Barnardo's Cymru research findings from anti-bullying poll 2013

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Barnardo's
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Acknowledgements

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Background research context of the poll

A survey monkey poll, along with printable PDF versions, were sent to private, statutory and third sector organisations working with children and young people across Wales. Responses came from a wide variety of organisations including charities, support groups, schools, statutory youth services and anonymous individuals.

The poll consisted of three, straightforward language, yes/ no questions regarding whether the respondent had witnessed bullying on grounds of race or culture, sexual orientation or disability. The poll then invited respondents to make further comments or give ideas about what the Welsh Government should be doing to prevent bullying. 46% of respondents chose to give further comments after answering the tick box questions.

Demographics of the respondents

644 children and young people completed our poll and we received another 11 responses from parents. This report only details children and young people's responses.
One fifth of responses were completed in Welsh and whilst we do not have data to undertake a full region comparison, responses came from all regions of Wales.

Almost three quarters (74%) of responses were from young people aged between 11 and 16 with the full age range being 6 to 23 years old. There were no discernable differences in replies based upon age, except that children under 12 years old were more likely to answer 'I don't know' to seeing homophobic bullying than older children.

Reported prevalence of identity related bullying

Over half of children who responded reported seeing bullying on grounds of identities protected within the Single Equalities Act 2010. 58% of respondents had witnessed bullying due to disability, 58% had witnessed bullying due to homophobia and 51% had witnessed bullying due to race or cultural heritage. Children and young people reported witnessing bullying in both school and community settings.

We received personal examples and stories of how children and young people with these 3 protected status' are bullied. There were significant variations between local authority areas regarding the level of bullying faced by children and young people with the different identities. The quotes below detail the varying forms that bullying can take- from verbal abuse masked as jokes or comments to physical abuse:

'People in my area get bullied for having a disability.'

'There is a lot of gay comments and racist comments.'

'There is lots of gay jokes. Not so much racist but just gay jokes.'

'It really needs to be sorted out because I hear a lot of inappropriate language towards people with additional requirements and it really upsets me to hear them saying these things.'

'A person in my school is getting bullied by people in his P.E. class and he is getting shoes thrown at him, just because he is bisexual.'

'I know someone in my school year who gets bullied by other students for his sexuality.'

'I seen somebody make racist remarks.'

'It's not quite bullying, more like generally ignoring or being rude to people who's origins they don't agree with.'

Children call on the Welsh Government to take a lead in anti-bullying practice

84% of all respondents felt the Welsh Government should be doing more to stop bullying. There were 3 reasons cited for this:

1. Children and young people felt that the Welsh Government should lead anti bullying work rather than leave it to local authority or school level decisions because there should be nation-wide action on anti bullying practice. They felt that Government should use its power to implement national programmes or initiatives in both school and community settings that have accompanying standards and monitoring. This call for the Government to take a lead is linked to the children and young people's main priority- the need for Government to improve current anti bullying practice.

'They should have a Wales wide anti bullying scheme'

'If the Government were making schools stick to their anti-bullying policy and use it more consistently, and making them be more proactive about stopping bullying then less bullies would be prepared to bully and the amount of young people who are bullied would decrease.'

'Every school should have to reach a certain anti-bullying standard.'

2. Bullying has an effect on children and young people's mental health, which should be a governmental concern. Children and young people said bullying can lead to suicide, self harm, eating disorders and poor mental health, as well as undermining people's self confidence and esteem.

'I think that the government should do something because bullying can lead to death or suicide.'

'It is causing people to have bad thoughts about severely injuring themselves'

3. Bullying impacts upon a child's ability to focus upon school work and affects educational attainment. It was felt that these are issues that the Welsh Government are talking about and therefore dealing with bullying is not just solvable by individual teachers or schools.

