The Role of the Family on Adolescent's Bullying Involvement

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Abstract

This thesis presents a mixed method exploration of different family factors and interpersonal relationships in relation to children's bullying involvement at school, online, and within the home. Five studies are presented. The first is a scoping review on between-sibling bullying, offering an insight into a lesser-known type of bullying, with some consideration of how this may relate to peer bullying. Three studies utilise the Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, offering large-scale cross-national datasets: the first of these investigates the role of family structure and interpersonal relationships on peer bullying, and highlights a risk for children living in social care only; the second looks into sibling characteristics for peer bullying, but the effects of these negligible; the third focuses deeper into the vulnerability for children living in social care. The fifth and final study adopts a qualitative approach and explores bullying involvement for children living in foster care specifically. The findings from this thesis challenge the claims that family structure and sibling characteristics are directly related to peer bullying, and instead reinforce the importance of interpersonal relationships. This is particularly relevant for those living in foster care, who until now have been unheard in the bullying literature. Subsequently, this thesis provides an insight into the experiences of children in foster care, and has the potential to change the way that we support children in care.

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Reflective Statement

This thesis explores the overarching concept of what role, if any, the family may play in adolescents' bullying involvement. My interest in this topic has been developing since I was a teenager; in 2012, I was studying for my A-Levels. At the same time, a girl only two years younger than me took her own life because of bullying. The suicide hit mainstream news, and I quickly became engrossed into the life of Amanda Todd. The Canadian student documented years of abuse in a 9-minute YouTube video, including when her classmates created Facebook pages to encourage her to end her life. In 2013 I completed an Extended Project Qualification on the rise of social media and the possible risk of bullying, which was the first time that I became acquainted with the scientific literature in this field. I was able to focus this interest further in on the role of different stakeholders in bullying during my undergraduate and master's degrees, before settling into a PhD where I could fully engage in this field.

Starting my PhD during the pandemic made it impossible to collect data face-to-face, which led to the secondary analysis of a cross-national dataset. These initial analyses inspired me to look further into the role of siblings, alongside the experiences of children in foster care. I was surprised by the limited research in both areas, and decided to approach these individually in my thesis, under the umbrella of family characteristics. The possible existence of polyvictimisation – or involvement in bullying both inside and outside of the home – is a theme that carries throughout this thesis.

To end, I have also become aware of my own position in this research: as a student, a researcher, a sibling, and as someone who has not had first-hand experience of the UK's social care system. I have become aware of the biases that I carry, as well as how this can make it harder to build a rapport with those who have experienced trauma because of social care. I believe that this was equally beneficial when talking to different stakeholders, reducing the risk of bias towards one specific group. I hope that this research can bring awareness to the risks that children may face, both within their biological families and within the care system.

Chapter One

General Introduction

Historically, bullying has been viewed as a 'rite of passage' that teaches assertiveness in children. From this perspective, it would be assumed that attempts to deal with bullying are futile and unnecessary. However, through advances in scientific research this attitude is beginning to change, and bullying is being treated as the problem that it is. Accordingly, anti-bullying schemes should adopt a society-wide approach, targeting not only those directly involved, but the wider community that the bullying occurs in; for this to be possible, a thorough understanding of how different factors can impact bullying involvement is essential. This thesis endeavours to answer some of these remaining questions, which will be presented through a literature review and a series of empirical research studies. Specifically, how do families and interpersonal relationships contribute to bullying?

1.1 Definitions of Bullying

The word 'bully' has originally been traced to the 1530s where it initially was a term of affection, before morphing into a similar concept to the modern-day word in the 17th century (Allanson et al., 2015; Donegan, 2012). Yet, references of bullying behaviours date back centuries; the Bible offers numerous examples of bullying, from Cain and Abel to David and Goliath, whilst *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Hughes (1857) and *Lord of the Flies* by Golding (1954) both mention behaviours that would now be understood as modern bullying (Donegan, 2012). Yet, it was not until the 1970s that research on this phenomenon began; bullying research was pioneered by Olweus in Scandinavia, who penned the first formal definition as "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Olweus later updated this definition to include an imbalance in strength or power (Olweus, 1999). This is still widely used in research, and identifies three core features that distinguish bullying:

1.   *Intentional* - Aggressive behaviours are acts that are intentionally carried out against the will of the victim (Smith et al., 2013). This is central to bullying definitions, as the intent to cause

harm means that accidental harm – albeit still distressing – is not considered bullying. Meanwhile, the behaviours must also be without the consent of the victim; this is an important distinction, as some online forums exist for the masochistic purpose of victims asking for others to abuse them for their own gratification. Although an interesting phenomenon, this specific topic is beyond the scope of this thesis but is essential to note when considering the 'intention' in definitions.

2.   *Power imbalance -* This is important for distinguishing bullying from general aggression (Goldsmid & Howie, 2014), as bullying must involve an unequal distribution of power between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s), with the former representing the weaker party. Inequalities can present in different ways, such as having a poor social support network, belonging to a minority group, or being physically, emotionally, or cognitively behind. The technological world may blur the lines of power, in that it offers an opportunity for those who may be physically weaker to regain some power online (Vanderbosch & van Cleemput, 2008). For instance, the ability to remain anonymous online means that victims can often be unaware of who the perpetrators are, instilling power onto the perpetrator(s).

3.   *Repetitive -* In cases of traditional bullying, repetition refers to the aggressive behaviours occurring on more than one occasion, which establishes a difference between standalone attacks and bullying (Goldsmid & Howie, 2014). Arguably, the creation of an uncomfortable or fearful atmosphere is also a form of repetition. However, repetition is questioned in cyberbullying definitions; one occurrence of online bullying has the ability to reach a wider audience, is inescapable even within the comfort of the victim's home and can often be permanent in nature – once something is posted, it is easily shared, saved, spread, and accessed at the click of a button for years to come. Moreover, if a perpetrator creates a webpage that intends to abuse a victim, then it can be accessed repeatedly by multiple parties. In these occurrences, the aggressive acts have only occurred once, but are repetitive in their nature (Slonje et al., 2013).

The definition by Olweus (1993; 1999) has provided a fundamental basis for research in this area, but it is not without criticism: the definition adopted by researchers is often considerably different to that of parents, teachers, and children themselves (Slattery et al., 2019; Smith & Monks, 2008; Younan, 2018). For instance, Ey and Campbell (2020) noted that Australian parents are often more inclusive with what they perceive as bullying, and often view single incidences of

fighting as bullying. This was also noted in an empirical study on students aged 8- to 18-years, whereby only 1.7% of participants definitions of bullying included 'intention' to cause harm, 6% included 'repetition', and 26% included a 'power imbalance' (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Ultimately, these contradictions in definitions have a significant impact on the outcome of the results (Younan, 2018), and providing a definition to participants is an essential measure, yet this is not always present in the research.

Other critiques of the Olweus definition focus on the features of bullying: the 'intention' to cause harm assumes the perpetrator is self-aware of their actions, and relies on their honesty to admit to wanting to harm another (Goldsmid & Howie, 2014); participants are required to make subjective judgements as to the nature of behaviours; the operationalisation of 'repetition' is different between studies; and the assumed 'power imbalance' fails to acknowledge the complexity of social power and equality, which may change in different situations, such as in the cyber-world. Finally, the early definitions are not seamlessly applied to cyberbullying; nonetheless, an overlap between traditional and online bullying has been widely acknowledged (Beran & Li, 2006; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2008).

To address some of the outlined criticisms of bullying definitions, a working group was established by UNESCO and the World Anti-Bullying Forum to propose a new definition, which is as follows:

> *"School bullying is in-person and online behaviour between students within a social network that causes physical, emotional, or social harm to targeted students. It is characterised by an imbalance of power that is enabled or inhibited by the social and institutional norms and context of schools and the educational system. School bullying implies and absence of effective responses and care towards the target by peers and adults."*

When presented at the World Anti-Bullying Forum in 2021, this definition attracted criticism from attending academics, and a new working group has been created by these same organisations to produce a clearer and more comprehensive definition of bullying.

To conclude this consideration of the definitions of bullying, it is important to note that there are no legal definitions of bullying or cyberbullying in UK legislation. This is common across many countries, yet some do offer legal definitions alongside comprehensive anti-bullying acts. For

example, Australian legislation defines bullying as when an individual or group "repeatedly behaves unreasonably" towards another, which "creates a risk to health and safety" (Fair Work Act 2009, section 789FD). Whilst this considers the repetitive nature of bullying, it fails to account for intentional behaviours or an imbalance of power. This is also true of legal definitions in the Philippines (Anti-Bullying Act of 2013) and Canada (Ontario Anti-Bullying Act 2012), but these also include the use of technological or electronic means to inflict harm. Ultimately, the inclusion of a legal definition of bullying is progress in effectively addressing the issue, and one that would be beneficial in UK legislation.

1.2 Types of Bullying

Bullying comprises a set of behaviours that can occur either face-to-face or online. Definitions of bullying expand beyond this to recognise different types of bullying. In the case of traditional face-to-face bullying, it is often characterised as either 'direct' or 'indirect' bullying (Olweus et al., 1999). 'Direct' bullying refers to verbal or physical abuse towards a victim, such as name calling or fighting, meanwhile 'indirect' bullying involves the use of psychological and social aggression, such as social exclusion and rumour spreading.

Cyberbullying can include – but is not limited to – sending unkind text messages, taking and sharing photographs and videos, creating webpages for the intention of attacking another, sending abusive voice notes and telephone calls, leaving people out of games or online networks, online sexual harassment, or creating fake social media accounts. It is often harder – but not impossible – to distinguish direct and indirect aggression in this.

1.3 Roles in Bullying

As well as different types of bullying, there are also various roles that individuals can be assigned in the behaviour; this is a necessary consideration when defining bullying and understanding reported prevalence rates. Perhaps most obvious is the perpetrator of the behaviour – the bully. In popular media conceptions, a bully would stereotypically be a tall and stocky boy from a neglectful 'broken' home. He would be unintelligent and skipping class, whilst looming over classmates demanding their lunch money. In reality, there is little empirical support for these

stereotypes (Sutton et al., 1999), and the factors that lead to an individual to bully others are much more complex; this will be explored throughout this thesis. Moreover, perpetrators of bullying have been sub-divided into three roles: the ringleader, the assistant, and the reinforcer (Salmivalli et al., 1996). The ringleader initiates and takes charge of the bullying behaviours, representing the typical role of the 'bully'. Alongside them are active supporters, known as 'assistants' or 'henchmen', who participate in the bullying at the leader's command, and are frequently the same gender as the ringleader (Wójcik & Flak, 2021). Finally, 'reinforcers' play a passive role in supporting the bullying behaviours and encourage the leader through laughing or providing an audience (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Typically, assistants and reinforcers represent 16.5% of children involved in a bullying incident (Levy & Gumpel, 2018). Moreover, these roles tend to be stable across time (Salmivalli et al., 1998), but when the ringleader is no longer present, the two supportive roles appear to diminish and even become 'pro-victim' (Wójcik & Flak, 2021). Overall, the existence of assistants and reinforcers has been associated with increased levels of bullying in the classroom (Salmivalli et al., 2011).

The next obvious role in bullying is that of the victim. Often portrayed as a 'geeky' and scrawny character, victims find themselves at the receiving end of the aggressive behaviours. Cranham and Carroll (2003) argue that there is an expectation for smaller and weaker individuals to be victimised at the hands of their stronger peers, and whilst this aligns with the importance of power imbalance in bullying definitions, it places a sense of blame on the physical characteristics of the victims. This stereotype also ignores the possibility of 'bully-victims': as the name would suggest, these individuals find themselves both a perpetrator and a receiver of bullying at different times (Kennedy, 2021; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999).

The remaining roles in bullying are those who do not take an active role as a perpetrator or victim, but witness the bullying. These individuals may act as a 'defender', who takes on a supportive role for the victim and actively tries to stop the behaviours or goes to seek help; or they may act as an 'outsider' or 'bystander', whereby they are aware of the bullying but do not engage in favour of either party (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Wójcik & Mondry, 2020). Typically, boys tend to display more help-seeking behaviours, whilst girls are more likely to actively defend the victim (Parris et al., 2020); when witnessing bullying, 13.7% take on a help-seeking role, 20.2% take on a

defending role, and 15.1% take on a passive bystander role (Levy & Gumpel, 2018). Although it is undeniable that the role of the bystander is important in intervening with bullying (Bezerra et al., 2023; Padgett & Notar, 2013), this group will not be focussed further in this thesis.

1.4 Prevalence

One of the core issues in the bullying literature is understanding just how common the problem is. Despite a clearer understanding of measuring bullying prevalence, there is considerable variation in the reported statistics. This may partially be a result of what the researchers intend to measure; many studies break down involvement into the defined roles, whilst others opt for a composite score of general involvement (perpetrator, victim, or bystander). Important considerations are the frequency criterion and the time measurement, which will be explored in depth later in this section. A further consideration is the country in which bullying is being studied: Biswas et al. (2020) compared the prevalence of bullying victimisation from 317,869 adolescents across 83 countries. The overall global prevalence was reported as 30.5%, with Europe representing some of the lowest overall victimisation (8.4%) and the Eastern Mediterranean region representing the highest overall victimisation (45.1%); it is unclear what these authors classified as Eastern Mediterranean.

Cyberbullying is frequently measured as a separate phenomenon, but a high correlation between the two has been noted (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Beran & Li, 2006; Modecki et al., 2014). Research into cyberbullying began in the early 2000s, with one of the first studies to include bullying via text messages and emails being conducted in the UK by Oliver and Candappa in 2003. The following year, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) conducted an American-based study focusing solely on online aggression, which they conceptualised as similar to traditional bullying. As the popularity of social media and technology has grown, so has the research to understand the phenomenon: Smith (2019) documents a stark increase in bullying literature between the early 2000s until 2017, and even more has been conducted since. However, the variation in cyberbullying statistics appears to be more wide-ranging than that of traditional bullying: Brochado et al. (2017) conducted a scoping review of 159 studies on cyberbullying and found that reported victimisation varied from 1.0% to 61.1%, compared to 3.0% to 39.0% for perpetration. There were considerable differences

between countries in these rates, and a variety of different measurement tools adopted. Further to the above, a systematic review and meta-analysis compared seven studies covering 25 European countries: across four different measures of cyberbullying, the pooled rate for cyberbullying victimisation was 9.62%, and 11.91% for cyberbullying perpetration (Henares-Montiel et al., 2022).

The ways in which prevalence of bullying is measured has been subject to many criticisms, and these may offer an insight into the disparities in the prevalence results. As previously mentioned, stakeholders define bullying behaviours differently; yet not all studies provide an operationalised definition to participants. In fact, one systematic review noted that only 11 out of 41 measures of bullying included a definition that fit the one provided by Olweus (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). Consequently, the prevalence rates in these studies may be inclusive of behaviours that researchers would not classify as bullying.

Likewise, the timeframe for behaviours to have occurred in are vastly different between studies. Whilst some studies limit recall to the previous month, others opt for periods of 3, 6, or 12 months – if any timeframe is specified. Bullying prevalence across an individual's lifetime is unsurprisingly higher compared to that in the previous month (Jadambaa et al., 2019).

Finally, the frequency of bullying behaviours also differs between studies: in their review, Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014) found that 53.1% of the included studies opted for a vague frequency of 'never', 'sometimes', and 'often', providing little insight into the actual frequency. On the other hand, 46.9% of the included studies required students to report the number of times bullying behaviours had occurred. As bullying definitions rely on repetition, the frequency criterion can play a substantial role in reported prevalence.

These core issues are further hindered by the various measures of bullying that are utilised: Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014) reviewed over 1000 papers and found that 41 different measures were used to assess traditional and online bullying. The limited agreement on tools limits cross-comparisons between studies, particularly when there is no indication that all studies are measuring the same concept.

Solberg and Olweus (2003) note that the use of different informants can also be problematic: many researchers rely on self-reported bullying involvement, but there are clear limitations of bias. Thus, others seek alternative samples, such as peer nomination, or teacher and

parent reports. Yet these groups are equally limited and may not thoroughly understand the extent of bullying. Overall, research would benefit from consensus in the measurement tools, definitions, and timeframes, alongside utilising numerous informants.

1.5 Consequences of Bullying

Bullying may be a normative experience, but this is not to say that it should be accepted, nor does it demonstrate the urgency in addressing the problem. Hundreds of victims have lost their lives to bullying at school, online, or in the workplace. Gabriel Taye was only 8-years-old when he took his life after being physically bullied at school; Megan Meier was 13-years-old when she took her life after an adult woman used social media to bully the teen; Haruma Miura, a Japanese actor, took his own life after being bullied online at age 30. The list continues, without any age, gender, race, country, or celebrity status being exempt. Certain groups may be at a greater risk of bullying involvement – as will be explored in later chapters – but no individual is fully protected from bullying. Scientific literature has explored whether bullying poses a significant risk of suicide: in a comparison across 48 countries, Koyanagi et al. (2018) noted that victims of traditional bullying were over three times more likely to attempt suicide than those who had not been victimised (Odds Ratio [OR] = 3.06). They found support for a dose-response effect, with those experiencing more frequent bullying being at an increased risk. A further systematic review and meta-analysis explored the risk of suicide in young people who would otherwise not be considered high-risk of suicidality: these were 'healthy' subjects who did not belong to any minority groups or have any predisposing psychiatric illnesses. The results found that victims of bullying were 2.1 times more likely to attempt suicide than those not involved, and perpetrators were 1.9 times more likely to attempt suicide (Katsaras et al., 2018). This amplified risk highlights just one reason why bullying needs to be fully understood and addressed.

Yet, suicide is only one possible – and extreme - consequence of bullying: a plethora of empirical studies have examined if and how traditional and online bullying relate to various emotional and behavioural difficulties over the lifespan. For instance, traditional- and cyber-bullying perpetration and victimisation have been consistently linked to reduced life satisfaction and increased mental health difficulties (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bai et al., 2020; Bowes et al., 2014;

Ditch The Label, 2020; Foody et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2018; Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019a), substance abuse (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019a), lower quality relationships with family and peers, and social withdrawal (Kowalski et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2014); and academic underachievement (Ditch the Label, 2020; Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019a). Bullying perpetration and victimisation have both also been associated with carrying a weapon (Kowalski et al., 2014; Valdebenito et al., 2017) and homicide (Eglar et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2019b; Su et al., 2019). Moreover, despite a tenuous link, bullying victimisation has been cited as one of the causes of the Columbine High School massacre in 1999 (Mears et al., 2017), and the school-shooting and bullying link continues to make headlines in the media today. For example, in September 2023, a 14-year-old opened fire on their Louisianna High School, killing one and injuring two others. News outlets quickly pinned the suspects supposed bullying victimisation as the cause (Blanco & Massie, 2023; Rosato, 2023). The evidence of this association is weak, and most victims of bullying do not commit homicide, but this is a link that must still be noted.

1.6 Risk Factors

Although there is not a single factor that causes a child to be a perpetrator or victim of bullying at school and online, there are numerous factors that may increase the risk: characteristics at an individual-level, family-level, and school-level will be considered.

1.6.1 Individual-level Factors

In his 1993 book, Olweus outlined characteristics of a typical victim or perpetrator: victims were described as quiet and sensitive, and would "signal to others that they are insecure and worthless individuals who will not retaliate if they are attacked or insulted" (p.32), compared to the impulsive and popular bullies, who had "an aggressive reaction pattern combined (in the case of boys) with physical strength" (p.34). At the time of this book, research on this topic was limited, particularly with consideration of female participants.

Understanding of individual characteristics that may put a child at risk of bullying involvement has developed substantially in the subsequent 30 years. For instance, victims of traditional and cyberbullying are significantly more likely to be children who belong to the

LGBTQIA+ community (Kahle, 2020; Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2020; Toomey & Russell, 2016), have a special educational need (SEN) or neurodiversity (Campbell et al., 2017; Gage et al., 2021; Malecki et al., 2020; Muijs, 2017), or in some cases belong to an ethnic minority group (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Graham, 2006); although the evidence for the latter is mixed (Xu et al., 2020). It is believed that these factors pose an increased risk of victimisation due to their deviation from the group norm.

One of the most heavily researched areas is the role of age and gender on bullying involvement. For traditional bullying, prevalence appears to peak around 11- to 13-years (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Nordhagen et al., 2005; Pichel et al., 2021), but this occurs somewhat later for cyberbullying involvement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014; Pitchel et al., 2021; Tokunaga, 2010). Likewise, whilst some researchers suggest that males are more likely to be involved in bullying (Craig et al., 2009; Nordhagen et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2019), others have suggested that gender differences depend on the form of bullying that is being studied: males may typically be more involved in physical bullying, whilst females may be more involved in relational or verbal bullying due to social expectations (Felix & Green, 2009; Smith et al., 2019), but Smith et al. (2019) note that these correlations typically ignore the historical and cultural context that underpin gender roles and bullying.

When considering cyberbullying, females are commonly reported to be involved over and above their male counterparts (Craig et al., 2020; Gusafsson, 2017), perhaps due to their supposed predisposition to relational aggression. Yet, a meta-analysis by Barlett and Coyne (2014) found that males surpassed females in cyberbullying involvement as they got older, suggesting an interaction of age and gender.

1.6.2 Family-level Factors

Likewise, various family-level factors have been associated with bullying involvement. One of the most established ideas follows the concept of Social Learning Theory, whereby children learn how to behave and interact through observing others, particularly in their early childhood (Bandura, 1978). Subsequently, children living in families with high levels of conflict and aggression may at risk of bullying perpetration (Chen et al., 2018; Ding et al., 2020; Duncan, 1999;

Holt et al., 2008; Buelga et al., 2017) and victimisation (Buelga et al., 2017; Duncan, 1999; Holt et al., 2008). Relatedly, children from homes with high levels of family incivility – families which undermine respect between other members through exclusion and doubting them – are more likely to perpetrate cyberbullying (Bai et al., 2020); interestingly, this is not overt aggression or violence, but still has a detrimental outcome on children within the home. The impact of family relationships will be explored in depth in 'Chapter Two: A Literature Review of the Family and Bullying'.

Moreover, correlations have been established between parental education, employment, and socioeconomic status (SES) and bullying involvement. For instance, children who have parents with low-level education and/or unemployment are at an increased risk of victimisation (Due et al., 2009; Jansen et al., 2011; Jansen et al., 2012) and perpetration (Jansen et al., 2011; Jansen et al., 2012). This may subsequently play into a household's SES: children from low SES backgrounds experience a small increased risk of bullying involvement as a perpetrator and a victim (Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Tippett & Wolke, 2014). The risk may be enhanced if children appear to be different from their peers, such as being unable to afford the same resources as their peers, both intellectually and superficially (Chen et al., 2018; Tippett & Wolke, 2014). However, some studies have failed to replicate any significant direct associations between SES and bullying involvement (Ding et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2008).

1.6.3 School-level Factors

Factors within the school and wider community have been correlated to bullying in children; relationships with teachers and classmates will be discussed in 'Chapter Two: A Literature Review of the Family and Bullying'. Firstly, the location of the school appears to have an impact on bullying involvement, with those placed in low SES neighbourhoods having higher risk of students being bullies or bully-victims (Jansen et al., 2012). However, this has received some contradictory findings, with an Israeli study by Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2004) suggesting that SES influences the type of bullying, but not the frequency: schools in low SES neighbourhoods may have a greater number of physical bullying incidents, whilst those in high SES neighbourhoods experience greater verbal and relational bullying. Interestingly, the impact of school size on bullying involvement has also been disputed in the literature. Whilst teachers and students perceive larger schools to have

higher incidences of bullying, this is not supported in self-reported victimisation rates (Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2004; Klein & Cornell, 2010).

Beyond the physical characteristics of the school, the status of schools had been associated with bullying. In England, children from schools with 'good' and 'outstanding' Ofsted ratings report lower levels of bullying, as well as those from faith schools (Bevilacqua et al., 2017). This could be indicative of the cultures that are established in these schools, with those fostering inclusive communities reporting lower bullying incidences. In addition, whilst all schools in England are now required by law to have an anti-bullying policy in place (Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; Educations and Inspections Act 2006), the implementation of these policies is not measured by authorities. In fact, when comparing the policies across UK schools, there is a variation in the content of these (Purdy, 2021). Kidwai and Smith (2023) note that despite increasing agreement, there are still many policies that do not include all important elements. Overall, schools with collaborative anti-bullying policies report lower rates of bullying (Muijs, 2017; Nikolaou, 2017), but the comparison across different schools with contrasting policies is problematic.

Chapter Two

A Literature Review of the Family and Bullying

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts the theoretical framework of the social-ecological model. First proposed by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s, this theory suggests that development happens through an individual's interactions with their environment; these interactions occur on various complex levels, categorised by different systems, and involving all contexts that occur on a regular and extended basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These were broken down into different systems: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. *Microsystems* refer to the individual-level relationships that a child may have, such as with friends, family, or teachers; these may be influenced by individual characteristics, such as age or gender (Espelage, 2014), and are presented in Chapter 1.6. Meanwhile, *Mesosystems* refer to the interaction of the microsystems, which typically include larger institutions, such as schools. This system considers how microsystems may be impacted by wider groups, such as how family factors may influence wider relationships outside of the home; this is a theme that is explored throughout this thesis. *Exosystems* expands this reach by including wider systems that an individual may not directly interact with, but that still affect other interactions, such as the role of the wider neighbourhood. These are in turn influenced by *Macrosystems*, which incorporate wider cultural differences and beliefs. Finally, the *Chronosystems* encompass the consistency of an individual's systems and environments over their life, through historical changes, such as variation in the family system; this will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

Crucially for this thesis, the social-ecological model assumes that these systems are interconnected, and a child's involvement in bullying is a result of their wider social environment. This acknowledges the complexity of human development and the importance of different stakeholders in both preventing and intervening with bullying. This framework underpins this thesis, whereby the role of the family and wider interpersonal relationships will be explored.

2.2 Family Structure

As mentioned in 'Chapter One: General Introduction', certain family characteristics have been associated with children's bullying involvement. Those discussed have predominantly focussed on parental characteristics, such as SES or education. Yet, research has also endeavoured to understand the role of family structure on bullying involvement.

Recent government statistics reported that in 2022, 61.6% of UK families with dependent children were headed by a married couple, whilst 22.5% were headed by a lone parent (Office for National Statistics, 2023). These statistics do not account for whether the married couple are the biological parents of the dependents, nor does it offer an insight into alternative family structures, such as multigenerational families or stepfamilies. Nonetheless, with 38.4% of children living in a 'non-traditional' family, it is important to understand if and how different family structures can pose a risk to bullying involvement. This section will critically synthesise the existing literature surrounding living with both biological parents, single parents, stepparents, and multigenerational families and bullying involvement; living in social care settings (foster families or residential care homes) will be reviewed in depth in 'Chapter Seven: A Focused Literature Review on the Experiences of Children Living in Social Care'.

Historically, living in a 'traditional' family with both biological parents has been viewed as important for successful child development, with stepfamilies and single-parent families being branded "inferior" (Popenoe, 1999, p.28). Although much of this research is relative to the cultural context, living with both biological parents has been linked to increased social wellbeing (Laursen et al., 2019), adjustment (Breivik & Olweus, 2006), and economic stability (Lee et al., 2015; Thomson & McLanahan, 2012), suggesting that family structure plays some role in children's development and wellbeing. Yet, when applied to bullying involvement, the results are inconclusive: on the surface, a number of studies suggest that family structure predicts bullying involvement, and more specifically that living with two parents is protective (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013), whilst others suggest that family structure is not a predictor of bullying involvement (Ding et al., 2020; Ilola et al., 2016; Laursen et al., 2019; Mohaptra et al., 2010; Turner

et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021). The relevant literature will be explored separately by family structure and bullying type.

A plethora of the research conducted in this area has focused predominantly on those with single parents. Children living with a single parent are reportedly more likely to be victimised at school (Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Erdogan et al., 2023; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013) and online (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2013), as well as perpetrators at school and online (Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Le et al., 2017; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2013). These findings are replicated across numerous countries and continents. Interestingly, Holt et al. (2008) replicated the increased risk of peer perpetration but failed to corroborate the increased risk of victimisation. Nevertheless, children living with a single parent are more at risk of bullying involvement than those living with two parents. Some explanation of this has been offered: having two biological parents increases the pool of resources, with there being greater opportunities for supervision of children (Holt et al., 2008) and other adults to share the pressures of parenting with (Shetgiri et al., 2012). If it is a case that living with two adults is protective due to the number of resources available, it would be logical to assume that living with stepparents or grandparents would equally be protective; yet this has not been found in the literature.

In Western countries, children living with a stepparent have been found more likely to be victimised at school (Wolke & Skew, 2012a; UK) and online (Arnarsson et al., 2020; the six Nordic countries), whilst those living with grandparents only are reportedly more likely to bully their peers at school (Edwards, 2016; USA). To my knowledge, this has not been explored in Eastern countries, with many studies in these regions grouping all family structures into 'both biological parents' and 'other'. The literature on these alternative family structures is scarce in comparison to that of single parents but offers some indication that family structure plays a deeper role in children's development and wellbeing than just the number of supervising adults a child has. For some children living in non-traditional family structures, the separation of two parents may be a result of death, divorce, or relationship breakdown; these experiences can be stressful and traumatic for the child, and this could in turn impact relationships within the home and with others. For instance, Hay and Nash (2002) note that family structure does not directly impact a child's

attachment type but structural changes in the family does, indicating that the breakdown of a traditional nuclear family is problematic, rather than the existence of these family types. Although relationships will be explored further in 'Section 2.4: Interpersonal Relationships', this could explain the increased risk of bullying in children from single parent families. The existing literature has not endeavoured to understand the mediating role of interpersonal relationships on family structure and bullying involvement, which will be explored in this thesis.

Although the foster family will be examined in depth in 'Chapter Seven: A Focused Literature Review on the Experiences of Children Living in Social Care', it is useful to note that this alternative family structure has also been associated with bullying involvement. In particular, children living in foster families are vulnerable to bullying perpetration and victimisation (Dansey et al., 2019; Sterzing et al., 2020; Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Due to a limited amount of literature focusing on this group, it is difficult to confidently understand why these children are at an increased risk. However, consistent with the previous discussion on stepparents, this could also be a result of traumatic experiences leading to the child's placement in foster care.

When considering the literature in this field, one of the largest limitations is the types of family structures studied, with many opting for a dichotomous measure of only two family types (e.g., 'intact' families compared to 'dissolved' families). This hinders the ability to accurately compare the risk across different family structures, whilst also reinforcing the views of a traditional nuclear family as superior and presenting a deterministic outlook for children in these families.

This thesis attempts to address each of these limitations. Firstly, multiple family structures should be considered, as opposed to grouping them as 'intact' and 'dissolved'; interpersonal relationships should be included as mediator variables; both offline and online bullying involvement should be studied (i.e., traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation).

In line with this, it is essential to note that this thesis treats 'family structure' as a demographic risk factor, rather than a causal risk factor for bullying involvement. In this, it is not assumed that living in any specific family structure is directly related to increased or decreased bullying involvement, but instead explores whether certain family structures are associated with differences in bullying involvement through the potentially mediating role of interpersonal

relationships. There are a number of reasons for this approach: firstly, the previous literature – albeit limited in scope – does not assume causation. In fact, much of the existing research proposes explanations for why certain family structures may be associated with increased bullying involvement, such as the aforementioned role of parental supervision (Holt et al., 2008), support within the family (Shetgiri et al., 2012), or instability from the breakdown of the family (Hay & Nash, 2002). To my knowledge, previous research has not explored the role of family structure and interpersonal relationships in numerous contexts (family, friends, teachers, and classmates) for bullying involvement, and thus this is a central part of this thesis.

Secondly, this thesis is grounded in the social-ecological model, which proposes that different systems interact with one another to impact an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1994). To assume that the family alone – a microsystem – directly causes bullying perpetration and victimisation is ultimately too simplistic. This would assume that the other systems, such as schools – a mesosystem – do not play as substantial a role as the social-ecological model suggests. Instead, this thesis proposes that a child's involvement in bullying is grounded in wider social contexts, and family structure is just one part of a much more complex system.

Finally, assuming that any one family structure is superior to another is socially problematic. As will be explored in 'Chapter Seven: A Focused Literature Review on the Experiences of Children Living in Social Care', children living in social care frequently experience stigma surrounding their alternative family structures, and this can be used as a source of bullying (Dansey et al., 2019; Rogers, 2017). To propose that living in a non-traditional family is a direct cause of bullying would only serve to further ostracise those who live in these families.

Nonetheless, identifying demographic risk factors is beneficial for understanding which – if any – groups are at risk of bullying. From here, interventions can be developed to mitigate possible bullying involvement. Thus, this thesis explores the impact of family structure as a demographic risk factor only. Attempts will be made to understand *why* certain family structures may pose a risk, with attention given to interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Siblings

Alongside the characteristics of the family system, attention has been given to the impact of having siblings on children's development and wellbeing. A large proportion of children in the UK live with either a biological or legal sibling (52.5 %; Clark, 2022; 57.7 %; Office for National Statistics, 2021). Relatedly, during adolescence children spend significantly more time with their siblings than their parents, teachers, peers, or alone (Tucker & Updegraff, 2009; Wolke & Skew, 2012b); this is unsurprising considering the proximity that many siblings face in the family home, such as sharing bedrooms, activities, and life experiences. Thus, it is expected that having siblings will have some influence on development, including interactions with peers. This section will focus specifically on the literature surrounding siblings and peer bullying; bullying between siblings will be explored in 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying'.

As association between having siblings and bullying involvement has been established. For instance, Panagiotou et al. (2021) found that children with siblings reported more social behaviour and subsequently less peer victimisation at school, suggesting an indirect but protective effect of having siblings. This can be explained further by the presence of siblings at school, with younger siblings seeking support from their older siblings against bullies in the playground (Hadfield et al., 2006), but these authors found that older siblings reported the opposite, with younger siblings creating difficulties at school. This could suggest that the role of siblings is much more complex than currently understood; Honig and Zdunowksi-Sjoblom (2015) reported that siblings also provide emotional support and advice following bullying incidents.

Other researchers have endeavoured to understand how and why having siblings can predict bullying involvement, and some focus has been given to the number of siblings a child has. In two early studies, Eslea and Smith (2000) and Ma (2001) examined if having more siblings influenced traditional bullying involvement. Whilst Eslea and Smith (2000) found evidence that British children with three or more siblings reported greater bullying perpetration than those with one or no siblings, Ma (2001) added that this was only true for older children, with the latter in a Canadian sample. In particular, they reported that children from large families were less likely to be victims but more likely to be bullies, but this was only true of children in grade eight, and not for those in grade six. This could indicate an interaction effect of age on this association. Nonetheless,

Ma (2001) provides no indication of how many siblings constitute a 'large' family, nor if there are differences between the specific numbers of siblings. Likewise, neither study report effect sizes for these differences, making it difficult to determine if having siblings really has a meaningful impact on children's involvement in bullying. A similar limitation is visible in the findings of Chen et al. (2018), who found that in a Chinese sample, the presence of siblings increased victimisation at school and online but did not specify if the number of siblings was important.

Finally, the previous studies have not yet examined if sibling gender plays a role in this association: research has suggested that brothers may have less supportive relationships than sisters (Kim et al., 2006), but the application of sibling gender to bullying involvement is scarce.

Regardless, having siblings has an influence on bullying involvement, but the reasons for this are currently unknown. One explanation may come from the behaviours and attitudes acquired from siblings. For instance, siblings may encourage their counterparts to retaliate against other children who are victimising them (Honig & Zdunowski-Sjoblom, 2015), which may perpetuate bullying. Likewise, children may experience victimisation at the hands of their siblings, which correlates to increased bullying involvement between peers (Bowes et al., 2014; Valido et al., 2021). This may be a result of internalised victimisation or learned behaviours from siblings. A second explanation for how siblings may influence bullying involvement is the possibility of tensions within the family unit due to larger family sizes. Although some have argued that the existence of a larger family can be a risk factor for poverty (Bradshaw et al., 2006), this has not been corroborated in recent literature. However, having greater numbers of siblings may place greater demand on parental resources and attention. This could result in reduced supervision, as parents are preoccupied with other children in the household (Bowes et al., 2009; Holt et al., 2008), or increased tension and rivalry as siblings compete for their parents' attention (Iftikhar & Sajjad, 2023). Yet, siblings themselves may offer a supervisory or protective role when parents lack the time or knowledge. This is particularly visible for cyberbullying, with older siblings monitoring younger siblings online (Chen et al., 2018). Overall, the previous literature does not offer a clear insight into how and why having siblings may impact involvement in peer bullying (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2018), and more research is necessary for understanding the potential risk of this extremely common family factor.

