What are the impacts of bullying?

- Research has identified negative impacts, not only for those who are bullied, but for those who bully others and those who witness bullying.

- The negative social and health outcomes observed in children and young people who persistently bully others suggest that such behaviour is a warning sign to educators for closer attention and action from parents and schools. There is a strong rationale for intervention with those who bully others that goes beyond punishment for their inappropriate behaviour.

- Negative impacts for students who have been bullied have been observed in school engagement, academic achievement and many aspects of wellbeing while at school, and long-term impacts have been identified for physical and mental health. It is likely the relationship between being bullied and these later problems is complex and reciprocal (rather than simply causal), possibly reflecting a cycle of harm over years.

- The most commonly described forms of bullying are verbal, physical and social. Verbal, physical, and social actions in bullying can be overt or covert, direct or indirect, face-to-face or online.

- In terms of negative impacts, the most significant problems have been noted in students subjected to direct and relational forms of bullying.

- Young people consider online and offline (face-to-face) settings to be connected rather than separate. The connection is their social lives being 'lived' across two environments involving interactions with people they know in both.

- While some previous research has suggested that online bullying leads to more significant negative outcomes, the majority of students in a recent Australian study considered face-to-face bullying more harmful than online bullying.

- As well as harm that may be apparent to others, the social dynamic nature of bullying means that individuals can be harmed through experiencing contempt and exclusion from peer relationships. More recent work has also explored how social anxiety, abjection and contempt production are created through bullying.

- These negative feelings of social anxiety, fear and distress about being treated with contempt can continue while away from the school, not just for online bullying, but for bullying that occurs face-to-face at other times.

- Many factors have been identified as relevant to students' assessment of whether unwanted actions are harmful, so it seems the effects of bullying are specific to each individual.

- Many students who are bystanders to bullying experience moral distress and social anxiety from witnessing or having to act in response to a disturbing incident which they consider to be wrong. Students feel distress about not knowing how to act and feeling concerned about their own status or safety.

- It would be simplistic to attribute poor life outcomes to a single aspect of a student's life, i.e. bullying experienced at school, without also considering the complex influences of other environmental, personal and developmental differences.

- It is clear that bullying is associated with numerous and lasting negative impacts on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing into adulthood.

Implications for schools

- The correlation of student bullying with a range of adverse impacts later in life provides a strong rationale for intervention and preventative support to students.

- Bullying should not be dismissed as an innocuous, harmless or 'normal' part of growing up.

- Bullying can be harmful for everyone involved, and all students involved in bullying need support, including those who are bullied, those bullying others and those who are bystanders.

- It is imperative that schools' interventions and responses are respectful of students and do not trigger further social anxiety or potential harm for them.

- Approaches to countering bullying within the school community will be more comprehensive and appropriate when students' views about why bullying is happening and how harmful it is for them are included. Adults' interpretations may not be accurate and may result in responses which are inappropriate.

- Regardless of the type of bullying, students can experience harm and negative impacts at school and continuing into life, so schools need to be aware of all 'faces' of bullying — verbal, physical and social; covert and overt; direct and indirect; face-to-face and online.

Want to know more?

This research snapshot is based on *A review of literature (2010–2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group.* (2015).

Other research snapshots on student bullying are available at Bullying. No Way!

Further information on bullying and on student safety and wellbeing can be found at: www.bullyingnoway. gov.au and www.safeschoolshub.edu.au

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