'It's effecting school work'

'I missed out on a valuable school year due to severe bullying, my school took so long to move me and the bullying was continued until moved'

Children and young people feel resigned to the lack of action to stop bullying

13% of respondents felt that they did not know what the Government could do to stop bullying. Despondency regarding the lack of action to tackle bullying received the third highest number of comments from respondents (joint with community safety, detailed below). Many children and young people felt despondent towards adults' ability to tackle bullying, believing it is endemic, a fact of life and not of concern to adults.

'It is really, really common. It's common because it's not challenged'

'The Government can't do much as everyone is being bullied or is bullying in some way.'

'I see it a lot of time in college and school and my friends are bullying everyone and I get bullied all the time.'

'Bullying is everywhere'

There needs to be clear support and sanctions for people displaying bullying behaviour

This was the second priority for respondents. Many children and young people are evidently angry and frustrated at the level of bullying they see around them and feel that there is no consistent approach to stopping bullying. Some felt it should become a criminal justice issue and that this is the level of seriousness it is given if it occurs between adults. Generally the call was for punishment or sanctions. These were not revengeful but suggestive of a lack of effective current practice that made many children and young people feel that some negative behaviours were not tackled or dealt with, which can lead to either despondency or resentfulness.

> *'I was beat up in my school yard by 12 children and because there was no teacher to see it they got away with just a warning.'*

Preventing bullying organisations work with those who display bullying behaviours and know that they need support and clear sanctions rather than a punishment approach. However, among the public, parents and children and young people, offering support to people to address their own bullying behaviours is a particularly difficult subject, and it is made more difficult to accept if children and young people's current experiences are that there is little support or concern for those who are bullied. Within such a climate, it is not surprising that punishments are called for rather than support.

> *'There should be a punishment for bullying so that people will start to realise the seriousness of it.'*
>
> *'There should be a more serious punishment then just getting told off because it is often the same people doing it again and again because they think they can get away with it.'*
>
> *'The Government should arrest people or sanction people who bully. Make it illegal'*

Findings regarding current practice in schools

Generally children and young people felt that initiatives were too piecemeal to be effective, that anti bullying policies are not followed up with implementation and that anti bullying work is a low priority at Government and school level. Improving current practice was the highest concern amongst respondents. From the responses we received we identified the following five themes:

- **Problems with reporting mechanisms in schools**

The quotes below highlight how often current reporting mechanisms of bullying are not effective. Firstly, respondents felt that bullying is ignored or that children that try to report it are not listened to:

> *'I think they need to put more pressure on schools to stick to their anti-bullying policy when bullying is reported because a lot of schools disregard it as 'kids being kids' and they don't do anything to stop it.'*
>
> *'Either when you tell a teacher they do nothing or they tell the bully off but nothing changes so if it happens again that pupil won't bother telling the teacher.'*
>
> *'Teachers should take children and accusations more seriously and not just say 'ignore it'.'*
>
> *'School teachers don't do nearly enough to stop bullying.'*

Secondly, respondents felt that pupils cannot approach teachers to report bullying and that schools should have better systems to reach out to pupils so they feel enabled to report bullying, in the knowledge that they will be listened to:

> *'Pupils in schools that are bullied feel like they cannot approach teachers'*
>
> *'I think that school should reach out to help students feel more like they have people to talk to.'*

Lastly, some respondents felt that a failure to take action on bullying once it had been reported should result in sanctions for the teachers involved.

> *'All bullying must be reported, failure should result on disciplinary procedures of teaching staff'*

- **Lack of implementation of anti bullying policies**

There were high levels of criticism regarding anti bullying policies. Problems were reported to be with the lack of enforcement, a lack of strategy and a lack of relating policies to initiatives and systems.

> *'There is no consistency in bullying policies in schools.'*
>
> *'Rubbish anti bullying policies in school.'*
>
> *'Schools need to have stricter anti bullying policies.'*
>
> *'Standardise anti bullying policies in schools.'*
>
> *'The bullying policy is not enforced.'*

- **Lack of "whole school" approach**

Most respondents who commented on the lack of effective current practice spoke about how there is a piecemeal approach to anti bullying in schools and therefore no clear strategy that links equality education, "whole school" ethos and anti bullying initiatives. Pupils were not saying that there were not some support systems in place, but that they do not work well and are too piecemeal to be effective.