2.4 Interpersonal Relationships

Family structure and having siblings have both been associated with bullying involvement (Family structure: Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Edwards, 2016; Erdogan et al., 2023; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Le et al., 2017; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013; Siblings: Eslea & Smith, 2000; Hadfield et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Panagiotou et al., 2021), but this does not explain *why* these specific characteristics create a risk or protective factor. One explanation may be found in the relationships that children have with those around them, such as their family, friends, teachers, and classmates. Consistent with the social-ecological model, it is likely that the various relationship systems are interconnected, and together influence a child's vulnerability to bullying involvement. As such, this thesis explores the role of interpersonal relationships on bullying involvement, with consideration to how these relationships may differ depending on different family characteristics. Before this, an understanding of the direct effect of interpersonal relationships is necessary; this will be separated into those within the family, with friends, and those at school. Only relationships directly involving the target child will be considered. As a result, parent-parent or teacher-teacher relationships will not be included. This is consistent with the bounds of the secondary dataset used in Chapters Five, Six, and Eight. However, these wider relationships will be mentioned in Chapter Nine, where foster parent-teacher and foster parent-social worker relationships will be discussed.

2.4.1 Relationships Within the Family

Some of the most widely researched relationships within the bullying literature are those within the family. In their review, Oliveira et al. (2017) proposed that family structure is not a predictor of bullying involvement, but the relationships within the family are. They argued that social interactions provide a model for children, and families characterised by aggression are ultimately teaching children that this is an acceptable way to behave. This concept is not dissimilar from Social Learning Theory described previously (Bandura, 1978).

Additionally, Powell and Ladd (2010) suggested the link between family relationships and bullying involvement is rooted in Attachment Theory. This theory was initially constructed by Bowlby, who proposed that caregivers – typically a child's parents – provide a secure base for

infants and children to explore the world, with the knowledge that they can return when they need comfort and safety (Bowlby, 1988). In this same book, Bowlby elaborated that these attachments determine how an individual will cope with future life events. In other words, these early models of attachment provide a basis for attitudes and expectations in later life, both in how an individual expects to be treated, and how they expect to treat others. Ainsworth (1985) developed further on this through the Strange Situation, whereby children were observed interacting with a stranger with and without their primary caregiver present: three main attachment types were identified, including a 'secure' and optimum attachment, an 'anxious-avoidant' attachment characterised by limited need for the caregiver, and an 'anxious-resistant' attachment characterised by distress in the absence of the caregiver but anger on their return. These attachment types have since been applied to bullying involvement. Children with anxious attachment types are reportedly more likely to engage in aggressive behaviours and bully their peers compared to other attachment types (Clear et al., 2020; Kokkinos et al., 2019; Powell & Ladd, 2010). Kokkinos et al. (2019) argue that this is a result of poor emotion regulation strategies, which in turn heightens the risk of aggression, whilst Powell and Ladd (2010) propose that this is a defence mechanism formed from an inability to form positive and stable relationships. Nonetheless, the impact of attachments within the family on bullying is evident. When exploring this topic, researchers investigate the family unit holistically, or through focusing on specific family members.

When considering the family unit as a whole, Perren and Hornung (2005) found that perpetrators of traditional bullying were more likely to report lower family support than uninvolved children. This trend was also visible for bully-victims, but statistical significance was not reached; effect sizes were not reported for either association, making it difficult to assess the strength of this association. Similarly, Murray-Harvey and Slee (2010) found that Australian adolescents with 'stressful' family relationships were more likely to be victims of traditional bullying, with a moderate effect size reported ($d = .53$). This has been extended to cyberbullying involvement, with children from families characterised by low support and high conflict being substantially more likely to be online bully-victims (Hellfeldt et al., 2019). Chen et al. (2018) suggested an issue of polyvictimisation, with children from violent families being at an increased risk of cyberbullying victimisation, but they noted that this did not extend to victims of child neglect. The reasons for this

in a cyberbullying context are unclear, but a potential explanation may that children who experience victimisation in the home may come to internalise themselves as 'weak' or 'victims', and view this as a trait that cannot be changed (Chen et al., 2018). On the other hand, children from violent families may seek refuge online, and their increasing online presence subsequently increases the exposure to victimisation. These children may experience less supervision online, with parents being disengaged or preoccupied: to my knowledge, an association between family conflict and parental supervision online has not been established. Finally, Bai et al. (2020) explored the role of family incivility on cyberbullying perpetration in a sample of Chinese adolescents. Family incivility represents a 'low-intensity' aggression, whereby the respect of an individual family member is undermined through exclusion or ignorant insults. Although not as outwardly aggressive as some of the previous examples, being a victim of family incivility has been associated with increased levels of hopelessness, which in turn increases cyberbullying perpetration (Bai et al., 2020). Ultimately, a number of studies have found that poor family relationships are a risk factor for bullying involvement at school and online. Yet, Chen et al. (2021) found this was not a direct effect, with an indirect effect through school relationships being seen instead: positive family relationships led to positive relationships with teachers, which subsequently reduced bullying victimisation at school. This could indicate that the effect of family relationships on bullying is much more complex than the previous research has suggested, and wider interpersonal relationships should be accounted for alongside the family. This holistic approach to the family is beneficial when accounting for different family structures, as the interpretation of who belongs to the family will largely be down to the participants, unless otherwise specified. In this, children living without biological parents can be easily included. Alternatively, other researchers have focused on particular family members, such as parents and siblings.

Parents have received much attention in the bullying and relationships literature, with a primary focus on supervision and monitoring of children's behaviours, yielding mixed findings. Children who reported low levels of parental supervision are significantly more likely to bully their peers (Atik & Güneri, 2013; Espelage et al., 2000; Morcillo et al., 2014; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022; Powell & Ladd, 2010) and be victims of traditional bullying (Atik & Güneri, 2013; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022). Powell and Ladd's (2010) review proposed that the effects of parental

supervision were observed in males only, whilst Spriggs et al. (2007) suggested that these effects were visible in White and Black samples, but not Hispanic samples. Interestingly, this has not been replicated using Hispanic samples, but more recent studies have corroborated the protective factor of parental supervision in White and Black samples (Hong et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2021a). In addition, Georgiou and Fanti (2010) identified a bidirectional relationship between parental supervision and traditional bullying perpetration: children who reported lower parental monitoring and involvement were more likely to report increased bullying perpetration, which they found then led to less parental monitoring and involvement. The authors explained this through parental frustration, whereby parents would 'give up' trying to intervene and monitoring their children online, because they were feeling frustrated at the previous lack of success. However, these findings were not consistent across all studies. For instance, a systematic review revealed that 77% of studies found an association with parental supervision and bullying perpetration, and 46% found one for bullying victimisation; 51% found no effect of parental supervision on victimisation, and 3% found an association in the opposite direction (Nocentini et al., 2019). The latter paper suggested that parents supervised more when children were experiencing online victimisation (Sasson & Mesch, 2017), questioning the direction of effect, which is not established in this cross-sectional study. The conflicting findings in the literature is only amplified by some of the associations finding low effect sizes (Lereya et al., 2013; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022), suggesting that the effects of parental supervision on traditional bullying are not as prominent as previously believed.

Supervising children's activities and interactions online is typically easier than supervising interactions on the playground or out of the home, with various software being developed for online safety. Unsurprisingly, children who are supervised online are less likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying (Low & Espelage, 2013; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022; Zych, 2019) or victims (Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022). The effect of parental supervision may be related to the involvement that parents take with their children, rather than the act of monitoring alone: children with uninvolved parents are more likely to be bullies (Espelage, 2014; Keelan et al., 2014; Papanikolaou et al., 2010). Furthermore, Nocentini et al. (2019) argued that parents only tend to supervise their children when they suspect something is wrong, meaning that victims of

cyberbullying are more likely to be supervised online as a reactive intervention, as opposed to a proactive prevention.

Beyond parental involvement, other characteristics have been associated with bullying involvement in children. Parental relationships characterised by positivity (including support, warmth, and low levels of conflict) have been associated with reduced bullying perpetration and victimisation at school and online (Biswas et al., 2010; Bowes et al., 2010; Ding et al., 2020; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022), whilst children whose parents punish without justification are more likely to be both bullies and victims (Papanikolaou et al., 2010). Finally, children with parents who stigmatised or shamed them as children were more likely to be victims as young adults, whilst those who were both stigmatised by parents but also recalled positive relationships with their parents were more likely to be perpetrators as young adults (Pontzer, 2010); this could be suggestive of inconsistent parenting. Ultimately, positive relationships with parents have consistently been associated with reduced bullying involvement, both as a perpetrator and a victim.

Finally, relationships with siblings have been explored in isolation of the wider family unit, with Oliviera et al. (2017) noting that siblings offer one of the first experiences of socialisation with similar-aged children. Research has suggested that sibling relationships characterised by warmth and positivity reduce the risk of traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation (Bowers et al., 1992; Bowers et al., 1994; Bowes et al., 2010; Powell & Ladd, 2010). Meanwhile, relationships characterised by bullying or aggressive behaviours are associated with greater peer bullying (Bowes et al., 2014; Foody et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2019; Morrill et al., 2018); this will be explored in depth in 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review – Between-Sibling Bullying' but offers an insight into the role of sibling relationships on peer bullying.

Overall, relationships within the family – whether that is as a unit, with parents, or with siblings – are important for children's socialisation, and offer a model for future behaviours. Families characterised by positivity are associated with protection against online and school bullying, whilst conflicted and aggressive families increase the risk of bullying involvement. They are undoubtedly an essential factor to consider when understanding children's bullying experiences.

2.4.2 Relationships with Friends

Friendships play an important role in children's development, supporting healthy social and emotional wellbeing, alongside protecting children against family conflicts (Powers et al., 2009); these are an important group to consider in bullying experiences. Peer status – including rejection, isolation, competence, popularity, and likeability (Cook et al., 2010) – has received a considerable amount of attention in the existing literature. The research proposes that children with a high peer status were protected against traditional bullying involvement, as both a victim and a perpetrator (Cook et al., 2010; Eslea et al., 2004; Zych et al., 2019). Nation et al. (2008) argued that bullies were typically more socially competent than uninvolved children, victims, or bully-victims, whilst victims were the least socially competent. Yet, they also found that empowerment in relationships was more important with teachers than with friends, suggesting an important aspect of relationships with teachers above and beyond friends. In line with this, children who reported having fewer friends and fewer close relationships were more likely to be victims, bully-victims (Eslea et al., 2004), or perpetrators of traditional bullying (Powell & Ladd, 2010), as well as perpetrators of cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2019). The vulnerability for victimisation could be a result of appearing an 'easy target', whilst perpetrators may feel anger at their perceived rejection (Powell & Ladd, 2010).

Alongside peer status, the quality of perceived friendships has offered an insight into children's bullying involvement. For instance, children who perceived their friends to be hard to talk to were more likely to be victims of traditional bullying (Hong et al., 2021a), suggesting a protective factor in communication quality. Moreover, children who shared their passwords with friends were at risk of online victimisation and perpetration (Mishna et al., 2012). The authors did not offer an insight into why this risk is enhanced – particularly for perpetration – but may be result of unsafe internet use or a tendency to overshare. Children who perceived their relationships with friends to be supportive, close, and positive were less likely to be victims (Chen et al., 2021; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Spriggs et al., 2007) or perpetrators of traditional bullying (Spriggs et al., 2007), as well as a lowered risk of cyberbullying victimisation (Aoyama et al., 2011) or perpetration (Leung et al., 2017). This was corroborated across multiple countries and may be indicative of these children having better social skills.

The effects of positive relationships with friends on bullying involvement differed between genders: males typically reported having more friends but feeling lonelier and less likeable (Eslea et al., 2004), but the differences were small in size. Females perceived their friendships as more supportive than their male counterparts, which subsequently reduced bullying victimisation at school and online (Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Holt & Espelage, 2007). Only one study found no effect of gender on the association between relationships with peers and bullying involvement (Chen et al., 2021), but notably this study did not distinguish between 'friends' and 'classmates'. This highlights a substantial issue in the existing research: many studies combine friends and classmates into a single group of 'peers' (Chen et al., 2021; Eslea et al., 2004), or fail distinguish friends at all (Biswas et al., 2010; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010); classmates will be discussed in the following section on 'Relationships at School'. Furthermore, Aoyama et al. (2011) note that children typically have multiple friends at one given time, which many studies fail to account for; these can be different groups within the school setting, or across different contexts. Nevertheless, there is a consistent finding that children with positive friendships are somewhat protected against school and online bullying.

2.4.3 Relationships at School

Unsurprisingly, teachers have a considerable impact on children's academic achievement and adaptability at school (Baker et al., 2008; Roorda et al., 2019). More specifically, certain characteristics have been associated with bullying involvement in the classroom. Teachers who cultivate respectful and task-focussed classroom environments have lower rates of teasing within the classroom (Dietrich & Hofman, 2020), whilst those who foster atmospheres of choice and low-pressure report lower bullying in the classroom (Roth et al., 2010). Interestingly, teachers who had personal experiences of bullying perpetration reported greater bullying in their classroom, which could be attributed to modelling behaviours to the children within their class, or a relaxed and accepting attitude towards bullying (Oldenburg et al., 2015). Finally, contradictory to expectations, teachers who express a strong ability or effort to deal with bullying had higher levels in their classrooms (Oldenburg et al., 2015; Veenstra et al., 2014). Oldenburg et al. (2015) argued that this could be indicative of teachers overestimating their own ability to deal with bullying, alongside

misunderstanding the complex nature of bullying itself. Overall, there is a clear role of teachers in children's bullying involvement, but there is a need for more longitudinal research to better understand the causal effect. This extends to the relationships between teachers and the children in their classroom: positive and supportive student-teacher relationships have been linked with lower bullying perpetration and victimisation (Chen et al., 2021; Dietrich & Cohen, 2019; Han et al., 2017; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010; Nation et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2015), and those characterised by conflict have been linked to increased bullying (Longobardi et al., 2018; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). These findings have been replicated across different countries and continents, suggesting a strong reliability in these conclusions.

Relationships with teachers are not the only school-based influence on bullying involvement, with classmate relationships also being an important factor. Whilst relationships with classmates and friends are frequently grouped as one, these two groups are not the same. Friends are those that children form an attachment to out of choice, whilst classmates are those that children are placed with either randomly or based on academic capabilities. Whilst the literature on peer status remains relevant here (Cook et al., 2010; Eslea et al., 2004; Kowalski et al., 2019; Nation et al., 2008; Powell & Ladd, 2010; Zych et al., 2019), there are also studies specific to classmates that offer a deeper insight into children's bullying involvement. Two studies across 84 countries explored the topic of peer support, but focusing specifically on classmates, and found that children with high levels of support reported lower victimisation and lower perpetration of school bullying (Biswas et al., 2010; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). This relationship has also been established between classmate acceptance and bullying: children who felt that they were not accepted by their classmates were more likely to report victimisation at school, whilst those who reported high levels of acceptance were more likely to be perpetrators at school (Perren & Hornung, 2005; Salmivalli et al., 1996). This could suggest that aggressive behaviours are reinforced by peers, whilst also being attractive characteristics. Finally, classes with hierarchies lead to greater bullying incidents within the class (Longobardi et al., 2018; Saarento et al., 2014).

Some differences in age and gender have been noted when considering relationships with classmates. Firstly, younger children tend to perceive their peer relationships as more negative than their older counterparts (Perren & Hornung, 2005). This could be due to the amount of time

that children have spent with their classmates, with younger children starting to establish hierarchies and friendships, whilst older children will often have been with the same children throughout much of their educational life; this may vary between countries and school systems, with the reported study being conducted in Switzerland. Nonetheless, typically children will be at schools closer to their homes, meaning many children will be familiar.

Gender differences have been established. For example, Salmivalli et al. (1996) found that male perpetrators reported high acceptance but low rejection, whilst female perpetrators reported simultaneous high acceptance and high rejection. One explanation could be in that males are traditionally perceived to be more aggressive, so these behaviours may lead to less rejection from peers compared to when a female is engaging in these.

With certain bullying experiences occurring at school, it is undoubtable that relationships within the institution will have an influence on children's bullying involvement. Teachers provide an adult role model outside of the home, whilst some classmates will play an active a role in the bullying incidents. Research has consistently found that these two groups are vital for understanding bullying, but consideration should be given to these relationships in context to those with family and friends.

2.5 Rationale

Bullying is still considered a normative problem for children today, and despite improvements in our understanding and identification of this issue, there are still areas that are not fully understood: in particular, the role of the family and interpersonal relationships. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to address the limitations in the previous literature and provide a deeper understanding of how and why the family impacts children's bullying experiences. This will be considered in three key areas.

Firstly, existing research on the role of family structure on bullying tends to focus on specific family types in isolation. I argue that all family structures should be considered together, with comparisons to understand what risks different families pose in relation to one another. This will include living with both biological parents, single parents, stepparents, in social care, or in less common family structures. Children living in social care, and particularly foster care, will be

explored in depth: the literature and rationale for this will be developed in 'Chapter Seven: A Focused Literature Review on the Experiences of Children Living in Social Care'.

Secondly, our current understanding of siblings is limited. This thesis endeavours to understand if and how the total number of siblings contribute to bullying involvement, alongside the impact of sibling gender. The latter is a relatively understudied topic, and knowledge in this area would help in identifying at-risk groups.

Thirdly, there is a clear role of interpersonal relationships on bullying, but it is unclear whether family characteristics (family structure or sibling characteristics) impact these relationships, or if interpersonal relationships mediate the effects of family characteristics on bullying involvement. This thesis will explore these roles in depth, alongside paying attention to classmate relationships and friendships as separate influences.

Finally, analyses will be conducted on traditional bullying involvement and cyberbullying involvement. The latter is a growing field and has received much less attention in the family and relationships research. An understanding of both types of bullying will offer a deeper understanding of which children are at risk, which will provide an essential foundation of intervention and prevention efforts.

Chapter Three

Scoping Review: Between-Sibling Bullying

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a scoping review which was conducted as an original piece of research. The findings were presented at the International Society for Research on Aggression conference in 2022 in Ottawa, Canada. The review was published in an international peer-reviewed journal, and is referenced as: Brett, H., Jones Bartoli, A., & Smith, P. K. (2023). Sibling bullying during childhood: A scoping review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 72,* 101862. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101862

3.2 Background

Sibling bullying is a relatively understudied area (Morrill et al., 2018; Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017). This may be partially explained by the lack of an agreed definition: the terms *violence*, *aggression*, *conflict*, *abuse*, *rivalry,* and *bullying* are often used interchangeably in the literature (Coyle et al. 2017; Eriksen & Jensen, 2009). Moreover, there may be a tendency for researchers to view bullying as only occurring between peers: the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) specifies that bullying occurs between "youths who are not siblings" (Gladden et al., 2014, p. 7). This is problematic for determining exactly what behaviours would constitute bullying, and what is perceived as 'normal' sibling disagreements. Moreover, popular media may help to reinforce the belief that sibling bullying is a normal part of growing up, with many shows and movies using sibling bullying as an element of comedy (Family Guy), to create a character arc (Stranger Things), or to build sympathy for the protagonist (Matilda).

This normalisation of sibling bullying may lead to an under-reporting of the issue and may explain the lack of consistent statistics (Hoetger et al., 2015; Wiehe, 1997). Coyle et al. (2017) note that prevalence rates for sibling bullying tend to vary between 30-78%, emphasising the lack of a clear understanding of the issue at hand. One aim of the current scoping review is to consider the reported prevalence rate of sibling bullying, and just how 'normal' it supposedly is. It is likely that

this will be impacted by the definitions and tools adopted in research studies, which will also be explored.

3.3 Objectives

Although advances in understanding this topic are ongoing, there remains a need for more research and clarity in this field. A scoping review was perceived to be the most effective first tool for understanding the issue and mapping the key areas of interest. This was favoured for the objectivity and replicability not found in narrative reviews, but with the lack of a narrow question needed for a systematic review (Horsley, 2019). The primary objective was to explore what existing empirical literature had been conducted, with a focus on several questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the studies conducted?
2. What is the prevalence of sibling bullying? How does this compare with peer bullying?
3. What else do we know about sibling bullying?

The latter question was answered primarily through the themes of the included papers, but additional attention was given to the following:

a. Who is most at risk?
b. Does the 'type' of sibling (biological, half-, step-, adopted, foster) matter?
c. Does family structure play a role?
d. Do any other family-based factors play a role, such as SES, religion, education, age, or birth order?
e. Are findings consistent in different cultures?
f. What is the impact of sibling bullying?

3.4 Method

Prior to starting this scoping review, ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

The Joanna Briggs Institute's recommendations (Peters et al., 2017) were used to guide and structure the scoping review; in particular, the extraction of results and use of the adapted PRISMA-ScR (Figure 3.1) were consistent with these recommendations. A protocol with a clearly outlined inclusion and exclusion criteria was registered on the Open Science Framework (osf.io).

3.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Consistent with the recommendations by Peters et al. (2017), less restrictive inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented. This allowed for a more inclusive and thorough consideration of sibling bullying research.

3.4.2 Participants

Papers must have been reporting on bullying occurring between children up to the age of 18; no other restrictions were implemented regarding participant characteristics, with both neurotypical and atypical samples being included. All countries, races, and religions were considered.

3.4.3 Concept

Papers investigating 'sibling bullying' were included: these papers needed a clearly operationalised concept of bullying that fit the Olweus (1993) definition (repetition, imbalance of power, and intent to cause harm). Siblings were not limited to biological or cohabiting relations, but any young person with at least one biological or legal parent in common. This allowed for the inclusion of various family structures, including foster families. Papers had to be reporting on sibling bullying as an outcome variable or independent variable; papers looking at sibling bullying as an interaction variable only were not included.

3.4.4 Types of Sources

Included papers must be reporting empirical research; both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were accepted. Meta-analyses and literature reviews were excluded but were

scanned to identify any additional sources. Articles that were not available in English were excluded.

3.4.5 Search Strategy

Searches were conducted on PubMed, PsychInfo, Wiley and Web of Science between December 2021 and May 2022. These databases were selected due to their ability to employ Boolean search terms, alongside their coverage of social sciences, and the accessibility for the research team. Additionally, academics in the field of sibling bullying were contacted for any grey literature. The Boolean search terms were as follows:

sibling(s) OR brother* OR sister* OR step* OR "sibling* relationship*"

AND

bull* OR cyberbull* OR "online bull*" OR cyber-bull* OR "cyber aggression" OR "cyber bull*" OR "online abuse" OR "online harass*" OR "online aggress*" OR "online victim*" OR "sibling bull*" OR "sibling aggress*" OR "sibling abuse" OR harass* OR conflict OR abus*

AND

adoles* OR teen* OR child* OR "young* people"

Once databases were searched, the titles and abstracts of all identified sources were scanned by the first author to establish eligibility against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (stage one), and the remaining papers were then read in their entirety by the same author to identify if they met the inclusion criteria (stage two). Inter-rater reliability checks were conducted by the first and third authors, which involved 30 papers retained from stage one being randomly selected and blindly assessed for inclusion. Agreement was at 93.3 %, with only one paper differing: upon consideration, this paper was excluded for being too vague with general sibling 'aggression', as opposed to the specification of 'bullying' in this review.

The included papers were screened, and the following information extracted: (a) author(s), (b) date of publication, (c) data of data collection, (d) aims and objectives, (e) research question, (f) country of study, (g) sample characteristics (e.g., number of participants, age, sex), (h)

independent variable(s), (i) dependent variable(s), (j) measure of sibling bullying used, (k)

mediating or moderating variables, (l) findings, (m) conclusions. These were then grouped into

themes for the insight they provided into sibling bullying.

3.5 Results and Discussion

Figure 3.1 illustrates the PRISMA flow-diagram, showing how many sources were retrieved

and retained at each stage. The search process initially found 17,278 papers; titles were screened

to remove duplicates and any papers that were clearly not relevant. 14,919 papers remained, and

the titles and abstracts were scanned during stage one; 138 papers were retained for stage two. 45

papers subsequently met the inclusion criteria for this review.

Figure 3.1

PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram
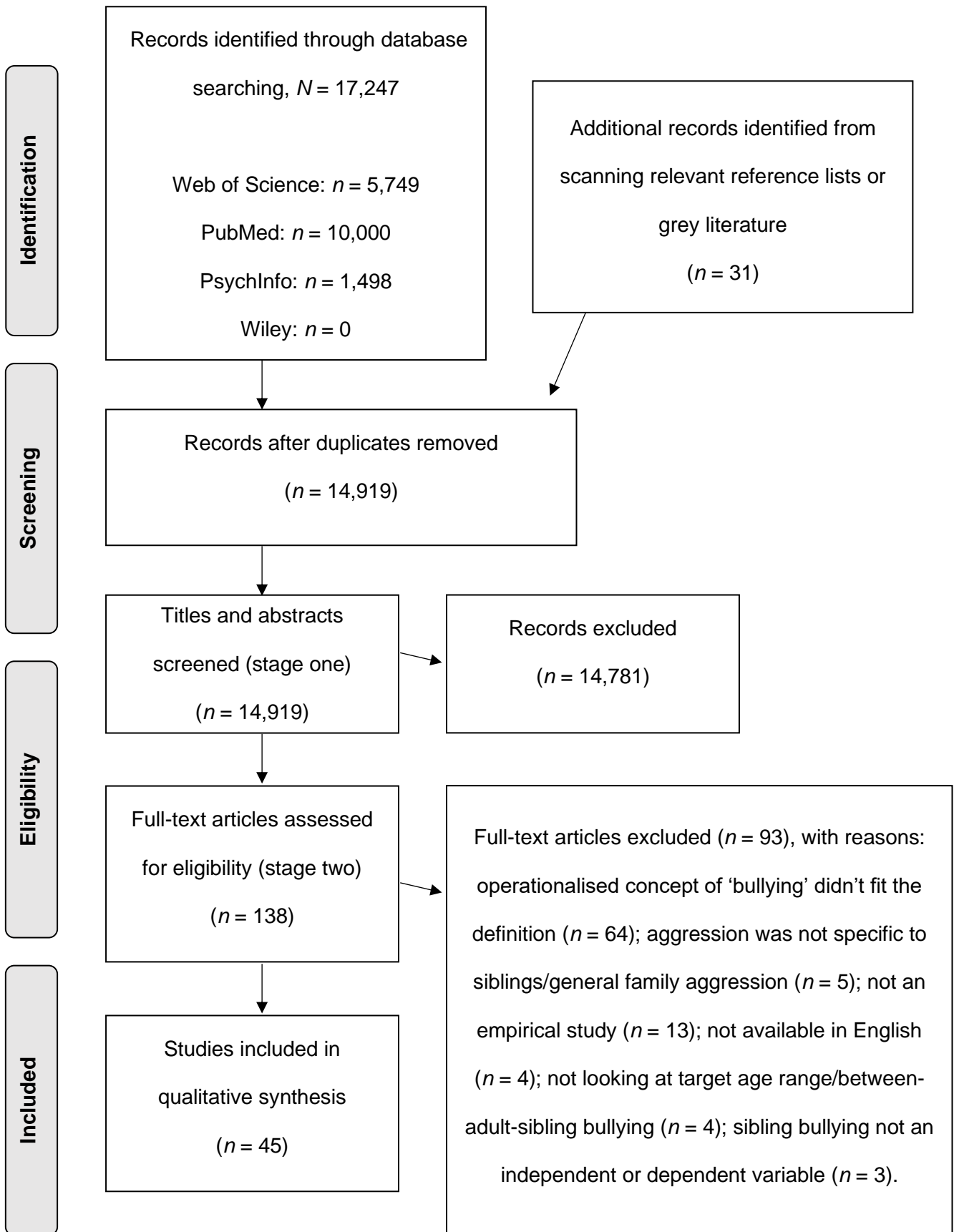
3.5.1 Question 1: What are the Characteristics of the Studies Conducted?

3.5.1.1 Cultural Differences. The 45 included papers were screened to identify specific characteristics; an overview of these papers can be found in Appendix A. Figure 3.2 highlights the number of papers per continent. Notably, 36 of the papers (80 %) were from Western countries, with these being disproportionately conducted in the United States (n = 20, 44.4 %) and the United Kingdom (n = 13, 28.8 %). This is problematic when considering the cultural differences that exist for peer bullying, particularly with regards to prevalence (Kowalski et al., 2014; Nesdale & Naito, 2005; OECD, 2019; Smith & Robinson, 2019); it is unclear whether these differences in prevalence are also found for sibling bullying.

Furthermore, bullying in South-East Asian countries presents differently to many Western countries, both in the way that it is defined, and the types of aggression displayed. In reviewing this, Sittichai and Smith (2015) note that cultural differences in social hierarchy may suggest that older perpetrators are 'legitimate' in their bullying of younger counterparts, which could question the perception of older siblings bullying younger siblings. Likewise, cultural differences exist in the roles that siblings play in the family. For instance, children in some rural and agricultural communities take on culturally defined roles of caregivers for their younger siblings (Sriram & Ganapathy, 1997; Tucker & Updegraff, 2009). It is possible that the existence of sibling bullying would differ in either prevalence or presentation in these cultures. Finally, none of the included literature compared sibling bullying across cultures. It is evident that more research is necessary to map sibling bullying onto other countries and cultures, particularly with respect to non-Western countries.

Figure 3.2

Number of Papers per Continent Identified
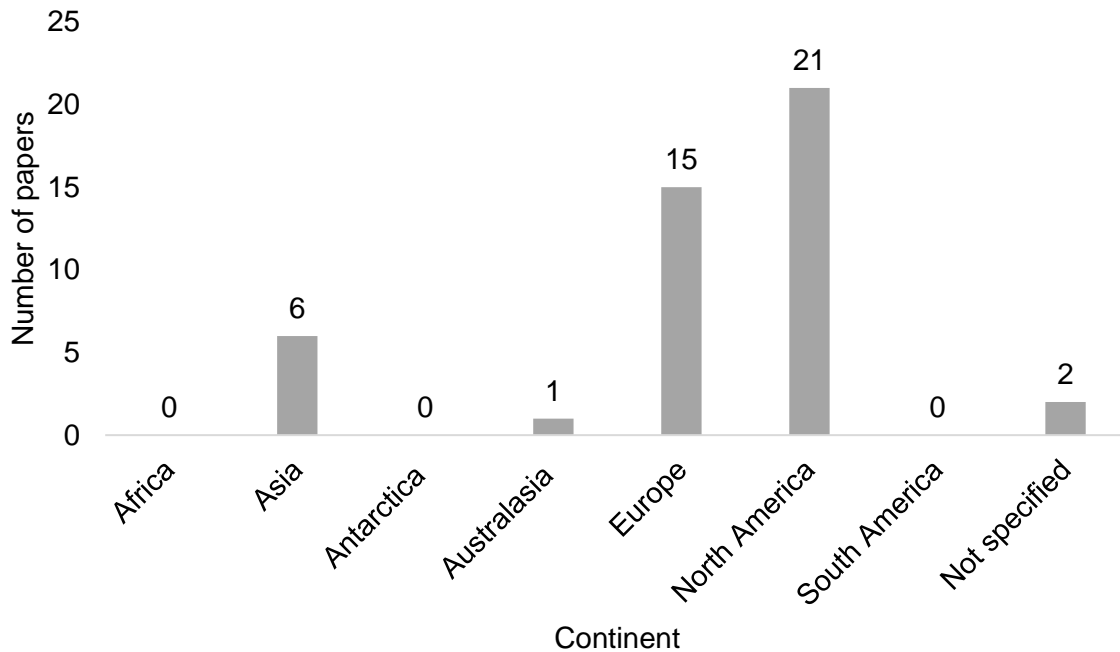
3.5.1.2 **Publication Date.** Most of these papers were published from 2015 onwards (*n* = 36, 80%), as indicated in Figure 3.3. Only 24 papers (53.3%) provided information of when the data was collected, with 16 of these utilising secondary data. Furthermore, two papers examined data from 1976 (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Eriksen & Jensen, 2009) creating a 30-year difference between data collection and publication. Date of data collection is important for considering findings within the context that they were studied (Smith & Berkkun, 2020). Whilst changes in the number of dependent children living in a household has not substantially changed since 2002 (Office for National Statistics, 2021), it is possible that other changes in family and social characteristics may impact the risk of sibling bullying. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns placed a unique strain on family relationships and dynamics, with Toseeb (2022) reporting an increase in sibling bullying during lockdowns; whilst these findings offer an insight into the impact of a stressful and uncertain period, it is problematic to consider them outside of their temporal context.

Figure 3.3

Number of Papers Identified per Year of Publication
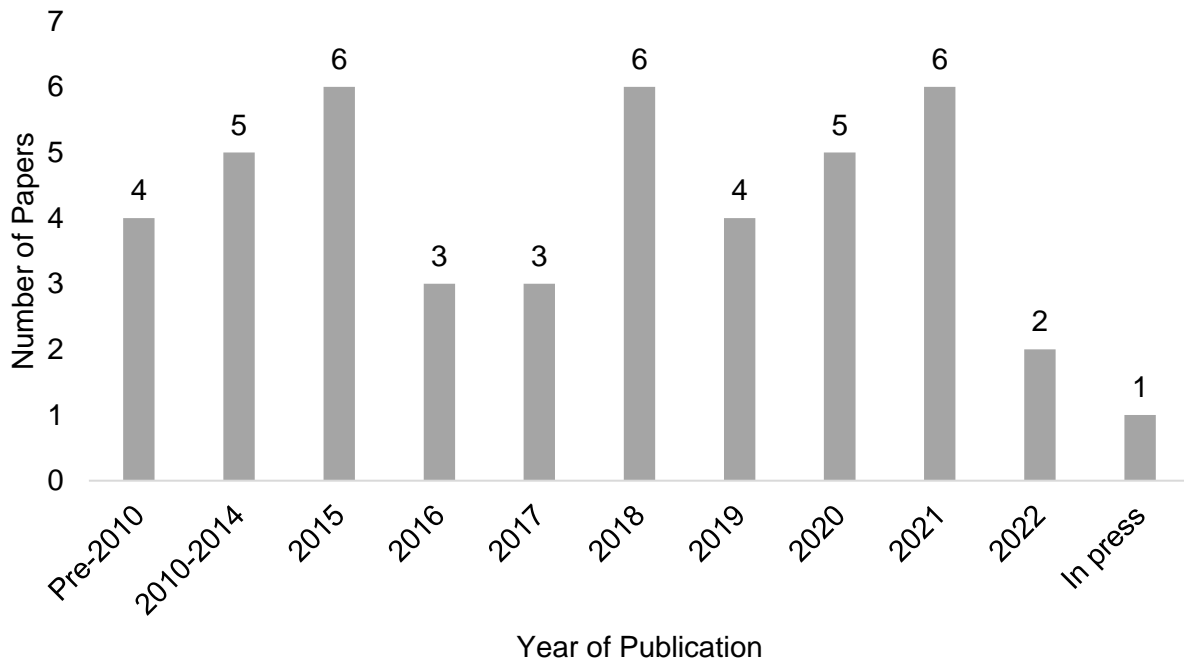
3.5.1.3 Measures. The most frequently used tool was an adapted version of the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ), in 11 of the studied (24.4 %) of studies. Another 11 studies utilised other pre-established tools, and 15 papers (33.3 %) developed novel measures. A similar issue of varied measurement tools is present in the peer bullying literature. A systematic review by Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014) found that between 1985 and 2012, 41 different measures of bullying and cyberbullying were created. These authors argued that these inconsistencies hindered the ability to compare prevalence and understanding across studies, which is an issue that is also true in the sibling bullying literature.

