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Bullying in Schulen

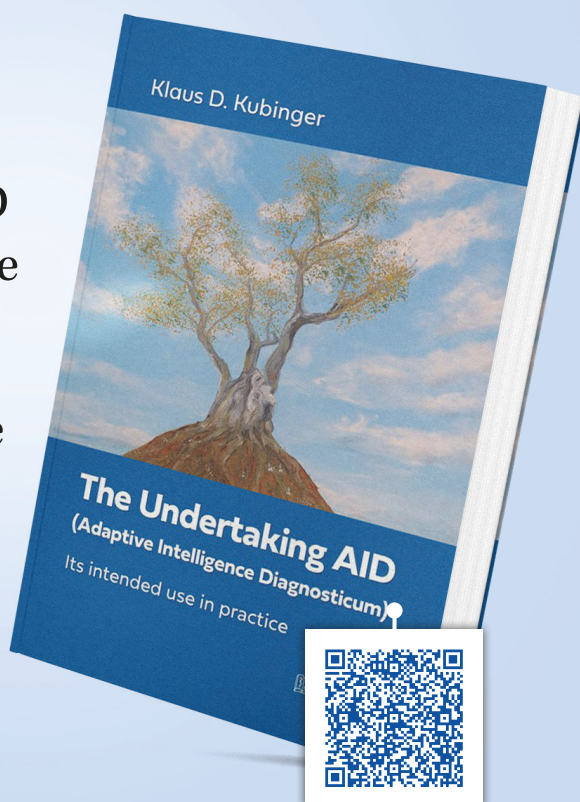
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Neele Bäker & Ute von Düring (Eds.)

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Bullying in Schulen

Neele Bäker & Ute von Düring

Universität Oldenburg

Bullying in der Schule gehört zu den seit Jahrzehnten intensiv beforschten Phänomenen schulischer Sozialbeziehungen. Nach wie vor ist ein erheblicher Anteil von Schülerinnen und Schülern an Bullyingprozessen beteiligt. Die Folgen reichen von akuten emotionalen Belastungsreaktionen über Angststörungen und depressive Symptome bis hin zu erhöhtem Suizidrisiko (Arseneault, 2018; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). Vor diesem Hintergrund wird die Notwendigkeit systematischer schulischer Unterstützungsangebote besonders deutlich. Die Sonderpädagogik kann mit ihren differenzierten theoretischen Zugängen und empirischen Perspektiven einen wichtigen Beitrag zum vertieften Verständnis von Bullying sowie zur Entwicklung wirksamer Schutz- und Unterstützungskonzepte leisten. Wir freuen uns daher, dieses Themenheft für die *Empirische Sonderpädagogik* gestalten zu dürfen.

Die UNESCO-Definition beschreibt Bullying als schädlichen sozialen Prozess, der in institutionelle, kulturelle und normative Kontexte eingebettet ist und das Recht auf Bildung, Sicherheit und Würde beeinträchtigt (UNESCO and World Anti-Bullying Forum Working Group, 2024). Damit wird Bullying ausdrücklich als Thema von Bildungsgerechtigkeit markiert. In diesem Verständnis zeigt Bullying an, wie Schule soziale Sicherheit, Anerkennung und Teilhabe konkret gestaltet. Als Pionier der Bullyingforschung berichtete Olweus (1993) in den 1990er Jahren von internationalen Prävalenzraten von Bullying von ca. 14%. Aktuelle Prävalenzdaten liefert die WHO-Studie "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children" (Cosma et al., 2024). Demnach sind 8 bis 11% der Schülerinnen und Schüler Opfer von Bullying und 5 bis 8% der Schülerinnen und Schüler Täterinnen und Täter. Die Autoren folgern aus den Daten einen kleinen Rückgang von Bullying seit 2014. Diese Prävalenzraten verdeutlichen, dass Bullying trotz jahrzehntelanger Forschung und der Existenz evidenzbasierter Präventionsprogramme weiterhin ein persistentes Problem darstellt. Kinder und Jugendliche mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf sind überdurchschnittlich häufig an Bullyingprozessen beteiligt oder von ihnen betroffen. Studien zeigen, dass insbesondere Schülerinnen und Schüler mit emotionalen und sozialen Auffälligkeiten stärker gefährdet sind, sowohl Bullying zu initiieren als auch selbst Opfer zu werden (Eilts et al., 2022; Schütz et al., 2022). Hinzu kommt, dass Jugendliche mit Lern- und Entwicklungsbeeinträchtigungen häufig in Peerkonstellationen eingebunden sind, in denen Statusdynamiken, Grenzverschiebungen und Zuschreibungsprozesse besonders instabil sind, was ihre Exponiertheit erhöht (Espelage, 2018). Wo wiederholte machtasymmetrische Aggressionen persistieren, werden Defizite in sozialer Sicherheit, Anerkennung und Teilhabe sichtbar. In diesem Sinne verweist Bullying nicht nur auf individuelle Risiken, sondern auch auf strukturelle Passungsprobleme innerhalb schulischer Systeme. Richtet sich der Blick der Forschung auf die Schule, liegen ebenfalls viele empirische Ergebnisse vor, die uns Hinweise darauf geben, wie Schule sich erfolgreich gegen Bullying aufstellen kann (Espelage & Swearer, 2009). Dennoch bleibt Bullying ein mittlerweile vertrautes Problem.

In den letzten Jahren hat sich international eine deutliche Strukturierung der Forschung in Metaperspektiven herausgebildet, die auch dieses Themenheft spiegeln. Eine erste Perspektive versteht Bullying als dynamischen Entwicklungsprozess in Peergemeinschaften. Sie untersucht Rollenverläufe, Statusdynamiken, situative Machtasymmetrien und soziale Mechanismen, die das Aufrechterhalten oder Beenden von Bullyingprozessen erklären (Salmivalli, 2010). Eine zweite Perspektive rückt Entwicklungsprozesse in den Mittelpunkt, die das Handeln von Schülerinnen und Schülern in Bullyingkontexten maßgeblich prägen. Dazu gehören moralisches Urteilen und Verantwortungsübernahme, Empathie und Perspektivenübernahme, Fähigkeiten der emotionalen Selbst- und Fremdregulation sowie die Orientierung an gruppenbezogenen moralischen Normen (Thornberg & Jungert, 2014). Eine dritte Perspektive betont schulische Kontexte, Schulklima und systemische Prävention im Sinne sozialökologischer Modelle. Sie analysiert institutionelle Bedingungen, normative Kulturen und professionelle Praktiken, die Bullying begünstigen oder begrenzen und untersucht gleichzeitig, wie Programme kontextsensibel implementiert werden können (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Die in diesem Heft versammelten Beiträge lassen sich diesen drei Linien zuordnen und bringen sie in einer Weise zusammen, die besonders für die Sonderpädagogik von Bedeutung ist, da hier besondere Vulnerabilitäten, Ressourcenprofile und institutionelle Bedingungen aufeinandertreffen. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Perspektiven lässt sich Bullying für die empirische Sonderpädagogik als ein zentrales Problem lesen. Es zeigt, wo Kinder und Jugendliche mit unterschiedlichen Voraussetzungen in ihren Peergemeinschaften keinen verlässlichen Platz finden, wo moralische und empathische Kompetenzen nicht hinreichend in eine Verantwortung für andere übersetzt werden und wo schulische Kontexte soziale Sicherheit nicht gewährleisten. Es verweist zugleich auf Möglichkeiten professionellen Handelns. Insgesamt rückt Bullying damit in das Zentrum einer sonderpädagogischen Forschungsperspektive, die soziale Teilhabe, Entwicklungsgerechtigkeit und schulische Schutzkonzepte gemeinsam betrachtet. Bullying erscheint nicht als isoliertes Verhalten einzelner Schülerinnen oder Schüler, sondern als verdichteter Ausdruck komplexer Passungsprobleme zwischen individuellen Voraussetzungen und sozialen Kontexten. Die in diesem Themenheft präsentierten Studien zeigen exemplarisch, wie empirische Forschung diese Zusammenhänge sichtbar machen kann und welche Wege sich daraus für professionelle Praxis und schulische Prävention ergeben. Als Gastherausgeberinnen dieses Themenhefts verstehen wir Bullying daher nicht nur als Gegenstand empirischer Analyse, sondern als normative Herausforderung. Eine Schule, in der Kinder und Jugendliche wiederholt, machtasymmetrisch und vor den Augen anderer verletzt werden, kann ihren Bildungs- und Teilhabeauftrag nicht erfüllen.

Unser Dank gilt den Autorinnen und Autoren der Beiträge für ihre sorgfältige empirische Arbeit und den Gutachterinnen und Gutachtern für ihre engagierten Rückmeldungen. Der Redaktion der Empirischen Sonderpädagogik danken wir für die Möglichkeit, dieses Themenheft zu gestalten. Wir hoffen, dass die hier präsentierten Arbeiten Impulse geben für weitere Forschung und für eine sonderpädagogische Praxis, die Bullyingprozesse differenziert versteht und Schulen in ihrer Entwicklung zu sicheren und inklusiven Lernorten unterstützt.

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Latent Profiles of Bully/Assistants and Associations with Empathy

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Abstract

Empathy is widely regarded as a critical socio-emotional skill for reducing bullying in schools. However, evidence from intervention studies suggests that empathy training in bullying prevention programs does not consistently reduce bullying behaviors, raising questions about the contexts in which empathy influences bullying dynamics. Previous correlational research has highlighted links between empathy deficits and increased bullying, as well as enhanced empathy and defender behaviors, but findings remain inconclusive regarding the roles of cognitive and affective empathy. Most studies adopt a variable-centered approach that examines average relationships across samples, obscuring how empathy dimensions and bullying behaviors co-occur within individuals and whether these configurations differ across students. A person-centred approach is necessary to identify distinct subgroups of students with different empathy-bullying profiles and to examine how these profiles evolve over time, potentially explaining inconsistent findings in the literature. This repeated measurement study utilizes latent profile analysis (LPA) to explore how cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and bullying behaviors intersect at two time points six months apart among 120 adolescents aged 10 to 16 from an inclusive educational setting, including students with and without special educational needs (SEN) in emotional and social development. Latent profiles identified distinct patterns of stability and change. While some students maintained low bullying and average empathy profiles, others transitioned from high bullying/low empathy profiles to profiles characterized by reduced bullying and improved empathy. This variability in profile stability over time suggests that empathy-bullying relationships are dynamic and heterogeneous rather than static and uniform across students. These findings highlight the value of person-centred approaches for revealing how empathy and bullying co-occur in distinct configurations within different subgroups of students. The existence of distinct profiles with different developmental trajectories suggests that school-based bullying prevention may benefit from differentiated approaches tailored to students' profile memberships rather than universal empathy training programs that assume homogeneous needs across all students.

Keywords: Bullying Perpetration, Empathy, longitudinal, latent profile analysis

Latente Profile von Bully-Assistenten und Zusammenhänge mit Empathie

Zusammenfassung

Empathie gilt weithin als eine zentrale sozio-emotionale Kompetenz zur Reduktion von Bullying in Schulen. Befunde aus Interventionsstudien zeigen jedoch, dass Empathietraining in Präventionsprogrammen Bullying nicht konsistent reduziert, was Fragen nach den Bedingungen aufwirft, unter denen Empathie die Bullying-Dynamik beeinflusst. Frühere Korrelationsstudien haben Zusammenhänge zwischen Empathiedefiziten und verstärktem Bullying sowie zwischen ausgeprägter Empathie und Verteidigungsverhalten aufgezeigt, jedoch bleiben die Befunde hinsichtlich der Rollen kognitiver und affektiver Empathie uneinheitlich. Die meisten Studien verwenden einen variablenzentrierten Ansatz, der durchschnittliche Zusammenhänge über Stichproben hinweg untersucht und dabei verdeckt, wie Empathiedimensionen und Bullying innerhalb von Individuen zusammen auftreten und ob diese Konfigurationen zwischen Schülerinnen und Schülern variieren. Ein personen-zentrierter Ansatz ist notwendig, um distinkte Teilgruppen mit unterschiedlichen Empathie-Bullying-Profilen zu identifizieren und zu untersuchen, wie sich diese Profile im Zeitverlauf entwickeln, was möglicherweise die inkonsistenten Befunde in der Literatur erklären kann. Diese Studie mit Mehrfachmessung nutzt latente Profilanalyse (LPA), um zu untersuchen, wie kognitive Empathie, affektive Empathie und Bullying zu zwei Messzeitpunkten im Abstand von sechs Monaten bei 120 Jugendlichen im Alter von 10 bis 16 Jahren in einem inklusiven Bildungssetting zusammenwirken, einschließlich Schülerinnen und Schüler mit und ohne sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarf im Bereich der emotionalen und sozialen Entwicklung. Die latenten Profile zeigten distinkte Muster von Stabilität und Veränderung. Während einige Schülerinnen und Schüler Profile mit geringem Bullying und durchschnittlicher Empathie beibehielten, wechselten andere von Profilen mit hohem Bullying und geringer Empathie zu Profilen mit reduziertem Bullying und verbesserter Empathie. Diese Variabilität in der Profilstabilität über die Zeit deutet darauf hin, dass Empathie-Bullying-Zusammenhänge dynamisch und heterogen sind und nicht statisch und einheitlich über Schülerinnen und Schüler hinweg. Diese Befunde unterstreichen den Wert personenzentrierter Ansätze, um aufzuzeigen, wie Empathie und Bullying in distinkten Konfigurationen innerhalb verschiedener Schülergruppen zusammen auftreten. Die Existenz distinkter Profile mit unterschiedlichen Entwicklungsverläufen legt nahe, dass die schulische Bullyingprävention von differenzierten Ansätzen profitieren könnte, die auf die Profiltugehörigkeit der Schülerinnen und Schüler abgestimmt sind, statt universeller Empathietrainingsprogramme einzusetzen, die homogene Bedürfnisse bei allen Schülerinnen und Schülern voraussetzen.

Schlagwörter: Bullying, Empathie, Längsschnitt, latente Profilanalyse

Bullying prevention programs often include components aimed at fostering empathy, grounded in the assumption that enhancing students' ability to understand and share others' emotions will reduce aggressive behaviors (Zych & Llorent, 2019; Zych et al., 2017). However, meta-analyses such as those conducted by Gaffney et al. (2021) challenge this premise, revealing that em-

pathy training has limited efficacy in reducing bullying perpetration. These findings raise questions about why and under what circumstances empathy does, or does not, play a role in the bullying dynamic. Empirical studies on the association between empathy and bullying present inconsistent results, further raising complicating our understanding (Stavrinides et al., 2012; Zych

et al., 2018; Zych & Llorent, 2019). Furthermore, the type of empathy (i.e., cognitive or affective) appears to differentially relate to bullying roles. Some studies find associations only with affective empathy (Eilts & Bäker, 2023), while others highlight the importance of cognitive empathy in understanding bullying behaviors (Zych et al., 2019). These inconsistencies may stem from the predominant use of variable-centred approaches, which examine average relationships across samples and may obscure meaningful heterogeneity in how empathy relates to bullying across different subgroups of students (e.g., Batanova & Loukas, 2011; Eilts & Bäker, 2023). This highlights the need for person-centred analyses to identify distinct subgroups of individuals with different empathy profiles and bullying behaviors (Eilts et al., 2025). Such an approach allows for the examination of stability and change in these profiles over time, potentially revealing patterns that explain inconsistent findings in the variable-centred literature. The current study addresses these gaps by employing a longitudinal latent profile analysis (LPA) to examine the interplay between cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and bullying over two time points. By identifying profiles and their transitions over time, this study aims to uncover when empathy-bullying configurations remain stable or change among different subgroups of students.

Bullying Perpetration

Bullying is a dynamic process (Hong & Espelage, 2012), which is characterized by the intensity of bullying experiences, the different roles students can assume and the variety in types of bullying (Rose et al., 2015). Generally, bullying is defined as aggressive behavior intended to harm others repeatedly over time, involving a perceived power imbalance between victims and perpetrators (Olweus, 2013; Smith 2016) and can manifest in three primary forms:

verbal bullying (insults and name-calling), physical bullying (hitting and kicking), and relational bullying (social exclusion and spreading rumors; Card & Little, 2006; Margraf & Pinquart, 2016). The literature distinguishes four primary roles in bullying: victims (being victimized), bullies (victimizing), bully-victims (those who are both bullies and victims), and individuals who are neither (Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1999; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Salmivalli et al. (1996) further expanded these roles to include assistants (active followers), reinforcers (those who encourage bullying through actions like laughing), defenders (who support and protect victims), and outsiders (those who remain uninvolved). These roles are fluid, often overlapping due to the complex interactions between individuals and their environments (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Rose et al., 2015). Especially, the roles of bullies and assistants often overlap or are highly correlated (Eilts et al., 2025; Jenkins et al., 2022; Jenkins & Canivez, 2021; Qiu et al., 2021), and both roles are associated with severe consequences (Leraya et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2017). Bullies and assistants tend to support pro-bullying behaviors. The bully is typically described as proactive, taking initiative, and exhibiting leadership qualities. In contrast, the assistant is also active but tends to follow rather than take a leading role (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Furthermore, students may assume different or multiple roles in various bullying episodes (Chen et al., 2017; Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017; Qiu et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that roles can vary based on individual interactions and perceptions (Leraya et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2017). Understanding these roles and their potential overlaps is crucial for comprehensively addressing the bullying dynamic (Eilts et al., 2025).

Studies focusing on the stability of bullying roles indicate that students who are uninvolved in bullying remain stable over time (e.g., Ryoo et al., 2015). However, the results focusing on different roles find

inconsistent results. Some studies indicate that students who are involved as bullies or victims show changes as they grow older (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Ryoo et al., 2015) while others indicate that these roles are relatively stable over time with some students becoming uninvolved (Demaray et al., 2021; Mazzone et al., 2016; Zych et al., 2018).

Students involved in the bullying dynamic are at risk for numerous negative outcomes for example later criminal behavior, suicidal thoughts, depression, school avoidance or loss of academic performance (Moore et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2017). Despite the knowledge on the severe consequences of bullying, current studies lack detailed insights into the risk profiles of different adolescents' groups as perpetrators or victims within the bullying dynamic (Bäker et al., 2023; Eilts et al., 2023). Certain characteristics identified in the literature, such as behavioral problems and inadequate social skills like lacking empathy, elevate the probability of adolescents becoming involved in bullying (Rose & Espelage, 2012; Zych et al., 2017).

Research indicates varying prevalence rates and gender-related differences in bullying involvement. Cosma et al. (2020), conducted a meta-analysis across 37 countries and found comparable victimization rates of traditional bullying, with approximately 46.5% for boys and 45.3% for girls. Nevertheless, studies discuss gender differences in bullying involvement, with boys more commonly experiencing verbal and physical bullying, while girls tend to encounter relational bullying (Card & Little, 2006; Margraf & Pinquart, 2016). Age-related differences also emerge (Rivers & Smith, 1994), such as higher incidences of physical bullying in lower grades (i.e., five to seven) compared to higher grades (Scheithauer et al., 2006). The meta-analytic study by Eilts and Koglin (2022) underscores that students with special educational needs (SEN) in emotional and social development exhibit significantly higher mean scores in bullying

perpetration and victimization compared to students without special needs. Further studies suggest an overrepresentation of students with SEN in bullying (e.g., Cho et al., 2009, 2020; Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019; Rose & Espelage, 2012; Schütz et al., 2022). However, Schütz et al. (2022) highlighted that externalizing behavior problems, rather than SEN status, are the primary predictor of both bullying perpetration and victimization experiences.

Empathy

Empathy has been defined in multiple ways (Cuff et al., 2016), but it commonly describes the sharing and understanding of others' emotional states. It encompasses thus both an affective and a cognitive component (Decety & Jackson, 2006; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006). Affective empathy refers to sharing an emotion, experiencing the same emotional state as the other individual. Cognitive empathy describes the understanding of others' emotions. It is thus similar to the broader concept of perspective taking, yet particularly focuses on understanding the emotion of others rather than generally taking their perspective (Joliffe & Farrington, 2006). While affective and cognitive empathy are often moderately correlated and thus seem to have some overlap (Ang & Goh, 2010; Eilts & Bäker, 2024; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006), they also show different patterns in the context of disorders (Blair, 2005), they are associated with different neural processes (Shamay-Tsoori et al., 2009), and they show distinct relations with social behavior (Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Van Lissa et al., 2017).

The theoretical rationale for examining affective and cognitive empathy separately in relation to bullying can be strengthened by drawing on the broader aggression literature, which distinguishes between different forms of aggressive behavior. Research differentiates between reactive (impulsive, emotionally-driven) and proactive (planned, goal-oriented) aggression (Dodge & Coie,

1987; Vitaro & Brendgen, 2005; Vitaro et al., 2006). Reactive aggression is characterized by impulsive responses to perceived provocation or threat, while proactive aggression is instrumental, used strategically to achieve goals such as dominance or resource acquisition. These distinctions are relevant to bullying, as research demonstrates that bullying behaviors can manifest both reactively and proactively (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Bullies, and particularly bully-victims, exhibit both reactive aggression (impulsive, emotionally-driven responses) and proactive aggression (planned, goal-oriented behaviors such as strategic relational aggression to maintain dominance), although the relative prominence of each type varies across individuals and bullying roles (Dodge & Coie, 1987; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Vitaro et al., 2006).

Affective empathy, which involves experiencing and sharing others' emotional states, may serve as an inhibitory mechanism for reactive aggression by triggering emotional discomfort when witnessing others' distress (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Students with lower affective empathy may be less likely to experience this emotional brake, potentially increasing their propensity for impulsive aggressive acts including physical and verbal bullying. This aligns with findings that affective empathy deficits are associated with various forms of bullying perpetration (Eilts & Bäker, 2023; Stavrinides et al., 2010).

Cognitive empathy, however, may play a more complex role, particularly in proactive or instrumental forms of aggression. The ability to understand others' emotions and perspectives could theoretically facilitate strategic bullying behaviors, such as relational aggression, by enabling perpetrators to identify vulnerabilities, manipulate social dynamics, and recruit assistants (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Sutton et al., 1999a, b). This "cold cognition" approach to understanding others without the emotional component of sharing their distress may explain findings showing positive associations

between perspective-taking and relational bullying perpetration (Batanova & Loukas, 2011). Consequently, differentiating between affective and cognitive empathy is essential when investigating bullying, as these dimensions may relate differently to various forms of bullying behavior.

Despite theoretical reasons to expect differential relationships, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Some studies find that both aspects of empathy are negatively associated with bullying perpetration, while others suggest that only affective empathy is relevant (Stavrinides et al., 2010; Zych & Llorent, 2019; Zych et al., 2019). These inconsistencies may reflect methodological differences, but they may also indicate meaningful heterogeneity in how empathy relates to bullying across different subgroups of students. Research using person-centred approaches provides preliminary support for this interpretation. Antoniadou et al. (2019) conducted a latent profile analysis examining traditional and cyber bullying and victimization and identified distinct profiles that differed significantly in their levels of affective empathy. Specifically, bullying perpetrators or bully-victims exhibited lower affective empathy compared to Victims and the uninvolved students. This finding suggests that the relationship between empathy and bullying may not be uniform across all students, but rather varies depending on individuals' overall pattern of involvement in bullying dynamics. Such heterogeneity could explain why empathy training in universal prevention programs shows limited effectiveness (Gaffney et al., 2021), interventions may be beneficial only for certain subgroups of students with specific empathy-bullying configurations, while being ineffective or even counterproductive for others.

Current Study

The current study extends this line of research by applying LPA to examine cognitive and affective empathy alongside bully-

ing perpetration over two time points. LPA is a model-based person-centred approach that probabilistically assigns individuals to latent subgroups (profiles) based on patterns of observed variables tests (Masyn, 2013; Spurk et al., 2020). It offers methodological advantages over traditional cluster analysis through the use of fit indices and formal statistical tests. This approach captures individual differences in empathy-bullying configurations and examines transitions between profiles, analyzing patterns of stability or change in these configurations over time.

Focusing on combined Bully and Assistant roles, which frequently overlap and represent high-risk profiles (Eilts et al., 2025; Jenkins et al., 2022), we explore distinct empathy-bullying profiles and their developmental trajectories. Our sample includes students from an inclusive educational setting, including those with and without special educational needs in emotional and social development, contexts where bullying behaviors and empathy deficits are particularly salient concerns.

It is important to clarify the scope and limitations of this approach. While person-centred analysis can identify distinct subgroups with different empathy-bullying configurations and reveal when profiles remain stable or change, it does not explain why these profiles emerge or what mechanisms drive transitions between them. Our study describes patterns of heterogeneity and temporal stability/change, but understanding causal mechanisms underlying profile membership and transitions requires additional research incorporating potential explanatory variables (e.g., environmental factors, interventions, developmental changes). Nevertheless, by identifying distinct empathy-bullying profiles and documenting their patterns of stability and change, this study provides foundational knowledge for developing more targeted, profile-specific interventions. Understanding whether students show different empathy-bullying configurations, and when these configurations change, is a necessary first

step toward tailoring more effective school-based interventions that foster safer and more inclusive educational environments.

Method

Procedure and Participants

This study is part of a larger project examining bullying among students with and without special educational needs. For the current research question, we use longitudinal questionnaire data, focusing only on information relevant to this question. The study received approval from the institutional review board, data protection board, and the regional school authority board. Employing a convenience sampling approach, we informed inclusive schools in northern Germany about the study. At participating schools, we distributed informed consent forms to the parents or primary caregivers of children in grades 5 to 10. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from parents or primary caregivers and the adolescents before data collection. There were no exclusion criteria for participation. Data collection occurred in group settings at the school twice within six months, from spring 2022 to fall 2023. The recruited sample consisted of 120 adolescents aged ten to sixteen ($M_{\text{ageT2}} = 13.01$, $SD_{\text{ageT2}} = 1.50$), in Grades 5 to 10. 60 (50%) students were male and 60 (50%) were female. The sample size of 120 participants is modest and below recommended guidelines for LPA. Nylund-Gibson and Choi (2018) suggest that 300 or more cases is generally desirable for mixture models, though smaller samples may be adequate with simpler models and well-separated classes. Tein et al. (2013) found that the ability to correctly identify the number of classes depends critically on class separation, with adequate power requiring large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 0.8$ or greater) when sample sizes are small to moderate (Masyn, 2013). Our selected 4-class models achieved en-

tropy values of .81 (T1) and .89 (T2), with minimum class assignment probabilities of .71 (T1) and .82 (T2), indicating good to excellent classification quality and suggesting reasonable class separation. However, with our sample of 120 participants, we likely have limited statistical power to definitively determine the optimal number of profiles and to detect all profile transitions, particularly those involving smaller classes. These results should be considered exploratory and require replication in larger, more diverse samples to confirm the identified profile structure and transition patterns.

Instruments

BPBQ

Bullying perpetration was measured using the Bully Participant Questionnaire (Summers & Demaray, 2008), a self-report tool in which students answered questions about various roles in the bullying dynamic (Bully, Victim, Assistant, Defender, and Outsider). For the purpose of this study we will focus on the role of Bully and Assistant. Each role is assessed with 10 items. Due to results revealed in psychometric studies (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2022; Jenkins & Canivez, 2021; Qiu et al., 2021) the roles Bully and Assistant can be summarized in a Bully/Assistant role. The exploratory factor analysis supports the summarizing of those two factors in one factor ($KMO = .80$; Bartlett Test: $\chi^2 = 1226.56$, $df = 190$, $p < .001$; Bartlett, 1950; Kaiser, 1974; Lloret et al., 2017). Thus, the two roles were summarized in one perpetration role for the purpose of this study ($\alpha = .89$). Students reported the frequency of these behaviors in the past 30 days on a scale from 0 (never) to 4 (7 or more times). The questionnaire's authors provide evidence for congruent, convergent, and divergent validity (Demaray et al., 2016).

BES

The Basic Empathy Scale (BES; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) consists of 20 items divided into affective empathy (11 items; e.g., "My friends' emotions don't affect me much", $\alpha = 0.70$) and cognitive empathy (9 items; e.g., "I can understand my friend's happiness when she/he does well at something", $\alpha = 0.77$). Students rated their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neither agree nor disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Scores were calculated by reverse coding the negatively worded items and summing the responses for each scale. Jolliffe and Farrington (2006) provide evidence of the instrument's validity. Consistent with other studies, females scored higher on the BES. The correlations with other personality constructs matched theoretical expectations, and the correlation between cognitive and affective empathy further supports the validity of the measure (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

The Bully Participant Questionnaire (BPBQ) and Basic Empathy Scale (BES) were originally developed in English. For the current study, we used existing German translations. The BES German version has been validated in a German adolescent sample (Heynen et al., 2016), showing comparable factor structure and adequate psychometric properties. The BPBQ was translated following standard back-translation procedures and has been used in previous German studies with satisfactory reliability (Eilts et al., 2025).

To address potential comprehension difficulties, particularly for students with special educational needs or limited German proficiency, research assistants were present during data collection to answer questions and clarify item meanings. Items were read aloud in group settings when requested. All students with SEN in our sample had sufficient German language skills to participate in regular classroom instruction, which served as our minimum inclusion threshold for comprehension.

Data Analysis

The statistical software R was employed to analyze the data and identify profiles using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). LPA is a statistical technique that models subjects as belonging to one of several latent clusters or profiles (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968; Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). This approach accounts for measurement error in the probability of membership in a given class. LPA describes a mixture of profiles represented by multivariate normal distributions, also known as Gaussian mixture modeling or model-based clustering (Aghabozorgi et al., 2015).

To facilitate comparability across different measures, the cognitive, affective, and bully/assistant measures at both Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2) were standardized using z-scores. Data were imputed using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) under the assumption that data were Missing Completely at Random (MCAR), as supported by a chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 14.52$, $df = 12$, $p = .269$; Little, 1988). The intercorrelation among the cluster variables was below $r = .8$ (see Table 1), indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern (Field, 2018). The latent profile analysis aimed to identify underlying subgroups of cognitive empathy, affective empathy and the bully/assistant role within the dataset at both time points. It was conducted using the tidyLPA (Rosenberg et al., 2018) package, which allows for the estimation of models with varying numbers of profiles. Models with 1 to 6 profiles were estimated for both time points. To determine the most appropriate number of clusters, we utilized the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), a widely used metric in longitudinal clustering analysis (Van de Schoot et al., 2017). A lower BIC value a better-fitting model. In cases where BIC values were similar between adjacent solutions, the final choice of the number of clusters relied on a subjective analysis of the identified patterns (Nagin & Odgers, 2010). Additionally, the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Log-Likelihood (LogLik),

Sample-Size Adjusted BIC (SABIC), and Entropy were used to evaluate the optimal number of clusters at each time point. For LogLik and Entropy, higher values indicate a better fit, while for AIC, BIC, and SABIC, lower values suggest a superior model fit. According to the model fit and theoretical assumptions a four cluster solution for both timepoints was chosen (see Table 2).

Profile Analysis and Transitions

After determining the optimal number of profiles, participants were assigned to latent profiles based on the profile with the highest probability. A transition table was then created to analyze the movement of individuals between profiles from T1 to T2. Thus, we present transitions descriptively and acknowledge that we cannot determine whether observed transitions differ significantly from chance. To visualize these transitions, a Sankey diagram was generated using the ggalluvial package (Brunson & Read, 2023). This diagram illustrates the flow of individuals between profiles at T1 and T2, providing a clear representation of profile transitions (Brunson & Read, 2023; Brunson, 2020). To further explore the clusters, descriptive statistics for each profile were computed, offering a detailed view of the characteristics associated with each latent profile. The R code is available under OSF (https://osf.io/dshxv/?view_only=8d0e8b-c4254d412fa348c1a963c8c1ca).

