Cultural factors

29. Cultural factors

Anke Görzig, Sebastian Wachs and Michelle Wright

Bullying has been mostly studied in Western countries; however, research in other parts of the world has been catching up in recent years (Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith, Kwak & Toda, 2016; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015). The phenomenon of bullying is present world-wide as demonstrated by cross-national surveys (e.g., Craig et al., 2009; Lian et al., 2018; Smith, López-Castro, Robinson, & Görzig, 2019a; Nansel et al., 2004; Smith, Robinson, & Marchi, 2016; Wachs, Jiskrova, Vazsonyi, Wolf, & Junger, 2016). In the current chapter, we review the cultural aspects of bullying mainly reflected as cross-national differences in the research evidence. We describe the emergence of bullying research with a focus on cross-national differences and similarities. Then we briefly touch on the cross-national differences in prevalence rates as well as on the similarities in characteristics and consequences. We then examine cross-national differences in specific aspects of bullying and present a theoretical framework applying a socio-ecological perspective to identify different factors that may contribute to the cross-national differences in prevalence. Lastly, we acknowledge some methodological challenges that highlight where cross-national research findings for bullying need to be considered with caution.

Research traditions across countries and time

The research on bullying commenced in the 1970s in Scandinavia, with Olweus (1978) being the most notable author, and it became more visible across Europe in the 1990s. This was, among other things, triggered by cases of suicide of three 10-14-year old boys from Norway due to bullying. There have been research traditions arising in other countries on somewhat similar concepts, including *harassment* or *peer victimisation* in the USA, *ijime* in Japan, *wang-ta* in

South Korea, and *qifu* in China. Research in the USA emerged about a decade or so later than in Europe, whilst among the Asian countries, Japan has the longest and most established research tradition, with a timeline parallel to European research which was similarly accelerated by cases of suicides.

At the same time, research in other parts of the world, such as Africa, Latin America, and South-East Asia, remains scarce, even though there is considerable need; although, research in South-East Asia has been gaining some momentum in recent years (Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith & Brain, 2000; Smith et al., 2016a; Wachs, Junger & Sittichai, 2015; Zych et al., 2015). A recent rise in research on bullying has occurred globally due to the advent of cyberbullying, including research extending beyond the traditional disciplinary areas in bullying research of psychology and sociology; now areas focused on bullying include criminology, education, information technology, and media studies. This rise in research is mostly seen across North America and Europe, with a relative lack of research from African and South American countries (Smith & Berkkun, 2017).

Smith (2014) categorized the research history on bullying into four phases:

1. 1970-88: the origins of the research in Scandinavia, interventions in Norway
2. 1989-mid 90s: cross-national surveys, interventions beyond Norway, extension of definition for bullying to include relational and indirect forms
3. 1990s-2004: international research program on school bullying, interventions in many countries worldwide
4. 2004- : accelerated growth of research due to the emergence of cyberbullying

Zych et al. (2015) reviewed the most cited articles on bullying and cyberbullying. They noted differences in number of publications between geographical areas as well as cross-national

collaborations across time periods. Prior to 2000 Mmore than half of the articles came from Northern Europe, which was then overtaken by North American publications. Highly cited articles from other parts of the world were very low (e.g., Western Europe, Australia < 10%) or non-existent (e.g., Africa, Latin America, Asia). They also showed that 14.2% of articles involved cross-national collaborations. This rose from only two studies showing cross-national collaborations before 2000, to 28.1% of the studies within the period of 2011-2015. The pattern across geographical regions for highly cited publication on cyberbullying were a little more diverse. Whilst most articles (about half) had been published by Northern American authors, publications from other parts of the world were also visible with each region contributing around 10%; this research included Northern, Western, and Southern Europe, Western Asia and Australia. For cyberbullying, 16.7% of articles involved cross-national co-authorships. Initially, when the field of cyberbullying emerged roughly around 2005, the most cited studies had all been published exclusively by US authors; in the period from 2011-2015, the percentage of cross-national collaborations had increased to 20%.