When comparing the different measures, some key features emerged. Firstly, most used peer bullying measures that were simply adapted to say 'siblings', with the exception of the Sibling Bullying Questionnaire (SBQ; Linares et al., 2015; Plamondon et al., 2021) and the Sibling Aggression Scale (Deniz et al., 2022). Although many characteristics will be similar between peer and sibling bullying (such as, physical harm), other aspects will inevitably be different: sibling bullying may be harder to escape than that on the playground, and the shared living space may

contribute to tensions. Likewise, Campione-Barr (2017) note that power dynamics between siblings are often less stable than those with parents and peers, often changing over time. Whilst this does not question the importance of power in bullying definitions, it should be considered when measuring the phenomenon.

Only one study utilised a measure that included cyberbullying between siblings (Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015), although it reported an extremely low prevalence of this. The use of technological platforms for family communication is increasing (Zhao et al., 2021), and the findings of Tanrikulu and Campbell (2015) need updating; measures of sibling bullying should include various forms of bullying, including online.

Consistent with the observations by Coyle et al. (2017) and Eriksen and Jensen (2009), there is variation in the terminology applied throughout the included papers. 23 papers labelled the sibling behaviours as 'bullying', whilst 13 used 'aggression', 4 used 'violence', 3 used 'abuse', and 2 used 'conflict'. This is noteworthy as included papers had to fit an operationalised concept of the Olweus (1993) definition of bullying; these papers were all measuring bullying by that definition, but only half of the papers labelled it as such. This lack of agreement in the literature may perpetuate the normalisation of sibling bullying, and agreement in the terminology and measurement tools is vital for future comparison of studies.

3.5.1.4 Participants. Due to the age specified in the inclusion criteria, all studies investigated sibling bullying for children up to the age of 18-years; nonetheless participants did not need to be in this age category. One study utilised participants under the age of 7, compared to studies looking at those aged 7- to 11-years ($n = 9$), or 12- to 18-years ($n = 21$). Meanwhile, nine studies were retrospective, with participants reflecting on experiences during 'childhood', and five used parent respondents. The disparities in participant ages brings about two main concerns: firstly, do children under-7 present sibling bullying in the same way as older children, including the same intention, and secondly does the retrospective perspective hinder the accuracy of the results (Hoetger et al., 2015)? The former concern can be related to the idea that younger children may perceive bullying differently to their older counterparts (Monks & Smith, 2006): it is likely that sibling bullying will also present and be perceived differently, similar to peer bullying. Furthermore, the

retrospective accounts considered any sibling bullying that occurred between 0- and 18-years; alongside the clear limitation of recall bias, this wide timeframe calls into question the reliability of the definition and measurement of sibling bullying, which will be explored further when discussing prevalence rates.

A further participant characteristic was gender. A large majority of the included papers adopted mixed-gender samples (n = 43, 95.5 %), but only four of these considered genders beyond biological sex (Martinez & McDonald, 2021; McDonald & Martinez, 2016; Rose et al., 2016; Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015). Two included studies focused on female-only samples (Corralejo et al., 2018; Martinez & McDonald, 2016). Whilst the gender bias and gender differences will be further considered when questioning who is at risk of sibling bullying, it is still essential to acknowledge the small amount of LGBTQIA+ populations included. Individuals belonging to LGBTQIA+ groups are substantially more likely to experience peer bullying than heterosexual and cis-gender individuals (Gower et al., 2018; Heino et al., 2021), and this remains true in the sibling bullying literature. Martinez and McDonald (2021) looked into sibling bullying in 31 non-binary and LGBTQIA+ individuals and found that cis-gender females and non-binary assigned-female-at-birth participants were more likely to report sibling bullying compared to cisgender males. Moreover, those who were assigned-male-at-birth but presented traditionally feminine characteristics were also at risk of sibling bullying. This is consistent with the peer bullying literature, whereby boys who had older sisters and were less competitive were more likely to be victimised by peers (Okudaira et al., 2015). It is evident that gender does play a role in sibling bullying, but knowledge of the extent of this is hindered by the lack of diversity in the current literature.

3.5.2 Question 2: What is the Prevalence of Sibling Bullying? How Does This Compare with Peer Bullying?

Prevalence was not reported in nineteen papers considered in this review. However, the remaining papers all utilised different criteria and measurement tools, hindering the ability to compare prevalence across studies. A breakdown of the reported prevalence in all papers can be found in Appendix B, but caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions about these figures.

When looking at overall sibling bullying regardless of role, prevalence was reported to vary from 79.1 % to 14 %. Of the 15 studies that also looked at peer bullying, only five compared the prevalence of sibling bullying and peer bullying; four of these reported that sibling bullying occurred more frequently than peer bullying (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019a; Duncan, 1999; Foody et al., 2020; Wolke & Samara, 2004), whilst Bar-Zomer and Brunstein Klomek (2018) argued that peer bullying was slightly more common than that of sibling bullying. These differences, alongside the large variation in the reported prevalence, may be explained by several issues in the definitions and measures of sibling bullying. For instance, the inconsistencies in the timeframe of bullying behaviours set the peer and sibling literature apart. Firstly, the included studies considered any behaviours that occurred during childhood, and no timeframe for involvement was specified; in comparison, many of the measures of peer bullying give a timeframe of victimisation between 7 days or the previous 12 months (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). This was equally visible in the measures used in papers that compared peer and sibling bullying. It is possible that sibling bullying only appears to have a higher prevalence due to the wide timeframe adopted.

Moreover, the Olweus (1993) definition of bullying outlines that behaviours must be repetitive, which can encompass a threatening atmosphere or the occurrence of bullying behaviours on more than one occasion. In the case of sibling bullying, an unfriendly atmosphere may be harder to escape than bullying that occurs at school.

3.5.3 Question 3: What Else do we Know About Sibling Bullying?

The papers were coded into five themes, depending on what topic they provided insight into: predictors ($n = 23$), outcomes ($n = 23$), perceptions ($n = 3$), interventions ($n = 2$), and measures ($n = 1$). Seven papers included both predictors and outcomes. The first five proposed questions fit the theme of predictors.

3.5.3.1 Who is Most at Risk? Several predictors were highlighted, including individual characteristics, social risk factors, and sibling constellations.

Individual Characteristic: Age. Consistent with our understanding of peer bullying, age appeared to predict sibling bullying involvement: overall, younger children were more likely to be

involved in sibling bullying, both as a victim and perpetrator (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Liu et al, 2021; Tippett & Wolke, 2015; Tucker et al., 2013). Only one research study attempted to predict the peak of sibling bullying, with this occurring prior to adolescence (Tucker et al., 2013). This somewhat differs from the peak age of peer bullying, which tends to be around 11- to 14-years for traditional bullying (Eslea & Rees, 2001) and 15-years for cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010). As only one study has explored this in sibling bullying, it is difficult to accurately predict the peak of this issue compared to peer bullying. Meanwhile, age in sibling bullying plays a complex role, as the age of the other siblings is often different: siblings closer in age were more likely to experience bullying (Tucker et al., 2013), with first-born children being more likely to perpetrate (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019a; Toseeb et al., 2020a). This may be reflective of an assumed power imbalance, with first-born children holding greater social power, but with some conflicting needs in closer aged siblings.

__Individual Characteristics: Gender.__ It is well-understood in peer bullying that gender impacts the role and type of bullying behaviours (Smith, 2016), but this has not been replicated in the sibling bullying literature. Boys are significantly more likely to be involved in sibling bullying, especially as perpetrators (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Dantchev & Wolke, 2019a; Menesini et al., 2010; Tippett & Wolke, 2015; Tucker et al., 2013). Although this has not specifically been considered in the existing sibling bullying literature, it is possible that gender-specific roles in peer bullying may also influence those involved in sibling bullying. For instance, girls are typically more likely to engage in relational, indirect, or cyberbullying (Barlett & Coyne, 2014). Yet within a family setting, these forms of bullying may be less common, especially that of cyberbullying. Thus, it is possible that physical bullying is more common between brothers; it would be beneficial for research to consider the specific forms of bullying and gender differences, with acknowledgement of all possible gender constellations.

Related to gender identity, there was a potentially mixed picture for individuals who identified as LGBTQIA+. Overall, they were not more likely to experience sibling bullying, unlike what is seen in peer bullying (Berlan et al., 2010), however two studies reported LGB females experiencing victimisation at the hands of their brothers (Martinez & McDonald, 2016; 2021).

Individual Characteristics: Psychological. Only two papers considered psychological factors as a risk for sibling bullying. Tanrikulu and Campbell (2015) found that perpetrators of sibling bullying scored significantly higher on trait anger and moral disengagement measures, whilst Toseeb et al. (2020a) reported that perpetrators had higher emotional dysregulation. Although additional research to corroborate these findings is needed, these do offer an initial insight into characteristics of sibling bullying perpetrators.

Individual Characteristics: Disabilities and Special Educational Needs (SEN). The included papers found mixed results surrounding the risk that disability or SEN poses; three papers suggested that these increased the risk of sibling bullying (Toseeb et al., 2018; Toseeb et al., 2020a; Tucker et al., 2017), whilst three found contrasting results (Rose et al., 2016; Toseeb, 2022; Tucker et al., 2017). For instance, children who had a physical disability were significantly more likely to be victimised by their siblings (Tucker et al., 2017), whilst children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were also at an increased risk of involvement (Toseeb et al., 2018; Toseeb et al., 2020a). On the other hand, it was perceived that disabilities were protective against sibling bullying due to increased parental intervention (Toseeb, 2022). Finally, Rose et al. (2016) and Tucker et al. (2017) found evidence that some, but not all, disabilities were protective against sibling bullying; this emphasises the complexity of this predictor in sibling bullying, and the need for clearer understanding of how disability may or may not pose a risk.

Interpersonal Relationships. This factor can be subdivided into the social relationships inside and outside of the home. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a majority of the papers that explored social factors focused on those within the home: four papers found evidence that harsh parenting increased the risk of sibling bullying (Kim & Kim, 2019; Martinez & McDonald, 2021; Tippett & Wolke, 2015; Toseeb et al., 2018), which is suggestive of poor child-parent relationships (Nocentini et al., 2019). Relatedly, experiencing parent-child violence or witnessing parent-parent violence was associated with increased sibling bullying perpetration and victimisation (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Ingram et al., 2020; Plamondon et al., 2021). Consistent with Social Learning Theory, this could be indicative of learned behaviours whereby violence is deemed an appropriate response (Bandura, 1978; Nocentini et al., 2019), meanwhile Chen et al. (2018) noted that aggression within the family can teach children to internalise themselves as a victim, which subsequently increases

their risk of further victimisation. Alongside this, sibling rivalry has been associated with greater sibling bullying (Plamondon et al., 2021).

Aside from family relationships, school relationships have been linked to sibling bullying. Menesini et al. (2010) and Valido et al. (2021) noted that children involved in peer bullying were significantly more likely to be involved in sibling bullying, both within- and between-groups, proposing that peer relationships have some impact on those with siblings. Moreover, Rose et al. (2016) and Valido et al. (2021) found a buffering effect of school belonging, with greater school belonging reducing both peer and sibling bullying; this could suggest that positive social relations are protective against victimisation at home and school. Ultimately, the existing literature provides an initial insight into the ways that family and school relationships may be related to sibling bullying, but the exact reasons for this are yet to be established.

3.5.3.2 Does the 'Type' of Sibling (Biological, Half-, Step-, Adopted, Foster) Matter?

Only one paper considered the impact of sibling type: Tanskanen et al. (2017) looked at sibling bullying between full- and half-siblings in the UK using the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). Sibling bullying was reportedly higher in full siblings, compared to half-siblings. Steinbach and Hank (2018) found evidence that whilst full-siblings tend to report more positive relationships than half- or step-siblings, they also report increased conflict; the authors suggest that this is a result of increased contact throughout development. Ultimately, this further emphasises the constraint of timeframe in the definitions, with full-siblings potentially having an increased period to consider sibling bullying. On the other hand, Tanskanen et al. (2017) argue that demands on parental resources are responsible for these differences, with full-siblings having to share parental resources, whilst half-siblings each have an individual parent to rely on. It could be hypothesised that other sibling types would also display lower rates of sibling bullying compared to full siblings, such as adopted or foster siblings and step-siblings, due to the existence of other parents or 'sources of supplies'. Yet, these children are likely to have experienced disruption and instability in the family home, and thus may be more at risk of sibling bullying. This emphasises a core limitation in the study by Tanskanen et al. (2017), in that half-siblings were only included if they were living with their biological mother and a stepfather; it is possible that dynamics would change in

households with a biological father and step-mother, or a single parent household. Furthermore, when applying Volk et al. (2016)'s Evolutionary Perspective of bullying to the sibling literature, it could be assumed that children without a genetic 'investment' – those who are less genetically related – would be more inclined to perpetrate sibling bullying. It is possible that this would be outweighed by the concept of shared parental resources (Tanskanen et al., 2017), but this is difficult to conclude from only one study.

  3.5.3.3 Does Family Structure Play a Role? As stated previously, limited research has been conducted with regards to alternate family types. Research has suggested that families considering divorce may experience greater peer bullying (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006), but this could be a result of relationships within the family: as mentioned, positive sibling relationships are protective against many difficulties (Tippett & Wolke, 2015; Wolke & Skew, 2012), which extends to relationships in the wider family unit (Bai et al., 2020; Buelga et al., 2017). Further research is needed to understand the existence of sibling bullying in alternative family structures, with specific attention to non-biological siblings, including step-, adopted- and foster-siblings.

  3.5.3.4 Do any Other Family-based Factors Play a Role, Such as Socioeconomic Status (SES), Religion, Education, or Birth Order? Previous research has identified a positive correlation between religiosity and greater bullying involvement, with religious children often finding themselves victimised for their contrasting beliefs (Schihalejev et al., 2020). If these beliefs are responsible for some level of bullying, then it would be logical to assume that siblings who share a religious background may be less involved in sibling bullying, but this has not been supported in the literature. Eriksen and Jensen (2006) reported that families with a strong religious background have a greater risk of sibling bullying. This has been expanded on by McCormick and Krieger (2020), who suggest that bullying within the family unit may be due to a sense of moral obligation to 'correct' children who are perceived as morally deviant.

  Furthermore, wealth and education have been found to have a linear relationship with sibling bullying, with poverty acting as a risk factor (Liu et al., 2021; Tippett & Wolke, 2015). It is possible that this is related to parental resources, with an increased tension between children

resulting from demands on parents. Likewise, those living in wealthier families are more likely to have large, less-crowded living conditions, providing the opportunity for personal space when tensions arise.

Finally, a consistent link has been established between parental characteristics and sibling bullying. In particular, harsh parenting (Tippett & Wolke, 2015) and having violent parents (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Ingram et al., 2020; Plamondon et al., 2021; Toseeb et al., 2018; Toseeb et al., 2020) increases the risk of bullying between siblings; this is consistent with current understandings of peer bullying, with children learning violence from role models.

3.5.3.5 Are the Findings Consistent in Different Cultures? As previously discussed, the included papers lacked cultural diversity, with 80% of the papers being from Western countries; it is thus unclear whether there is an increased risk associated with certain cultures. However, aside from the geographical cultures are those shared between racial and ethnic groups (Xu et al., 2020). Two studies found evidence that white children are disproportionately more likely to be involved in sibling bullying compared to 'non-whites' (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009) or blacks and Hispanics (Tucker et al., 2013), highlighting an ethnic risk for involvement. The reasons for this are unclear, which corroborates the need for more research across different racial and ethnic groups. Nonetheless, a review by Xu et al. (2020) has suggested that ethnic minority groups may underreport bullying victimisation in an attempt to not 'identify' with this label; this could expand into sibling bullying and family perceptions of victimisation.

3.5.3.6 What is the Impact of Sibling Bullying? Outcomes of sibling bullying were divided into mental wellbeing, social wellbeing, delinquent behaviours, and peer bullying involvement. When considering the potential impact on mental wellbeing, a majority of the included papers found evidence that sibling bullying had a negative influence on mental health for both victims and perpetrators; involvement increased the risk of anxiety (Bowes et al., 2014; Coyle et al., 2017; Fite et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020), depression (Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek, 2018; Bowes et al., 2014; Dantchev et al., 2018; Dantchev et al., 2019; Fite et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020), low self-esteem (Deniz & Toseeb, 2023; Plamondon et al., 2021; Toseeb & Wolke, 2021), self-harming

behaviours (Bowes et al., 2014); and suicidal ideation (Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek, 2018; Dantchev et al., 2019). Other studies reported general difficulties with internalising issues, lowered general wellbeing, and poor emotional regulation (Coyle et al., 2017; Deniz & Toseeb, 2023; Mathis & Mueller, 2015; Plamondon et al., 2021; Toseeb et al., 2018; Tucker et al., 2015). A dose-response was found for these outcomes whereby increased sibling bullying led to poorer outcomes (Liu et al., 2020; Toseeb & Wolke, 2021), and these were not moderated by gender or age (Mathis & Mueller, 2015). Interestingly, the implications for mental wellbeing were not specific for perpetrators or victims.

These outcomes are similar to those of peer bullying, yet Coyle et al. (2017) found evidence that the detrimental outcomes for sibling bullying were worse than those seen in peer bullying. Conversely, another study found no significant outcomes of sibling bullying on mental health or wellbeing: Mackey et al. (2010) did not find a relationship between self-reported victimisation and depression or anxiety in adulthood. However, it must be noted that the retrospective design may have caused an over-reporting of sibling bullying: 83 % of respondents reported experiencing severe emotional victimisation from siblings, and 56 % reported severe physical victimisation. It is possible that these prevalence rates are impacted by recall bias.

Moreover, sibling bullying was associated with social issues, including increased loneliness (Duncan, 1999), and poorer attachments to friends and parents (Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek, 2018; Kim & Kim, 2019); whether or not these were perpetrators or victims of sibling bullying was not specified. From here – and as previously discussed – it is perhaps predictable that many of those involved in sibling bullying report subsequent involvement in peer bullying (Bowes et al., 2014; Foody et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2019; Morrill et al., 2018). Furthermore, this was not moderated by gender (Kim & Kim, 2019).

A final reported outcome was delinquent behaviours. Whilst Dantchev et al. (2018) noted that victims of sibling bullying were nearly three times more likely to be dependent on nicotine in adulthood, Ingram et al. (2020) and Tucker et al. (2015) found that perpetrators of sibling bullying were at an increased risk of substance abuse, and other delinquent behaviours such as skipping school and carrying a weapon. These remained when SES, gender and age were controlled.

Overall, the identified research almost unanimously agreed that sibling bullying has detrimental outcomes for those involved. This emphasises the importance of addressing this issue properly.

3.6 Practical Recommendations

The existing literature has offered useful insights into what factors may predict sibling bullying and the impact that this can have, but there are still large gaps in our understanding. First and foremost, the disagreements between terminology and measurement tools must be settled; without this, cross-comparison is difficult and reliable conclusions cannot be formed. I suggest that measures should include all forms of bullying behaviours – including cyberbullying – and must account for dynamics that would only exist for siblings, such as sharing living spaces, and the role of parents. Secondly, researchers should continue to try and understand the prevalence rates of sibling bullying. Alongside consistency in measurement tools, the literature would benefit from consistency timeframes of sibling bullying, and a clear definition of bullying provided to participants. This field would benefit from cross-cultural analyses, with attention to sibling bullying across different cultures; tools should pay attention to different family roles and differences in definitions.

Understanding how sibling bullying is perceived is also an important issue: perceptions will influence the normalisation of sibling bullying, which may increase the prevalence, as well as how stakeholders approach intervention programmes. For instance, McDonald and Martinez (2016) and Meyers (2014) looked at how victims of sibling bullying perceived adult responses, and both found reports of minimisation and favouritism. Future research should explore how different stakeholders perceive sibling bullying.

Finally, limited research has endeavoured to implement interventions to reduce sibling bullying: only two studies investigated potential ways to address sibling bullying, both on very young samples (Corralejo et al., 2018; Linares et al., 2015). The previous research has established that this is a realistic concern with serious consequence; attempts must be made to intervene with sibling bullying, as well as prevent future cases.

3.7 Limitations and Implications

This review was particularly limited by the search methods used: first, searches were only conducted in English, and papers in other languages were not included. This may have resulted in the omission of papers that met the inclusion criteria; a cultural bias was found in the results of this review, and it is possible that this is influenced by the language inclusion criteria implemented. Similarly, this review only utilised four databases (PubMed, PsychInfo, Wiley, and Web of Science), which may have limited the papers included. Regardless, the inclusion of grey literature is a considerable strength in this review.

However, this scoping review has provided an original and concise insight into what we currently understand about sibling bullying, and what more is needed. This is an emerging topic within the wider bullying literature and could have implications for peer bullying and better understanding the role of siblings in child development.

3.8 Conclusions

The literature identified in this scoping review offers some useful insights into sibling bullying, and particularly the risk and protective factors surrounding this phenomenon. Nonetheless, these are only the beginning in terms of understanding the bullying that occurs between siblings. The existing literature fails to address several theoretical and methodological concerns, alongside providing limited explanations for why certain children may be vulnerable. In developing successful prevention and interventions, researchers should carefully consider the use of terminology, definitions and measurement tools to assess the prevalence of sibling bullying. Cross-cultural research is imperative in this field, and this should be considered in the context of both biological and non-biological family structures.

Chapter Four

Methodology: Secondary Analysis of the HBSC Dataset

4.1 Chapter Overview

Data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study was utilised for a series of family and relationship-focussed analyses. The results of these will be presented in Chapters Five (family structure), Six (siblings), and Eight (social care). This chapter outlines the datasets used and the rationale behind these, alongside an Exploratory Factor Analysis that was conducted.

4.2 Secondary Data Analysis

The research for this thesis began during the COVID-19 pandemic, and face-to-face data collection was prohibited. Due to this, the use of secondary data was considered an appropriate place to start. Using secondary datasets in psychological research is an extremely useful and important tool and offers several advantages.

Firstly, the data collected in secondary datasets often provide a rich set of data, covering a plethora of topics. Davis-Kean et al. (2015) note that while secondary datasets are constructed for the original author's research purposes, they do typically contain several complementary measures and topics. Alongside this, the measures adopted are commonly the same as those used throughout the literature: in the case of the HBSC survey, this is visible in the measures used for bullying, which outlined the Olweus (1993; 1999) definition of bullying; this will be explained in detail in 'Section 4.6.1: Dependent Variables'. This allows for consistency between studies.

Secondly, secondary datasets boast large and representative samples, providing a substantial amount of statistical power and good external validity. In fact, Jones (2010) notes that studies with small samples and poor external validity are rarely archived and made accessible as secondary data. Thus, the temporal and financial demands that would come from recruiting very large samples are avoided, making secondary data an efficient and affordable option.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these datasets are accessible to researchers, students, and usually the general public. They are easily accessible for replication studies, as well as exploring new research questions and hypotheses.

Nonetheless, there are some considerations to be aware of when using secondary data. For example, although a variety of complementary measures and topics are explored in secondary data (Davis-Kean et al., 2015), finding a dataset that measures the items that you are interested in can be difficult. Jones (2010) states that using secondary data should not be seen as an easy option to skip the process of data collection. She elaborates on this by acknowledging that the process of finding a dataset, understanding it, and then preparing it for analysis is an arduous and time-consuming process in itself.

Due to the large sample sizes in many of the secondary datasets, there may be the issue of too much statistical power. This subsequently can heighten the risk of Type I errors (false positives), which was an issue faced in the current thesis. Although this can be easily addressed through consideration of effect sizes, it can prove problematic when interpreting the results, and caution should be exercised when expressing whether statistical significance is meaningful. Despite these considerations, secondary datasets are an invaluable resource, and one that has been utilised in the current thesis.

4.3 The HBSC Study

The HBSC study is a large-scale, cross-national survey, conducted by researchers in more than 40 participating countries and regions across Europe and North America, and runs in collaboration with the World Health Organization (Currie et al., 2014; Inchley et al., 2018). The study is conducted every four years, with a focus on the health and well-being of adolescents aged 11-, 13-, and 15-years.

Prior to use of the HBSC survey, other potential secondary datasets were considered, including the Millenium Cohort Study (MCS), the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), and the Wirral Child Health and Development Study (WCHADS). Whilst these all boasted longitudinal designs, these resources had a number of issues that made them unsuitable in comparison to the HBSC survey. Firstly, the alternative resources all utilised British-only

samples, meaning that a cross-cultural comparison was not possible; the HBSC survey provided an insight into different countries for comparison. Secondly, none of these alternative resources offered an insight into all the desired variables; to my knowledge, the HBSC survey was the only secondary dataset available that specifically measured bullying alongside family and sibling characteristics, and all types of interpersonal relationships over a multi-year period. Finally, due to accessibility requirements, alternative datasets were not as readily and freely available as the HBSC datasets. Subsequently, the HBSC study was an appropriate and beneficial resource. Further supporting the use of the HBSC survey, this is a common dataset within the bullying research (Bjereld et al., 2020; Biswas et al., 2022; Craig et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

Prior to conducting any analyses, ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Analyses were initially conducted on the 2014 data from Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland), and replicated on the data from Canada. The HBSC study did not separate Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, and thus the wider UK could not be included. Further analyses were conducted on the 2018 British and Canadian datasets.

4.4 Replication

The ability to replicate and reproduce findings is a central part of psychological research. In the early 2010s, a 'replication crisis' was declared in Psychology, whereby researchers were finding that the original results from published papers were not being replicated (Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019). This questioned the reliability and accuracy of the original studies and led to considerable criticism within Psychology. As a result, there was a movement to encourage replications of studies, acting as a reliability check and test for falsification. Despite this push, replications remain somewhat low, with many academics preferring original work over replication studies: Earp and Trafimow (2015) suggest that this is due to low publishing rates for replications, and a stigma of merely 'copying' others. Yet, many academics state that replication is an essential part of Psychology and should be prioritised within the literature (Earp & Trafimow, 2015; Laws, 2016; Plucker & Makel, 2021; Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019).

When using the HBSC data, I utilised two forms of replication: cross-cultural replication, and cross-time replication. Regarding the former, analyses were conducted on the British HBSC datasets, and replicated on the Canadian data. Canada was selected as a replication group due to similar characteristics in the survey questions asked – some questions were optional in the overall HBSC survey – and the Canadian dataset had the closest number of respondents to the British dataset. Many other countries had considerably smaller samples. As a country, Canada also follows similar cultural practices to Britain, and was therefore seen as a good comparison. Consequently, the replications were grounded in the notion of 'operational replication' (Lykken, 1968) or 'direct replication' (Laws, 2016), meaning that the methods and measures were the same across both sets of analyses.

When starting the research for this thesis, the most recent available HBSC dataset was from the 2014 survey. Subsequently, all analyses were conducted using this dataset. However, in October 2022, a newer dataset was released for public use; this was the 2018 dataset and is currently the most recent available dataset. To address this, analyses were replicated on the newer dataset, allowing for a cross-time replication alongside that of the cross-cultural replication.

4.5 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The 2014 and 2018 HBSC surveys included 14 items that surround interpersonal relationships, focussing on family, friends, teachers, and classmates. For the analyses in this thesis, it was necessary to combine the items into concise measures of relationships, rather than having scores across multiple items. To ensure that the items were grouped appropriately, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted on both datasets separately. The same four-factor solution was identified in both.

For the 2014 survey, the four-factor solution explained 80.7% of the total variance, and for the 2018 survey, the solution explained 81.5% of the total variance. The interpreted factors were 'relationships with family members', 'relationships with friends', 'relationships with teachers', and 'relationships with classmates'. The corresponding items for each factor are outlined in Table 4.1. Notably, the 'relationships with family' and 'relationships with friends' factors were not measured in the 2014 Canadian sample for reasons that are unknown.

Table 4.1

Factors and Corresponding Items Identified in Exploratory Factor Analysis for Items Used in the 2014 and 2018 HBSC Analyses

Factor	Items
Factor one *Relationships with family*	- My family tries to help me - I get the emotional help and support I need from my family - I can talk about my problems with my family - My family is willing to help me make decisions
Factor two *Relationships with friends*	- My friends try to help me - I can count on my friends when things go wrong - I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows - I can talk about my problems with my friends
Factor three *Relationships with teachers*	- I feel that my teachers accept me as I am - I feel that my teachers care about me as a person - I feel a lot of trust in my teachers
Factor four *Relationships with classmates*	- The students in my class(es) enjoy being together - Most of the students in my class(es) are kind and helpful - Other students accept me as I am

All items were measured on Likert-scales: items relating to factors one and two were scored on a 7-point scale from 'very strongly disagree' (1) to 'very strongly agree' (7), and items

relating to factors three and four were scored on a 5-point scale from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (5). Subsequently, the items relating to the first two factors were recoded to a 5-point scale; for this, scores of 'very strongly disagree' (1) and 'strongly disagree' (2), and 'very strongly agree' (7) and 'strongly agree' (6) were combined. These items were then reverse coded to match the same scale as items on factor three and four. Due to the ordinal nature of the item scales, median scores were calculated for items in each factor. Low scores indicated greater disagreement with the items, reflecting negatively perceived relationships. These four factors were utilised as mediators in the regression analyses outlined in later chapters.

4.6 Variables

4.6.1 Dependent Variables

Bullying perpetration and victimisation were consistently used as the dependent variable in all analyses on the HBSC datasets. In the 2014 survey, bullying was measured across three questions: one on school bullying perpetration in the previous couple of months, one on school bullying victimisation in the previous couple of months, and one on cyberbullying victimisation without a specified timeframe. Meanwhile, in the 2018 survey, bullying was measured across four questions: one on school bullying perpetration, one on school bullying victimisation, one on cyberbullying perpetration, and one on cyberbullying victimisation. These were all measured from the previous couple of months. Definitions of bullying were provided in the 2014 and 2018 surveys, which was consistent with that of Olweus' (1993; 1999) definition. This was as follows:

> *Here are some questions about bullying. We say a person is being bullied when another person or a group of people, repeatedly say or do unwanted nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It also is bullying when a person is teased in a way he or she does not like or when he or she is left out of things on purpose. The person that bullies has more power than the person being bullied and wants to cause harm to him or her. It is not bullying when two people of about the same strength or power argue or fight.* (Currie et al., 2014; Inchley et al., 2018).

Both surveys adopted a 5-point-Likert scale for all bullying questions: high scores indicated more frequent involvement, whilst scores of '1' indicated no involvement. In the 2018 survey,

scores for traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation were compiled to assess whether participants were bully-victims. For clarity, the items relating to each measure are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Items Relating to the Four Bullying Measures Used in the HBSC 2014 and 2018 Surveys

Measure	Items in HBSC Surveys	Year(s) Included
Traditional Bullying Perpetration	How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?	2014 & 2018
Traditional Bullying Victimisation	How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?	2014 & 2018
Cyberbullying Perpetration	In the past couple of months how often have you taken part in cyberbullying (e.g., send mean instant messages, email or text messages; wall postings; created a website making fun of someone; posted unflattering or inappropriate pictures online without permission or shared them with others)?	2018
Cyberbullying Victimisation	How often have you been bullied in the following ways?: Someone sent mean instant messages, wall postings, emails, and text messages, or created a website that made fun of me. / Someone took unflattering or inappropriate pictures of me without permission and posted them online.	2014 & 2018

4.6.2 Independent Variables

There were three core independent variables, which each relate to a different chapter. In Chapter Five, the independent variable was the participant's family structure. Participants were required to select who lived in their main home, and from here different constellations were formed to identify different family structures. These included living with both biological parents only, living

with a single mother, living with a single father, living with a stepparent in any situation (including same-sex stepfamilies), living in social care, or living in a different family structure. The latter could include multigenerational families, which was measured in previous HBSC surveys, but was not specified in the 2018 survey.

In Chapter Six, the independent variable was the number of siblings that a participant had; this was measured in the 2014 survey only. During the data cleaning stage of this study, outliers were identified in the datasets: responses of over seven siblings were considered as missing data, which was consistent with the family size statistics for this period (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Finally, these were recoded to provide four responses categories for each, using '1', '2', '3', and '4+'. Due to the lower response rates for '4', '5', '6', and '7' siblings, it was appropriate to group these into one single category of '4+'. Sibling gender constellations were also considered: participants who reported at least one brother and sister were categorised as 'mixed', whilst those with only brothers or sisters were categorised as such.

In Chapter Eight, children living in social care were compared to those living with biological family. The independent variable was a dichotomous categorical measure; social care included living in a foster home or in a children's home. Living in kinship care or adopted families was not specified in the HBSC survey.

4.7 Analyses and Effect Sizes

A number of analyses were conducted using the HBSC datasets, and these will be outlined in each corresponding chapter. A variety of inferential tests were used, meaning that different effect sizes were adopted. This ensured that the effect sizes were appropriate for the statistical tests conducted, and as a result, it is necessary to outline the criteria used for interpretation.

For Mann-Whitney U tests, eta-squared (η^2) was the most appropriate measure of effect size: which was interpreted as .009 – .05 is small, .06 – .13 is moderate, and > .14 is large (Richardson, 2011).

For the Kruskal-Wallis H test, epsilon-squared (ε^2) was the most appropriate measure of effect size: this was interpreted using the criterion of .01 – .08 is small, .09 – .24 is moderate, and > .25 is large (Iacobucci et al., 2023). When necessary, pairwise comparisons were

conducted, and Cohen's *d* was calculated: this was interpreted as .20 – .49 is small, .50 - .79 is

moderate, and > .80 is large (Cohen, 1977).

Finally, following the guidance of Nieminen et al. (2022), the standardised regression

coefficient (β) was interpreted as the effect size in regression analyses. This was interpreted

as: .10 - .29 is small, .30 - .49 is moderate, and > .50 is large.

Chapter Five

The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter details the first of three sets of analyses on the HBSC dataset. These analyses looked the effect of different family structures on bullying involvement at school and online, and whether interpersonal relationships mediated this. Analyses were conducted on the 2018 British and Canadian datasets, allowing for a cross-cultural replication; analyses were replicated on the 2014 British and Canadian datasets, which are presented in Appendix C. The findings for this study were presented at the 2021 Workshop on Aggression in Turku, Finland.

5.2 Objectives and Hypotheses

As discussed in 'Chapter Two: A Literature Review of the Family and Bullying', 38.4% of children living in the UK reside in a 'non-traditional family' (Office for National Statistics, 2023), that is, not living in a family headed by a married heterosexual couple. As living in these 'non-traditional' families is a normative arrangement, it is important to understand if these children have different experiences, both in terms of their involvement in bullying and in their interpersonal relationships.

A plethora of literature has proposed that the traditional nuclear family is protective against children's bullying involvement (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013), whilst living with single parents, stepparents, or in foster care can pose a risk for bullying perpetration and victimisation (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Dansey et al., 2019; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Sterzing et al., 2020). Yet, this has received some contradiction in other studies, with some research suggesting that the family structure is not a predictor of bullying involvement (Ding et al., 2020; Ilola et al., 2016; Laursen et al., 2019; Mohaptra et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021). The reasons for these contrasts may be due to methodology differences between the studies. In particular, many of these studies utilised dichotomous measures of family types (Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Ding et al., 2020; Erdogan et al., 2023; Ilola et al., 2016; Laursen et al., 2019; Le et al., 2017; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke &

Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013). In doing so, these authors assume that the 'alternative family structures' that are used as a comparison are all equal. Yet, the experiences of children living with two parents (biological parents or stepparents) will inevitably be different to those living with grandparents only, in foster care, or with a single parent. Likewise, these children may have experienced trauma in the loss of their parent(s), whether this is through death, divorce, separation, or being placed into the child welfare system. Consequently, they will have different backgrounds and needs that cannot be assumed equal to all other family types. As a result, there is a need to consider all family structures in analyses, rather than constructing dichotomous measures. This will be addressed in the measures used in the analyses for this chapter.