Results

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations among the study variables. The results indicate that gender is negatively correlated with cognitive empathy at Time 1 (T1) ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$) and Time 2 (T2) ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$), as well as with affective empathy at T1 ($r = -.29$, $p = .001$) and T2 ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$). This suggests that male students exhibit lower levels of both cognitive and affective empathy compared to female students.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	M	SD	4	5	6	7	8	9
1) Age T1	12.63	1.33	-.09	.05	-.02	.01	-.03	.00
2) Age T2	13.01	1.35	-.09	.07	-.06	.01	-.03	-.03
3) Gender			-.36***	-.41***	-.29**	-.36***	.13	.26**
4) Cognitive Empathy T1	0.00	1.00		.55***	.74***	.28**	-.01	-.16
5) Affective Empathy T1	0.00	1.00			.55***	.75***	-.16	-.13
6) Cognitive Empathy T2	0.00	1.00				.44***	-.16	-.22*
7) Affective Empathy T2	0.00	1.00					-.22*	-.16
8) Bully/Assisstant T1	0.00	1.00						.45***
9) Bully/Assisstant T2								

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Additionally, gender shows a positive correlation with the Bully/Assistant scale at T2 ($r = .26, p = .005$), indicating that males score higher on this scale at T2 than females. Cognitive empathy at T1 is positively correlated with affective empathy at T1 ($r = .55, p < .001$), cognitive empathy at T2 ($r = 0.74, p < 0.001$), and affective empathy at T2 ($r = .28, p = .002$). Moreover, affective empathy at T1 is positively correlated with cognitive empathy at T2 ($r = .55, p < .001$) and affective empathy at T2 ($r = .75, p < .001$).

Cognitive empathy at T2 is positively correlated with affective empathy at T2 ($r = .44, p < .001$) but negatively correlated with the Bully/Assistant scale at T2 ($r = -.22, p = .019$). Furthermore, affective empathy at T2 is negatively correlated with the Bully/Assistant scale at T1 ($r = -.22, p = .016$), and Bully/Assistant at T1 is positively correlated with Bully/Assistant at T2 ($r = .45, p < .001$).

Latent Profile Analysis

For Time 1, the model with 4 profiles was selected as it exhibited the lowest BIC value, balancing fit and complexity effectively, while maintaining good entropy. For Time 2, a similar approach was adopted. Models

with 1 to 6 profiles were evaluated using the same fit indices. The model with 4 profiles was again found to provide the best balance between fit and complexity, with favorable BIC and entropy values. Table 2 depicts the different fit indices for the models.

The means of the four classes show that the class numbers are not representing the same thing throughout the two timepoints (Table 3 and 4). Class 1 for T1 comprises 16 individuals characterized by very low levels of Cognitive Empathy ($M = -1.76, SD = 0.68$) and Affective Empathy ($M = -1.27, SD = 0.87$). This group also shows low scores in the Bully/Assistant dimension ($M = -0.46, SD = 0.44$). These findings suggest that individuals in this class tend to exhibit a lack of both cognitive and affective empathy and are less likely to engage in or be involved in bullying behavior or assisting roles.

Class 2 includes 75 individuals with average levels of Cognitive Empathy ($M = 0.11, SD = 0.54$) and Affective Empathy ($M = 0.01, SD = 0.61$). This class also demonstrates low scores on the Bully/Assistant scale ($M = -0.14, SD = 0.61$). Members of this class exhibit typical levels of empathy, without significant deviations from the mean, and show low involvement in bullying behavior or assisting roles.

Table 2
Model Fit Classes T1 and T2

T1	LogLik	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Probability for any Class		Entropy
					Min	Max	
1 Class	-500.80	1013.60	1030.22	1011.25	1.00	1.00	1.00
2 Classes	-479.23	978.47	1006.17	974.56	.86	.99	.86
3 Classes	-470.99	969.98	1008.77	964.52	.81	.92	.77
4 Classes	-443.14	922.29	972.16	915.26	.71	.97	.81
5 Classes	-443.17	930.32	991.30	921.75	.00	.97	.61
6 Classes	-441.98	935.96	1008.00	925.81	.00	.97	.71

T2	LogLik	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Probability for any Class		Entropy
					min	Max	
1 Class	-500.80	1013.60	1030.22	1011.25	1.00	1.00	1.00
2 Classes	-480.89	981.77	1009.48	977.87	.84	.99	.92
3 Classes	-470.70	969.40	1008.19	963.93	.82	.97	.86
4 Classes	-468.25	972.51	1022.38	965.48	.82	.97	.89
5 Classes	-468.25	980.50	1041.46	971.91	.00	.97	.61
6 Classes	-429.51	911.03	983.07	900.87	.77	1.00	.87

Note. LogLik = Log-Likelihood; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; SABIC = Sample-Size Adjusted BIC

In Class 3, consisting of 19 individuals, both Cognitive Empathy ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.51$) and Affective Empathy ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.72$) are notably high. This class also scores low on the Bully/Assistant dimension ($M = -0.29$, $SD = 0.40$). Individuals in this cluster are characterized by high levels of both cognitive and affective empathy and tend not to engage in bullying behaviors or assisting roles.

Class 4, with 8 individuals, exhibits high scores in the Bully/Assistant dimension ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.21$) and low levels of Cognitive Empathy ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.99$) and Affective Empathy ($M = -0.72$, $SD = 0.95$). This cluster is distinguished by a high tendency towards bullying or assisting roles while showing relatively low levels of both cognitive and affective empathy.

Class 1 for T2 consists of 13 individuals who exhibit very low levels of Cognitive Empathy ($M = -2.09$, $SD = 0.62$) and Affective Empathy ($M = -0.99$, $SD = 1.02$). This class is characterized by high scores on the Bully/Assistant dimension ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 2.09$). Individuals in this class show significant deficits in both cognitive and affective empathy while demonstrating a high tendency towards bullying behavior or involvement in assisting roles. The high variability in the Bully/Assistant scores suggests a wide range of bullying or assisting behaviors within this group.

Class 2 includes 19 individuals who score high on both Cognitive Empathy ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 0.36$) and Affective Empathy ($M = 1.05$, $SD = 0.73$). This class shows low scores on the Bully/Assistant dimension ($M = -0.37$, $SD = 0.58$). Members of this class

Table 3
Means per Class T1

Class	N	Cognitive Empathy		Affective Empathy		Bully/Assistant	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1 Low Empathy/Low Bullying	16	-1.76	0.68	-1.27	0.87	-0.46	0.44
2 Average Empathy/Low Bullying	75	0.11	0.54	0.01	0.61	-0.14	0.61
3 High Empathy/Low Bullying	19	1.16	0.51	1.32	0.72	-0.29	0.40
4 Low Empathy/High Bullying	8	0.30	0.99	-0.72	0.95	2.90	1.21

Table 4
Means per Class T2

Class	N	Cognitive Empathy		Affective Empathy		Bully/Assistant	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1 Low Empathy/High Bullying	13	-2.09	0.62	-0.99	1.02	0.71	2.09
2 High Empathy/Low Bullying	19	1.34	0.36	1.05	0.73	-0.37	0.58
3 High Cognitive/Low Affective Empathy/Low Bullying	1	0.89	-	-2.92	-	-0.72	-
4 Average Empathy/Low Bullying	85	0.01	0.47	-0.05	0.79	-0.02	0.76

exhibit strong cognitive and affective empathy while showing minimal engagement in bullying behavior or assisting roles. This suggests that they are both highly empathetic and less likely to exhibit or experience bullying.

Class 3, comprising a single individual, shows a high level of Cognitive Empathy ($M = 0.89$) but an extremely low level of Affective Empathy ($M = -2.92$). The Bully/Assistant score is not available for this class. This unique profile suggests a person with high cognitive empathy but very low affective empathy, suggesting a strong ability to understand others' thoughts without necessarily sharing their feelings.

Class 4 consists of 85 individuals with average levels of Cognitive Empathy ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 0.47$) and Affective Empathy ($M = -0.05$, $SD = 0.79$). Their scores on the Bully/Assistant dimension are also low (M

$= -0.02$, $SD = 0.76$). This class is characterized by typical levels of both cognitive and affective empathy and shows low involvement in bullying behavior or assisting roles. Individuals in this class generally have a balanced level of empathy and minimal engagement in bullying.

Correspondence Between T1 and T2 Classes

The clustering results reveal notable correspondences between classes at Time Point 1 (T1) and Time Point 2 (T2). Specifically, Class 4 at T1, characterized by low empathy and high involvement in bullying behaviors, corresponds closely with Class 1 at T2, which exhibits similar low empathy and high bullying tendencies. Similarly, Class 2 at T1 and Class 4 at T2 show an average level of empathy and minimal bullying. Addi-

tionally, Class 3 at T1 and Class 2 at T2 correspond with each other. The other Classes (1 at T1 and 3 at T2) do not correspond well to each other.

Latent Profile Transition Analysis

The transition of the latent profiles is depicted in the supplement (Figure S1). Table 5 presents the transitions between latent profiles over the two time points (T1 and T2). Each cell in the table shows the number of individuals who transitioned from a given profile at T1 (rows) to a profile at T2 (columns). These transitions provide insight into the stability or change in empathy and bullying behavior over time.

Profile 1. Low Empathy/Low Bullying at T1: Out of those who started in this profile at T1, 9 transitioned to a low empathy/high bullying profile at T2, while 7 transitioned to Profile 4 (Average Empathy/Low Bullying). This suggests no stability, but a shift either towards an increase in bullying or to an increase in empathy.

Profile 2. Average Empathy/Low Bullying at T1 seems to be the most stable profile. Of the 75 adolescents in this profile 64 remain in the same profile at T2. 9 adolescents moved to the high empathy/low bullying profile at T2 indicating an increase in empathy, whereas one individual decreased

in empathy and increased in bullying. The last individual showed differences between the two empathy variables at T2 with higher cognitive empathy.

Profile 3. High Empathy/Low Bullying at T1: Ten individuals from this profile remained stable at T2, while 9 transitioned to Profile 4, indicating moderate stability, but with some movement toward the Average Empathy/Low Bullying profile.

Profile 4. High Bullying/Low Empathy at T1: Three individuals remained in this profile, and five transitioned to Profile 4 at T2. This suggests a notable shift, where most individuals moved from a high-bullying/low-empathy profile to an average empathy profile with low bullying, highlighting potential reductions in bullying behavior.

In summary, the transitions reveal a tendency for individuals across different profiles to shift towards Profile 4 (Average Empathy/Low Bullying) at T2. This suggests a trend toward lower bullying and more moderate levels of empathy over time, reflecting potential changes in behavior and emotional regulation as time progresses. Additionally, some profiles (e.g., Profile 2: Average Empathy/Low Bullying) exhibited moderate stability, while others (e.g., Profile 1: Low Empathy/Low Bullying) demonstrated more fluid transitions.

Table 5
Latent Profile Transition

Profile T1	Profile T2	1 Low Empathy/ High Bullying	2 High Empathy/ Low Bullying	3 High Cognitive/ Low Affective Empathy	4 Average Empathy/Low Bullying
1 Low Empathy/Low Bullying		9	0	0	7
2 Average Empathy/Low Bullying		1	9	1	64
3 High Empathy/Low Bullying		0	10	0	9
4 High Bullying/Low Empathy		3	0	0	5

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the interplay between cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and bullying behaviors using a person-centered approach through longitudinal LPA. The results revealed four distinct latent profiles at both time points, highlighting patterns of stability and change. Notably, while some students maintained low bullying and average empathy profiles, others transitioned from high bullying/low empathy profiles to profiles characterized by reduced bullying and improved empathy. These findings emphasize the complexity of empathy and bullying dynamics, underscoring the need for tailored, profile-specific interventions in school settings.

The study's findings partly align with prior research suggesting that empathy deficits are associated with increased bullying behaviors, while higher empathy is linked to defender roles (Zych & Llorent, 2019; Eilts & Bäker, 2023). The identification of a stable profile (Profile 2: Average Empathy/Low Bullying), with 64 out of 75 individuals remaining in this profile across time points, supports the theoretical assumption that average empathy and low bullying may represent a more balanced and stable behavioral state during adolescence (Ryoo et al., 2015). This is consistent with studies indicating that uninvolved students tend to maintain their status over time, while those involved in bullying roles often exhibit changes (Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

However, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that not all bullying roles are equally stable. Most interestingly, some students moved from profiles with low bullying to high bullying, while others moved from high bullying to low bullying. Specifically, Profiles 1 (Low Empathy/Low Bullying) and 4 (High Bullying/Low Empathy) showed significant transitions, with many individuals moving towards profiles with lower bullying behavior. Adolescents in Profile 1 showed a bifurcation: some moved towards higher bullying behaviors

while keeping a low level of empathy, others exhibited improved empathy levels while showing continued low bullying. This dual pathway suggests that both risk escalation and positive behavioral shifts are possible from a starting point of low empathy. This complexity underscores the need for differentiated intervention strategies tailored to adolescents' specific empathy-bullying profiles. This dynamic aligns with developmental theories suggesting that adolescence is a critical period for socio-emotional growth and that shifts in empathy and bullying behaviors may reflect developmental changes or the effects of school-based interventions (Gaffney et al., 2021). The transition observed in Profile 4 (from high bullying/low empathy to average empathy/low bullying) may reflect improved socio-emotional abilities. This aligns with the assumption that empathy training might not uniformly reduce bullying across all groups (Gaffney et al., 2021). Profile 2 and Profile 3 showed an increase in empathy over time, which may indicate natural emotional development during adolescence. The progression from average to higher empathy levels suggests a growing sensitivity to others' perspectives, which is consistent with developmental theories of socio-emotional growth during adolescence (Zych et al., 2017). The increase in empathy, particularly cognitive empathy, among some adolescents implies that interventions focusing on perspective-taking might be more effective than those emphasizing affective empathy alone. This distinction is important as previous studies have shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of empathy training in bullying prevention (Stavrinides et al., 2010; Zych et al., 2019). The unique case in Profile 3 at T2, where an individual showed an increase in cognitive empathy but not affective empathy, highlights the importance of distinguishing between these two components. Cognitive empathy's association with lower bullying involvement suggests that enhancing perspective-taking skills could be a promising direction for anti-bullying

interventions. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that cognitive empathy may play a more critical role in understanding and reducing bullying behaviors (Batanova & Loukas, 2011).

These findings can be interpreted through the theoretical lens of reactive and proactive aggression discussed earlier. The transition from Profile 4 (high bullying/low empathy) toward profiles with reduced bullying and improved empathy may reflect developmental increases in affective empathy, which serves as an inhibitory mechanism for reactive, impulsive aggression (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Students who develop the capacity to share others' emotional distress may find it increasingly uncomfortable to engage in bullying behaviors. However, the pathway observed in Profile 1, where some students escalate to high bullying despite low empathy, suggests that other factors beyond empathy deficits contribute to bullying perpetration, possibly including proactive motivations such as status-seeking or instrumental goals that cognitive empathy might actually facilitate in some contexts (Sutton et al., 1999b).

The increase in cognitive empathy observed among students transitioning from Profile 2 to Profile 3 (from average to high empathy) without corresponding changes in bullying behavior further supports the complex role of cognitive empathy. Understanding others' perspectives does not automatically reduce bullying if it is not accompanied by the affective component that motivates prosocial action. This distinction has important implications for intervention design: programs focusing exclusively on perspective-taking without fostering emotional connection may be insufficient for reducing bullying, particularly for students engaging in more strategic, proactive forms of aggression such as relational bullying (Batanova & Loukas, 2011; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006).

While our study documents distinct empathy-bullying profiles and patterns of sta-

bility and change, it does not examine the mechanisms underlying profile membership or transitions. Understanding why some students in Profile 1 escalate to high bullying while others improve in empathy requires examining additional variables such as peer relationships, family context, school climate, exposure to interventions, and developmental factors. Similarly, the transitions observed in Profile 4 (from high bullying to average empathy) may reflect natural maturation, intervention effects, changes in peer groups, or other unmeasured factors. Future research incorporating these explanatory variables through latent transition analysis with covariates would provide critical insights into the mechanisms driving profile membership and change. Our contribution lies in establishing that meaningful heterogeneity exists and that transitions occur, providing a foundation for future mechanism-focused research.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, although four different profiles were examined, one profile contained only a single participant. This limited sample size for that specific profile reduces the reliability and generalizability of findings related to it. While our sample of 120 participants meets methodological guidelines for LPA profile identification (Nylund et al., 2007; Tein et al., 2013) and achieved good classification quality (entropy = .81-.89), it is insufficient for conducting formal statistical tests of profile transitions or for adequate power to detect small effect sizes. The modest sample size, particularly the presence of one profile with only a single participant at T2, limits our ability to draw definitive conclusions about transition patterns and necessitates caution in generalizing findings beyond this specific sample. We present transitions descriptively and acknowledge that we cannot determine whether observed transitions differ significantly from chance.

Future research with larger samples would enable latent transition analysis with covariates to formally test transition probabilities and examine predictors of profile membership changes.

Second, the standardized mean values for the bully and assistant roles range only from -0.72 to 0.72, indicating a restricted variability in these measures. This limited range may constrain the ability to detect stronger effects or variations in bullying behavior. Expanding the range of scores in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of these roles.

Third, the study relies on self-report questionnaires, which are subject to biases such as social desirability and self-perception inaccuracies. Participants may have underreported or misrepresented their behaviors, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Incorporating additional data sources, such as peer reports or behavioral observations, could enhance the validity of the results. Nevertheless, the study offers some practical implications and impulses for future research.

Additionally, we did not test for measurement invariance across time points. Our analytical approach treats profiles as emergent configurations at each time point rather than assuming equivalent measurement structures. While this limits our ability to make strong claims about whether profile meanings remain identical across time, it allows for the possibility that empathy-bullying configurations may naturally reorganize during adolescence. Future research with larger samples should examine measurement invariance to determine whether profiles represent equivalent constructs across time.

Practical Implications and Further Perspectives

The findings of this study underscore the complex role of empathy in bullying dynamics, highlighting that it should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all solution.

While empathy can play a significant role in reducing bullying, its impact varies depending on individual profiles and the socio-emotional context of each adolescent. The stability of certain profiles may explain the limited effectiveness of empathy training reported in meta-analyses, such as that by Gaffney et al. (2021). If empathy is already well-developed, further training may not significantly reduce bullying behaviors. Conversely, for profiles with less developed empathy, especially those with variable characteristics, targeted interventions focusing on cognitive empathy might facilitate transitions towards profiles with lower bullying involvement. The study's results suggest that a person-centered approach is essential when designing interventions. Before implementing empathy training, it is crucial to assess the baseline levels of cognitive and affective empathy for each individual. Training may only be effective for those with initially low empathy levels. For students already displaying average or high levels of empathy, additional training might not yield significant results and could even lead to frustration or disengagement.

Moreover, empathy skills could also be "misused" in bullying dynamics. Individuals who excel at perspective-taking may leverage this ability to inflict greater harm within bullying processes, as they could use bullying to enhance their social status (Hensums et al., 2023; Samson et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to assess the underlying motivations for bullying behavior before initiating empathy training. Interventions should differentiate between adolescents who lack empathy and those who might exploit their empathy skills for manipulative or aggressive purposes. Additionally, bullying is not solely an individual problem but also a group phenomenon (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Competitive environments might exacerbate bullying by rewarding aggressive behaviors that secure higher status within the group (Hensums et al., 2023; Samson et al., 2021). In contrast, cooperative settings could reduce bullying by promoting shared

goals and empathy-based interactions (Gaffney et al., 2021). The immediate social environment significantly shapes whether aggressive behaviors are tolerated or sanctioned and influences which roles within the group are seen as desirable. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (1977, 1981), which emphasizes that individual behaviors cannot be fully understood without considering the broader social systems in which they occur. Empathy operates on an individual level, but a systemic approach would require focusing on group dynamics, peer norms, and the school climate. For instance, interventions might benefit from addressing peer norms that tolerate or even reinforce bullying behaviors, in addition to fostering empathy.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between empathy and bullying behaviors, highlighting the need for nuanced, profile-specific intervention strategies. The findings suggest that while average empathy levels may promote stability in low bullying involvement, shifts towards higher empathy and lower bullying may require targeted interventions addressing both cognitive and affective empathy. The findings also align with theoretical perspectives suggesting that empathy's influence on bullying may depend on the type of empathy and the specific context of the bullying dynamic (Zych et al., 2019). The observed variability in profile stability and transitions suggests that both individual characteristics and contextual factors (such as school interventions or peer influences) may shape the empathy-bullying relationship.

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Offene Daten	Daten können unter jule.eilts@psy.lmu.de angefragt werden
Offener Code	Der zur Analyse der Daten verwendete R Code ist verfügbar unter https://osf.io/dshxv/?view_only=8d0e8bc4254d412fa348c1a963c8c1ca
Offene Materialien	Die Fragebögen der Studie können über die Autor:innen der Fragebögen angefragt werden.
Präregistrierung	Die Studie wurde nicht Präregistriert.
Votum Ethikkommission	Die Ethikkommission der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg hat das Desing der vorliegenden Studie geprüft (Drs. Nr.EK/2020/047).
Finanzielle und weitere sachliche Unterstützung	Die Studie wurde nicht gefördert.
Autorenschaft	JE, JW und NC haben das Manuskript geschrieben, JE hat die Studie geplant und die Daten erhoben, JE und JW haben die Daten analysiert.
KI und generative Modelle	ChatGPT wurde genutzt um den R Code zu überprüfen.

Effectiveness of School-Based Interventions for Reducing Bullying and Victimisation: A Subgroup Analysis from the BRAVE Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Bullying remains a pervasive challenge in educational settings worldwide, with serious implications for students' well-being and learning. This meta-analysis presents a focused subgroup analysis from the BRAVE-project, synthesising 93 group comparisons on bullying and victimisation outcomes ($k = 42$ and $k = 51$, respectively) across 35 primary studies. The analysis revealed statistically significant effects for both bullying ($d = 0.37$) and victimisation ($d = 0.17$), exceeding effect sizes reported in previous meta-analyses. However, high heterogeneity ($I^2 > 96\%$) highlights substantial variation between studies. Moderator analyses identified several content- and method-related factors that influence programme effectiveness. Interventions grounded in interactionist or cognitive theories, implemented in classroom settings with high implementation fidelity, were more effective than behaviourist or structurally unspecific programmes. Programmes conducted in North America showed stronger effects than those in Europe, suggesting contextual variation. Notably, randomised controlled trials reported higher effect sizes than quasi-experimental designs. These findings underscore the importance of theory-driven, context-sensitive prevention strategies and the need for differentiated implementation practices. Implications for school policy and future research are discussed, particularly in relation to intervention design, professional training, and international evidence gaps.

Keywords: Bullying, Victimisation, school-based interventions, meta-analysis, methodological moderators, content-related moderators, theoretical frameworks

Wirksamkeit schulbasierter Interventionen zur Reduktion von Mobbing und Viktimisierung: Eine Subgruppenanalyse aus der BRAVE-Metaanalyse

Zusammenfassung

Mobbing stellt weltweit eine anhaltende Herausforderung in Bildungskontexten dar und ist mit erheblichen Folgen für das Wohlbefinden und das Lernen von Schülerinnen und Schülern verbunden. Die vorliegende Metaanalyse präsentiert eine fokussierte Subgruppenanalyse aus dem BRAVE-Projekt und synthetisiert 93 Gruppenvergleiche zu den Zielgrößen Mobbing und Viktimisierung ($k = 42$ bzw. $k = 51$) aus 35 Primärstudien. Die Analyse zeigte

statistisch signifikante Effekte sowohl für die Reduktion von Mobbing ($d = 0.37$) als auch für Viktimisierung ($d = 0.17$), die über den in früheren Metaanalysen berichteten Effektstärken liegen. Gleichzeitig weist die hohe Heterogenität ($I^2 > 96\%$) auf erhebliche Unterschiede zwischen den Studien hin. Moderatoranalysen identifizierten mehrere inhaltsbezogene und methodische Faktoren, die die Wirksamkeit der Programme beeinflussen. Interventionen, die auf interaktionistischen oder kognitiven Theorien beruhen, im Klassenkontext umgesetzt werden und eine hohe Implementationsfidelität aufweisen, erwiesen sich als wirksamer als lerntheoretische oder strukturell unspezifische Programme. In Nordamerika durchgeführte Programme zeigten stärkere Effekte als solche in Europa, was auf kontextuelle Unterschiede hindeutet. Bemerkenswert ist zudem, dass randomisiert kontrollierte Studien höhere Effektstärken berichteten als quasi-experimentelle Designs. Die Befunde unterstreichen die Bedeutung theoriegeleiteter, kontextsensibler Präventionsstrategien sowie die Notwendigkeit differenzierter Umsetzungspraktiken. Abschliessend werden Implikationen für Schulentwicklung, Professionalisierung und zukünftige Forschung diskutiert, insbesondere im Hinblick auf Interventionsdesign, fachliche Qualifizierung und internationale Evidenzlücken.

Schlagwörter: Mobbing; Viktimisierung; schulbasierte Interventionen; Metaanalyse; methodische Moderatoren; inhaltsbezogene Moderatoren; theoretischer Bezugsrahmen

Bullying, a term commonly used in international discourse, represents a major global challenge for educational development, the psychosocial wellbeing of children and adolescents, and the professional competence of educational practitioners. In academic research, bullying is generally defined as systematic, repeated aggressive behaviour among peers characterised by a power imbalance between perpetrator and victim (Olweus, 1993). Victimisation, in turn, refers to the experience of being targeted by such aggressive acts and represents the recipient perspective in this asymmetrical interaction (Smith et al., 2002). Although conceptually related, bullying and victimisation constitute distinct yet interdependent phenomena within the broader framework of peer aggression (Salmivalli, 2010).

Bullying can manifest in various forms—such as physical, verbal or relational aggression—and typically emerges during the early years of formal schooling. The consequences of bullying are multifaceted: while victims often exhibit internalising symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or psychosomatic complaints, perpetrators are likewise

at risk of developing long-term maladaptive behavioural patterns, including reduced empathy, increased aggression, and antisocial behaviour (Ttofi et al., 2011).

While digital forms of peer aggression are frequently included in broader definitions of bullying, there is increasing debate about whether cyberbullying constitutes a distinct phenomenon due to structural differences such as anonymity, permanence of exposure, and detachment from physical settings (Tokunaga, 2010). We therefore refer to cyberbullying only when studies explicitly used this term.

The global evidence base compellingly illustrates the high prevalence of this phenomenon. In a cross-national analysis encompassing data from 83 countries, 30.5% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 reported being bullied at least once in the past 30 days (Biswas et al., 2020). A meta-analysis by Modecki et al. (2014) found that approximately 36% of students worldwide experience traditional forms of bullying as victims, and around 35% report engaging in bullying behaviour themselves. These findings underscore the widespread nature of

bullying and the multifaceted consequences on wellbeing and learning.

The physical and psychological consequences of bullying are diverse and often severe. Victims show significantly increased risks for depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, psychosomatic complaints, and school-related difficulties such as academic decline and absenteeism (Arseneault, 2018; Gini & Pozzoli, 2013). We have come to recognise that the impact of childhood bullying victimisation on the development of mental health problems is more complex. This paper aims to review the evidence for an independent contribution of childhood bullying victimisation to the development of poor outcomes throughout the life span, including mental, physical and socioeconomic outcomes, and discuss the implications for policy and practice.

Findings

Existing research indicates that (a. Furthermore, bullying can destabilise classroom social dynamics, reduce students' perceived sense of safety, and impose a considerable emotional burden on teaching staff (Valdebenito et al., 2015). These associated long-term psychosocial costs and constraints on individual learning and development highlight the urgency of addressing bullying at the institutional level.

Given these risks, bullying is also of critical relevance from both educational policy and societal perspectives. UNESCO (2019) identifies school bullying as a global educational issue that threatens not only the realisation of the human right to education but also the achievement of inclusive, safe, and equitable learning environments. Addressing bullying within the school context is therefore not merely a matter of individual protection, but a structural imperative within the broader framework of school quality development and preventive culture.

School-Based Bullying Prevention: Effect Sizes, Moderators, and Research Gaps

The high prevalence of bullying in everyday school life and the associated burdens have, over recent decades, led to the development of a wide range of school-based prevention and intervention programmes. These programmes aim to reduce bullying behaviour, strengthen social-emotional competencies, and foster a positive school and classroom climate. A typical example is the KiVa programme from Finland (e.g., Williford et al., 2013). No empirical evidence currently exists on whether existing school-based antibullying programs are effective in targeting the unique aspects of cyberbullying. To address this important gap, the present study investigates the unique effects of the KiVa Antibullying Program on the frequency of cyberbullying and cybervictimization among elementary and middle school youth. Using data from a group randomized controlled trial, multilevel ordinal regression analyses were used to examine differences in the frequencies of cyberbullying and cybervictimization between intervention ($N = 9,914$), a whole-school approach combining classroom lessons, peer support structures, and staff training to promote a prosocial climate and reduce bullying incidents. A substantial body of empirical studies and systematic reviews suggests that such school-based programmes are generally effective—albeit with considerable variation in terms of design, implementation quality, and effect size.

One of the most comprehensive and methodologically rigorous analyses in this domain is the updated meta-analysis by Gaffney, Ttofi, and Farrington (2021) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al.). Based on 100 evaluation studies involving school-aged children and adolescents, the review demonstrated that school-based programmes can significantly reduce bullying

behaviours: the average reduction in perpetration rates was approximately 18–19%, and in victimisation rates around 15–16%. However, the observed effect sizes were modest overall (Cohen's $d = 0.15$ for perpetration; $d = 0.12$ for victimisation), and the findings show substantial heterogeneity ($I^2 > 70\%$). This variance indicates that not all programmes are equally effective; rather, success appears to depend on specific contextual and implementation-related factors. It highlights existing research gaps and suggests the importance of identifying key moderators of programme effectiveness.

To better understand these differences, Gaffney et al. (2021) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al. conducted an extensive moderator analysis. Among other findings, the review revealed that programmes tailored to particular age groups, especially primary school students, tended to yield stronger effects. In addition, significant variations emerged between geographical regions and programme types: interventions implemented in North America generally produced smaller effects than those in Europe, and multicomponent programmes (e.g., school-wide approaches combined with classroom-based instruction and parental involvement) were found to be particularly effective. The authors emphasised that the analysis of such variations in effectiveness is far from complete and called for future meta-analyses to examine further substantive and methodological moderators in greater detail.

Similarly, reviews by Ttofi and Farrington (2011) and Jiménez-Barbero et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of structural features—such as integration into the school curriculum, whole-school participation, and implementation quality—as key factors influencing programme success. Nevertheless, it remains unclear which content-related and methodological variables most significantly moderate the effectiveness of school-based interventions. The existing

literature provides partly inconsistent findings in this regard: for example, Cantone et al. (2015) reported greater efficacy for systemically embedded, multicomponent programmes, whereas other studies (e.g., Evans et al., 2014) underscored the value of specific elements, such as peer mediation or class-level interventions.

