencing bullying victimisation has also been associated with increased engagement in a wide range of health risk behaviours (Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013), including smoking tobacco (S. E. Moore et al., 2017; Vieno, Gini, & Santinello, 2011), substance use (Hertz et al., 2015) and alcohol consumption (S. E. Moore et al., 2017). Perpetrating bullying

has also been linked to increased risk behaviours including weapon carrying (Dukes, Stein, & Zane, 2010) and tobacco use (Vieno et al., 2011).

Recently, research has identified associations between involvement in bullying as a victim or a perpetrator and poorer social outcomes extending into later life, including 'dropping out' of school (S. E. Moore et al., 2015), lower levels of education (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010), unemployment (Brimblecombe et al., 2018; Takizawa et al., 2014), less financial gains (Brimblecombe et al., 2018; Wolke et al., 2013) and poorer social relationships (Schafer et al., 2004; Takizawa et al., 2014; Wolke et al., 2013). A systematic review and meta-analysis of 18 studies demonstrated significant associations between perpetrating bullying and later criminal offending; odds ratio (OR) = 2.60, reducing to 1.82 when controlling for confounding variables (Ttofi et al., 2011).

The negative impact of bullying has been demonstrated internationally across a number of health and wellbeing outcomes (Analitis et al., 2009; Due et al., 2005; Lereya, Copeland, Costello, et al., 2015), and has been revealed among both victims and perpetrators of bullying behaviours. The longitudinal nature of many of these studies strongly suggests the causal relationship between bullying and poorer health, wellbeing and social indicators (S. E. Moore et al., 2017).

However, it is also important to note that bully-victims, individuals who both bully others and experience bullying themselves, appear to be at an increased risk of poorer outcomes compared to young people who are involved in bullying as either solely a perpetrator or a victim (Chang et al., 2013; Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Wolke et al., 2013). Analysis of longitudinal data collected as part of the ALSPAC study in the UK has shown bully-victims were significantly more likely to experience mental health problems and suicidal ideation and behaviour (Lereya, Copeland, Zammit, & Wolke, 2015; Winsper et al., 2012). Similarly, a USA study noted bully-victims were at a significant increased risk for suicidality, although this was only identified among male participants (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Bully-victims have also been shown to have an increased risk of engagement with health risk behaviours. For example, a large meta-analysis identified that bully-victims were nearly six times more likely to carry a weapon compared to those not involved with bullying, the comparative results were three times as likely for those who were identified as sole perpetrators and twice as likely for those who only reported victimisation (Valdebenito, Ttofi, Eisner, & Gaffney, 2017).

A number of studies have also compared types of bullying behaviours to establish whether they are associated with differential outcomes (Boulton, 2013; Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015; Thomas et al., 2016), concluding that different forms of bullying are independently associated with poorer wellbeing. Comparisons between cyberbullying and the more traditional forms of bullying have seen considerable attention (Baier, Hong, Kliem, & Bergmann, 2019; Chang et al., 2013; Hertz et al., 2015; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011). Cyberbullying has been associated with poor mental health, with suggestions that it may play a greater detrimental role than other forms of bullying (Baier et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2011). However, it is important to acknowledge that young people who have experienced both cyberbullying and traditional bullying have demonstrated the poorest outcomes, including a greater chance of reporting symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation and engaging in health risk behaviours (Hertz et al., 2015; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012).

2.2.5 Summary

While the definition of bullying is to some extent contested, it is generally believed to be a distinct sub-type of aggression characterised by 1) intentional harmful behaviours, 2) carried out repeatedly over time, 3) within a relationship characterised by a power imbalance (Olweus, 1995). Bullying behaviours are most commonly classified as: physical, verbal, relational and cyber bullying. With growing evidence demonstrating associations between bullying involvement (as a victim, bully or bully-victim) and poorer health, wellbeing and future life chances (Wolke et al., 2013). Bullying is thought to be a relatively common occurrence in schools worldwide, although variations in measurements exist (Modecki et al., 2014). International analysis suggests approximately a third of young people across Europe and North America had been bullied at least once in the previous two months (Chester et al., 2015).

2.3 Preventing bullying

Considering the detrimental and potentially long-lasting impacts associated with bullying there is widespread concern and focus on the prevention of bullying across many countries (Minton & O'Moore, 2004; Smith, 2011). This section will initially outline current anti-bullying efforts within the UK. School level anti-bullying measures will then be discussed, with reference to both national and international anti-bullying programmes.

2.3.1 National level

In the UK there is no legal definition of bullying, however there are a number of laws and regulations which are in place to help prevent bullying behaviours – both in and outside of the school environment. The majority of bullying incidents are not considered as being against the law, however some forms of bullying such as assault, theft and criminal damage of property could be a criminal offence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Malicious Communications Act 1988 or the Public Order Act 1986.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate, harass or victimise individuals based on nine protected characteristics - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. All schools (maintained and independent) must follow the Equality Act 2010. Additionally, the inclusion of the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Act places a duty on publicly funded schools and colleges to:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

In relation to bullying specifically, all schools are required to have anti-bullying measures. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 states that maintained schools must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying among students, and the school anti-bullying measures must be published and conveyed to students, staff and parents. Furthermore, the Education and Inspections Act 2006 allows schools to intervene in cases of bullying outside of the school environment. The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 refers to academies and independent schools, and stipulates that effective anti-bullying policies must be drawn up and implemented. The Education Act 2011 also extended the power of school staff to screen and search electronic devices, which may be applicable to cases of cyberbullying. School staff are now able to search and delete files from a student's electronic device (such as a mobile phone) if they are likely to cause harm.

Accordingly, the Department for Education has published a number of guidance documents which can inform school anti-bullying measures, including advice for preventing and tackling bullying (Department for Education, 2017), the role of the Equality Act 2010 in schools

(Department for Education, 2014), behaviour and discipline in schools (Department for Education, 2016) and schools' power to screen and search students (Department for Education, 2018b). Bullying is also addressed on the UK government webpages (see www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school). Public Health England contributed to the guidance too, publishing a report on cyberbullying intended for those interested in young people's mental wellbeing including school nurses, head teachers and principals (Brooks et al., 2017).

Furthermore, maintained schools and academies in England are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Schools are inspected across five key judgement areas including "personal development, behaviour and welfare" (Ofsted, 2018, p. 38), under which bullying behaviours are considered when making an assessment.

Within the UK there are also a number of specialist anti-bullying organisations such as the ABA, Bullying UK, Ditch the Label and Kidscape. These charity organisations provide support for young people experiencing bullying, as well as advice and resources for parents and teachers. They demonstrate a wider societal concern surrounding bullying among young people. Every year in England the ABA co-ordinate Anti-Bullying Week during the month of November to raise awareness of bullying. The 2018 Anti-Bullying Week was thought to reach 79% of schools in England and approximately 7.5 million young people (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2018). The widespread uptake of this initiative reflects broader national efforts concerned with reducing the number of young people being victimised.

2.3.2 School level

While the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 make it statutory for all schools (state and independent) to have anti-bullying measures in place, it does not specify what type of measure must be instated. Consequently, the content and implementation of anti-bullying measures vary greatly between schools (Ofsted, 2012). Furthermore, research has suggested school anti-bullying policies are lacking in detail; a content analysis of anti-bullying policies in England identified a number of deficits including the recording of bullying incidents, the preventative role of peers and other school staff and the evaluation of school measures (Smith et al., 2012). Research comparing anti-bullying measures across schools in New Zealand and Australia noted a similar lack of detail surrounding the role of non-teaching staff and methods for policy evaluation (Marsh, McGee, Hemphill, & Williams, 2011).

Anti-bullying measures in schools tend to follow one of two approaches; either they are proactive and preventative in nature, or they are reactive and responsive to incidents of bullying (Smith, 2011). The two approaches are complementary and are often implemented together. The preventative strategies aim to reduce the number of reactive interventions which are necessary, while the reactive interventions may deter others from engaging in bullying behaviours (Rigby & Slee, 2008).

Preventative measures aim to change the current attitudes and behaviours of all students in order to create an anti-bullying ethos which is adopted universally within the school (Rigby, 2012). Preventative methods may include assemblies, curriculum activities (including Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education), staff training, cooperative group work and changes to the school environment (Thompson & Smith, 2011). Preventative methods help to promote a positive school climate, for example cooperative group work encourages students to work outside of their usual social groups, fostering inclusivity among peers and acceptance of diversity (Sullivan, 2000).

The reactive approach, with a focus on those involved in specific bullying incidents, can be punitive or non-punitive in nature. Punitive action (for example, disciplinary sanctions such as a school detention or being 'grounded') is the traditional response to those caught bullying. The punitive approach is thought to offer the victim a sense of justice, and is often favoured by both parents and teachers (Rigby, 2012). However, Rigby (2012) identified types of bullying behaviours (such as relational bullying) which may go unnoticed following punitive approaches and suggests that the traditional disciplinary approach ignores that bullying is often a group phenomenon. Non-punitive measures focus on restoring pro-social behaviour rather than punishment and may include support group methods and restorative approaches (Thompson & Smith, 2011). Non-punitive approaches are often characterised by group meetings over a period of time, with the intended outcome that the perpetrator(s) will take responsibility for their actions.

A whole-school approach to the prevention of bullying is often advocated; bullying is a complex phenomenon and "it is unlikely to be intervened by simply employing single-level strategies or programs" (Chan & Wong, 2015, p. 102). The Department for Education (2017) guidance does not explicitly refer to the 'whole-school approach', but recommends that schools create a safe inclusive environment which extends beyond the classroom by working with pupils, parents and the wider community. Consequently, schools often employ a range of anti-bullying measures. Furthermore, whole-school anti-bullying programmes have been

formulated and implemented across the world, including the 'Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme' (Olweus, 2004), the 'Sheffield Project' (Smith, Sharp, Eslea, & Thompson, 2004) and the 'KiVa anti-bullying programme' (Kärnä et al., 2011). Each of these programmes provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to the prevention of, and response to, bullying behaviours in school.

Individual anti-bullying programmes have been subject to evaluation and critique. For example, Kärnä et al. (2013) report a large scale review of the KiVa anti-bullying programme drawing on data from over 16 500 young people across 73 schools in Finland; the intervention was deemed most effective among younger students (aged 8 – 13 years) compared with teenagers, with the odds of those in the control schools being involved in bullying about 1.5 times greater than those in schools participating in the KiVa anti-bullying programme. However, meta-analyses provide a more comprehensive evaluation of a broad range of anti-bullying measures and allow for identification of elements which have been most effective.

Lee et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 studies and concluded anti-bullying measures had a small to moderate effect on bullying victimisation, and suggested that peer counselling, anti-bullying policies and emotional learning were particularly key in reducing bullying. A more comprehensive meta-analytical review of 100 evaluations concluded that anti-bullying measures can have a positive impact, reducing perpetration by approximately 19-20% and victimisation by 15%-16% (Gaffney, Ttofi, & Farrington, 2019). However, this meta-analysis failed to consider individual components of anti-bullying programmes and is therefore unable to identify which elements are particularly effective. A prior review conducted by the authors similarly noted that that rates of bullying victimisation decreased on average by 17-20%, and also identified that disciplinary methods, playground supervision and parental involvement were associated with greater effectiveness (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Conversely, earlier reviews of anti-bullying programmes in schools reported mixed findings, with negligible results (Baldry & Farrington, 2007; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Overall, it is assumed anti-bullying measures in school appear to have moderate positive effects on bullying behaviours (Arseneault, 2018). Ttofi and Farrington (2011) concluded that "programs should be targeted on children aged 11 or older rather than on younger children" (p. 46). This stance has since been challenged by Yeager and colleagues (2015) who established the significant positive association with age as a consequence of methodological approach; in line with the previously described evaluation reported by Kärnä et al. (2013), it

is likely that anti-bullying interventions are most effective with younger children. However, the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures and programmes rely on the implementation and commitment of schools; and research has shown this to vary considerably across schools and classrooms (Haataja et al., 2014). Consequently, it may be most useful for schools to continually critique and evaluate their own anti-bullying measures rather than compare across schools, because "what will work in one school may not necessarily work in another" (N. O'Brien, 2009, p. 421).

2.3.3 Summary

Efforts to prevent bullying have been noted across the globe (Minton & O'Moore, 2004). In the UK, laws and guidance are in place to help promote anti-bullying efforts both within and outside of the school environment. The importance of bullying within the UK government is further evidenced by the all-party parliamentary group on bullying[6] which aims to raise awareness of bullying and promote changes nationally and locally in the effort to reduce the prevalence of bullying among young people.

While schools are lawfully bound to devise and implement an anti-bullying policy, these have been shown to vary greatly (Smith et al., 2012). Consequently, Smith and colleagues (2012) suggested a collaborative approach between government and schools to ensure comprehensive anti-bullying policies are developed. Further, establishing a school policy is not sufficient in itself as they are poorly correlated with bullying incidents (Smith et al., 2012; Woods & Wolke, 2003). The effectiveness of an anti-bullying policy relies on the individual school consistently implementing and evaluating their approach to anti-bullying. Schools often employ a whole-school approach to bullying, featuring a mixture of preventative and reactive measures as part of their policy. Current evaluations suggest anti-bullying efforts have the potential to successfully reduce bullying behaviours, but variation across schools has been demonstrated (S. Lee et al., 2015; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

2.4 Relational bullying

Relational bullying describes bullying behaviours which aim to cause harm to the victim through the systematic manipulation and damage of peer relationships and feelings of group acceptance (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). There are a great variety of relational bullying methods which can be employed: threatening to retract friendships,

[6] http://www.appgb.org.uk/

spreading rumours resulting in peer rejection, encouraging peers to reject the victim and purposefully ignoring and excluding the victim from socialising (Coyne et al., 2006; Dukes, Stein, & Zane, 2009). This section will introduce the historical context of relational bullying, before providing an overview of the current understanding of this form of bullying. Relational bullying was developed as an area of research interest much later than the topics of physical and verbal bullying and it could be argued that it is to some extent still under-researched today, as detailed below.

2.4.1 Historical perspective

The study of bullying initially overlapped with research addressing the broader concept of aggression. Aggression was traditionally deemed a male only phenomenon, with Buss (1961) suggesting women were so infrequently aggressive it was not worthwhile studying female aggression. This gender typing also extended to bullying, with Olweus (1978) initially excluding girls and focusing primarily on boys' experiences of school bullying.

Björkqvist and colleagues were pivotal in highlighting qualitative differences of aggression between males and females, as opposed to quantitative (Björkqvist et al., 1992; Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988). Björkqvist (1994) suggested that men and women did not differ in the amount of aggressive behaviour they exhibited but in the type, with women adopting more indirect methods. This notion had been overlooked previously due to aggression being operationalised as the heavily male stereotyped behaviour of physical fighting (Björkqvist & Niemelä, 1992). The quantifiable gender difference in aggression levels was logical if aggression was measured purely through observations of physical fighting - a behaviour infrequently employed by females. When evaluating aggression as more than just physical fighting through the inclusion of more indirect methods women were deemed to be no less aggressive than men. In a meta-analysis of gender difference studies, Hyde (1984) found sex differences accounted for only 5% of variance in aggression scores. The work by Björkqvist and colleagues expanded the scope of aggression research beyond that of physical behaviours, paving the way for the study of relational bullying.

2.4.2 Definitional issues

As previously discussed, defining bullying and bullying behaviours is complex (see Section 2.2.1). A variety of terms are often used to describe similar behaviours, however relational bullying is particularly susceptible to this. For example, it has been described as indirect (Maunder et al., 2010; van der Wal et al., 2003), covert (Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson,

2009), social (Borowsky, Taliaferro, & McMorris, 2013), emotional (Department for Education, 2017), psychological (HSCIC, 2015) and indirect non-verbal (Sullivan, 2000).

There has been particular debate about the use of the terms relational and indirect (Björkqvist, 2001). Coyne et al. (2006) offer a comprehensive account of the terms indirect, relational and social in reference to the broader concept of aggression, rather than bullying specifically. Indirect aggression is primarily categorised by its covert nature, the perpetrator remains unknown. Relational aggression describes behaviours which damage relationships. Social aggression encompasses all the behaviours in indirect and relational aggression, whilst also adding harmful non-verbal behaviours to the construct such as 'giving dirty looks'. Archer and Coyne (2005) reviewed the three terms and deemed them more similar than different, identifying them as the same form of aggression and suggesting research should integrate all three types. Björkqvist (2001) also concluded that the behaviours are all characterised by social manipulation in an aptly named article "Different names, same issue".

However, referring back to Figure 2.1, it appears the terms differ in their fundamental underpinnings – indirect describes the subtlety of the bullying behaviour while relational describes the method of inflicting harm (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Relational bullying behaviours can be both indirect and direct (Gladden et al., 2014). Indirect methods may include a bully hiding behind rumours and encouraging others to hurt the victim by retracting their friendships, while threats such as 'I won't be your friend, unless...' and refusals of a seat at the lunch table would be considered direct. Furthermore, not all indirect bullying would be considered relational, for example the damage of property or sending anonymous notes.

Complicating understanding further, a number of studies have examined specific relational bullying behaviours separately, for instance social exclusion and rumour spreading have been studied independently rather than under the broader term of relational bullying (Thomas et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2012). Cyberbullying has also been positioned as a relational bullying behaviour (Jackson, Cassidy, & Brown, 2009; Spears et al., 2009), with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention locating cyberbullying as a context in which relational bullying can occur (Gladden et al., 2014).

Outside of academic research, these types of behaviours are often overlooked as bullying, particularly in a UK context. The English language contains a variety of words and phrases which are used to describe bullying, including 'being picked on', 'teased', 'tormented', or

'harassed'. Smorti et al. (2003) analysed the way in which parents from five countries understood and conceptualised such terms. Across all five countries, the English words had the lowest associations with acts of social exclusion, with the term 'bullying' most strongly associated with physical actions. Similarly, an international comparison of young people's definitions established that young people in England were most likely to associate bullying with physical or verbal behaviours, whereas young people from other countries were more sensitive to acts of social exclusion (Smith et al., 2002).

2.4.3 Prevalence

Despite anecdotal evidence suggesting relational bullying is a common occurrence, very little research reports the prevalence of relational bullying alone. The variety of terms used to describe relational bullying also complicates the interpretation of prevalence rates. Furthermore, the methodological challenges of measuring bullying (see Section 2.2.3) also extend to relational bullying and are likely to contribute to the reporting of inconsistent prevalence rates and hinder comparisons across studies and countries.

An Australian study identified 16% of young people had experienced covert bullying in the past few weeks (Cross et al., 2009) - although it should be recognised that covert bullying is not entirely equivalent to relational bullying. A fifth (20%) of Taiwanese college students reported retrospective relational bullying at school (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015). Over 40% of an American sample of young people reported relational bullying in the past two months at school (Wang et al., 2009); however a comparative American study identified 9% of young people at school had experienced rumour spreading using the stricter reference period of the past month (Waasdorp et al., 2017).

In the UK, further research is needed to establish the prevalence of relational bullying. Benton (2011) captured the element of social exclusion specifically, with prevalence rates ranging from 14% in boys aged 17 years to 32% in girls aged 11 years. However, Benton (2011) utilised the rather large reference period of experiencing bullying in the last 12 months. More recently, the WAY study reported the prevalence of rumour spreading and social exclusion among 15 year olds in England; 30% reported being victimised through rumours and 29% reported experiencing social exclusion in the past couple of months (HSCIC, 2015). The LSYPE collected data at a similar time point, and identified 14% of 15-16 year olds had experienced social exclusion in the past 12 months (Department for Education, 2018a); the smaller percentage in comparison to the WAY study is to some extent surprising considering the larger reference period. At present, the proportions of young people

experiencing relational bullying in a UK context is unclear. Furthermore, the majority of research has focused on specific relational bullying behaviours, such as social exclusion, rather than the assessing the broader concept of relational bullying.

2.4.4 Gender differences

Relational bullying is often thought to be more prevalent among females; however, this interpretation is complicated by the presentation of gender differences both within and between different types of bullying. Girls are more likely to be involved in relational bullying behaviours compared with physical forms of bullying, while the opposite is true for boys (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Österman et al., 1998; Wang et al., 2009). However, when comparing gender differences within relational bullying the findings are mixed.

Traditionally, girls were thought to experience relational bullying more often than boys (Björkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Österman et al., 1998; Rivers & Smith, 1994). Recent national data also identified over a third of girls experienced social exclusion compared with around a fifth of boys (HSCIC, 2015). However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest gender differences are, at most, negligible (Baldry & Winkel, 2004; Coyne et al., 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Dukes et al., 2009; Gini, 2008; Kuppens, Grietens, Onghena, Michiels, & Subramanian, 2008; Prinstein et al., 2001). An Australian study examining the related concept of covert bullying identified minimal gender differences: 18% of girls compared with 15% of boys (Cross et al., 2009). A meta-analysis of the broader phenomena of aggression identified trivial gender differences, concluding "indirect aggression is not a 'female form' of aggression" (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008, p. 1209). Drawing on 107 studies and over 50 000 participants, Card et al. (2008) established an effect size of r = -0.03; while statistically significant, the magnitude was deemed trivial. Essentially, girls may have a preference for relational bullying behaviours compared with other methods, but within relational bullying the gender difference is small. Furthermore, Talbott et al. (2004) found gossiping amongst girls was the main prerequisite to physical fighting; highlighting that different types of bullying are not unconnected.

The media reinforces the concept of relational bullying as a female form of aggression (Swearer, 2008). Popular books emphasise relational bullying as a problem behaviour among girls e.g. "Queen Bees & Wannabes" (Wiseman, 2002) and "Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Girls Aggression" (Simmons, 2011). Indirect aggression is portrayed on television more frequently than physical acts of aggression (Coyne & Archer, 2004; Coyne et al., 2006). Furthermore, the acts are most likely to be depicted by attractive female characters, well-

known examples include Mean Girls and Gossip Girl (Coyne & Archer, 2004). When relational bullying appears in the news it is often directed at girls, with headlines such as "Mean girls: How to talk to your daughter about toxic friendships"[7] and "Teen girls' friendships: Sugar and spice and scars for life"[8].

Underwood and Rosen (2011) suggested a need to move beyond mean gender differences in bullying to explore the relationships with gender in more detail. Research suggests that girls and boys may hold gender-specific views and perceptions about bullying. For example, boys have been shown to perceive social, relational and indirect aggression as less harmful and less serious than physical and verbal aggression; whereas girls perceive the more indirect behaviours to be of greater importance and have a considerable negative impact (Coyne et al., 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000).

It has been suggested that friendships among girls are more salient, hence the destruction of these relationships may be particularly traumatic for girls (Coyne et al., 2006). However, the oversimplification of relational bullying as a girl issue ignores the substantial number of boys who are subjected to relational bullying; for example, over a third of boys in an American sample reported being victimised relationally in the previous two months (Wang et al., 2009). Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the gendered conceptualisation of relational bullying as being typically female may prevent boys from reporting that they have experienced relational bullying or that the behaviour is harmful for fear of deviating from gender norms.

2.4.5 Consequences of relational bullying

As previously described, bullying behaviours have been associated with poorer health, wellbeing and future life chances (see Section 2.2.4). Relational bullying in young people has been associated with negative health outcomes including depression (Baldry & Winkel, 2004), anxiety (Boulton, 2013), loneliness (Prinstein et al., 2001), suicidal ideation (van der Wal et al., 2003) and somatic complaints (Nixon, Linkie, Coleman, & Fitch, 2011).

A number of studies have compared the effect of different types of bullying. Relational bullying has been shown to have an independent association with negative health outcomes irrespective of other bullying behaviours (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015; Thomas et al., 2016).

[7] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting/mean-girls-how-to-talk-to-your-daughter-abouttoxic-friendships/

[8] https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/apr/10/teen-girls-friendships-whisering-scars-for-life

Furthermore, there are indications that relational bullying behaviours are more strongly associated with negative outcomes compared with other forms of bullying (Baldry & Winkel, 2004; van der Wal et al., 2003). Among an Australian sample of approximately 10 000 adolescents, those who experienced social exclusion reported significantly elevated levels of psychological distress and reduced emotional wellbeing compared with those experiencing physical and verbal bullying (Thomas et al., 2016). American studies found relational victimisation was a stronger predictor of somatic symptoms (Nixon et al., 2011) and physical health outcomes in later life (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016) compared with physical victimisation. Baier et al. (2019) established relational bullying was more highly correlated with mental health than physical bullying among German adolescents, however they found it was not as influential as cyberbullying. Conversely, some studies have been unable to replicate these findings, identifying contrary relationships (A. G. Dempsey, Haden, Goldman, Sivinski, & Wiens, 2011) or minimal differences between the different types of bullying (Hampel, Manhal, & Hayer, 2009; Wang et al., 2011).

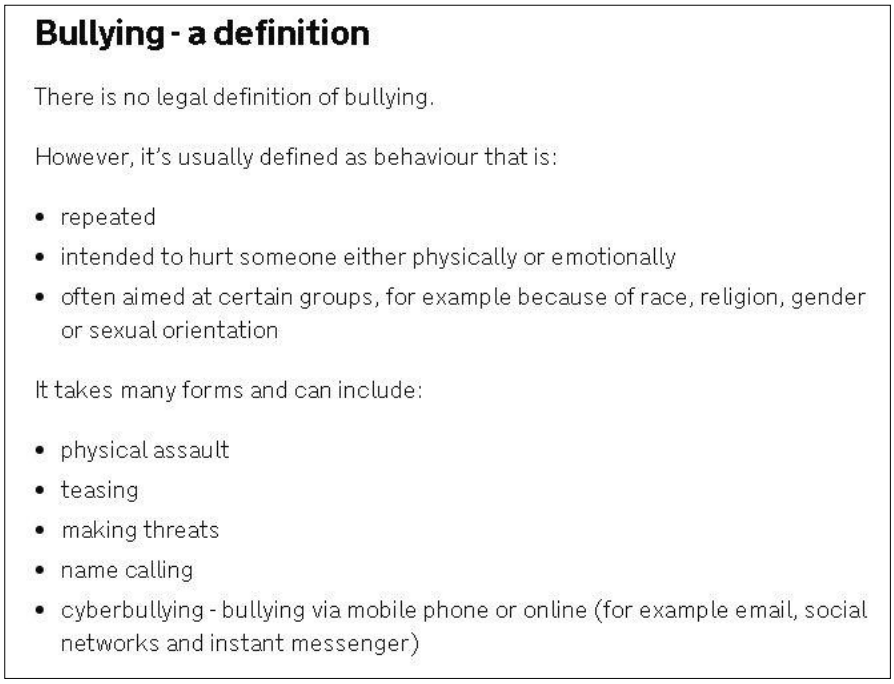
While young people appear to hold gendered perceptions of relational bullying including the relative impact of these behaviours, it is unclear whether these are reflected in the actual relationship between victimisation and health outcomes. Traditional work by Crick and colleagues (1998; 2002) suggested relational bullying had a stronger association with socio-psychological adjustment among girls than boys. More recently, Thomas et al. (2016) demonstrated that rumour spreading had a larger influence on psychological distress among girls than boys. However, the abovementioned relationship between relational bullying and somatic complaints (Nixon et al., 2011) and later physical symptoms (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016) was not moderated by gender. Whereas Baier et al. (2019) only established gender differences in relation to sexual bullying behaviours and not relational bullying. Furthermore, a meta-analysis identified the significant relationship between indirect aggression and internalising problems was not moderated by gender, suggesting the outcome of relational bullying may not vary between boys and girls (Card et al., 2008). It is also worth considering whether gender differences could be a product of the outcome measures being studied. Girls and boys may present their distress differently, for example research suggests girls are more likely to exhibit internalising symptoms while boys tend to display externalising symptoms (Baier et al., 2019; Nivard et al., 2017). Consequently, studies which focus on internalising symptoms as an outcome measure may unfairly skew the perception as they do not account for boys experiencing distress in varying ways.

A plethora of research (Biebl et al., 2011; Hertz et al., 2015; S. E. Moore et al., 2017; Stapinski et al., 2014) has demonstrated bullying in general is detrimental to young people, and recent studies in Australia (Thomas et al., 2016), America (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016), Germany (Baier et al., 2019) and Taiwan (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015) have demonstrated the negative outcomes associated with relational bullying specifically. In comparison to current international research, relational bullying has received less attention in a UK context. The ALSPAC study in England collects data on relational bullying behaviours, however subsequent analysis often combines all forms of bullying into an overall measure of victimisation (Bowes et al., 2015; Stapinski et al., 2014; Wolke et al., 2014). Of note, Winsper et al. (2012) distinguished between relational and overt victimisation when drawing on ALSPAC data. The study examined associations between bullying involvement at age 4-10 years and suicidal ideation at 12 years, identifying a significant increased risk for future suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviour among relational bullying victims (OR = 1.77). A retrospective methodology with UK university students established that experiencing relational bullying, and not physical or verbal, in childhood was associated with social anxiety in later life (Boulton, 2013). Benton (2011) reported findings from over 35 000 young people from across 100 UK secondary schools; when examining associations between types of bullying behaviours and emotional wellbeing, the largest effect size was noted for social exclusion. Furthermore, the link between 'being left out' and poorer wellbeing was stronger for boys compared with girls - which further emphasises the need for UK based research as this is in stark contrast with traditional assumptions of relational bullying as a female issue. However, the study by Benton (2011) focused specifically on social exclusion and failed to consider other forms of relational bullying behaviours.

2.4.6 Preventing relational bullying

Broadly speaking, relational bullying behaviours are not explicitly described in the national guidance for schools provided by the Department for Education (2017) nor the UK government webpages (see Figure 2.2). However, both sources refer to causing harm 'emotionally' which has been frequently used to describe relational bullying behaviours. Furthermore, the national guidance for schools acknowledges the harm of relational bullying:

> *"Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is obviously a school's first priority but emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical; teachers and schools have to make their own judgements about each specific case."* (Department for Education, 2017, p. 8)



Bullying - a definition

There is no legal definition of bullying.

However, it's usually defined as behaviour that is:

- repeated
- intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally
- often aimed at certain groups, for example because of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation

It takes many forms and can include:

- physical assault
- teasing
- making threats
- name calling
- cyberbullying - bullying via mobile phone or online (for example email, social networks and instant messenger)

Figure 2.2 *Definition of bullying on the UK government webpage*[9]

In the UK it is the responsibility of each school to devise appropriate anti-bullying measures encompassing all forms of bullying (see Section 2.3). However, research suggests that relational bullying behaviours are not well addressed within the school environment. Smith et al. (2012) found relational bullying was less likely than physical or verbal bullying to be included in school anti-bullying policies, although did note an increase between 2002 and 2008 among both primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, policies themselves are not indicative of bullying levels, with research demonstrating greater levels of relational bullying among schools with the most comprehensive anti-bullying polices (Woods & Wolke, 2003). School policies must be effectively implemented and actioned, however it is acknowledged that school staff may find this more challenging in response to relational bullying.

A poor understanding of relational bullying among school staff may hinder the efforts to identify and respond to cases of relational bullying. Research has shown that teachers and school support staff are more likely to identify a scenario as bullying when the behaviour includes either a physical or verbal act (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001; Maunder et al., 2010). A study of teachers from 51 schools across the UK found that a minority (13%) of teachers referred to social exclusion when defining

[9] www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school

bullying (Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Furthermore, teachers understanding of relational bullying may be complicated because these behaviours are often tied up within friendship groups, making it problematic for outsiders to make distinctions between relational bullying and normal conflict among friendship groups (Besag, 2006).

Despite evidence indicating the long-lasting and detrimental outcomes associated with relational bullying, these behaviours are often perceived as less serious than other forms of bullying. Studies from across the world have found teachers and support staff rank relational bullying as the least severe and least serious form of bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton et al., 2014; Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011; Craig et al., 2000; Hazler et al., 2001; Kahn et al., 2012; Maunder et al., 2010). Teachers have also reported feeling less empathy towards the victims of relational bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton et al., 2014).

The way in which school staff perceive relational bullying will consequently influence their response to such behaviours. Evidence from both the UK and United States of America (USA) suggests that teachers are less likely to intervene in cases of relational bullying compared with physical or verbal bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 2012; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Qualitative research with young girls found that teaching staff intervened in cases of physical fighting but did not intervene in the relational bullying behaviours which preceded the physical fight (Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2004). The minimisation of relational bullying is likely to reduce intervention efforts, but relational bullying behaviours may also receive less attention because they are overshadowed by physical and verbal acts of bullying. Physical and verbal bullying may be more disruptive in the classroom environment, requiring immediate resolution for the lesson to continue.

Furthermore, when teachers intervened in cases of relational bullying their responses were likely to be more passive, leaving the resolution down to those involved in the bullying (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). In the UK, punitive measures (such as verbal reprimands and detentions) were less likely to be used in cases of relational bullying compared with physical, verbal or cyber bullying; whereas the support group method was deemed particularly effective for relational bullying (Thompson & Smith, 2011). However, qualitative work with 15 year old girls in Australia noted that they were pessimistic about the interventions for relational bullying behaviours (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). The gendered perceptions of relational bullying may also extend to intervention efforts as fewer teachers were identified intervening when boys experienced relational bullying compared with girls (Kahn et al.,

2012). Parents have also been shown to respond differently to relational-type bullying behaviours. When a young person was victimised directly parents reported contacting members of the school staff (including teachers and school counsellors), whereas indirect victimisation most likely resulted in parents themselves talking to the young person being victimised (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011).

Until recently there has been a paucity of research focusing on developing tools for reducing relational bullying. Leff and colleagues have been pivotal in studying prevention and intervention measures for the broader concept of relational aggression (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010; Leff, Waasdorp, Paskewich, et al., 2010). Evaluations of such programmes have showed promising results, highlighting key features including consideration of the young person's age, gender, culture and social environment (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). The 'Walk Away, Ignore, Talk, Seek Help' programme implemented in Canada was viewed favourably because of its whole-school approach which included members of both the school and local community (Leadbeater, Hoglund, & Woods, 2003). Similarly, the 'Steps to Respect' programme involved a universal whole-school approach to all forms of bullying including relational, and proved to be successful in reducing malicious gossiping (Low, Frey, & Brockman, 2010). The study estimates indicate approximately 270 fewer cases (per class) of young people being targeted with gossip in the follow-up period (April-June) compared with the baseline period (October-December), however the authors note that reduction in gossip victimisation was more common among young people with supportive friends (Low et al., 2010). A number of existing measures have been directed at girls specifically, for example 'Friend to Friend' (Leff et al., 2009); considering the uncertainty surrounding gender differences it is important future interventions also account for boy's experiences of relational bullying.

2.4.7 Summary

Relational bullying is a complex behaviour, further complicated by discrepancies in defining and understanding this phenomenon. Research has progressed to evaluating qualitative rather than quantitative distinctions between boys and girls; evidence has indicated that relational bullying behaviours are frequent and have potentially long-lasting and detrimental outcomes for those experiencing them (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016).

Relational bullying has received less attention than other forms of bullying in the UK, however broader societal perceptions suggest these behaviours are not considered as seriously as other of forms of bullying. Students, parents and school staff are less likely to

define relational bullying behaviours as a form of bullying (Smith et al., 2002; Smorti et al., 2003). Furthermore, it is ranked as the least severe form of bullying and evokes less empathy (Boulton et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 2012) despite the fact that it can have a substantive and long-term negative impact on the young person. Consequently, relational bullying is likely to be the least recognised form of bullying, which carries huge implications for the primary identification of this behaviour and for the implementation of effective interventions. Young people may not report being victimised in this way if they associate bullying with physical acts; in addition, school staff have reported using fewer and more passive interventions with relational bullying. Further, Ofsted acknowledges that it is more difficult to define and detect relational bullying behaviours compared with other forms of bullying (Ofsted, 2003).

Considering the inconsistencies between current understanding and potential outcomes of relational bullying it warrants further research attention; as O'Brien (2009) concludes, "more research in relation to social exclusion and victimisation is needed in order to increase understanding of this phenomenon and inform recommendations for practice" (p. 418). The inconsistencies between how relational bullying is defined and commonly understood suggest it may be useful to capture the perceptions of those who are experiencing this behaviour, as such further work is required to examine the way in which young people in the UK experience and perceive relational bullying.

2.5 The young person's voice in bullying

Young people's role in research has seen a radical shift since the early 1990s; moving from young people as voiceless research objects to active social agents (Moules & O'Brien, 2012). Historically, research concerning young people was conducted entirely from the perspective of adults, however researchers now acknowledge young people can offer a unique insight into their own worlds (T. Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur, 2016). Furthermore, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states young people have the right to express their views, and for those to be taken seriously, in matters which affect them (UN General Assembly, 1989).

A substantial evidence base has demonstrated the negative associations of experiencing bullying, however fewer studies have considered young people's experiences and perceptions of this behaviour (Canty et al., 2016; Nassem, 2017; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Thornberg (2015a) stated that "it is a matter of urgency to investigate how they

[young people] make sense of different social situations and phenomena" (p. 16) as the way in which a young person understands bullying will influence their response when faced with such a situation. It has been suggested that bullying research involving young people can utilise consultation, self-evaluation and/or co-researcher approaches (Thomson & Gunter, 2008). Young people assuming a co-researcher role is growing in the UK, such as the body of work by Niamh O'Brien and colleagues using a participatory approach to bullying (N. O'Brien, 2016; N. O'Brien & Moules, 2012; N. O'Brien, Munn-Giddings, & Moules, 2018). This section will detail current research exploring young people's perceptions and experiences of bullying, with particular focus on relational bullying behaviours.

2.5.1 Young people's perceptions and experiences

It has been acknowledged that young people's understanding of bullying may vary compared to adult-led definitions. Vaillancourt and colleagues (2008) aptly named paper "Bullying: Are researchers and children/youth talking about the same thing?" concluded that young people seldom refer to the characteristics of intent, repetition and a power imbalance which are often the basis of bullying definitions. Furthermore, the study found that relational bullying behaviours were less likely than physical or verbal actions to be included in young people's definitions, though the likelihood did increase with age (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). However, it must be noted that the researchers asked young people to complete the sentence "A bully is…" which differs semantically to the verb 'bullying'; as such the findings may more closely illustrate how young people perceive an individual bully rather than what constitutes bullying behaviours.

Similarly, a mixed methods study in Sweden established an emphasis on the more physical and verbal behaviours, with young people's understanding of bullying growing more nuanced with age as they begin to consider non-physical acts too (Hellström, Persson, & Hagquist, 2015). Girls were more likely than boys to include relational bullying behaviours in their perception of bullying (Hellström et al., 2015). Furthermore, the qualitative research found that young people considered the harm caused to the victim when defining bullying; a single incident may be considered an act of bullying if it was significantly hurtful (Hellström et al., 2015). The victim's experience is rarely considered in adult-led definitions of bullying. Repetition has been a particularly contested criteria among young people (Cheng, Chen, Ho, & Cheng, 2011) with Cuadrado-Gordillo concluding repetition was not a defining characteristic among Spanish young people (2012).

Thornberg and colleagues have established a body of research which focuses on young people's perspective of bullying in Sweden (Strindberg, Horton, & Thornberg, 2019; Thornberg, 2015a; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). Through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies their research has addressed *why* young people may bully others, with social positioning identified as a re-occurring explanation of bullying perpetration across their research with young people. For example, focus groups with young people (aged 11-12 years) identified the concepts 'coolness' and 'social vulnerability' to distinguish between bullies and victims respectively (Strindberg et al., 2019). However, it must be noted that the focus groups were facilitated by a single vignette which most closely related to verbal bullying and as such the research may not accurately reflect young people's perceptions of other types of bullying behaviours. Further, Thornberg (2011) reviewed qualitative studies which specifically captured personal experiences and views on bullying. Young people described bullying perpetration as a response to an individual being different in some way and their accounts illustrated the complex role of social hierarchy and status at school. Young people's experience of bullying is embedded in a complex social system with both prohibiting and inhibiting factors for bullying involvement (Thornberg, 2011).

The way in which bullying is understood and perceived has been shown to vary across cultures (Canty et al., 2016). Consequently, it is necessary to consider the applicability of international research to a UK context as the perception and understanding of bullying is likely to be culturally dependent. For example, Taiwanese students rated relational bullying behaviours as the most severe form of bullying (L.-M. Chen, Liu, & Cheng, 2012) which is in stark contrast to findings across the UK (Maunder et al., 2010); it has been suggested that the collectivist culture dominant in Asia may contribute to Taiwanese young people placing a greater importance on the damage of peer relationships.

In 2009, a systematic review sought to establish how UK secondary school teachers and students defined bullying (N. O'Brien, 2009). The review drew on both quantitative and qualitative research comprising over 3000 young people, including studies from Naylor et al. (2006), Monks and Smith (2006) and Boulton et al. (2002). The concepts of repetition, intent and harm presented mixed findings, however, in general, the characteristics were mentioned by a minority of young people. Further, young people's understanding of bullying was most likely to refer to physical and verbal actions, rather than relational bullying behaviours such as social exclusion. In line with Thornberg's work in Sweden (Thornberg,

2015a; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011), young people in England were also found to focus on difference when defining bullying (N. O'Brien, 2009).

O'Brien (2009) noted differences among young people including variations across age and gender. Perceptions of bullying have also been shown to vary depending on the gender of those involved in the bullying. For example, a UK-based study established that a boy victimising a boy was perceived as the most acceptable form of bullying among a sample of secondary school students, whereas a boy victimising a girl was the most problematic (C. O'Brien, 2011). Furthermore, female and not male bullies were perceived as bitchy, irrespective of the type of bullying behaviour they perpetrated (C. O'Brien, 2011).

More recently in the UK, Nassem (2017) employed a range of qualitative methodologies to examine the perspective of 'children' (aged 10-16 years) involved in bullying. While Nassem's (2017) work focused on perpetrators it highlighted how relational bullying, such as excluding others, was viewed by young people as a method they could employ to maintain their own group status and acceptance. The perceived emotional response to cyberbullying was explored among primary school students in England, however students were presented with a list of emotions rather than recalling feelings in their own words (Monks, Robinson, & Worlidge, 2012). A recent participatory approach "with student voice and perspective at its core" (N. O'Brien et al., 2018, p. 29) sought to understand young people's experience of reporting bullying in an independent school in England. Fundamentally young people's decision to report bullying centred on whether or not they perceived bullying to have occurred, which further emphasises the importance of fostering young people's voice on this topic. O'Brien et al. (2018) report that young people also made decisions based on the perceived severity of the bullying, with physical bullying behaviours more likely to be viewed as 'serious enough' to report.

It has been argued that the voice of girls is missing in research around aggression and violence in schools (Batchelor, Burman, & Brown, 2001; Dytham, 2018). This may be particularly pertinent in research addressing the more physical bullying behaviours (Canty et al., 2016), however the opposite relationship could be suggested for relational bullying. In the UK, Besag (2006) employed an ethnographic study to understand the related phenomena of indirect bullying amongst girls in primary school. Indirect bullying behaviours were observed among friendship groups and girls perceived "the breaking of a friendship as the most anxiety-provoking aspect of school life" (Besag, 2006, p. 535). Similarly, research from Australia captured the experience of indirect aggression between girls (aged 15)

(Owens, Shute, et al., 2000; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000) and provided them the opportunity to describe how it feels to experience these behaviours and to articulate why they may employ indirect aggression. Indicative quotes from the girls include: "[it] was the worst year in my whole life" and "[it] could emotionally damage someone for life" (Owens, Shute, et al., 2000, p. 78). Owens and colleagues (2000) facilitated discussions about indirect aggression with a vignette which was co-designed with 15 year old girls, ensuring the research was grounded in young people's experiences. The popular book "Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Girls Aggression" (Simmons, 2011) is a further example of facilitating the voice of girls in particular, however Simmons acknowledges that relational bullying behaviours are not exclusive to girls and suggests "it is surely time for boys to have their say" (p. xix).

2.5.2 Summary

Creating opportunities for young people to share their views and opinions on bullying is important as they are the ones who are experiencing these behaviours; this is supported by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). Young people's understanding of bullying appears to differ to adult-led definitions, such as those proposed in research and the school environment (N. O'Brien, 2009). Further, relational bullying behaviours are less likely than physical or verbal behaviours to be considered as bullying by young people (Hellström et al., 2015), yet these behaviours do persist and have been associated with poorer outcomes (Thomas et al., 2016). If school staff and students hold divergent perceptions of what constitutes bullying it is likely to hinder intervention efforts. Moreover, acknowledging how young people experience and understand bullying can contribute to, and improve, intervention efforts as anti-bullying measures will have "relevance for them and their peer cultures" (Thornberg, 2015a, p. 21).

However, rather than shaping the bullying discourse and research around young people's own experiences and understanding, many researchers have concluded that more needs to be done to adjust young people's definition of bullying to align more closely with those used in research (Canty et al., 2016; Hellström et al., 2015). Furthermore, young people's understanding of bullying is often examined through an adult lens; young people's perception of bullying is compared and contrasted with the current adult-led proposal (Naylor et al., 2006). Canty et al. (2016) advocate for the use of qualitative research which does not pose a definition of bullying, thus permitting young people to provide voluntary insights into bullying which extend beyond the scope of adult-led perceptions.

Bullying was traditionally viewed as a male phenomenon (Olweus, 1978), and as such girls' voices have been underrepresented in the literature (Dytham, 2018). However, the narrative of girls has dominated the discourse around relational bullying type behaviours. While it is encouraging that the accounts of girls are being given consideration, recent research indicating negligible gender differences in relational bullying (Card et al., 2008; Cross et al., 2009) suggest boys' voices need to be captured too. Additionally, the exclusive focus on a subset of bullying behaviours among girls perpetuates gendered perceptions of bullying. Feminist approaches to the bullying literature critique this perspective because it "individualizes, essentializes and pathologizes girls' aggression" (Ringrose, 2008, p. 511); such perspectives inherently emphasise gender differences which encourage a focus on the individual. An individualistic approach to the study of bullying does not acknowledge recent work establishing the role of social context, which has been further supported by qualitative accounts from young people (Thornberg, 2011). The following section will discuss social-ecological factors and how they may have an influence on bullying.

2.6 Bullying and the social-ecological theory

Over the last decade a number of studies have examined bullying through the social-ecological perspective (Rose, Nickerson, et al., 2015; Thornberg, 2015b). This section will initially introduce the social-ecological theory and associated ecologies, with particular focus on those relevant to young people. Subsequently, existing research which has adopted a social-ecological perspective to the study of bullying will be discussed.

2.6.1 What is the social-ecological theory?

The social-ecological theory was proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) as an alternative, broad approach to the study of human development, in comparison to the existing work which he argued was narrow in focus. Development refers to the process of growth and change which occurs during the lifespan of an organism, whether human or animal (Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). The theory suggests that human development occurs through complex, reciprocal interactions between an individual's proximal and distal ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Ecology can be thought of as "the environmental settings which the person or organism is experiencing" (Smith et al., 2003, p. 9). Consequently, to understand human development, the social environment must be considered.

The social-ecological theory was subject to a number of revisions and developments (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The original theory proposed in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) illustrated the social environment through a set of four nested ecologies surrounding the individual: the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems (see Figure 2.3). The individual is positioned at the centre of the social-ecological model, illustrating a bi-directional relationship between them and the ecological domains. The microsystem refers to the immediate environment with which the individual has direct contact (i.e. the school and family). The mesosystem describes connections between elements of the individual's microsystem, for example the relationships between school and parents. The exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem and contains interactions in which the individual is not an active participant but would be influenced by the interactions, such as those between the family and parental employment. The macrosystem refers to the broader societal context which can influence development, and may include culture, religion and politics. In the succeeding decades Bronfenbrenner stressed the need for a greater focus on the role of the individual in human development, including accounting for biological and genetic contributions to human development which resulted in the theory being termed the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The final reiteration of the social-ecological theory incorporated the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006); the PPCT model was proposed as a framework for how to conduct research from an ecological perspective and placed emphasis on research addressing all four aspects of the model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

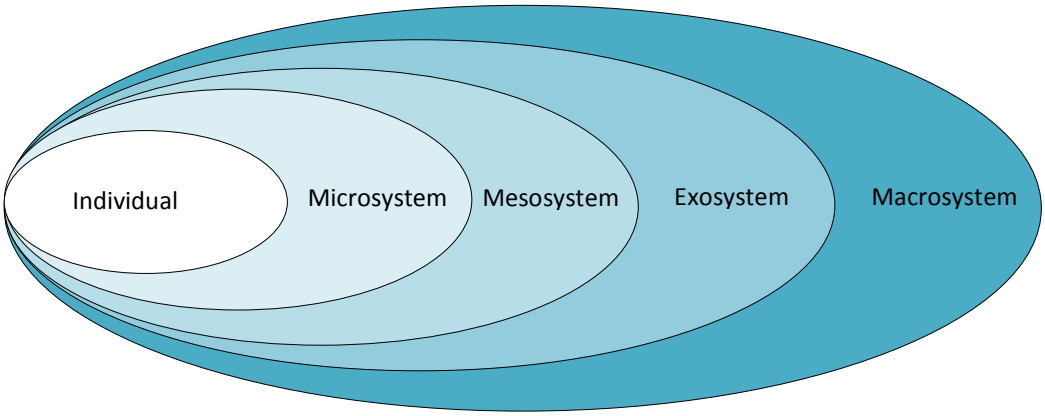


Figure 2.3 *Illustration of the social-ecological theory*

Human development occurs through a reciprocal interaction, with either people or objects, in each of the ecologies over a prolonged period. The social-ecological model illustrates the interdependent nature of the ecologies, a change in one ecology may have repercussions for another and thus the ecological environments are constantly restructuring (Smith et al., 2003).

The social-ecological theory encompasses human development more broadly and does not exclusively address child and adolescent development. However, Bronfenbrenner (1994) acknowledged the importance of the social environment during the early phases of human development in particular; with Rosa and Tudge (2013) describing Bronfenbrenner's work as "improving the living conditions for children, adolescents, and their families" (p. 251). Furthermore, human development is thought to be most significant in the years before adulthood - during infancy, childhood and adolescence.

While the social-ecological theory was developed as a theoretical perspective for the study of human development, it has been employed extensively within the public health arena (Eriksson, Ghazinour, & Hammarström, 2018; Golden & Earp, 2012). The social-ecological framework acknowledges factors from the environment which influence health and wellbeing. Nationally, environmental influences on health have been acknowledged by Public Health England (2018) and the Chief Medical Officer (Department of Health, 2013), and has been adopted for health promotion among young people, including international comparisons by the World Health Organization (2014).

2.6.2 The young person in the social-ecological theory

While the social-ecological theory positions the individual at the centre of a set of nested ecologies (see Figure 2.3), the theory originally paid little attention to the role of the individual in the developmental framework. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) acknowledged and criticised past work which had failed to consider the characteristics of the individual in human development. However, in further revisions, the social-ecological theory accounted for biological and genetic contributions to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) coined the terms 'force', 'resource' and 'demand' characteristics. Force characteristics describe behavioural dispositions most likely to initiate or prevent developmental interaction, resource characteristics were thought to be inherited and either foster or hinder the development process, and demand characteristics are those which

influence external interactions that are necessary for development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

The social-ecological theory was established to further understanding of human development, and considering adolescence is a marked period of development, it may be examined from the social-ecological perspective. However, an individual's developmental stage is also likely to influence their development:

> *"Much developmental research treats the cognitive and socioemotional characteristic of the person as dependent variables; that is, as measures of developmental outcomes. Far less often are such characteristics examined as precursors and producers of later development."* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810)

Taking into account the reciprocal role between a person's characteristics and their development, it is important to consider the individual in the social-ecological theory. Furthermore, as the individual becomes embedded within the ecologies they will have influence and power to shape their environment (Cala & Soriano, 2014).

2.6.3 The young person's social-ecological system

The ecological environments influencing development will vary throughout the life course, shaped by both the development of the individual person and their evolving environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Domains of the young person's social-ecological system which have been shown to be particularly pivotal include the family, friendships and peer relationships and the school environment (Cala & Soriano, 2014; Kia-Keating, Dowdy, Morgan, & Noam, 2011; Lampropoulou, 2018). These three ecologies will be detailed initially, with the subsequent section situating bullying within the young person's social-ecological system.

The family

The family environment is a key feature spanning the social-ecological system of young people. It is a fundamental aspect of the microsystem, being the immediate environment, which young people occupy and interact with. The family often liaises with the school (mesosystem) and is likely influenced by parental social networks (exosystem); thus demonstrating the multi-layered ecological system in which young people develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Traditional perspectives assume that the influence of the family, in particular parents, diminishes throughout adolescence – for example, studies have shown feelings of connectedness with parents (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2002), quality of parental relationships (Larson & Richards, 1991) and perceived parental support decreases during

adolescence (Brooks et al., 2015). However, more recent research suggests that family and parents continue to play a key role in supporting young people's development through to adulthood. Supportive relationships and positive communication with parents are widely acknowledged as determinants of young people's health and wellbeing (Gutman, Brown, Akerman, & Obolenskaya, 2010), and have been associated with fewer health risk behaviours (Gutman, Eccles, Peck, & Malanchuk, 2011; Klemera et al., 2017; Zaborskis & Sirvyte, 2015) and improved mental health and emotional wellbeing (Fenton, Brooks, Spencer, & Morgan, 2010; Levin, Lorenza, & Candace, 2012; Moreno et al., 2009).

Friendships and peer relationships

Friendships and peer relationships constitute an important element of young people's social-ecological system. During adolescence young people begin to spend more time with their friends, as they are thought to become equal in significance to parental relationships (de Goede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2009; Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000). During this time friendships tend to shift from being pragmatic to affective, moving from being grounded in shared activities and interests to affective characteristics such as loyalty and intimacy (Brown, Dolcini, & Leventhal, 1997; Cairns & Cairns, 1994). The affective role of friendships appears to be particularly salient among girls, who are more likely to report support, trust and self-disclosure in their friendships (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2010; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). Friends and peers are often perceived to have a negative impact on development, commonly cited as encouraging engagement with risk behaviours (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). However, friendships offer support and have been linked to increased wellbeing (Gutman & Brown, 2008; Moreno et al., 2009). Furthermore, a young person's social group is particularly influential for identity development. Identity development describes the process of personal discovery through which a young person defines who they are, their beliefs and goals; developing a stable identity as they move into adulthood (Duriez, Luyckx, Soenens, & Berzonsky, 2012). Peer groups provide a safe setting where young people can experiment with a range of behaviours and identities before committing to one in particular (Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010).

The school environment

Young people spend a clear majority of their time at school, positioning the school environment as a key ecological domain. The school offers young people a wealth of experiences which "influence every aspect of development during adolescence" (Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 21), including social, emotional, moral, behavioural and cognitive

development. Feelings of connectedness and belonging to school have been associated with reduced risk behaviours, including suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Marraccini & Brier, 2017). Student-teacher relationships may be particularly salient for young people's development, with links to academic engagement and learning, self-esteem and positive wellbeing (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; García-Moya et al., 2015; Niehaus, Rudasill, & Rakes, 2012).

The family, friends and peers, and school environment have been identified as key elements in the social-ecological system of young people. Research has established associations between these domains and a young person's development, health and wellbeing and social outcomes. The following section will focus specifically on research which has drawn on the social-ecological theory to study bullying.

2.6.4 Bullying through the social-ecological theory

Research has established that involvement in bullying behaviours as either a perpetrator, victim or bystander can vary across time, space and context (Ryoo et al., 2015), which emphasises the role of situational factors. Examining bullying from a social-ecological perspective acknowledges that the behaviour is not the result of individual characteristics alone, but is constructed via interactions between an individual and the ecological domains they inhabit (Hong & Espelage, 2012b). Swearer and Espelage (2011) expanded the social-ecological theory for the study of bullying, suggesting these behaviours must be studied at the individual, peer, family, school, community and cultural levels. Bullying research utilising the social-ecological theory has increased over the last decade and has been advocated by a number of scholars (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage, 2014; Rose, Nickerson, et al., 2015; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). It has been employed primarily in the study of bullying across the USA (Hong et al., 2016; C. H. Lee, 2011) and East Asia (Hong, Kim, & Hunter, 2019; Hong, Lee, Lee, Lee, & Garbarino, 2014).

