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Parental Advice Regarding School Bullying: From Mothers and Fathers to Girls and Boys

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Abstract

Parents may influence their child's bullying experience by reacting and advising them on how to address bullying victimisation and perpetration. However, little is known about the types of advice parents give their children in cases of bullying perpetration, whether mothers and fathers differ in the advice they provide and whether such advice varies by child's gender. In this study, parents (mothers and fathers) were asked about the types of advice they would give their children (girls and boys) if they had been bullied or had bullied others. We used survey data collected among parents of children attending Finnish schools (N=2842). In cases of bullying victimisation, parents prefer to advise their child to tell their teacher or promise their child they will think together about a solution. Regarding bullying perpetration, parents prefer to tell their child that they need to stop bullying immediately or try to explain that bullying can hurt. Mothers scored higher on most items regarding both bullying victimisation and perpetration. Differences between advice given to girls and to boys were found for perpetration. Findings regarding parental guidance can be integrated to anti-bullying interventions to increase their effectiveness.

Keywords: bullying, parental advice, gender differences, mother-father differences

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Bullying among peers at school is a type of aggressive behaviour characterised by repetitiveness, imbalance of power and intentionality (Olweus, 2013) and is a severe problem worldwide (Due et al., 2005; Lester et al., 2017). Being bullied can have negative consequences on children's mental and physical health, academic achievement and social adjustment (Halliday et al., 2021; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). Although bullying by peers mostly occurs within the school environment and is influenced by peer group dynamics (Saarento & Salmivalli, 2015) and teacher behaviour (Veenstra et al., 2014), the family context, parents' attitudes and reactions in particular, may still play a significant role (Bowes et al., 2010). Research on school-based interventions further indicates that parental involvement enhances intervention effectiveness, emphasising the need to account for parents and family-related factors in research and program development (Mann et al., 2015).

One of the most direct ways parents might affect a child's involvement in bullying, either as a victim or a perpetrator, is by suggesting response strategies or responding to the event (Harcourt et al., 2014). Parental advice might influence how children react to victimisation and how they behave towards other children. Therefore, addressing parental advice could be an important component of effective interventions. Before targeting parental advice regarding school bullying, it is essential to understand the kind of advice parents typically give their children regarding bullying perpetration and victimisation, whether mothers and fathers differ in this respect, and how the advice given is affected by the child's gender.

How Can Parents Influence Their Children's Bullying Perpetration and Victimisation?

Children's behaviour and development are shaped by various social environments, including peers, family, school and the wider community. Within this framework, family systems theory provides a more focused lens on how the structure, functioning and organisation of the family can affect the child's behaviour and attitudes (Bowen, 1978). Thus, parents are seen as significant influences on children's involvement in bullying, whether as perpetrators or victims. Despite suggestions that the responsibility for bullying prevention should be shared between school, family, young people themselves and communities (Bellmore, 2016), family factors have received less research attention, compared to individual and school-level factors (Mann et al., 2015). Meta-analyses and systematic reviews provide evidence that an adverse family climate (e.g., child neglect, violence, maltreatment) is a risk factor for both bullying perpetration and

victimisation (Bradshaw, 2014; Lereya et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2019). In contrast, positive parenting (e.g., support, well-established communication) is associated with a lower likelihood that a child will be involved in bullying incidents and may help victimised children cope with these experiences.

One key dimension of parenting is the quality of parent-child communication. Although many bullied children do not disclose their victimisation to adults, they are more likely to tell their parents than their teachers (Blomqvist et al., 2020). Therefore, parents are uniquely positioned to influence their child's involvement. Supportive communication between parents and children can help protect children from victimisation by peers (Baldry & Farrington, 2005; Nocentini et al., 2019) and might mitigate the negative consequences of victimisation, such as depression and behavioural problems (Bowes et al., 2010). Furthermore, parent-child dyads with more positive communication were found to generate more effective anti-bullying strategies when presented with hypothetical situations of bullying (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2017).

The quality of parent-child communication is also associated with a child's bullying perpetration (Nocentini et al., 2019). Research indicates that high levels of perceived parental support, especially emotional support, are associated with lower levels of bullying perpetration. Conversely, parental anger and boredom towards the child, low family cohesion and poor mother-child connection are associated with a greater likelihood of bullying perpetration (Baldry & Farrington, 2005; Foshee et al., 2016; Nocentini et al., 2019; Shetgiri et al., 2013). However, only few parents are aware of their child's bullying perpetration (Holt et al., 2008), presumably because children who bully others have little reason to disclose this to their parents. Furthermore, parents are more willing to talk to their children about being victimised than about bullying others (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001). Positive communication might promote trust in the relationship between parents and their children, possibly facilitating children's disclosure – and therefore parental awareness – about their own bullying behaviour.

Parental Advice Regarding Their Child's Bullying Perpetration and Victimisation

When finding out about their child's bullying perpetration or victimisation, a parent can immediately engage with their child by offering strategies or responding in a certain way. Previous research has either examined how parents react to past incidents of bullying (e.g., Sawyer et al., 2011) or how they would respond in hypothetical situations of bullying or victimisation (e.g., Stives et al., 2019).