In summary, while there is a solid empirical foundation supporting the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programmes, substantial clarification is still needed regarding the most effective programme components, relevant contextual conditions, and methodological standards. The high degree of heterogeneity observed across studies underlines the necessity of conducting differentiated analyses that assess effectiveness not in general terms, but with reference to specific moderating variables.

Research Question

Despite the substantial body of meta-analytic evidence on school-based bullying prevention, previous reviews have largely focused on overall effectiveness estimates (e.g., Gaffney et al., 2021; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al.), providing limited insight into why and under which conditions interventions succeed or fail. In light of the substantial heterogeneity of existing findings and the wide range of potential influencing factors, the present study therefore extends previous research by exploring these variations in greater depth. The central research question of this paper is as follows: Under which content-related, methodological, and contextual conditions are school-based intervention programmes particularly effective in reducing bullying and victimisation?

Method

Literature Search

The systematic literature search was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). It was carried out via the EBSCO-host platform and included the following subject-specific databases: ERIC, APA PsycINFO, PSYINDEX, MEDLINE, Education Source, and GreenFILE. The aim was to identify empirical studies on the effectiveness of school-based interventions targeting externalising and internalising behaviour; the present study on bullying and victimisation represents a subgroup analysis within this broader framework.

Accordingly, “bullying” and “victimisation” were not used as primary search terms, as the overarching BRAVE meta-analysis focused on school-based interventions addressing a wide range of behavioural and emotional difficulties. Bullying and victimisation outcomes were therefore captured as part of this broader behavioural spectrum. This approach ensured conceptual consistency with the main BRAVE framework while still allowing for a systematic extraction of all studies reporting bullying-related outcomes during the subgroup analysis.

The search strategy followed a two-step procedure:

- In the first step, broad keyword combinations referring to school settings (e.g., “school-based intervention”, “teaching method”, “inclusive education”) were combined with terms related to externalising and internalising behaviour (e.g., “behaviour problems”, “emotional disorders”, “classroom behaviour”) as well as effectiveness (e.g., “effectiveness”, “wirksam*”).
- In the second step, the search was expanded to include more specific combinations such as “classroom management strategies”, “behaviour modification”, “reward strategies”, “emotion-focused

intervention”, and “systemic intervention”.

The search results were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2024, and written in English, German, or French. In total, 1,234 records were identified.

The inclusion criteria of the present study were applied consistently throughout the selection process—including the title, abstract, and full-text screening—and comprised the following:

- Quantitative evaluation studies with a pre-post design (with or without follow-up)
- A comparison group (randomised, quasi-experimental, or single-case design with control condition)
- Implementation in a school-based setting (mainstream or special education classrooms, school-related social work, or day-structure programmes)
- Target group: school-aged children and adolescents without cognitive impairment
- Reported or computable effects on behavioural outcomes, based on standardised tests, rating scales, or systematic observation
- Thematic relevance of the intervention to education, psychology, social work, or school-based therapy

Studies were excluded if they were qualitative, theoretical or case reports, if they lacked a school-based context (e.g., purely clinical settings), or if they focused on physical or medical interventions. Also excluded were studies involving only adults or university students, as well as those that did not provide sufficient data to calculate effect sizes.

Study selection was conducted using the web-based tool Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016), which facilitated a structured and transparent title and abstract screening process. In 45.5% of cases, screening was conducted independently by two reviewers in a

blinded fashion. The resulting conflict rate of 15.7% was resolved through consensus discussions within the team. This procedure is also supported by the systematic review on Rayyan usage by Olofsson et al. (2017)

Following duplicate removal and eligibility screening based on the inclusion criteria, 441 studies (35.7%) were retained for full-text review—352 from the primary search and 89 from the supplementary search. The comparatively high exclusion rate may be attributed to the deliberately broad and sensitive search strategy, aimed at increasing statistical power and minimising bias (Sedlmeier & Renkewitz, 2018).

In order to ensure comprehensive coverage, a targeted supplementary search focusing on German-language programmes was conducted. This supplementary step aimed to identify evaluation studies that might not have been indexed in international databases but were available through national dissemination channels. This involved an analysis of manuals from 47 established programmes aimed at promoting social-emotional competencies, followed by entering the respective programme titles and authors into the EBSCOhost databases to locate any related peer-reviewed evaluation studies. Studies identified through this approach that met the inclusion criteria but had not been captured in the initial search were subsequently added to the dataset. In total, 63 additional studies were identified and included in the final analysis through this supplementary procedure.

Data Extraction and Study Coding

Full-text screening and subsequent data extraction were based on a structured coding protocol that was developed in several piloting phases and revised iteratively. The protocol was informed by established templates from meta-analytical reviews (Schlosser et al., 2013; Sedlmeier & Renkewitz, 2018) and adapted to the domain-specific requirements of school and classroom research. Coding was carried out collaboratively

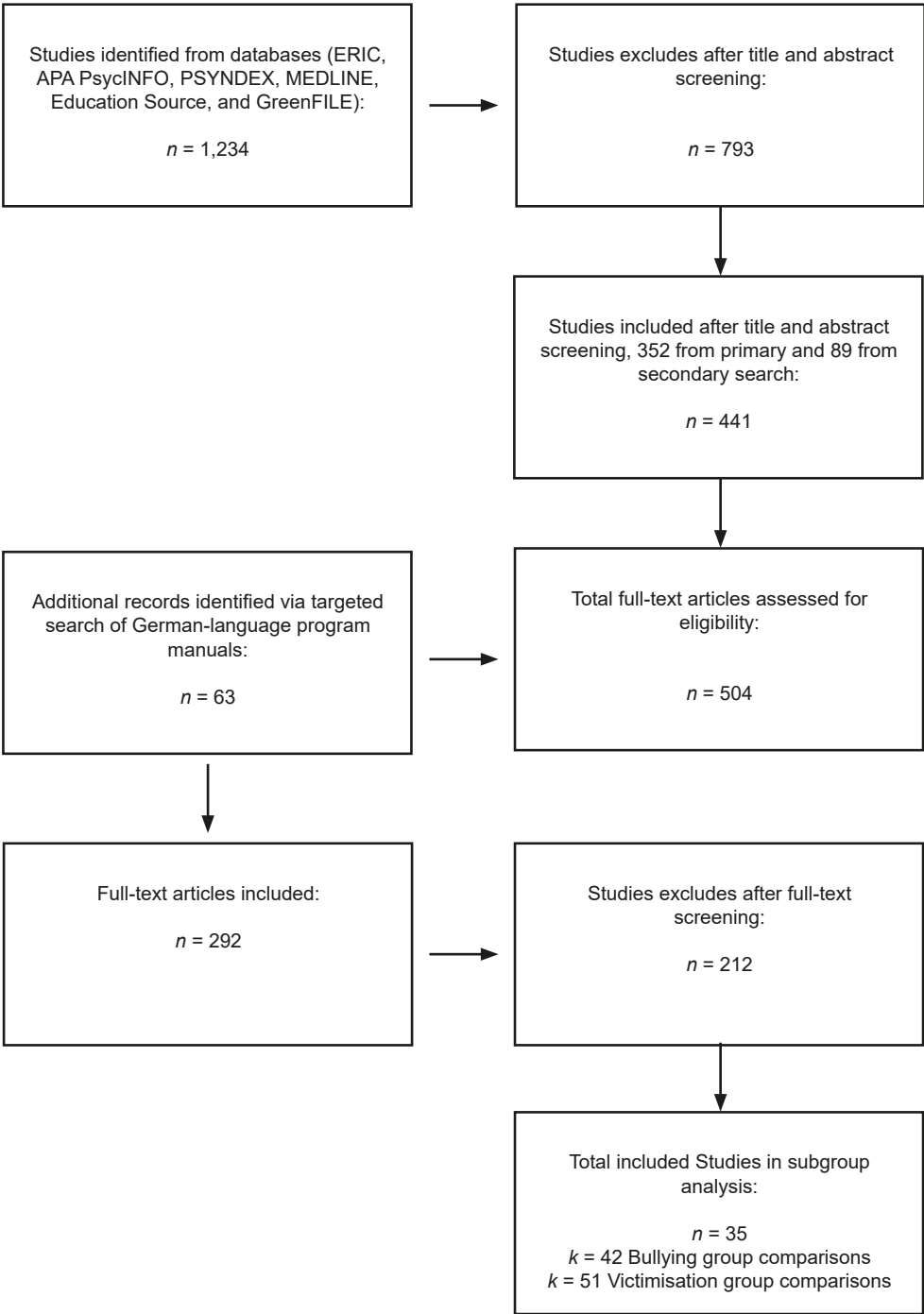
within the BRAVE-project team and supported by a four-eye principle with consensus procedures.

A total of 504 studies identified as potentially eligible during the title and abstract screening were examined in full. These studies were reassessed based on the previously defined inclusion criteria. In parallel, relevant study characteristics—such as design, sample size, outcome measures, main results and potential moderators—were systematically extracted and documented in a structured Excel spreadsheet by eight trained researchers. During this phase, 212 studies were excluded, mainly due to methodological shortcomings or insufficient data for effect size calculation. 292 studies remained for further analysis.

To assess inter-rater reliability, a two-step rating procedure was implemented. First, 126 of the 504 studies (25%) were independently reassessed by a second rater with regard to inclusion or exclusion. The resulting Cohen's kappa of 0.83 indicates an "almost perfect" agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). In a second step, an additional 25% of the data entries were independently reviewed for each coding category (e.g., sample, design, type of intervention). Agreement was calculated using the prevalence-adjusted bias-adjusted kappa (PABAK, Byrt et al., 1993), which adjusts for skewed category distributions and potential selection bias. Inter-rater reliability across categories ranged from substantial to almost perfect. For the category "study design", where agreement was lower, all entries for the 292 studies were re-reviewed and re-coded. Five researchers participated in the second coding phase.

For the present subgroup analysis, a subset of the 292 included studies was selected that reported effect sizes for bullying (perpetration) and/or victimisation, or from which such values could be calculated based on means, standard deviations, or inferential statistics. This resulted in 42 group comparisons on bullying and 51 group comparisons on victimisation, drawn from a total of 35

Figure 1
Flow Diagram of Study Selection



unique studies. These comparisons were included in the meta-analytic models.

All data were documented in a protected database and prepared for analysis in a standardised Excel structure. On this basis, several sets of moderator variables were constructed to examine systematic differences in effect sizes. Methodological moderators included study design (randomised controlled trial, cluster-randomised trial, quasi-experimental design), type of outcome assessment (self-report, external rating, assessment), sample size, the presence of pre-test group differences between intervention and control conditions, and the geographical region of the study (Europe, North America, Australia, Asia, Africa). Contextual moderators captured the socio-economic status of the study sample (low SES, middle SES, high SES, socio-economically heterogeneous, or not reported), level of prevention (universal, selective, indicated), implementation setting (mainstream school, special school, school-based therapeutic context), and mode of delivery (classroom-based, small-group, individual). Content-related moderators referred to the theoretical orientation of the programmes (cognitive, cognitive-behavioural, interactionist, emotion-focused, behavioural, arts-/music-based, other/unspecified), the quality of implementation (explicitly reported fidelity check, implicit positive reference to implementation, implicit negative reference, explicitly negative assessment, or no information on implementation), and intervention intensity (number of sessions). These moderator categories were coded consistently across all eligible studies and formed the basis for the subsequent moderator analyses.

Data Analysis

All reported effect sizes, unless already provided as Cohen's d (Cohen, 2013), were converted to d based on the respective primary statistics. This conversion was carried out using either directly reported effect

measures (e.g., η^2 , r , or ϕ), means and standard deviations, or test statistics such as t - or F -values.

Following the conventions proposed by Bortz and Döring (2016), effect sizes were classified as follows: $d < 0.20$ was considered negligible, $d = 0.20$ – 0.49 small, $d = 0.50$ – 0.79 moderate, and $d \geq 0.80$ large.

In line with Lipsey and Wilson (2009), a bias correction for small sample sizes was applied to all d values. In addition, a weighting factor (w) was calculated for each individual effect size, based on the precision of the estimate (inverse of the variance). The weighted mean effect size was computed by summing the products of d and w across all effects and dividing by the total sum of w . It was then tested whether these weighted average effect sizes significantly differed from zero.

To determine whether the distribution of effect sizes was homogeneous or heterogeneous, several heterogeneity statistics were calculated. The Q -statistic was used to test whether the observed variance exceeded what would be expected by chance alone. A significant Q -value indicates substantial heterogeneity—that is, systematic differences between studies.

To complement the Q -statistic, the I^2 index was calculated, which quantifies the percentage of total variation that is attributable to real differences between studies rather than sampling error. An I^2 value of 0 % indicates complete homogeneity, while values above 75 % are generally interpreted as reflecting considerable heterogeneity (Higgins, 2003).

When the effect sizes of the included studies are homogeneous—i.e., sufficiently similar—it can be assumed that all studies estimate the same true effect. This is more likely if the studies are relatively comparable in terms of intervention type, outcome domain, and sample characteristics. In such cases, a fixed-effects model would be the appropriate analytic strategy. This model calculates a weighted average of the effect sizes, with weights assigned in inverse

proportion to their variances. Thus, larger studies with smaller variances have greater influence on the pooled estimate.

However, since all heterogeneity tests in the current dataset were significant, the assumption of a single underlying effect could not be upheld. Therefore, random-effects models were used consistently throughout the analysis. These models assume that true effect sizes may vary between studies and account for both within-study and between-study variance components (τ^2). As a result, smaller studies typically receive more weight in random-effects models than in fixed-effects models. This approach yields more conservative effect estimates with wider confidence intervals, appropriately reflecting uncertainty across studies.

To explore potential moderators of effect size, additional analyses were conducted. These examined whether specific study characteristics systematically influenced effect magnitudes. Examples of such moderators include the study design, the theoretical foundation of the intervention, the mode and quality of implementation, or contextual factors such as the setting. For this purpose, meta-regression models were estimated. The *QM* statistic was used to test whether the included moderators significantly explained variation in effect sizes. These analyses enabled more nuanced conclusions about the conditions under which school-based interventions are particularly effective for reducing bullying and victimisation.

All analyses were conducted in RStudio using the Meta Package (Schwarzer et al., 2015).

Results

Description of Included Studies

As outlined in the Methods section, the present subgroup analysis on bullying and victimisation is based on 36 primary studies, covering a broad spectrum of designs,

target groups, and implementation features. Table 1 provides an overview of their core , including the instruments used to assess bullying and victimisation. While most studies focused on general forms of peer aggression, six explicitly targeted specific subtypes (e.g., cyberbullying, relational aggression). Across studies, bullying and/or victimisation was assessed predominantly via self-report questionnaires ($n = 29$), with some using teacher ratings ($n = 5$) or multi-informant approaches ($n = 2$).

Together, the included studies encompassed a total sample of 45,869 school-aged children and adolescents, with an average sample size of 1,274 participants ($SD = 3,078$; median = 437). The mean age across studies was 11 years and 3 months ($SD = 2$ years and 1 month; median = 11;3). On average, 51% of the participants were female ($SD = 6.7$; median = 51.7), although the gender distribution was relatively balanced in most samples.

The majority of studies followed a universal prevention approach ($n = 28$), while eight studies targeted selective at-risk populations. Regarding socio-economic status (SES), 18 studies described their samples as socially heterogeneous, eight studies as low SES, six as middle SES, and three as high SES. One study did not report information on SES.

Geographically, the studies were distributed across four continents, with most conducted in Europe ($n = 23$), followed by North America ($n = 9$), Australia ($n = 2$) and Asia ($n = 1$).

In terms of methodological design, 13 studies used cluster-randomised designs, 13 applied quasi-experimental designs, and nine employed randomised controlled trials. This pattern differs from previous meta-analyses that often reported a predominance of North American studies (e.g., Gaffney et al., 2021; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al.) and likely reflects our supplementary search strategy.

Table 1
Included Studies

Studie	N	SES / Level	Region	Design	Survey Instruments	Theory / Name of Intervention	Setting / Mode	Units / Duration	Implementation / Person	k
(Andreou et al., 2007)	454	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	QED	Peer Victimisation Scale and the Bullying Behaviour Scale (Austin & Joseph, 1996)	Other / *	Regular School / Class	16 / 4	NR / Classroom Teacher	2
(Bull et al., 2009)	77	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	RCT	Olweus' Bully/Victim questionnaire (BVQ, 1996)	Cognitive / "fairplayer. manual"	Regular School / Gruppe	10 / 10	IP / Classroom Teacher	2
(Chapman et al., 2013)	314	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Australia	CRT	The Australian School Students Alcohol and Drugs Survey	Cognitive-Behavioural / SPIY (Skills for Preventing Injury in Youth programme)	Regular School / Class	8 / 8	EP / Other	1
(Chaux et al., 2016)	582	Middle / Universal	Europe	CRT	European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ)	Cognitive / "Medienhelden"	Regular School / Class	15 / *	IP / Classroom Teacher	8
(Domitrovich et al., 2022)	811	Low / Universal	North America	CRT	Bullying Scale (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001)	Other / "Facing History and Ourselves"	Regular School / Class	* / 26	EP / Classroom Teacher	1
(Fonagy et al., 2009)	1499	Low / Universal	Europe	CRT	The Peer Experiences Questionnaire (Vernberg et al., 1999) & Peer Nomination	Other / SPC	Regular School / Class	* / *	NR / Other	4

(Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2018)	176	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	Cyberbullying: Screening of Peer Harassment & Cyberbullying: Screening of Peer Harassment	Cognitive / "Cyberprogram 2.0 and Cooperative Cybereduca 2.0"	Regular School / Class	25 / *	EP / Other	10
(Hess et al., 2020)	586	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	QED	Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ)	Cognitive / "Medienhelden"	Regular School / Class	10 / 10	NR / Classroom Teacher	2
(Kimber et al., 2008)	1003	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	QED	CAN questionnaire	Cognitive-Behavioural / "SET Program"	Regular School / Class	36 / 36	NR / Classroom Teacher	1
(Lewis et al., 2021)	930	Low / Selective	North America	QED	*	Cognitive-Behavioural / PA (Positive Action)	Regular School / Class	6 / *	EP / Classroom Teacher	1
(Lewis et al., 2013)	1170	Low / Selective	North America	QED	Aggression Scale (Orpinas and Frankowski)	Cognitive-Behavioural / PA (Positive Action)	Regular School / Class	140 / *	NR / Classroom Teacher	1
(Low & Van Ryzin, 2014)	3119	Middle / Universal	North America	RCT	School Environment Survey (SES) & Colorado Trust's Bullying Prevention Initiative Student Survey	Interactionist / "Steps to Respect"	Regular School / Class	11 / 36	EP / Researcher	7
(Morgan-Lopez et al., 2020)	4025	Low / Selective	North America	RCT	The self-reported victimization scale	Other / SBMH (School-based mental health)	Regular School / Single	* / *	NR / Therapist	4
(Rapee et al., 2020)	4135	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Australia	RCT	Personal Experiences Checklist (PECK; Hunt, Rapee, & Peters, 2012)	Other / "Friendly schools"	Regular School / Class	15 / *	EP / Other	3

(Richards et al., 2008)	420	High / Universal	Europe	QED	Bully	Other / *	Regular School / Class	* / 9	NR / Classroom Teacher	1
(Santamaría-Villar et al., 2021)	100	High / Universal	Europe	RCT	School Violence in Preschool and Primary School Questionnaire ((AlbaladejoBlázquez et al., 2013)	Emotion-Focused / *	Regular School / Class	15 / 30	EP / Classroom Teacher	1
(Schick & Cierpka, 2005)	23	Heterogeneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	Landau scales of social climate in the class (LASSO)	Emotion-Focused / "Faustlos"	Regular School / Class	35 / 156	IP / Classroom Teacher	1
(Schick & Cierpka, 2003)	23	Heterogeneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	Landau scales of social climate in the class (LASSO)	Emotion-Focused / "Faustlos"	Regular School / Class	35 / *	IN / Classroom Teacher	1
(Schmidt & Vereenooghe, 2021)	71	Heterogeneous / Universal	Europe	RCT	Revised Peer Experiences Questionnaire (RPEQ)	Cognitive / CBM-I (cognitive bias modification for interpretations)	Special Education School / Single	3 / 3	EN / Classroom Teacher	3
(Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2016)	490	Middle / Universal	Europe	CRT	The European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ; Brighi et al., 2012)	Cognitive / "Medienhelden"	Regular School / Class	1 / 1	IP / Classroom Teacher	2
(Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2014)	399	Heterogeneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ)	Cognitive / "Medienhelden"	Regular School / Class	10 / 10	EP / Classroom Teacher	4

(Spröber et al., 2006)	145	Middle / Universal	Europe	QED	BullyVictim Questionnaires	Behavioural / "ProACT + E"	Regular School / Class	3 / 4	IN / Classroom Teacher	2
(Stallard et al., 2014)	890	Middle / Universal	Europe	CRT	Olweus' BullyVictim questionnaire (BVQ, 1996)	Cognitive-Behavioural / "Health-led FRIENDS"	Regular School / Class	9 / 9	EP / Therapist / Classroom Teacher	4
(Stevens et al., 2000)	531	Heterogeneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	*	Behavioural / "The Flemish anti-bullying intervention"	Regular School / Class	* / *	NR / Classroom Teacher	4
(Taylor et al., 2013)	2655	Low / Universal	North America	RCT	*	Cognitive / "Shifting Boundaries"	Regular School / Class	10 / 10	NR / Educational Assistance	1
(Trip et al., 2015)	970	High / Universal	Europe	CRT	bullying and victimization scales	Cognitive-Behavioural / "ViSC Social Competence Program & REBE Program"	Regular School / Class	19 / 10	EP / Researcher	4
(van der Ploeg et al., 2016)	38	Heterogeneous / Selective	Europe	QED	Olweus' BullyVictim questionnaire (BVQ, 1996)	Other / "KiVa anti-bullying programme"	Regular School / Group	* / *	NR / Other	2
(Verret et al., 2018)	33	Keine Angabe / Selective	North America	QED	Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)	Cognitive / "Multi-Propulsions"	Regular School / Group	12 / 12	EP / Therapist	1
(Von Marées & Petermann, 2010)	372	Middle / Universal	Europe	QED	Bullying- und Viktimisierungs-Fragebogen für Lehrkräfte (BVF-L)	Cognitive-Behavioural / «Verhaltenstraining in der Grundschule»	Regular School / Class	26 / *	EP / Classroom Teacher	4

(Von Marées & Petermann, 2009)	85	Hetero- geneous / Selective	Europe	QED	Bullying- und Viktimisierungs- Fragebogen für Lehrkräfte (BVF-L)	Cognitive-Behavioural / "Verhaltenstraining in der Grundschule"	Regular School / Class	24 / 13	EN / Classroom Teacher	2
(Wang et al., 2015)	168	Low / Universal	North America	QED	The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale- Perpetration-Student Version (VPBS)	Cognitive / BLP (The Bullying Literature Project)	Regular School / Class	5 / 5	EP / Therapist	2
(Wang & Goldberg, 2017)	84	Hetero- geneous / Selective	North America	QED	Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale- Perpetration & ClassMaps Survey	Cognitive / BLP-MD (The Bullying Literature Project- Moral Disengagement Version)	Regular School / Class	* / 5	EP / Researcher	2
(Williford et al., 2013)	18412	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	RCT	Olweus' Bully/Victim questionnaire (BVQ, 1996)	Cognitive / "KiVa anti- bullying programme"	Regular School / Class	10 / 40	NR / Classroom Teacher	2
(Wölfer et al., 2014)	593	Hetero- geneous / Universal	Europe	CRT	Standardized student questionnaires (SSQ)	Cognitive / "Medienhelden"	Regular School / Class	10 / 10	IP / Classroom Teacher	1
(Yan et al., 2019)	114	Low / Selective	Asia	RCT	Revised Olweus Bully/ Victim Questionnaire	Arts- or music-based / *	School-indicated Therapy / Group	6 / 12	IP / Therapist	2

Notes. SES = Socio-Economic Status, Design: Quasi-experimentell = QED, Cluster-randomized = CRT, Random Control Trail = RCT, Implementation: Implicit Reference Negative = IN, Implicit Reference Positive = IP, Explicit Reference Negative = EN, Explicit Reference Positive = EP, No Reference = NR, k = Number of Group Comparisons, * = Information not Available.+

The number of intervention sessions ranged from 1 to 140, with an average of 19 sessions ($SD = 24.8$; median = 11). The overall programme duration averaged 19.5 weeks ($SD = 29.8$; median = 10). Regarding mode of delivery, most interventions were class-based ($n = 30$), while four were conducted in small groups and two in individual settings.

The implementation setting was primarily regular schools ($n = 33$). One study took place in a special school, and one in a school-based therapeutic context.

In terms of personnel, the interventions were most frequently delivered by classroom teachers ($n = 21$). Other implementers included therapists ($n = 5$), researchers ($n = 3$), a teaching assistant ($n = 1$), and five other educational professionals, whose roles were not further specified.

With regard to theoretical orientation, the interventions reflected diverse conceptual frameworks: ten studies were grounded in cognitive theories, nine in cognitive-behavioural approaches, three in emotion-focused models, two in behavioural approaches, one in an interactionist framework, and one in an arts- or music-based approach. For eight studies, the theoretical foundation was either unspecified or categorised as "other".

Overall Effects for Bullying and Victimization

Separate analyses were conducted for the two outcome variables bullying (perpetration) and victimisation, each revealing statistically significant overall effects alongside substantial heterogeneity.

For bullying, based on $k = 42$ group comparisons, the mean weighted effect size was $d = 0.37$ (95% CI [0.22, 0.53]; $p < .001$). The test for heterogeneity yielded a highly significant result ($Q(df = 41) = 3,155.06$, $p < .001$), with an I^2 value of 97.77%, indicating substantial between-study variability. Accordingly, a random-effects model was applied to account for both within-study

sampling error and between-study variance.

For victimisation, the analysis was based on $k = 51$ group comparisons and showed a significant average effect size of $d = 0.17$ (95% CI [0.08, 0.26]; $p < .001$). Again, the heterogeneity test reached statistical significance ($Q(df = 50) = 2,009.71$, $p < .001$), and the I^2 value of 96.37% confirmed a high degree of heterogeneity. A random-effects model was therefore used in this case as well.

These findings suggest that school-based interventions, on average, lead to statistically significant and practically meaningful reductions in both bullying and victimisation. However, the considerable variation between studies underscores the importance of identifying moderating factors, which are examined in the following section.

Influence of Contextual and Methodological Characteristics on Effect Sizes

To account for the substantial between-study heterogeneity, a series of moderator analyses was conducted. The analyses focused on conceptually and empirically relevant characteristics, SES, study design, implementation quality, assessment method, and continent. In addition, we examined sample size as a continuous predictor, and pre-test differences as a methodological factor that may influence the observed outcomes.

Sample size had no significant impact on the magnitude of effect sizes ($QM(df = 1) = 0.71$, $p = .400$) and explained none of the heterogeneity ($R^2 = 0.00\%$). The observed effect sizes thus appear independent of the number of participants included in each study.

A highly significant moderation effect was found for socio-economic status ($QM(df = 5) = 49.26$, $p < .001$). Studies involving samples with medium SES ($d = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.62]) or heterogeneous backgrounds ($d = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.34]) yielded the largest effects. In contrast, studies with low, high or unspecified SES showed no statistically significant deviations from the overall mean.

Implementation quality also significantly moderated the outcomes ($QM(df = 5) = 49.26, p < .001$). The included studies were classified based on whether and how implementation fidelity was systematically monitored. In the case of explicit implementation control, authors clearly reported how fidelity was assessed during implementation ($d = 0.53, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.37, 0.69]$). In studies with implicit implementation reference, no methodological description was provided, but references to implementation were included in the results section ($d = 0.33, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.14, 0.52]$). Studies that made no mention of implementation still showed significant effects ($d = 0.22, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.08, 0.36]$). In contrast, implicit ($d = 0.14, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.10, 0.38]$) or explicitly negative assessments of implementation ($d = -0.07, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.39, 0.25]$) were associated with substantially smaller effect sizes and did not differ significantly from zero.

Study design also emerged as a significant moderator ($QM(df = 3) = 39.91, p < .001$). The strongest effects were observed in randomised controlled trials ($d = 0.41, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.24, 0.58]$), followed by cluster-randomised designs ($d = 0.23, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.10, 0.35]$) and quasi-experimental designs ($d = 0.19, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.36]$).

The type of assessment instrument used also significantly influenced effect size estimates ($QM(df = 2) = 42.66, p < .001$). Studies using external ratings showed the strongest effects ($d = 0.50, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.29, 0.71]$), while those relying on self-reports yielded smaller but still statistically significant effects ($d = 0.22, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.13, 0.31]$).

The geographical region of the studies also had a significant overall moderating effect ($QM(df = 4) = 48.06, p < .001$). However, only studies conducted in Europe ($d = 0.21, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.31]$) and North America ($d = 0.51, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.33, 0.69]$) yielded statistically significant effect sizes. Studies from Asia ($d = 0.20, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.40, 0.81]$) and Australia ($d = -0.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.40, 0.38]$) did not differ significantly from zero.

Finally, pre-test differences were included as a methodological moderator ($QM(df = 3) = 90.90, p < .001$). The largest effects were observed in studies without any indication of whether pre-test differences were present ($d = 1.04, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.79, 1.30]$), while studies with reported pre-test differences ($d = 0.23, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.10, 0.35]$) and studies explicitly stating no such differences ($d = 0.17, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.07, 0.27]$) yielded smaller but statistically significant effects. Due to the unclear meaning and potential confounding in the “no information” category, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

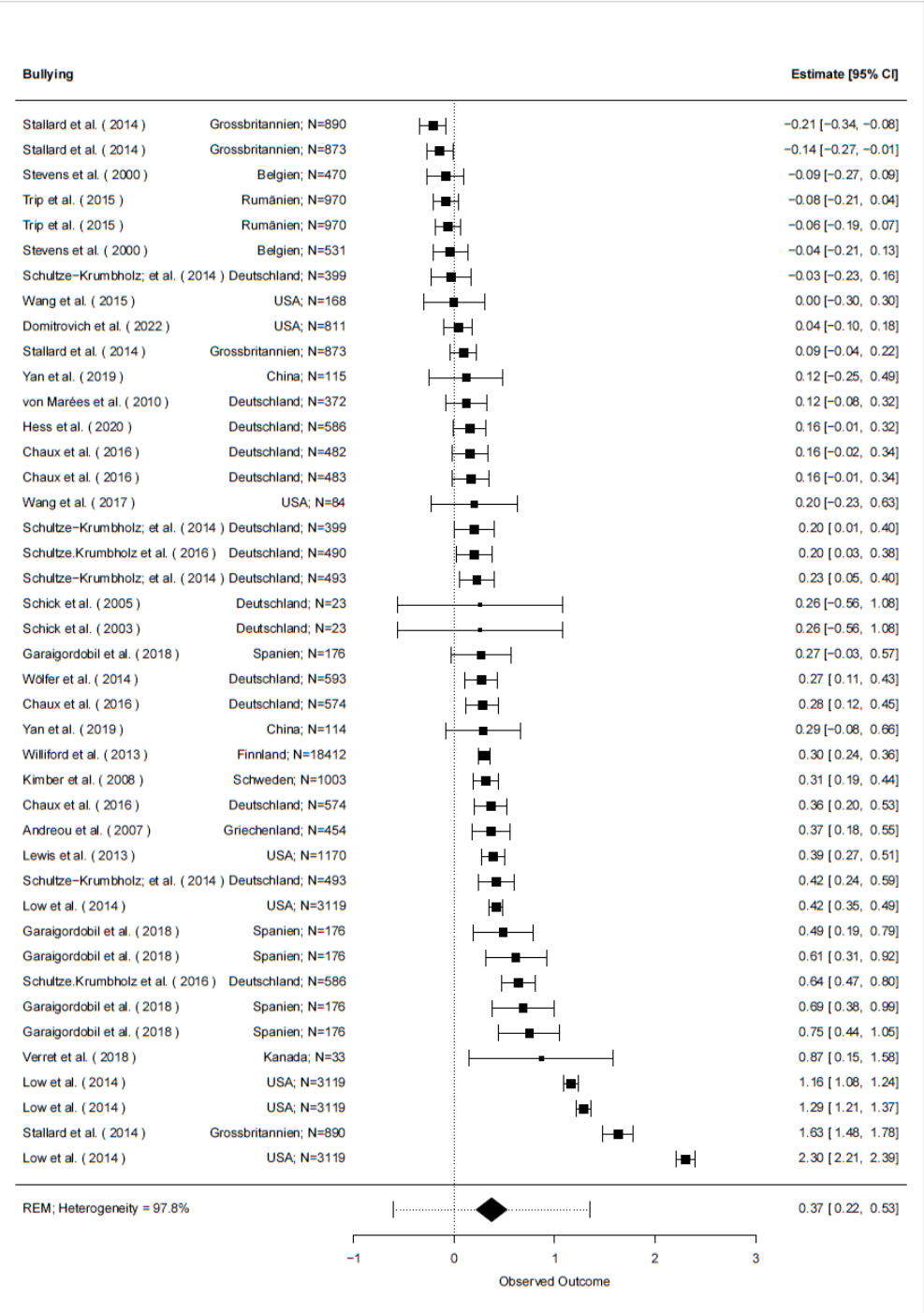
Bullying: Moderator Analysis

To identify relevant factors influencing the effectiveness of school-based interventions targeting bullying behaviour, a series of moderator analyses was conducted. The broad variation in individual effects is also visually evident in the forest plot presented in Figure 2.