Applying the social-ecological theory to bullying allows for the identification of elements from across the ecologies which foster a vulnerability to bullying involvement – both as a perpetrator and victim. Individual level factors such as gender, age, depression and social media use have been associated with an increased risk of victimisation (Hong et al., 2019, 2016), while factors such as weapon carrying, substance use and depression increased the chances of being a perpetrator (Barboza et al., 2009; Hong et al., 2019). Poor peer relationships were common among victims of bullying (Hong et al., 2019), and negative family interactions were associated with perpetration (C. H. Lee, 2011). Furthermore, many

of the findings concerning bullying and the ecological domains of young people stem from research which has not explicitly adopted a social-ecological perspective. For example, Saarento et al. (2013) presented student, classroom and school level risk factors for experiencing bullying with no reference to the social-ecological theory; however, findings such as an individual's anxiety and teachers' attitudes to bullying resonate with the ecological perspective of bullying as they coincide with the 'individual' and 'micro-system' of the social-ecological model (Figure 2.3). Review papers by Espelage and colleagues (Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Huang, Hong, & Espelage, 2013; Rose, Espelage, Monda-Amaya, Shogren, & Aragon, 2015) provide a comprehensive account of current research associated with the different domains of the social-ecological model.

Whilst much research has identified risk factors of bullying from the social-ecological system, there has been less attention on identifying factors which may be protective against bullying. Bronfenbrenner (1986) criticised the over-representation of research from a deficit perspective, focusing on the negative implications of disruptive ecological systems. Instead it was proposed the social-ecological theory is utilised to identify elements of the ecologies which are positive and strengthen human development. Analysis of data from the USA indicates the protective role of the ecological systems on bullying involvement, including time spent with friends, peer support and family satisfaction (Hong et al., 2019). Of the studies which have examined protective factors, the majority have looked at protecting against the experience of bullying (Boel-Studt & Renner, 2013; Fanti, Demetriou, & Hawa, 2012; Helweg-Larsen, Schütt, & Larsen, 2012; Hong et al., 2019).

The identification of risk and protective factors from across the ecological system suggests the need for anti-bullying interventions which transverse the environments of young people (Barboza et al., 2009; Hong et al., 2014). If bullying involvement is influenced by factors from the individual, family, school, peer and community it is likely that effective interventions should target multiple domains. These findings resonate with the whole-school approach to bullying prevention which is often advocated (see Section 2.3.2), supported further by evaluative work which noted the importance of parental and community involvement when reducing bullying behaviours (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

2.6.5 Summary

The social-ecological theory has proved to be a valuable framework for research beyond human development and has been extended to the study of bullying. While the social-ecological theory was subject to a number of revisions over time (see Rosa and Tudge (2013)

for a thorough discussion), the majority of studies in relation to bullying have adopted the earlier framework proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979). The earlier version of Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory has also been more frequently applied in school psychology (Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2016), mental health (Eriksson et al., 2018) and family studies (Tudge et al., 2009, 2016) research.

A number of review papers have successfully united existing research spanning the ecologies of young people (Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Swearer & Hymel, 2015), and more recently empirical studies have drawn on the social-ecological theory as a guiding framework (Cross et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2016). Future research must consider addressing multiple factors from the ecologies, as existing work can be critiqued for studying one or two factors within the microsystem (Espelage, 2014). Nevertheless, current research has demonstrated links between bullying involvement (as either perpetrator or victim) and risk and protective factors from the individual, family, peer, school and community contexts (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

However, protective factors can also be thought to ameliorate and buffer against negative events (Kia-Keating et al., 2011). Bronfenbrenner described "ecologies that sustain and strengthen" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 738). Similarly, Rosa and Tudge (2013) explained how influence can be positive either on developmental outcomes themselves, or by preventing negative outcomes. Consequently, the application of the social-ecological theory to bullying could move beyond the identification of risk and protective factors for bullying involvement, to recognising factors from across the ecologies which safeguard against negative effects and promote wellbeing. For example, a positive and supportive home environment has been shown to buffer the negative effects of victimisation. A UK-based twin study identified that maternal warmth was significantly correlated (r = -0.23) with behavioural problems among those experiencing bullying (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arseneault, 2010). However, the study utilised mother's reports of wellbeing rather than capturing the young person's self-reported perspective and did not consider additional elements of the young person's ecological system beyond the family.

2.7 Chapter summary

Bullying is a common phenomenon among young people in the UK (Brooks et al., 2015; HSCIC, 2015). Furthermore, it has been established that involvement in bullying (as a perpetrator or victim) can have long-lasting detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing, as

well as future social outcomes (S. E. Moore et al., 2017). Consequently, national efforts in government and charity organisations demonstrate a commitment to reduce bullying in schools across England.

However, the present chapter has illustrated discrepancies surrounding relational bullying in particular. Defining relational bullying is fraught with inconsistencies (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist, 2001). Consequently, relational bullying has been studied under varying guises, hindering comparisons. Relational bullying is often perceived as the less harmful form of bullying and therefore commands less empathy and intervention from teachers (Boulton et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 2012). Currently it is absent in national guidance on bullying and has seen less research attention in the UK.

Further, young people often have unique understandings of bullying which differ from adult-led interpretations. Relational bullying was often missing from young people's accounts of bullying behaviours (N. O'Brien, 2009; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). It is important to understand why behaviours are (or are not) conceptualised as bullying as this is likely to influence the way in which young people and others respond to them.

It must be noted that bullying research is interdisciplinary, spanning the fields of psychology, sociology, health and education. However, the social-ecological perspective has proven to be a useful tool in the study of bullying as it is considered inclusive in nature, offering an overarching framework which brings together perspectives from the individual and their situational context (Thornberg, 2015b).

The social-ecological theory positions the young person at the centre of their ecologies; facilitating the voice of young people is essential in order to understand their experience and perception of relational bullying. Relational bullying is often tied up within friendship groups and peer relationships (Besag, 2006) and research has demonstrated that actors from each of the ecologies have varied understandings of relational bullying behaviours (Boulton et al., 2014; N. O'Brien, 2009), emphasising the importance of the broader ecological system.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on the research methodology employed in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodological approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail the methodological approach adopted in this study. The methodology and the methods employed were guided by both epistemology and relevant theory; these will initially be discussed to explain the basis for this research. This chapter will introduce mixed methods research, presenting the practicalities and justification for this choice of methodology. Both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research are explained subsequently. Section 3.6 concludes with an exploration of the ethical issues associated with conducting research with young people, including informed consent and confidentiality.

3.2 Epistemological and theoretical perspective

Research is underpinned by philosophical assumptions about the world; the researcher's perception of the world shapes the research conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These assumptions have been termed paradigms (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and worldviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Essentially, these assumptions refer to our understanding of knowledge, our epistemological stance. Epistemology describes "...a theory or philosophy about the nature of knowledge and the stance we take on how we come to know what we know about the world" (Allsop, 2013, p. 19).

A range of epistemological positions exist; fundamentally these stances vary depending on beliefs surrounding the subjective (or objective) nature of knowledge. Epistemological positions are best conceptualised along a spectrum (G. Morgan & Smircich, 1980), varying from concrete objectivity where knowledge is external and certain through to great subjectivity where knowledge is viewed as context-dependent, social constructions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

It is intuitive that different perspectives of knowledge demand different research approaches and methods. For example, the positivist view is often referred to as the scientific method; it focuses on cause and effect, generating and testing laws and theories which govern the social world. The positivist researcher uses deductive reasoning, beginning with a theory or hypothesis which is tested through observations (Weaver & Olson, 2006). Consequently, in these circumstances, the quantitative research approach is most suitable, allowing for the quantification of human behaviour through experiments or surveys. In

contrast, the constructionist view assumes knowledge is construed from individual meaning and uses inductive reasoning to develop theories from observations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The qualitative research approach is beneficial as it allows for exploration of individuals' personal understanding through methods such as interviews and case studies.

Traditionally the 'incompatibility thesis' governed that epistemologies and their related methods cannot and should not be mixed (Howe, 1988). More recent methodological movements have queried this stance, with Greene and Caracelli (1997) promoting the use of multiple epistemologies within mixed method research and Maxwell (2011) discussing the value of adopting traditionally quantitative epistemologies while conducting qualitative research. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) present pragmatism as a solution to the incompatibility thesis. As previously suggested, epistemologies can be envisioned on a spectrum; pragmatism would be central on this spectrum. Pragmatism assumes knowledge is "both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18); it appreciates both the natural and social elements of knowledge. Pragmatism allows researchers to choose which methods best fit their research question; the methodology is guided solely by the research question (Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes, & Onghena, 2013). As pragmatism assumes world knowledge is formed of different layers and elements, mixed methods are frequently necessary to tap into these different aspects (Feilzer, 2010).

Epistemology plays an important role in informing the research approach, but theory is also integral. Crotty (2003) proposes the hierarchical structure presented in Figure 3.1, where each subsequent element is grounded in the epistemological stance. Theories combine concepts to provide an understanding of a phenomena (Silverman, 2005); these can be macro, mid-range or micro in nature (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). A theoretical perspective plays an important role in guiding and tailoring the focus of the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Reeves et al., 2008).

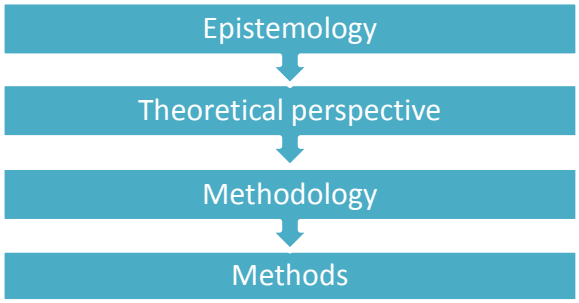


Figure 3.1 *Hierarchical influence of epistemology as proposed by Crotty (2003)*

3.2.1 Epistemological and theoretical perspective in the present research study

The literature review highlighted the power of both objective and subjective knowledge surrounding bullying. For example, quantitative data has played an important role in evidencing the psychological outcomes associated with bullying (Bowes et al., 2015) and qualitative data has provided insights into bullying in the everyday contexts of young people (Thornberg, 2011). Furthermore, the diversity of the research objectives required the rejection of the dichotomous positivist versus constructionist stance to fully explore relational bullying from the young person's perspective. Consequently, a pragmatic stance was adopted, corresponding with the use of mixed methods (described in further detail in Section 3.3).

As outlined in Figure 3.1, theory is interlinked with epistemological stance and methodological decisions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggests that theory in mixed methods research functions as a framework which informs and guides the research process including data collection methods, analytic techniques and the interpretation of findings. The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) acted as theoretical framework in this study (see Section 2.6). The social-ecological theory resonates with the current research as it assumes bullying has to be understood on the individual level as well as embedded in the family, friends, school and wider community contexts (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Furthermore, the framework aligns with the pragmatic stance which has been adopted as there are many elements working simultaneously with different meanings.

3.3 Mixed methods

Mixed methods research describes "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches of methods in a single study" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4). Traditional perspectives assumed the two approaches were inherently incompatible because their underlying epistemological perspectives are distinctly opposing; knowledge cannot be both a certain external entity and a social construct (Allsop, 2013; Howe, 1988). As mentioned previously (see Section 3.2) pragmatism provided one response to these epistemological debates, suggesting that addressing the research question effectively is more important than adhering to paradigms (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). More recently, the use of mixed methods has become widely advocated and utilised across a number of disciplines, in part this has been driven by government and research funding bodies proposing research

priorities which require both quantitative and qualitative methods (Brannen, 2009; Giddings, 2006). Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) suggest that mixed methods should now be viewed as a distinct research approach alongside qualitative and quantitative and not simply a combination of the traditional forms. Brannen (2009) describes how positioning mixed methods as an individual methodology will allow researchers to make informed decisions and seek guidance specific to mixed methods.

A number of advocates have suggested the value that mixed methods adds to either quantitative or qualitative research alone (Bryman, 2006; Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Sechrest & Sidani, 1995; Sieber, 1973). Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2009) propose eight benefits of employing mixed methods: triangulation, completeness, offsetting weaknesses and providing stronger inferences, answering different research questions, explanation of findings, illustration of data, hypotheses development and testing, and instrument development and testing. Table 3.1 provides an overview of each of these advantages. While numerous rationales for mixed methods have been suggested, the proposal by Doyle et al. (2009) consolidates the majority of these to provide a clear and comprehensive account.

Table 3.1 *Benefits of mixed methods research, adapted from Doyle et al.* (2009)

Benefit	**Description**
Triangulation	Triangulation refers to the use of different methods to measure the same phenomenon as a process of validation, ensuring findings are a characteristic of the trait and not the methodology employed (Greene et al., 1989).
Completeness	Combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding.
Offsetting weakness and providing stronger inferences	Quantitative and qualitative research both have their own weaknesses, by combining the two methods the weaknesses are counteracted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).
Answering different research questions	Qualitative and quantitative methodology used to answer different research questions (Bryman, 2006).
Explanation of findings	Qualitative research can be used to explain the findings of the quantitative element, and vice versa.
Illustration of data	Qualitative research can be used to illustrate quantitative findings (Bryman, 2006).
Hypotheses development & testing	Hypotheses can be developed via qualitative research, which are then tested using quantitative methodology.
Instrument development and testing	Qualitative work can be used to develop items, determine optimal conditions and explain variations in outcomes (Collins et al., 2006).

Since the emergence of mixed methods, varying research designs have been proposed in abundance (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Giddings & Grant, 2006; Greene et al., 1989;

Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; D. Morgan, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Mixed method designs have been a useful tool for guiding researchers, and importantly, have helped ground mixed methods as a distinct field with rigorous methods and technical language (Doyle et al., 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). However, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) state that a list of mixed method designs is never exhaustive. It could therefore be argued that the magnitude of proposed designs may mean that there are additional decision-making challenges associated with mixed methods research. A number of researchers have suggested the underpinning assumptions of these designs (Bryman, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Tariq & Woodman, 2013); reflection on these works identified the following three criteria, all of which were considered when planning the mixed method design for the current study:

1. Timing - are the quantitative and qualitative elements conducted sequentially or concurrently?
2. Function - what is the purpose of mixed method research? For example, is it for triangulation or explanatory purposes?
3. Priority - are the quantitative and qualitative components weighted equally, or is one dominant?

Fundamental to mixed methods research is the integration of quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman, 2006, 2007; Tariq & Woodman, 2013). Without combining the data sets, the mixed methodologies are at risk of functioning as separate, individual research projects with the mixed methodology providing no added benefit. Despite the importance of integration, it is an area which many researchers find problematic (Bryman, 2007) and is lacking in guidance (Östlund, Kidd, Wengström, & Rowa-Dewar, 2011). Quantitative and qualitative findings can be integrated through merging, connecting or embedding data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Palinkas et al., 2011). Merging describes bringing the two data sets together in order to triangulate the results. Connecting refers to one data set building on the other. Embedding describes one data set providing a supplementary role to the other.

3.3.1 Mixed methods in the present research study

Mixed methods in the present study involved secondary analysis of quantitative data from the 2014 HBSC study for England, followed by qualitative face-to-face interviews with young people aged 12-18 years. Utilising Creswell and Plano Clark's (2007) mixed method typologies, the present study can be viewed as a sequential embedded design (see Figure

3.2). Embedded designs are employed when research objectives require different methodology; when "a single dataset is not sufficient" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 67). In the current study the quantitative data is dominant, with the qualitative element playing a supporting role (Plano Clark, Huddleston-Casas, Churchill, Green, & Garrett, 2008). Embedded designs can occur simultaneously or sequentially, this study adopted a sequential process.

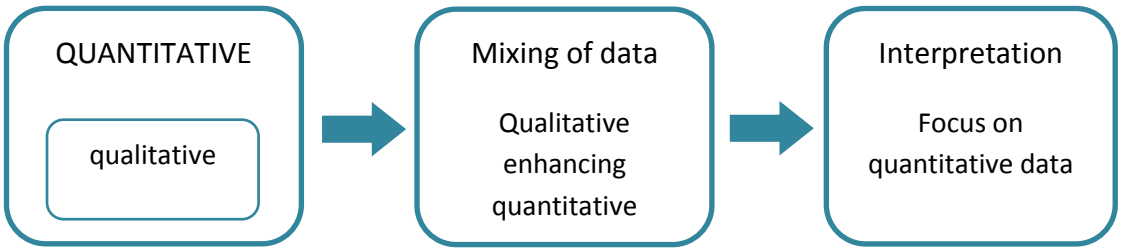


Figure 3.2 *Mixed methods in the current study, adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2007)*

Referring back to Table 3.1, mixed methods in the present study facilitated completeness, the answering of different questions and explanation/illustration of findings which enabled the overall aim and research objectives to be achieved. While not acknowledged in Table 3.1, the quantitative component also performed a role in informing the choice of the participants and tailored the research areas that were explored in the qualitative element; Greene et al. (1989) termed this function 'development'.

Relational bullying is a complex phenomenon and to understand it fully both quantitative and qualitative research objectives were proposed (see Section 1.3). Consequently, mixed methodology was an appropriate and necessary approach to the present study. Figure 3.3 illustrates the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative research phases and the related contribution to the research objectives. The dominant nature of the quantitative phase is depicted by the larger circle.

Two of the four research objectives were achieved through a single research approach: objective no. 1 required numerical, quantitative information to capture reliable and representative prevalence data, while research objective no.4 was fulfilled through qualitative data which allowed young people to voice their own understanding and experience.

However, research objectives no. 2 and no. 3 were fulfilled through the combination and integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Objective no. 2, examining the health

and wellbeing outcomes of relational bullying, benefitted from both quantitative and qualitative data: quantitative data played a dominant role as the robust, validated health measures allowed for generalisation, while qualitative data played an illustrative purpose. Objective no. 3, identifying factors which young people perceive as helping them to navigate relational bullying, drew on a quantitative and qualitative approaches equally. An initial, exploratory quantitative analysis was conducted to examine the association between factors from the young person's world and life satisfaction among a subset of young people who reported experiencing weekly relational bullying (see Section 5.8). This was followed by face-to-face interviews which were devised in order to expand upon the quantitative findings and provide young people the opportunity to note factors that may help them during the experience of relational bullying, which may not have been measured in the quantitative survey.

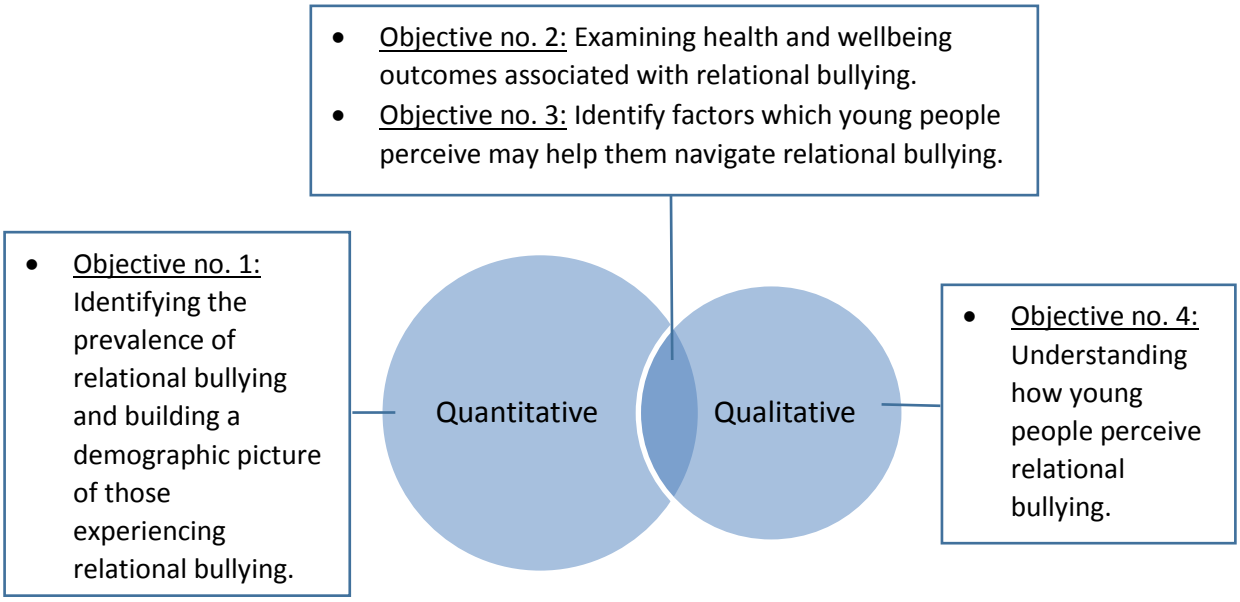


Figure 3.3 *Diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative phases and the research objectives*

Essentially, mixed methods is appropriate when "neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient in themselves to capture the trends and details of the situation" (Creswell, Fetters, & Ivankova, 2004, p. 7). Mixed methods was required to allow for the study of different yet related aspects of relational bullying in order to provide a complete picture of this behaviour, with particular focus on capturing the voice of the young person.

3.4 Quantitative research phase

The following section will detail the quantitative component of the research. The quantitative phase entailed secondary analysis of data collected as part of the 2014 HBSC study carried out in England. The broader international HBSC study will initially be introduced before detailing the 2014 HBSC England data set which was utilised in this study. The section will conclude with a rationale for utilising the 2014 HBSC England as a source for secondary analysis.

3.4.1 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)

The HBSC study was founded in 1982 by researchers from three countries - Finland, Norway and England. Shortly afterwards, HBSC became a World Health Organization (WHO) collaborative study and has now grown to include 48 countries across Europe and North America. Each country participating in the HBSC study has a national research team responsible for coordinating the study in their country. In order to allow for valid cross-national comparisons, national teams conduct the survey in accordance with an international protocol (Currie et al., 2014).

Every four years the HBSC study measures young people's health, wellbeing, health behaviours and the social context in which these occur. HBSC collects data from young people aged 11, 13 and 15 years via self-completed, school-based surveys. The surveys consist of core, optional and country-specific questions (Currie et al., 2014). Core questions constitute the majority of the survey and allow for cross-national comparisons which form the internationally reported HBSC data (Inchley et al., 2016). Groups of countries can also decide to collaborate using HBSC optional packages; topic specific packages of questions which offer the ability to develop a deeper understanding of a particular subject. Finally, national research teams will often add country-specific questions to the survey to reflect current priority areas (see Appendix A for an overview of the core, optional and country-specific questions used in the 2014 HBSC England survey).

England was one of the founding HBSC countries in 1982, however England withdrew from the study shortly afterwards and re-joined in 1997. The HBSC study for England is currently co-ordinated from CRIPACC, UH. England has taken part in the 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018 survey rounds. This study drew on data collected as part of the 2014 HBSC England study only; the 2014 HBSC England survey will be outlined in further detail in Section 3.4.2.

Further information about the HBSC study internationally and nationally can be found at www.hbsc.org and www.hbscengland.org respectively.

3.4.2 2014 HBSC England study

This study utilised the 2014 HBSC England data set. Access to the data set was granted by Professor Fiona Brooks, Principal Investigator of the HBSC England study. The following section will outline the sampling method, sample characteristics, survey tool and data collection process of the 2014 HBSC England study.

Sample

The population for the 2014 HBSC England study was young people aged 11, 13 and 15 years who were attending school[10] (state or independent), this corresponded to school years 7, 9 and 11 respectively. Cluster sampling was employed, which involved sampling groups of organisations before sampling within the organisation. This was an ideal method as it was "impractical to compile a list of the elements composing the population" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 155). A list of state and independent schools across all regions of England was used as a sampling frame. The sample consisted of 100 schools, stratified by region and school type. Sampling was done by replacement; if one school from the original sample declined to participate, a matched school was contacted.

A total of 5335 young people from 48 schools participated in the 2014 HBSC England study. The student response rate was 91.8%; with 2.9% absent from class due to sickness, 2.2% pupil or parent refusals, 2.6% absent for other reasons [11] and 0.4% returned blank questionnaires.

Sample characteristics

The 2014 HBSC England data set offered a large representative sample of young people from across England. The sample was stratified by region to ensure geographical representation, with respondents from all except one region taking part in the study. The North East was not represented in the 2014 HBSC England sample due to sampling difficulties, however the breadth and magnitude of respondents across the remaining regions in England is likely to represent the country's different economic and social conditions. The sample was further stratified by school type; ensuring representation from both maintained schools (including secondary, grammar, middle and high schools) and independent schools.

[10] Special schools and home-schools were not included in the sample.

[11] Including students on holiday, attending medical appointments and attending extra-curricular activities.

The sample was representative of gender (51.9% boys; 48.1% girls), with a fair spread across each of the three age groups (39.8% 11 year olds; 30.0% 13 year olds; 30.2% 15 year olds). Free school meal (FSM) eligibility is indicative of lower household income. The 2014 HBSC England sample identified 12.8% of young people in state schools were receiving FSM; this was slightly lower than the 16.3% reported by the Department for Education (2013). All major ethnic groups were represented in the survey in approximately the proportions in which they exist in the population of interest; providing a fitting reflection of ethnic diversity in society as a whole. Overall, 70.6% of respondents identified as 'White British' and 90.2% said they had been born in Britain.

A detailed breakdown of the 2014 HBSC England sample characteristics can be found in Brooks et al. (2015).

Survey tool

The 2014 HBSC England survey was a comprehensive measure of young people's health and wellbeing in England. The questionnaire included several measures which captured the broad scope of young people's physical, emotional and social wellbeing. There were two versions of the questionnaire – one for 11 and 13 year old respondents, and one for 15 year old respondents. Respondents who were 15 years old were asked additional questions concerning sexual health, substance use, alcohol consumption and self-harm which were deemed inappropriate for the younger respondents; otherwise the questionnaires were identical. The majority of questions offered a choice of response options, such as a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'; open ended responses were used in a few instances, for example when a respondent recorded their height. See Appendix A for an overview of the questions which featured in the 2014 HBSC England survey – including details of which questions were asked of 15 year old respondents only, and the possible response options.

This study analysed a subset of measures in the 2014 HBSC England survey, including questions relating to demographics, bullying, health and wellbeing and the young person's social environment. See Section 4.2.1 for a detailed description of the specific questions analysed in this study.

Data collection

Data was collected between September 2013 and March 2014. The surveys were administered in schools by members of the national research team or teaching staff,

depending on the preference of the individual school. In instances where teachers administered the survey to their students they were provided with detailed instructions. Respondents completed the questionnaire during a school lesson and completion typically took no longer than 45 minutes. The questionnaires were answered in exam-like conditions (in silence and at individual desks) to ensure respondents would feel comfortable answering the questions in a reliable way. Respondents sealed their completed questionnaires in an envelope to keep their responses confidential. Completed questionnaires were collected by members of the national research team or teaching staff who administered the survey. For further information on the 2014 HBSC England study methodology see Brooks et al. (2015).

3.4.3 Professional association with the HBSC England study

Since 2012 I have held a research post in the Health, Young People and Family Lives Research Unit based in CRIPACC, UH. My primary role has been to assist with the delivery of the HBSC study in England, contributing to both the 2014 and 2018 HBSC England survey rounds. In relation to the 2014 HBSC England study specifically, I participated in all stages of the research project including the development of the survey tool, the seeking of ethical approval, the sampling and recruitment of schools, fieldwork, data entry and write-up of the results (i.e. Brooks et al., 2015).

My personal involvement with the HBSC study in England proved to be valuable in the context of my doctoral studies. Initially, engaging with the HBSC research study triggered my interest in young people's bullying behaviours. Furthermore, on both a national and international level the HBSC study has supported young people's involvement in research; this fostered an understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of capturing the voice of young people and informed the decision to position young people as central in this research. Being part of a research team facilitated my critical thinking and awareness of research, enabling me to identify relational bullying specifically as an important and under-researched topic within the UK. This led to the development of the research aim and objectives being explored in the present study.

Furthermore, being involved in the 2014 HBSC England study provided underpinning knowledge about the sample and data set. This knowledge and practical involvement with the 2014 HBSC England study proved to be particularly beneficial when undertaking statistical analyses. For example, the real-world experience of conducting fieldwork within classes within schools was a concrete example of the cluster sampling employed and illustrated how this technique may produce observations that are not independent of each

other, which in turn facilitated my understanding and approach to data analysis through the employment of multilevel modelling.

3.4.4 Rationale for secondary analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data set

The 2014 HBSC England data set was an ideal source for secondary data analysis, offering a number of advantages. Firstly, the 2014 HBSC England survey contained measures which were pertinent to the research topic, thus facilitating the meeting of the research objectives (see Section 4.2.1). The survey contained questions on relational bullying which were employed and adapted in this research study. Furthermore, the survey included a number of measures assessing health and wellbeing; in line with the WHO (1986) definition of health, the measures extended beyond physical health complaints to incorporate the subjective and emotional wellbeing of an individual too. These measures were integral to examine the health and wellbeing associations of relational bullying. The 2014 HBSC England survey also explored the wider social context of young people including the family, school and neighbourhood, which aligned with the social-ecological framework that guided this research. The broad scope of the study was crucial for exploring factors which may help young people successfully navigate relational bullying.

Secondly, drawing on data collected as part of the HBSC study ensured validated measures were utilised. Members of the HBSC international network continually develop and validate research measures to promote robust findings (Currie et al., 2014). Validation work from the HBSC international network has been published in relation to a number of measures, including the Family Affluence Scale (Currie et al., 2008), KIDSCREEN-10 (Erhart et al., 2009; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010), school performance (Felder-Puig et al., 2012) and teacher support (Torsheim et al., 2012).

Additionally, all countries in the HBSC study strive for a large, nationally representative sample to increase the credibility and generalisability of the findings. The 2014 HBSC England sample achieved a final sample of 5335 respondents from 48 schools. The sample for England was stratified by region and school type to ensure geographic representation and a mix of state and privately funded schools. The 2014 HBSC England sample was representative of gender, age and ethnicity, providing a trustworthy source for secondary data analysis and the generation of new knowledge.

Finally, young people were involved throughout the HBSC research process ensuring that the HBSC study was informed by young people (Daniels et al., 2014; Inchley et al., 2016) - this

resonated with the central focus on young people in the present research (see Figure 1.1). On a national level the HBSC England research team adopted a participatory approach, working collaboratively with young people on questionnaire development, ethical sensitivity and the interpretation of results (Brooks et al., 2015). Both the national (Brooks et al., 2015) and international (Inchley et al., 2016) reports from the 2014 study include commentary from young people on their interpretation and meaning of the data.

3.4.5 Summary of quantitative research phase

Relational bullying behaviours have received less research in a UK context, and as such the 2014 HBSC England data set offered a unique opportunity to examine relational bullying among a large representative sample of young people in England. The data allowed for the successful examination of prevalence, demographic factors and associations with health outcomes. Furthermore, the 2014 HBSC England survey included pivotal measures allowing the exploration of social context and relational bullying. However, the quantitative data alone was unable to provide a complete picture of this complex social behaviour. The secondary analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data set was followed by a qualitative research phase which captured different yet related elements of relational bullying, with a particular focus on the experience and perception of the young person.

3.5 Qualitative research phase

This section will outline the qualitative component of this research study. The qualitative element involved face-to-face individual interviews with young people (aged 12-18 years). The preparatory consultation work conducted with young people is described initially. Subsequently, the recruitment methods and data collection process are outlined. The section concludes with a discussion surrounding the importance of rapport-building, and the techniques utilised in this study to foster relationships with young people which was conducive to an open and honest discussion.

3.5.1 Consulting with young people

Initial consultation with young people via two reference groups proved especially valuable in relation to the planning of the qualitative element of the study. A youth reference group is a tool for developing research through the advice and expertise of young people. A reference group describes when a “group of children and young people (perhaps with adults)

advise and inform those planning, delivering or reviewing a piece of work, or who manage a team or organisation" (The National Youth Agency, 2009, p. 4).

Public and patient involvement in health research is widely advocated and accepted (INVOLVE, 2012; Staniszewska, Denegri, Matthews, & Minogue, 2018). In relation to children and young people, participation is embedded at an international level through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). It has since been reflected in policy, for example, the Children Act (1989; 2004) and Education and Inspections Act (2006) and national publications including "Every Child Matters" (2003), "Our children deserve better: Prevention pays" (Department of Health, 2013) and "Achieving Equity and Excellence for Children" (Department of Health, 2010).

Many researchers have highlighted the benefits of involving young people in the research process (Kirby, 2004; T. Moore et al., 2016; Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011). Young people's expertise can improve the relevance of research (T. Moore et al., 2016), the suitability of research tools (Harper & Carver, 1999; McLaughlin, 2006) and identify successful recruitment strategies (Flicker, 2008), which is likely to have positive implications for the quality of data gathered. Furthermore, the Public Health, Education, Awareness and Research (PEAR) group assembled by the National Children's Bureau identified a number of positive benefits for young people themselves including skills development (PEAR, 2010).

Considering the potentially sensitive and complex nature of the present research study, consultation, via reference groups, was felt to be necessary to ensure young people's insight informed the research. Two youth reference groups were consulted providing young people with the opportunity to share their views and opinions about the research topic and research methodology. The first reference group was held at an East of England middle school on 29th November 2013 with six young people (all girls, 12-13 years old), and the second reference group was held at the UH on 11th March 2014 with two young people (one girl and one boy, 15-16 years old).

The reference groups revealed great variation in how young people understood and defined bullying and relational bullying specifically. Given that young people were conceptualising relational bullying in varying ways it was decided that descriptive statements would be used during the qualitative phase of the study to illustrate relational bullying consistently across participants (see Section 3.5.4). The consultation also demonstrated that relational bullying often occurred among friendship groups, suggesting the need for individual based qualitative

work rather than, for example, focus groups; this was exemplified by the following quote from a reference group member:

> *"Because if I knew I was sitting here with my best friend I would have to be very careful about what I say..."*

Finally, the reference groups highlighted that social media may play an important role in relational bullying. The qualitative research ensured scope for exploring the role of social media, with the interview schedule addressing bullying outside of the school grounds.

This study acknowledged that young people are key to understanding relational bullying and sought to facilitate their voice through methods which were appropriate to them. Consulting youth reference groups proved to be constructive and helpful by raising key issues which helped to enhance the research by tailoring the focus, shaping the data collection approach and highlighting important questions to consider. The world of young people is often inaccessible to adults and consultation provided a unique insight into their experiences, ensuring the research was relevant and appropriate.

3.5.2 Sampling and recruitment

Sampling techniques vary greatly between quantitative and qualitative research. Sampling processes adopted in quantitative research tend to be based on statistical procedures concerned with increasing the generalisability of research findings (Field, 2009), whereas sampling in qualitative research moves away from statistical notions to provide understanding, richness and depth rather than generalisations (Gentles, Charles, & Ploeg, 2015).

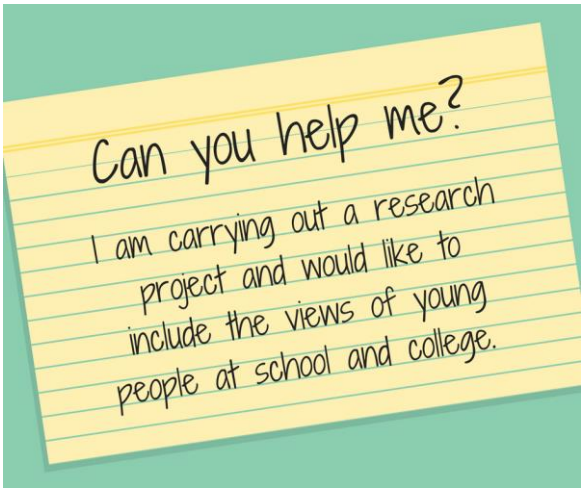
It has been suggested that the very nature of qualitative research dictates that the sampling processes are to some degree purposeful (Devers & Frankel, 2000); that is the potential participants are "selected because of their personal experience or knowledge of the topic under study" (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014, p. 473). In relation to the present research, young people aged 11-18 years were recruited based on the experience and insight they would have of current bullying behaviours from a young person's perspective. Participants did not need to have experienced bullying as it was important to develop a broad picture of how bullying was understood and perceived by young people, therefore young people aged 11-18 years who were fluent in English were eligible to participate in the study. Furthermore, bullying is a sensitive topic and keeping the criteria more 'open' prevented any young person from being labelled as a victim which may have been stigmatising.

This study sought to recruit young people via schools and youth groups. Both types of institution were invited to participate in the study with a formal letter of invitation being sent to a designated person (e.g. head teacher; youth group leader), this was followed by continued communication (via email and phone) as well as face-to-face meetings to clarify if and how the institution would like to be involved in this study. Unfortunately, recruitment through the youth group proved unsuccessful despite numerous communications and the group expressing much initial interest. However, young people were able to be recruited from across two secondary schools. The participation of School 1 arose after a senior member of school staff contacted me regarding an article I authored for Schools Week (an education sector news website) as they had an interest in bullying. Following continued communication and two face-to-face meetings, School 1 agreed to help facilitate the recruitment of young people in this study. Contact with School 2 was facilitated via a teacher who had previously arranged a work experience programme between the school and the UH.

Young people in each of the schools were recruited via the following process:

1. Introductory information was shared with young people inviting them to take part in the study (Figure 3.4). In School 1 this information was cascaded to all students (school years 7-11 and sixth form students) via teaching staff during personal tutor periods. In relation to School 2, I had a face-to-face meeting with two potential participants during their work experience programme at the UH. During the meeting I provided the young people with the introductory information, and verbally explained the research project and what their participation would involve. The young people were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
2. Young people who were interested in taking part in the research study were provided with an envelope containing a student information letter (Appendix B), parent/guardian information letter (Appendix C) and parent/guardian consent form (Appendix D). Young people who wished to participate in the study were asked to talk to their parent/guardian about taking part, and to provide them with the information letter and consent form. A parent/guardian was required to sign the consent form in order for the young person to participate (Appendix D).
3. Interview dates were scheduled with the young people, in co-ordination with teaching staff or work experience co-ordinators.

4. On the scheduled date, before the interview commenced, young people returned the signed parent/guardian consent form.
5. Prior to starting the interview, the young person and I discussed and completed two student consent forms together (Appendix E) - allowing each of us to keep a signed copy of the consent form. See Section 3.6 for further details about consent procedures.



My name is Kayleigh Chester and I am a student at the University of Hertfordshire. I am carrying out a research project which is trying to understand what happens at school/college between friends and class mates. I am particularly interested in when things go wrong, for example when students feel that they are left out and ignored. My research so far suggests these types of behaviour can be harmful and upsetting, but I really want to talk to young people to get their views.

I don't know what it is like to be at school…but YOU do! It would be great to find out what you think about these situations, even if you have never been involved.

It is really important to me that my research has an impact for young people, and I aim to collaborate and share my research with relevant organisations. So far, I have authored reports with Public Health England, presented at the Houses of Parliament and published in academic journals. My research has also been in the national media including BBC News.

If you would like to help me with my research, it would involve us meeting face-to-face for a chat at school. It would last for about 45 minutes, and would give me time to ask you some questions and find out what YOU think!

Figure 3.4 *Initial invitation for young people to take part in the research study*

3.5.3 Participants

Participants were recruited via two secondary schools, one from the East Midlands (School 1) and one from the East of England (School 2). The recruitment process resulted in twelve

young people agreeing to take part in the study and providing their own written consent as well as that of their parent/guardian. However, due to a student being absent from school for medical reasons, a total of eleven interviews were conducted. The final sample was made up of nine girls and two boys, spanning 12-18 years. See Table 3.2 for participant demographics.

Table 3.2 *Participant demographics*

Pseudonym	School	Gender	Age	Year group	Ethnicity
Jess	1	Female	14 years	9	White British
Bethany	1	Female	13 years	9	White British
Heidi	1	Female	15 years	11	White British
Harriet	1	Female	15 years	11	White British
Claire	1	Female	16 years	11	White British
Molly	1	Female	12 years	7	White British
Joe	1	Male	17 years	12	White British
Dylan	1	Male	12 years	7	White British
Kelly	1	Female	18 years	13	White British
Tiffany	2	Female	15 years	10	White British
Kirsty	2	Female	14 years	10	White British

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not normally used to make statistical inferences at a population level and as such, sample sizes for qualitative research are not pre-set using statistical tests for power (Gentles et al., 2015; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Recommendations for sample size have been proposed based on the qualitative methodology employed, for example Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest between 6-10 participants for thematic analysis similar to this project. However, such proposals have been met with some criticism, as Morse (2000, p. 5) explains "conditions of each study vary too greatly to produce tight recommendations". Instead, Guetterman (2015) suggested qualitative samples can be assessed on adequacy and appropriateness. Adequacy describes whether the sample achieved a sufficient richness of data, a concept similar to the idea of data saturation (when fresh data is no longer contributing new insights) which is an indicator that data collection can cease (Gentles et al., 2015). Appropriateness describes whether the sample is a suitable source of data able to answer the research questions. In the present study the sample achieved both the requirements of adequacy and appropriateness. The

participants provided an adequate richness of data which reached data saturation (as described by Gentles et al. (2015)) and informed the decision to stop data collection, and being young people themselves they were able to share the experiences of bullying among young people.

3.5.4 Data collection

The interview is frequently described as the most common research method employed with children and young people (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009). An interview is often utilised to understand a person's experience and perspective (Hammersley, 2013) and the use of interviews with young people provides a mechanism through which their thoughts and opinions can be heard (Heath et al., 2009). In terms of qualitative research, interviews can be broadly categorised as either semi-structured or unstructured, depending upon the focus of the research (Mitchell, 2015).

The present study utilised a semi-structured interview approach, with an interview schedule comprised of a series of prompt questions following a number of key areas to explore. The nature of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to explore unexpected topics and deviate from the interview schedule, while also allowing flexibility in how and when questions are asked (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

The sequential mixed methods approach allowed the quantitative findings to inform the focus of the interview schedule, including exploring the impact and experience of relational bullying from the young person's perspective. Furthermore, the social-ecological theoretical framework which positions young people as central was considered in the development of the interview schedule. For example, the phrasing of prompt questions such as 'anything in your life' and 'anything or anyone else' extended across the ecologies of young people. The interview schedule concluded with the question 'Is there anything else you would like to add?' to further facilitate the voice of young people. See Appendix F for a copy of the interview schedule detailing the prompt questions and key areas which were explored.

The interviews were facilitated using descriptive statements (see Figure 3.5). The statements helped to illustrate relational bullying consistently across the interviews, as the reference group consultation with young people had highlighted that their conceptualisation of bullying and relational bullying may vary greatly. The statements corresponded with questions in the 2014 HBSC England questionnaire, which additionally ensured relational bullying was described in the same way across the quantitative and qualitative components

of this study. The term relational bullying was not utilised in the interviews nor in the 2014 HBSC England survey; both phases of the research illustrated relational bullying through specific behavioural statements.

Other students left them out of things on purpose, excluded them from their group of friends, or completely ignored them.

Other students told lies or spread rumours about them and tried to make others dislike them.

Other students spread embarrassing or personal information about them.

Figure 3.5 *Descriptive statements facilitating discussions on relational bullying*

Eleven interviews were conducted in total; nine were undertaken on school premises (School 1) and two interviews were conducted at the UH. The interviews took place between January 2018 and March 2018. The interview location, a private room, was prepared prior to the arrival of the participant; this primarily involved organising materials such as the consent form and digital recorder as well as the layout of furniture to facilitate a slightly more relaxed atmosphere. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participant. Interviews lasted for between 25 - 40 minutes.

Once the interviews had concluded, young people were asked to provide demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity and school year). All respondents were provided with a Support Services Information Sheet (Appendix G) and a thank you letter. None of the participants displayed any distress during or after the interview (see Section 3.6 for further details). Immediately after each interview field notes were made detailing personal impressions of the participant and their engagement with the process, reflection on the interview technique, a description of the interview location and initial thoughts about emerging themes.

3.5.5 Building rapport

Building rapport is widely accepted as an important element in qualitative research (Prior, 2018) and has been described as “both an aim and established element of quality” (Weller, 2017, p. 614) in qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews often involve the disclosure of personal information which requires a trusting relationships between the participant and researcher (L. Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, & Murphy, 2016). The young people in this study were asked to share their understanding, experiences and perceptions of relational bullying

behaviours which is a potentially sensitive topic, so it was imperative to establish rapport to ensure they were comfortable talking openly and honestly throughout the interview.

A number of academics have offered guidance for conducting interviews with young people (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Heath et al., 2009). In line with Dixon (2015) all interviews were opened with an introductory question about the young person themselves; consequently the first few minutes of the interview focused on, for example, their favourite school subject or their university application. I strove to use open body language, clear questioning and to demonstrate my interest through non-verbal cues such as eye contact, nodding and smiling (Heath et al., 2009; Matthews, 1998). Establishing rapport over a short period of time can be difficult so I endeavoured to use all available opportunities to foster a relationship with participants. For example, I arranged to meet most of the participants and walk with them to the interview location which provided the opportunity for informal conversation.

Whilst conducting fieldwork on school grounds the interviews often spanned a lunch period; I took this opportunity to eat lunch in a designated classroom which allowed the young people to engage with me outside of the confines of the research study. I was able to present myself as friendly and approachable, which contributed towards developing rapport with the young people. Participants continued to volunteer for the study in the weeks after the initial invitation was cascaded to students; having the opportunity to familiarise themselves with me during lunch breaks may have been influential in encouraging others to engage with my research.

The concept of sameness/difference between a researcher and their participants has been widely discussed (Barker & Smith, 2001; Heath et al., 2009). Researchers seeking to understand female relationships during adolescence have described sharing characteristics with their participants as advantageous (Dixon, 2015; Morris-Roberts, 2001). As a young female interviewer, the perception of similarities between myself and female participants appeared to help build rapport. For example, when discussing social support with Kirsty (14 years old) she referred to us being relatively similar in age:

> Kirsty: *"It could be a parent but I feel like if it is a <u>massive</u> age gap then you feel less like they understand you."*
> KC: *"Okay."*
> Kirsty: *"Say if it's, say for yourself if you were trying to comfort me I would personally like that better than someone who's a lot older than you."*

Irrespective of any similarities between myself and the young people, they often used terms that I was unfamiliar with. Frequently this occurred when the young people were discussing social media apps and technology which I was unacquainted with. I was always honest about my lack of knowledge and would ask them if they could explain these in more detail. Reflecting, I believe this helped to build rapport. The young people seemed to enjoy this opportunity to teach me and felt comfortable leading the conversation.

On reflection, all opportunities were taken to establish rapport with the young people. Following guidance from researchers who have worked with young people helped to ensure that the young person felt at ease, thus facilitating an environment which allowed the participant to feel comfortable in talking openly and honestly. During the interviews, young people were often openly critical about their school environment and used casual language, including swear words on occasions, which suggests they felt relaxed during the interview.

3.5.6 Summary of qualitative research phase

The qualitative component of the study drew on data collected from 11 young people (aged 12-18 years) through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Young people were recruited via two secondary schools - one from the East Midlands and one from the East of England. The interviews proved instrumental in exploring the perception and experience of relational bullying among young people. They also provided young people with the opportunity to identify factors which they perceived as having the ability to help them navigate relational bullying successfully.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Conducting ethical research equates to ensuring morality throughout the research process (Wiles, 2013) and ensuring that research is conducted with "due care and regard towards all those who are involved" (Heath et al., 2009, p. 21). Ethical considerations are important across all research studies, but working with young people can raise different issues based on variations in the competencies of young people and the potential for an unequal power relationship between young people and adult researchers (Kirk, 2007; Morrow, 2008).

The 2014 HBSC England study was granted ethical approval from the University of Hertfordshire Health and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority (Protocol number: HSK/SF/UH/00007; 22/07/2013). Parent/guardian(s) were provided with an information letter and the option to 'opt out' if they did not give permission for their child

to take part in the research (Brooks et al., 2015). However, young people made the final decision about their involvement; at the point of the survey administration young people were reminded that their involvement was voluntary and they were given the opportunity to decline participation. The 2014 HBSC England survey was anonymous and completed questionnaires were sealed in envelopes to further maintain confidentiality. The national report provides a detailed account of the study's ethical procedures (Brooks et al., 2015).

Ethical approval for the qualitative element of the current research was obtained from the University of Hertfordshire Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority (Protocol number: aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(3); 15/03/2018; see Appendix H for ethics approval notification). A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check was also conducted in line with UH ethics procedures for working with children. The subsequent section will explore important ethical considerations in relation to the qualitative research phase which required my own independent application for ethical approval.

Informed consent

Informed consent is an imperative aspect of all research and refers to a participant's involvement being voluntary, free from influence and based on a thorough understanding of the research. Participants should be notified:

> "*what the research is about; why it is being conducted, who is funding it, what will happen to the results and how they will be disseminated; what their participation in the project will involve; what the potential risks and benefits of their involvement might be, and, how issues of anonymity and confidentiality will be managed."* (Wiles, 2013, p. 25).

Informed consent relies on a person's competency and their ability to understand, which can be a difficult notion to assess when carrying out research with young people (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Wiles, Heath, Crow, & Charles, 2005). In the UK, the ability to provide informed consent does not focus on biological age. Instead, the rule known as 'Gillick competency' comes into play, where young people are thought to be able to provide informed consent in their own right if they demonstrate sufficient reasoning and understanding (Cashmore, 2006). In theory, young people can participate in research without parental consent (Heath et al., 2009), however, in practice, many researchers seek parental consent for their own assurance as identifying competency is not an objective matter (Valentine, 1999).

For the qualitative component, active consent was sought from both young people and their parent/guardian (Pokorny, Jason, Townsend, & Curie, 2001). Young people made the primary decision about their involvement in the research by volunteering to take part in an interview. A parent/guardian information letter and consent form were provided to those who had volunteered (see Appendices C and D). While parental consent is not a legal requirement, I consider the parent/guardian to be an integral part of young people's lives and best placed to assess their child's competency. Young people returned the signed parent/guardian consent form on the day of the interview and this was checked before the interview commenced. Furthermore, informed consent was also sought from the young people themselves; prior to starting the interview the young person and I discussed and signed two student consent forms together (see Appendix E). Thus, young people made the final and informed decision about their participation in this research.

Much research with young people is conducted in educational institutions. It has been suggested that young people may be unable to distinguish between normal school work and research activities, which would hinder the potential for informed consent (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Heath et al., 2009). In this study, interviews were conducted outside of the classroom environment to help distance the activity from educational work, reducing the likelihood of young people participating due to a misconception that it constitutes school work.

Recruiting via educational institutions often results in researchers gaining access to participants via gatekeepers. Young people can be relatively powerlessness, and if gatekeepers are advocating for their involvement in research they may feel obliged to participate. The effect of gatekeepers was negated by asking participants to volunteer to take part in the study. Furthermore, researchers have highlighted how teachers who act as gatekeepers may perceive their consent as sufficient, and that consent from parents and young people is not necessary (Morrow, 2008; Valentine, 1999). During the recruitment stage for this study I was faced with this perspective as a member of teaching staff offered to provide me with young people who they deemed appropriate to participate in the study. I declined this offer stressing the importance of the young people wanting to take part as well as the process of informed consent; consequently, an inclusive recruitment method was adopted which allowed young people to self-select if they were interested in participating in the research study.

Consent is an ongoing process (Morrow, 2008); all participants have the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the research process. The power dynamic between researcher and participant may be particularly salient when research participants are young people, making it more difficult for them to express their wish to stop participating once the research process has begun (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Throughout the interviews I endeavoured to alleviate the potential power imbalance through my own behaviour including wearing casual clothes, using informal language and distancing myself from authority figures by introducing myself as a student. During the interview I aimed to position myself as a non-expert with the view that the young person was sharing their expertise, perception, experience and understanding of relational bullying, using phrases like "*that's interesting*", *"there is no right or wrong answers*" and "*I don't know how it* [Snapchat] *works…*?" with the aim to reduce any potential power imbalance. On reflection, I feel I was successful in ensuring young people were empowered during the interviews. Their body language was open and relaxed, and they often spoke at length when answering my questions.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality describes how participants should not be identifiable from the presentation of research findings, preventing the information they supplied from being associated with them (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Several practices were put in place to ensure participants confidentiality. Pseudonyms were attributed immediately after data collection and have been used when reporting findings. Details of individual schools, places and people have been removed and careful attention has been paid not to report information that could potentially identify a participant. Electronic data is currently stored on a password protected UH server and hardcopies of data (e.g. transcripts) are stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office on the UH premises. Any personal data which was recorded (including participant's name, age and gender) is being stored separately to interview transcripts. Electronic data will be stored on the password protected UH server for five years (until January 2023) and will then be destroyed, while hardcopies will be destroyed on completion of this study. The data storage processes were outlined in both the participant and parent/guardian information sheets (Appendices B and C).

Confidentiality can be more challenging with young people due to legal obligations. In the UK those aged under 16 years are protected by the Children Act (1989; 2004) which means researchers have a duty of care to report if young people are in danger or pose a danger to others. It is good practice to acknowledge the limitations of confidentiality prior to the

interview (Kirk, 2007). In this study, these were explicitly stated in the student consent form: "I understand that if I disclose information which suggests I or others are at risk of harm, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities" (Appendix E). Furthermore, the statements were verbally explained to participants when completing the consent form together. For example, prior to interviewing Katie (18 years old) I explained:

> *"…so if you told me something like you don't like a teacher that is absolutely fine. The only time I would have to let the school know something about this conversation is if you tell me something that makes me think you're, like, harming yourself or others."*

All the young people appeared to understand this notion, with Harriet (15 years old) responding "*Yeah, I've been through this rule many times".* Parents/guardians were also informed about this restriction via the parent/guardian consent form (see Appendix D).

Location

The location of fieldwork can pose ethical considerations, including issues around safety and confidentiality. Furthermore, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) documented the importance of location when researching the topic of bullying specifically, describing an occasion when a participant was anxious and distracted because peers in the library were watching the interview take place.

Nine interviews were conducted on school grounds (School 1), while two interviews were conducted on UH premises. Neither of the locations posed a safety risk for the participants or researcher. Those interviewed in the school environment were very familiar with the location. The students who were interviewed on UH premises had spent a period of time familiarising themselves with the environment via their work experience placement. At both locations, interviews were conducted in private office-style rooms thus providing a safe and neutral environment for the young person to discuss bullying openly and in confidence. The interview room was in a staffed environment, in close proximity to either members of school or university staff, protecting myself as a lone-researcher.

Distress

The research topic of bullying is one of a sensitive nature and it was possible the young people could experience mild discomfort and/or distress of an emotional nature when talking about their understanding and experiences of the behaviour. The student information sheet (see Appendix B) outlined the topics which were likely to be discussed in the interview, so participants were prepared for the content; this enabled any young person

who would find the topics particularly emotive to make an informed decision about whether to participate or not, prior to the interview.

As outlined in my application for ethical approval, if a situation arose in which a participant showed distress, participants would have been reminded they did not have to answer any questions they were not comfortable answering. I would have offered any such participants the chance to stop the interview for a break or terminate the interview completely if they could not continue. If the young person appeared to be upset during the interview it was decided that, with the participant's permission, the consenting adult for the young person would be informed.

Fortunately, none of the young people displayed distress during the interview. The young people appeared relaxed and were comfortable engaging with my questions. For example, my field notes described that Jess (14 years old) "*was relaxed and open*" as demonstrated by the fact "*her answers became longer and more detailed and drew on personal experiences*" as the interview progressed. However, all participants were given a Support Services Information Sheet (see Appendix G) regardless of whether the research had raised any issues or caused distress. The Support Services Information Sheet detailed relevant sources of support and contact details should they require support or advice following involvement in the research project. To date, no young person or parent/guardian has been in touch post-interview.

3.6.1 Summary of ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical challenges which need to be thoroughly considered when conducting research with young people; these undoubtedly stem from a need to protect young people. However, it is worth noting that a number of the measures that are in place to protect young people can contribute to young people feeling that they do not have full control in terms of their decision-making. The practice of seeking parental consent and the influential position of gatekeepers can hinder young people from making independent decisions about their own involvement in research.

