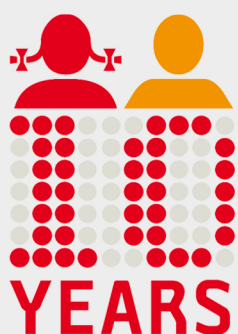


**CHILD  
HELPLINE  
INTERNATIONAL**

**BRIEFING  
PAPER**

**ON**

**BULLYING**



*For more information also find us on:*



*An analysis of ten years  
of child helpline data on  
bullying*

# Bullying: Analysis of 10 year Global Data

While discourse on bullying is predominantly focused on developed countries or those that are high and very high on the Human Development Index, the fact is it occurs everywhere, in every country on the globe. As increasing numbers of young people have begun socializing through the internet, using social networking websites, cyber bullying too has become a significant vehicle for abuse and violence. Children and young people around the world suffer from bullying, both in the real world as well as the virtual world. Children and young people subjected to bullying can feel depressed, anxious, dejected and may suffer from personality disorders, suicidal and self-harm tendencies.

With growing awareness amongst children and young people about bullying, contacts with child helplines on this issue are rising. In this briefing paper Child Helpline International (CHI) has compiled statistics and information on contacts about bullying that child helplines have received since 2002. Based on 126 million contacts made with member child helplines, Child Helpline International has analysed the different aspects of bullying disaggregated at different levels – global and regional— taking into account the gender of the victim and the perpetrators. While this paper describes the intensity of the issue, more in-depth investigation is needed into the causes and consequences of bullying in order to find solutions and responses at the government and community level.

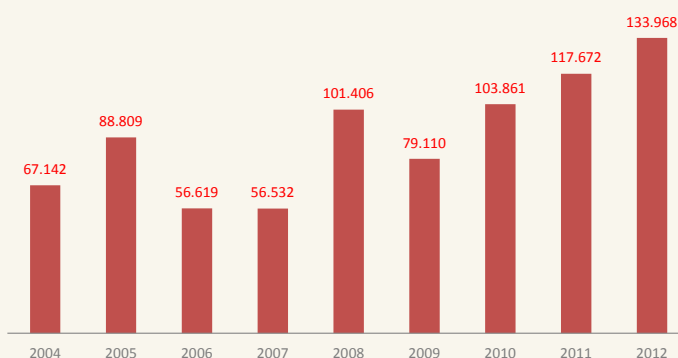
## 1. Background

CHI, based in Amsterdam, is a unique network of government and civil society organisations, operating 173 child helplines in 142 countries around the world. Working with partner organisations, child helplines give a voice to children and young people and respond to their concerns and needs for care and protection.

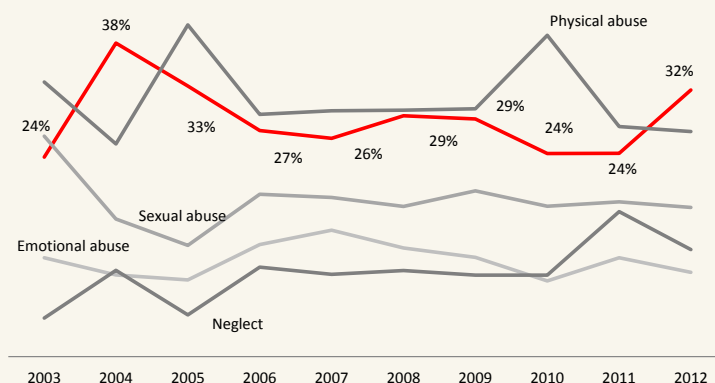
CHI has been collecting annual data from its member child helplines. In the past 10 years CHI has built up a database with details of over 126 million contacts by children and adults on behalf of young people. CHI uses this information to advocate for the strengthening of child protection systems.

The CHI database has, as any database and empirical study, certain strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, child helplines did not submit their data each consecutive year. It was also evident that some child helplines showed aberrant patterns in the data and therefore needed to be “screened or cleaned”. Furthermore, data is not always uniformly recorded when a child has made a call to a child helpline. In some instances a child helpline staff member might record a call under several subcategories such as: physical abuse, family relationships and fear and anxiety; whereas at another child helpline a similar contact might be recorded under one category only. Reasoning and rationality around documentation of children’s calls remains abstract or intangible and relies heavily on how the counsellors have been trained. Nevertheless, the CHI database represents a unique collection of international, longitudinal data. The extensive collaboration between different child helplines in the CHI network for the past ten years has stimulated