A significant moderator was the theoretical framework underpinning the intervention ($QM(df = 7) = 60.45, p < .001$). The strongest effects were found for interactionist models ($d = 1.29, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.90, 1.68]$), followed by cognitively oriented programmes ($d = 0.45, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.16, 0.73]$). No significant effects were found for cognitively-behavioural approaches ($d = 0.20, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.06, 0.46]$), emotion-focused models ($d = 0.26, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.54, 1.06]$), learning-theoretical approaches ($d = 0.14, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.18, 0.46]$), or arts- and music-based concepts ($d = 0.20, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.40, 0.81]$). Studies with unspecified or categorised as “other” theoretical models showed small but statistically significant effects ($d = 0.27, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.52]$).

The mode of delivery also proved to be a relevant moderator ($QM(df = 2) = 22.21, p < .001$). Interventions implemented in whole-class formats yielded significant effects ($d = 0.37, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.21, 0.53]$), while group-based formats achieved similar but

Figure 2
Forest Plot Bullying



not statistically significant effects ($d = 0.38$, 95% CI $[-0.24, 1.01]$).

With regard to the setting, only interventions implemented in regular school environments were associated with statistically significant effects ($d = 0.38$, 95% CI $[0.22, 0.55]$). Programmes delivered in school-based therapeutic settings did not differ significantly from zero ($d = 0.20$, 95% CI $[-0.54, 0.95]$) ($QM(df = 3) = 21.98$, $p < .001$).

The person responsible for implementation was also a significant moderator ($QM(df = 4) = 34.99$, $p < .001$). The strongest effects were observed when the interventions were delivered by researchers ($d = 0.76$, 95% CI $[0.42, 1.11]$) or by professionals with unspecified backgrounds ($d = 0.56$, 95% CI $[0.14, 0.98]$). Therapists ($d = 0.44$, 95% CI $[0.04, 0.83]$) and classroom teachers ($d = 0.20$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.39]$) achieved smaller but still statistically significant effects.

With regard to the level of prevention, universal programmes showed significant positive effects ($d = 0.38$, 95% CI $[0.21, 0.54]$), whereas selective interventions did not significantly differ from zero ($d = 0.35$, 95% CI $[-0.12, 0.82]$) ($QM(df = 2) = 22.21$, $p < .001$).

The number of intervention sessions did not moderate the intervention outcomes ($QM(df = 1) = 0.01$, $p = .926$). The estimated effect size ($d = -0.0004$) was not statistically significant and explained no additional variance ($R^2 = 0.00\%$).

These findings highlight that the effectiveness of school-based bullying interventions is substantially influenced by their theoretical underpinnings, delivery mode, and the qualifications of the professionals involved in implementation. Programmes lacking a clear theoretical foundation or implemented in less structured contexts appear to be markedly less effective.

Victimisation: Moderator Analysis

For the 51 group comparisons related to the reduction of victimisation, moderator

analyses were again conducted to examine intervention effectiveness as a function of conceptual, methodological, and implementation-related features. The variability of effects across studies is also clearly visible in the forest plot (see Figure 3).

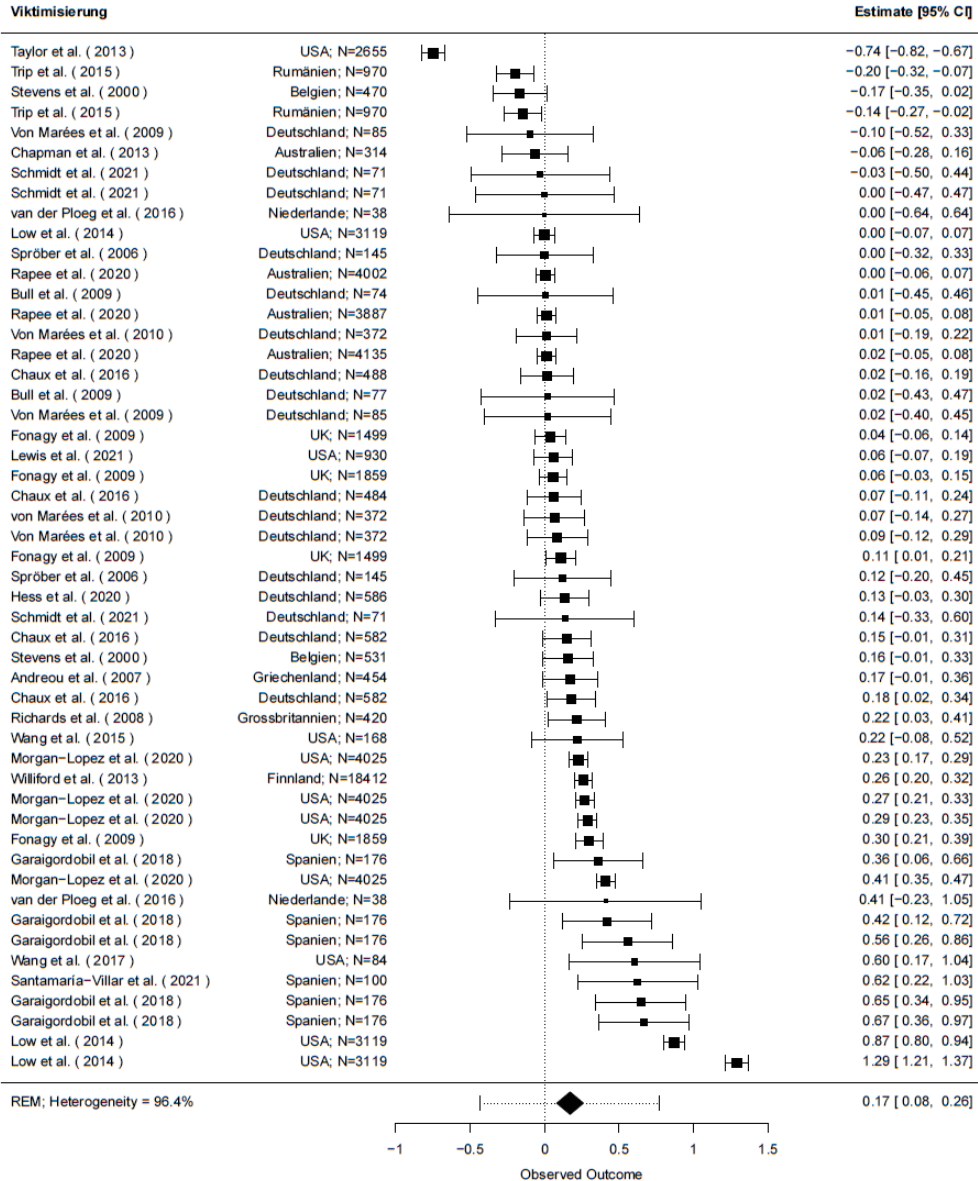
A significant moderator was the theoretical model underlying the interventions ($QM(df = 7) = 38.80$, $p < .001$). The highest effects were found for interactionist approaches ($d = 0.72$, 95% CI $[0.42, 1.02]$), followed by cognitive theory-based interventions ($d = 0.21$, 95% CI $[0.05, 0.38]$). Interventions based on other or unspecified theoretical frameworks also showed significantly positive effects ($d = 0.20$, 95% CI $[0.03, 0.36]$). In contrast, programmes with an emotion-focused ($d = 0.62$, 95% CI $[-0.03, 1.28]$), psychodynamic ($d = 0.18$, 95% CI $[-0.19, 0.55]$), cognitive-behavioural ($d = -0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.19, 0.17]$), or learning theory orientation ($d = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.12, 0.23]$) did not yield effects significantly different from zero.

The mode of delivery also showed significant differences ($QM(df = 3) = 13.76$, $p = .0033$). Interventions implemented in classroom settings showed moderate and significant effects ($d = 0.17$, 95% CI $[0.07, 0.28]$), while individual formats ($d = 0.19$, 95% CI $[-0.05, 0.42]$) and group-based formats ($d = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.31, 0.50]$) were not significantly different from zero.

With regard to the implementation setting, significant differences were also observed ($QM(df = 3) = 14.06$, $p = .0028$). Interventions delivered in mainstream school environments demonstrated statistically significant effects ($d = 0.18$, 95% CI $[0.08, 0.27]$), whereas those conducted in special education settings did not differ significantly from zero ($d = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.40, 0.48]$).

The level of prevention significantly moderated effectiveness ($QM(df = 3) = 14.15$, $p = .0027$). Universal prevention programmes showed significant effects ($d = 0.16$, 95% CI $[0.06, 0.27]$), as did selective interventions ($d = 0.23$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.44]$). In contrast, indicated interventions did not yield sig-

Figure 3
Plot Victimization



Notes. SES = Socio-Economic Status, Design: Quasi-experimentell = QED, Cluster-randomized = CRT, Random Control Trail = RCT, Implementation: Implicit Reference Negative = IN, Implicit Reference Positive = IP, Explicit Reference Negative = EN, Explicit Reference Positive = EP, No Reference = NR, k = Number of Group Comparisons, * = Information not Available.

nificant effects ($d = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.59, 0.62]$).

The implementing personnel also influenced the effectiveness of interventions ($QM(df = 5) = 36.50$, $p < .001$). The highest effects were achieved by researchers ($d = 0.40$, 95% CI $[0.18, 0.62]$) and therapists ($d = 0.29$, 95% CI $[0.05, 0.52]$). Interventions delivered by teaching assistants showed a significant negative effect ($d = -0.74$, 95% CI $[-1.26, -0.22]$). While interventions delivered by classroom teachers also yielded positive outcomes ($d = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.02, 0.22]$), the effects were not statistically significant. Personnel from other unspecified professional backgrounds achieved significant effects as well ($d = 0.21$, 95% CI $[0.07, 0.36]$).

The number of intervention sessions did not moderate intervention effects ($QM(df = 1) = 0.66$, $p = .418$). The estimated effect ($d = 0.006$) was not statistically significant and did not explain additional variance ($R^2 = 0.00\%$).

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of anti-victimisation programmes also depends on a clear theoretical framework, methodologically sound implementation, and qualified delivery. Programmes delivered in school-based settings by well-trained professionals and rooted in structured conceptual models tend to be more effective in reducing victimisation.

Discussion

This meta-analysis examined the average effectiveness of school-based interventions aimed at reducing bullying and victimisation among children and adolescents.

Across all 93 group comparisons from 36 studies, a small to moderate average effect was found for both bullying ($d = 0.37$, 95% CI $[0.22, 0.53]$, $p < .001$) and victimisation ($d = 0.17$, 95% CI $[0.08, 0.26]$, $p < .001$), suggesting that school-based interventions can meaningfully reduce bullying as well as victim experiences in school settings.

The high degree of heterogeneity ($I^2 = 97.8\%$ for bullying; $I^2 = 96.4\%$ for victimisation) indicates substantial variation across studies. Moderator analyses helped clarify the conditions under which interventions are most effective:

- Theoretical models made a notable difference in both domains. Interventions based on interactionist or cognition-based models were particularly effective in reducing both bullying and victimisation.
- Implementation modality and implementer qualification also significantly influenced effectiveness. When delivered by researchers or therapists, effects tended to be stronger than when delivered by classroom teachers, although teacher-led programmes still produced statistically significant outcomes.
- In both outcome domains, the setting of implementation (e.g. regular school vs. other contexts), the level of prevention (universal vs. selective), and implementation quality contributed to differential effectiveness.
- Interestingly, intervention intensity (number of sessions) did not moderate outcomes in either domain.
- Finally, the type of measurement instrument influenced the magnitude of effects: self-report measures yielded smaller effects compared to external assessments.

Taken together, the findings highlight that school-based bullying prevention is effective under certain conditions, with theoretical orientation, implementation characteristics, and evaluation methods shaping observed effect sizes.

Interpretation in the Context of Existing Research and Theoretical Models

Our findings align with the international body of research on the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programmes but indicate slightly higher effects than those reported in previous meta-analyses. For example, Gaffney, Ttofi, and Farrington (2021)

and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al. found average effect sizes of $d = 0.15$ for bullying and $d = 0.12$ for victimisation. In contrast, the effect sizes in our analysis were $d = 0.37$ (bullying) and $d = 0.17$ (victimisation). This discrepancy is not only statistically relevant but also theoretically informative. It reflects a widely observed trend in the literature: school-based interventions tend to produce stronger effects on bullying behaviour than on reducing experiences of victimisation (Gaffney et al., 2021; Tofi & Farrington, 2011) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Modecki et al.). Our results confirm this pattern. Evidently, it is easier to influence perpetrator behaviour than to sustainably protect pupils from becoming victims. This insight underlines the importance of developing targeted strategies that strengthen vulnerable students and foster supportive peer dynamics to achieve comparable improvements in victimisation outcomes.

Moreover, our results highlight the critical importance of sound theoretical grounding and contextual alignment of school-based prevention programmes. Interventions based on cognitive or interactionist approaches showed above-average effectiveness in our analysis. Notably, programmes grounded in interactionist theory – which promote social participation, cooperative norms, and peer engagement – proved to be the most effective. This finding is consistent with results from Low and Van Ryzin (2014), who demonstrated that interventions promoting a cooperative school climate and strong social relationships are particularly effective in reducing victimisation. These programmes place less emphasis on individual behaviour modification and more on improving the quality of social dynamics across the school context.

Cognitive programmes – focusing on perspective-taking, moral reasoning, or digital literacy – were also associated with substan-

tial reductions in bullying, although their effects on victimisation were more modest. In contrast, behaviourist approaches and interventions without a clear theoretical model tended to yield weaker effects. This pattern suggests that sustainable change in social behaviour is unlikely to result from short-term behaviour drills or isolated training sessions. Rather, theory-driven and context-sensitive programmes that systematically integrate cognitive, emotional, and relational components are more promising in achieving meaningful behavioural improvements (Cantone et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2014).

Finally, the study by Low and Van Ryzin (2014) underscores the importance of school climate as a moderator of programme effectiveness. Their findings show that a supportive psychosocial climate—characterised by positive relationships between teachers, parents, and pupils—can significantly enhance the impact of anti-bullying interventions, particularly in reducing victimisation. Our analysis corroborates this conclusion: the implementation setting (mainstream classroom vs. other contexts) emerged as a relevant moderator. It appears that interventions are most effective when embedded in a trusting, engaged, and relationally supportive school environment—highlighting the importance of school-wide culture and community as critical conditions for successful bullying prevention.

Limitations

This meta-analysis is based on a broad empirical foundation and was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Its strengths include double independent ratings, the use of an extended search strategy (including grey literature), transparent data extraction procedures, and comprehensive moderator analyses with high inter-rater reliability. The results are reported separately for bullying and victimisation, enabling a differentiated assessment of intervention effectiveness.

Nevertheless, several methodological limitations need to be considered. The high heterogeneity ($I^2 > 90\%$) indicates systematic differences between the included studies. These differences concern, for example, study design, implementation fidelity, or the measurement instruments used – factors that could not be fully controlled for. Although part of this variance was addressed through moderator analyses, the generalisability of the overall findings remains limited.

One notable methodological aspect concerns the study design. Whereas previous meta-analyses have often found stronger effects in less controlled designs (Gaffney et al., 2021) and a recent meta-analysis shows that these forms of aggression remain prevalent among young people globally (Moddecki et al., our analysis showed that randomised controlled trials (RCTs) tended to report higher effect sizes than quasi-experimental studies. Although counterintuitive at first glance, this pattern may reflect the fact that highly effective, internationally established programmes such as KiVa or OBPP were more frequently evaluated in RCTs. Conversely, quasi-experimental studies may have been conducted under more constrained or less favourable conditions. This finding highlights the importance of differentiating between study designs and, where appropriate, analysing them separately.

Furthermore, it was not possible to analyse pre-test differences between intervention and control groups, as many studies did not provide sufficient information. This lack of data makes it more difficult to assess internal validity and represents a recurring limitation in the field of school-based interventions.

Another key limitation is the uneven geographical distribution of primary studies. The majority of included research originated from Europe and North America, while other world regions – such as Asia, Africa or South America – were markedly underrepresented or entirely absent. This limits the global transferability of findings. Our own analysis revealed regional differences,

with interventions conducted in North American schools achieving noticeably larger effects than those implemented in European contexts. Such differences may stem from cultural, structural or educational system-related factors. Given the high prevalence of bullying in many non-Western countries, future research should aim to include more studies from the Global South to gain a more comprehensive picture of the worldwide effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes. From a methodological perspective, higher baseline prevalence may also increase the potential for detectable intervention effects, because substantial reductions are statistically easier to demonstrate when initial rates are high. However, as our dataset includes only one study from Asia and none from Africa or South America, such assumptions remain hypothetical in the present analysis and require systematic empirical testing in future research.

In sum, while the present analysis rests on a solid methodological foundation, the aforementioned limitations – from heterogeneity and potential bias to limited geographical coverage – must be considered when interpreting the results. The findings should be regarded as the best possible estimates based on currently available evidence. Future meta-analyses could benefit from a stronger commitment to open science practices (e.g., preregistration, data and code sharing), more internationally diverse samples, and the use of standardised instruments (Page et al., 2021). Ultimately, reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programmes can only be achieved through methodological rigour, contextual sensitivity and full transparency.

Implications for Practice

The present findings offer several practical implications for the development and implementation of school-based anti-bullying programmes. Schools can make an effective contribution to reducing bullying and vic-

timisation, particularly when interventions are embedded within regular classroom teaching and aligned with universal prevention strategies. Programmes based on cognitive or interactionist approaches – such as those promoting social perspective-taking, peer relationships, or cooperative group norms – proved especially effective. These approaches go beyond individual behaviour management and foster systemic changes in classroom climate and social dynamics.

Secondly, implementation quality is of critical importance. Explicit monitoring of intervention fidelity is central to the sustainable application of programmes, underscoring the need for structured supervision and staff training. Effective programmes are not only well designed but also consistently implemented. Our moderator analyses further show that who delivers the programme matters: interventions implemented by researchers or therapists achieved stronger effects than those delivered by classroom teachers, even though teacher-led programmes still yielded positive outcomes. This pattern suggests that specialised expertise, more intensive training, or the “novelty” of external professionals may enhance effectiveness. From a practical perspective, this underscores the need for high-quality professional development, coaching, and, where feasible, co-delivery models in which external experts initially support teachers and gradually build their capacity to implement programmes independently. School leadership should ensure that staff possess the necessary competencies and support structures to carry out such interventions with integrity.

Thirdly, the results suggest that victimisation is more difficult to reduce than bullying. This highlights the need for interventions that specifically strengthen the resilience of potential victims and activate bystander support. Empowering all pupils – including those not directly involved in bullying – appears crucial for sustainable change.

Finally, the success of school-based prevention efforts depends heavily on context-

tual appropriateness. Interventions should be tailored to the social and structural realities of each school. Notably, the number of intervention sessions did not significantly moderate programme effectiveness, indicating that “more” is not automatically “better”. Rather than extending programmes indefinitely, schools should prioritise a focused set of core components that demonstrably drive change (e.g., peer norms, classroom climate, teacher responses to bullying) and integrate them coherently into everyday practice. Investing in a positive school climate, fostering supportive teacher–student relationships, and integrating anti-bullying programmes into broader educational strategies can substantially enhance their effectiveness.

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- *Studies included in this meta-analysis.

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Furthermore, during the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (version GPT-4-turbo, July 2025) to improve the readability and language of the manuscript under human oversight and control. After using this service, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content and accept full responsibility for the final version of the published article.

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Offener Code	Das Meta Package ist frei verfügbar unter https://doi.org/10.32614/CRAN.package.meta
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KI und generative Modelle	Wir haben während der Erstellung dieser Arbeit ChatGPT (Version GPT-4-turbo, Juli 2025) genutzt, um die Lesbarkeit und Sprache des Manuskripts unter menschlicher Aufsicht und Kontrolle zu verbessern. Nach der Nutzung dieses Dienstes überprüfen und bearbeiteten wir den Inhalt gründlich und übernehmen die volle Verantwortung für die endgültige Fassung des veröffentlichten Artikels.

Bullying and Victimization in German Elementary Schools: Prevalence and Associations with Student Characteristics

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Abstract

Research shows that bullying and victimization are widespread among school-aged students with detrimental effects on a range of outcomes at school and beyond. This study aimed to determine prevalence rates for student groups involved in bullying and to describe school-related cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social characteristics of these student groups. To do so, we analyzed representative data from the Trends in Student Achievement 2016 study ($N = 26,577$ fourth-graders, age: $M(SD) = 10.50(0.52)$ years). The results of a latent class analysis supported a four-class solution with 78% classified as non-involved students, 16% as victims, 4% as bullies, and 2% as bully-victims. Across all bullying-involved groups, all analyzed characteristics were consistently less favorable compared to those of non-involved peers. Bully-victims exhibited the most adverse school-related outcomes, with a significantly higher likelihood of having a special educational needs status, greater subject-specific anxiety, and overall worse academic and social well-being than both bullies and victims. These findings underscore the status of bully-victims as highly vulnerable.

Keywords: bullying, victimization, elementary school, latent class analysis

Bullying und Viktimisierung an deutschen Grundschulen: Prävalenz und Zusammenhänge mit Schüler:innenmerkmalen

Zusammenfassung

Bullying und Viktimisierung sind unter Schüler:innen im schulpflichtigen Alter weit verbreitet und wirken sich nachteilig auf deren schulische Leistungen und darüber hinaus aus. Die vorliegende Studie zielt darauf ab, für Gruppen von Schüler:innen, die an Bullying beteiligt und/oder davon betroffen sind, die entsprechenden Prävalenzraten zu ermitteln sowie diese Gruppen durch zur Verfügung stehende schulbezogene kognitive, motivational-emotionale und soziale Merkmale zu beschreiben. Grundlage der Analysen sind Daten des IQB-Bildungstrends 2016 mit 26.577 Viertklässler:innen (Alter: $M(SD) = 10.50(0.52)$ Jahre). Die Ergebnisse einer latenten Klassenanalyse stützen eine vier-Klassen-Lösung, bei der 78% als

nicht involvierte Schüler:innen, 16% als Victims, 4% als Bullies und 2% als Bully-Victims klassifiziert wurden. In allen Gruppen, in denen die Schüler:innen an Bullying beteiligt und/oder davon betroffen waren, waren alle Ressourcen durchweg ungünstiger ausgeprägt als bei nicht involvierten Gleichaltrigen. Bully-Victims wiesen die ungünstigsten schulischen Ergebnisse auf, hatten eine deutlich höhere Wahrscheinlichkeit für sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarf, berichteten größere fachspezifischen Ängste und ein insgesamt schlechteres schulisches und soziales Wohlbefinden als sowohl Bullies als auch Victims. Diese Ergebnisse unterstreichen den Status von Bully-Victims als besonders gefährdet.

Schlagwörter: Bullying, Victimisierung, Grundschule, latente Klassenanalyse

Bullying is a dynamic process with differences across time and contexts (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Research from Germany and worldwide provides ample evidence that bullying and victimization are widespread among school-aged students (Fischer et al., 2020; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; von Marées & Petermann, 2010). By the end of elementary school, bullying roles tend to stabilize (e.g., Schäfer et al., 2005), marking a transition from transient peer conflicts to more patterned and role-consistent behaviors. Moreover, students in fourth grade still rely heavily on dyadic peer relations and show comparatively lower levels of social-cognitive skills such as perspective taking (Smith & Madsen, 1999), while physical forms of aggression remain more common than in adolescence/secondary school (Scheithauer et al., 2006). These developmental characteristics shape how bullying emerges and is maintained. As early bullying involvement can lead to maladaptive trajectories in school (e.g., poor academic achievement, absenteeism, depressive feelings) and beyond (e.g., poor health, substance use; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Wolke & Lereya, 2015), identifying bullying roles at this age group seems crucial. Despite this, representative prevalence data for German elementary school students are currently lacking.

In addition to empirical data on prevalence rates, a better understanding of the association of potentially modifiable variables with bullying is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention measures in order to curb this behavior or ex-

perience in school (e.g., Hong & Espelage, 2012). Characteristics of students at risk of becoming involved in bullying – as bully, victim, or both – include cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social variables (e.g., Cook et al., 2010; Eriksen et al., 2014; von Marées & Petermann, 2010). However, previous studies have often focused only on single socio-emotional characteristics, while a broader description of school-related characteristics among students involved in bullying in elementary school is still lacking (for secondary school students, see, e.g., Liu et al., 2021).

Addressing both outlined research gaps, we aimed to (1) examine the prevalence of bullying roles among elementary school students in Germany and (2) comprehensively characterize these groups using a wide range of variables that have been found to be associated with bullying involvement and are relevant to students' learning success. Specifically, we investigated school-related cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social variables – modifiable characteristics that can affect their involvement in bullying and be reshaped by it (e.g., school achievement may function as a predictor and as an outcome of bullying; Woods & Wolke, 2004).

Prevalence of bullying

Research typically distinguishes between bullies, victims, bully-victims, and non-involved students (e.g., Menesini & Salmivalli,

li, 2017; Mutiso et al., 2019; Zych et al., 2020). In elementary and middle school populations, prevalences for these groups vary widely – from 3% to 14% for bullies, 4% to 31% for victims, and 2% to 17% for bully-victims (e.g., Eriksen et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2021; von Marées & Petermann, 2010; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013; see Supplement S1 for previous findings on prevalences). These variations are probably attributable to differences in how bullying is defined (use of different theoretical frameworks; use of definitions referring to the intent to harm, repetition, and/or power imbalance or not) and measured (e.g., respondent, used instruments with or without a bullying definition or examples of bullying behavior, methodological differences [e.g., dichotomous items vs. Likert scale, cut-off scores vs. latent class analysis]), sample selection (e.g., convenience vs. random samples), cultural, and contextual differences (e.g., Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Modecki et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2024). Additionally, many studies span wide age ranges (e.g., Liu et al., 2021), potentially obscuring developmental changes in bullying behavior over the course of schooling (Demaray et al., 2021; Nylund et al., 2007).

For Germany, only a few studies have examined bullying prevalence in elementary school. Using data from two German federal states, von Marées and Petermann (2010) identified 10.0% of elementary school students as bullies, 17.4% as victims, and 16.5% as bully-victims (bullying definition based on that of Olweus; combination of scores of the Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire for Teachers [reactive and proactive forms of aggression in children, direct and indirect victimization signs; 3-point rating scale: *never true/sometimes true/often true*] and [...] for Children [direct and indirect/relational bullying and victimization; 3-point frequency scale: *never/sometimes/often*]; 67% cut-off values to determine students' bullying roles). However, evidence on the prevalence of bullying in elementary school children in Germany using representative data is still

lacking. Using representative data helps to reduce systematic biases (e.g., due to self-selection or contextual characteristics) and provides a more comprehensive picture of the scope, risk factors, and/or consequences of bullying. Moreover, such data are crucial for informing evidence-based prevention and intervention efforts, as policymakers and practitioners require data that accurately reflect the conditions in the general population.

Characteristics of students associated with bullying

The school context represents a central microsystem, in which students are confronted with academic and social demands. Whether they cope successfully with these demands depends on the availability of individual and contextual resources – such as academic motivation, emotion regulation, and social support. Drawing on Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources theory, lower levels of such resources increase vulnerability to stress and maladaptive behaviors, whereas higher levels (e.g., higher competencies, improved grades) may buffer against adverse outcomes. At the same time, achievement differences between individuals, differences in motivation, or in the extent to which unfavorable emotions and social interactions are experienced can be results of bullying behavior or experiences (e.g., Zych et al., 2017). To effectively prevent and reduce bullying, it is essential to understand the personal and contextual variables associated with students' involvement in bullying (e.g., Hong & Espelage, 2012). Taking the reciprocal relations between bullying behavior/experiences and further school-related individual and contextual factors into account (e.g., Marsh et al., 2004; Woods & Wolke, 2004), we focused on identifying student groups involved in bullying first and aimed to subsequently describe differences in school-related characteristics between these groups

using a broad variety of school-related characteristics.

Previous studies have often focused only on single characteristics indicating, for example, lower academic performance for bullies and victims compared to non-involved students (e.g., Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Ozyildirim & Karadag, 2024; but also see Woods & Wolke, 2004). Possible explanatory mechanisms include peer rejection, impaired concentration as a consequence of victimization, and school avoidance driven by fear of bullying (Ozyildirim & Karadag, 2024). Moreover, students involved in bullying (especially victims and bully-victims) often report lower levels of academic self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (e.g., Caputo, 2014; Marsh et al., 2004). These motivational-emotional difficulties are often interpreted as consequences of chronic stress, negative social feedback, and withdrawal tendencies (Cui et al., 2021; Isolan et al., 2013). Furthermore, students involved in bullying often show poorer social functioning, including weaker social problem-solving skills, difficulties forming and maintaining friendships, and lower levels of received and provided peer support (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Cook et al., 2010). These deficits are particularly pronounced for victims and bully-victims, who often experience social exclusion and isolation (Liu et al., 2021). Bullies and bully-victims, by contrast, tend to show higher levels of deviant behavior, reflecting their use of aggression as a strategic tool (Cook et al., 2010).

In sum, students involved in bullying tend to show less favorable cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social characteristics than non-involved students (e.g., Antoniadou et al., 2019; Caputo, 2014; Marsh et al., 2004), with bully-victims being the most disadvantaged group (e.g., Cook et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2021; Mutiso et al., 2019). The present study builds on empirical evidence by examining whether these group differences also emerge in a representative sample of German elementary school students, using a broad and integrated set of in-

dicators with regard to students' school-related achievement, motivation, emotions, and social experiences.