A further limitation comes from the lack of effect sizes reported in the existing literature; many of these studies do not indicate the effect sizes, which calls into question whether the statistically significant effects were meaningful (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Le et al., 2017; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke & Skew, 2012a). This is something that needs to be probed further before making any conclusions about the effect of family structure on bullying perpetration and victimisation; these will be reported and considered in this chapter.

Finally, if family structure does predict bullying involvement, then the possible mechanisms for this should be probed. One possible explanation may be in the interpersonal relationships that children form with their family, friends, teachers, and classmates. Although it is established that poor interpersonal relationships correlate with bullying perpetration and victimisation (Family: Chen et al., 2018; Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010; Perren & Hornung, 2005; Friends: Chen et al., 2021; Kowalski et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2021a; Zych et al., 2019; Teachers: Chen et al., 2021; Dietrich & Cohen, 2019; Longobardi et al., 2018; Classmates: Biswas et al., 2010; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010), this has not been considered in the context of family structure. Thus, the objective of the following chapter is to explore the effect of multiple family structures on school and online bullying perpetration and victimisation, with careful consideration of the effect sizes. If family structure is a significant predictor of bullying, the mechanisms behind this will be probed. The hypotheses were as follows:

H1: Family structure would predict bullying involvement. In particular, living with both biological parents would be protective against bullying perpetration and victimisation, whilst living in alternative family structures (single parents, stepparents, or foster care) would be a risk factor.

To understand why these children may be at risk, interpersonal relationships were also considered. For this, it was first necessary to understand if interpersonal relationships predicted bullying involvement, and if these differed between genders and age groups.

H2: Age and gender differences would exist in the perceived interpersonal relationships. Younger children would perceive interpersonal relationships as more negative. Meanwhile, the direction of gender on interpersonal relationships was exploratory.

H3: Interpersonal relationships would impact bullying involvement, with positively perceived relationships being protective against perpetration and victimisation, whilst negatively perceived relationships would act as a risk factor.

Following this, if any family structures were significant predictors of bullying involvement, a regression with parallel mediation would be conducted on these.

H4: There would be a mediating effect of interpersonal relationships and family structure on bullying involvement (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Model to Show the Effect of Family Structure on Bullying Involvement Through Perceived Interpersonal Relationships
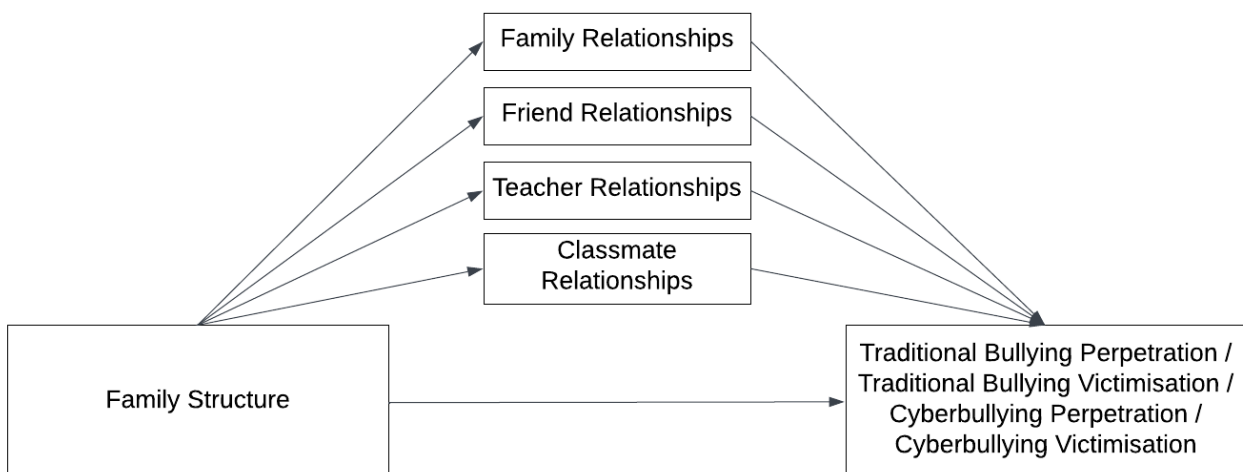
5.3 Methods

5.3.1 Participants

The sample comprised of 20,547 British children and 12,678 Canadian children from the

2018 data collection. Age and gender distributions are outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Age and Gender Distributions of Children Included in Family Structure Analyses From 2018 British

and Canadian Datasets

	Age			
	11-years-old	13-years-old	15-years-old	Total
	Great Britain			
Gender				
Males	3,353	3,741	2,830	9,924
Females	3,597	3,812	2,991	10,400
Total	6,950	7,553	5,821	20,324
	Canada			
Males	1,757	2,315	2,046	6,118
Females	1,759	2,482	2,175	6,416
Total	3,516	4,797	4,221	12,534

Note. 223 cases were missing from the 2018 British data, and 144 cases from the Canadian data.

5.3.2 Variables

As discussed in 'Chapter Four: Secondary Analyses of the HBSC Dataset', the dependent

variables were traditional bullying perpetration, traditional bullying victimisation, cyberbullying

perpetration, and cyberbullying victimisation. The independent variable in this chapter was family

structure (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2

Frequencies of Each Family Structure across the 2018 British and Canadian Samples

	Great Britain	**Canada**
Family Structure		
Both Biological	12,439 (60.5%)	8,326 (65.7%)
Single Mother	4,969 (24.2%)	1,851 (14.6%)
Single Father	555 (2.7%)	352 (2.8%)
Stepparent	501 (2.4%)	907 (7.2%)
Social Care	193 (0.9%)	123 (1.0%)
Other	1,890 (9.2%)	1,119 (8.8%)
Total	20,547	12,678

5.3.3 Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted on the 2018 British dataset and replicated on the 2018 Canadian dataset. Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to determine if children living in various family structures experienced different amounts of bullying involvement at school and online. This non-parametric test was favoured due to the violation of multiple assumptions needed to conduct an unrelated Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): first and foremost, the dependent variables were measured on an ordinal scale, as opposed to the favourable interval or ratio scales (Coolican, 2018). Moreover, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted to assess the homogeneity of variance, and this assumption was violated on all four of the bullying dependent variables in the 2018 British dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $F(5, 19727) = 66.01$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $F(5, 19857) = 42.78$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $F(5, 19770) = 59.69$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $F(5, 19823) = 74.27$, $p < .001$), as well as in the 2018 Canadian dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $F(5, 11879) = 44.07$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $F(5, 11868) = 25.24$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $F(5, 11733) = 34.89$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $F(5, 11749) = 53.98$, $p < .001$). Finally, a series of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests identified significant deviation from normality in the 2018 British dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $D(19096) = .48$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying

victimisation, $D(19096) = .37$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $D(19096) = .52$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $D(19096) = .48$, $p < .001$), and the 2018 Canadian dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $D(11519) = .44$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $D(11519) = .33$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $D(11519) = .52$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $D(11519) = .49$, $p < .001$). Subsequently, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was deemed most appropriate. Epsilon-squared (ε^2) was used to measure the effect sizes of the Kruskal-Wallis tests and was interpreted with .01 - .08 representing a small effect size, .09 – .24 being moderate, and > .25 being large (Iacobucci et al., 2023). Pairwise comparisons were conducted to further assess where significant differences existed, and for this Cohen's d was utilised and interpreted as .20 – .49 is small, .50 - .79 is moderate, and > .80 is large (Cohen, 1977).

From here, interpersonal relationships and bullying involvement were explored, with the anticipation of these being potential mediating factors. To first understand interpersonal relationships, Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to see if gender differences existed in interpersonal relationships, and Kruskal-Wallis tests explored if age differences existed. Like the above, these non-parametric tests were adopted due to the violation of various assumptions needed for conducting parametric tests. Firstly, the four interpersonal relationship measures were scored on an ordinal scale, with parametric tests requiring dependent variables to be scored on interval or ratio scales (Coolican, 2018). Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted to assess the homogeneity of variance, and this was violated on three of the interpersonal relationship dependent variables in the 2018 British dataset (family, $F(2, 19521) = 62.79$, $p < .001$; teachers, $F(2, 20126) = 133.10$, $p < .001$; classmates, $F(2, 20150) = 314.36$, $p < .001$), and on all of the interpersonal relationship variables in the 2018 Canadian dataset (family, $F(2, 11887) = 6.29$, $p < .001$; friends, $F(2, 11850) = 10.46$; $p < .001$; teachers, $F(2, 12244) = 34.57$, $p < .001$; classmates, $F(2, 12234) = 13.89$, $p < .001$). Homogeneity of Variance was identified for relationships with friends in the British dataset ($F(2, 20058) = 2.77$, $p = .063$), but due to the violation of the other assumptions, the non-parametric tests were still considered most appropriate. Finally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests identified significant deviation from normality in the 2018 British dataset (family, $D(19421) = .38$, $p < .001$; friends, $D(19421) = .32$, $p < .001$; teachers, $D(19421) = .25$, $p < .001$; classmates, $D(19421) = .28$, $p < .001$), and the 2018 Canadian dataset (family,

D(11898) = .31, *p* < .001; friends, *D*(11898) = .27, *p* < .001; teachers, *D*(11898) = .25, *p* < .001; classmates, *D*(11898) = .26, *p* < .001). As such, non-parametric tests were most appropriate for testing age and gender differences in interpersonal relationships. For Mann-Whitney U tests, eta-squared (η^2) was used to measure the effect size, and was interpreted as: .009 – .05 is small, .06 – .13 is moderate, and > .14 is large (Richardson, 2011).

From here, multiple regression analyses examined whether interpersonal relationships predicted bullying involvement, with a focus on curvilinearity. The standardised Beta coefficient was utilised for measuring effect size. For clarity, visualisation of the curvilinear relationships only are presented. In these analyses, the standardised regression coefficient (β) was used to indicate the effect size, with .10 - .29 being small, .30 - .49 being moderate, and > .50 being large (Nieminen et al., 2022).

Finally, if any family structures predicted bullying involvement, then it was anticipated that a regression with parallel mediation would be conducted on these.

Replications on the 2014 British and Canadian datasets have been conducted, but for ease of reading are presented in Appendix C. The assumptions for the 2014 British and Canadian datasets were also violated, and are presented in 'Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' to avoid repetition. The findings were consistent in the 2014 datasets, and do not alter the conclusions drawn here.

5.4 Results

Frequencies of bullying perpetration and victimisation are outlined in Table 5.3. Many children reported no involvement in traditional or online bullying, but for who were, this was most frequently as a victim. Descriptive statistics for each variable can be found in Table 5.4, and the correlation matrix in Table 5.5.

Table 5.3

Frequency of Bullying Involvement for 2018 British and Canadian Datasets

	Traditional Bullying		Cyberbullying	
	Great Britain	Canada	Great Britain	Canada
No involvement	16,454 (80.1%)	9,411 (74.2%)	15,695 (76.4%)	9692 (76.4%)
Bully only	274 (1.3%)	307 (2.4%)	591 (2.9%)	251 (2.0%)
Victim only	2,349 (11.4%)	1,758 (13.9%)	2,233 (10.9%)	1,274 (10.0%)
Bully-victim	341 (1.7%)	290 (2.3%	1,087 (5.3%)	464 (3.7%)
Missing	1,129 (5.5%)	912 (7.2%)	941 (4.6%)	997 (7.9%)

5.4.1 Hypothesis One: Family Structure and Bullying Involvement

The descriptive statistics for each bullying variable and family structure are outlined in Table 5.4. When looking at the British dataset, traditional bullying perpetration significantly differed between family structures, χ^2 (5) = 89.84, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .005$. Pairwise comparisons were performed, with a Bonferroni correction for multiple testing. With the exception of 'other', children living with biological parents reported significantly less bullying perpetration than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -4.58, $p < .001$, $d = .07$), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.03 $p = .037$, $d = .11$), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.16, $p < .001$, $d = .14$), and in social care (Z_{kw} = -7.23, $p < .001$, $d = .51$). Notably, the only other group that differed from all other family structures was children living in social care. These children reported significantly more bullying perpetration than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -6.12 $p < .001$, $d = .46$), a single father (Z_{kw} = -4.72, $p < .001$, $d = .43$), or a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.06, $p = .001$, $d = .41$). Effect sizes were small – moderate for those involving children living in social care. Contrastingly, children living in an unspecified family structure reported greater perpetration than those in social care, with a moderate effect size (Z_{kw} = 6.99, $p < .001$, $d = .51$). The same analyses were run on the 2018 Canadian dataset, and again traditional bullying perpetration significantly differed between family structures, χ^2 (5) = 84.08, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .007$. However, the pairwise comparisons identified a slightly different trend: children living in social care did not differ in bullying perpetration to any other family structure, but living with both biological parents was still protective for those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -5.04, $p < .001$, d

= .14), a single father (Z_{kw} = -5.02, p < .001, d = .28), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -5.44, p < .001, d = .19), or another family type (Z_{kw} = -4.73, p < .001, d = .17). Overall, effect sizes were small.

Likewise, traditional bullying victimisation differed between family structures in the British dataset, χ^2 (5) = 126.86, p < .001, ε^2 = .006. Pairwise comparisons were performed, with a Bonferroni correction for multiple testing, and similar effects were observed for traditional bullying victimisation. Children living with both biological parents reported significantly less bullying victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -7.88, p < .001, d = .14), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.50, p = .007, d = .19), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.16, p < .001, d = .15), or in social care (Z_{kw} = -7.41, p < .001, d = .58). Effect sizes were small for all groups, except for a moderate effect size between those living with both biological parents and those living in social care. Moreover, children living in social care reported more victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -5.57, p < .001, d = .45), a single father (Z_{kw} = -4.67, p < .001, d = .39), or a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.24, p < .001, d = .45). Effect sizes were small – moderate. Meanwhile, children living in an unspecified family structure reported greater victimisation than those in social care, with a moderate effect size (Z_{kw} = 6.26, p < .001, d = .51). Analyses were run on the Canadian dataset, and the same results were found, χ^2 (5) = 149.39, p < .001, ε^2 = .01. The pairwise comparisons identified that children living with both biological parents reported less victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -6.59, p < .001, d = .17), a single father (Z_{kw} = -5.40, p < .001, d = .33), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -9.36, p < .001, d = .34), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -5.49, p < .001, d = .16). Children in social care did not significantly differ in their traditional victimisation, but children living with stepparents reported greater victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -3.88, p = .002, d = .18), in social care (Z_{kw} = 2.99, p = .04, d = .22), or in an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = 3.40, p = .01, d = .19).

Cyberbullying perpetration differed between family structures in the British dataset, χ^2 (5) = 66.78, p < .001, ε^2 = .003. In particular, children living in social care reported significantly more cyberbullying perpetration than those living with both biological parents (Z_{kw} = -5.70, p < .001, d = .41), a single mother (Z_{kw} = -4.66, p < .001, d = .36), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.76, p = .003, d = .34), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -3.35, p = .012, d = .36), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = 5.98, p < .001, d = .41). Effect sizes were small. Interestingly, children living with single mothers reported

greater cyberbullying perpetration than those living with both biological parents (Z_{kw} = -4.44, p < .001, d = .08), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = 4.19, p < .001, d = .08), whilst those living with a stepparent reported more perpetration than those living with both biological parents (Z_{kw} = -3.06, p = .034, d = .08), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -3.06, p = .006, d = .08). The effect sizes for these were negligible. These difference between family structure and cyberbullying perpetration were replicated in the Canadian dataset, χ^2 (5) = 50.84, p < .001, ε^2 = .004. However, differences only existed for those living with both biological parents: these children reported significantly less cyberbullying perpetration than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -4.73, p < .001, d = .13), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.18, p = .02, d = .14), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.30, p < .001, d = .14), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -3.59, p = .005, d = .09). Effect sizes were negligible. Likewise, children living in social care did not differ in their cyberbullying perpetration.

Finally, cyberbullying victimisation also differed between family structures in the British dataset, χ^2 (5) = 88.97, p < .001, ε^2 = .004. Children living with both biological parents reported less cyberbullying victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -7.20, p < .001, d = .10), or stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.46, p < .001, d = .16) only, with small effect sizes. Meanwhile, living in an unspecified family structure led to less cyberbullying victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = 3.71, p = .003, d = .15) or stepparent (Z_{kw} = 3.62, p = .005, d = .09), but again effect sizes were negligible. Consistent with the other forms of bullying, children living in social care were more at risk of cyberbullying victimisation than those living with both biological parents (Z_{kw} = -5.11, p < .001, d = .46), a single mother (Z_{kw} = -3.46, p = .008, d = .38), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.39, p = .01, d = .39), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = 4.65, p < .001, d = .45). Effect sizes were small. When tested on the Canadian dataset, these differences remained, χ^2 (5) = 81.79, p < .001, ε^2 = .007. Children living with both biological parents reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -6.15, p < .001, d = .16), a single father (Z_{kw} = -4.71, p < .001, d = .25), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -5.51, p < .001, d = .19), or in an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -3.88, p = .002, d = .15), but effect sizes were small.

Table 5.4

Descriptive Statistics for Each Family Type and Bullying Measure in the British and Canadian 2018 Datasets

	Traditional Bullying Perpetration			Traditional Bullying Victimisation			Cyberbullying Perpetration			Cyberbullying Victimisation		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Family Structure						*Great Britain*						
Both Biological	1.20	.58	11948	1.57	1.02	12039	1.11	.46	11988	1.23	.65	12027
Single Mother	1.24	.64	4741	1.72	1.15	4769	1.15	.53	4751	1.30	.73	4757
Single Father	1.27	.67	517	1.78	1.23	525	1.16	.54	520	1.29	.73	522
Stepparent	1.29	.66	495	1.73	1.09	494	1.15	.49	492	1.34	.74	490
Foster Care	1.70	1.27	178	2.33	1.54	175	1.45	1.07	173	1.71	1.33	174
Other	1.20	.58	1854	1.65	1.08	1861	1.11	.47	1852	1.24	.63	1859
						Canada						
Both Biological	1.28	.64	7827	1.66	1.05	7825	1.07	.36	7742	1.19	.58	7748
Single Mother	1.38	.75	1724	1.85	1.17	1722	1.13	.53	1698	1.30	.75	1706
Single Father	1.49	.87	331	2.05	1.32	325	1.13	.46	317	1.37	.84	321
Stepparent	1.42	.79	850	2.07	1.32	848	1.13	.49	836	1.32	.75	836
Foster Care	1.46	.80	113	1.79	1.27	109	1.14	.48	109	1.22	.63	109
Other	1.40	.78	1050	1.84	1.15	1045	1.11	.46	1037	1.29	.75	1035

Table 5.5

Correlation Matrix for all Variables Included in the HBSC Analyses for British and Canadian 2018 Datasets

	Gender	Age	Traditional Bullying Perpetration	Traditional Bullying Victimisation	Cyberbullying Perpetration	Cyberbullying Victimisation	Family Structure	Family Relationships	Friend Relationships	Teacher Relationships	Student Relationships
						Great Britain					
Gender	1										
Age	-.004	1									
Traditional Bullying Perpetration	-.090**	.058**	1								
Traditional Bullying Victimisation	.023**	-.013	.262**	1							
Cyberbullying Perpetration	-.056**	.065**	.382**	.186**	1						
Cyberbullying Victimisation	.054**	.016*	.227**	.449**	.431**	1					
Family Structure	.018*	-.029**	.023**	.043**	.014	.024**	1				

Family Relationships	-.049**	-.103**	-.080**	-.079**	-.083**	-.089**	-.042**	1		
Friend Relationships	.061**	-.052**	-.063**	-.097**	-.059**	-.077**	-.041**	.472**	1	
Teacher Relationships	-.032**	-.279**	-.121**	-.122**	-.104**	-.132**	.020**	.147**	.102**	1
Student Relationships	-.090**	-.231**	-.110**	-.297**	-.080**	-.184**	-.021**	.109**	.114**	.405**	1

Canada

Gender	1					
Age	.011	1				
Traditional Bullying Perpetration	-.078**	.020*	1			
Traditional Bullying Victimisation	.027**	-.060**	.275**	1		
Cyberbullying Perpetration	-.050**	.038**	.284**	.135**	1	
Cyberbullying Victimisation	.047**	.004	.172**	.379**	.368**	1

Family Structure	.023**	.015	.070**	.083**	.044**	.061**	1				
Family Relationships	-.058**	-.079**	-.107**	-.145**	-.102**	-.125**	-.086**	1			
Friend Relationships	.092**	-.004	-.089**	-.153**	-.060**	-.084**	-.052**	.464**	1		
Teacher Relationships	-.013	-.178**	-.146**	-.162**	-.097**	-.120**	-.060**	.213**	.161**	1	
Student Relationships	-.088**	-.080**	-.119**	-.311**	-.057**	-.163**	-.074**	.183**	.229**	.374**	1

5.4.2 Hypothesis Two: Age and Gender on Interpersonal Relationships

Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to assess if gender impacted interpersonal relationships with family, friends, teachers, and classmates. In the British dataset, gender differences existed for all relationships, but effect sizes were negligible (Family: $Z = -6.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .002$; Friends: $Z = 12.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .007$; Teachers: $Z = -5.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .001$; Classmates: $Z = -13.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .008$). Girls reported poorer relationships with their families, teachers, and classmates compared to their male counterparts, but more positive relationships with their friends. Similar results were found in the Canadian dataset, except there were no gender differences in relationships with teachers (Teachers: $p = .07$; Family: $Z = -6.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .003$; Friends: $Z = 12.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$; Classmates: $Z = -10.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .008$). Again, girls reported poorer relationships with their families and classmates compared to boys, but more positive relationships with friends.

Similarly, Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to explore age differences in interpersonal relationships. In the British dataset, there were statistically significant differences between the age groups and bullying involvement, but effect sizes were negligible to small (Family: $\chi^2 (2) = 392.15$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .06$; Friends: $\chi^2 (2) = 118.33$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .11$; Teachers: $\chi^2 (2) = 2167.12$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .006$; Classmates: $\chi^2 (2) = 1275.12$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .02$). The perceived quality of interpersonal relationships reduced with age, with older children reporting poorer relationships than their younger counterparts. This was also found in the Canadian dataset, but no age differences were found for relationships with friends (Friends: $p = .16$; Family: $\chi^2 (2) = 119.75$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .008$; Teachers: $\chi^2 (2) = 434.15$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 < .001$; Classmates: $\chi^2 (2) = 92.68$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .01$).

5.4.3 Hypothesis Three: Interpersonal Relationships and Bullying Involvement

From visual inspection of the mean bullying scores relative to each interpersonal relationship (Table 5.6), a curvilinear effect can be seen for relationships with family and friends. Moreover, these relationships correlated with bullying involvement at school and online (Table 5.5). Subsequently, the effect of interpersonal relationships on bullying involvement was first studied separately to family structure.

Regression analyses were conducted on each relationship type individually, with each model including the squared term for the relationship, which tested for curvilinear effects (for a similar procedure, see Giorgi et al., 2015).

Table 5.6

Descriptive Statistics for Interpersonal Relationships and Bullying Involvement in the British and Canadian 2018 Datasets

	Traditional Bullying Perpetration			Traditional Bullying Victimisation			Cyberbullying Perpetration			Cyberbullying Victimisation		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
						Great Britain						
Family Relationships												
1	1.26	.69	2894	1.68	1.13	2903	1.17	.60	2896	1.31	.78	2893
2	1.37	.78	933	1.94	1.28	934	1.25	.67	929	1.47	.89	931
3	1.33	.72	1401	1.87	1.22	1397	1.20	.62	1402	1.39	.82	1404
4	1.28	.67	1858	1.78	1.16	1861	1.16	.54	1866	1.33	.75	1866
5	1.17	.53	11959	1.54	.99	12063	1.09	.41	12009	1.20	.59	12050
Friend Relationships												
1	1.26	.68	3127	1.72	1.20	3142	1.17	.59	3136	1.32	.80	3145
2	1.31	.69	1298	1.94	1.23	1303	1.19	.56	1291	1.41	.86	1304
3	1.27	.65	1846	1.78	1.13	1847	1.16	.57	1853	1.30	.73	1859
4	1.26	.65	2602	1.69	1.09	2622	1.13	.49	2618	1.26	.66	2621
5	1.18	.55	10672	1.52	1.98	10762	1.10	.43	10704	1.21	.61	10733

Teacher Relationships

1	1.52	1.09	658	2.11	1.46	667	1.36	.96	658	1.60	1.14	654
2	1.35	.79	1453	1.94	1.29	1465	1.23	.68	1450	1.47	.95	1449
3	1.25	.62	4679	1.69	1.09	4687	1.13	.48	4691	1.29	.70	4715
4	1.19	.55	7913	1.56	.99	7972	1.11	.43	7953	1.21	.59	7961
5	1.15	.51	4901	1.53	1.01	4941	1.08	.40	4902	1.19	.58	4926

Class Relationships

1	1.57	1.13	544	2.92	1.61	541	1.35	.95	537	1.78	1.22	539
2	1.33	.79	1587	2.33	1.42	1606	1.20	.65	1589	1.52	.94	1595
3	1.25	.62	5279	1.77	1.12	5288	1.14	.49	5285	1.31	.73	5298
4	1.18	.53	9576	1.43	.86	9656	1.10	.41	9620	1.18	.56	9639
5	1.17	.58	2632	1.38	.88	2660	1.11	.48	2634	1.15	.54	2643

Canada

Family Relationships

1	1.41	.79	1466	1.97	1.30	1453	1.14	.55	1428	1.35	.81	1428
2	1.49	.84	876	2.07	1.28	876	1.18	.60	86	1.36	.77	870
3	1.42	.77	1451	1.90	1.18	1451	1.15	.53	1431	1.32	.76	1437
4	1.36	.67	1701	1.81	1.10	1700	1.08	.36	1685	1.26	.66	1684
5	1.25	.61	6282	1.59	.99	6288	1.05	.31	6231	1.15	.53	6234

Friend Relationships

1	1.42	.83	1541	2.06	1.36	1526	1.14	.55	1498	1.34	.85	1504
2	1.42	.76	1057	1.97	1.18	1056	1.11	.45	1039	1.29	.71	1040
3	1.39	.75	1600	1.85	1.14	1602	1.10	.45	1576	1.25	.67	1577
4	1.29	.63	2024	1.70	1.06	2025	1.08	.39	2015	1.20	.58	2012
5	1.27	.63	5531	1.60	.99	5537	1.07	.35	5490	1.19	.58	5498

Teacher Relationships

1	1.74	1.12	248	2.33	1.56	244	1.32	.91	239	1.42	.97	238
2	1.52	.86	666	2.14	1.34	663	1.12	.41	653	1.39	.83	655
3	1.41	.76	2539	1.92	1.22	2537	1.13	.49	2516	1.32	.77	2517
4	1.30	.66	5038	1.70	1.05	5038	1.09	.39	4921	1.21	.60	4985
5	1.22	.57	3349	1.56	.97	3348	1.04	.29	3309	1.14	.51	3317

Class Relationships

1	1.53	.97	409	2.87	1.63	404	1.17	.65	392	1.59	1.13	392
2	1.49	.88	1013	2.39	1.39	1021	1.12	.47	1000	1.41	.87	1005
3	1.36	.71	3342	1.92	1.17	3334	1.11	.45	3289	1.28	.71	3293
4	1.29	.63	5187	1.55	.91	5195	1.08	.36	5189	1.17	.53	5164
5	1.21	.56	1879	1.38	.80	1869	1.06	.36	1847	1.11	.44	1848

5.4.3.1 Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, the linear model of family relationships on traditional bullying perpetration explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 18850) = 114.72, p < .001]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [ΔR^2 = .004, F (1, 18849) = 73.24, p < .001]; family relationships were positively associated with traditional bullying perpetration [β = .36, t = 6.93, p < .001]. Bullying perpetration declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived family relationships, who appeared to be protected from perpetration; the effect size was moderate. This is visualised in Figure 5.2. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the quadratic model providing a statistically significantly increase in the explained variance [Linear: R^2 = .02, F (3, 11643) = 74.74, p < .001; Quadratic: ΔR^2 = .003, F (1, 11642) = 35.84, p < .001; β = .22, t = 3.92, p < .001], and the same trend being noted with a small effect size. This is visualised in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.2

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying

Perpetration in British Adolescents

Figure 5.3

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying

Perpetration in Canadian Adolescents

5.4.3.2 Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying Victimisation. In the British

dataset, the linear model of family relationships on traditional bullying victimisation explained a

statistically significant proportion of the variance [$R^2 = .007$, $F(3, 18956) = 45.37$, $p < .001$]. When

adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the

variance [$\Delta R^2 = .009$, $F(1, 18955) = 177.95$, $p < .001$]; family relationships were positively

associated with traditional bullying victimisation [$\beta = .60$, $t = 11.64$, $p < .001$], with a large effect

size. As before, victimisation declined as relationships became more positive, apart from those with

the poorest perceived family relationships, who reported lower victimisation. This is visualised in

Figure 5.4. This was replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the quadratic model significantly

increasing the explained variance [Linear: $R^2 = .03$, $F(3, 11636) = 106.36$, $p < .001$; Quadratic:

$\Delta R^2 = .003$, $F(1, 111635) = 41.18$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .21$, $t = 3.67$, $p < .001$], and the same trend being

noted but a small effect size. This is visualised in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.4

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying

Victimisation in British Adolescents

Figure 5.5

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Traditional Bullying

Victimisation in Canadian Adolescents
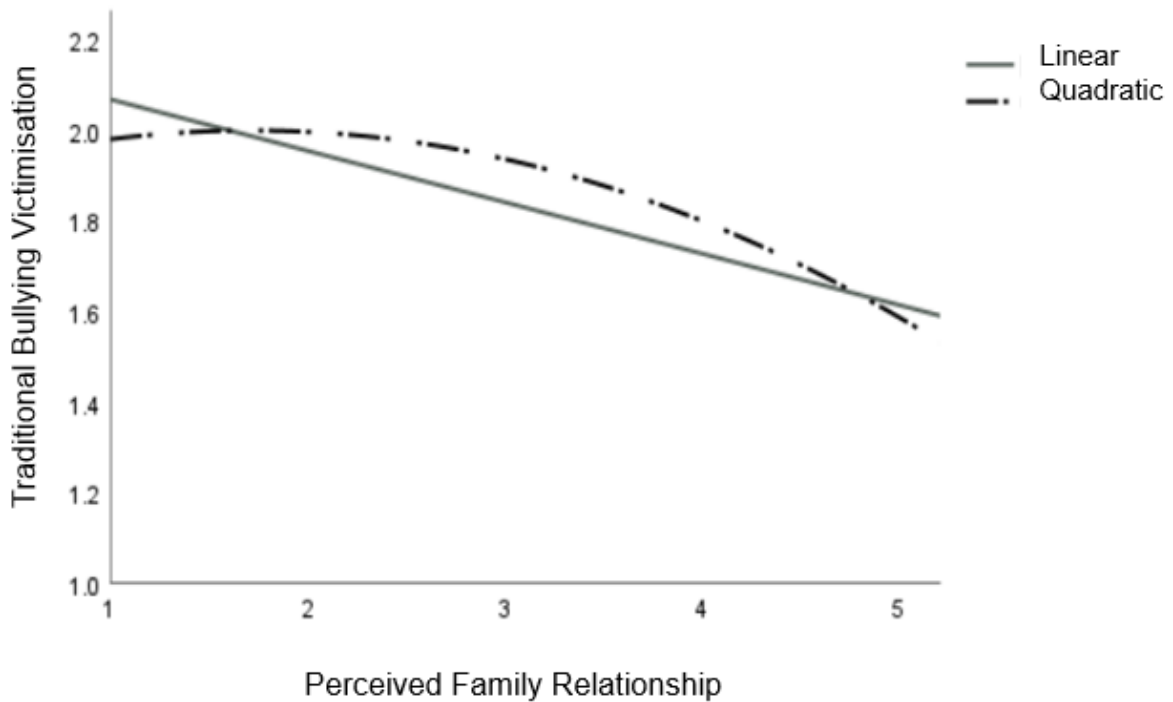
5.4.3.3 Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, the linear model of family relationships on cyberbullying perpetration explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .01, $F(3, 18901)$ = 89.52, $p < .001$]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [ΔR^2 = .002, $F(1, 18900)$ = 45.01, $p < .001$]; family relationships were positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration [β = .26, t = 5.09, $p < .001$]. Cyberbullying perpetration declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived family relationships, who appeared to be protected from perpetration. This is visualised in Figure 5.6. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the quadratic model significantly increasing the explained variance [Linear: R^2 = .01, $F(3, 11512)$ = 55.78, $p < .001$; Quadratic: ΔR^2 = .001, $F(1, 11511)$ = 14.46, $p < .001$; β = .11, t = 1.95, p = .05], and the same trend being noted. This is visualised in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.6

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration in British Adolescents
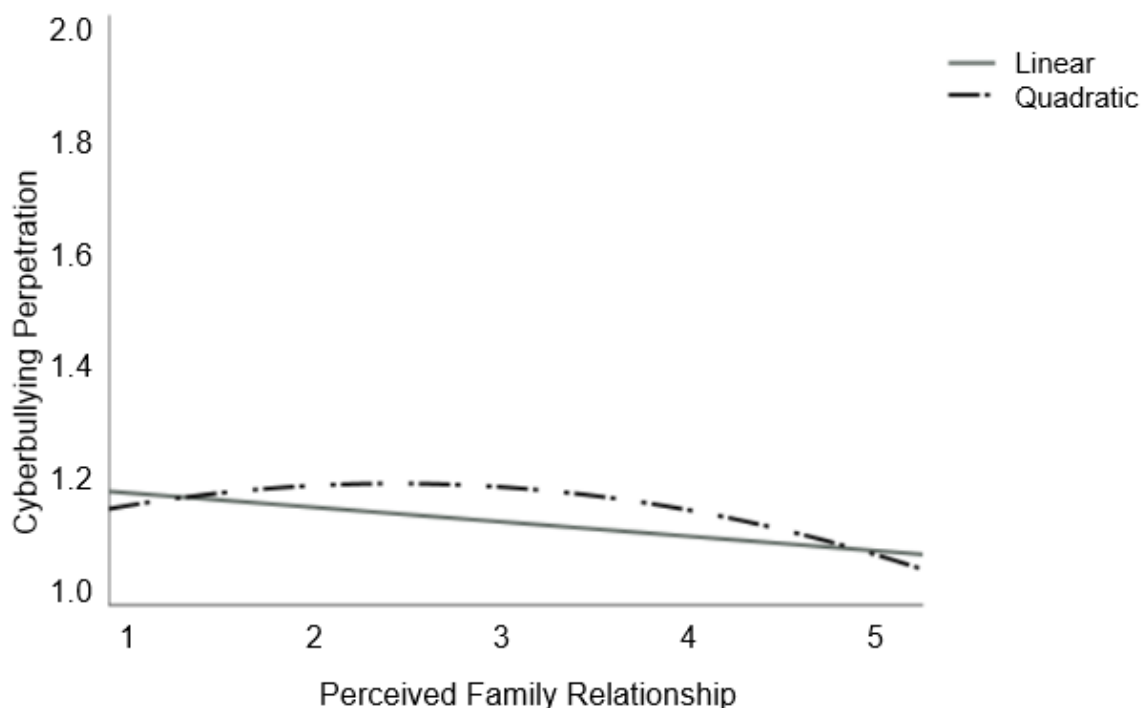
Figure 5.7

