Behind the Scenes of Bullying Prevention

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A Closer Look at Program Development, Implementation, Mechanisms of Action, and Evaluation

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Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, then it's not the end.

(Attributed to John Lennon)

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Résumé

Le harcèlement à l'école scolaire reste une préoccupation majeure dans de nombreuses écoles. Par conséquent, de nombreux programmes de prévention ont été élaborés pour lutter contre cette forme de violence. Cependant, leur impact sur la réduction du harcèlement et de la victimisation reste limité depuis plus d'une décennie. Cette thèse identifie quatre problèmes qui entravent à la fois l'évaluation précise des résultats des programmes et leur efficacité globale. Ces problèmes concernent le développement, la mise en œuvre, les mécanismes d'action et l'évaluation des programmes. Nous avons profité de la mise en œuvre du programme KiVa en Belgique francophone pour mener quatre études visant fournir des réponses partielles à ces questions et à explorer les processus qui se déroulent dans les coulisses des programmes de prévention du harcèlement à l'école. Nos résultats contribuent à une meilleure compréhension du phénomène du harcèlement à l'école tout en remettant en question plusieurs théories largement utilisées dans ce domaine.

Abstract

School bullying remains a major concern in many schools. As a result, numerous prevention programs have been developed to address this form of violence. However, their impact on reducing bullying and victimization has remained limited for over a decade. This dissertation identifies four issues that hinder both the accurate evaluation of program outcomes and their overall effectiveness. These issues relate to program development, implementation, mechanisms of action, and evaluation. We took the opportunity provided by the implementation of the KiVa program in French-speaking Belgium to conduct four studies, aiming to shed light on these issues and to explore the processes behind the scenes of bullying prevention programs. Our findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of bullying and challenge several common assumptions in the field.

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In the chaos of life, what we build together between human beings gives our stories meaning, hope, and brightness.

NTO X Sofiane Pamart, *Manifesto* (Forever Friends)

Chapter 1

General introduction

General introduction

In occidental countries, schools, as the primary institutions for learning and socialization, play a crucial role in the education of future citizens. Schools must provide a safe environment for students to learn the rules of society and develop their skills (UN General Assembly, 1989). However, this safe environment is not always guaranteed, as schools can also be the place of various forms of violence, with school bullying being a significant concern (Greene, 2006; Inchley et al., 2020; Zych et al., 2015). Consequently, bullying prevention programs were developed to help schools in their mission to make students feel safe in their environment and promote public health (Gaffney et al., 2019a).

Despite significant progress in the research on bullying prevention programs, there are still understudied limitations that preclude accurate evaluations of their effects and hinder their effectiveness. Most of these limitations have emerged because program evaluation studies solely assess the impact of the programs on bullying, thereby neglecting crucial issues and leaving important questions related to program development, implementation, mechanisms of action, and evaluation unanswered (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). This dissertation aims to shed some light on these general limitations by investigating the processes behind the scenes of bullying prevention programs.

1. What is Bullying and Why Prevent it?

Since pioneer Dan Olweus' first study on bullying in Norway in 1978, interest in this phenomenon has grown to become a major concern in schools worldwide (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Smith & Brain, 2000; Zych et al., 2015). Studies first started to observe school bullying and victimization (i.e., being bullied) as harmful and repeated actions toward a student on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1991). Based on this definition, four characteristics of bullying have been specified. First, negative actions refer to intentionally causing discomfort or hurt. This formulation is purposely vague because it aims to capture a large range of aggressive behaviors: physical, verbal, social, attacks on property, and, more recently, through electronic devices (i.e., cyberbullying; Joseph & Stockton, 2018). In addition, this characteristic excludes accidental negative behaviors such as unintentionally pushing or ignoring someone (Olweus, 1993). Second, bullying is not an isolated incident but rather a series of repetitive, long-lasting behaviors. Third, the definition specifies that the author of bullying behaviors is not necessarily acting alone but is often part of a group. Finally, it was added that there must be a power imbalance between the authors and the victims to distinguish bullying from other types of aggression. In other words, this implies that victims have difficulties defending themselves (Olweus, 1993).

This first attempt to define and clarify what bullying is has led to increased interest in the phenomenon worldwide (Smith & Brain, 2000). In parallel, several debates have emerged about the concept itself. The power imbalance characteristic has notably been criticized because it is hard to define (Finkelhor et al., 2012). It could arise from numerous sources and restricting it to strength, popularity, age, or wealth may give an incomplete picture of bullying

(Finkelhor et al., 2012; Green et al., 2013). Moreover, repetition has also been debated because it could exclude isolated but severe acts of aggression (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Volk et al., 2014). Therefore, some scholars have suggested focusing on harmfulness, which combines the intensity and frequency of bullying behaviors (Volk et al., 2014). It has also been noted that assessing intentionality is complicated (Sercombe & Donnelly, 2013) and should be replaced by the goal of the behaviors (i.e., goal-directedness; Volk et al., 2014). This characteristic implies that bullying is always looking at fulfilling an objective, such as reaching social dominance or accumulating resources. However, this criterion has been challenged by research that found that students combining the profiles of bullies and victims sometimes show aggressive behaviors not associated with any adaptative outcomes (Marini et al., 2006).

The criterion regarding the importance of the group is widely accepted by the scientific community. The first research on the participant role approach (Salmivalli et al., 1996) demonstrated that beyond the bullies and the victims, the other students could encourage and assist the bullies, defend the victims, or ignore the situation. These students, called bystanders, indirectly participate in bullying and influence the bullying dynamic. More recent empirical research has suggested combining the role of bullies, reinforcers, and assistants, given their important overlapping (Troop-Gordon et al., 2019). Overall, defining bullying is still a matter of debate (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Volk et al., 2017), but most studies on bullying are based on the first definition proposed by Olweus (Volk et al., 2017).

Bullying is a cause for concern and has been the subject of extensive research due to its prevalence and harmful consequences. The prevalence of bullying has ranged from 10% to 30% worldwide (Inchley et al., 2020; Modecki et al., 2014). These variations between studies are partially due to the different scales used, making the interpretation of absolute prevalence meaningless in isolation (Smith, 2016). Nevertheless, it could be concluded that bullying is a widespread problem rather than an anecdotal phenomenon.

Bullying has been associated with numerous negative outcomes. The most established consequences of being bullied during childhood are an increasing risk of developing internalized symptoms (i.e., depression and anxiety), poor general health, and suicidal ideation later in life (Moore et al., 2017; Schoeler et al., 2018). Adopting bullying behaviors may also be at greater risk of developing undesirable life outcomes. For instance, bullying others during childhood increases the risk of showing more externalized symptoms (i.e., aggressiveness, violence, impulsivity), other delinquent behaviors, and less school adjustment (Ttofi et al., 2012; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Bullies who are also victimized (i.e., bully-victims) tend to experience negative outcomes associated with both profiles (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Finally, even witnessing bullying is associated with psychological and academic difficulties and a more negative perception of the school (Janosz et al., 2008; Kubiszewski, 2016). This implies that all students, even those not victimized or directly involved, could suffer from bullying. All these studies underscore the necessity of intervening in bullying to alleviate the adverse outcomes experienced by all students. Moreover, it is imperative to prevent bullying to avoid its short-term effects and to preclude more severe escalations, such as suicide or high levels of violence.

2. Bullying Prevention Programs

Given the prevalence and the consequences of bullying, both researchers and policymakers have multiplied their efforts to detect, prevent, and tackle bullying. Historically, the first attempt to prevent bullying has emerged with the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP; Olweus, 2003). The program included recommendations to enhance supervision in the playground and at lunchtime, in-class activities for students, reinforcement of classroom rules, and discussions with bullies, victims, and bystanders (Olweus, 2003, p. 66). The program was associated with a significant reduction in bullying and victimization (Jimerson et al., 2009). In addition, it also reduced other aggressive behaviors and improved several dimensions of the school climate. These results and the increased concern around bullying due to cases of suicide and school shootings have brought researchers and stakeholders to export the OBPP to other countries (Merrell et al., 2008) and inspired the development of other programs around the world (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009).

Since 2010, following the recommendations of meta-analyses and lessons learned, bullying prevention programs have multiplied, and some of them have been developed using evidence-based practices to enhance their effectiveness (Galand et al., 2023). About 70 different bullying prevention programs have been identified around the world (Gaffney et al., 2021a). In 2010, the most notable evolution was the expansion of the whole-school approach (Gaffney et al., 2021b). This approach targets not only authors and victims of bullying but also students not directly involved (i.e., the bystanders) and all teachers, school actors, parents within the school community (Valle et al., 2020). In addition, efforts are being made to integrate bullying prevention into school policy and the physical environment (e.g., displaying posters reminding students of anti-bullying rules; Lekamge et al., 2025). In a decade, meta-analyses indicate that the number of whole-school bullying prevention programs has nearly doubled, becoming the most implemented type of program in schools (Gaffney et al., 2021b; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009). Bullying prevention programs following the whole-school approach intend to combine multiple strategies to prevent bullying (e.g., socio-emotional activities, strengthening rules regarding bullying, increasing awareness and knowledge of bullying) and to target all individuals within and around the school (i.e., students directly involved in bullying, but also their peers, teachers, parents, educators, and school psychologists). In addition, some whole-school programs have included both actions to prevent future bullying and handle identified cases (Valle et al., 2020).

Several studies suggest that the whole-school approach is associated with better effectiveness (Gaffney et al., 2021b; Valle et al., 2020). Therefore, some whole-school programs have benefited from extensive evaluations in different countries (e.g., OBPP, ViSC & KiVa; Gaffney et al., 2019b). Among these programs, one of the most evaluated is KiVa (Kiusaamista Vastaan, “against bullying” in Finnish). It is based on the participant role approach (Kärnä et al., 2011a; Salmivalli et al., 1996), which considers bullying as a group process where bystanders can decrease bullying by actively defending the victim. Consequently, the program plans to target all students to improve their defending behaviors, and it also directly targets bullies and victims when bullying occurs. Several evaluations of the KiVa program have shown positive effects and a reduction of bullying and victimization

(e.g., Huitsing et al., 2020; Kärnä et al., 2011b; Nocentini & Menesini, 2016), making it one of the programs with the most replicated positive effects across countries.

Overall, research has emphasized the importance of bullying, which must be addressed and prevented at school. Policies are adopted in an increasing number of countries to compel schools to implement bullying prevention programs (Hall, 2017). Therefore, research on bullying prevention is still needed to evaluate new programs or their adaptations to specific populations and contexts (Gaffney et al., 2019b; Kubiszewski, 2024).

3. The Remaining Issues in Bullying Prevention Programs

Replication studies and new program evaluations have yielded weaker results than the OBPP's original evaluation, and most programs showed no significant reduction in bullying after their implementation in schools (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). This was notably explained by the different methodologies used across studies. The first evaluations of OBPP compared students not receiving the intervention in a specific year with other students of the same age receiving it one year later (i.e., age cohort designs). These results were compared to cluster Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT), which compare students randomly allocated to experimental or control groups. RCTs are considered the gold standard for evaluating bullying prevention programs (because they have better internal validity) but have generally yielded less important results than age cohort designs (Gaffney et al., 2019a). A meta-analysis also deplored that school bullying programs tend only to impact knowledge, attitudes, and self-perceptions rather than actual bullying behaviors (Merrell et al., 2008). Another more optimistic meta-analysis reported that bullying prevention programs, on average, reduced the number of bullies and victims by around 20% (Gaffney et al., 2019a). On the one hand, it means that bullying prevention programs can have a positive impact and reduce bullying significantly. On the other hand, it means that, on average, a substantial number of bullying cases remain unchanged even after implementing a prevention program. In addition, variations in effect sizes between program evaluations are still poorly understood.

Since the creation of bullying prevention programs in the late 1970s, their implementation in schools has frequently responded to an urgent need to reduce bullying due to dramatic situations (e.g., school shootings and suicides; Huitsing et al., 2020; Merrell et al., 2008) or alarming reports about its critical prevalence in a country (e.g., Herkama et al., 2017). Once these situations are reported by the media and disseminated to the public, they exert pressure on policymakers to take prompt action. The imperative for rapid implementation of bullying prevention programs in schools has led stakeholders and researchers to circumvent essential issues. Most of them pertain to the development of the programs (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022), how bullying is measured (Casper et al., 2015), their implementation, and their evaluation (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). This dissertation aims to explore these issues that impede the accuracy of assessment and the effectiveness of bullying prevention by examining the processes that occur behind the scenes. This dissertation focuses on four of these issues: (1) the implications of selecting a specific measure to assess bullying are unclear, (2) many variables associated with bullying and used to prevent bullying (e.g., empathy and class

norms) lack robust evidence of predictive validity, (3) evaluation studies of a bullying prevention program often neglect to assess implementation at the class level, (4) the same evaluation studies tend to only test the effect of the program on bullying and victimization, overlooking mechanisms supposed to explain their effectiveness. These issues are detailed in the following sections.

3.1 First Issue: The Lack of Guidelines When Selecting a Bullying Measure

Bullying can be assessed from multiple perspectives using a variety of scales. A recent systematic review has identified 75 different scales to measure bullying and victimization (Xie et al., 2022). Among these, three types are the most commonly used across studies. The first is a self-report scale that presents a definition of bullying to students (definition-based measure). The responders are required to complete the scale by indicating the number of instances in which they have engaged in bullying or been victimized, according to the definition presented (e.g., Cosma et al., 2024). The second scale is also self-reported but presents specific behaviors instead of a definition (behavior-based measure). Students are then asked to indicate the number of times they have engaged in or been subjected to these specific behaviors (e.g., Joseph & Stockton, 2018). The last scale also presents a definition to students but then asks them to indicate which of their peers engage in bullying or are bullied (peer-reported measure; e.g., Kärnä et al., 2011a). The existence of these different types of scales has given rise to two debates.

First, presenting a definition in the measure has been proposed as a means of capturing the characteristics of bullying and facilitating a shared understanding between students and researchers (Vessey et al., 2014; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). However, presenting the term "bullying" might result in underreporting due to its negative connotation, and a lengthy definition might impede a clear understanding of the question (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000; Thomas et al., 2014). While measures that avoid the definition of bullying and instead focus on specific behaviors may overcome these limitations (Huang & Cornell, 2015), behavior-based measures may neglect the power imbalance characteristic and instead measure general aggression (Ybarra et al., 2014).

Second, many bullying scales have relied on self-report, as students' subjective perceptions are often necessary to obtain reliable information about their own behaviors and experiences (Olweus, 2013). However, these measures are subject to social desirability biases (Cole et al., 2006; Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2013). In light of these considerations, peer-reported measures have been designed to circumvent these biases. Nevertheless, relying on peer reports may result in an inaccurate estimation of bullying and victimization due to the selective relationship between students and their unawareness of certain indirect bullying behaviors (Casper et al., 2015; Volk et al., 2017).

The advantages and limitations of each measurement strategy have given rise to ongoing debates concerning the assessment of bullying (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2022). However, most arguments are based on theory, and there is a lack of empirical evidence.

Consequently, the selection of a specific scale has become increasingly challenging for those engaged in the evaluation of bullying, with the implications of this decision remaining unclear (Jia & Mikami, 2018). A significant challenge arises when attempting to compare results from different studies and summarize the current state of knowledge in the field of bullying literature (Casper et al., 2015). Notably, the comparison of the impact of different bullying prevention programs is sometimes challenging when different scales are employed to evaluate their efficacy. Moreover, although some studies used different scales for the same program evaluation, discrepant results depending on the scale used call into question the general efficacy of the program (Saarento et al., 2015a; van Verseveld et al., 2021).

Studies that have addressed this issue are inconclusive. Some found that presenting a definition did not change bullying prevalence (Cook et al., 2009; Modecki et al., 2014), while some did (Chen & Cheng, 2013; Huang & Cornell, 2015). Correlations between peer and self-reported bullying measures ranged from small to large (Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2013; Kärnä et al., 2011b). In addition, empirical studies found that presenting a definition did not influence associations with other variables (Cook et al., 2010). However, bullying self-reported measures seem more strongly associated with internalizing and externalizing symptoms, while peer-reported measures correlate more with social indicators such as social rejection and acceptance (Bouman et al., 2012; Košir et al., 2020).

Establishing a unique bullying scale to be employed in all studies may not be the optimal solution. Different measures may fulfill different objectives and observe bullying from different lenses (Iliescu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, it is crucial to comprehend the rationale and consequences of selecting a specific scale and justify this decision. Some studies have suggested including both behaviors and (part of) the definition in the scale (e.g., Felix et al., 2011; Palladino et al., 2015; Sjögren et al., 2025), but such a combination is not commonly found in bullying research (Xie et al., 2022). More empirical studies are necessary to guide researchers and practitioners in making informed decisions and understanding the implications of selecting one of the most commonly used measurement methods.

3.2 Second Issue: The Variables Associated with Bullying Lack Evidence of Predictive Validity

Two main approaches have been formulated to explain the development of bullying. The first focuses on the individual and proposes that bullies share characteristics that need to be addressed to reduce these behaviors (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). One of the most widely spread assumptions is that some students bully others because they lack empathy (Endresen & Olweus, 2001), which is defined as the capacity to understand and feel the emotions of others (Cuff et al., 2016; Davis, 1983). The second approach conceptualizes bullying as an adaptive process that helps students reach popularity and a dominant social status in a group (Volk et al., 2022). In this approach, classmates and teachers play a crucial role because they can determine the social position and popularity of students (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). In other words, classmates and teachers are the two most studied protagonists because they are the two primary sources of normative influence on students' bullying behaviors (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Yoon et al., 2020).

In light of these theories, numerous bullying prevention programs have incorporated empathy lessons and components for peers and teachers into their curriculum (Gaffney et al., 2021b; Valle et al., 2020). However, most of the variables assumed as predictors[1] of bullying lack empirical evidence indicating that a change in these variables results in a subsequent change in bullying behaviors. Indeed, many variables included in bullying prevention programs curricula are only supported by cross-sectional studies, which only give information about the strength of association with bullying (Zych et al., 2019a). Therefore, it is still unclear which variables should be targeted to decrease bullying. More longitudinal studies are needed, using appropriate statistical analysis to unravel their unique associations with bullying over time are needed (Kljakovic & Hunt, 2016; Zych et al., 2019a).

3.2.1 Testing the Effect of Empathy on Bullying

The extensive research conducted on empathy has led to its integration into the curriculum of many bullying prevention programs as a way to decrease bullying (Gaffney et al., 2021b). However, some caveats have been expressed regarding the assumed causal relation between bullying and empathy. First, most studies separate cognitive empathy (i.e., understanding others' emotions) from affective empathy (i.e., feeling others' emotions; Cuff et al., 2016) as they are differently linked to bullying (Zych et al., 2019b). Although studies have found that both dimensions of empathy are negatively correlated with bullying in meta-analyses (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; Zych et al., 2019b), inconsistent associations found across studies may indicate that these associations are relatively weak (particularly for cognitive empathy). Moreover, the strength of the links has been found to change when variables such as gender or age are considered (Caravita et al., 2009; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015).

Second, the limited longitudinal studies available preclude the ability to draw firm conclusions regarding the direction of effects. Moreover, results from the few longitudinal studies are inconsistent. Some studies have found a significant and negative effect of affective empathy on future bullying (Stavrinides et al., 2010; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022), while others have not (Farrell et al., 2020; Saarento et al., 2015a). To better address this question, Cross-Lagged Panels Models (CLPM; Selig & Little, 2012) have been proposed to disentangle the directions of effects (see Figure 1b). This model uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and requires at least two variables and two waves of data. By considering stability over time (auto-regressive paths) and associations between variables at the same measurement time (covariances), this design allows researchers to determine if variables predict each other over time (cross-lagged paths). The CLPM has been extensively used in psychological research to go beyond establishing associations between variables. However, to our knowledge, no study has used such a design to investigate relations between bullying and empathy. The results closest to a CLPM used longitudinal linear regressions (Figure 1a), which only used cross-lagged paths but no auto-regressive nor covariance paths. This study found a significant yet small bidirectional effect between affective empathy and bullying

[1] In this dissertation, « predictors » refer to variables that may be influenced by bullying prevention programs and exclude variables such as gender or age.

(Stavrinides et al., 2010). Despite these unconvincing results, empathy is still assumed to be a predictor of bullying that must be addressed to prevent bullying (Garandeau et al., 2021; Zych et al., 2019b).

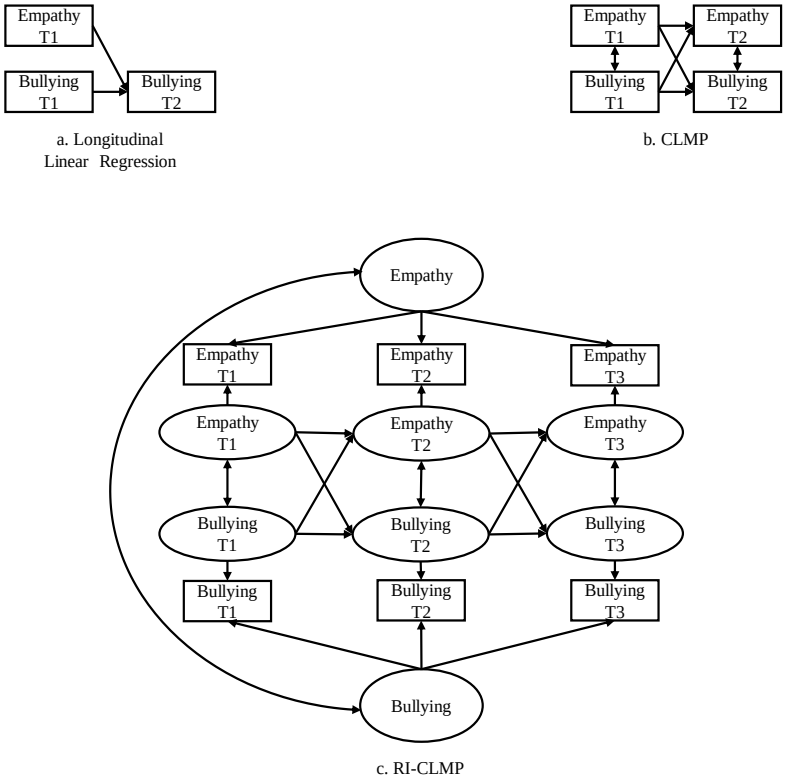


Figure 1. Models that could be used to explore the longitudinal relationships between bullying and empathy.

Although a CLPM on bullying and empathy would provide important results, this model has been criticized for not considering the influence of unobserved time-invariant variables (Hamaker et al., 2015; Usami et al., 2019). In other words, even if the CLPM included auto-regressive paths that capture the stability of the measured concepts over time, it does not control for the influence of individuals' stable traits (i.e., between-person differences; Hamaker et al., 2015). Therefore, the threat of an unobserved time-invariant variable explaining the relations between two other variables is still present in a CLPM and could create spurious results (Lucas, 2023). Adding Random Intercepts in a CLPM (RI-CLPM; see Figure 1c) overcomes this limitation and controls for between-person differences when providing within-person deviations at each time point (Hamaker et al., 2015; Usami et al., 2019). The RI-CLPM could only be modeled by using at least three measurement times. In

the case of bullying, relations between empathy and bullying could be influenced by time-invariant variables such as gender (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015) or personality traits (e.g., narcissism; Fanti & Kimonis, 2012; Farrell et al., 2020). Therefore, although a CLPM that investigates whether an increase in empathy leads to a decrease in bullying seems appropriate, the addition of random intercepts to control for the stable relation between these variables might provide even more accurate results.

3.2.2 Testing the Effect of Class-Level Predictors Bullying

The theory conceptualizing bullying as a strategy to gain social acceptance has led to the assumption that bullies could change their behaviors to fit the group. Therefore, if bullying is associated with social rejection in the class, students would be less prone to engage in such behaviors. Conversely, if bullying is rewarded with a gain in popularity or social dominance, students are more likely to engage in such behaviors (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Given that teachers and classmates can determine which behaviors are expected and approved (or not) in the classroom (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Yoon et al., 2020), several studies have investigated their role in the bullying dynamic. Classmates' influence on bullying has been mainly studied through the framework of class norms (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021), while teachers' influence has been mainly examined based on their responses to bullying situations (Colpin et al., 2021).

Class Norms

Different subtypes of class norms have been investigated to understand the role of classmates in the bullying dynamic. The descriptive class norm refers to what most students do, while the injunctive class norm refers to what most students (dis)approve (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). Regarding the descriptive class norm, the majority of studies focused on defending behaviors, which are actions taken by bystanders in a bullying situation that are aimed at standing up to the bullies or helping the victim (Salmivalli et al., 1996). These individual behaviors, when aggregated at the class level, represent the descriptive defending peer norm (Salmivalli, 2010). The injunctive bullying class norm is obtained through the aggregation of students' attitudes toward bullying in a class (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). This type of norm has also been targeted by several interventions to decrease bullying behaviors (e.g., Kärnä et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2011). However, evidence supporting class norms as a predictor of bullying is mixed overall (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2021; Nocentini et al., 2013; Scholte et al., 2010; Sentse et al., 2015).

The estimation of the effect of class norms on bullying involves two statistical considerations. First, multilevel analysis is required to consider the inherent nested structure of the data and the non-independence of observations (Lüdtke et al., 2009). Second, when aggregating behaviors or attitudes at the class level, it is necessary to integrate the same variable at both levels to adequately isolate the effect of class norms (see the big-fish-little-pond effect; Marsh et al., 2012). Therefore, the effect of class norms should be estimated through a multilevel model and control for students' individual characteristics (because they

do not have the same level of defending behaviors and attitudes toward bullying). Studies on the injunctive bullying norm generally followed these recommendations (e.g., Scholte et al., 2010; Sentse et al., 2015). On the contrary, studies on the descriptive defending peer norm and bullying rarely considered these two statistical recommendations but are often used to justify the importance of this peer norm in bullying prevention (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2001; Nocentini et al., 2013; Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Teachers' Reactions

Regarding teachers' reactions to bullying, studies generally differentiated passive from active reactions (Yoon et al., 2023). Passive reactions regroup all teachers' behaviors that do not aim at changing the bullying situation (e.g., ignoring or not taking any actions) and are associated with more bullying behaviors (Campaert et al., 2017). On the contrary, active reactions, which represent any actions taken against bullying situations, are associated with less bullying behaviors (Veenstra et al., 2014).

Studies on active reactions to adopt when facing bullying have yielded inconsistent results, precluding the formulation of clear recommendations for teachers (Bauman et al., 2021). When targeting the involved students, teachers can work with victims and try to foster their assertiveness or advise them to walk away from the bully (Bauman et al., 2008). Some studies found that this reaction is associated with less bullying, while others found adverse effects because it may communicate that victims should manage the situation independently (Burger et al., 2022; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015). Teachers can target bullies by using disciplinary methods or by raising their empathy toward the victims. Both have been associated with lower scores of bullying (Burger et al., 2022; Wachs et al., 2019), but in the long term, disciplinary methods might foster retaliation or less visible forms of bullying (van der Zanden et al., 2015; Wachs et al., 2019). In addition, working with the bullies and victims simultaneously (e.g., by having an interview with both at the same time) may have adverse effects because victims need a safe space to express themselves without the presence of their bullies (Senden & Galand, 2021). Finally, teachers reacting to bullying by involving other adults, such as colleagues, school psychologists, or parents, has been associated with both positive and negative effects (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015; van der Zanden et al., 2015).

These discrepant results could be partially explained by the various methods used across studies to assess teachers' reactions to bullying. Some studies have used teacher-reported questionnaires, while others have asked students to report their perceptions of their teachers' reactions (Bauman et al., 2021). To our knowledge, no studies have compared the effects of these different methods on bullying by integrating them into a unique model. Therefore, we do not know if these methods bring complementary information or if students perceive teachers' reactions as teachers report them.

The Combined Influence of Class Norms and Teachers' Reactions

Beyond these specific methodological issues, the normative influence of classmates and teachers has rarely been studied simultaneously and longitudinally. To our knowledge, only a few studies have integrated both protagonists into one single model (Kollerová et al., 2018;

Saarento et al., 2015a). However, these studies only focused on teachers' attitudes toward bullying (and not teachers' reactions; Kollerová et al., 2018; Saarento et al., 2015a), and one did not measure descriptive defending norms or use bullying as the dependent variable (Kollerová et al., 2018). As a result, it is still unclear whether peers and teachers exert independent influences on students' individual bullying behaviors over time. Practically, we do not know if efforts should be directed toward students, teachers, or both to reduce bullying.

3.3 Third Issue: The Implementation of Bullying Prevention Programs is not Assessed at the Class Level

During the implementation of a bullying prevention program in a school, it is crucial to monitor how the program is running in each class and whether teachers are following the curriculum. Numerous studies have observed large variations between classrooms in the implementation of a program (Axford et al., 2020; Klocek et al., 2024), which have influenced its general effectiveness (Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). Assessing the degree of implementation of a program can be particularly challenging due to the numerous components to measure. Four main dimensions have been identified at the class level: (1) fidelity refers to how closely the program delivered corresponds to the original program, (2) quality refers to how well various program components have been executed, (3) participant responsiveness refers to the program's ability to capture the interest and attention of students, and (4) dosage represents the number of activities proposed by the program delivered in classes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

It is recommended to assess several dimensions of implementation to capture the breadth of the implementation in each class (Goncy et al., 2015; Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). However, when evaluating bullying prevention programs at a large scale, it has been argued that the priority lies in the assessment of dosage to differentiate classes that fully implemented the program from those that did not (or insufficiently; Joronen et al., 2011). Furthermore, the number of activities implemented in each classroom following a bullying prevention program has been found to directly impact its effectiveness (Haataja et al., 2014; Swift et al., 2017). Despite these recommendations, assessing dosage among classes is often overlooked in bullying prevention evaluations or only measured at the school level (Goncy et al., 2015). Consequently, all classes are often considered to have benefited from the same number of activities. Assessing dosage is required to control for this discrepancy between classrooms before evaluating the effect of a bullying prevention program (Swift et al., 2017).

3.4 Fourth Issue: The Logic Model of Bullying Prevention Programs is Rarely Tested

A limitation frequently encountered during the evaluation of school bullying prevention programs is the lack of consideration of the logic model (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Volk et al., 2017). A logic model summarizes the theoretical framework underlying a bullying prevention program. It precisely describes the relations between variables targeted to eventually prevent bullying behaviors (Volk et al., 2017). Logic models guide program

implementation and clarify which variables it intends to change. Testing such models would eventually allow us to provide important results on the predictive validity of some variables. The rare studies that have investigated if an intervention impacts bullying through the hypothesized mediators have reported unexpected yet interesting results (Saarento et al., 2015a; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019).

A study evaluating all KiVa mediators found that only students' and teachers' attitudes toward bullying mediated the effects of the program on bullying reduction (Saarento et al., 2015a). A second study on interventions targeting specific mediators associated with bullying analyzed the mediating effect of moral disengagement and perceived injunctive norms on bullying (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). This study found that a decrease in students' use of moral disengagement mechanisms was associated with a decrease in bullying behaviors. Additionally, this study found that targeting perceived injunctive norms reduced bullying without passing through the intended mediator (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). A study on cooperative learning found that the intervention increased affective empathy and peer relatedness, which, in turn, reduced bullying (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019). However, the results indicated that modifying peer relationships should be prioritized to increase empathy rather than the other way around (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022).

All these studies suggest that how bullying prevention programs achieve bullying reduction is still widely misunderstood. Further studies are needed to document how bullying prevention programs decrease bullying by testing their logic model (Volk et al., 2017). This approach would permit the consideration of distal impacts and concomitant effects, thereby reducing the likelihood of erroneous conclusions regarding the program's efficacy (Rucker et al., 2011; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). Moreover, this would help reach the lowest cost-effectiveness ratio (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

4. The Present Dissertation

Bullying prevention programs have flourished around the world, and many schools have implemented one to tackle this phenomenon. Nevertheless, we have highlighted four issues that are still understudied when evaluating the effects of such programs. We lack knowledge about the assessment of bullying itself, its predictors at the individual and class level, the mechanisms that explain the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs, and the dosage required for programs to reduce bullying. Overall, this situation directly impacts our capacity to handle bullying. We need to better understand these issues and their implications and propose better bullying prevention methods.

Although the issues highlighted pave the way for a plethora of future research, addressing all of them exhaustively is beyond the scope of a single dissertation. Consequently, this dissertation focuses on key aspects of each of the four issues as a starting point. To explore the first issue further, we begin examining convergence between the three most commonly used bullying measures. Then, we investigated the unique associations between these scales and several psychosocial adjustment indices to compare their relations with students' wellbeing. This approach aimed to go beyond theoretical considerations by providing

empirical results that could assist in making a more informed decision when selecting a measurement strategy to assess bullying.

In order to contribute to the understanding of the second issue, we used two different approaches. First, regarding the lack of study on the predictive validity of empathy on bullying, we conducted a CLMP on three measurement points to disentangle the temporal association between these variables. However, due to the inherent limitations of this type of analysis, we added RIs to the model to improve the accuracy of our results. This will contribute to a greater understanding of the reciprocal associations between bullying and empathy, one of the most targeted variables in bullying prevention programs (Gaffney et al., 2021b; Zych et al., 2019b). Regarding peer norms and teachers' responses, we opted for a multilevel longitudinal design to establish the association between these predictors at the class level and bullying at the student level over time. We also controlled for student's individual characteristics when evaluating the effect of peer norms to properly isolate their effect on bullying. Finally, we integrated peer norms (i.e., descriptive defending and injunctive bullying) and teachers' reactions (i.e., self- and students'-reported) that have been most mobilized in prevention programs into a single model to estimate their unique longitudinal effects on bullying.

Since the last two issues are related to bullying prevention programs themselves, we examine these issues simultaneously by following the implementation of such a program. On the one hand, we tracked information on the dosage of the program in each class to enable us to test its association with effects on students. On the other hand, we also measured the mechanisms supposed to explain how the program influences bullying to test its logic model. The overarching objective of this dissertation was to explore several processes behind the scenes of bullying prevention programs and their implications to suggest avenues to improve their evaluation and our understanding of their underlying mechanisms.

4.1 Data collection

This research project took place in the context of the implementation of the KiVa bullying prevention program in the French-speaking part of Belgium in collaboration with trainers from a non-profit organization, Université de Paix. This organization works on conflict management and notably bullying between children. At the beginning of the project, no evidence-based program with documented efficacy was available in this geographic area (Tolmatcheff et al., 2020). This situation brought the Université de Paix to collaborate with our team to empirically evaluate the KiVa program in the French-speaking part of Belgium. KiVa was selected because it is one of the few evaluated programs associated with a reduction in bullying behaviors in various countries (Gaffney et al., 2019b; Galand et al., 2023).

In October 2020, trainers from the Univesité de Paix contacted 30 schools, 23 of which were retained and assigned to one of four groups organized into three cohorts created for this research project. The first cohort was a pilot group (N = 6 schools). We collected data from this first cohort in May 2021 (T0) and tested our different scales and data collection

procedures. The second cohort was made up of 15 schools. Eight schools were assigned to the experimental group and seven to the waitlist (i.e., the control group). Schools were assigned to the experimental or control groups to best meet the schools' agendas while maintaining the best possible similarity between the groups in terms of representativeness criteria. In both groups, there was diversity in each criterion. These criteria were geographic location, socioeconomic status, and school size. Data were collected in December 2021 (T1) and May 2022 (T2) for these 15 schools in the second cohort. During this time, additional training sessions were provided for the experimental group, where teachers received lessons on group dynamics, emotions, and communication to prepare them to implement the KiVa program the following year (i.e., in September 2022). September 2022 marked the beginning of the implementation of the KiVa program itself in the experimental group. Data were collected in 10 schools representing the third cohort, which consisted of the same eight experimental schools implementing KiVa from the second cohort and two new control schools. Figure 2 shows our data collection flowchart.

4.2 Structure of the present dissertation

The four following chapters comprise our empirical studies. **Study 1**, the second chapter of this dissertation, addresses the first issue of bullying prevention by reviewing the advantages and limitations of the three most commonly used types of measure of bullying (i.e., definition-based, behaviors-based, and peer-reported). Then, it compares their convergences and associations with several psychosocial outcomes. **Study 1** used the data from the first cohort (T0), which was used to test the psychometric qualities of our questionnaire.