Typically, parents do not choose a single strategy but rather combine several (Benatov, 2019; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Sawyer et al., 2011). A systematic review of parental perspectives on bullying (Harcourt et al., 2014) shows that parents' strategies when their child is victimised fall into two main categories: one focuses on comforting the child (e.g., by providing emotional support), the other focuses on solving the problem (e.g., by suggesting to use self-defence).

Other studies reveal that the strategy most commonly applied by parents is simply discussing the bullying incidents with the child (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Holt et al., 2008; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2019; Waasdorp et al., 2011). Moreover, parents generally prefer to involve school officials in the process of dealing with bullying victimisation. They either advise their child to tell the teacher about the bullying (Sawyer et al., 2011; Stives et al., 2019; Tu et al., 2021) or contact someone in the school themselves (Larrañaga et al., 2018; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2019). Parents sometimes also decide to involve the school when they realise their advice is not effective (Brown et al., 2013). Additionally, parents of bullied children are more likely to contact school officials rather than speak directly with the parent of another child involved in the incident (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Holt et al., 2008). Less frequently, parents may also recommend avoiding or ignoring bullies (e.g., Cooper & Nickerson, 2013), or being assertive and even confronting them (Holt et al., 2008; Stives et al., 2019; Tu et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that, overall, parents prefer to provide emotional support to their victimised child and seek information and social support from others rather than suggest retaliation or self-blame (Benatov, 2019). Among parents who suggest retaliation, some admit that they advise it when other strategies have failed, or when the child's physical safety is at risk (Sawyer et al., 2011). Parents also report that they try to teach their children prosocial behaviour and suggest talking to the bully without aggressively confronting them (Larrañaga et al., 2018; Sawyer et al., 2011).

Studies exploring how parents respond when their child engages in bullying are scarce. The systematic review by Nocentini et al. (2019) on the associations between family characteristics and children's bullying victimisation and perpetration includes 24 articles on parent-child communication, but none of them examined parents' reactions to bullying perpetration specifically. In one study, only one-third of the children who reported that they had bullied others also reported that their parents talked to them about their bullying behaviour; however, this study does not indicate whether the children disclosed their behaviour to their parents or whether the parents knew about it (Fekkes et al., 2004). Another study found that the most common responses among parents of bullying perpetrators were discussing the behaviour with their child and telling them to stop (Holt et al., 2008). Overall, research on this topic remains very limited.

Differences Between Mothers and Fathers

It is possible that mothers differ from fathers in their reactions and advice to their child's bullying behaviour and victimisation, since they tend to be involved in their child's life in different ways. Mothers often bear greater responsibility for child-rearing tasks, such as being attuned to the child's emotions and staying informed about their teachers, as well as for managing household routines and finances (Alonso et al., 2025; Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). Concerning the advice they give their child regarding bullying perpetration and victimisation, mothers are more likely to suggest help-seeking, prosocial, and passive or non-confrontational strategies, whereas fathers are more likely to recommend aggressive responses, such as retaliation (Lee & Ju, 2019; Lester et al., 2017; McWood et al., 2023). Overall,

mothers tend to teach their child social skills as a reaction to both bullying perpetration (empathy-raising, teaching to "put yourself in the other child's shoes") and victimisation (teaching their child to say something nice to the bully) (Lee & Ju, 2019). Mothers themselves perceive the discrepancy between their attitudes and those of the child's father: specifically, they reported that fathers either dismissed the issue as not serious or, in contrast, reacted too strongly without taking into account the importance of maintaining positive relationships with others (Lee & Ju, 2019). There is one exception to these findings: using hypothetical scenarios of verbal bullying, Allan et al. (2024) found that mothers were *more likely* than fathers to suggest retaliation and ignoring.

Parental Advice Given to Girls and Boys

Parents can transmit expectations and norms about appropriate roles and behaviours for sons and daughters through their words and actions, a phenomenon referred to as gendered parenting (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). It can take different forms: exposing the child to certain toys and activities, gendered evaluation of someone's behaviour in front of the child or direct talk to the child about their skills, behaviour and interests, emphasising which behaviour is appropriate for girls vs. boys (for instance, referring to boys as risk-takers, and to girls as children who are nice to others). Explicit gendered parenting is mainly observed in early childhood (Endendijk et al., 2016; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). However, a recent narrative review highlights that gendered parenting can also occur in adolescence, when parents monitor their daughters more than their sons, perceive disruptive behaviour less negatively when displayed by their sons, and have more emotional talks with their daughters (Dittman et al., 2023). Whether gendered parenting is at play when parents give advice to their children regarding victimisation and bullying perpetration remains unclear.

Parental behaviour after bullying incidents might play a role, particularly in children's coping strategies. Girls are more likely than boys to choose prosocial responses (such as asking for help and maintaining relationships), whereas boys choose prosocial responses as often as antisocial ones (such as fighting back; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). These gendered coping patterns may be influenced by how parents respond to and advise their children. However, only few studies have examined associations between a child's gender and the parental advice they receive regarding bullying involvement. One study showed that parents were more likely to tell victimised girls than victimised boys to ignore the bullying (Larrañaga et al., 2018). Another study has not found any significant link between parents' responses to the child's bullying victimisation and the child's gender (Waasdorp et al., 2011). Thus, while research highlights consistent gendered patterns in parenting and children's social behaviours, findings on parental advice and reactions to bullying and victimisation remain mixed, suggesting the need for additional research.