Prevalence and consequences

There is a large variation between studies as to their definition and methods used for the measurement of bullying. Therefore, it remains challenging to compare prevalence rates and outcomes cross-nationally (Smith, Görzig, & Robinson, 2018a; Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2017; Wolke, Woods, Stanford, & Schulz, 2001). However, a number of cross-national surveys have assessed bullying. These surveys show that there is considerable variation in prevalence rates of bullying between countries. For example, in the 2010 EU Kids Online (EUKO) survey of 25 European countries, rates of bullying victimisation ranged from 2% in Italy and Portugal to 43% in Estonia (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). In the 2013/14 Health

Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey including 42 countries, bullying victimisation ranged from 3% in Armenia to 30% in Lithuania (Inchley et al., 2016). Whilst the exact values of those bullying prevalence rates need to be considered against the background of the measurement approach taken (discussed below) and therefore used with caution, considerable variation in bullying rates between countries does occur across different surveys.

Despite the differences in prevalence rates, it is generally found that the main characteristics and consequences associated with bullying show similar patterns across countries and cultures. In general, there is agreement across cultures that a phenomenon of bullying exists as per the most widely used definition classifying it as an act of aggression, which is repeated with the intention to harm that includes a power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). Even though there have been cross-country differences observed in the relative occurrences for types for bullying (e.g., verbal, physical, relational, social exclusion) as well as in the role of age and gender (see below) their general patterns remain largely consistent across countries. Likewise, the negative associations of bullying with socio-emotional difficulties occur across the cross-cultural spectrum. This has been examined for negative associations with peer relations, academic functioning, and psychological adjustment across China, Japan, Korea, and Western countries (see Smith et al., 2016a). Similarly, Nansel et al. (2004) compared 25 countries using data from the HBSC survey and found that those involved in bullying (as bullies, victims or both – bully-victims) showed significantly poorer outcomes on health, emotional, and school adjustment measures than those not involved. Albeit, some cross-national differences were observed on a few of the individual measures as well as between the different bullying involvement groups, the general pattern was consistent across countries. Whilst the general patterns for characteristics of bullying as well as associations with the consequences show generally similar patterns across

different countries and cultures, there are also some notable differences in the specific aspects of bullying which will be discussed below.

Cross-national differences in aspects of bullying

Age and gender

Most of the research looking at age in relation to bullying and victimization rates in different countries suggests consistent age-related trends. In a study with adolescents from 40 countries, Craig et al. (2009) found that overall rates of victimization decreased with age across each of the countries. Specifying different types of bullying behaviours, Bradshaw, Crous, Rees, and Turner (2017) also found that bullying victimization decreased by age. However, they also found cross-national differences in age-related declines which were strongest among adolescents from Spain and South Korea, but not significant in some countries. Kanetsuna (2016) reported that pupils in Japan indicated that bullying behaviours were most likely carried out by other pupils of a similar age and within their school class, whilst pupils in England indicated that bullying most likely occurred by someone who is older and outside of their class. The literature on cyberbullying has revealed that early adolescents engage in and are victimized by these behaviours more than children, late adolescents, and adults (Sevcikova & Smahel, 2009). Görzig and Ólafsson (2013) showed that cyber-bullies tended to be older than face-to-face bullies and that this finding was consistent across 25 countries.

Gender similarities and differences have been found in cross-cultural studies on face-to-face bullying and victimisation. Results from a meta-analysis of 153 studies published from 1970 to 2006 indicated consistencies in rates of bullying and a higher likelihood of being a bully, victim, or bully-victim for boys (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). Similarly, a cross-national study of relational and physical aggression revealed consistencies across all 9

countries studied, with findings indicating that boys engaged in greater physical aggression, but no gender differences were found for relational aggression (Lansford et al., 2012). Craig et al. (2009) also found uniform patterns of higher bullying rates for boys in their analyses of HBSC data across 40 countries; however, rates of victimisation were higher for girls in 29 countries. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019a) found bullying perpetration rates for males to be consistently higher across countries and surveys whilst there was some variation in victim rates. Other studies have found inconsistencies in the higher bullying rates for boys across countries. For instance, in a study across 19 countries, higher rates of bullying among boys compared to girls were only statistically significant in half of the countries (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2010). In their analyses of HBSC survey data, Currie et al. (2012) as well as Bradshaw et al. (2017) found higher rates of bullying amongst boys which were not shown to be significant across all countries studied.