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration

in Canadian Adolescents
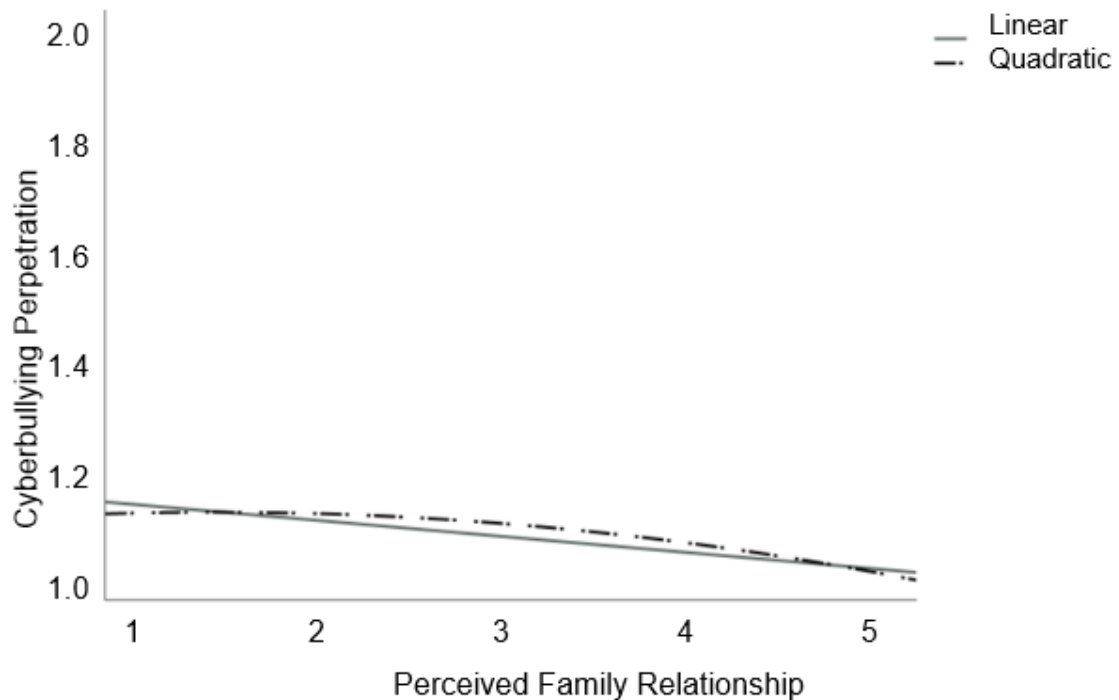
5.4.3.4 Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, the linear model of family relationships on cyberbullying victimisation explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [$R^2 = .01$, $F(3, 18943) = 66.50$, $p < .001$]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [$\Delta R^2 = .006$, $F(1, 18942) = 107.99$, $p < .001$]; family relationships were positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration [$\beta = .45$, $t = 8.61$, $p < .001$]. Cyberbullying victimisation declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived family relationships, who reported lower victimisation online. This is visualised in Figure 5.8. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the quadratic model significantly increasing the explained variance [Linear: $R^2 = .02$, $F(3, 11523) = 66.83$, $p < .001$; Quadratic: $\Delta R^2 = .002$, $F(1, 11522) = 23.04$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .15$, $t = 2.59$, $p = .01$], and the same trend being noted. This is visualised in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.8

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation

in British Adolescents
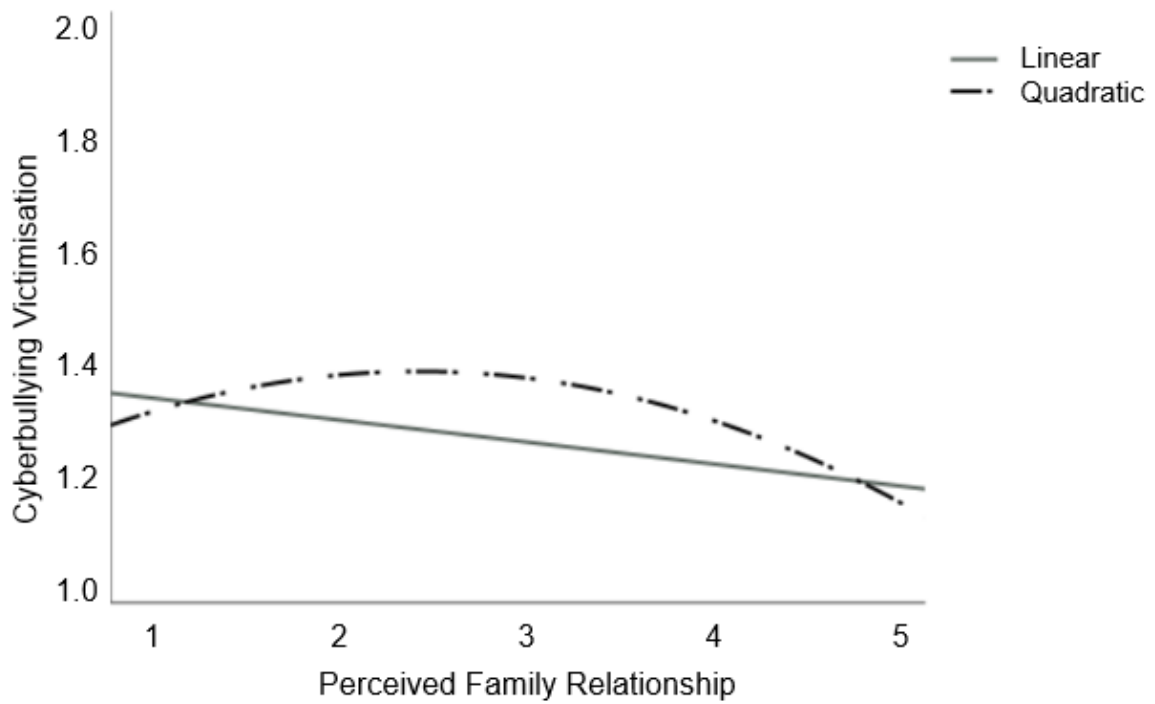
Figure 5.9

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Family Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation

in Canadian Adolescents
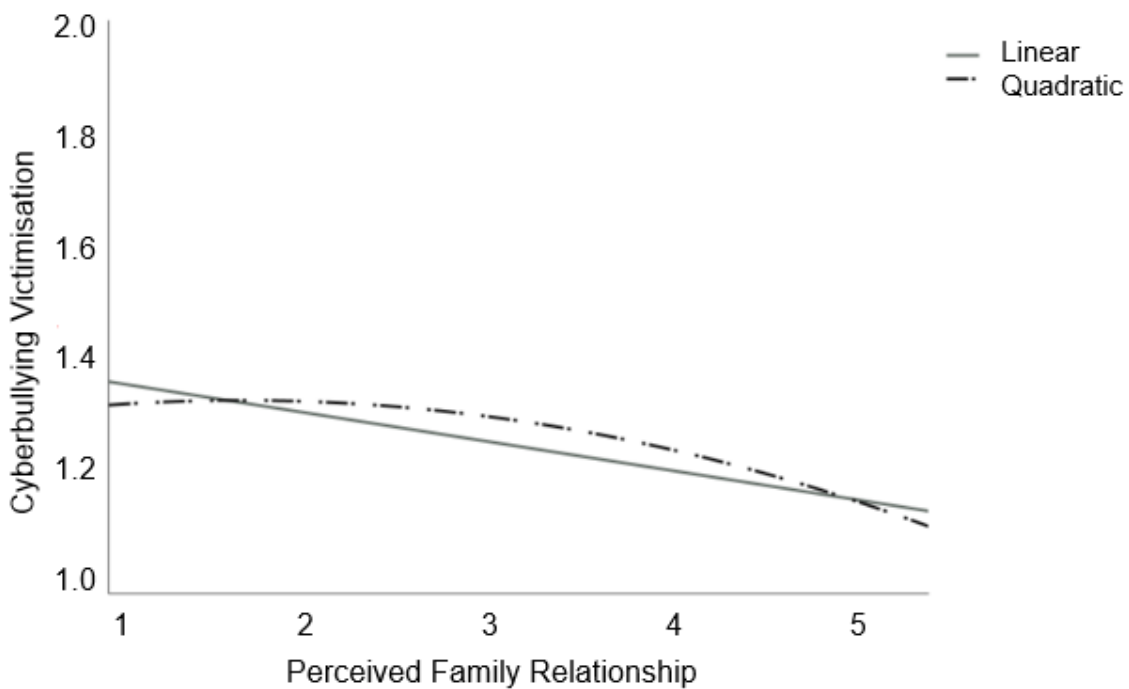
5.4.3.5 Friend Relationships and Traditional Bullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, the linear model of relationships with friends on traditional bullying perpetration explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .015, F (3, 19345) = 98.51, p < .001]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [ΔR^2 = .001, F (1, 19344) = 13.54, p < .001]; relationships with friends were positively associated with bullying perpetration [β = .12, t = 2.47, p = .01], but the effect size was small. Nonetheless, this small effect is visualised in Figure 5.10. Bullying perpetration declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived friendships, who reported lower perpetration. These findings were not replicated in the Canadian dataset, where a there was a statistically significant linear relationship [R^2 = .01, F (3, 11620) = 52.66, p < .001], but the quadratic model was not statistically significant (p = .79). As relationships with friends became more positive, traditional perpetration declined [β = -.08, t = -8.99, p < .001].

Figure 5.10

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Friend Relationships and Traditional Bullying Perpetration in British Adolescents
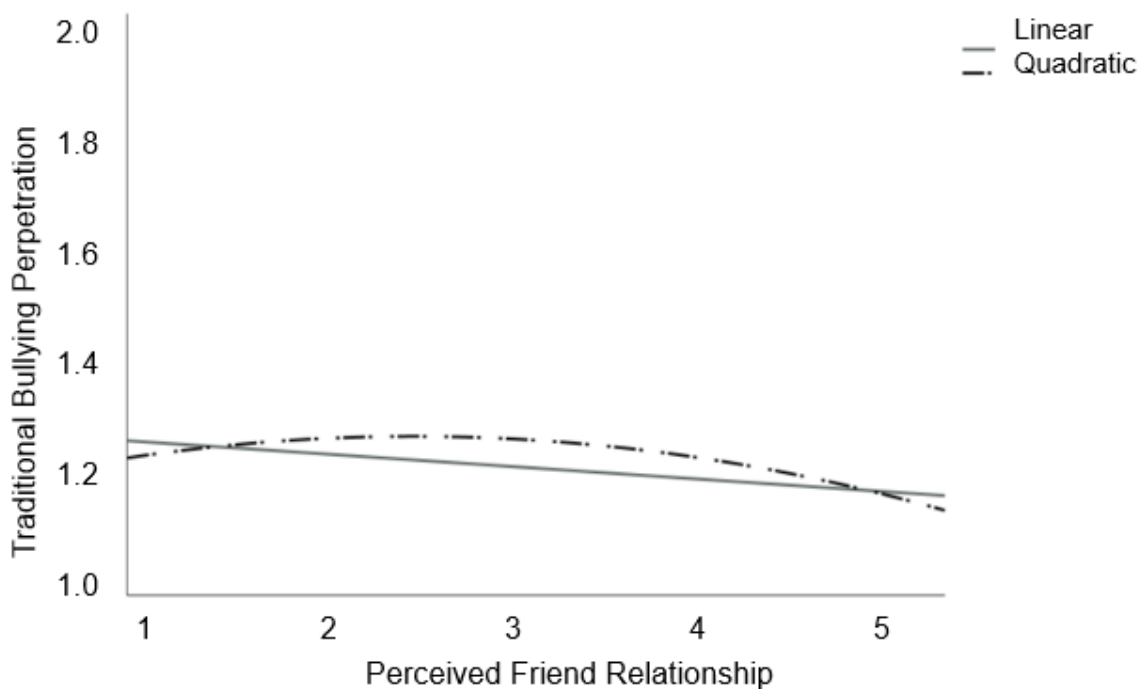
5.4.3.6 Friend Relationships and Traditional Bullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, the linear model of relationships with friends on traditional bullying victimisation explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .01, F (3, 19469) = 68.16, p < .001]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [ΔR^2 = .005, F (1, 19468) = 89.12, p < .001]; relationships with friends were positively associated with bullying victimisation [β = .34, t = 7.21, p < .001]. As with the previous examples, victimisation declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived friendships, who reported lower victimisation. This is visualised in Figure 5.11. These findings were not replicated in the Canadian dataset, where there was a statistically significant linear relationship [R^2 = .03, F (3, 11615) = 115.76, p < .001], but the quadratic model was not statistically significant (p = .39). As relationships with friends became more positive, traditional perpetration declined [β = -.16, t = -17.08, p < .001].

Figure 5.11

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Friend Relationships and Traditional Bullying Victimisation in British Adolescents
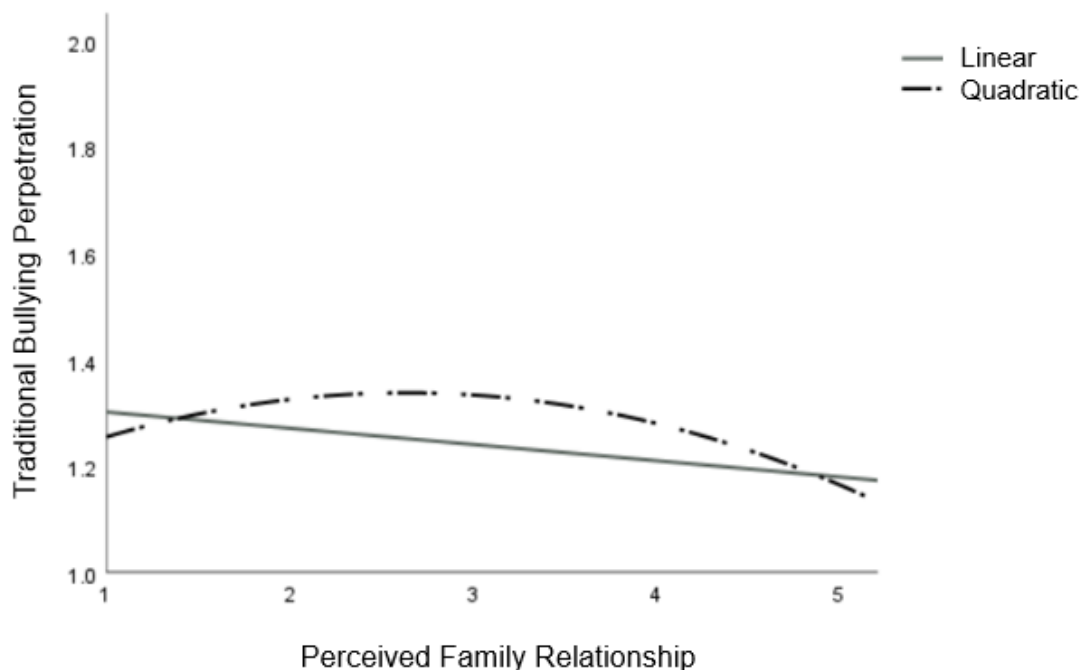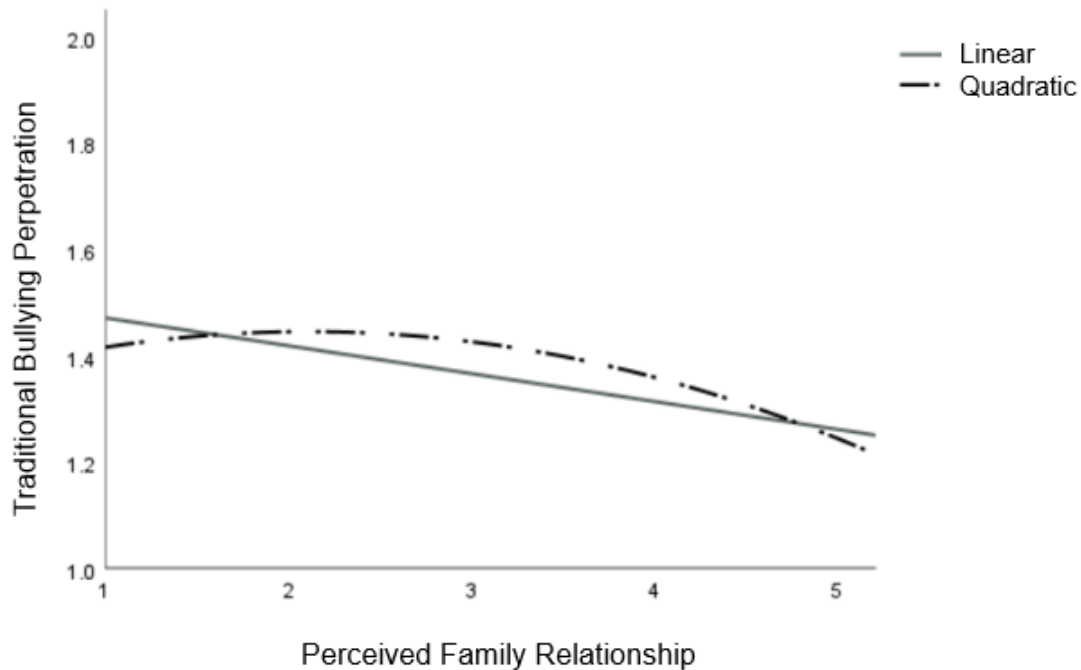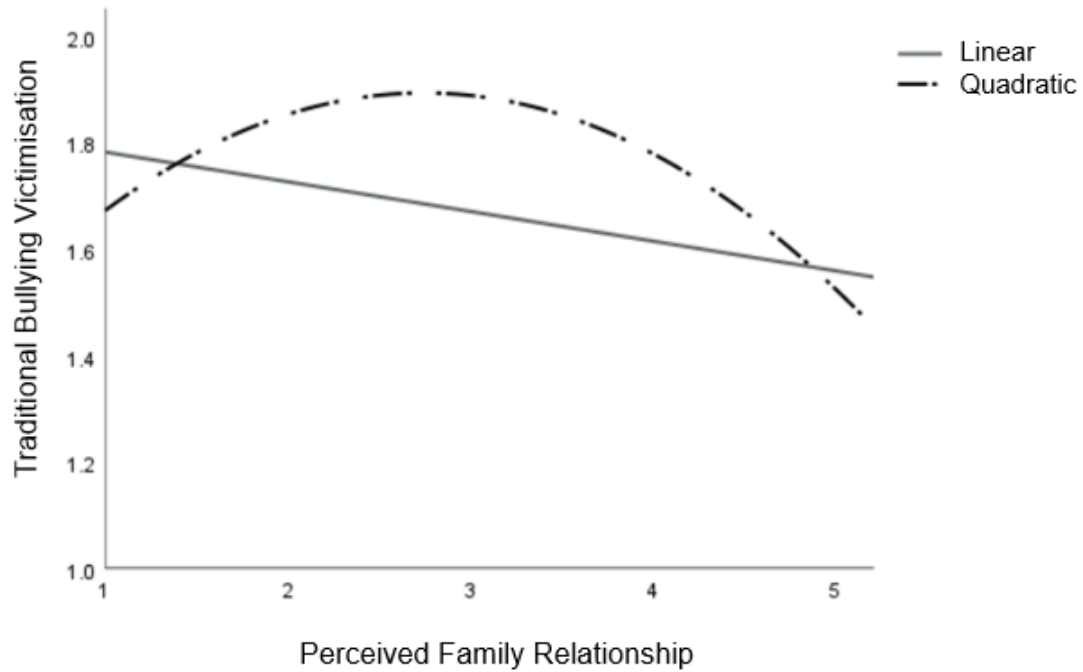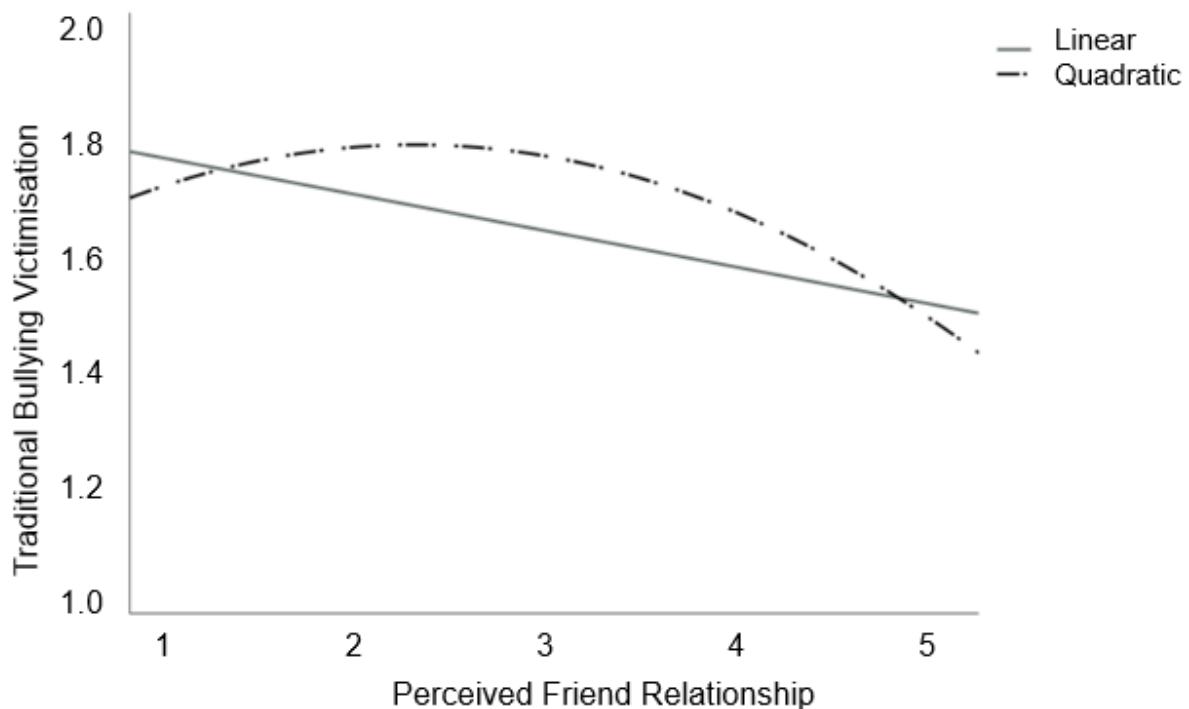
5.4.3.7 Friend Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, the linear model of relationships with friends on cyberbullying perpetration explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .01, F (3, 19396) = 69.87, p < .001]. Despite a slight trend of curvilinearity in the mean scores (Table 5.6), the quadratic model was not statistically significant (p = .25), suggesting that the linear model is the best fit. Relationships with friends were negatively associated with bullying perpetration [β = -.05, t = -7.53, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .007, F (3, 11490) = 26.63, p < .001], and again the quadratic model was not statistically significant (p = .19). As relationships with friends became more positive, traditional perpetration declined [β = -.06, t = 6.01, p < .001].

5.4.3.8 Friend Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, the linear model of relationships with friends on cyberbullying victimisation explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .009, F (3, 19456) = 61.92, p < .001]. However, when adding in the quadratic term for Model 2, there was a statistically significant increase in the variance [$\triangle R^2$ = .001, F (1, 19455) = 17.02, p < .001]; relationships with friends were positively associated with bullying victimisation [β = .11, t = 2.38, p = .02]. Victimisation declined as relationships became more positive, except for children with the poorest perceived friendships, who reported lower victimisation. This small effect is visualised in Figure 5.12. These findings were not replicated in the Canadian dataset, where there was a statistically significant linear relationship [R^2 = .01, F (3, 11502) = 40.19, p < .001], but the quadratic model was not statistically significant (p = .58). As relationships with friends became more positive, traditional perpetration declined [β = -.09, t = -9.57, p < .001].

Figure 5.12

Curvilinear Relationship Between Perceived Friend Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation

in British Adolescents
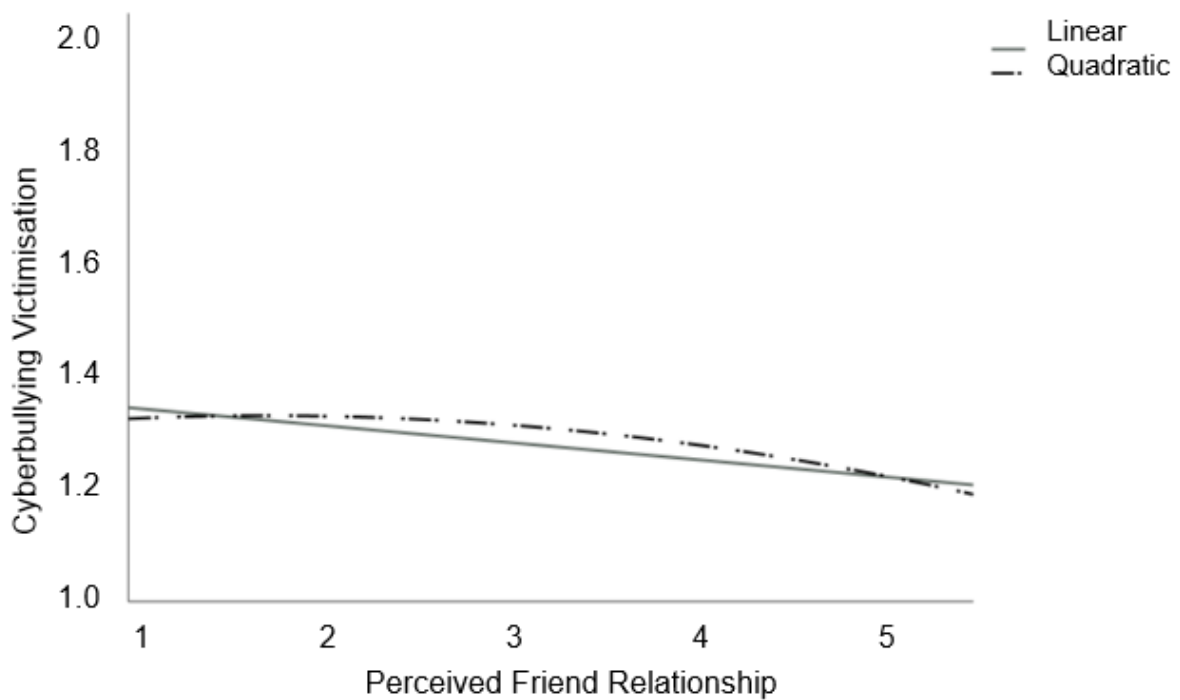
5.4.3.9 Teacher Relationships and Traditional Bullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with teachers on traditional bullying perpetration, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, $F(3, 19398) = 158.29$, $p < .001$]. Relationships with teachers were negatively associated with bullying perpetration [$\beta = -.12$, $t = -15.57$, $p < .001$]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .03, $F(3, 11704) = 112.32$, $p < .001$], with a negative association [$\beta = -.15$, $t = -16.12$, $p < .001$]. As relationships with teachers became more positive, traditional perpetration declined.

5.4.3.10 Teacher Relationships and Traditional Bullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with teachers on traditional bullying victimisation, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, $F(3, 19520) = 115.57$, $p < .001$]. Relationships with teachers were negatively associated

with victimisation [β = -.14, t = -18.28, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .04, F (3, 11695) = 141.95, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.18, t = -19.31, p < .001]. As relationships with teachers became more positive, victimisation declined.

5.4.3.11 Teacher Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with teachers on cyberbullying perpetration, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 19445) = 102.75, p < .001]. Relationships with teachers were negatively associated with online perpetration [β = -.09, t = -12.81, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .01, F (3, 11565) = 48.28, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.09, t = -10.03, p < .001]. As relationships with teachers became more positive, online perpetration declined.

5.4.3.12 Teacher Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with teachers on cyberbullying victimisation, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 19497) = 132.90, p < .001]. Relationships with teachers were negatively associated with online victimisation [β = -.14, t = -18.28, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 11578) = 65.01, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.12, t = -12.94, p < .001]. As relationships with teachers became more positive, online victimisation declined.

5.4.3.13 Classmate Relationships and Traditional Bullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with classmates on traditional bullying perpetration, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 19411) = 151.70, p < .001]. Relationships with classmates were negatively associated with bullying perpetration [β = -.11, t = -14.99, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the

variance [R^2 = .02, F (3, 11695) = 88.87, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.13, t = -13.80, p < .001]. As relationships with classmates became more positive, traditional perpetration declined.

5.4.3.14 Classmate Relationships and Traditional Bullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with classmates on traditional bullying victimisation, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .10, F (3, 19539) = 680.76, p < .001]. Relationships with classmates were negatively associated with victimisation [β = -.32, t = -45.04, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .10, F (3, 11689) = 453.08, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.32, t = -36.07, p < .001]. As relationships with classmates became more positive, victimisation declined.

5.4.3.15 Classmate Relationships and Cyberbullying Perpetration. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with classmates on cyberbullying perpetration, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .01, F (3, 19455) = 84.57, p < .001]. Relationships with classmates were negatively associated with online perpetration [β = -.08, t = -10.43, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .007, F (3, 11555) = 26.79, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.06, t = -6.07, p < .001]. As relationships with classmates became more positive, online perpetration declined.

5.4.3.16 Classmate Relationships and Cyberbullying Victimisation. In the British dataset, there was a linear effect of relationships with classmates on cyberbullying victimisation, and the linear regression model explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance [R^2 = .04, F (3, 19505) = 243.52, p < .001]. Relationships with classmates were negatively associated with online victimisation [β = -.19, t = -25.76, p < .001]. These findings were replicated in the Canadian dataset, with the linear model explaining a statistically significant amount of the variance [R^2 = .03, F (3, 11569) = 108.60, p < .001], with a negative association [β = -.16, t = -17.22, p < .001]. As relationships with classmates became more positive, online victimisation declined.

5.4.4 Hypothesis Four: Mediating Effect of Interpersonal Relationships

Although a statistically significant effect of living with both biological parents and reduced bullying involvement was found, the effect sizes were extremely small. There were no other family structures that predicted bullying involvement, and thus it was not appropriate to conduct a regression with parallel mediation on this. However, this is with the exception of living in social care; a mediated regression was conducted for this family structure, which is presented in 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement'.

5.5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to address the limitations in the existing literature, namely through the inclusion of multiple family structures together, through looking at traditional and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation, through careful consideration of effect sizes, and through the inclusion of interpersonal relationships.

5.5.1 Family Structure and Bullying Involvement

First, the effect of family structure on bullying involvement was explored. Although living with both biological parents appeared protective against bullying perpetration and victimisation at school and online, the effect sizes were extremely small (d = .07 to .28), indicating that living with both biological parents is not as protective as initially presumed. This contradicts much of the previous literature that has argued otherwise (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013); yet, when exploring these studies further, many of them did not report effect sizes, and the two that did, reported small odds ratios (Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Yang et al., 2013). Interestingly, children living with single parents were not found to be more at risk of bullying involvement, opposing the previous findings (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Erdogan et al., 2023; Le et al., 2017; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2013). In fact, the only group that had a moderate effect on bullying involvement were those living in social care; this will be explored further in 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' but proposes that family

structure itself is not a risk factor for bullying involvement, unless children are living in social care settings.

5.5.2 Age and Gender Differences for Interpersonal Relationships

Contrary to previous research, there were negligible differences in the perceived quality of interpersonal relationships for all ages and genders. Perren and Hornung (2005) found that younger children report poorer relationships with family members and classmates, but this was not corroborated in the current findings. However, one explanation may be in the effect sizes, with Perren and Hornung (2005) failing to report the effect sizes in their study. Utilising the descriptive statistics presented in their study, effect sizes can be calculated, with age differences for peer relationships ranging from small to moderate (victims: $d = .62$; perpetrators: $d = .48$), as well as for family relationships (victims: $d = .36$; perpetrators: $d = .64$). It may be that the overall age differences in perceived relationships are not as substantial as previously assumed.

Previous research found mixed results for gender differences in perceived relationships with friends and classmates (Chen et al., 2021; Eslea et al., 2004; Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Salmivalli et al., 1996). This, alongside the negligible effect sizes found in the current study, could be due to what is being studied for these relationships. Whilst some studies measured likeability and acceptance (Eslea et al., 2004; Salmivalli et al., 1996), others focused on perceived supportiveness in the form of helpfulness (Holt & Espelage, 2007). In fact, only one of these papers utilised measures similar to the ones adopted in this study, but despite finding significant gender differences, their effect sizes were small (Hellfeldt et al., 2019; $d = .33$).

5.5.3 Interpersonal Relationships and Bullying Involvement

Family relationships had a quadratic curvilinear association with bullying involvement. In the British dataset, children with the most negatively perceived family relationships reported significantly lower traditional bullying perpetration (moderate effect size), traditional bullying victimisation (large effect size), and cyberbullying victimisation (moderate effect size) than those who rated their family relationships as moderate (scores of 2, 3 and 4). This was unexpected but could reflect the types of questions asked in the HBSC survey to measure family relationships.

These items included receiving emotional support from family members, as well as talking about problems and help making decisions. It could be that children who are less involved in bullying seek this type of support less from their families, which would result in a lower score on some items. Consequently, it may not be that these children have poor relationships with their families, but rather that they rely on their family for emotional support less. For all other ratings of family relationships, bullying involvement reduced as family relationships increased in positivity. This is consistent with what was expected from the previous literature (Biswas et al., 2010; Bowes et al., 2010; Ding et al., 2020; Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022; Perren & Hornung, 2005). This suggests that children involved in bullying – particularly as victims – view their family relationships as positive and supportive, regardless of their bullying experiences. This trend was visible across both countries, but effect sizes were small in all the Canadian analyses, and cyberbullying perpetration in the British dataset.

A similar curvilinearity was observed for relationships with friends, but only in the British dataset: a quadratic curvilinear association was visible for relationships with friends and traditional bullying perpetration and cyberbullying victimisation, but effect sizes were small. In contrast, moderate effect sizes were found for traditional bullying victimisation: children who rated their relationships with friends as most negative reported significantly less bullying victimisation than those with 'somewhat negative' or 'neutral' relationships. As expected, children who perceived their relationships with friends as most positive reported lower victimisation, corroborating previous literature (Aoyama et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2021; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Leung et al., 2017; Spriggs et al., 2007). The surprising curvilinearity may be explained by the types of questions asked when assessing relationships with friends: as with family relationships, children with more positively perceived relationships may experience victimisation, but acknowledge that they are supported by their friends. Similarly, this measure does not account for the reality that children typically have multiple friendships (Aoyama et al., 2011), meaning that not all friendships will be perceived to the same level of positivity.

Finally, a linear relationship between relationships with teachers and bullying involvement was found, but effect sizes were negligible to small in the British and Canadian datasets. This was also true of relationships with classmates, except for traditional bullying victimisation. A moderate

linear effect was found, whereby positively perceived relationships with classmates predicted lower victimisation at school. This corroborates the findings of previous researchers (Biswas et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2021; Han et al., 2017; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010; Nation et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2015) and highlights a protective factor in positive relationships within the classroom.

5.5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Work

Despite some interesting findings, there are some limitations that may hinder the interpretation of these results. As mentioned, the relationship measures adopted from the HBSC survey are somewhat problematic. Firstly, the items that form each relationship measure are focussed predominantly on support from family and friends, and acceptance from teachers and classmates. This reflects only one element of each relationship, ignoring other important aspects of interactions, power, cohesion, and functioning. Secondly, the measures assume one congruent relationship for each stakeholder group and ignores the possibility of multiple relationships within each group. For instance, children may have friends across different contexts, and it is unclear which friends the respondents referred to. Relationships with friends at school may impact bullying involvement differently to relationships with friends outside of school, such as in youth groups. Likewise, relationships within the family can include those with parents, siblings, and extended family members. It is unrealistic to assume one single measure can represent something as complex as interpersonal relationships. It would be useful for future work to adopt more varied measures to allow for a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships. For instance, the Family Systems Test (FAST) measures cohesion and power within the family, accounting for the interconnectedness of different members (Gehring & Wyler, 1986), whilst the Systemic Analysis of Group Affiliation (SAGA; Compagnone, 2009) adapts this to include different types of power. These would provide a deeper understanding of family relationships, which would benefit future research.

Unlike much of the previous literature, this study offered an insight into multiple family structures, as opposed to a comparison of dichotomous family types. Whilst this offers a more inclusive and thorough comparison of multiple family structures, those included were not exhaustive. In particular, the 'other' family structures could include grandparents, aunts, uncles,

living across two households, or with unrelated people. This limits the ability to draw comparisons between biological families and unrelated families, as well as the impact of having numerous adults to provide support against bullying. Furthermore, there was no distinction between children with same-sex parents; this has been established as a risk factor for bullying (Bos et al., 2008; Bos & van Balen, 2008; Cody et al., 2017), and it would be useful for future research to consider a more inclusive constellation of family types.