Present Study

The present study has three objectives: 1) To identify the strategies or advice most commonly given by parents when their child is victimised and when their child bullies others, 2) To test whether mothers and fathers differ in this advice, and 3) To test whether different advice is given to girls and to boys. In this study, parents were asked what they would say to their child in case of bullying perpetration or victimisation.

This study takes an exploratory approach to address several gaps in the literature. One such gap concerns parental responses to bullying perpetration. While existing studies highlight the protective and mitigating role of parent-child communication when a child is victimised by peers, little is known about how parents react when they learn that their child has bullied others. Additionally, few studies compare mothers' and fathers' responses, and findings are often inconsistent. Previous research on family involvement in bullying intervention suggests that focus on mothers and fathers separately can be beneficial because male and female caregivers utilise different communication styles and advice (Lester et al., 2017). Therefore, involving fathers in interventions may be crucial, as it could lead to more effective support of the child within the family (Mann et al., 2015). Lastly, there is limited research on how a child's gender may affect the advice a child receives from parents. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how parental advice and responses to bullying perpetration and victimisation vary depending on the parent's role (mother/father) and the child's gender, so as to better inform the development of anti-bullying policies and interventions for parents and schools.

Methods

Participants

Data for this study was collected in 2021 and 2022 as part of a larger project on school bullying in Finland (MASKED FOR REVIEW). The sample includes the parents of the children (Grades 1—9, aged 6 to 17 years) who participated in the project. While filling out the consent form for their children, parents themselves were invited to take part in the study. Parents who provided consent had the option to leave their email addresses, to which the link to the online survey was sent. The survey was provided in Finnish and English.

The original dataset from 2021 had 3250 observations, and the dataset from 2022 had 1901 observations. The data from both years were combined into one dataset. If a parent answered the survey for the same child in 2021 and 2022, only the data from 2021 was retained for the analyses. In some cases (N of children = 162), information about one child was provided by both parents; for most of them (N of children = 144), it was clear which information was provided by the mother and which was provided by the father; for the other cases (N of children = 18), information about the parent's role for one or both parents was missing. To ensure independence of the data, we retained for analyses information about one parent, who was randomly selected. Moreover, parents were instructed to complete the

questionnaire with reference to a specific child. Parents with more than one child were therefore able to provide multiple responses (N of families = 377, N of observations = 795). In such cases, we retained for analyses information about one of the siblings, who was randomly selected. Surveys in which parents did not provide a response to at least one item on advice regarding bullying perpetration or victimisation (N of observations = 375) were excluded. Thus, an observation refers to an individual parental response regarding one child from only one year of data collection.

The final sample (N = 2842) included 2423 mothers and 398 fathers. Out of the 2842 children, 47.7% were boys and 45.3% girls, and their mean age was 12.4 (*SD* = 2.6).

Measures

Parent's Role

The parent's role in the family was based on participants' answers to the question: "Are you the child's…" where the response options were "mother," "father," or "another adult taking care of the child." Mothers were coded as 0 (reference category), and fathers were coded as 1. Since we were interested in differences between mothers and fathers, we excluded those participants who reported being "another adult taking care of a child" (N = 19). For observations with missing values (N = 21), parent's role was imputed later in the analysis because those observations had all answers on advice questions, which was an important criterion for the data cleaning procedure.

Child's Gender

Children reported on their gender in the students' questionnaire. They were presented with the question stem "I am…" and the following answer options: "girl," "boy," "I don't feel like either girl or boy", and "I don't want to answer". Girls were coded as 0 (reference category) and boys as 1. Due to the low prevalence of responses for third and fourth options (<2%), they were excluded during the data cleaning stage. Missing values (7%) were imputed later in the analysis.

Child's Age

Parents were asked about the child's birth year. Child's age was calculated by subtracting the birth year from the year when parents completed the survey, and it ranged from 8 to 17 after data cleaning procedure (*M* = 12.4, *SD* = 2.6). Missing values (21.7%) were imputed later in the analysis.

Parental Advice Regarding Victimisation

Participants were asked how likely they would be to give their child specific advice if their child had been bullied at school. Parents were presented with ten items that captured various types of responses, such as ignoring, help-

seeking and retaliation (e.g., “I would advise him/her to get back at the bullies”). The responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very unlikely, 5 = Very likely).

Parental Advice Regarding Bullying Perpetration

Participants were asked how likely they would be to give their child certain advice if the child had bullied another student in school. There were nine items in the questionnaire that described various types of responses, such as empathy-raising and condemning (e.g., “I would tell my child that bullying can hurt another student badly”). The responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very unlikely, 5 = Very likely).

Analytic Plan

All statistical analyses were performed using R version 4.3 (R Core Team, 2014). First, we checked the internal structure of the parental advice scales regarding victimisation and bullying perpetration by conducting an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to better understand the clustering of the type of advice parents are likely to give to their children. However, the proposed structure always had at least one item in each factor with poor loading. Moreover, the Tucker-Lewis Index showed a poor fit in various structures. Thus, our second step was to examine the potential clustering using theory-based Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). For parental advice regarding victimisation, we aimed to validate the three-factor structure of the scale: Ignoring, Help-Seeking and Retaliation. For advice regarding bullying perpetration, we had planned to use a theoretical approach (Garandeau et al., 2016; Olweus, 1993), which suggested that there are two main responses: Condemning (i.e., disciplinary actions) and Empathy-Raising (i.e., explaining how bad it feels for the victim). Our aim was therefore to validate this two-factor structure with six items. However, with both advice regarding victimisation and bullying perpetration, these analyses yielded factors with low-reliability indices (based on Cronbach’s Alpha and Omega tests). As a result, we decided to analyse each item separately in the present study.