Less attention has been given to the role of gender in cross-cultural examinations of cyberbullying. Wright et al. (2015) found no gender differences in rates of cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese and Japanese adolescents. They also found that Indian boys had higher rates of cyberbullying perpetration when compared to Indian girls and had greater perpetration when compared to boys and girls from China and Japan. Görzig and Machackova (2016) reported that across 25 European countries, overall girls were more likely to be cyber-victims compared to boys; however, this finding was not significant across all countries and reversed for Turkey. Comparing different cross-national surveys, Smith et al. (2019a) found that across countries females tended to be more likely victims of online compared to offline bullying. Smith, Görzig and Robinson (2019b) explain the relative greater involvement of girls in cyber- compared to face-to-face bullying with the greater similarity to relational bullying (more girls – although, note that the latter is not consistently higher for girls across countries).

Interaction effects of age, gender, and culture as well as survey period have been shown. For example, in the HBSC survey from 2005/06 across 40 countries bullying others decreased by age in about half of the countries for boys but in fewer countries for girls (Currie et al., 2008); however, in the 2009/10 survey, bullying others increased by age, again, for about half of the countries for boys and in just under half for girls (Currie et al., 2012). In terms of victimisation, declines by age were shown for boys and girls across the majority of countries and survey periods (Currie et al., 2008, 2012). The interactions for age trends by country, gender, and survey as well as survey period are more thoroughly investigated by López-Castro, Smith, Robinson, and Görzig (in preparation).

Types of bullying

Research has delineated specific types of bullying and examined cross-cultural differences. Examining differences in types of bullying among children and adolescents from 14 countries, Smith and colleagues (2002) found similarities in the classification used for non-aggressive behaviours, social exclusion, physical bullying, and indirect bullying. Examining prevalence and correlates of physical and relational aggression across nine countries, Lansford et al. (2012) found that the countries differed significantly in their mean levels of both types of aggression; however, cross-country similarities were shown in the association between the types of aggression. Similarly, Bradshaw et al. (2017) found cross-country differences in levels of types of bullying (i.e., 'being hit' and 'being left out'), with Turkey and South Africa showing the highest rates for 'being hit' and the UK and Nepal showing the highest rates for 'being left out', whilst both types correlated significantly across countries.

It has been reported that there is more emphasis on social exclusion in Eastern (e.g., Japan, South Korea, China) compared to Western countries (Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith et

al., 2016a), which is reflected also in the use of language (see below); however, this is not mirrored in actual frequencies, and Smith et al. (2016a) suggest that the differences may lie in the nature of social exclusion between Eastern (group based exclusion) and Western (gender based exclusion) cultures. Comparing types of bullying between countries in a review of studies carried out in South-East Asia, Sittichai and Smith (2015) report that 'being made fun of' was on top of the list in terms of frequency rates for the countries studied by TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study); i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand. Other more complex patterns of differences between the individual ASEAN countries reviewed are also reported.

Cross-cultural differences in cyberbullying involvement have been documented in the literature. Cyberbullying involvement is higher among Austrian, Canadian, Indian, and U.S. adolescents than for Chinese and Japanese adolescents (Barlett et al., 2013; Li, 2008; Strohmeier, Aoyama, Gradinger, & Toda, 2013; Wright et al., 2015). Although research on cross-cultural differences in cyberbullying prevalence have been carried out, less is known about cross-cultural differences in *types* of cyberbullying perpetration and victimization. Delineating cyberbullying into proactive (i.e., to obtain a goal) and reactive (i.e., response to provocation) forms, Shapka and Law (2013) found that Canadian adolescents engaged in more reactive forms of cyberbullying while East Asian adolescents engaged in proactive forms of cyberbullying. More research is needed on cross-cultural studies on types of cyberbullying.