5.5.5 Implications

It is important to understand the risk factors that contribute to bullying involvement, which allows for targeted prevention and intervention strategies. These findings highlight a vulnerability of those living in social care, which will be explored further in 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement'. But these findings also demonstrate that family structure itself is not as influential as previous research may suggest. The family is inevitably an important influence on children's wellbeing and development, but this may be rooted more in the relationships within the family, rather than the descriptive characteristics of it.

The findings for interpersonal relationships were interesting and play an important role in addressing bullying. Overall, a trend was found between positively perceived relationships at school and reduced school and online bullying perpetration and victimisation. This contributes to an existing body of literature that highlights the importance of these relationships, acknowledging the importance of these stakeholders in anti-bullying programmes.

Yet, the curvilinear effects found for relationships with family and friends were unusual and present an additional dimension to relationships outside of the school. There appears to be a protective feature for children who perceive these relationships as most negative, or perhaps least supportive. This is an important topic for research to explore further, to understand how these children differ from their 'positive-relationship peers'. Moreover, these findings emphasise the need for families to be involved in anti-bullying strategies, as they play a core role in children's bullying experiences.

Chapter Six

The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the second set of secondary analyses on the HBSC dataset, exploring whether sibling characteristics impact bullying involvement. As stated in 'Chapter Four: Methodology - Secondary Analysis of the HBSC Dataset', the total number of siblings was not measured in the newest HBSC survey, and family and friend relationships were not measured in the 2014 Canadian survey. Thus, analyses were conducted on the 2014 British dataset only. This study was presented at the 2021 World Anti-Bullying Forum in Stockholm, Sweden.

6.2 Objectives and Hypotheses

Over half of children living in the UK have a legal or biological sibling (Clark, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2021), and the bonds formed between siblings can have a substantial impact on children's social and emotional development (Dirks et al., 2015; Soysal, 2016). However, when related to peer bullying, the existing literature is scarce and conflicted. For instance, Panagiotou et al. (2021) found that having siblings was protective against traditional bullying victimisation in a Greek sample, but Chen et al. (2018) found that having siblings increased the risk of traditional bullying and cyberbullying victimisation in a Chinese sample. Due to a small amount of research in this area, it is difficult to specify whether these differences are cultural, and more research would be useful to add weight to these findings.

Meanwhile, other researchers have queried if the number of siblings a child has matters, particularly relative to traditional bullying perpetration: Eslea and Smith (2000) found that British children with three or more siblings were at an increased risk of bullying perpetration than those with only one or no siblings. This was corroborated by Ma (2001) in a Canadian sample. Yet, neither study reported effect sizes, nor applied these findings to bullying victimisation.

However, these existing studies are related only to the characteristics of siblings and offer little insight into *why* siblings may act as a risk or protective factor in peer bullying. One possible explanation is in the relationships between siblings: it has been established that positive and warm

sibling relationships reduce the risk of school bullying perpetration and victimisation (Bowers et al., 1992; Bowers et al., 1994; Bowes et al., 2010; Powell & Ladd, 2010), and negative and aggressive relationships between siblings increase the risk of peer bullying (Bowes et al., 2014; Foody et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2019; Morrill et al., 2018). This could suggest one mechanism for *why* siblings matter for peer bullying, but existing literature has not explored these relationships within the context of sibling characteristics, or the impact of siblings on wider interpersonal relationships.

From the small amount of previous literature, there are a number of questions and concerns that have not yet been addressed, which emphasises the need for further research in this area. Firstly, does having siblings impact children's bullying involvement as both a perpetrator and a victim of school bullying, and in the lesser studied cyberbullying? If so, how does this relate to the number of siblings? What is the effect size for this, and is this meaningful? Secondly, does sibling gender matter in relation to peer bullying? To my knowledge, this question remains unexplored in the existing sibling literature. Finally, if having siblings impacts bullying involvement, is this mediated by interpersonal relationships inside and outside of the family? The hypotheses were as follows:

H1: The total number of siblings would be directly related to bullying involvement at school and online. In particular, having three or more siblings would increase the risk of traditional bullying perpetration, but the direction on victimisation was not hypothesised.

H2: Sibling gender would also be directly related to bullying involvement, with brothers predicting greater bullying perpetration, and sisters predicting greater victimisation.

To fully understand the role of sibling gender, confirmatory analyses were conducted to test the effect of gender on bullying involvement:

H3: Boys would be more involved as perpetrators of traditional bullying, whilst girls would be at greater risk of traditional bullying and cyberbullying victimisation.

Finally, these analyses were applied to interpersonal relationships, in the anticipation that these would mediate the effect of sibling characteristics on bullying involvement.

H4: Sibling characteristics would have an impact on interpersonal relationships (family, friends, teachers, and classmates), but the direction was not hypothesised.

6.3 Methods

6.3.1 Participants

Participants who did not provide any data on their siblings were excluded from the analyses in this chapter (n = 1,736). A total of 13,762 British children were included, with similar distributions in age and gender: 50.4% of participants were male (n = 6,938), and 49.6% were female (n = 6,824); 35.6% were 11-years-old (n = 4,894), 34.5% were 13-years-old (n = 4,743), and 29.4% were 15-years-old (n = 4,004). Overall, 87.1% of participants had at least one sibling, and a full breakdown of the total number of siblings and their gender is outlined in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Total Number of Siblings and Sibling Gender in the 2014 British Dataset

	n (%)
Number of Siblings	
0	1776 (12.9%)
1	5422 (39.4%)
2	3742 (27.2%)
3	1696 (12.3%)
4+	1126 (8.2%)
Sibling Gender	
Brothers only	4051 (29.4%)
Sisters only	3624 (26.3%)
Mixed	4242 (30.8%)

Note. 69 participants (0.5%) did not provide data on sibling gender.

6.3.2 Data Analysis

The analyses were broken into two sections: sibling characteristics on bullying involvement, and sibling characteristics on interpersonal relationships. For the former, the dependent variables were traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation. The independent variables were the total number of siblings (0-4+) and sibling gender. This was first

considered in isolation of the participant's gender, and next as a gender constellation. For the second section, the dependent variables were the perceived relationships with family, friends, teachers, and classmates. The independent variables remained the same as the first section. These were analysed using Kruskal-Wallis H tests, with pairwise comparisons; Bonferroni corrections were applied to account for multiple testing. This non-parametric test was adopted due to the violation of multiple assumptions needed to conduct a parametric alternative, including that the dependent variables were measured on an ordinal scale. Alongside this, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted to assess the homogeneity of variance, and this assumption was violated on all three of the bullying dependent variables: traditional bullying perpetration, $F(4, 13368) = 47.29$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $F(4, 13378)$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $F(4, 13159) = 10.05$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests identified significant deviation from normality in the dataset: traditional bullying perpetration, $D(12935) = .48$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $D(12935) = .38$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $D(12935) = .48$, $p < .001$. Subsequently, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was the most appropriate. Epsilon-squared (ε^2) was used to measure the effect sizes of the Kruskal-Wallis tests, with .01 - .08 suggesting a small effect size, .09 – .24 being moderate, and > .25 being large (Iacobucci et al., 2023). Pairwise comparisons were conducted to further assess where significant differences existed, and for this Cohen's d was utilised, with .20 – .49 being interpreted as small, .50 - .79 as moderate, and > .80 as large (Cohen, 1977).

If statistically significant differences were found for sibling characteristics on bullying involvement, it was anticipated that a logistic regression with parallel mediation would be conducted. For this, the independent variables would be the total number of siblings and sibling gender constellations, while the dependent variables would be the three bullying measures (traditional bullying perpetration, traditional bullying victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation). The four measures of interpersonal relationships would be included as parallel mediators. This is outlined in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1

A Parallel Mediation Path Diagram to Show Sibling Gender Constellations and Interpersonal

Relationships on Children's Bullying Involvement
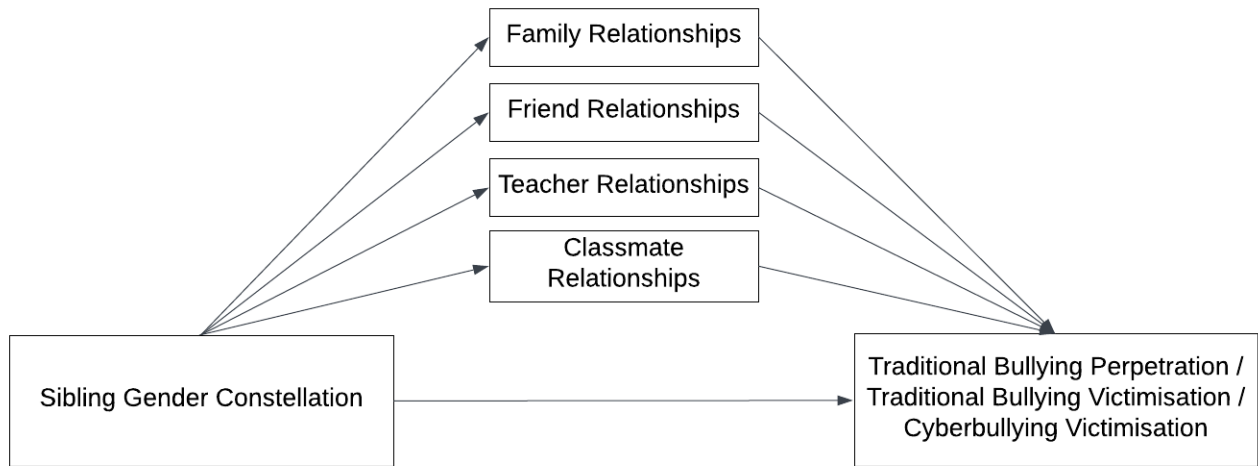
6.4 Results

Table 6.2 outlines the descriptive statistics for the number of siblings and interpersonal

relationships relative to traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying

victimisation. Upon visual inspection, children with no siblings had a higher mean score on all three

bullying measures than those with one sibling, and those with mixed-gender siblings had higher

mean scores on all three bullying measures than those with single-sex siblings.

Table 6.2

Descriptive Statistics for Sibling Characteristics and Bullying Involvement in the 2014 British

Dataset

	Traditional Bullying Perpetration			Traditional Bullying Victimisation			Cyberbullying Victimisation		
	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*
Total No. of Siblings									
0	1.21	.56	1682	1.58	.99	1684	1.24	.57	1639
1	1.19	.50	5307	1.56	.99	5309	1.23	.55	5251
2	1.22	.57	3645	1.55	1.00	3656	1.23	.54	3595
3	1.26	.58	1646	1.58	1.01	1640	1.23	.55	1618
4+	1.32	.69	1093	1.71	1.14	1094	1.29	.63	1061
Sibling Gender									
Brothers only	1.19	.52	3964	1.56	.99	3964	1.22	.54	3908
Sisters only	1.20	.52	3540	1.57	1.00	3554	1.23	.55	3509
Mixed	1.26	.62	4119	1.59	1.03	4114	1.25	.57	4042

6.4.1 The Total Number of Siblings on Bullying Involvement

The Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed statistically significant differences between the total number of siblings a child has and traditional bullying perpetration, but the overall effect sizes were negligible, χ^2 (4) = 76.32, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .006$. When exploring the different groups further, those with 3+ siblings were more likely to be perpetrators of traditional bullying: children with 3 siblings reported greater bullying perpetration than those with no siblings ($Z_{kw} = -4.04$, $p = .001$, $d = .09$), 1 sibling ($Z_{kw} = -6.12$, $p < .001$, $d = .13$), or 2 siblings ($Z_{kw} = -4.16$, $p < .001$, $d = .07$), but effect sizes were negligible. Children with 4+ siblings reported greater bullying perpetration than those with no siblings ($Z_{kw} = -5.29$, $p < .001$, $d = .18$), and 2 siblings ($Z_{kw} = -5.48$, $p < .001$, $d = .16$), but again the effect sizes were negligible. Finally, children with 4+ siblings reported greater than those with 1 sibling, with a small effect size ($Z_{kw} = -7.19$, $p < .001$, $d = .22$).

Statistically significant differences were also found between the total number of siblings and traditional bullying victimisation, χ^2 (4) = 16.46, p = .002, ε^2 = .001. The pairwise comparisons revealed that children with 4+ siblings were significantly more likely to be victims of peer bullying than those with 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = -3.50, p = .005, d = .14), or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = -3.97, p = .001, d = .15). The effect sizes were negligible.

Finally, statistically significant differences were found between the total number of siblings and cyberbullying victimisation, χ^2 (4) = 11.38, p = .02, ε^2 = .001. The pairwise comparisons found that children with 4+ siblings were significantly more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than those with 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = -3.11, p = .02, d = .10) or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = -3.22, p = .01, d = .10), but again the effect sizes were negligible.

6.4.2 Sibling Gender on Bullying Involvement

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were first conducted to see if school and online bullying involvement differed based on sibling gender, regardless of the gender of the participant. A statistically significant difference for sibling gender on traditional bullying perpetration was found. χ^2 (3) = 38.78, p < .001, ε^2 = .003. Children with mixed-gender siblings reported significantly more traditional bullying perpetration than those with brothers-only (Z_{kw} = -5.51, p < .001, d = .12), sisters-only (Z_{kw} = -4.99, p < .001, d = .10), or those who were only children (Z_{kw} = -3.61, p = .002, d = .08). The effect sizes were negligible.

There were no statistically significant differences in traditional bullying victimisation (p = .75), or cyberbullying victimisation (p = .09) based on sibling gender. From here, it was queried whether gender constellations would have an impact on bullying involvement: that is, whether the participant's gender was also important when considering sibling gender. Before this could be tested, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to assess if participant gender impacted bullying involvement. Boys were significantly more likely to be perpetrators of traditional bullying than their female counterparts (Z = -13.71, η^2 = .01, p < .001), but effect sizes were small. Likewise, girls were significantly more likely to be victims of traditional bullying (Z = 4.74, η^2 < .001, p < .001) and cyberbullying (Z = 16.18, η^2 = .01, p < .001) compared to their male counterparts, but the effect sizes were negligible to small.

When gender constellations were explored, there were statistically significant differences. Descriptive statistics for the constellations are outlined in Table 6.3. There were statistically significant differences between gender constellations for traditional bullying perpetration, χ^2 (7) = 229.92, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .02$. Girls with sisters only reported significantly less traditional bullying perpetration than girls with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = -4.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .12$), as well as boys with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = 10.94$, $p < .001$, $d = .31$), boys with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = 7.60$, $p < .001$, $d = .22$) or sisters only ($Z_{kw} = 7.60$, $p < .001$, $d = .21$), or boys who were only-children ($Z_{kw} = 6.24$, $p < .001$, $d = .23$). Girls with brothers only reported significantly less traditional bullying perpetration than girls with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = -4.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .15$), as well as boys with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = 11.29$, $p < .001$, $d = .34$), boys with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = 7.77$, $p < .001$, $d = .25$) or sisters only ($Z_{kw} = 7.77$, $p < .001$, $d = .24$), or boys who were only-children ($Z_{kw} = 6.27$, $p < .001$, $d = .26$). There also appeared to be a protective factor of being a female with brothers, but effect sizes were small for each male constellation, and negligible for girls with mixed-gender siblings. Girls who were only-children reported lower rates of traditional bullying perpetration than boys with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = 8.13$, $p < .001$, $d = .29$), boys with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = 5.46$, $p < .001$, $d = .21$) or sisters only ($Z_{kw} = 5.48$, $p < .001$, $d = .19$), or boys who were only-children ($Z_{kw} = 4.83$, $p < .001$, $d = .22$). Effect sizes were small. Girls who had mixed-gender siblings reported lower rates of traditional bullying perpetration than boys with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = 7.05$, $p < .001$, $d = .20$), boys with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = 3.54$, $p = .01$, $d = .11$), or boys with sisters only ($Z_{kw} = 3.58$, $p = .01$, $d = .09$). Effect sizes were negligible. Finally, boys with mixed-gender siblings were more likely to be perpetrators of traditional bullying perpetration than those with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = -3.40$, $p = .02$, $d = .09$), or sisters only ($Z_{kw} = -3.30$, $p = .03$, $d = .11$). Effect sizes were negligible.

There were statistically significant differences between gender constellations for traditional bullying victimisation, χ^2 (7) = 27.34, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .002$. Girls with mixed-gender siblings reported significantly more traditional bullying victimisation than boys with mixed-gender siblings ($Z_{kw} = -3.85$, $p = .003$, $d = .08$), and boys with brothers only ($Z_{kw} = -3.40$, $p = .02$, $d = .09$), but effect sizes were negligible. There were no differences between any of the other gender constellations on traditional bullying victimisation.

A statistically significant difference between the gender constellations for cyberbullying victimisation was found, χ^2 (7) = 274.57, p < .001, ε^2 = .02. There were no gender differences within each gender group, meaning that females did not differ regardless of the gender of their sibling(s), nor did males. However, there were statistically significant differences between the two gender groups in relation to sibling gender. Boys who were only-children reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than female only-children (Z_{kw} = -6.56, p < .001, d = .26), and females with brothers only (Z_{kw} = -6.58, p < .001, d = .23), sisters only (Z_{kw} = -6.35, p < .001, d = .24), or mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -8.73, p < .001, d = .30). Effect sizes were small. Likewise, boys with brothers only reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than female only-children (Z_{kw} = 7.57, p < .001, d = .27), girls with brothers only (Z_{kw} = -8.15, p < .001, d = .24) or sisters only (Z_{kw} = -7.70, p < .001, d = .25), and mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -10.98, p < .001, d = .31), with small effect sizes detected. Males with sisters-only reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than female only-children (Z_{kw} = -6.77, p < .001, d = .23), and females with brothers only (Z_{kw} = -7.09, p < .001, d = .20), sisters only (Z_{kw} = -6.70, p < .001, d = .20), or mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -9.90, p < .001, d = .27). Again, effect sizes were small. Finally, boys with mixed-gender siblings also reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than female only-children (Z_{kw} = -7.27, p < .001, d = .25), and females with brothers only (Z_{kw} = -7.76, p < .001, d = .22), sisters only (Z_{kw} = -7.32, p < .001, d = .22), or mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -10.62, p < .001, d = .28). Effect sizes were small.

Table 6.3

Means and Standard Deviations for Sibling Gender Constellations and Bullying Involvement in the 2014 British Dataset

	Traditional Bullying Perpetration			Traditional Bullying Victimisation			Cyberbullying Victimisation		
	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*
Gender Constellation									
Male – Only Child	1.27	.64	830	1.54	.98	830	1.16	.51	813
Male – Brothers	1.26	.60	1940	1.54	.97	1940	1.16	.46	1904
Male – Sisters	1.25	.57	1880	1.55	1.00	1891	1.18	.50	1869
Male – Mixed	1.32	.68	2031	1.55	1.02	2024	1.17	.50	1977
Female – Only Child	1.15	.46	852	1.62	1.00	854	1.31	.62	826
Female – Brothers	1.13	.41	2024	1.59	1.01	2024	1.29	.60	2004
Female – Sisters	1.14	.46	1660	1.58	1.00	1663	1.29	.59	1640
Female – Mixed	1.20	.54	2088	1.63	1.04	2090	1.33	.62	2065

Table 6.4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Total Number of Siblings on Interpersonal Relationships

Relationships with:	Family			Friends			Teachers			Classmates		
	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*
No. of Siblings												
0	4.21	1.34	1656	4.08	1.34	1653	3.75	1.05	1731	3.78	.89	1743
1	4.21	1.36	5309	4.10	1.36	5295	3.83	1.00	5381	3.81	.87	5403
2	4.17	1.36	3633	4.09	1.39	3624	3.77	1.01	3711	3.81	.87	3724
3	4.04	1.43	1652	4.00	1.41	1650	3.75	1.01	1676	3.80	.86	1684
4+	3.98	1.45	1085	3.94	1.47	1086	3.77	1.03	1106	3.71	.94	1116
Gender Constellation												
Male – Only Child	4.24	1.32	814	3.96	1.34	811	3.76	1.05	858	3.85	.92	870
Male – Brothers	4.25	1.32	1932	4.02	1.35	1930	3.85	.99	1971	3.86	.86	1981
Male – Sisters	4.23	1.34	1871	3.97	1.37	1862	3.78	1.03	1906	3.88	.83	1921
Male – Mixed	4.16	1.35	2032	3.92	1.42	2027	3.79	1.00	2064	3.81	.88	2086
Female – Only Child	4.18	1.36	842	4.20	1.33	842	3.74	1.04	873	3.71	.85	873
Female – Brothers	4.15	1.38	2026	4.20	1.36	2022	3.81	.99	2055	3.76	.88	2058
Female – Sisters	4.11	1.42	1663	4.17	1.39	1661	3.78	.99	1684	3.75	.87	1687
Female – Mixed	4.01	1.46	2087	4.12	1.40	2085	3.76	1.04	2125	3.73	.92	2127

Note. Relationships scored '5' indicate more positively perceived relationships, and those scored '1' indicate negatively perceived relationships.

6.4.3 Total Number of Siblings on Interpersonal Relationships

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted to see if the total number of siblings impacted interpersonal relationships, and the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6.4. Relationships within the family differed depending on the total number of siblings a child had, χ^2 (4) = 47.49, p < .001, ε^2 = .003. Children with 3+ siblings perceived family relationships more negatively than those with fewer siblings. For instance, children with 3 siblings differed significantly from those with no siblings (Z_{kw} = 3.80, p = .001, d = .13), 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = 4.96, p < .001, d = .12), or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = 3.45, p = .006, d = .09). Similarly, children with 4+ siblings differed significantly from those with no siblings (Z_{kw} = 4.38, p < .001, d = .16), 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = 5.37, p < .001, d = .16), or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = 4.08, p < .001, d = .14). There were no statistically significant differences between those with 3 or 4+ siblings (p = .318). Nonetheless, effect sizes were negligible for all differences.

Relationships with friends differed depending on the total number of siblings a child had, χ^2 (4) = 15.27, p = .005, ε^2 = .001. The only statistically significant differences were detected between children with 4+ siblings and those with 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = 2.92, p = .04, d = .11), or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = 2.99, p = .03, d = .10). In particular, children with 4+ siblings reported poorer relationships with friends, but effect sizes were negligible.

Relationships with teachers differed depending on the total number of siblings a child had, χ^2 (4) = 13.99, p = .007, ε^2 = .001. However, when applying Bonferroni correction for multiple testing, the individual pairwise comparisons failed to find any statistically significant differences.

Finally, Relationships with classmates differed depending on the total number of siblings a child had, $\chi2$ (4) = 10.98, p = .03, ε^2 = .001. Similar to those with friends, the only statistically significant differences were detected between children with 4+ siblings and those with 1 sibling (Z_{kw} = 3.13, p = .02, d = .11), or 2 siblings (Z_{kw} = 2.94, p = .03, d = .11). Children with 4+ siblings reported poorer relationships with friends, but effect sizes were negligible.

6.4.4 Sibling Gender on Interpersonal Relationships

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to explore whether sibling gender constellations impacted interpersonal relationships, and the descriptive statistics are outlined in Table 6.4. Relationships within the family differed depending on the gender constellation, χ^2 (7) = 39.67, p < .001, ε^2 = .003.

There were few groups whereby statistically significant differences were actually found, with these all involving girls with mixed-gender siblings: these children reportedly significantly poorer and more negative family relationships than females with brothers only (Z_{kw} = 3.23, p = .04, d = .10), and all male sibling constellations (boys who were only-children: Z_{kw} = 3.72, p = .006, d = .17; Boys with brothers only: Z_{kw} = 5.32, $p < .001$, d = .17; Boys with sisters only: Z_{kw} = 5.05, $p < .001$, d = .16; Boys with mixed-gender siblings: Z_{kw} = 3.24, p = .03, d = .11). The effect sizes were negligible.

Relationships with friends also differed depending on the gender constellation, χ^2 (7) = 157.89, $p < .001$, ε^2 = .01. All male sibling constellations differed significantly to their female counterparts. Boys who were only-children reported poorer relationships with their friends than girls who were only-children (Z_{kw} = -5.15, $p < .001$, d = .18), girls who had brothers only (Z_{kw} = -6.50, $p < .001$, d = .18), girls who had sisters only (Z_{kw} = -5.82, $p < .001$, d = .15), and girls with mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -5.07, $p < .001$, d = .12). Likewise, boys with brothers only reported poorer relationships with their friends than girls who were only-children (Z_{kw} = -4.36, $p < .001$, d = .13), girls who had brothers only (Z_{kw} = -6.19, $p < .001$, d = .13), girls who had sisters only (Z_{kw} = -5.27, $p < .001$, d = .11), and girls with mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -4.33, $p < .001$, d = .07). Boys with sisters only reported poorer relationships with their friends than girls who were only-children (Z_{kw} = -5.42, $p < .001$, d = .17), girls who had brothers only (Z_{kw} = -7.53, $p < .001$, d = .17), girls who had sisters only (Z_{kw} = -6.56, $p < .001$, d = .14), and girls with mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -5.70, $p < .001$, d = .11). Finally, boys with mixed-gender siblings reported poorer relationships with their friends than girls who were only-children (Z_{kw} = -5.97, $p < .001$, d = .20), girls who had brothers only (Z_{kw} = -8.32, $p < .001$, d = .20), girls who had sisters only (Z_{kw} = -7.28, $p < .001$, d = .18), and girls with mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = -6.45, $p < .001$, d = .14).

Relationships with teachers did not differ based on gender constellations (p = .19), but relationships with classmates did, χ^2 (7) = 69.29, $p < .001$, ε^2 = .005. Girls who were only-children reported poorer relationships with their classmates than boys who were only-children (Z_{kw} = 3.83, p = .004, d = .16), boys with brothers only (Z_{kw} = 4.79, $p < .001$, d = .17), boys with sisters only (Z_{kw} = 4.96, $p < .001$, d = .20), and boys with mixed-gender siblings (Z_{kw} = 3.20, p = .04, d = .12). Girls with brothers only reported poorer relationships with their classmates than boys with brothers only (Z_{kw} = 4.31, $p < .001$, d = .11), and boys with sisters only (Z_{kw} = 4.52, $p < .001$, d = .12). Likewise,

girls with sisters only reported poorer relationships with their classmates than boys who were only-children (Z_{kw} = 3.14, p = .05, d = .11), boys with brothers only (Z_{kw} = 4.29, p < .001, d = .13), and boys with sisters only (Z_{kw} = 4.50, p < .001, d = .15). Girls with mixed-gender siblings reported poorer relationships with their classmates than boys who were only-children (Z_{kw} = 3.67, p = .007, d = .13), boys with brothers only (Z_{kw} = 5.08, p < .001, d = .15), and boys with sisters only (Z_{kw} = 5.29, p < .001, d = .17).

6.5 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to address some of the shortfalls of the existing literature, with a particular focus on sibling characteristics and interpersonal relationships. It was first explored if the total number of siblings matters, with an emphasis on understanding the effect sizes. Next, the lesser studied topic of sibling gender was explored. Finally, questions were asked if siblings impacted interpersonal relationships, with the expectation that this may mediate any effects of siblings on bullying involvement.

6.5.1 The Total Number of Siblings on Bullying Involvement

The first purpose of this research was to investigate if having more siblings has an impact on bullying involvement; interestingly, the results suggested that the number of siblings has a negligible impact on traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation. These findings, in part, support that of previous research: Eslea and Smith (2000) noted that there were no differences in traditional bullying victimisation for the total number of siblings that a child has. However, they did note that traditional bullying perpetration increased for children with three or more siblings, yet effect sizes were not reported. From the analyses in this chapter, children with three or more siblings were also found to be significantly more likely to be perpetrators of traditional bullying, but the effect sizes were negligible. This suggests that the total number of siblings that a child has may not be as influential to bullying perpetration that initially believed.

In contrast, other research has suggested that having more siblings can directly increase peer victimisation (Ma, 2001), and indirectly through increasing sibling bullying (Bowes et al., 2014;

Dantchev & Wolke, 2019a), which in turn leads to peer bullying involvement (Menesini et al., 2010; Valido et al., 2021). One possible explanation for the differing results is that much of the previous research has explored the number of siblings on between-sibling bullying. Despite the link between sibling and peer bullying, the former issue was not measured in the HBSC survey, and thus it cannot be concluded that sibling bullying was increasing at all. Alternative factors may explain the link between sibling and peer bullying, such as victims internalising themselves as victims and thus experiencing polyvictimisation (Chen et al., 2018).

Overall, the existing research on this topic is relatively small, and thus these findings offer a further exploration of whether the total number of siblings a child has impacts their involvement in bullying. Moreover, to my knowledge, this is the first to extend this field into the realms of cyberbullying victimisation.

6.5.2 Sibling Gender on Bullying Involvement

Following the research on the total number of siblings, analyses were extended into sibling gender. Sibling gender alone did not influence children's bullying involvement, but when considered alongside the participants' own genders, the results differed. For traditional bullying perpetration and cyberbullying victimisation, there were significant differences between both genders, but not within genders. This proposes that the participant's gender is important to consider, rather than sibling gender alone.

6.5.3 The Total Number of Siblings on Interpersonal Relationships

It was hypothesised that the total number of siblings would impact interpersonal relationships, but no direction was predicted; yet the results suggest otherwise. A significant effect of the total number of siblings on relationships with family, friends, and classmates was found, but the effect sizes were negligible.

Typically, larger families have been linked to increased risk of poverty than smaller families (Bradshaw et al., 2006), with increased tensions and strains on family resources and parental attention creating a risk for bullying perpetration and victimisation (Chen et al., 2018). On the other hand, children from larger families may perceive that they have more support, with multiple

different people to turn to. Subsequently, it was expected that the total number of siblings, and thus family size, would impact family relationships, which would then provide a foundation for wider relationships with friends, teachers, and classmates. The lack of findings to support these hypotheses may be a result of the flaws within the HBSC survey, which will be discussed later.

6.5.4 Sibling Gender on Interpersonal Relationships

It was also hypothesised that sibling gender would impact interpersonal relationships, but no direction was predicted. Previous research has found that brothers are typically less emotionally involved with their siblings when compared to sisters (Kim et al., 2006), with brothers engaging in greater sibling aggression (Bowes et al., 2014; Tippett & Wolke, 2015). But this was not corroborated in the results presented in this chapter; sibling gender had a negligible impact on relationships with family, friends, and classmates, and no effect on relationships with teachers.

It is likely that this is a result of the limitations within the HBSC survey when measuring siblings but could also highlight the inclusion of only two genders in this research. While some transitioning children experience greater authenticity and acceptance in their relationships with siblings (Parker & Davis-McCabe, 2021), others are faced with rejection. Moreover, transgender children are disproportionately more at risk of bullying victimisation (Reisner et al., 2015), highlighting the importance of understanding gender identity within the context of siblings and bullying.

6.5.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research provides a novel insight into how sibling characteristics may play a role in bullying involvement, but certain limitations must be considered before making any conclusions. In particular, the way that siblings were measured in the HBSC survey is problematic: participants were asked to write how many brothers lived in their main home, and how many sisters lived in their main home. The open question response resulted in several outliers, with a total of 213 participants reporting that they had between 7 and 23 siblings living in their main home at the time of responding. To remain consistent with the national statistics of family size at this time (Office for National Statistics, 2013), these participants were treated as missing data. Moreover,

this does not include siblings who may live in different households, or those who have left home. If it was a case that siblings indirectly impact bullying involvement, it is probable that this would be inclusive of siblings across households.

A second issue with the measurement of siblings was that the question specified that participants should include any 'type' of sibling living in the main home ("including half, step or foster brothers and sisters"). Yet the experiences of children living with step-, half-, or foster siblings is inevitably different to those living with full-biological siblings (Kumar, 2017). Bullying victimisation will substantially differ in blended families, through experiences of sibling bullying, and differing relationship dynamics; this research offers an insight into the role of siblings, but future research should explore the different sibling types.

Finally, the HBSC did not include any measures of sibling ages or birth order. If older children provide a protective and supervisory role to their younger siblings (Chen et al., 2018), it is reasonable to assume that birth order will play a role in the relationship between sibling characteristics and bullying involvement. This has not been considered in the context of bullying and interpersonal relationships, and it would be beneficial to understand the potentially moderating role of birth order.

In line with this, the 2014 HBSC survey did not measure the bullying that occurs between siblings, or sibling relationships; this would provide a unique insight into the dynamics between siblings specifically, rather than the whole family. A relationship has been established between peer bullying and sibling bullying (Menesini et al., 2010; Valido et al., 2021), and future research should endeavour to understand sibling bullying and dynamics as a facet of the wider family relationships.

Overall, the findings from this chapter offer a preliminary understanding of having siblings for bullying involvement but leaves many questions unanswered. The measurement of siblings in the HBSC – both in terms of their characteristics and the relationships between siblings – is not representative of all sibling experiences. Future research should expand this field by exploring the more complex details of having siblings.

6.5.6 Implications

Whilst the number of siblings was ultimately inconsequential in these analyses, the role of siblings is not one that should be ignored. Siblings can provide a unique access to one another beyond the school playground. As discussed, siblings may supervise one another online when parents are unable to (Chen et al., 2018), and whilst these individuals should not be solely relied on as a replacement for adult-led anti-bullying strategies, siblings could offer a layer of support that peers and adults are unable to. It is likely that this would be threefold: establishing positive sibling relationships would reduce between-sibling aggression; positive relationships would be protective against bullying involvement; siblings have a unique access to one another that is beyond the scope of parents, whether that is emotionally, physically, or just a matter of being in the same generation.

To conclude, the findings presented provide a novel contribution to bullying literature, and despite the need for additional research, these findings offer a useful guide for further understanding these experiences. Additional research is needed to understand if and how sibling type (full-, half-, step-, or foster-siblings), birth order, and sibling relationships matter in the wider context of peer bullying. Only when the full influence of this group is understood can we begin to implement prevention and intervention strategies that utilises siblings in an effective way.

Chapter Seven

A Focused Literature Review on the Experiences of Children Living in Social Care

7.1 Chapter Overview

Following the findings presented in 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', it became evident that more research was needed to improve understanding around the experiences of children in social care in the UK. This chapter presents a focused literature review on the experiences of children in social care, establishing the background for the research presented in 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' and 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children'.

7.2 Introduction

The number of children in social care in the UK is rising: that is, children who are removed from the care of their biological family by local authorities and placed into the temporary care of another. This may be with somebody that they know (kinship), a stranger, or with staff, and may occur on a short-term or long-term basis, as well as for emergencies or with the intention of adopting. In 2017, 72,670 children were reported to be living in some form of social care (Department for Education, 2017), which had increased to 82,170 by 2021 (Department for Education, 2022).

When discussing social care, there are two standard situations that children in the UK may experience: living in residential care settings and living in foster care. The former refers to institutional facilities with their own sub-cultures, housing varying numbers of children, and managed by staff who do not live in the facility. In contrast, foster care mimics the structure of a traditional family, whereby children live in a home with foster parents, and potentially a small number of other children. Foster children represent 73.4% of all looked after children, with a reported 57,380 children living in foster care in England (Ofsted, 2021). Typically, foster

placements are the first option for children placed into the care system, whilst residential care is seen as a 'last resort' (Berridge et al., 2012).

Children living in care represent some of the most vulnerable people in society, with approximately 65% of children in the UK care system having been removed from their families due to abuse, and 15% due to dysfunction within the family (Narey & Owers, 2018). Children may also enter the care system due to absent parents, displaying socially unacceptable behaviours, or acute family stress (Berridge et al., 2012). Following their placement in care, many of these children then experience poor placement stability (Salazar, 2013), resulting in turbulent and difficult childhoods. Subsequently, these children are more likely to suffer from mental health difficulties (Engler et al., 2022), reduced cognitive functioning (Goemans et al., 2016), lower academic grades (Gypen et al., 2017), and peer bullying involvement (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012) compared to those living with biological parents. When entering adulthood, these difficulties extend into unemployment and poverty (Naccarato et al., 2010; Stewart et al. 2014), mental health difficulties (Zlotnick et al., 2012), substance abuse (Maliszewski & Brown, 2014), and criminal behaviours (Lindquist & Santavirta, 2014). Despite this deterministic outlook, it is not the case that all children in care will have poor outcomes in adulthood; nurturing and supportive relationships can reduce maladaptive behaviours (Gypen et al., 2017).