The second issue relates to insufficient evidence supporting the assumed predictors of bullying. **Study 2**, the third chapter of this dissertation, focused on the relation between empathy and bullying by conducting an RI-CLPM using data from T2-T3-T4 in the experimental group. This sample was selected because it contains the largest number of students. **Study 3**, the fourth chapter of this dissertation, used a longitudinal multilevel model using T1 and T2 in schools from the second cohort. This sample was selected because it contains the largest number of classes.

The third issue is related to the absence of dosage assessment at the class level when implementing bullying prevention programs (Tolmatcheff et al., 2024), and the fourth one refers to the non-consideration of the logic models of those programs when evaluating their effects (Volk et al., 2017). In order to use the best methodological standards to evaluate the effect of KiVa, we conducted an RCT (Gaffney et al., 2019a). To do so, the data used for **Study 4** was the control schools from the second cohort and all schools from the third cohort. We also measured the dosage at the class level in the KiVa group and all variables included in the program's logic model (Saarento et al., 2015a). Overall, **Study 4** attempts to replicate the results obtained for the evaluation of KiVa in Finland in a sample of French-speaking Belgians by considering its logic model and dosage in each class.

Table 1 provides a general overview of the studies, and Figure 3 illustrates how our studies are articulated in relation to the issues identified. This dissertation is a collection of articles, and the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 were written to be read independently. Therefore, some repetition and overlap between the chapters are inevitable. Chapter 6 synthesizes the results obtained from Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, as well as their limitations and implications. It then concludes this dissertation by presenting an agenda for future research on bullying.

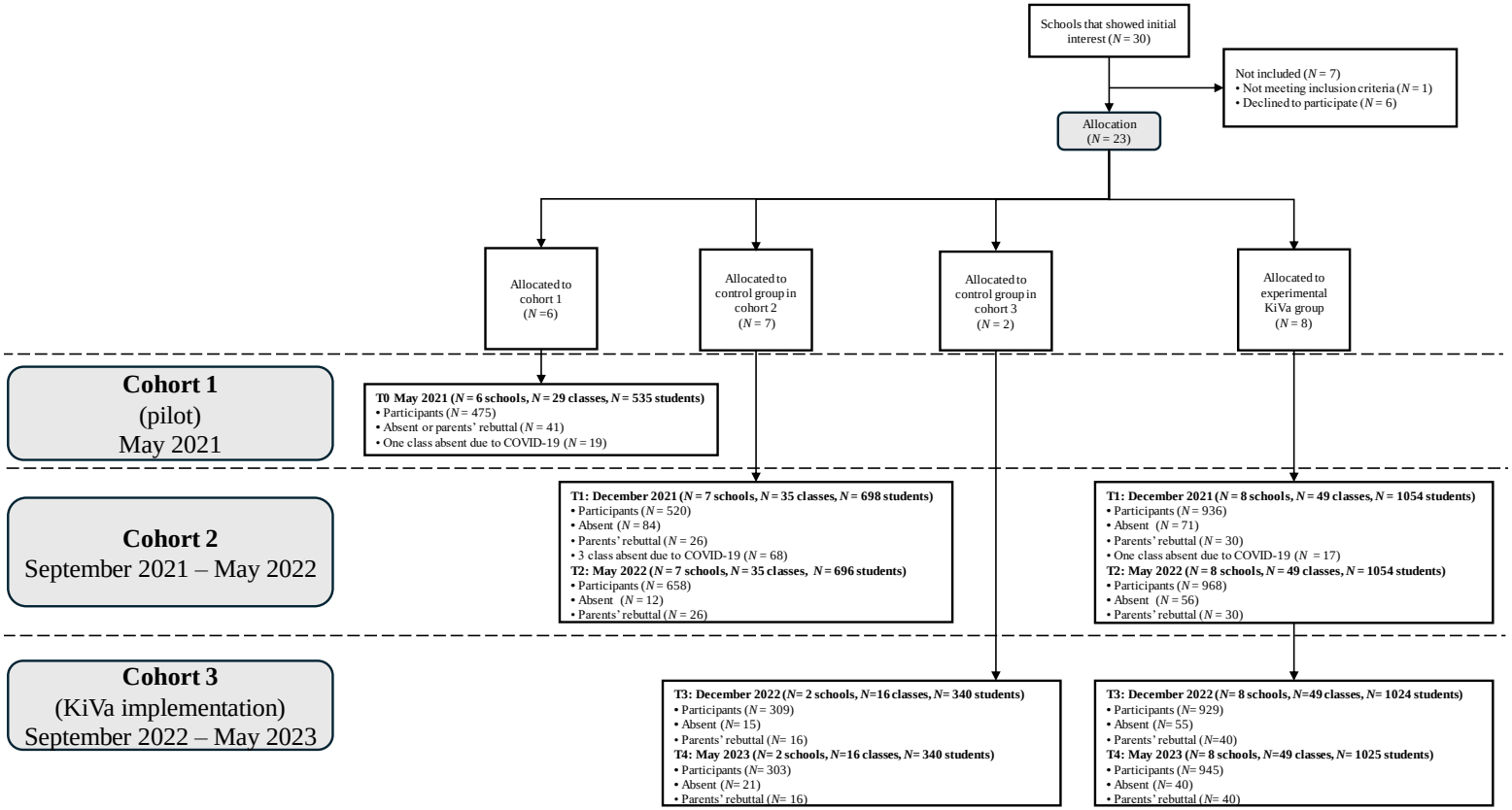


Figure 2. Data Collection

Table 1. General Overview of the Studies

Empirical Chapter	Issue	Time point used	Final sample: N students	Design and main method	Main variables analyzed
2	1	T0	475	Cross-sectional path model	Bullying Victimization Psychosocial adjustment Likeability
3	2	T2-T3-T4 (KiVa group only)	1,263	Random-intercept cross-lagged model panel	Bullying Empathy
4	2	T1-T2	1,626	Longitudinal multilevel model	Bullying Anti-bullying attitudes Defending Teachers' reactions (self-reported) Teachers' reactions (students-reported)
5	3-4	T1-T2 (for control schools in the second cohort) T3-T4 (for all schools in the third cohort)	2,132	Cluster randomized control trials Longitudinal multilevel model with random slopes	Bullying Empathy Anti-bullying attitudes Defending Teachers' reactions (students-reported)

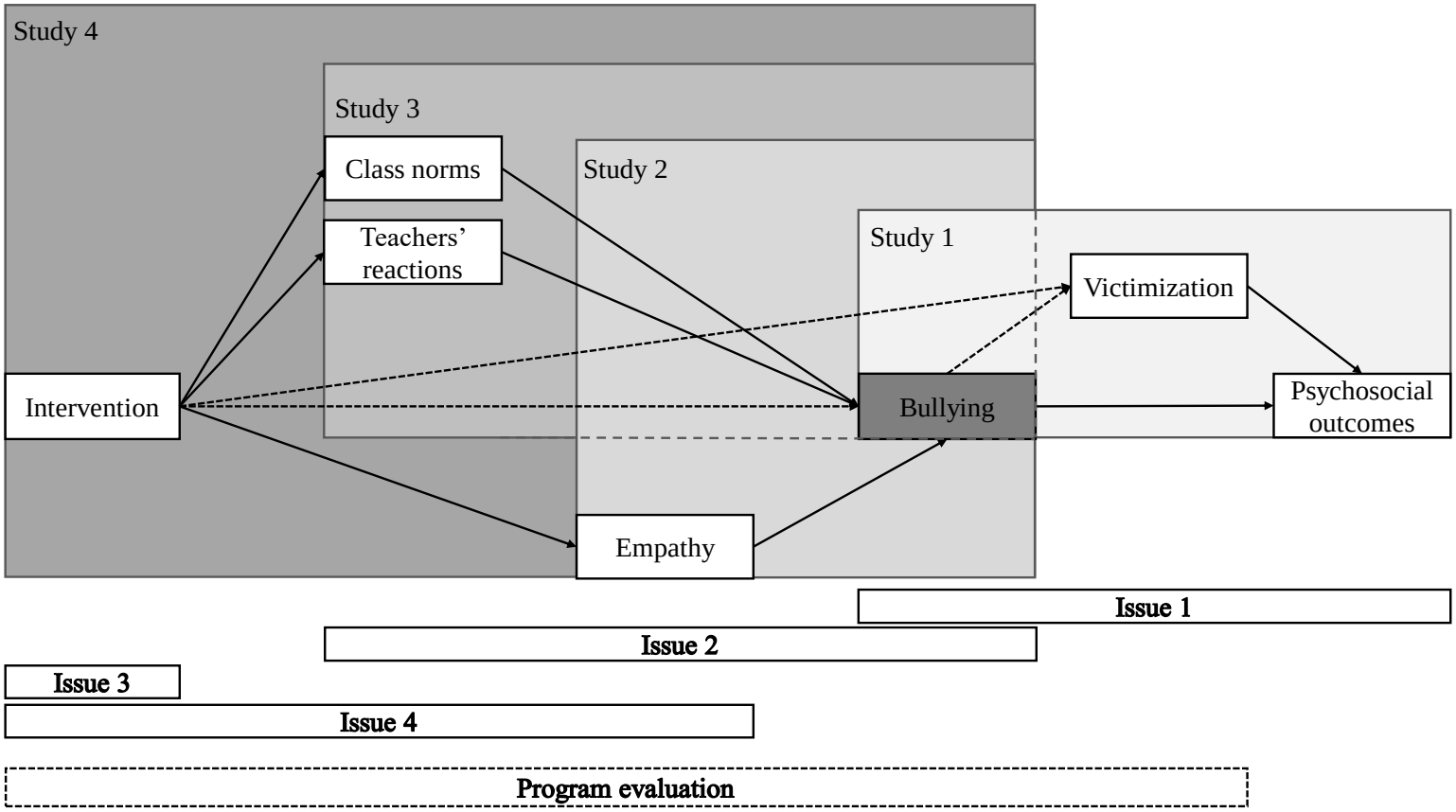


Figure 3. Organization of Studies in Relation to the Bullying Prevention Issues Identified in This Dissertation

Chapter 2

School bullying measurement

Convergence between self-reported behavior-based, definition-based, and peer-reported measures and their unique associations with students' psychosocial adjustment

Bullying has been studied for several decades, but its measurement remains a debated issue among scholars and different measures are available to researchers and practitioners. The two main questions are whether measures should include a definition of bullying or specific bullying behaviors (definition-based or behavior-based measure) and whether self- or peer-reports should be used. Theoretical arguments in favor of and against each type of measure have been advanced, but empirical data about the convergence of the different measures and their unique associations with students' psychosocial adjustment are lacking. This was the main goal of this study. A sample of 475 elementary school students completed the three most common types of bullying and victimization measures (self-reported behavior-based, self-reported definition-based, and peer-reported definition-based), and key psychosocial adjustment indicators. The results indicated that these three types of measures converge to some extent. Including these three types of measures in a single path model revealed that self-reported behavior-based measures were more strongly associated with students' psychosocial adjustment, except for social rejection, which was more strongly associated with peer-reported measures. Overall, our findings support the idea that researchers and practitioners should select the type of measure that best fits their specific goals and constraints.

Chapter 2

School bullying measurement

Convergence between self-reported behavior-based, definition-based, and peer-reported measures and their unique associations with students' psychosocial adjustment

School bullying is a form of aggressive behavior characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). This multifaceted phenomenon encompasses direct bullying such as physical violence, indirect bullying such as social exclusion, and cyberbullying, referring to online forms of bullying (Joseph & Stockton, 2018). School bullying has been repeatedly linked to students' psychosocial adjustment, which refers to students' subjective well-being, psychopathology, and social adaptation (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2016; Zych et al., 2019). More specifically, being a victim of bullying (i.e., victimization) has been found to be positively associated with several internalizing symptoms, including depression, anxiety (Cook et al., 2010), and social isolation (Moore et al., 2017). Perpetrating bullying has been found to be positively associated with several externalizing behaviors, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms (Farrington & Baldry, 2010) and conduct problems (Cook et al., 2010), and negatively associated with prosocial behaviors (Volk et al., 2022). In addition, both bullies and victims have been found to be less socially accepted and more rejected by their peers (Bouman et al., 2012; Zych et al., 2019). Overall, the well-documented adverse consequences of school bullying have led to an exponential rise in research and prevention efforts to identify and address this phenomenon over the past decades (Zych et al., 2015).

However, the measurement of bullying remains a major topic of debate among scholars and is considered the "Achilles' heel of bullying research" (Volk et al., 2017, p. 36). The two main questions dividing researchers are whether bullying measures should include a definition of bullying, and whether self- or peer-reports should be used (Jia & Mikami, 2018). This ongoing debate is notably reflected in the most commonly used bullying measures, which are based on either a definition of bullying (definition-based; e.g., Inchley et al., 2020) or a description of bullying behaviors without definition (behavior-based; e.g., Joseph & Stockton, 2018) and are either self-reported (e.g., Solberg & Olweus, 2003) or peer-reported (e.g., Salmivalli et al., 1996). While these different measures are correlated to some extent, some rare comparative studies have suggested that they do not fully converge (Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2013; Green et al., 2013). Therefore, it is unclear whether the different types of measures capture the same phenomenon. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge about the unique associations between these different bullying measures and students' psychosocial adjustment. As a result, the implications of using one measure rather than another are poorly

understood, and practitioners lack clear guidelines to follow when selecting an appropriate scale for their objectives and context. Arguments for and against each type of measure are mainly based on theoretical considerations, and empirical data are lacking (Volk et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2022).

Overall, further research is needed to provide empirical insights into the convergence of the most common types of bullying and victimization measures and how they are associated with students' psychological adjustment. This would help define evidence-based recommendations to guide researchers and practitioners in selecting bullying measures, depending on the context and specific objectives. This study aimed to examine the convergence and associations between the three most common types of bullying measures and several indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment, including anxiety and depression, peer problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, conduct problems, prosocial behaviors, social acceptance, and social rejection.

1. Bullying Measures With or Without Definition

Definition-based measures first present and define bullying to students before asking them to report how often they have bullied others (i.e., bullying) and been bullied by others (i.e., victimization). It has been argued that including a definition can help researchers and students reach a common understanding of bullying (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014; Volk et al., 2017) and distinguish it from other aggressive behaviors (Shaw et al., 2013) or students' own conceptions (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Including a definition, it is claimed, is the best way to capture the three characteristics of bullying: intention, repetition, and power imbalance (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014; Ybarra et al., 2014). This is important because the presence of these three aspects has been found to be associated with greater psychosocial maladjustment in students (Felix et al., 2011; Kaufman et al., 2020).

However, several studies have found that both perpetrators and victims of bullying do not always report bullying or victimization when bullying is explicitly defined (Kert et al., 2010; Lai & Kao, 2018). In addition, one study has shown that students who are bullies are more likely to view aggressive behaviors as not being bullying (Monks & Smith, 2006). It has been argued that mentioning the word "bullying" can lead to underreporting due to the associated stigma (Thomas et al., 2014; Vessey et al., 2014). A second issue is the length of the definition, which ranges from 150 to more than 200 words and may be misunderstood by younger students (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000; Swain, 1998). A final issue is that definition-based bullying measures sometimes rely on a single general item following the definition (e.g., Inchley et al., 2020; Solberg & Olweus, 2003), which increases the risk of random measurement error (Nunnally, 1978; Thomas et al., 2014).

As an alternative, some bullying measures do not use a definition and instead ask students to report how often they have experienced or engaged in various bullying behaviors (e.g., "make fun of another student") within a given period (Bear et al., 2014; Joseph & Stockton, 2018). Describing specific behaviors may facilitate students' understanding, as short items are easier to process than long definitions (Kaufman et al., 2020). In addition, specific

behaviors may be easier for students to remember and report reliably (Huang & Cornell, 2015). However, bullying measures without a definition have been criticized for focusing on repetition, at the expense of power imbalance and, to a lesser extent, intentionality. Consequently, critics have argued that these measures provide a measure of general aggression (perpetrated or experienced) rather than bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2008; Ybarra et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, behavior-based measures without a definition are one of the three most common types of bullying measures (Xie et al., 2022) and were therefore essential to include in this study. It should be noted that definition-based and behavior-based qualities are not mutually exclusive, as a measure may combine both a definition and specific behaviors. However, most bullying measures typically fall into one of these two categories.

Definition-based and behavior-based bullying measures have shown moderate convergence in identifying bullies and victims (Chen & Cheng, 2013; Felix et al., 2011). However, the overall pattern of findings is inconclusive, with some studies reporting different rates using different types of measures (Cook et al., 2009; Modecki et al., 2014; Sjögren et al., 2025), and others reporting similar rates (Huang & Cornell, 2015). On the other hand, similar associations have been found between bullying and victimization and various indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment across studies, regardless of the presence of a definition (Cook et al., 2010). However, no study has simultaneously examined the unique associations between definition-based and behavior-based bullying measures and students' psychosocial adjustment by including both types of measures in a single model. Table 2 summarizes the theoretical arguments for and against both types of bullying measures.

Table 2. Summary of the theoretical strengths and limitations of presenting or omitting a definition of bullying

With a definition	Without a definition (behavior-based)
• Presents the three characteristics of bullying explicitly: intention, repetition, and power imbalance	• Prevents the stigma attached to the word "bullying"
• Helps researchers and responders reach a common understanding of bullying	• Relies on specific behavior items, which are easier for students to understand and reliably remember
• Helps distinguish bullying from other aggressive behaviors	
• Definitions used vary across studies	• Behaviors included can vary across studies
• Sometimes single-item, which increases the risk of random error and does not distinguish between indirect, direct, and cyberbullying	• The power imbalance characteristic is usually neglected, causing a possible overlap with general aggression
• Risk of underreporting due to the stigma attached to the word "bullying"	
• Definitions are often lengthy and may be misunderstood by younger students	

Note. Bullying measures can include both a definition and specific behaviors. However, such a combination is not commonly found among bullying measures.

2. Self-Reported or Peer-Reported Bullying Measures

While some studies rely on self-reported measures of bullying and victimization, others also use peer nominations (e.g., Kärnä et al., 2011). Self-reported scales have been more widely used for several reasons. First, students can be considered the most reliable informants about their own behaviors and experiences (Olweus, 2013; Shaw et al., 2013). Victims may sometimes be the only ones to know the details (e.g., frequency) of the bullying they experience (Thomas et al., 2014). In line with this, adults may need to know the victim's subjective perceptions of the bullying to determine whether intervention is needed. However, a major shortcoming of self-reported measures is that they are subject to social desirability bias (Cole et al., 2006; Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2013). In addition, many studies examine self-reported bullying measures in relation to other self-reported constructs, causing method-specific shared variance issues (Lee & Cornell, 2010; Volk et al., 2017).

Peer-reported bullying measures are typically definition-based and ask students to nominate those who bully others or are bullied from a list of classmates. Although rarer, some peer-reported bullying measures are behavior-based and do not include a definition (Schwartz et al., 2001; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022a). Another possible variation is to ask students by whom they are bullied and whom they bully to capture dyadic relationships and enable social network analysis (Veenstra et al., 2007). This study focused on definition-based and non-dyadic peer-reported bullying measures, which are the most commonly used (Xie et al., 2022). Since bullying has been conceptualized as a social phenomenon (Salmivalli et al., 1996), peer-reported measures have been praised for providing information about the peer context (Volk et al., 2017). Peer-reported bullying measures prevent social desirability bias (Furlong & Sharkey, 2009; Green et al., 2018) and method-specific shared variance issues when the other variables of interest in a study are self-reported (Lee & Cornell, 2010; Volk et al., 2017). Psychometrically, peer-reported measures have multiple reporters for one item, ensuring reliability and reducing random measurement error (Branson & Cornell, 2009).

However, peer-reported measures also have several limitations. First, nominations may be based on reputations rather than actual behavior (Casper et al., 2015; Hymel et al., 1990) and may be less suitable for capturing behavior change over relatively short periods of time (e.g., in an intervention study design). In addition, student relationships may affect the reliability of the answers, for instance, with students being reluctant to nominate their friends as bullies (Casper et al., 2015). Some students may also perceive the nominations as a form of "snitching" and answer inaccurately. As students are not trained to detect all forms of bullying, they may not consider less visible or indirect bullying (e.g., spreading rumors; Volk et al., 2017). Peer-reported nominations are often limited to classmates for practical reasons (e.g., when using paper questionnaires), so that children cannot identify bullies outside their class (Casper et al., 2015; van der Ploeg et al., 2015). Because the validity of peer-reported measures is contingent on the number of respondents, results from small classes or classes with many absent students during data collection may be unreliable (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Finally, method-specific shared variance issues may also occur if the other variables of interest are peer-reported.

The few studies that have compared different bullying measures have reported correlations between peer-reported and self-reported measures ranging from small ($r < .20$) to moderate ($r = .46$) for bullying and from moderate ($r = .32$) to large for victimization ($r = .75$; Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2013; Kärnä et al., 2011; Lee & Cornell, 2010). Similarly, the effects of anti-bullying programs have varied depending on whether a peer-reported or self-reported measure is used (van Verseveld et al., 2021). Some studies have found that peer-reported victims are less liked and more rejected by their peers, whereas self-reported victimization is more strongly associated with internalizing problems (Bouman et al., 2012; Košir et al., 2020). Regarding bullying perpetration, peer-reported measures correlate more with social rejection (Caravita et al., 2009; Juvonen et al., 2001), whereas self-reported measures are more associated with internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety (Bouman et al., 2012). Overall, although self- and peer-reported bullying measures seem to partially overlap, inconsistencies remain across studies. Studies that compared the associations between self- and peer-reported measures by integrating them in a single model are scarce (e.g., Bouman et al., 2012). Therefore, knowledge about the distinct and unique associations of peer-reported and self-reported bullying measures with students' psychosocial adjustment is limited. Table 3 summarizes the main strengths and limitations for both types of reports.

Table 3. Summary of the theoretical strengths and limitations of self- and peer-reported bullying measures

Self-reported measure	Peer-reported measure
• Students are the most reliable informants about their own behaviors or experiences • Only the victims might know some details of the bullying they experience • Adults may need to know students' subjective perceptions to make intervention-related decisions	• Prevent social desirability bias • Reduce random measurement error because they rely on multiple informants • Provide information about the peer context
• Subject to social desirability bias	• Nominations may be based on reputations rather than behaviors • Student relationships may affect reliability • Students might be resistant if they see identifying a bully as "snitching" • Students may not consider less visible or indirect bullying • Often limited to classmates for practical reasons • Results may be unreliable if many absent students or smaller classes

3. The Present Study

The goal of this study was twofold. The first aim was to assess the convergence between the three most commonly used types of bullying and victimization measures: self-reported behavior-based, self-reported definition-based, and peer-reported definition-based. The second aim was to provide insights into the unique associations between these three types of bullying measures and several key indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment: anxiety

and depression, peer problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, conduct problems, prosocial behaviors, social acceptance, and social rejection. It should be noted that the ambition of this study was not to resolve the ongoing debate on which type of measure captures bullying best or to determine their content validity in measuring bullying. Instead, we included the three most commonly used types of measures to enhance comparability with prior research and provide further insights into their convergence and associations with students' psychosocial adjustment. To achieve these goals, we first examined the correlations among these three types of measures of bullying and victimization. We then simultaneously examined the unique associations between the different bullying and victimization measures and the seven students' psychosocial adjustment indicators in a single model.

We first assumed that measures assessing the same construct (bullying or victimization) would converge, and that the two self-reported measures (definition-based and behavior-based) would be more strongly correlated because of method-specific shared variance (Hypothesis 1). Because students can be considered the most reliable informants about their own behaviors and experiences (Olweus, 2013; Shaw et al., 2013), we hypothesized that both types of self-reported measures would be more strongly associated with students' psychosocial adjustment than peer-reported measures, except for social acceptance and social rejection, due to common method variance (Hypothesis 2). As definition-based measures are supposed to better capture the three bullying characteristics, which have been found to be associated with greater psychosocial maladjustment (Felix et al., 2011; Kaufman et al., 2020), we hypothesized that definition-based measures would be more strongly associated with students' psychosocial adjustment indicators than behavior-based measures (Hypothesis 3).

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

Data were collected from six schools in French-speaking Belgium during the pilot implementation of the KiVa anti-bullying program. The schools' geographical locations covered three out of the six provinces of that region. These schools varied in size, ranging from 30 to 121 students in Grades 4-6. Their official socioeconomic indices, based on the students' area of residence, ranged from 10 (medium) to 20 (high). Our sample comprised 535 students from 28 Grade 4-6 classrooms. Parental consent was obtained through a letter sent by the schools. Sixty students (11%) did not participate because they were absent (N = 25), or their parents objected to their participation (N = 29), or they themselves refused to participate (N = 6). Therefore, our final sample consisted of 475 students (Mage = 10.37 years; SD = 1.07; 54.5% girls).

4.2 Procedure

Data were collected in May 2021. Students were asked to fill out a confidential questionnaire during school hours. A research team member was present to explain the general procedure of the study and answer questions. The researcher read the questionnaire

aloud in every classroom except in sixth grade, where students completed the questionnaire independently after receiving general instructions. This study and its procedure obtained the approval of the ethics committee of UCLouvain.

4.3 Measures

The behavior-based measures were presented first in the questionnaire to avoid the priming effect of the definition (Huang & Cornell, 2015). Next, the definition of bullying was presented, followed by the definition-based measures, then the peer-reported measures. The psychosocial adjustment indicators were presented at the end of the questionnaire. This questionnaire was part of a larger survey, and included other measures not examined in this study.

4.3.1 Bullying and Victimization

Behavior-Based Bullying and Victimization. We used a 10-item scale validated for French-speaking elementary school students (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022a), including direct (three items: insulting, hitting, scratching or pulling hair), indirect (four items: mocking or teasing, gossiping, excluding, hiding or damaging personal things), and cyber (three items: calling or texting, sending offensive or threatening messages through the Internet, publishing pictures or videos) forms of aggression. The 10 items are common items of bullying and victimization behavior-based measures (Joseph & Stockton, 2018). These scales have been validated among French-speaking elementary students and have consistently reported good psychometric indices over the years (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022a). For victimization, students had to report how many times they had undergone these specific behaviors since Christmas on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 times to more than four times (e.g., “Another student has called me names”; “Another student has hit me”). For bullying, students were asked to report how often they had engaged in each behavior toward another student since Christmas (from 0 times to more than four times; e.g., “I have called another student names.”; “I have hit another student”). Using Christmas as the time point of reference implied a period of approximately four months before the data collection, which is a common timeframe in bullying research (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014; Xie et al., 2022). We used a bifactor model to concurrently assess the global construct and the three subdimensions (Morin et al., 2016). The confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) showed a good fit for both perpetration (χ^2 (28) = 36.320, p = .13, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .025, 95% CI: 0–.046, and SRMR = .034) and victimization (χ^2 (28) = 51.95, p = .004, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .043, 95% CI: .024–.06, and SRMR = .037). We used ordinal Cronbach’s alpha (α) based on a polychoric matrix to estimate the reliability of our scales (Gadermann et al., 2012). The ordinal Cronbach’s alpha was α = .86 for bullying and α = .82 for victimization.

Definition-Based Bullying and Victimization. We used the French-validated version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire–Revised (OBVQ-r; Kubiszewski et al., 2014; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). After reading the definition of bullying (provided in Appendix Questionnaire enfants pilote), students were asked to report how many times they had been bullied since the Christmas holidays on a five-point Likert scale (0 = I have never suffered

from this; 1 = one or two times; 2 = two or three times; 3 = about once a week; 4 = several times a week). Then, students were asked to report how many times they had bullied others since the Christmas holidays (0 = I have never done this; 1 = one or two times; 2 = two or three times; 3 = about once a week; 4 = several times a week).

Peer-Reported Bullying and Victimization. These single-item measures were based on the Participant Roles Questionnaire (Kärnä et al., 2011; Salmivalli et al., 1996) and were translated into French for this study. Although the definition of bullying was not repeated a second time, these measures followed the definition-based measures and thus relied on the previously provided definition. Students received the list of their classmates and were asked to identify those who bullied others in their class. Next, students were asked to nominate classmates who were victimized by others. The number of nominations was unlimited. We summed the number of received nominations for each student and divided it by the number of present students minus one (because students could not nominate themselves). The final scores ranged from 0 to 1.

4.3.2 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

We used the French-validated version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997; Capron et al., 2007) to assess five indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment: emotional symptoms (anxiety and depression), peer problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, conduct problems, and prosocial behaviors. Students had to rate each item on a three-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not true) to three (certainly true). A higher score in a given dimension indicated greater endorsement of that trait by students. The SDQ has been used in mental health and bullying research (Capron et al., 2007; Shaw et al., 2013), and has been translated and validated in French with satisfactory psychometric properties (Capron et al., 2007).

Prosocial Behaviors. Five items assessed the extent to which students acted with other people in a caring and prosocial way, e.g., "I try to be nice to other people"; "I am kind to younger children". CFA results indicated a good fit (χ^2 (5) = 5.8, p = .33, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .02, 95% CI: .0–.075, and SRMR = .025), and the ordinal Cronbach's alpha was α =.75.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity. Five items assessed externalized symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, e.g., "I am restless. I cannot stay still for a long time"; "I am easily distracted". We removed one reversed item ("I think before I do things") that decreased the reliability of the scale. CFA results showed a good fit (χ^2 (2) = 5.64, p = .06, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .067, 95% CI: 0–.136, and SRMR = .024). The ordinal Cronbach's alpha was α =.62.

Conduct Problems. Five items referred to students' disciplinary issues, e.g., "I get very angry and often lose my temper"; "I am often accused of lying or cheating". The results of the CFA indicated a good fit (χ^2 (3) = 85.42, p = .27, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .024, 95% CI: 0–.078, and SRMR = .024). The ordinal Cronbach's alpha was below the conventional threshold (α =.52).

Peer Problems. Five items referred to negative relationships with others and social isolation, e.g., “I am usually on my own”; “Other people my age generally like me (reversed)”. The CFA results indicated an acceptable fit (χ^2 (5) = 11.1, p =.049, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .055, 95% CI: .003–.1, and SRMR = .038), and the ordinal Cronbach’s alpha was α = .73.

Emotional Symptoms (Anxiety and Depression). Five items assessed symptoms of anxiety and depression, e.g., “I am often unhappy, downhearted, or tearful”; “I worry a lot”. The CFA results indicated a good fit (χ^2 (5) = 0.7, p = .984, CFI = 1, RMSEA = 0, 95% CI: .0–.0, and SRMR = .007), and the ordinal Cronbach’s alpha was α =.74.

4.3.3 Social Acceptance and Social Rejection

Students received the list of their classmates and were asked to nominate those they liked the most and the least (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). They could nominate a maximum of 5 classmates but not themselves. We summed the number of received nominations for social acceptance and social rejection for each student. We divided it by the number of present students minus one. The final scores ranged from 0 to 1.

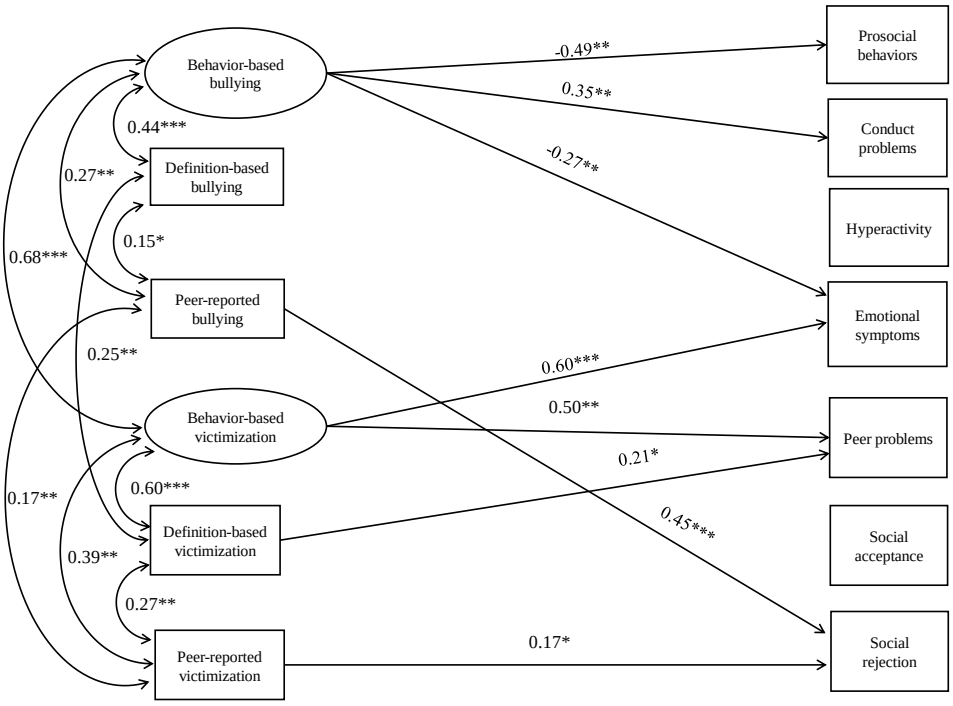
4.4 Analytical Strategy

We first performed all our descriptive analysis based on mean scores with SPSS (version 27). Then, we extracted the factor scores from the SDQ subscales and conducted a correlation matrix and a path analysis with Mplus (version 8.4) to estimate all regressions simultaneously in a single model. We used the robust maximum likelihood estimator to deal with non-normality and nonindependence in the observations. By default, Mplus uses full-information likelihood to deal with missing data (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2015). All variables had a covariance coverage exceeding 83%. Since students were nested in their classrooms and schools, we computed the intraclass coefficient (ICC) for both levels. The ICC on the class level was higher than 10% for most of our bullying and victimization scales, whereas the ICC on the school level was negligible (< 5%) for all variables. Therefore, standard errors were adjusted using a sandwich estimator to account for the nonindependence of observations on the class level (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

We ran a path model with all six bullying and victimization measures as independent variables. SDQ subscales and the social rejection and social acceptance measures were considered dependent variables (see Figure 4). Among the independent variables, we allowed for correlations among measures assessing the same construct, that is, between the three victimization measures on the one hand, and between the three bullying measures on the other. In addition, because bullying and victimization are moderately correlated (Wolke & Lereya, 2015), we allowed each victimization measure to covary with its equivalent bullying measure (e.g., behavior-based victimization with behavior-based bullying).

5. Results

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations between variables. According to the conventional thresholds proposed by Cohen (1988), the definition-based and behavior-based measures were correlated strongly for victimization (r = .60) and moderately for bullying (r = .44). The correlations between the behavior-based and peer-reported measures were medium for victimization (r = .39) and low for bullying (r = .27). The weakest correlations were between the definition-based and peer-reported measures for both victimization (r = .27) and bullying (r = .15).



Note. For the sake of clarity, only the standardized and significant linear regression coefficients are presented in this diagram.
*p < .05; **p < .01; *** p < .001.

Figure 4. Path diagram of the associations between bullying measures and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire subscales

The fit of our main model was good: χ^2 (325) = 500.851, p < .001, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .034, 95% CI: .028–.039, and SRMR = .044. Figure 4 shows all the significant standardized regression coefficients. Behavior-based bullying was significantly and negatively associated with prosocial behaviors (β = -.49) and emotional symptoms of anxiety and depression (β = -.27) and positively associated with conduct problems (β = .35). This means that students reporting more frequent bullying behaviors were less prone to report prosocial behaviors and more prone to report other conduct problems. They were also less likely to report emotional symptoms of anxiety and depression. Behavior-based victimization was significantly linked

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of and correlations among variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Bullying and Victimization														
1. Behavior-based bullying	0.32	0.35												
2. Behavior-based victimization	0.53	0.46	.68**											
3. Definition-based bullying	0.14	0.48	.44**	.20**										
4. Definition-based victimization	0.48	0.94	.29**	.60**	.25**									
5. Peer-reported bullying	0.06	0.10	.27**	.19**	.15**	.06								
6. Peer-reported victimization	0.04	0.08	.13**	.39**	.02	.27**	.17**							
Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (self-reported)														
7. Prosocial behaviors	1.63	0.35	-.36**	-.17**	-.13*	-.09	-.09*	.06						
8. Conduct problems	0.47	0.33	.56**	.53**	.23**	.24**	.21**	.21**	-.20**					
9. Hyperactivity	0.92	0.48	.21**	.19**	.04	0.01	.09	.05	-.09	.27**				
10. Emotional symptoms	0.65	0.48	.15**	.38**	.09*	.21**	-.03	.23**	.01	.25**	.30**			
11. Peer problems	0.36	0.38	.34**	.58**	.16**	.50**	.14	.30**	-.23**	.43**	.11*	.31**		
Social acceptance and rejection (peer-reported)														
12. Social acceptance	0.29	0.02	-.12	-.20**	-.09	-.16**	-.05	-.11	.12*	-.21**	-.07	-.11*	-.26**	
13. Social rejection	0.15	0.02	.25*	.19*	.14	-.10	.51**	.24**	-.06	.21**	.09	-.03	.22**	-.27**

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

to more anxiety and depression symptoms (emotional symptoms: β = .60) and more social difficulties (peer problems: β = .50). Consistently with this result, students identifying themselves as victims, as measured by definition-based victimization, were also more likely to report social difficulties (peer problems: β = .21). Social rejection was positively associated with both peer-reported bullying (β = .45) and peer-reported victimization (β = .17). In other In other words, students identified as bullies and, to a lesser extent, as victims by their peers were also more likely to be identified as least liked.