Since several items regarding bullying victimisation and perpetration showed substantial conceptual overlap, the ones with clearer and more precise wording were chosen for analysis. Moreover, items that demonstrated greater variability (larger standard deviations) were prioritised for inclusion. Following this selection process, nine items measuring parental advice regarding victimisation and six items measuring parental advice regarding bullying perpetration were retained for the final analyses. The correlation matrix between advice items is available in the appendix (Table 1 and Table 2).

Our analysis was performed with ordinal logistic regression models. Missing values were imputed using the *mice* package in R (five imputations). Regarding methods of data imputation, Predictive Mean Matching was used on

numeric variables, and Logistic Regression was used on binary variables. We did not perform imputation on the outcomes, as we pre-selected a subsample for whom these questionnaires have been filled.

We performed ordinal logistic regression where the dependent variables were individual items on advice (nine items for victimisation and six items for bullying perpetration), which were regressed (each in a separate model) on the parent's role (mother or father) and the child's gender (girl or boy) while controlling for the child's age. The regression estimates were pooled across the imputed datasets.

Results

Descriptive statistics

To determine which advice regarding bullying perpetration and victimisation parents choose as more likely to be given, we calculated the mean value for each item and the proportion of parents who rated each strategy as either "likely" or "very likely" on a Likert scale (Table 3). The preferred advice regarding bullying victimisation was *"We would think together about what to do in case that happens again"* (*M* = 4.81; *SD* = 0.49), with 98.7% of parents choosing it as likely or very likely to be recommended. This was followed by *"I would advise him/her to tell the teacher"* (97.9%; *M* = 4.80; *SD* = 0.57). In contrast, parents rarely chose *"I would advise him/her to get back at the bullies"* (6.7%; *M* = 1.90; *SD* = 0.97) and *"I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up"* (1.0%; *M* = 1.33; *SD* = 0.65) as strategies they would recommend.

Regarding advice to children who bully others, parents' preferred answer was *"I would try to make him/her understand, how bad it feels to the bullied student"* (98.8%; *M* = 4.87; *SD* = 0.44) followed by two items with the close proportion of parents who chose them as likely to recommend strategies: *"I would make it clear that he/she has misbehaved and it cannot happen again"* (98.6%; *M* = 4.86; *SD* = 0.47) and *"I would let him know that I love him/her, even though I do not approve his/her actions"* (97.8%; *M* = 4.74; *SD* = 0.55). Similar to advice given for victimisation, the least preferred item was *"I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up"* (0.6%; *M* = 1.16; *SD* = 0.50).

Regression models

Regarding a child's victimisation, the parent's role was a significant predictor of six types of advice (Table 4). The odds of not saying much because it is a part of growing up (*B* = 0.86; *SE* = 0.11; *OR* = 2.36) and advising to get back at the bullies (*B*= 0.75; *SE* = 0.09; *OR* = 2.13) were more than twice as high among fathers as among mothers. Mothers were more likely to promise the child they would think together about what to do (*B* = -0.75; *SE* = 0.13; *OR* = 0.47), to tell them that they will take care of it (*B* = -0.89; *SE* = 0.10; *OR* = 0.41), to tell them not to let themselves be

treated badly (*B* = -0.32; *SE* = 0.10; *OR* = 0.73), and to advice their child to tell the teacher (*B* = -0.69; *SE* = 0.13; *OR* = 0.50). Child's gender was not significantly associated with any item regarding bullying victimisation.

Regarding advice on bullying perpetration, a significant association between five items and the parent's role was found (Table 5). The odds of not saying much because it is a part of growing up (*B* = 0.79; *SE* = 0.14; *OR* = 2.19) were twice as high among fathers as among mothers. Mothers were more likely to try to make the child understand how bad it feels to the bullied student (*B* = -1.11; *SE* = 0.14; *OR* = 0.33), decide on appropriate consequences like less game time (*B* = -0.31; *SE* = 0.10; *OR* = 0.73), make it clear that the child has misbehaved and it cannot happen again (*B* = -0.42; *SE* = 0.15; *OR* = 0.65), and let the child know that she loves them, even though she does not approve these actions (*B* = -1.08; *SE* = 0.11; *OR* = 0.34). Furthermore, the child's gender was associated with two items. The odds of deciding on appropriate consequences (*B* = 0.16; *SE* = 0.07; *OR* = 1.18) and making it clear that the child has misbehaved and it cannot happen again (*B* = 0.28; *SE* = 0.12; *OR* = 1.32) were higher among parents of boys than parents of girls.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to investigate which advice parents give their children when they are involved in school bullying perpetration and victimisation, and examine whether this parental advice differs between mothers and fathers and varies according to the gender of the child. The results indicated that not only were some parental responses more commonly endorsed than others, but the parent's role and the child's gender were both related to the kind of advice or strategies that parents offered. Knowledge regarding the kind of advice parents give to their children is important as it might affect children's coping strategies, as well as their future behaviour and well-being.