7.3 Interpersonal Relationships

It is well-established that interpersonal relationships form a foundation for human development (Reis et al., 2000), with positive relationships offering a basis for healthy social and emotional development (Damon et al., 2006). But for children living in social care, many relationships will be impacted by instability, distrust, and feelings of negativity; Kim (2014) notes that children in foster care specifically have difficulties forming stable attachments, and this results in greater social isolation (as cited in Hong et al., 2021b). The interpersonal relationships with different adults and children will be explored separately.

One of the potentially most confusing relationships for children in care is that with their birth family. Under the Children Act (1989), local authorities have a legal obligation to promote contact between children and their birth families, except in instances where it is not in the best interests of

the child. The nature of contact will vary between children, with some occurring face-to-face whilst others are restricted to telephone conversations only, and some children having contact on a much more frequent basis. Nonetheless, contact serves the purpose of maintaining attachments to the birth family, teaching the child about their heritage and culture, improving the continuity and psychological well-being of the child, and creating trust between the carers and birth family with the possibility of the child returning to the care of their birth parent(s) (Salas Martínez et al., 2016). When contact is collaborative between the birth family and foster family, children are more likely to form positive relationships within both families, as well as creating a healthy identity within the families (Boyle, 2017). Yet, Salas Martínez et al. (2016) found that frequently contact agreements are not fulfilled, meaning that many foster children do not get to see their birth family, and the benefits are subsequently lost. This can result in fragmented and conflicted relationships, particularly between foster parents and birth parents, which then lead to anxiety for the children involved (Linares et al., 2010). Although this is specific for those in foster care, the experiences extend into those living in residential care settings, with regular contact being central to forming positive attachments, establishing identities, and improving wellbeing (Porter et al., 2020). Interestingly, children in residential care settings have previously reported that living in a care home is beneficial for not resembling a traditional family, in that it does not challenge a child's identity or belonging within their birth family (Anglin, 2014). Overall, maintaining contact and encouraging positive relationships with birth families is important for many children living in care, but the success of this will depend heavily on the individual cases.

Yet, birth families are not the only influential adults in the lives of children in care. Relationships with nonparental adults provided role models for children in care and may have protective effects for some of the detrimental outcomes: youth who reported positive relationships with a trusted adult or mentor were less likely to experience homelessness, depression, stress, or be arrested (Ahrens et al., 2011; Collins et al., 2010; Munson & McMillen, 2009). For children in foster care, these relationships are typically formed with the foster parents, whilst for those in residential care this is likely to be with staff. The latter is focused on less in this thesis, but ultimately supportive relationships between children and staff are associated with improved psychological wellbeing and feelings of protection (Magalhães & Calheiros, 2017; Moore et al.,

2018). However, children are more likely to perceive staff relationships as supportive when they have been in the facility for a longer period (Pinheiro et al., 2022), highlighting the importance of stability for children in care. This is also true of children living in foster care, with stable and nurturing families playing a key role in their emotional and social development, alongside improving resilience (Ahrens et al., 2011; Harden, 2004). Yet, the foster family is structured and managed in a similar way to a traditional family. In a systematic review exploring foster children's perceptions of the family, Ie et al. (2022) noted that some children view the family as fluid and something that can be chosen. These children felt that a nurturing and open foster family could instil greater feelings of connectedness than birth families; yet others reported that the bloodline should be honoured, regardless of experiences of abuse. There are clear individual differences in the role that nonparental adults take in the lives of children in care, and it is not evident what causes these differences: it is possibly a result of different childhood experiences, circumstances leading to a child entering the care system, and wider interpersonal relationships. What is certain, however, is that having a positive attachment to an adult is vital for children's development (Ahrens et al., 2011; Greeson et al., 2008; Harden, 2004; Munson et al., 2010).

Within these nonparental adults are teachers: these have previously been explored in this thesis within the general population, but in the context of social care, they have an additional layer. Firstly, teachers have an obligation to safeguard their students, and their referrals may be the catalyst that leads to a child entering the care system. They play an essential role in protecting children, and supportive relationships will therefore be central to identifying concerns. But for children already within the care system, the reality can be very different: Vacca and Kramer-Vida (2012) note that when children are moved to new schools due to their care placement, they are often pre-labelled as 'difficult' or 'problematic'. This is amplified by limited training for supporting children in care, and a lack of continuity between lessons and assignments.

On the other hand, relationships with peers have been studied in greater depth within care populations. When entering the care system, children are frequently moved to different schools and away from the friendships that they have formed. These children report peer relationships as being essential for their wellbeing and providing a supportive role in the absence of a stable family (Ridge & Millar, 2000). Consequently, they lose the relationships that have provided a safe

foundation, and experience isolation and further instability. This alone is a concern, but combined with their wider social difficulties, children in care represent an extremely vulnerable group. In their meta-analysis, DeLuca et al. (2019) identified 12 studies looking into peer relationships in foster samples. They found that children living in foster care reported fewer peer relationships than those raised with biological families, as well as poorer quality relationships within those they did have. Whilst Leve et al. (2007) suggested that children in care had poorer social skills, Barter and Berridge (2011) argued that it was the maltreatment and negative childhood experiences that account for poor quality peer relationships. Yet, these difficulties do not seem to extend to all peer relationships: whilst non-care peers may unintentionally highlight differences between them, forming friendships with other children in care can increase feelings of support and belonging (Rogers, 2017).

Overall, children living in social care represent an extremely vulnerable group. Ainsworth and Hansen (2005) described these children – specifically those in residential care – as displaying an "inability to live peacefully with others" (p. 195). This stigma permeates through societal attitudes, with children in care being perceived as 'delinquents', 'challenging', and 'mentally unstable' (Johnson et al., 2020; Kools, 1997). These perceptions will inevitably impact how others approach and treat children in care, further impacting interpersonal relationships.

7.4 Bullying

Only a small amount of research has explored the risk of living in care on bullying experiences, and much of this has focused on children living in residential care settings. Many of these children experience peer bullying within the residential home, which is only made worse by the inescapable nature of living alongside their peers (Barter, 2009; Morgan, 2008). The prevalence of bullying for children in these settings is considerably higher than that of the general population, with studies reporting as many as 73.4% of children in residential care being involved in bullying (Sekol & Farrington, 2010). Research has suggested that there are no gender differences in reported perpetration for children in care (Sekol & Farrington, 2016a), however 56.4% of males in care and 70.1% of females in care are victims of bullying (Sekol & Farrington,

2016b). Overall, children living in residential care perceive bullying as a 'normal' experience (Barter et al., 2004; Mazzone et al., 2019; O'Neil, 2001).

Although the reasons for these exceptionally high prevalence rates are not fully understood, some argue that this is a result of the type and quality of interpersonal relationships found in residential care. Firstly, Sekol (2015) found that both bullies and victims reported lower peer support, whilst female victims also felt unsupported by staff in the care setting. Moreover, peer hierarchies are commonplace in these settings, with a minority of children holding social power over others. These hierarchies are then used to inflict and justify peer violence, particularly towards new admissions who pose a threat to social status (Mazzone et al., 2019; Sekol, 2013). Staff are reported to accept hierarchies and normalise peer violence to maintain a 'pecking order' (Barter, 2009; Mazzone et al., 2019; O'Neil, 2001), whilst other children in the care setting report that they fear retaliation from intervening, so remain passive bystanders (Mazzone et al., 2019). Furthermore, Attar-Schwartz (2008) suggested that those who have been in residential care for longer are more likely to have secure attachments to staff and peers, and thus display less aggression. Finally, children living in residential care have often experienced instability within their biological family, alongside trauma and maltreatment (Mazzone et al., 2019), which further increases the risk of bullying involvement. Overall, children living in residential care are extremely vulnerable to peer bullying, but this literature only explains a small proportion of those living in social care.

Unlike in residential care, children living in foster care will experience a family unit similar in characteristics to that of a traditional family, particularly in that they will usually attend a school outside of the family home and will participate in clubs and activities outside of their foster family. Subsequently, their experiences living in foster care will be very different to those living in residential care. Yet, few researchers have focused on this group specifically; likewise, much of the existing research focuses on wider peer abuse and maltreatment, with few studying bullying specifically.

An association has been established between living in foster care and peer aggression perpetration (Höjer et al., 2006; Morgan, 2011; Perry & Price, 2017; Watson & Jones, 2002) and victimisation (Bennett et al., 2023; Font et al., 2015; Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012), but these are

not specific to bullying. Nonetheless, Sterzing et al. (2020) looked into bullying involvement in a female-only sample and found a majority of those in foster care were involved in bullying: 6.2% were perpetrators of bullying, 24.7% were victims, 38.1% were bully-victims, and only 30.9% were uninvolved. Finally, in a qualitative exploration of peer interactions in the foster home, Barter and Lutman (2016) interviewed foster carers, and identified that this group felt that their birth children were at risk of victimisation at the hands of the foster children living with them. This adds an additional layer to our understanding of bullying for foster children, with unrelated peers in the home posing a risk of perpetration, not dissimilar to those living in residential care setting. There is currently no discussion around the victimisation of foster children at the hands of their foster siblings. Overall, it is evident that there is a vulnerability towards aggression for foster children, but with a limited amount of bullying-specific research, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions.

When trying to understand why these children are at risk, Vacca and Kramer-Vida (2012) state that children in foster care are disproportionately more likely to belong to ethnic minorities and the LGBTQIA+ community, which heightens their risk for bullying involvement. Moreover, these authors state that foster children experience low self-esteem and instability in school placements, which also acts as a risk factor for bullying, but these claims are not substantiated with empirical research. In fact, Lutman and Barter (2016) later go on to criticise the lack of research studying the role of religion or ethnicity in foster children's bullying experiences, questioning the validity of the claims by Vacca and Kramer-Vida (2012). Regardless, other potential explanations are visible in the literature. For instance, the general status as a 'child in care' has been linked to victimisation, with the status being used to ostracise and target foster children (Dansey et al., 2019; Rogers, 2017). This suggests that the stigma associated with living in care is a risk factor in itself. Interestingly, children in care seek support from other looked-after children, gaining a sense of group belonging and support from their mutual status (Rogers, 2017), which proposes that the group identity also provides some protection.

To conclude, in a review of the existing literature, Lutman and Barter (2016) noted that little is currently understood about the experiences of children in foster care, and that the voices of foster children themselves are absent.

7.5 Rationale

The first study that will be presented regarding living in care is an extension of the HBSC secondary analyses presented in 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement'. These analyses, which will be outlined in Chapter Eight, focused on children living in social care generally, without separating those living in residential care settings from those in foster care settings. This was due to the constraints of the HBSC survey, which did not distinguish between different types of care. Nonetheless, this provides an inclusive insight into the experiences of those living in care more generally; despite very different living conditions, the experiences leading to children being placed into care would be somewhat similar. This chapter aims to further understand why children living in social care are vulnerable to bullying perpetration and victimisation, contributing to a growing area of research, and incorporating the effects of interpersonal relationships.

The second study that will be presented on this topic is specific to those living in foster care. This will be presented in Chapter Nine and offers a qualitative insight into the experiences of foster children, providing a voice for those directly involved. This chapter aims to explore the personal experiences of foster care leavers and foster parents, with focus on interpersonal relationships and bullying. Moreover, this study provides a foundation for future research and policy development.

Chapter Eight

The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

8.1 Chapter Overview

      This chapter reports the final analyses conducted using the HBSC secondary data. Taking the outcomes from 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', this will focus specifically on children in social care.

8.2 Objectives and Hypotheses

      The number of children living in social care in the UK is increasing (Department for Education, 2017; 2022), and concerningly, many of these children perceive bullying victimisation to be a normative experience in care (Barter et al., 2004; Mazzone et al., 2019; O'Neil, 2001). 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' identified a relationship between living in social care and increased bullying perpetration and victimisation, but the mechanisms behind *why* these children are at risk was not probed. The existing literature has not offered an insight into this, but I question whether this is a result of the interpersonal relationships experienced by children living in care.

      As has been previously established, positive interpersonal relationships in the general population are protective against children's bullying involvement (Chen et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021; Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010; Perren & Hornung, 2005; Zych et al., 2019), and it is likely that this is also applicable to those living in social care. However, this has not been studied in the existing literature. Thus, the objective of this chapter is to probe this effect further.

      First, it is beneficial to understand if children in care experience the same age and gender differences in bully involvement as those in the general population: traditional bullying involvement peaks around 11- to 13-years (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Nordhagen et al., 2005; Pichel et al., 2021), but cyberbullying increases as children get older (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014; Pitchel et al., 2021; Tokunaga, 2010); meanwhile, males are more likely to be involved in physical bullying (Craig et al., 2009; Nordhagen et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2019), whilst females are more

involved in relational bullying, including cyberbullying (Craig et al., 2020; Gusafsson, 2017).

Understanding if these are also visible in care samples will help to identify if all children in care are

equally vulnerable (no differences for age or gender), or if any subgroups experience greater risk

than others. Thus, the first hypothesis was as follows:

H1: Age and gender differences in bullying involvement would exist in social care

populations, but the direction was unknown.

In order to understand *how* and *why* children in social care may be at an increased risk of

bullying involvement, interpersonal relationships were considered. It was hypothesised that:

H2: Children living in social care (residential care settings and foster care inclusive) would

be significantly more likely to be involved in traditional and online bullying as both victims and

perpetrators, compared to those living with biological family members.

H3: Interpersonal relationships (family, friends, teachers, and classmates) would mediate

the link between living in care and bullying involvement.

8.3 Method

8.3.1 Participants

Due to the vast differences in group size between children living in social care and children

living with biological family members, it was appropriate to take a smaller sample of those in the

latter population. A sample of age and gender matched controls were randomly taken from the

children living in any non-care family structure. For this, participants living in non-social care

families were separated into their age and gender groups (i.e., males aged 11, males aged 13,

etc.) and the SPSS function of 'Select Random Sample' was used to select an equal number of

participants to those living in social care. The age and gender distributions for each dataset are

outlined in Table 8.1. Data from 582 children was taken from the 2014 dataset, and 386 from the

2018 dataset.

Table 8.1

Age and Gender Distributions for Children Living in Social Care or in Non-Care Families

	Social Care	Non-Care	Total
Great Britain 2014			
Age			
11-years	95	95	190
13-years	112	112	224
15-years	77	77	154
Missing	7	7	14
Gender			
Male	150	150	300
Female	141	141	282
Total	219	219	582
Great Britain 2018			
Age			
11-years	53	53	106
13-years	70	70	140
15-years	66	66	132
Missing	4	4	8
Gender			
Male	99	99	198
Female	94	94	188
Total	193	193	386

8.3.2 Data Analysis

Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to see if there were gender differences in bullying involvement for those living in social care, and Kruskal-Wallis H Tests were used to explore age differences. As in the previous HBSC analyses from this thesis, these non-parametric tests were favoured due to the violation of several assumptions needed to conduct the parametric alternatives. As mentioned, the dependent variables were measured on an ordinal scale, making parametric testing problematic (Coolican, 2018). Moreover, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was used to assess homogeneity of variance, and this assumption was violated on one of the dependent variables in the 2014 British dataset (cyberbullying victimisation, $F(2, 264) = 9.61$, $p < .001$), and two of the dependent variables in the 2018 British dataset (traditional bullying victimisation, $F(2, 168) = 10.30$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $F(2, 166) = 6.88$, $p = .001$). Homogeneity of variance was assumed for two of the 2014 dependent variables (traditional bullying perpetration, $F(2, 271) = 1.48$, $p = .230$; traditional bullying victimisation, $F(2, 271) = .46$, $p = .526$), and for two of the 2018 dependent variables (traditional bullying perpetration, $F(2, 171) = .24$, $p = .788$; cyberbullying victimisation, $F(2, 167) = 2.36$, $p = .098$), but due to other assumptions being violated, the non-parametric alternatives were still used. Finally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests identified significant deviations from normality in the 2014 dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $D(267) = .42$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $D(267) = .29$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $D(267) = .42$, $p < .001$), and the 2018 dataset (traditional bullying perpetration, $D(166) = .38$, $p < .001$; traditional bullying victimisation, $D(1660) = .25$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying perpetration, $D(166) = .47$, $p < .001$; cyberbullying victimisation, $D(166) = .42$, $p < .001$).

Epsilon-squared (ε^2) was used to measure the effect sizes of the Kruskal-Wallis tests and was interpreted with .01 - .08 representing a small effect size, .09 – .24 being moderate, and > .25 being large (Iacobucci et al., 2023).

Following this, regressions were conducted on SPSS using Hayes' Process Macro (v4.2), allowing for a parallel mediation. Analyses were conducted on the 2014 HBSC dataset first and replicated on the 2018 dataset. The predictor variable was a dichotomous measure of family type (living in social care vs. a non-care family structure), and the outcome variables were traditional

bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration (2018 only) and victimisation. Age and gender were controlled, and the mediators were interpersonal relationships with family, friends, teachers, and classmates. Due to the quadratic curvilinearity of the 'family relationships' and 'friend relationships' variables, these variables were squared for use in the regression models; this is except for 'friend relationships' on cyberbullying perpetration, which was linear. The standardised regression coefficient (β) was interpreted as the effect size, with .10 - .29 being considered a small effect, .30 - .49 a moderate effect, and > .50 a large effect (Nieminen et al., 2022).

8.4 Results

The mean bullying involvement for children living in social care and those in non-care families is presented in Table 8.2. Upon visual inspection, children living in social care report greater traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation than those living in non-care families. This is replicated in the 2014 and 2018 British datasets.

Table 8.2

Mean Bullying Involvement for Children Living in Social Care Compared to Those in Non-Care Families

	Traditional Bullying Perpetration	Traditional Bullying Victimisation	Cyberbullying Perpetration	Cyberbullying Victimisation
Great Britain 2014				
Social Care	1.41	1.92	-	1.42
Non-Care	1.16	1.58	-	1.20
Great Britain 2018				
Social Care	1.70	2.33	1.45	1.71
Non-Care	1.16	1.62	1.11	1.28

8.4.1 Age and Gender Differences

Analyses were conducted to see if age and gender differences in bullying perpetration existed for children living in care. In the 2014 dataset, there were no statistically significant differences in age for traditional bullying perpetration ($\varepsilon^2 < .001$, $p = .98$) or traditional bullying victimisation ($\varepsilon^2 = .004$, $p = .56$). There was a statistically significant difference in age for cyberbullying victimisation, but the effect size was extremely small ($H(2) = 5.89$, $\varepsilon^2 = .02$, $p = .05$): respondents aged 11 ($M = 1.24$) reported lower cyberbullying victimisation than those aged 13 ($M = 1.50$) and 15 ($M = 1.53$). There were no statistically significant differences between males and females for traditional bullying perpetration ($\eta^2 = .02$, $p = .09$) or cyberbullying victimisation ($\eta^2 = .004$, $p = .10$). There was a statistically significant difference in gender for traditional bullying victimisation, but the effect size was small ($U = 8548.00$, $\eta^2 = .02$, $p = .03$).

Analyses were replicated on the 2018 dataset, and no statistically significant differences were found in age for traditional bullying perpetration ($\varepsilon^2 = .009$, $p = .34$) or victimisation ($\varepsilon^2 = .02$, $p = .08$), nor cyberbullying perpetration ($\varepsilon^2 = .003$, $p = .44$) or victimisation ($\varepsilon^2 = .003$, $p = .64$). There were no statistically significant differences between males and females for traditional bullying perpetration ($\eta^2 = .02$, $p = .17$) or victimisation ($\eta^2 = .02$, $p = .06$), nor cyberbullying perpetration ($\eta^2 = .003$, $p = .44$) or victimisation ($\eta^2 < .001$, $p = .52$).

8.4.2 Traditional Bullying Perpetration

A multiple regression analysis with parallel mediation was carried out to predict the effect of living in social care on traditional bullying perpetration. When conducted on the 2014 dataset, a significant effect was found, $R^2 = .065$, $F(5, 535) = 7.46$, $p < .001$, whereby living in social care was associated with increased traditional bullying perpetration ($\beta = .35$, $t = 4.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.11, .33]), with a large effect size found. Living in care predicted relationships with family ($\beta = -.29$, $t = -3.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.67, -.17]), teachers ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.09$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [-.38, -.01]), and classmates ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -2.32$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-.36, -.03]), with children in care reporting poorer relationships with these groups. Living in care did not predict relationships with friends ($p = .22$). Moreover, interpersonal relationships did not predict traditional bullying perpetration: relationships with family ($p = .94$), friends ($p = .34$), or teachers ($p = .13$). Relationships with

classmates did predict traditional bullying perpetration, β = -.14, t = -3.04, p = .002, 95% CI [-.15, -.03]. There was an indirect effect of living in care on bullying perpetration through relationships with classmates only; the proportion of the total effect that operates indirectly is 15%.

These analyses were replicated on the 2018 dataset, and a significant effect was also found, R^2 = .173, F (7, 319) = 9.55, p < .001, where living in social care was associated with increased traditional bullying perpetration, β = .55, t = 5.14, p < .001, 95% CI [.32, .72], and a large effect size was found. In this model, living in care only predicted relationships with family (β = -.44, t = -4.02, p < .001, 95% CI [-6.74, -2.31]); relationships with friends (p = .10), teachers (p = .32), and classmates (p = .07) were not predicted by living in care in this model. Moreover, poorly perceived relationships with family (β = -.16, t = -2.59, p = .01, 95% CI [-.03, -.004] and relationships with teachers (β = -.21, t = -3.62, p < .001, 95% CI [-.26, -.08] predicted more bullying perpetration, but those with friends (p = .91) and classmates (p = .55) did not. There was an indirect effect of living in care on bullying perpetration through relationships with family only; the proportion of the total effect that operates indirectly is 18.2%. Figure 8.1 presents the path diagram for traditional bullying perpetration.

Figure 8.1

Path Diagram for Living in Social Care on Traditional Bullying Perpetration (2014 and 2018

datasets)

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .001

8.4.3 Traditional Bullying Victimisation

A multiple regression analysis with parallel mediation was carried out for traditional bullying victimisation on the 2014 dataset, and a significant effect was found, R^2 = .196, F (7, 521) = 18.19, p < .001), with living in social care predicting greater traditional bullying victimisation, β = .33, t = 3.89, p < .001, 95% CI [.19, .58], with a large effect size identified. Living in care predicted relationships with family (β = -.31, t = -3.69, p < .001, 95% CI [-4.44, -1.35]), teachers (β = -.19, t = -2.40, p = .02, 95% CI [-.39, -.04]), and classmates (β = -.18, t = -2.17, p = .03, 95% CI [-34, -.02]), with children in care reporting poorer relationships with these groups. Living in care did not predict relationships with friends (p = .19). Moreover, neither relationships with family (p = .49) or friends (p = .70) predicted traditional bullying victimisation, but those with teachers (β = -.09, t = -2.16, p = .03, 95% CI [-.19, -.009]) and classmates (β = -.38, t = -8.71, p < .001, 95% CI [-.55, -.35]) did. Negatively perceived relationships with classmates and teachers increased the risk of victimisation. There was an indirect effect of living in care on bullying victimisation through relationships at school; the proportion of the total effect that operates indirectly is 28.5%.

These analyses were replicated on the 2018 dataset, and a significant effect was replicated, R^2 = .217, F (7, 319) = 12.63, p < .001, with living in care predicting greater victimisation with a large effect size, β = .52, t = 4.80, p < .001, 95% CI [.42, .99]. In this model, living in care only predicted relationships with family (β = -.41, t = -3.73, p < .001, 95% CI [-6.40, -1.98]); relationships with friends (p = .10), teachers (p = .20), and classmates (p = .05) were not predicted by living in care in this model. Moreover, relationships with family (p = .08), friends (p = .47), and teachers (p = .12) did not predict bullying victimisation. However, negatively perceived relationships with classmates predicted greater victimisation, β = -.31, t = -5.45, p < .001, 95% CI [-.55, -.26]. Victimisation was not mediated by any interpersonal relationships. Figure 8.2 presents the path diagram for traditional bullying victimisation.

Figure 8.2

Path Diagram for Living in Social Care on Traditional Bullying Victimisation (2014 and 2018
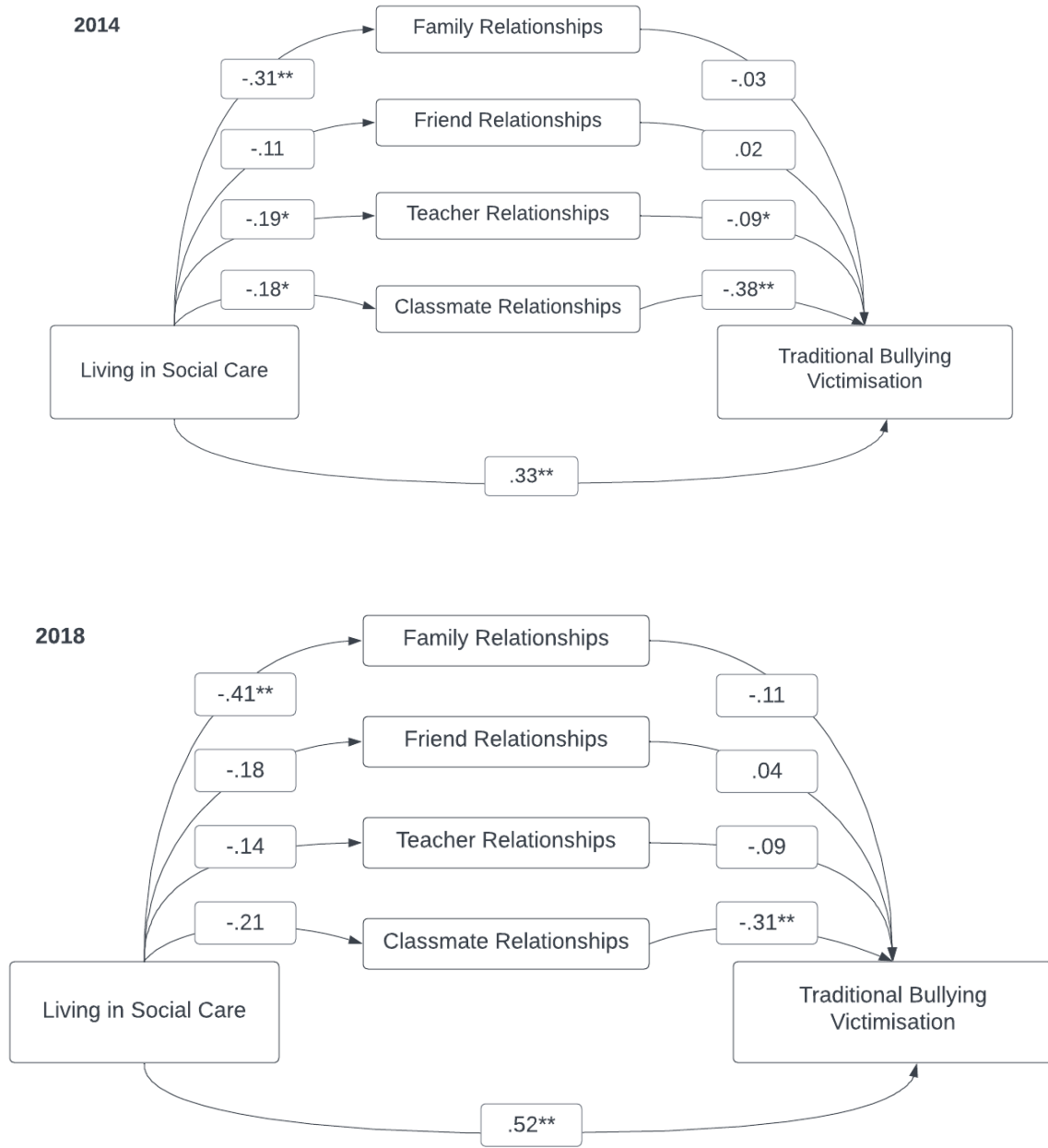
datasets)

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .001

8.4.4 Cyberbullying Perpetration

A multiple regression analysis with parallel mediation was carried out on the 2018 HBSC dataset only to predict the effect of living in social care on cyberbullying perpetration, and a significant effect was found, $R^2 = .026$, $F(7, 18671) = 72.18$, $p < .00$, where living in social care was associated with increased cyberbullying perpetration with a large effect size, $\beta = .64$, $t = 7.85$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.23, .39]. In this model, living in care predicted relationships with family ($\beta = -.37$, $t = -4.59$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-5.05, -2.03]), friends ($\beta = -.21$, $t = -2.62$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [-.57, -.08]), teachers ($\beta = -.16$, $t = -2.01$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [-.32, -.004]), and classmates ($\beta = -.24$, $t = -2.97$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-.35, -.07]). Cyberbullying perpetration was not predicted by relationships with friends ($p = .31$), but was predicted by relationships with family ($\beta = -.07$, $t = -7.85$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.004, -.002]), teachers ($\beta = -.07$, $t = -8.28$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.04, -.03]), and classmates ($\beta = -.05$, $t = -5.84$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.03, -.02]). However, only family relationships mediated cyberbullying perpetration. Figure 8.3 outlines the path diagram for cyberbullying perpetration.

Figure 8.3

Path Diagram for Living in Social Care on Cyberbullying Perpetration (2018 dataset)

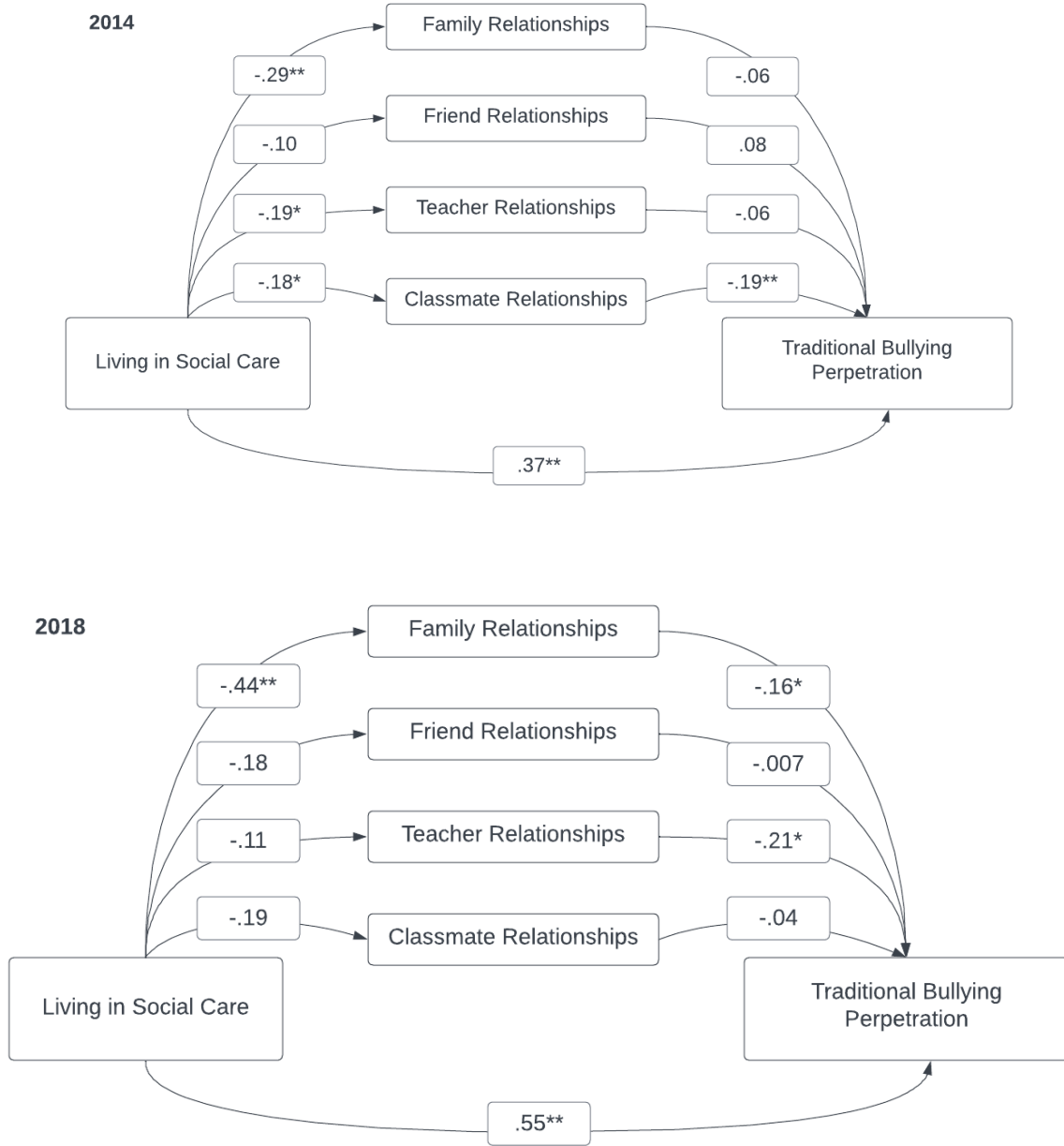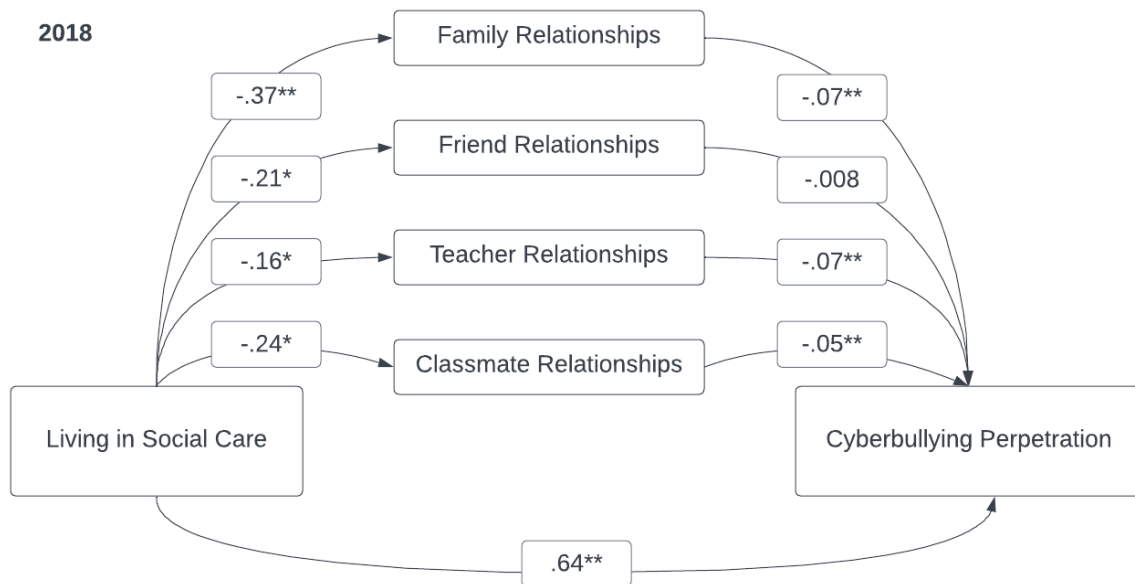*Note.* * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

8.4.5 Cyberbullying Victimisation

A multiple regression analysis with parallel mediation was carried out to predict the effect of living in social care on cyberbullying victimisation on the 2014 dataset, and a significant effect was found, $R^2 = .170$, $F(7, 512) = 14.99$, $p < .001$): living in social care was associated with increased cyberbullying victimisation, with a large effect size identified ($\beta = .31$, $t = 3.56$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.09, 32]). Living in care predicted relationships with family ($\beta = -.30$, $t = -3.57$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-4.38, -1.27]), teachers ($\beta = -.19$, $t = -2.36$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-.39, -.04]), and classmates ($\beta = -.19$, $t = -2.24$, $p = .03$, 95% CI [-35, -.02]), with children in care reporting poorer relationships with these groups. Living in care did not predict relationships with friends ($p = .23$). Moreover, neither relationships with family ($p = .06$) or teachers (p = .21) predicted cyberbullying victimisation, but those with friends ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.59$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.002, .02]) and classmates ($\beta = -.33$, $t = -7.51$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.29, -.17] did. Negatively perceived relationships with classmates increased the risk of victimisation, but positive relationships with friends increased the risk of victimisation; this is also visible in the mean scores for bullying involvement (Table 5.6). There was an indirect effect of living in care on bullying victimisation through relationships with classmates only; the proportion of the total effect that operates indirectly is 19.4%.

