

# Evidence presented at meetings of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Bullying 2011-2016

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**17<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

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### **The Study**

This study focuses on the views of a small number of young people (n=4, Nikki, John, Andrew, Sam), who self-excluded from school as a result of bullying. Two parents also participated (Jessica, Nikki's mother and Jackie, John's mother). Semi-structured interviews and an online survey were used to collate data. The findings were presented to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Bullying in October 2016. This paper provides a summary of the key findings from the study.

### **Findings**

This paper focuses on two key themes from the study:

- School support
- Life after exclusion

#### **School support**

After continuous repeated abuse, which was having an impact on their schooling and mental health, participants in this study made the decision to leave school. They agreed that their schools did not provide them with adequate support when they complained about being bullied. John, aged 14, was bullied by a group of girls who had sent him indecent images and called him late at night. He spoke about what happened when he told his head of year:

*"...I had had a really bad day with the girls so I came out and I explained all this to my head of year and how it was affecting me but instead of supporting me he put me straight into isolation."*

Andrew, aged 15, was bullied as a result of mental health issues. He felt the outcome for him might have been different if he had received support at school *"Being offered help at the school would have been a start."* He suggested that the school placed the onus on him as a victim of bullying to change:

*"We tried to seek advice from the school I was at for months but they offered no advice and told us that if I didn't "make an effort" then I'd be kicked out, or I should just leave anyway."*

Sam, aged 15, said the bullying was *"cos I am different to everyone in my class"*. Upon reflection about what could have been done to prevent self-exclusion, Sam said *"the teachers actually helping and listening would have been good but no one did listen."*

Participants felt that their individual needs should have been catered for at school and the lack of compassion and understanding from teachers is a deterrent for young people reporting bullying:

*"Schools need to be looking out for their student's mental wellbeing – not only be there to teach them but to support and mentor them. Keep them safe really...."*  
(Nikki)

Despite efforts to seek support in school, Nikki aged 16, was not offered any help with bullying. A physical fight broke out with eight young people supporting Nikki's bully:

*"When I went to the school about it the students said I had attacked them – all eight of them! I just realised that no one believes me, nobody is there to help and support me so I really can't be there anymore. That was the last day I spent at school."*

In conceptualising and rationalising why teachers were not listening to her complaints of constant bullying, Nikki doubted whether her complaint was valid:

*"I could understand them thinking I maybe got the wrong end of the stick with one incident but this was 18 months of me constantly reporting different incidents."*

John had a similar experience:

*"...it was an everyday thing I just couldn't take it and it was causing me a lot of anxiety."*

## **Life after exclusion**

### **Mental health**

Although the participants experienced isolation and loneliness as a result of bullying, a sense of relief to no longer be at school was evident:

*"I felt safe at home and didn't at school. It's comforting to be in a known environment away from those people." (Andrew)*

Nikki however felt that the lack of support from school resulted in further isolation from her peers and she had no option but to remain at home:

*"It got to the point where the bullying just got too bad. I had no friends I felt really isolated. The school wasn't doing anything and I didn't feel like I had anyone to support me.... The only support I had was at home so I felt I had no option but to stay at home."*

Jessica reported that the bullying and not being at school had a huge impact on Nikki:

*"She really did have a breakdown, rarely left her room.....It was very intense. She didn't leave the house at all for eight months. She was so broken. She did end up having a complete break down and she did attempt suicide."*

### **Effects on the wider family**

Jackie described the effect of John's self-exclusion on the wider family as "dreadful":

*"As a mum to watch your son feel so depressed and so isolated it's absolutely heart-breaking."*

In addition Jackie has felt ostracised from other parents as a result of withdrawing John from school:

*"To be cast as somebody who goes out of the way to not work with the system is really frustrating. I lay in bed at night awake and he does the same."*

Jessica spoke about the difficulties in receiving support for Nikki:

*"It's so hard as a parent to watch your child go further and further down. It's so difficult because there is nowhere to turn to and we can't afford private counsellors and therapists. Every NHS thing has months to wait. It wasn't until she attempted suicide that she eventually got a CAMHS appointment."*

### **Key points:**

- Young people did not feel listened to when reporting bullying in school and felt the outcome might have been different if somebody at school supported them.
- Feelings of loneliness and isolation as a result of bullying were reported.
- The effects on the wider family are those of helplessness and frustration at not being able to resolve the bullying.