Definitions and language

The definition of bullying includes intent to harm, repetition and power imbalance; however, these features are not always shared or equally emphasised in the understanding of terms used to capture the term bullying in different languages. Moreover, the different types of bullying (e.g.,

physical, verbal, relational) are not always reflected by those terms or are given a different emphasis across languages and cultures (see Smith et al., 2018b). For example, using a cartoon test depicting different types of bullying scenarios with school children, Smith et al. (2002) found that the Italian term *prepotenze* was more strongly associated with physical aggression than the English term *bullying* or the Japanese term *ijime*. Moreover, the Korean term *wang-ta* and the Japanese term *ijime* were considered to strongly capture social exclusion, which was less so the case for *ha yan* in Hong Kong and *qifu* in mainland China (Smith et al., 2016c). *Ijime* appears to more strongly emphasise the group setting, whilst *wang-ta* places an emphasis on severe social exclusion and *qifu* has an emphasis on the power imbalance of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2016a). Whilst the English term bullying has been shown to have mostly similar connotations across English speaking nations, it was slightly more wide-ranging in England compared to Canada and the USA (Smith et al., 2016c). In some languages, the English term *bullying* was adopted to make up for the lack of an equivalent term (e.g., India-Punjab, Spain, Brazil; Smith et al., 2018b) whilst in other languages different terms within a language are being used to capture the different types of bullying (for example Korea; see Lee, Smith & Monks, 2012).

The meaning of the term bullying within one language has also shown to change over time; for example, the English term *bullying* has increased its application to social exclusion (Monks & Smith, 2006); similarly, the Thai term *tum rai* and the Korean term *wang-ta* have changed in their applications over time (Lee et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2018b). The differences in the meaning and emphasis of different terms used for bullying across different languages and cultures are likely to reflect the differences between cultures in the nature and types of the bullying behaviours themselves. It is notable that in most languages investigated, there does not

appear to be a term that exactly matches the meaning of the English term *bullying*, whilst often other terms exist that capture particular aspects of bullying behaviours and other aggressive acts (see Smith et al., 2018b; Smith et al., 2016c; Smith & Monks, 2008).

Roles in bullying

Most research points towards equal distributions or small differences between countries in the relative prevalence of bullies, those who support the bully (assistants), and those who applaud or cheer on the bully (reinforcers), as well as in victims rates, those who support the victim (defenders); and those who do not get involved (outsiders; Schäfer et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2016a). However, differences are found in the ratio of bullies to victim; that is, the number of bullies per victim. Interestingly, those ratios are mostly above one (more than one bully per victim) in Eastern countries, whilst they tend to be below one in Western countries. The exception appears to be China (including Hong Kong) with bully/victim ratios similar and at times even lower than in Western countries (Smith et al., 2016a). It is argued that this may be due to a higher emphasis of group-based or more collectivistic aspect of bullying amongst those countries with a higher bully/victim ratio (Strohmeier, Yanagida & Toda, 2016; Lee et al., 2012). Despite similar overall patterns between bullying roles, variations in gender differences have been found between European and Indian samples; that is, girls' higher rates of defending compared to boys were more pronounced in Europe and hardly present in India, whilst higher victimisation rates of boys were more pronounced in India. Further, it was found that bullying and victimisation rates were higher in India compared to Germany and it is argued that this may be due to differences in social inequality (Goossens et al., 2018; see also *socio-economic stratification* as an explanation for country differences below).

Explanations for cross-national differences in bullying prevalence

Socio-Ecological Theory as put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains human development within the wider social context. A child's development is described in relation to four interrelated types of environmental systems, namely, the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem. These systems are categorised from smaller, proximal settings that directly influence children's development to broader, distal settings that indirectly effect children's development. The developing child is situated at the centre of the five environmental systems. The *macrosystem,* on which we will focus here, is the largest and most distant layer and describes the culture (e.g., cultural values, norms, and beliefs) in which children live in. The cultural level comprises abstract influences such as economic, social, educational, legal, or political systems which can elicit indirect influences upon children and other levels of the ecological system they are a part of.