6. Discussion

Despite being studied for several decades, there is an ongoing debate about whether bullying measures should include a definition of bullying and whether self- or peer-reports should be preferred. The most common types of bullying measures include definition-based self-reports, behavior-based self-reports, and definition-based peer-reports. Although arguments have been made in favor or against each type of measure, the debate has been dominated by theoretical considerations rather than empirical evidence. To date, there is no compelling evidence demonstrating that one type of measure captures bullying more accurately than the others. Overall, it remains unclear whether these three types of measures capture the same phenomenon and what their unique associations are with students' psychosocial adjustment. While determining which type of measure best capture bullying goes beyond the scope of our study, we provided some insights into the convergence of these three types of measures of bullying and victimization and their unique associations with key indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment.

Consistently with previous studies, our first hypothesis was supported by the results. Measures assessing the same construct (bullying or victimization) converged to some degree, with moderate correlations between behavior-based and definition-based measures (Green et al., 2013) and smaller correlations between peer-reported and self-reported measures (Branson & Cornell, 2009; Lee & Cornell, 2010), most likely because of common method variance (Casper et al., 2015). Unexpectedly, however, peer-reported measures were more strongly associated with behavior-based measures than with definition-based measures, despite peer-reported and definition-based measures relying on the same definition of bullying. That is, students who were identified as bullies or victims by their peers were more likely to report specific aggression behaviors than to identify themselves as victims or bullies. This is in line with the idea that students may be reluctant to endorse the labels of "bully" or "victim" because of the associated stigma, which may lead to underreporting (Thomas et al., 2014; Vessey et al., 2014). In addition, a recent study found that peer-reported bullies often do not admit to their behavior when presented with a definition (Garandeau et al., 2024) .

Our second hypothesis was partially supported by the results, with social rejection being significantly associated with peer-reported measures, but not self-reported measures, which is likely due to common method variance (Casper et al., 2015). Surprisingly, we did not find an association between any of the types of measures and social acceptance. That is, neither type of self-reported measure was associated with social rejection when peer-reported

measures were included in the same model. This underlines how peer nomination is a unique source of information about social dynamics among students (Kaufman et al., 2021; Veenstra & Huitsing, 2021).

Our third hypothesis was not supported by the results, as behavior-based measures were more strongly associated with students' psychosocial adjustment than definition-based measures. Behavior-based bullying was more strongly associated with conduct problems and prosocial behaviors than definition-based bullying. Likewise, behavior-based victimization was more strongly associated with emotional symptoms of anxiety and depression and peer problems than definition-based victimization. These results align with other studies suggesting that providing a definition of bullying does not necessarily improve the measure (Cook et al., 2010; Felix et al., 2011; Green et al., 2013). However, it is still possible that behavior-based measures without a definition also capture elements of non-bullying aggression (Andrews et al., 2023; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). Overall, further progress in the debate on bullying measurement and the validity of different types of bullying measures may require innovative strategies to advance the debate beyond theoretical considerations alone. For example, future research could take an ethnographic approach to compare the categorization of students into bullying roles based on observations of social dynamics in the classroom with that derived from different types of bullying measures. Until such novel empirical evidence is provided, any assertion that one type of measure is less valid than another in capturing bullying remains an ideological stance rather than a scientifically grounded conclusion.

6.1 Limitations and Future Perspectives

Our study included three different bullying measures in a single model, allowing us to simultaneously examine the unique associations between each type of measure and students' psychosocial adjustment. Despite this main contribution, this study also had some limitations. First, the conduct problems and attention deficit/hyperactivity subscales had relatively low internal consistency, which suggests that these results should be interpreted with caution. However, goodness-of-fit indices indicated a good fit for both subscales, which is more relevant to consider in path modeling (Stanley & Edwards, 2016).

Second, although we made sure to include some peer-reported indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment, most were self-reported, which may have inflated the correlations with self-reported bullying measures. Prioritizing students' subjective psychosocial adjustment, which has been extensively studied and consistently shown to influence future life outcomes (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008; Wolke & Lereya, 2015), is arguably relevant. However, including both self-reported and peer-reported measures of similar constructs (e.g., peer-reported and self-reported social rejection) may help disentangle common method variance from the relations of interest in future studies.

Third, while our measures encompassed the three most common types of bullying measures, alternative measures within these types exist. Using different phrasing or including different items may yield different outcomes. Furthermore, although this is less common,

definition-based and peer-reported measures can rely on multiple items instead of a single item (e.g., Huitsing et al., 2020; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Another possible variation is the use of dyadic peer nominations, which provides insights into relational networks and allows for selective focus on specific ties and roles (e.g., bullies nominated by victims). This approach also prevents nominations from being based on reputations rather than actual behaviors (Veenstra et al., 2007). Additional research is needed that examines the implications of these variations on the convergence of bullying measures and their associations with students' psychosocial adjustment.

It could also be argued that neither definition-based nor behavior-based measures fully capture all characteristics of bullying (Green et al., 2013; Kaufman et al., 2020) and that new measures ought to be developed (Andrews et al., 2023). This might involve assessing bullying characteristics more explicitly. For instance, power imbalance could be assessed by asking students if the bully is more popular or stronger than them (e.g., Kaufman et al., 2020). As power imbalance may stem from countless sources (Finkelhor et al., 2012), future studies should focus on victims' subjective feeling of helplessness. Given the importance of power imbalance in bullying dynamics, further research is needed to develop and test the use of such additional items. An important challenge would be to avoid items that could be confused with depression, low self-esteem, or low social skills.

Fourth, future studies could randomize the order of the different types of measures in the questionnaire to overcome order bias. For instance, students might have focused more on their own behaviors due to the initial self-reported measures, potentially influencing their subsequent responses in peer-reported measures. Randomizing the order of questions can help mitigate priming effects and provide insights into the impact of presenting bullying measures in a specific order on students' responses.

Fifth, our sample consisted of elementary school students, which may limit the generalizability of the results to older or younger students. Some developmental effects may influence the way students report bullying. For instance, adolescents may better understand the definition of bullying but might be less inclined to report it using self-reports (Furlong & Sharkey, 2009).

Finally, the translation of "bullying" entails some nuances in different languages (Jia & Mikami, 2018; Smith et al., 2002). In contrast to its English equivalent, the French word used for bullying in Belgium ('harcèlement', which also translates as 'harassment') was not originally part of children's vocabulary. Nevertheless, in practice, students are well aware of this phenomenon nowadays, thanks to the extensive media coverage over the past decade.

6.2 Implications for Practitioners

Our results indicate that the three different types of bullying and victimization measures used in this study converge to some extent, suggesting a certain degree of overlap. Additionally, these different measures were associated with most indicators of students' psychosocial adjustment, suggesting that each measure captures, to some extent, a construct related to students' psychosocial adjustment. Taken together, these findings support the

recommendation to use the type of measure that best fits the purpose and constraints of the survey (Volk et al., 2017). For example, if the goal is to monitor global trends in bullying over time, self-reported definition-based single-item measures are easier to use and may facilitate comparisons across countries in international surveys (e.g., Inchley et al., 2020). On the other hand, behavior-based measures might be more appropriate for practitioners to identify specific forms of bullying or victimization that are more prevalent in a given school and tailor the prevention strategies accordingly (Bear et al., 2014; Kennedy, 2020).

In general, self-reported measures are more accessible and easier to administer for school professionals as the data collection is more straightforward and raises fewer ethical issues compared to peer nomination (Casper et al., 2015; Furlong & Sharkey, 2009). Self-reported measures might also be more suitable for evaluations of psychological interventions and prevention programs, in which students' subjective perceptions and psychosocial adjustment are critical (Olweus, 2013; Xie et al., 2022). Nevertheless, as peer-reported measures provide unique insights into social interactions within a group, they could be valuable for helping teachers recognize bullying (Kaufman et al., 2021; Veenstra & Huitsing, 2021) and for managing the classroom social dynamics, for instance through the choice of seating arrangement (Hoekstra et al., 2023).

7. Conclusion

This study provides some empirical insights into the convergence of the three most common types of bullying and victimization measures and their unique associations with students' psychosocial adjustment. Our results suggest that these different measures reflect an overlapping phenomenon. This supports the idea that both researchers and practitioners should select the type of measure that best fits their specific goals and constraints (Volk et al., 2017). Future studies should further examine the potential complementarity of peer-reported and self-reported bullying measures (Veenstra, 2021; Volk et al., 2017) in both basic and applied research. Overall, more empirical research is needed that examines the implications of variations in measurement to inform theoretical discussions about the critical issue of bullying measurement (Sjögren et al., 2025).

Chapter 3

Longitudinal Relationships Between Empathy and Bullying among Boys and Girls
A Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model Study

For decades, empathy has been hypothesized as a protective factor against bullying. However, this hypothesis is mainly supported by cross-sectional studies, while longitudinal research on bullying and empathy is still scarce. The present study aimed to fill this gap by conducting random-intercept cross-lagged panel models of the relations between cognitive and affective empathy and bullying behaviors across three-time points each separated by five months, separately for boys and girls. Results from 1228 elementary school students (52.92% boys; Mage = 10.19, SD = 1.13) indicated that the associations between bullying and empathy are different for boys and girls. For boys, cognitive and affective empathy are negatively associated with bullying at the between level. At the within level, the only significant cross-lagged path indicated that a positive deviation from the expected score of cognitive empathy at baseline predicted a positive deviation from the expected score in bullying behavior five months later. For girls, there were no associations between empathy and bullying at either the within- or between-level. This study calls for further clarification of the direction of the relation between bullying and empathy before incorporating it into prevention programs.

Reference

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Chapter 3

Longitudinal Relationships Between Empathy and Bullying among Boys and Girls

A Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model Study

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and experience another person's feelings (Cuff et al., 2016; Davis, 1983), has been considered a protective factor against bullying perpetration for over two decades (Endresen & Olweus, 2001; Warden & MacKinnon, 2003). Furthermore, numerous anti-bullying programs have integrated lessons aimed at increasing students' empathy (Gaffney et al., 2021). Empathy is most commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing two dimensions: cognitive and affective. Understanding others' emotions refers to cognitive empathy, whereas experiencing them refers to affective empathy (Cuff et al., 2016; Yu & Chou, 2018). Many studies have found a negative association between both dimensions of empathy and bullying (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; Zych et al., 2019b), but most of them relied on a cross-sectional design that did not provide any information on the direction of the effects (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Zych et al., 2019b). Longitudinal studies are still scarce and have yielded inconsistent results (Farrell et al., 2020; Stavrinides et al., 2010). Moreover, previous longitudinal studies on empathy and bullying used a two-wave longitudinal design, limiting inferences about the direction of the associations between variables. In addition, almost no studies have included a random intercept in their model, overlooking stable individual differences (Hamaker et al., 2015) and possibly producing incorrect estimations of cross-lagged effects (Lucas, 2023). Finally, no studies have been conducted separately for boys and girls, while the associations between cognitive and affective empathy and bullying could vary depending on students' gender (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). This study aims to address these limitations by testing the direction of the link between the two most studied dimensions of empathy (i.e., cognitive and affective) and bullying behaviors using a Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model (RI-CLPM) with three measurement waves.

1. Cross-Sectional Associations Between Empathy and Bullying Behaviors

The role of cognitive empathy in bullying behaviors is still debated (van Noorden et al., 2015). Some researchers have suggested that bullies have a limited capacity to comprehend the emotional states of others (e.g., Espelage et al., 2018; Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012). This low level of cognitive empathy would make them less aware of the suffering they cause to their victims, leading them to maintain their negative behaviors. In line with this, some meta-analyses reported a negative association between cognitive empathy and bullying (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; Zych et al., 2019b).

However, this association may vary depending on the characteristics of the bullies. For instance, bullying was associated with lower cognitive empathy among boys but not among girls in one study (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011). In a meta-analysis, being younger and being a girl were both related to weaker negative associations between cognitive empathy and bullying (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). Other studies did not find any significant association between cognitive empathy and bullying (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006a; van Noorden et al., 2017). In one study with secondary school students, a *positive* association was found (Caravita et al., 2009). Some research explained these inconsistencies by suggesting that theory of mind skills (i.e., competencies to understand others' mental states) can be used for both prosocial and antisocial purposes (Lonigro et al., 2014; Smith, 2017). ToM abilities could be of two types. Nice ToM abilities refer to skills used by students to better cooperate or comfort others, whereas nasty ToM abilities are used to lie, cheat, or tease others (Ronald et al., 2005). This is aligned with the idea that some bullies could have high cognitive empathy and are able to manipulate others to reach their goals, such as gaining popularity in the peer group (Peeters et al., 2010; van Noorden et al., 2017).

The results on the relation between bullying and affective empathy are more consistent. Most studies found a negative association, suggesting that bullies are less able to feel others' emotions (van Noorden et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2019b), even when controlling for gender (Ciucci & Baroncelli, 2014; Del Rey et al., 2016) and age (Del Rey et al., 2016; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). However, the magnitude of the negative association seems stronger for boys (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). When integrating both affective and cognitive empathy in the same analysis to capture the unique contribution of each dimension of empathy on bullying, some studies found that both dimensions were significantly and negatively associated with bullying (e.g., Del Rey et al., 2016). However, other studies found that only cognitive empathy remained negatively associated with bullying (e.g., Graf et al., 2019). Interestingly, when conducting analyses separately for boys and girls in a sample of students between 11 and 14 years old, affective empathy was only negatively associated with bullying for boys (Caravita et al., 2009). In contrast, empathy was positively associated with bullying for both genders. For students between 8 and 10 years old, no association between affective or cognitive and bullying was found, regardless of their gender (Caravita et al., 2009). Overall, these results suggest that both dimensions, even if they are largely correlated, are differently linked to bullying. Nevertheless, important inconsistencies remain across studies, and additional research is needed to clarify the associations between cognitive and affective empathy and bullying behaviors. Moreover, most studies have relied on cross-sectional data, leaving the question of the direction of effects open (van Noorden et al., 2015). Finally, results have rarely been analyzed separately for boys and girls despite consistent findings indicating that gender influences the associations between bullying and empathy (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). One study found that boys' bullying behaviors tend to be more negatively associated with socio-emotional skills such as empathy than girls' (Joliffe & Farrington, 2011). In addition, aggression is more normative for boys, and they tend to show more aggressive behavior than girls despite similar levels of anger (Archer, 2004). It is possible that empathy is more important for boys as a resource to

counter stereotypes and gender role expectations, whereas girls may need less empathy skills to refrain from aggressive behavior.

2. Longitudinal Associations Between Empathy and Bullying

Longitudinal studies on empathy and bullying are rare and provide only partial information about the direction of the association between these variables. A study with 38 bullies found that empathy lessons reduced self-reported bullying (Şahin, 2012). In addition, several effective anti-bullying programs have been shown to also increase empathy toward victimized students (Garandeau et al., 2021; Limber et al., 2018). However, these studies did not test the hypothesis that a change in empathy predicts subsequent changes in bullying.

Some studies have measured empathy and analyzed the association with bullying after a period of time while controlling for the baseline level. Using this methodology, a study found that cognitive empathy negatively predicted bullying one year later (Williford et al., 2016). However, in other studies including both affective and cognitive empathy, only affective empathy negatively and significantly affected subsequent cyberbullying (Schultze-Krumbholz & Scheithauer, 2013) and traditional bullying (Stavrinides et al., 2010). One study found that cooperative learning lessons lead to higher affective empathy and reduced bullying (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019), with some analyses suggesting that a change in affective empathy partially mediates the change in bullying. However, when controlling for other correlates of bullying (e.g., impulsivity, attitudes toward bullying, or narcissistic traits), other studies found that affective empathy did not predict subsequent bullying (Farrell et al., 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2018). A study even found a positive association between online affective empathy and cyberbullying one year later when controlling for moral disengagement through technology (Marín-López et al., 2020).

Bullying has also been assumed to hinder the development of empathy (van Noorden et al., 2015). One study found a bidirectional negative relation between bullying and affective (but not cognitive) empathy over six months (Stavrinides et al., 2010). Another study found that engaging in bullying activates moral disengagement mechanisms that prevent students from understanding and feeling others' emotions when committing such behaviors (Falla et al., 2021). This suggests that students may reduce their empathy to protect themselves from feeling psychological discomfort caused by engaging in bullying.

Overall, the results of longitudinal studies have been inconclusive, and whether empathy (either affective or cognitive) predicts future bullying behaviors remains unclear. These rare studies also present several limitations. First, the few existing studies that examined the reciprocal relations between these variables have only used two waves of data, which provide limited information. Second, gender differences have rarely been considered, although they have been found to affect the association between bullying and empathy (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). It has been suggested that boys' bullying behaviors tend to be more negatively associated with socio-emotional skills such as empathy than girls' (Joliffe & Farrington, 2011). Another explanation lies in the idea that boys tend to use more physical

forms of bullying, while girls tend to use more indirect forms (e.g., teasing and rumors spreading; Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010). It could be assumed that empathy is more strongly and negatively associated with more direct forms of bullying, given that the consequences of such behavior are more apparent. Third, previous studies have rarely integrated victimization scores (i.e., being bullied) when analyzing relations between empathy and bullying. Many studies have found a positive association between bullying and victimization and that students who simultaneously exhibit bullying and victimization behaviors (i.e., bully-victims) show a different profile in terms of psychosocial competence from non-victimized bullies (Zych et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to control for victimization to assess the unique relationship between empathy and bullying behavior, which is not confounded by victimization.

Finally, even if longitudinal studies give valuable information, to our knowledge, no studies have used Cross-Lagged Panel Modeling (CLPM) to disentangle the direction of effects. However, some limitations of CLPM have been highlighted. Notably, these models assume that stable differences between subjects do not influence the studied variables (Hamaker et al., 2015), which seems unrealistic for bullying and empathy (see Cuff et al., 2016; Zych et al., 2019a). In addition, CLPM could be a source of spurious cross-lagged effects due to the non-consideration of unobserved time-invariant variables (Lucas, 2023; Usami et al., 2019). To overcome the limitations of CLPM, some authors have proposed adding Random Intercepts (RI) to account for between-person differences while analyzing within-person differences (Hamaker et al., 2015; Usami et al., 2019). Given that the relations between affective and cognitive empathy and bullying are still unclear, an RI-CLPM with three measurement points seems relevant to disentangle the direction of effects between these variables.

3. The Present Study

This study aimed to provide further insights into the direction of the association between cognitive and affective empathy and bullying behaviors across three-time points (each separated by five months) using an RI-CLPM separately for boys and girls. Beyond considering the differences both within and between students, we controlled for students' grades and victimization at each time point. We conducted our analyses in a sample of 4-6 graders during one year because this period is particularly sensitive for the development of empathy (Bensalah et al., 2016) and bullying behaviors (Chow et al., 2023), notably because of the increasing social experiences (Malti et al., 2016). When repeated measures of the same variable are combined into one latent variable at the between level (i.e., the random intercept), we expected negative associations between bullying and both cognitive and affective empathy (hypothesis 1). At the within level, we first assumed that both cognitive and affective empathy negatively predict subsequent bullying at each wave (hypothesis 2a and 2b, respectively). Second, we expected bullying to negatively predict future cognitive and affective empathy at each wave (i.e., at the within level; hypotheses 3a and 3b, respectively). We expected these relations to be stronger for boys than for girls at the between-level and the within level (hypothesis 4).

4. Method

4.1 Procedure

Data were collected in May 2022, October 2022, and May 2023 from 4th, 5th, and 6th graders in eight elementary schools (49 classrooms) in the French-speaking part of Belgium. The schools varied in size, geographical location, and socio-economic level. Because two schools had multi-grade classrooms for 3rd and 4th graders, these 3rd graders (N = 94) were integrated into our analysis. At each wave, students were asked to complete a paper and pencil questionnaire during school hours. A research team member was present to explain the study procedure, guarantee confidentiality, and answer questions. The researchers read the questionnaire aloud in every class except for sixth graders, who completed the questionnaire independently after receiving general instructions. This survey was part of a larger research project and included other measures that were not utilized in the present study. This study and its procedure obtained the approval of the ethics committee of UCLouvain.

4.2 Participants

Our questionnaire was sent out to 1,644 students as part of a larger research project. We sent letters to parents to give them the opportunity to withdraw their child from the research process. We received 30 parental rebuttals at T1, automatically excluding these students from all waves. Sixth graders at T1 were excluded because they could only participate in the first wave of data collection (N = 351). We kept 4th graders at T2 in our analysis to increase the sample size and avoid convergence issues (N = 388). Students who did not indicate their gender were excluded from the analyses (N = 35). The final sample, used for all analyses, involved 1,228 students: 634 at T1 (336 boys and 298 girls; *M*age = 10.30; SD = 1.26), 885 at T2 (473 boys and 412 girls; *M*age = 9.92; SD = 1.04), and 896 at T3 (478 boys and 418 girls; *M*age = 10.36; SD = 1.09). From this sample, 426 students responded at one wave, 417 at two, and 385 at all waves, making 65.3% of students responded to at least two waves.

4.3 Measures

4.3.1 Bullying Perpetration

We used a 10-item bullying perpetration scale for French-speaking elementary school students (Galand et al., 2014; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022), including direct (3 items: insulting, hitting, scratching or pulling hair), indirect (4 items: mocking or teasing, gossiping, excluding, hiding or damaging personal things) and cyber (3 items: calling or texting, sending offensive or threatening messages through the Internet, publishing images or videos) bullying. Students were asked to report how often they had engaged in each behavior toward another student since the beginning of the school year (for T2) or since last Christmas holidays (for T1 and T3) on a five-point Likert scale (from "0 times" to "four times or more"). We computed McDonald's omegas (ω) to assess the reliability of our scales (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). We also conducted bifactor Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the fit of our scales using the Chi-Square test (χ^2), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis

Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The bifactor CFA results indicated a good fit for each measurement wave and satisfying internal consistency (see Table 5).

4.3.2 Bullying Victimization

We used a 10-item bullying victimization scale for French-speaking elementary school students (Galand et al., 2014), including the same direct, indirect, and cyber forms of bullying behaviors as in the bullying perpetration scale. Students were asked to report how often they had undergone each behavior (e.g., "Other students have teased me") since the beginning of the school year (for T2) or last Christmas holidays (for T1 and T3) on a five-point Likert scale. The bifactor CFA results indicated a good fit for each measurement wave and McDonald's omegas indicated satisfying internal consistency (see Table 5).

4.3.3 Cognitive and Affective Empathy

We used the French adaptation of the Basic Empathy Scale for Children to assess cognitive and affective empathy (Bensalah et al., 2016; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006b). Five items measured affective empathy (e.g., "When others feel happy, I feel happy too"). Four items measured cognitive empathy (e.g., "I can often understand how people are feeling even before they tell me"). Students were asked whether they agreed with the sentences on a five-point Likert scale (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree). We added a correlation between the residual errors of two items because of parallel wording ("I can usually tell when my friends are happy" and "I can usually tell when my friends are angry"). The second order CFA results indicated an acceptable fit for each measurement wave (see Table 5). McDonald's omega indicated satisfying internal consistency for each measurement wave, except for cognitive empathy at T1 (McDonald's omega = .61).

4.4 Analytic Plan

We first extracted factor scores from confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each scale, which were used in all subsequent analyses. We then used SPSS version 28 to perform bivariate correlations and descriptive analyses separately for boys and girls. Next, we ran a Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test to examine the pattern of our missing data. The test indicated that our data were not MCAR ($\chi^2 = 114.97$, df = 70, $p < .001$). Therefore, we used Full Information Maximum Likelihood estimation (FIML) to manage missing data (Enders, 2022; Newman, 2014). All our models were conducted on Mplus 8.4 and used a robust Maximum Likelihood estimator to deal with the non-normality of some data.

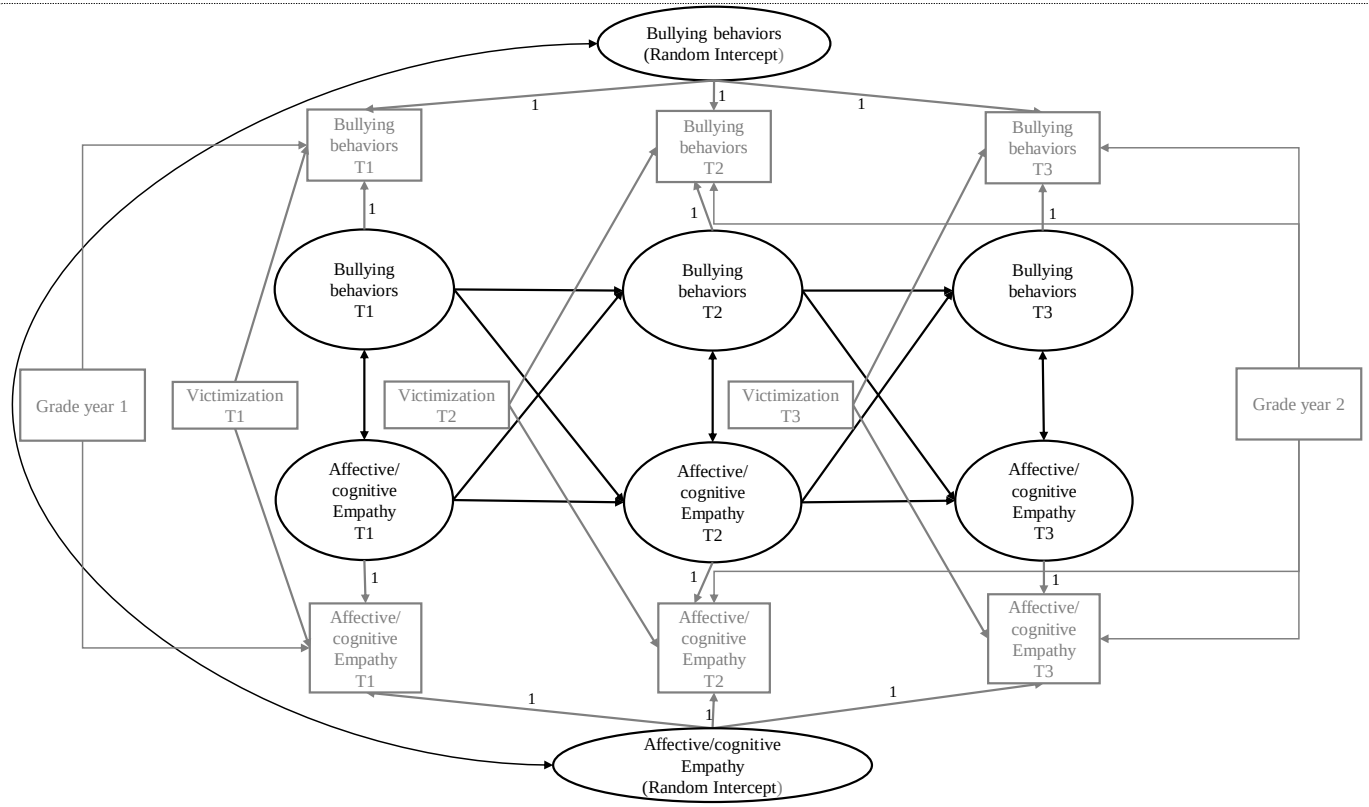
Using a step-by-step approach, we started with regular CLPM to facilitate comparison with previous studies. To do so, we modeled covariances between all variables at the same measurement time, autoregressive and cross-lagged paths between observed factors. Then, we performed an RI-CLMP, following the guidelines of Hamaker et al. (2015), to model time-invariant individual differences between students (i.e., random intercept) in bullying and empathy as well as time-variant deviation from these stable "traits". Each observed variable (factor score) was set to load on two latent factors, one common to each

measurement point random intercept) and one specific to each measurement point. All loadings were constrained to be equal to 1. At the between-level, we modeled covariances between all variables. At the within-level, we modeled covariances between all variables at the same measurement time, as well as autoregressive and cross-lagged paths between latent factors. Next, we constrained all our autoregressive and cross-lagged paths to be equal across time. Then, we compared this model to another that only constrained the auto-regressive paths to be equal across time. Finally, we removed all constrained paths and compared this model to the previous one to see if it was better adapted to our data. We compared these models by using the Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square test (Satorra & Bentler, 2010). Finally, we tested if the model was similar for boys and girls by conducting a multigroup analysis (Mulder & Hamaker, 2021). For all our models, we controlled for the effect of grade level and bullying victimization on the observed variable at each time point (see Figure 5).

Table 5. Fit and reliability indices for all scales.

Measures	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA 90% CI	SRMR	McDonald's ω
Bullying T1	44.190 (29)	.96	.93	.028	[.008 - .044]	.048	.75
Bullying T2	84.620 (29)	.95	.92	.045	[.034 - .057]	.061	.79
Bullying T3	82.252 (29)	.92	.88	.044	[.033 - .056]	.055	.78
Empathy T1	100.840 (25)	.89	.86	.068	[.055 - .082]	.051	Affective = .69 Cognitive = .61
Empathy T2	115.951 (25)	.92	.89	.063	[.052 - .075]	.046	Affective = .70 Cognitive = .68
Empathy T3	127.235 (25)	.93	.90	.066	[.055 - .078]	.045	Affective = .73 Cognitive = .76
Victimization T1	45.037 (29)	.98	.97	.029	[.009 - .045]	.030	.83
Victimization T2	72.727 (29)	.97	.95	.040	[.029 - .052]	.038	.83
Victimization T3	88.218 (29)	.95	.93	.047	[.036 - .058]	.037	.83

Note: χ^2= chi-square test of model fit associated with robust maximum likelihood estimator; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. We modeled empathy as a second-order construct, where cognitive and affective empathy represent subdimensions of the general concept of empathy, to compute the fit indices. However, we calculated McDonald's ω for each subdimension separately.



Note. Affective and cognitive empathy are presented together, albeit analyzed as separate variables for the sake of clarity. The models were identical for boys and girls.

Figure 5. Conceptual Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model of Cognitive and Affective Empathy and Bullying with Control Variables.

5. Results

5.1 Preliminary Analysis

Table 6 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between all variables of the study, separately for boys and girls. All bullying measures were positively and moderately correlated across time ($r > |.42|$). All affective empathy measures were also positively and strongly ($r > |.52|$) correlated across time. Cognitive empathy measures were positively and moderately ($r > |.38|$) correlated across time. Cognitive and affective empathy were positively intercorrelated at each time point: rs ranging from moderate ($r > |.30|$) to strong ($r > |.59|$). For boys and girls, all correlations between bullying and affective or cognitive empathy were negative and weak ($r < |.19|$). However, they were systematically stronger for boys than for girls.

Repeated measures ANOVA indicated that the average level of any of the variables did not change over time: for bullying $F(2, 828) = 0.004$, $p = 0.949$, $\eta^2 = .01$; for affective empathy $F(2, 818) = .095$, $p = 0.758$, $\eta^2 = .01$; for cognitive empathy $F(2,818) = 0.076$, $p = 0.784$, $\eta^2 = .01$. We computed Intraclass Correlations (ICC) for each variable to determine the amount of variance that could be explained by stable differences between persons vs. within-person fluctuations (e.g., Trach et al., 2023). For bullying, 61% of the variance lay at the between-person level, while within-person changes accounted for 39% of the variance. For affective empathy, 59.6% of the variance lay at the between-level, leaving 40.4% of the variance at the within-level. For cognitive empathy, 48% of variance is situated at the between-level and 52% at the within-level.

5.2 Cross-Lagged Panel Model

The CLPM fitted well the data (χ^2 [45, N = 1263] = 222.60, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, TLI= .90, RMSEA = .056, 90% CI: .049-.63, and SRMR = .049). All autoregressive paths were significant, which means that all variables were stable within students across all measurement times. Within-time associations between cognitive and affective empathy were significant and large (r from .61 to .72). Bullying was cross-sectionally and negatively correlated with affective empathy only at T1 ($r = -.09$). Regarding cross-lagged paths, affective empathy at T1 positively predicted cognitive empathy at T2 ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$), which, in turn, negatively predicted bullying at T3 ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$).