The present study acknowledged that young people should be allowed to make a decision about their involvement in research, using a self-selecting process to diminish the influence of the institution. I was conscious of the potential power imbalance between myself and the young people, and consequently throughout the interview I aimed to position myself as a non-expert. Furthermore, initially consulting with young people via youth reference groups

provided a unique insight and enhanced the ethical sensitivity of the research, for example ensuring the most appropriate data collection methods were employed.

3.7 Chapter summary

The combination of quantitative secondary analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data set and the qualitative face-to-face interviews with young people allowed for the successful exploration of young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying in England. The use of the mixed methods facilitated the research objectives in the following way:

- Research objective no. 1 concerning prevalence and demographic factors was met through the quantitative element as the 2014 HBSC England data set provided a suitable large, representative sample of young people.
- Research objective no. 2 examining the health and wellbeing consequences of experiencing relational bullying was met through both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data provided robust measures of young people's health and wellbeing, while young people's accounts provided the opportunity for them to illustrate outcomes of relational bullying.
- Research objective no. 3 seeking to identify factors which help young people navigate relational bullying was achieved through the combination and integration of both quantitative and qualitative components. The 2014 HBSC England data measured aspects of a young person's social world suitable for quantitative analysis, while the face-to-face interviews were devised in order to explore and expand upon the quantitative findings.
- Research objective no. 4 regarding young people's perception of relational bullying was met through the qualitative element, as the interviews facilitated the voice of the young person.

Mixed methods in this study allowed for the exploration of different yet related aspects of relational bullying to provide a broad and comprehensive understanding, with the qualitative element further functioning to explain and illustrate the quantitative data.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, provides a comprehensive overview of the analysis techniques which were employed in relation to both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Chapter 4: Data analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the analysis techniques in relation to both the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data is described initially, before detailing the qualitative analysis of the interview data.

4.2 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis drew on data collected as part of the 2014 HBSC England study. As detailed in Section 3.4, the survey tool used to collect this data was comprehensive and covered a broad range of topics. This section will initially describe the measures and associated questions [12] which were utilised in this analysis. The statistical techniques, including descriptive and inferential statistics, will then be outlined.

4.2.1 Measures

The following section will focus specifically on the measures from the 2014 HBSC England survey which were drawn on for the secondary analysis (see Appendix A for a comprehensive overview of questions in the 2014 HBSC England survey). The measures used in this study can be categorised as:

1. Demographics
2. Bullying
3. Health outcomes
4. Factors associated with the social-ecological theory

Prior to analysis a number of the measures required preparatory work, including generating overall scores and creating categories, which will also be detailed.

Demographics

Demographic variables were utilised in this study, including:

- Gender - with response options 'boy' or 'girl'.

[12] Here, 'measure' refers to the broader outcome which is assessed through a question or series of questions. For example, 'gender' is a measure assessed via the question 'Are you a boy or girl?'

- Age - respondents were asked for their date of birth, from which their age at time of completion was calculated. In line with the 2014 HBSC international protocol (Currie et al., 2014) respondents were categorised into '11 years old', '13 years old' or '15 years old'.
- Ethnicity - young people were given 18 different response options commonly used by the Office for National Statistics (2013) as well as 'don't know' and 'don't want to say'. Several response options had a very small numbers of respondents (for example, the category 'Bangladeshi' recorded only 33 responses). It would have proven difficult to draw sensible conclusions regarding such small numbers, so for the purpose of analyses ethnicity was collapsed into broader categories in line with the ethnicity categories reported by the Office for National Statistics (2013) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 *Measuring ethnicity in the 2014 HBSC England survey*

Response options in the 2014 HBSC England survey	**Categories for analysis**
White British/ Irish/ Traveller of Irish heritage/ Gypsy or Roma/ Any other white background	White/White British
White and black Caribbean/ White and black African/ White and Asian/ Any other mixed background	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
Indian/ Pakistani/ Bangladeshi/ Any other Asian background	Asian/ Asian British
Black Caribbean/ Black African/ Any other black background	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British
Chinese	Chinese
Any other ethnic background	Other

- Socio-economic status (SES) - measured via free school meal (FSM) eligibility and the Family Affluence Scale (FAS). FSM eligibility was used as an indicator of lower SES as eligibility relied on receiving state benefits. FAS was developed within the HBSC international network as a simple measure of SES for use with young people (Currie et al., 2008). FAS assesses SES via four questions which measure indicators of affluence present in the respondent's home (see Table 4.2). In line with FAS guidelines (Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006; Inchley, Currie, Todd, Akhtar,

& Currie, 2005) scores on the four items were summed and respondents were categorised into low (0-3), medium (4-6) and high (7-9) family affluence.

Table 4.2 *Details of the Family Affluence Scale (FAS)*

Question	Response options	Score
How many computers does your family own (including laptops and tablets, but not including game consoles and smartphones)?	None/ One/ Two/ More than two	0-3
Does your family own a car, van or truck?	No/ Yes, one/ Yes, two or more	0-2
Do you have your own bedroom for yourself?	No/Yes	0-1
How many times did you and your family travel out of England for a holiday/vacation last year?	Not at all/ Once/ Twice/ More than twice	0-3

Bullying

The 2014 HBSC England survey contained several measures addressing bullying. The questionnaire included four core questions: two focusing on perpetration and victimisation in reference to traditional bullying behaviours (Figure 4.1) and two pertaining to different forms of cyberbullying victimisation (Figure 4.2). The measures illustrated in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 were included in this study and analysed using descriptive statistics.

The questions in the 2014 HBSC England survey were adopted from the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (ROBVQ) (Olweus, 1996; Solberg & Olweus, 2003) and were preceded by a preamble which is designed to encompass all types of bullying behaviour and establish a consistent understanding across respondents (Greif & Furlong, 2006). Considering the international nature of the HBSC study the preamble was imperative for ensuring cross-cultural consistency (Currie et al., 2014). The functionality and validity of the single item perpetration and victimisation measures have been established, with Solberg and Olweus (2003) suggesting they are the most appropriate method for assessing bullying prevalence. The questions offered a specific context (i.e. at school) and a clear reference period (i.e. in the past two months) which would be understandable to young people.

Here are some questions about bullying. We say a student is BEING BULLIED when another student, or a group of students, say or do nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she does not like or when he or she is deliberately left out of things. But it is NOT BULLYING when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight. It is also not bullying when a student is teased in a friendly and playful way.

How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?

- ☐ I have not bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months
- ☐ It has happened once or twice
- ☐ 2 or 3 times a month
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ Several times a week

How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?

- ☐ I have not been bullied at school in the past couple of months
- ☐ It has happened once or twice
- ☐ 2 or 3 times a month
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ Several times a week

Figure 4.1 *Measure of bullying perpetration/ victimisation in the 2014 HBSC England survey*

How often have you been bullied at school in the following ways?

	I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months	Once or twice	2 or 3 times a month	About once a week	Several times a week
a). Someone sent mean instant messages, wall posting, emails and text messages or created a website that made fun of me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b). Someone took unflattering or inappropriate pictures of me without permission and posted them online	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 4.2 *Measure of cyberbullying victimisation in the 2014 HBSC England survey*

The 2014 HBSC England survey also contained a checklist of bullying behaviours primarily originating from the ROBVQ (Olweus, 1996; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). The checklist comprised of both optional and country-specific questions (Figure 4.3). The questions on the behavioural checklist which address physical and verbal bullying were included in both the descriptive and inferential statistics of this study (see Figure 4.3, Items A and C).

How often have you been bullied at school in the following ways?

	I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months	Once or twice	2 or 3 times a month	About once a week	Several times a week
a) I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or completely ignored me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Other students told lies or spread false rumours about me and tried to make others dislike me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e). Other students made fun of me because of my body weight.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f). Other students made sexual jokes, comments or gestures at me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g). Other students spread embarrassing or personal information about me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
h). Other students made fun of me because of my illness or disability.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
i) Other students made fun of me because of my ethnicity (e.g. skin colour, language, culture, ancestry or family history).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j). I have been called names like gay, lesbian, faggot, dyke etc. in a way which upset me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 4.3 *Bullying checklist in the 2014 HBSC England survey*

The 2014 HBSC England survey measured relational bullying via three items which encompassed common relational bullying behaviours – social exclusion, rumour spreading and the sharing of personal information (see Figure 4.3, Items B, D and G). Relational bullying was the focus of the present study and these three items formed the basis of the quantitative

secondary analysis. As the three items measured the single concept of relational bullying it was useful to combine them to create a composite measure. A composite measure allows multiple facets of a concept to be presented in a single score (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006), and additionally, simplifies the interpretation of the data.

Young people could respond in one of five ways to the relational bullying items: 'I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months', 'once or twice in the past couple of months', 'two or three times a month', 'about once a week' and 'several times a week'. When analysing ordered categorical variables such as the relational bullying items, numbers are often assigned to each of the response options similar to a Likert scale e.g. 1 = 'I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months' through to 5 = 'several times a week'. A common method for combining items on a Likert type scale is to sum responses to the individual items or create a mean score; this method has been employed frequently within research relating to bullying (Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011). Whilst summing the individual items or creating a mean score within the present research would have allowed for comparison with existing research, it would have assumed the data was interval – that the intervals between each of the response categories are equal (Field, 2009). The data collected in this instance was ordinal; the response categories were ranked in order but it cannot be assumed that the difference between each is equal. For example, the difference between 'I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months' and 'about once a week' is not necessarily three times greater than the difference between 'I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months' and 'once or twice in the past couple of months'. Existing bullying research which has taken the approach to sum responses has often involved numerous items for which summing may be more appropriate; however, with the three items measuring relational bullying it was possible to examine responses in detail and assign categories.

The composite measure in the present research categorised relational bullying into weekly victimisation, monthly victimisation and no victimisation. Categorisation was based on a respondent's most extreme answer. If a respondent answered 'about once a week' or 'several times a week' to any of the items they were categorised as experiencing weekly bullying irrespective of any of their other responses. If a respondent's most extreme answer was 'two or three times a month' they were categorised as monthly bullying irrespective of the frequency they reported for the other items. Respondents who answered 'I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months' or 'once or twice in the past two

months' were categorised as not being victimised. The cut-off point of 'two or three times a month' has been widely used with the ROBVQ (Olweus, 1996) and reflects the repetitive and ongoing nature of bullying whilst excluding one-off incidents (Molcho et al., 2009; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Empirical research suggests significant differences in psychosocial adjustment between those who report 'two or three times a month' and the two lowest categories (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Despite this, it was decided within the present research that if a respondent answered 'once or twice in the past couple of months' to all three items they would be re-categorised as experiencing monthly relational bullying. While Solberg and Olweus (2003) support the cut-off 'two or three times a month', their research also highlights that cut-off points are not straight forward and require both conceptual and strategic considerations. In the present research the items form a composite measure reflecting one type of bullying behaviour so it is appropriate to view the items collectively; for an individual to report experiencing all three items it is indicative that the bullying is both repetitive and ongoing which coincides with the conceptualisation of bullying. Moreover, respondents who reported being bullied 'once or twice in the past couple of months' were still found to differ significantly on psychosocial adjustment variables compared with those who reported no bullying (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). To illustrate how the items were categorised Table 4.3 presents a variety of possible response combinations and their respective relational bullying categorisation.

Table 4.3 *Possible response combinations to relational bullying items and final relational bullying categorisation*

	Item 1	**Item 2**	**Item 3**	**Final category**
Response combinations	Not been bullied	Not been bullied	Not been bullied	No victimisation
	Not been bullied	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Not been bullied	No victimisation
	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Monthly
	Not been bullied	Not been bullied	Two or three times a month	Monthly
	Two or three times a month	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Not been bullied	Monthly
	Two or three times a month	Two or three times a month	Once or twice in the past couple of months	Monthly
	Not been bullied	Not been bullied	Once or twice a week	Weekly
	Once or twice a week	Not been bullied	Several times a week	Weekly
	Several times a week	Several times a week	Not been bullied	Weekly

N.B. Due to the number of response combinations only a selection are presented as examples.

Health outcomes

The 2014 HBSC England survey included a variety of measures which assessed young people's health and wellbeing. This study analysed the data collected on general self-rated health, health related quality of life (HRQL) and life satisfaction to encompass both physical health and emotional wellbeing.

General self-rated health is based on an individual's perception and conceptualisation of their own health. It is encompassing of all that contributes to an individual's health as opposed to domain specific measures. In the 2014 HBSC England survey self-rated health was measured through a single question which asked respondents 'Would you say your health is...?', with response options 'excellent', 'good', 'fair' and 'poor'. Analyses have demonstrated self-rated health is a relatively stable construct that has been correlated with demographic, psychosocial and physical health measures (Boardman, 2006; Breidablik, Meland, & Lydersen, 2009; Kelleher, Tay, & Gabhainn, 2007).

HRQL is a multifaceted construct including physical, social, emotional and behavioural components of wellbeing; it is based on the belief that health is comprised of not only somatic symptoms but also how an individual feels and their ability to cope with everyday life (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2001). The 2014 HBSC England survey included an established measure of HRQL called KIDSCREEN-10, which was specifically designed for young people aged 8 – 18 years (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010). The measure is comprised of ten items which are rated on a 5-point answer scale (Figure 4.4). An overall score is generated by summing responses to each of the items, with higher scores indicative of positive HRQL (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010). Allowance is made for up to one missing response. The sums are then converted into Rasch personal parameters. These are then transformed to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of approximately 10 (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010). KIDSCREEN-10 has shown good internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82) and test-retest reliability (r=0.70) (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2014). Research suggests KIDSCREEN-10 may be a particularly good indicator of psychological wellbeing, with strongest correlations between psychological and wellbeing measures and large effects sizes when used to discriminate between good and poor mental health (Erhart et al., 2009; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010). The data collected via KIDSCREEN-10 was used in this study, and in preparation for analysis an overall score was generated.

Thinking about the last week... *Please circle one answer for each line*					
a). Have you felt fit and well?	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
b). Have you felt full of energy?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
c). Have you felt sad?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
d). Have you felt lonely?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
e). Have you had enough time for yourself?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
f). Have you been able to do the things that you want to do in your free time?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
g). Have your parent(s) treated you fairly?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
h). Have you had fun with your friends?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always
i). Have you got on well at school?	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
j). Have you been able to pay attention?	Never	Rarely	Quite often	Very often	Always

Figure 4.4 *KIDSCREEN-10 (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2001)*

Life satisfaction is concerned with an individual's overall contentedness with their current situation. Within the 2014 HBSC England survey, life satisfaction was measured via a Cantril (1965) ladder, where respondents ranked their satisfaction with life from 0 - 10 (Figure 4.5). The data on life satisfaction was utilised within this study, however for the purpose of analysis respondents were categorised into low (0-4), medium (5 - 6) and high (7 - 10) life satisfaction. These categories were in line with international[13] reporting of data collected using the Cantril ladder measure, as well as national reporting of the 2014 HBSC England data specifically (Brooks et al., 2015).

[13] https://news.gallup.com/poll/153818/nearly-one-four-worldwide-thriving.aspx#2

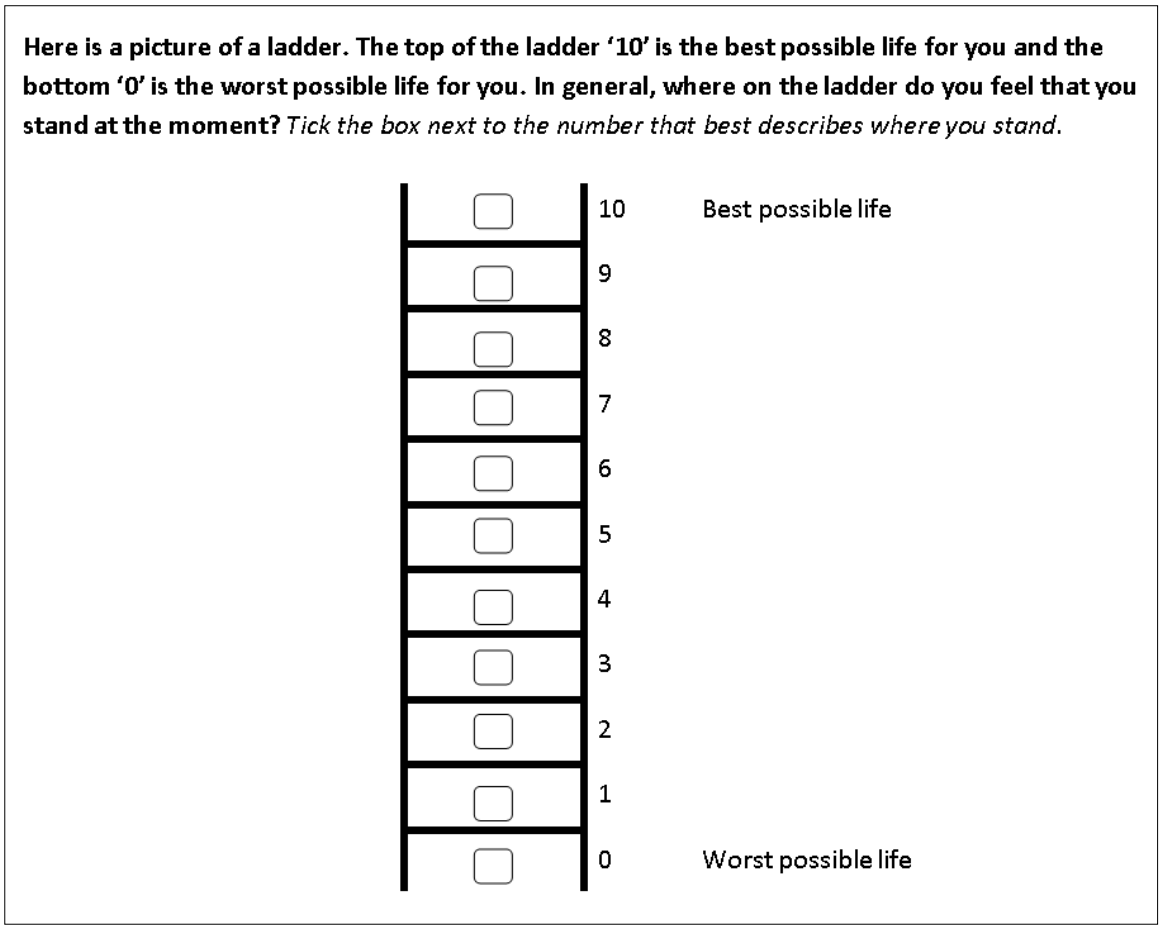


Figure 4.5 *Life satisfaction, adapted from Cantril (1965)*

Factors associated with the social-ecological framework

One of the research objectives of the present study was to explore and identify factors from the young person's world which may play a role in helping young people to navigate relational bullying. The HBSC study is unique in situating young people's health and wellbeing in their social environment (Brooks, Magnusson, Klemera, Spencer, & Morgan, 2011) and as such the 2014 HSBC England survey included a number of measures relating to the young person's social context. The social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) was used to guide the identification of relevant measures from within the survey (see Section 2.6 for a thorough discussion of the social-ecological theory). Figure 4.6 illustrates the measures which I identified as being associated with the different domains of the social-ecological framework. These measures were primarily utilised in the secondary analysis conducted in response to research objective no. 3 (see Section 4.2.2). The 2014 HBSC England survey did not contain any measures related to the broader macro-system (e.g. politics and culture).

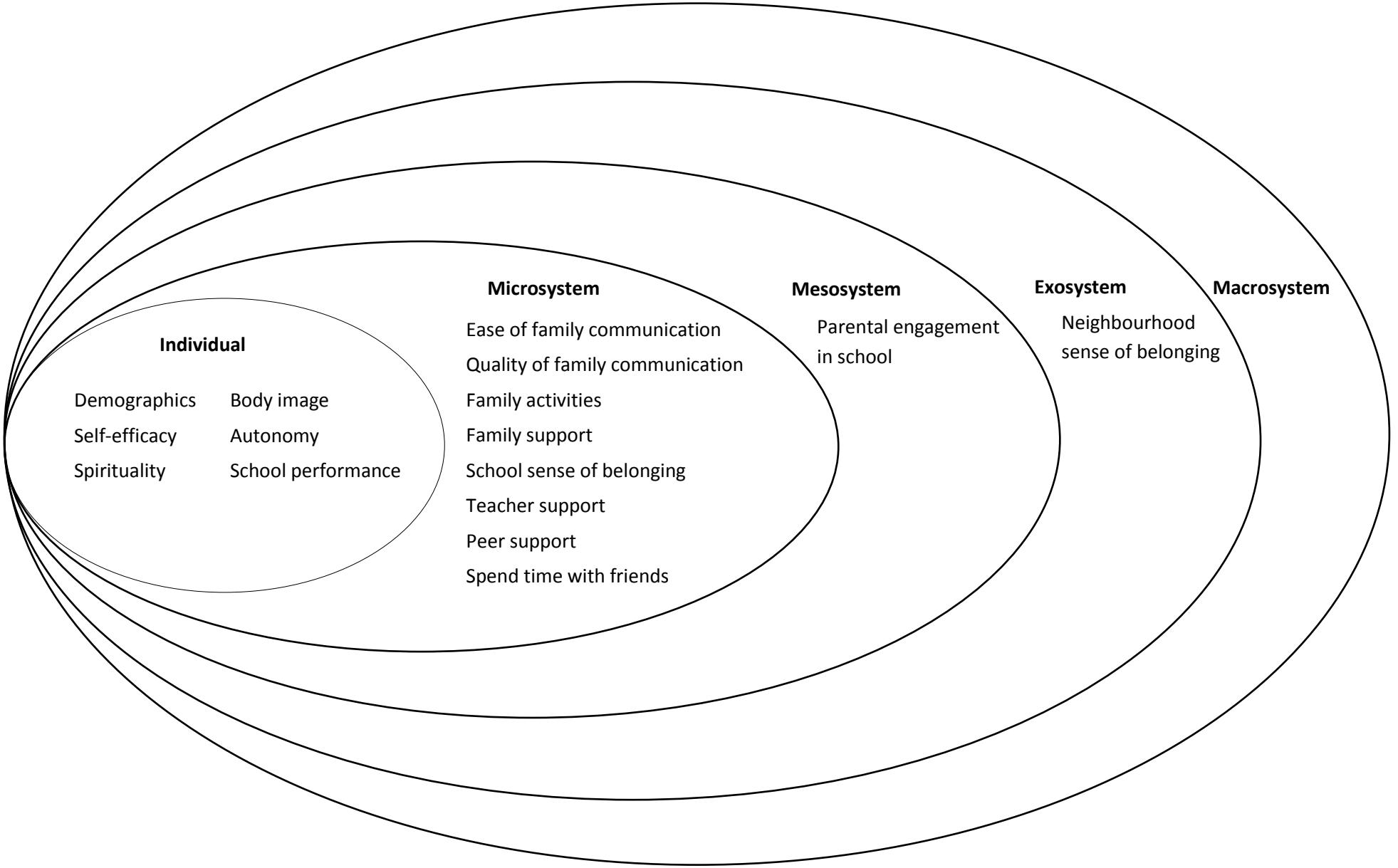


Figure 4.6 *Measures within the 2014 HBSC England survey identified for secondary analysis using the social-ecological framework*

Table 4.4 provides a detailed breakdown of the measures identified using the social-ecological theory as a guiding framework, including items and response options. As the HBSC study is a long-standing project there is a substantial body of work drawing on the measures addressing young people's social context. Consequently, guidance was sought from national and international work to identify the most appropriate method of preparing and working with the measures. For example, the analysis of spirituality followed the developers' suggestions and analysed by domain rather than overall score (Michaelson et al., 2016); while the responses 'easy' and 'very easy' to communicate with mother and father have been collapsed together in the HBSC international reports dating back to 2002 (Currie et al., 2012; Inchley et al., 2016). Furthermore, neighbourhood sense of belonging has been categorised in a similar frame both nationally (Brooks, Magnusson, Spencer, & Morgan, 2012; Chester et al., 2019) and internationally (Boyce, Davies, Gallupe, & Shelley, 2008; Elgar, Trites, & Boyce, 2010).

Table 4.4 *A description of the measures identified for secondary analysis using the social-ecological theory as a guiding framework*

Measures	Further details
Individual level:	
Demographics	Age, gender, ethnicity and SES (as measured by FAS and FSM eligibility).
General self-efficacy	Measured by the General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Comprised of 10 items such as 'I can handle whatever comes my way' and 'I am certain I can accomplish my goals'. The items are rated on a 4-point scale from 'not at all true' through to 'absolutely true'. Responses are summed, providing a score with a range of 10 to 40.
Body image	Single question assessing body image. Responses categorised into 'too fat', 'too thin' and 'about right'.
School performance	Single question measure of how young people perceive their performance at school. Responses categorised into 'above average', 'average' and 'below average'.
Spirituality	Measured by a scale developed by Michaelson et al. (2016). The measure begins with 'How important is it for you to…' and includes 8 items such as 'be kind to other people' and 'be forgiving of others'. The items are rated on a scale of 1-5 where 1 = 'not at all important' and 5 = 'very important'. The measure is divided into four domains of spirituality: connections to others, to self, to nature and to the transcendent. For each domain responses were averaged, and scores were categorised into 'not important', 'somewhat important' and 'important'.
Autonomy	Single questions of a young person's autonomy over their free time. Responses categorised into 'high', 'medium' and 'low'.
Microsystem:	
Ease of family communication	Two single items measuring how easy it is for young people to talk to their father and mother. Responses categorised into 'easy' and 'difficult'.
Quality of family communication	Derived from the Family Dynamics Measure II (Rask, Åstedt-Kurki, Paavilainen, & Laippala, 2003). Comprised of 4 items such as 'I think the important things are talked about'. Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were averaged to provide a mean score, with higher scores indicating positive communication.
Family activities	Measured by 4 items asking how often young people and their family partake in certain activities together e.g. 'Watch TV or DVD/film together' or 'Play sports together and exercise'. Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 'every day' through to 'never'. Responses were summed and categorised into 'low', 'medium' and 'high'.

Family support	Measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Comprised of 4 items such as 'My family really tries to help me'. Items were rated on a 7-point scale from 'very strongly disagree' through to 'very strongly agree'. Responses were summed to provide an overall score.
School sense of belonging	Comprised of 3 items such as 'I feel safe in school'. Items rated on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were summed and categorised into 'low', 'medium' and 'high'.
Teacher support	Comprised of 3 items such as 'I feel that my teachers accept me as I am'. Items rated on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were summed and categorised into 'low', 'medium' and 'high'.
Peer support	Measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). Comprised of 4 items such as 'My friends really try to help me'. Items were rated on a 7-point scale from 'very strongly disagree' through to 'very strongly agree'. Responses were summed to provide an overall score.
Spend time with friends	Single item question measuring how often young people spend time with friends before 8pm in the evening. Responses categorised into 'at least weekly' and 'less than weekly'.
Mesosystem:	
Parental engagement in school	Comprised of 5 items such as 'My parents are willing to come to school to talk to teachers'. Items rated on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were summed and categorised into 'low', 'medium' and 'high'.
Exosystem:	
Neighbourhood sense of belonging	Comprised of 7 items such as 'I feel safe in the area where I live' and 'You can trust people around here'. Items rated on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were summed and categorised into 'low', 'medium' and 'high'.

4.2.2 Statistical analyses

This section will describe the statistical techniques used to analyse the 2014 HBSC England data set. A variety of descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to achieve the research objectives. The variables listed in Section 4.2.1 were included in these analyses.

It is possible to apply weights to the 2014 HBSC England data set to further improve its match to the larger population, up weighting cases from underrepresented groups and down weighting others. However, adding this complexity to the analysis is only worthwhile if it makes substantive differences to the results as it can restrict the analyses possible (the ability to use weights with some multilevel analyses is a subject of ongoing development). In all cases, exploratory analyses using weights showed only small differences to unweighted analyses and, as such, all analyses presented her were conducted without weights.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics are "procedures for organizing and summarizing data so that the important characteristics are described" (Heiman, 2004, p. 293); measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion, frequencies and percentages may be used to describe the basic characteristics of the data. Descriptive statistics were employed in relation to research objective no. 1 (see Section 1.3), to establish the prevalence of relational bullying and to situate relational bullying within the broader context of bullying behaviours by making comparisons with other measures of bullying contained within the 2014 HBSC England survey. Descriptive statistics were also used to establish a demographic picture of those experiencing relational bullying by looking at the frequency of this behaviour by gender, age, SES and ethnicity. All descriptive statistics were carried out using the software IBM SPSS Statistics. The results of the descriptive statistics are reported in Section 5.2 – Section 5.4 of Chapter 5.

Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics go beyond simply describing the data to make broader inferences based on the data being analysed. Inferential statistics often include tests of statistical significance, seeking to identify whether the findings are due to random chance or whether they are "representing a 'real' relationship found in nature" (Heiman, 2004, p. 126). However, statistical significance on its own does not imply practical significance, causation nor provide the size of the effect. Consequently, during the inferential analyses and presentation of findings, care has been taken to interpret statistically significant results within context.

Cluster sampling was employed during the 2014 HBSC England study (see Section 3.4.2). Cluster sampling resulted in respondents being organised within classes and schools, these classes and schools inevitably comprised of different cultures and policies so it is likely respondents from the same class and/or school were more similar to each other (Field, 2009). The effects of clustering were acknowledged through the use multilevel modelling which took account of variation at the different levels – student, class and school levels. As such, all inferential modelling was conducted using the multilevel modelling software package MLwiN (Centre for Multilevel Modelling, University of Bristol).

Inferential statistics played a dominant role in facilitating research objectives no. 2 and no. 3 (see Section 1.3). The two research objectives, which a) sought to identify health and wellbeing outcomes of relational bullying and b) identify factors which young people perceive as helping them to navigate relational bullying, were regarded as building on each other. Successfully navigating relational bullying is likely to reduce the health and wellbeing outcomes associated with this behaviour. However, it was initially important to ascertain the health outcomes associated with relational bullying – especially considering the dearth of evidence from a UK-based perspective (see Section 2.4.5). As such, the inferential statistics examining health and wellbeing outcomes draw only on demographic factors in the social-ecological theory; however, the variables associated with the social-ecological theory (see Figure 4.6) are drawn upon heavily in the subsequent analysis identifying factors which may help with the navigation of relational bullying.

In response to research objective no. 2, three multilevel models were built in order to examine the association between young people's experience of relational bullying and three measures of health and wellbeing:

1. HRQL as measured by KIDSCREEN-10. HRQL was a scale variable and consequently a regression model for a continuous outcome was computed (see Section 5.5).
2. General self-rated health was a categorical variable in which the response options formed a sequence, as such it was appropriate to fit an ordered multinomial regression model (see Section 5.6).
3. Life satisfaction, similar to general self-rated health, was a categorical variable with ordered response options and as such an ordered multinomial regression model was computed (see Section 5.7).

In all three multilevel models relational bullying was included as an explanatory variable, while demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity and SES) and physical and verbal forms of bullying

were included as potentially confounding variables irrespective of significance. The 5% level of significance was used to identify main effects. Random slopes and interactions between main effects were then considered using the stricter 1% level to reduce the risk of overfitting by including spurious terms. When modelling general self-rated health and life satisfaction a number of the main effects violated the proportional odds assumption and as such the effect of the variables differed across the outcome categories. For instance, the associated effect of relational bullying differed between the high, medium and low life satisfaction categories. The model building allowed for this variation by fitting separate coefficients for each outcome category.

Research objective no. 3, seeking to identify factors in the young person's world which may help them to navigate the experience of relational bullying (see Section 1.3), was met through the integration of both inferential statistics and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis played an initial exploratory role. A multilevel model explored factors from the young person's social-ecological system which were associated with high life satisfaction among those experiencing relational bullying, seeking to identify factors which help young people positively navigate relational bullying (see Section 5.8). Life satisfaction was a binomial outcome variable with either 'low' or 'high' life satisfaction, consequently a logistic regression model was created. A forward selection strategy was employed to identify main effects from the factors listed in Figure 4.6 which were associated with the social-ecological theory. Wald tests were used to judge significance at the 1% level. The 1% level of significance was used, as opposed to 5%, due to the fact multiple comparisons were being made which would have increased the chance of identifying spurious relationships. Random slopes and interactions between main effects were then considered using the stricter 0.1% level of significance to reduce the risk of overfitting. Demographic variables including age, gender, ethnicity and SES were retained in the model despite being non-significant to control for any minor effect they may have.

4.2.3 Summary of quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis drew on a range of measures within the 2014 HBSC England survey, including those related to demographics, bullying, health outcomes and factors associated with the social-ecological framework. Measures were prepared prior to data analysis. The quantitative secondary analysis employed both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings from the quantitative analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

4.3 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis drew on data collected from 11 face-to-face interviews with young people. There are a number of well-established techniques for analysing qualitative data (Silverman, 2011), however qualitative analysis approaches are often thought to share the same fundamental methods of examining, organising and reducing data into categories in order to draw conclusions (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). While the underpinning assumptions of qualitative research are well established, there is little practical advice on *how* to conduct qualitative analysis. Lather (1991) described analysis as "the 'black hole' of qualitative research" (p.149). Furthermore, it has been suggested that qualitative analysis is linked to the experience and knowledge of the analyst (M. Q. Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2011) which may pose a challenge for novice qualitative researchers.

This section will provide a detailed description of the analysis of the qualitative data including the role of transcription and the adopted analytical approach of thematic analysis. Techniques which were employed to ensure rigour and quality will also be detailed.

4.3.1 Transcription

The interviews with young people were audio recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of analysis. I personally transcribed all of the interviews into a Microsoft Word document using a transcription foot pedal to control the audio recording. After listening to the interviews several times, they were transcribed verbatim, including noting instances when the young person paused, laughed or emphasised certain words. To check the accuracy of transcription each interview was re-listened to whilst reading the transcript on several occasions. Interview transcripts were anonymised prior to analysis, removing any identifying information such as details of individual schools, places and people. Dialogue by the interviewer was marked with an 'I' and dialogue by the young person was noted with a 'P' followed by a number (corresponding to the sequence of interviews). See Appendix I for an extract of a transcript.

Transcribing interviews can be a time-consuming and challenging process. Consequently the task is frequently delegated to trained transcribers which may quicken the process and minimise the likelihood of errors (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004). However, the valuable role of transcription in the analytical process has been noted (Bird, 2005). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) considers that transcription may "jumpstart" (p. 808) the analysis of qualitative data as it encourages the researcher to become familiar with the data. The process of transcription undoubtedly immersed me in the data. It enabled a level of familiarity which

allowed me to recall the young person's voice and tone when reading the transcripts, helping to provide a greater level of context to their words.

4.3.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a recent approach towards analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involves "identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes within a data set" (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2). Thematic analysis seeks to study meaning across the entire data set. The process of grouping data into broader categories of meaning is a feature of other methods of qualitative analysis and it has been suggested that thematic analysis "underpins most other methods of qualitative data analysis" (Willig, 2013, p. 57). However, recent work has positioned thematic analysis as a standalone data analysis method as opposed to an underlying research tool (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017).

Unlike other methods of qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis is not associated with any particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The flexibility offered by thematic analysis was appropriate considering the pragmatic stance to mixed methodology in this study (see Section 3.2). Furthermore, while thematic analysis was initially introduced in the field of psychology it has been advocated within the field of health and wellbeing research (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis has the benefit of being a relatively accessible approach to qualitative data analysis, enabled in part by a six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis was conducted with the help of NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to guide this analysis, however a secondary coding step was introduced resulting in seven phases:

1. Data familiarisation and immersion was facilitated through the process of transcription which involved listening to audio recordings and re-reading transcripts on numerous occasions. Transcripts were annotated with initial observations.
2. Initial coding involved assigning a "label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 61). Initial coding resulted in 165 codes.
3. Second level of coding was an additional step introduced to reduce the number of codes created during initial coding. The second level of coding grouped codes into higher level codes or categories (Willig, 2013), collapsed similar codes together and

removed codes with only single references from across the data set. For example, the codes 'Dad', 'Mum' and 'parent support' were re-coded as 'parental support'. Second level coding resulted in 49 codes.

4. Identifying themes among the coded data involved scrutinising the codes to detect similarities and overarching topics which unified codes. 9 themes were identified.
5. Themes were reviewed to ensure they were a fitting reflection of the data, guided by questions such as "Is this a theme (it could be just a code)?" and "Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65). Following the review, 5 themes were retained.
6. Themes were defined and named, ensuring they were both specific and unique which acted as a further quality check. The themes were named with a quote from one of the young people alongside my own interpretation, ensuring the theme titles reflected the young person's words as well as my own stance. During this stage Braun and Clarke (2012) advise summarising each theme in a few sentences to test whether the theme is coherent. This process highlighted one theme which did not have a singular focus and proved difficult to summarise concisely. The theme 'conflicting perceptions of relational bullying' was deemed too broad in focus and was divided into three themes: 1) "It made me feel really upset": Negative impact of relational bullying, 2) "It went all over social media": Social media facilitating relational bullying and 3) "There is always something going around": Normalisation of relational bullying. The process of defining and naming themes resulted in a total of 7 themes.
7. Write-up of the themes is thought to be an extension of the analysis rather than a distinct phase post-analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The writing of the themes was key in ensuring the data was illustrated coherently with sufficient evidence.

Figure 4.7 illustrates the process of moving from codes through to themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) acknowledge that novice coders are likely to code more frequently and at a more descriptive level, whereas experienced coders may establish themes more quickly. As my initial coding resulted in a large number of codes, the secondary coding steps proved a necessary and useful phase in moving from codes to themes. Appendix J illustrates the process of moving from a number of codes through to one theme.

Figure 4.7 *Thematic analysis process*

The thematic analysis employed a 'bottom up' approach which is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) was used as a guiding framework during all of the analysis; the data was interrogated with the ecologies of young people in mind. However, the thematic analysis was not confined to the social-ecological theory alone, allowing flexibility for bottom up, inductive analysis and the emergence of codes and themes beyond the theoretical framework. This was particularly important for capturing young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying.

While Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis may appear linear, the process of qualitative analysis was iterative; "the researcher often moves back and forth between the different phases" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 23). During the process of analysis, I often moved between transcripts, codes and themes.

4.3.3 Rigour and quality

The issue of what constitutes quality in qualitative research has seen much debate (T. Long & Johnson, 2000; Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski, 1993). The terms reliability[14] and validity[15] translate readily to quantitative research methods and findings but their application to qualitative research has been questioned (Noble & Smith, 2015). Alternative terms and criteria have been proposed to evaluate quality in qualitative research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001); Lincoln and Guba (1985) contributed the terms 'truth value', 'consistency', 'neutrality' and 'applicability' which continue to influence the evaluation of qualitative research today (Noble & Smith, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017).

Irrespective of terminology, a number of techniques and strategies have been proposed which promote rigour in qualitative research (T. Long & Johnson, 2000; Noble & Smith, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017; Whittemore et al., 2001). The following techniques were employed in this study to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings:

[14] "The ability of a measure to produce consistent results when the same entities are measured under different conditions" (Field, 2009, p. 792).
[15] "A test measures what it set out to measure conceptually" (Field, 2009, p. 795).

- Prolonged engagement with data, as noted by both Long and Johnson (2000) and Nowell et al. (2017), enhances a researcher's sensitivity to the participant's perspective. During this study I immersed myself in the data including listening to the interview audio recordings and reading the interview transcripts on multiple occasions.
- Audit trails and documentation are a consistent marker of credible research (T. Long & Johnson, 2000; Noble & Smith, 2015; Whittemore et al., 2001). Throughout the research process, including the thematic analysis, I documented decisions - for example, the development of codes and themes (Appendix J records the process of moving from several codes to one theme).
- Transparency of the methodological and theoretical choices throughout the research process is key to ensure others "can understand how and why decisions were made" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). The methodological approach and theoretical framework used in this study has been carefully considered and clearly articulated.
- Peer debriefing, discussing analytical decisions and emerging findings with peers, challenges a researcher's thought processes and interpretations (T. Long & Johnson, 2000; Noble & Smith, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017). Throughout all stages of this study discussions were held with my supervisory team. Furthermore, the findings were presented at varying intervals, stimulating discussions of the research findings from different perspectives.
- Contextual detail allows the transferability of findings to be evaluated (Noble & Smith, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017). Demographic details for each participant were collected and have been reported in this dissertation, facilitating judgements on the application of research findings to different settings.

4.3.4 Summary of qualitative analysis

The qualitative interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was deemed a suitable approach because the analytical method is not aligned with one epistemological or theoretical perspective which resonated with the pragmatic stance adopted in this research (Terry et al., 2017). Furthermore, thematic analysis has been suggested as an ideal method for novice qualitative researchers as the structure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) provides an accessible approach to the analysis of qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The qualitative analysis identified seven themes – these are presented in detail in Chapter 6.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the analysis techniques which were employed in relation to both the quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data collected as part of the 2014 HBSC England study was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The inferential analyses accounted for clustering effects through multilevel modelling. Qualitative data collected through face-to-face interviews with young people was analysed using thematic analysis.

The following chapter, Chapter 5, will outline the findings from the quantitative analysis.

Chapter 5: Quantitative findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings from the secondary analysis of the HBSC England 2014 data set will be outlined in this chapter. The data set consisted of 5335 respondents from 48 schools in England, and provided a large representative sample of young people from across England (see Section 3.4.2 for further sample characteristics). Initially, descriptive statistics for relational bullying are illustrated including prevalence rates, comparisons with other bullying behaviours and a demographic picture of those experiencing relational bullying. Subsequently, three separate multilevel models are presented which examine the health outcomes associated with relational bullying. Finally, an exploratory multilevel model is presented which identifies factors that may help young people navigate relational bullying without negative outcomes. The chapter closes with a summary of the quantitative secondary data analysis.

5.2 Relational bullying: Prevalence

Relational bullying was measured via three items within the HBSC England 2014 survey which encompassed social exclusion, rumour spreading and the sharing of personal information. The three items were combined to create a composite measure of relational bullying which categorised young people into three groups based on their experience in the past couple of months: weekly victimisation, monthly victimisation and no victimisation. See Section 4.2.1 for detailed information on the items and the relational bullying composite measure.

This section provides an overview of the prevalence of relational bullying. Each of the individual relational bullying behaviours (social exclusion, rumour spreading and sharing personal information) are presented initially, followed by an overall prevalence of relational bullying as identified by the above-mentioned composite measure.

Social exclusion

Overall, 28.2% of respondents reported being socially excluded at least once in the past couple of months. Experiencing social exclusion did not appear to vary greatly by age: 28.6% of 11 year olds, 29.7% of 13 year olds and 26.4% of 15 year olds. However, social exclusion did differ considerably by gender, with 35.2% of girls compared with 21.6% of boys reporting social exclusion in the past two months. The majority of young people who had experienced social exclusion said it had happened to them ‘once or twice’ in the past couple of months (Figure

5.1). Gender differences were most evident at the 'once or twice' level and seemed to diminish as frequency increased.

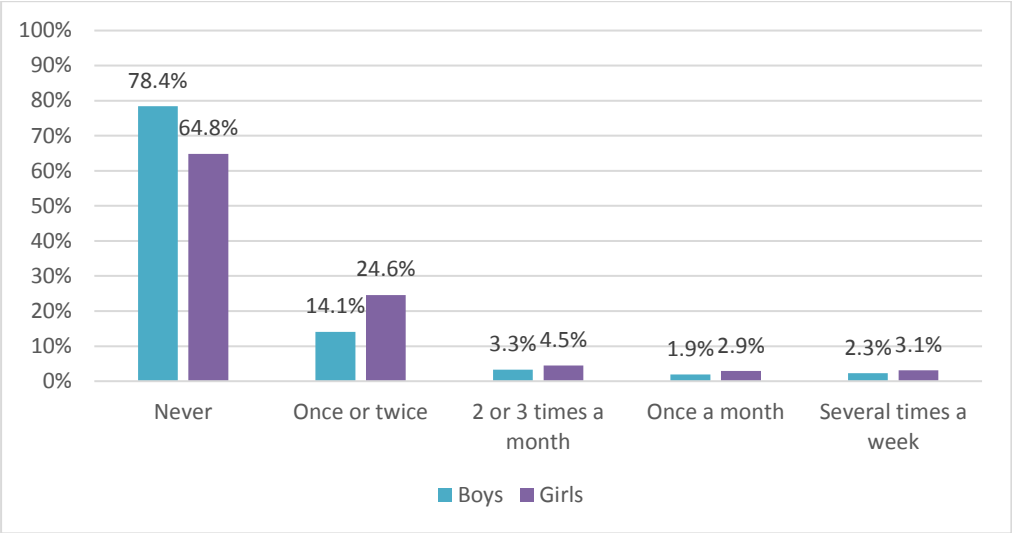


Figure 5.1 *Frequency of social exclusion in the past couple of months by gender*

Rumour spreading

In total, 29.3% of respondents reported having lies or rumours spread about them in the couple of months prior to completing the survey. Gender differences were evident, with around one third (34.2%) of girls compared with a quarter (24.6%) of boys experiencing rumour spreading. Overall, 13 year olds seemed marginally more likely to report having rumours spread about them: 27.7% of 11 year olds, 32.1% of 13 year olds and 28.4% of 15 year olds. The majority of young people who experienced this behaviour reported that it had happened to them 'once or twice' in the past couple of months (Figure 5.2).

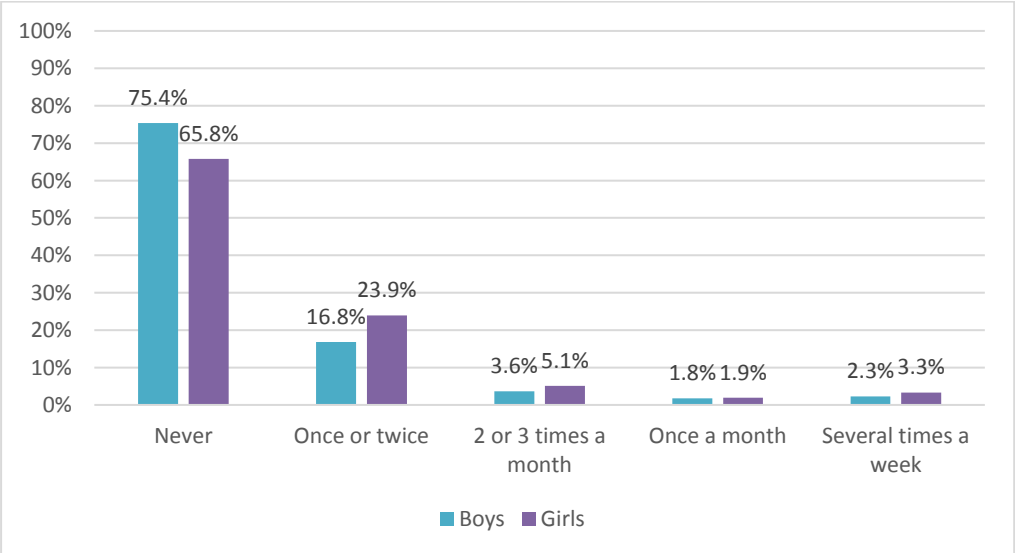


Figure 5.2 *Frequency of rumour spreading in the past couple of months by gender*

Sharing of personal information

Overall, 15.8% of young people reported embarrassing and personal information about them had been shared in the two months prior to the survey being completed. Girls were more likely to say they had experienced this type of behaviour; 18.7% of girls compared with 13.0% of boys. Having personal information shared appeared to increase with age: 13.5% of 11 year olds, 17.5% of 13 year olds and 16.9% of 15 year olds. The majority of young people who experienced this behaviour reported that it had happened to them 'once or twice' in the past couple of months (Figure 5.3). The sharing of personal information was the least common form of relational bullying behaviour; young people were almost half as likely to report experiencing this form compared with social exclusion or the spreading of rumours.

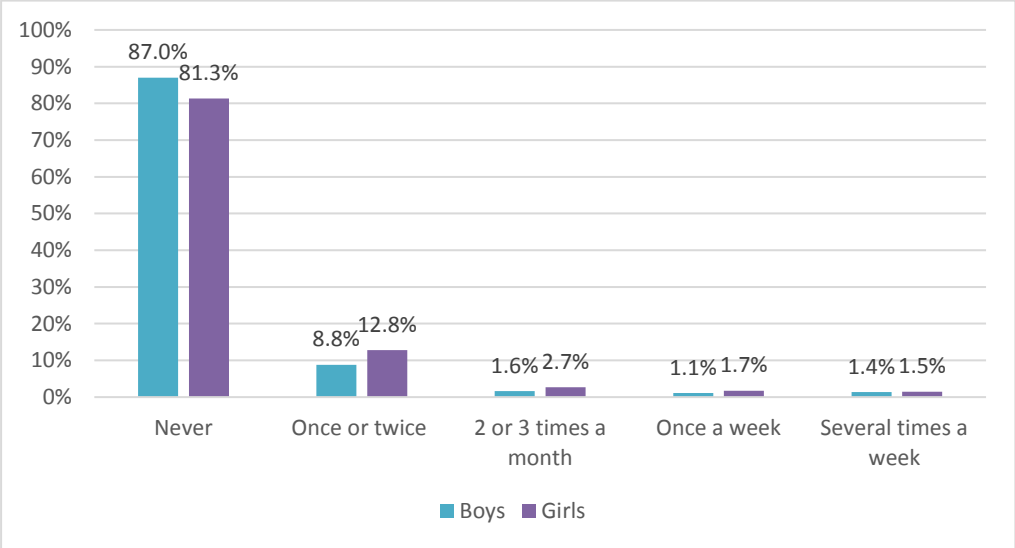


Figure 5.3 *Frequency of sharing embarrassing and personal information in the past couple of months by gender*

Multiple relational bullying behaviours

Figure 5.4 illustrates the relationship between the different relational bullying behaviours. Of those young people who reported experiencing relational bullying, just over a fifth (22.8%) of victims said they had experienced all three bullying behaviours, followed closely by those experiencing social exclusion and rumour spreading (21.4%) and social exclusion alone (21.3%). Very few victims (4.5%) reported having only embarrassing and personal information about them shared. The majority of victims reported experiencing more than one form of relational bullying behaviour.

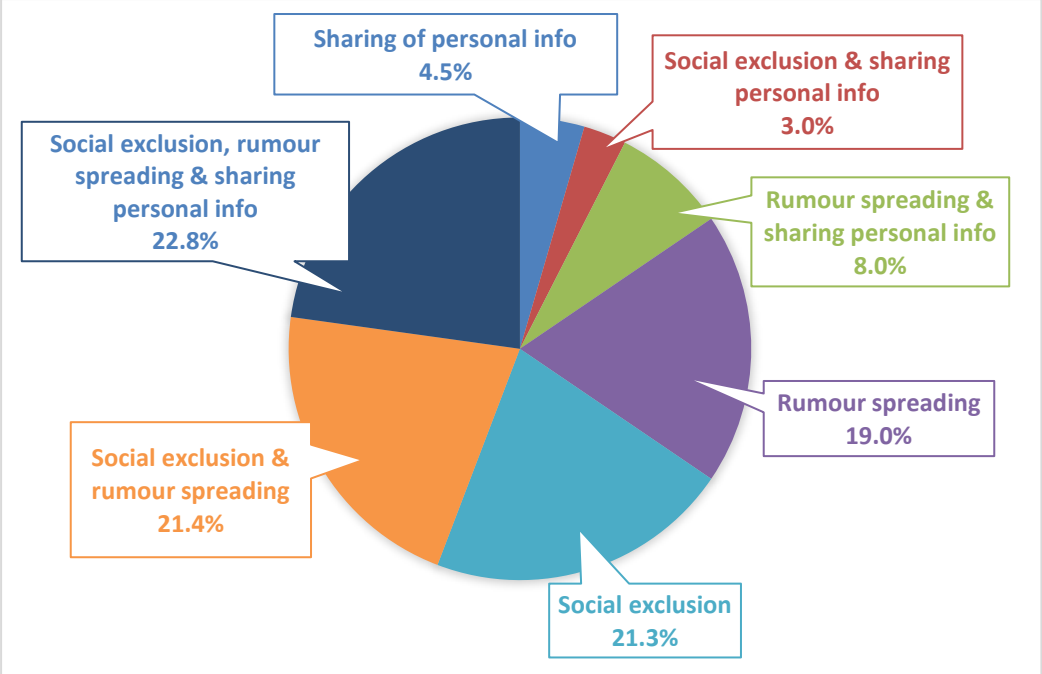


Figure 5.4 *Combinations of relational bullying behaviours*

Overall relational bullying

Combining social exclusion, rumour spreading and sharing of personal and embarrassing information to create an overall relational bullying measure allowed for categorisation of respondents into no victimisation, monthly victimisation and weekly victimisation. The composite measure utilised the more rigorous cut-off of '2 or 3 times a month' which is widely advocated in bullying research, except in instances where respondents reported all three forms of relational bullying 'once or twice' in the past couple of months (see Section 4.2.1 for a thorough description of the composite measure).

Of the 5335 young people who completed the 2014 HBSC England survey, 4991 respondents could be classified with the relational bullying composite measure (344 young people were unable to be categorised due to missing responses). Overall, 16.6% of young people were categorised as being a victim of relational bullying. Approximately equal proportions of young people were in the monthly and weekly victimisation categories (Table 5.1). Slightly more girls than boys were categorised as experiencing relational bullying.

Table 5.1 *Prevalence of relational bullying, by age and gender*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)											
	All ages			**11 year olds**			**13 year olds**			**15 year olds**		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
No victimisation	86.3% (2204)	80.3% (1958)	83.4% (4162)	85.9% (909)	82.7% (714)	84.5% (1623)	86.0% (621)	79.2% (644)	82.4% (1265)	87.2% (668)	78.7% (597)	83.0% (1265)
Monthly victimisation	7.1% (180)	10.5% (256)	8.7% (436)	7.5% (79)	9.2% (79)	8.2% (158)	7.2% (52)	11.3% (92)	9.4% (144)	6.3% (48)	11.2% (85)	8.7% (133)
Weekly victimisation	6.6% (169)	9.2% (224)	7.9% (393)	6.6% (70)	8.1% (70)	7.3% (140)	6.8% (49)	9.5% (77)	8.2% (126)	6.5% (50)	10.1% (77)	8.3% (127)
Total	100.0% (2553)	100.0% (2438)	100.0% (4991)	100.0% (1058)	100.0% (863)	100.0% (1921)	100.0% (722)	100.0% (813)	100.0% (1535)	100.0% (766)	100.0% (759)	100.0% (1525)

5.2.1 Summary

Of the three relational bullying behaviours, social exclusion and rumour spreading were the most common behaviours experienced by respondents, with similar rates of reporting for both behaviours. Of those young people who had experienced any of the three relational bullying behaviours the majority reported being victimised at least once or twice in the past couple of months.

Examining the co-occurrence of social exclusion, rumour spreading and sharing of personal information supported the creation of a composite measure; the majority of victims reported experiencing multiple relational bullying behaviours rather than a single form. Furthermore, being victimised by all three relational bullying behaviours was the most common combination of relational bullying behaviours reported by victims.

Utilising the composite measure of relational bullying identified 16.6% of respondents had experienced relational bullying either monthly or weekly in the two months prior to completing the survey. Subsequent analyses employed the composite measure, and therefore focus on those young people who provided valid answers and were categorised as experiencing either weekly, monthly or no relational bullying.

5.3 Relational bullying: The broader picture of bullying

The 2014 HBSC England survey included a number of measures of bullying and not just those pertaining to relational bullying. For full details of the survey measures see Section 4.2.1. The subsequent section describes the overall picture of bullying; situating relational bullying in the context of other bullying behaviours. The cut-off of 'two or three times a month' has been used as this is the most appropriate comparison to the measure of relational bullying.

Global measure of bullying

The 2014 HBSC England survey included an item assessing global bullying victimisation from the ROBVQ (Olweus, 1996; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Respondents were provided with a definition of bullying, encompassing physical, verbal and relational bullying behaviours, and asked how often they had been bullied in the previous two months. Overall, 10.5% of respondents reported being bullied at least twice a month (Table 5.2). The oldest respondents were least likely to say they were victims of bullying, while 13 year old girls were the most likely group to report being bullied.