Because bullying behaviours and experiences have been shown to result from a complex interplay between individuals and their social environment, Swearer and Espelage (2004) have put forward a socio-ecological framework of bullying. Since bullying does not occur in isolation, it is imperative in prevention and intervention programs to address not only bullying involved youth but also the surrounding environmental systems (Swearer & Espelage, 2004; Wachs, Bilz, Niproschke, & Schubarth, 2019). The socio-ecological framework has been widely applied in research on traditional and cyberbullying (e.g., Cross et al., 2015; Görzig & Machackova, 2016; Hilton, Anngela-Cole, & Wakita, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Pozzoli, Ang, & Gini, 2012; Lim & Hoot, 2015; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Meter & Bauman, 2015; Smith et al., 2019b).

In the following section we focus on the macrosystem to describe possible reasons for cross-cultural difference in bullying prevalence rates. In an adaptation of the socio-ecological

model developed by the EU Kids Online project (Livingstone et al., 2011) the macrosystem comprises five aspects, for which we will consider empirical evidence to explain cross-national differences in bullying prevalence rates in the following: *Cultural values* (e.g., power distance, tradition, benevolence, individualism vs. collectivism); *Technological infrastructure* (e.g. penetration of mobile phones, smart phones and internet); *Education system* (e.g. levels by age, grade retention, class groupings, school & class size, structure of school day, break times and supervision); *Regulatory system* (e.g. school policies, legal aspects, anti-bullying initiatives); and *Socio-economic stratification* (e.g., income, internet access, health, crime).

Cultural values

Recent approaches have emphasized the need to unpack culture by using national mean level of cultural values to explain cross-cultural differences in bullying (Smith et al., 2016a, 2019b). Smith et al. (2016a) and Campbell, Kettle and Sunduram (2018) have derived predictions for the links between bullying and victim rates with each of the six cultural value dimensions put forward by Hofstede et al. (2010; i.e., power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, indulgence-restraint). However, empirical evidence is scarce and only available for some, mostly focusing on the collectivism-individualism dimension. On the individual level, individualism has been positively linked with face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying perpetration whereas collectivism related negatively to face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying perpetration (Wright et al., 2015). Similarly, Ji, Zhang, and Jones (2016) showed that aggression and bullying were higher in a more collectivistic oriented society (China) compared to a less collectivistic oriented society (England). In contrast, different patterns have been shown regarding country level associations and cross-cultural differences in victimisation rates. For example, Smith and Robinson (2019) found that countries

higher on individualism showed less victimisation overall in the last two decades, which the authors explain with a higher regulatory framework in Western countries during this more recent time period. Their analyses further showed some support for associations of the individualism dimension with a lower ratio of bullies to victims, which may be explained by the stronger emphasis of group-based bullying as well as occurrence of group-based exclusion in Eastern or more collectivistic cultures. There is still more research needed on the role of cultural values in bullying and cyberbullying behaviours and besides Hofstede's cultural value dimensions, prominent frameworks by other authors may be considered (e.g., Gelfland et al., 2011; Schwarz, 2006)

Technological infrastructure

Countries differ in the technological infrastructure (e.g., internet and mobile phone penetration, but also television, movies and gaming) and thereby usage which may contribute to cross-national differences in bullying. This may be particularly the case for cyberbullying with it's clear link to technology usage, but links with traditional bullying have also been found. In relation to cyberbullying, a number of studies have shown that increased media usage and activities were associated with involvement in cyberbullying in different countries (e.g., Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK, and the USA; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Müller, Pfetsch & Ittel, 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker & Perren, 2013). In a review of publications using the EU Kids Online data set, Görzig and Machackova (2016) reported that across 25 European countries, cyberbullying was higher in countries where internet usage as well as risky online activities were higher. Using the same data, Görzig and Ólafsson (2013) found the link between cyberbullying with risky online activities to be stronger in countries with higher mobile phone penetration.