The present study

To complement existing research on bullying involvement, the present study pursues two main aims. First, we provide representative prevalence rates of bullying groups in German elementary schools, a gap that has not yet been systematically addressed in national large-scale data. Based on the study by von Marées and Petermann (2010) with elementary school students in two German federal states, we expected most students to be non-involved, fewer students to be identified as bullies (up to 10%), victims, or bully-victims (each around 17%).

Second, we aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of a broader range of student characteristics associated with bullying. To ensure a theoretically grounded selection of school-related characteristics, we drew on established frameworks on learning and development: Expectancy–Value theory for motivational constructs (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), the Control–Value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2024), and research identifying social adjustment as a core correlate of bullying involvement (Cook et al., 2010). Accordingly, we clustered our variables into achievement-related, motivational-emotional, and social characteristics to provide a better overview of the results, especially since stable relations with bullying should be expected within variable clusters. By examining this wide range of variables across groups, our study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how patterns of school-related functioning differ between students involved in bullying. We expected that bully-victims would show the least favorable characteristics, followed by victims, bullies, and non-involved students. In addition to modifiable school-related characteristics, we considered demographic information about

students that is usually associated with bullying involvement (see Supplement S2 for a summary of previous research findings).

Method

Sample and Procedure

Our analyses are based on data from the German large-scale educational assessment study *Trends in Student Achievement 2016* (Schipolowski et al., 2019; Stanat et al., 2019). For the purpose of our study, students from two of the 16 German federal states were excluded because questions on bullying and victimization were not administered there. The final sample comprised 26,577 students from 1,507 regular elementary schools (age: $M = 10.50$ years, $SD = 0.52$; 49% female). Participation in the achievement tests was mandatory for all students, while the student questionnaire was voluntary in some federal states, depending on state-specific regulations. Completion of the parent questionnaire was always voluntary.

Variables

Students completed a modified version of the Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire for children (von Marées & Peterman, 2009). The bullying items assessed whether students had intentionally caused harm to peers directly or indirectly since the last summer school vacation (e.g., “I have said mean things to other kids.”), whereas the victimization items assessed whether students had been the target of such behavior (e.g., “Other kids said mean things to me.”). Students rated all six items for each subscale on a 4-type Likert scale (1 = *never or rarely* to 4 = *almost always*; $\alpha_{\text{bullying/victimization}} = .74/.85$). A detailed list of all assessed constructs and measurement instruments as well as information on intercorrelations are provided in Supplements S3 and S4.

Analyses

Data analyses were conducted in *R* 4.3.3 and *MPlus* 8.7. Missing values on the questionnaire variables resulting from the rotational design (Rjosk et al., 2017) were replaced by multiple imputation under the missing at random assumption using the *mice* package in *R* (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011) to create ten imputed datasets.¹

For our research questions, we followed a 3-step approach (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2014). First, we applied a latent class analysis (LCA), which has been often used in the context of bullying and victimization (see Supplement S1), to determine classes of students involved in bullying using the bullying and victimization items. In LCA, group profiles are identified based on observed responses and interpreted on the basis of theoretical assumptions (Nylund et al., 2007). To reduce sparseness, stabilize parameter estimation, and improve the interpretability of latent classes while preserving the conceptual distinction between “endorsed” and “non-endorsed” behaviors, we followed Nylund et al. (2007) by collapsing low-frequency categories (scale levels *never* or *rarely* and *sometimes* were collapsed to 0; the levels *often* and *almost always* were collapsed to 1). The number of latent classes was determined by comparing models with varying numbers of classes. As there are no universal decision rules for selecting the optimal number of classes, we compared common fit indices of a model of k classes with those from a model with $k - 1$ classes: the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), the sample size-adjusted BIC (SABIC), and the Consistent Akaike Information Criterion (CAIC). Lower values indicate better model fit (Nylund et al., 2007). Additionally, entropy values for models were determined. Second, we drew ten plausible values (PV; von Davier et al., 2009) per person and imputation from the person-specific distribution

¹ In the data set from the research Data Centre at the IQB, bullying and victimization items were not imputed. Therefore, the authors imputed missing data following the imputation process for the IQB (see Schipolowski et al., 2019; Weirich et al., 2017).

of class probabilities. Therefore, each set of PV reflects the individual class probabilities and the uncertainty of class assignment.

Third, we examined the relations between the PV of class assignments and all examined variables to evaluate whether students from different groups differ in these variables. We computed weighted means, standard deviations, and mean differences between groups for background variables. Subsequently, we predicted all examined school-related variables with the final LCA solution while including background variables as control variables. To do so, three regression models were calculated for each school-related characteristic: In model 1, non-involved students were the reference group (contrast 1); in model 2, bullies were the reference group (contrast 2); and in model 3, victims were the reference group (contrast 3). This allows the values to be compared between all groups involved in bullying ($\alpha = .008$ per comparison). To account for nested imputed data, the pooling rules of Rubin (2003) were applied in all analyses.

Results

Results of step 1 of the LCA show that, as the number of classes increased, model fit improved (Tab. 1). The most substantial improvement was observed between the one-class and two-class solution, whereas further gains in model fit diminished with each additional class thereafter. The three-class and four-class models yielded the highest entropy values. Given the minimal difference in entropy, the slightly better overall fit of the four-class model, and in accordance with previous empirical findings, the four-class solution was selected for subsequent analyses. According to students' agreement with the bullying and victimization items (Fig. 1; Supplement S5), the four latent classes can be interpreted as *non-involved students* (77.4%), *victims* (15.9%), *bullies* (4.4%), and *bully-victims* (2.4%). Interest-

ingly, bullies also report experiences of victimization that, at least descriptively, distinguish them from the group of non-involved students.

Tables 2 provides an overview of mean differences in background characteristics, Table 3 of differences in unstandardized regression parameters for cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social characteristics resulting from the regression analyses in step 3. Compared to non-involved students, *bullies* are more likely to be male, to have been diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN), an immigration background, and to come from families with lower parental education. They also exhibited lower academic achievement, reported less favorable motivational-emotional characteristics, were less likely to provide support to peers, and more likely to engage in deviant behavior than non-involved students. *Victims* did not differ significantly from non-involved students in terms of gender, but were also more likely to be diagnosed with SEN, to have an immigration background, and to come from families with lower parental education. Similar to bullies, victims also showed lower academic achievements and less favorable motivational-emotional profiles than non-involved students. Additionally, they were less likely to receive peer support, more likely to report low peer integration, and showed higher levels of deviant behavior. *Bully-victims* combined the most disadvantageous characteristics of both bullies and victims, showing the least favorable profiles in almost all areas.

When comparing *bullies* and *victims*, bullies were significantly more likely to be male, to report lower interest in German, higher boredom in German and mathematics, and less enjoyment in learning German. They also reported receiving more support from peers, whereas providing support was more common among victims. Furthermore, bullies exhibited higher levels of deviant behavior but reported greater/better social integration into their class than victims. Further differences emerged when

Table 1
Fit indices of competing LCA models

number of latent classes	BIC	SABIC	CAIC	Entropy
1	188083.751	188045.615	188095.752	NA
2	156667.110	156587.661	156546.670	.886
3	150774.666	150653.903	150521.784	.915
4	148759.517	148597.440	148374.194	.913
5	148063.808	147860.418	147546.042	.862
6	147877.339	147632.635	147227.132	.819
7	147710.624	147424.606	146927.976	.825
8	147657.292	147329.960	146742.202	.833

Note. NA = not applicable.

Table 2
Mean differences (ΔM ; complemented by standard errors (SE)) for background characteristics

variable	non-involved vs.			bullies vs.		victims vs.
	bullies	victims	bully-victims	victims	bully-victims	bully-victims
gender (0= <i>boys</i> , 1= <i>girls</i>)	-0.23 (0.02)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.21 (0.02)	0.22 (0.02)	0.02(0.03)	-0.21 (0.02)
special educational needs (0= <i>no</i> , 1= <i>yes</i>)	0.09 (0.02)	0.04 (0.01)	0.18 (0.02)	-0.05(0.03)	0.09 (0.03)	0.14 (0.02)
immigration background (0= <i>no</i> , 1= <i>yes</i>)	0.05 (0.02)	0.03 (0.01)	0.08 (0.02)	-0.01(0.02)	0.03(0.03)	0.04(0.02)
parental education (z-stand.)	-0.26 (0.05)	-0.16 (0.02)	-0.43 (0.06)	0.10(0.06)	-0.17(0.07)	-0.27 (0.06)

Notes. Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons was applied, resulting in a significance level of $p < .008$ for group comparisons (six comparisons per variable). Significant mean differences are printed in bold.

comparing *bully-victims* with both *bullies* and *victims*: Specifically, bully-victims were significantly more likely to have a SEN status than either group. Compared to bullies, they showed higher levels of deviant behavior and lower peer integration. Relative to victims, bully-victims were more often male, performed worse in school, reported higher boredom, lower eagerness to learn, higher subject-specific anxiety, and exhibited more deviant behavior.

Discussion

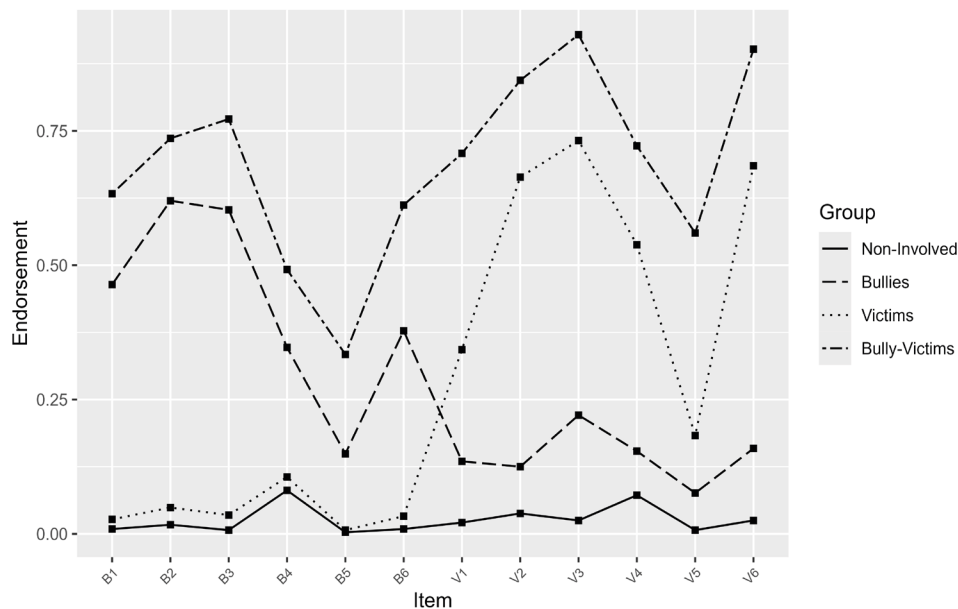
Bullying and victimization are widespread among children and adolescents and are associated with long-term adverse consequences that extend beyond students’ academic trajectories (e.g., Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). However, much of the existing research has been conducted in non-German contexts (e.g., Ettekal & Ladd, 2017; Zheng et al., 2024) or has focused on a narrow set of student characteristics (e.g., Caputo, 2014; Ettekal & Ladd, 2017), thus

Table 3
Differences in unstandardized regression parameters (Δb ; complemented by standard errors (SE)) for academic achievement, motivational-emo-
tional, and social characteristics, and explained variance (R^2) for regression models

variable	non-involved vs.			bullies vs.			victims vs.		
	bullies	victims	bully-victims	victims	bully-victims	bully-victims	bully-victims	bully-victims	R^2
achievement									
German grade	-0.29 (0.06)	-0.16 (0.03)	-0.50 (0.07)	0.13(0.07)	-0.20(0.09)	-0.34 (0.08)	-0.34 (0.08)	0.20	
mathematics grade	-0.32 (0.07)	-0.24 (0.03)	-0.50 (0.08)	0.08(0.07)	-0.18(0.10)	-0.26 (0.08)	-0.26 (0.08)	0.16	
reading test score	-0.36 (0.09)	-0.16 (0.04)	-0.70 (0.10)	0.20(0.09)	-0.34(0.14)	-0.54 (0.11)	-0.54 (0.11)	0.17	
mathematics test score	-0.42 (0.08)	-0.21 (0.03)	-0.68 (0.10)	0.21(0.09)	-0.27(0.12)	-0.48 (0.10)	-0.48 (0.10)	0.19	
motivational-									
self-concept German	-0.19 (0.05)	-0.11 (0.02)	-0.27 (0.08)	0.08(0.05)	-0.08(0.09)	-0.16(0.08)	-0.16(0.08)	0.05	
emotional									
self-concept mathematics	-0.21 (0.05)	-0.16 (0.03)	-0.34 (0.08)	0.05(0.06)	-0.13(0.10)	-0.17(0.09)	-0.17(0.09)	0.08	
interest German	-0.30 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.03)	-0.27 (0.08)	0.21 (0.06)	0.03(0.09)	-0.18(0.08)	-0.18(0.08)	0.05	
interest mathematics	-0.24 (0.06)	-0.12 (0.03)	-0.21(0.09)	0.12(0.06)	0.03(0.10)	-0.09(0.09)	-0.09(0.09)	0.04	
enjoyment of learning German	-0.27 (0.06)	-0.07(0.03)	-0.16(0.08)	0.20 (0.07)	0.11(0.09)	-0.09(0.09)	-0.09(0.09)	0.05	
enjoyment of learning mathematics	-0.17 (0.06)	-0.08(0.03)	-0.03(0.10)	0.09(0.07)	0.14(0.11)	0.05(0.10)	0.05(0.10)	0.04	
eagerness to learn	-0.26 (0.05)	-0.18 (0.03)	-0.40 (0.06)	0.08(0.05)	-0.14(0.08)	-0.22 (0.06)	-0.22 (0.06)	0.10	
boredom German	0.53 (0.07)	0.19 (0.03)	0.73 (0.09)	-0.34 (0.08)	0.20(0.11)	0.54 (0.10)	0.54 (0.10)	0.07	
boredom mathematics	0.56 (0.06)	0.26 (0.03)	0.79 (0.09)	-0.30 (0.07)	0.23(0.12)	0.53 (0.10)	0.53 (0.10)	0.10	
anxiety German	0.32 (0.06)	0.24 (0.03)	0.57 (0.08)	-0.08(0.07)	0.26(0.11)	0.34 (0.09)	0.34 (0.09)	0.07	
anxiety mathematics	0.31 (0.06)	0.30 (0.03)	0.57 (0.09)	-0.01(0.06)	0.26(0.11)	0.28 (0.10)	0.28 (0.10)	0.13	
school enjoyment	-0.36 (0.06)	-0.29 (0.03)	-0.48 (0.08)	0.07(0.07)	-0.12(0.09)	-0.19(0.08)	-0.19(0.08)	0.08	
self-esteem	-0.18 (0.04)	-0.18 (0.02)	-0.35 (0.07)	0.00(0.04)	-0.18(0.08)	-0.18(0.08)	-0.18(0.08)	0.03	
support provided	-0.22 (0.05)	-0.04(0.03)	-0.18(0.07)	0.18 (0.06)	0.04(0.10)	-0.13(0.08)	-0.13(0.08)	0.04	
support received	-0.06(0.06)	-0.26 (0.04)	-0.24(0.10)	-0.20 (0.07)	-0.18(0.11)	0.02(0.11)	0.02(0.11)	0.04	
deviant behavior	0.64 (0.04)	0.12 (0.01)	1.02 (0.08)	-0.52 (0.04)	0.38 (0.09)	0.90 (0.08)	0.90 (0.08)	0.33	
peer integration	-0.10(0.04)	-0.37 (0.02)	-0.37 (0.07)	-0.27 (0.04)	-0.27 (0.08)	0.00(0.08)	0.00(0.08)	0.06	

Notes. All parameters were estimated including control variables (gender, special educational needs, immigration background, and parental education). Grades were inversely coded, with higher values reflecting better achievement. Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons was applied, resulting in a significance level of $p < .008$ (six comparisons per variable). Significant differences from the respective reference are printed in bold.

Figure 1
Profile plot for the 4-class solution of bullying and victimization



Notes. Item probabilities are pooled over ten datasets. Items (B=bullying, V=victimization):
B1=I pushed another child on purpose.
B2=I have teased other children.
B3=I said mean things to other children.
B4=I didn't let other children play along.
B5=I forced other children to do something they didn't want to do.
B6=I spoke poorly about another child.
V1=Other children in my class pushed me on purpose.
V2=Other children in my class teased me.
V3=Other children in my class said mean things to me.
V4=Other children in my class didn't let me play along.
V5=Other children in my class forced me to do something I didn't want to do.
V6=Other children in my class talked poorly about me.

limiting the generalizability of their findings. The present study sought to address some of these obstacles by examining the prevalence of bullying involvement using LCA in a large, representative sample of fourth graders in Germany. Moreover, we aimed to systematically characterize distinct bullying roles based on a broad set of variables.

In line with previous research (e.g., Liu et al., 2021; Lovegrove & Cornell, 2014), four distinct groups emerged: non-involved students (77.8%), victims (16.2%), bullies (3.8%), and bully-victims (2.3%). These prevalence rates largely align with findings

from the few other international large-scale studies (e.g., Yang & Salmivalli, 2013) and recent German data for secondary school students (Fischer & Bilz, 2024). Compared to earlier research with German elementary school students (von Marées & Petermann, 2010), however, the proportion of bully-victims was notably lower in our study (2.3% vs. 16.5%). This discrepancy may be attributed to use of cut-off scores in the study by von Marées and Petermann vs. the person-centered approach applied in our study. Across all assessed school-related characteristics students involved in bullying re-

ported less favorable outcomes than non-involved peers. In line with prior findings (e.g., Mutiso et al., 2019; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013), bully-victims exhibited the most pronounced deficits, highlighting their particular vulnerability. The distinction between the groups was especially pronounced in social variables. Bullies, for example, reported low levels of prosocial behavior (e.g., offering support to peers) and high levels of deviant behavior. At the same time, they also reported receiving peer support and reported levels of social integration comparable to those of non-involved students. This suggests that bullies may leverage their social influence or dominance strategically to maintain their position in the peer group (Cook et al., 2010; Isolan et al., 2013). In contrast, victims reported offering similar levels of support to peers as non-involved students, yet received significantly less support themselves and felt less socially integrated. This asymmetry may reflect peer group dynamics in which bystanders tend to align with aggressors (bullies) rather than support the victim (Salmivalli, 2010). Bully-victims stood out with the highest levels of deviant behavior compared to all other groups as well as the lowest levels of peer integration compared to non-involved students and bullies. While they resemble bullies in terms of behavioral problems, they lack the social status or support typically reported by bullies, further underlining their risk profile.

The label “non-involved students” may, however, be somewhat misleading. Even if these students do not self-identify as perpetrators or victims, they may still play active roles in bullying episodes (e.g., as reinforcers, assisters, defenders, or outsiders; Salmivalli, 2010). Future studies would therefore benefit from incorporating participant role measures (Pouwels et al., 2016) to capture the role of non-involved students more accurately.

Recent meta-analyses (e.g., Gaffney et al., 2021) suggest that different components of anti-bullying interventions may vary in their

effectiveness for different student groups (e.g., co-operative group work contributes to the reduction of school-bullying perpetration but not victimization). Our findings may inform such differentiated approaches by identifying group-specific profiles that can be targeted through tailored interventions. At the same time, these efforts can build on well-established program components that have proven effective (e.g., classroom rules, co-operative group work, informal peer involvement).

Limitations and Future Research

Our study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. As we relied on students’ self-reports to specify student groups involved in bullying, some forms of bullying behavior may be underreported – particularly bullying perpetration due to social desirability bias (Fischer et al., 2020). Future research should incorporate multiple informants (e.g., teachers, parents) and alternative data sources (e.g., social network data) to validate and triangulate students’ self-assessments. Another limitation is that our data were collected in 2016. More recent studies suggest that the psychosocial stress experienced by students has increased significantly in recent years (Kaman et al., 2025), which could theoretically also have an impact on the prevalence of bullying. Consequently, the patterns identified in our study may not fully reflect current post-pandemic conditions.

Moreover, our analyzed sample did not include students with SEN taught in special needs schools. In Germany, students in these schools follow a special curriculum and are taught by special education teachers in small learning groups of students with SEN (Kocaj et al., 2018). Thus, their experiences at school regarding bullying and victimization might differ from those of their peers at regular schools. Future studies should explicitly examine the prevalence and patterns of bullying and victimization among students with SEN in special

schools and regular schools and explore whether these patterns differentially relate to school-related characteristics. The specific SEN domain could also be taken into account, as previous research has indicated differences in bullying in this regard (e.g., Eilts et al., 2024).

Due to the cross-sectional nature of our data, causal inferences cannot be drawn. Longitudinal designs are needed to better understand the directionality and dynamics of associations between group membership and school-related characteristics. Finally, as prevalence and forms of bullying vary across age groups (e.g., Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017), longitudinal data would also allow to investigate developmental trajectories. For example, latent transition analysis (e.g., Ettekal & Ladd, 2017) could be used to track changes in students' group membership over time and identify risk and protective factors associated with transitions between roles.

Conclusion

In sum, our study highlights the substantial prevalence of different bullying roles among German fourth-graders. All groups involved in bullying – bullies, victims, and especially bully-victims – show significantly less favorable levels of school-related cognitive, motivational-emotional, and social characteristics than non-involved students with bully-victims being the most disadvantaged subgroup. These findings emphasize the importance of identifying and strengthening resilience-promoting factors. To support students' academic development and psychosocial well-being, targeted and resource-oriented prevention and intervention strategies are needed, particularly those that address the specific needs of the different groups involved in bullying. As such, longitudinal research is needed to better understand developmental trajectories and to inform evidence-based interventions that enable all students to thrive both academically and socially.

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Offene Daten	Die Daten können am Forschungsdatenzentrum des IQB beantragt werden (http://doi.org/10.5159/IQB_BT_2016_v2)
Offener Code	Die Codes werden auf Anfrage zur Verfügung gestellt.
Offene Materialien	Das Skalenhandbuch zu den Fragebögen ist verfügbar unter https://www.iqb.hu-berlin.de/fdz/studies/IQB-BT_2016 (https://doi.org/10.18452/25471). Eine ausführliche Beschreibung des IQB-Bildungstrend 2016 findet sich im entsprechenden Berichtsband (Stanat et al., 2017).
Präregistrierung	nein
Votum Ethikkommission	Die Schulgesetze aller Bundesländer sehen -je nach Bundesland- eine obligatorische Teilnahme von Schüler:innen und Lehrkräften an einigen oder allen Teilen der Studie vor. Die Teilnahme an den Leistungstests ist für Schüler:innen in allen Bundesländern verpflichtend. Die Verwendung dieser Daten für Forschungszwecke ist ausdrücklich gestattet und erwünscht, sofern bestimmte Bedingungen zur Einhaltung ethischer und rechtlicher Standards, wie z. B. Datenschutzbestimmungen, eingehalten werden. Die Landesministerien haben alle Verfahren, Fragebögen und Informationsmaterialien der Studie geprüft, bevor sie die Studie insgesamt und die verpflichtende Teilnahme im Einzelnen genehmigt haben. In Bundesländern mit freiwilliger Teilnahme an der Schüler:innenbefragung wurde zuvor die Zustimmung der Eltern eingeholt. Darüber hinaus stand es allen Teilnehmer frei, einzelne Fragen nicht zu beantworten.
Finanzielle und weitere sachliche Unterstützung	keine finanzielle Unterstützung
Autorenschaft	RS, FE und SH haben die Studie konzipiert, RS, AV, FE und SH haben das Manuskript geschrieben, FE und SW haben die Daten analysiert.
KI und generative Modelle	Für Übersetzungsarbeiten in Englische wurde DeepL 25.6.2 genutzt.

Rollenverhalten in Bullyingprozessen: Die Bedeutung von emotionaler Kompetenz, Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity

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Zusammenfassung

Bullying in Schulen findet im sozialen Kontext der Klasse statt. Neben Täter:innen und Opfern können Rollen wie Defender oder Outsider beteiligt sein. Bei der Prävention von Bullying stellt sich die Frage, warum Lernende spezifisches Rollenverhalten zeigen. Dazu untersucht die vorliegende Studie, ob Pro-Bullying-, Defender- und Outsiderverhalten in Beziehung mit emotionaler Kompetenz stehen und ob diese Beziehungen über Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity mediert werden. Um diese Fragestellungen zu beantworten, wurden die Daten von 570 Lernenden aus fünften bis neunten Klassen untersucht. Die Analyse zeigt Verbindungen emotionaler Kompetenz zu allen drei betrachteten Rollenverhalten, die in unterschiedlichem Maß entweder über Moral Disengagement (bei Pro-Bullying-Verhalten, Outsiderverhalten) oder Moral Sensitivity (bei Defenderverhalten) mediert werden.

Schlagerwörter: Bullying, Bullying Rollen, Emotionale Kompetenz, Moral Disengagement, Moral Sensitivity

Participant Roles in Bullying: The Relevance of Emotional Competence, Moral Disengagement and Moral Sensitivity

Abstract

Bullying in schools happens in the social context of the classroom. Next to bullies and victims, other participant roles such as defenders or outsiders can be involved. Regarding bullying prevention, the question arises why students show specific role behavior. The study at hand investigates whether reinforcing, defending or outsider behavior is related to emotional competence and whether these relations are mediated by moral disengagement and moral sensitivity. To answer these questions, data from 570 students (grades five to nine) were analyzed. Relations between emotional competence and all three participant roles behaviors considered (defenders, reinforcers and outsiders) were found. The relations were mediated by either moral disengagement (regarding reinforcers and outsiders) or moral sensitivity (regarding defenders).

Keywords: Bullying, Bullying Roles, Emotional Competence, Moral Disengagement, Moral Sensitivity

Bullying ist ein soziales Phänomen in Schulklassen, das vermehrt an Aufmerksamkeit gewinnt (Hess & Scheithauer, 2015; Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Es ist eine Form von aggressivem Verhalten und liegt vor, wenn eine schwächere Person wiederholt und über einen längeren Zeitraum absichtlich verletzenden Handlungen von einer oder mehreren überlegenen Personen ausgesetzt ist und sich nicht aus eigener Kraft gegen die Übergriffe zur Wehr setzen kann (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Olweus, 1999). Dieses Machtungleichgewicht ist zentral für das Verständnis von Bullying und grenzt es von anderen Formen der Aggression ab (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Die Ursprünge des Machtungleichgewichts können dabei vielfältig sein und sich z.B. aus einer sozialen Überlegenheit ergeben, die mit einer erhöhten Popularität oder zahlenmäßigen Übermacht einhergeht (Nelson et al., 2019; Olweus, 2013). Dabei ist es entscheidend, ob und wie sich die Klassenmitglieder am Bullyingprozess beteiligen. Gemäß des Participant-Role-Approachs können die Mitschüler:innen als Bullying-Assistent:innen (Assistants), Bullying-Verstärker:innen (Reinforcer), Verteidiger:innen (Defender) der Opfer oder Außenstehende (Outsider) auftreten (Salmivalli, 2014; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Assistants unterstützen die Haupttäter:innen, indem sie beim Bullying mitmachen (z.B., Beleidigungen wiederholen), Reinforcer belohnen das Bullying mit positivem Feedback (z.B. Lachen, Anfeuern), Outsider ignorieren das Bullying (z.B. nicht reagieren, Situation vermeiden), während Verteidiger:innen gegen das Bullying vorgehen und die Opfer unterstützen (z.B. Täter:innen melden, konfrontieren, Opfer trösten; Salmivalli, 2014). Das Verhalten von Assistants und Reinforcern ist oft nicht trennscharf und wird deshalb häufig als Pro-Bullying-Verhalten zusammengefasst (Bjärehed et al., 2020, 2021; Pozzoli et al., 2012; Sutton & Smith, 1999; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). Es wird ein Zusammenhang zwischen dem Rollenverhalten der Peers und der Häufigkeit von Bul-

lying in Schulklassen beschrieben, wobei mitmachendes und verstärkendes Verhalten die Auftretenswahrscheinlichkeit von Bullyingverhalten erhöht und verteidigendes Verhalten die Auftretenswahrscheinlichkeit senkt (Kärnä et al., 2010). Dies lässt sich möglicherweise über die soziale Lerntheorie zur Erklärung von Aggression (Bandura, 1978) erklären, die beschreibt, dass aggressives Verhalten davon abhängt, ob ein Individuum positive (z.B. Erfolg) oder negative Konsequenzen (z.B. Bestrafung) für sein Verhalten antizipiert. Das Rollenverhalten kann darüber hinaus in enger Beziehung zu den Klassennormen stehen, wobei Klassen mit stark ausgeprägten Anti-Bullying-Normen eine höhere Rate an Defendern und eine niedrigere Rate an Outsidern aufweisen (Thornberg et al., 2022). Für die Opfer von Bullying kann das Verhalten der Peergroup entscheidend für ihre soziale Eingebundenheit sein, die als protektiver Faktor gegen Viktimisierung gilt (McNicholas et al., 2020; Serdiouk et al., 2016). Insgesamt wird demnach in unterschiedlicher Weise die Relevanz der Peergroup betont, was die Frage aufwirft, unter welchen Bedingungen Lernende spezifisches Rollenverhalten zeigen.

Mit Bezug auf bestehende Forschung lässt sich vermuten, dass an Bullyingprozessen beteiligte Personen spezifische Profile in ihrer emotionalen Kompetenz aufweisen (Eilts et al., 2023; Imuta et al., 2022; Rueda et al., 2021). Dabei kann die emotionale Kompetenz als ein multidimensionales Konstrukt beschrieben werden, das eine Vielzahl von Fähigkeiten umfasst, die im Umgang mit Emotionen erforderlich sind (Garner, 2010). Rindermann (2009) und Nizielski und Rindermann (2016) unterscheiden dabei zwischen intra- (Erkennen, Regulation und Ausdruck eigener Emotionen) und interpersonalen Fähigkeiten (Erkennen und Regulation von Emotionen bei anderen). Die emotionale Kompetenz könnte entscheidend für die Art der Beteiligung am Bullyingprozess sein, da sie mit pro- bzw. dissozialem Verhalten in Verbindung steht (Koglin et al.,

2013; Navas-Casado et al., 2023; Röhr-Sendlmeier & Schmitz, 2010). Personen, die aktiv am Bullying teilnehmen, werden dabei eher geringe emotionale Kompetenzen zugeschrieben, während Personen, die verteidigendes Verhalten zeigen, eher hohe Kompetenzen in emotionalen Bereichen aufweisen (Baumgartner et al., 2021; Camodeca & Nava, 2022). Bezüglich des Assistent- bzw. Reinforcer-Verhaltens können durch das defizitäre Erkennen der Emotionen anderer die Problematik des Bullying und die Verletzung des Opfers unterschätzt werden. Darüber hinaus können Defizite in den intrapersonalen emotionalen Kompetenzen mit Impulsivität und aggressivem Verhalten verbunden sein (Bohnert et al., 2003; Navas-Casado et al., 2023). Hinsichtlich der Frage, ob Personen in spezifischen Situationen eingreifen oder sich heraushalten, könnte eine gute emotionale Kompetenz grundlegende Voraussetzung für die Entscheidung zur Hilfeleistung gelten. Dabei kann die Entscheidung auch von den Schritten des five-step-decision-making-Modells nach Latané und Darley (1970) abhängen, zu der die Wahrnehmung (1) und Interpretation (2) der Situation, die Übernahme persönlicher Verantwortung (3), die Einschätzung der Fähigkeit zum Helfen (4) und das Abwägen von Kosten (5) gehören. Insbesondere bei den Schritten 1, 2, 4 und 5 könnte eine gute emotionale Kompetenz positiv auf die Entscheidung zur Hilfeleistung wirken. Um Bullying-situationen wahrzunehmen (1) und diese als ernsthaft verletzende Situationen zu interpretieren (2) ist möglicherweise die Kompetenz, Emotionen bei anderen zu erkennen, grundlegend. Die Einschätzung der Fähigkeit in Bullying-situationen wirksam helfen zu können (4), ist ggf. von der Kompetenz zur Regulation der Emotionen anderer abhängig, die es ermöglicht effektiv auf Opfer und Täter:innen einzuwirken. Ähnlich könnten die intrapersonalen emotionalen Kompetenzen wirken, wobei das Erkennen, die Regulation und der Ausdruck der eigenen Emotionen ein (emotional) kontrolliertes Eingreifen ermög-

lichen. Die Sicherheit, die eigenen Emotionen auch in schwierigen Situationen kontrollieren zu können, führt evtl. dazu, dass die emotionalen Kosten für das Eingreifen (5; z.B. eigene emotionale Verletzungen) weniger hoch eingeschätzt werden, was verteidigendes Verhalten begünstigen könnte.