5.3 Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model

According to the Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square test, the RI-CLMP with autoregressive paths fitted better our data than the model with all constrained paths ($\Delta\chi^2 = 18.11$, $p < .01$). However, the model with all free parameters was not significantly better than the model with constrained autoregressive paths ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.03$, $p = .38$). Therefore, we kept the model with constrained autoregressive paths, which was the most parsimonious and fitted the

Table 6. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for boys and girls

Variables	Boys		Girls			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*														
1. Bullying T1	0.46	0.57	0.37	0.42	-2.50*		-.01	-.04	.43**	.63**	-.13	-.09	.33**	.50**	-.06	-.06	.33**	.14*	.13
2. Affective Empathy T1	1.76	0.90	2.28	0.90	7.34**	-.15**		.60**	-.06	-.13	.59**	.45**	-.06	-.13	.57**	.42**	-.07	.02	.01
3. Cognitive Empathy T1	2.86	0.85	3.06	0.71	3.25**	-.08	.61**		.03	-0.07	.33**	.46**	.03	-.06	.32**	.47**	.05	.02	-.02
4. Victimization T1	0.89	0.76	0.83	0.76	-0.95	.47**	-.04	-.02		.16*	-.06	.01	.57**	.17*	.01	.07	.47**	.12*	.14*
5. Bullying T2	0.43	0.54	0.31	0.42	-3.80**	.66**	-.19**	-.11	.29**		-.09	-.09	.46**	.51**	-.05	-.02	.36**	.06	.01
6. Affective Empathy T2	1.77	0.91	2.34	0.91	9.46**	-.15*	.56**	.36**	-.01	.01		.81**	-.04	-.01	.61**	.42**	-.04	-.10	.01
7. Cognitive Empathy T2	2.86	0.86	2.97	0.89	1.82	-.15*	.39**	.42**	.02	-.06	.73**		-.01	-.04	.53**	.54**	.01	-.11	.02
8. Victimization T2	0.77	0.74	0.69	0.69	-1.68	.34**	-.14*	-.06	.58**	.50**	.07	.02		.38**	-.01	.06	.67**	-.07	.07
9. Bullying T3	0.47	0.56	0.37	0.44	-3.14**	.58**	-.07	-.14*	.34**	.63**	.01	-.09	.35**		-.02	-.02	.48**	-.03	-.02
10. Affective Empathy T3	1.70	0.94	2.28	0.93	9.30**	-.13*	.53**	.32**	.02	-.02	.53**	.42**	-.01	.03		.73**	.02	-.13*	-.06
11. Cognitive Empathy T3	2.83	0.93	3.09	0.81	4.56**	-.18**	.31**	.39**	.01	-0.09	.38**	.44**	-.02	-.08	.72**		.04	-.12	-.01
12. Victimization T3	0.86	0.75	0.77	0.69	-1.73	.35**	.01	.01	.55**	.40**	.13*	.06	.63**	.48**	.08	.02		-.06	-.07
13. Grade year 1	4.43	0.61	4.37	0.60	/	.01	-.09	-.10	-.04	.03	-.09	-0.09	-.02	.05	-.13*	-.09	-.01		.99**
14. Grade year 2	4.94	0.92	4.92	0.88	/	.01	-.09	-.12	-.01	.01	-.19**	-.19**	-.10*	-.02	-.12**	-.12**	-.14**	.99**	

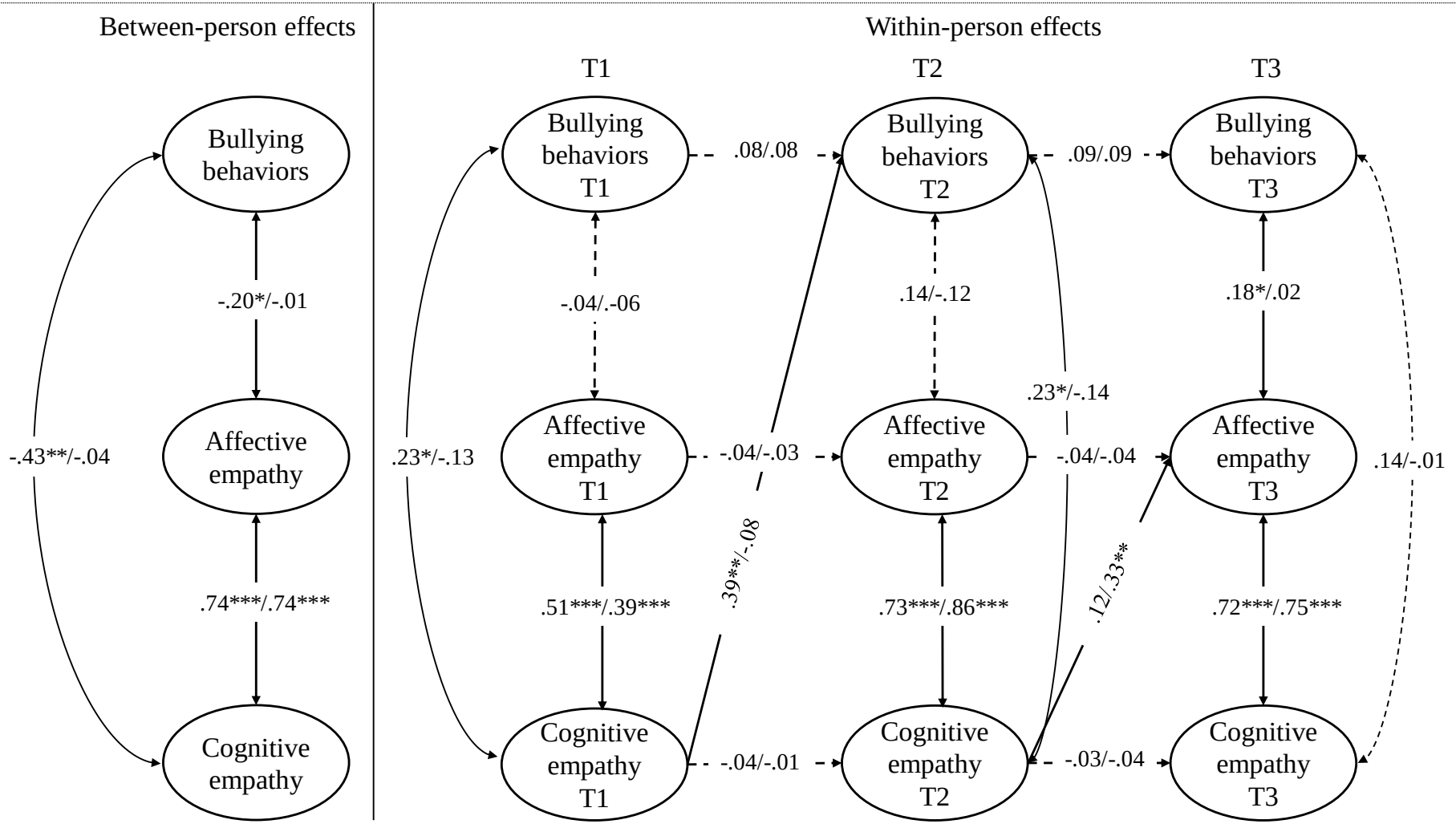
Note. Results for girls are displayed above the diagonal. t-tests report the mean difference between boys and girls. N at T1 = 634 (336 boys and 298 girls); N at T2 = 885 (473 boys and 412 girls); N at T3 = 896 (478 boys and 418 girls).
** p<.01; * p<.05

best our data (χ^2 [6] = 6.352, p = .39, CFI = 1, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .007, 90% CI: .000-.038, and SRMR = .013). In addition, to test if the model was the same for girls and boys, we performed a multiple groups analysis (Mulder & Hamaker, 2021). We compared an RI-CLPM model without any constraints between groups with an RI-CLPM model with lagged parameters constrained to be equal between groups. The Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square test was significant ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 49.37, p < .01), meaning that the lagged effects are different for boys and girls. This model is presented in Figure 6.

At the between-level, we observed a significant and positive association between cognitive and affective empathy for boys and girls. On average, students with higher cognitive empathy reported higher affective empathy (rboys = .74; rgirls = .74). Across all waves, boys with higher bullying scores reported less cognitive (r = -.43) and affective empathy (r = -.20). However, these associations were lower and non-significant for girls. At the within-level, no autoregressive paths were significant for boys, meaning that a deviation from the expected mean scores for any variables at one measurement point did not lead to a subsequent deviation from the expected score for this variable at the next measurement time.

Concerning within-time covariances, cognitive and affective empathy were associated at T1 (rboys = .51; rgirls = .39), T2 (rboys = .7; rgirls = .86), and T3 (rboys = .72; rgirls = .75). Significant within-time covariances between bullying and empathy were found for cognitive empathy at T1 and T2 only for boys (rs = .23. At the within-level, a positive deviation from their expected bullying scores at T1 and T2 is associated with a significant and positive deviation from their expected cognitive empathy scores at the same measurement time when controlling for stable traits. A significant and positive covariance was also found at the within-level for boys between affective empathy and bullying at T3 (r = .18). For boys, a deviation from the expected score of bullying at T3 is associated with a positive deviation of the expected score of affective empathy at the same measurement time when controlling for stable traits.

For boys, cross-lagged parameters indicated that bullying at T2 was positively predicted by cognitive empathy at T1 (β = .39, p < .01) at the within-level while controlling for students' stable differences. This pattern means that a positive deviation from boys' expected level of cognitive empathy at T1 was likely to be followed by a positive deviation from their expected level of bullying at T2. Finally, girls' cognitive empathy at T2 predicted positively affective empathy at T3 at the within-level (β = .33, p < .01). Therefore, a positive deviation within girls' expected cognitive empathy score at T2 was followed by a positive deviation in their expected score of affective empathy at T3. The R^2 are shown in Table 6 for both boys and girls. Almost all effect sizes were small, except for bullying at T2 and affective empathy at T3 for girls, which were medium, and bullying at T2 for boys, which was large (Orth et al., 2024).



Note. Only latent variables and standardized coefficient paths are shown. Parameters are presented as Boys/Girls (e.g., -.23*/-.10). Dotted lines are non-significant correlations and auto-regressive paths for both boys and girls. Non-significant cross-lagged paths are not shown. *** p <.001; ** p <.01; * p <.05

Figure 6. Simplified Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model of Cognitive Empathy, Affective Empathy, and Bullying

Table 6. Effect sizes (R^2) for the within-person cross-lagged effects of the random intercept cross-lagged panel models for girls and boys.

	Effect sizes (R^2)	
Variables	Girls	Boys
Bullying T2	.08	.14
Bullying T3	.03	.02
Affective empathy T2	.02	.01
Affective empathy T3	.09	.05
Cognitive empathy T2	.01	.02
Cognitive empathy T3	.03	.05

Note. Effect sizes represent the variance explained for each variable by its predictors.

6. Discussion

It is generally accepted that improving empathy is a promising path to reduce bullying. However, most research has relied on cross-sectional data, which do not indicate the direction of effect (van Noorden et al., 2015). Moreover, the scarce longitudinal studies have yielded inconsistent results and rarely used more than two data waves (e.g., Saarento et al., 2015; Stavrinides et al., 2010). This study addressed these limitations by conducting an RI-CLMP on cognitive and affective empathy and bullying scores of 1263 primary students across three measurement times separately for boys and girls.

At the between-level, the results for boys showed that variations in cognitive and affective empathy were negatively associated with variations in bullying, partially supporting our first hypothesis and consistent with meta-analyses (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; Zych et al., 2019b). Nevertheless, bivariate correlations indicated that bullying and empathy were not consistently associated across all time points. This is in line with previous findings from cross-sectional studies that are sometimes inconsistent regarding these associations. Nevertheless, our study provides evidence for the assumption that boys who generally understand and feel the emotions of others show less bullying behaviors (van Noorden et al., 2015).

Unexpectedly, at the within-level, cognitive empathy at T1 was positively associated with bullying behaviors at T1 and T2 for boys, invalidating hypothesis 2a. Boys who temporarily and positively deviated from their expected cognitive empathy mean score were prone to report bullying behaviors above their mean score, both concurrently and five months later. This finding echoes studies that have argued that bullying might require some social skills and aptitudes for understanding the emotions of others (Sutton et al., 1999; van Noorden et al., 2017). For example, understanding how to gain popularity in a group requires knowing what is expected in that group (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). In addition, this is consistent with the idea that some students used their ToM abilities to antisocial ends such as bullying (i.e., nasty ToM; Smith, 2017). Furthermore, it is conceivable that self-reported cognitive empathy may also reflect students' favorable self-perception, which could be indicative of narcissism and may potentially contribute to an increase in bullying behaviors (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). In addition, an increase in cognitive empathy may foster students' willingness to admit their

bullying behaviors. However, to our knowledge, only one study has investigated this question and did not find any effect of empathy on the likelihood of admitting to bullying others (Garandeau et al., 2024). Nevertheless, this cross-lagged effect was not significant in the third wave or for girls. Replications of these results are needed to confirm this pattern and provide an explanation of these unexpected results.

Contrary to our hypothesis 2b, we did not find evidence that a change in affective empathy led to a change in subsequent bullying at the within-level while considering stable individual differences in these constructs. This is consistent with previous studies that found no longitudinal effect of affective empathy on bullying several months later (Farrell et al., 2020; Saarento et al., 2015). Because all paths are significant at the between-level for boys, this could mean that empathy and bullying simultaneously change depending on a third variable (Usami et al., 2019). It could be hypothesized that both empathy and bullying are concurrently influenced by developmental stages rather than affecting each other. Students' bullying behaviors might also be more impacted by moral disengagement, impulsivity, or narcissism, than by empathy (Farrell et al., 2020). Affective empathy might also not be directly associated with bullying, but its effect could be mediated by other variables (e.g., attitude towards bullying; Walters & Espelage, 2018). Testing such mediating paths when implementing anti-bullying programs would be insightful.

Contrary to our hypotheses 3a and 3b, bullying did not predict change in any empathy dimension over time, regardless of gender. These results are inconsistent with previous studies suggesting that bullying hinders the development of empathy (Falla et al., 2021; Stavrinides et al., 2010). This might be due to differences in analytical strategies between studies. Beyond using random intercepts, we also considered the non-normal distribution of our data and used three waves of measurement.

Our results are aligned with our hypothesis 4, echoing previous studies that found that the association between empathy and bullying is stronger for boys than for girls (Caravita et al., 2009; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). However, we did not expect bullying to be unrelated to empathy among girls both at the between-level and the within-level. This gender gap might explain inconsistent results across studies combining scores from boys and girls. Further studies are needed to better understand the possible different mechanisms at play between boys and girls in the bullying process (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011).

Compared to the RI-CLPM, the CLPM did not show any positive association over time between empathy and bullying. On the contrary, the results indicated that cognitive empathy at T2 is associated with less bullying at T3. This study illustrates the importance of selecting the most indicated model to explore longitudinal relations between variables (Usami et al., 2019). This could also explain the different results obtained in this study and other longitudinal research that found positive effects of affective empathy on future bullying behaviors (e.g., Stavrinides et al., 2010).

6.1 Strength and limitations

This study's main strength is the use of random intercepts with three waves of data, which enabled us to disentangle the stable relations between bullying and (cognitive and affective) empathy and their temporal relations over a year for boys and girls. Despite this strength, this study also has some limitations. First, we measured general empathy rather than empathy towards bullied students specifically, which could have reduced the associations between the variables. Besides, some anti-bullying interventions aim to increase empathy towards victimized peers in particular (e.g., Saarento et al., 2015). Future studies should replicate the present results by focusing on students' empathy toward victims specifically. However, since most studies have measured general empathy, this study can easily be compared with previous research.

Second, while our study helps to disentangle the directions of effects between bullying and empathy, we cannot draw any conclusions about causality. Some intervention studies have examined if empathy mediates the effects on bullying, but results have been inconsistent (Saarento et al., 2015; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022). Future studies should examine whether anti-bullying programs impact cognitive and affective empathy differently and test their mediating roles in observed changes in bullying.

Third, the period that students were instructed to think about reporting their bullying behaviors was shorter at T2 compared to the two other data collections to ensure the same time interval between data collections. Future studies could investigate the development of associations between empathy and bullying using more waves over a longer period (e.g., six waves over 2 years) and with a consistent period of reporting (e.g., by systematically asking students to report their behavior over the past three months).

Fourth, because this study focused on empathy only, it did not include other correlates of bullying. For example, adding moral disengagement, callous-unemotional traits, narcissism, or anti-bullying attitudes to our model might be relevant in future studies (Zych et al., 2019a). Including these variables in a single model would provide further insights into the development of bullying.

Fifth, we disentangled the effect of empathy on bullying behavior while controlling for victimization but were not able to capture the effects of empathy on bullying behavior among bully-victims and non-victimized (pure) bullies separately. Future studies should use a person-oriented approach to investigate if empathy follows a different evolution and affects behavior differently among these two groups.

Finally, we only used self-reported scales, thus increasing common method variance between our variables. In addition, self-reported empathy may reflect students' self-perception of their understanding and feelings of others' emotions rather than their actual empathy. Future studies could use dyadic peer-reported nominations as a complementary measure of bullying or a behavioral measure of empathy to address these limitations (e.g., Strayer, 1993).

6.2 Implications for interventions

This study joins many others by replicating that bullying is negatively associated with cognitive and affective empathy at the between-person level (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; van Noorden et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2019b) but for boys only. However, at the within-level, our results suggest that an increase in cognitive or affective empathy is not followed by a subsequent decrease in bullying for both genders. Given that these results echo several intervention studies (e.g., Saarento et al., 2015; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022), it might suggest that increasing empathy is not the main mechanism that leads to bullying reduction. Although more research is needed to elucidate the complex relationship between bullying and empathy (e.g., through longer study periods and replication across diverse samples), other variables may warrant greater consideration in the development of prevention programs.

For example, perceived norms or peer relatedness have more convincing evidence for predicting bullying and might be more helpful in preventing it (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022). In addition, increasing empathy may not be sufficient to decrease bullying if bullies' moral disengagement mechanisms (e.g., their perception of the victims or their responsibilities regarding the situations) remain unchanged. Finally, at the within-level, we did not find that engaging in bullying hinders future empathy development. This suggests that bullies may be similarly receptive to empathy-raising messages as other students (Garandeau et al., 2016; Johander et al., 2022).

To conclude, this study provided some insights into the complex links between empathy and bullying. This study found a consistent negative cross-sectional correlation at the between-level between empathy and bullying for boys but not for girls. However, longitudinally, an increase in empathy did not lead to a decrease in bullying at the within-level. It could be assumed that bullying and empathy mainly change concurrently across development rather than causing each other. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of the processes underlying bullying behavior is crucial. Additional longitudinal and intervention studies are necessary to clarify the direction of the effects between bullying and its cross-sectional correlates. Further research on these topics would help prevention policies and stakeholders in targeting the most effective variables to tackle bullying.

Chapter 4

Classmates and Teachers Matter

Effects of Class Norms and Teachers' Responses on Bullying Behaviors

School bullying is a complex social phenomenon that is embedded in the classroom. At the class level, classmates and teachers are the two main sources of normative influence on students' bullying behavior. It has been suggested that bullying is less frequent in classes where classmates hold more negative attitudes towards bullying (i.e., the attitudinal or injunctive anti-bullying class norm) and display more defending behaviors (i.e., the descriptive defending class norm). It has also been suggested that teachers' responses to bullying incidents influence their prevalence within the classroom. However, most available studies have focused either on class norms or teachers' responses and provided inconsistent findings overall. The present study aimed to examine the influence of the injunctive anti-bullying class norm and the descriptive defending class norm and both teacher- and student-reported teachers' responses to students' bullying behaviors over time, in 1,626 primary students and their 79 teachers. Multilevel analyses showed that the injunctive anti-bullying class norm and some of the teachers' responses (i.e., working with the bullies and the victim, and disciplinary methods) predicted change in bullying over 5 months. This suggests that classmates and teachers have independent effects on bullying behaviors. The descriptive defending class norm did not predict bullying, which is in line with recent literature questioning the effectiveness of promoting defending behaviors among classmates. Our results suggest that anti-bullying programs should target both classmates' attitudes and teachers' responses to maximize effectiveness.

Reference

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Classmates and Teachers Matter

Effects of Class Norms and Teachers' Responses on Bullying Behaviors

School bullying is a form of aggressive behavior that is deliberately inflicted to cause harm, with victims often unable to defend themselves (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). It is a widespread problem that exerts a detrimental influence on students' lives.(Zych et al., 2015, 2019). It is a complex social phenomenon that extends beyond the perpetrators and victims and is embedded in the context of the entire classroom (Espelage & Swearer, 2009). Being in a certain classroom may increase or decrease students' bullying behaviors beyond their individual characteristics (Saarento et al., 2015a). Studies have consistently shown that students' bullying behaviors vary between classes (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2021; Salmivalli et al., 2011). Some theories have suggested that bullying may serve as an adaptive behavior that enables students to gain popularity and establish a dominant social position within a class (Volk et al., 2022). Classmates and teachers have been suggested as possible explanatory factors in these variations in bullying, as they both exert a normative influence on the social position of students within the class (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023).

The influence of classmates' attitudes and behaviors has primarily been investigated in terms of class norms, which are collectively established by classmates and can affect their actions. Class norms convey what is commonly done or accepted by most classmates (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). Conforming to class norms is generally associated with social approval and deviating from them may result in social rejection (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Research on bullying has primarily focused on two types of norms: descriptive and injunctive. The descriptive norms refer to what students commonly do, while the injunctive norms reflect what students expect or approve/disapprove of (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). According to the participants' role approach, bullying most often occurs in the presence of bystanders (i.e., students who witness the incident; Salmivalli et al., 1996) who can impact the bullying dynamic through their responses or attitudes (Hawkins et al., 2001; Salmivalli et al., 2011). At the class level, the injunctive anti-bullying class norm reflects students' average anti-bullying attitudes within the class (Scholte et al., 2010; Sentse et al., 2015). The descriptive defending class norm is usually operationalized by students' average defending behaviors within the class. (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). These two types of norms have been particularly incorporated into the curricula of anti-bullying prevention programs (Gaffney et al., 2021; Valle et al., 2020).

Teachers' normative influence on students' bullying behaviors has been mainly studied through their responses to bullying (Colpin et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2023). Like students, teachers can have a positive impact in this respect, for example, by communicating that such behavior is not tolerated in the classroom (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015; Yoon et al., 2023). Following the taxonomy of Bauman et al. (2008) and van Aalst et al. (2022), teachers can

ignore the situation or adopt one or more of four active responses: disciplining the bullies, working with the bullies, working with the victims, and enlisting other adults.

Although classmates and teachers are central targets in many anti-bullying programs (Gaffney et al., 2021; Valle et al., 2020), their normative influences on students' bullying behaviors have been mostly studied independently. Consequently, their respective contributions or joint effects on students' bullying behaviors and the direction of the effects remain unclear. The objective of this study was to fill these gaps by investigating the longitudinal normative influence of classmates and teachers on students' individual bullying behaviors. Specifically, this study examined how teachers' responses, the descriptive defending class norm, and the injunctive anti-bullying class norm predicted bullying behaviors over a period of 5 months.

1. Class Norms and Bullying Behaviors

Scholars have especially focused on two types of norms in bullying prevention research. First, the descriptive defending class norm has mainly been targeted through activities aimed at increasing the defending behaviors of all students within a class (e.g., Espelage et al., 2015; Kärnä et al., 2011; Yanagida et al., 2016). Enhancing the descriptive defending class norm has been assumed to lead to a decrease in individual bullying behaviors (e.g., Kärnä et al., 2011).However, the results regarding the association between defending and bullying behaviors have been inconclusive overall. Although some studies have found a negative relation between defending and bullying behaviors at the individual level (Thornberg et al., 2015), others have found no association between these variables (Gini et al., 2007; Saarento et al., 2015b). Moreover, the few studies examining the effectiveness of defending behaviors were limited to observations of small samples and specific contexts (i.e., two Canadian elementary schools) over a very short period of time (e.g., Craig & Pepler, 1998; Hawkins et al., 2001). Multilevel studies on the descriptive defending class norm have also yielded mixed results (Nocentini et al., 2013; Saarento et al., 2015b). In addition, most of these studies did not control for the individual level of defending, leading to an inappropriate estimation of the descriptive defending class norm (Lüdtke et al., 2009; Salmivalli et al., 2011). Despite ongoing efforts to encourage bystanders to defend their classmates, it remains unclear whether promoting the descriptive defending class norm effectively prevents bullying (Healy, 2020).

Second, the injunctive bullying class norm has commonly been targeted in bullying prevention research through activities aimed at enhancing classmates' anti-bullying attitudes (Valle et al., 2020). At the individual level, positive attitudes toward bullying (i.e., considering bullying acceptable) have been associated with more frequent bullying behaviors (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Zych et al., 2019). It has been suggested that a class with a more favorable injunctive class norm toward bullying may encourage students to engage in bullying as a way of promoting their integration into the group (Sentse et al., 2007; Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). This hypothesis has been supported by both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that found fewer bullying behaviors in classes with a stronger injunctive

anti-bullying class norm (Scholte et al., 2010; Sentse et al., 2015). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has examined the impact of both the injunctive anti-bullying class norm and the descriptive defending class norm simultaneously.

2. Teachers' Responses and Bullying Behaviors

Teachers have been conceptualized as the "invisible hand" overseeing students' interactions within the classroom (Farmer et al., 2011). It has been suggested that they have a normative influence on students' bullying dynamics occurring in their classes through their responses to bullying (Colpin et al., 2021; Troop-Gordon, 2015). Several studies have examined the impact of teachers' responses on students' bullying behavior by using either students' or teachers' reports. Students who perceive their teachers as not reacting to bullying have been found to report more bullying behaviors (Campaert et al., 2017). Teachers' self-reported non-response, on the other hand, has not been found to be associated with bullying prevalence at the student level (van der Zanden et al., 2015) or at the school level (De Luca et al., 2019). Conversely, when students perceive their teachers as holding a negative attitude toward bullying and taking active measures against it, they tend to report less bullying (Mucherah et al., 2018; Saarento et al., 2015b; Veenstra et al., 2014).

The inconsistent results across studies preclude the formulation of guidelines for teachers on the best direct responses to adopt when facing bullying (Bauman et al., 2021). When targeting the students involved, teachers can work with the victims and try to foster their assertiveness or advise them to walk away from the bully (Bauman et al., 2008). Some studies found that this response was associated with less bullying, while others found adverse effects because it may communicate that victims have to manage the situation on their own (Burger et al., 2022; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015). Teachers can target the bullies by using disciplinary methods or by raising their empathy toward the victims. Both strategies have been associated with lower scores of bullying (Burger et al., 2022; Wachs et al., 2019), but in the long term, disciplinary methods might foster retaliation or less visible forms of bullying (van der Zanden et al., 2015; Wachs et al., 2019). In addition, working with the bullies and victims simultaneously (e.g., by having an interview with both at the same time) may have adverse effects because victims need a safe space to express themselves without the presence of their bullies (Senden & Galand, 2021). Finally, teachers reacting to bullying by involving other adults has been associated with both positive and negative effects (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015; van der Zanden et al., 2015).

These discrepancies may be due to the different methodologies used across studies of teachers' responses. Most of them have relied on hypothetical situations presented in vignettes (see exceptions: van der Zanden et al., 2015; Wachs et al., 2019). The reported answers may thus not reflect teachers' actual responses in a real-life context. In addition, studies are either based on students' collective perceptions of the teachers (e.g., Burger et al., 2022; Campaert et al., 2017) or on teachers' reports (e.g., De Luca et al., 2019; van der Zanden et al., 2015). Although students' perceptions may avoid social desirability bias, not all students are able to observe all the strategies their teacher applies to deal with bullying

(e.g., enlisting other adults or working with the students concerned). These approaches may capture complementary aspects of teachers' responses, but, to the best of our knowledge, no study has included and compared both sources of information.

3. The Present Study

Research indicates that bullying varies between classes, as teachers and classmates may affect students' bullying over and above individual characteristics. Class norms and teachers' responses have been suggested as two important sources of normative influence explaining these variations between classes. However, how these variables uniquely and jointly affect bullying variations between classes is still unclear. Although class norms and teachers' responses are often targeted in anti-bullying programs, findings have been mixed overall. Moreover, since class norms and teachers' responses have mainly been studied separately, we do not know their unique and combined effects on bullying. To move forward, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the specific impact of class norms and teachers' responses on the evolution of students' bullying behaviors. This study examined the effects of the descriptive defending class norm, the injunctive bullying class norm, and teachers' responses on students' bullying behaviors over time. Teachers' responses to bullying were measured through teachers' and students' reports to capture both perspectives. Teachers reported the frequency of each response they adopted (i.e., ignoring, disciplining the bullies, working with the bullies, working with the victims, and enlisting other adults). In contrast, students only reported their perception of how often their teachers reacted in cases of aggression between students. A multilevel longitudinal model with two time points was used to analyze the effects of individual- and class-level variables. First, we hypothesized that the descriptive defending class norm at T1 would negatively predict bullying behaviors at T2 (Hypothesis 1). Second, we expected the injunctive anti-bullying class norm at T1 to negatively predict bullying at T2 (Hypothesis 2). Third, we assumed that students' perception of teachers' responses at the class level at T1 would negatively predict subsequent individual bullying behaviors at T2 (Hypothesis 3). Regarding self-reported teacher responses, we hypothesized that ignoring bullying at T1 would increase students' bullying behaviors at T2 (Hypothesis 4a). Finally, we hypothesized that any of the other active teacher responses at T1 (i.e., disciplining the bullies, working with the bullies, working with the victims, and enlisting other adults) would decrease students' bullying behaviors at T2 (Hypothesis 4b). These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 7.

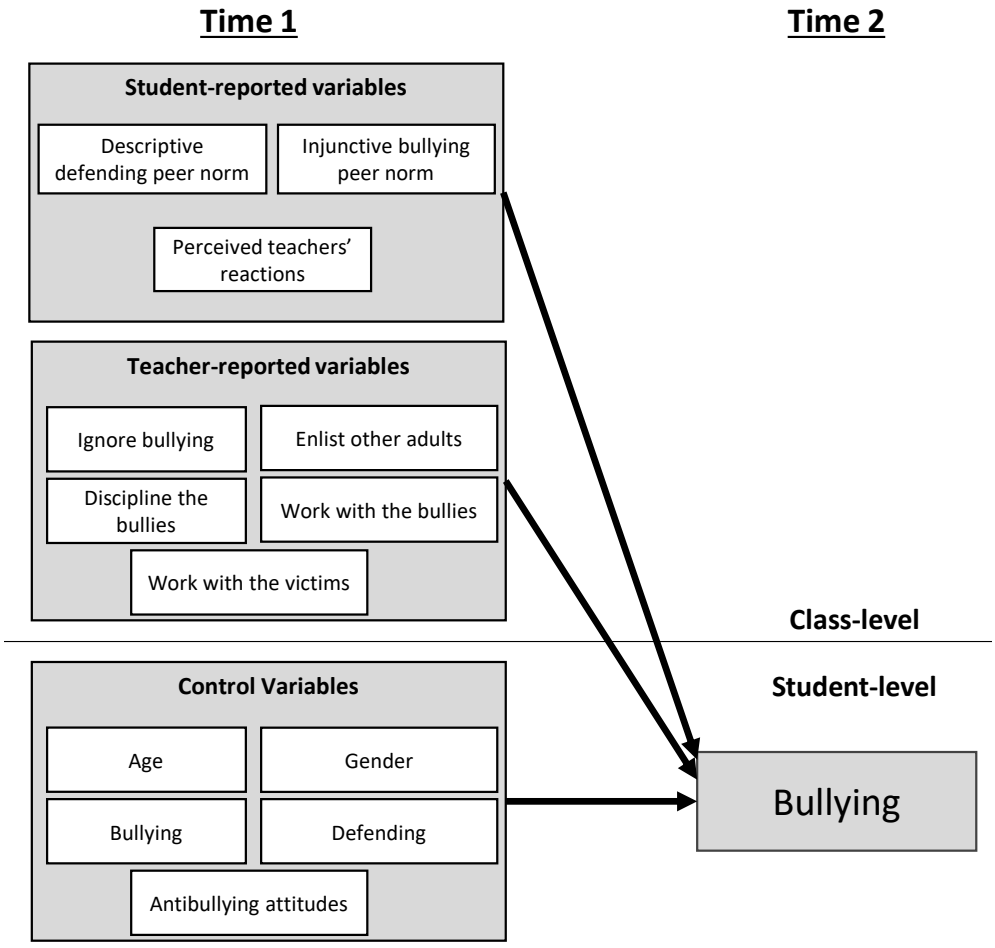


Figure 7. Theoretical Integrative Model

4. Method

4.1 Participants

Data were collected in 15 schools in the French-speaking part of Belgium in October 2021 and May 2022. The targeted sample consisted of 1,752 students from 81 grade 4-6 classes recruited through the implementation of an anti-bullying program. At T1, 240 students were absent or refused to participate (including four classes where students were completely absent due to COVID-19). At T2, 68 students were absent or refused to participate. We used passive consent and received 56 parents' refusals, automatically excluding their children from both T1 and T2. Our final sample consisted of 1,456 students at T1 (51.4% boys, *M*age = 9.97 years, *SD* = 1.02) and 1,628 at T2 (51.3% boys, *M*age = 10.3, *SD* = 1.18), in 79 classes. Two teachers were absent during data collection at T1. The schools had between 26 and 246 students in grades 4-6. The schools had official socioeconomic indices, based on students' area of residence, ranging from 1 (low) to 20 (high) and were situated across various regions and areas of the French-speaking part of Belgium .

4.2 Procedure

Teachers and students were asked to fill out a confidential questionnaire during school hours. A member of the research team was present to explain the study's general procedure and answer questions. The questionnaire was read aloud by the researchers in every classroom except for the sixth graders, who received general instructions and completed the questionnaire independently. The confidentiality of their answers was ensured before they completed the questionnaire. This study and its procedure obtained the approval of the ethics committee of UCLouvain .

4.3 Measures

4.3.1 Student-level Measures

Bullying Perpetration

We used a 10-item bullying perpetration scale for primary school students (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022), composed of three subdimensions: direct (3 items: insulting, hitting, scratching or pulling hair), indirect (4 items: gossiping, excluding, teasing, hiding or damaging personal things) and cyber (3 items: calling or texting, sending offensive or threatening messages through the Internet, publishing images or videos) bullying. Students were asked to report the frequency with which they had engaged in each behavior toward another student since the beginning of the school year (at T1) or Christmas break (at T2) on a five-point Likert scale (from 0 = never to 4 = four times or more). We used a confirmatory bifactor model to assess general bullying and its subdimensions simultaneously (Morin et al., 2020). We forced the general factor to be uncorrelated to the subdimensions while leaving the subdimensions to be correlated with each other. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated a good fit at T1: χ^2 (29, *N*= 1436) = 73.74, $p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, Tucker-

Lewis index (TLI) = .92, root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = .033, 90% confidence interval (CI): .024-.042, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .045 and T2: (χ^2 (28, *N*= 1599) = 133.356, *p* < 001, CFI = .92, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .049, 90% CI: .040-.057, and SRMR = .061. McDonald's omegas showed good reliability at both times for the general factor (T1 and T2: ω = .81).

Anti-bullying Attitudes

We used a French translation of the anti-bullying attitude scale (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). It was composed of eight statements about students' attitudes toward bullying (e.g., "It is funny to see kids get upset when they are teased"). Students had to rate on a five-point Likert scale whether they agreed with each statement (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree). Half of the items were reversed; we thus correlated the residual errors of these items. The CFA showed a good fit (χ^2 (47.23, *N*= 1428) = 47.23, *p* < .001, CFI = .95, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .041, 90% CI: .028-.054, and SRMR = .031). McDonald's omega was ω =. 63.

Defending Behaviors

We opted for a self-reported measure because some defending behaviors (e.g., comforting the victim) are not highly visible to all students and could occur outside of the class. We transformed the defending scenario of Pronk et al. (2013) into four items on a five-point Likert scale. The scale started with the question: "What do you do when you see someone being bullied?". Students then indicated their level of agreement (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree) with the items (e.g., "I call a friend, and together we confront the bully or bullies and intervene"). The CFA demonstrated a good fit: χ^2 (2, *N*= 1433) = 7.90, *p* > .05, CFI = .99, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .045, 90% CI: .016-.081, and SRMR = .015. McDonald's omega was ω =.64.

4.3.2 Class-level Variables

Injunctive Anti-bullying Class Norm

We aggregated individual anti-bullying attitudes at the class level to compute the injunctive anti-bullying norm for each class (Marsh et al., 2012; Veenstra & Lodder, 2022).

Descriptive Defending Class Norm

We aggregated individual defending behaviors at the class level to identify the descriptive defending norm for each class.

Perceived Teachers' Responses

Five items asked students to what extent they perceived their teachers as directly reacting to a bullying situation (e.g., "Teachers intervene when one or more students are bullying others"; Galand et al., 2014). Items ranged from 0 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). We correlated the errors of two items because of content and wording similarity based on their modification indices ("Teachers don't let us make fun of someone who gives a wrong

answer" and "Teachers don't let us say negative things about other students in the class"). The CFA showed a good fit: χ^2 (4, *N*= 1435) = 6.31, *p* = 0.18, CFI = .99, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .02, 90% CI: .00-.048, and SRMR = .014. McDonald's omega was ω =.62. The individual scores were then aggregated at the class level to identify the class perception of teachers' responses to bullying.

Teachers' Responses

We used a French adaptation of the Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ; Bauman et al., 2008). The following sentence introduced this scale: "As an adult, there are many ways to react when a student is bullied by their classmates. When some students bully another student, what is your response? Please indicate the frequency of your responses by checking the box that most closely matches your practice". Fifteen items were presented, and teachers had to indicate the frequency of each of their responses on a seven-point Likert scale (0 = never; 6 = very often). Items were then regrouped according to the same dimensions as Bauman et al. (2008) and van Aalst et al. (2022): ignoring the incident (two items; e.g., "I do not react"), disciplining the bullies (three items; e.g., "I punish the bullies"; ω = .77), working with the bullies (three items; e.g., "I find solutions with those who are bullying to improve the situation"; ω = .81), working with the victims (three items; e.g., "I advise the student to defend her/himself"; ω = .71), enlisting other adults (three items; e.g., "I inform my colleagues about the situation"; ω = .71). A CFA with a five-factor solution showed good fit indices (χ^2 (70, N= 79) = 78.56, *p* = .22, CFI = .97, TLI = .96 RMSEA = .039, 90% CI: .00-.079, and SRMR = .073).

4.3.3 Analytical Procedure

First, factor scores were extracted for each variable and used in all analyses to overcome convergence issues at the class-level. We computed the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix with SPSS version 28. Given the nested structure of the data, we used Mplus 8.4 to perform multilevel random intercept modeling. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) indicated that the variance in our dependent variable (i.e., bullying at T2) at the class level was 10.1%, whereas at the school level it was 3.2% using a three-level model. The low variance explained at the school level made us exclude this level for our subsequent analysis. All variables had a covariance coverage above 68%. Our data were not missing completely at random according to the MCAR test (χ^2 = 236.41, df = 129, *p* < .001). Following the recommendations of Newman (2014), we used the Maximum Likelihood Robust (MLR) and Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) techniques to deal with missing data and biased estimates. In addition, we added auxiliary variables to enhance estimate accuracy and strengthen the missing at random (MAR) assumption (Enders, 2010). The added variables were students' perceptions of the teachers' responses at the individual level and the grades of students. We proceeded step by step; starting with a simple longitudinal model, we separately added variables at Level 2 and finally combined them in a single model. The dependent variable was bullying behaviors at T2, controlling for bullying at T1. Because several studies have found that age and gender are associated with bullying, we controlled for these variables in all models (Cook et al., 2010). We also controlled for anti-bullying

attitudes and defending behaviors at the individual-level to avoid conflated variances at the classroom-level when analyzing the effect of norms. In Model 1, we included all individual-level variables that served as control variables in all subsequent multilevel models. Model 2a included the descriptive defending class norm, Model 2b included the injunctive anti-bullying class norm, Model 3a included students' perceptions of teachers' responses, and Model 3b included the five reported responses of teachers. The final and integrative model combined all significant variables found in previous separate models (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). All variables at Level 1 used for controlling the effects of class norms (i.e., defending behaviors and anti-bullying attitudes) and individual control variables (age, gender, and bullying at T1) were group-mean centered. All aggregated variables at Level 2 (i.e., the injunctive anti-bullying class norm, the descriptive defending class norm, and students' perception of their teachers' responses) were grand-mean centered (Rights et al., 2020; Yaremych et al., 2023).