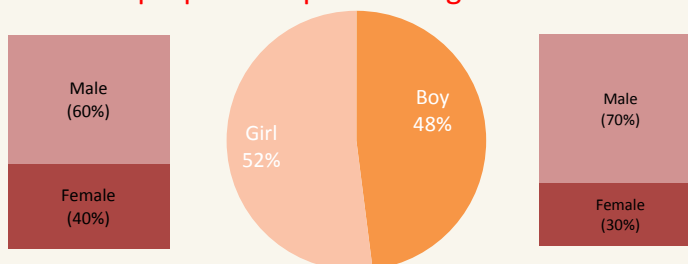
Number of contacts on bullying

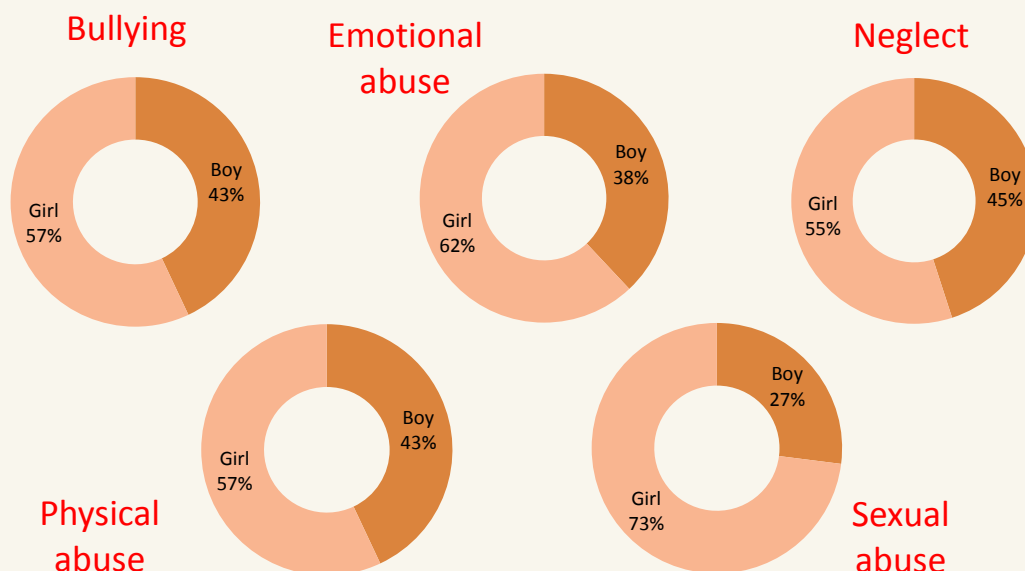


Proportion of contacts on bullying



Gender of bullying victim and perpetrator per victim gender





constructive debate and exchange of findings between different members. Seen from this perspective, the CHI database has summarised the stories of children in need of answers, social support and help worldwide for the past ten years.

## 2. Bullying - worldwide

Abuse and violence are amongst the most common reasons for children and young people to contact child helplines worldwide. Of the 126 million contacts collated by CHI over the past decade, almost 18% or over 4 million were about abuse and violence that include categories like bullying, emotional, physical, sexual abuse and violence as well as neglect. Many governments, civil society organisations, schools administrations and others make efforts to address bullying. In spite of this, or maybe due to this increased awareness, the number of contacts the child helplines worldwide receive on the issue is increasing. The gravity of bullying in the lives of children and young people can be gauged from the fact that nearly 20% of contacts made with child helplines in the past 10 years on abuse and violence were on this topic.

### 2.1 Who is bullied?

For most contacts, child helplines are not able to record the gender of the child or the young person contacting them

Bullying is an intentional use of force by an individual or a group to intimidate, coerce or abuse another individual, either through physical, emotional, or verbal means. CHI's information shows that boys are found to use intimidation and direct physical and emotional aggression to bully others, while girls often resort to emotional bullying by spreading rumours, gossiping or social exclusion of the victim.

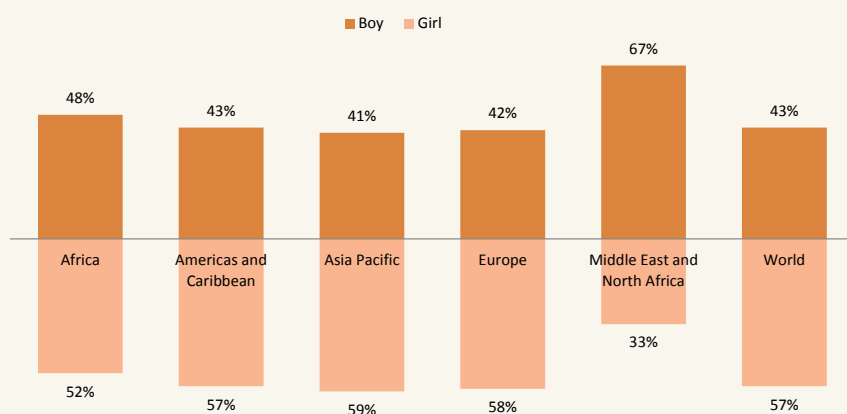
Bullying can mean many different things. These are some ways children and young people have described bullying:

- being called names
- being put down or humiliated
- being teased
- being pushed or pulled about
- having money and other possessions taken or messed about with
- having rumours spread about you
- being ignored and left out
- being hit, kicked or physically hurt
- being threatened or intimidated

Bullying can also be part of other forms of abuse, including neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

<http://www.childline.org.uk/explore/bullying/pages/bullying.aspx>

Gender of bullying victim in regions



*“Children’s have a fundamental right to have a healthy physical and emotional development. Bullying is a problem that puts the child in an abuse situation but also in a psychological abuse risk situation, and that is a violation of their rights” - a child helpline*

# Child helplines

Child helplines are a service for children and young people to reach out when they are in need of support and assistance. Child helplines allow children and young people to talk in confidence and empower them with the tools to take their lives in their own hands. Child helplines listen, counsel and if needed refer children and young people to child protection services or intervene directly.

Since its foundation in 2003, CHI annually collects information from its child helpline members on these contact using a standardised questionnaire. The information is collated into the CHI database which in recent months has been consolidated into a single database: The collected information shows that in ten years, child helplines have received over 126 million contacts through telephone, chat, SMS, outreach, walk-in centres, bulletin boards and other means of contacts.

*“A main issue is digital bullying. Some of the children have tried to tell someone, teachers etc. what is going on, others have not. It is a widespread problem and often hard for authorities to deal with, because teachers and parents have problems understanding what is actually going on and how to stop it. Our approach is that bullying is a cultural phenomenon in a social context – and not a problem in relation to only the directly affected children (the perpetrator and the victim). Often parents, children and professionals do not share our approach. Instead they are trying to solve the problems by working only with the single individuals – and not the culture as such.” - a child helpline*

because a majority of children (over 71%) were not willing to disclose their gender for recording purposes. Focusing on those contacts for which the information is known, shows that more girls than boys contact child helplines on the issue. With children as young as 13 accessing social networking websites on the internet, cyber bullying has also become a major issue. CHI began collecting data on cyber bullying in 2011 and since then more than 27000 contacts have been received by child helplines about the issue.

Contacts on cyber bullying also demonstrate a similar trend in terms of the gender of victims. The number of boys contacting about cyber bullying is slightly lower than the number of girls. However, nearly 80% of the children and young people contacting child helplines on cyber bullying hesitated to disclose their gender to protect their identity and maintain their anonymity after having suffered online abuse.

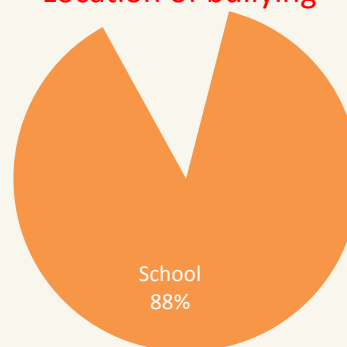
## 2.2 Forms of bullying

Bullying can happen in different forms. Based on the information gathered from child helplines since 2011, children and young people indicate that bullying can be divided into four major categories – emotional, physical, exposure and theft. Almost 50% of the contacts on bullying can be categorised as emotional bullying. The second most common form of bullying is physical abuse amounting to nearly 25%. Instances of exposure and theft, where children and young people are either exposed to bullying as a witness or have their belongings stolen, were about 12.5%. While more girls said that they faced emotional bullying and theft, boys mentioned physical bullying, exposure and theft as the basic reasons for contact with child helplines. Thus the data indicates that while girls faced more emotional bullying, boys suffer physical abuse more than emotional bullying.

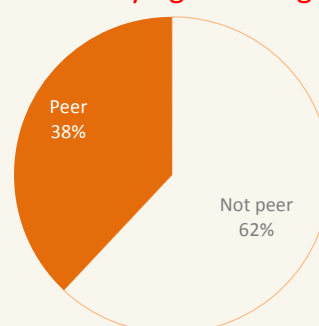
## 2.3 Where bullying happens?

