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"*I feel guilty that we didn't do more to intervene*": The impact of young people's experiences of bullying on their parents'/carers' mental health.

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BACKGROUND

- Being bullied is a frequent and negative experience for many young people, and as such, it is something young people require support to cope with (Shaw et al., 2019).
- Parents and carers are often reported to be a source of social support for young people experiencing bullying (Fekkes et al., 2005). However, research has also identified that this support is not always protective (Noret et al., 2018). Understanding the reasons why this may be is crucial to aid our understanding of how best to support young people being bullied and their families.
- While a wealth of research has examined parental/ family factors associated with bullying behaviour (e.g., Nocentini et al., 2019), research focusing on the impact of a young person's experiences of bullying on their family is a somewhat neglected area.
- Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the impact of a child's experiences of bullying on their parents'/ carers'.

METHOD

- Participants were 16 parents/ carers who had completed a pre-intervention questionnaire on Qualtrics as part of a larger evaluation study. The questionnaire examined 1) their child's experiences of bullying, 2) their child's trauma symptoms, and 3) the impact of the bullying on their child and on the family.
- Of interest to this poster were parents' responses to the question: '*Can you tell us a little more about the impact the bullying has had on you and your family*?' Responses to this question were analysed using content analysis.



- Participants' children were aged between 8 and 16 years old.
- 14 parents/carers (77.8%) reported that their child was still being bullied.
- 15 (93.7%) reported that their child had taken time out of school due to bullying.

KEY FINDINGS

Parent responses highlighted the profound and harmful impact bullying was having on their child, their family and themselves as parents/carers. Bullying was found to impact parents in terms of 1) feelings of worry and stress related to bullying, 2) the emotional impact, 3) the impact on the whole family, 4) the development of conflict in the family because of bullying, and 5) the impact on parents' work. These themes are discussed in more detail opposite.

KEY FINDINGS

WORRY & STRESS

A child's experiences of bullying was frequently discussed as a source of stress and worry for parents/ carers. Parents/carers highlighted their feelings of stress and worry they regularly experienced:

"I have suffered from physical symptoms of stress, including diarrhoea for 1 month, poor sleep, inability to focus, sensations of my skin crawling etc."
"I feel stressed and upset thinking about what has happened."

"It is heartbreaking when he [their child] *says he wishes he was normal like everyone else. When he gets angry, it isn't easy to help him. Causes stress and strain."*

"It has caused us so much anger, hurt, and worry."

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Participants highlighted a range of emotions they felt in response to their child's experiences of bullying. These strong emotions included feelings of guilt, powerlessness, helplessness and anger as their child continued to struggle with their experiences of bullying:

"We all feel broken, powerless, confused, guilt, anger."

"I feel guilty that we didn't do more to intervene (we tried our best but the school wouldn't listen for a long time)."

"I felt I was in some ways responsible for what was happening to my son. As his father, I believed I was failing him even though I followed the school's protocol."

"Sense of helplessness as to how to manage this."

IMPACT ON WORK

Several participants highlighted the impact of their child's experiences of bullying on their ability to engage at work. Parents/ carers highlighted the need to take time away from work to support their child, alongside feeling distracted and unable to concentrate:

"I have had to have several days off work recently because it is wrecking me."

"Father had to take time off from work, as situation was getting very serious at home."

"I have taken unpaid leave from work to look after her, which is causing financial difficulty and extreme stress about what happens to her when I inevitably have to return to work."

"I am constantly worried about my child's safety and this has hugely impacted on my performance at work."

KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT ON THE WHOLE FAMILY

Participants also highlighted the impact that their child's bullying had on the family, leading to distress for lots of family members but also damaging previously close relationships:

"The bullying has impacted on every inch of our family life, and it is something we will never forget."

"It has put a huge emotional strain on all of us as a family."
"His grandad was absolutely devastated."

"His anxiety has become more severe to the point where he has avoided members of his extended family who he had previously had a very good relationship with."

CONFLICT IN THE FAMILY

A child's experiences of bullying were associated with conflict in the home, related to how to manage the behaviour and sibling jealousy:

"I am one of two divorced parents, and he gets little support when he is bullied or is suffering bullying at the other parent's (mother's) home."

"When she is anxious, she is much more likely to react badly to new situations and this can make general family life more difficult…. Often this makes her have a bad temper which can be aimed at her younger brother in the form of telling him off, or having a go at him."

"Sophie's brother thinks we don't care about him, he is getting jealous, upset, angry, can't understand what is going on with his sister."

KEY FINDINGS

- The parents/ carers reported the impact of their child being bullied as being profound and wide-reaching.
- Their child's experiences were clearly a source of stress for parents/ carers and something that impacted them and the wider family.
- This negative impact may affect parent/carers' ability to support their child. Further research examining how the impact of bullying is related to the quality of parental support is needed



- Understanding the impact of bullying on parent/ carers would be of benefit to inform intervention programmes and provide further support to families on how best to support their child if bullied. .

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