Links were also found between cyberbullying and violent media exposure in general (on television, internet, movies, video games) in Spain (Calvete et al., 2010) and Cyprus (Fanti, Demetriou & Hawa, 2012) (see also chapter 28). A longitudinal study found media violence to be a predictor for cyberbullying in the USA; however, this relationship became insignificant when controlling for traditional bullying (Barlett, Kowalewski, Kramer & Helmstetter, 2019). Hence, the proposed link between media availability as well as media use with bullying may be more prevalent for traditional bullying, especially when media content is violent. Links between traditional bullying and media violence have been found in Cyprus (Stavrinides, Tsivitanou, Nikiforou, Hawak &Tsolia, 2013) as well as in Canada (Dittrick, Beran, Mishna, Hetherington & Shariff, 2013) (see also chapter 28).

Whilst a stronger technological infrastructure will be linked with a higher likelihood of exposure to media content that may enhance bullying behaviours, in particular if the content is violent, it has conversely been argued that similar types of media usage can be used for intervention efforts to reduce bullying, presumably using non-violent content (Nickerson, Feeley & Tsay-Vogel, 2017). The precise role of the technological infrastructure for explaining cross-national differences in bullying remains a topic of further investigation.

Education system

The effects of the education system on cross-cultural differences in prevalence rates of bullying have rarely been investigated. Hence, it is largely unknown how differences in the educational systems across countries influence the prevalence rates of bullying. Investigating the impact of education systems is complex because education systems vary widely from one country to another and also within countries in terms of, for example, class groupings, structures, school policies, average school and class sizes, duration, length, and structure of the school day, or curricula (Jessel, 2016; OECD, 2017).

Akiba, LeTendre, Baker, and Goesling (2002) used the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) survey to investigate whether factors related to the national education system are related to levels of school violence cross-nationally. The results showed education systems that produce greater achievement differences between high- and low-achieving students tend to be associated with higher levels of victimisation in schools. Kanetsuna (2016) found that the supervision of break times and use of home room classes explains differences in the prevalence rate of *ijime* in Japan and *bullying* in England. Moreover, Garandeau, Yanagida, Vermande, Strohmeier, and Salmivalli (2019) found in a sample of Dutch and Austrian students that classroom size was related to frequency rates of peer-reported bullying and victimisation. Frequency rates were lower in classes with more students compared with smaller classroom in both samples, but with self-reported bullying and victimisation only in the Dutch sample.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also gives some information on cross-cultural differences in prevalence rates on bullying. Based on a comparison of 29 countries, it was found that in all countries, except for Japan, Korea, and Macao (China),

students from disadvantaged schools were more likely to experience bullying victimisation. In Japan, Korea and Macao, however, students in advantaged schools were more likely to experience victimisation than those from disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2017). The PISA data showed that across countries the proportion of bullied students is around 7% higher in schools with poorer disciplinary climate. This relationship, however, seems to be particularly strong in Macao, the Slovak Republic, and the United Arab Emirates (OECD, 2017). PISA also showed that students who attend schools where teachers were perceived as unfair are more likely to be victimised than students in schools where teachers are perceived as fair. This relationship differed in strength by country and was especially strong in Brazil, Chile, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, Greece, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Thailand, and Tunisia. These findings suggest that the patterns across countries are often comparable but might differ in terms of the strength.

Regulatory system

Little research has focused on the comparison of anti-bullying policies within or across countries or the effects of these policies on students' bullying behaviours and experiences. Ananiadou and Smith (2002) reviewed legal guidelines against bullying by Ministries of Education or equivalent institutions and anti-bullying materials distributed to schools on national and regional level in several European countries. The authors found that most of the investigated countries had legal requirements on school violence in general but only a few specifically on bullying, at that time. The review also showed that most countries have provided schools with anti-bullying materials; however, the quality in terms of content and format varied considerable between and within countries.