Verbal bullying

Verbal bullying was assessed through the item 'I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way' from the ROBVQ (Olweus, 1996). In total, 11.4% of young people said they had experienced verbal bullying at least two or three times a month. Girls were slightly more likely than boys to report verbal bullying, with gender difference most pronounced at 13 years (Table 5.2).

Physical bullying

The ROBVQ (Olweus, 1996) item 'I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors' measured physical bullying. The measure of physical bullying identified a fairly low prevalence rate, with 4.3% reporting physical bullying. Table 5.2 illustrates boys were more likely to say they had experienced physical bullying across all age groups.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying was assessed via two items measuring different forms of cyberbullying behaviour: written text and images (see Section 4.2.1 for further details). Using the cut-off point of 2 or 3 times a month identified small numbers of cyberbullying; 2.6% of respondents reported being cyberbullied through messages, and 2.1% through images. In the line with the 2014 HBSC England national report (Brooks et al., 2015), the two cyberbullying items were combined identifying an overall cyberbullying prevalence of 4.0%. Further scrutiny shows girls were twice as likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying (Table 5.2).

5.3.1 Comparing bullying measures

Table 5.2 displays the proportion of young people experiencing bullying two or three times a month, identified from five measures of bullying contained in the 2014 HBSC England survey. When making comparisons it is important to note that relational bullying has been quantified differently, creating a composite measure from three items, and as such may not be a truly fair comparison. However, it provides the unique opportunity to examine relational bullying alongside other forms of bullying behaviour.

Cyberbullying and physical bullying were the least common forms of bullying behaviour, both reporting very similar rates. However, they identified varying gender differences – with cyberbullying being more common among girls of all ages while physical bullying was more common among boys of all ages. Relational bullying was identified as the most frequent bullying behaviour, followed by verbal bullying. Both relational and verbal bullying were more common among girls than boys, across all age groups.

Table 5.2 *Comparing the prevalence of bullying as measured by varying questions, by age and gender*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)											
	All ages			**11 year olds**			**13 year olds**			**15 year olds**		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
Global bullying	10.5% (275)	10.5% (259)	10.5% (534)	11.0% (120)	10.4% (92)	10.7% (212)	10.6% (77)	12.3% (101)	11.5% (178)	9.7% (77)	8.5% (66)	9.1% (143)
Verbal	10.1% (258)	12.7% (311)	11.4% (569)	9.4% (100)	11.5% (100)	10.4% (200)	12.0% (87)	15.4% (126)	13.8% (213)	9.3% (71)	11.2% (85)	10.2% (156)
Physical	5.4% (136)	3.3% (80)	4.3% (216)	5.5% (58)	3.4% (29)	4.6% (87)	6.1% (44)	3.4% (27)	4.6% (71)	4.3% (34)	3.1% (24)	3.8% (58)
Cyber	2.4% (60)	5.7% (138)	4.0% (198)	1.3% (14)	3.8% (33)	2.4% (47)	2.4% (17)	5.4% (44)	4.0% (61)	3.8% (29)	8.0% (61)	5.9% (90)
Relational bullying*	13.7% (349)	19.7% (480)	16.6% (829)	14.1% (149)	17.3% (149)	15.5% (298)	14.0% (101)	20.8% (169)	17.6% (270)	12.8% (98)	21.3% (162)	17.0% (260)

** As measured by the composite measure detailed in Section 4.2.1*

The global measure of bullying is preluded with a definition of bullying which encompasses physical, verbal and relational bullying; as such one would expect the global measure to identify all instances of bullying victimisation apart from cyberbullying. Table 5.2 suggests this is not the case, with the individual prevalence rates of both verbal and relational bullying exceeding the 10.5% reported via the global bullying measure.

Figure 5.5 examines this further by combining those who report verbal and/or physical and/or relational bullying; allowing for comparisons between the prevalence identified by the global measure and those combined bullying behaviours. Combining those who reported verbal and/or physical and/or relational bullying identified a larger prevalence rate than the global measure of bullying, with a difference of 9.1 percentage points. Interrogation of the data identified that 550 respondents reported not being bullied on the global measure of bullying but reported they had been bullied verbally, physically or relationally. Previous work has found similar results, with behaviour type items recording higher prevalence rates than definition based bullying measures (Salin, 2001; A. L. Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008).

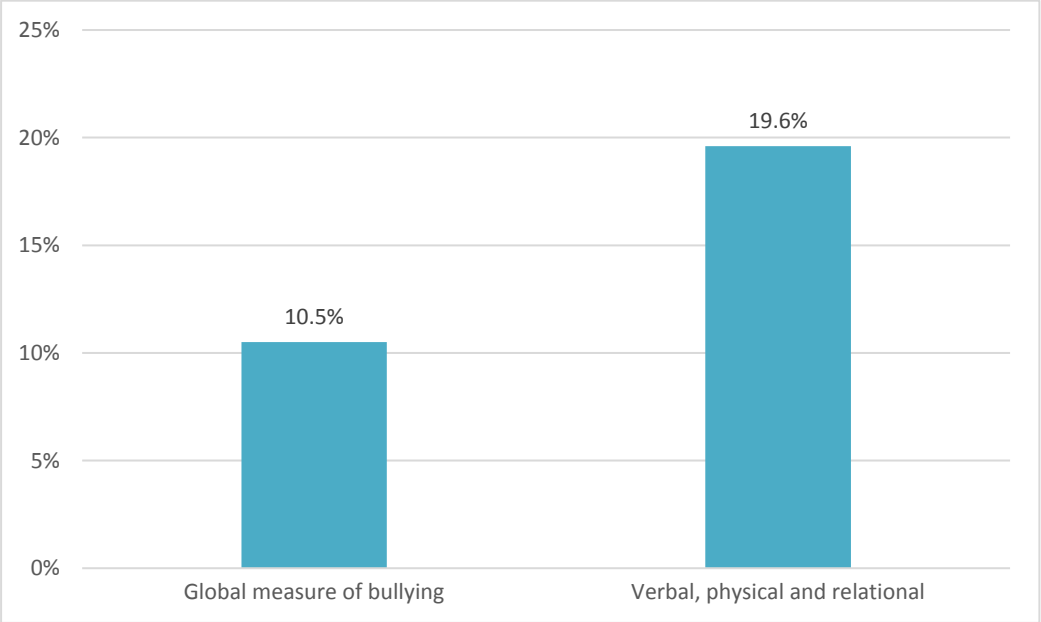


Figure 5.5 *Global measure of bullying vs combined bullying behaviours*

Young people often experienced more than one form of bullying. Figure 5.5 provides support for this idea as the 'verbal, physical & relational' category does not equal the sum of the individual prevalence rates identified in Table 5.2. Figure 5.6 illustrates the crossover of these three different forms of bullying. Of the young people who reported being bullied, the majority (38.3%) said they had experienced relational bullying alone, while physical bullying alone was the least common (2.1%). Relational bullying, whether alone or in combination with

other bullying behaviours, was reported by 82.5% of victims. Of the young people who reported being bullied, 15.0% had experienced all three forms of bullying at least two or three times a month prior to completing the survey.

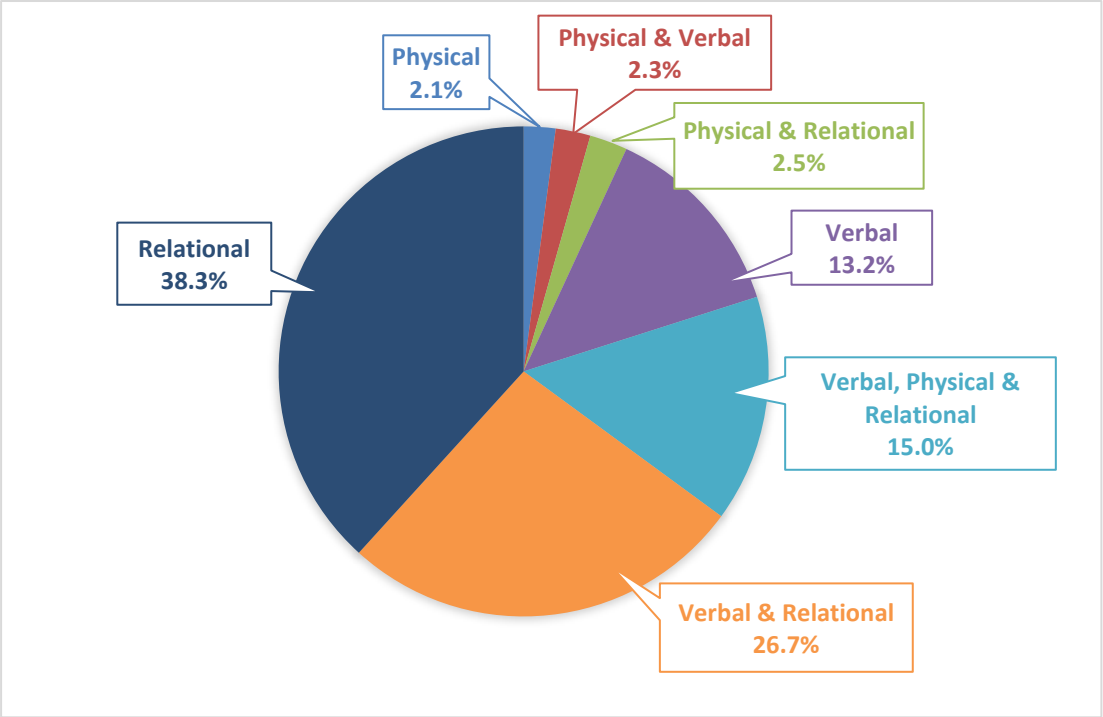


Figure 5.6 *Combinations of bullying behaviours*

5.3.2 Summary

Data from the 2014 HBSC England study provided a comprehensive picture of bullying, with the survey including multiple measures addressing varying forms of bullying behaviours. Relational bullying was identified as the most common form of bullying behaviour. Furthermore, the data suggests the vast majority of victims experienced relational bullying, whether alone or in combination with other bullying behaviours. It is important that these findings are interpreted with the caveat that the measure of relational bullying differed to that of other bullying behaviours as it was comprised of three items which created a composite measure. Nevertheless, this data allowed for comparisons of measures within a survey with the same group of respondents; all of the measures were administered at the same time and formed a related section within the survey, utilised the same reference period (in the last couple of months) and employed the same cut-off point (2 or 3 times a month).

The data illustrated different gender and age patterns across bullying behaviours – with pronounced gender differences for physical, cyber and relational bullying. There appears to

be an overall age pattern, with bullying peaking among 13 year olds; however cyberbullying was distinct in that it tended to increase with age.

Furthermore, the analysis corroborated the complexities of measuring bullying which were outlined in Section 2.2.3. The global measure of bullying and the individual bullying items identified varying rates of prevalence. It was anticipated that the global measure of bullying would have captured all instances of bullying (excluding cyberbullying) but analysis of the separate items identified a proportion of young people who had not been identified by the global measure of bullying.

5.4 Relational bullying: A demographic picture

Research objective no. 1 included building a demographic picture of those who experienced relational bullying. Gender, age, ethnicity and SES were explored. Relational bullying is presented using the composite measure, where relational bullying involvement is categorised into no victimisation, monthly victimisation and weekly victimisation.

5.4.1 Gender

In all, 19.7% (480) of girls were categorised as experiencing relational bullying in the previous couple of months compared with 13.7% (349) of boys. Figure 5.7 presents the number of respondents in each relational bullying category by gender. A chi-square test for independence indicated sufficient evidence to claim an association between gender and relational bullying victimisation; $\chi^2(1, n = 4991) = 32.853$, $p < .001$. This suggests girls are more likely to experience relational bullying victimisation. Post-test analysis indicated a weak effect size; Cramer's V = 0.081.

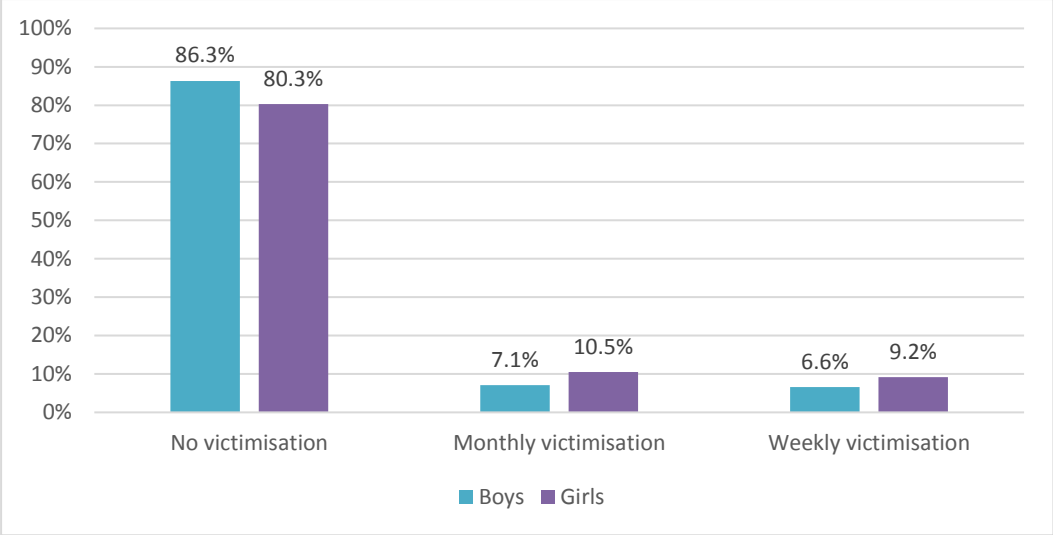


Figure 5.7 *Relational bullying status by gender*

5.4.2 Age

Experiencing relational bullying was least common among 11 year old respondents; 15.5% (298) of 11 year olds reported being relationally bullied in the last couple of months compared with 17.6% (270) of 13 year olds and 17.0% (260) of 15 year olds (Figure 5.8). A chi-square test for independence indicated insufficient evidence to claim an association exists between age and relational bullying; $\chi^2(4, n = 4981) = 3.246, p = 0.517$.

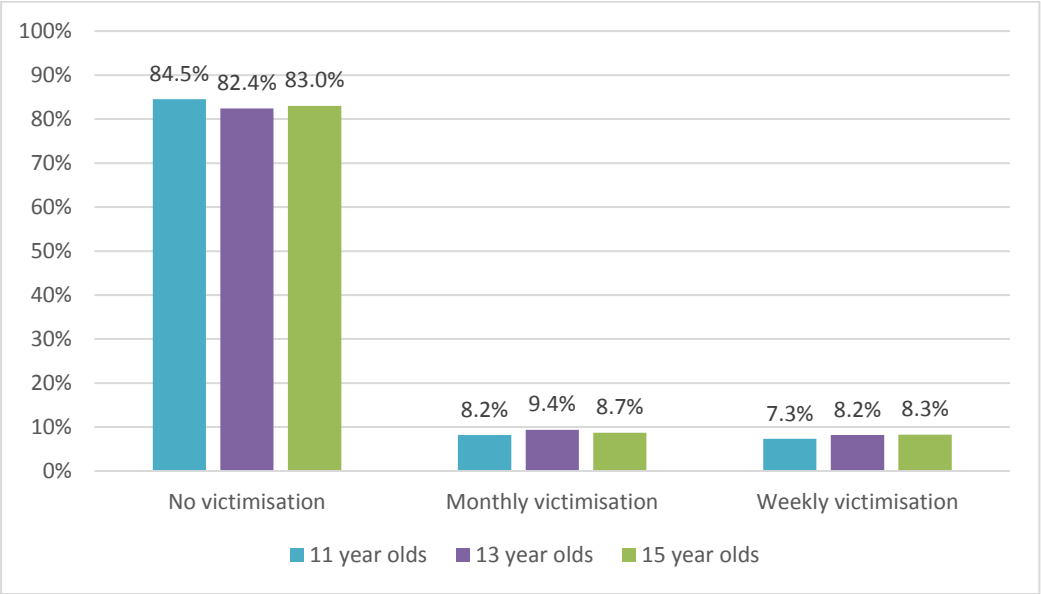


Figure 5.8 *Relational bullying status by age*

5.4.3 Ethnicity

The 2014 HBSC England survey collected data on ethnicity. A number of the ethnicity categories which were identified contained very small numbers of respondents (e.g. 33

respondents reported their ethnicity as Bangladeshi); it would have proven difficult to draw sensible conclusions regarding such small numbers. As such, the ethnicity data was collapsed into broader categories in line with previous analysis from the Office for National Statistics. See Section 4.2.1 for further details. Table 5.3 suggests relational bullying is experienced by young people of all ethnic groups. Young people who identified with the category 'other ethnic group' were the most likely to report being a victim of relational bullying, however it is important to acknowledge only 0.6% of the complete sample (n = 29, of whom 25 had a valid relational bullying status) reported being in the 'other ethnic group' and as such the reliability of this category could be called into question. Chi square test for independence identified no significant relationship between ethnicity and relational bullying, $\chi^2(10, n = 4714) = 14.510$, $p = 0.151$.

Table 5.3 *Relational bullying status by ethnicity*

Ethnicity	**Proportion of respondents % (N)**			
	Relational bullying status			**Total**
	No victimisation	Weekly	Monthly	
White	83.2% (2990)	9.0% (322)	7.8% (282)	100.0% (3594)
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	86.9% (526)	6.9% (42)	6.1% (37)	100.0% (605)
Asian/Asian British	82.5% (179)	6.9% (15)	10.6% (23)	100.0% (217)
Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British	86.7% (150)	8.7% (15)	4.6% (8)	100.0% (173)
Chinese	85.0% (85)	6.0% (6)	9.0% (9)	100.0% (100)
Other ethnic group	72.0% (18)	16.0% (4)	12.0% (3)	100.0% (25)
Total	83.8% (3948)	8.6% (404)	7.7% (362)	100.0% (4714)

5.4.4 Socio-economic status (SES)

SES was measured via the Family Affluence Scale (FAS), a proxy measure for SES designed for use with young people, and a question which identified whether the respondent was in receipt of free school meals (FSM). See Section 4.2.1 for further details.

Experiencing relational bullying appeared to be associated with lower family affluence (Figure 5.9). A chi square test for independence indicated a significant relationship between FAS category and relational bullying, $\chi^2(4, n = 4489) = 11.317, p = 0.023$. While significant, post-test analysis indicated a weak effect size; Cramer's V = 0.036.

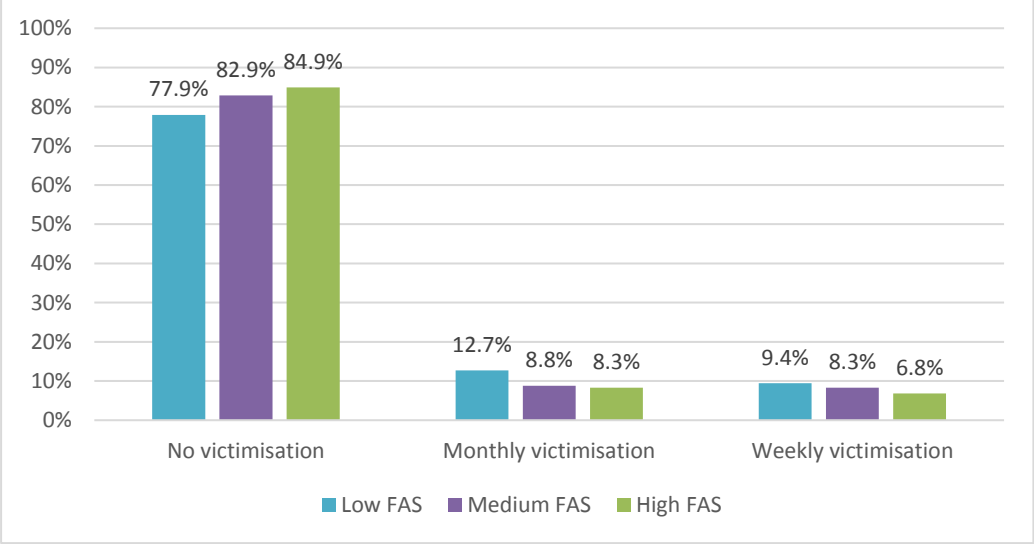


Figure 5.9 *Relational bullying status by FAS category*

Figure 5.10 presents experience of relational bullying by FSM status. The data indicated those young people receiving FSM were slightly more likely to be a victim of relational bullying. A chi square test for independence indicated insufficient evidence to identify an association between relational bullying and FSM eligibility, $\chi^2(2, n = 4952) = 4.142, p = 0.126$.

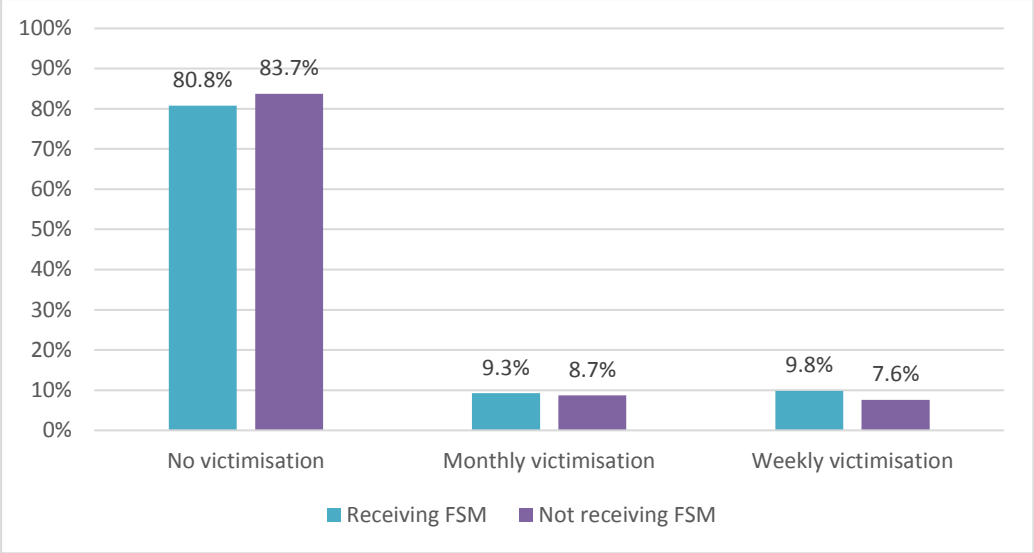


Figure 5.10 *Relational bullying by FSM eligibility*

5.4.5 Summary

Young people of all demographics can be subjected to relational bullying, however analysis demonstrated that girls and young people from households with lower family affluence were significantly more likely to be victimised in this way. Statistical significance should be interpreted with caution as significant differences are more likely to be identified in large samples, as is the 2014 HBSC England data set. The effect size can shed light on whether the differences identified are meaningful. Rea and Parker (1992) propose the following guidelines for interpreting Cramer's V:

- 0.00 < 0.10 Negligible association
- 0.10 < 0.20 Weak association
- 0.20 < 0.40 Moderate association
- 0.40 < 0.60 Relatively strong association
- 0.60 < 0.80 Strong association
- 0.80 < 1.00 Very strong association

The effect size identified when comparing relational bullying with gender (0.081) and family affluence (0.036) were both lower than 0.10, suggesting the effect of these demographics is negligible. Viewing the demographic differences in practical scenarios confirms that, while the differences may be significant, they lack meaningful real life application. For example, examining the gender difference in a typical class of 30 students, would equate to three female students and two male students experiencing relational bullying.

5.5 Multilevel analysis 1: Health related quality of life (HRQL)

HRQL was measured via KIDSCREEN-10 (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010) - a 10-item measure designed and validated for use with young people which provides an overall score, with higher scores indicative of better HRQL (see Figure 4.4 in Chapter 4 for further details).

5.5.1 Descriptive statistics

The mean KIDSCREEN-10 score was 47.28 (Standard deviation (SD) = 9.02) for the entire sample, with 45.90 (SD = 8.98) for girls and 48.59 (SD = 8.88) for boys. KIDSCREEN-10 score decreased with age for boys and girls (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 *Mean KIDSCREEN-10 score and standard deviation (SD), by age and gender*

	Boys			**Girls**		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**	**11 years**	**13 years**	**15 years**
Mean score	50.86	47.83	46.07	50.30	45.35	41.37
(SD)	(9.24)	(8.59)	(7.76)	(9.01)	(8.31)	(6.98)

Descriptive statistics were employed to explore the relationship between HRQL and experience of relational bullying. Young people who were categorised as not experiencing relational bullying had higher KIDSCREEN-10 scores; 48.38 (SD = 8.84) compared with 42.57 (SD = 7.35) and 40.67 (SD = 8.11) for those experiencing monthly and weekly relational bullying respectively. Being relationally bullied was associated with lower KIDSCREEN-10 scores for boys and girls (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 *Mean KIDSCREEN-10 score and standard deviation (SD) by relational bullying status*

	Boys			**Girls**		
	No bullying	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**	**No bullying**	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**
Mean score	49.52	44.03	41.48	47.10	41.57	40.07
(SD)	(8.69)	(6.60)	(8.73)	(8.82)	(7.68)	(7.59)

5.5.2 Statistical model

The association between experience of relational bullying and KIDSCREEN-10 was explored using a multilevel regression model. The distribution of KIDSCREEN-10 was examined and

showed sufficient normality for the associated tests of significance to be valid. Relational bullying was included as an explanatory variable, along with five potentially confounding demographic variables and verbal and physical forms of bullying. For a more thorough description of the statistical analysis see Section 4.2.2 in Chapter 4. The model included a total of seven significant variables, with one interaction. Physical bullying was retained in the model despite a non-significant relationship to control for its effect. No random slopes were included in the model - Figure 5.11 illustrates it; significant main effects are highlighted in bold text while an asterisk marks the significant interaction.

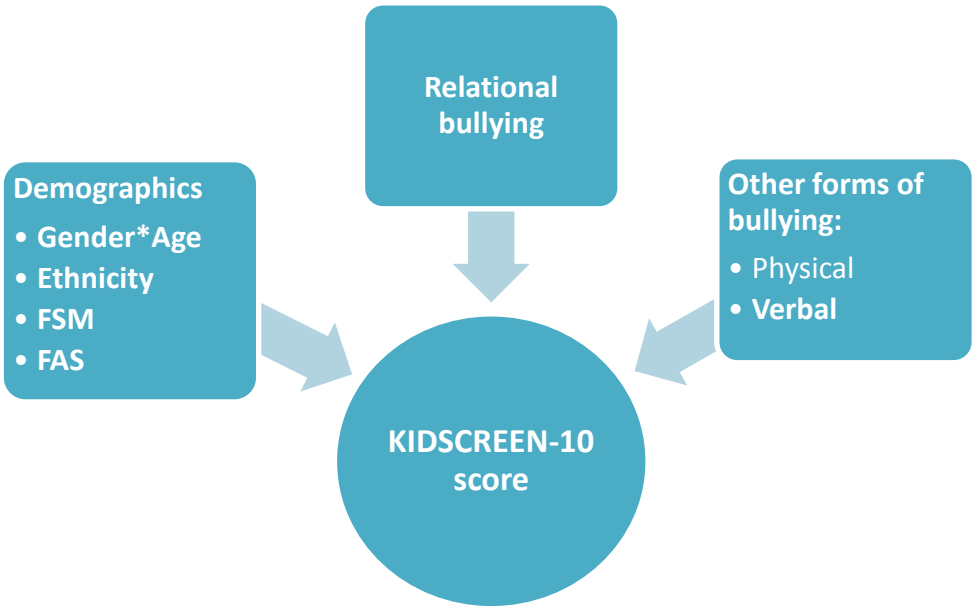


Figure 5.11 *Variables and interactions present when modelling KIDSCREEN-10*

Table 5.6 displays the mean difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score for the main effects, together with the 95% confidence intervals and relevant *p*-values. Significant figures are highlighted in bold text. A change of half a standard deviation in KIDSCREEN-10 score can be categorised as 'noticeable' (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2006), which would equate to 4.5 points in the present analysis. Young people not receiving free school meals tended to have KIDSCREEN-10 scores just less than 1 unit higher than those receiving free school meals (FSM), and similarly those reporting high FAS were more likely to have an increased KIDSCREEN-10 score compared with those in medium or low family affluence. Although socio-economic status, as measured via FAS and FSM eligibility, was identified as significantly associated with KIDSCREEN-10 score the expected difference in KIDSCREEN-10 scores cannot be considered noticeable. Ethnicity was identified as a main effect, with only a significant difference between Chinese and

White/White British respondents. Those who reported they were Chinese were more likely to report lower KIDSCREEN-10 scores when compared with White/White British respondents.

Table 5.6 *Estimated difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score for explanatory variables not involved in interactions with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Factor	Comparison	Difference	95% CI	*p*-value
Relational bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-4.58**	**(-5.50, -3.65)**	***p<0.001***
	Weekly compared with never	**-5.35**	**(-6.53, -4.18)**	***p<0.001***
	Weekly compared with monthly	-0.78	(-2.10, 0.55)	*p=0.250*
Verbal bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-2.14**	**(-3.39, -0.89)**	***p=0.001***
	Weekly compared with never	**-2.45**	**(-3.68, -1.21)**	***p<0.001***
	Weekly compared with monthly	-0.31	(-1.85, 1.24)	*p=0.699*
Physical bullying	Monthly compared with never	-0.74	(-2.74, 1.30)	*p=0.477*
	Weekly compared with never	-1.43	(-3.26, 0.41)	*p=0.128*
	Weekly compared with monthly	-0.69	(-3.22, 1.85)	*p=0.597*
FAS	Medium compared with low	0.79	(-0.31, 1.88)	*p=0.160*
	High compared with low	**1.53**	**(0.43, 2.64)**	***p=0.007***
	High compared with medium	**0.75**	**(0.25, 1.25)**	***p=0.004***
FSM	**Not receiving FSM compared with receiving FSM**	**0.92**	**(0.11, 1.74)**	***p=0.027***
Ethnicity*	**Chinese compared with White/White British**	**-1.80**	**(-3.52, -0.09)**	***p=0.040***

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; FSM = Free school meals; Bold text = significant main effects; * = Only significant comparisons for ethnicity are presented due to numerous non-significant comparisons.

Gender and age had a significant interaction in the model. The interaction term implies that gender becomes relevant to KIDSCREEN-10 scores at the age of 13 and 15 years only. At age 11 the KIDSCREEN-10 scores of boys and girls are not statistically different, but by age 13 and 15 years girls' KIDSCREEN-10 scores decrease significantly more compared with that of boys' of the same age (see Table 5.7 and Table 5.8). A 15 year old boy is estimated to have a KIDSCREEN-10 score 4.93 units lower than an 11 year old, whereas a 15 year old girl is expected to have a difference of -9.12 (see Table 5.7). Figure 5.12 illustrates the decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score across the three age categories for boys and girls with the same demographics. KIDSCREEN-10 scores get worse with age for both boys and girls, but the effect is most detrimental on girls' KIDSCREEN-10 score.

Table 5.7 *Estimated differences in KIDSCREEN-10 score for age category comparisons by gender, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparison of age categories	**Gender**	
	Boy	**Girl**
13 compared with 11	**-3.10** **(-4.02, -2.28)** ***p*<0.001**	**-5.02** **(-5.93, -4.11)** ***p*<0.001**
15 compared with 11	**-4.93** **(-5.83, -4.03)** ***p*<0.001**	**-9.12** **(-10.04, -8.20)** ***p*<0.001**
15 compared with 13	**-1.82** **(-2.76, -0.88)** ***p*<0.001**	**-4.10,** **(-5.01, -3.20)** ***p*<0.001**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Table 5.8 *Estimated difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score for gender comparisons by age, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparisons of gender	**Age**		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**
Girl compared with boy	-0.15 (-0.99, 0.70) *p*=0.736	**-2.06** **(-2.93, -1.19)** ***p*<0.001**	**-4.34** **(-5.19, -3.48)** ***p*<0.001**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

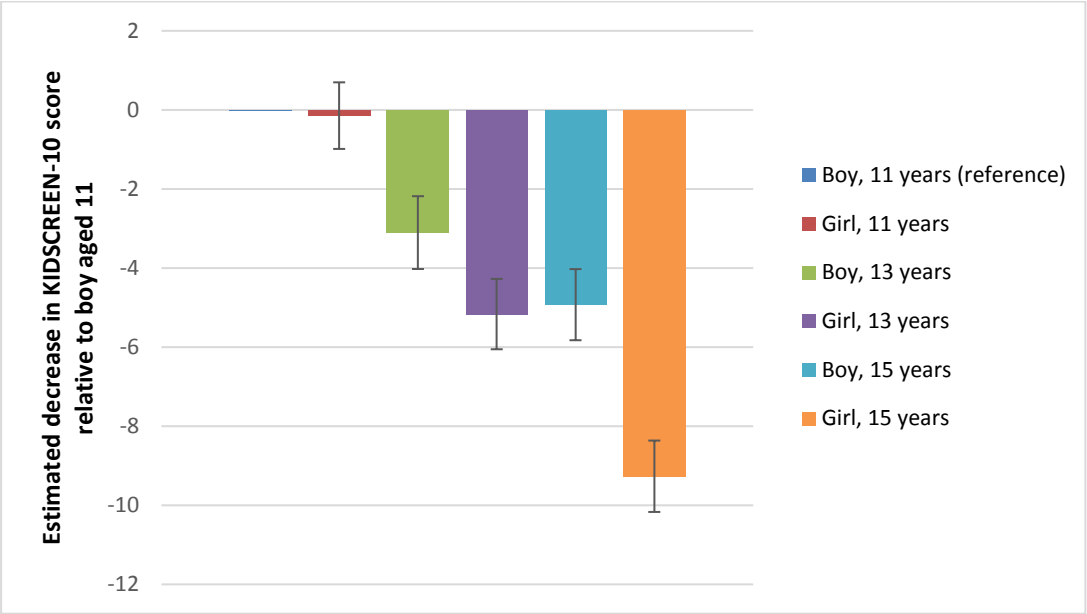


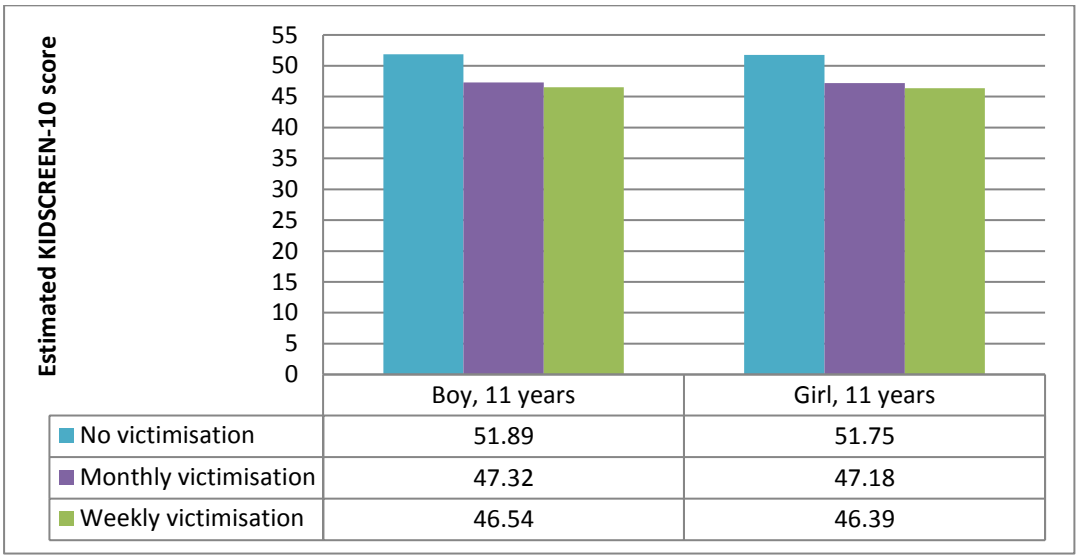
Figure 5.12 *Estimated decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score attributable to age and gender relative to a boy aged 11 years*

Experiencing either monthly or weekly verbal bullying was associated with a significant decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score, although neither estimated differences are large enough to be considered noticeable. There was insufficient evidence to identify a significant relationship between physical forms of bullying and KIDSCREEN-10 score.

The focus of the present research is the association between relational bullying and KIDSCREEN-10 score. Those experiencing relational bullying either monthly or weekly were estimated to have lower KIDSCREEN-10 scores than those not experiencing any bullying. The negative association with KIDSCREEN-10 was strongest for those reporting the highest levels of victimisation, with an estimated decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score by 5.35 compared with those who have not been bullied. The smallest difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score was noted when comparing monthly relational bullying to weekly relational bullying. Relational bullying was a main effect and did not interact with any demographic variables, as such the relationship between experiencing relational bullying and KIDSCREEN-10 score is thought to be the same for all respondents.

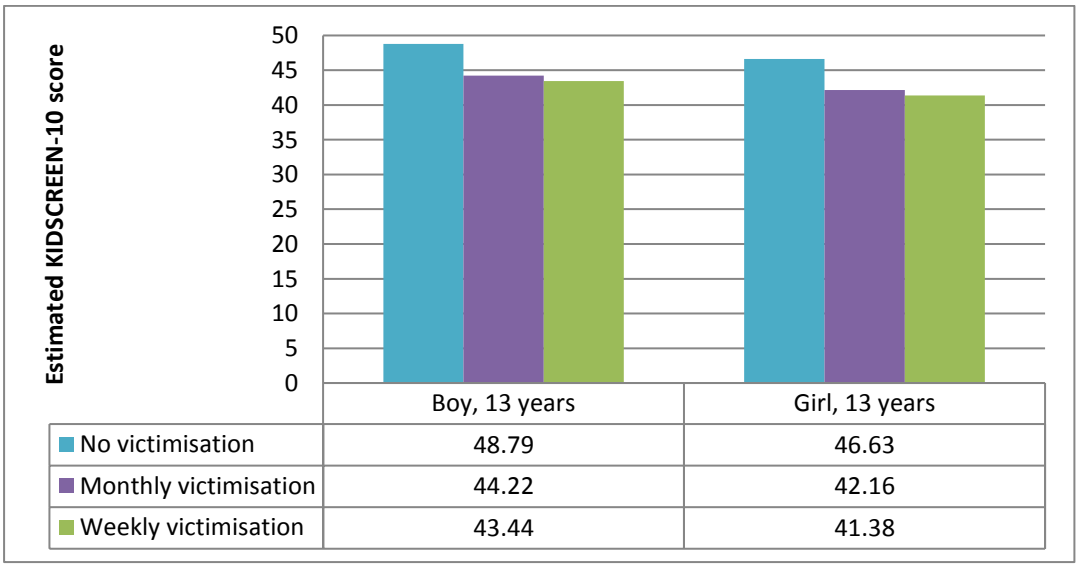
Figures 5.13, 5.14 and 5.15 illustrate estimated KIDSCREEN-10 scores for a girl and boy aged 11, 13 and 15 years respectively; the overall scores displayed are reflective of a white respondent who is not receiving free school meals, is of medium family affluence and is not experiencing physical or verbal bullying; but differences shown would apply to all

demographics. KIDSCREEN-10 score decreases equally for boys and girls across all ages as relational bullying increases. When comparing 11 year olds (see Figure 5.13) to 13 and 15 year olds (see Figure 5.14 and 5.15) the significant effect of age is apparent. Moreover, the interaction between gender and age is evident; at age 11 (see Figure 5.13) boys and girls KIDSCREEN-10 scores do not differ whereas at age 15 (see Figure 5.15) gender differences are largest.



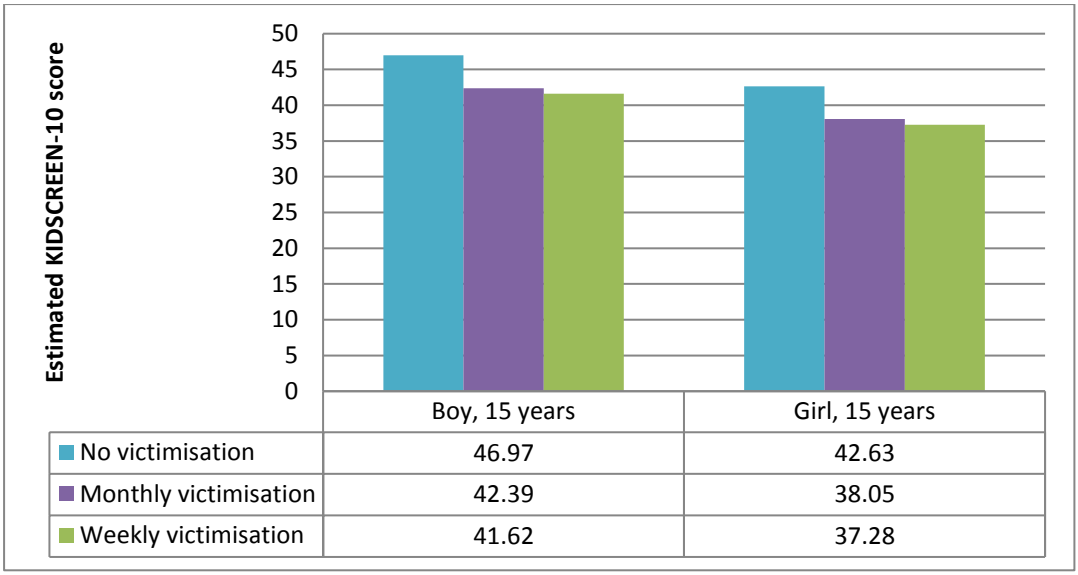
	Boy, 11 years	Girl, 11 years
No victimisation	51.89	51.75
Monthly victimisation	47.32	47.18
Weekly victimisation	46.54	46.39

Figure 5.13 *KIDSCREEN-10 scores for boys and girls age 11 matched on demographic variables*



	Boy, 13 years	Girl, 13 years
No victimisation	48.79	46.63
Monthly victimisation	44.22	42.16
Weekly victimisation	43.44	41.38

Figure 5.14 *KIDSCREEN-10 scores for boys and girls age 13 matched on demographic variables*



	Boy, 15 years	Girl, 15 years
No victimisation	46.97	42.63
Monthly victimisation	42.39	38.05
Weekly victimisation	41.62	37.28

Figure 5.15 *KIDSCREEN-10 scores for boys and girls age 15 matched on demographic variables*

Significant variance at level 2 was identified; an estimated 1.6% of the total variance in KIDSCREEN-10 scores was due to between class differences. KIDSCREEN-10 scores significantly varied between school classes, suggesting that class level factors which are not included in the present analysis are associated with the HRQL of young people. However, no random slopes were identified suggesting the relationship between explanatory variables and KIDSCREEN-10 score was the same across level 2 and level 3 units. In regard to relational bullying this suggests relational bullying has the same effect on KIDSCREEN-10 scores across classes and schools.

5.5.3 Summary

The multilevel regression model identified seven significant variables including one interaction associated with KIDSCREEN-10 scores. The KIDSCREEN manual suggests that a change in half a standard deviation can be thought of as 'noticeable' (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2006). Consequently, of all the associations, the estimated decrease of relational bullying and the interaction between gender and age can be considered noticeable. Of interest, the estimated decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score for relational bullying was over double that of weekly verbal bullying (-5.35 vs. -2.45). The interaction between age and gender was associated with the largest estimated difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score of all the variables in the model (-9.12).

Please refer to Appendix K for the published peer-reviewed paper of this analysis (Chester, Spencer, Whiting, & Brooks, 2017).

5.6 Multilevel analysis 2: General self-rated health

General self-rated health was assessed via one question which asked respondents 'Would you say your health is…?' with response options 'excellent', 'good', 'fair' and 'poor'.

5.6.1 Descriptive statistics

The majority (85.3%) of young people reported that their general health was good or excellent. Boys were more likely than girls to report having excellent health; 37.1% of boys compared with 24.8% of girls. Across both boys and girls, the youngest respondents were most likely to rate their general health as excellent (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 *General self-rated health by age and gender*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)					
	Boys			**Girls**		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**	**11 years**	**13 years**	**15 years**
Excellent	43.0% (480)	33.6% (240)	32.0% (258)	36.3% (319)	21.3% (167)	15.5% (121)
Good	47.9% (534)	52.4% (374)	51.4% (414)	54.2% (476)	59.0% (462)	62.3% (487)
Fair	7.7% (86)	12.2% (87)	14.3% (115)	8.8% (77)	17.6% (138)	19.3% (151)
Poor	1.3% (15)	1.8% (13)	2.2% (18)	0.8% (7)	2.0% (16)	2.9% (23)

Descriptive statistics were employed to explore the relationship between general self-rated health and experience of relational bullying. Young people who experience relational bullying appeared to be less likely to report excellent health and more likely to report poor health (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10 *General self-rated health by relational bullying status*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)					
	Boys			**Girls**		
	No bullying	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**	**No bullying**	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**
Excellent	38.2% (810)	29.1% (51)	35.8% (58)	26.4% (417)	16.7% (41)	21.0% (46)
Good	50.3% (1067)	57.7% (101)	40.7% (66)	59.3% (1116)	58.5% (144)	50.2% (110)
Fair	10.2% (217)	10.3% (18)	16.0% (26)	13.1% (246)	21.5% (53)	22.4% (49)
Poor	1.3% (27)	2.9% (5)	7.4% (12)	1.2% (23)	3.3% (8)	6.4% (14)

5.6.2 Statistical model

The association between experience of relational bullying and general self-rated health was explored using a multilevel ordered multinomial regression model. Relational bullying was included as an explanatory variable along with five potentially confounding demographic variables. Verbal bullying and physical bullying were also controlled for. As the main effects of relational bullying, gender, age and FAS violated the proportional odds assumption, separate coefficients were fitted for each response category for these explanatory variables. See Section 4.2.2 for a thorough description of the statistical approach.

The model included a total of six significant variables, with one interaction between age and gender. There was insufficient evidence to demonstrate a significant association between physical bullying and general self-rated health, and FSM eligibility and general self-rated health; despite a non-significant association both physical bullying and free school meal eligibility were retained in the model to control for their effect. Figure 5.16 illustrates the model; significant main effects are highlighted in bold text and asterisks mark the significant interaction effect.

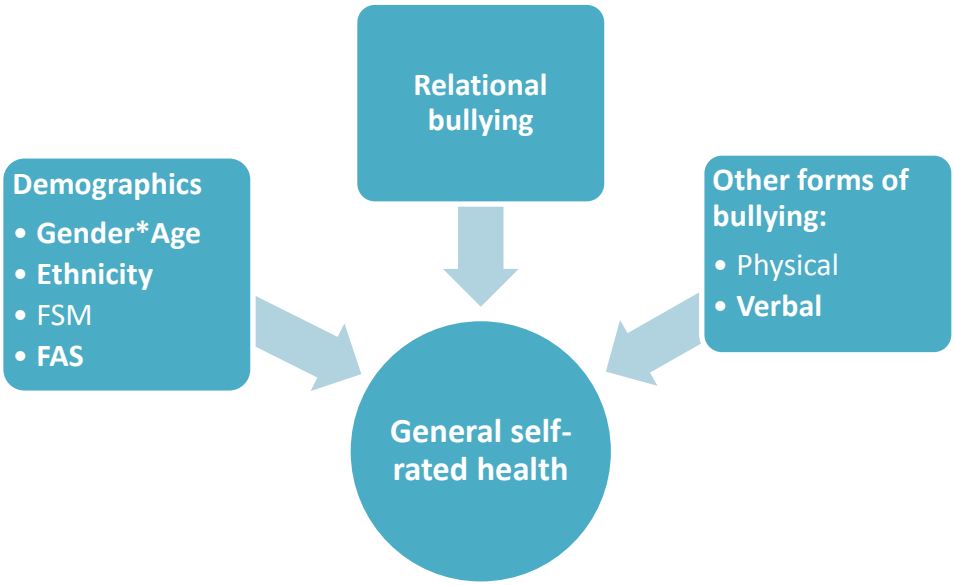


Figure 5.16 *Variables and interactions present when modelling general self-rated health*

Ethnicity and verbal bullying will be discussed initially; neither ethnicity nor verbal bullying violated the proportional odds assumption and as such the findings are applicable to all response options for general self-rated health. Table 5.11 displays estimated logits for the main effects of ethnicity and verbal bullying, along with relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values.

Ethnicity was identified as a significant main effect for general self-rated health, with only a significant difference between those reporting Mixed or Chinese ethnicity compared with White/White British respondents. The main effects of Mixed and Chinese ethnicity had significant negative coefficients, indicating those who reported Mixed or Chinese had a lower probability of reporting positive health compared with White/White British respondents. However this finding is likely to be an artefact of the data; as ethnicity was broadly categorised to take account of certain response categories having low frequencies, the present data set does not contain the level of detail required to investigate such a relationship. As such, ethnicity is included only as a control.

Monthly but not weekly verbal bullying had a significant negative association with general self-rated health, suggesting those experiencing monthly verbal bullying were less likely than their non-victimised peers to report positive self-rated health. Throughout the model building process verbal bullying bordered on the 5% significance boundary, and as such little weight is attributed to the findings of verbal bullying. There was insufficient evidence to suggest physical bullying was associated with general self-rated health. Verbal and physical bullying

are retained in the model as controls, allowing conclusions about relational bullying to be drawn whilst taking account of other forms of bullying behaviours.

Table 5.11 *Logits for main effects in relation to general self-rated health, 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	Comparison	Logit (95% CI)	*p*-value
Ethnicity*	**Mixed compared with White/White British**	**-0.51 (-0.71, -0.30)**	***p*<0.001**
	Chinese compared with White/White British	**-0.44 (-0.86, -0.02)**	***p*=0.039**
Verbal bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-0.33 (-0.65, -0.01)**	***p*=0.043**
	Weekly compared with never	-0.20 (-0.50, 0.11)	*p*=0.217

Note. Bold text = significant main effects; * = Only significant comparisons for ethnicity are presented due to numerous non-significant comparisons.

The main effects of relational bullying, gender, age and family affluence violated the proportional odds assumption, with separate coefficients fitted for each of the response options for general self-rated health. The overall picture will be presented first by drawing on probabilities, before presenting the logits, 95% CI and relevant *p*-values for each of the response options. For ease of interpretation the logits have been transformed to probabilities and these will be the primary focus of the results section.

Figures 5.17 – 5.19 illustrate the estimated probability of reporting 'excellent', 'at least good' and 'poor' general self-rated health respectively, for all combinations of the following variables: relational bullying, gender, age and family affluence. They visually depict the probability of reporting the different general self-rated health response options for a variety of respondents.

Family affluence was significantly associated with respondent's general self-rated health - identifying as having high family affluence was associated with a higher probability of reporting at least good health. For example, a 13 year old girl not experiencing relational bullying with low FAS has an estimated probability of 0.78 for at least good health compared with 0.87 for a respondent matched across characteristics but with high family affluence (Figure 5.18).

In line with the regression analysis modelling KIDSCREEN-10 scores, age and gender were associated with general self-rated health. Overall, the effect of gender is most apparent when

considering the probability of reporting excellent health (Figure 5.17). Boys were significantly more likely to report having excellent health than girls; the estimated probability of non-victimised 11 year olds, with low FAS were 0.42 for boys compared with 0.34. When examining probability for reporting poor health the gender differences are less apparent (Figure 5.19). Age appeared to have a more consistent effect across all categories of general self-rated health than gender, positive self-rated health was more likely among 11 year old respondents. Figure 5.17 illustrates 11 year old boys and 11 year old girls are more likely to report excellent health than their counterparts, likewise in Figure 5.18 the youngest respondents have a higher probability of having good or excellent health.

A similar interaction between gender and age was identified for general self-rated health as with modelling KIDSCREEN-10, the association between age and general self-rated health is strongest among girls. When comparing the difference in probability between boys and girls of matched ages it is evident the difference increases with age, so by 15 years girls have a reduced probability disproportionate to that of boys. This is visually depicted in Figure 5.17, the change in probabilities between 11 year olds and 13 year olds follows an almost identical pattern for boys and girls however the change in probabilities between 13 year old and 15 year old is much larger among girls than boys. Essentially general self-rated health worsens with age for both boys and girls but the effect is most detrimental among girls, resulting in 15 year old girls being the least likely to report excellent health.

The focus of this research is the association between relational bullying and general self-rated health whilst controlling for other variables including alternative forms of bullying. The model identifies a significant relationship between experiencing relational bullying and health. Experiencing relational bullying is associated with increased chances of reporting poor health (Figure 5.19) and resulted in reduced probability of reporting at least good health (Figure 5.18) when compared with those who were not exposed to relational bullying. Those reporting weekly relational bullying presented the worst general self-rated health probabilities. The association is complex, presenting a counterintuitive association between weekly relational bullying and excellent health; young people reporting weekly bullying had the equal chance of excellent health as those not bullied at all (Figure 5.17). However, the reliability of this result could be questioned due to relatively small numbers of young people in the excellent category (see Table 5.10). Examining those who reported at least good health includes a larger, more representative sample and may therefore be the most reliable interpretation of the data. While associations between general self-rated health and the main effects of gender, age and

family affluence were identified, the lack of interactions with relational bullying demonstrate the relationship between general self-rated health and relational bullying is consistent across demographics. While the probability of reporting positive health is lower among girls, older respondents and young people from poorer family backgrounds, we are unable to detect any differences in the impact of relational bullying across the demographic factors.

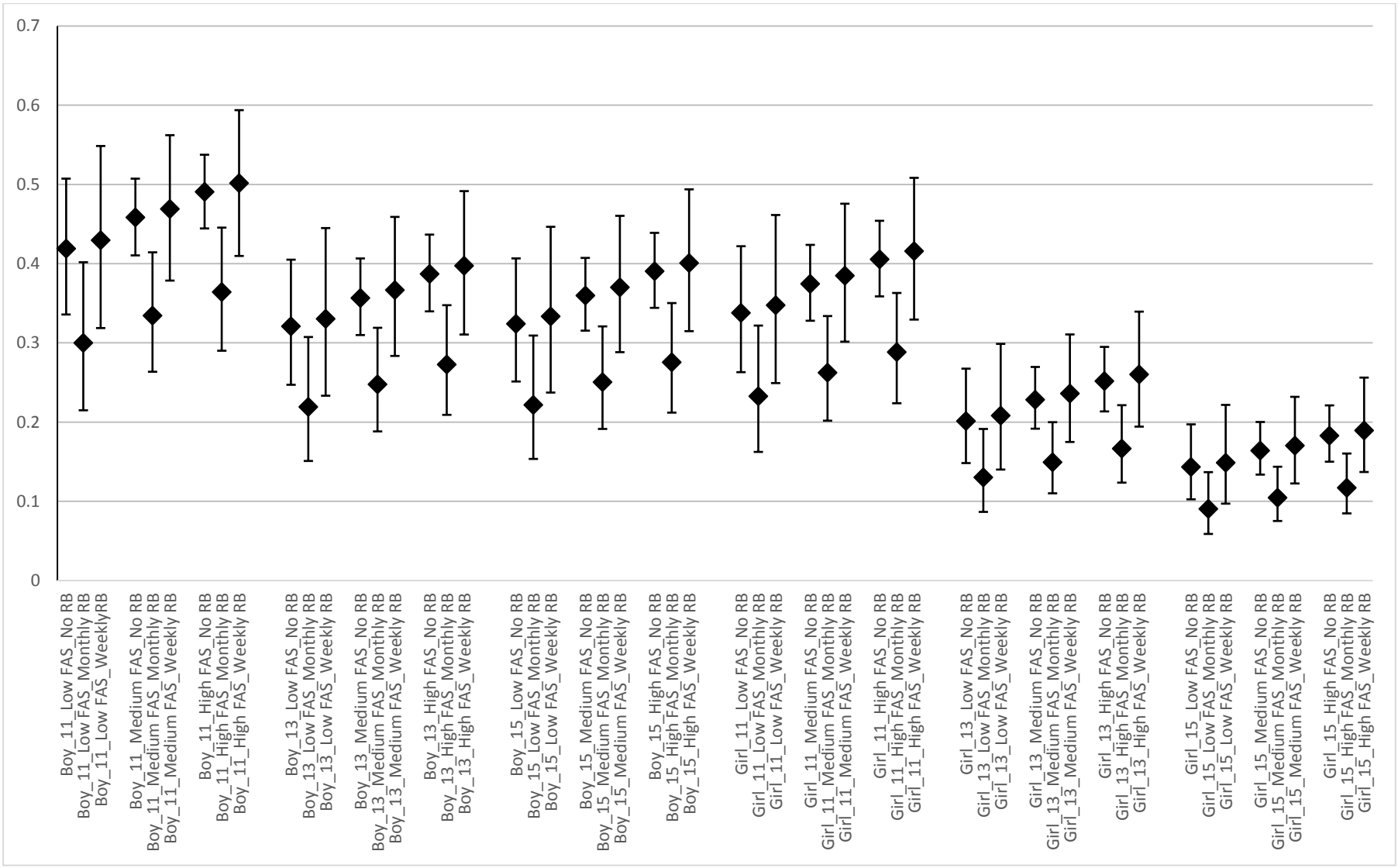


Figure 5.17 *Probability of reporting excellent health by different combinations of explanatory variable*

Note. RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale.