Die skizzierte Verbindung der emotionalen Kompetenz zum Rollenverhalten könnte darüber hinaus über die moralische Einstellung zu Bullying vermittelt werden. Diesbezüglich steht die moralische Einstellung zu Bullying sowohl mit der emotionalen Kompetenz (Nasaescu et al., 2023) als auch mit dem Rollenverhalten in Bullyingprozessen in Verbindung (Thornberg et al., 2023). Bestehen negativere Einstellungen gegenüber Bullying und mehr prosoziale Einstellungen, zeigen Lernende weniger Bullyingverhalten, weniger Unterstützung von Bullying und mehr Handlungen, die das Opfer verteidigen (Palmer et al., 2015; Pozzoli et al., 2012; Yun & Graham, 2018). Die moralische Einstellung zu Bullying kann sich dabei in Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity manifestieren (Sjögren et al., 2024; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). Moral Disengagement beschreibt die sozialkognitiven Prozesse, die es ermöglichen, verletzendes, menschenverachtendes Verhalten von moralischen Wertvorstellungen zu lösen und zu legitimieren (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996, 2000). Moral Sensitivity umfasst die Mechanismen, die es ermöglichen moralische Aspekte in komplexen Situationen wahrzunehmen und steht mit den Fähigkeiten in Verbindung, die Reaktionen und Gefühle anderer zu interpretieren, Empathie zu empfinden, andere Perspektiven zu übernehmen, angemessen auf das Verhalten anderer zu reagieren und die Auswirkungen von Handlungen auf das eigene sowie auf das Wohl anderer zu erkennen (Jordan, 2007; Sjögren et al., 2024). Bei Bullyingprozessen kann Moral Disengagement als Einstellung verstanden werden, die es ermöglicht, die eigenen moralischen Standards zu umgehen, indem die

schädigenden Handlungen bagatellisiert (z.B. als harmlosen Spaß darstellen) oder rationalisiert (z.B. die Meinung vertreten, die Viktimisierten hätten es verdient) werden, während Moral Sensitivity es ermöglicht, die zahlreichen negativen Folgen von Viktimisierung (z.B. gesundheitliche Beeinträchtigungen, Angst, Depressionen und Einsamkeit) anzuerkennen und Empathie für die Betroffenen zu empfinden (Sjögren et al., 2024; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

Es ist zu vermuten, dass eine verharmlosende und legitimierende Einstellung in Form von Moral Disengagement eher mit einer niedrigen emotionalen Kompetenz verbunden ist. So zeigen Georgiou et al. (2022) positive Zusammenhänge zwischen Moral Disengagement und maladaptiver Emotionsregulation. Einschränkungen in der intrapersonalen wie interpersonalen Emotionswahrnehmung könnten es vereinfachen, sich emotional vom Leid der viktimisierten Personen zu distanzieren und von moralischen Standards zu lösen. Eine hohe emotionale Kompetenz könnte hingegen eher mit einer empfindsamen Einstellung gegenüber Bullyingprozessen in Form von Moral Sensitivity einhergehen. Die Verbindung der moralischen Einstellung zu Bullying und die emotionale Kompetenz von Lernenden wurde bisher nur in Ausschnitten untersucht. So bestehen Befunde, die die Beziehungen zwischen Rollenverhalten, Moral Disengagement sowie Moral Sensitivity und Empathie feststellen (Eilts & Bäker, 2024; Xie et al., 2023). Empathie kann als Fähigkeit, sich in die Gefühle anderer hineinversetzen und diese nachfühlen zu können, betrachtet werden (Saarni, 1999). Dabei könnten die interpersonale emotionale Teilkompetenz, Gefühle anderer zu erkennen (die andere Person fühlt sich schlecht), und die intrapersonale emotionale Teilkompetenz, die eigenen Emotionen zu erkennen und zu verstehen (ich fühle mich auch nicht gut, weil es der anderen Person nicht gut geht) grundlegend für die Entwicklung von Empathie sein. Da einzelne emotionale Teilkompetenzen eng miteinander verknüpft sind

(Rindermann, 2009) und bisher noch nicht in ihrer Gesamtheit innerhalb der dargestellten angenommen Beziehungen untersucht wurden, erscheint eine globale Betrachtung der emotionalen Kompetenz sinnvoll.

Fragestellung und Hypothesen

Die skizzierten Zusammenhänge weisen auf eine Beziehung zwischen Rollenverhalten, moralischer Einstellung zu Bullying und emotionaler Kompetenz hin. Dabei wurden bisher nur die einzelnen Zusammenhänge zwischen den Konstrukten untersucht, nicht aber der Gesamtzusammenhang betrachtet. Der vorliegende Beitrag greift dieses Desiderat auf und untersucht, ob Pro-Bullying-, Defender- und Outsiderverhalten in Beziehung mit der emotionalen Kompetenz steht und ob diese Beziehungen über die moralischen Einstellungen zu Bullying (Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity) mediiert werden. Dabei legen die skizzierten Überlegungen folgende Hypothesen nahe (s. Abb. 1; enthält die Richtung und die Valenz der angenommenen Beziehungen):

1. Die emotionale Kompetenz steht in Beziehung zum Rollenverhalten in Bullyingprozessen.
2. Diese Beziehungen werden über die moralische Einstellung zu Bullying mediiert, indem
 - 2.1 ein Effekt der emotionalen Kompetenz auf die moralische Einstellung zu Bullying und
 - 2.2 ein Effekt der moralischen Einstellung zu Bullying auf das Rollenverhalten besteht.

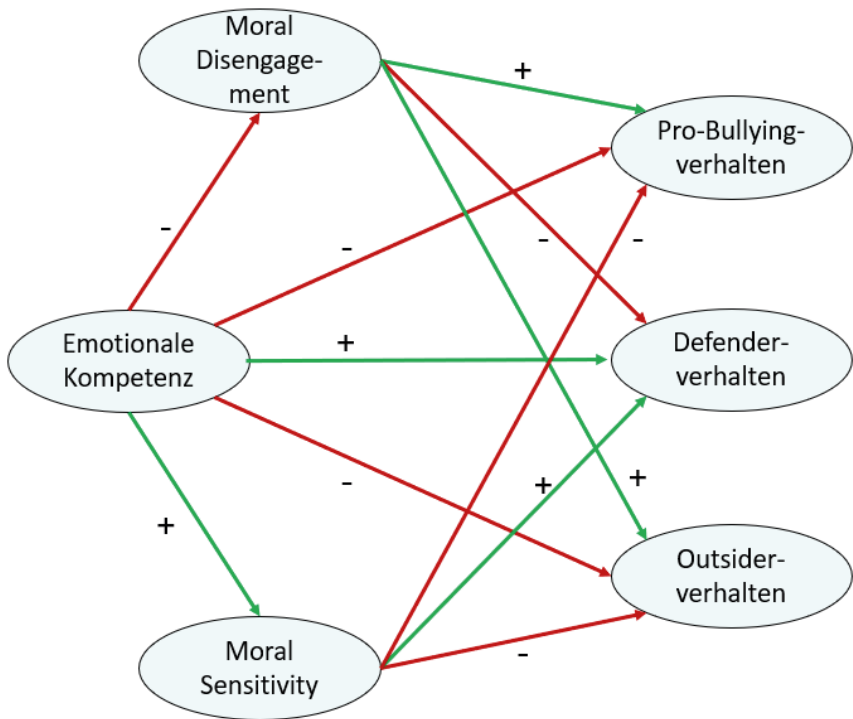
Methode

Stichprobe

Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage wurde eine querschnittliche Fragebogenstudie mit 570 Lernenden (51.37 % weiblich, 46.62 % männlich, 2.01% divers) in 47 Klassen der Stufen 5 – 9 durchgeführt (Alter in Jahren: $M [SD] = 12.79 [1.47]$). Erhoben

Abbildung 1

Grafische Darstellung der Hypothesen



wurde an Real- bzw. Oberschulen (95.95%) und integrierten Gesamtschulen (3.52 %) in Niedersachsen und Nordrhein-Westfalen. Die Stichprobengröße resultierte aus der Teilnahmebereitschaft der angefragten Schulen, Lehrkräfte und Lernenden sowie dem Rücklauf der Einverständniserklärungen der Erziehungsberechtigten. Die Studie wurde vor Beginn durch das Regionale Landesamt für Schule und Bildung Hannover und die Ethikkommission der Leibniz Universität Hannover genehmigt. Die Befragung erfolgte anonymisiert und fand 2023 und 2024 sowohl papier- als auch onlinebasiert statt.

Eingesetzte Instrumente

Der eingesetzte Fragebogen umfasste sechs Dimensionen. Zur Beantwortung der Items, mit Ausnahme der demografischen Varia-

blen und der Schulleistungsdaten, wurde eine fünfstufig Likert-Skala verwendet (0 = trifft überhaupt nicht zu – 4 = trifft voll zu). In der vorliegenden Analyse wird ein ausgewählter Teil dieser Skalen berücksichtigt.

Rollenverhalten

Die Skala zum Rollenverhalten basiert auf einer stark gekürzten Version des Bullying Participant Behavior Questionnaires von Demaray et al. (2016) und erfasst Pro-Bullying-Verhalten, Defenderverhalten und Outsiderverhalten, die jeweils durch drei Items repräsentiert werden. Die Skala Pro-Bullying-Verhalten ($\alpha = .74$) erfasst Bullying-unterstützendes Verhalten (z.B. *Ich mache mich über Personen lustig, die von anderen geärgert, angegriffen oder ausgeschlossen werden.*). Die Skala Defenderverhalten ($\alpha = .72$) fragt nach

dem aktiven Eingreifen bei Bullyingprozessen (z.B. *Ich verteidige Personen, die geärgert, angegriffen oder bewusst ausgeschlossen werden.*) und die Skala Outsiderverhalten ($\alpha = .70$) nach der Tendenz, sich bewusst von Bullyingssituationen zu distanzieren (z.B. *Wenn jemand geärgert, angegriffen oder bewusst ausgeschlossen wird, versuche ich dies zu ignorieren.*). Die konfirmatorische Faktorenanalyse (CFA) des drei-faktoriellen Modells mit robustem Maximum-Likelihood-Schätzer (MLR) deutet auf eine akzeptable Modellanpassung hin (CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03 und SRMR = 0.03).

Emotionale Kompetenz

Die Skala zur Erfassung der emotionalen Kompetenz ist an den Emotionale-Kompetenz-Fragebogen von Rindermann (2009) angelehnt und umfasst fünf Dimensionen: Das Erkennen und Verstehen eigener Emotionen (3 Items; $\alpha = .74$) wird durch Items gemessen, die sich darauf konzentrieren, wie gut Individuen ihre eigenen Gefühle wahrnehmen können (z.B. *Ich erkenne meistens, wie ich mich fühle.*). Das Erkennen von Emotionen bei anderen (6 Items; $\alpha = .83$) betont die Fähigkeit, die Gefühlszustände anderer zu verstehen (z.B. *Ich kann erklären, wie andere sich fühlen.*). Die Regulation und Kontrolle eigener Emotionen (4 Items; $\alpha = .73$) wird durch die Fähigkeit beschrieben, eigene emotionale Reaktionen zu steuern (z.B. *Ich kann meine Gefühle gut kontrollieren.*). Emotionale Expressivität (4 Items; $\alpha = .81$) bezieht sich auf die Fähigkeit, eigene Emotionen klar auszudrücken (z.B. *Ich kann meine Gefühle anderen verständlich darstellen.*). Schließlich erfasst die Regulation der Gefühle anderer (4 Items; $\alpha = .70$) die Fähigkeit, angemessen mit den Emotionen anderer umzugehen (z.B. *Es fällt mir leicht, auf die Gefühle von anderen zu reagieren.*). Die CFA (MLR-Schätzung) des fünf-faktoriellen Modells ergab einen CFI von 0.93, einen TLI von 0.91, einen RMSEA von 0.05 und einen SRMR von 0.07, was auf eine gute Passung des Modells hinweist.

Moralische Einstellung zu Bullying

Die Skala zur moralischen Einstellung zu Bullying basiert auf Skalen von Thornberg und Jungert (2013). Sie umfasst die Skala für Moral Sensitivity (3 Items; $\alpha = .72$), die eine empfindsame Einstellung zu Bullyingprozessen erfasst (z.B. *Eine Person, die gemobbt wird, leidet schrecklich darunter.*) und die Skala Moral Disengagement (6 Items; $\alpha = .74$), die die Tendenz erfasst, Bullyingprozesse zu verharmlosen und zu rechtfertigen (z.B. *Mobbing ist gar nicht so schlimm, sondern etwas, was man einfach ertragen muss.*). Die CFA (MLR-Schätzung) des zweifaktoriellen Modells zeigte eine gute Modellanpassung: CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06 und SRMR = 0.06.

Auswertung

Alle Analysen wurden mit R, Version 4.4.2 (R Core Team, 2021) unter Nutzung der Pakete *psych* (Revelle, 2022) und *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012) durchgeführt. Zunächst erfolgte eine deskriptive Analyse der Konstrukte der Studie. Im Anschluss wurden die Pearson-Korrelationen der einzelnen Dimensionen ermittelt. Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage wurden die Konstrukte in einem Strukturgleichungsmodell analysiert. Als unabhängige Variable fungierte die emotionale Kompetenz, die sich als Second-Order-Variable aus den Variablen Erkennen und Verstehen eigener Emotionen, Erkennen von Emotionen bei anderen, Regulation und Kontrolle eigener Emotionen, emotionale Expressivität und Regulation der Gefühle anderer ergibt. Als Mediatoren wurden Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity in das Modell integriert. Als abhängige Variablen wurden Pro-Bullying-, Defender- und Outsiderverhalten festgelegt. Alle Variablen wurden im Modell latent abgebildet, wobei die Messmodelle zuvor in einer CFA überprüft und teilweise angepasst wurden. Dabei wurde auf ausreichende Ladung der Items geachtet und im begründeten Fall Kovarianzen zwischen

den Fehlertermen zugelassen. Im Strukturmodell wurden ebenfalls Kovarianzen zwischen den Variablen datenbasiert geprüft und theoriegeleitet zugelassen. Es werden die unstandardisierten Kennwerte berichtet, wobei für die Pfadkoeffizienten zusätzlich auch die standardisierten Werte angegeben werden. Die Schätzung der Modelle erfolgte in lavaan unter Verwendung des MLR-Schätzers. Dieses Verfahren berücksichtigt nur vollständige Datensätze, sodass nur ein Teil der Stichprobe in diese Analysen eingeflossen ist. Zur Beurteilung der Modellpassung wurden der Comparative Fit Index (CFI), der Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) und der Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) herangezogen. Von einer angemessenen Modellgüte kann bei einem CFI > .95, einem RMSEA < .06 und einem SRMR < .09 ausgegangen werden (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Ergebnisse

Die deskriptiven Ergebnisse und Korrelationen der zentralen Konstrukte sind in Tabelle 1 dargestellt.

Hypothesenprüfung

Im Strukturgleichungsmodell konnten Daten von 468 Lernenden berücksichtigt wer-

den. Die Prüfung der Modelgüte des spezifizierten Modells (s. Abbildung 2) ergibt im Allgemeinen eine akzeptable Passung ($\chi^2 = 1142.18$; $df = 672$; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .05). Die Faktorladungen, Fehlervarianzen der exogenen Variablen und Koeffizienten sind in Abbildung 2 dargestellt.

Die beschriebenen Messmodelle lassen sich als gut bewerten. Die Varianzaufklärung (R^2) beträgt für Moral Disengagement 6.6 %, für Moral Sensitivity 31.9 %, für Pro-Bullying-Verhalten 45.6 %, für Defenderverhalten 52.1 % und für Outsiderverhalten 22.5 %. Die eingeschlossenen Items laden hinreichend ($\lambda \geq .76$) und signifikant ($p \leq .001$) auf die jeweiligen Faktoren. Bei Betrachtung der Mediationsbeziehung zwischen der emotionalen Kompetenz, der moralischen Einstellung zu Bullying (Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity) und dem Rollenverhalten (Pro-Bullying-Verhalten, Defenderverhalten und Outsiderverhalten) zeigt sich folgendes Ergebnismuster (s. Tabelle 2, inkl. der standardisierten Pfadkoeffizienten und Abbildung 2).

Die totalen Effekte weisen auf die Verbindung der emotionalen Kompetenz mit Pro-Bullying-Verhalten ($b = -.45$; $p \leq .001$), Defenderverhalten ($b = .99$; $p \leq .001$) und Outsiderverhalten ($b = -.22$; $p \leq .05$) hin. Dabei besteht eine direkte negative Bezie-

Tabelle 1
Deskriptive Kennwerte und Pearson-Korrelationen der Konstrukte

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	0.47	0.65					
2 Defenderverhalten	2.21	0.99	-.13**				
3 Outsiderverhalten	1.40	0.88	.40**	-.24**			
4 Emotionale Kompetenz ¹	2.14	0.65	-.21**	.28**	-.04		
5 Moral Disengagement	0.59	0.73	.54**	-.18**	.34**	-.11*	
6 Moral Sensitivity	3.11	0.91	-.21**	.44**	-.11*	.27**	-.34**

Anmerkungen. Codierung: ¹ aggregiert aus den fünf Subdimensionen; 0 = trifft überhaupt nicht zu; 1 = trifft eher nicht zu; 2 = trifft teilweise zu; 3 = trifft eher zu; 4 = trifft voll zu; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Abbildung 2
Strukturgleichungsmodell zur Beziehung von emotionaler Kompetenz, Einstellung zu Bullying und Rollenverhalten

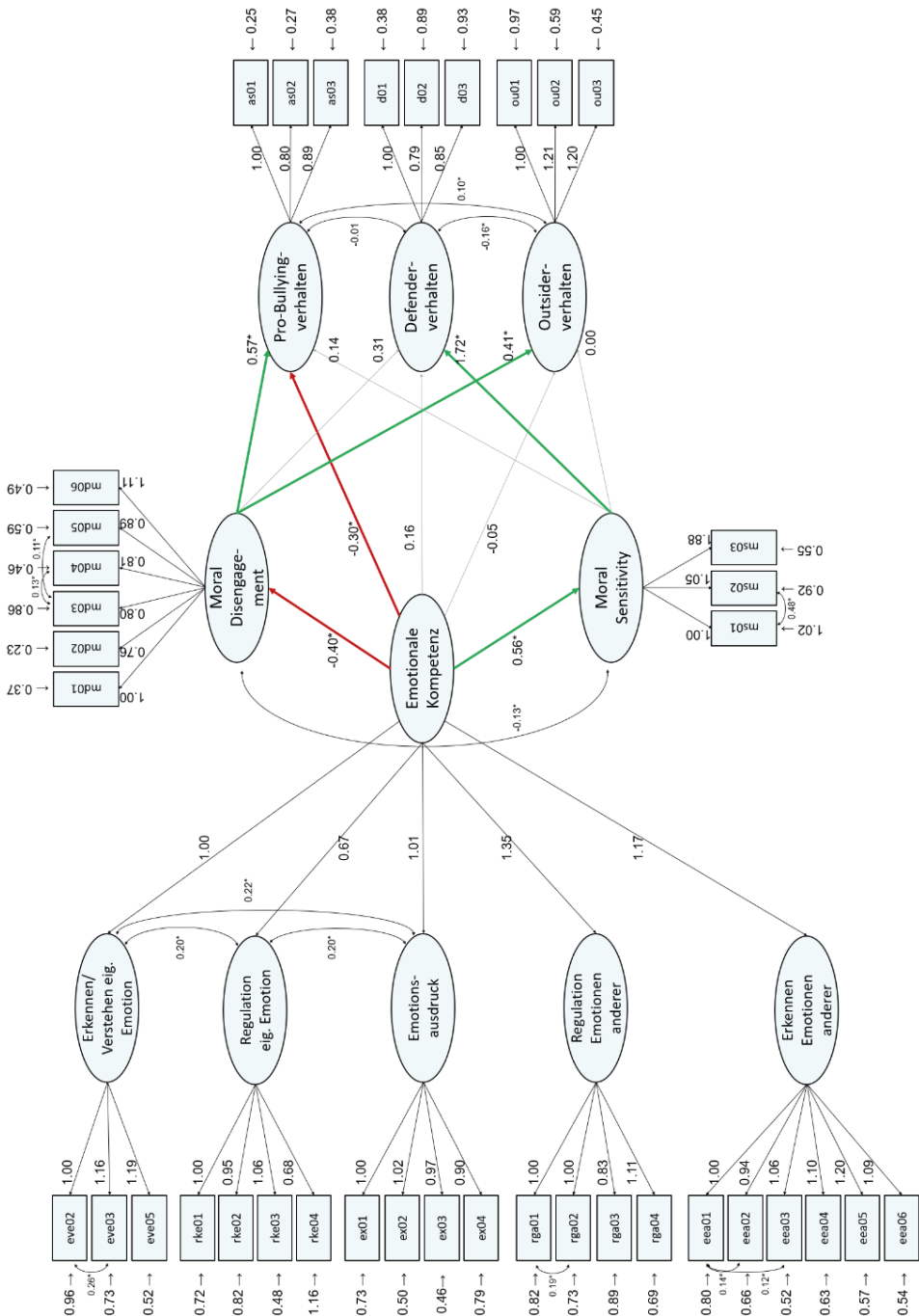


Tabelle 2
Effekte der emotionalen Kompetenz auf Pro-Bullying-Verhalten, Defenderverhalten und Outsiderverhalten

unabh. Variable	Mediator	abhg. Variable	Effekt	b (SE)	β	p
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Disengagement	x		-.40 (.14)	-.26	< .01
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Sensitivity	y		.56 (.15)	.57	< .001
Emotionale Kompetenz	-	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	c1 (direkt)	-.30 (.12)	-.22	< .05
-	Moral Disengagement werbsorientierung	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	a1	.57 (.12)	.65	< .001
	Moral Sensitivity	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	b1	.14 (.18)	.10	.439
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Disengagement	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	x*a1 (indirekt)	-.23 (.10)	-.17	< .05
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Sensitivity	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	y*b1 (indirekt)	.08 (.11)	.06	.456
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	-	Pro-Bullying-Verhalten	total	-.45 (.12)	-.33	< .001
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	-	Defenderverhalten	c2 (direkt)	.16 (.22)	.07	.467
-	Moral Disengagement	Defenderverhalten	a2	.31 (.12)	.23	.069
	Moral Sensitivity	Defenderverhalten	b2	1.72 (.49)	.78	< .001
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	Moral Disengagement	Defenderverhalten	x*a2 (indirekt)	-.13 (.08)	-.06	.139
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Sensitivity	Defenderverhalten	y*b2 (indirekt)	.96 (.30)	.44	< .01
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	-	Defenderverhalten	total	.99 (.20)	.45	< .001
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	-	Outsiderverhalten	c3 (direkt)	-.05 (.12)	-.22	.666
-	Moral Disengagement	Outsiderverhalten	a3	.42 (.09)	.46	< .001
	Moral Sensitivity	Outsiderverhalten	b3	.00 (.17)	.00	.999
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	Moral Disengagement	Outsiderverhalten	x*a3 (indirekt)	-.17 (.06)	-.12	< .01
Emotionale Kompetenz	Moral Sensitivity	Outsiderverhalten	y*b3 (indirekt)	.00 (.09)	.00	.999
Emotionale Kompetenz Lehrkraftpräferenz	-	Outsiderverhalten	total	-.22 (.11)	-.16	< .05

Anmerkungen. signifikante Effekte sind hervorgehoben (fett) dargestellt; b = unstandardisierter Effekt; β = standardisierter Effekt; SE = Standardfehler

hung zwischen der emotionalen Kompetenz und Pro-Bullying-Verhalten ($b = -.30$; $p \leq .05$). Diese wird partiell über Moral Disengagement mediert, das in negativer Beziehung zur emotionalen Kompetenz ($b = -.40$; $p \leq .01$) und in positiver Beziehung zu Pro-Bullying-Verhalten steht ($b = .57$; $p \leq .001$), sodass sich ein signifikanter indirekter Effekt ergibt ($b = -.23$; $p \leq .05$). Es kann kein direkter Effekt der emotionalen Kompetenz auf das Defenderverhalten ($b = .16$; $p = .47$) nachgewiesen werden, jedoch besteht eine vollständige Mediation dieser Beziehung über Moral Sensitivity. Moral Sensitivity steht in positiver Verbindung zur emotionalen Kompetenz ($b = .56$; $p \leq .001$) und Defenderverhalten ($b = 1.72$; $p \leq .001$), sodass auch hier ein signifikanter indirekter Effekt besteht ($b = .96$; $p \leq .01$). Es kann keine direkte Beziehung zwischen der emotionalen Kompetenz und Outsiderverhalten ($b = -.05$; $p = .67$) beschrieben, jedoch ein indirekter Effekt ($b = -.17$; $p \leq .01$) über Moral Disengagement festgestellt werden, der sich in einer negativen Beziehung zwischen emotionaler Kompetenz und Moral Disengagement ($b = -.40$; $p \leq .01$) und einer positiven Beziehung zwischen Moral Disengagement und Outsiderverhalten ($b = .42$; $p \leq .001$) manifestiert.

Diskussion

Die vorliegende Studie untersucht, ob Pro-Bullying-, Defender- und Outsiderverhalten in Beziehung mit der emotionalen Kompetenz stehen und ob diese Beziehungen über (Moral Disengagement und Moral Sensitivity) mediert werden. Die erste Hypothese, dass das Rollenverhalten in Bullyingprozessen in Beziehung zur emotionalen Kompetenz steht, kann für die drei untersuchten Dimensionen bestätigt werden. Es zeigte sich eine positive Verbindung der emotionalen Kompetenz zu Defenderverhalten und jeweils negative Verbindungen zu Pro-Bullying-Verhalten und Outsiderverhalten. Dies entspricht Ergebnissen, die emotionale

Kompetenzen positiv mit prosozialem und Defenderverhalten und negativ mit Assistent- und Outsiderverhalten assoziieren (Farina & Belacchi, 2022; Imuta et al., 2022). Auch die zweite Hypothese, dass die Beziehung der emotionalen Kompetenz und Rollenverhalten über die moralischen Einstellungen zu Bullying mediert wird, lässt sich für alle untersuchten Rollenverhalten bestätigen. Werden die moralischen Einstellungen berücksichtigt, zeigen sich keine direkten Effekte der emotionalen Kompetenz auf das Defender- und Outsiderverhalten mehr, während für das Pro-Bullying-Verhalten immer noch ein moderater negativer direkter Effekt beschrieben werden kann. Die Annahme der direkten Effekte, bei denen eine gute emotionale Kompetenz die Einschätzung der Fähigkeit zu helfen verbessert und damit Defenderverhalten begünstigt und Outsiderverhalten entgegensteht, muss an dieser Stelle verworfen werden, auch wenn eine Metanalyse Zusammenhänge zwischen Selbstwirksamkeit (insbesondere der Selbstwirksamkeit Opfer zu verteidigen) und Defenderverhalten festgestellt hat (Liu et al., 2023). Der verbleibende direkte Effekt der emotionalen Kompetenz auf das Pro-Bullying-Verhalten weist möglicherweise darauf hin, dass Pro-Bullying-Verhalten teilweise als wenig reflektiertes (nicht aus den eigenen Einstellungen entstehendes) und impulsiveres Verhalten betrachtet werden könnte, das aus Defiziten in der emotionalen Kompetenz resultiert. Dies passt zu Ergebnissen, die Bullying als reaktives Verhalten betrachten und mit Wut und Ärger in Verbindung bringen (Camodeca et al., 2002; Hein et al., 2015). Der indirekte Effekt über Moral Disengagement stellt dennoch auch für Pro-Bullying-Verhalten die Relevanz der moralischen Einstellung heraus.

Es zeigt sich ein negativer Zusammenhang zwischen der emotionalen Kompetenz und Moral Disengagement sowie ein positiver Zusammenhang zwischen emotionaler Kompetenz und Moral Sensitivity. Dies stützt die Annahme, dass Defizite

in der emotionalen Kompetenz mit einer emotionalen und moralischen Distanz zu Bullyingprozessen einhergehen könnten, während es eine gute emotionale Kompetenz erleichtert, die negativen Folgen von Viktimisierung zu erkennen und sich in die Situation des Opfers einzufühlen. Moral Disengagement wirkt im Mediationsmodell als belastbarer Prädiktor für Pro-Bullying-Verhalten und Outsiderverhalten, während Moral Sensitivity in signifikanter Beziehung zu Defenderverhalten steht. Dies kann bestehende Ergebnisse ähnlicher Studien in großen Teilen bestätigen (Jiang et al., 2022; Sjögren et al., 2024; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). Thornberg und Jungert (2013) zeigen zusätzlich für Defender- sowie Outsiderverhalten negative Verbindungen zu Moral Disengagement sowie für Pro-Bullying-Verhalten eine negative Verbindung zu Moral Sensitivity, während für Outsiderverhalten eine positive Beziehung von Moral Sensitivity festgestellt wird. Diese Effekte zeigen sich in der vorliegenden Untersuchung nicht. Der Effekt der moralischen Einstellung auf das Outsiderverhalten zeigt sich sogar konträr, indem die Analysen eine positive Verbindung von Moral Disengagement und Outsiderverhalten nachweisen. Dies könnte an Unterschieden in der Operationalisierung von Outsiderverhalten liegen. Während Thornberg und Jungert (2013) passivere Verhaltensweisen erfassen (z.B. *I didn't do anything but I was quiet and passive instead*; S. 479), werden in der vorliegenden Befragung aktivere Formen des Heraushaltens (z.B. *Ignorieren und so tun, als würde man nichts bemerken*) betont. Passives Heraushalten ist dabei ggf. eher als Nicht-Mitmachen zu verstehen, das aus Moral Sensitivity resultiert. Aktives Heraushalten könnte hingegen als unterlassene Hilfeleitung interpretiert werden, die möglicherweise durch Moral Disengagement legitimiert wird. Dies spricht dafür Outsiderverhalten in zukünftigen Untersuchungen differenzierter zu betrachten.