Parents' Preferred Advice

Our study revealed that, should their child be victimised, the preferred strategy among parents was to discuss with the child what to do if this happens again. This is consistent with previous research highlighting that talking with the victimised child about the situation is a common approach used by parents (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Holt et al., 2008). The second most commonly reported strategy in case of victimisation was advising the child to tell a teacher, a response that has been found to be common in previous studies as well (Sawyer et al., 2011; Stives et al., 2019; Tu et al., 2021). Bullying is a social process influenced by its broader context, so the positive engagement of both parents (Bowes et al., 2010) and teachers (Veenstra et al., 2014) may prevent incidents and mitigate negative consequences. The findings also showed that parents were less likely to recommend ignoring, self-defence or active retaliation. Overall, parents' preferred strategies seemed to be constructive. However, some qualitative research (Sawyer et al., 2011) suggests that parents of victimised children may adjust their strategy recommendations according to external circumstances. For example, although parents value the "tell the teacher" advice and encourage their child to avoid retaliation, they may ultimately recommend retaliatory actions, even if they initially did not (Benatov, 2019; Sawyer et al., 2011). It is also important to

recognise that parents' responses to hypothetical situations reflect behavioural intentions, but they may be expressed without the emotions or self-efficacy concerns that parents often have when their child is actually being victimised. Moreover, it is likely that the children of many of our participating parents had not been bullied in real life or had only experienced bullying occasionally.

Regarding bullying perpetration, parents' preferred strategies were raising empathy towards the victimised child (emphasising how bad bullying feels to the victim) and condemning the child's bullying behaviour (making it clear that this behaviour cannot happen again). Both of these messages have been found useful when coming from teachers, increasing the bullying child's intention to change their behaviour (Garandeau et al., 2016), and therefore are likely to have a positive effect on the child's behaviour also when communicated by parents. However, we do not know to which extent the parents of children who actually bully their peers endorse such strategies. Parents are often unaware of their child's bullying behaviour (Holt et al., 2008) and only third of children who bullied others indicated that their parents talked to them about their behaviour (Fekkes et al., 2004). These findings suggest that parents may not address this behaviour at home, although it remains unclear whether this is due to their lack of awareness of their child's involvement in bullying.

Differences Between Mothers and Fathers

Although there were differences in the advice given by mothers and fathers, the effect sizes were small. On average, mothers were more likely than fathers to advise their victimised child to seek help from the teacher and to stand up for themselves. Moreover, mothers were more likely to promise their children to take care of the victimisation themselves so that the bullying stops. Furthermore, mothers were more likely to suggest thinking together with the child about what to do in case bullying happens again. Previous studies had similar results: compared to fathers, mothers were more likely to suggest help-seeking, as well as more prosocial and less confrontational strategies (Lee & Ju, 2019; Lester et al., 2017). Our study revealed that fathers scored higher than mothers on suggesting active retaliation to their child and on ignoring the bullying because "it is part of growing up". Prior studies showed that the results differed depending on the type of bullying, with one study showing that mothers scored higher than fathers in advising retaliation when their child had been exposed to verbal bullying (Allan et al., 2024; Lester et al., 2017). Our survey did not distinguish between types of bullying; however, such distinctions may be crucial in future research to obtain a better understanding of parental choice of advice.

With respect to bullying perpetration by the child, mothers scored higher than fathers on both empathy-raising (e.g., making the child understand how bad it feels to the bullied student) and condemning the behaviour (e.g., deciding on appropriate consequences like less game time), whereas fathers scored higher than mothers on ignoring "because

bullying is a part of growing up". Letting the child know that a parent is angry by yelling and scolding were equally rare among mothers and fathers. Our results align with previous research suggesting that mothers of children who bully others teach them prosocial strategies, by attempting to raise their empathy for the victim (Lee & Ju, 2019). However, studies on this topic remain limited and rarely involve fathers, due to their low participation rates in research on parenting.

For both bullying victimisation and perpetration, mothers scored higher than fathers on both emotional/prosocial and problem-solving/controlling/condemning items. Mothers in general, on the one hand, tend to provide more emotional support to their children (Alonso et al., 2025) and, on the other hand, take active roles in managing their child's routine (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). Being more involved emotionally and engaged in their child's life, including their relationships with peers and the school, mothers can be more inclined to offer both prosocial strategies and problem-solving approaches in their child's school life.

Advice Given to Girls and Boys

In case of victimisation, our findings suggest that the types of advice parents are ready to endorse do not differ for boys and for girls. Although some studies have shown that girls and boys differ in the type of responses that they choose when being bullied (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018), some previous research on the topic found no significant difference in the parental advice given to girls and to boys (e.g., Waasdorp et al., 2011). In the case of bullying perpetration, parents of boys were more likely to decide on appropriate consequences (such as less game time or curfew) and clearly communicate that the child had misbehaved and it cannot happen again, than in the case of girls' bullying behaviour. This may reflect broad gendered expectations: parents often perceive boys as more prone to externalising behaviours (such as aggression) and as risk-takers and consequently, their disruptive behaviour is more tolerated compared to girls (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). However, because the threshold for unacceptable behaviour may be higher for boys, parents might feel a strong need to assert authority and establish limits when that threshold is crossed. Since parents generally tend to monitor girls more (Dittman et al., 2023), they may consider disciplinary actions for addressing boys' severe misbehaviour more appropriate and effective.