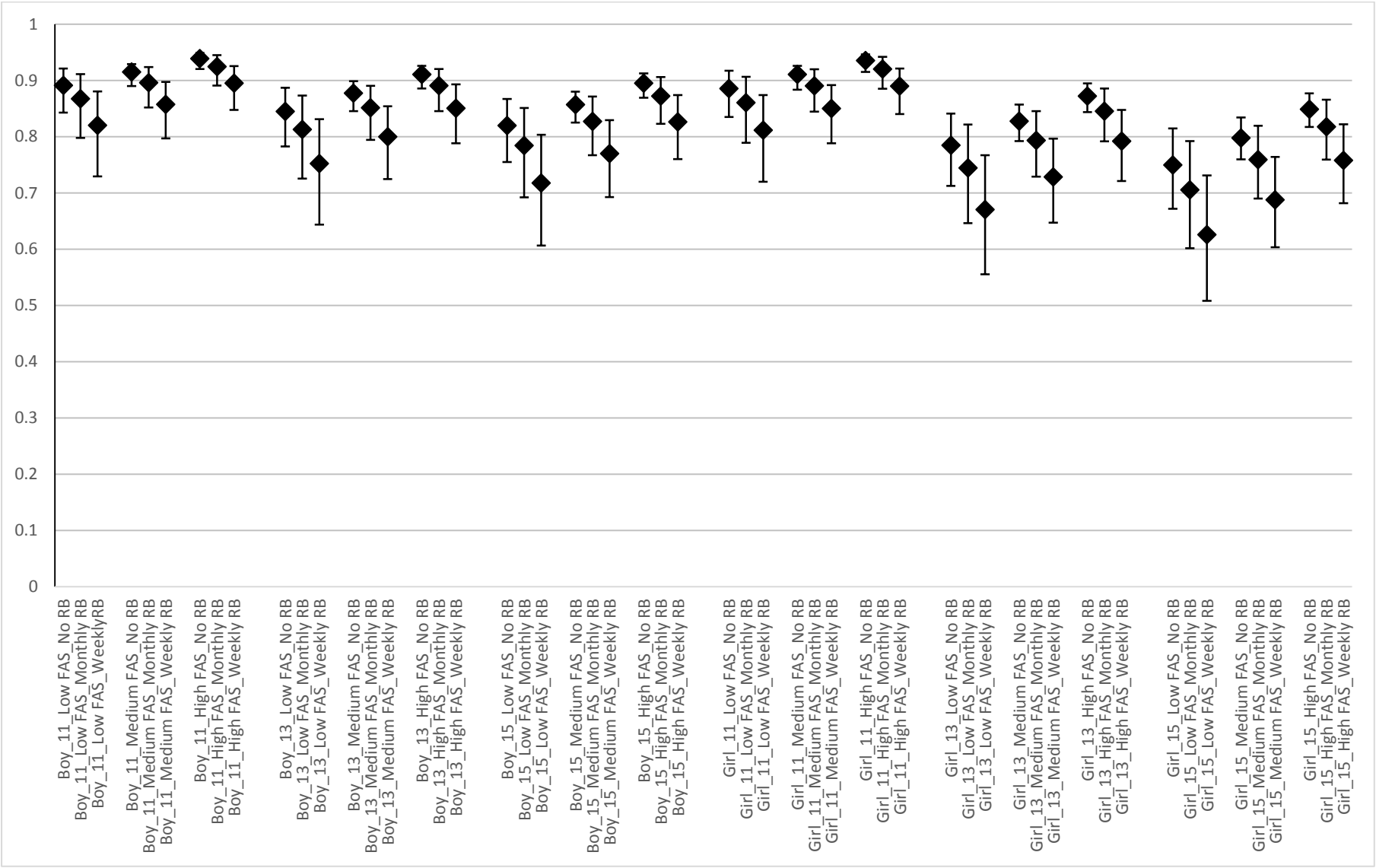


Figure 5.18 *Probability of reporting at least good health by different combinations of explanatory variable*

Note. RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale.

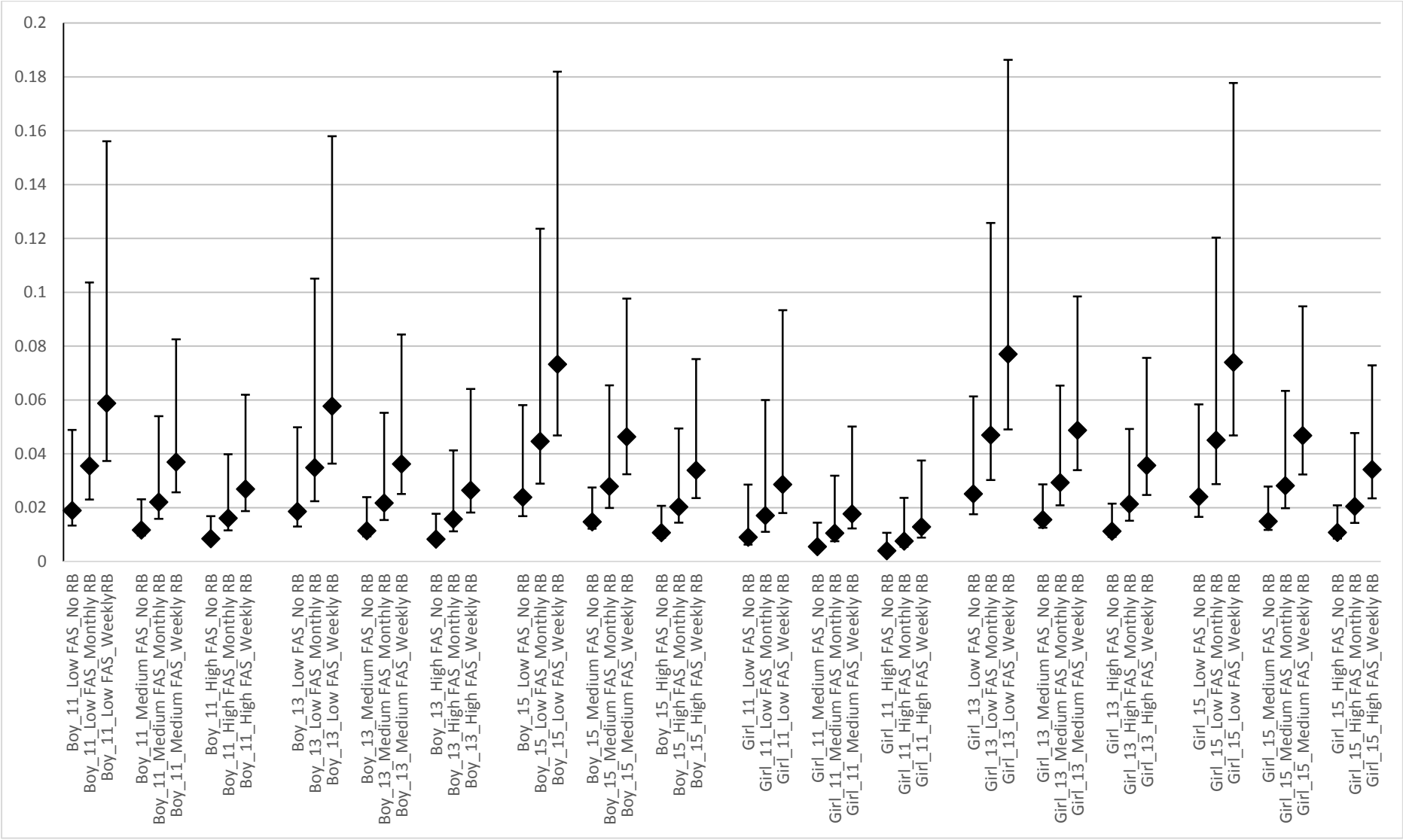


Figure 5.19 *Probability of reporting poor health by different combinations of explanatory variable*

Note. RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale.

Following the violation of the proportional odds assumption for relational bullying, age, gender and family affluence, findings for these variables are discussed subsequently at each of the response levels.

Excellent self-rated health

The estimated logits for the main effects, and relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values, are reported in Table 5.12. Tables 5.13 and 5.14 display logits for the interaction effect between gender and age. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. Figure 5.17 displays probabilities of reporting excellent health for different combinations of the four main effects.

Boys were more likely than girls to report excellent health, and across both genders excellent health was more common among 11 year olds. Focusing on relational bullying, there is an interesting relationship between the level of relational bullying and association with excellent health. There is a significant negative association between experiencing monthly relational bullying and reporting excellent health; victims of monthly relational bullying are less likely to have excellent health compared with those who are not bullied. The relationship between weekly relational bullying and self-rated health is non-significant, but portrays a conflicting relationship worth noting. Young people who report weekly relational bullying are equally likely as those not victimised to report excellent health, suggesting the experience of weekly relational bullying had no negative impact of general self-rated health.

Table 5.12 *Logits for reporting excellent health, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	**Comparison**	**Logit (95% CI)**	***p*-value**
Relational bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-0.52 (-0.82, -0.23)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with never	0.04 (-0.28, 0.37)	*p*=0.793
FAS	Medium compared with low	0.16 (-0.17, 0.49)	*p*=0.336
	High compared with low	0.29 (-0.04, 0.62)	*p*=0.083

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; Bold text = significant main effects.

Table 5.13 *Logits for reporting excellent health for age category comparisons by gender, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparison of age categories	**Gender**	
	Boy	**Girl**
13 compared with 11	**-0.42** **(-0.66, -0.18)** ***p*<0.001**	**-0.71** **(-0.96, -0.45)** ***p*<0.001**
15 compared with 11	**-0.41** **(-0.64, -0.17)** ***p*<0.001**	**-1.11** **(-1.39, -0.84)** ***p*<0.001**
15 compared with 13	0.01 (-0.24, 0.26) *p*=0.911	**-0.41** **(-0.70, -0.12)** ***p*=0.005**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Table 5.14 *Logits for reporting excellent health for gender comparisons by age, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparisons of gender	**Age**		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**
Girl compared with boy	**-0.35** **(-0.57, -0.12)** ***p*=0.003**	**-0.63** **(-0.88, -0.37)** ***p*<0.001**	**-1.05** **(-1.32, -0.78)** ***p*<0.001**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

At least good self-rated health (including excellent)

The estimated logits for the main effects, and relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values, are reported in Table 5.15. Logits for the interaction are presented in Tables 5.16 and 5.17. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. Figure 5.18 presents the estimated probabilities visually, combining all main effects to portray different types of respondents.

The probability of reporting at least a good level of health is high for all main effects, indicating the majority of young people reported either good or excellent general health; thus Figure 5.18 provides the most representative picture of general self-rated health. As was seen in Figure 5.17, the probability of reporting at least good health decreases with age for both boys and girls. Taking into consideration both the good and excellent response categories appears to have reduced the effect of gender. Figure 5.18 presents a more logical association between

relational bullying and general self-rated health, with the likelihood of good or excellent heath reducing with increased exposure to relational bullying.

Table 5.15 *Logits for reporting at least good health, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	Comparison	Logit (95% CI)	*p*-value
Relational bullying	Monthly compared with never	-0.22 (-0.54, 0.09)	*p*=0.157
	Weekly compared with never	**-0.58 (-0.92, -0.25)**	***p*<0.001**
FAS	Medium compared with low	0.28 (-0.08, 0.63)	*p*=0.125
	High compared with low	**0.63 (0.27, 0.99)**	***p*<0.001**

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; Bold text = significant main effects.

Table 5.16 *Logits for reporting at least good health for age category comparisons by gender, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparison of age categories	Gender	
	Boy	Girl
13 compared with 11	**-0.41 (-0.76, -0.05) *p*=0.024**	**-0.75 (-1.08, -0.42) *p*<0.001**
15 compared with 11	**-0.59 (-0.92, -0.25) *p*<0.001**	**-0.95 (-1.27, -0.62) *p*<0.001**
15 compared with 13	-0.18 (-0.50, 0.15) *p*=0.282	-0.20 (-0.47, 0.07) *p*=0.152

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Table 5.17 *Logits for reporting at least good health for gender comparisons by age, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparisons of gender	Age		
	11 years	13 years	15 years
Girl compared with boy	-0.06 (-0.43, 0.31) *p*=0.762	**-0.40 (-0.71, -0.09) *p*=0.013**	**-0.42 (-0.70, -0.14) *p*=0.004**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Poor self-rated health

The logits for the main effects, and relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values, are reported in Table 5.18. Tables 5.19 and 5.20 present data for age and gender. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. Figure 5.19 illustrates the probabilities of reporting poor health for a variety of respondents.

A minority of young people reported their health as poor, demonstrated by the small estimated probabilities and large confidence intervals pictured in Figure 5.19. The majority of age and gender comparisons were non-significant except for 13 year old girls who were significantly more likely to report poor health when compared with 11 year olds. However, the *p*-value for this association is marginally below the 5% significance boundary and as such little weight is attributed to the findings; it can be inferred that there is insufficient evidence to support an association between gender and poor self-rated health. In line with Figure 5.18, across all young people the probability of reporting poor health increases as the frequency of relational bullying increases.

Table 5.18 *Logits for reporting poor health, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	**Comparison**	**Logit (95% CI)**	***p*-value**
Relational bullying	Monthly compared with never	-0.65 (-0.09, 1.38)	*p*=0.083
	Weekly compared with never	**-1.17 (0.54, 1.81)**	***p*<0.001**
FAS	Medium compared with low	-0.49 (-1.31, 0.34)	*p*=0.247
	High compared with low	-0.81 (-1.66, 0.04)	*p*=0.061

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; Bold text = significant main effects.

Table 5.19 *Logits for reporting poor health for age category comparisons by gender, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparison of age categories	Gender	
	Boy	**Girl**
13 compared with 11	-0.02 (-0.93, 0.89) *p*=0.968	**1.04** **(0.00, 2.08)** ***p*=0.049**
15 compared with 11	0.24 (-0.58, 1.06) *p*=0.572	1.00 (-0.05, 2.04) *p*=0.062
15 compared with 13	0.26 (-0.62, 1.13) *p*=0.566	-0.04 (-0.78, 0.69) *p*=0.907

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Table 5.20 *Logits for reporting poor health for gender comparisons by age, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparisons of gender	Age		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**
Girl compared with boy	-0.75 (-1.84, 0.34) *p*=0.175	0.31 (-0.54, 1.16) *p*=0.477	0.01 (-0.76, 0.78) *p*=0.980

5.6.3 Summary

The multilevel ordered multinomial regression model identified six significant variables and one interaction between age and gender. The main effects of relational bullying, gender, age and family affluence violated the proportional odds assumption; the effect of the variables differed across the general self-rated health response categories (excellent, good, fair and poor). Overall, young people experiencing relational bullying on either a weekly or monthly level were more likely to report poorer self-rated health.

5.7 Multilevel analysis 3: Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured via the Cantril (1965) ladder which asks young people to rate their current life on a ladder from zero through to ten, where zero equals the worst possible

life and ten equals the best possible life. Respondents were categorised into low (0 – 4), medium (5-6) and high (7-10) life satisfaction. See Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4 for full details.

5.7.1 Descriptive statistics

The majority (74.4%) of young people reported high life satisfaction. Boys were more likely than girls to report high life satisfaction: 79.2% of boys compared with 69.3% of girls. Across both genders, life satisfaction appears to decrease with age (Table 5.21).

Table 5.21 *Proportions of young people reporting different levels of life satisfaction*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)					
	Boys			**Girls**		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**	**11 years**	**13 years**	**15 years**
High	82.9% (860)	79.3% (625)	74.4% (598)	81.2% (801)	68.6% (516)	54.9% (422)
Medium	11.5% (119)	15.9% (125)	18.4% (148)	13.9% (137)	20.2% (152)	29.1% (224)
Low	5.6% (58)	4.8% (38)	7.2% (58)	5.0% (49)	11.2% (84)	16.0% (123)

Initially descriptive statistics were employed to explore the relationship between life satisfaction and experience of relational bullying. Both boys and girls who experienced relational bullying appeared to be more likely to report low life satisfaction than their peers who were not bullied (Table 5.22). However, it is worth noting that a considerable portion of young people who said they experienced bullying were also reporting high life satisfaction – this is examined in further detail in Section 5.8.

Table 5.22 *Life satisfaction by relational bullying status*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)					
	Boys			**Girls**		
	No bullying	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**	**No bullying**	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**
High	82.6% (1753)	63.7% (109)	53.6% (89)	74.2% (1429)	53.3% (138)	44.1% (97)
Medium	13.2% (280)	27.5% (47)	21.7% (36)	19.2% (369)	25.1% (65)	26.8% (59)
Low	4.2% (89)	8.8% (15)	24.7% (41)	6.6% (128)	21.6% (56)	29.1% (64)

5.7.2 Statistical model

The relationship between relational bullying and life satisfaction was examined using a multilevel ordered multinomial regression model. Relational bullying was included as an explanatory variable along with five potentially confounding demographic variables. Verbal bullying and physical bullying were also controlled for. As the main effects of relational bullying and verbal bullying violated the proportional odds assumption, separate coefficients were fitted for each response category for these explanatory variables. See Section 4.2.2 for a thorough description of the statistical approach.

The model included a total of seven significant main effects and one interaction. Figure 5.20 illustrates the model; significant main effects are highlighted in bold text and asterisks mark the significant interaction effect. There was insufficient evidence to demonstrate a significant association between ethnicity and life satisfaction, however ethnicity was retained in the model as a control.

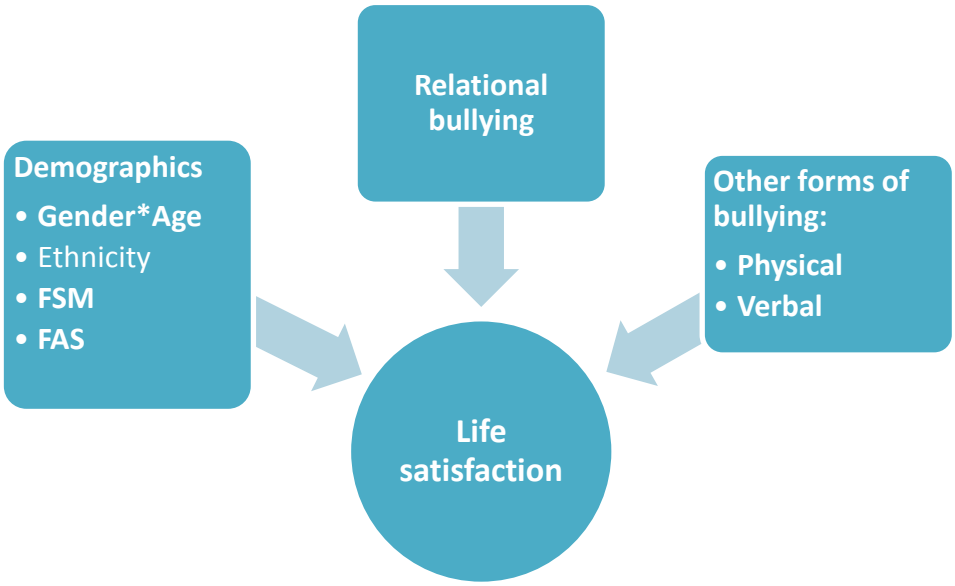


Figure 5.20 *Variables and interactions present when modelling life satisfaction*

The main effects associated with SES (FAS and FSM), physical bullying and the significant interaction between age and gender are presented initially. These main effects did not violate the proportional odds assumption and as such the findings are applicable to all response options for general self-rated health. Table 5.23 displays estimated logits for the main effects, along with relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values. Tables 5.24 and 5.25 present data for the gender interaction. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. For ease of

interpretation the logits have been transformed to probabilities and these will be the primary focus of the results section.

Table 5.23 *Logits for main effects in relation to life satisfaction, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	Comparison	Logit (95% CI)	*p*-value
FAS	**Medium compared with low**	**-0.47 (-0.76, -0.17)**	***p*=0.002**
	High compared with low	**-0.76 (-1.06, -0.46)**	***p*<0.001**
FSM	**No compared with yes**	**-0.25 (-0.48, -0.01)**	***p*=0.042**
Physical bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**0.71 (0.19, 1.23)**	***p*=0.007**
	Weekly compared with never	0.21 (-0.27, 0.68)	*p*=0.397

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; FSM = Free school meals; Bold text = significant main effects.

Table 5.24 *Logits for life satisfaction for age category comparisons by gender, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparison of age categories	Gender	
	Boy	**Girl**
13 compared with 11	**0.40 (0.10, 0.70) *p*=0.009**	**0.88 (0.61, 1.16) *p*<0.001**
15 compared with 11	**0.69 (0.40, 0.97) *p*<0.001**	**1.49 (1.21, 1.76) *p*<0.001**
15 compared with 13	**0.29 (0.01, 0.57) *p*=0.046**	**0.60 (0.36, 0.84) *p*<0.001**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

Table 5.25 *Logits for life satisfaction for gender comparisons by age, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Comparisons of gender	Age		
	11 years	**13 years**	**15 years**
Girl compared with boy	0.03 (-0.27, 0.32) *p*=0.869	**0.51 (0.25, 0.77) *p*<0.001**	**0.82 (0.59, 1.06) *p*<0.001**

Note. Bold text = significant interaction effects.

The main effects of relational bullying and verbal bullying violated the proportional odds assumption, with separate coefficients fitted for each of the response options for life satisfaction. However, an overall picture of the findings will be presented first by illustrating the probabilities through graphs. Subsequent sections present the logits, 95% CI and relevant *p*-values for each of the response options.

The identification of significant main effects for all variables excluding ethnicity results in a more complex model to present as there are multiple possible combinations of main effects. Figures 5.21 through to 5.26 illustrate estimated probability of reporting different levels of life satisfaction for a variety of combinations of age, gender, FAS and relational bullying, whilst keeping FSM, verbal and physical bullying constant (at the level of non-eligible and no victimisation). They provide a picture of the probability of reporting low, at least medium and high life satisfaction for different types of respondents.

The model identified a significant negative association between age and life satisfaction; as young people grow older their life satisfaction appears to decrease. Across both genders, 11 year olds were most likely to report high life satisfaction (Figure 5.21), while 15 year olds were most likely to report low life satisfaction (Figure 5.23).

In line with previous analyses, an interaction between gender and age was identified for life satisfaction. At 11 years old, boys and girls reported similar levels of life satisfaction; by the age of 13 and, most prominently, at the age of 15 the difference between boys' and girls' life satisfaction had increased (Figure 5.22). Life satisfaction decreases with age for both genders, but the effect is most prominent among girls, with 15 year old girls reporting the lowest levels of life satisfaction.

Social economic status, as measured by FAS and FSM, appears to have a consistent overall association with life satisfaction. Figure 5.21 displays the probability of reporting high life satisfaction for individuals of varying family affluence matched across further explanatory variables; the probability of non-victimised 13 year old boys reporting high life satisfaction increases from 74% with low FAS to 86% with high FAS. FSM displays a similar pattern to FAS, life satisfaction is worse for young people who report being eligible for free school meals. Figure 5.21 displays estimated probability for reporting high life satisfaction for young people not receiving FSM whereas Figure 5.24 displays the estimated probability of high life satisfaction for young people eligible for FSM. Comparison of Figures 5.21 and 5.24 highlights

an overall decrease in probabilities across respondents receiving FSM, illustrating the negative association between FSM and life satisfaction.

Unlike previous analyses, verbal and physical bullying were identified as consistent main effects. Experiencing verbal and physical bullying was related to lower life satisfaction. Comparing Figure 5.25 with Figure 5.21 displays the additive effect of weekly verbal bullying on reducing the probability of high life satisfaction; the probability of 11 year old boys with low FAS reporting high life satisfaction decreased by approximately 15% when they experience verbal bullying weekly. Being victimised physically had a smaller association with life satisfaction than verbal bullying (Figure 5.26); the probability of high life satisfaction decreases by 3% when comparing 11 year old boys with low FAS who have experienced weekly physical bullying to those who have not been physically bullied.

Relational bullying is the explanatory variable of primary interest whilst controlling for further confounding variables, including verbal and physical bullying. The statistical model highlights a significant negative association between relational bullying and life satisfaction. Experiencing relational bullying reduced the probability of reporting medium or high life satisfaction (Figure 5.22) and increased the chances of reporting low life satisfaction (Figure 5.23) when compared with non-victimised young people. Overall, weekly relational bullying appears to be associated with a greater decrease in probability than monthly relational bullying (Figure 5.22); however, the probability of reporting high life satisfaction only, did not differ between monthly and weekly relational bullying (Figure 5.21). Life satisfaction was statistically lower among older respondents, in particular girls, and young people of lower social economic status; however, the association between relational bullying and life satisfaction was not moderated by respondent demographics.

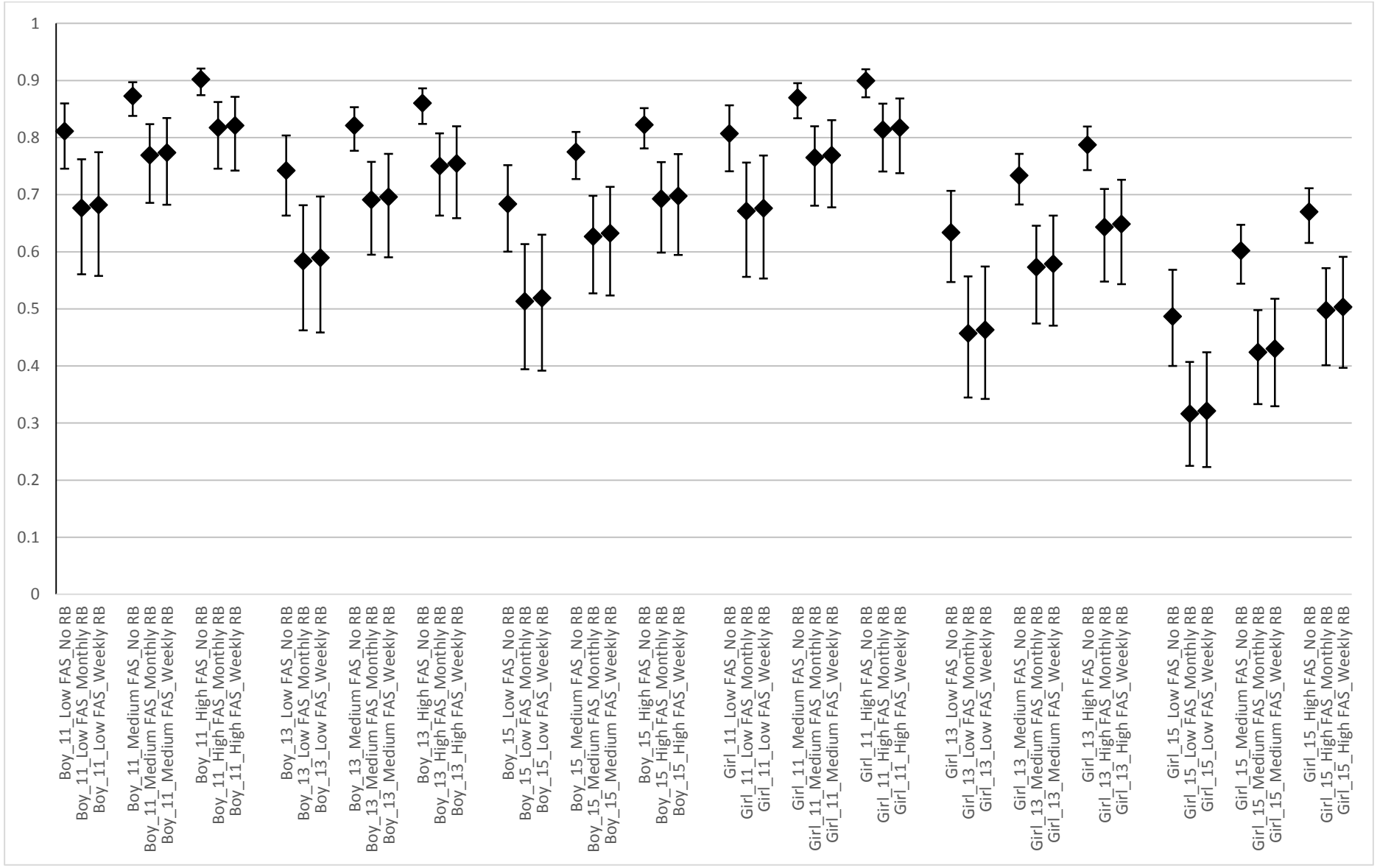


Figure 5.21 *Probability for reporting high life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable with no FSM, verbal or physical bullying.*

Note. RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

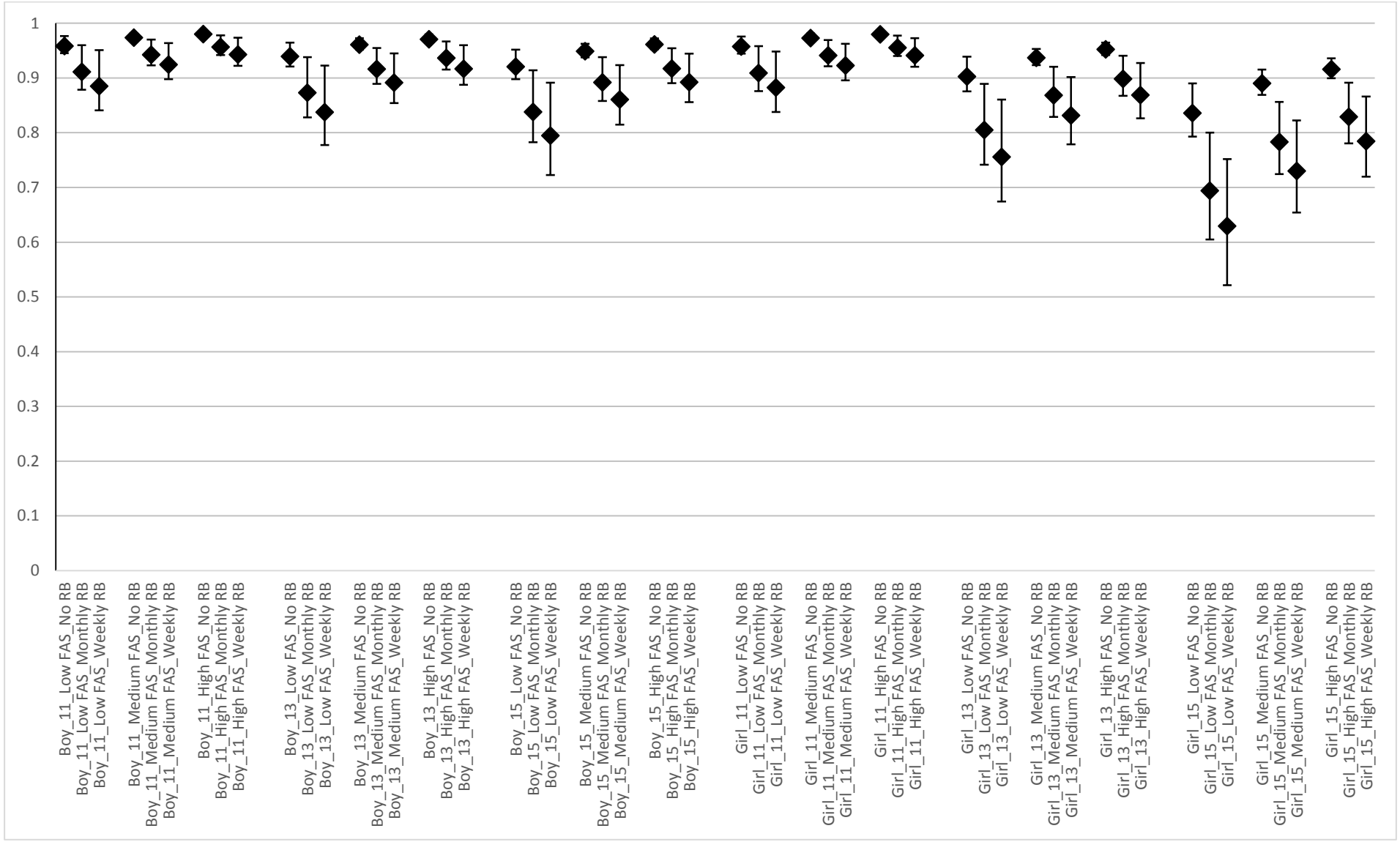


Figure 5.22 *Probability for reporting at least medium life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable with no FSM, verbal or physical bullying. Note. RB* = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

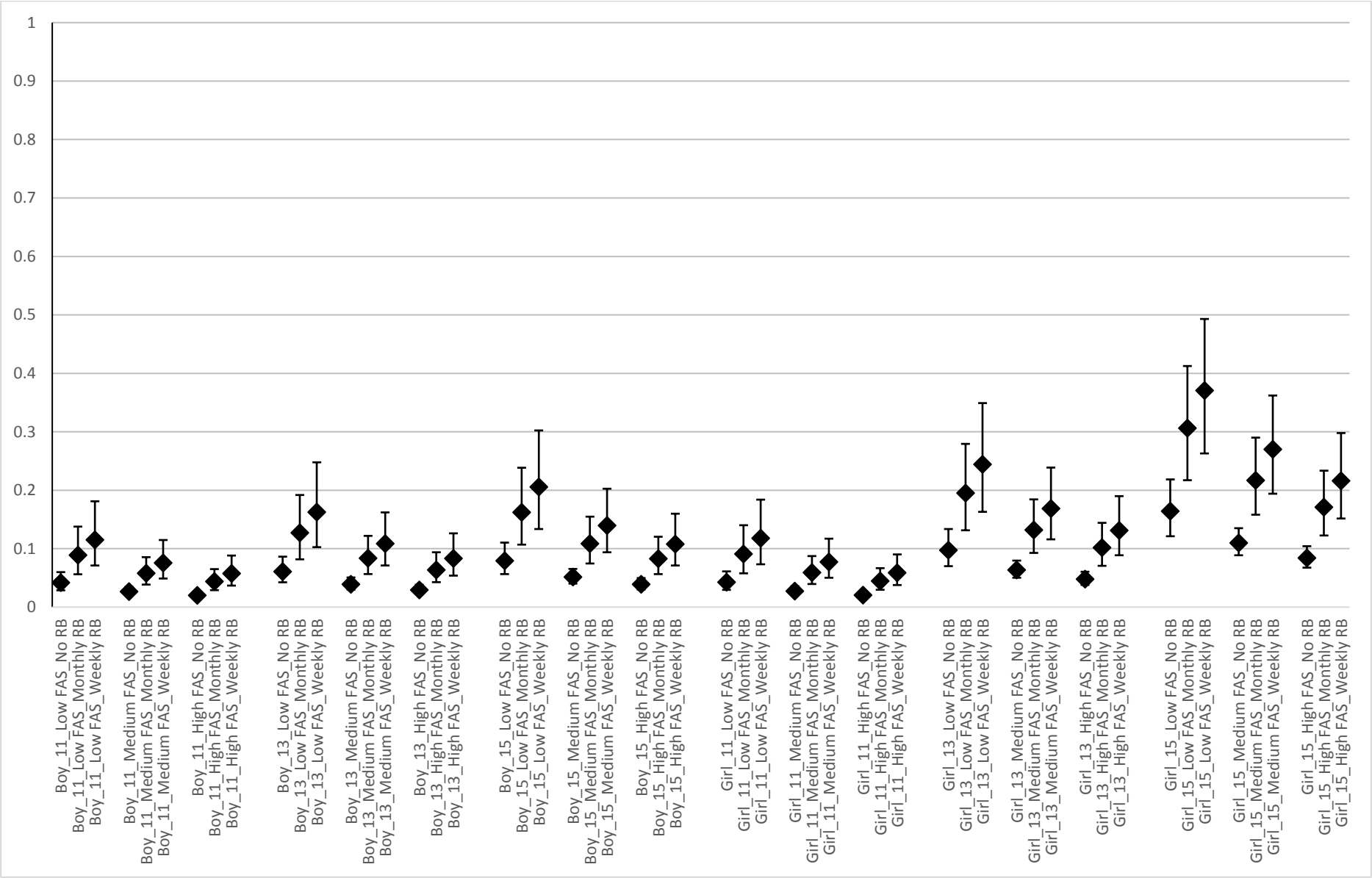


Figure 5.23 *Probability for reporting low life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable with no FSM, verbal or physical bullying*

Note. RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

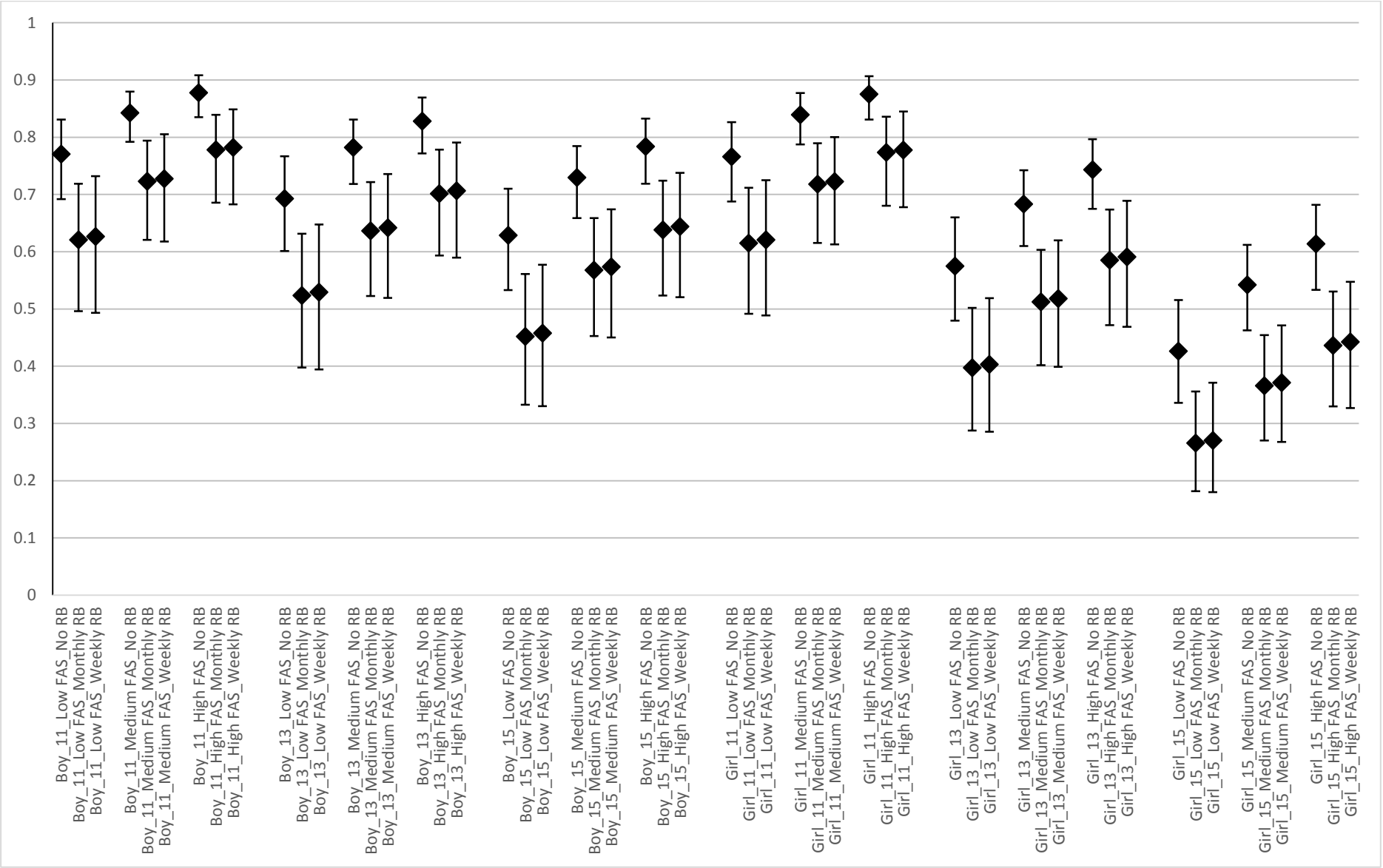


Figure 5.24 *Probability for reporting high life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable when receiving FSM, but not experiencing verbal or physical bullying. Note. RB* = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

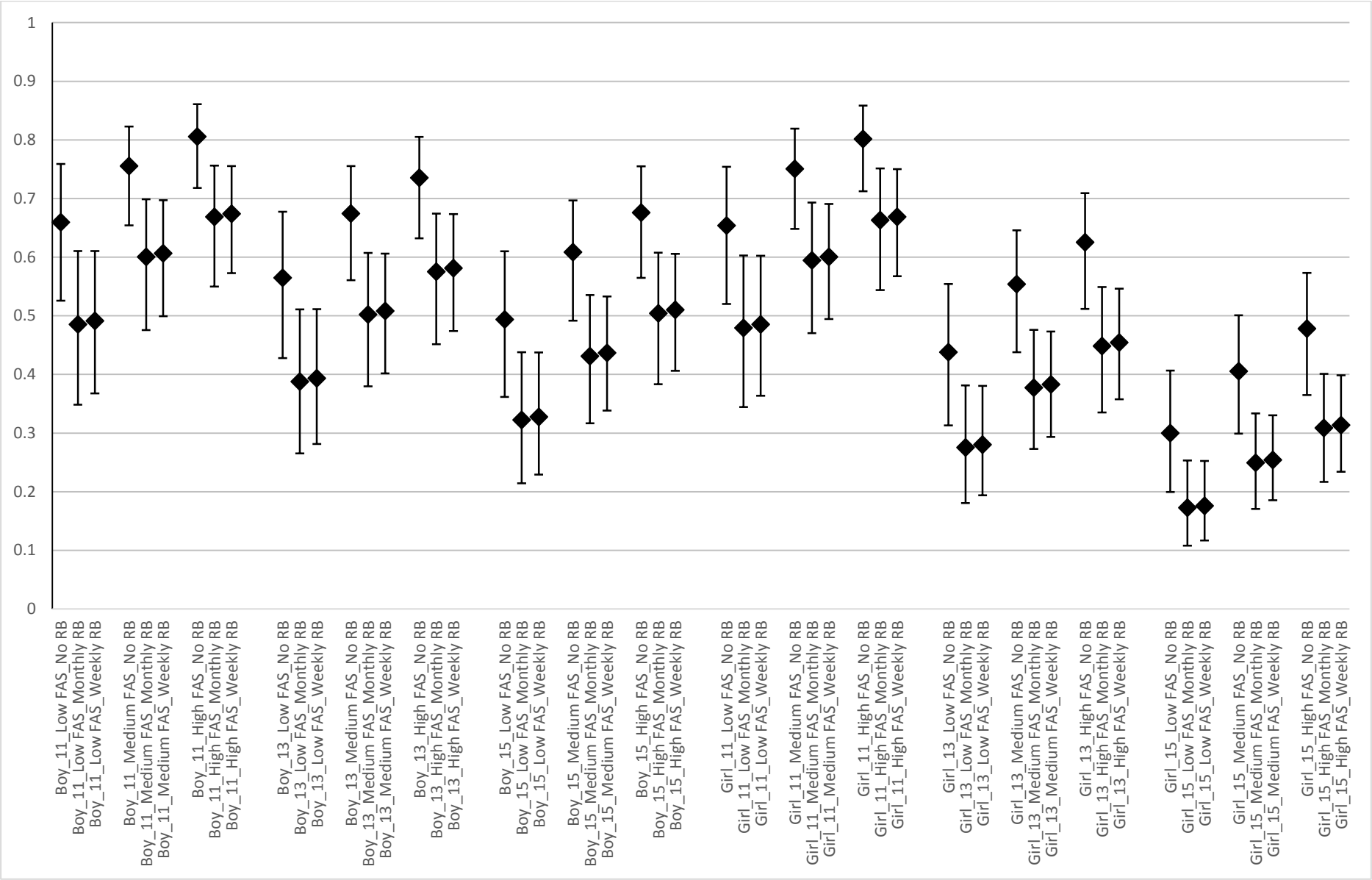


Figure 5.25 *Probability for reporting high life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable with no FSM, no physical bullying and weekly verbal bullying. Note.* RB = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

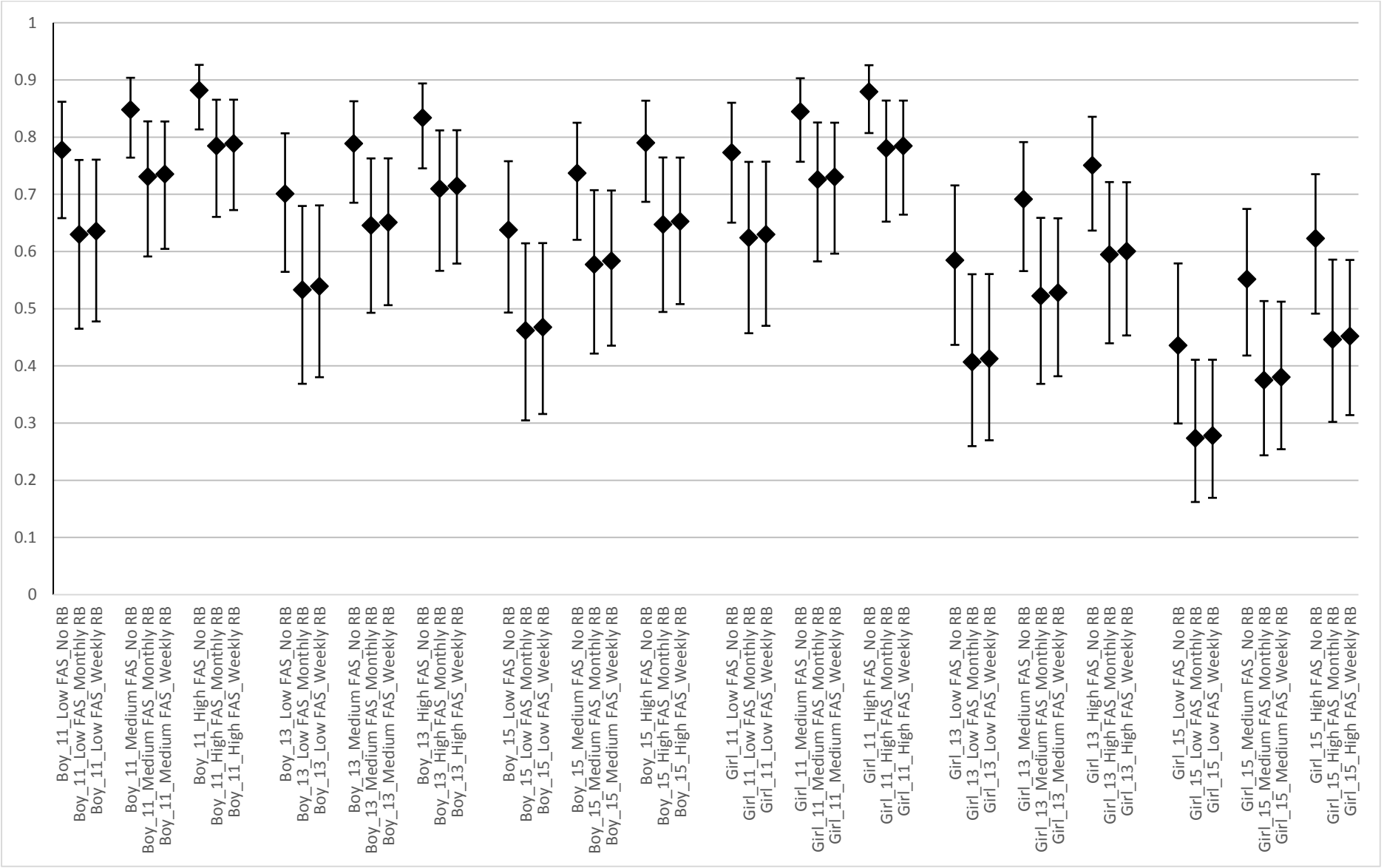


Figure 5.26 *Probability for reporting high life satisfaction for different combinations of explanatory variable with no FSM, no verbal bullying and weekly physical bullying. Note. RB* = Relational bullying; FAS = Family affluence scale, FSM = Free school meals.

Relational bullying and verbal bullying violated the proportional odds assumption, thus findings for these variables are discussed at each response level.

High life satisfaction

The estimated logits for the main effects, and relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values, are reported in Table 5.26. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. Relational bullying is significantly associated with lower odds of high life satisfaction, as displayed in Figure 5.21. The odds of reporting high life satisfaction did not differ between weekly or monthly relational bullying.

Table 5.26 *Logits for reporting high life satisfaction, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	Comparison	Logit (95% CI)	*p*-value
Relational bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-0.72 (-0.98, -0.46)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with never	**-0.69 (-1.01, -0.38)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with monthly	0.02 (-0.33, 0.38)	*p*=0.895
Verbal bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-0.52 (-0.86, -0.18)**	***p*=0.003**
	Weekly compared with never	**-0.80 (-1.13, - 0.46)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with monthly	-0.28 (-0.70, 0.14)	*p*=0.192

Note. Bold text = significant main effects.

At least medium life satisfaction (including high life satisfaction)

The estimated logits for the main effects, and relevant confidence intervals and *p*-values, are reported in Table 5.27. Significant effects are highlighted in bold text. Experiencing relational bullying on either a monthly or weekly basis was associated with reduced odds of reporting at least medium life satisfaction, visually depicted in Figure 5.22. Unlike the model for high life satisfaction (Table 5.26), weekly relational bullying was associated with a greater decrease than monthly relational bullying.

Table 5.27 *Logits for reporting at least medium life satisfaction, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Main effect	Comparison	Logit (95% CI)	*p*-value
Relational bullying	**Monthly compared with never**	**-0.81 (-1.18, -0.44)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with never	**-1.10 (-1.51, -0.69)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with monthly	-0.29 (-0.73, 0.15)	*p*=0.201
Verbal bullying	Monthly compared with never	-0.46 (-0.94, 0.03)	*p*=0.065
	Weekly compared with never	**-0.98 (-1.40, -0.57)**	***p*<0.001**
	Weekly compared with monthly	**-0.53 (-1.06, -0.001)**	***p*=0.049**

Note. Bold text = significant main effects.

5.7.3 Summary

The multilevel ordered regression model identified seven significant main effects and one interaction between age and gender. The main effects of relational bullying and verbal bullying violated the proportional odds assumption; the effect of the variables differed across the life satisfaction response categories (high, medium and low). All forms of bullying – physical, verbal and relational – were associated with poorer life satisfaction.

5.8 Multilevel analysis 4: Positively navigating relational bullying

Whilst examining the association between relational bullying and health outcome measures it became apparent that a considerable portion of the young people who were victimised continued to report positive health. Existing research suggests that experiencing relational bullying is associated with poorer health outcomes; the present findings corroborated this in that being relationally bullied significantly lowered your chances of reporting positive health. However, the unexpected finding of positive wellbeing among a sizeable portion of those who had been bullied warranted further examination.

5.8.1 Descriptive statistics

The counterintuitive relationship was noticeable when scrutinising the descriptive statistics in relation to life satisfaction, reported in Section 5.7.1. While the likelihood of reporting high life satisfaction decreased for victims of relational bullying, a substantial number of young people who reported being relationally bullied on a weekly basis also rated their life

satisfaction as high (Table 5.28). For example, over half (53.6%) of the boys who reported experiencing weekly relational bullying said they had high life satisfaction.

Table 5.28 *Life satisfaction by relational bullying status*

	Proportion of respondents % (N)					
	Boys			**Girls**		
	No bullying	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**	**No bullying**	**Monthly bullying**	**Weekly bullying**
High	82.6% (1753)	63.7% (109)	**53.6% (89)**	74.2% (1429)	53.3% (138)	**44.1% (97)**
Medium	13.2% (280)	27.5% (47)	21.7% (36)	19.2% (369)	25.1% (65)	26.8% (59)
Low	4.2% (89)	8.8% (15)	**24.7% (41)**	6.6% (128)	21.6% (56)	**29.1% (64)**

The data posed a unique opportunity to explore the differences between victims of relational bullying who report low life satisfaction and those who report high life satisfaction. The breadth of the 2014 HBSC England survey allowed for the exploration of factors from different domains of the ecological system which may help young people navigate relational bullying.

5.8.2 Statistical model

The model compared those young people who reported experiencing weekly relational bullying, and had either high or low life satisfaction; the participants included in the analysis are highlighted in bold text in Table 5.28. A forward selection multilevel logistic regression model explored the association between life satisfaction category (low or high) and variables associated with the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). (See Table 4.4 for a list of measures in the 2014 HBSC England survey identified using the social-ecological theory as a guiding framework). The final model included a total of four significant variables, whilst controlling for demographic factors (Figure 5.27). Demographic variables including age, gender, ethnicity, FAS and FSM eligibility were retained in the model despite being non-significant to control for any effects. No significant random slopes or interactions were identified. For a thorough description of statistical analysis see Section 4.2.2.

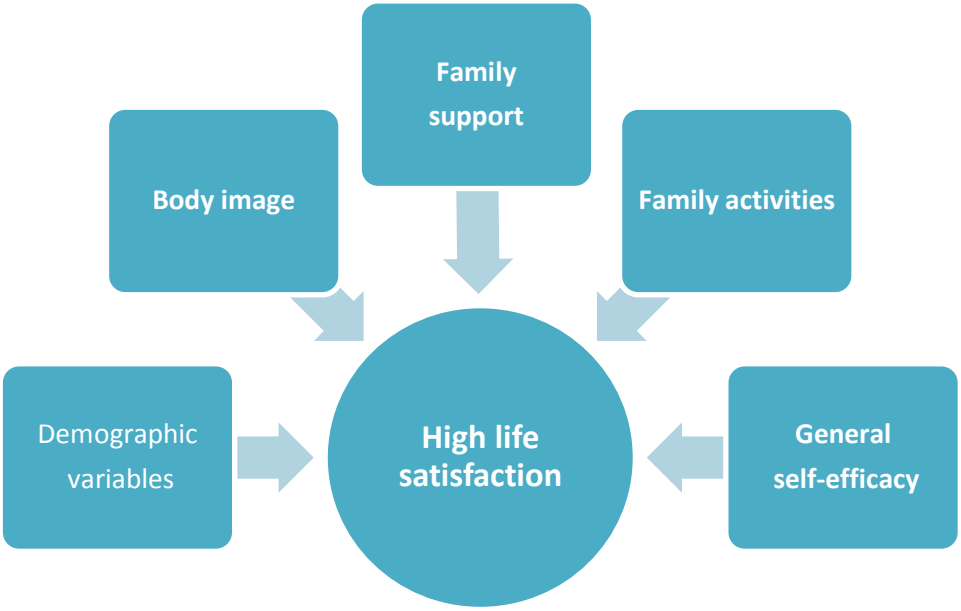


Figure 5.27 *Variables present when modelling factors associated with high life satisfaction*

Table 5.29 displays the odds of reporting high life satisfaction for the main effects, together with 95% confidence intervals and relevant *p*-values. Significant figures are highlighted in bold text.