Limitationen

Die Studie unterliegt mehreren Limitationen. Die Erfassung der Daten über die Selbstauskunft birgt insbesondere bei Abfrage der moralischen Einstellungen zu Bullying und dem eigenen Verhalten in Bullyingssituationen das Risiko sozialer Erwünschtheit. Darüber hinaus werden in den Analysen keine Kontextfaktoren berücksichtigt. Dabei ist jedoch davon auszugehen, dass Dynamiken und Normen der Klasse individuelles Rollenverhalten und moralische Einstellungen beeinflussen können (Pozzoli et al., 2012; Thornberg et al., 2022). Perspektivisch könnten hier relevante Zusammenhänge in Mehrebenenmodellen untersucht werden. Auch wenn die emotionale Kompetenz als globales Konstrukt betrachtet werden kann, könnte eine differenzierte Analyse der erfassten Teilkompetenzen Aufschluss darüber geben, welche Kompetenzen besonders relevant für moralische Einstellungen und Rollenverhalten in Bullyingprozessen sind. Ein solches Modell wäre jedoch sehr komplex, was Schwierigkeiten in Bereichen der Power und Interpretierbarkeit mit sich bringen könnte. Eine zentrale Limitation ergibt sich aus dem querschnittlichen Untersuchungsdesign, das keine Schlüsse über Kausalitäten erlaubt. Dabei zeigen Maxwell et al. (2011) sowie Maxwell und Cole (2007), dass sich querschnittlich identifizierte Mediationsbeziehungen in längsschnittlichen Betrachtungen oftmals als nicht belastbar erweisen. Hinsichtlich der zeitlichen Abfolge von Einstellung und Verhalten können entsprechend keine Aussagen getroffen werden. Demnach wären auch Modelle denkbar, die die betrachteten Variablen in andere Zusammenhänge setzen. Beispielsweise könnten Lernende ihre Einstellungen ihrem Verhalten anpassen, um kognitive Dissonanz (Festinger, 1978) zu vermeiden und ihr Handeln im Nachhinein zu legitimieren (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2018).

Zusammenfassung

Insgesamt stellt sich für das Rollenverhalten eine hervorgehobene Relevanz der moralischen Einstellung zu Bullying heraus. Dabei scheint eine verharmlosende legitimierende Einstellung in Form von Moral Disengagement mit Pro-Bullying-Verhalten und Outsiderverhalten in Beziehung zu stehen, während eine empfindsame Einstellung in Form von Moral Sensitivity mit Defenderverhalten assoziiert ist. Sowohl Moral Disengagement als auch Moral Sensitivity können dabei negativ bzw. positiv mit der emotionalen Kompetenz verbunden sein. Für die Prävention und Intervention von Bullying lässt sich daraus schließen, dass Maßnahmen sowohl auf die Entwicklung emotionaler Kompetenz als auch auf die Förderung moralisch sensibler Einstellungen abzielen sollten. Ein wissenschaftlich fundiertes Beispiel für ein solches Anti-Bullying-Programm ist das KiVa-Programm. Evidenzen deuten darauf hin, dass die Implementierung des Programms, das gezielt auf die Förderung von verteidigendem Verhalten sowie Mit- und Verantwortungsgefühl abzielt, zu einem Anstieg von Empathieempfinden und Defenderverhalten in Schulklassen führen kann (Garandau et al., 2022, 2023). Solche Maßnahmen, die die Auswirkungen von Bullying bewusst machen und Perspektivenübernahme sowie das (emotional) sichere Eingreifen in Bullingsituationen trainieren, könnten die Bereitschaft erhöhen, bei Bullying zu intervenieren, statt das Bullying passiv durch Heraushalten oder aktiv durch Mitmachen zu unterstützen.

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Bullyingrollen im Grundschulalter und ihre Stabilität im Verlauf eines Schulhalbjahrs

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Zusammenfassung

Zur Beschreibung der Rollen, die Schüler:innen in Bullyingprozessen einnehmen, werden altersübergreifend die gleichen Kategorien verwendet (bspw. Bully, Victim, Bully-Victim). Inwiefern sich diese Rollen auch im Grundschulalter voneinander abgrenzen lassen, ist weitestgehend unklar. Entsprechend verfolgt die vorliegende Studie das Ziel zu untersuchen, welche Bullyingrollen sich hier voneinander abgrenzen lassen und welche Stabilität diese aufweisen. Eine Stichprobe von $N = 545$ Schüler:innen der dritten und vierten Klasse beantwortete über einen Zeitraum von fünf Monaten an drei Messzeitpunkten Items zu erlebter Viktimisierung und ausgeübtem Bullyingverhalten. Die Analyse der Daten erfolgte mit latenten Klassen- und Transitionsanalysen. Die Ergebnisse legen vier unterscheidbare Rollen nah. Diese lassen sich entlang der Dimensionen Bullyingverhalten und Viktimisierungserfahrungen beschreiben: Während eine Klasse an Bullyingprozessen unbeteiligt scheint, berichten die drei übrigen Klassen in unterschiedlichem Ausmaß von Viktimisierungserfahrungen, wobei zwei Klassen auch angeben in substanziellem Ausmaß selbst Bullyingverhalten zu zeigen. Während für alle Klassen der Verbleib in dieser über die drei Messzeitpunkte hinweg jeweils die höchste Wahrscheinlichkeit aufwies, wechselte ein substanzieller Anteil der befragten Schüler:innen im Laufe der fünf Monate zwischen den Klassen. Diese Befunde stehen teilweise im Widerspruch zu bisherigen Studien und werfen Fragen insbesondere in Bezug auf Motive für Bullying im Grundschulalter und die Klassifizierung mit statusdiagnostischen Verfahren auf.

Schlagwörter: Bullying, Bullyingrollen, Viktimisierung, Latente Klassenanalyse, latente Transitionsanalyse

Bullying roles in primary school students and their stability during one school semester

Abstract

When describing participant roles of bullying processes, usually the same roles are used for all age groups (e.g., bully, victim, bully-victim). However, it's not clear if these roles can also be distinguished from each other in primary school students. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate which distinct participant roles can be differentiated from one another and how stable they are. A sample of $N = 545$ third and fourth-grade students were asked to answer

items regarding victimization and bullying three times over the course of five months. Data was analyzed using latent class and latent transition analysis. The results indicate four distinct bullying roles. While one class was largely uninvolved, the remaining three classes all reported being victimized to a different degree. Two classes of students also indicated exhibiting bullying behavior themselves. All classes had relatively stable trajectories, with remaining in the same class from one measurement point to another being the most likely outcome. However, a substantial part of students transitioned between classes over the course of five months. These findings partly contradict earlier studies and raise questions regarding motives for bullying behavior in primary school students and commonly used classification procedures.

Keywords: Bullying, Bullying roles, Victimization, latent class analysis, latent transition analysis

Bullying ist ein Phänomen, das im schulischen Kontext über alle Jahrgangsstufen hinweg und entsprechend auch in der Grundschule auftritt (Olweus, 1993). Bullying wird dabei als Gruppenphänomen verstanden, in dem die Mitglieder einer Gruppe spezifische Rollen einnehmen (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Während Studien zeigen, dass sich die Erscheinungsformen von Bullying mit zunehmendem Alter von einem physisch- zu einem relational geprägten Bullying hin verschieben (Zych et al., 2020), werden zur Beschreibung der Rollen, die einzelne Schüler:innen in Bullyingprozessen einnehmen, altersübergreifend die gleichen Kategorien (bspw. Bullies, Victims, Bully-Victims, Unbeteiligt) verwendet.

Bei der schulischen Intervention von Bullying wird implizit davon ausgegangen, dass sich Bullyingrollen innerhalb einer Schulklasse trennscharf abgrenzen lassen und zeitlich stabil bleiben. Hierbei ergeben sich insbesondere zwei Probleme: Erstens ist bisher weitestgehend unklar, ob sich im Grundschulalter die beschriebenen Rollen tatsächlich klar voneinander abgrenzen lassen, da sich auch unter Jugendlichen eine starke Überschneidung zwischen einzelnen Rollen zeigt (Eilts et al., 2024b). Zweitens fehlen Studien, die die Stabilität dieser Rollen im Grundschulalter betrachten. Vor diesem Hintergrund untersucht die vorliegende Studie einem personenzentrierten Ansatz folgend, welche Bullyingrollen sich im Grundschulalter (Klasse 3 und 4) vonein-

ander abgrenzen lassen und wie stabil diese im Verlauf eines Schulhalbjahrs sind.

Rollen in Bullyingprozessen

Bullying ist nach Olweus (1993) als intentionales aggressives Verhalten definiert, das über einen längeren Zeitraum wiederholt auftritt und vor dem Hintergrund eines Machtgefälles stattfindet. Bullying ist in diesem Sinne eine Form des aggressiven Verhaltens (Salmivalli, 1996), die von anderen Formen aggressiven Verhaltens insbesondere durch das Kriterium der Zielgerichtetheit und Wiederholung abgegrenzt wird (Salmivalli, 2010). Bullying-Prozesse bedürfen entsprechend immer Schüler:innen in der Rolle der Täter:innen (Bullies) und der Opfer (Victims). Ausgehend von der Annahme, dass Bullyingprozesse immer in soziale Kontexte (bspw. Schulklassen) eingebettet sind und entsprechend alle Gruppenmitglieder potenziell eine Bedeutung für die Aufrechterhaltung von Bullyingprozessen haben, werden im Participant Role Ansatz zusätzlich die Rollen der Unterstützer:innen (Assistant), Verstärker:innen (Reinforcer), Verteidiger:innen (Defender) und der Unbeteiligten (Outsider) unterschieden (Salmivalli, 1996).

Während diese Unterscheidung verschiedener Rollen theoretisch plausibel und geeignet ist, um spezifische Gruppendynamiken besser zu beschreiben, steht die empirische Forschung vor dem Problem

von sehr hohen Korrelationen zwischen den einzelnen Rollen. So zeigen Studien, dass pro-Bullying Rollen wie Assistent, Reinforcer und Bully hoch miteinander korrelieren (Crapanzano et al. 2011). Diese hohe Korrelation zwischen pro-Bullying Rollen zeigt sich auch in einer Studie im deutschen Grundschulkontext: Hörmann und Schäfer (2009) interpretieren hierbei die hohen Korrelationen als Hinweis für eine höhere Plastizität von aggressivem Verhalten im Grundschulalter. Einen noch weitergehenden Befund liefert eine Studie von Eilts et al. (2024b) an einer Gruppe von 10- bis 16-jährigen. Die Ergebnisse einer Clusteranalyse legen hier nahe, dass eine Differenzierung am besten zwischen generell hoch- und niedrig involvierten Schüler:innen erfolgen kann. Dies verweist auch auf das methodische Problem, dass Schüler:innen je nach Kontext häufig mehrere Rollen zugewiesen werden können, was in der Forschungspraxis jedoch selten passiert.

Eine Ausnahme bildet hier die Rolle der Bully-Victims (Täter:innen-Opfer), die explizit dem häufigen Nebeneinander von erlebter Viktimisierung und ausgeübtem Bullying Rechnung trägt. Bully-Victims unterscheiden sich dabei substantiell von sowohl Bullies als auch Victims (Veensstra et al., 2005; Wolke & Stanford, 1999; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). Bully-Victims zeigen im Vergleich mit Bullies sowohl ein höheres Maß reaktiver als auch an proaktiver Aggression (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Salmivalli (2010) nimmt hierbei an, dass Bully-Victims im Gegensatz zu Bullies weniger strategisch statusbezogene Ziele (Sijtsema et al., 2009) mit ihrem Bullyingverhalten verfolgen. Vor dem Hintergrund, dass statusbezogene Motive mit der beginnenden Adoleszenz zunehmen (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010), erscheint es daher plausibel, dass, wie die Studie von Wolke et al. (2001) nahelegt, im Grundschulalter die meisten Bullies auch Victims sind.

Stabilität von Rollen in Bullyingprozessen

Die Stabilität der einzelnen Rollen variiert dabei stark je nach Messmethode, Rolle, Altersgruppe und gewähltem Zeitintervall (vgl. Zych et al. (2020) für eine systematische Darstellung). Für den Grundschulkontext liefern Sentse et al. (2015) Anhaltspunkte dafür, dass die Stabilität von Bullyingverhalten und Viktimisierungserfahrungen hier geringer ausfällt als auf weiterführenden Schulen. Betrachtet man einen längeren Zeitraum, deutet sich darüber hinaus an, dass die in der Grundschule eingenommenen Rollen in Bullyingprozessen nur wenig stabil sind. So zeigten Schäfer et al. (2005), dass Zweit- und Drittklässler:innen über alle Rollen hinweg die größte Wahrscheinlichkeit hatten, 6 Jahre später an Bullyingprozessen unbeteiligt zu sein.

Zych et al. (2020) weisen allerdings auf die Problematik hin, dass bisherige Studien primär die Stabilität einzelner Rollen betrachteten und der Wechsel zwischen Rollen bisher kaum systematisch über mehrere Messzeitpunkte hinweg untersucht wurde. In ihrer Studie, die Jugendliche vom Alter von 11 Jahren bis zum Alter von 17 Jahren an vier Messzeitpunkten befragte, klassifizierten sie die Teilnehmer:innen auf Grundlage ihrer Antwortmuster auf Items zu Bullyingverhalten und Viktimisierungserfahrungen mit Hilfe einer latenten Klassenanalyse in vier Rollen. Hierbei zeigte sich, dass die Rollen viel weniger klar abgrenzbar waren, als dies theoretisch häufig angenommen wird: Bspw. zeigten Schüler:innen in der als Victims betitelten Rolle durchaus auch Bullyingverhalten und Bullies berichteten ebenfalls von Viktimisierung. Die anschließende Analyse der Stabilität dieser Rollen über die vier Messzeitpunkte durch eine latente Transitionsanalyse zeigte für die Rolle der Bully-Victims häufige Wechsel in die Rolle der Bullies oder Victims, wohingegen die übrigen Rollen ein gewisses Maß an Stabilität aufwiesen.

Die vorliegende Studie

Während die Studie von Zych et al. (2020) den Verlauf von Bullyingrollen vom Ende der Grundschulzeit über die Adoleszenz betrachtete, liegen ähnliche Studien für die Grundschulzeit selbst nicht vor. Bullying scheint sich in diesem Schulabschnitt dabei von Bullying im späteren Schulverlauf nicht nur in Häufigkeit und Erscheinungsform (physisch vs. verbal/relational) zu unterscheiden (Pouwels et al., 2018; Scheithauer et al., 2006). Vielmehr könnten die Erklärungsansätze für das geringere Ausmaß von Bullying im Grundschulalter aufgrund von weniger ausgeprägten statusbezogenen Motiven (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010) auch auf eine generell anders gelagerte Motivlage verweisen. Das häufige Zusammenfallen der Rolle der Bullies und Victims (Wolke et al., 2001) wirft darüber hinaus die Frage auf, ob sich die Rollen wirklich klar voneinander abgrenzen lassen.

Die vorliegende Studie schließt an diese Forschungslücke an und verfolgt zwei aufeinander aufbauende explorative Fragestellungen. Erstens soll untersucht werden, welche Bullyingrollen sich im Grundschulkontext voneinander abgrenzen lassen (Forschungsfrage 1). Dem Vorgehen von Zych et al. (2020) folgend nutzt die vorliegende Studie entsprechend keine zuvor theoretisch abgeleiteten Rollen, sondern untersucht mit einem personenzentrierten Ansatz das Antwortverhalten auf einzelne Items der Dimensionen Bullying und Viktimisierung. Zweitens stellt sich die Frage der Stabilität der Rollen bzw. der Wahrscheinlichkeiten für Wechsel zwischen Rollen. Die vorliegende Studie untersucht dabei im Vergleich zu früheren Studien (Zych et al., 2020) dezidiert einen kurzen Zeitraum von wenigen Monaten innerhalb eines Schulhalbjahrs, so dass entsprechend ein generell höherer Grad der Stabilität über alle Rollen hinweg zu erwarten ist.

Methode

Stichprobe

Die Stichprobe für die vorliegende Untersuchung bestand ursprünglich aus $N = 763$ Schüler:innen aus 37 dritten und vierten Klassen inklusiver Grundschulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen, die im Rahmen einer Längsschnittuntersuchung an drei Messzeitpunkten zwischen Februar und Juni 2024 befragt wurden. Für die hier vorliegende Studie wurden nur diejenigen Schüler:innen berücksichtigt, die an allen drei Messzeitpunkten der Befragung teilnahmen und jeweils 50% der zwei verwendeten Skalen bearbeiteten (siehe 2.4).

Die Stichprobe reduzierte sich hierdurch auf $n = 545$ Schüler:innen (48% weiblich). Diese waren an Messzeitpunkt 1 im Mittel $M_{\text{Alter}} = 9.10$ Jahre alt ($SD_{\text{Alter}} = 0.84$) und verteilten sich ungefähr in gleichen Teilen auf Klassen der dritten (49%) und vierten Jahrgangsstufe (51%). Für 20% der Schüler:innen gaben die Klassenlehrkräfte an, dass in den Familien nicht Deutsch gesprochen wird. Der sozioökonomische Status (SES) wurde durch die Schüler:innen mit der Family Affluence Scale (FAS; Curie et al., 2008) eingeschätzt. Im Vergleich mit den deutschen Daten der Erhebungswelle von 2017/2018 der repräsentativen HBSC-Studie (Moor et al., 2020) zeigt sich in der vorliegenden Stichprobe ein signifikant geringerer SES, $t(627.1) = -3.4915$, $p < .001$, wobei der Effekt als vernachlässigbar einzustufen ist ($d = -0.186$).

Instrumente

Bullying- und Viktimisierungserfahrungen der Schüler:innen wurden im Selbstbericht mit dem Bullying- und Viktimisierungsfragebogen für Kinder (BVF-K; von Marées & Petermann, 2010) erhoben. Der Fragebogen besteht aus 16 Items, wobei jeweils 8 Items die Skalen „Viktimisierung“ und „Bullying“ bilden. Die Items beschreiben spezifische aggressive Handlungen, die durch Piktogramme

gramme unterstützt werden, und für die Schüler:innen auf einer dreistufigen Antwortskala (0 = *nie*, 1 = *manchmal*, 2 = *oft*) angeben sollen, wie häufig sie die Handlungen erfahren oder selbst durchführen. Die Items beider Skalen umfassen dabei jeweils sowohl direkte oder physische Formen („Wie oft tust du / wird dir von anderen Kindern absichtlich weh getan?“) von Bullying und Viktimisierung als auch indirekte bzw. relationale („Wie oft lässt du / lassen dich andere Kinder nicht mitspielen?“).

In der vorliegenden Untersuchung wurde den Schüler:innen in der Instruktion kein klarer zeitlicher Referenzrahmen gegeben, da die im Manual vorgegebene Instruktion („seit den letzten Ferien“) uneinheitlich über die drei Messzeitpunkte gewesen wäre und andere typische Formulierungen („in den letzten 30 Tagen“) teilweise Ferienzeiträume eingeschlossen hätten. Für den BVF-K liegen alters- und geschlechtsspezifische Normwerte vor, die zur Klassifikation in verschiedene Bullyingrollen genutzt werden, die in der vorliegenden Untersuchung keine Verwendung fanden. Die interne Konsistenz im vorliegenden Datensatz war für beide Skalen an allen drei Messzeitpunkten gut ($\omega > .80$).

Durchführung

Die Datenerhebung wurde durch geschulte Studierende der Bergischen Universität Wuppertal im zweiten Schulhalbjahr des Schuljahrs 2023/2024 durchgeführt und war Teil des Projekts *Entwicklung sozialer Ausgrenzung über das Schuljahr (ELSA; <https://uni-w.de/e6xri>)*. Die Schulen wurden auf freiwilliger Basis durch die Studierenden in Nordrhein-Westfalen rekrutiert. Es handelte sich entsprechend um eine Gelegenheitsstichprobe. Alle Schulen waren öffentliche Grundschulen. Voraussetzung für die Teilnahme der jeweiligen Schüler:innen war ein schriftliches Einverständnis der Erziehungsberechtigten. Die Erhebung fand im Rahmen einer Doppelstunde im Paper-Pencil Format statt, wobei die Schüler:innen

von den Studierenden durch die Befragung geleitet und alle Items laut vorgelesen wurden. Die Abstände zwischen den Messzeitpunkten lagen im Schnitt zwischen Messzeitpunkt 1 und 2 bei $M = 79.14$ Tagen ($SD = 5.55$ Tage) und zwischen Messzeitpunkt 2 und 3 bei $M = 53.68$ Tagen ($SD = 8.60$ Tage).

Statistische Datenauswertung

Wie oben beschrieben, musste ein Teil der Stichprobe aufgrund von fehlenden Werten aus der Datenauswertung ausgeschlossen werden. 208 von 763 Schüler:innen wurden ausgeschlossen, weil sie an einem oder zwei der Messzeitpunkte fehlten. 10 weitere Schüler:innen wurden nicht berücksichtigt, da sie an einem der drei Messzeitpunkte auf einer der zwei verwendeten Skalen weniger als 50% der Items bearbeiteten. Ein Vergleich der über alle Messzeitpunkte hinweg gemittelten Skalenwerte zeigt, dass sich die aufgrund von Abwesenheit bzw. fehlenden Werten ausgeschlossenen Schüler:innen weder in Bezug auf Viktimisierungserfahrungen, $t(351.38) = 1.33$, $p = .184$, noch selbstberichtetem Bullyingverhalten, $t(337.45) = 1.650$, $p = .100$, signifikant von den für die Datenanalyse berücksichtigten Schüler:innen unterschieden. Dies zeigte sich auch analog beim Vergleich an den jeweiligen Messzeitpunkten (alle $p > .05$).

Zur Beantwortung der zwei Fragestellungen wurde dem Vorgehen von Nylund-Gibson et al. (2023) folgend in einem ersten Schritt separat für alle drei Messzeitpunkte eine latente Klassenanalyse (LCA) durchgeführt. Bei der LCA handelt es sich um ein personenzentriertes Verfahren, dessen Ziel darin besteht, aus den Ausprägungen auf mehreren nominal oder ordinal skalierten Variablen zugrundeliegende Gruppen bzw. Klassen zu identifizieren (Collins & Lanza, 2010). In der vorliegenden Studie wurden entsprechend alle 16 Items der zwei Skalen *Bullying* und *Viktimisierung* verwendet und daraufhin untersucht, ob und wie viele zugrundeliegende Gruppen (Klassen) die

Antwortmuster der Schüler:innen erklären können.

Hierfür wurden Modelle mit unterschiedlichen Anzahlen von Klassen geschätzt. Üblicherweise wird die Anzahl von Klassen so lange erhöht, bis die Modelle nicht mehr identifiziert sind bzw. nicht mehr konvergieren (Nylund-Gibson & Young Choi, 2018). Bei der vorliegenden Untersuchung war dies ab einem Modell mit 7 Klassen der Fall, so dass Modelle mit 1-6 Klassen miteinander verglichen wurden. Die Auswahl der passenden Anzahl von Klassen erfolgte entlang der Indizes BIC, aBIC und CAIC, wobei Modelle mit möglichst kleinen Werten hier vorzuziehen sind (Nylund et al., 2007). Zum Modellvergleich wurde der Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test herangezogen¹. Ein signifikantes Ergebnis spricht hier dafür, dass das Modell mit mehr Klassen besser zu den Daten passt (Nylund-Gibson & Young Choi, 2018). Weiterhin wurde die Entropie als Maß für die Zuverlässigkeit der Klassifikation der Schüler:innen zu den einzelnen Klassen herangezogen. Werte $> .80$ gelten als zufriedenstellend (Nylund-Gibson & Young Choi, 2018). Eine höhere Entropie spricht dabei nicht für ein bessere Passung eines Modells, so dass dieses Maß nicht für den Vergleich zwischen zwei Modellen geeignet ist (Nylund-Gibson & Young Choi, 2018). Die Interpretierbarkeit und Größe der Klassen findet darüber hinaus Berücksichtigung. Nach Identifikation der passenden Anzahl von Klassen wurden, da die Parameterschätzung bei der LCA iterativ erfolgt, die entsprechenden Modelle erneut mit einer höheren Anzahl von Startwerten geschätzt, um sicherzustellen, dass die entsprechende Log-Likelihood repliziert werden konnte (Nylund et al., 2007).

In einem zweiten Schritt wurde, vor der inhaltlichen Interpretation der Klassen, auf Messinvarianz über die drei Messzeitpunkte hinweg geprüft, um sicherzustellen, dass die an den jeweiligen Messzeitpunkten gefundenen Klassen inhaltlich vergleichbar

sind. Hierfür wurde ein Modell, das die Schwellenwerte der Items für die einzelnen Klassen pro Messzeitpunkt frei schätzt, mit einem Modell verglichen, das eine Gleichheitsrestriktion dieser Schwellenwerte über die Messzeitpunkte vornimmt.

Im dritten Schritt wurde dann im Rahmen einer Latenten Transitionsanalyse (LTA) die Stabilität der einzelnen Klassen bzw. die Wahrscheinlichkeiten für den Wechsel zwischen Klassen analysiert.

Alle Auswertungen wurden über die Mplus-Schnittstelle (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017) MplusAutomation (Hallquist & Wiley, 2018) in R (R Core Team, 2019) durchgeführt.

Ergebnisse

In Tabelle 1 sind die deskriptiven Kennwerte der Skalen des BVF-K für die drei Messzeitpunkte dargestellt. Es zeigen sich nur geringfügige Unterschiede zwischen den Mittelwerten an den einzelnen Messzeitpunkten. Sowohl für Bullying als auch Viktimisierung fällt auf, dass jeweils die Mittelwerte für direktes, bzw. physisches, Bullying höher ausfallen als für indirektes bzw. relationales Bullying. Die Gesamtskalen Bullying und Viktimisierung weisen an allen drei Messzeitpunkte mittelstarke Zusammenhänge auf ($.41 < r < .46$).

Latente Klassenanalyse der Bullyingrollen (Fragestellung 1)

Die berechneten Fit-Indizes der durchgeführten LCAs mit 1-6 Klassen für alle drei Messzeitpunkte sind in Tabelle 2 dargestellt. Die LCAs legen für alle drei Messzeitpunkte das Vorliegen von vier unterscheidbaren Klassen nah. Sowohl am ersten als auch am zweiten Messzeitpunkt sprechen drei der verwendeten Kriterien für das Modell (jeweils fett in Tabelle 2) mit vier Klassen. Für den dritten Messzeitpunkt fallen die Er-

¹ Der als zuverlässiger geltende Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test (Nylund et al., 2007) konnte trotz mehrfacher Erhöhung der Startwerte nicht zuverlässig geschätzt werden, was laut Van Lissa et al. (2024) ein häufiges Problem bei eher explorativen LCAs ist.

Tabelle 1
Mittelwerte und Standardabweichungen der Subskalen des BVF-K an allen drei Messzeitpunkten

Skala	T1		T2		T3	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Bullying						
Gesamt	0.27	0.29	0.27	0.31	0.26	0.31
Direkte Aggression	0.35	0.42	0.34	0.43	0.34	0.43
Indirekte Aggression	0.19	0.25	0.19	0.27	0.19	0.28
Viktimisierung						
Gesamt	0.72	0.45	0.67	0.47	0.66	0.48
Direkte Viktimisierung	0.83	0.52	0.76	0.56	0.75	0.56
Indirekte Viktimisierung	0.61	0.49	0.58	0.48	0.56	0.50

Anmerkung. n = 545

Tabelle 2
Fit-Werte für die durchgeführten LCA an den drei Messzeitpunkten

MZP	K	LL	BIC	aBIC	CAIC	VLMR	Entropy	n min
T1	1	-6,764.11	13,729.86	13,628.27	13,761.86	–	–	-
	2	-6,149.63	12,708.82	12,502.48	12,773.82	<.001	0.83	0.39
	3	-5,956.32	12,530.11	12,219.02	12,628.11	<.001	0.85	0.20
	4	-5,804.92	12,435.24	12,019.39	12,566.23	0.03	0.85	0.15
	5	-5,739.03	12,511.39	11,990.79	12,675.39	0.78	0.86	0.08
	6	-5,676.96	12,595.18	11,969.83	12,792.18	0.84	0.85	0.05
T2	1	-6,721.98	13,645.59	13,544.01	13,677.59	–	–	-
	2	-6,018.66	12,446.86	12,240.53	12,511.86	<.001	0.85	0.47
	3	-5,796.08	12,209.64	11,898.55	12,307.64	0.01	0.87	0.13
	4	-5,652.54	12,130.49	11,714.64	12,261.49	0.01	0.86	0.12
	5	-5,568.29	12,169.90	11,649.30	12,333.90	0.75	0.86	0.06
	6	-5,493.79	12,228.83	11,603.47	12,425.83	0.23	0.87	0.06
T3	1	-6,722.59	13,646.80	13,545.22	13,678.80	–	–	-
	2	-5,956.93	12,323.41	12,117.08	12,388.41	<.001	0.85	0.44
	3	-5,691.47	12,000.43	11,689.33	12,098.43	<.001	0.89	0.21
	4	-5,537.94	11,901.28	11,485.44	12,032.28	0.55	0.87	0.18
	5	-5,451.23	11,935.78	11,415.18	12,099.78	0.18	0.89	0.10
	6	-5,380.62	12,002.50	11,377.14	12,199.50	0.06	0.89	0.07

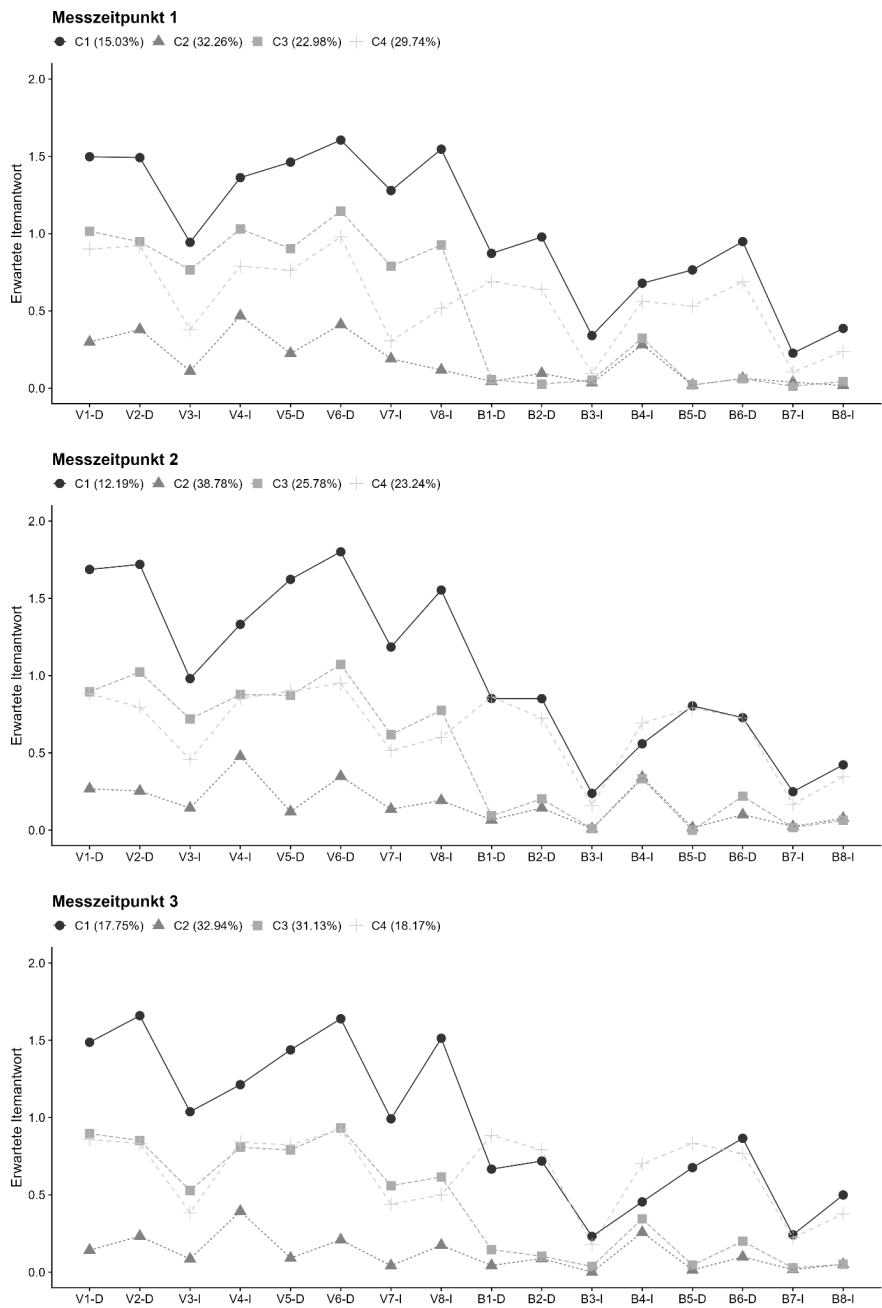
Anmerkung. K = Anzahl der Klassen, LL = Log Likelihood, aBIC = sample size adjusted BIC, CAIC = consistent Akaike information criterion, VLMR = Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test p-value. n min = minimaler Anteil von Schüler:innen pro Klasse.

gebnisse etwas inkonsistenter aus, da der Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test eher ein Modell mit drei Klassen nahelegt. Aufgrund der Werte des BIC und des CAIC sowie der inhaltlichen Interpretierbarkeit² wurde an dieser Stelle aber auch am

dritten Messzeitpunkt die Entscheidung für ein Modell mit vier Klassen getroffen. Für alle drei Messzeitpunkte wurde das Modell mit vier Klassen erneut mit höheren Startwerten berechnet und konnte die jeweiligen Log-Likelihood Werte replizieren.