Children and young people are expected to feel safe in a

Location of bullying



Proportion of bullying involving peers



*“Every day they wait for me and insult me. Every day!” says Peter (16). “They say ‘You are gay, you are stupid, you are a woman.’ I asked the school psychologist for advice, but she only says that I should ignore them. I can’t! They torture me more and more.”*

*The child helpline encouraged Peter to continue his efforts to find a solution. Peter was told about laws and rules that exist that can help him. The school has an obligation to help him, regardless of who he is. Peter said that he felt much better after the conversation and that he would use the information to make the school psychologist and others at school to help him.*

school, at home and on playgrounds, but contacts made with child helplines show that most of the bullying happens in schools. Nine out of ten cases of bullying reportedly take place at school (88%) and another 4% in playgrounds. Almost 88% of girls and 80% boys said that they faced bullying at school. Also, when it comes to bullying in playgrounds boys appear to be affected more than girls.

## 2.4 Who are the bullies?

Not surprisingly, most bullying is perpetrated by peers of the victims (62%). Over a third of indicated perpetrators are adults however (38%). One fifth of reported cases committed by peers, involved a friend of the child (21%). Interestingly, one quarter of reported bullying involved a child or young person’s teacher (21%) and one in five cases involved a child’s (biological, step or foster) parent (20%). Two thirds of bullying is committed by males (65%); a more detailed review of gender disaggregated data shows that male perpetrators bully mostly boys, while female perpetrators mainly bully girls.

Globally teachers are responsible for more than 23% of bullying, of which more than 14% is done by male teachers and another 7% by female teachers, in 2% of cases the gender of the teacher was not known. In Europe around 4% of contacts on bullying involved a teacher; in America and the Caribbean the proportion is 2%, while in Africa it is 37%. Lower percentages of bullying perpetrated by teachers is a possible effect of stricter laws against corporal punishment in schools.

## 2.5 Cyber-bullying

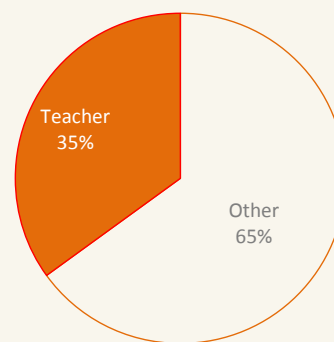
Social media and mobile communication are evolving rapidly, and are the new mode of socialisation amongst peers and communities. Almost 40% of children on Facebook are under the age of 13, but recently research has shown that social media sites Facebook and Youtube are declining in popularity amongst young people as other social media, such as Twitter, SnapChat, Vine and Reddit are on the rise; and on its 21st anniversary, SMS is being overtaken by application chatting on smart phones.

Although a positive opportunity does exist for young people to share and express their interests while connecting with others, there are also downsides to online sharing, especially in an environment that is not restricted to space and time. Web and mobile based messages reach children and young people in the privacy of their own home, twenty-four hours a day, making bullying inescapable and even more threatening than before. As a result, an increasing number of child helplines state they receive contacts on cyber-bullying.

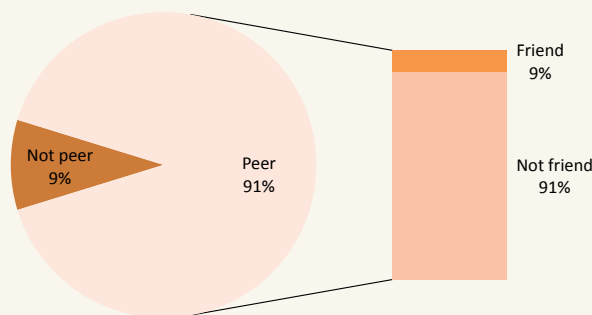
## 3. Regional scenario

Disaggregation of the data according to the five regions – Africa, America and the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa – shows that bullying is a universal problem. However, more children and young people in Europe contacted child helplines on this issue than in other regions. Over the past 10 years over half-a-million contacts were made in Europe alone. Asia Pacific follows with almost

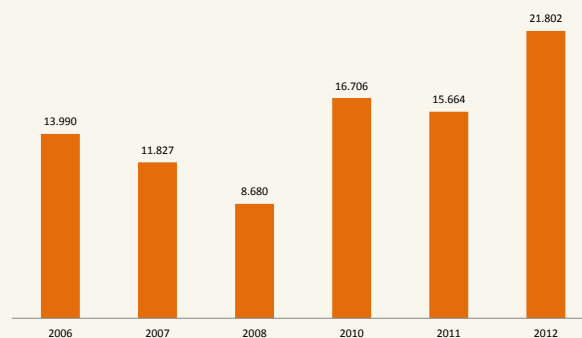
### Proportion of bullying involving teachers