There is also some evidence that certain anti-bullying policy components may be more powerful than others in tackling bullying behaviours and protecting children from bullying experiences (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). If these components differ by country is, however, largely unknown. In a study with students in grades 9 to 12 from 25 states in the U.S., students in states with anti-bullying policies that had at least one legislative component had a 24% reduced odds of reporting bullying victimisation and a 20% reduced odds of reporting cyberbullying victimisation compared with students in states with policies that had no legislative components (Hatzenbuehler, Schwab-Reese, Ranapurwala, Hertz, & Ramirez, 2015). Furthermore, a review of the effectiveness of policy intervention studies published in English (Hall, 2017) showed that across studies anti-bullying policies were generally perceived as effective by educators. For some studies, the quality of the policies was related to the rates of bullying reduction whilst in others no such relation was found. Further, it was reported across studies that specific anti-bullying policies (e.g., regarding sexual orientation or gender identity) led to reports of better protection by targeted students. Whilst over 80% of studies stemmed from populations within the USA, studies with samples from Europe, Australia, East Asia, and Southwest Asia were also included. No variation by country of study has been reported.

To understand whether anti-bullying policies are effective or not, a simple assessment of the existent of anti-bullying policies might not be enough because they must be put into practice to be effective. Hence, more important is the fidelity of implementation of anti-bullying policies (Hall, 2017). Whether there are cross-cultural differences regarding the implementation of certain anti-bullying components is largely unknown and needs to be investigated to understand the cross-cultural validity of such policies.

Socio-economic stratification

It has been proposed that differences in socio-economic provision (e.g., income, internet access, health, crime) between contexts or countries may contribute to the differing prevalence rates of bullying. Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Pratto, Sidanius & Levin, 2006) offers some helpful theoretical underpinnings in this regard. SDT is a theoretical framework of intergroup relations based on the perception that societies are organized in group-based hierarchies. Stronger social hierarchies are linked with more institutional discrimination (discrimination by governmental and business institutions) and fewer resources for low hierarchy group members (e.g., health provision, income, education). SDT further proposes that hierarchies on the societal level would be reflected on the individual level, such as in the power and status differences inherent in bullying events (e.g., Olweus, 1978; Volk et al., 2017). In that sense, higher social inequalities as reflected in disparities in socio-economic provision would be associated with more occurrences of bullying within a society. There is some empirical evidence from linkage with WHO (World Health Organisation) supported cross-national research data on bullying which supports this argument. Traditional bullying prevalence rates have been linked with general income as well as income inequalities on the country level. Whilst a higher national level income (GDP) was associated with lower bullying prevalence rates (Elgar et al., 2015; Viner et al., 2012), higher income inequalities (Gini index) were linked with higher bullying prevalence rates (Due et al., 2009; Elgar, Craig, Boyce, Morgan & Vella-Zarb, 2009; Viner et al., 2012). It was further shown that income inequality on the country level earlier in life (before the age of four) positively predicted bullying victimisation in adolescence (Elgar et al., 2019).

Further relations were found for social and health related factors. Higher crime rates as well as lower life expectancies per country or region were associated with higher bullying

prevalence rates (Görzig & Machackova, 2016; Görzig, Milosevic, & Staksrud, 2017) and positive family connections (i.e., positive relationships with parents or guardians) were associated with lower victimisation rates per country for girls (Viner et al., 2012). In terms of prevalence rates for cyber-victimisation, higher crime rates and general wealth but lower life expectancies and population density were associated with a higher prevalence (Görzig et al., 2017). Cyber-victimisation prevalence rates were also found to be higher in a few countries and regions were family affluence was lower (Inchley et al., 2016). The inverse relationship found for general wealth with cyber-victimisation (positive) as opposed to traditional bullying (negative) may reflect a need to consider additional cultural level factors related to technological expertise and affordability in relation to cyber-bullying.

Measurement issues

In addition to the differences in prevalence rates between countries within one survey or study as discussed above, there are also differences in the rank order of countries between surveys. Smith et al. (2016b) compared four prominent cross-national surveys [EU Kids Online survey (EUKO); Global School Health Survey (GSHS); Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); and Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)] and found that whilst within survey correlations (e.g. across different socio-demographic groups) were high, correlations across those surveys were low and sometimes even negative. Hence, correlates of cross-national differences as reviewed above need to be interpreted against the specific measurement approach taken for each of the surveys.