2 Ein Vergleich der durch die Modelle vorgenommen Klassifikation zeigt, dass das Modell mit drei Klassen zwei der Klassen des Modells mit vier Klassen (C3 & C4) zu einer großen Klasse zusammenfasst.

Abbildung 1
Erwartetes Antwortverhalten auf die 16 Items der vier Klassen (C1-C4) an den drei Messzeitpunkten.



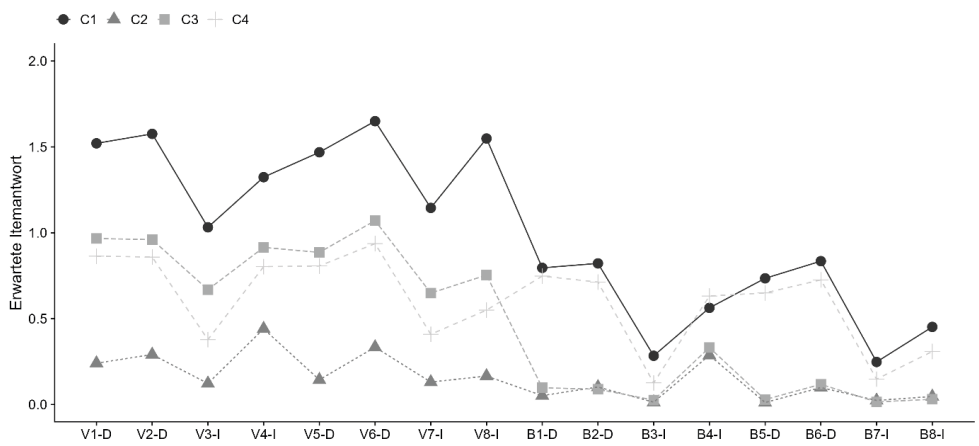
Anmerkung. V1-V8 bzw. B1-B8 bezeichnen jeweils die acht Items der Skalen Viktimisierung bzw. Bullying. Der nachfolgende Buchstabe gibt jeweils an, welcher Subskala das Item zugeordnet wird (D = direkt/physisch; I = indirekt/relational).

Tabelle 3
Prüfung auf Messinvarianz der durchgeführten LTA

	Modell	LL	BIC	aBIC	Par	Modellvergleich	χ^2 diff	Δdf	p
1	keine Invarianz	-16614.55	35818.72	34514.04	411				
2	Invarianz	-16735.69	34448.00	33955.97	155	2 vs. 1	244.75	256	.68

Anmerkung. LL = Log Likelihood, aBIC = sample size adjusted BIC, Par =Anzahl der geschätzten Parameter

Abbildung 2
Erwartetes Antwortverhalten auf die 16 Items der einzelnen Klassen (C1-C4) des messinvarianten Modells.



Anmerkung. V1-V8 bzw. B1-B8 bezeichnen jeweils die acht Items der Skalen Viktimisierung bzw. Bullying. Der nachfolgende Buchstabe gibt jeweils an, welcher Subskala das Item zugeordnet wird (D = direkt/physisch; I = indirekt/relational).

Die berechneten Modelle geben für alle 16 Items für alle vier Klassen jeweils eine durch das Modell vorausgesagte Wahrscheinlichkeit für die drei Antwortkategorien an. Zur besseren Interpretierbarkeit wurde für die grafische Darstellung aus diesen ein erwarteter Itemscore berechnet (auf der Skala 0-2). Abbildung 1 stellt diese für alle drei Messzeitpunkte dar. Auf der x-Achse sind hierbei zuerst die acht Items der Skala *Viktimisierung* abgetragen (V1-V8) gefolgt von den acht Items der Skala *Bullying* (B1-B8). Der nachfolgende Buchstabe gibt jeweils an, welcher Subskala das Item zugeordnet wird (D = direkt/physisch; I = indirekt/relational). Die vier Klassen schei-

nen an allen drei Messzeitpunkten ähnliche Antwortmuster in den vier Klassen zu beschreiben. Um formal zu prüfen, ob nicht nur die Anzahl der Klassen an den drei Messzeitpunkten gleich ist, sondern die gefundenen Klassen auch inhaltlich gleich zu interpretieren sind, wurden die drei separat durchgeführten LCAs auf Messinvarianz geprüft. Der Vergleich (Tabelle 3) zeigt, dass die Restriktion der Gleichheit der Parameter das Modell nicht signifikant verschlechtert, $\chi^2(256) = 244.75, p = .68$, so dass Messinvarianz angenommen werden kann.

Betrachtet man die grafische Darstellung des invarianten Modells in Abbildung 2 lassen sich die vier Klassen in Bezug auf die

Items der Dimension *Viktimisierung* (V1-V8) als niedrig³ (C2), mittel (C3 & C4) und hoch (C1) beschreiben. Für die Dimension *Bullying* (B1-B8) finden sich zwei Klassen mit niedriger Ausprägung (C2 & C3) und zwei Klassen mit im Vergleich hoher Ausprägung (C1 & C4). Auffällig ist weiterhin, dass sich die vier Klassen jeweils nicht in ihren spezifischen Mustern, sondern eher im Level der Ausprägung zu unterscheiden scheinen. So zeigen einzelne Items klassenübergreifend im Vergleich mit den übrigen Items eher hohe oder niedrige Werte. Hier spiegelt sich auch die in der deskriptiven Betrachtung (vgl. Tabelle 1) sichtbare, eher niedrigere Ausprägung der Werte der Items, die indirektes bzw. relationales Bullying bzw. Viktimisierung beschreiben, wider.

Kombiniert man diese Beschreibungen, lässt sich aufgrund der niedrigeren Werte sowohl in Bezug auf die Items zu Viktimisierung als auch die Items zu Bullying eine der gefundenen Klassen als *Unbeteiligt* bezeichnen (C2). Dieser wird rund ein Drittel (30-38%) der Schüler:innen zugeordnet. Die Schüler:innen in Klasse C1, der ca. 15% der Schüler:innen zugeordnet werden, berichteten hingegen von einer hohen Viktimisierung und viel eigenem Bullyingverhalten (hVvB). Diese Klasse kann als *Bully-Victims* bezeichnet werden. Die Schüler:innen in Klasse C3 (23-27%) und C4 (24-27%) berichten beide von mittelstark ausgeprägten Viktimisierungserfahrungen, unterscheiden sich jedoch darin, dass diejenigen aus Klasse C3 kein Bullyingverhalten berichten (mVkB), wohingegen diejenigen aus Klasse C4 auch von viel Bullyingverhalten berichten (mVvB). In Anlehnung an bisherige Klassifizierungen lässt sich Klasse C3 entsprechend am ehesten als *Victims* labeln, wohingegen Klasse C4 hier als *Bullies mit mittlerer Viktimisierung* bezeichnet wird.

Stabilität der Bullyingrollen (Fragestellung 2)

In einem nächsten Schritt wurde eine LTA durchgeführt. Die vom Modell geschätzten Wahrscheinlichkeiten für die Transitionen von Messzeitpunkt 1 zu 2 bzw. von Messzeitpunkt 2 zu 3 sowie die Häufigkeiten an den einzelnen Messzeitpunkten sind in Abbildung 3 getrennt für die vier identifizierten Klassen dargestellt. Für alle vier Klassen hat der Verbleib in der jeweiligen Klasse die höchste Wahrscheinlichkeit (66%-87%). Am stabilsten zeigt sich dabei die Klasse der Unbeteiligten (C2; 80%-87%), wohingegen die Klasse der *Victims* (C3) die geringste Stabilität aufweist (66%-73%).

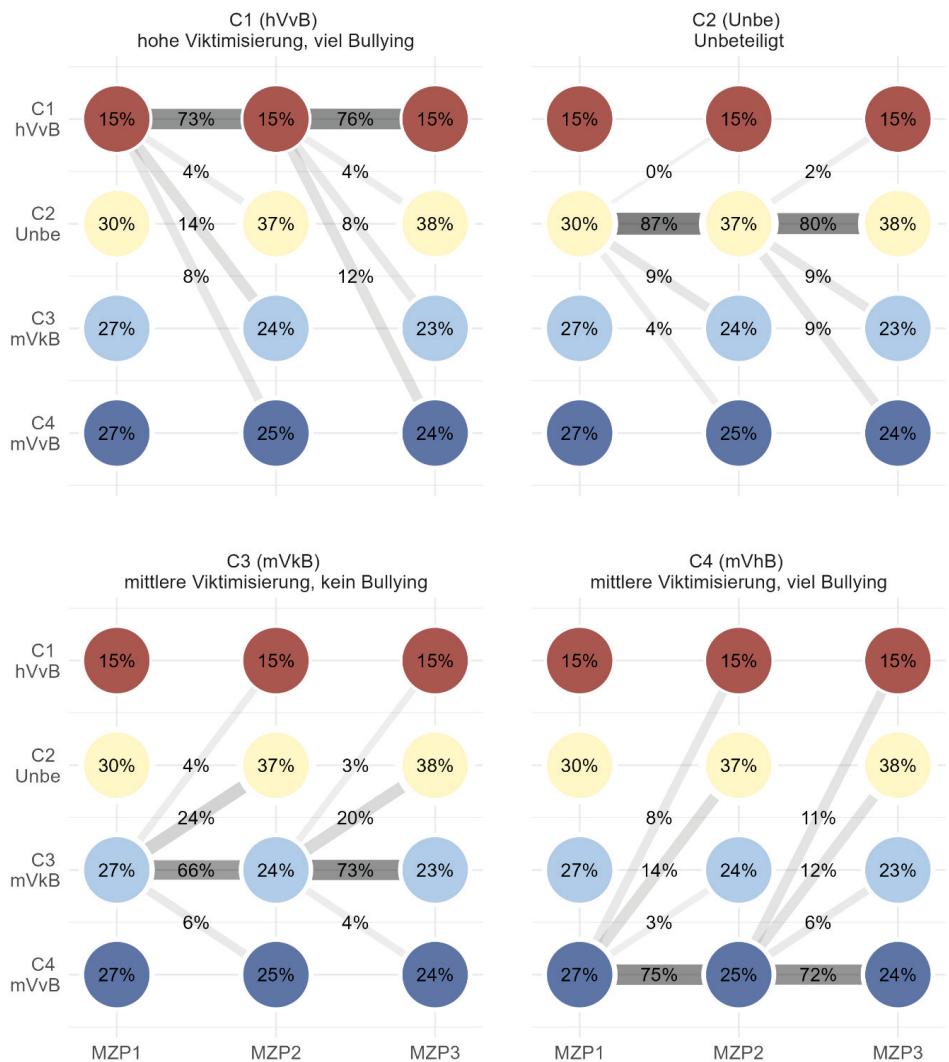
Insgesamt 57% der Schüler:innen weisen an allen drei Zeitpunkten die gleiche Klassenzugehörigkeit auf. Hieraus ergibt sich, dass 21% der Schüler:innen über alle drei Messzeitpunkte hinweg unbeteiligt sind. Da alle anderen Rollen auch von Viktimisierung betroffen sind, berichten entsprechend 79% an einem oder mehreren Messzeitpunkten davon, viktimisiert zu werden. Auf der anderen Seite zeigen 52% der Schüler:innen an einem oder mehreren der Messzeitpunkte viel Bullyingverhalten (Klasse C1 oder C4). An mindestens einem Messzeitpunkt unbeteiligt sind 59% der Schüler:innen.

Abseits vom Verbleib in der bisherigen Klasse haben sowohl Bully-Victims (C1) als auch Unbeteiligte (C2) die höchste Wahrscheinlichkeit in die Rolle der *Victims* (C3) zu wechseln. Sowohl *Victims* (C3) als auch *Bullies* mit mittlerer Viktimisierung (C4) wechseln am ehesten in die Rolle der Unbeteiligten (C2).

Betrachtet man die Häufigkeiten der 192 (4*4*4) möglichen Verläufe, findet sich abseits von den vier Verläufen, die einen Verbleib in einer Rolle beschreiben, mit dem Wechsel von der Klasse der *Victims* in die Klasse der Unbeteiligten (C3 → C2 → C2) nur ein Verlauf, der mehr als 5% der Fälle betrifft.

3 Die Begriffe „niedrig“, „mittel“, „hoch“ und „viel“ werden hier deskriptiv in Relation zu den übrigen Rollen benutzt

Abbildung 3
Transitionswahrscheinlichkeiten der einzelnen Klassen über die drei Messzeitpunkte.



Diskussion

Die vorliegende Studie verfolgte das Ziel zu untersuchen, welche Bullyingrollen im Grundschulkontext voneinander abgrenzbar sind (Fragestellung 1) und welche zeitliche Stabilität diese aufweisen bzw. welche Wechsel zwischen den Rollen stattfinden (Fragestellung 2). Mit Blick auf die erste Fragestellung konnten vier voneinander unter-

scheidbare Rollen mit latenten Klassenanalysen identifiziert werden, die hier als 1.) Unbeteiligt, 2.) Victims, 3.) Bullies mit mittlerer Viktimisierung und 4.) Bully-Victims bezeichnet wurden. In Bezug auf die zweite Fragestellung zeigen alle Rollen zwar eine gewisse Stabilität, dennoch wechselt ein nicht zu vernachlässigender Anteil von Schüler:innen (43%) innerhalb von fünf Monaten mindestens einmal ihre Rolle.

Die gefundenen Rollen unterscheiden sich von den in der Literatur bzw. in vorherigen Studien beschriebenen Rollen insbesondere darin, dass keine reine Bully-Rolle gefunden werden konnte. Beide Rollen, die sich durch viel Bullyingverhalten auszeichnen, berichten auch davon, Viktimisierungserfahrungen zu machen. Dies deckt sich mit den Ergebnissen von Zych et al. (2010), die analog keine Rolle von Bullies finden konnten, die nicht auch von Viktimisierungserfahrungen berichten. Sowohl die Antwortmuster als auch die Skalenwerte (Tabelle 1) bestätigen hier frühere Befunde, dass im Grundschulalter eher direkte bzw. physische Formen von Bullying dominieren (López-Castro et al., 2023; Scheithauer et al., 2006). Somit lassen sich die Rollen, weder aus der Perspektive der Bullies noch der Victims anhand der Erscheinungsformen von Bullying differenzieren.

Die deutlich geringere Ausprägung der Items zu Bullyingverhalten im Vergleich zu Viktimisierungserfahrungen steht in Einklang mit der für die Altersgruppe berichteten Skalenmittelwerten für das verwendete Messinstrument (von Marées & Petermann, 2010). Im Ergebnisteil wurde daher bei der Beschreibung der Rollen der Begriff „viel“ verwendet, um Unterschiede zwischen den Rollen zu verdeutlichen. Ob es sich hier um eine Verzerrung durch die Messung im Selbstbericht oder einen realen Unterschied in der Häufigkeit von Bullying und Viktimisierung handelt, lässt sich nicht abschließend klären.

Auch die Einordnung der Häufigkeiten der einzelnen Rollen steht vor der Schwierigkeit, dass Prävalenzen je nach verwendeter Mess- und Klassifikationsmethode stark variieren (Cook et al., 2009; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014) und das hier eingesetzte explorative Verfahren der Identifikation von Rollen nur schwer Vergleichbarkeit ermöglicht. Dennoch sollen hier zwei auffällige Befunde herausgestellt werden.

Erstens fällt der hohe Anteil von Bully-Victims (C1; 15%) auf, der in Kontrast zur bisherigen Forschung steht, die diese Grup-

pe als klein (2-6%) beschreibt (Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli & Peets, 2018). Dass diese Gruppe auch diejenige ist, die die stärksten Viktimisierungserfahrungen berichtet, steht in Einklang mit früheren Studien (Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). Fast man auch die weitere Gruppe der Bullies (C4; 24-27%), die auch von Viktimisierungserfahrungen berichtet, als Bully-Victims auf, vergrößert sich der Anteil entsprechend. Vor diesem Hintergrund liegt die Interpretation nah, dass das häufige Zusammenfallen von Bullying und Viktimisierung ein Charakteristikum der Grundschulzeit bzw. mittleren Kindheit darstellen könnte (Wolke et al., 2001). In diesem Sinne wäre Bullyingverhalten in diesem Schulabschnitt stärker durch reaktive Aggression oder Rechtfertigungsstrategien geprägt (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002) und weniger durch das strategische und proaktive Verfolgen statusbezogener Ziele motiviert (Sentse et al., 2015; Sijtsma et al., 2009). Da dies auch Konsequenzen für potenzielle Interventionen hätte, sollten zukünftige Studien hier ansetzen.

Zweitens fällt der geringere Anteil der als unbeteiligt klassifizierten Schüler:innen (30-38%) im Vergleich mit früheren Studien auf (Salmivalli, 2010; von Marées & Petermann, 2009). Ein Erklärungsansatz könnte hier in unterschiedlichen Klassifikationsverfahren bzw. der häufigen Anwendung statistischer Normen für die Zuweisung der Rollen liegen. Hierfür spricht, dass eine Studie von Eilts et al. (2024a), die eine kriteriale Norm zur Klassifikation verwendete, einen noch niedrigeren Anteil von Schüler:innen identifizierte, die nie Bullyingverhalten zeigen und keine Viktimisierungserfahrungen machen. Allerdings zeigt sich auch in der methodisch vergleichbaren Studie von Zych et al. (2020) am ersten Messzeitpunkt, an dem die Schüler:innen im Mittel zwei Jahre älter waren als die der vorliegenden Studie, ein deutlich höherer Anteil von Unbeteiligten (55%). Betrachtet man hingegen nicht die einzelnen Messzeitpunkte, sondern den Gesamtzeitraum, finden sich 59% der Schüler:innen, die sich an mindestens einem

Messzeitpunkt als unbeteiligt beschreiben.

Dies verweist auf die im Rahmen der zweiten Fragestellung untersuchte Stabilität der Rollen. Die Ergebnisse der LTA legen einen gewissen Grad der Stabilität für alle Rollen nah (66-87%). Dass die Rolle der Unbeteiligten die höchste Stabilität aufweist, steht in Einklang mit früheren Studien (Cárcamo et al., 2025; Demaray et al., 2021; Zych et al., 2020). Ein großer Teil (43%) der befragten Schüler:innen wechselt jedoch über die drei Messzeitpunkte mindestens einmal zwischen den vier gefundenen Rollen. Dies war aufgrund der gewählten kurzen Zeitabstände so nicht erwartet worden und wirft die Frage auf, wie geeignet die einmalige Messung zur Klassifikation von Bullyingrollen spezifisch im Grundschulkontext ist. Hierbei handelt es sich nicht allein um eine methodische Frage (Reliabilität), sondern um ein Problem, das einen Kernbestandteil der Definition von Bullying betrifft. Wird Bullying als aggressives Verhalten verstanden, das über einen längeren Zeitraum auftritt, dann liefern die vorliegenden Befunde Anlass dazu, gängige statusdiagnostische Erhebungsverfahren zu überdenken, da bei zumindest bei einem Teil der Schüler:innen hierdurch vorübergehendes Erleben oder Verhaltensweisen Gefahr laufen fälschlicherweise als Bullying bzw. Viktimisierung identifiziert zu werden.

Limitationen und Ausblick

Die vorliegende Studie weist insbesondere aufgrund ihres explorativen Charakters einige Limitationen auf. Auch wenn an allen drei Messzeitpunkten die gleichen Rollen gefunden werden konnten, bedürfen diese einer Replikation in zukünftigen Studien. Hierbei sollte, ausgehend von den vorliegenden Befunden, auch der Aspekt der statistischen Power berücksichtigt werden, der erklären könnte, warum an Messzeitpunkt 3 statistisch auch eine alternative Modelllösung mit drei Klassen nahelag.

Eine ergänzende Verwendung von Peer-Rating Verfahren, bei denen Schüler:innen

das Verhalten aller Mitschüler:innen aus einer Außenperspektive beurteilen, könnte hier zusätzlich einen differenzierteren Blick auf die Rolle der Bullies ermöglichen (Yun & Espelage, 2024). Auch die weiteren diskutierten Rollen, die in der vorliegenden Studie nicht berücksichtigt wurden, könnten hierbei in den Blick genommen werden.

Ein weiterer Aspekt, der im vorliegenden Artikel keine Berücksichtigung finden konnte, sind zusätzliche Kovariaten, die sowohl bedeutsam für die Wahrscheinlichkeit der Einnahme aber auch den Wechsel zwischen Rollen sein könnten. Neben Merkmalen wie Geschlecht oder sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf, könnten - angesichts des hohen Anteils von Bully-Victims und des Fehlens einer klaren Bully-Rolle - zukünftige Studien insbesondere Aggressionsformen (reaktiv vs. proaktiv) und Emotionsregulationsstrategien in die Betrachtung einbeziehen, die nicht nur erklären könnten, warum bestimmte Schüler:innen in Bullying involviert sind und es bleiben, sondern auch Ansatzpunkte für Fördermaßnahmen darstellen. Der häufige Wechsel eines großen Teils der Schüler:innen legt darüber hinaus nahe, dass der Einsatz noch engmaschiger Verfahren wie Verlaufsdiagnostik bzw. Extensive Longitudinal Methods gewinnbringend sein könnte. Hierdurch würde es auch ermöglicht, den Schüler:innen einen klaren zeitlichen Referenzrahmen zu geben.

Als eine methodische Limitation ist der hohe Drop-Out durch Abwesenheit an einem der Messzeitpunkte (29%) bzw. fehlende Einverständniserklärungen zu nennen. Auch wenn sich die erste Gruppe von Schüler:innen mit Blick auf die untersuchten Variablen nicht von den für die Datenanalysen verwendeten unterscheiden, ist dies für diejenigen ohne Einverständniserklärung nicht auszuschließen.

Fazit

Die Ergebnisse der vorliegenden Studie verdeutlichen die komplexe Dynamik von Bullyingprozessen in der Grundschule und die

Schwierigkeit, diese mit gängigen statusdiagnostischen Verfahren zu erfassen. Betrachtet man Bullying als Gruppenprozess, kann generell infrage gestellt werden, ob die Zuweisung von klar getrennten und als stabil wahrgenommene Rollen zielführend ist und das Erleben der Schüler:innen abbildet. Vor dem Hintergrund der hier dargestellten Ergebnisse scheint dies zumindest bei einmaliger Messung nicht der Fall zu sein.

Die hohe Fluktuation zwischen Rollen stellt aber nicht nur ein messtheoretisches Problem dar, sondern kann hinsichtlich der Möglichkeiten von Lehrkräften Einfluss zu nehmen, auch Grund für Optimismus sein. Dies ist insbesondere deshalb relevant, da Interventionen durch Lehrkräfte im Grundschulkontext wirksamer zu sein scheinen als an weiterführenden Schulen (Smith, 2009). Die Erforschung dieser Einflussmöglichkeiten hat für die sonderpädagogische Forschung eine besondere Relevanz, nicht nur, weil Schüler:innen mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf häufiger in Bullyingprozesse involviert sind (Eilts et al., 2024b; Kulawiak et al., 2023), sondern weil auch umgekehrt Bullying einen Risikofaktor für Lern- und Verhaltensprobleme darstellt (Eastman et al., 2018). Hierfür wäre es entsprechend der dargestellten Überlegungen wichtig, in zukünftigen Studien die Faktoren zu identifizieren, die darüber entscheiden, ob Schüler:innen in Bullying involviert sind und es auch bleiben.

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KI und generative Modelle	Es wurden keine KI-Tools genutzt.

Oerter, Rolf

Kultur als Freund, Feind und Herr der Evolution

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Band II

Die häufig getroffene Unterscheidung zwischen dem Menschen als Natur- und Kulturwesen ist irreführend, da Kultur von Anbeginn Bestandteil der Evolution des Homo sapiens ist. Aber Kultur hat sich im Laufe der Menschheitsgeschichte ver selbstständigt und ist nicht immer Verbündeter der Evolution geblieben. Dieses Buch beschreibt, wann und in welcher Weise Kultur zum Freund oder Feind der Evolution wird und damit dem Menschen nützt oder schadet.

Die im Vergleich zur Evolution viel rascher voranschreitende kulturelle Entwicklung hat es mit sich gebracht, dass sich der Mensch zum Herrn der Evolution aufschwingen konnte und durch Züchtung von Pflanzen und Tieren bis hin zur direkten Genveränderung die Evolution gewissermaßen selbst in die Hand nehmen konnte.

Nach einer eher systematischen Gegenüberstellung der drei Formen des Verhältnisses von Kultur zur Evolution werden Einzelthemen, wie Religion, Spiel



und Sport sowie die moderne Natursehnsucht behandelt.

Das Buch bemüht sich um Sachlichkeit, enthält sich aber nicht wertender Stellungnahmen. Als Resümee werden Empfehlungen und dringliche Aufgaben formuliert, die heute anliegen und eine Transformation unserer Kultur erfordern.

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Peter Schay, Roland Helsper, Niklas Helsper

Durchgerutscht: Kinder und Jugendliche zwischen den Hilfesystemen!

Analysen und Lösungsansätze zur Sozialarbeit in suchtblasteten Familien

Die Suchthilfe und Jugendhilfe haben die politische und moralische Verantwortung dafür, dass die vielschichtigen und unterschiedlichsten Probleme von „Kindern und Jugendlichen aus psychosozial belasteten und „armen“ Lebensverhältnissen“ gelöst werden.

Etwa drei Millionen Kinder erleben bei ihrem Vater oder ihrer Mutter oder bei beiden Eltern eine schwere Suchterkrankung. Zwei Drittel dieser Kinder werden selbst psychisch krank – meist süchtig. Abhängigkeit, Armut, soziale Ausgrenzung und Diskriminierung vererben sich in Familien über Generationen, wenn nicht von außen eingegriffen wird.

Zuständig sind die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe und andererseits die Suchthilfe.

Beide Systeme kooperieren oft miteinander, sind jedoch in vielen Fällen mangelhaft koordiniert. Dementsprechend deprimieren die erzielten Ergebnisse. Nur eine kombinierte Hilfe aus beiden Systemen kann nachhaltig wirksam sein. Peter Schay und KollegInnen analysieren nicht nur die vielfältige Problematik, sondern berichten auch über Formen der Zusammenarbeit in einzelnen Projekten. Leser-



Innen erfahren in den einzelnen Beiträgen viel Konkretes und auch sehr Persönliches, wie Kindern und Jugendlichen aus suchtblasteten Familien Wege für ein gesundes Leben geebnet werden können. In einigen Statements kommen auch betroffene Jugendliche selbst zu Wort.

Das Buch bietet eine reiche Zahl von Wegbeschreibungen und Anregungen für die Sozialarbeit. Der ebenso vorsichtige wie realistische und tatkräftige Optimismus der AutorInnen sollte in ihrer Fachwelt weite Verbreitung finden.

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Klees, Esther; Kettritz, Torsten (Hrsg.)

Sexualisierte Gewalt durch Geschwister

Praxishandbuch für die pädagogische und psychologisch-psychiatrische Arbeit mit sexualisiert übergriffigen Kindern/Jugendlichen

Innerfamiliäre sexualisierte Gewalt durch Geschwister ist bis heute ein nahezu unangetastetes Tabuthema in Deutschland. Tagtäglich arbeiten jedoch viele Fachkräfte aus Pädagogik und Therapie mit Jungen und Mädchen, die sexualisierte Gewalt an Geschwistern ausgeübt haben oder mit den von sexualisierter Gewalt betroffenen Geschwistern und deren Familien. In diesem Praxishandbuch tragen ExpertInnen aus Praxis und Wissenschaft erstmalig ihre vielfältigen Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit mit den sexualisiert übergriffigen Jungen und Mädchen zusammen.

Auf der Basis aktueller internationaler Forschungsergebnisse und z.T. jahrzehntelanger Praxiserfahrungen werden u.a. folgende Themen diskutiert:

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- Funktionen des Leugnens und der Scham,
- Therapie im Zwangskontext,
- systemische Bedeutung innerfamiliärer sexualisierter Gewalt,
- Kooperation zwischen Opferberatungsstellen und Einrichtungen, die mit sexualisiert übergriffigen Kindern/ Jugendlichen arbeiten,
- Kooperation Pädagogik und Therapie,
- Bedürfnisse Betroffener,
- Rolle des Jugendamtes und gelingende interdisziplinäre Kooperation,
- Zugangswege ins Hilfesystem: Ausübung se-



xualisierter Gewalt, um selbst (endlich) Hilfe zu bekommen?

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- Sexualpädagogik,
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- Sicherheit und Rückfallprophylaxe,
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Das Buch richtet sich an (werdende) Fachkräfte aus den Bereichen Pädagogik und Therapie sowie an Interessierte, die durch ihre Kenntnis der Problematik zu einer Enttabuisierung sexualisierter Gewalt durch Geschwister beitragen möchten.

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