4.4 Results

Table 7 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. At the individual level, bullying at T1 and T2 showed a positive correlation, and both were negatively associated with anti-bullying attitudes and perceptions of teachers' responses. However, they were not associated with defending behaviors. Table 8 displays the coefficients found in the successive models. Model 1 only included individual-level predictors: baseline bullying behaviors, gender, age, anti-bullying attitudes, and defending behaviors. The results showed that bullying behaviors at T1 was the only significant predictor of bullying at T2 ($\beta = 0.61$; $p < .001$). Model 2a included the descriptive defending class norm at T1 and found no significant effect of this norm on bullying at T2 ($\beta = -0.08$; $p = .52$). On the other hand, the results of Model 2b indicated a significant reduction in student bullying at T2 in classrooms with a stronger injunctive anti-bullying class norm at T1 ($\beta = -0.66$; $p < .001$), accounting for 43% of the between-class variance. Results for Model 3a showed that students reported reduced bullying behaviors at T2 in classes where teachers were perceived by students to be more prone to react at T1 ($\beta = -0.51$; $p < .001$). This model explained 26% of the between-class variance in bullying behavior. Model 3b included all self-reported teachers' responses. It showed that students reported a lower frequency of bullying at T2 in classes where the teacher reported working with the bullies ($\beta = -0.40$; $p < .01$) and the victim ($\beta = -0.28$; $p < .05$) more often. Conversely, more bullying at T2 was reported in classes where teachers relied more on disciplinary methods at T1 ($\beta = 0.40$; $p < .05$). This model explained 21% of the class variance in bullying behavior. When isolated in a model without any other class variable, only the teachers' responses of working with the bullies remained significant ($\beta = -0.36$; $p < .01$).

Our final model integrated all previously significant variables at the class level (i.e., the injunctive anti-bullying class norm, perceived teachers' responses, teachers' responses of disciplining the bullies, and working with the bullies and the victim). The injunctive anti-bullying class norm and perceived teachers' responses remained significant and negatively predictive of bullying at T2 (respectively: $\beta = -0.51$; $p < .001$; $\beta = -0.31$; $p = .001$). In addition

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Individual level											
1. Bullying T1	0.40	0.49									
2. Bullying T2	0.47	0.54	.58**								
3. Gender (0=girl; 1=boy)	0.55	/	.13**	.11**							
4. Age	10.05	1.05	.10**	.03	.03						
5. Anti-bullying attitudes T1	3.27	0.61	-.29**	-.17**	-.14**	-.06*					
6. Defending T1	1.94	0.90	.04	.01	-.13**	-.01	.17**				
7. Teachers' perceived direct responses T1	3.09	0.78	-.14**	-.10**	-.06*	-.09**	.28**	.13**			
Class level											
1. Descriptive defending class norm T1	1.94	0.27									
2. Injunctive anti-bullying class norm T1	3.27	0.22	.12**								
3. Teachers' perceived direct responses T1	3.09	0.27	.07**	.33**							
4. Ignoring T1	0.28	0.62	-.13**	-.11**	-.08**						
5. Disciplining the bullies T1	4.00	1.26	-.30**	-.11**	-.17**	.05*					
6. Working with the bullies T1	5.46	0.75	.10**	.18**	.18**	-.25**	.13**				
7. Working with the victims T1	2.30	1.34	-.11**	-.11**	-.20**	.10**	.49**	-.17**			
8. Enlisting adults T1	4.70	1.11	-.08**	.10**	.05*	-.02	.44**	.35**	-.16**		

Note. **: p<.01; *: p<.05.

Table 8. Multilevel Models for Bullying Behaviors at T2

	Bullying behaviors T2											
Predictor	Model 1 Individual variables		Model 2a Descriptive norm		Model 2b Injunctive norm		Model 3a Student-reported teachers' responses		Model 3b Self-reported teachers' responses		Model 4 Integrative	
Individual level	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)
Bullying T1	0.61***	(0.03)	0.56***	(0.03)	0.56***	(0.03)	0.56***	(0.03)	0.56***	(0.03)	0.56***	(0.03)
Gender (1=boy)	0.02	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)
Age	-0.03	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)
Anti-bullying attitudes T1	0.01	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)
Defending T1	-0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)
Class level												
Descriptive defending class norm T1			-0.08	(0.12)							/	
Injunctive anti-bullying class norm T1					-0.66***	(0.12)					-0.51***	(0.08)
Perceived teachers' direct responses T1							-0.51***	(0.09)			-0.31**	(0.09)
Ignoring T1									-0.05	(0.12)	/	
Disciplining the bullies T1									0.40*	(0.21)	0.19	(0.10)
Working with the bullies T1									-0.40**	(0.19)	-0.25*	(0.11)
Working with the victims T1									-0.28*	(0.19)	-0.25*	(0.11)
Enlisting adults T1									-0.15	(0.20)	/	
Residual variance												
Within	.63	(0.04)	0.69	(0.04)	0.69	(0.04)	0.69	(0.04)	0.69	(0.04)	0.69	(0.04)
Between	/	/	0.99	(0.02)	0.57	(0.09)	0.74	(0.09)	0.79	(0.10)	0.41	(0.09)

Note. All coefficients are standardized.

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

teacher-reported working with the victim and working with the bullies maintained their negative and significant associations with bullying at T2 (β = -0.25; $p < .05$ in both cases). The effect of disciplining the bullies was no longer significant (β = 0.19; $p = .057$). This model explained 59% of the between-class bullying variance.

5. Discussion

Research has consistently shown that students' bullying behaviors vary between classes (Saarento et al., 2015a; Troop-Gordon, 2015). Some studies have suggested that these between-class variations are explained by the normative influence of class norms and teachers' responses (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023). However, little research has been conducted on the unique and combined effects of these variables on students' bullying behaviors. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining the longitudinal impact of the injunctive anti-bullying class norm, the descriptive defending class norm, and (student- and self-reported) teachers' responses on students' bullying behaviors 5 months later.

We found no predictive effect of the descriptive defending class norm on bullying behaviors, invalidating Hypothesis 1. This unexpected result is inconsistent with some previous studies that have found a negative association between the descriptive defending class norm and bullying (Nocentini et al., 2013; Salmivalli et al., 2011). It should be noted that these studies used aggregated scores of peer reports, whereas our study used self-reports, which may explain this discrepancy. However, our results are consistent with those of another study using peer reports (Saarento et al., 2015b). In addition, our findings align with two meta-analyses of anti-bullying programs, suggesting that promoting interventions of bystander students is not linked to a significant reduction in bullying (Gaffney et al., 2021; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). On the one hand, it could be hypothesized that some perpetrators stop their behaviors when other students intervene (Salmivalli, 2010). On the other hand, defending victims might reinforce the status of some perpetrators as popular "rule-breakers", thus increasing bullying (Healy, 2020). Both effects may occur simultaneously, resulting in a non-significant total effect. Furthermore, it is conceivable that not all defensive behaviors are equally associated with bullying (Lambe & Craig, 2020; Wang et al., 2023). It may be suggested that direct defending (e.g., confronting the bullies) may have iatrogenic effects because it could communicate that the victims are unable to defend themselves or incite revenge-seeking responses from bullies (Healy, 2020). Conversely, indirect forms of defense, such as comforting victims, may mitigate their plight and have beneficial outcomes. Finally, the impact of defending may vary depending on the status of the defenders. It can be postulated that defending is beneficial for the victim only if the defender is perceived as popular by their peers. Future studies should investigate these hypotheses and test whether the identity of the defenders and the way they defend influence the bullying situation differently (Sainio et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2023). Our models showed that the injunctive anti-bullying class norm significantly and negatively predicted bullying at T2, supporting Hypothesis 2. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found similar effects (Scholte et al., 2010; Sentse et al., 2015). Overall, these results provide insight into why

focusing on changing classmates' attitudes may be more effective than encouraging bystanders' intervention in anti-bullying programs (Gaffney et al., 2021). Future studies should explore why students are influenced by their classmates' attitudes but not by their classmates' defending behaviors. Further insights are needed to understand how students interpret what their classmates think about bullying.

Consistently with Hypothesis 3, being in a class where the teacher is perceived as more responsive to peer aggression was associated with less bullying at the student level 5 months later. These results are in line with previous studies indicating a negative association between students' perceptions of their teachers' attitudes and subsequent bullying (Saarento et al., 2015b; Veenstra et al., 2014). Regarding self-reported teachers' responses, contrary to Hypothesis 4a, ignoring bullying situations was not associated with bullying at T2. This echoes some studies that have found no effect of teachers' lack of response (both self- and student-reported) on student bullying (Burger et al., 2022; van der Zanden et al., 2015). However, some other studies have found that individual victimization is higher when teachers ignore bullying situations (Burger et al., 2022; Yoon et al., 2023). It may be that teachers' lack of response makes victims feel abandoned, worsening their perception of the situation. Conversely, students may remain unaffected by the teachers' absence of response.

Several self-reported teachers' responses significantly predicted bullying, partially supporting Hypothesis 4b. Consistently with previous studies, working with the bullies was associated with a decrease in bullying behaviors 5 months later (Wachs et al., 2019; Garandeau et al., 2016). Working with bullies in a non-punitive way (i.e., holding them responsible for the consequences of their behavior) thus appears to be a promising approach for dealing with bullying (Garandeau et al., 2016; Wachs et al., 2019; Yoon et al., 2023). Working with the victim was also associated with lower levels of bullying. This suggests that teachers' support for victims could potentially prevent perpetrators from continuing their behavior (Campaert et al., 2017; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010), possibly because students perceive that the teacher is aware of the situation.

Disciplining the bullies was found to be associated with an increase in bullying behavior 5 months later in model 3b. It is possible that punishing the bullies may put a temporary stop to the incident, but in the long term, it may lead to retaliation or less visible forms of bullying (van der Zanden et al., 2015; Wachs et al., 2019). Contrary to our expectations, enlisting other adults did not predict bullying at T2. This response may have two simultaneous effects. On the one hand, this reaction could help teachers to stop bullying because other adults successfully manage the situation (Johander et al., 2022; van der Zanden et al., 2015). On the other hand, it may communicate that the victim is weak and encourage the perpetrators to continue their behavior (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015).

Interestingly, when each response is analyzed separately in different models, only working with the bullies is significantly associated with bullying at T2. This could mean that this response should be prioritized before working with the victims. Conversely, when a teacher is already working with the bullies, adding disciplinary sanctions may have a counter-productive effect (Wachs et al., 2019).

Integrating all class-level significant variables in the final model explained additional between-class variance compared to separated models. This suggests that teachers have a direct normative influence on bullying behavior over and above class norms. Thus, beyond fostering positive relationships between students, our study supports the idea that teachers play a significant role in bullying through their specific responses (Farmer et al., 2011). Finally, these results show that teacher-reported and student-reported teachers' responses toward bullying provide complementary perspectives.

5.1 Limitations and Future Studies

This study has several limitations. First, the HBQ has been criticized for its psychometric properties, particularly due to its brevity. We chose this scale because it appeared to be the most appropriate and commonly used to assess teachers' responses toward bullying (van Aalst et al., 2022). As the HBQ only includes five possible teacher responses, more research could be useful to document the diversity of teachers' responses to bullying among students. Alternatively, future studies could investigate how to promote specific responses by asking teachers about their confidence in their abilities related to bullying (e.g., Feijóo et al., 2024). Second, although our study is longitudinal, it is limited to two measurement points. Future research could build on our findings by including additional measurement points to better explore patterns in the development of bullying over time. Third, our defending and bullying scales relied on students' self-reports. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, future studies could supplement these measures with peer nominations (Branson & Cornell, 2009). Fourth, we measured teachers' responses differently depending on who reported them (i.e., teachers or students), which reduced direct comparability between sources. Students were asked to report their perception of how often their teachers reacted in cases of aggression between students. In contrast, teachers reported what specific responses they adopted when confronted with bullying situations. We made this decision because students may not be able to observe all responses listed in the HBQ. However, future studies could use the same questionnaire for both students and teachers (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015; van Gils et al., 2022) to examine their level of agreement regarding teachers' responses associated with bullying. Fifth, we only considered the descriptive defending and the injunctive anti-bullying class norms because they are the most mobilized in anti-bullying programs (Gaffney et al., 2021; Valle et al., 2020). Other class norms, based on other student behaviors (e.g., descriptive reinforcing class norm; Saarento et al., 2015b), could be considered and may provide additional insights. Additionally, recent research has pointed out the importance of bullying norms salience (i.e., how bullying is associated with popularity) and students' perception of the norm (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Authors, 2022). Future studies could include these types of norms to explore how students infer their classmates' attitudes and are influenced by the injunctive class norm. Finally, this study was conducted among primary students. Conducting a similar study with adolescents would provide valuable insights, as some authors have suggested that class norms could influence adolescents more strongly than teachers due to developmental changes (Salmivalli et al., 2021; Yeager et al., 2015).

5.2 Implications for Bullying Prevention

Several implications for anti-bullying programs can be drawn from the present study. First, our results contribute to an emerging set of findings that question the relevance of promoting defending behaviors among classmates to prevent bullying (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2023; Saarento et al., 2015b). Consequently, prevention policies should not solely focus on classmates' defending behaviors but also their attitudes toward bullying. Changing the injunctive anti-bullying class norm, on the other hand, has been consistently linked to fewer bullying behaviors and seems a more promising approach to decreasing bullying (Pronk et al., 2013; Scholte et al., 2010).

Second, our results support the idea that teachers' responses to bullying situations are also a relevant factor in the evolution of bullying (Troop-Gordon, 2015; van Aalst et al., 2022). Being in a classroom where the teacher is perceived as more prone to react to peer aggression is associated with a reduction in bullying. Nevertheless, our study suggests that not all responses reported by teachers lead to a reduction in bullying. Working with the students involved (especially the perpetrators) appears to be the most indicated teachers' responses to decrease bullying (Burger et al., 2022; Wachs et al., 2019). Several anti-bullying programs propose conducting separate discussions with both the bully and the victim to reduce bullying (e.g., Kärnä et al., 2011). It is important to underline that discussing with the bully and the victim together may have iatrogenic effects (Burger et al., 2022). As bullying involves an imbalance of power, victims should have a safe space to express themselves without the presence of their perpetrators (Senden & Galand, 2019).

Importantly, this study provides empirical evidence on the unique and joint influence of classmates and teachers on bullying and reinforces the idea that they could both be mobilized to prevent bullying (Saarento et al., 2015b). This supports the current recommendations to involve both teachers and classmates in bullying prevention efforts, as this could have a greater impact than solely focusing on improving interactions among students (Gaffney et al., 2021; Valle et al., 2020). For example, activities intended for students should be combined with specific teacher training in dealing with bullying situations in their classroom by working with the students concerned in a non-punitive way (van Verseveld et al., 2019, 2021).

To conclude, this study examined how class norms and teachers' responses explain between-classroom variations in bullying behaviors. When combined in a unique model, results indicated that the descriptive defending class norm seemed to have less impact than expected, whereas the injunctive anti-bullying class norm was significantly associated with subsequent reductions in bullying behaviors. We also found that students' perceptions of teachers' readiness to react to bullying and teacher-reported work with bullies and victims reduced bullying. By contrast, enlisting other adults had no direct effect. To reduce bullying, it may be effective to promote classmates' anti-bullying attitudes and encourage teachers to react, specifically by working with bullies. Further research is needed to unravel the underlying mechanisms through which both classmates and teachers exert their normative influence on bullying behavior.

Chapter 5

The effectiveness of the KiVa anti-bullying program in the French-speaking part of Belgium

Testing the logic model and implementation dosage at the class-level

School bullying affects 10% to 30% of students worldwide, with 11% of 11-year-olds in French-speaking Belgium reporting recent experiences. Bullying has many negative consequences for all students involved. Anti-bullying programs have been developed to address this problem, but their effectiveness remains limited. One possible reason is that implementation dosage (i.e., the degree to which a program is implemented) is rarely considered at the classroom level. In addition, evaluation studies often overlook the logic model that explains how a program achieves its effects. This study evaluates KiVa in French-speaking Belgium, focusing on class-level dosage and its effects on bullying and victimization, as well as KiVa's logic model. Results indicate that KiVa reduced bullying only in classes that implemented at least 60% of the program's activities. However, no significant differences were found in victimization or in variables related to KiVa's logic model. No differences were observed between control classes and classes that implemented KiVa with less than 60% of the activities. These findings highlight the critical role of implementation dosage in program effectiveness and suggest that our understanding of the mechanisms behind bullying reduction remains incomplete. Future research should further investigate these mechanisms in order to improve anti-bullying interventions.

Chapter 5

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School bullying is a subtype of aggressive behavior that causes harm in which victims have difficulties defending themselves (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). It can take different forms (e.g., violence, insults, social exclusion, cyberbullying) and is embedded in a social dynamic, including the authors, victims, and bystanders (Joseph & Stockton, 2018; Salmivalli et al., 1996). This phenomenon concerns 10% to 30% of students worldwide (Cosma et al., 2024; Modecki et al., 2014). In the French-speaking part of Belgium, the latest HBSC survey found that 11% of 11-year-old children have reported being bullied in the past couple of months (Cosma et al., 2024). Victims are more at risk of internalized symptoms and general health issues (Moore et al., 2017), whereas bullies are more likely to develop other deviant behaviors (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). In addition, witnessing bullying is associated with a more negative perception of school and more psychological distress (Janosz et al., 2008; Kubiszewski, 2016). Given its prevalence and consequences, school bullying has been subject to numerous initiatives to reduce it. The most recent meta-analysis has reported that anti-bullying programs are associated with an average 20% reduction in bullying behaviors (Gaffney et al., 2019a).

However, evaluation studies of anti-bullying programs have suffered from two major limitations. First, program evaluation studies usually compare schools that have implemented the program to schools that have not, without considering implementation dosage. Dosage refers to how much of the program has been delivered and is usually operationalized as the number of activities implemented (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Lekamge et al., 2025). Many studies have reported that dosage varies significantly from one class to another within schools implementing an anti-bullying program (Joronen et al., 2011; Matischek-Jauk et al., 2017; Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). Therefore, to assess the specific effects of anti-bullying programs more accurately, evaluation studies should account for dosage variation within each class. Second, most program evaluation studies neglect to test the logic model supposed to explain the program's effectiveness (Volk et al., 2017). Therefore, even if a program is associated with positive outcomes, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the specific mechanisms behind these effects (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

The program KiVa is one of the rare anti-bullying programs that have been implemented in several countries (Gaffney et al., 2019b; Kärnä et al., 2011a). Adding to the body of replication studies of the effects of KiVa, this study aimed to evaluate the program in French-

speaking Belgium, where no programs have been associated with a reduction in bullying yet (Tolmatcheff et al., 2020). To address the limitations of previous evaluation studies, this study further examined (1) the effect of dosage at the class-level on both bullying and victimization (being bullied) and (2) KiVa's logic model.

1. The KiVa Program

The general theoretical framework of KiVa is based on the socio-cognitive theory (Kärnä et al., 2013), which conceptualizes human behavior as interdependent with personal and environmental factors. In addition, KiVa is also based on research on bullies' social status (Juvonen et al., 2003). Finally, the program mainly focuses on the role of bystanders in explaining the persistence of bullying behaviors (i.e., participant role approach; Salmivalli et al., 1996). If bystanders encourage bullies or do not defend the victims, they increase the risk of maintaining bullying situations (Salmivalli et al., 2011). KiVa includes two types of activities rooted in these theoretical frameworks: universal actions and indicated actions. Universal actions target all students and aim to raise their awareness about the importance of the group in the bullying dynamic. These actions include a video game, fluorescent vests for adults supervising recess, an information guide about KiVa for parents, and other tools that are distributed to the various actors within the school to signify that the school is taking the issue of bullying seriously (Kärnä et al., 2013). The indicated actions specifically target the students involved in a bullying situation and consist of interviews conducted by teachers trained in the KiVa method (Kärnä et al., 2013).

1.1 KiVa's Theoretical Logic Model

KiVa aims to decrease bullying by targeting students' attitudes, empathy, class norms, and perceptions of their teachers' attitudes regarding bullying (Saarento et al., 2015a). At the student level, anti-bullying attitudes (i.e., personal disapproval of bullying) have been found to be negatively associated with bullying behaviors (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). KiVa targets students' attitudes toward bullying across several activities, emphasizing that bullying always hurts and is unjustifiable (Kärnä et al., 2011a). Empathy encompasses two distinct dimensions: affective (the degree to which an individual experiences others' emotions) and cognitive (the extent to which an individual comprehends others' emotions). KiVa places a particular emphasis on fostering affective empathy (Garandeau et al., 2021), as it has been consistently negatively associated with bullying behaviors. In contrast, the association between cognitive empathy and bullying behaviors has been inconsistent across studies (van Noorden et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2019a).

KiVa also aims to increase anti-bullying attitudes and defending behaviors at the class-level, referring to the injunctive anti-bullying norm and descriptive defending norm (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022). These two class norms have been assumed to be negatively associated with bullying behaviors (for a review, see Saarento et al., 2015b). Several activities are designed to encourage students to show disapproval of bullying and stand up for the victims (Saarento et al., 2015a). In addition, several studies have underlined the

importance of the teachers' reactions to bullying to reduce bullying (Campaert et al., 2017; Wachs et al., 2019). Therefore, KiVa also targets teachers by providing information and practical tools to face bullying to encourage them to show their disapproval of bullying and intervene when it happens (Kärnä et al., 2011a).

Although KiVa's theoretical logic model has been clearly described (Saarento et al., 2015a), very few studies have tested it empirically. KiVa has been found to increase students' affective empathy toward the victims (Garandeau et al., 2021), anti-bullying attitudes, perceptions of teachers' anti-bullying attitudes, and defending behaviors (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016; Saarento et al., 2015a). However, to our knowledge, only one Finnish study tested whether KiVa's hypothesized working mechanisms influenced bullying. Their results revealed that only students' anti-bullying attitudes and collective perceptions of teachers' anti-bullying attitudes mediated KiVa's effects on bullying (Saarento et al., 2015a). Overall, it remains unclear how KiVa decreases bullying and which of its logic model's mechanisms should be prioritized.

1.2 KiVa's Effectiveness Across the World

The first Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) evaluations of KiVa in Finland reported a significant reduction in bullying and victimization in Grades 4 to 6 after seven months of implementation compared to control schools (Kärnä et al., 2011a). Similar results were obtained for Grades 1 to 3 but not for Grades 7 to 9, where no significant differences were observed between groups, which suggests that the program may be more effective for younger students (Kärnä et al., 2013). The results of a non-RCT large-scale evaluation involving 888 Finnish schools supported these previous studies' findings, showing a significant bullying reduction in primary school (Grades 1 to 6) but not at the beginning of secondary school (grades 7 to 9; Kärnä et al., 2011b).

The subsequent RCT evaluations of the program in other countries yielded mixed results. In Italy and the Netherlands, KiVa was associated with a reduction in bullying (Huitsing et al., 2020; Nocentini & Menesini, 2016). In Wales and the Czech Republic, no significant reduction in bullying was found (Axford et al., 2020; Klocek et al., 2024). In Chile and the United Kingdom, the program was associated with a reduction in victimization but not bullying (Bowes et al., 2024; Valenzuela et al., 2022). In the countries where KiVa was found to significantly reduce bullying, the associated effect sizes were small to moderate (Cohen's d ranged from .10 to .24), according to the benchmarks proposed by Bosco et al. (2015).

Several of these studies have pointed out the low level of program implementation to partially explain the absence of results (Axford et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2022). Interestingly, an implementation checklist was developed during the KiVa evaluation in the Czech Republic (Klocek et al., 2024). Their results suggested that higher levels of implementation led to a greater reduction in bullying, but no significant differences were found between the KiVa and control schools, regardless of implementation level. Research specifically focusing on KiVa's dosage at the class-level has found that the number of activities implemented and their duration were significantly associated with the rate of

bullying (Haataja et al., 2014; Swift et al., 2017). More generally, dosage has been found to influence reductions in bullying in other anti-bullying programs (Joronen et al., 2011; Leadbeater et al., 2016), suggesting that programs need to reach a certain level of dosage to show effects on bullying. Beyond anti-bullying program research, implementation science in general echoes these findings but also emphasizes that achieving full implementation (i.e., 100% of activities) is unrealistic. It has been suggested that 60% of activities should be implemented to observe the effects of a program (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Overall, these findings converge to indicate that the number of lessons delivered in each classroom (i.e., dosage at the class level) is critical to accurately evaluate the effects of anti-bullying programs and should be systematically measured.

2. The Present Study

Two main limitations of anti-bullying program evaluations must be addressed. First, we need to test the logic models underlying these programs. Second, we need to consider the role of program dosage in the evaluation of program effectiveness. This was the two-fold goal of the present study, which evaluated KiVa in French-speaking Belgium for the first time. We expected that students receiving KiVa would report lower bullying and victimization over time compared to students in the control group (Hypothesis 1). We further hypothesized that students receiving KiVa would exhibit higher levels of affective empathy, anti-bullying attitudes, injunctive anti-bullying norm, descriptive defending class norm, and collective perceptions of teachers' active reactions to bullying over time compared to students in the control group (Hypothesis 2). Finally, in line with the recommendations from the implementation literature (Durlak & DuPre, 2008), we expected that the program's effects on both the hypothesized mediators and outcome variables would be more pronounced in classrooms where 60% or more of the activities were implemented compared to classrooms below the 60% threshold (Hypothesis 3).

3. Methods

3.1 KiVa's Adaptation to the French-speaking Belgium Context

The interest in school bullying in French-speaking Belgium only started after 2010, following the intense media coverage of some bullying cases. Since then, various initiatives and non-profit organizations have been created to fight bullying. However, the theoretical and empirical basis for most of these initiatives is unclear or limited, and almost none of them has been scientifically evaluated (Tolmatcheff et al., 2020). In response to the alarming rates of bullying and the lack of evidence-based programs in French-speaking Belgium, a collaborative partnership was formed between researchers from UCLouvain and a nonprofit organization against school violence (Université de Paix). In 2018, the members of this collaboration decided to adapt, implement, and evaluate KiVa in French-speaking Belgium. After attending the KiVa training in Finland, the non-profit organization trainers adapted and

implemented KiVa in some French-speaking Belgian schools, while the UCLouvain research team conducted the evaluation.

Given the differences between the Belgian and Finnish education systems, the trainers made several modifications to the original program to best fit the local context. First, the video game component was discarded due to the lack of technical resources in the French-speaking Belgian schools compared with Finland (Aearts-Bancken et al., 2022) and previous evidence suggesting that doing so does not affect the effectiveness of the program (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016; Valenzuela et al., 2022). Second, the interviews in the context of indicated actions were only conducted by teachers trained in the KiVa method (and not all teachers) due to their shorter and less specialized initial training in Belgium. To further compensate for these differences in initial training between Finnish and Belgian teachers, the latter also received an additional two training days, four sessions where the trainers provided examples of classroom activities, and several formal moments of exchange with the trainers. This additional preparatory year before the program implementation was also done in Italy for similar reasons (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016). This extra training included examples of classroom activities, structured moments of exchange with the trainers, and a special focus on socio-emotional and communication skills. Finally, the program, which was initially designed for Grades 3 and 5, was extended to all elementary school grades. The added activities were inspired by the non-profit organization trainers' own program ("Objectif Groupe"). In total, the program consisted of 20 KiVa and "Objectif Groupe" activities that teachers could implement in their classes. This is twice the number of activities proposed in the original version of KiVa (although the "Objectif Groupe" activities were generally shorter than the KiVa lessons).

3.2 Participants and Study Design

The trainers and the researchers sent letters to schools of various socioeconomic statuses and sizes situated in the different Provinces of French-speaking Belgium. After schools expressed initial interest in the program, the trainers organized information sessions. For the project to proceed in a school, at least 80% of the staff needed to support it. Out of 23 schools that showed initial interest, 15 of them were selected to create a representative sample for this study, later joined by 2 additional schools (see research design explanation below), resulting in N = 17 schools in total.

Due to limited resources and practical constraints, we employed a pre-test/post-test comparison across (partially) separate cohorts research design. In the first academic year, two waves of data were collected in seven schools that were placed on a waiting list, serving as a control group baseline. In the following academic year, two additional waves of data were collected in eight KiVa schools, along with two new concurrent control schools. The schools were allocated to either the first cohort (control schools only) or second cohort (KiVa or control) based on their own scheduling preferences while ensuring comparability between groups in terms of geographical location, socioeconomic status, and school size. Figure 8 presents the CONSORT flowchart.

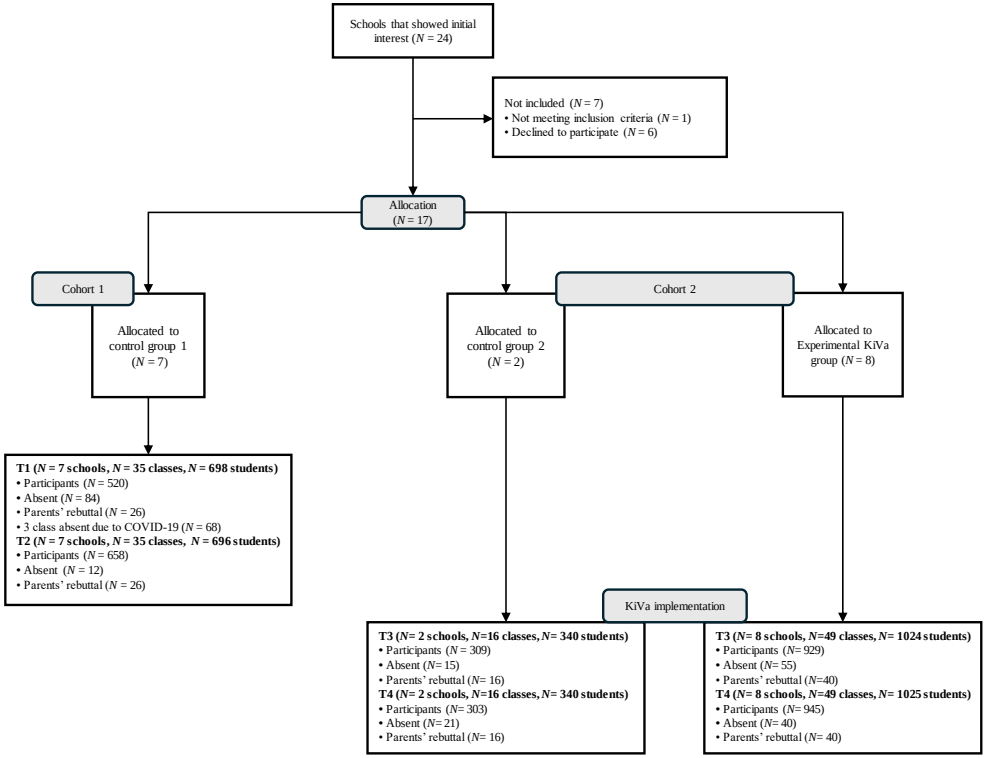


Figure 8. Flowchart of study participants

3.3 Data Collection and Procedure

Data collection took place at four-time points. The first two waves of data (T1 and T2) were collected in October 2021 and May 2022 from the first cohort of seven control schools. The third and fourth waves (T3 and T4) were collected in October 2022 and September 2022 from a second cohort composed of eight KiVa schools (which had previously completed the KiVa preparatory year) and the two new concurrent control schools. The seven schools from the first cohort could not serve as the KiVa group because they did not participate in the KiVa preparatory year.

Teachers and students were invited to complete a confidential paper questionnaire during school hours. A researcher was present to explain the general procedure and answer any questions. The questionnaire was read aloud by the researchers in each class, with the exception of sixth-graders, who were given general instructions and completed the questionnaire on their own. The confidentiality of their answers was ensured before they completed the questionnaire. This study and its procedure were approved by the ethics committee of UCLouvain.

3.4 Measures

Table 9 shows all psychometric indices for all scales used in this study.

3.4.1 Student-level Variables

Bullying Perpetration.

We used a 10-item bullying perpetration scale for French-speaking primary school students (Galand et al., 2014; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). The scale asked students how often (from 0 time to 4 times or more) they had engaged in various bullying behaviors (direct, indirect, and cyber) toward another student (e.g., I hit another student) over the past three months.

Bullying Victimization.

We used the matching 10-item bullying victimization scale (Galand et al., 2014; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022), including the same direct, indirect, and cyber forms of bullying behaviors as in the bullying perpetration scale. Students were asked to report how often they had undergone each behavior (e.g., “Other students have teased me”) over the past three months.

Anti-bullying Attitudes.

We translated into French an anti-bullying attitude scale (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004) composed of 8 statements about students’ personal attitudes toward bullying (e.g., “It is funny to see kids get upset when they are teased”). Students had to rate on a five-point Likert scale whether they agreed with the sentence (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree). We correlated residual errors of all reversed items.

Table 9. Psychometric Indices for the Different Variables

Variables	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA 90% CI	SRMR	McDonald's ω
Bullying pre-test	72.765 (29)	.97	.95	.029	[.021 - .038]	.044	.77
Bullying post-test	77.259 (28)	.96	.93	.031	[.023 - .039]	.044	.78
Victimization pre-test	93.151 (28)	.97	.95	.037	[.029 - .045]	.031	.81
Victimization post-test	103.738 (29)	.97	.95	.037	[.030 - .045]	.031	.83
Empathy pre-test	31.680 (2)	.96	.88	.093	[.066 - .123]	.025	.65
Empathy post-test	37.644 (2)	.96	.88	.098	[.072 - .126]	.029	.69
Anti-bullying attitudes pre-test	58.363 (14)	.94	.89	.043	[.032 - .054]	.029	.62
Anti-bullying attitudes post-test	68.774 (14)	.96	.93	.046	[.035 - .057]	.028	.70
Perceived teacher reaction pre-test	15.894 (4)	.98	.96	.041	[.021 - .064]	.020	.61
Perceived teacher reaction post-test	21.092 (4)	.98	.96	.048	[.029 - .069]	.021	.70
Defending behaviors pre-test	9.067 (2)	.99	.97	.045	[.018 - .077]	.015	.65
Defending behaviors post-test	14.101 (2)	.98	.95	.057	[.031 - .086]	.018	.63

Note: χ^2= chi-square test of model fit associated with robust maximum likelihood estimator; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Affective Empathy.

We used the French adaptation of the Basic Empathy Scale for Children to assess affective empathy (Bensalah et al., 2016; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Five items measured affective empathy (e.g., "When others feel happy, I feel happy too"). Students were asked whether they agreed with the sentences on a five-point Likert scale (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree).

3.4.2 Class-level Variables

Injunctive Anti-bullying Class Norm.

We aggregated individual anti-bullying attitudes at the class level to compute the injunctive anti-bullying class norm for each class (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022).

Descriptive Defending Class Norm.

We measured students' defending behaviors by transforming the defending scenario of Pronk et al. (2013) into four items on a five-point Likert scale. The scale started with the question: “What do you do when you see someone who is bullied?”. Then, students indicated their level of (dis)agreement (from 0 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree) with the items (e.g., “I will call a friend, and together we will confront the bully or bullies and intervene”). Then, we aggregated individual defending behaviors at the class level to create the descriptive defending class norm for each class.

Perceived Teacher Reactions.

Students were asked to what extent they perceive their teachers as directly reacting to a bullying situation using five items (e.g., “Teachers intervene when one or more students are bullying others”; Galand et al., 2014). Items ranged from 0 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). We correlated the errors of two items due to content and wording similarity based on their modification indices (“Don’t let us make fun of someone who gives a wrong answer” and “Don’t let us say negative things about other students in the class”). The individual scores were then aggregated at the class level to have the class perception of teachers’ reactions to bullying.