Young people's perception of their body was significantly associated with their life satisfaction category. Young people who rated their body as 'too thin' were estimated to have 6.53 times greater odds of being in the high life satisfaction category than those who reported their body image was 'too fat', which equates to a 553% increase in the odds. Those young people who said their body was 'about the right size' were estimated to have 8.10 times greater odds of reporting high life satisfaction than those who reported their body image was 'a bit too fat' – a 710% increase in the odds.

Engaging in frequent family activities was associated with high life satisfaction. Young people who reported a medium level of family activities had 3.54 times greater odds of reporting high life satisfaction than those who reported engaging in a low number of family activities, a 254% increase in the odds of being in the high life satisfaction category. The odds of reporting high life satisfaction increased by 5.20 for young people who reported the most frequent family activities compared to those with low family activities, resulting in the odds increasing by 420%.

Family support was significantly associated with being in the high life satisfaction group. Family support was measured through four items on a 6 point scale; answers were summed and averaged to create a score between 1 and 6. The odds of reporting high life satisfaction increased 1.37 times with a single unit increase in family support; this equates to a 37% increase in the odds of reporting high life satisfaction.

Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997), was associated with reporting high life satisfaction. The odds of reporting high life satisfaction increased by 1.09 for every unit increase of general self-efficacy, which equates to a 9% increase in the odds. However, a one unit increase on the general self-efficacy scale is fairly small as the scale ranges from 10-40; as such using an increase in one standard deviation as an indicator was sensible. The odds of reporting high life satisfaction increased by 1.85 for a one standard deviation increase in general self-efficacy, this is an 85% increase in the odds.

Table 5.29 *Odds ratios for reporting high life satisfaction for explanatory variables, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Factor	Comparison	Odds ratio	95% CI	*p*-value
Body image	**Too thin vs too fat**	**6.53**	**(2.02, 21.15)**	***p*=0.002**
	About right vs too fat	**8.10**	**(3.08, 21.32)**	***p*<0.001**
	About right vs too thin	1.24	(0.36, 4.27)	*p*= 0.733
Family activities	**Medium vs low**	**3.54**	**(1.39, 8.99)**	***p*=0.008**
	High vs low	**5.20**	**(1.83, 14.81)**	***p*=0.002**
	Medium vs high	1.47	0.53, 4.07	p=0.457
Family support	**A 1 unit increase in family support**	**1.37**	**(1.10, 1.70)**	***p*=0.005**
General self-efficacy	**For a one standard deviation increase**	**1.85**	**(1.22, 2.81)**	***p*=0.004**

Note. Bold text = significant main effects.

Table 5.30 displays the odds ratios for reporting high life satisfaction associated with demographic variables. None of the variables were significant at the 1% level, but the demographic variables were retained in the model to control for their effect.

There is some evidence to suggest that being a girl rather than a boy increased the odds of having good life satisfaction; this was only significant at the 2.9% level, which given the number of comparisons undertaken is not rigorous enough to be considered significant. There were also indications that having high FAS rather than medium FAS leads to lower odds of high life satisfaction, but as with gender, it is likely these are spurious relationships.

There was insufficient evidence to suggest that age, ethnicity or being in receipt of free school meals affects the likelihood of reporting high life satisfaction.

Table 5.30 *Odds ratios for reporting high life satisfaction for demographic variables, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and relevant p-values*

Factor	Comparison	Odds ratio	95% CI	*p*-value
Gender	Girl compared with boy	2.55	(1.10, 5.91)	*p*=0.029
Age	13 compared with 11	1.80	(0.69, 4.71)	*p*=0.230
	15 compared with 11	1.30	(0.48, 3.53)	*p=0.609*
	11 compared with 13	1.39	(0.51, 3.77)	*p=0.519*
FAS	Medium compared with Low	2.70	(0.62, 11.85)	*p*=0.188
	High compared with Low	0.92	(0.21, 4.04)	*p*=0.910
	High compared with Medium	0.34	(0.15, 0.80)	*p*=0.013
FSM	Receiving FSM compared with not receiving FSM	1.52	(0.44, 5.25)	*p*=0.510
Ethnicity*	White compared with Black/Black British	7.92	(0.62, 101.86)	*p=0.112*
	Mixed compared with Black/Black British	6.76	(0.43, 105.60)	*p=0.173*
	Asian/Asian British compared with Black/Black British	7.42	(0.37, 147.27)	*p=0.189*
	Chinese compared Black/Black British	6.84	(0.32, 145.24)	*p=0.218*
	Other compared with Black/Black British	[a]	[a]	*p=1.000*

Note. FAS = Family affluence scale; FSM = Free school meals; * = Only selected comparisons for ethnicity are presented due to numerous comparisons*;* [a] = Estimate of difference set to zero by estimation process as indistinguishable from zero.

5.8.3 Summary

The multilevel logistic regression model examined differences between young people experiencing weekly relational bullying who reported high life satisfaction vs those who reported low life satisfaction. The model identified four significant variables – body image,

family support, family activities and general self-efficacy. Young people with positive attributes in those four areas were more likely to report high life satisfaction, despite experiencing relational bullying on a weekly basis, suggesting these factors may play a role in helping young people positively navigate the experience of relational bullying. Having a positive body image was associated with the greatest increase in odds of being in the high life satisfaction category. Interestingly, demographic variables were not retained in the model; suggesting that the variables may play a protective function for boys and girls across all three age groups.

5.9 Summary of quantitative findings

Utilising both descriptive and inferential statistics, the secondary analysis of the 2014 HBSC England data set sought to:

1. Identify the prevalence of relational bullying and build a demographic picture of those experiencing this form of bullying.
2. Examine the health and wellbeing outcomes associated with experiencing relational bullying.
3. Identify factors which may help young people to positively navigate relational bullying.

Descriptive statistics established that relational bullying was a fairly common occurrence – 16.6% of respondents reported being victimised in this way at some point in the couple of months prior to completing the survey. The analysis indicated that relational bullying could be the most frequent form of bullying behaviour experienced by young people. However, the variation in measurement tools may have influenced the findings, which further emphasises the challenges associated with measuring and comparing the prevalence of bullying. Experiencing relational bullying was significantly more likely among girls and those from families with lower SES; however, the associated effect sizes were negligible and as such it can be construed that relational bullying may be experienced by a young person of any demographic.

Three separate multilevel regression models examined the association between relational bullying and three measures of health and wellbeing: HRQL, general self-rated health and life satisfaction. Relational bullying was linked to poorer outcomes across all three measures of health wellbeing. Inferential statistics identified relational bullying as more detrimental than

physical or verbal bullying for young people's health and wellbeing. For example, when measuring HRQL, relational bullying was associated with the biggest decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score compared with other forms of bullying; while physical bullying remained non-significant and verbal bullying bordered on the 5% significance boundary for general self-rated health.

Aside from bullying, an interesting relationship between gender, age and the measures of health and wellbeing was identified. Age and gender featured as a significant interaction in all three multilevel regression models examining health outcomes. Overall, the self-reported health and wellbeing of young people declined with age, however this effect was greater among girls. For instance, at 11 years old the KIDSCREEN-10 score for girls was an estimated 0.15 lower than boys, compared with a difference in KIDSCREEN-10 score of 4.34 at 15 years old (Table 5.8).

While the analysis established a significant association between relational bullying and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, it also highlighted that a number of young people who experienced relational bullying continued to respond positively to the measures of health and wellbeing. For example, 44.1% of girls who were classified as experiencing weekly relational bullying had recorded high life satisfaction (Table 5.28). An exploratory multilevel logistic regression model identified factors which may help young people to positively navigate relational bullying and thus continue to report positive health and wellbeing. The final model included four significant main effects: body image, family activities, family support and general self-efficacy.

The quantitative findings were further enhanced through qualitative interviews with young people, which contributed to building a comprehensive picture of relational bullying. The qualitative findings are discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Qualitative findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative component of this study. In total, eleven interviews with young people (aged 12-18 years) were conducted and the interview data was analysed using thematic analysis (for further details see Section 4.3). Initially, each of the themes are presented and described in detail. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the qualitative findings, including the presentation of a model which illustrates them and captures the perspective of the young people.

Participants were recruited from a general sample of young people and experiencing bullying was not a requirement for taking part in the study (see Section 3.5.2), however six out of the eleven participants referred to personal experiences of bullying using phrases such as "*I know from experience*" (Bethany, 13 years old) and "*I've been on the end of it before*" (Harriet, 15 years old). Of the remaining five participants who did not explicitly state they had experienced bullying, four described instances when they had observed bullying, for example Joe (17 years old) stated "*yeah, I've seen that before*" when faced with descriptions of relational bullying behaviours.

6.2 Identification of themes

Following thematic analysis seven overarching themes were identified:

1. *"It's hard to put into words*": The complexity of defining bullying
2. "*They've like betrayed their trust*": The role of friends in relational bullying
3. "*It made me feel really upset*": Negative impact of relational bullying
4. "*It went all over social media*": Social media facilitating relational bullying
5. "*There is always something going around*": Normalisation of relational bullying
6. "*Brush it off*': Personal resources to navigate relational bullying
7. "*Like your friends, family, like teachers*"*:* External resources to navigate relational bullying

Themes have been named using a quote from the young people which epitomises it and are also accompanied with a researcher interpretation. The subsequent sections will describe each theme in detail. Quotations, from the interview transcripts, are drawn on to illustrate

the themes through the voice of the young person (names attributed to quotes are pseudonyms and the age refers to the age given by the young person at time of interview).

6.2.1 "*It's hard to put into words*": The complexity of defining bullying

This theme focuses on bullying more broadly, and illustrates how complex it can be for young people to define and recognise bullying behaviours. The interviews were opened with an introductory question asking young people how they would describe bullying in general terms. At this point in the interview, all of the young people were able to offer their thoughts about what they perceived bullying to be. The young people's ideas often emphasised that bullying was a harmful behaviour and that it was done on purpose with the intent to cause emotional distress to the victim, for example:

> *"I guess what I consider bullying is anything that's purposely done to upset someone else."* (Harriet, 15 years old)
>
> *"Erm, it's when you're doing something on purpose to upset another person, or to…yeah just to hurt their feelings."* (Jess, 14 years old)

However, as the interview progressed, the young people demonstrated a level of uncertainty in the way they verbally articulated a definition of bullying. When asked follow up questions to clarify when and why behaviours may (or may not) be perceived as bullying, young people's responses were often marked by pauses and fillers. Many participants revealed their indecision subtly through interjections like *"I don't know"* (Tiffany, 15 years old) and "*I guess*" (Jess, 14 years old), while Heidi (15 years old) explicitly explained that "*it's hard to put* [bullying] *into words*". Throughout the interview, the way in which young people explained and defined bullying often became less definite and more subjective. In the later stages of the interview, Jess (14 years old) acknowledged that she had described two conflicting perceptions of what constituted bullying behaviours during our conversation:

> KC: *"I think you've already answered this, but yeah, thinking about these* [relational bullying descriptive statements]*, would you define them as bullying?"*
>
> Jess: *"I would say that the bottom two* [relational bullying descriptive statements] *are bullying because…oh…I am kind of going against what I said!" (laughter)*

There was a general acceptance among the young people that for a behaviour to be defined as bullying it must be repeated, but the idea of repetition seemed quite difficult for young people to explain in detail. When young people attempted to quantify how often or for how long behaviours must continue in order to be classified as bullying, their answers were often

vague and there was a lot of variation among young people. Joe (17 years old) said it would "*have to happen a few times…like twice*" and Kelly (18 years old) felt "*it doesn't have to be a lot, just a few times*"; while Claire (16 years old) described how it must happen for "*weeks on end*" to be defined as bullying. Furthermore, young people's initial accounts may have included the idea of repetition, but this feature was neglected in subsequent descriptions. For example, both Heidi and Kirsty suggested early in the interview that they perceived bullying as a repetitive behaviour that occurred over time:

> *"Ermmm, it's like something done on purpose to like harm. I don't know it's like…it depends if it upsets that person. But it's like bullying and it's like repeated but…it doesn't have to be like physical or like verbal if that makes sense…"* (Heidi, 15 years old)

> *"I would describe it as repetitive, mmm, something someone saying not very nice things about you or another person. Erm definitely more than once."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

However, on further reflection, Heidi and Kirsty both reframed the significance of repetition, mentioning that bullying is harmful irrespective of frequency (Heidi) and that bullying can in fact be a single incident (Kirsty):

> *"Cause it's done on purpose to like hurt an individual so it's like…it is bullying cause no matter how often it happens it's…yeah…"* (Heidi, 15 years old)

> *"I don't know I guess it* [a single incident] *can still be classed as bullying if it's like really bad. Because I had one of those incidents before…"* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

The only exception to this were the two youngest participants, Molly and Dylan (both 12 years old), who were unwavering in defining bullying as a repetitive behaviour. Both Molly and Dylan were very clear and certain that for an action to be considered bullying it must be a repetitive behaviour:

> *"If they do do something like mean on the first…like just one thing…I think that's like being mean obviously, but I don't think it's bullying because it's not doing it over and over again."* (Molly, 12 years old)

> *"It's where you're being mean like punching someone, kicking someone, saying stuff to people a <u>lot</u> of times."* (Dylan, 12 years old)

Young people did not explicitly describe a power imbalance when asked to define bullying, suggesting this is not a feature they would consciously draw on when identifying acts of bullying. However, their own stories and recollections of bullying highlighted the importance of a bully's power. The power was often described as a product of a bully's own popularity and social status, with strict social hierarchies at school:

> *"But it's like, kind of like your social kind of hierarchy like at school. It's like if someone's at the bottom and they are being bullied nobody is going to go and help them because they could go to the bottom as well."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

Throughout the interviews it became clear that young people often made their decisions about bullying by also assessing the context in which the behaviours occur. For example, distinguishing bullying became more difficult when it occurred within social groups, with young people struggling to decipher between normal group conflict and bullying. Jess explained how a change in group relations was not enough on its own to constitute bullying, but that coupled with other actions it may be considered bullying:

> *"If they were normally like friends and they talk every day or whatever and then just suddenly they weren't talking I wouldn't see it as bullying. But if like the person has like said something to them before or like you know they've fell out recently and they're just doing it on purpose then I would see it as bullying."* (Jess, 14 years old)

When talking about friendship groups, young people adopted different words and phrases like "*joking*" (Tiffany, 15 years old) , "*banter*" (Dylan, 12 years old), "*teasing*" (Kirsty, 14 years old), "*mocking*" (Joe, 17 years old) and "*taking the mick*" (Kelly, 18 years old). Jokes were viewed as a reciprocated action among close friends, where you take "*the mick out of each other*" (Kelly, 18 years old). However it was acknowledged that in certain circumstances jokes can be hurtful:

> *"Erm, mocking is…mocking is when they are taking…laughing with you I would say but with, actually sometimes it hurts people because they are, they can't understand why they're mocking them…"* (Joe, 17 years old)

Young people described a number of group behaviours which may help to indicate that joking among friends is simply innocent fun rather than more harmful bullying behaviours. For example, Tiffany (15 years old) explained that "*if they were joking around, like, you nudge each other*" while Kelly (18 years old) emphasised that joking was often part of a reciprocal exchange among friends: "*…'ah they did this'…'they did that'…".* In fact, Harriet (15 years old) suggested that it was hardest for someone outside of the friendship group to really understand what was happening and to identify bullying behaviours because they would not understand the group norms:

> Harriet: *"I feel like some people, especially boys, there are certain people in friendship groups that just sort of…take being bullied in a way, like physically bullied as just you know having a laugh with their friends."*
> KC: *"Okay."*
> Harriet: *"And I feel like…so it's hard to tell like are they…is this just like them messing around, are they literally bullying that person."*

It appeared that young people were considering the context in which a behaviour occurred in order to decide whether a behaviour was, or was not, bullying. The following quote from Kelly captures the subjective nature of defining an action as bullying:

> *"It's kind of like…I suppose in that way I suppose it might not be bullying but…I think a lot of depends on the situation."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

During the interview, a number of school resources were described which can help young people to understand what bullying is. The types of school resources which were referenced included "*people coming in to talk about bullying*" (Kirsty, 14 years old), "*assembli*es" (Jess, 14 years old), what "*teachers tell us*" (Claire, 16 years old) and "*signs around school*" Dylan (12 years old). These resources were described as a way of helping to educate young people about bullying, however when discussed in more detail young people's opinion on how valuable and helpful the resources were appeared to be mixed:

> "*…I'm not sure many people took it* [information from an assembly] *in, acknowledged it.*" (Dylan, 12 years old)

> "*I think if they didn't have them* [assemblies] *it would be far worse*." (Joe, 17 years old)

> "*Erm, for a person who doesn't know what it* [bullying] *is then yeah more so, but if you already know what it* [bullying] *is, it's kind of irritating and a bit boring.*" (Kirsty, 14 years old)

The role of personal experience may be particularly important in identifying whether behaviours were bullying. For example, Molly (12 years old) stated "*I kind of know*" when asked to describe what bullying is, and when questioned on how she had come to her definition of bullying Molly described her own experience of being bullied. Other respondents noted that their definition of bullying behaviours was influenced by their own observations of bullying and the accounts of those who had experienced bullying:

> *"I think mainly just like what people have told me, and what like people…if I've heard about their story about being bullied, like what they've said."* (Claire, 16 years old)

> *"Erm, so my sort of definition of bullying sort of comes from what I see and what I can tell hurts people and what hurts and what would hurt me."* (Harriet, 15 years old)

Not only did young people indicate how complex it can be to define bullying behaviours, but they acknowledged how others around them may hold different views about what bullying is too. A number of young people demonstrated their awareness of the subjectivity of defining bullying. For example, both Heidi and Harriet described different understandings among peers as well as the broader school environment:

"Different people think bullying is different things." (Heidi, 15 years old)

"Erm. Obviously like mostly at primary school you're taught about it a bit. Erm, but I wouldn't say the definition that they gave is the same definition that I gave." (Harriet, 15 years old)

In summary, the young people's accounts indicated how defining bullying behaviours is complex and nuanced. This theme focused on the broader context of all bullying behaviours, under which relational bullying would sit. All of the young people were able to provide an initial description of how they understood bullying, but on further discussion their understanding of bullying became more subjective. The majority of young people spoke confidently about bullying being intentional and harmful. The concepts of repetition, power and context were also highlighted, but these concepts appeared to be more complex and ambiguous to describe. When making decisions about what is (and is not) bullying behaviour, young people drew on their own personal experience, past observations, educational materials and the knowledge of people around them.

6.2.2 "*They've like betrayed their trust":* The role of friends in relational bullying

After discussing young people's understanding of bullying more broadly, relational bullying was introduced to young people using descriptive statements (see Section 3.5.4). The use of statements ensured that relational bullying behaviours were illustrated consistently in each of the interviews. During the discussions about relational bullying behaviours specifically, young people often referenced their friends. This theme captures the way in which friends may be involved in relational bullying.

Young people acknowledged that the spreading of rumours, embarrassing information and social exclusion may stem from within their own friendship group. When presented with the statements describing relational bullying behaviours, the young people often made reference to friends. For example, Claire discussed the role that friends can play in sharing embarrassing and personal information about a victim of relational bullying, while Kelly spoke about friends in relation to social exclusion:

"I think that's probably someone like, it could be like someone's like close friend where they've told them things about them like that you'd only tell someone that was close and then they've like betrayed their trust…and yeah." (Claire, 16 years old)

"Erm, and then students being left out, erm, I think that happens a lot as well but sometimes it is just within friends." (Kelly, 18 years old)

It appeared that the different types of relational bullying behaviours outlined in the descriptive statements may be interlinked. Tiffany described the way in which rumour

spreading and social exclusion are related, suggesting the spreading of information may result in the loss of friends:

> *"It just gets worse and worse and by then you've lost all your friends because you've done something that you haven't really done."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

Bethany and Jess both referenced the ways in which these types of behaviour may develop within friendship groups. Both of them indicated that they were the result of group wide behaviours, with Bethany suggesting this was often led by one dominant member of the friendship group:

> *"Because, because it is like the boss of the group. We don't disagree to her because she will kick us out. That sort of thing. And then she says 'right we are going to kick this person out', and they sort of agree to it because they don't want to fight back."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

> *"Like, if you're with some people in lessons you'll probably be like, oh like start kinda saying stuff about the person and you'll be like 'oh shall we just ignore them like at lunch' or whatever, and I guess you kinda talk about it with your friends and then if so many people start doing it in that group then the others will like just join in necessarily not without them like realising it will just…happen…I guess."* (Jess, 14 years old)

When discussing relational bullying behaviours they were often described as being a consequence of conflict between friends. For example, Kirsty, Jess and Tiffany all suggested that social exclusion and rumour spreading may occur after a "*falling out*" between friends:

> *"Just from someone like falling out with someone for them to do that* [referring to relational bullying descriptive statements] *and then be friends with them again and then when they are not friends with them they do the same thing again…"* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

> *"If like the person has like said something to them before or like you know they've fell out recently and they're just doing it on purpose then I would see it as bullying…because you're making a person upset or making them feel left out."* (Jess, 14 years old)

> *"And we found out that it was one of the girls just making it up because they had fallen out and she lost all her friends for no reason."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

Some young people were more specific about the purpose of relational bullying behaviours among friends. Kirsty (14 years old) described these behaviours as being "*retaliation*" and believed they were used to "*get revenge and get them* [the victim] *back*", but did not expand upon why a friend they may seek revenge. Similarly, Claire referred to the idea of "*revenge*":

> *"Yeah, because they could be like trying to get like revenge on you for something."* (Claire, 16 years old)

Through the interviews with young people, the importance of romantic relationships on friendships and relational bullying became apparent. Harriet (15 years old) described relational bullying being more common among a social group who she perceived as having "*a lot more experience with boys*" and Joe (18 years old) felt these behaviours were often due to jealousy over "*who they are going out with*". Bethany expanded on this suggesting that an individual may be excluded from a friendship group for receiving attention from a boy:

> *"…so they'll say 'right we are going to kick her out', cause he likes her…"* (Bethany, 13 years old)

The descriptions suggest that relational bullying among friends could, in part, be associated with the development of romantic relationships. Furthermore, the types of rumours which were discussed were often sexual in nature, with Kelly (18 years old) labelling the content of the rumours as "*inappropriate*". Tiffany explained how sexual rumours can be used to damage friendships and isolate individuals, by creating competition and exploiting emotions around romantic relationships:

> *"Normally what they'll do is if you don't like them they'll say, they'll try to split friends up, 'oh she did that with that boy'…but it will normally be one of the popular girl's ex so then they will fall out."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

In summary, relational bullying behaviours were often described by young people in the context of friendship groups. Young people acknowledged that the spreading of rumours and personal information was likely to originate from someone the victim had confided in. Dylan (12 years old) reckoned that "*you've got to depend on the person you're telling the stuff*" to, demonstrating an awareness and concern about personal information being shared. The interviews shed light on the importance of group dynamics in friendship groups, and highlighted the role that romantic relationships may have on friendships. As previously discussed, in Section 6.2.1, defining bullying is complex and made more difficult among friendship groups. Kelly confirmed social exclusion (with and without intent) could occur among friends, and reflected on whether or not she perceived it as bullying:

> *"Like sometimes you invite people and like you miss someone out, or there's not enough room for everyone to come and then that person feels like they're being excluded when it's not actually intended that way. But then again with like groups of friends like not everyone always likes each other that much, so it's like you'll leave someone out because you don't want them there and then… I don't know if it's bullying because it's like… I don't know..."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

6.2.3 "*It made me feel really upset*": Negative impact of relational bullying

The quantitative analysis identified links between relational bullying and lower levels of self-reported wellbeing (see Chapter 5). This theme provides an insight into how relational bullying made young people feel, with the young people's accounts supporting the quantitative data as they often described the implications of relational bullying on a person's wellbeing.

Young people were consistent in describing the emotionally hurtful nature of relational bullying; Heidi (15 years old) commented that "*it can just make them* [victims] *feel, like, down*", while Molly (12 years old) described it as "*upsetting and embarrassing"*. Jess and Harriet referred to instances when they had personally experienced relational bullying behaviours and each of them described negative feelings as an outcome of the bullying:

> *"Ahhh…It makes you, well it made me feel really upset."* (Jess, 14 years old)
>
> *"I mean I've been on the end of it before and it's, I don't know, it's horrible."* (Harriet, 15 years old)

The detrimental implications of relational bullying on a person's emotional wellbeing and mental health was further acknowledged by Claire and Kirsty:

> "*Like, it will create like a bad memory of like a bad time that they went through and I think it can like kind of like scar you mentally because it can make you feel like really down."* (Claire, 16 years old)
>
> *"So it might even lead to someone having depression even, or like self-harming or something…which is quite sad."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

The language Claire and Kirsty adopted moved beyond describing negative emotions and feelings of upset as they used terms associated with mental health including "*self-harming*" and "*depressio*n"; their quotes demonstrate a perception that relational bullying may have extreme consequences on a person's mental health.

Jess (14 years old) explained that she found the experience particularly distressing because "*it matters what people think of me…if something bad is said about me it affects me*." Other young people also recognised that relational bullying, particularly the spreading of rumours, may be detrimental to how young people feel about themselves. Heidi (15 years old) said it can make someone "*question themselves"* and Kelly (18 years old) described how victims may "*doubt themselves*". Joe explained that the rumours may be harmful because they damage the person's identity:

> *"They strip away everything the person has made, like the personality of the person."* (Joe, 17 years old)

Relational bullying often involves social exclusion and the manipulation of friendships and peer relationships. Many young people referenced the feelings of isolation and loneliness which came with experiencing these types of behaviour:

> *"Like excluding them and leaving them by themselves and it kind of makes you feel vulnerable because you're like in this big place by yourself."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

> *"I think it would make someone feel like really down and just like not good about themselves because they feel like they are just on their own and they don't really have anyone to like go to."* (Claire, 16 years old)

> *"Yeah…erm…cause I have, I have been left out of groups and it's sort of you feel a lot more lonely when like... When you are actually alone but you know you have a group of friends that like to hang out with you, you don't feel quite as alone. But when that person, that group of friends has like completely swept you out of the group it's, it feels a lot more lonely because you can't really talk to anyone else about it."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

> *"Like upsetting because it's like they don't like you, they're trying to make you feel left out and erm like you end up with like no friends and stuff because of them and they're just like leaving you out."* (Molly, 12 years old)

In the above quotes, Bethany and Molly described scenarios which involved their friends. Kelly suggested that it may be the involvement of friends in relational bullying which makes it particularly hurtful:

> *"Erm, well it's not nice obviously. It's just… I think and especially when it's your friends or people you thought were your friends I think that hurts a lot more because it's kind of like they've betrayed you and it's like you wouldn't expect them to do that. It's like they've kind of like turned on you and now they are one of the bullies, which can be a lot more upsetting because obviously it's someone that you trust and that you've trusted with this information, all these things you've told them and they've gone and told other people and used it for like their humour. So, like obviously it's not nice in any situation but I think within friends it's more unexpected so it hurts more and it makes it more upsetting."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

Young people also acknowledged that relational bullying had negative implications in addition to the impact on an individual's emotional wellbeing and mental health. Many young people mentioned that those who experienced relational bullying were not only actively isolated by others but may also choose to avoid social situations. When Harriet (15 years old) referred to her own personal experience of relational bullying she described feeling like she wanted to "*curl into a ball and just, like, not be there*" and Kirsty (14 years old) commented that "*you'd want to lock yourself up and, like, not see the outside world*". The school environment was identified as an important setting which young people may seek to avoid following relational

bullying. Joe (17 years old) was particularly comprehensive in his account of how relational bullying may affect school attendance and outcomes:

> Joe: *"Erm, because they don't know how it's going to affect someone but, until they've actually done it and they've… Sometimes with the rumour spreading the children stop coming into school because it's that bad."*
> KC: *"Okay."*
> Joe: *"It's that disheartening because they don't want to be related to…not be related…be associated with them. And then they would stop their education and affect their lives to come."*

Of note, Joe was the only young person to explicitly state that he had "*never been bullied*", suggesting his account was based on observations of relational bullying among peers and younger students in the school as opposed to his own experience. However, other young people reported similar perceptions. For example, Jess spoke about her own personal experience of relational bullying behaviours and described her reluctance to attend school:

> *"At first I didn't want to come into school, regardless of like having older cousins and that, I just didn't want to come into school because I know people would talk about it* [the rumour]*."* (Jess, 14 years old)

To summarise, the accounts of young people repeatedly illustrated the potentially negative impact associated with experiencing relational bullying. Young people acknowledged the detrimental effect of this form of bullying on a person's emotional wellbeing and mental health. The isolation associated with relational bullying was particularly emotive, as young people described feeling "*invisible*" (Kirsty, 14 years old) and "*vulnerable*" (Tiffany, 15 years old). Wider societal implications were also highlighted including the consequence of relational bullying on a student's school attendance and outcomes.

6.2.4 "*It went all over social media*": Social media facilitating relational bullying

Relational bullying may involve a number of behaviours including rumour spreading and social exclusion. This theme will capture young people's perspective on how social media may be used to facilitate these types of relational bullying behaviours.

The narratives of many young people illustrated that relational bullying behaviours, particularly the spreading of rumours, were persistent and far-reaching. They described how quickly and easily rumours could spread across classes and year groups. For example, Molly (12 years old) described rumours "*spreading all, like, round school*", Kirsty (14 years old) reported that "*most likely it will be nearly everyone that finds* [out] *about it*"" and Jess (14 years old) mentioned that "*even the teachers will know at one point*". Without specific

prompting, the use of mobile phones and social media was often mentioned as contributing to the pervasive nature of relational bullying behaviours. Social media was identified as being particularly key in the spreading of rumours as Jess (14 years old) describes of her own experience:

KC: *"Do these types of behaviour in the statements…the rumours and the exclusion…do they extend outside of school?"*

Jess: *"Er yeah, the rumours do. Cause when it happened to me it went all over social media."*

The majority of young people were very knowledgeable about social media platforms and explained how they could be used to share information. Tiffany described the process of sharing information and rumours via Snapchat, while Bethany referred to the use of Instagram:

> *"So basically you take a picture and then you can write <u>on</u> the picture. They just take like a blank screen and they just add the message 'oh have you heard this?' and they will put it on their* [Snapchat] *story. It means <u>everyone</u> can see it."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

> *"Yeah, like, there will be an Instagram account which will have like 'so-and-so is cheating on their girlfriend' or something."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

Using social media was thought to increase the potential reach of rumours, with the above quote from Tiffany stressing "*<u>everyone</u> can see it*". Kirsty explained that social media often created links between students of different year groups which helped to increase the breadth of rumours, while Joe suggested that having access to phones also increased the speed at which rumours could spread among students:

> *"And because social media, like, erm, say for at the moment I have some of my people who are following me are from like younger years and then some are from older, so you can literally, everyone can find out about it pretty much."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

> *"Because we were all allowed our phones on us I think one rumour got out in an hour"* (Joe, 17 years old)

While social media seemed key in facilitating the spreading of rumours, young people also described situations when social exclusion could continue beyond the physical school environment through the use of electronic media. For example, Bethany (13 years old) described how friends can "*block your number so you can't contact them".* While the following quotes from Heidi and Harriet demonstrated how social media may produce feelings of being left out and excluded from events:

> *"Like you can see like your friends doing something on social media and then you're like 'oh I wasn't even asked' or something."* (Heidi, 15 years old)

> *"Say if a group of friends go out and don't invite one person - one of their friends – before, like they'd all, if they didn't want the person to know, they'd all just keep quiet about it and that person would never know, but because of social media they all put stuff on their Snapchat stories and then that person sees and that person gets upset and then they exclude that person and…"* (Harriet, 15 years old)

A few young people felt that bullying facilitated through phones and social media may have particularly harmful consequences. It was frequently mentioned that the use of social media could leave the perpetrator anonymous. Jess (14 years old) said that the use of social media means "*you won't know who it is*", Bethany (13 years) spoke about "*anonymous accounts*" and Harriet (15 years old) thought bullies "*hide behind it* [social media]". Kelly noted that the anonymity of social media may make it particularly distressing:

> *"So it's kind of like you can bully them but they don't know who it is so they can't do anything about it. So they are kind of like powerless, they don't…there's no way to know like…"* (Kelly, 18 years old)

Bethany and Joe raised the issue that social media posts have the potential to be permanent and long-lasting, suggesting that bullying conducted through social media may have long-term implications:

> *"Some people use social media to spread rumours and the personal information that doesn't…no one wants on the internet…but once they put it on social, erm, social media, it won't come…it will <u>never</u> come back down again, and I don't think they realise the impact of what is going to affect their lives in their late life."* (Joe, 17 years old)

> *"…if it's a* [verbal] *rumour or something it might not actually reach them* [the victim]. *Whereas if someone sees something on Instagram they could say 'oh this has been posted about you' and then they go and look and it's there."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

Joe and Kirsty described how each of their schools had prohibited the use of phones. Both Joe (17 years old) and Kirsty (14 years old) spoke positively about this rule; Joe believed it *"helped the problem* [of rumour spreading]*"* and Kirsty felt it prevented students from "*taking photos and horrible things like that*". However, in Kirsty's account she referred to the positive impact "*during school time*", indirectly highlighting that school regulations cannot influence all social media use. Furthermore, as Kelly and Heidi recognise, there may be considerable overlap between relational bullying behaviours which occur face-to-face and those which occur online:

> *"…you say something to someone and then it all goes on there* [social media]*, so I suppose, and then that goes into school. Everything from social media then comes into school…"* (Kelly, 18 years old)
>
> *"And then it has just like escalated because it comes like into school, and it's just like, it's been told on there* [social media] *so it's like, like on group chats or whatever…it's like spread…"* (Heidi, 15 years old)

In summary, young people spoke consistently about how far rumours may spread. Social media and the use of phones was thought to increase the potential reach of rumours as it allowed information to be openly accessible and shared quickly with young people from across the school environment. Electronic media was also thought to facilitate feelings of exclusion as social media posts could be used to remind young people that they have been left out of group activities. Two young people described how schools have restricted the use of mobile phones among students, but young people's own accounts acknowledged that interactions and events which occur online often continued offline in the school environment as well.

6.2.5 "*There is always something going around*": Normalisation of relational bullying

The harmful effects of relational bullying were identified in the quantitative analysis (see Chapter 5) and supported by the accounts of young people (see Section 6.2.3), however the discussion around relational bullying also suggested that these behaviours are often normalised. This theme illustrates how young people themselves and the wider school environment can normalise relational bullying behaviours.

Relational bullying behaviours were viewed as a common occurrence among young people, with four participants referring to their own experience of being subjected to these types of behaviour and a further five denoting that they had witnessed it. The language young people adopted when describing the frequency of relational bullying was rather casual, in stark contrast to their perception of these behaviours being harmful and damaging (see Section 6.2.3). Harriet (15 years old) reported she had seen relational bullying behaviours *"sooo many times"*, Joe (17 years old) claimed "*but yeah it happens all the time"* and Jess (14 years old) described how "*loads of things are said about other people all the time at school".* The majority of respondents indicated that they had observed relational bullying behaviours whilst at school and the language young people adopted reflected how these behaviours were deemed frequent, and thus normalised, within their lives. The two youngest participants, Molly and Dylan (both 12 years old), were the exception to this. Molly explicitly said she had "*never seen them* [relational bullying behaviours] *happen"* and suggested this was because

she was new to the school, while Dylan believed relational bullying behaviours were *"not done a lot".*

Furthermore, young people often described relational bullying behaviours using informal language. For example, Joe (17 years old) used the phrase "*all the beef*" when describing these types of behaviour. Joe explained what this phrase meant:

> *"Erm, its where you, sort of like the…I don't know what the technical slang definition for it is but it's where they spread rumours about people that don't…it's not true at all but they only do it to make gossip up…"* (Joe, 17 years old)

Jess (14 years old) and Heidi (15 years old) used the word "*drama*" when talking about relational bullying behaviours. Both Jess and Heidi expanded on this idea of drama, and their quotes suggest relational bullying behaviours are typical, frequent and to some extent expected among young people:

> *"Well there needs to be, something is going to happen because it is teenagers, it's just, erm, but I don't know how to explain it really."* (Heidi, 15 years old)

> *"Like you know there is something going around, there is always something going around."* (Jess, 14 years old)

Throughout the interview many young people acknowledged that different types of bullying behaviours were perceived differently within the school environment. In particular young people seemed to describe a wider acceptance and tolerance of relational bullying behaviours compared to other forms of bullying. For example, Harriet felt that relational bullying behaviours were not acknowledged as bullying at her school:

> *"Just like, little maybe little comments or like, erm say if you've fallen out with like a friend or something and they sort of get people on their side and sort of make it obvious even if they are not going up to you and saying stuff like make it obvious that they are against you and things like that. Erm we were always taught that wasn't bullying." (Harriet, 15 years)*

Kelly attended the same school as Harriet, and she felt that teaching staff may not respond to relational bullying behaviours for a number of reasons, including a perception that these types of bullying behaviour are not particularly serious:

> *"But I feel like the teachers sometimes they'd ignore it a lot of the time just because it's, they think 'oh it's not a big deal' maybe 'it's not that bad' <u>or</u> they just don't really understand what is actually happening."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

Young people did not always explicitly refer to relational bullying but described a focus on physical bullying behaviours, which inadvertently minimised relational bullying behaviours.

For example Tiffany (15 years old) described how she approached her head teacher with concerns about bullying and she reported feeling that the school would intervene only if the bullying took on a physical form:

Tiffany: *"I went to the head teacher but he said 'just tell me when it gets worse'...".*
KC: *"What do you think he means by worse?"*
Tiffany: *"That's what I said to him. I explained to him like they were waiting for her outside so I don't know what would have happened if like me and my friends didn't stay but he just said…"*
KC: *"Yeah. How much worse do you think it would have to get?"*
Tiffany: *"For them to actually get in a fight."*

Kirsty attended the same school as Tiffany and reinforced the idea that the school were most likely to intervene in cases of physical bullying:

"[If] *it's <u>really</u> bad bullying like physical and all that sort of stuff then it's more likely to go to the head teacher and stuff and probably all the punishments are a lot worse.*" (Kirsty, 14 years old)

"…they don't really notice the not so extreme types of bullying whereas they're more likely to notice the more extreme types." (Kirsty, 14 years old)

The below quote from Jess (14 years old) suggests that it may be the frequency of bullying behaviours which result in them becoming normalised within the school environment , and this in turn influences the way in which some teachers may respond to bullying:

Jess: *"…some teachers say that, erm, like if this* [bullying] *would happen like you need to write a statement whereas others would be like it's not…important enough. Or it hasn't happened enough for it to become a big issue."*
KC: *"So not important enough, what would you mean by that? Is it how many times? Or…"*
Jess: *"Or how, and like what is actually done or said."*
KC: *"Okay, so when wouldn't they ask you to* [write a statement]*…"*
Jess: *"Er, well, cause everyone sort of says like stuff about everyone at the school."*
KC: *"Okay."*
Jess: *"And like 'slag' gets, like, said so much round the school that they've probably heard it so many times that...then they are like oh it's not a big deal and yeah."*

Interestingly the accounts from the two youngest participants, Molly and Dylan (both 12 years old), suggested that they had an individual emphasis on physical bullying. The focus of physical behaviours was similar to the way in which many other young people had portrayed the atmosphere in the school environment. They both explicitly stated that physical bullying behaviours were the most harmful form of bullying, with Dylan (12 years old) clarifying that

"*if you're punching someone and kicking them you can end up with a broken bone or something like that*". As mentioned previously, unlike the other young people, Molly and Dylan did not perceive relational bullying behaviours to be particularly frequent.

In summary, relational bullying behaviours appear to be very common in school. The vast majority of young people confirmed they had seen them take place, with a number of young people indicating they had personally experienced these types of behaviour. Young people often used casual language which subtly normalised and trivialised these forms of bullying behaviour; the descriptions young people gave suggested that relational bullying behaviours were often accepted as part of day to day life. Furthermore, young people described feeling that relational bullying behaviours received less attention than other forms of bullying, in particular that which had a physical component to it, within the school.

6.2.6 "*Brush it off*": Personal resources to navigate relational bullying

The majority of young people recognised that bullying was experienced and navigated in different ways. For example, Tiffany (15 years old) and Jess (14 years old) described that certain people appeared to be able to "*brush it off*". This theme will illustrate the personal resources that young people identified as having the potential to help them navigate relational bullying.

During the interviews, young people alluded that having a positive sense of self was beneficial when navigating bullying, although this was articulated in different ways. During their accounts both Harriet and Jess spoke about the importance of knowing "*who you are*", describing how people with a strong sense of self are less likely to have an emotional response to negative comments:

> *"Yeah, and I feel like, erm, if you're more of a mature person and more like comfortable and confident with who <u>you are</u> then what other people say won't bother you as much."* (Harriet, 15 years old)

> *"And erm, yeah some people can just, like it doesn't matter what people think of them, like they know 'who they are'…"* (Jess, 14 years old)

Kirsty (14 years old) suggested that moving schools may help young people dealing with bullying. Following further probing Kirsty explained that moving school may prove to be an effective solution "*because it's a new environment and no one knows you so you can be who you want to be, you can be yourself again*". Kirsty's quote further supports the idea that a strong sense of self was important for young people to cope with bullying.

Bethany and Tiffany did not explicitly refer to the analogy of knowing "*who you are*" when describing factors which may help young people deal with bullying, however the accounts they provided described the role of confidence. Bethany explicitly used the word "*confident*", while Tiffany described a situation when a victim was confident enough to be unaffected by people's opinions:

> *"I suppose you can make yourself a bit more known to other people, so be a bit more confident when you're talking to other people and then get yourself known as that type of person."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

> *"Some people can brush it off because they're like 'well it's not true, if they choose to believe that then that's their fault'…"* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

The majority of young people described the harmful effects relational bullying can have on a young person's emotional wellbeing and mental health (see Section 6.2.3). However, it was also acknowledged that positive wellbeing was important for young people to be able to cope with bullying effectively. It was thought that young people who had poor emotional wellbeing and mental health were less likely to be able to successfully navigate relational bullying:

> *"I mean I always think some people are more prone to having like troubles with mental health than others, so for one person, like even like the…I don't know what word to use…the…I don't know…like for one person like, being like harassed occasionally at school like that could literally like tear them apart and then for another person it wouldn't do anything."* (Harriet, 15 years old)

> *"I feel it's just on like your mental wellbeing maybe or something. Maybe if you've had bad past experiences or something you can be quite weak or something."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

The accounts from young people demonstrate that a person's wellbeing was seen as influential in how they coped with bullying. Joe used a metaphor of being on the edge of a cliff to portray the balancing act between a person's wellbeing and their coping abilities, acknowledging that wellbeing is not static:

> *"I think it's on that, erm, edge of a cliff and they're like, if they are going to fall they are going to come crashing down and they're going to fall and everything is going to be effected by it but I think if they stay on the top of the hill and then they actually rise above everyone which is a better and more positive way of looking at it."* (Joe, 17 years old)

During the interviews young people identified a number of strategies which would help them to successfully navigate bullying, demonstrating that their own resourcefulness was a useful tool for helping them to cope with the experience of bullying. Young people spoke about how they would avoid putting themselves in situations which would upset them or expose them to the bullying. Tiffany (15 years old) suggested that *"at lunch you try and find something you've*

got to do" in order to avoid "*sitting by themselves*". Young people also spoke about spending time in different spaces including the "*library*" (Claire, 16 years old) or a specific classroom (Jess, 14 years old).

Not only did young people talk about avoiding physical spaces as a method for navigating bullying, but they also spoke about reducing their time in the virtual world. Both Jess (14 years old) and Tiffany (15 years old) voluntarily suggested that avoiding or limiting mobile phone use was a positive method for dealing with relational bullying as engaging with the content on social media would cause them more emotional distress:

> *"If you are not on your phone it is kind of putting your mind at ease because you're not knowing what people are saying, and like if you don't look at it you won't know what's being said. Which obviously like people say 'oh they're saying it behind your back', but then some stuff I would rather not know it is being said than to know it because then it just makes me feel so much worse."* (Jess, 14 years old)

> *"Because people say it's like better to know, but if you think about it, it's not because then you <u>don't</u> actually know what they've been saying. It's different with rumours because like you'll hear it around from your friends but if they're saying something on social media and <u>you</u> don't know what it's been saying and they're talking about it when you're not there…then it's...you <u>don't</u> actually know what's been saying so it could be good or bad but…it's better not to know."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

Another strategy young people described as helping them to cope with relational bullying was to engage in activities which focused their attention away from the experience of bullying. A number of activities were suggested including listening to music and taking part in art and sport:

> *"I think music is sort of a good way to escape. I don't know if escape is the right word, just to kind of shut yourself out from like all the problems and that because you can just focus on that. And especially if like a song, like the lyrics fit with the mood. And, it just suits your mood so well like you kind of get, you forget about it even though like the song talks about it."* (Jess, 14 years old)

> *"If you're like involved in like a sport or something you could do that. Erm, I like drawing and art and stuff so I would do that, or read. Just like things that distract your mind from like over thinking about it."* (Claire, 16 years old)

> *"I guess for some people like they don't have that escape at home. Erm, maybe it's like activities out of school, maybe it is their family, maybe it's just something as simple as going for a walk. I don't know. I think, I think everyone does have a bit of an escape through something."* (Harriet, 15 years old)

The quantitative findings (see Section 5.8) identified that victims of relational bullying who spent more time engaging in activities with their family reported higher level of perceived wellbeing compared to those who did not take part in family activities. While the family unit

may be an external resource (discussed in Section 6.2.7), this theme suggests the engagement in family activities could be a route for helping young people distance themselves from bullying. Re-focusing attention away from the experience of bullying was perceived as a positive thing, with Jess (14 years old) describing that it "*takes your mind off it* [the bullying]*"*. However, while Claire (16 years old) believed that it helps you *"get away from it* [the bullying]" she acknowledged that these activities are not a method of ignoring the bullying and suggested victims should "*still recognise it is happening and try and get help".*

Overall, bullying behaviours were experienced differently by different people. During the interviews young people highlighted personal resources which they felt may help young people to positively navigate relational bullying. Having self-confidence and knowing "*who you are*" was thought to help overcome and withstand bullying behaviours, while a person's emotional wellbeing and mental health was also seen as key to their coping abilities. Furthermore, a number of young people described strategies and actions which they could do personally that would help lessen the harm caused by bullying, suggesting their own resourcefulness and insight can be a helpful resource for navigating relational bullying.

6.2.7 "*Like your friends, family, like teachers*": External resources to navigate relational bullying

While young people acknowledged a number of personal resources which may help them to cope with the experience of relational bullying (see Section 6.2.6), the interviews also identified external resources which young people perceived as playing a role in helping them to navigate relational bullying. This theme will detail the external factors young people identified.

All of the young people referred to the family in some manner as an external source of support for helping young people deal with bullying. The quantitative analysis (see Section 5.8) established a link between perceived family support and higher levels of self-reported wellbeing among victims of relational bullying. Many young people discussed the value of family support in helping young people who were being bullied, supporting the quantitative findings in part:

> "*If my mum knows about the situation then I think she, like she is already obviously nice, but like she'll be…more supportive*." (Jess, 14 years old)

> *"I guess they can reassure you and sort of help you, I guess. I don't know. It is nice to eventually tell your parents and they can help you deal with that as well, because then you don't have to keep it all inside, you can let all out which is quite nice."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

> "*I think it's like the support of the people that are around you so like the family. Family is like the most important one because they do understand who you are and do understand what possibly could have happened."* (Joe, 17 years old)

However, while Jess and Kirsty acknowledged that parents can play a supportive role, the language they used suggested that parents may not always be informed about bullying. For example, Jess stated "*if my mum knows…"* and Kirsty said "*it is nice to eventually tell your parents…*", in a similar vein Joe referenced *"if the family have been told…*". The accounts from young people suggested that victims may be reluctant, or find it difficult, to tell their parents about bullying.

Some young people also acknowledged the more practical role parents could play in supporting young people through bullying. This often focused on parents contacting teachers to report the bullying and working with the school to help support the person being bullied. Claire felt that if parents engaged with the school on matters to do with bullying it added more weight to the student's statement and may strengthen the schools response to the bullying incident:

> *"…they could like come into the school and like tell you, like tell the teachers and try and get help because I think if a student's just like saying it they, I think they'd take it more seriously if the parents got involved because then they know that like you're, it's like a complaint that you're making like at home and something you're still getting upset about at home, so if they came in they might take it a bit more seriously."* (Claire, 16 years old)

However, Bethany did not perceive parental involvement as a helpful response. She suggested that parental involvement at school was an ineffective solution because the response from school would be inadequate, thus rendering parental involvement an ineffective tool:

> *"I don't really think there is anything that your mum and dad can do because the…cause I suppose ringing the school that…it doesn't necessarily <u>fix</u> the problem. It just…they usually just give an assembly on it and then that's it."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

It was also acknowledged that parents may intervene and try to resolve the bullying in other ways. For example, Dylan (12 years old) described how parents may "*speak to their* [the bully's] *mum and dad"* while Jess's (14 years old) mum *"phoned the police*" in response to physical threats that Jess had received.

While parents were seen as a key source for support, the wider family was also referenced by a few of the young people. Both Bethany (13 years old) and Kirsty (14 years old) mentioned the role of "*brothers and sisters*", while Jess (14 years old) and Tiffany (15 years old) referred

to their "*cousins*". Siblings and cousins who attended the same school as the victim were thought to be a particularly useful source of support. For example, Bethany spoke broadly about the role siblings may play in preventing the spreading of rumours, while Tiffany drew on her personal experience and actions she took to support her own sister who was experiencing bullying:

> *"I definitely think that brothers and sisters can help especially if they are in the same school they can help stop spread it, stop it spreading from other years."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

> *"Well, because my sister she was being picked on over and over and over again. She went to her year manager and they said they would speak to them, they spoke to them and they didn't stop so I went to the head teacher instead."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

All the young people spoke about the school environment and staff in relation to bullying. A number of students were critical about the way in which their own school responded to instances of bullying. However, there was an overall sense that the school environment, and in particular the school staff, could play a role in helping young people cope with bullying. For example, Kelly was critical about whether teachers responded appropriately to all bullying incidents, while Molly suggested there were inconsistencies in how different members of staff responded to bullying at her school:

> *"I feel like teachers can ignore it sometimes. I don't know why. They shouldn't obviously but I feel like sometimes they either don't want to get involved with it or, like I said before, they don't see it for what it actually is."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

> *"Yeah…erm…some teachers like don't get it, like, sometimes they just don't deal with it the same as other teachers do and they don't like…"* (Molly, 12 years old)

Despite Kelly and Molly's negative accounts of the way in which their own school responded to bullying, they also acknowledged that there were members of staff at school who were in a position to help young people who were being bullied:

> *"Like teachers because they can potentially stop it more than anyone else can. Erm, like the welfare, like, people that deal with bullying and that, I suppose they are the people you would go for to get help about because…it's their job really."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

> *"Or you could probably just go to them* [the Welfare Team] *and just say 'look, like this has happened today, erm, I'm fed up of it and I just like want it over with and done'…and dealt with".* (Molly, 12 years old)

Young people often spoke about one teacher in particular. Jess (14 years old), Molly (12 years old) and Heidi (15 years old) each named a specific teacher that they would approach if they experienced bullying. Tiffany (15 years old) stated "*there's one teacher that I'm really, really*

close to, so if anything happens I'll talk to her" and Claire (16 years old) suggested that you could "*go to like a subject teacher that you like*" if you were experiencing relational bullying. In the quote below Heidi reflected back to her own experience at primary school, where she felt bullying was handled more positively than in her current secondary school due to student-teacher relationships being stronger, thus emphasising how important it was for young people to have one teacher they could talk to about bullying:

> *"…it's like from primary school you kind of knew what was happening, like not knew, but if you were getting bullied it would feel like the teachers would know a bit more and you kind of stayed with your one teacher."* (Heidi, 15 years old)

Section 6.2.2 focused on the role friends may play in relational bullying, however young people also consistently described how friends could function as a positive resource when navigating relational bullying. Jess and Kirsty (both 14 years old) used the phrase "*got my back*" when describing the role of friends in bullying. Jess expanded on this phrase, emphasising the way in which friends can defend the victim of bullying:

> *"Just to like defend them and if like someone says something they'll kind of just stick up for them and help them if the situation gets bad."* (Jess, 14 years old)

The descriptions young people provided suggested that friends may not just offer support to those experiencing bullying but can also take on quite an active role in preventing bullying. Dylan (12 years old) flatly stated that friends can "*stop the bullying*" because they "*stand up to it*". In the below accounts Kelly and Bethany explain how friends can help prevent the spreading of rumours, while Kirsty described an incident when she helped a friend who was being bullied by seeking help from a teacher:

> *"The friends that you do have, that that, when they, they like stand up for you and like tell people 'well that's not true', like I think that helps."* (Kelly, 18 years old)

> *"Tell people why it's not true and give them examples of how it's not true and not spread it myself and tell others not to spread it. So it just kind of stops the flow."* (Bethany, 13 years old)

> *"And we've had, erm, some of my friends they have like told us and we're like 'oh this is bad, you shouldn't have kept that' so then we told the year managers so they eventually sorted it out because they were too afraid that the person was then going to do something to them."* (Kirsty, 14 years old)

Tiffany states that to feel supported a victim may need only "*one*" friend, while Bethany talks about having "*a*" singular friend. The below quotes link with the accounts young people provided regarding their teachers, suggesting that external sources of support may come in the form of single individuals:

> *"Well if you had like that one friend you could talk to. Even if it was <u>one</u>, like, then you can talk to them about it and just be like 'well like at least you believe me' and just to know that someone doesn't believe all the bad things."* (Tiffany, 15 years old)

> *"And having a friend that wouldn't do that and being kind to you, erm, and they would help you out about it and stuff like that."* (Molly, 12 years old)

While there was wide recognition among young people that friendships were a really helpful source of support for those who were being bullied, some young people demonstrated awareness about the potential unpredictability of friends. Tiffany (15 years old) spoke about peers who are "*just friends with anyone they can be to make them seem popular*", while Kirsty (14 years old) felt a fellow student "*was pretending to be my friend like one day and then another day she was like really horrible*". The accounts of young people suggested that friendships can be a helpful source of support for those experiencing bullying, however, who that friend may be is likely to vary depending upon the situation. Claire (16 years old) seemed to acknowledge this when she suggested that a person who is being bullied may feel better *"talking to a friend…that's like not doing it* [the bullying]*".* Dylan (12 years old) also seemed to be aware that support from friends may vary and emphasised the importance of having a variety of friends from across social groups and schools:

KC:	*"And having other friends from outside of school, is that a good thing do you think?"*
Dylan:	*"Yeah…and other friends outside your group."*
KC:	*"Okay. And how would that help do you think?"*
Dylan:	*"When…if, like, you got excluded then you can go to them"*
KC:	*"Yeah, so it's having someone else to go to that is really good?"*
Dylan:	*"Yeah, like your back up."*

In summary, throughout the interviews young people identified external resources which were perceived as being able to help young people navigate relational bullying. The family, and in particular parents, were frequently recognised as playing a supportive and encouraging role. While young people were often critical of their own school's policies and processes for managing bullying, they acknowledged that there is scope for the school environment to act as a positive resource. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted that young people may seek support from only a single member of school staff. Friends were often described as taking on very active roles in helping to stop bullying in the school environment. Young people were aware of the unstable nature of friends but were consistent in describing them as a positive source of support, suggesting that the role of friendships is fairly constant but the individual friend within that role may change.

There is likely to be overlap between these external sources of support, most obviously between the family and school. Young people noted parents will often communicate with the school when their child is experiencing bullying and victims of bullying may attend the same school as their siblings. Joe suggested that it was through both the family and school working together that young people could successfully navigate bullying:

> *"…if the family has been told about what is going on they will work with them to develop, work with the family and school to develop the things that will help them in their life to not be bullied and the skills that they will need to rise above it."* (Joe, 17 years old)

Furthermore, Joe described how the family and school were able to help the victim develop personally; thus identifying links between the external sources of support discussed in this theme and the personal resources outlined in Section 6.2.6.