One possible explanation for the finding that differences between parents of girls and boys emerged only in relation to bullying perpetration is that gendered parenting may primarily shape how parents interpret and respond to their child's behaviour, rather than how they interpret experiences that happen to the child (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). Thus, parents may communicate gender-differentiated expectations and norms more explicit in case of their child's bullying behaviour and less directly in relation to their child's victimisation experience.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, fathers are severely underrepresented in our sample. The same is true for previous quantitative and qualitative studies on parenting (Benatov, 2019; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Ledwell & King, 2015; Sawyer et al., 2011; Stives et al., 2019), with samples sometimes including only mothers despite attempts to recruit both mothers and fathers (McWood et al., 2023). This may be due to the fact that, overall, mothers are more involved in their children's lives and, consequently, more likely to participate in research about their children. This results in fathers' perspectives regarding their child's bullying perpetration/victimisation involvement being poorly understood and highlights the importance for future research to recruit more fathers.

Second, the variables included in our regression models only predicted a small proportion of variance in the advice and strategies endorsed by parents. This suggests that there are factors other than the ones included in our analyses that can explain the type of advice and strategy parents choose. Such factors may include parenting style, the parent's bullying-related attitudes and own history of bullying or victimisation at school, or the child's actual involvement in bullying (as a perpetrator or a victim).

Another limitation of this study concerns the use of hypothetical situations to assess parents' advice regarding bullying victimisation and perpetration since it might differ from parental advice given in real-life bullying situations. Moreover, the use of self-reports from parents may elicit socially desirable responses. More research that examines how endorsed advice translates into actual behaviour is needed to better understand how parents react on their child's involvement in bullying as a perpetrator or a victim.

Directions for Future Research

The current study points to several avenues for future research. First, considering that parental advice and reactions aim to reduce bullying incidents and help their child cope better with being bullied, research regarding whether and how children follow parental advice can be beneficial for the field. It is also important to examine whether the advice parents give actually helps when children do follow it. Many factors may influence how children perceive and respond to parental advice, including both what parents say and how they say it. Understanding parental advice from a child's perspective can highlight the importance of parent–child communication and improve guidelines for parents regarding bullying. Second, research shows that parental reactions and advice to their children might differ depending on the type of bullying their child is experiencing. Indeed, parents perceive types of bullying differently in terms of seriousness; for instance, parents view physical bullying more seriously than verbal bullying (Mishna et al., 2006). Thus, distinguishing between them may be crucial for getting a better understanding of parental choice of advice. Third, previous studies both explored real cases of parents who have children with bullying perpetration/victimisation experience and asked parents about their behaviour in hypothetical scenarios. Future studies could explore how parents' reactions might differ in real-

life situations from hypothetical ones, and whether responses change when parents have first-hand experience supporting a victimised child. Lastly, to better understand the role of context in parents' choice of strategy, more research with scenario-based or vignette methodologies is needed to investigate how factors such as type and frequency of bullying as well as cultural background influence the decision-making process that parents face in such circumstances.

Declarations

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Ethics approval

The study was approved by the Humanities and Social Sciences Division of the Ethics Committee for Human Sciences at the University of [MASKED FOR REVIEW] on 17.06.2020. The procedure used in this study adhere to the tenets of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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Table 1

Spearman Correlations: Advice Regarding Bullying Victimisation

Spearman correlations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. I would advise him/her to get back at the bullies	1.00								
2. I would say it is not worth worrying about the whole thing	.20 ***	1.00							
3. I would tell him/her not to let him/herself be treated badly	.09 ***	-.01	1.00						
4. I would advise him/her to tell to the teacher	-.12 ***	-.11 ***	.13 ***	1.00					
5. I would not say much, because I know such	.18 ***	.25 ***	-.07 ***	-.21 ***	1.00				

things are a part of growing up									
6. I would advise him/her to defend him/herself	.32 ***	.02	.41 ***	.05 *	-.01	1.00			
7. We would think together about what to do in case that happens again	-.11 ***	-.14 ***	.19 ***	.29 ***	-.26 ***	.12 ***	1.00		
8. I would promise that I will take care of it so that the bullying stops	-.01	-.12 ***	.23 ***	.22 ***	-.21 ***	.18 ***	.25 ***	1.00	
9. I would tell not to pay attention to what the bullies say	.07 ***	.40 ***	.04 *	.04 *	.06 ***	.06 **	.03	.04 *	1.00

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 2

Spearman Correlations: Advice Regarding Bullying Perpetration

Spearman correlations	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I would try to make him/her understand, how bad it feels to the bullied student	1.00					
2. I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up	-.29 ***	1.00				
3. I would decide on appropriate consequences (for example, less game time, curfew, or cancelling something nice that has been agreed on)	.20 ***	-.15 ***	1.00			

4. I would make it clear that he/she has misbehaved and it cannot happen again	.38 ***	-.22 ***	.31 ***	1.00		
5. I would let him know that I love him/her, even though I do not approve his/her actions	.28 ***	-.22 ***	.14 ***	.25 ***	1.00	
6. I would let him/her know that I am angry by yelling or scolding	.06 **	.02	.26 ***	.13 ***	-.07 ***	1.00