Intervention Dosage.

Throughout the program implementation, teachers in the KiVa condition completed an online checklist to report which activities they implemented in their classrooms. The program consisted of 20 activities, all of which teachers were expected to deliver. Following recommendations from implementation science literature (Durlak & DuPre, 2008), a 60% implementation threshold (i.e., at least 12 activities) was used to create a dichotomous variable distinguishing between low and high dosage levels. Among the 49 classes assigned to the KiVa condition, 37 were classified as low dosage, 10 as high dosage, and 2 had missing data (not included in the analysis).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 10 shows descriptive statistics for control and KiVa schools during the pre-test and post-test. Examination of the means showed that the two groups follow a similar pattern, with bullying and victimization increasing over time in both groups. Affective empathy, anti-bullying attitude, and perceived teacher reactions tend to decrease over time in both groups. A similar decrease was observed for class-level variable means in both groups.

At pre-test, both groups had an equivalent gender distribution (53.87% boys in control schools vs. 53.78% in KiVa schools) and mean age (Mage = 10). No significant initial differences were found between groups for bullying ($t = -1.513$, $p = .131$), victimization ($t = -0.703$, $p = .482$), anti-bullying attitudes ($t = 1.140$, $p = .255$), affective empathy ($t = -1.62$, p

= .15), and defending behaviors (t = 0.455, p = .644). Students in the KiVa schools perceived slightly fewer teacher reactions at pre-test than students in control schools (t = 2.869, p < .01). However, this difference was small (Cohen's d = .14).

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Control and KiVa Schools

	Control		KiVa	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	9.98	1.02	9.99	1.07
Gender (% boys)	53.87	—	53.78	—
Bullying pre-test	0.33	0.41	0.37	0.48
Bullying post-test	0.41	0.47	0.43	0.52
Victimization pre-test	0.70	0.67	0.74	0.72
Victimization post-test	0.83	0.71	0.82	0.72
Anti-bullying attitudes pre-test	3.28	0.59	3.26	0.68
Anti-bullying attitudes post-test	3.24	0.65	3.25	0.66
Empathy pre-test	2.03	0.85	2.04	0.95
Empathy post-test	2.02	0.86	1.98	0.98
Perceived teacher reactions pre-test	3.16	0.83	3.09	0.90
Perceived teacher reactions post-test	3.11	0.87	3.00	0.94
Defending behaviors pre-test	1.92	0.88	1.94	0.91
Defending behaviors post-test	2.05	0.86	1.98	0.90

4.2 Testing KiVa's Effects on Bullying and Victimization

Results reported in Table 11 show that there was no significant difference in the evolution of bullying behavior over time between control classrooms and KiVa low-dosage classrooms. However, students in KiVa high-dosage classrooms reported a significantly less steep increase in bullying behavior over time compared to the control classrooms (β = -0.17, p < .05). The effect size was moderate (d = .19; Bosco et al., 2015). There were no significant differences between control and KiVa classrooms for victimization, regardless of dosage condition.

4.3 Testing KiVa's Logic Model

Results in Table 12 indicate that the evolution of anti-bullying attitudes and affective empathy did not significantly differ between KiVa and control classrooms, regardless of dosage condition. There was no significant difference either in the evolution of descriptive defending and injunctive anti-bullying class norms or perceived teacher reactions between KiVa and control classrooms, regardless of dosage condition (see Table 13).

Table 11. Multilevel Model for Bullying and Victimization

	Victimization	Bullying
Time-level		
Intercept	0.37	-0.38*
Bullying	0.51***	
Victimization		0.43***
Students level		
Age	-0.04*	0.04
Gender (0 = girl, 1 = boy)	0.06	0.16***
Classroom level (reference = control)		
Low-implementation	0.03	0.03
High-implementation	-0.08	0.26
Low-implementation by Time	-0.03	-0.01
High-implementation by Time	0.09	-0.17*
Residual variances		
Time-level	0.30***	0.27***
Student-level	0.44***	0.31***
Classroom-level	0.06*	0.06**
Random slope of time	0.02*	0.01*

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

Table 12. Multilevel Model for the KiVa Mediators at the Individual-Level

	Affective Empathy	Anti-bullying attitudes
Time-level		
Intercept	0.43	1.01***
Students level		
Age	-0.02	-0.09***
Gender (0 = girl, 1 = boy)	-0.44***	-0.26***
Classroom level (reference = control)		
Low-dosage	0.07	-0.14
High-dosage	0.21	0.04
Low-dosage by Time	-0.01	0.09
High-dosage by Time	-0.13	-0.04
Residual variances		
Time-level	0.30***	0.41***
Student-level	0.26***	0.20***
Classroom-level	0.04*	0.06*
Random slope of time	0.01	0.03**

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

Table 13. Multilevel Model for the KiVa Mediators at the Class-Level

	Injunctive Bullying Norms	Perceived Teacher Reactions	Descriptive Defending Norms
Time-level			
Intercept	0.05	0.02	-0.06
Classroom level (reference = control)			
Low-dosage	-0.17	-0.11	0.10
High-dosage	0.04	0.21	0.14
Low-dosage by Time	0.11	-0.03	-0.08
High-dosage by Time	-0.02	-0.09	-0.11
Residual variances			
Time-level	0.04***	0.03***	0.03***
Class-level	0.03	0.05***	0.02*
Random slope of time	0.01***	0.01	0.01

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

5. Discussion

This study assessed the effectiveness of KiVa in French-speaking Belgium. In addition, we examined the effect of implementation dosage in KiVa classrooms for both bullying and victimization behavioral outcomes and the mediators hypothesized by the logic model underlying KiVa. Our results were mixed. In contrast with previous results found in Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, and partially in Chile and the United Kingdom, KiVa was not associated with a reduction of bullying or victimization at the school-level in the present study, therefore rejecting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 assumed that KiVa would impact the mediators proposed by its logic model (i.e., students' affective empathy, anti-bullying attitudes, and class norms), but this was not supported either. Several reasons could be assumed to explain these null results.

First, part of this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating strict lockdown measures in schools. These restrictions were particularly severe during the preparatory year for the KiVa group. Although trainers from the non-profit organization adapted supplementary training sessions to an online format, this may have reduced their effectiveness and limited teachers' engagement. Consequently, teachers may not have been adequately fully prepared for the KiVa implementation. Second, since 2021, the government of French-speaking Belgium has made several policy decisions to address bullying in its schools. Schools assigned to the control group in this study may have benefited from the early stages of this new bullying policy (Hall, 2017). However, KiVa was associated with a reduction in bullying in the Netherlands, where a comparable context occurred during the implementation of the program (Huitsing et al., 2020). Future studies should consider the national context to better disentangle the effects of a program from those of bullying policies, for example, by comparing the effect of a program across different countries (Gaffney et al., 2019b; Hall, 2017). Finally, the evaluation was conducted after only one year of

implementation. Although this time frame is common in anti-bullying program evaluations, the KiVa evaluation study in the Netherlands found a reduction in bullying after more than a year of implementation (Huitsing et al., 2020). Teachers may still be learning the tools and becoming familiar with the activities at the time of our last data collection. Evaluating the impact of KiVa after more than a year may yield more positive results as schools gain a deeper understanding of the program (Herkama et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 3 assumed that higher levels of KiVa implementation would yield greater effects on the different variables. We found that students in classrooms that implemented at least 60% of the proposed activities increased significantly less in bullying compared to students in control classrooms, providing partial support for hypothesis 3. This underlines the importance of considering classroom implementation when evaluating anti-bullying programs (Swift et al., 2017). Moreover, this could provide some explanations for the absence of effect of KiVa on bullying in the Welsh and Czech evaluation studies where the average time spent on KiVa lessons was lower than in the Finnish evaluation (Axford et al., 2020; Klocek et al., 2024). The overall suboptimal implementation level in the present study (only 20% of classes in the KiVa group reach the high-dosage threshold) may have limited the program's effectiveness (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). This is in line with some other anti-bullying program evaluation studies showing that insufficient implementation was associated with reduced effectiveness at the classroom level (Joronen et al., 2011; Low et al., 2014).

Another potential explanation is that teachers in the high dosage group not only implemented more activities but also tended to implement the program with greater quality. These teachers may be more enthusiastic and at ease with the activity topics (e.g., emotional regulation, psychosocial skills, bullying), thereby making the activities more appealing to their students. Such implementation quality may also reflect teachers' more personal skills, which could have contributed to preventing bullying increases in these classrooms (Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). However, it should be noted that there was no effect of implementation dosage on any of the other mediating (empathy, anti-bullying attitudes, class norms) or outcome (victimization) variables.

5.1 Limitations and Future Studies

This study presents several limitations. First, we sent a brief survey to all school principals during the recruitment phase to ensure that all schools were motivated to implement KiVa and to prevent them from dropping out. However, this could pose a threat to the external validity of our design, as only schools with some concerns about bullying participated in the process. These decisions limit the generalizability of our findings to schools that are motivated to implement such programs.

Second, the implementation checklist only measured the number of activities carried out by teachers in their classrooms. Other essential components of the KiVa program, such as information sessions about the KiVa teams, the use of posters and fluorescent vests, the indicated actions, and any other tools developed by the schools or teachers themselves, could have been taken into consideration. This may have provided a more precise estimation of

how the program was implemented in classrooms and schools. In addition, other implementation features (e.g., quality of delivery, adaptations to the school context) could shed further light on the impact of implementation on the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs (Berkel et al., 2011; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Moreover, the implementation checklist was self-reported, which is less reliable than observational data (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Future studies could assess implementation by directly observing KiVa activities in each classroom (e.g., Tolmatcheff et al., 2024), which could also contribute to understanding the reasons for the variations in implementation between classrooms.

Third, we had few controls on the implementation process because it was overseen mainly by the trainers from the non-profit organization. Although the research team ensured that all core components of KiVa were implemented in all schools in the experimental group, trainers made some modifications in each school to respond to local specificities. Given that adaptations at the school-level were made throughout the implementation process, we were unable to conduct a three-arm RCT to compare KiVa with its adapted version (e.g., Huitsing et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2022). Consequently, we cannot determine whether these adaptations improved or hindered the effectiveness of the original version of KiVa.

5.2 Practical Implications

This study highlights the importance of considering dosage at the class-level when implementing a school-based bullying prevention program. Two directions could be taken from there. On the one hand, additional support, such as the identification of implementation difficulties specific to each school, could foster a higher dosage of the program in each class. The creation of an iterative action plan in line with the identified barriers and levers could enable school-specific management (Herkama et al., 2024). Identifying the difficulties and facilitators frequently encountered in the implementation of the program could also provide important information about the optimal implementation of KiVa in the French-speaking part of Belgium (Galand et al., under review). In Finland, a qualitative study that interviewed teachers in 15 schools that had been implementing KiVa for several years identified some barriers and facilitators to the sustainability of the program. Among the facilitators identified by the teachers were the projection of achievable goals, the integration of the program into the school's general policy, and a national context that promotes bullying prevention (Hall, 2017; Herkama et al., 2022). Regarding the last point, the recent policy of the French-speaking part of Belgium that promotes bullying prevention could support schools in overcoming the various potential challenges of implementing a bullying prevention program (Hall, 2017).

Conversely, adding implementation support may not help every class, as certain teachers might lack the motivation, willingness, or confidence to implement KiVa. Thus, compelling all educators to adopt the program could be counterproductive. Instead, we suggest that schools and teachers be given the freedom to choose the interventions best suited for their needs. Nonetheless, these interventions should be grounded in strong theoretical foundations and undergo empirical evaluation (Owen et al., 2022) to prevent spending resources on

programs that are less likely to effectively combat bullying (Gottfredson et al., 2015; Tolmatcheff et al., 2020).

In conclusion, this study found limited evidence for the effectiveness of KiVa in French-speaking Belgium. KiVa was found to curb the increase in bullying only when it was sufficiently implemented. This effect size was comparable to the other evaluations of KiVa around the world. However, the program was not associated with a change in victimization or any of the variables included in the KiVa logic model. Moreover, our findings highlight the importance of considering the level of implementation in each classroom when evaluating the effectiveness of an anti-bullying program. It also calls for further research into the mechanisms that explain reductions in bullying to improve its prevention.

Chapter 6

General discussion

General discussion

In this dissertation, we identified four issues related to the development and evaluation of bullying prevention programs and aimed to shed light on them. The first issue is the lack of clear guidelines on which bullying scale to select for a specific objective, which has led to discrepancies between studies and become a barrier to cumulative knowledge. **Study 1** aimed to clarify certain aspects of this problem by comparing the three most commonly used bullying scales to gain insight into their convergence and associations with student psychosocial adjustment. The second issue is that variables assumed to be predictors of bullying are not appropriately and empirically established. We contribute to its resolution using two distinct studies, each investigating the effect of specific variables often considered predictors of bullying. **Study 2** unraveled the directionality of the effects of bullying and empathy using an RI-CLPM, which allowed us to disentangle the stable and fluctuating associations between these variables. **Study 3** employed multilevel modeling to examine the longitudinal and unique effects of peer norms and teachers' reactions toward bullying on bullying behaviors. The third and fourth issues pertain to the lack of consideration for the implementation of the prevention program at the class level and its logic model, respectively. **Study 4** focused on the implementation of the KiVa program in the French-speaking part of Belgium to partially address these issues. We tested the mechanisms by which the KiVa program is expected to reduce bullying and considered the dosage of the program at the class level.

Overall, this dissertation is devoted to exploring processes behind bullying prevention programs related to their development, implementation, mechanisms of action, and evaluation. In this last chapter, we discuss the main findings of this dissertation as well as its limitations and practical implications. Next, we outline the following steps that could be taken to continue addressing these issues and deepen our understanding of bullying. We conclude this chapter by summarizing the key messages of this dissertation.

1. Main Findings

1.1 Comparing the Most Commonly Used Bullying Scales

Using a sample of 475 students from grades 4-6, we conducted path analyses to explore the correlations between the three most used types of bullying and victimization scales and their associations with psychosocial adjustment. The selected scales were self-reported behaviors-based and self- and peer-reported definition-based. The results showed that all three scales were correlated, indicating that they all partially measured a similar construct. However, it is noticeable that peer-reported scales are more correlated with behaviors-based than with definition-based scales. This result could mean that students seem more inclined to report bullying-related behaviors than to identify with the definition when they are nominated as bullies by their peers. This directly questions the argument that self-reported definition-

based scales capture better bullying than those based on behaviors (Gladden et al., 2014). It might be that students are less likely to identify as bullies or victims due to the stigma attached to the label (Thomas et al., 2014; Vessey et al., 2014), their misunderstanding of a long definition (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000), they minimization of their acts (Monks & Smith, 2006), or their focus only on severe cases of bullying (Kubiszewski et al., under review).

By using behavior-based bullying scales in all subsequent studies, we acknowledge the inherent limitation of potentially neglecting power imbalance. Some authors have argued that measuring power imbalance is crucial because it differentiates general aggression from bullying (Andrews et al., 2023) and that these two phenomena need to be addressed separately (Gladden et al., 2014). However, none of those claims are supported by empirical research (Jia & Mikami, 2018; Menin et al., 2021), and definition-based measures do not seem to better capture power imbalance (Kaufman et al., 2020). In other words, until solid empirical evidence is presented to justify the distinction between bullying and general aggression, we recommend continuing to focus on the predictive validity of the measure (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Galand, 2021). Additionally, we posit that the debate surrounding the presentation of the definition in the measure is an unwarranted distraction. While behavior-based measures have been criticized for overestimating the prevalence of bullying (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014), the results of **Study 1** instead suggest that definition-based measures may have failed to identify students suffering from low levels of bullying.

In contrast, reporting specific bullying behaviors might avoid these obstacles and is more consistent with classmates' perceptions. Additionally, we found that behaviors-based bullying and victimization measures were more strongly associated with most of the psychosocial adjustment variables. Including a definition in the bullying measure did not provide additional information into its association with psychosocial adjustment variables. This challenges once again theoretical arguments that claim definition-based measures to better capture bullying and victimization because they should reveal stronger associations with these adjustment variables (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014).

Peer-reported scales were more strongly associated with social rejection measures, and none of the self-reported scales provided supplemental information. This implies that, compared to self-reported bullying scales, peer-reported bullying scales are important tools that describe social dynamics within classrooms more accurately. For example, network diagnoses, which provide feedback on the social relationships between classmates, use peer-reported measures and are shared with teachers to help them identify bullying cases (Kaufman et al., 2021). Moreover, peer-reported bullying scales could be used for the choice of seating arrangements (Hoekstra et al., 2023). However, more research is needed on the use of these measures in bullying prevention programs, as studies incorporating network analysis in interventions have not yet shown clear benefits in reducing bullying (Hoekstra et al., 2024; Huitsing et al., 2020).

1.2 Testing the Effects of Several Assumed Predictors of Bullying

We used two different sets of data to gain some insight into this issue at different levels of analysis. At the individual level, we conducted an RI-CLPM using behaviors-based bullying and cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy. We used the data from T2-T3-T4 of the experimental group to gather a maximum number of students at three measurement times. We controlled for students' victimization scores and grades at each measurement time and performed the analyses separately for boys and girls.

Results obtained in **Study 2** did not support the hypothesis that an increase in empathy leads to a decrease in bullying and vice versa. This was found for both dimensions of empathy and both genders. More precisely, both dimensions of empathy and bullying were negatively associated at the between level but not at the within level, meaning that they maintained stable relationships across measurement times but did not predict each other over time (Hamaker et al., 2015). Instead, bullying and empathy may be simultaneously influenced by an unobserved time-variant variable, such as developmental stages or narcissism (Fanti & Henrich, 2015; Usami et al., 2019). In addition, some studies suggest that bullies can feel what others feel but find reasons not to care about their victims. For example, some students might be empathetic but continue to bully others by justifying their actions (i.e., moral disengagement), evaluating bullying as a positive thing, or simply being unable to change their behaviors (Farrell et al., 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2018).

At the class level, we conducted a longitudinal multilevel model on T1 and T2 of the experimental and control groups to unravel the effects of several class norms and teachers' reactions on students' bullying behaviors. At T1, we assessed the descriptive defending and injunctive bullying class norms while controlling for students' individual attitudes toward bullying and defending behaviors. We measured teachers' reactions through a general students-reported scale and a more precise teacher-reported scale (i.e., the HBQ; Bauman et al., 2008). We also measured students' gender, age, and bullying at T1, which we treated as control variables. At T2, we focused on students' bullying, which we treated as the dependent variable.

Results from **Study 3** showed that, when all variables were integrated into a single model, only injunctive bullying class norms, students' perceptions of teachers' reactions, and teachers' reactions of working with bullies and victims negatively predicted students' bullying behaviors at T2. These findings support the idea that both classmates and teachers have an independent influence on students' bullying behaviors (Saarento et al., 2015a). However, we found that classmates' defending behaviors did not impact bullying behaviors. Although this finding is inconsistent with the recommendations of several bullying prevention programs (Gaffney et al., 2021b), it aligns with the findings of most longitudinal studies (Nocentini et al., 2013; Saarento et al., 2015a). Students defending victims might make bullies stop their behaviors but also encourage them to continue by provoking retaliation or by disempowering and stigmatizing the victims (Healy, 2020). All these

different outcomes resulting from the defense of victims may ultimately lead to a lack of effect.

More generally, the null results found in **Studies 2** and **3** highlight that some research following a flawed design or reporting non-significant results are cited to misleadingly suggest a causal effect. Indeed, when retrieving articles on the effect of empathy and the descriptive defending class norm on bullying, we noticed the dearth of studies on their causal effect. Nevertheless, many studies on empathy have only referenced the significant results from a single longitudinal study (Stavrinides et al., 2010) and ignored that the majority of longitudinal studies did not report any effect of empathy on bullying over time (e.g., Farrell et al., 2020; Marín-López et al., 2020; Saarento et al., 2015a; Walters & Espelage, 2018). In addition, we found no CLPM on empathy and bullying. The most convincing results regarding the causal impact of empathy on bullying come from a study that tested the mediating effect of peer relations and affective empathy in assessing a cooperative learning intervention on bullying (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019). Although they found that both variables led to a reduction in bullying over time, the effects were significant only when both variables were simultaneously integrated into the model. The researchers thereby suggested that "bullying prevention should focus as much (or more) on improving peer relations as opposed to developing student empathy as a means to reduce bullying" (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022, p. 158). Overall, **Study 2** simultaneously echoes most of the previous studies while failing to confirm the widely held assumption that empathy predicts future bullying.

The situation is even more alarming regarding the effect of the descriptive defending norm, as the rare longitudinal studies have consistently reported non-significant results (Nocentini et al., 2013; Saarento et al., 2015a). The evidence is clearly too weak to support the idea that increasing classmates' defending behaviors reduces bullying or victimization (see Frisén et al., 2012; Healy, 2020). However, observational studies with important methodological limitations are still used to justify the development of studies on the descriptive defending norm (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2001). Nowadays, some studies on bullying prevention have started focusing on defending behaviors (and treating them as the dependent variable) instead of bullying behaviors (e.g., Garandeau et al., 2023; Kollerová et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2019). However, the results of many available studies, including **Study 3**, do not support the idea that the descriptive defending norm predicts bullying.

1.3 Testing the Effect of the Dosage of KiVa at the Class Level in the French-speaking Part of Belgium

Using data from the RCT sample, we performed multilevel longitudinal modeling with random slopes to analyze the impact of KiVa on the evolution of bullying and victimization. Results from **Study 4** showed that the increase in bullying is significantly less important in classes that implemented more than 60% of the KiVa activities compared to control classes, but not in the other KiVa classes. We found some evidence for the effectiveness of KiVa in the French-speaking part of Belgium, but only in classes with a sufficient level of implementation. These results echo a review that found positive effects of programs are detected when 60% of their implementation has been achieved (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). We

found that these effects can also be observed at the class level and that "KiVa worked better in classrooms that received more of it" (Swift et al., 2017, p. 112).

While numerous efforts have been made to develop new theoretical frameworks for building bullying prevention programs (Gaffney et al., 2019a), few studies have documented the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder their implementation (Galand et al., 2024). However, the results of **Study 4** indicated that even incomplete measures of implementation, such as dosage, could help to understand the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs (Joronen et al., 2011; Swift et al., 2017). These findings highlight the importance of closely examining implementation processes and systematically incorporating them into evaluation studies.

1.4 Testing the Logic Model of KiVa in the French-speaking Part of Belgium

We also used data from the RCT sample and performed multilevel longitudinal modeling with random slopes to test the KiVa logic model. The program had no impact on any of the variables included in its logic model (i.e., affective empathy, anti-bullying attitude, injunctive anti-bullying norm, descriptive defending norm, and students' perceptions of teachers' reactions), precluding us from testing the mediating paths. **Study 4** did not replicate the results obtained in Finland that found that KiVa reduces bullying by increasing students' anti-bullying attitudes (Saarento et al., 2015a). Some variables that were not measured in this dissertation may explain the reduction in bullying we observed in some classes (e.g., moral disengagement, prosociality, popularity norms, or peer relations). Alternatively, it is possible that the implementation of KiVa initially influenced teacher-related variables (e.g., their perceptions of bullying or their perceptions of being supported by trainers; Ahtola et al., 2012), which could then have triggered a cascade effect on bullying.

2. Limitations

The first steps we took to improve our understanding of bullying prevention programs already present several limitations. They must be acknowledged to enable future research to build upon our findings and offer several suggestions for continuing to address these four issues.

2.1 The Choice of Measures

Several measures could have been added or improved to bring complementary perspectives to our findings. First, in **Study 1**, only our behavior-based measure was composed of multiple items. We made this decision to reduce redundancy throughout the entire questionnaire. Using the long form of the peer-reported (e.g., Salmivalli et al., 1996) and definition-based scale (which combines definition-based and behavior-based measures; Solberg & Olweus, 2003) might have yielded different outcomes. To complement our results, future studies could assign students to three different experimental conditions, each measuring bullying using a multi-item version of the definition-based, behavior-based, or

peer-reported measure. Then, results must be compared between groups to evaluate which is more strongly associated with psychosocial adjustments.

Second, in **Study 2**, although self-reported measures are typically used to assess empathy, this approach may inadvertently elicit responses that reflect students' self-perceptions of their emotional understanding and feelings. Indeed, we have no guarantee that students truly understand and feel others' emotions. The use of behavioral measures (e.g., those that assess empathy through children's reactions to vignettes) could add further information to our results by observing students' understanding and feelings about others' emotional states (for a review, see Simon & Nader-Grosbois, 2023).

Third, our measures of teachers' reactions could be improved. Regarding the students-reported scale, having a more precise idea of which specific reactions are associated with their bullying behaviors would have been valuable. Several student-reported scales have been developed (e.g., Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015; van Gils et al., 2022) and could be used in future research to have more precise results on what type of teachers' active reactions are perceived by the students. For example, future research could examine whether there is consistency in teachers' responses to bullying as perceived by the teachers themselves or as perceived by their students. Furthermore, the scale we used for self-reported teachers' reactions (HBQ; Bauman et al., 2008) has been criticized for its shortness and psychometric properties (Bauman et al., 2021). However, to our knowledge, no well-validated self-reported scales for teachers' reactions toward bullying are available. Future studies should revisit the fundamental development of such scales by identifying the breadth of teachers' reactions (see Boateng et al., 2018). Globally, although **Study 3** underlined the importance of the class in the bullying dynamic, further studies employing alternative measures are necessary to draw more precise conclusions and practical guidelines.

Fourth, other variables could have been included to assess KiVa's implementation in **Study 4**. Notably, no data were collected about implementation fidelity, quality, or participant responsiveness, though these dimensions and their interactions have also been found to influence program outcomes (Berkel et al., 2018; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). It is possible that in classes where at least 60% of the activities were implemented, teachers were more comfortable with the topics covered, or students enjoyed the program's activities more. The interaction of these different dimensions of implementation may have led to a reduction in bullying behaviors (Berkel et al., 2018; Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). Regarding fidelity, because the trainers' team oversaw the implementation of the program in schools, we had no direct control over the adaptations made. We only assessed if the KiVa core components were implemented. Given that adaptations were made throughout the implementation process, we were unable to conduct a three-arm RCT to compare KiVa with its adapted version (e.g., Huitsing et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2022). Consequently, we cannot fully impute the results obtained to KiVa, the activities added (from "Objectif Groupe"), or their combination.

Fifth, as the objective was to test the KiVa logic model, only the variables included in it were used. It is possible that the program achieved its effectiveness in the high-dosage classes

through mechanisms that were not evaluated in this study. For example, at the individual level, moral disengagement or prosociality could potentially explain KiVa's effectiveness (Zych et al., 2019a). At the classroom and school levels, positive relations between various educational actors (students, parents, teachers, educators, and principals) may have been improved thanks to the program, which in turn led to better prevention of bullying (Ahtola et al., 2012; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022).

2.2 The Design Applied

Although the designs used in our studies provided some answers to our research questions, some limitations remain. First, because the pilot sample consisted of only one measurement time, no conclusions could be drawn from the results obtained in **Study 1** about the direction of the effects. Investigating which type of bullying or victimization scales predicts psychosocial adjustment and social acceptability or rejection over time (and reciprocally) would have provided complementary insights. Second, longitudinal designs, such as those used in **studies 2** and **3**, provided information about the direction of the association between variables but did not clarify causality. Intervention studies (ideally RCTs) should be conducted to test whether modifying a particular variable predicts a subsequent change in bullying. Nevertheless, the absence of significant association over time already calls into question the potential causal link between the variables.

RCTs are often considered the gold standard for establishing causality and program effectiveness (Gaffney et al., 2019a), but they do not provide indisputable evidence (Coppe et al., under review). Results obtained in this dissertation need to be complemented with other designs (e.g., qualitative, observational, or ethnographic studies) to achieve a broader perspective and reduce the error rates inherent to statistics (Owen et al., 2022; Prasad & Cifu, 2019). However, even if other designs offer interesting insights, RCTs overcome many biases and provide irreplaceable information when evaluating the effects of an intervention (Lilienfeld et al., 2018; Mancenido, 2024; Prasad & Cifu, 2019).

2.3 The Lack of Qualitative Data

This dissertation primarily collected quantitative studies that employed a deductive approach, which neglected important information and yielded incomplete results (Patton et al., 2017). Qualitative studies that follow an inductive approach are rare in the field of bullying (Patton et al., 2017) but could also have been selected to provide answers to the issues identified in this dissertation. Regarding the first issue, **Study 1** was unable to provide a firm answer on which scale best captures the characteristics of bullying. Qualitative studies may bring complementary information regarding students' conceptualization of bullying and help researchers improve their definitions and measures of the phenomenon (Boateng et al., 2018; Thornberg, 2011).

Qualitative data could also provide important insights into the second issue identified in this dissertation by exploring the development of bullying and how it might be prevented (Frisén et al., 2012; Patton et al., 2017). **Studies 2** and **3** were limited to testing whether

certain variables significantly predicted bullying over time. Qualitative interviews with bullies could complement these findings by exploring their perception of the class environment and the extent to which they feel supported when engaging in bullying. Investigating how bullies interpret their victims' emotions could also provide deeper insight into our null findings regarding empathy (**Study 2**).

Study 4 would also have benefited from qualitative data to help explain the variation among the classes we observed. For example, interviews with teachers or trainers could have been conducted to bring additional insights on the personal and organizational factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of a program (Herkama et al., 2022). Moreover, the methods used in **Study 4** did not allow us to explore alternative variables that might have explained the effectiveness of KiVa in the high implementation group. Qualitative methods could have provided us with more opportunities to shed light on the underlying mechanisms that led KiVa to reduce bullying in specific classes (Hong & Espelage, 2012). In general, more qualitative studies could provide complementary perspectives to the issues identified in this dissertation (see Patton et al., 2017).

3. Practical Implications

This dissertation has several implications for practitioners and policymakers. We elaborate on three of them: (1) the need to identify students in distress, (2) the role of the classroom in bullying prevention, and (3) the future of KiVa implementation in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

3.1 Identifying Students in Distress

The priority for school actors is not to differentiate between bullying and other aggressive behaviors but to be able to detect students in distress (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Hellström et al., 2013). Consequently, as long as bullying remains a theoretical concept, we recommend school actors to use behavior-based measures because they are the most related to students' psychosocial adjustments (Hellström et al., 2013). In addition, including several forms of aggressive behaviors would help to capture the breadth of the phenomenon (Marsh et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2022). Almost 30 years ago, Arora (1996) noted that no clear and widely shared definition of bullying existed and questioned the utility of providing one. She then suggested focusing on observable aggressive behaviors that lead to distress in students, irrespective of whether these behaviors align with a specific definition of bullying. We concur with her conclusion and suggest focusing efforts on tailoring interventions and prevention programs based on aggressive behavior perceived as problematic by both teachers and students.

3.2 Emphasizing the Role of the Class

There is a growing body of evidence that highlights the role of the class in preventing bullying. On the one hand, several studies found that injunctive anti-bullying norms can hinder the development of bullying (Sentse et al., 2015; see also **Study 3**). These findings

align with numerous studies that emphasize the importance of bystanders and the relevance of involving all classmates in addressing bullying (Marsh et al., 2023; Saarento et al., 2015b; Salmivalli, 2010). On the other hand, teachers could also be conceptualized as bystanders who have a crucial influence on bullying (Troop-Gordon, 2015; Yoon et al., 2020). A general recommendation that can be drawn from **Study 3** is that teachers should demonstrate to students that bullying is not tolerated in their class and intervene when early warning signs are observed (Yoon et al., 2023). Although more research is needed on the specific responses teachers might adopt to address bullying, making students experience that bullying is not tolerated in the classroom seems an essential first step in tackling bullying as a teacher (Cheon et al., 2023; Veenstra et al., 2014).

Altogether, **Study 3** also supported the hypothesis that teachers and classmates exert independent influences on bullying, consistent with the idea that both play a role in selecting which behaviors are rewarded or sanctioned. Therefore, students will continue to bully as long as the class rewards them for their behaviors (Sanders et al., 2021; Volk et al., 2022). All members of the class need to work together to create an environment where bullying behaviors are not associated with any benefits (Marsh et al., 2023; Sanders et al., 2021). Interestingly, it has been suggested that using praise notes to identify and acknowledge students' prosocial behavior by both teachers and classmates could replace the rewards associated with bullying (Ellis et al., 2016).

Study 4 also emphasizes the central role of the class level in the prevention of bullying. We have observed considerable implementation variation between classes, which has impacted the program's effectiveness. This variation could be attributed to the teachers' willingness to implement the program. In informal discussions with the research team, KiVa trainers indicated that some teachers had demonstrated reluctance to implement KiVa in their classrooms. It is also possible that some classes were less responsive to the KiVa activities, which may have demotivated teachers from implementing them. Furthermore, the high implementation group scored particularly high in bullying at baseline compared to the two other groups. These differences could have pushed teachers from these classes to follow the program thoroughly because bullying rates were alarming. Conversely, teachers in the low implementation group may have felt that bullying was not a problem in their classrooms and that KiVa was unnecessary for them. All these potential explanations for the variations in dosage observed between classes in **Study 4** and other studies (e.g., Haataja et al., 2014; Tolmatcheff et al., 2024) underline that bullying prevention programs need to be monitored at the class level. In practice, this could mean that teachers need more individual support to deal with specific problems in their classrooms.

3.3 The Future of KiVa in the French-speaking Part of Belgium

The mixed results of **Study 4** suggest that we need to carefully weigh the costs and benefits of implementing such a program in schools in the French-speaking part of Belgium. On the one hand, several classes benefited from the KiVa program, which appears to be effective in preventing bullying. On the other hand, in numerous KiVa classes, the program

was not associated with any changes in the measured variables. We identified two non-exclusive directions to enhance bullying prevention efforts.

The first direction would be to help school actors achieve a sufficient implementation level, thereby increasing the number of classes benefiting from KiVa. As previously deplored in several evaluations of bullying prevention programs, the schools participating in the program implemented only a limited part of the curriculum (Axford et al., 2020; Cross et al., 2019). We obtained similar results at the class-level. Therefore, we suggest that further studies investigate the barriers and facilitators of implementation to improve the initial deployment of bullying prevention programs and their sustainability (e.g., Herkama et al., 2022). To our knowledge, only one pre-registered study will evaluate an intervention (i.e., the IMPRES support) to help school staff members sustain the implementation of the KiVa program (Herkama et al., 2024). In the meantime, we recommend paying more attention to analyzing each classroom separately and thus providing more tailored interventions. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the effect we observed occurred after only one year of KiVa implementation. It could be that more substantial effects would be observed after a longer implementation period, when school staff would have the opportunity to integrate KiVa activities into their daily practices. Follow-up studies should test these hypotheses.

The second direction is based on the hypothesis that even with all the resources available, some classes may still not implement KiVa for various reasons. For instance, teachers may lack motivation, feel unprepared, or doubt the relevance of the activity for their classes. Moreover, even if **Study 4** reported a reduction in bullying in classes in the high-implementation group, this effect is moderate (but similar to the other evaluations of KiVa across Europe; Huitsing et al., 2020; Kärnä et al., 2011a; Nocentini & Menesini, 2016). Therefore, forcing schools and teachers who are reluctant to implement KiVa may not be effective and could even be counterproductive. Instead, we recommend granting schools autonomy to select the most suitable programs from a pre-established list of proposed interventions.

Several precautions need to be considered when creating this list. First, since adults do not detect all bullying situations (Oldenburg et al., 2016), we suggest implementing a method for identifying bullying and victimization by involving students (such as a systematic survey). This would help teachers capture the students' perceptions of violence in schools. Second, we recommend proposing options that present a strong theoretical basis and have been subject to empirical evaluation (see Owen et al., 2022). This would limit the risk of proposing options to schools that are unlikely to reduce bullying, thereby preventing schools from implementing a more effective option (Gottfredson et al., 2015; Tolmatcheff et al., 2020). Third, it may be worthwhile to evaluate the impact of the chosen option to determine whether it has effectively reduced bullying. As teachers often have an incomplete perception of the intervention's impact, the evaluation must include student perceptions to accurately capture its effect (Galand et al., under review).