6.3 Summary of qualitative findings

The aim of the qualitative phase of this study was to gain insight into how young people perceived and experienced relational bullying, and to identify factors which young people perceived as playing a role in helping them to navigate relational bullying. Thematic analysis of data collected from eleven interviews with young people identified seven themes, capturing the perspective and experience of young people. Figure 6.1 presents a model for understanding relational bullying, which diagrammatically summarises the qualitative findings.

Figure 6.1 illustrates relational bullying using a multi-layered model. In the centre of the model, the green and red arrows depict the different factors which shape how relational bullying is navigated. Factors which promote successful navigation are depicted in the green arrows showing a forward direction, and encompass both the personal and external resources young people recognised as playing a positive role in how they responded to and dealt with relational bullying. For example, personal wellbeing and resourcefulness (see Section 6.2.6) and the family and teachers (see Section 6.2.7) are illustrated in the model. Factors which may hinder how young people navigate relational bullying are depicted by the red arrows in the reverse direction. They include the normalisation of this behaviour (see Section 6.2.5) and the way in which it is facilitated via social media (see Section 6.2.4). The outside layer of the model (in blue) illustrates the broader context in which young people must navigate and respond to relational bullying, including managing the complexities of defining what is (and is not)

bullying behaviours (see Section 6.2.1) and potentially experiencing the negative effects associated with relational bullying (see Section 6.2.3).

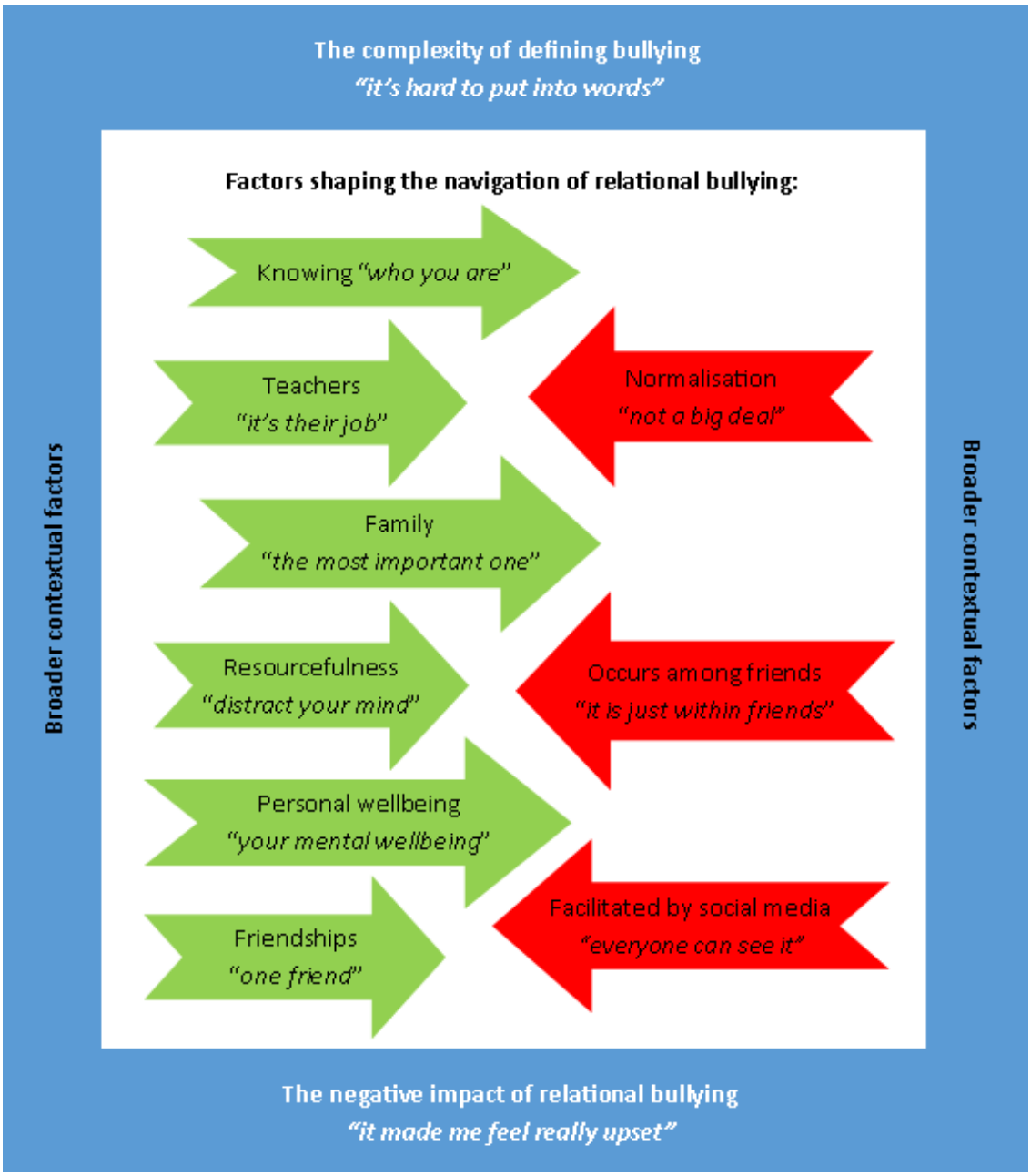


Figure 6.1 *Understanding relational bullying*

Chapter 7 will critically discuss both the quantitative and qualitative findings within the context of the existing body of literature.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This research sought to understand young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying using a mixed methods approach. This chapter will initially discuss methodological implications arising from this research. Key findings from this study will then be outlined, uniting both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research diagrammatically in the Young People's Relational Bullying model. The research findings and components of the model will be discussed in relation to existing literature and the establishment of emerging implications. Subsequently, the role of the social-ecological theory as a guiding theoretical framework in this study of relational bullying will be examined. Finally, the Young People's Relational Bullying model emerging from this research will be critiqued.

7.2 Methodological considerations

This doctoral research posed a number of methodological considerations. Initially this section will critically discuss the application of mixed methods in the study of relational bullying. Existing work has documented the challenges of measuring bullying behaviours quantitatively (Volk et al., 2017), and the current study contributes to this discussion. Finally, personal reflections on the qualitative research methodology are considered.

7.2.1 The use of mixed methods

Traditionally the practice of mixed methods has provoked much debate (Howe, 1988), however interest in mixed methods has grown substantially over the last few decades and it is now viewed as a distinct and separate methodology (Brannen, 2009). Mixed method approaches are advocated for a number of reasons (see Table 3.1 in Chapter 3), however it is commonly described as providing a more comprehensive picture of a phenomenon. Creswell et al. (2004) suggested mixed methods is necessary when quantitative or qualitative approaches alone cannot "capture the trends and details of the situation" (p. 7), while Yoshikawa et al. (2008) explained that mixed methods "represent the world more completely" (p. 4). Relational bullying is a complex phenomenon; the use of mixed methods in the present study allowed the examination of different yet related aspects of this behaviour in order to provide a complete picture.

The historic argument against mixed methods stems from the concern that quantitative and qualitative methods are underpinned by seemingly incompatible epistemological stances

(Allsop, 2013; Howe, 1988). The mixed method approach is not entirely removed from epistemology. Pragmatism has proved to be a widely accepted solution to this argument, and was the adopted stance within this study. Pragmatism acknowledges that knowledge can be both objective and subjective (Feilzer, 2010); it allows the research methods to be dictated by the research questions. (Feilzer, 2010; Heyvaert et al., 2013). Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of relational bullying produced knowledge which reflects the reality of young people in England. Furthermore, fundamental to pragmatism is the production of useful knowledge (Feilzer, 2010). Bullying is a world-wide, public health concern among young people; generating usable data was a priority in this study, and that benefited from the mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods.

This study utilised the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) as a theoretical framework to guide the quantitative and qualitative research. Mixed method approaches have been advocated for the study of reciprocal contextual relationships such as those illustrated in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) social-ecological model (Yoshikawa et al., 2008). The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) resonates with mixed methodology as it considers an individual's development as contextual, which inherently recognises multifaceted perspectives. As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) explain "both objective and subjective elements are posited as driving the course of human development; neither alone is presumed sufficient" (p.797).

In relation to bullying specifically, the vast majority of research has been wholly quantitative in nature (Powell, Mihalas, Onwuegbuzie, Suldo, & Daley, 2008). However, Hong and Espelage (2012a) noted the shortcomings of quantitative data, which led to a review of mixed methods research on school bullying. The review concluded that mixed methods has much to contribute to the study of bullying and is a particularly suitable approach for ensuring a comprehensive understanding of a behaviour which occurs in an ever changing social context (Hong & Espelage, 2012b). Considering that relational bullying is poorly understood and heavily situated in a young person's social context, mixed methods provided an ideal approach for examining this specific form of bullying - further contributing to the growing evidence base of mixed methods research in bullying.

Since the emergence of mixed methods, numerous designs have been proposed which outline ways in which quantitative and qualitative research can be combined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Giddings & Grant, 2006; Greene et al., 1989; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; D. Morgan, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Such designs are a useful

tool for guiding thinking around mixed methods approaches, however, the great magnitude and possibilities of mixed method designs was somewhat overwhelming. The aptly named article "How the novice researcher can make sense of mixed methods designs" concluded that the numerous designs have only increased ambiguity (Niglas, 2009). Furthermore, the designs do not offer an exhaustive list, and comparable designs are often described in varying ways by different researchers (Niglas, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). While this work was initially guided by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), the questions outlined in Section 3.3 proved to be a particularly useful tool for constructing and conceptualising mixed methods in this study. Fundamentally, there are no prescribed designs for mixed methods research (Brannen & Moss, 2012).

7.2.2 Reflections on measuring bullying

Establishing a quantitative measurement of bullying has been described as "the Achilles' heel of bullying research" (Volk et al., 2017, p. 36). The measures of bullying analysed in this study were collected via a well-recognised approach - a large-scale survey with anonymous self-report questions (Smith et al., 2016; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). Self-report data is widely used within bullying research. It is thought to reflect young people's own experiences of bullying and the anonymity of self-report data fosters a safe environment in which young people may be more likely to report bullying incidents (Casper, Meter, & Card, 2016). The 2014 HBSC England survey contained a number of questions addressing bullying which formed a related section within the questionnaire – comprising a definition of bullying, a global measure of bullying and a behavioural checklist relating to specific forms of bullying (see Section 4.2.1 for further details). The suite of questions expressed the features of intent, repetition and a power imbalance which are deemed necessary to capture reliable and valid measurements of bullying (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014).

It has been widely noted that the prevalence obtained through bullying measures varies greatly across studies and countries, hindering comparisons (Modecki et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Moore et al. (2017) noted prevalence rates spanning a range of 10-35% were likely due to variations in how bullying was measured. Comparison of the different bullying measures within the 2014 HBSC England study contributed to this discussion. Section 5.3 illustrates the prevalence of bullying as measured by different questions in the questionnaire, noting diverging prevalence rates. For example, the global measure of bullying which was thought to encompass physical, verbal and relational bullying behaviours captured a prevalence rate lower than that of the single question addressing verbal bullying specifically.

The variation in prevalence rates achieved across the measures in the 2014 HBSC England questionnaire is not unsurprising. Solberg and Olweus (2003) noted a correlation of 0.79 between the global measure of bullying and the behavioural checklist in the ROBVQ (which was utilised in the HBSC England study). The global measure of bullying was preluded with a definition of bullying, and the word 'bullied' featured in both the question and the response options. It has been established that measures which contain the word 'bully' report significantly lower levels of bullying behaviour than those which do not reference the word (Kert et al., 2010). The behavioural checklist for specific bullying behaviours formed part of the same suite of questions however they were not placed directly after the definition of bullying and make fewer references to the word, which may in part explain the higher rates of reported bullying victimisation.

In the frame of this study, comparisons with other measures of bullying were made to illustrate the broader context and to situate relational bullying within other forms of bullying. The data recognised that relational bullying is a particularly common form of bullying, often co-occurring with other forms of bullying behaviour. However, it has been acknowledged that the measure of relational bullying comprised of three items whereas other measures in the 2014 HBSC England survey collected data via single questions, and as such may hinder direct comparisons.

The use of single item measures within bullying has been advocated (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). However, relational bullying comprises of a number of types of bullying behaviours (for example, it may involve social exclusion, the spreading of rumours and embarrassing information). Furthermore, young people have been shown to focus on physical and verbal behaviours when conceptualising bullying (Maunder et al., 2010), and therefore a single item measure including the word bullying may not have effectively captured relational bullying behaviours. Consequently, the behavioural checklist included in the 2014 HBSC England study and was an appropriate source in order to measure the multifaceted nature of relational bullying. The three items were combined to create an overall composite score categorising young people's experience of relational bullying into weekly victimisation, monthly victimisation and no victimisation (see Section 4.2.1).

Bullying measures are scored in numerous ways across the literature, which further impedes comparisons across studies. Measures are often summed to create a total score and treated as continuous, with higher scores indicative of higher levels of bullying (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). However such approaches can be critiqued for assuming the data is interval rather than

categorical, and the meaning of the score is fairly abstract (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). The present research aligns more closely with the studies that Vivolo-Kanter et al. (2014) identified in which categories were created based on a specific cut-off point. A composite score can be perceived as offering a simple and unambiguous way of interpreting data, however Solberg and Olweus (2003) were wary of the number of ways in which composite scores can be created and reasoned that approaches must be replicable by other researchers. This research has provided a clear and comprehensive account of how relational bullying was assessed in the 2014 HBSC England survey and the subsequent development of the relational bullying composite measure, allowing for the approach to be replicated in future studies.

7.2.3 Reflections on the qualitative data collection

While both phases of this doctoral study offered developmental opportunities, as a relatively novice qualitative researcher, the qualitative element of the study posed a more personal challenge. My previous research experience had primarily involved quantitative methodology, where the researcher can be fairly removed from the data collection process and the analytic approach often follows a set of objective procedures. The qualitative phase of the study highlighted the key role the researcher plays in gathering and analysing qualitative data.

I became acutely aware that I played a major part in the generation of the interview data, particularly compared to past experiences of administering quantitative surveys. Following guidance within the literature, I worked hard to build rapport with the young people and I feel that this paid dividends in terms of the richness of the data collection. However, throughout this process I also came to realise the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. Personal reflective notes, to aid my thinking, became a feature of my qualitative research; notes were made immediately after the interview, during the transcription process and throughout the analysis. As data collection, transcription and analysis occurred simultaneously I was able to reflect on why certain interview techniques were successful and able to respond accordingly in future interviews. In this way, the process of reflecting was integral to the development of my interview skills throughout the qualitative research phase, contributing to my development as a qualitative researcher.

Recruitment of participants is a problematic feature of most research projects; however, I was particularly concerned about the recruitment process in relation to the qualitative component considering the nature of the topic. School 1's involvement in the research arose after a senior

member of the school staff contacted me following an article I authored in Schools Week[16]. The member of staff was keen to find out more about my research and during our conversations they mentioned a recent Ofsted inspection which did not go as well as they had hoped. I was apprehensive about School 1's motivations for engaging with this research, and had to clearly communicate that participation in my doctoral research did not mean that there would be any immediate benefits in terms of their anti-bullying approach and that the findings specific to individuals would not be shared with the school. Further, I did not specifically seek to recruit young people who had experienced bullying. Fortunately, the member of staff was the school's anti-bullying lead with an interest in this area and was keen to facilitate research on the topic of bullying. The boundaries of my research were readily accepted - I ensured that the school did not have influence over who participated in the interview and the interviews were conducted in private.

7.3 Overview of findings

This study employed a sequential mixed methods design: a dominant quantitative research phase followed by a qualitative research phase. Findings from each component will be summarised separately, before uniting the two research components in the Young People's Relational Bullying model.

7.3.1 Quantitative findings

The quantitative analysis identified a prevalence rate for relational bullying: 16.6% of young people were classified as experiencing relational bullying in the couple of months prior to the survey. Demographic factors were examined, and gender and SES were significantly related to experiencing relational bullying; however effect sizes suggest the role of demographics to be negligible.

A series of three multilevel regression models examined the association between experiencing relational bullying and health outcomes (HRQL, general self-rated health and life satisfaction). Relational bullying was associated with poorer outcomes across all three measures of health. Of particular note, demographic variables did not interact with relational bullying; the association between relational bullying and poorer health and wellbeing was consistent across boys and girls. Furthermore, the findings indicate that relational bullying may be more detrimental than physical or verbal forms of bullying. When modelling HRQL (as measured by

[16] https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-need-to-wake-up-to-relational-bullying/

KIDSCREEN-10) the estimated decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score associated with relational bullying was over double that of verbal bullying, while there was insufficient evidence to establish a significant relationship between physical bullying and HRQL.

A fourth multilevel regression model identified factors which were associated with high life satisfaction among those experiencing weekly relational bullying. Four variables were retained in the model:

- Body image
- General self-efficacy
- Family activities
- Family support

Positive attributes in each of the above areas significantly increased the chances of reporting high life satisfaction despite experiencing weekly relational bullying. The effect of demographic variables was non-significant, indicating that the four variables may play a role in promoting high life satisfaction among both girls and boys of different ages.

Unanticipated findings

Whilst modelling the association between relational bullying and a range of health outcomes, the quantitative data highlighted a significant association between all three health measures (HRQL, general self-rated health and life satisfaction) and gender and age. All three models included a significant interaction between gender and age. This suggested that positive health and wellbeing decreased with age among both boys and girls, however this decrease was most pronounced among girls. For example, when modelling HRQL (measured by KIDSCREEN-10) the estimated decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score for a 15 year old girl (compared with an 11 year old) is nearly double that of a 15 year old boy. Reporting on the association between demographic factors and health was not a focus nor anticipated outcome within the current study; demographic variables were retained in the regression models in order to control for any confounding effect they may have. However, the significant influence of gender and age was consistent across all three models, and as such can be considered a noteworthy finding.

7.3.2 Qualitative findings

The qualitative data provided insight into how young people themselves experienced and perceived relational bullying behaviours, including describing the negative effects associated with this behaviour. Furthermore, the thematic analysis suggested young people were making complex decisions and drawing on multiple sources of information when defining bullying

behaviours. The interviews allowed the young people to identify factors which they perceived as supporting them through the experience of relational bullying including internal (i.e. personal wellbeing) and external (i.e. the family) resources. Young people also referred to factors which may hinder and be detrimental to how they navigated relational bullying including the normalisation of these types of behaviour.

7.3.3 Uniting findings: The Young People's Relational Bullying model

The quantitative and qualitative research components were undertaken to provide a comprehensive picture of this form of bullying. Figure 3.3 (Chapter 3) depicts the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative research phases and the related contribution to the research objectives. The two research phases played an interconnected and complementary role.

In light of this, the quantitative and qualitative findings have been united in Figure 7.1 titled the Young People's Relational Bullying model. Figure 7.1 is a further development of the model (Figure 6.1) depicted in Section 6.3 which focused solely on the qualitative findings. The revised model (Figure 7.1) embraces the quantitative findings also and is presented as the first model relating to relational bullying that has been solely derived from the perspectives of young people themselves.

Figure 7.1 provides a multi-layered framework for understanding relational bullying. At the centre of the model are factors which shape how relational bullying is navigated. Factors which promote successful navigation are depicted in the green arrows showing a forward direction, while factors which may hinder how young people navigate relational bullying are depicted by the red arrows showing a backward direction. Arrows with a bold outline describe factors which both the qualitative and quantitative findings resonate with. For example, family support was identified as a significant factor in the quantitative analysis and was also referenced by the majority of young people during the qualitative interviews.

The second layer of the diagram (in light blue) depicts further development of the model (Figure 6.1). This level considers young people's experiences of relational bullying, with a particular focus on the negative impacts associated with relational bullying. Relational bullying was significantly associated with poorer health and wellbeing in the quantitative analyses, and young people's personal interview accounts corroborated these findings by referencing the detrimental effects on emotional wellbeing, mental health and social outcomes. Considering

the wealth of evidence demonstrating these negative effects it was imperative that the model navigated how young people experience relational bullying.

Finally, the outermost layer of the model illustrates the broader context of relational bullying. This layer draws on findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data; from a quantitative perspective, there is reference in the model to the prevalence rate and demographic picture in which relational bullying is situated. This layer also refers to the complexities of defining bullying which emerged from the qualitative data; the way in which young people understand and conceptualise bullying more broadly provides the context for understanding relational bullying.

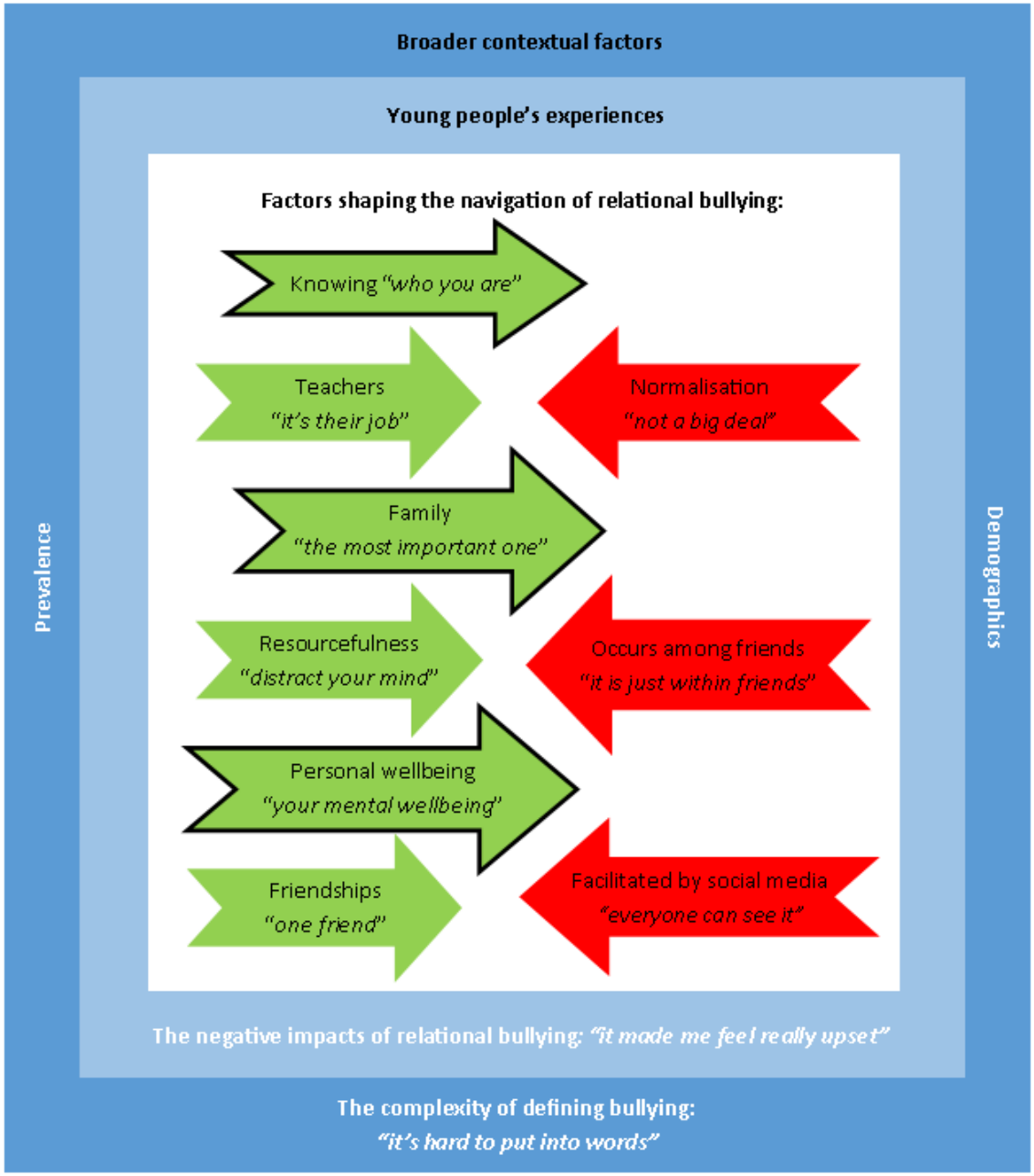


Figure 7.1 *The Young People's Relational Bullying model*

The following sections will discuss the relational bullying model depicted in Figure 7.1 in further detail, expanding on individual components of the model within the context of existing literature. The discussion is not presented in a purely linear approach due to the interconnected nature of the components:

- 'The complexity of defining bullying' is discussed in Section 7.4.
- 'Prevalence' and 'Demographics' are combined in Section 7.5.
- 'The negative impact of relational bullying' and 'Normalisation' are presented simultaneously in Section 7.6 as they offer insightful conflicting perceptions of relational bullying.
- 'Facilitated by social media' is discussed in Section 7.7.
- 'Knowing who you are', 'Teachers', 'Family', 'Resourcefulness', 'Personal wellbeing', 'Friendships' and 'Occurs among friends' are combined in Section 7.8 under the heading 'Navigating relational bullying', and are discussed in the frame of the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979).

7.4 The complexity of defining bullying

The qualitative data highlighted how young people's definitions of bullying were complex and nuanced. While this aspect was not specific to relational bullying, it emerged as a pivotal and recurrent theme during the interviews. In essence, understanding how young people experienced and perceived relational bullying was underpinned by young people's broader conceptualisation of bullying behaviours. Consequently, this featured as a contextual factor within the model illustrated in Figure 7.1. Bullying is frequently defined as: 1) intentional harmful behaviours, 2) carried out repeatedly over time, 3) within a relationship characterised by a power imbalance. These three defining features of bullying behaviours are widely used in academia (Arseneault, 2018), and have been employed nationally (Department for Education, 2017) and internationally (UNESCO, 2017, 2019). However, these three criteria did not always translate into young people's own experiences. Furthermore, young people's understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviours extended beyond the adult-led definition commonly proposed within research and school environments.

Young people consistently described the intentional and harmful nature of bullying behaviours, corroborating existing work (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012). However, the traits of repetition and a power imbalance were less clearly articulated. Repetition is arguably the most

ambiguous characteristic in the definition of bullying, with no set criteria for how repetition is quantified and measured. Naylor et al. (2006) found only 9% of young people alluded to repetition when defining bullying. While the young people in this study tended to refer to repetition initially, they struggled to articulate the parameters of this defining feature. In line with a mixed methods study in Sweden (Hellström et al., 2015), in this research, young people's interpretation of the repetition criteria was influenced by other factors including how harmful the experience was perceived to be. Recent definitions proposed by a number of organisations are further testimony to the complexity of defining bullying through repetition. The Northern Ireland Anti-bullying Forum[17] state that bullying is usually repeated, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention claim bullying is highly likely to be repeated (Gladden et al., 2014); both taking a more tentative approach to the criteria of repetition. Moreover, the Scottish anti-bullying organisation respect*me*[18] has adopted a critical stance, stressing the subjective notion of measuring repetition and insisting that a single incident can be detrimental to a young person's wellbeing.

Previous work has found that young people are less likely to consider relational bullying behaviours when defining bullying (Boulton et al., 2002; Maunder et al., 2010; Naylor et al., 2006; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). However, in this research most young people who were interviewed recognised relational bullying behaviours (as depicted in the descriptive statements, see Figure 3.5) as a form of bullying. The variation in findings may be attributed in part to the inclusion of the semi-structured qualitative interviews which allowed young people to reflect on what bullying meant to them. Comparatively, studies with diverging findings (from a UK perspective) often employed a survey-methodology (Boulton et al., 2002; Maunder et al., 2010). The present findings may also be a reflection of the predominantly female interviewees, as research has found girls are more likely than boys to refer to relational behaviours when defining bullying (Hellström, Persson, & Hagquist, 2015; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006).

Furthermore, young people's understanding of bullying was not bound by the three characteristics of the adult-led definition of bullying. Their understanding of what is (and what is not) bullying drew on additional sources of information from within their social context including, for example, knowledge of friendship groups and previous conflict among individuals. A large study of over 2000 young people in Spain found that the same bullying

[17] http://www.endbullying.org.uk/what-is-bullying/
[18] http://respectme.org.uk/page-3/page-4/

behaviours could be considered both intentionally hurtful (therefore classified as bullying) and also a typical form of social interaction among young people (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012) - for example, 'not letting others participate in class' was classified in both categories. Cuadrado-Gordillo (2012) noted that an individual's involvement in bullying influenced how bullying behaviours were classified, however it more broadly supports the situational element of conceptualising bullying behaviours.

Previous work has demonstrated that young people and adults conceptualise bullying differently. For example, adults are more likely to refer to the repetitive nature of the behaviour and the power imbalance between bully and victim (Monks & Smith, 2006; Naylor et al., 2006). This study did not seek to compare adults and young people's understanding of bullying. However, it is noteworthy that young people themselves acknowledged that their definition differed to adults around them. In particular, young people recognised and were critical of discrepancies between their perception and those held within the wider school environment; often citing that school staff seemed to focus on the more physical bullying behaviours.

Bullying behaviours are often cited as occurring in spaces not inhabited by adults, for example the school toilets, canteen or on social media (Jamal, Bonell, Harden, & Lorenc, 2015). However, this research emphasises the more abstract social context of young people. As noted by the young people, their understanding of bullying was often dependent on situational factors. Whether physically present or not, adults are outsiders in young people's social words and are unlikely to have a full understanding of the group dynamics of young people. Consequently, the discrepancies between young people's definitions and those of adults may in part be due to the insider/outsider status of each; young people make their judgements on what is (and is not) bullying by drawing on knowledge which is unavailable to adults.

7.4.1 Implications relating to the complexity of defining bullying

A shared understanding and definition of bullying is important to ensure that bullying incidents are responded to consistently. If young people and school staff have diverging perceptions of bullying behaviours it is likely that policies and interventions will not align with young people's own experience of bullying. Canty et al. (2016) was critical of researchers who inferred young people need to be primed and taught what bullying is. For example, Naylor (2006) concluded that teachers need to "work with and help them [young people] to develop their conceptions of the phenomenon" (p. 554). This stance assumes that an adult-led

definition of bullying is accepted as correct, however, research has demonstrated that adults' own conceptualisations of bullying often do not align with the three defining features of intent, repetition and a power imbalance which are characteristic of bullying definitions (Naylor et al., 2006). Rather than conclude that young people need to be educated on the topic of bullying, a more inclusive approach acknowledges that young people are the ones experiencing this behaviour and therefore have an important insight and understanding that should be embraced. Hellström et al. (2015) are advocates of reaching a consensus between young people and adults, while O'Brien (2009) notes the merit of young people and school staff working collaboratively to devise a definition of bullying.

Moreover, the accounts of young people indicate a nuanced approach to defining bullying which a single definition may not fully encompass, including interpreting actions within their situational context. As previously discussed, adults are unlikely to be able to consider such intricacies and as such adults and young people may not identify the same incidents as bullying. Consequently, creating safe spaces and mechanisms which encourage bystanders to report bullying incidents may be an effective route for ensuring all forms of bullying are recognised within the school environment.

7.5 Prevalence and demographics

The Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) acknowledges that the prevalence of relational bullying and demographic variables are important contextual factors which impact how relational bullying is perceived and understood. To date, the proportions of young people in England who have experienced relational bullying has been unclear. This research offers new insights into the extent of this form of bullying: 16.6% of respondents were categorised as having experienced relational bullying in the two months prior to the HBSC England survey, which equates to 1 in 6 young people being victimised in this way.

Demographic variables relate to gender, age, ethnicity and SES; however, the role of gender in relation to this form of bullying has received particular attention. The study of relational bullying emerged from aggression research which traditionally assumed that males favour direct, physical means of expressing aggression whereas females prefer more indirect and manipulative methods (Björkqvist, 1994). It has been suggested that the gendered cultured views possessed by society may be at the root of gender differences in aggression and bullying behaviours. Gender norms often position girls as being caring and kind, which is in stark

contrast to the expression of aggression (Ringrose, 2008; Simmons, 2011). Therefore aggression among girls could be considered deviant and in response girls may adopt more indirect methods in order to maintain an idealised feminine image (Ringrose, 2008).

However, the current picture of gender differences in relational bullying is mixed. Recent work has established a higher prevalence of social exclusion among girls (HSCIC, 2015), while Dukes and colleagues (2009) concluded "relational bullying is occurring among both boys and girls" (p. 684). The quantitative phase of this study identified that girls were significantly more likely to experience relational bullying than boys, however the finding should be interpreted with caution considering the small effect size. In line with a meta-analysis of the broader phenomenon of indirect aggression (Card et al., 2008), it would be safe to conclude that gender differences in relational bullying may be negligible.

It has been suggested that relational bullying may be particularly harmful for girls as their friendships tend to be more intimate and based on loyalty and self-disclosure (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). Girls have been shown to perceive relational bullying behaviours as more harmful than boys (Coyne et al., 2006), however quantitative evidence examining gendered outcomes is mixed. This study established that relational bullying influenced the health and wellbeing of boys and girls in similar ways; across all three health outcome measures gender did not interact with relational bullying. In comparison, analysis of a comparable sample in Australia found rumour spreading was most strongly related to psychological distress among girls (Thomas et al., 2016). The variation in findings may be explained in part by the outcome measures which were utilised. Thomas and colleagues (2016) employed a measure of psychological distress which focused on symptoms of anxiety and depression, which resonate more closely with internalising symptoms often exhibited by girls. In contrast, the outcome measures of HRQL, general self-rated health and life satisfaction used in this research provide a broader indicator of a young person's wellbeing, spanning the physical, social and emotional components of health.

7.5.1 Implications relating to prevalence and demographics

Relational bullying is a common experience among young people which emphasises the need for anti-bullying initiatives which encompass this form of bullying. The influence of demographic factors on prevalence can be considered negligible, however this is an important finding which challenges common assumptions of relational bullying which are often heavily gendered. Consequently 'Demographics' is a broader contextual feature of the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1).

The traditional perceptions of relational bullying as a female problem may be detrimental to the identification and intervention in cases of relational bullying among boys. The prevailing gender stereotypes may hinder school staff from recognising these types of bullying behaviours among male students; furthermore, they may prevent boys from identifying as a victim of relational bullying for fear of being associated with typically feminine behaviour. This research has demonstrated that relational bullying is experienced by both boys and girls in schools across England, and that the experience of relational bullying is equally detrimental for both genders.

7.6 Negative and normalised: Discrepancies between the experience and perception of relational bullying

This section refers to two components of the Young People's Relational Bullying model: 'The negative impacts of relational bullying' and 'Normalisation' of this behaviour. These factors suggest discrepancies between young people's own experiences of relational bullying and broader perceptions of this behaviour. The quotes in Figure 7.1 which characterise the two components are illustrative of the conflicting perspectives - "It made me feel really upset" emphasises emotional hurt and pain, which is in stark contrast to describing relational bullying as "not a big deal".

Over the last decade bullying has been studied from a public health perspective (Anthony et al., 2010). Longitudinal research has demonstrated that bullying can have long term implications on physical health, emotional wellbeing and mental health and social indicators (S. E. Moore et al., 2017, 2015). Relational bullying behaviours have been associated with negative outcomes also, including anxiety (Boulton, 2013) and somatic symptoms such as headaches and less of appetite (Nixon et al., 2011). By drawing on a large representative sample of young people in England, this research contributed to the under-researched evidence base surrounding relational bullying in a UK context. In line with existing work, relational bullying was shown to have significant associations with poorer health and wellbeing over and above the effects of physical and verbal bullying. Further, the young people vouched for the negative experience of relational bullying, with many describing their own emotional response to being victimised in this way. The negative effects identified as an outcome of relational bullying are an important element of young people's experience, shaping how they feel and interact with others around them, and are consequently acknowledged in Figure 7.1.

Understanding how different forms of bullying (for example, physical, verbal, relational and cyberbullying) are experienced is important, rather than assuming similar associations across different types of bullying behaviour (Thomas et al., 2016). Relational, verbal and physical bullying were shown to have varying associations with the three heath outcome measures used in this study. Furthermore, the data suggests that relational bullying was associated with a greater detrimental effect on an individual's HRQL than either verbal or physical bullying. This corresponds with recent findings from Australia (Thomas et al., 2016) and Germany (Baier et al., 2019), which established social exclusion and psychological bullying were most strongly associated with poorer mental health.

Relational bullying is thought to be particularly distressing because it influences a young person's friendship and peer group which become increasingly important during adolescence (de Goede et al., 2009). As relational bullying often occurs among friendship groups young people can be victimised in very personal ways; the perpetrator can take advantage of information disclosed whilst the individuals were friends (Owens, Shute, et al., 2000). Furthermore, as relational bullying behaviours are often subtle and hidden from observers the victimisation may continue for longer without intervention, which could prolong and heighten the victim's distress (Thomas et al., 2016).

Despite relational bullying being associated with significant negative outcomes, young people's accounts illustrated a normative perspective towards these types of behaviour. The language young people adopted normalised and minimised this form of bullying. Furthermore, the interviews illustrated similar attitudes in the wider school environment, with a perception that school staff have a greater focus on the more physical bullying behaviours. International research with teaching staff from the UK (Boulton et al., 2014; Maunder et al., 2010), USA (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Kahn et al., 2012) and Australia (Byers et al., 2011) has established wider normative assumptions of relational bullying. Relational bullying has been perceived as less serious, less harmful and requiring less intervention than other forms of bullying. However, the accounts of young people indicate that they have come to recognise the views and perceptions of school staff. It could be argued that the normative language adopted by young people is a reflection of the broader context in which they are situated. Figure 7.1 acknowledges this normalisation as a factor which many hinder how relational bullying is navigated by young people. The way in which a behaviour is constructed is likely to influence an individual's responses to it and viewing this form of bullying as

normative or trivial may be detrimental for those young people trying to navigate this behaviour.

7.6.1 Implications relating to the normalisation of relational bullying

Considering the detrimental experience of relational bullying, it warrants as much attention as other forms of bullying in anti-bullying policies and interventions. Smith et al. (2012) established that the majority (78.3%) of school policies they examined referenced relational bullying, although it did not feature as often as physical or verbal bullying. However, the inclusion in a school policy is not sufficient alone. Teacher perceptions of bullying have been shown to influence the way in which they respond to bullying behaviours (Boulton et al., 2014); if relational bullying is normalised within the school environment it is less likely to command the attention and intervention efforts that it requires. Furthermore, teacher's attitudes towards bullying have been shown to influence the help-seeking behaviours of young people (Blomqvist, Saarento-Zaprudin, & Salmivalli, 2019; Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). If a young person believes their teacher is unconcerned with relational bullying behaviours they will be unlikely to report the behaviour, which may further perpetuate the bullying behaviour and implications on young people's health and wellbeing.

7.7 Facilitated by social media: "Everyone can see it"

Bullying behaviours can be classified in a number of ways, however they are frequently categorised into physical, verbal, relational and cyber (Y.-Y. Chen & Huang, 2015; Fluck, 2017) - consequently, positioning cyberbullying as a distinct method of bullying. However, the findings in the current study challenge this notion; as depicted in Figure 7.1, the use of social media and mobile phones was described by young people as facilitating relational bullying behaviours including the spreading of rumours and fostering feelings of social exclusion. Existing work has highlighted commonalities between relational bullying and cyberbullying. Similar to relational bullying, cyberbullying behaviours are often indirect in nature (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013) and are thought to occur among friends (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Furthermore, a large scale study of over 28,000 young people established an overlap between cyberbullying and relational bullying in particular (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). In striking likeness to the present study, a qualitative study of cyberbullying established that "covert cyberbullying reflects indirect, social and relational behaviours resulting in exclusion, isolation and manipulation of friendships" (Spears et al., 2009, p. 193).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention definition of bullying positions cyberbullying as a context, as opposed to a distinct method of bullying (Gladden et al., 2014). Consequently, types of bullying (i.e. relational) occur within different contexts (i.e. online); this perspective resonates with the young people's experience. When reviewing the literature in Chapter 2 it was striking how many terms were used to describe and categorise bullying behaviours, consequently, Figure 2.1 was devised as a logical approach for understanding the multiple ways in which bullying is described. In light of the findings arising from this study, and consideration of cyberbullying as a broader context, an additional layer can be incorporated into the model to account for online and offline contexts (see Figure 7.2).

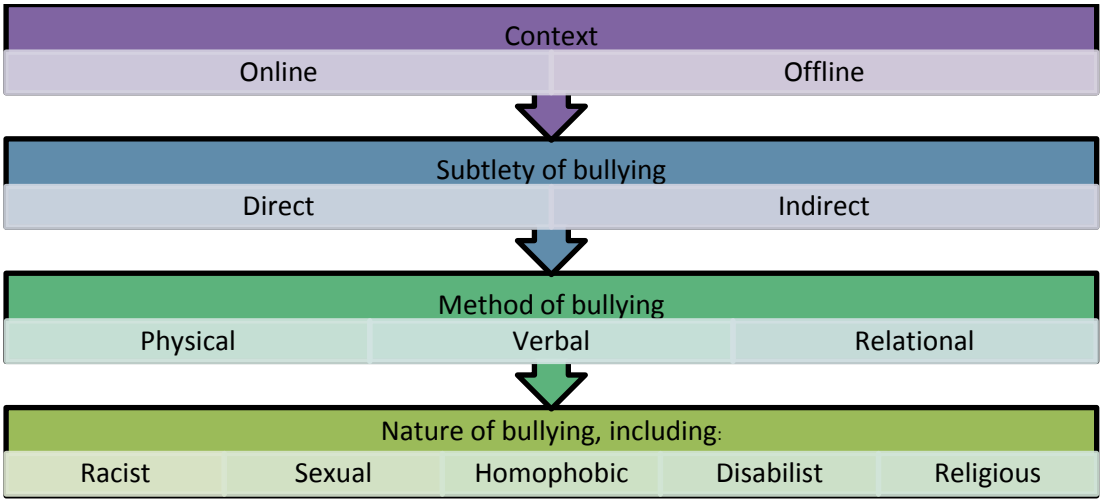


Figure 7.2 *Types of bullying behaviours (revised)*

Cyberbullying has been subject to further debate beyond its place in bullying typologies. The definition of cyberbullying has been scrutinised (Englander et al., 2017). On one hand, cyberbullying is viewed as an extension of the more traditional bullying behaviours and therefore encompasses the three characterising features of 1) intentional harmful behaviours, 2) carried out repeatedly over time, 3) within a relationship characterised by a power imbalance (Olweus, 2012). Conversely, it has been suggested that the key defining features of traditional bullying do not readily translate into the online world (Slonje et al., 2013). For example, the assumption that cyberbullying must be repeated has been called into question (Slonje et al., 2013). A single online post may be shared multiple times online – does the single post count as one incident, or does each share indicate repetition?

Furthermore, the argument for studying cyberbullying as a separate and distinct phenomenon is supported by the identification of characteristics exclusive to cyberbullying. These unique features are thought to make the experience of cyberbullying more traumatic than other

forms of bullying. The potential breadth of the audience observing the cyberbullying is unlimited (Griezel et al., 2012). The interviews with young people noted the far-reach of social media, with the spreading of rumours being enhanced through the use of mobile phones. Dooley et al. (2009) suggest that cyberbullying may be more damaging than face-to-face bullying as victims tend to experience higher levels of distress with a wider audience. Interactions in an online context are also relatively permanent, this offers the victim an opportunity to replay the distressing incident (Campbell, 2005; Griezel et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying can allow the perpetrator to remain anonymous. The anonymity offered on social media was widely discussed among young people, with references to anonymous Instagram accounts and the anonymous messaging app Sarahah[19] which were used to perpetuate the spreading of rumours. The potential invisibility offered by cyberbullying is often championed as a unique feature, the anonymous nature may foster feelings of deindividuation encouraging the perpetrator to act in ways they would not usually (Kowalski et al., 2014). However, the element of anonymity also feeds into the criteria of a power imbalance used in traditional definitions of bullying. A power imbalance may occur in cyberbullying not because the perpetrator is more powerful, but because the anonymity can remove the victim's power (Dooley et al., 2009); it is difficult to defend yourself if you do not know who you are defending yourself against.

Concerns about cyberbullying often focus on its potential omnipresent nature. The latest report from Ofcom (2019) identified that 99% of 12-15 year olds access the internet regularly, 83% own a smartphone and 69% have a social media profile. Young people have substantial access to electronic devices, and as such can be exposed to bullying at anytime and anywhere. However, the overlap between bullying in an online and offline context was emphasised by the young people who took part in the qualitative phase of this study. A number of studies have examined the association between traditional forms of bullying and cyberbullying; Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2015) established cyberbullying occurred most frequently alongside other forms of bullying, with only 4.6% of respondents experiencing cyberbullying alone.

7.7.1 Implications relating to social media

The conceptualisation of cyberbullying is hotly contested, positioned as both an extension of traditional bullying behaviours and also a distinct form of aggression (Englander et al., 2017). The experiences of young people in this research suggest that relational bullying was

[19] Following an online petition stating Sarahah facilitated bullying the app was removed from the Google Play Store and iOS App Store. For further details: https://www.androidauthority.com/what-is-sarahah-790691/

facilitated through the use of mobile phones and social media, making connections between relational bullying and cyberbullying. Furthermore, previous work established an overlap between these two forms of bullying in particular (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015) which influenced the decision not to control for cyberbullying in the quantitative analyses. Conceptualising cyberbullying as a context, rather than a type of bullying, may prove to be a useful approach which more accurately reflects the way in which electronic devices are being used by young people.

Cyberbullying is often thought to extend bullying beyond the school grounds, however this offers a simplistic interpretation of the overlap between different bullying behaviours. Bullying does not remain either in or outside of the school grounds. Young people described the co-occurrence of relational bullying via social media and in person. Spears et al. (2009) articulated that bullying can "straddle the real and the cyber world somewhat simultaneously" (p. 189). However, the work by Spears and colleagues was conducted over a decade ago and considering technological advancements it could be argued that there are not two worlds, only one. Young people do not live polarised lives but have grown and developed in a world facilitated by technology. Acknowledging that bullying has no clear boundaries has implications for intervention efforts. When bullying occurs across multiple environments (e.g. the school and home) who takes responsibility for its resolution? The model depicted in Figure 7.1 acknowledges how the use of social media may perpetuate relational bullying, making it more challenging for young people to navigate. In England, the Education and Inspections Act 2006 allows schools to intervene in cases of bullying outside the school environment, however research suggests schools may be reluctant to respond in cases of cyberbullying which occur off school grounds (N. O'Brien & Moules, 2012).

7.8 Navigating relational bullying

The innermost section of the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) illustrates factors which young people perceived as shaping how they navigated relational bullying, with many of the factors referring to the ecological domains of young people. The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) was used as a guiding framework throughout this research, and played a key role in considering how factors in a young person's ecological system may help them to successfully navigate the experience of relational bullying. Consequently, this section initially presents traits specific to the individual, followed by findings relating to three domains which have been identified as particularly important for

young people: family, friendships and the school environment (Cala & Soriano, 2014; Kia-Keating et al., 2011; Lampropoulou, 2018). Current findings emerging from the ecologies of young people will be discussed in light of existing research and theory, noting converging and diverging conclusions. The components 'Normalisation' and 'Facilitated by social media' were also identified as influencing the navigation of relational bullying but offer insights beyond the ecologies of young people and as such have been discussed separately in Sections 7.6 and 7.7 respectively.

7.8.1 Individual

The Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) includes the components 'Knowing who you are', 'Resourcefulness' and 'Personal wellbeing' as individual-level factors shaping how relational bullying is navigated.

There has been a wealth of research exploring associations between demographic variables and the likelihood of experiencing bullying; including gender, age, sexual orientation and identification (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Inchley et al., 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2016). In this study demographic variables had a negligible association with the risk of experiencing relational bullying, however they were not identified as contributing to how relational bullying was experienced and navigated. Gender, age and ethnicity did not moderate the effects of relational bullying, suggesting the consequences of this form of bullying are not specific to certain groups (see Section 7.5 for further discussion of demographics).

However, both the quantitative and qualitative data recognised internal traits which helped young people to manage relational bullying effectively. The quantitative finding concerning a positive body image appears to be compatible with the qualitative data which emphasised the importance of 'knowing who you are', both pertaining to an overall positive sense of self. Establishing a self-definition or identity is considered a key developmental passage during adolescence (Meeus, 2011). It has been proposed that identity development occurs through a continued process of exploring, committing and reconsidering identities (Klimstra et al., 2010; Marcia, 1980). A strong sense of identity has been linked with increased wellbeing (Meeus, 2011), which young people in this study also recognised as being a contributing factor in how they responded to relational bullying. It could be suggested that those young people who know "*who they are*" will be in an advantageous position to navigate external challenges because of the associated links with increased wellbeing. A UK-based study similarly demonstrated that a strong sense of identity, particular ethnic/religious identity, buffered depressive symptoms among victims, and proposed this may be due to increased sources of

social support available to young people with a strong religious/ethnic identity (Hunter, Durkin, Heim, Howe, & Bergin, 2010). Querying the developmental stage of a young person and its interaction with how relational bullying is experienced and navigated offers a novel but approved application of the social-ecological framework, as Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) acknowledged the developmental stages of young people may be considered as contexts rather than outcome measures. However, while identity formation is a key occurrence during adolescence and identities tend to become increasingly stable (Klimstra et al., 2010; Meeus, 2011), much research suggests the process may continue beyond adolescence and into adulthood (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their own capabilities to reach goals and achieve certain outcomes (Bandura, 1997), was identified in the quantitative analysis as being associated with improved wellbeing among victims of relational bullying. Self-efficacy resonates with the individual-level components 'Knowing who you are' and 'Resourcefulness'. This research contributes to the current understanding that self-efficacy may play a protective function when facing general stressors (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007), and it may function to withstand the negative outcomes of bullying behaviours specifically (Noret, Hunter, & Rasmussen, 2018; Raskauskas, Rubiano, Offen, & Wayland, 2015). It must be acknowledged that lower self-efficacy has previously been identified as a risk factor for experiencing bullying (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012), and experiencing bullying can reduce self-efficacy in relation to coping specifically (Noret et al., 2018). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms which foster self-efficacy in young people may have a twofold benefit of both preventing victimisation, and moderating the negative effects for those experiencing bullying. Of interest, young people's social environment including the family and school are key contributors to developing a young person's self-efficacy (Vieno, Santinello, Pastore, & Perkins, 2007), resonating with the social-ecological theory that interactions between ecologies influence human development.

Finally, through young people's accounts it became apparent that they were self-aware of their emotions and were able to identify actions they could take to make themselves feel better and prevent further distress; this has been described throughout the dissertation as young people's resourcefulness (see Figure 7.1). This finding was unanticipated, but consistent across many interviews with young people. There has been much research examining individual characteristics of the young person including demographics (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2016), wellbeing and psychometric traits (Cook et al., 2010; Kljakovic & Hunt, 2016), however it is also important to understand the way in which young

people personally respond to the experience of bullying. Young people's resourcefulness was evidenced through their own decisions to engage in activities which distract from the experience of bullying. Behaviours which focus on practical solutions resonate with productive strategies described in the coping literature more broadly (Garcia, 2010), and in relation to bullying specifically (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012).

7.8.2 The family

The Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) includes the factor 'Family' with an accompanying quote describing the family as "the most important one". Traditionally, the role and influence of the family during adolescence was thought to diminish (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2002). However, more contemporary views acknowledge the continued importance of the family in young people's lives (Gutman et al., 2010, 2011). Despite this, the family unit has seen less attention in bullying research compared to peers and the school environment (Nocentini, Fiorentini, Di Paola, & Menesini, 2019; Swearer, 2008).

A recent systematic review concluded that family relationships characterised by warmth, affection, open communication and support were associated with lower levels of bullying victimisation (Nocentini et al., 2019). Moreover, the review identified a small number of articles which focused on the role and characteristics of the family post-victimisation; communication, support and parental engagement with school activities buffered against the negative effects of bullying. In the UK, Bowes et al. (2010) identified maternal warmth as a buffer against the negative effects of bullying. Similarly, this research extends such findings in the context of relational bullying specifically. The family was identified across both research phases as helping young people to successfully navigate relational bullying and ameliorate the negative effects associated with it (as depicted in Figure 7.1).

A wealth of research (Gutman et al., 2010; Klemera et al., 2017; Levin et al., 2012; Moreno et al., 2009) has demonstrated that family support (often parental support in particular) is associated with young people's wellbeing and development, particularly in stressful events (Pössel et al., 2018). The quantitative data focused on family support more broadly and indicated that a supportive family environment more generally is a useful resource for navigating relational bullying. Comparatively, the young people in the interviews described family support in the context of being victimised. If the family unit offers support which is specific to the experience of relational bullying it requires that the family is aware of the situation. However, research shows that many young people do not inform their parents, with only a third of young people in a Finnish sample telling an adult at home (Blomqvist et al.,

2019); as such many young people may not benefit from the positive effects of family support specific to victimisation.

The quantitative data identified that young people who engaged in family activities were more likely to report better wellbeing despite experiencing high levels of relational bullying. This may feature as an extension of family support, providing opportunities for positive, meaningful interactions among families, and fostering open communication. However, it also resonates with the young people's accounts of being resourceful and keeping themselves occupied, which they described as being a useful approach in helping themselves feel better about the situation.

7.8.3 Friendships

This section refers to two components in Figure 7.1, 'Friendships' and 'Occurs among friends', which were identified as influencing how relational bullying is navigated. In the corresponding section in the literature review (see Section 2.6.3) the broader label 'friendships and peer relationships' was utilised. The literature on young people's social ecologies often refers to peers (Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Swearer & Espelage, 2011; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). However, during the interviews with young people they did not acknowledge the broader concept of peers themselves. Consequently, this section has been labelled to reflect the ecology of friendships which was recognised by young people.

Friends become an increasingly important ecology during adolescence (de Goede et al., 2009). The role of friends in bullying behaviours has been subject to much attention. Friends are thought to play two protective roles: 1) offering social support which can moderate against the effects of bullying and 2) defending against bullies (Berger, Gremmen, Palacios, & Franco, 2019). The accounts of young people resonated with this conclusion; friends were identified as ideal sources of support, and also uniquely positioned to challenge relational bullying.

However, while friendships play a pivotal developmental role during adolescence they are fairly unstable in nature (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Furthermore, relational bullying is often tied up within friendships, as demonstrated by young people's personal experiences. Bullying behaviours have been understood from the perspective of building and maintaining friendships (Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Thornberg, 2015b). Friendships are based on shared social norms, which can be policed through bullying behaviours. Furthermore, the exclusion of an individual from a group inherently fosters feelings of inclusion among those remaining;

relational bullying can therefore be considered a social tool used to a perpetrator's benefit (James et al., 2011; Volk et al., 2012).

Understanding the role of friends in relational bullying may be particularly nuanced and complex. Friendships may be a useful resource and play a role in helping a young person positively cope with these types of bullying behaviour. However, the individual person within that role may change over time due to the instability of friendships. Furthermore, the fluid nature of friendships may facilitate relational bullying behaviours as these actions are used to reaffirm group processes and norms. The dual function of friendships within relational bullying is illustrated in Figure 7.1, with friends featuring in both a green and red arrow to indicate the positive and negative roles they may play in helping young people navigate relational bullying.

7.8.4 The school environment

The Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) includes the component 'Teachers' as a factor shaping the navigation of relational bullying. The school environment has seen considerable attention in regards to anti-bullying research (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Young people spend much of their time at school and bullying behaviours frequently occur in the school environment, making it an ideal context in which to consider how bullying can be prevented. Section 7.6.1 discussed the impact of teacher perceptions hindering anti-bullying interventions, but cross-national research has demonstrated that the school environment is a significant predictor of bullying involvement too (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011).