> 'They need to spend more money on improving things to stop bullying. My school was doing little about bullying'
>
> 'In X there is a lack of anti bullying facilities in the school.'
>
> 'I feel as though there are not enough anti-bullying schemes in place and if they are they are not thought through well enough to stop bullying'

Children and young people suggested implementing different initiatives and stated their schools did different things. This suggests that whilst some schools are implementing some anti bullying preventative measures there is a piecemeal approach that is not implemented on a whole school basis. It also suggests that good practice may not be currently replicated across schools or areas. Suggestions that children and young people had for reducing bullying included:

> *'They should offer counselling for all people. To put posters around the school for counselling'*
>
> *'Self-esteem courses'*
>
> *'Provide support workers in schools who will listen at any time about anything.'*
>
> *'There needs to be more help than there is at the moment. More teachers around at break and lunch times in school'*
>
> *'Need to look into rolling out more buddy systems so the bullied young people have someone to talk to and feel like they're being heard and listened too.'*
>
> *'Look further behind the reasons behind why those children are bullying other children.'*

- **The need for teacher training**

There was not a negative attitude towards teachers. However, it was felt that teachers and senior school staff were not equipped to notice bullying nor know how to tackle it and there was a focus upon individual teachers having to solve the issues of bullying with no whole school approach.

> *'Teachers should be given proper training to deal with bullying.'*
>
> *'Make the teachers better with dealing with it'*
>
> *'I think teachers should be more aware to look out for bullying within schools.'*
>
> *'Teachers and individuals in senior positions in the school don't take it seriously enough, or do not chase it up if bullying has been going on.'*

- **The need to improve equalities education in schools**

There were a number of calls for Government initiated work in schools regarding equality education and bullying prevention:

> *'Maybe more work is needed to help people who are bullied. As even if someone isn't bullied they are still judged if they are homosexual, have a disability, race or skin colour etc.'*

Pupils felt that anti bullying work in schools needs to be more consistent and include ongoing education about tolerance, positive behaviour and equality. The issue for most was that although some work is undertaken, it is not pivotal to their school's delivery or ethos and does not constitute a programme of learning about equality and respect.

> *'Also they could have lessons in school to raise awareness of the importance and seriousness of these matters and issues in our area.'*
>
> *'People need to be taught about equality so that people will be more accepting and respectful.'*
>
> *'They could make anti bullying campaigns more known and where to find them.'*
>
> *'More education is needed at primary schools'*
>
> *'You should raise awareness of homophobic language and that it is just as wrong as racism or sexism'*
>
> *'Host assemblies and social groups to create a better awareness of different disabilities, culture and homophobia.'*
>
> *'I think people need to be told that the language they are using is inappropriate and disrespectful.'*
>
> *'I think they should raise awareness about gay/bisexual/pansexual because a lot of these things happen because people don't understand.'*

Findings regarding bullying outside of school

- **The need to support diversity in community settings**

There was a feeling that there needs to be more support groups for LGBT and disabled children and young people. It was also felt that bullying would be reduced if youth settings, outside of schools, had equality awareness education and anti bullying training. Generally, this call focused upon the lack of support for children and young people coping with bullying outside of school settings and that there is no central place for them to get information and concrete help.

> *'Make more accessible LGBT support groups for young people.'*
>
> *'Stop bullying to sexualities. They should find out how people get bullied and encourage that there is nothing wrong with gays/lesbians. It is all quite immature.'*
>
> *'Provide more support online on websites etc.'*
>
> *'Helplines for victims'*

- **Bullying and community safety**

Linking bullying to the community safety agenda received the third highest number of comments (joint with feelings of despondency). Children and young people felt that whilst bullying in school is not adequately dealt with, there is no focus upon bullying that occurs outside of school and there is little education regarding bullying and equality outside of school:

> *'The government should focus more on the bullying that happens outside of school'*
>
> *'Provide more places in the local village for support'*
>
> *'More people to help and support out side of school'*
>
> *'Not enough support if bullying happens in the community.'*

It was also felt that bullying in neighbourhoods should be dealt with by community support police, which would put it in the category of community safety (in line with the hate crime framework and as currently applied to adults).