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Parental Advice Regarding Bullying Victimisation and Perpetration

	Mean (SD)	Proportion of parents who answered "likely" or "very likely"
Advice regarding bullying victimisation		
We would think together about what to do in case that happens again	4.81 (0.49)	98.7%
I would advise him/her to tell the teacher	4.80 (0.57)	97.9%
I would promise that I will take care of it so that the bullying stops	4.22 (0.90)	83.5%
I would tell him/her not to let him/herself be treated badly	4.12 (1.02)	82.3%
I would advise him/her to defend him/herself	3.67 (0.99)	68.5%
I would tell not to pay attention to what the bullies say	3.27 (1.28)	55.2%
I would say it is not worth worrying about the whole thing	2.37 (1.20)	22.9%
I would advise him/her to get back at the bullies	1.90 (0.97)	6.7%
I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up	1.33 (0.65)	1.0%
Advice regarding bullying perpetration		
I would try to make him/her understand, how bad it feels to the bullied student	4.87 (0.44)	98.8%

I would make it clear that he/she has misbehaved and it cannot happen again	4.86 (0.47)	98.6%
I would let him know that I love him/her, even though I do not approve his/her actions	4.74 (0.55)	97.8%
I would decide on appropriate consequences (for example, less game time, curfew, or cancelling something nice that has been agreed on)	4.21 (0.96)	82.4%
I would let him/her know that I am angry by yelling or scolding	3.07 (1.11)	42.0%
I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up	1.16 (0.50)	0.6%

Table 4

Ordinal Logistic Regression for Advice Regarding Bullying Victimisation

Models	B (SE)	OR	95% CI	*p*
I would advise him/her to get back at the bullies				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	0.75 (0.09)	2.13	(1.75, 2.58)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.06 (0.07)	0.95	(0.82, 1.09)	.436
Child's age	0.06 (0.02)	1.06	(1.03, 1.09)	< .001
Threshold 1/2	0.57 (0.19)	1.76	(1.21, 2.56)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	1.80 (0.19)	6.02	(4.11, 8.80)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	3.48 (0.21)	32.31	(21.59, 48.36)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	5.91 (0.31)	368.62	(202.82, 669.97)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .011				
I would say it is not worth worrying about the whole thing				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	0.14 (0.10)	1.15	(0.96, 1.39)	.137
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.06 (0.07)	0.95	(0.83, 1.08)	.415
Child's age	0.00 (0.02)	1.00	(0.98, 1.03)	.801
Threshold 1/2	-0.74 (0.19)	0.48	(0.33, 0.69)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	0.34 (0.19)	1.40	(0.96, 2.03)	.079
Threshold 3/4	1.26 (0.19)	3.51	(2.41, 5.11)	< .001

Threshold 4/5	3.47 (0.22)	32.19	(21.10, 49.12)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .001				
I would tell him/her not to let him/herself be treated badly				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.32 (0.10)	0.73	(0.60, 0.88)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.05 (0.08)	0.95	(0.82, 1.10)	.516
Child's age	0.03 (0.02)	1.03	(1.00, 1.06)	.033
Threshold 1/2	-3.03 (0.21)	0.05	(0.03, 0.07)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-1.99 (0.20)	0.14	(0.09, 0.20)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-1.22 (0.19)	0.30	(0.20, 0.43)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	0.63 (0.19)	1.88	(1.29, 2.75)	.001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .002				
I would advise him/her to tell to the teacher				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.69 (0.13)	0.50	(0.39, 0.65)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.18 (0.11)	1.20	(0.96, 1.49)	.104
Child's age	-0.10 (0.03)	0.91	(0.86, 0.95)	< .001
Threshold 1/2	-5.94 (0.39)	0.00	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-5.40 (0.38)	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-5.11 (0.37)	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	-2.99 (0.35)	0.05	(0.03, 0.10)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .016				

I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	0.86 (0.11)	2.36	(1.90, 2.92)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.96	(0.80, 1.14)	.625
Child's age	0.01 (0.02)	1.01	(0.97, 1.04)	.763
Threshold 1/2	1.32 (0.25)	3.73	(2.28, 6.10)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	2.74 (0.26)	15.45	(9.32, 25.60)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	4.87 (0.31)	130.65	(70.59, 241.81)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	6.23 (0.45)	507.84	(209.33, 1232.02)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .014				
I would advise him/her to defend him/herself				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.01 (0.10)	0.99	(0.81, 1.20)	.898
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.07 (0.07)	0.94	(0.81, 1.08)	.362
Child's age	0.03 (0.02)	1.03	(1.00, 1.06)	.102
Threshold 1/2	-2.95 (0.22)	0.05	(0.03, 0.08)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-1.49 (0.21)	0.23	(0.15, 0.34)	< .001
Threshold ¾	-0.49 (0.21)	0.61	(0.41, 0.92)	.019
Threshold 4/5	1.91 (0.21)	6.77	(4.50, 10.20)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .001				
We would think together about what to do in case that happens again				

Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.75 (0.13)	0.47	(0.37, 0.61)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.06 (0.11)	1.06	(0.86, 1.30)	.602
Child's age	-0.03 (0.02)	0.97	(0.93, 1.02)	.200
Threshold 1/2	-5.81 (0.41)	0.00	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-5.15 (0.36)	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-4.83 (0.35)	0.01	(0.00, 0.02)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	-2.17 (0.31)	0.12	(0.06, 0.21)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .012				
I would promise that I will take care of it so that the bullying stops				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.89 (0.10)	0.41	(0.34, 0.50)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.10 (0.07)	1.11	(0.96, 1.28)	.152
Child's age	-0.01 (0.02)	0.99	(0.96, 1.03)	.608
Threshold 1/2	-4.42 (0.27)	0.01	(0.01, 0.02)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-3.08 (0.23)	0.05	(0.03, 0.07)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-1.84 (0.22)	0.16	(0.10, 0.25)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	0.01 (0.22)	1.01	(0.66, 1.55)	.973
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .013				
I would tell not to pay attention to what the bullies say				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	0.11 (0.10)	1.12	(0.93, 1.35)	.235
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.04 (0.07)	0.96	(0.83, 1.10)	.531

Child's age	-0.03 (0.01)	0.97	(0.95, 1.00)	.044
Threshold 1/2	-2.17 (0.19)	0.11	(0.08, 0.17)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-1.25 (0.18)	0.29	(0.20, 0.41)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-0.57 (0.18)	0.57	(0.40, 0.81)	.002
Threshold 4/5	1.38 (0.19)	3.97	(2.76, 5.70)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .001				

Table 5

Ordinal Logistic Regression for Advice Regarding Bullying Perpetration

Models	β (SE)	OR	95% CI	*p*
I would try to make him/her understand, how bad it feels to the bullied student				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-1.11 (0.14)	0.33	(0.25, 0.44)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.08 (0.13)	1.08	(0.84, 1.39)	.549
Child's age	-0.03 (0.03)	0.97	(0.91, 1.04)	.439
Threshold 1/2	-6.19 (0.54)	0.00	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-5.19 (0.48)	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-4.96 (0.47)	0.01	(0.00, 0.02)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	-2.71 (0.44)	0.07	(0.03, 0.16)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .026				
I would not say much, because I know such things are a part of growing up				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	0.79 (0.14)	2.19	(1.66, 2.90)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	-0.03 (0.13)	0.98	(0.76, 1.25)	.843
Child's age	-0.04 (0.03)	0.96	(0.92, 1.01)	.124
Threshold 1/2	1.72 (0.32)	5.60	(3.00, 10.45)	< .001

Threshold 2/3	3.07 (0.33)	21.61	(11.32, 41.28)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	4.72 (0.39)	112.48	(52.19, 242.42)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	5.05 (0.42)	156.06	(68.77, 354.19)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .012				
I would decide on appropriate consequences (for example, less game time, curfew, or cancelling something nice that has been agreed on)				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.31 (0.10)	0.73	(0.60, 0.89)	.002
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.16 (0.07)	1.18	(1.02, 1.36)	.029
Child's age	0.02 (0.02)	1.02	(0.99, 1.05)	.340
Threshold 1/2	-3.59 (0.23)	0.03	(0.02, 0.04)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-2.39 (0.21)	0.09	(0.06, 0.14)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-1.33 (0.20)	0.26	(0.18, 0.39)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	0.31 (0.20)	1.37	(0.93, 2.01)	.110
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .002				
I would make it clear that he/she has misbehaved and it cannot happen again				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.42 (0.15)	0.65	(0.49, 0.88)	.005
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.28 (0.12)	1.32	(1.05, 1.67)	.020
Child's age	-0.02 (0.02)	0.98	(0.94, 1.03)	.482
Threshold 1/2	-5.53 (0.42)	0.00	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001

Threshold 2/3	-4.80 (0.36)	0.01	(0.00, 0.02)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-4.40 (0.35)	0.01	(0.01, 0.02)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	-2.18 (0.31)	0.11	(0.06, 0.21)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .006				
I would let him know that I love him/her, even though I do not approve his/her actions				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-1.08 (0.11)	0.34	(0.27, 0.42)	< .001
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.05 (0.10)	1.06	(0.88, 1.27)	.570
Child's age	-0.02 (0.02)	0.99	(0.95, 1.02)	.441
Threshold 1/2	-5.95 (0.40)	0.00	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-4.98 (0.32)	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)	< .001
Threshold 3/4	-4.20 (0.29)	0.02	(0.01, 0.03)	< .001
Threshold 4/5	-1.57 (0.26)	0.21	(0.13, 0.34)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .025				
I would let him/her know that I am angry by yelling or scolding				
Parent's role (reference = mother)	-0.08 (0.10)	0.92	(0.76, 1.11)	.390
Child's gender (reference = girl)	0.08 (0.07)	1.08	(0.94, 1.24)	.254
Child's age	0.02 (0.02)	1.02	(0.99, 1.05)	.273
Threshold 1/2	-1.80 (0.20)	0.17	(0.11, 0.24)	< .001
Threshold 2/3	-0.65 (0.19)	0.52	(0.36, 0.76)	< .001

Threshold 3/4	0.56 (0.19)	1.75	(1.20, 2.56)	.004
Threshold 4/5	2.96 (0.21)	19.23	(12.84, 28.80)	< .001
McFadden's pseudo R^2 = .001				