The interviews with young people highlighted the role teachers may play in supporting young people through the experience of bullying. There was an overall sense of dissatisfaction about how relational bullying was dealt with in the school environment, but an acknowledgement that school staff were in a prime position to help with bullying behaviours, as exemplified by the accompanying quote in Figure 7.1 - "it's their job". Previous quantitative work has established the role of teacher support in relational victimisation specifically, identifying a more prominent role for teachers compared with parental support (Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). Furthermore teacher support has been associated with improved wellbeing and self-esteem (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; García-Moya et al., 2015; Niehaus et al., 2012), resonating with the individual traits that helped facilitate the successful navigation of relational bullying. In young people's experience they often sought support from one specific teacher. Existing research suggests young people tend to report close relationships with only a few members of teaching staff in particular (García-Moya, Brooks, & Moreno, 2019).

7.8.5 Implications for the navigation of relational bullying

Anti-bullying measures which are preventative in nature and aim to reduce the prevalence of bullying are an integral aspect of a schools anti-bullying approach, however understanding what helps young people cope with the experience of bullying is equally important for the development of interventions specific to the victims of bullying. Young people recognised factors from multiple domains which shaped the way in which they navigated the experience of relational bullying – including individual traits as well as factors from their immediate environment (family, friendships and school). The identification of factors from across domains is supportive of whole-school approaches to bullying prevention, with a particular emphasis on those which include the family unit.

7.9 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework provides guidance and structure across the research process (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The present study was guided by the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979), which positions young people at the centre of the research. This section will critically discuss the theoretical framework adopted in this study, and its application to the study of relational bullying.

7.9.1 The social-ecological theory

The social-ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) was originally developed as a model of human development, which stressed the significance of studying the context of an individual. The model has since been adopted and advocated by academics studying bullying (Espelage, 2014; Rose, Nickerson, et al., 2015; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). The theory resonates with the understanding that bullying behaviours can be understood at both an individual and situational level (Monks et al., 2009). The social-ecological theory has been widely discussed in its application to bullying, however fewer research studies have explicitly adopted the theory as a guiding framework. Instead, a number of comprehensive review papers have illustrated the function of the social-ecological theory by collating findings which draw on the ecologies irrespective of the theoretical perspective of the study (Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

This research studied relational bullying using the social-ecological theory as a guiding framework, contributing to the growing evidence base which explicitly draws on the social-ecological perspective to facilitate the research process including the research rationale,

methodology, analysis and interpretation of data. Adopting the social-ecological theory as a theoretical framework in this study (depicted in Figure 1.1, Chapter 1) proved beneficial as the theoretical framework facilitated a clear research structure and approach that informed both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research, including guiding the identification of variables for quantitative analysis and informing the thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Bullying behaviours extend beyond the traditional bully/victim dyad, and occur through a complex interplay of situational factors (Hong & Espelage, 2012b), and this is particularly pertinent to relational bullying which often occurs among friendship and peer groups (Besag, 2006). The social-ecological theory therefore offered a logical approach to the study of relational bullying as it encompassed multiple contexts.

The social-ecological theory has been primarily utilised to study risk or protective factors which may function in relation to bullying involvement (Hong et al., 2019, 2016). However, it is possible to identify ecologies which function in a way to prevent negative outcomes: "ecologies that sustain and strengthen" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 738). The social-ecological theory proved to be an effective framework to consider how factors in a young person's ecological system may help them to successfully navigate the experience of relational bullying – as detailed in Section 7.8. However the factors recognised by young people in this study were situated solely within the microsystem, and did not extend to the meso-, exo- or macrosystems of the social-ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979).

The social-ecological theory recognises interactions between the ecologies and the current findings allow for a discussion across the domains of the young person's world, for example the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) includes the components 'Family' and 'Personal wellbeing' and the links between the two have been acknowledged and discussed in Section 7.8.2. However, the current findings are not able to offer a comprehensive understanding of how the individual, family, friends and school environments may be interconnected and work together to help young people navigate relational bullying. Nevertheless, this research resonates with the social-ecological theory by establishing associations from across the ecologies of young people. Individual factors and those connected to the family domain appear to be particularly valuable, noted in both phases of the research study.

Furthermore, the social-ecological theory offers an element of theoretical inclusivity, with micro-theories explaining occurrences within each of the ecologies. Thornberg (2015b) argued for communication between theoretical perspectives in order to progress understanding, and advocated for the social-ecological approach as a "meeting point of theories" (p. 161). Postigo and colleagues (2013) similarly suggest that the social-ecological theory can act as a broad framework under which specific theories, across the different ecological levels, can be positioned. For example, under the guise of the social-ecological theory the current discussion was able to draw on literature addressing psychosocial development of identity in adolescence (see Section 7.8.1).

7.9.2 The young people's voice

The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) positions young people at the centre of their ecological system, resonating with the current research approach which aimed to facilitate the voice of young people and understand their experiences and perceptions of relational bullying. Research on bullying has been critiqued for not recognising young people's perspective, but more recent work has stressed that young people's voice enhances our understanding of this behaviour (Nassem, 2017; Thornberg, 2015a). This study adds to the growing body of work in the UK which provides an opportunity for young people to share their perspective on bullying behaviours (Nassem, 2017; C. O'Brien, 2011; N. O'Brien et al., 2018). It was acknowledged that understanding the experiences of young people was particularly crucial in terms of relational bullying as these types of bullying behaviours have been shown to be understood inconsistently across young people, parents and school staff (Smith et al., 2002; Smorti et al., 2003), and have been studied under varying guises among academics (Björkqvist, 2001; Coyne et al., 2006).

Young people were considered throughout the research process - both the quantitative and qualitative phases were designed for and informed by young people. On an international level the HBSC study is informed by young people (Inchley et al., 2016), and the HBSC England team indicate that they employed a participatory approach during the development of the 2014 survey (Brooks et al., 2015). Careful consideration was given to the qualitative phase including consultation with two youth reference groups. In line with Canty et al. (2016), young people were not provided with a definition of bullying during the face-to-face interviews so they could reflect on their own understanding and perspectives, rather than the discussion being directed around a more typical adult-led definition of bullying. It was also decided not to introduce the term 'relational bullying' during the interviews with young people. Instead, discussions were

successfully facilitated by descriptive statements which illustrated relational bullying behaviours. Other studies evoking young people's experiences and perceptions have similarly employed vignettes (Owens, Shute, et al., 2000; Owens, Slee, et al., 2000; Strindberg et al., 2019).

7.10 Reviewing the Young People's Relational Bullying model

The uniting of the quantitative and qualitative findings resulted in the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1). The model provides a new theoretical approach towards understanding relational bullying among young people, grounded in the experiences and perceptions of young people. This section will examine the model, with particular reference to the social-ecological theory.

Diagrammatic presentations of bullying often emulate the social-ecological theory, with nested structures for each of the ecologies specific to bullying. The ecologies present in the social-ecological model have been subject to modifications; for example, Cross et al. (2015) acknowledged societal changes since Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) original model of human development and consequently expanded the social-ecological theory to include an online context. While Barboza (2009) extended the model to include characteristics of the victim and bully, as well as adding a time dimension to account for the repetitive nature of bullying.

The social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) was used to guide this research, and consequently played an underlying role in the development of the Young People's Relational Bullying model. While the social-ecological theory was imperative in shaping the focus of the research, Figure 7.1 offers a different perspective to the traditional nested structures of the social-ecological theory. The model outlined in this study is specific to young people's experience of relational bullying and extends beyond their ecologies and reflects their own experiences and perceptions of relational bullying.

The social-ecological theory positions the individual at the centre of the framework, which resonates with the model emerging from this study. However, the Young People's Relational Bullying model offers a more detailed account at the individual level. The model is grounded in young people's experiences, as demonstrated through the labelling of components with young people's own words. From a participatory point of view it was important that the model resonated with young people's experience - young people's participation is acknowledged in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). From

a practical point of view, it is imperative that the understanding of a phenomenon is grounded in experiences to ensure an accurate representation; in the context of relational bullying, establishing a true understanding has the potential to improve the relevance and applicability of anti-bullying measures.

A visual depiction of the social-ecological model, similar to that illustrated in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1), plays an important role in conceptualising the ecological systems influencing young people's involvement with bullying. However, the findings from this research did not extend to factors from the meso-, exo- or macrosystems. While this may reflect the scope of the variables within the 2014 HBSC England study, the young people themselves did not recognise factors outside of their microsystem as influencing their experience of relational bullying. Consequently, the nested structures of the social-ecological theory did not adequately capture the way in which young people understood relational bullying. The Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1) offers a much more precise understanding of young people's experiences and perceptions of this behaviour, with a focus on the ecological domains young people perceived as being important – in particular, their family and friendships.

7.10.1 Informing future studies and practice

The Young People's Relational Bullying model has the potential to inform future research studies. The model would be a logical choice for studies examining relational bullying as it provides a new and comprehensive understanding of this form of bullying. The model could act as the basis for relational bullying studies across different settings (for example, primary schools, colleges or youth centres) and among minority groups (for example, young people with SEND or identifying as LGBT). While this study focused on the perspectives and experiences of young people, the model (Figure 7.1) could inform research which is conducted to understand how teachers and parents perceive relational bullying. The Young People's Relational Bullying model has the potential to act as a starting point, with individual components fuelling further research questions. For instance, the centre of the model (Figure 7.1) titled 'Factors shaping the navigation of relational bullying' could be examined in relation to other forms of bullying behaviours to identify whether the factors highlighted in this study play a supportive role across other experiences. With the topic of bullying being multidisciplinary in nature, the Young People's Relational Bullying model may support the work of academics across a range of disciplines including psychology, education, sociology and public health.

The model arising from this research also has the potential to be applied in practical settings. Bullying poses a significant real-world problem, and the Young People's Relational Bullying model provides an understandable framework which can be used to develop thinking and discussion around relational bullying in practical settings such as schools and youth groups. The way in which bullying is understood has been shown to vary across young people, parents and teachers (N. O'Brien, 2009; Smorti et al., 2003), and relational bullying has proved to be fraught with discrepancies in particular. Consequently, illustrating relational bullying with a visual diagrammatic representation is a helpful for conceptualising this form of bullying with a wide range of audiences. Furthermore, the model in Figure 7.1 has adopted clear language to facilitate its use beyond academia, to the wider public domain. It is anticipated that the model could foster an understanding of relational bullying among adults who work with young people (e.g. teaching staff and youth workers). Furthermore, by naming components of the model (Figure 7.1) with the phrases and words of young people it ensures the model is relevant and relatable when used with young people themselves. Secondly, individual components of the model could be drawn upon to inform anti-bullying policy and practice in school settings. For example, acknowledging the 'Family' component of the model and the role the family can play in supporting young people could guide schools to consider when and how they engage with the families of their students. See Section 8.3 for five key recommendations stemming from the Young People's Relational Bullying model.

7.11 Chapter summary

The present chapter has offered a critical discussion of key aspects of this doctoral study. Methodological considerations were examined, with a particular focus on the application of mixed methodology in bullying research. This chapter has acknowledged the role of the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) in framing research on bullying. The theoretical approach led to the development of the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1), which unites both the quantitative and qualitative data and acknowledges young people's voice in the experience of relational bullying.

The following chapter (Chapter 8) will conclude this dissertation, summarising the original contribution to knowledge and practical implications.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

From the outset this dissertation acknowledged the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) which states all children and young people should be protected from harm. Bullying has the potential to inflict physical, mental and emotional harm. The intention of this study was to examine relational bullying in particular, arguably one of the most hidden forms of bullying. Using a mixed methods approach this research evidenced the harmful impact of relational bullying, over and above the effect of physical and verbal behaviours which are often more widely acknowledged. Furthermore, through both the quantitative and qualitative data, factors from the young person's world have been recognised which play a role in mitigating the negative effects of relational bullying. This concluding chapter will summarise the contributions to knowledge and implications for anti-bullying initiatives. The limitations to the study and areas for future research are acknowledged and discussed. The chapter concludes with a final summary statement.

8.2 Contribution to knowledge

The doctoral research presented in this dissertation adds to the existing knowledge base around bullying in young people. The research also offers new methodological and theoretical contributions.

8.2.1 Subject knowledge

The subject knowledge base on bullying is a well-established and growing area. Nonetheless, this study contributes to our understanding of relational bullying in the UK, which has seen less attention nationally. Firstly, the research has identified the prevalence of relational bullying utilising a comprehensive measure, which has not been previously articulated. Secondly, establishing the health and wellbeing impacts associated with relational bullying contributes to the growing evidence base suggesting this form of victimisation is particularly harmful (Baier et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2016); it challenges the divergent perception that relational bullying is not as severe as other forms (Boulton et al., 2014; Maunder et al., 2010). Thirdly, this research elicited young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying, which to date has been an understudied area.

Additionally, the study extends current understanding of the way in which young people define bullying behaviours more broadly. While it is widely accepted young people do not often engage with the bullying characteristics of intent, repetition and a power imbalance (Olweus, 1995), the findings provide an insight into the very nuanced and complex thought processes young people undertake in order to decide what is (and is not) bullying. Further, the data interrogates the assumption of cyberbullying as a separate form of bullying behaviour.

8.2.2 Methodological contributions

The challenge of measuring bullying is well recognised and discussed within the literature (Volk et al., 2017). Comparing the bullying measures which were contained in the 2014 HBSC England study with each other (see Section 5.3) supported this notion as varying prevalence rates were recorded across the different questions. However, this doctoral research offers a new contribution to the measurement of relational bullying in particular. Relational bullying describes behaviours which cause harm through the manipulation and damage of peer relationships and friendships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It may include a range of behaviours such as social exclusion, rumour spreading, threatening to retract friendships and encouraging others to ignore the victim (Coyne et al., 2006; Dukes et al., 2009). Research often focuses on these individual bullying behaviours, rather than viewing them as part of the wider construct of relational bullying - for example, in the UK the WAY study reported social exclusion and rumour spreading separately (HSCIC, 2015), while Benton (2011) reported on social exclusion specifically. Relational bullying in this study was measured by three items addressing different types of relational bullying behaviours. Responses to the three items were combined to create an overall composite measure, therefore recognising the comprehensive picture of relational bullying. Victimisation was identified using the cut-off of 'two to three times a month' in line with an existing recommendation (Solberg & Olweus, 2003); however, if a respondent answered 'once or twice in the past couple of months' to all three items, they were re-categorised as monthly victimisation. This approach is testimony to the fact that these three items addressed a single concept and were therefore viewed collectively. The measurement of relational bullying in this study was unique, offering an innovative approach which may inform future research decisions surrounding the measurement of bullying.

Further, this doctoral research offers methodological insights into using mixed methods in the study of bullying. Mixed methods has been perceived as an advantageous approach to the study of bullying, however a literature review identified only twenty mixed methods studies

worldwide, including five graduate theses (Hong & Espelage, 2012b). At the time of Hong and Espelage's (2012b) review only one of the identified studies was conducted in the UK – Cowie and Olafsson (2000) had used mixed methods to capture young people's experience of a peer support intervention, the focus of the research was specific to the intervention rather than young people's broader experience and perception of bullying at school. A mixed methods approach in this study proved to be beneficial, generating data which spans the quantitative and qualitative research objectives and thus providing a broad picture of this complex phenomenon.

8.2.3 Theoretical contributions

Research on bullying has been subject to criticism for a lack of theoretical direction (Canty et al., 2016; Volk et al., 2017); this study has clearly articulated an epistemological and theoretical position. The social-ecological theory (Espelage, 2014; Rose, Nickerson, et al., 2015) has been widely positioned as a useful framework through which bullying behaviours can be examined. Despite this, much of the existing literature advocating the use of the social-ecological theory in understanding bullying is comprised of review papers (Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Consequently this study adds to the original work on bullying explicitly guided by the social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Furthermore, this study extended the use of the social-ecological theory beyond the more typical application of recognising risk and protective factors for involvement in bullying. In this study the social-ecological theory guided the identification of factors from the young people's social world which may help to mitigate the negative effects of relational bullying; recognising an innovative approach to the application of the social-ecological theory.

Additionally, the findings from this study resulted in the Young People's Relational Bullying model (Figure 7.1). Unlike the social-ecological theory, which is not specific to bullying and young people, the model which developed out of this research offers a new and unique way of theorising young people's experience of relational bullying specifically. The model offers a comprehensive illustration of relational bullying grounded in young people's own experiences and perceptions, which may be utilised by researchers to inform future studies. It is also anticipated that the model can encourage understanding of relational bullying in practical settings. Further work could also explore whether the Young People's Relational Bullying model can be applied or adapted to address other forms of bullying.

Practical insights have also emerged from this research, and these are outlined in the following section.

8.3 Recommendations for anti-bullying initiatives

The findings from this study have practical implications for the development and delivery of anti-bullying initiatives in school:

1. Relational bullying warrants as much attention as other forms of bullying in anti-bullying policies and programmes.
2. Efforts to educate and raise awareness of relational bullying among school staff and students would help challenge common perceptions of this form of bullying as being un-harmful and normative.
3. Involving young people in the development of anti-bullying initiatives would ensure the young person's experiences are acknowledged and foster a common ground between school staff and students.
4. Anti-bullying initiatives that encompass both offline and online situations would more closely relate to young people's experiences of bullying which occur concurrently across the two environments.
5. Whole-school approaches to bullying have been widely advocated (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011); those which involve and extend to the family have potential to be particularly successful in supporting young people through bullying.

8.4 Dissemination

Dissemination, the sharing of knowledge generated by research, is a key aspect of the research process (Derman & Jaeger, 2018). In order for research to have an impact, the findings must be communicated effectively to relevant audiences. National and international research funding bodies emphasise the importance of research dissemination, particularly beyond an academic audience (Wilkinson & Weitkamp, 2013). For example, the Economic and Social Research Council expects grant holders to "publish results widely – considering the academic, user and public audiences for research outcomes" (ESRC, 2019, p. 16).

Dissemination to academic audiences commonly occurs via presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles (Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan, & Nazareth, 2010). To date, research findings have been disseminated via a variety of conferences with both national (2019 & 2016 Children's Nursing Conference; 2018 & 2015 UH School of Health and Social Work Research Conference; 2017 UH Post Graduate Research Conference) and international audiences (2016 Excellence in Paediatrics Conference; 2019 World Anti-bullying Forum) (see Appendix L for further details). Findings have been published in the Journal of School Health (Chester et al., 2017)

(see Appendix K). Further journal submissions are under development, including a paper focusing on the use of mixed methods when examining bullying behaviours.

Academic beneficiaries are a significant aspect of the dissemination process, however policy makers and practitioners (i.e. school staff) are in key positions to implement research findings. It is imperative to consider the audience characteristics when planning to disseminate research, and in particular the sources of information the audience are commonly exposed to (Brownson, Eyler, Harris, Moore, & Tabak, 2018). School staff may be unlikely to engage with academic conferences and journal articles which often require a fee. Consequently, research findings were written up for publication in Schools Week[20] (an education sector news website) and The Conversation[21] which provided accessible and relevant outlets. The article in Schools Week was referenced in a House of Commons Library briefing (R. Long, Brown, & Bellis, 2018), which was created as a resource for Members of Parliament participating in the 2018 Anti-Bullying Week parliamentary debate.

Alternative methods for disseminating research beyond the more traditional routes of conference presentations and peer-reviewed articles have also been recognised (Brownson et al., 2018; Wilkinson & Weitkamp, 2013). I have engaged with a range of dissemination opportunities, including the 2018 UH 3 Minute Thesis competition which proved a valuable opportunity to present the research and its significance in a succinct manner to a non-academic audience. The research also features in "Vision and Voice 2016: The next generation of researchers", a publication of photographs and summaries illustrating UH doctoral research for a public audience.

Media engagement has been identified as a method of wider dissemination (Brownson et al., 2018). A press release detailing current research findings, facilitated by the UH press office, coincided with the 2017 Anti-Bullying Week. Resultant media coverage included findings being reported in articles by BBC News[22], Mail Online[23] and The Telegraph[24]. I also discussed the research during a pre-recorded interview on a local radio station[25].

[20] https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-need-to-wake-up-to-relational-bullying/
[21] https://theconversation.com/bullying-isnt-just-verbal-or-physical-it-can-also-be-social-and-this-can-have-the-worst-effects-87819
[22] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-41998643
[23] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5085965/Frenemies-harm-children-physical-bullies.html
[24] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/bullying-bad-news-doesnt-stop-leave-school/
[25] http://www.bobfm.co.uk/news/local-news/friends-worse-than-enemies-when-children-are-bullied-say-hertfordshire-researchers/

Furthermore, a developmentally appropriate summary of the research findings, in the form of a brief report, will be disseminated to the two schools that participated in the qualitative component of this study during the 2019 autumn school term.

8.5 Limitations

This research was undertaken to understand young people's experiences and perceptions of relational bullying, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive and rich picture. The findings have raised important issues and contributed to the current knowledge base, however it is important to consider limitations of the research. The following sections discuss the quantitative and qualitative components separately, before raising a limitation of the mixed methodology. The section concludes with a reflection on my role as a novice researcher.

8.5.1 Quantitative research phase

While the 2014 HBSC England data set proved to be an invaluable source for secondary analysis it is not without its limitations. As is the nature of self-completed surveys, accuracy of responses could be questioned. Social desirability bias may influence a respondent's answers as they do not want to express socially undesirable behaviours, preferring to present themselves in a favourable light (Nederhof, 1985). In relation to the present study there may be a concern that young people under-report being bullied due to the stigma attached with identifying as a victim. However, as far as was feasibly possible the HBSC England team ensured conditions which aimed to promote honesty. This included completing the survey in exam like conditions to prevent peer influence and providing students with an envelope to seal their completed questionnaire in order to ensure privacy. Students were also informed that their responses would remain anonymous and that no teachers or family members would see their answers.

The cross-sectional nature of the 2014 HBSC data set allows for the identification of relationships within the data, but it cannot indicate causation or the direction of the relationship (Field, 2009). For example, an association between relational bullying and poor health may suggest experiencing relational bullying leads to poorer health, or it could suggest those with poorer health are more likely to experience relational bullying, or there may be a third confounding variable at play which is causally related to both relational bullying and health. However, drawing on existing longitudinal work demonstrating the causal link

between bullying and poor health (Wolke et al., 2014), the current research assumes relational bullying takes the causal role. Furthermore, analyses have taken account of potential confounding variables including demographics and other forms of bullying.

The 2014 HBSC England survey covers a broad range of topics, however it should be acknowledged that the analyses were to some extent restricted by the variables which feature in the survey. Crucially, the qualitative component provided the opportunity for young people to identify factors which they perceived as playing a role in helping them to navigate the experience of relational bullying – ensuring that the findings were not limited to the questions included in the 2014 HBSC England survey. Whilst not a focus of this research study, it is important to note that the quantitative data did not ask young people whether they had perpetrated relational bullying, and as such the current study is unable to draw any conclusions about bully-victims – those who both experienced and perpetrated relational bullying.

8.5.2 Qualitative research phase

The objective of the qualitative phase was not generalisation, but to provide a deeper and richer understanding of relational bullying. The overall sample size was small but commensurate with similar qualitative thematic analysis projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and data saturation was reached. However, it must be noted that the sample was under-represented by males. It is well documented that recruiting young people in general can be challenging (Heath et al., 2009), and difficulties recruiting boys specifically has been noted elsewhere (Fenton, 2013). Young people inhabit different contexts to adults which may influence recruitment; for example, they spend the majority of their time in age specific institutions, they are protected by age specific policies and can be relatively powerless (Heath et al., 2009). This often results in researchers gaining access to young people via gatekeepers (see Section 3.6 for further discussion of gatekeepers). During the qualitative phase of this study I successfully liaised and co-operated with gatekeepers resulting in an inclusive recruitment method which promoted the young person's autonomy; however, it was not entirely successful in recruiting male participants. It is possible that the research topic may have appealed to females more than males, with girls being more willing to talk about peer groups and friendships. Furthermore, Barker and Smith (2001) noted that a researcher's gender may play an important role during fieldwork, with girls more likely to engage with and disclose information to a female researcher and vice versa.

David et al. (2001) noted that conducting fieldwork in a school environment may create unintentional associations between the research topic and education, consequently influencing participant's responses. However, as the school environment is so closely tied to bullying (Saarento et al., 2013) that the school context became a feature of the interview schedule, and as such this was not a concern in the present study. Furthermore, the two participants who were interviewed on UH premises also referred to their school during the interview.

8.5.3 Mixed methods

One of the purposes of mixed methods in the present study was to explain and illustrate, as the qualitative results provided a level of meaning and insight into the quantitative findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This was particularly relevant to research objectives no. 2 and no. 3 which were met through both the quantitative and qualitative components. However, it is acknowledged that the role of the qualitative research in explaining/illustrating the quantitative findings is reduced in part by the use of different participants across each of the research components. The HBSC England study is anonymous in nature, preventing the follow-up of individual participants.

8.5.4 Personal experience

It is important to acknowledge my role as a novice researcher and the limitations of my research experience. However, this doctoral study was supported by a comprehensive programme of research training at the UH, addressing topics such as ethics, qualitative and quantitative methods, research integrity and research writing skills. Funding was also sought and awarded for researcher development activities external to the UH, including a National Centre for Research Methods short course 'Applied Multilevel Modelling' at the University of Southampton. The training opportunities integrated throughout this doctoral programme facilitated the development of sound research knowledge and skills. Furthermore, my supervisory team has been invaluable in my personal development as an independent researcher - providing ongoing mentorship, critical feedback and support throughout this programme of research.

8.6 Future research

Considering the qualitative component of the study and the difficulties of recruiting male participants, future research focusing specifically on boys' experiences and perceptions of

relational bullying would be beneficial. Traditional assumptions of relational bullying assumed that this was a female form of bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), while more recent work has queried this (Card et al., 2008). However, gender perceptions of relational bullying still persist (Swearer, 2008). The quantitative data did not detect differences between boys and girls in relation to the health and wellbeing outcomes utilised in this research, and the data from the two male participants (Joe aged 17 years and Dylan aged 12 years) resonated with this, however the voice of boys was less represented in this study. Taking into account the gendered perceptions of relational bullying, boys may be less likely and unwilling to identify with these types of behaviours; future work may require exploration of alternative research methods to engage and empower boys to discuss relational bullying.

The family was identified as a key resource in helping young people to navigate relational bullying, with both the quantitative and qualitative data highlighting the role the family can play. The family is an under-researched area in relation to bullying behaviours more broadly, despite being a central feature of the young person's social-ecological system (Nocentini et al., 2019). Continued research into the role of the family context in ameliorating the negative effects of bullying would be beneficial. Furthermore, it is also important to understand the experience and impact on the family supporting a young person through bullying. What do families perceive their role to be? And when, how and why would they be likely to intervene? Qualitative research would provide an in-depth insight and contribute to current understanding of family support.

The social-ecological theory proved to be a useful guiding framework in this research, and in the study of bullying more broadly. However, there is less work examining the interactions between and across the ecologies of young people i.e. the meso- and exosystems (Espelage, 2014). Findings from this study showed the potentially protective function of the family and school; with young people themselves noting the way in which family and school may work collaboratively to support them through relational bullying. Future work focusing on the interactions between the family and school would shed light on successful routes to supporting young people, and may contribute to whole-school bullying approaches which extend beyond the school environment.

Finally, the Young People's Relational Bullying model which arose from this research reflects the experiences and perceptions of young people in English secondary schools. Future research in different environments (for example, in primary schools, colleges and universities) would explore the applicability of the model across other contexts. The model could also

inform research with participants with different demographic factors (age, SES and ethnicity); the voice of male participants was less represented in this study, so it would be beneficial to explore the Young People's Relational Bullying model in further detail with boys specifically.

8.7 Concluding comments

Over the last two decades there has been a wealth of knowledge on the topic of bullying; with Volk et al. (2017) noting over 5000 peer-reviewed articles had been published on the topic in a six year period. This growing interest in bullying is understandable and warranted considering the detrimental and potential life-long impacts for the individual's involved in bullying (S. E. Moore et al., 2017). Nationally, the UK has made concerted efforts to reduce bullying among young people including national legislation (e.g. The Education and Inspections Act 2006), government guidance documents (Department for Education, 2017, 2018b), numerous charitable organisations (e.g. ABA and Ditch the Label) and an annual national awareness week.

Despite efforts to reduce bullying, relational bullying behaviours have not had the national recognition that they deserve. This form of bullying is often positioned as a normative social behaviour among girls (Simmons, 2011). The normalisation of relational bullying may be detrimental to its detection and intervention, which could have implications for young people's health and wellbeing. This doctoral research has demonstrated that relational bullying is a relatively common experience, with around 1 in 6 young people in England reporting this form of victimisation. Despite wider normative assumptions surrounding relational bullying (Boulton et al., 2014), this form of victimisation was shown to be significantly related to poorer health and wellbeing. The research recognises factors which may help young people to successfully navigate relational bullying, mitigating the negative effects of this form of victimisation. Considering the overlap between different forms of bullying (Wang et al., 2010), particularly cyberbullying, it is likely that the protective role of these factors may extend beyond relational bullying behaviours specifically. Despite common normative perceptions, relational bullying warrants as much attention as the more overt forms of bullying; anti-bullying initiatives which encompass relational bullying behaviours are likely to have a significant reach in improving young people's health, wellbeing and, therefore, their future life chances.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of the questions in the 2014 HBSC England survey

Measure	Response options	Age groups	Status
*Gender	Boy/Girl	All ages	Core
*Grade	Year 7 - Year 11	All ages	Core
*Month of birth	Jan - Dec	All ages	Core
*Year of birth	1995 - 2004	All ages	Core
*Free school meals	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
Born in England	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
*Ethnicity	White British/ Irish/ Traveller of Irish heritage/ Gypsy or Roma/ Any other white background/ White and black Caribbean/ White and black African/ White and Asian/ Any other mixed background/ Indian/ Pakistani/ Bangladeshi/ Any other Asian background/ Black Caribbean/ Black African/ Any other black background/ Chinese/ Any other ethnic background/ Don't want to say/ Don't know	All ages	Country-specific
Breakfast on weekdays	Never - Five days	All ages	Core
Breakfast on weekends	Never/One day/Both days	All ages	Core
Eat fruits	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Core
Eat vegetables	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Core
Eat sweets	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Core
Consume fizzy drinks	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Core
Consume energy drinks	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Country-specific
Consume squash/cordial	Never - More than once a day	All ages	Country-specific
Eat 5 portions of fruit/veg	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
Eat at fast food restaurants	Never - More than five days a week	All ages	Country-specific
Breakfast with parents	Never - Everyday	All ages	Core
Dinner with parents	Never - Everyday	All ages	Core
Tooth brushing	More than once a day - Never	All ages	Core
Time to sleep on school night		All ages	Country-specific
Time wake up on school night		All ages	Country-specific

Enough sleep to concentrate	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
On a diet	No, my weight is fine - Yes	All ages	Core
Physical activity past 7 days	0 days - 7 days	All ages	Core
Days smoking in lifetime	Never - 30 days or more	All ages	Core
Days smoking last 30 days	Never - 30 days or more	All ages	Core
Smoking	Every day - I don't smoke	All ages	Core
Days drunk alcohol in lifetime	Never - 30 days or more	All ages	Core
Days drunk alcohol last 30 days	Never - 30 days or more	All ages	Core
Drink beer	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Drink wine	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Drink spirits	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Drink alcopops	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Drink cider	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Drink other alcohol drink	Every day/Every week/Every month/Rarely/Never	All ages	Core
Number of alcoholic drinks	I never drink - Five or more drinks	15 year olds	Core
Been drunk in lifetime	Never - More than 10 times	All ages	Core
Been drunk last 30 days	Never - More than 10 times	All ages	Core
Cannabis life time	Never - 40 times or more	15 year olds	Core
Cannabis last 30 days	Never - 40 times or more	15 year olds	Core
Age of first alcohol drink	Never - 16 years or older	15 year olds	Core
Age of first drunk	Never - 16 years or older	15 year olds	Core
Age of first cigarette	Never - 16 years or older	15 year olds	Core
Age of first cannabis use	Never - 16 years or older	15 year olds	Core
*Academic achievement	Very good/Good/Average/Below average	All ages	Core
Predicted GCSE English grade		15 year olds	Country-specific
Predicted GCSE Maths grade		15 year olds	Country-specific
Is not taking GCSE's		15 year olds	Country-specific
Liking school	A lot/A bit/Not very much/Not at all	All ages	Core
Pressured by schoolwork	Not at all/ A little/Some/A lot	All ages	Core
*Safe in school	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific

*Belong in school	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Students like being together	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
Students kind and helpful	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
Students accept me	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*Teachers accept me	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*Teachers care about me	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*I trust my teachers	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
One teacher I can go to	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Health	Excellent/Good/Fair/Poor	All ages	Core
Weight		All ages	Core
Height		All ages	Core
*Life satisfaction	1-10	All ages	Core
Visited GP in last year	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
At ease with GP	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
GP treat you with respect	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
Happy with GP explanation	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
Talk to GP about personal things	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific
Long-term disability	Yes/No	All ages	Optional
Disability medication	I do not have/Yes/No	All ages	Optional
Disability effect school	I do not have/Yes/No	All ages	Optional
Type of disability	7 response options	All ages	Country-specific
*KIDSCREEN: Fit and well	Not at all/Slightly/Moderately/very/Extremely	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Energy	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Sad	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Lonely	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Time for yourself	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Free time	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Parents	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Friends	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
*KIDSCREEN: Got on at school	Not at all/Slightly/Moderately/very/Extremely	All ages	Optional

*KIDSCREEN: Pay attention	Never/Rarely/Quite often/Very often/Always	All ages	Optional
Headache	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Stomach-ache	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Back ache	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Feeling low	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Irritability or bad temper	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Feeling nervous	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Difficulties in sleeping	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
Feeling dizzy	Every day - Rarely or never	All ages	Core
*Self-efficacy: Solve problems	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Opposes me	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Accomplish goals	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Unexpected events	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Resourcefulness	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Solve problems	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Coping abilities	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Find solutions	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Good solution	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Self-efficacy: Handle whatever comes	Not at all true - Absolutely true	All ages	Country-specific
*Think about body	Much too thin - Much too fat	All ages	Core
Age of menstruation		All ages	Core
Month of menstruation		All ages	Core
Ever been in love	With a girl/With a boy/With girls and boys/No	15 year olds	Optional
Ever been in relationship	With a girl/With a boy/With girls and boys/No	15 year olds	Optional
Sexual intercourse	Yes/No	15 year olds	Core
Contraceptive - condoms	Yes/No/Don't know	15 year olds	Core
Contraceptive - birth control pills	Yes/No/Don't know	15 year olds	Core
Contraceptive - morning after pill	Yes/No/Don't know	15 year olds	Core
Contraceptive - other method	Yes/No/Don't know	15 year olds	Core
Age of first sexual intercourse	11 years or younger - 17 years	15 year olds	Core

Bullied others past 2 months	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Core
*Bullied past 2 months	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Core
*Cyberbullying - instant messages	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Core
*Cyberbullying - pictures	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Core
*Mean names	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Optional
*Social exclusion	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Optional
*Physical bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Optional
*Rumour spreading	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Optional
Body weight based bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Country-specific
Sexual bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	15 year olds	Optional
*Embarrassing info	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Country-specific
Illness or disability based bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Country-specific
Ethnicity based bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	All ages	Country-specific
Homophobic bullying	Haven't - Several times a week	15 year olds	Country-specific
Times physical fight	None - 4 times or more	All ages	Core
Times injured	Not injured - 4 times or more	All ages	Core
Injury needing medical treatment	Not injured/Yes/No	All ages	Core
Ever self-harmed	Yes/No	15 year olds	Country-specific
How often self-harm	Every day - Several times a year	15 year olds	Country-specific
Mother in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Father in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Stepmother in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Stepfather in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Grandmother in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Grandfather in main home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Living in foster/child home	Yes/No	All ages	Core
Living with someone/somewhere else	Yes/No	All ages	Core
No. brothers main home		All ages	Core
No. sisters main home		All ages	Core
Family well off	Very well off - Not at all well off	All ages	Core

*People say 'hello'	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Safe for children to play out	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*You can trust people around here	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Good places to spend time	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Ask for help from neighbours	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*People take advantage	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Feel safe where I live	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
Father job	Yes/No/Don't know/Don't have	All ages	Core
Reason father does not work	Four response options including "don't know"	All ages	Core
Mother job	Yes/No/Don't know/Don't have	All ages	Core
Reason mother does not work	Four response options including "don't know"	All ages	Core
*Talk to father	Very easy - Very difficult, "don't have or see"	All ages	Core
Talk to father's partner	Very easy - Very difficult, "don't have or see"	All ages	Core
*Talk to mother	Very easy - Very difficult, "don't have or see"	All ages	Core
Talk to mother's partner	Very easy - Very difficult, "don't have or see"	All ages	Core
*Important things are talked about	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*Someone listens to what I say	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*Ask questions	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*We talk over misunderstandings	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Core
*Parents ready to help with school	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Parents willing to talk to teachers	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Parents encourage me at school	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Parents interested in school	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Parents help with homework	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
*Autonomy over free time	I usually decide - My parents decide	All ages	Country-specific
*Family watch TV/DVD	Every day - Never	All ages	Optional
*Family play computer games	Every day - Never	All ages	Optional
*Family sports & exercise	Every day - Never	All ages	Optional
*Family sit and talk	Every day - Never	All ages	Optional
*Family helps me	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core

*Emotional support	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Talk about problems	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Help make decisions	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Friends help me	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Count on friends	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Share joys and sorrows with friends	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
*Talk about problems with friends	Very strongly disagree - Very strongly agree	All ages	Core
Phone/skype/facetime friends	Never - Daily	All ages	Core
Text/SMS friends	Never - Daily	All ages	Core
Email friends	Never - Daily	15 year olds	Core
Instant message friends	Never - Daily	15 year olds	Core
Social media friends	Never - Daily	15 year olds	Core
*Meet friends before 8pm	Never - Daily	All ages	Core
Meet friend after 8pm	Never - Daily	All ages	Core
Watch TV/DVD/video, weekdays	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Watch TV/DVD/video, weekends	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Play computer games, weekdays	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Play computer games, weekends	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Computer use, weekdays	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Computer use, weekends	None at all - About 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
*No. of computers	None/One/Two/More than two	All ages	Core
Personal computer	No/Yes, one/Yes, more than one	All ages	Country-specific
*No. of cars	No/Yes, one/Yes, two or more	All ages	Core
*Own bedroom	No/Yes	All ages	Core
*Holiday out of England	Not at all/Once/Twice/More than twice	All ages	Core
No. of bathrooms	None/One/Two/More than two	All ages	Core
Own a dishwasher	No/Yes	All ages	Core
Exercise - times a week	Every day - Never	All ages	Core
Exercise - hours a week	None - 7 hours or more	All ages	Core
Have you had PSHE	Yes/No	All ages	Country-specific

PSHE: Talked with friends	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Talked with parents	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Skills to care for others	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Consider importance of health	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Health behaviours	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Taken part in discussions	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: PSHE teacher is knowledgeable	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Create own view	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: As challenging as other classes	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
PSHE: Skills to care for own health	Strongly agree - Strongly disagree	All ages	Country-specific
Health and wellbeing	Very well covered - Very poorly covered, "N/A"	All ages	Country-specific
Sex & relationships	Very well covered - Very poorly covered, "N/A"	All ages	Country-specific
Staying safe	Very well covered - Very poorly covered, "N/A"	All ages	Country-specific
Economics and careers	Very well covered - Very poorly covered, "N/A"	All ages	Country-specific
Personal and social skills	Very well covered - Very poorly covered, "N/A"	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Be kind to others	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Forgive others	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Meaning or purpose	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Joy	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Connected to nature	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Care for environment	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Higher spiritual power	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific
*Spirituality: Meditate or pray	Not at all important - Very important	All ages	Country-specific

* Variables utilised in the present study, including both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Appendix B: Student information letter

January 2018

Hello,

I am a student at the University of Hertfordshire and I am doing a research project. The aim of my project is to understand what happens at school between friends and class mates. In particular, I would like to learn more about when things go wrong between friends and class mates. For example, when people might feel left out or ignored, or feel their friends have been turned against them. Hopefully my research will find ways we can help young people deal with these situations. I wonder if you can help me?

If you would like to help me with my research it would involve meeting face-to-face for a chat at school. It would last for about 45 minutes, and would give me time to ask you some questions and find out what **YOU** think.

My research concerns young people so it is really important I talk to young people to get their views. I don't know what it is like to be at school but **YOU** do!

Any information that you tell me will be used in my research to understand what is happening at school and what we can do to help young people. Your name will not be used at any point – it will be kept secret. Your details will be kept safely on a password protected computer at the University of Hertfordshire.

My project has been approved by the Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee at the University of Hertfordshire (Protocol number: aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(2)) to make sure my research is safe and fair.

You do not have to take part if you don't want to – it is completely your choice.

If you are interested in taking part, please give your parent/guardian the letter which is addressed to them and have a chat with them about participating. Your parent/guardian will need to provide their consent for you to take part.

I'm very happy to talk to you and your parent/guardian to answer any questions you have.

Yours sincerely,

Kayleigh Chester

Appendix C: Parent/guardian information letter

January 2018

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a PhD student at the University of Hertfordshire and I am writing to ask you if you would allow your son or daughter to help me with my doctoral research.

My research focuses on a specific form of bullying called relational bullying. Relational bullying describes behaviours which cause harm by damaging friendships and social status e.g. spreading rumours and gossip, excluding peers and encouraging others to do the same. This topic is particularly important because it can be difficult to identify and intervene with this form of bullying.

I am looking to carry out face-to-face interviews with young people aged 11-18 years. Young people **do not** have to have experienced relational bullying. It is important to understand more broadly what young people think about these types of behaviour.

Participation would involve a face-to-face interview, lasting roughly 45 minutes. The interview will happen during school time and on school grounds. If there are any questions your son or daughter would prefer not to answer they are free to skip them, and if at any point they don't want to continue with the interview it can be stopped. The interview will be tape recorded, with their permission

Any information your son or daughter shares with me will be used in my research to help understand bullying at school and what we can do to help young people. Your child's name and school will not be used at any point – the data will be confidential.

All research at the University of Hertfordshire is reviewed by an independent Research Ethics Committee to ensure that the research conducted is moral, legal and safe for participants. This study has been reviewed and given approval by the Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee (Protocol number: aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(2)). I have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for working with children and young people. Any data collected will be stored on secure university servers, and can only be accessed by myself or my supervisors. Data will be destroyed after 5 years.

If you are happy for your son or daughter to take part in my research please complete the attached consent form.

If you have any questions about my project, please contact me on [phone number] (or email [email address]). Alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr Lisa Whiting, on [phone number] (or email [email address])

Yours sincerely,

Kayleigh Chester

Appendix D: Parent/guardian consent form

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

PhD Research Project:

Exploring young people's perception of relational bullying and identifying factors which may protect against the negative outcomes associated with relational bullying victimisation.

Ethics protocol number: aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(2)

Name of researcher: Kayleigh Chester [email address]

	Please initial:
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and that I have had any questions about the research answered to my satisfaction.	
2. I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or has put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities	
3. I give my consent for …….. to take part in the study and understand that s/he can withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.	

Details of person with authority to give consent (Parent/Guardian):

Name: _____ Telephone no:_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Student consent form

Student Consent Form

PhD Research Project:

Exploring young people's perception of relational bullying and identifying factors which may protect against the negative outcomes associated with relational bullying victimisation.

Ethics protocol number: aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(2)

Name of researcher: Kayleigh Chester [email address]

	Please initial:
1. I have read and understood the information sheet for the above research study. I have had chance to think about the information and to ask questions – I am happy with the answers that I have been given,	
2. I agree to take part in the research and understand that I can decide to leave it at any time without giving a reason.	
3. I understand that if I disclose information which suggests I or others are at risk of harm, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.	

Details of person participating in the research study:

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Details of person taking consent:

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Introduction

- Introduce self to young person. Present myself as a student seeking young people's expertise to help reduce the potential power imbalance.

- Explain what will happen over the next 45 minutes e.g. "I would like to find out more about what happens at school between friends and classmates. I would like to ask you a few questions and have a chat and find out what you think. There are no right or wrong answers."

- Check that the young person is aware of the request to digitally record the interview and if they are happy for it to be recorded. *[Begin digital recording with young person's permission.]*

- Reiterate to the participant that they do not have to take part, that they can skip any questions they don't want to answer and that they can stop the interview at any time.

- Reiterate the limitations of confidentiality stated in the consent form. For example :"Do you understand that if you tell me something which makes me worry about your safety or about the safety of others I have a duty of care to report it to the relevant people?"

- Ask an open question to the young person to break the ice and build rapport e.g. "Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself?" or "Why don't you tell me a little bit about your school?"

Main body of interview

Themes to be covered:

- **Perception and understanding** of relational bullying behaviours

- The **impact and experience** of relational bullying behaviours

- Identifying **what helps young people** deal with relational bullying behaviours – the model found family and personal traits.

Indicative questions:

- Could you tell me how you would describe bullying? What do you think bullying is?
    - If someone does something once, do you think that can be bullying?
    - How did you come to that decision? What helped you decide what is and what isn't bullying?
    - Do you think it is clear at school what is bullying?

- Can you tell me what sort of things bullying might include?
    - Can you give me an example…?

Show statements about relational bullying.

- I'd like to have a chat about the behaviours which are described in these statements. Can you tell me what you think about them?

- Have you seen these kinds of things happen at school?
    - Can you give me an example…?
    - You mentioned _____, can you tell me a little bit more about that?
    - Does it happen to boys/girls/both?
    - When it happens at school, is it easy to spot?

- Thinking about those statements and the behaviours you've described; how often do you think these kinds of things happen at school?
    - Can these kinds of things happen outside of school?

- Again, thinking about these kinds of behaviours, would you ever describe them as bullying?
    - Why do you/ do you not think they are bullying?

- Looking at the statements, how do you think it feels to be treated like that?
    - Can you give me an example…?
    - You mentioned __, can you say a bit more about that?

- If you were being excluded or having rumours spread about you, what might make you feel better?

- Is there anything in your life that may help you cope in a situation like that?
    - In what way might they help?
    - Is there anything or anyone else that can help?

- Do you think there are anyways we can help young people who are experiencing these behaviours? (refer to statements) What might help them?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Closing

- Thank the young person for taking part – give thank you letter and support sheet.

- Explain what will happened next with the data.

Protocol to follow in the event of a safeguarding issue

If a participant discloses information which leads me to believe they are at risk of harm I have a duty of care to report these concerns to the appropriate authority. The following procedure will be adhered to in the event of a safeguarding concern:

1. I would inform the young person that I have to talk to other adults about the information they have disclosed because it suggests they and/or others may be at risk of being hurt, this ensures the young person is aware of my intended actions. I would also encourage the young person to discuss the information with an appropriate adult.

2. If the disclosed information does not relate to an omission or commission to the young person (or others) by the parent/guardian, the primary response would be to contact the young person's parent/guardian(s), who are likely to be in the family home when the interview is conducted. In the event that the parent/guardian(s) are not at the family home when the interview is conducted, the parent/guardian would be telephoned (the consent form asks for a contact telephone number).

3. In the event that it is the home environment which poses the risk of harm to the young person, the relevant outside agencies would be contacted. Guidance would immediately be sought from supervisors FB and LW who have extensive experience conducting research with children and young people (one supervisor will be contactable whilst each interview is taking place, in line with the lone worker policy).

Appendix G: Support services information sheet

Support Services Information Sheet

If you should have any further queries, or feel that you would like some support or advice following your involvement in this research project, please contact one of the following:

Project team

Kayleigh Chester (Project Lead): [phone number]; [email address]
Dr Lisa Whiting (Project Supervisor): [phone number]; [email address]

Childline

Childline is a free, confidential service offering advice and support for young people. You can talk to a trained counsellor on the phone, send them an email or chat to them online. You can contact Childline at any time – they are available 24 hours a day. The Childline website has specific pages about bullying including advice for coping with bullying.

Phone: 0800 1111
Website: https://www.childline.org.uk

BullyBusters

BullyBusters offers free, confidential support to young people who are worried about bullying. You can contact BullyBusters on the phone or send them an email. The BullyBusters website contains practical information and advice about bullying. BullyBusters can also offer advice to parents and guardians.

Phone: 0800 169 6928
Website: http://www.bullybusters.org.uk

Ditch the Label

Ditch the Label offer online support through their website to help young people overcome bullying. You can join the Ditch the Label online community where you can ask questions and seek advice.

Website: www.ditchthelabel.org/get-help

Diana Award's Anti-Bullying Campaign

The Diana Award's Anti-Bullying Campaign offers useful advice if you are experiencing bullying including answers to frequently asked questions from young people. The website also contains useful information for parents and guardians.

Website: http://www.antibullyingpro.com

Bullying UK

Bullying UK is a part of the Family Lives charity. The Bullying UK website offers practical information and advice about bullying for young people, as well as parents and guardians.

Website: http://www.bullying.co.uk

Appendix H: UH ethics approval notification

University of Hertfordshire UH

HEALTH SCIENCE ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Kayleigh Chester
CC	Professor Fiona Brooks & Dr Lisa Whiting
FROM	Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science, Engineering and Technology ECDA Chair
DATE	15/03/2018

Protocol number: **aHSK/PGR/UH/02866(3)**

Title of study: Exploring young people's perception of relational bullying and identifying factors which may protect against the negative outcomes associated with relational bullying victimisation

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Modification: Addition of interview location.

This approval is valid:

From: 15/03/2018

To: 31/03/2018

Additional workers: no additional workers named

Please note:

If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete. You are also required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form if you are a member of staff. This form is available via the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site via the 'Application Forms' page http://www.studynet1.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Teaching+Documents?Openview&count=9999&restricttocategory=Application+Forms

Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1/EC1A or as detailed in the EC2 request. Should you amend

Appendix I: Exert of an interview transcript

I: And with like these ones in particular, so like the exclusion, rumours and all that, can the school…or do the school punish people that are…?

P11: Well before they use to just, because it wasn't extremely serious cases from what I went through, but they would, they do have a word with the student and they will say 'oh if you do this again then it will be a bit worse than what you have' but they don't really get punished they just got told off verbally, which is okay on some levels. But, erm, and then now they've brought in a system where, because we have a new…erm, what do you call it…behavioural system which is where they get an hour or something if they're bullying, which I probably would have liked more if they had done that before. If they get a verbal like, because some of them had verbal warnings and did it again which then they still got a verbal warning, but I feel like if they had a verbal warning and then also like the hour then maybe they would probably stop.

I: Okay, yeah.

P11: Because I feel like if they, because most people don't like having hours and stuff.

I: What, sorry just explain something, what do you mean by hours? Like is that…

P11: It's where you sit in a room…

I: …like a detention?

P11: Yeah a detention. Yeah and you sit in there for an hour.

I: Okay…that makes sense now! Sorry!

P11: That's okay.

I: Yeah, and then with that, like how does erm… Just thinking about the process…so, does the school, erm, always get involved? Do you have to, do you as a victim would you have to tell the school?

P11: If, because we have year managers we can speak to our year managers if we need to, but not everyone is willing to tell someone so sometimes they just bottle it up and only tell their friends. And we've had, erm, some of my friends they have like told us and we're like 'oh this is bad, you shouldn't have kept that' so then we told the year managers so they eventually sorted it out because they were too afraid that the person was then going to do something to them. It's like 'no it's fine, we've got your back', we can just tell them and it will be dealt with and then probably won't happen again. Which it didn't, so…

I: That's good to hear.

P11: But, yeah, each school is very different so they have different ways of dealing with bullying. So I don't know what other schools do though.

I: No, of course.

P11: So they could do much worse, like much more worse punishments and stuff or it could be easy breezy! *Laughter*

Appendix J: Example of moving from a number of codes through to one theme

Initial coding	Secondary coding	Sub-themes	Final theme
Adolescent identity	Strength in knowing who you are	"know who you are"	"Brush it off": Personal resources to navigate relational bullying
Knowing who you are			
Confidence to deal with bullying	Self-confidence helps you cope with bullying		
Self-confidence			
Self-confidence to cope			
Social skills			
Emotional response	Poor mental health linked to coping ability	Emotional wellbeing	
Mental health			
Activities to escape	Importance of keeping occupied/deflecting	Resourcefulness	
Distracting technique			
Dwell on the bullying			
Laughing at themselves	Strategies to prevent being bullied/ preventing		
With-holding information to prevent bullying			
Ignore the bullying	The ability to switch off from bullying/deflecting		
The ability to switch off from bullying			
Don't check your phone	Removing phone from situation may help/avoidance		
Remove phone from situation			
Avoiding the situation	Avoiding environments where the bullying may take place/ avoidance		

Appendix K: Publication in the Journal of School Health

JOURNAL OF SCHOOL HEALTH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Association Between Experiencing Relational Bullying and Adolescent Health-Related Quality of Life

KAYLEIGH L. CHESTER, BSc[a] NEIL H. SPENCER, PhD[b] LISA WHITING, DHRes[c] FIONA M. BROOKS, PhD[d]

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Bullying is a public health concern for the school-aged population, however, the health outcomes associated with the subtype of relational bullying are less understood. The purpose of this study was to examine the association between relational bullying and health-related quality of life (HRQL) among young people.

METHODS: This study utilized data from 5335 students aged 11-15 years, collected as part of the 2014 Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) study conducted in England. Data were collected through self-completed surveys. Multilevel analysis modeled the relationship between relational bullying and HRQL. Demographic variables (sex, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) and other forms of bullying were controlled for.

RESULTS: Experiencing relational bullying had a significant negative association with HRQL whilst controlling for other forms of bullying. Weekly relational bullying resulted in an estimated 5.352 (95% confidence interval (CI), −4.178, −6.526) decrease in KIDSCREEN-10 score compared with those not experiencing relational bullying.

CONCLUSION: Experiencing relational bullying is associated with poorer HRQL. The findings question the perception of relational bullying as being a predominantly female problem. Girls were more likely to report experiencing relational bullying, but the negative association with HRQL was equal for boys and girls.

Keywords: health-related quality of life; KIDSCREEN; relational bullying; victimization.

Citation: Chester KL, Spencer NH, Whiting L, Brooks FM. Association between experiencing relational bullying and adolescent health-related quality of life. J Sch Health. 2017; 87: 865-872.

Received on June 13, 2016
Accepted on April 9, 2017

Appendix L: Dissemination activities

Sept. 2019	**"Young people's perception of relational bullying."** Invited talk at the 2019 Children's Nursing Conference, University of Hertfordshire.
June 2019	**"Adolescent perceptions of relational bullying and associated protective factors: A mixed methods study."** Paper presented at the 2019 World Anti-Bullying Forum, Dublin City University.
Oct. 2018	**3 Minute Thesis competition** 2018 Postgraduate Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire. ***Awarded first place***.
June 2018	**"Exploring the health consequences of adolescent relational bullying and identifying protective factors from the adolescent world."** Paper presented at the 2018 School of Health and Social Work Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire.
Nov. 2017	**Media engagement during 2017 Anti-Bullying Week** A pre-recorded interview for a local radio station (BOB FM) and a telephone interview resulting in a BBC News article titled "The worst bullies: My friends called me Ugly Betty".
Oct. 2017	**"It's not sticks and stones but exclusion and lies: Exploring the health and wellbeing consequences of relational bullying."** Poster presented at the 2017 Postgraduate Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire. ***Poster prize.***
Dec. 2016	**"The association between relational bullying and health related quality of life among English adolescents."** Poster presented at the 2016 Excellence in Pediatrics Conference, London.
Oct. 2016	**"Vision and Voice 2016: The next generation of researchers."** Doctoral research illustrated through photographs; publication arising from the 2016 Annual Conference for Research Students, University of Hertfordshire.
Sept. 2016	**"The association between relational bullying and health related quality of life."** Poster presented at the 2016 Children's Nursing Conference, University of Hertfordshire.
July 2015	**"Relational bullying and emotional wellbeing."** Poster presented at the 2015 School of Health and Social Work Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire. ***Poster prize.***
July 2014	**"Reflections from drawing on the expertise of youth reference groups to shape the development of proposed research."** Paper presented at the 2014 School of Health and Social Work Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire.
July 2013	**"Girls use different bullying behaviours to boys: Key challenges in the field."** Paper presented at the 2013 School of Health and Social Work Research Conference, University of Hertfordshire.