> *'There's people in groups going around areas beating people up'*
>
> *'The Government could do more to stop groups and gangs of local people from the same area from bullying local individuals and stop violence and threats'*

Barnardo's Cymru would not be advocating for the criminalisation of young people on this issue. However, we would urge that initiatives within the Welsh Government's 'Tackling Hate Crime and incidences: a framework for Action', such as public education and community reporting centres are applied to children and young people as much as adults. There is also scope for preventing bullying to be incorporated onto community safety agendas such as PACT (Partnerships and Communities Together).

- ### The Need to raise public awareness of bullying

The consensus was that there is not enough direct information about bullying for children and young people, with different organisations offering different things in different parts of the country. Respondents also pointed out that there is no information for the public or parents about the issues of bullying. Respondents felt there should be public awareness of equality issues as they affect children and young people, and information available to the public regarding what action they can take to support targets of bullying and stop bullying.

> *'Make people more aware of different races and religions'*
>
> *'I think the Government should be doing more to raise awareness of LGBT issues'*
>
> *'Encourage that there is nothing wrong with gays and lesbians'*
>
> *'The best way forward is for funding to be provided to train people in presentation skills so that they can go into society and share their stories as part of a greater education system. We should educate others about how bullying actually affects people, to show bullies the results of their actions, and to challenge them head on.'*

- **Cyber bullying**

There was a high level of awareness and concern regarding cyber bullying, and respondents felt it is an escalating problem. Respondents referred to cyber bullying as bullying that occurs outside of school, although with current phone technology it can occur within and beyond the school gate. They felt that the Government could be more proactive towards cyber bullying and take action to force web site companies to be more responsible, as well as provide practical information to children and young people about how to reduce the cyber bullying they are exposed to. This was seen as a Government responsibility that should not be left to individual teacher knowledge or action at a school level.

'I think the Government should do more to prevent cyber bullying.'

'Provide more support for people being cyber-bullied and look at younger ages as well, not just teenagers.'

Many respondents called for the Government to close websites like ask.fm and require much better security and blocking systems of social network sites.

'Try to close down dangerous websites that could potentially spread rumours and cause arguments with saying it face to face. E.g. ask.fm'

'They should ban some websites that are dangerous'

'More security on web and social networks'

'Have better blocking systems on social networks'

Effective tackling of bullying

- **Good practice**

Where children and young people felt that bullying was prevented and tackled well they were keen to highlight it. Good practice examples included cultural differences education in schools, local authority anti bullying forums for specific characteristics, being a part of a young inspectors anti bullying programme, and having anti bullying policies that are implemented, clear and relevant.

'I am trying to challenge bullying by being a young inspector.'

'Being part of this anti-bullying group I have learnt a lot about my rights and how schools/settings should protect myself and others from being bullied. However, I don't think schools promote young peoples rights, school is not a safe place to learn. I think because policies are in place the setting thinks its ok, like a tick box exercise. If young people don't know about the policy, understand the sanctions then what's the point?'

'Schools in [our local authority] will be assessed by young people, young people's voices hear and settings will do more to be awarded an anti-bullying kite mark.'

Conclusions

It is clear that children and young people have identified many problems with current anti bullying practice and are calling for the Welsh Government to take action across the country to implement higher, consistent standards. This call to action is possible through firstly creating a national anti bullying strategy that includes the good practice that respondents identify and addresses the weaknesses identified, and secondly applying community safety and hate crime prevention to the experiences of children and young people. Respondents were clear that there is a need for stronger equality education in schools and community settings which should include support for teachers and other adults.