Several methodological issues are considered to impact consistency of measurement across and within surveys. Although most surveys cover secondary school period, the exact *age range* differs slightly between the surveys. There were also *sampling issues* that may have

affected the differences between the surveys (e.g., a representative sample within each country; HBSC) vs. representative samples of internet using children only (EUKO in 2010 - when internet use still showed larger variations between countries than it does today). The method of how the sample was acquired (e.g., telephone register, random walk technique, school classes) also is worth consideration. The exact *dates* when surveys were administered tended to differ slightly. As intervention programs tend to show impact over time, this may have played a role. Moreover, seasonal or local events can influence survey responses. *Administrative procedures* can affect but also be affected by cross-cultural differences. These can be procedural issues such as self-reports, face-to-face assessment, and at home or at school but also the general assessment method (e.g., questionnaires, peer nominations). *Definitional issues* are as well prevalent in the measurement of bullying. This is particularly the case for the assessment of cyberbullying. Differences between questionnaires exist in whether the term bullying itself is mentioned, which can have implications due to language differences (see above), or whether a behaviour-based measure is employed, which may accidentally assess a wider range of behaviours than would be considered bullying (e.g., general aggression). For cyberbullying, additional difficulties arise in the definition regarding the repetition and power imbalance criteria, both are debated and difficult to assess in the context of the internet. It was further shown that behaviour-based approaches for the assessment of cyberbullying may or may not include either of those criteria. Moreover, *time references periods* as well as *frequency scales* tend to differ between surveys. It is possible that longer time reference periods [e.g., '12 months' (EUKO) as opposed to 'last couple of months' (HBSC)] or frequency scale points [e.g., 'several times a week' (HBSC) as opposed to 'every day' (EUKO)] lead to the recall of different and more serious events. Lastly, surveys differ in the

range of types of bullying they assess (e.g., EUKO explicitly includes social exclusion whilst HBSC does not; Görzig, 2012; Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2019b; Smith et al., 2016b).

Conclusions

The current chapter presents some evidence demonstrating that bullying should be considered against a cultural background as well as their cross-national differences. The research history on bullying has shown that largely similar traditions have been developed across Eastern and Western cultures whilst research in some geographical areas remains scarce (Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2016a). The emergence of cyber-bullying has spurred broader disciplinary approaches beyond psychology and sociology as well as research in different parts of the world and cross-national collaborations (Zych et al., 2015). Large variations in prevalence rates of bullying across countries have been demonstrated in different cross-national surveys (e.g., Smith et al., 2019b) albeit the associations with detrimental effects on socio-emotional well-being emerge consistently (e.g., Nansel et al., 2004).

Bullying and victimisation rates have generally been found to decrease with age, however, there are considerable variations by country in the strengths of these effects as well as interactions by type of bullying and gender. For gender, boys have mostly been found to be more involved in bullying as well as victimisation across countries; however, results were not always significant or consistent across countries, particularly victimisation and cyberbullying prevalence rates shifted to a stronger prominence of girls for some studies and countries. The classification of bullying types has generally been consistent across cultures; however, there have been variations in their relative prevalence. There has been some indication of a stronger emphasis of group-based exclusion in Eastern cultures (Sittichai & Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2016a). Nevertheless, types of bullying tend to correlate within cultures. The emphasis of different

aspects of bullying also appears to be reflected in the language used for bullying in different cultures as well as across time, different emphasis is placed on the physical, relational, group or power imbalance aspects depending on the terminology used. Bullying roles occur in similar relative prevalence across countries; however, the ratio of bully/victim rates appears to be close or smaller to one in Western cultures but larger than one in most Eastern or collectivistically oriented cultures. The latter may link with a possibly greater emphasis of group-based bullying associated with collectivistic values in Eastern cultures.

There are some indications that differences in prevalence rates between countries or cultures can be explained by variations of macro-level factors of the socio-ecological system, such as cultural values, technological infrastructure, education system, regulatory system, and socio-economic stratification. More support from empirical evidence of the contribution of these factors is needed. The current evidence is scarce and paints a mixed picture. Lastly, methodological factors affecting conclusions from cross-national survey evidence need to be considered.

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