Even if whole-school bullying prevention programs are widely implemented across the world and have been associated with greater effectiveness in a recent meta-analysis (Gaffney

et al., 2021b), not all schools may have the resources to implement such programs. Other less demanding activities have been associated with reductions in bullying and could be chosen to address bullying in a classroom setting (e.g., Tolmatcheff et al., 2022; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019). Furthermore, students who are already bullies or victims may not benefit from these collective programs or activities but need to be targeted individually (Senden & Galand, 2021). Therefore, resources should be allocated for school psychologists to take the time to respond at an individual level when bullying occurs alongside prevention efforts (Waseem & Nickerson, 2024).

4. Possible Next Steps for Bullying Research

Over the past 50 years, several efforts have been made to address bullying, resulting in notable progress, including increased awareness among the general population and a bullying reduction in many countries (Gaffney et al., 2019a; Galand, 2021). Although these achievements are important, we support Salmivalli (2023)'s call that researchers on bullying now need to critically examine and understand our failures. By describing and examining four issues, this dissertation aimed to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the processes behind the scenes of bullying prevention programs. However, many of our hypotheses were rejected, suggesting that a reassessment of our current conceptualization of bullying may be necessary. In other words, instead of rushing forward, future studies need to take a step back to refine our understanding and methods. In our view, we must take the time to reconsider our assumptions about (1) how we define and capture bullying, (2) how we develop valid frameworks to explain bullying, and (3) how we attempt to prevent bullying.

4.1 Reconsidering the Definition and the Measure of the Bullying Concept

A major ongoing issue is the persistent theoretical debate about the measurement of bullying (Volk et al., 2017). In our view, many resources are spent on developing theoretical arguments while empirical evidence remains sorely lacking. Several papers have been published to propose an updated definition of bullying or new criteria (e.g., Andrews et al., 2023; Menin et al., 2021; Volk et al., 2014), and defining bullying was still debated at the last World Anti-Bullying Forum[2] meeting in 2023. Bullying has been subject to gradual semantic inflation, resulting in the term encompassing an increasing range of different behaviors (see "concept creep"; Haslam et al., 2020). Over the years, school bullying has progressively included other forms of behavior (e.g., cyber forms; Joseph & Stockton, 2018). In addition, the focus has gradually changed from the students directly involved in the bullying situation to social and institutional norms (Menin et al., 2021; Sondergaard et al., 2023). Finally, the original criteria of repetition, intentionality, and power imbalance are sometimes relaxed in some studies (Haslam et al., 2020). Furthermore, some authors have even criticized the whole concept of bullying and questioned its very existence due to the

[2] The WABF is an international conference gathering researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the prevention of bullying (https://worldantibullyingforum.com)

difficulty of measuring its distinctive features compared to other forms of peer victimization (Finkelhor et al., 2012).

Future research could take inspiration from these debates to explore each characteristic of bullying (i.e., repetition, intentionality, and power imbalance) and test the relevance of separating it from aggression. For example, future studies could assess the frequency with which bullying causes harm and empirically test whether there is a threshold at which bullying becomes harmful (Olweus, 2003). In addition, it would be interesting to investigate if some behaviors, even at low frequencies, already degrade the victim's well-being or if multiple trivial bullying behaviors are more hurtful than a single, very intense one (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Volk et al., 2014). It would also be beneficial to examine how to operationalize power imbalance (e.g., Felix et al., 2011; Sjögren et al., 2025). However, as it can arise from unlimited sources, restricting it to variables such as popularity, strength, or intelligence might not be the solution to capture this component (Finkelhor et al., 2012). Perhaps it could be better measured by students' general sense of helplessness in the situation, but the challenge would be to develop measures that are different from internalizing symptoms. Moreover, it has been found that students suffering from poor mental health are more at risk of being the target of victimization (Saint-Georges & Vaillancourt, 2020; Vaillancourt et al., 2013). Therefore, we can wonder if students reporting internalizing symptoms could be more prone to interpret aggressive behaviors as intentional or feel unable to defend themselves. Finally, adapting these types of questions to a bullying perpetration scale would also require further research.

More generally, this suggests that research is still required to empirically assess the added value of measuring specific characteristics of bullying. In addition, researchers must provide evidence on the relevance of separating this phenomenon from general aggression, as no studies have yet indicated that they need to be targeted differently (Jia & Mikami, 2018; Marsh et al., 2023). Further empirical evidence is required for the concept of bullying itself to move beyond its hypothetical status (Finkelhor et al., 2012). These studies would ultimately lead to more precise recommendations about its measurement.

4.2 Reconsidering How We Develop Valid Frameworks Explaining the Development of Bullying

The unexpected results obtained in **Studies 2, 3,** and **4** illustrate that the frameworks we mobilized in our research may need to be refined. More rigorous research is needed to test current theoretical frameworks explaining the development of bullying. First, when identifying potential predictors of bullying, we recommend retrieving how the variable has been measured, operationalized, and analyzed across studies. This approach would facilitate the identification of potential inconsistencies between studies and avenues for future research (see **Study 2**). Additionally, detecting whether results change depending on the analytical strategy can also help researchers identify gaps in the literature (see Studies 2 and 3).

Besides methodological recommendations, **Studies 2, 3,** and **4** also suggest that our understanding of bullying remains limited. New theoretical frameworks might need to be

developed. Recent research has reviewed the motives behind bullying and proposed testing these hypotheses to shed light on why some students bully while others do not (e.g., Dawes et al., 2024; Sanders et al., 2021; Volk et al., 2022). However, understanding the motives behind bullying behaviors does not directly translate into concrete recommendations because "not everyone who is motivated to bully will actually do it" (Sanders et al., 2021, p. 168). Therefore, we also suggest exploring what reinforces bullying dynamics.

Engaging in bullying behaviors can be viewed as a cost-benefit analysis, where the benefits outweigh the costs (Volk et al., 2014). Investigating the benefits of bullying and how to reduce them seems a promising avenue for its prevention. Consistent with the literature, **Studies 3** and **4** highlighted the importance of the class environment in bullying development, indicating that social context may serve as a key lever for reducing bullying (Marsh et al., 2023; Saarento et al., 2015b; Salmivalli, 2010). Future research should investigate how classmates and teachers reward bullying and explore strategies to decrease the benefits associated with these behaviors.

Although the results from **Studies 2, 3,** and **4** tend to favor the role of variables at the class level, students' characteristics should not be overlooked. Indeed, it should be noted that the intraclass correlation coefficient found in Studies 3 and 4 was approximately 10%, meaning that an important part of the bullying variance is explained at the individual level. Even if empathy does not seem to be the panacea for bullying prevention (see **Study 2**; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2022), other variables at the individual level offer more solid evidence of their causal effect on bullying. It is plausible that bullies tend to distort or misunderstand the rewards associated with bullying. For example, moral disengagement in bullying refers to mechanisms that students use to justify why they engage in bullying (Hymel & Bonanno, 2014). Longitudinal studies have consistently shown that a decrease in moral disengagement mechanisms is followed by a subsequent decrease in bullying (for a review, see Thornberg, 2023).

Furthermore, prosociality and anti-bullying attitudes also seem to be promising candidates for promoting more positive behaviors and hindering bullying (Ellis et al., 2016; Hawley & Williford, 2015; Kubiszewski & Carrizales, 2024; Saarento et al., 2015a). However, we still lack practical knowledge on how to influence these variables and to test their effects on bullying, which could be addressed in future studies. Finally, several studies have found that bully-victims exhibit a distinct profile and are not looking for any rewards (Volk et al., 2014). These students tend to engage in bullying as a continuation of their broader pattern of aggressive behavior (Galand & Baudoin, 2015) and may need to be investigated separately (Tolmatcheff et al., 2018).

Altogether, this suggests that many variables have been identified for building theoretical frameworks, but few have been thoroughly tested to determine whether they predict future bullying. We believe that it is essential to examine each variable separately, using the most relevant methodology and analysis. These studies would ultimately facilitate the identification of relevant variables that influence bullying and build step-by-step theoretical frameworks that are supported by empirical evidence.

4.3 Reconsidering How We Prevent Bullying

Our evaluation of one of the most evaluated and implemented bullying prevention programs yielded mixed results, showing a limited effect of KiVa (when highly implemented) in the French-speaking part of Belgium (see **Study 4**). As meta-analyses have reported that the average effects of bullying prevention programs have remained limited for nearly a decade, this highlights a lack of substantial progress in our capacity to prevent bullying (Gaffney et al., 2019a; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). We believe that we need to slow down the development of new anti-bullying programs composed of multiple components (e.g., whole-school programs), as well as their replication around the world. Instead, as previously advocated, we need to "return to the root of anti-bullying programs" (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022, p. 13). Therefore, before developing new bullying prevention programs composed of multiple components, future studies should investigate how predictors of bullying can be modified through interventions and explore how these interventions can be effectively implemented.

Examining Separately the Mechanisms of Bullying Prevention Programs

The most widely evaluated bullying prevention programs are often whole-school programs that combine multiple components targeting different predictors (Gaffney et al., 2021b). These complex programs make it difficult to assess the contribution of each component to the overall effectiveness (Eisner & Malti, 2012; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Furthermore, these programs typically target bullying at multiple levels that need to be explored separately in future research.

At the individual level, several programs proposed to implement interviews with students directly involved in a bullying situation (Gaffney et al., 2021b). Although interventions to tackle acute cases of bullying have been developed (Rigby & Griffiths, 2011; Senden & Galand, 2021), studies on their effectiveness are rare. Clinicians, school psychologists, and teachers are therefore left with theoretical knowledge to choose the best intervention to implement (Senden & Galand, 2021). Future studies should investigate the impact of these various approaches to inform practitioners and provide guidance on selecting the most effective method for addressing bullying situations (Destiné et al., 2024; Garandeau et al., 2014a). However, the effectiveness of individual interventions may vary depending on the characteristics of the bullies (Garandeau et al., 2014b; Johander et al., 2022), the setting of the intervention (school or clinical), and the targeted students (bullies, victims, or bystanders). Comparing these different approaches by considering these aspects should help practitioners make informed decisions when handling bullying cases.

A major issue of components implemented at the class level is that their effectiveness is rarely tested separately but instead evaluated as part of a whole package (Eisner & Malti, 2012). This method hinders our ability to test the contribution of each component and detect whether some have no or even iatrogenic effects on bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). One alternative method for addressing this gap is to evaluate each variable mobilized in logic models within the different interventions separately, assessing its impact on the proposed mechanisms and on bullying (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019). This

would help assess the unique effects of variables integrated into logic models and select those that have a significant impact on bullying.

Whole-school bullying prevention programs are also directed at the entire school community (Valle et al., 2020), including parents, teachers, as well as school policies. Based on the few studies that have compared programs with and without specific components at the school level, some preliminary patterns can be observed. First, informing parents that measures are being taken to prevent bullying in their school appears to increase the effectiveness of the program. However, the results remain inconclusive regarding the impact of greater parental involvement (Cross et al., 2012; Gaffney et al., 2021b). Second, providing teachers with tools to handle bullying alone appears insufficient without directly targeting students (van Verseveld et al., 2021). Finally, establishing clear school policies against bullying appears to support the overall effectiveness of a program (Gaffney et al., 2021b), which indicates that more studies are needed to explore the added value of these actions at the school level. This could be addressed through a three-arm RCT by comparing a control group to both the standard version of a program and an adapted version that includes or excludes specific components (e.g., Huitsing et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2022; van Verseveld et al., 2021).

To summarize, future research must move beyond evaluating whole-school programs as a single package and instead disentangle the effects of each component at all levels (Eisner & Malti, 2012). By first evaluating components in isolation, we can then identify the most effective combinations for maximum impact (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022). Ultimately, this approach will allow us to design bullying prevention programs that integrate the most impactful components, both independently and in combination, while optimizing the benefit-cost ratio (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

Getting Practical on the Implementation of Bullying Prevention Programs

The evaluation of the KiVa program in the French-speaking part of Belgium occurred in a specific context. A research team from UCLouvain closely collaborated with a training team from Université de Paix. The goal was for members of both teams to benefit from each other's expertise. In addition, UCLouvain could use the collected data to address issues in the bullying literature.

The collaboration itself provided an opportunity for mutual knowledge exchange between researchers and practitioners (Henrick et al., 2017). There were monthly meetings with some members of each team to discuss the practical points of this collaboration. The recurrent topics were program implementation, co-construction of the questionnaires, and communication with KiVa schools. These meetings also provided an opportunity for direct inquiries from trainers to researchers regarding the existing literature on a given topic. If the research team was unable to provide a comprehensive response directly, they undertook further research and prepared a brief report. For example, reports were written on the evaluation of KiVa around the world, the role of socio-emotional learning in bullying, and the differences between bullying, jokes, and exclusion. These meetings also served to clarify the adaptations made to the program by the trainers. Moreover, a research team member

participated in almost all meetings concerning the KiVa implementation and was physically present at least once a week to discuss with the trainers more informally. This collaboration also enabled researchers to gain a deep and up-to-date understanding of KiVa's Belgian adaptation, ensured that the program was implemented by a team of professional trainers, and facilitated data collection. Drawing from this collaboration, we propose two recommendations to enhance both the implementation of bullying prevention programs and the partnership between research and practice.

First, we observed that the average number of activities implemented in each class was relatively low, and a considerable number of classes had not implemented any activities at all (see **Study 4**). This point is particularly concerning, given that dosage has been consistently found to be associated with the effectiveness of a program (Galand et al., 2024; Latessa, 2018; Swift et al., 2017). A growing body of research recommends investing more effort in the implementation process to assess the impact of a bullying prevention program (Gaffney et al., 2019a; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). We identified several directions for future research on this topic. Prior to implementing a bullying prevention program, we recommend that researchers conduct an inventory of the activities or lessons currently and previously offered at the school. It is plausible that the issue of bullying has already been addressed by teachers and within some classes. Therefore, a new program should be implemented with an understanding of what is helpful for each school and what can be integrated into teachers' daily practice. Although this may be time-consuming, it can help teachers realize that they are not starting from scratch and that the program presents an opportunity to address the challenges they face (Bryk, 2015; Janosz et al., 2024).

Supplemental time should also be allocated to assess teachers' readiness to implement the program (Cook et al., 2023). The implementation of KiVa in the French-speaking part of Belgium always started when a school principal contacted the Université de Paix to apply for the project. After a brief presentation of the program to teachers, at least 80% of the educational team must support its implementation. This prerequisite is a good starting point for assessing teachers' initial motivation, but in our case, it only led to the school's exclusion if the score was below 80%. More detailed aspects of teachers' readiness to implement could have been collected. For example, how much time are they ready to invest in the program? What is their initial knowledge of bullying? Is bullying a problem in their class or school? Are they feeling efficient in preventing bullying? Does adding the implementation of a new program to their agenda seem feasible? Questioning teachers about their readiness to implement the program could already help detect local obstacles and adapt it to facilitate implementation (Bressoux, 2023; Cook et al., 2023). Despite the importance of this aspect of implementation, most studies only used this information to explain a posteriori why a program did not work (e.g., Axford et al., 2020; Janosz et al., 2024). Further research is needed to explore the value of these pre-implementation strategies.

Motivational interviews designed for teachers could also be incorporated into the program to support and guide them throughout the implementation process (Frey et al., 2023). These interviews were initially developed for psychological counseling and were aimed at strengthening motivation and commitment to change (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Applied to

bullying prevention programs, this takes the form of discussion with the diverse implementers (e.g., teachers, trainers, or principals) about the obstacles encountered during the implementation process. The obstacles may be related to the will, knowledge, and skills of school staff or the organization of the program (Bressoux, 2023; Frey et al., 2023). These interviews are utilized in various interventions and have demonstrated evidence of enhancing their effectiveness and facilitating behavioral change (Magill et al., 2018). However, they have rarely been utilized in the implementation of prevention programs (Pas & Bradshaw, 2021) and, to our knowledge, never in the context of bullying prevention programs.

The second obstacle was aligning the trainers' agendas with those of the researchers to reach common goals. The research team was mainly present at the beginning of the evaluation but had to reduce its participation after two years to focus on analyses and redaction tasks. Indeed, the conclusions presented in this dissertation required a substantial amount of time to analyze the data, review the literature, and interpret the results. Before that, we were unable to communicate our results to the trainers who were rightfully expecting them. Research-practice partnerships can create tensions between the expectations of practitioners seeking immediate solutions and the time needed for publishing. Balancing the need for prompt responses with the time required for rigorous publication can be complex for researchers in these partnerships (Coppe et al., 2024; Henrick et al., 2017). This type of collaboration should be encouraged while also acknowledging that researchers and practitioners may share common objectives but often take different approaches to achieving them. Although it provides a valuable lever to reduce the gap between practitioners and researchers, some institutional standards need to be reconsidered to enable researchers to engage more effectively in this type of collaboration (Coppe et al., 2024).

5. General Conclusion

Despite nearly half a century of research on bullying, issues regarding its evaluation, predictors, and prevention mechanisms persist, limiting our capacity to tackle it. First, researchers and practitioners lack clear guidelines for selecting the measure adapted to the survey's objective (Jia & Mikami, 2018). Second, many variables associated with bullying lack robust evidence of predictive validity (Zych et al., 2019a). Third, evaluation studies often neglect assessing implementation at the class level (Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). Fourth, the same evaluation studies tend to test only the effect of the program on bullying and victimization, overlooking mechanisms supposed to explain their effectiveness (Saarento et al., 2015a). This dissertation aimed to take a step toward addressing each issue and deepening our understanding of the processes occurring behind the scenes of bullying prevention.

On the one hand, the hypotheses supported by our results converge to emphasize the crucial role of the class in preventing bullying. Teachers and classmates can influence bullying through their attitudes and behaviors (Veenstra & Lodder, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023). Consequently, they bear responsibility for addressing bullying, even in the absence of direct involvement in the situation (Saarento et al., 2015b). In addition, the implementation of a bullying prevention program at the class-level impacts its effectiveness (Swift et al., 2017;

Tolmatcheff et al., 2024). We aligned with current research that conceptualizes bullying as embedded in the classroom and recommend focusing on this level to better prevent this phenomenon (Espelage & Swearer, 2009; Marsh et al., 2023).

On the other hand, most of our hypotheses were not supported by our results. First, compared to definition-based measures, behavior-based measures are the most closely associated with students' psychosocial adjustments, suggesting that they may be the most suitable for evaluating bullying prevention programs. Moreover, we found no evidence to support the role of empathy and the descriptive defending peer norm as predictors of bullying, even though they are widely assumed to prevent bullying. Finally, we also observed that the implementation of the KiVa program partially reduces bullying but not through the mechanisms supposed by its logic model. Taken together, these null findings underscore the importance of testing theories on bullying prior to their widespread application in practice.

Over the past decade, significant resources have been devoted to developing new bullying prevention programs in response to the urgency of the situation. However, their effectiveness has remained limited for more than 10 years (Gaffney et al., 2019a). We believe it is time to rethink our approach. We advocate for more deliberate and rigorous research to deepen our understanding of bullying and improve prevention efforts. In other words, researchers' conceptualizations of bullying must be directly challenged and refined through the voices of students and teachers who experience it firsthand, using the most relevant methodological and analytical standards. Children's thriving depends on it.

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Appendices

Mail à destination des directions des écoles KiVa

Cher/Chère XXXX

Je suis chercheur à l'UCLouvain et je m'occupe de l'évaluation du programme KiVa dans votre école.

Je vous envoie ce mail pour organiser la passation des questionnaires liés au projet KiVa.

Comme expliqué précédemment par mes collègues de l'Université de Paix, ce questionnaire est d'une durée approximative de 45 minutes pour chaque classe. Pour rappel, toutes les informations collectées le sont à titre confidentiel. L'objectif de ce dernier est de récolter des données sur le ressenti des enfants et les dynamiques relationnelles au sein de l'école. Il est crucial que la passation s'effectue avant les vacances de Noël, le 23 décembre.

Concrètement, nous souhaiterions idéalement organiser cette récolte en une journée avant l'implantation du projet dans l'école. Les passations se dérouleront dans les classes.

Par ailleurs, nous aimerions obtenir une liste regroupant le nombre d'élève dans chaque classe du second cycle. Cette liste est très importante car elle nous permettra d'organiser les passations dans les meilleures conditions possibles.

Sachez que ces données seront conservées dans un dossier sécurisé et que je serai l'unique personne à y avoir accès.

Concernant le questionnaire, nous serons présents dans chaque classe pour assurer la passation. Le mieux est que l'enseignant de la classe soit également présent, mais ce n'est pas indispensable. Grace à l'aide d'étudiants de master en psychologie et science de l'éducation, nous serons en mesure de faire deux classes en parallèle. Pourriez-vous nous proposer un horaire de passation nous permettant de rencontrer l'ensemble des classes sur une journée à la date qui vous conviendrait le mieux ?

Si vous avez la moindre question, n'hésitez à me les poser en réponse à ce mail ou en m'appelant au [redacted]

En vous remerciant pour votre précieuse collaboration, recevez mes sincères salutations,

Charlie Devleeschouwer

Doctorant / PhD student

Chercheur à l'Université de Paix

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Mail à destination des directions des écoles contrôles

Bonjour XXX,

Comme expliqué dans un appel précédent, votre école a été sélectionnée comme une école contrôle dans le projet KiVa cette année. Cela veut dire que nous souhaiterions rester à votre disposition jusqu'au démarrage du programme dans votre école l'année prochaine.

L'objectif des écoles contrôles est de servir de point de comparaison face aux écoles qui mettent déjà le programme en œuvre cette année. Cette procédure permet de comprendre sur quoi le programme agit et s'il est efficace. Votre rôle d'école contrôle est donc essentiel et indispensable au processus d'évaluation.

Votre participation comporte également des avantages.

- Tout d'abord, nous vous proposons d'établir un état des lieux de votre école. Notamment par rapport à la présence du harcèlement scolaire mais également sur d'autres mesures, comme le climat scolaire et le bien-être des élèves. Les chercheurs de l'UCLouvain s'engagent, si vous le souhaitez, à faire un retour dès que les résultats seront disponibles. Ce dernier pourra être sous forme de rapport ou de conférence où le chercheur répondra à vos questions.
- Deuxièmement, vous gagnez aussi la garantie d'être prioritaire pour implanter le programme KiVa l'année prochaine.
- Finalement, ce projet aura bénéficié d'une année « test ». Cela signifie que les formateurs seront plus expérimentés et la recherche aura ciblé les points importants de la prévention du harcèlement. Vous aurez donc un accès prioritaire sur une version « améliorée» du projet actuel.

Si vous êtes d'accord de participer, ce projet implique deux passations du questionnaire cette année scolaire aux élèves de 4e, 5e et 6e primaire et aux enseignants de primaire. La première passation aura lieu en novembre et la deuxième au mois de mai.

Dès que vous nous **montrez votre accord** en retour à cet email **avant le 15 octobre**, vous recevrez un autre message avec les informations pratiques.

Qu'elle soit votre décision, nous vous remercions déjà pour votre motivation et votre investissement dans ce projet.

XXXX,
Formateur à l'Université de Paix

Madame, Monsieur,

Encore merci pour votre réponse positive.

Voici, ci-dessous, les informations plus concrètes.

Le questionnaire est d'une durée approximative de 45 minutes pour chaque classe. Toutes les informations collectées le sont à titre confidentiel. L'objectif est de récolter des données sur le ressenti des enfants et les dynamiques relationnelles au sein de l'école. Il est crucial que la passation s'effectue avant les vacances de Noël, le 23 décembre.

Nous souhaiterions idéalement organiser cette récolte en une journée. Les passations se dérouleront dans les classes.

Par ailleurs, nous aimerions obtenir une liste regroupant le nombre d'élève dans chaque classe du second cycle (P4-P5-P6). Cette liste est très importante car elle nous permettra d'organiser les passations dans les meilleures conditions possibles.

Sachez que ces données seront conservées dans un dossier sécurisé et que je serai l'unique personne à y avoir accès.

Concernant le questionnaire, nous serons présents dans chaque classe pour assurer la passation. Le mieux est que l'enseignant de la classe soit également présent, mais ce n'est pas indispensable. Grace à l'aide d'étudiants de master en psychologie et science de l'éducation, nous serons en mesure de faire deux classes en parallèle. Pourriez-vous nous proposer un horaire de passation nous permettant de rencontrer l'ensemble des classes sur une journée à la date qui vous conviendrait le mieux ?

Si vous avez la moindre question, n'hésitez à me les poser en réponse à ce mail ou en m'appelant au [redacted]

En vous remerciant pour votre précieuse collaboration, recevez mes sincères salutations,

Charlie Devleeschouwer

Doctorant / PhD student
Chercheur à l'Université de Paix

IPSY – Psychological Sciences Research Institute
Place Cardinal Mercier 10/L3.05.01 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
Bureau – C.108

UCLouvain
Institut de recherche
en sciences psychologiques

Université de Paix asbl
De la prévention à la gestion positive des conflits

Lettre de consentement pour les parents (KiVa)

Namur, le 15 novembre 2021

Informations aux parents d'élèves de 3ième, 4ième, 5ième et 6ième primaire

Chers parents,

L'école de votre enfant commencera prochainement le programme KiVa, programme conçu par l'Université de Turku en Finlande et adapté par l'Université de Paix en Belgique. Ce dispositif vise non seulement à prévenir et intervenir en cas de harcèlement scolaire mais aussi à installer un climat positif dans lequel chacun puisse se sentir bien en classe et à l'école.

Dans le cadre de ce projet, l'Université de Paix collabore avec l'UCLouvain qui est chargé d'évaluer l'efficacité du programme. Pour cela, les élèves de l'école répondront à un questionnaire d'une durée approximative de 50 minutes. L'objectif de ce dernier est de récolter le ressenti des enfants sur le projet KiVa ainsi que sur les dynamiques relationnelles au sein de l'école. Afin de réaliser au mieux cette évaluation, il est important qu'un maximum d'élèves y participent.

Le questionnaire est confidentiel et, bien que l'école aura accès aux résultats généraux de la recherche, elle n'aura pas accès aux réponses des élèves. Nous avons besoin de votre accord pour pouvoir faire passer ce questionnaire à votre enfant. Si vous ne souhaitez pas que votre enfant participe à l'enquête, nous vous demandons dès lors de renvoyer le talon ci-joint à l'enseignant concerné qui nous en informera.

Pour toute question relative à cette recherche, aux données collectées ou à leur utilisation, vous pouvez contacter Mr Charlie Devleeschouwer, responsable du projet, à l'adresse mail suivante : Charlie.devleeschouwer@uclouvain.be

En vous remerciant pour votre confiance et en restant à votre disposition pour tout renseignement complémentaire, veuillez agréer, Madame, Monsieur, l'expression de nos salutations distinguées,

Charlie Devleeschouwer, doctorant UCLouvain
charlie.devleeschouwer@uclouvain.be

Esther Alcala Recuerda, coordinatrice du projet KiVa
e.alcala@universitedepaix.be

✂----------

Talon à compléter et rendre à l'enseignant (en cas de refus)

Je, soussigné(e) .....

parent de .....,

Accepte que mon enfant remplisse un questionnaire dans le cadre de l'évaluation du projet KiVa

☐ OUI

☐ NON

Date : ..... Signature :

www.universitedepaix.org

Lettre de consentement pour les parents (contrôle)

Université de Paix asbl

Namur, le 12 novembre 2021

Informations aux parents d'élèves de 3ième, 4ième, 5ième et 6ième primaire

Chers parents,

Comme vous le savez, veiller au bien-être de vos enfants et garantir leur épanouissement dans un climat de bienveillance et de respect de tous est une priorité dans chaque école.

L'école de votre enfant participera prochainement à une recherche menée par l'Université de Paix. Cette recherche vise à explorer le quotidien des élèves ainsi que leur perception de l'école.

Dans le cadre de ce projet, l'Université de Paix collabore avec l'UCLouvain qui est chargé d'évaluer ces dimensions. Pour cela, les élèves de l'école répondront à un questionnaire d'une durée approximative de 50 minutes. L'objectif de ce dernier est de récolter le ressenti des enfants ainsi que sur les dynamiques relationnelles au sein de l'école. Afin de réaliser au mieux cette évaluation, il est important qu'un maximum d'élèves y participent.

Le questionnaire est confidentiel et, bien que l'école aura accès aux résultats généraux de la recherche, elle n'aura pas accès aux réponses des élèves. Nous avons besoin de votre accord pour pouvoir faire passer ce questionnaire à votre enfant. Si vous ne souhaitez pas que votre enfant participe à l'enquête, nous vous demandons dès lors de renvoyer le talon ci-joint à l'enseignant concerné qui nous en informera.

Pour toute question relative à cette recherche, aux données collectées ou à leur utilisation, vous pouvez contacter Mr Charlie Devleeschouwer, responsable l'évaluation, à l'adresse mail suivante : Charlie.devleeschouwer@uclouvain.be

En vous remerciant pour votre confiance et en restant à votre disposition pour tout renseignement complémentaire, veuillez agréer, Madame, Monsieur, l'expression de nos salutations distinguées,

Charlie Devleeschouwer, doctorant UCLouvain
charlie.devleeschouwer@uclouvain.be

Esther Alcala Recuerda, coordinatrice du projet KiVa à l'université de paix
e.alcala@universitedepaix.be

✂----------

Talon à compléter et rendre à l'enseignant (en cas de refus).

Je, soussigné(e) .....

parent de .....,

Accepte que mon enfant remplisse un questionnaire sur le bien-être à l'école

☐ OUI

☐ NON

Date : ..... Signature :

www.universitedepaix.org

Procédures de passation

0. Remarque générale

- L'idéal est que l'enseignant(e) reste dans la classe pendant la passation, mais plutôt en retrait et occupé(e) à autre chose. (Par exemple à son bureau.)
    - **En train de passer son questionnaire.**
- Au besoin, demander à l'avance de l'aide à un élève pour distribuer les questionnaires.
- Entrée en classe :
    - Etape importante, attention au non verbal : entrer et regarder toute la classe (pas juste l'un ou l'autre élève).
    - Vérifier auprès du professeur s'il sait pourquoi vous êtes là (surtout pour les écoles contrôles !).
    - Dans les classes définies à l'avance où le niveau de lecture est bas (quatrième primaire ; ISEM bas), lire chaque question et laisser à chaque fois le temps aux élèves de répondre.
- Concernant le **questionnaire enseignant,** le donner dès qu'on a un peu de temps **au début**. Pour P6 plus simple car on ne lit pas tous les items. Pour les P5, l'idéal est après les questions socio-démos ou alors à la fin de la première page en disant « je vous laisse terminer tranquillement la première page ». : profiter d'être à deux pour se diviser le travail

1. Rencontre avec la classe :

- Bonjour je m'appelle ...

- Je suis chercheur/étudiant.e à l'Université

- Je fais une recherche sur la vie des élèves à l'école

- J'ai besoin de votre aide

- Je (ou mon collègue) est déjà passé dans votre école trois fois (pour les 5e et 6e, pour les 4e : 1 fois). Maintenant, il s'agit de la dernière fois où nous venons ! Votre avis pour ce dernier questionnaire est très important.

- Comment ça se passe pour vous à l'école ; ce qu'on pourrait peut-être améliorer. => votre avis que vous nous avez donné pendant deux ans (pour les 5e et 6e) vont servir à l'ensemble de l'école et des autres écoles en Belgique francophone. Il est donc important que vous répondiez correctement à ce questionnaire pour aider vos professeurs à aider tous les élèves à se sentir bien dans leur école.

Pour école contrôle :

- Comment ça se passe pour vous à l'école ; ce qui va bien, mais aussi ce qui va moins bien, pour savoir ce qu'on pourrait peut-être améliorer.

- Si vous êtes d'accord de m'aider

- Questionnaire avec des questions sur ce que vous vivez à l'école.

2. Pictos au tableau (les coller au fur et à mesure):- 3 choses vraiment importantes

0) Vous vous rappelez de certaines règles ?

1) Pas de points + jamais de bonne ou de mauvaise réponse --> c'est vraiment votre avis que vous donnez, donc ce que vous pensez. (Picto 1)
2) Questionnaire confidentiel :
   - Personne de l'école ne pourra lire vos réponses (enseignant(e), directrice, élève).
   - Il n'y a que les chercheurs qui liront vos réponses, mais ils ne vous connaissent pas
   + Vous ne devez pas écrire votre prénom sur le questionnaire !
   - => Vous pouvez vraiment être tout à fait honnête et dire la vérité Picto 2)

3) On ne dit pas tout haut ses réponses + Vraiment interdit d'essayer de regarder les réponses des autres (Picto 3) (Si quelqu'un essaye de regarder les réponses de quelqu'un d'autre, il sera éliminé de la recherche immédiatement.) Pictos :

1) 

2) 

3) 

3. Consignes à voix haute pour tout le monde et explications au tableau :

- Pour répondre, on a fait simple : pour tout le questionnaire, il faut mettre des croix dans les cases qui vous conviennent le plus.

- deux manières de répondre :

1) on va vous demander combien de fois vous le faites. **donc une seule croix par ligne + on ne fait rien dans le cadre gris**
2) Ici, c'est toujours la même chose. Il faut mettre des croix. MAIS on va vous demander si vous êtes d'accord ou non avec la phrase. Si la phrase c'est "Le chocolat c'est mauvais." et que vous, vous aimez le chocolat -> D'accord ou pas d'accord ? »+ chocolat blanc/chocolat noir, etc… **donc une seule croix par ligne + on ne fait rien dans le cadre gris**

4. Distribution du questionnaire (face verso) : dire qu'ils doivent le laisser retourner

5. Précisions orales juste après la distribution :

Vous pouvez retourner le questionnaire

Pour les P4& P5 : lire avec eux TOUS LES ITEMS (*P6 : lire les amorces au cas où)*

Pg de garde : Pas besoin de lire la première page --> pictos au tableau

Pg 1 : question 1 (compréhension + accord) très important de ne pas se tromper : si « non », chercheurs ne pourront pas utiliser votre questionnaire et devront le jeter à la poubelle --> « oui ».

- Q2 : le faire avec eux pour nous ! (et si quelqu'un est né le 9 mars ? : il écrit 09)
- Pg1 : ne cocher qu'une seule case chaque ligne !
    - tu dois penser à **tous les** élèves qui sont dans ta classe, **pas juste tes amis**
- Pg3 : c'est comme je vous ai expliqué (chocolat blanc)
- Pg 5 Toi et tes sentiments : redire la phrase : « il arrive que les enfants n'aient pas toujours les mêmes sentiments ou idées ».

6. questions (le dire seulement ssi question)

Pg1. Si mon anniversaire est bientôt ? --> On met l'âge qu'on a aujourd'hui, on ne triche pas, même si l'anniversaire est demain.

Pg1. Si c'est pour rire ? --> Oui, ça compte quand même. Si on n'a pas internet/de téléphone ? --> Alors forcément ça n'a pas pu t'arriver !

Pg3 :

1e cadre : si ça ne m'est jamais arrivé ? -> imagine que tu vois un élève qui se ferait embêter.

Questions de compréhension : relire la phrase avec de l'emphase, répéter la question « Est-ce que tu es plutôt d'accord ou pas d'accord avec cette phrase ? Ou entre les deux ? » Reformuler au besoin.

Interviennent -> agir

Pg5 :

Vivent = font

progrès = comment tu t'améliores, si tu fais les choses mieux qu'avant.

Respect = sont gentils, écoute les élèves.

Pg6 :

« Parfois on n'a que deux choix : attaquer le premier (la première) ou attendre que les autres attaquent. » => question la plus difficile à comprendre ; reformuler dans le sens « dans la vie, on ne peut faire que deux choses ? est-ce que vous pensez que vous avez d'autres choix ? »

un sale coup = a pas été très gentil avec toi.

Pg7 :

Chagrin = être triste.

Influencer = se sentir comme eux.

se sentir mal dans sa peau = ne pas être content d'être soi. Envie d'être loin de tout = avoir envie de n'avoir rien ni personne autour de toi.