### Peers and friends as a cause of bullying - Europe



### Contacts to Kindertelefoon on Bullying since 2006



*“Please help me! I keep getting the horrible messages on my mobile phone and on my email. I don’t know who they’re from. It just doesn’t stop. It’s every day, all the time! I want it to stop! I don’t know what to do. Please help me. What can I do?” Anna was desperate. “I feel ashamed to talk to my parents about it.”*

The child helpline counsellor talked to Anna about the messages and what they said. The counsellor provided her with psychological support and worked with her to find a way to stop the messages. Anna was encouraged to talk to her parents about the situation and file a report with the police, as it would allow the police to pursue the case and press charges. Several days later Anna called the child helpline again “Thank you so very much for your help! Talking to my parents really was a relief. They were very worried for me and went to the police with me. We filed a report. We changed my phone number and now the messages have stopped.”

135,000 contacts, and America and the Caribbean (nearly 100,000), Africa (55,000 contacts) and lastly Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Except in MENA, most contacts on bullying involved girls. In America and the Caribbean region nearly 61% contacts were made by girls, where as in Asia-Pacific it was 58%, in Europe 56.5% and in Africa nearly 52%. However in the MENA region more than 55% contacts were made by boys and about 44% by girls. In cases of cyber bullying girls also outnumbered boys as the victims in all regions, including MENA.

### 3.1 Europe

While more girls than boys reported bullying there is a very marginal difference in numbers, which indicates that children and young people, irrespective of their gender, are bullied but the forms of bullying differ.

Nearly 63% of the contacts recorded by child helplines in Europe mention emotional bullying as the primary concern. In 24% of contacts the reason cited by children and young people was physical bullying. Emotional bullying is more prevalent amongst girls, while physical bullying is common amongst boys. In one out of ten contacts on bullying, children and young people informed the child helplines that their belongings were stolen by their peers in order to bully them (i.e. theft). Nearly 57% of the contacts on bullying in Europe were made by girls. In most cases girls mentioned emotional bullying whereas boys appear to suffer more from physical abuse.

More than 90% of the victims in Europe indicated that peers were responsible for the bullying, more than ten per cent of those cases involved a friend. The number of cases where teachers were accused of bullying was about 4%. The data demonstrates that nearly all bullying in Europe happens in schools (94%). Most contacts on cyber-bullying in 2012 were received by child helplines in Europe, but in most cases the child helpline was not able to ascertain the gender of the child.

### 4. Bullying in The Netherlands

While The Netherlands ranks the first in the recent UNICEF report on Child Well Being, children and young people in the country appear to face high levels of abuse and violence. Over the past 10 years de Kindertelefoon has received more than 187,000 contacts on abuse and violence, and about 70% of these were about bullying. So far Kindertelefoon has received over 129,000 contacts on bullying over a period of 10 years. Besides bullying, physical (15%) and sexual abuse (13%) are the most common reported forms of abuse in the country.

## Recommendations

CHI recommends that all governments:

- Recognise bullying as a form of abuse that can severely affect a child's development and potential;
- Develop and implement anti-bullying and cyber bullying legislation that involves all stakeholders and creates awareness with schools, teachers and children and young people alike;
- Embed a safe and bullying free culture in schools and families;
- Provide regular training for teachers about responding to all forms of bullying

*Sean (15) called and said he had no friends at school. Everyone shuns him; Other children beat him, insult him and mock his masculinity in front of others. The other day a class mate had pulled down his pants in the school yard. Sean says he hates his class mates for what they do and feels very angry towards them. He wants to hit them and hurt them. "Can you please me something I can do to make them stop and take revenge? There must be something I can do?"*

*The counsellor listened to Sean and acknowledged all his negative emotions without judging or making any suggestions. Through this support, Sean and the counsellor were able to build a trusting relationship and together find a solution to improve the situation. The situation of trust allowed Sean to start forming friendships with his peers at school. The counsellor agreed with Sean that he would call every week at the same time. Over time, these sessions led to Sean being more positive. The permanent bad experiences coming from the school environment were gradually replaced by pleasant incidents and new friendships.*

Child Helpline International (CHI) is the global network of 173 child helplines in 142 countries (October 2012). In ten years together child helplines in the network received more than 126 million contacts from children and young people in need of care and protection. CHI supports the creation and strengthening of national toll free child helplines worldwide and uses child helpline data and knowledge to highlight gaps in child protection systems and advocate for the rights of children.

For more information please contact Child Helpline International:

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