N.B. Vers la fin des 45 minutes, dire à ceux qui sont vraiment lents qu'ils peuvent s'arrêter à la première « fin » du questionnaire (p. 7 ; Qdp et HBSC)

7. Pour terminer :

- Veiller à ne pas laisser les questionnaires remplis par les élèves à la vue du professeur, les garder avec soi ou les ranger face cachée dans la caisse ou enveloppe prévue à cet effet (cfr. remarque ci-dessus concernant la confidentialité des réponses des élèves)
- Dire un grand merci : grâce à vos réponses on va comprendre ce qui se passe dans votre classe et voir ce qu'on pourrait améliorer. Cela fait la 4e fois que nous venons et nous ne viendrons plus. Maintenant nous allons analyser vos réponses et comprendre comment vous avez évolué pendant ces deux ans. Cela va nous aider à partager ce que nous avons observé pour aider vos enseignants et toutes les écoles par la même occasion.
- **Dans ce questionnaire, vous vous êtes peut-être parfois senti mal.** Si jamais vous voulez parler de ces choses que vous vivez, vous ne devez pas hésiter à en parler à vos professeurs ou parents. Si jamais vous voulez parler à d'autres personnes, vous pouvez toujours contacter le **103** ou le centre PMS de ton école (expliquer rapidement s'ils ne savent pas). Ils t'écouteront et tout restera secret.
- souhaitez une bonne continuation aux élèves et remercier l'enseignant.
- Récupérer les questionnaires **enseignants.**
    - Dire qu'ils peuvent garder la page de garde avec mon adresse mail s'ils ont des questions. (la déchirer)

Fiche pour les absences

Classe :

Élèves dont les parents ont refusé la participation au questionnaire :

Pouvez-vous indiquer les prénoms des élèves ...

... absents :

... ne parlant pas français :

Autres précisions (par ex. dyspraxie, difficultés importantes de lecture, ...) ?

Questionnaire enfants pilote (cohort 1)

Bonjour ! ☺

Nous avons besoin de ton aide : nous réalisons une recherche sur la vie des élèves à l'école et nous aimerions beaucoup avoir ton avis.
Grâce à toi, nous pourrons savoir ce qui va bien et ce qui va moins bien dans ton école. Nous t'encourageons à répondre jusqu'au bout, c'est vraiment important !

Ce que tu dois savoir :

1. Il n'y a pas de points, ni de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses aux questions : ici, c'est vraiment ton avis qui compte !



2. Ce questionnaire est confidentiel, ce qui veut dire que personne de l'école ne lira tes réponses.



3. Si tu ne veux vraiment pas répondre à ce questionnaire, ton enseignant(e) te donnera un travail à faire pendant ce temps.

Si un mot ou une phrase n'est pas clair, n'hésite pas à poser tes questions.

Si après ce questionnaire tu souhaites discuter avec un adulte de ce que tu vis à l'école, tu peux en parler à ton enseignant ou contacter le centre PMS de ton école.
Tu peux aussi appeler le 103 par téléphone si tu préfères parler à quelqu'un qui n'est pas à l'école.

Merci beaucoup pour ta participation, tu nous aides vraiment !



1. J'ai bien compris que personne de l'école ne lira mes réponses et j'accepte de participer à ce questionnaire ☐ Oui ☐ Non

2.

Écris ici les 2 premières lettres de ton **prénom** :	☐☐	Par exemple, si tu t'appelles Marie, tu écris : M A
Écris ici les 2 premières lettres de ton **nom de famille** :	☐☐	Par exemple, si tu t'appelles Dupont, tu écris : D U
Écris ici le chiffre du jour de ton anniversaire :	☐☐	Par exemple, si tu es né le 24 janvier 2012, tu écris : 2 4

3. En quelle année es-tu ?

☐ 3e primaire ☐ 4e primaire ☐ 5e primaire ☐ 6e primaire

4. Quel âge as-tu ?

☐ Moins de 8 ans ☐ 8 ans ☐ 9 ans ☐ 10 ans
☐ 11 ans ☐ 12 ans ☐ 13 ans ☐ Plus de 13 ans

5. Tu es :

☐ Une fille ☐ Un garçon

6. Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il est arrivé qu'un ou une élève...	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
se moque de moi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
raconte des choses sur moi que je n'aime pas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me dise des insultes ou des gros mots	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me frappe (claques, coups de pied ou de poing)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
utilise internet pour m'envoyer des insultes ou me faire peur (TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, ...)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me dise que je ne peux pas jouer ou parler avec eux	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me téléphone ou m'envoie des SMS qui me font mal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me pince, me griffe ou me tire les cheveux	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1

6. Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il est arrivé qu'un ou une élève...	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
abîme ou cache mes affaires	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
montre une photo ou une vidéo à d'autres pour se moquer de moi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
prenne quelque chose qui m'appartient sans ma permission	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
dise qu'il ou elle va me faire du mal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. **Mets une croix dans** la case qui convient le plus à ce que tu penses :

À ton avis, les comportements que tu viens de lire à la question d'avant :

☐ n'étaient jamais méchants

☐ étaient parfois méchants

☐ étaient presque tout le temps méchants

8. Depuis la rentrée de Noël, **il m'est arrivé**...	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
de me moquer d'un(e) autre élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de raconter des choses blessantes sur un(e) autre élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'insulter un autre élève, de lui dire des gros mots	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de frapper un élève (claques, coups de pied ou poing)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'utiliser internet pour envoyer des insultes ou faire peur à un élève (TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, ...)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de refuser de parler ou de jouer avec un autre élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de téléphoner ou d'envoyer un SMS à un autre élève pour l'embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de pincer, de griffer ou de tirer les cheveux d'un(e) autre élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'abimer ou cacher les affaires des autres	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de montrer une photo ou une vidéo pour me moquer d'un autre élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2

Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il m'est arrivé…	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
de prendre les affaires d'un autre élève sans sa permission	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de dire à un élève que je vais lui faire du mal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou pas</u> avec la phrase.

Exemple : si la phrase c'est « Le chocolat c'est mauvais » et que toi tu adores le chocolat, tu coches la case « Pas du tout d'accord ». Si la phrase c'est « le chocolat c'est délicieux », tu fais l'inverse.

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Exemple : Le chocolat c'est mauvais	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exemple : Le chocolat c'est délicieux	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒

10. Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Si quelqu'un m'embête à l'école, je sais comment faire pour que cela s'arrête.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quand un(e) autre élève cherche à m'ennuyer, je ne sais pas quoi faire.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je ne sais pas comment réagir si d'autres élèves me rejettent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je sais comment gérer mes problèmes avec les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase. Je suis capable de…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
intervenir contre ceux qui ennuient les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3

Je suis capable de…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
aider les élèves qui se font embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
empêcher que certains élèves ennuient les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
dire aux élèves d'arrêter d'embêter les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
empêcher que certains élèves disent des choses blessantes sur les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Mets une croix dans la case si tu es d'accord ou non avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Ça peut parfois être drôle d'embêter un élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il faudrait essayer d'aider les élèves qui se font embêter par d'autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est amusant quand un élève se moque tout le temps d'un(e) autre élève de la classe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est bête d'ennuyer un élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cela m'énerve quand un élève se fait embêter sans raison.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est bien d'aider les élèves qui ne savent pas se défendre.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. Mets une croix dans la case si tu es d'accord ou non avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Quand dans un film le héros ou l'héroïne a peur, j'ai peur aussi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quand les autres sont contents, je me sens aussi content(e).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ça ne me rend pas triste de voir une personne qui a du chagrin.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si mes ami(e)s ont des problèmes, je ne suis pas inquiet ou inquiète à cause de leurs problèmes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4

13. Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Quand quelqu'un se sent triste, j'arrive à le comprendre.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Souvent, je me sens triste quand je regarde des choses ou des films tristes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Souvent, je peux comprendre comment les gens se sentent même s'ils ne me l'ont pas dit.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ça ne me fait rien de spécial quand je vois une personne s'énerver.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
En général, j'arrive à deviner quand mes ami(e)s sont content(e)s.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si je suis avec des ami(e)s qui ont peur, j'ai peur aussi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Généralement, je me rends vite compte quand un(e) ami(e) est en colère.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je suis souvent influencé(e) par l'humeur de mes ami(e)s : je me sens triste si ils/elles sont tristes ou joyeux si ils/elles sont joyeux.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cela ne me fait rien de voir qu'un(e) de mes ami(e)s est malheureux ou malheureuse.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Maintenant, pense à ton enseignant(e)



14. Quand un élève se fait souvent embêter (exemple, se fait insulter, frapper, exclure…) **mon enseignant(e)…**	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
fait comme s'il ne s'était rien passé	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
essaye d'aider l'élève qui se fait embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ignore la situation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
aide les élèves concernés à parler entre eux du problème	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
laisse les élèves se débrouiller seuls	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5

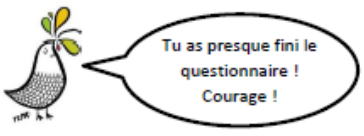
14. Quand un élève se fait souvent embêter, mon enseignant(e)…	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
sanctionne ceux ou celles qui embêtent l'élève	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
discute avec toute la classe du problème	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Mets une croix dans la case si tu es d'accord ou non avec la phrase. À ton avis, ton enseignant(e)…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
pense qu'il faut aider les élèves qui se font ennuyer par d'autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
trouve que c'est grave si un(e) élève se fait souvent embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
pense que c'est grave si les élèves rigolent d'un enfant qui se fait embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
veut qu'on le prévienne si un(e) élève se fait souvent embêter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
trouve qu'il faut soutenir les élèves qui se font souvent ennuyer par d'autres	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Maintenant, pense aux élèves qui sont de ta classe

16. Mets une croix dans la case si tu es d'accord ou non avec la phrase. D'après les élèves de ma classe, je devrais…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
défendre les élèves qui se font frapper par les autres élèves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me moquer des élèves qui sont rejetés	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
jouer avec les élèves qui sont seuls	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
empêcher les élèves de se moquer des autres	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
aider les élèves qui sont seuls et rejetés du groupe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
embêter les autres élèves qui ne savent pas se défendre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6



Lis attentivement cette définition qui te permettra de répondre aux trois questions suivantes.

On dit qu'un(e) élève est victime de harcèlement scolaire quand un(e) ou des élèves

- disent des mots qui peuvent blesser ou embêter quelqu'un ; l'insultent ou lui donnent des surnoms qui lui font du mal ;
- Font comme s'il ou elle n'était pas là ou le mettent à l'écart d'un groupe d'élèves
- le poussent, le frappent, le bousculent ou encore l'enferment dans une pièce ;
- Racontent des choses qui ne sont pas vraies ou disent des choses qui lui font du mal et essaient de faire en sorte que les autres ne lui parlent plus ;
- et tout ce qui pourrait lui faire du mal.

On parle de harcèlement scolaire quand

1. ces situations arrivent souvent ;
2. il est difficile pour l'élève qui subit cela de se défendre par lui-même ;
3. quand un élève est régulièrement taquiné de manière blessante.

Cependant, on ne parle pas de harcèlement scolaire lorsque l'élève concerné par ce qui est dit ou fait n'en souffre pas du tout

On ne parle pas non plus de harcèlement scolaire quand deux élèves de même force se disputent ou se battent.

Pour chaque question, coche une seule case

17. As-tu harcelé quelqu'un depuis la rentrée de Noël ?

⚠ Ne coche qu'une seule case

☐ Je n'ai jamais fait cela
☐ Une ou deux fois
☐ Deux/trois fois
☐ Un peu près une fois par semaine
☐ Plusieurs fois par semaine

18. As-tu été harcelé depuis la rentrée de Noël ?

⚠ Ne coche qu'une seule case

☐ Je n'ai jamais subi cela
☐ Une ou deux fois
☐ Deux/trois fois
☐ Un peu près une fois par semaine
☐ Plusieurs fois par semaine

7

19. Depuis combien de temps te fais-tu harceler ?	☐ Cela n'est jamais arrivé depuis la rentrée de Noël
⚠ Ne coche qu'une seule case	☐ Cela dure depuis/a duré une semaine ou deux.
	☐ Cela dure depuis/a duré environ un mois
	☐ Cela dure depuis la rentrée de Noël.
	☐ Cela dure depuis la rentrée de septembre.

20. Coche l'élève ou les élèves de ta classe qui harcèlent les autres élèves

(Rappelle-toi bien que personne de l'école ne pourra lire tes réponses !)

☐ Élève 1	☐ Élève 2	☐ Élève 3	☐ Élève 4
☐ Élève 5	☐ Élève 6	☐ Élève 7	☐ Élève 8
☐ Élève 9	☐ Élève 10	☐ Élève 11	☐ Élève 12
☐ Élève 13	☐ Élève 14	☐ Élève 15	☐ Élève 16
☐ Élève 17	☐ Élève 18	☐ Élève 19	☐ Élève 20
☐ Élève 21	☐ Élève 22	☐ Élève 23	☐ Élève 24
☐ Élève 25	☐ Élève 26	☐ Élève 27	☐ Élève 28

⚠
- PAS toi-même
- S'il n'y en a pas, ne coche personne.

21. Coche l'élève ou les élèves de ta classe qui se font harceler par les autres élèves

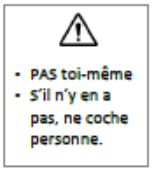
☐ Élève 1	☐ Élève 2	☐ Élève 3	☐ Élève 4
☐ Élève 5	☐ Élève 6	☐ Élève 7	☐ Élève 8
☐ Élève 9	☐ Élève 10	☐ Élève 11	☐ Élève 12
☐ Élève 13	☐ Élève 14	☐ Élève 15	☐ Élève 16
☐ Élève 17	☐ Élève 18	☐ Élève 19	☐ Élève 20
☐ Élève 21	☐ Élève 22	☐ Élève 23	☐ Élève 24
☐ Élève 25	☐ Élève 26	☐ Élève 27	☐ Élève 28

⚠
- PAS toi-même
- S'il n'y en a pas, ne coche personne.

8

22. Coche l'élève ou les élèves de ta classe qui **défendent** ceux ou celles qui se font harceler

☐ Élève 1	☐ Élève 2	☐ Élève 3	☐ Élève 4
☐ Élève 5	☐ Élève 6	☐ Élève 7	☐ Élève 8
☐ Élève 9	☐ Élève 10	☐ Élève 11	☐ Élève 12
☐ Élève 13	☐ Élève 14	☐ Élève 15	☐ Élève 16
☐ Élève 17	☐ Élève 18	☐ Élève 19	☐ Élève 20
☐ Élève 21	☐ Élève 22	☐ Élève 23	☐ Élève 24
☐ Élève 25	☐ Élève 26	☐ Élève 27	☐ Élève 28



23. Coche les élèves de ta classe **que tu aimes le plus** (pas plus que 5).

(Rappelle-toi bien que personne de l'école ne pourra lire tes réponses !)

☐ Élève 1	☐ Élève 2	☐ Élève 3	☐ Élève 4
☐ Élève 5	☐ Élève 6	☐ Élève 7	☐ Élève 8
☐ Élève 9	☐ Élève 10	☐ Élève 11	☐ Élève 12
☐ Élève 13	☐ Élève 14	☐ Élève 15	☐ Élève 16
☐ Élève 17	☐ Élève 18	☐ Élève 19	☐ Élève 20
☐ Élève 21	☐ Élève 22	☐ Élève 23	☐ Élève 24
☐ Élève 25	☐ Élève 26	☐ Élève 27	☐ Élève 28



24. Coche l'élève ou les élèves de ta classe **que tu aimes le moins** (pas plus que 5).

☐ Élève 1	☐ Élève 2	☐ Élève 3	☐ Élève 4
☐ Élève 5	☐ Élève 6	☐ Élève 7	☐ Élève 8
☐ Élève 9	☐ Élève 10	☐ Élève 11	☐ Élève 12
☐ Élève 13	☐ Élève 14	☐ Élève 15	☐ Élève 16
☐ Élève 17	☐ Élève 18	☐ Élève 19	☐ Élève 20
☐ Élève 21	☐ Élève 22	☐ Élève 23	☐ Élève 24
☐ Élève 25	☐ Élève 26	☐ Élève 27	☐ Élève 28



9

25. Coche pour chaque énoncé la case "Pas vrai", "Un peu vrai" ou "Très vrai". Réponds du mieux que tu peux, même si tu n'es pas sûr(e) ou si la phrase te paraît bizarre !

Depuis la rentrée de septembre...	Pas vrai	Un peu vrai	Très vrai
j'essaie d'être gentil(le) envers les autres.	☐	☐	☐
je suis agité(e), j'ai du mal à rester assis.	☐	☐	☐
j'ai souvent mal à la tête ou au ventre	☐	☐	☐
je partage avec les autres (nourriture, jeux, stylos, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
je suis souvent en colère	☐	☐	☐
je joue souvent seul(e)	☐	☐	☐
en général, je fais ce qu'on me dit	☐	☐	☐
je me fais beaucoup de soucis	☐	☐	☐
j'aide volontiers quand quelqu'un s'est fait mal ou ne se sent pas bien	☐	☐	☐
j'ai au moins un(e) ami(e)	☐	☐	☐
je me bagarre beaucoup	☐	☐	☐
je pleure facilement	☐	☐	☐
en général, les gens de mon âge m'aiment bien	☐	☐	☐
je suis facilement distrait(e), j'ai du mal à me concentrer	☐	☐	☐
je perds facilement confiance en moi	☐	☐	☐
je suis gentil(le) avec les enfants plus jeunes	☐	☐	☐
on me dit souvent que je mens ou que je triche	☐	☐	☐
des enfants de mon âge m'embêtent souvent	☐	☐	☐
J'aime aider les autres	☐	☐	☐
je prends mon temps avant d'agir	☐	☐	☐
je prends des choses qui ne m'appartiennent pas	☐	☐	☐
je préfère les adultes que les enfants de mon âge	☐	☐	☐
j'ai beaucoup de peurs, je suis facilement effrayé(e)	☐	☐	☐
je finis ce que j'ai commencé. C'est facile pour moi de me concentrer	☐	☐	☐

Voilà, le questionnaire est terminé !

Encore merci pour ta participation !



10

Questionnaire enfants RCT (cohort 2 & 3)

Bonjour ! ☺

Nous avons besoin de ton aide : nous réalisons une recherche sur la vie des élèves à l'école et nous aimerions beaucoup avoir ton avis.
Grâce à toi, nous pourrons savoir ce qui va bien et ce qui va moins bien dans ton école. Nous t'encourageons à répondre jusqu'au bout, c'est vraiment important !

Ce que tu dois savoir :

1. Il n'y a pas de points, ni de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses aux questions : ici, c'est vraiment ton avis qui compte !



2. Ce questionnaire est confidentiel, ce qui veut dire que personne de l'école ne lira tes réponses.



3. Si tu ne veux pas répondre à ce questionnaire, ton enseignant(e) te donnera un travail à faire pendant ce temps.

Si un mot ou une phrase n'est pas clair, n'hésite pas à poser tes questions.

Si après ce questionnaire tu souhaites discuter avec un adulte de ce que tu vis à l'école, tu peux en parler à ton enseignant ou contacter le centre PMS de ton école.
Tu peux aussi appeler le 103 par téléphone si tu préfères parler à quelqu'un qui n'est pas à l'école.

Merci beaucoup pour ta participation, tu nous aides vraiment !



J'ai bien compris que personne de l'école ne lira mes réponses et j'accepte de participer à ce questionnaire.

☐ oui ☐ non

Écris ici les 2 premières lettres de ton **prénom** :	☐☐
Écris ici les 2 premières lettres de ton **nom de famille** :	☐☐
Écris ici le chiffre du **jour** de ton anniversaire :	☐☐

En quelle année es-tu ?	☐ 3e primaire	☐ 4e primaire	☐ 5e primaire	☐ 6e primaire

Quel âge as-tu ?	☐ Moins de 8 ans	☐ 8 ans	☐ 9 ans	☐ 10 ans
	☐ 11 ans	☐ 12 ans	☐ 13 ans	☐ Plus de 13 ans

Tu es	☐ Une fille	☐ Un garçon	☐ Autre

Toi et les autres élèves



Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il est arrivé qu'un ou une élève …	0 fois	1 fois	2 fois	3 fois	4 fois ou plus
se moque de moi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
raconte des choses méchantes sur moi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me dise des gros mots ou des insultes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me frappe (claques, coups de pied ou de poing).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
abîme mes affaires exprès.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me dise que je ne peux pas jouer ou parler avec lui/elle.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
fasse exprès de me pousser.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me pince, me griffe ou me tire les cheveux.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
dise qu'il ou elle va me faire du mal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1

	0 fois	1 fois	2 fois	3 fois	4 fois ou plus
montre une photo ou une vidéo à d'autres élèves pour se moquer de moi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
me téléphone ou m'envoie des SMS pour m'embêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
utilise internet pour m'envoyer des insultes ou me faire peur (TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, ...).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il m'est arrivé...	0 fois	1 fois	2 fois	3 fois	4 fois ou plus
de me moquer d'un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de raconter des choses méchantes sur un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de dire des gros mots à un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de frapper un(e) élève (claques, coups de pied ou poing).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de refuser de parler ou de jouer avec un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de pousser exprès un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de pincer, de griffer ou de tirer les cheveux d'un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'abîmer exprès les affaires d'un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de dire à un(e) élève que je vais lui faire du mal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de montrer une photo ou une vidéo pour me moquer d'un(e) autre élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de téléphoner ou d'envoyer un SMS à un(e) autre élève pour l'embêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'utiliser internet pour envoyer des insultes ou faire peur à un(e) élève (TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2

Que fais-tu si tu vois un(e) autre élève de l'école se faire souvent embêter ?	Jamais	Presque jamais	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
Je vais parler aux personnes qui embêtent et je leur dis d'arrêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'appelle un(e) ami(e) et ensemble, nous allons leur dire d'arrêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'attends que l'élève soit seul(e) et je vais le ou la consoler.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je vais voir un adulte immédiatement et je lui explique ce qu'il se passe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou pas</u> avec la phrase.

Exemple : si la phrase c'est « Le chocolat c'est mauvais » et que toi tu adores le chocolat, tu coches la case « Pas du tout d'accord ».

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
	☹	😕	😐	🙂	😀
Exemple : Le chocolat c'est mauvais	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

Maintenant, ce n'est plus un exemple ! **Je me sens capable…**	Pas du tout d'accord ☹	Plutôt pas d'accord 😕	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord 😐	Plutôt d'accord 🙂	Tout à fait d'accord 😀
d'aider les élèves qui se font embêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'intervenir contre ceux qui ennuient les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'empêcher que certains élèves ennuient les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'empêcher que certains élèves disent des choses méchantes sur les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de dire à quelqu'un d'arrêter d'embêter les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3

Toi et tes amis



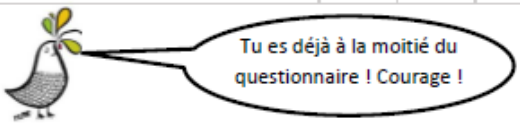
mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
	☹	😕	😐	🙂	😀
J'ai des ami(e)s qui embêtent souvent les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mes ami(e)s sont violents avec les autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mes ami(e)s se moquent souvent des autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mes ami(e)s aiment rigoler des élèves qui se font embêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Toi et ton école



Les enseignants de cette école…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
essayent que tous les élèves s'entendent bien dans la classe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
laissent faire sans réagir lorsqu'il y a des problèmes entre élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
interviennent dès qu'un ou plusieurs élèves embêtent les autres.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ne permettent pas qu'on se moque de quelqu'un qui donne une mauvaise réponse.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ne nous laissent pas dire des choses négatives sur d'autres élèves de la classe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
font respecter les règles comme prévu.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
appliquent les règles de la même façon pour tout le monde.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
interviennent dès qu'ils se rendent compte qu'un élève ne respecte pas les règles.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
sont prêts à aider les élèves s'ils ont un problème.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4



Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase. Les enseignants de cette école…	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
s'intéressent à ce que les élèves vivent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
sont attentifs à nos progrès.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
font tout leur possible pour aider les élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
laissent les élèves se débrouiller tout seuls avec leurs difficultés.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
traitent les élèves avec respect.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
J'ai peur d'aller à l'école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens en sécurité dans cette école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'aime mon école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'aimerais changer d'école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Toi et tes sentiments



Il arrive que les enfants n'aient pas toujours les mêmes sentiments ou idées.

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Il faudrait essayer d'aider les élèves qui se font embêter par d'autres élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ça peut parfois être drôle d'embêter quelqu'un.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si un(e) élève se fait embêter par d'autres, c'est de sa faute.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est idiot d'embêter quelqu'un.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5

Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
					
Ce n'est pas si grave de rigoler avec les autres quand quelqu'un se fait embêter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ce n'est pas bien d'aider quelqu'un à embêter un élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est drôle quand quelqu'un se moque tout le temps d'un élève de la classe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quand quelqu'un se fait embêter, il se sent mal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
On se sent grand et fort quand on peut obliger quelqu'un à obéir.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parfois on n'a que deux choix : attaquer le premier (la première) ou attendre que les autres attaquent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C'est normal de frapper quelqu'un si l'on est très en colère.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Faire peur aux autres est une bonne manière de se faire respecter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si quelqu'un te fait un sale coup, tu dois te venger.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Les plus forts ont toujours raison.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si on refuse de se battre, tout le monde va penser qu'on est un(e) faible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Quand dans un film le héros ou l'héroïne a peur, j'ai peur aussi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quand les autres sont contents, je me sens aussi content(e).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6

Mets une croix dans la case <u>si tu es d'accord ou non</u> avec la phrase.	Pas du tout d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
	☹	😕	😐	🙂	😀
Ça ne me rend pas triste de voir une personne qui a du chagrin.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si mes ami(e)s ont des problèmes, je ne suis pas inquiet ou inquiète à cause de leurs problèmes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quand quelqu'un se sent triste, j'arrive à le comprendre.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Souvent, je me sens triste quand je regarde des choses ou des films tristes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Souvent, je peux comprendre comment les gens se sentent même s'ils ne me l'ont pas dit.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ça ne me fait rien de spécial quand je vois une personne s'énerver.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
En général, j'arrive à deviner quand mes ami(e)s sont content(e)s.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si je suis avec des ami(e)s qui ont peur, j'ai peur aussi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Généralement, je me rends vite compte quand un(e) ami(e) est en colère.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cela ne me fait rien de voir qu'un(e) de mes ami(e)s est malheureux ou malheureuse.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je suis souvent influencé(e) par l'humeur de mes ami(e)s : je me sens triste si ils/elles sont tristes ou joyeux si ils/elles sont joyeux.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Depuis la rentrée de Noël, il m'arrive...	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
de me sentir mal dans ma peau.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de me sentir inutile.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7

Depuis la rentrée de Noël , il m'arrive...	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Très souvent
d'avoir des idées tristes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de me sentir incapable de me concentrer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de me sentir bon(ne) à rien.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de pleurer sans raison.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'avoir l'impression que personne ne m'aime.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'avoir mal au ventre ou envie de vomir le matin avant de partir pour l'école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de me sentir sans énergie.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de n'avoir confiance en personne.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'avoir envie d'être loin de tout.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On dit qu'un élève est victime de harcèlement lorsqu'un(e) ou plusieurs autres élèves, lui disent ou lui font des choses méchantes et désagréables. C'est également du harcèlement lorsqu'un élève est taquiné de façon répétée d'une manière qu'il n'aime pas ou lorsqu'il est volontairement exclu de certaines activités.

Ce n'est pas du harcèlement lorsque deux élèves ayant à peu près la même force se disputent ou se battent. Il n'y a pas non plus de harcèlement lorsqu'un élève est taquiné de manière amicale.

As-tu été harcelé(e) depuis la rentrée de Noël ?

Je n'ai jamais subi cela	Une ou deux fois	deux/trois fois	un peu près une fois par semaine	plusieurs fois par semaine
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

As-tu harcelé quelqu'un depuis la rentrée de Noël ?

Je n'ai jamais fait cela	Une ou deux fois	deux/trois fois	un peu près une fois par semaine	plusieurs fois par semaine
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Voilà, le questionnaire est terminé !

Encore merci pour ta participation !



8

Questionnaire enseignants RCT (cohort 2 & 3)

Bonjour,

Bienvenue dans ce questionnaire, nous vous remercions d'ores et déjà pour le temps que vous y consacrerez.

Grâce à ce questionnaire, nous souhaiterions comprendre le vécu de l'équipe éducative ainsi que votre perception du climat scolaire. Votre point de vue sur ce sujet nous est donc très précieux.

Avant de commencer, il est important de préciser que vous êtes totalement libre de participer à cette recherche mais également d'arrêter votre participation à tout moment et ce, sans justification.

Ce questionnaire est entièrement confidentiel, n'hésitez donc pas à répondre de manière honnête et spontanée. Les données récoltées seront utilisées uniquement à des fins de recherche et seuls les chercheurs concernés y auront accès.

Par ailleurs, une synthèse de *l'ensemble* des résultats sera communiquée aux équipes éducatives et aux équipes de l'Université de paix.

Pour toute question relative à la protection des données, n'hésitez pas à contacter le responsable de l'évaluation, Charlie Devleeschouwer, via l'adresse email : Charlie.devleeschouwer@uclouvain.be.

UCLouvain

Université de Paix asbl
De la prévention à la gestion positive des conflits

Quel est votre temps de travail ?

☐ quart-temps ☐mi-temps ☐trois-quarts temps ☐quatre-cinquièmes temps ☐plein temps

En quelle(s) année(s) donnez-vous cours principalement ? (plusieurs réponses possibles)

☐ 1e ☐ 2e ☐ 3e ☐ 4e ☐ 5e ☐6e

Quel est votre statut dans l'école ?

☐ Enseignant·e titulaire ☐ Enseignant·e polyvalent ☐ Professeur·e d'éducation physique

☐ Professeur·e de religion ☐ Professeur·e de langues

Relation à l'école

Le ressenti professionnel de chaque personne peut être différent.

Veuillez indiquer votre degré d'accord en mettant une croix dans la case correspondant le plus à votre ressenti.	Pas du tout d'accord	Pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Je me sens à l'aise pour échanger et discuter avec la direction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mes relations avec la direction sont conflictuelles.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
La direction se préoccupe de ma qualité de vie à l'école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Si je rencontre une difficulté, je peux compter sur l'appui de la direction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens soutenu·e dans mes initiatives par la direction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens soutenu·e par mes collègues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je m'entends bien avec mes collègues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'aime travailler en équipe avec mes collègues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'ai des collègues de travail qui sont importants pour moi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L'information circule difficilement entre collègues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mes relations avec les élèves sont bonnes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'ai du plaisir à être avec les élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1/6

	Pas du tout d'accord	Pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
J'ai souvent des conflits avec les élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il y a une confiance réciproque entre les élèves et moi.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Les élèves me respectent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Actions vis-à-vis du harcèlement à l'école

Les actions contre le harcèlement peuvent être multiples et variées. Il peut s'agir, par exemple, de posters affichés dans la classe, d'une animation en classe, d'un travail collaboratif avec un organisme extérieur à l'école, d'un projet d'école,...

À quelle fréquence mettez-vous en place des actions dans votre classe ou votre école pour gérer et/ou prévenir le harcèlement scolaire ? Veuillez cocher la case qui correspond le mieux à votre vécu.

Jamais	Quelques fois par an	Une fois par mois	Quelques fois par mois	Une fois par semaine	Quelques fois par semaine	Chaque jour
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Veuillez indiquer votre degré d'accord en mettant une croix dans la case correspondant le plus à votre réalité.

Dans cette école, ...	Pas du tout d'accord	Pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
je reçois des recommandations claires sur la manière dont je peux gérer le harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
je suis consulté·e dans la prise de décision vis-à-vis de la prévention du harcèlement dans l'école.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
je reçois du soutien de mes collègues quand je rencontre des difficultés à gérer une situation de harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
il y a une bonne coordination qui me permet de mettre en place facilement des activités anti-harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Dans cette école, …	Pas du tout d'accord	Pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
mes collègues et moi fournissons des efforts collectifs pour gérer le harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
l'avis des enseignants est pris en compte dans le processus de gestion du harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mes collègues me partagent leur expérience vis-à-vis de la gestion du harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j'ai une certaine autonomie pour décider de la mise en œuvre d'activités de gestion du harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j'ai suffisamment de temps pour mettre en œuvre des activités anti-harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mes collègues partagent des ressources utiles avec moi par rapport au harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
on me laisse le choix de participer aux formations anti-harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'ai suffisamment d'occasions de formation pour apprendre à gérer des situations de harcèlement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

À quelle fréquence êtes-vous confronté.e à des situations de harcèlement entre élèves ? Veuillez cocher la case correspondant le plus à votre ressenti.

Jamais	Quelques fois par an	Une fois par mois	Quelques fois par mois	Une fois par semaine	Quelques fois par semaine	Chaque jour
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Gestion des conflits entre élèves

En tant qu'adulte, il existe de nombreuses manières de réagir lorsqu'un·e élève se fait embêter par ses pairs. Actuellement, lorsqu'un·e élève se fait embêter par d'autres élèves, quelle est votre réaction immédiate ? Veuillez indiquer la fréquence de vos réactions en cochant la case correspondant le plus à vos pratiques.

Quand un·e élève se fait embêter, …	Jamais 1	2	3	4	5	6	Très souvent 7
vous punissez ceux ou celles qui embêtent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous vous fâchez sur les élèves qui embêtent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3/6

Quand un·e élève se fait embêter, …	Jamais 1	2	3	4	5	6	Très souvent 7
vous séparez les élèves concernés.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous dites aux élèves qu'ils ne peuvent plus jouer ensemble.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous ne réagissez pas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous faites comme s'il ne s'était rien passé.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Autre ? Veuillez préciser :							

Que faites-vous si la situation perdure et que l'élève continue à se faire régulièrement embêter ?

Quand un·e élève se fait régulièrement embêter, …	Jamais 1	2	3	4	5	6	Très souvent 7
vous obligez ceux ou celles qui embêtent à s'excuser auprès de l'élève.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous discutez avec ceux ou celles qui embêtent pour qu'ils se comportent de manière plus responsable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous trouvez des solutions avec ceux ou celles qui embêtent pour améliorer la situation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous dites à l'élève d'ignorer ceux ou celles qui l'embêtent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous dites à l'élève de ne pas se laisser faire.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous dites à l'élève qu'on embête qu'il ou elle doit se débrouiller.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous ne réagissez pas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous conseillez à l'élève d'éviter ceux ou celles qui l'embêtent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous conseillez à l'élève de se défendre.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Quand un·e élève se fait régulièrement embêter, …	Jamais 1	2	3	4	5	6	Très souvent 7
vous discutez avec toute la classe de la situation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous appelez les élèves concernés pour trouver une solution ensemble.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous informez la direction ou d'autres professionnels de l'école (CMPS, AMO,…) de la situation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous informez les parents du comportement de leurs enfants.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vous discutez du problème avec vos collègues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Autre ? Veuillez préciser : ……							

Actuellement, à quel point vous sentez-vous capable…	Pas du tout capable 1	2	3	4	5	6	Tout à fait capable 7
de contrôler les comportements perturbateurs dans la classe ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de motiver les élèves qui montrent peu d'intérêt pour le travail scolaire ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'amener les élèves à penser qu'ils peuvent réussir leurs tâches scolaires ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'aider les élèves à développer le goût d'apprendre ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'arriver à ce que les élèves suivent les règles de la classe ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de calmer un·e élève perturbateur ou bruyant ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
de mettre en place un·e système de gestion de classe ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d'aider les familles à soutenir la réussite scolaire de leurs enfants ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Bien-être au travail

Veuillez indiquer votre degré d'accord en mettant une croix dans la case correspondant le plus à votre ressenti. Si vous avez un doute sur l'exactitude de votre réponse, cochez la case qui correspond le plus à vos souvenirs actuels.

	Jamais 1	2	3	4	5	6	Chaque jour 7
Je me sens émotionnellement vidé·e par mon travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens à bout à la fin de ma journée de travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens fatigué·e lorsque je me lève le matin et que j'ai à affronter une autre journée de travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je peux comprendre facilement ce que mes élèves ressentent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je sens que je m'occupe de certains élèves de façon impersonnelle, presque comme s'ils étaient des objets.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je m'occupe très efficacement des problèmes de mes élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je sens que je craque à cause de mon travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'ai l'impression, à travers mon travail, d'avoir une influence positive sur les gens.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je suis devenu·e plus insensible aux gens depuis que j'ai ce travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je crains que ce travail ne m'endurcisse émotionnellement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je sens que je travaille « trop dur » dans mon métier.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je ne me soucie pas vraiment de ce qui arrive à certains de mes élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'arrive facilement à créer une atmosphère détendue avec mes élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens ragaillardi·e lorsque, dans mon travail, j'ai été proche de mes élèves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J'ai accompli beaucoup de choses qui en valent la peine dans ce travail.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Je me sens au bout du rouleau.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dans mon travail, je traite les problèmes émotionnels très calmement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6/6 Un grand merci pour votre participation !