These analyses were replicated on the 2018 dataset, and a significant effect was found, $R^2 = .126$, $F(7, 318) = 6.56$, $p < .001$. Living in social care predicted increased cyberbullying victimisation, with a large effect size ($\beta = .41$, $t = 3.77$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.21, .67]). In this model, living in care only predicted relationships with family ($\beta = -.40$, $t = -3.70$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-6.35, -1.94]); relationships with friends ($p = .14$), teachers ($p = .32$), and classmates ($p = .07$) were not predicted by living in care in this model. Moreover, relationships with family ($p = .32$), friends (p = .40), and classmates (p = .06) did not predict bullying victimisation. However, negatively perceived relationships with teachers predicted greater victimisation, $\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.97$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-.26, -05]. Victimisation was not mediated by any interpersonal relationships. Figure 8.4 outlines the path diagram for cyberbullying victimisation.

Figure 8.4

Path Diagram for Living in Social Care on Cyberbullying Victimisation (2014 and 2018 datasets)
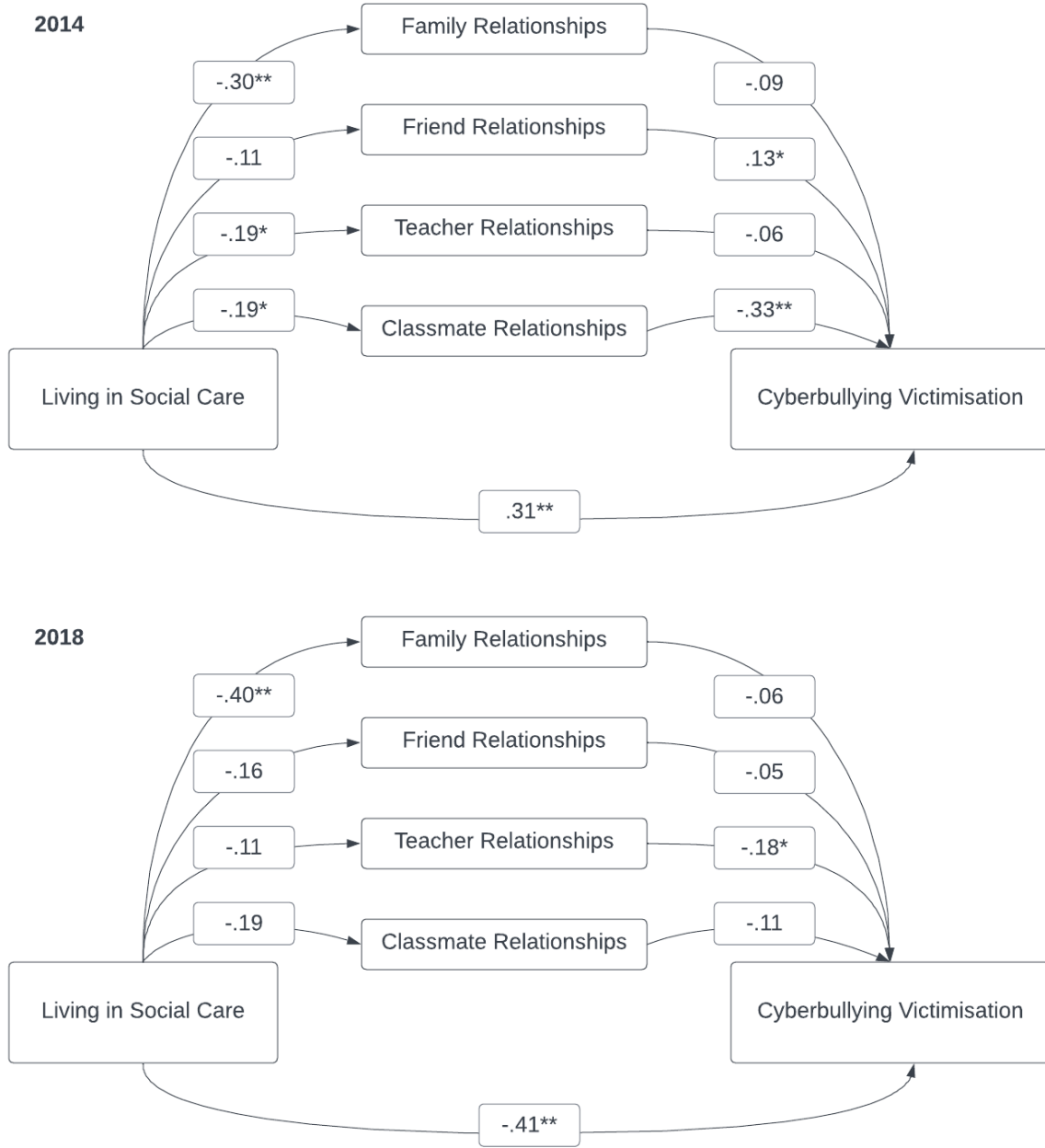
Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .001

8.5 Discussion

The present study aimed to understand if and how living in social care impacts bullying involvement in adolescence, and if there is a mediating role of interpersonal relationships. To our knowledge, this is the first study to consider both traditional and cyberbullying involvement in a sample of British children in social care.

8.5.1 Age and Gender Differences

Age and gender differences exist in bullying involvement (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Tokunaga, 2010), and analyses were conducted to see if these differences extended to children living in social care. There were no age or gender differences in traditional bullying perpetration or victimisation, nor cyberbullying perpetration or victimisation, suggesting that children in care are at risk of bullying involvement regardless of their age or gender. This supports the findings of Sekol and Farrington (2016a), whereby there were no gender differences in perpetration for children in social care, but contrasts that of Sekol and Farrington (2016b) for victimisation. To my knowledge, these are the only studies to have previously examined the role of gender in social care samples, and this was within a Croatian population. Subsequently, the findings presented in this chapter offer a unique insight in the experiences of British children in social care, as well as contributing to our understanding of age and gender on bullying involvement.

8.5.2 Traditional Bullying Perpetration

As predicted, a direct effect of living in social care on bullying perpetration was found, with those in care being significantly more likely to bully others. This was consistent across the 2014 and 2018 datasets and corroborates the findings of previous research (Sekol & Farrington, 2010; Sekol & Farrington, 2016a). However, the mediational effect of interpersonal relationships was somewhat unexpected. In the 2014 dataset, the effect was mediated by relationships with classmates only, which explained 15% of the total effect. Meanwhile, in the 2018 dataset, classmates did not mediate this effect, but relationships with family did. This mediator explained 18.2% of the total effect. Ultimately, living in social care predicted poorer relationships with classmates (2014) and family members (2018), which subsequently increased bullying

perpetration. But the small indirect ratios found in both models indicate that the direct effect of living in care on bullying perpetration is much more complex than these relationships account for.

8.5.3 Traditional Bullying Victimisation

Similarly, a direct effect of living in social care on traditional bullying victimisation was found, with those in care experiencing greater victimisation than those in other family types; this is similar to that found by Sekol & Farrington (2010) and Sekol & Farrington, (2016b). Like that of traditional bullying perpetration, relationships with classmates mediated the effect in the 2014 dataset, and the indirect ratio was much larger for this variable (28.5%). However, attempts to replicate this in the 2018 dataset were unsuccessful. There were no indirect effects of living in social care on traditional bullying victimisation in the more recent dataset.

8.5.4 Cyberbullying Perpetration

Living in social care also directly predicted cyberbullying perpetration, with children in care being more likely to bully others online; previous research has not yet explored cyberbullying perpetration in the social care population. Moreover, family relationships mediated this effect, whereby children in care reported poorer relationships with their families, leading to higher levels of cyberbullying perpetration. This could be a result of feelings of frustration leading to cyberbullying, with limited support being provided from the family. Alternatively, children in social care may experience limited parental supervision online, which has consistently been associated with increased cyberbullying perpetration (Low & Espelage, 2013; Pascual-Sanchez et al., 2022; Zych, 2019). These children may not be taught appropriate behaviours online or may feel that any perpetration will go unpunished. Regardless, it is difficult to conclude why these family relationships mediate this effect without understanding specific characteristics of the respondents, such as how long they have been in care, or even whether the child was referring to their foster family or birth family when responding, or the type of care they were in.

8.5.5 Cyberbullying Victimisation

Finally, living in care directly increased the risk of cyberbullying victimisation. In the 2014 dataset, there was an indirect effect through relationships with classmates, but there were no mediation paths in the 2018 dataset. Overall, relationships with classmates were important for bullying involvement in all models utilising the 2014 dataset, particularly when considered in relation to those with family, friends, or teachers. Nonetheless, the failure to replicate this in the 2018 dataset questions the reliability, and further research would be beneficial to further interrogate these findings.

8.5.6 Social Care and Interpersonal Relationships

Living in care was consistently associated with poorer relationships with family, teachers, and classmates, which highlights a vulnerability for children living in care. Firstly, these relationships may represent instability for children in care. Regardless of the reasons for entering care, family relationships will be embedded with experiences of trauma, as well as the instability of being removed from the biological family with little clarity of when they will return. Meanwhile, relationships at school will be impacted by absences, being moved between schools to fit with care placements, and misinformation about the child in care's experiences. It is apparent why these relationships would be perceived as more negative, when the foundations will inevitably be unstable.

Secondly, positive relationships are protective (Perren et al., 2012), and children with difficult or conflicted relationships may use cyberspace as a form of escapism, which increases their risk of cyberbullying exposure. This could highlight a risk for children in care as a result of their relationships.

8.5.7 Implications for Future Research

The present research provides a unique insight into how living in social care may play a role in bullying involvement at school and online, and for interpersonal relationships. However, this research is not without limitation. Perhaps the most substantial is that the nature of the social care experience was not measured in depth. Firstly, the experiences of children living in residential care

settings and foster care are likely to be very different. Whilst one mimics a traditional family setting, the other is an institutionalised setting with clearer boundaries between care staff and service users. To our knowledge, no research has compared these two groups, and therefore it is impossible to definitively answer whether their experiences of bullying are the same. It would be useful for these subgroups to be separated, with a deeper exploration of how foster care specifically impacts relationships and bullying involvement. This would allow for consideration of foster-specific characteristics, such as living in a home with other children; some have argued that children who are placed in foster homes with other children related biologically to the foster carers are more likely to have successful placements, whilst others have argued against this (Oosterman et al., 2007; Perry & Price, 2017).

In line with this, the HBSC did not measure how long the children had been living in social care, specifically in the placement at the time of completing the survey. As mentioned, children who have been in a specific residential care settings for a longer period are more likely to have developed secure attachments and display less aggression (Attar-Schwartz, 2008). It would be reasonable to assume that this also applies to those living in foster care, but the literature is unclear: Perry and Price (2017) note that children who had lived in a foster placement for longer periods of time were more likely to commit relational aggression than those who had not lived in a placement for longer periods, but whether this applies to the wider bullying field beyond relational aggression is unclear. It would be beneficial to examine if the amount of time in a social care placement impacts the effects found in these regression models. This is also applicable to school placements: due to the nature of foster care, children often get moved between schools, which can lead to disruption in their education and the need to readjust to different teachers and school rules (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Equally, these authors note that moving schools regularly may make foster children an 'easy target', due to fewer friends to provide support. The HBSC survey was not able to measure whether children experienced consistency in schools during their time in social care, but future research would benefit from including this factor as a potential mediator.

8.5.8 Implications for Practice

Children living in social care are an extremely vulnerable group. Previous research has noted that children in residential care settings may be at risk of bullying involvement (Mazzone et al., 2019; Monks et al., 2009; Yubero et al., 2019), yet foster children and the wider care system have frequently been forgotten in this field. Not only are these children at risk of poor interpersonal relationships, but they are also more likely to be involved in bullying. It is therefore essential for teachers, social workers, and the wider community to collectively work to support and protect these children.

Under the Children Act 1989, schools have a legal obligation to safeguard and protect children living in care, which includes providing a designated member of staff to support their educational needs. It is required that this member of staff has training to support children in care. Other than this, UK schools do not have a legal obligation to train any other member of staff in supporting looked after children. In this sense, many of the staff who educate children in care every day will have no training or formal understanding of their experiences. They will be unaware of the increased risks of bullying, or of their difficulties in forming stable interpersonal relationships, and as we will see in 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children', they may not be aware of the child's background or care situation at all.

Subsequently, all schools and educators should have a basic understanding of the social care system, and the experiences of the children living in social care. The Fostering Network and PAC-UK are two leading UK organisations who work to promote the inclusion and welfare of children living in social care. Both organisations provide educational resources for schools, which aim to provide the skills needed to fully support children living in care.

To conclude, the findings in this chapter provide a novel insight into the experiences of children living in care, and the risks that these children face. From understanding these risks, there is an evident need for schools and the wider community to receive education and training on how to support these children.

Chapter Nine

A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children

9.1 Chapter Overview

The following chapter outlines the qualitative project conducted for this thesis, surrounding foster children's experiences of bullying. This chapter was inspired by the results from the HBSC analyses in 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' and 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', which highlighted a vulnerability of children in social care for bullying. The initial findings from this study were presented as an oral presentation at the 2022 Workshop on Aggression in Jena, Germany.

9.2 Objectives and Research Questions

The previous chapter (Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement) identified that children living in social care are at an increased risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation. However, due to the nature of the HBSC surveys, this was inclusive of those living in residential care and foster care. The experiences of those living in either type of social care will be very different to one another. Children in residential care settings live in a group home with several other children and staff members; these children may attend a school within the care home. Meanwhile, children in foster care will live in a family unit, with a small number of other children – if any – and foster parents at the forefront. They will typically attend a school outside of the foster home and are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities. As a result, the latter is more consistent with a traditional family structure.

Previous research has identified that children living in residential care settings are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of peer bullying than non-care children (Barter, 2009; O'Neil, 2001; Mazzone et al., 2019; Sekol & Farrington, 2010; Sekol & Farrington, 2016a; Sekol & Farrington, 2016b), but the experiences of children in foster care specifically have not received the same amount of attention. In fact, much of the research on foster children has focused on wider aggression, rather than peer bullying (Bennett et al., 2023; Font et al., 2015; Höjer et al., 2006; Morgan, 2011; Perry & Price, 2017; Watson & Jones, 2002), or on female-only samples (Sterzing

et al., 2020). There is a desperate need for research looking into the bullying experiences of children in foster care, and Barter and Lutman (2016) emphasised that this should include the voices of the children directly.

The objective of this chapter was to focus solely on the experiences of children in foster care, with a qualitative approach to understand their experiences of bullying and interpersonal relationships. The nature of this research was exploratory, so no hypotheses were predicted. However, the research questions were:

1. What is the nature of interpersonal relationships at home and at school for children living in foster care?

2. What are the experiences of bullying for foster children? Do these children also experience bullying within the foster home, such as 'between-sibling bullying' with related or unrelated siblings?

3. How can we best support future children in foster care in their interpersonal relationships and bullying experiences?

9.3 Method

9.3.1 Participants

Participants were recruited through various channels, including posts on social media groups aimed at foster care leavers or foster parents, word-of-mouth, and through contacting different groups directly involved in supporting children in social care and care leavers. These groups included social services teams across the UK, the Look Ahead groups in Maidenhead and Lewisham, and a Maidenhead-based homeless charity with nationwide links and strong networks of care leavers. Attempts to recruit participants were conducted from the start of August 2022 until May 2023.

A total of 13 foster care leavers were recruited, but six of these (four males and two females) dropped out prior to the interviews being conducted. A total of seven foster care leavers were interviewed, six females and one gender non-binary. Their ages of participants ranged from 18-41 ($M = 24.57$) years. Six participants were White-British, and one participant was Black African. No exclusion criteria were enforced regarding the type of foster home lived in (kinship or

unrelated foster carers), the age when entering care as a child, or the total length of time in care.

Table 9.1 outlines the participant characteristics. All participants had experience of living with other children in foster care, whether this was those biologically related to the carer, or other foster children; this was explored further in terms of relationships and bullying within the foster home.

A total of nine foster parents were recruited (all female), but four of these dropped out prior to the interviews being conducted. A final five foster care parents were included, with their ages ranging from 36-61 ($M = 47.25$) years. One participant did not provide their ethnicity, but the remaining four were White-British. There was no exclusion criterion applied for the type of foster care provided, nor the length of time as a foster parent: only one participant was no longer a foster parent at the time of interviewing. Table 9.2 outlines the participant characteristics for this group. Mia was the only foster carer with a child on a long-term placement, who will be with her until he turns 18. Both Mia and Laura were fostering children with additional learning and physical needs, which required different forms of care. All participants have been given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Table 9.1

Characteristics of the Foster Care Leavers Participating in Interviews

Name	Ethnicity	Age when entering care	Length of time in care	Number of placements	Moved schools due to foster placements
Emily	White British	3-years-old	18 years	21	No[c]
Sarah	White British	4-years-old	15 years	Multiple[a]	Primary school only
Olivia	White British	6-years-old	10 years	5	Yes
Charlie	White British	9-years-old	3 years	6[b]	Yes
Milly	White British	16-years-old	2 years	1	No
Sophie	Black African	16-years-old	9 months	1	No
Claire	White British	17-years-old	10 months	1	No

Note. [a]Sarah disclosed that she had been in multiple placements, but a number was not specified. [b]Charlie noted that they had been in multiple emergency placements, which were not included in this figure. Charlie was placed into residential care following their final foster placement. [c]Emily attended a specialist behavioural school, which she reported was a response to mainstream schools having difficulty managing her behaviour, and it was deemed in her interest to keep her there regardless of placement location.

Table 9.2

Characteristics of Foster Parents Participating in Interviews

Name	Length of time fostering	Local Authority (LA) or Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)	Kinship foster carer	Still fostering at time of interview	Biological children living in home when fostering
Laura	1.5 years	LA	Yes	No	No
Ella	4 years	LA	No	Yes	Yes
Mia	2 years	IFA	No	Yes	No
Rose	5.5 years	IFA	No	Yes	Yes
Isabelle	14 years	Both[a]	No	Yes	Yes

Note. [a]Isabelle had fostered for her LA for 11 years before changing to an IFA, with whom she had been with for three years.

9.3.2 Measures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with foster care leavers and foster parents. Due to the differences in foster care experiences, a structured interview was not deemed appropriate. The interviews were split into four sections: section one involved initial questions surrounding how long they were in care or had been foster parents, and if there were other children in the foster home; section two focused on the interpersonal relationships of the foster child; section three focused on bullying experiences, and the Olweus (1993) definition of bullying was provided here; section four focused on what participants felt the social care system needed to better support foster children. The basic interview schedule is provided in Appendix D for foster care leavers, and Appendix E for foster parents.

9.3.3 Data Collection

Prior to conducting this research, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Interviews were conducted in a location that was most comfortable and convenient for the participant, with 11 opting for video calls and one face-to-face. This allowed for inclusion of participants from further geographical locations. Informed consent was collected prior to the interview, and all participants agreed for their interviews to be audio recorded. All names were replaced with pseudonyms, and identifying information such as locations or fostering agencies were redacted. Interviews ranged in duration from 40-90 minutes. All participants were paid £20 for their participation, except one participant who refused payment. Interviews were transcribed semi-verbatim, meaning that certain utterances were not transcribed, specifically stutters, fillers, and non-speech sounds.

9.3.4 Data Analysis

The interview data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), allowing for an understanding of the unique and subjective experiences of participants. This analytic method centres the idea of 'making sense' of an experience, with an individual's lived experience – as well as their own understanding of this – being fundamental (Smith et al., 2021). In this sense, IPA assumes that knowledge and truth come from the meaning that individuals place onto an experience, rather than an objective 'truth': Smith et al. (2021) state that IPA is rooted in a person-centred model, whereby *"the meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes an experience, can be said to represent the experience itself"* (p.27). Moreover, IPA is less about fitting qualitative data into predefined categories, but instead about understanding individual cases first, before identifying similarities and differences between the cases; although understanding the shared experience is important, each participants' voice remains at the forefront. In the context of foster care and bullying, IPA was the most beneficial and appropriate approach. As discussed, previous research has not yet explored the experiences of children in foster care, and IPA allows these voices to be heard. This is useful for gaining a deeper understanding of this complex topic, as well as acknowledging that each foster child is an individual, rather than a part of the system in which they lived. Providing them a platform to share their subjective experiences

allows them to regain some individuality and power over their experiences, whilst also recognising that each foster family experience is unique.

Finally, IPA adopts a 'double hermeneutic' approach, whereby both the participant and the researcher are attempting to make sense of the experiences, but from different entry points (Smith et al., 2021). In the first stage, participants derive meaning from their experiences through their recollection, and in the second stage, the researcher makes sense of the participants' meaning. This was important for this thesis, with me – the researcher – not being from a social care background. My understanding of the social care system in the UK was fundamentally different to those who grew up in foster care and will be reflected on in Section '9.5.4 Reflexive Statement'.

The analysis process followed that of Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014): each interview transcript was read multiple times to allow for full immersion into the data, and initial notes were made to describe and summarise key points. The key focus was on the content being described, rather than the way participants discussed their experiences. Next, notes were revised and compiled into emerging themes specific to each transcript, such as grouping each description of an experience into a concise and summarising phrase. Finally, these emerging themes were compiled with the other transcripts in the sample, and clustered to establish common themes. It is important to note that themes from the two groups (foster care leavers and foster parents) were compiled separately, in order to have two distinguishable groups. Although some themes were similar in both groups – such as, 'failings of social services' – these were created in isolation, and the similarities were naturally-occurring.

Upon completing the analysis, participants were contacted with a list of the identified themes and any quotes from them that would be used in the written report; this allowed participants an opportunity to confirm if the themes reflected their experiences. All participants agreed with the themes selected.

9.4 Results

Interpersonal relationships formed a central theme in the interviews with both foster care leavers and foster parents. For foster care leavers, relationships in the foster home and with schools had a considerable impact on the success of a foster placement, school functioning, and

on bullying experiences. Foster care leavers also discussed experiences of bullying outside of relationships, with just being in care acting as a risk factor for victimisation, and an overarching sense of needing to deal with bullying alone. The final theme centred the need for genuine care for children living in foster care.

Foster parents also discussed interpersonal relationships, but with a focus on the formation and maintenance of these. They discussed the impact on birth children, both in terms of their relationships with the foster child, and for the risk of bullying in the home. Foster parents highlighted the need for all systems to work collaboratively, but – like foster care leavers – noted failures in the existing social care system. Themes for each group are presented in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3

Themes Identified from Foster Care Leavers and Foster Parent Interviews

Foster Care Leavers	Foster Parents
Interpersonal Relationships	**Building and Maintaining Relationships**
Relationships in the foster family	Foster parent and foster child relationships
Relationships in the school	Relationships with Schools
Self-perception	Impact for birth children
Bullying	**Bullying**
The risk of being in care	Bullying
Coping alone	
The Need for Genuine Care	**The Failings of the Care System**
The role of the school	The 'whole system'
Failings of social services	Failings of social services
Training and collaboration	Support needs

9.4.1. Foster Care Leavers

9.4.1.1 Interpersonal Relationships. Interpersonal relationships were at the forefront of all experiences within the foster care setting, influencing their general wellbeing, and their involvement in bullying. These were subdivided into 'Relationships in the Foster Family', 'Relationships in the School', and 'Self-Perception'. Whilst the latter was not directly an interpersonal relationship, participants' perceptions of themselves – or their 'self-relationship' – had an influence on their interpersonal relationships.

Relationships in the Foster Family. Participants who had experienced multiple foster placements (Emily, Sarah, Olivia, and Charlie) were encouraged to discuss any number of placements, but all chose to focus in on one family that they felt epitomised their care experience. Despite the expected struggles, these families were typically reflected upon positively. Emily and Charlie made some reference to other foster families, but these were to illustrate negative experiences.

All seven participants described one foster carer that had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their experience in care. Three participants described their foster parent as becoming a mother figure: Olivia noted *"I used to call her mum"* and later documented that she *"felt part of the family"*, whilst Milly described her foster parent as *"very motherly"*. Claire elaborated on this further, stating that *"she replaced my mum, and I replaced her daughter. It helped us both get through missing what we wanted and needed"*. Each of these participants mentioned a strained relationship with their biological mothers, and thus this description and allocation of a 'motherly' role appears intimate. Interestingly, Milly later stated *"she created a motherly bond…which I didn't see myself having nowhere near close to that time"*, amplifying the closeness in this relationship, and creating an undertone that this foster carer exceeded her expectations. This concept was also highlighted by Emily:

> *"I was sectioned. I was hospitalised by CAMHS. And she was there every single day, even with the other little girl that she fostered […] it's not her job to do other things and it's not her job to be there when I was in hospital. She took us on so many holidays, adventures. She really didn't need to".*

Whilst the expectations for Milly were those that involved how she felt towards her foster mother, the expectations for Emily involved what she believed the role of her foster mother was. In particular, she believed that their role was not to provide unconditional emotional support in one of her greatest times of need. At a minimum, foster carers are expected to offer a safe and stable environment to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of the child (Steenbakkers et al., 2018), but for a child who may have poor self-esteem or limited experience of these needs being met, this may exceed the expectations of what they believe they are deserving of.

Moreover, Emily stated that her foster mother *"didn't need"* to take them on *"many holidays"* and *"adventures"*. Activities and holidays were mentioned in many of the interviews, with Sophie, Sarah and Milly all mentioning that they too were taken on days out and holidays; these were described in a positive manner, with them feeling *"included"* (Sophie) and *"lucky"* (Sarah).

Nonetheless, Sarah recalled an experience that was less positive surrounding these activities. In this, Sarah remembered having an argument with her foster parents over her bad behaviours, with them asking *"how could you be like this when we've taken you here or we've taken you on nice holidays?"*. This offers an interesting juxtaposition to the positive activities, with these being used as a motivator or justification for 'good behaviour', rather than a positive experience that foster children are as equally entitled to as biological children. Children in foster care frequently show a desire to be accepted by their foster families, and seek a sense of belonging (Sinclair, 2005). Although there is nothing inherently negative about rewarding good behaviours with treats and activities, the experience that Claire reflects on has an undertone of guilt, with her worthiness of being given these treats being questioned.

Beyond relationships with foster parents, those with other children in the foster home were discussed. Typically, these all surrounded bullying, or rather the lack thereof; all seven participants had experienced living with other children in the foster home, but none of them perceived there to be any incidents of bullying. 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying' identified a need for further research on sibling bullying in alternative family structures, and this offers a useful insight into this topic.

Regardless, not all interactions between children in the foster home were positive. Charlie documented a single altercation with the biological child of their foster parents, stating:

"*I think her parents used to have a lot of arguments because of me as well, because I was angry a lot. So, she didn't like that, and I think she kind of didn't like that I was taking her parents' attention away from her*".

Charlie then overheard the foster sister saying that it was *"no wonder"* that their mum did not want them, resulting in Charlie hitting the foster sister and being removed from the home. Charlie later described feelings of being a burden or "*extra*" in the foster home, and although this will be discussed in depth in the theme of 'Self-Perception', it highlights the idea of blaming the child in care, and the strain that these children face with others. However, this incident was with the biological child of the foster parent, and interactions between-foster children were perceived differently. Whilst Olivia described keeping herself to herself, Claire described any arguing as "*like siblings*", rather than bullying or intending to cause harm. This could be a result of the shared experiences between foster children, with Sarah acknowledging that other foster children *"were dealing with their own issues"* and Emily noting that other children in care *"understood"*. Sarah noted that even in times of difficulty, the foster children always "*found a way to get on with each other*", suggesting a mutual respect between them. This could suggest that the bullying risk factors for foster children are relative to others outside of foster care, but within the foster care system, these factors are reduced by a shared understanding.

To finish, three participants (Olivia, Claire, and Sophie) shared that they are still in contact with the foster parents who provided them with positive homes and support; these positive relationships have had a last impact on these individuals, and continue to provide a stable and loving family environment. This is a positive side to an otherwise difficult and disruptive experience for children, and epitomises what the foster care system should be: loving and stable.

Relationships in the School. In contrast to the 'Relationships in the Foster Home', which were predominantly reflected on in a positive light, 'Relationships in the School' were described as strained and difficult. One of the most commonly noted reasons for strained school relationships was a result of being moved around whilst in care.

For instance, Emily noted that the instability of being in care led to her *"acting up"* at school, and that it was *"harder to keep in contact, especially when you're younger and you don't exactly have a phone"* and are *"constantly moving schools"*. This was echoed by Sarah, who was unable

to keep in contact with children from other placements as the adults involved *"thought that would be holding you back and not moving forward"* leading to *"a bit of a separation"*. The exact reasoning behind this reduced contact is unclear, but it is a normative experience for children in care: a 2009 Ofsted report found that 35% of children in care lost contact with the friends made pre-care, and many reported losing friends upon moving placements.

On the other hand, Sophie and Milly remained in their original schools throughout their foster care experience and thus were not removed from their existing friendships. Nonetheless, both reported feeling strain in their friendships. For instance, Sophie experienced disrupted lessons and breaktimes at school, noting relationships were strained due to *"having to be taken out when I would be spending time with them and doing group stuff"*, which emphasises a further instability for children in foster care and an impact on their educational experiences. Meanwhile, Milly reported feeling distanced from classmates who did not interact with her because her *"whole personal life was completely different to them"*. Consequently, it appears that both the physical and psychological instability of being in care has a negative impact on interpersonal relationships with peers and classmates.

For Sarah, attending multiple primary schools resulted in her being academically behind her peers, specifically when she entered secondary school:

> *"My primary experience was horrific because I went to so many different schools […] It really impacted me. I was totally lost really. It was good that I attended the same senior school, but I did lose a lot of my education, and it definitely impacted me in senior school"*.

Further to this *"horrific"* experience, Sarah felt that her secondary school viewed her as less academic and *"a bit thick"*. This questions the approach of schools when supporting students in the care system, and perhaps how much they understand about the individual's background. Similar issues were described by Sophie, who found that teachers *"would just dump a bunch of work and be like, 'well this is due in'"* to account for the lessons missed from care meetings and interviews. However, Sophie went on to state that:

> *"I had to explain the situation to them, because it wasn't disclosed […] I had to disclose that information to them and that I'm being taken out. And then they were sympathetic to me and gave me a lower workload"*.

This emphasises the idea that oftentimes schools are unaware of student backgrounds, with this participant having to actively tell her teachers about her home situation. Whilst this is respectful of student privacy, it questions if teachers can fully support each individual student if they are not aware of the traumas the child is experiencing; this concept was revisited in the theme of 'The Need for Genuine Care', but ultimately there does not appear to be a clear answer on how to address this. The need to disclose personal and family information to somehow address an educational challenge was also considered by Emily, who found herself disclosing to inquisitive classmates, and Milly, who had to address insensitive comments from an unaware teacher.

Alongside the need to disclose information and lost education, three participants felt that they were unsupported by their schools, identifying an additional educational challenge. Both Claire and Charlie described acting in disruptive and problematic ways at school due to the difficulties in their home lives, but they both felt that schools did not attempt to support them in behaving more appropriately and addressing their problems. Claire stated, *"I was always in trouble, instead of people sitting down and thinking 'why is she acting like this?'"*, which was echoed by Charlie who was expelled from primary school due to their often volatile behaviours in the classroom. Although it is undeniable that schools have a responsibility to protect all children, and thus behaviours that are harmful must be reprimanded regardless of the perpetrator's circumstances, it does highlight the additional needs of vulnerable children in foster care. A meta-analysis by Gypen et al. (2017) found that children who had lived in foster care were frequently involved in criminal behaviours, and whilst the mechanisms underpinning this are not yet known, it is interesting that those who displayed aggression in school reported perceived rejection instead of supportive correction.

A further element of school relationships was the issue of differential treatment from teaching staff, and was mentioned by three participants. One example was visible when Olivia was asked if she had ever felt as though teaching staff treated her differently or favouritised her because of her status as a child in foster care, to which she responded:

> *"I was treated differently, but I wouldn't say I was favouritised […] I felt left out a few times. I felt like I was the last person to choose or be chosen by someone. Because of the situation I was in".*

Olivia later discussed other experiences of rejection in her life, offering the view that school –
somewhere that should offer stability and safety for children in care – amplified her feelings of
being rejected and 'different' to her classmates living with biological parents. Alternatively, two
participants felt that their status as children in care led them being treated more positively that their
classmates.

> Emily: *"When I was in primary school, I went into school in PE shorts because my foster
> carer couldn't find my skirt that morning. […] My school teacher went out at lunch and
> bought me one, and I was like – you don't do that for anybody else. You know? They
> brought things in from home. They let us have time away from class. It's something not
> many kids get in terms of support"*.

Emily asked her teachers why they treated her favourably, and they responded *"well, it's because
you're in foster care"*, which she felt should not have made a difference. Initially, the experiences
described sound positive – at least in comparison to Olivia's feelings of rejection – but the obvious
differences in treatment made Emily feel set apart from her peers. Milly described various similar
experiences, including not getting into trouble for shouting at a teacher, and being driven home by
the headmaster when her birth mother failed to collect her. However, her experiences influenced
how students treated her:

> *"Some of them treated me really nicely so that they could get in the teachers' good books,
> but it was obvious that they were being over nice. But then some of them just ignored me
> again."* (Milly).

Overall, the acts of kindness from teachers were well-intentioned, but resulted in other students
treating Milly differently. Both Emily and Milly reflected on these actions as favouritism and
highlighting them as different to their peers.

> ***Self-perception.*** This theme was present in four interviews (Claire, Sarah, Milly, and
Charlie), and referred to their negative feelings towards themselves. Although this was not
descriptive of their interpersonal relationships directly, their self-perceptions were described as
having an impact on their wider relationships and general well-being.

Claire: *"I think I struggled to take it all in. Why am I in foster care? Why are my siblings not in foster care? It was really hard to get my head around. On the outside, it was all 'yeah this is fine', but on the inside I had a lot of issues."*.

For Claire, this appeared as an outward presentation of being confident and collected, whilst internally struggling. This questioning of 'why me' in comparison to her siblings could indicate some degree of self-blame, whilst further amplifying feelings of being different. Self-blame was also expressed by Charlie, who explained *"when you're used to people leaving, you find it difficult to not think, 'oh, that's my fault'"*. As such, the negative self-perceptions described by these participants is evident, and further enhances feelings of isolation in foster children, which would likely impact their interpersonal relationships. Interestingly, Milly did not necessarily blame herself for her situation, but noted an expectation for her to act in a certain way as a child in care (Milly: *"It was expected for me to be a bad kid. It still is"*). The stereotype of children in care being difficult or delinquent is one that exists throughout society and the academic literature, with Ainsworth and Hansen (2005) describing children in the social system as displaying "an inability to live peacefully with others" (p.195).

Meanwhile, three participants expressed feelings of *"intruding"* (Claire) or feeling too institutionalised to understand the dynamics of family life (Sarah: *"I was quite institutionalised […] I had no idea how family life was"*). One participant elaborated on these feelings, and the role it played in their relationships in the foster family:

Charlie: *"I preferred being on my own, more because I was the only child they were focusing on. So, I didn't feel bad that they were focusing on me, especially when it was their own kids, because in my head I was like, they're always going to come first, because that's their child, and I'm just extra"*.

They later expressed a fear of *"being too much"*, suggesting a feeling of being a burden. Interestingly, Claire and Charlie were the same two to express feelings of self-blame, and thus this further amplifies the negative self-perception that these participants were feeling as children in foster care, and a lack of belongingness or security in their foster homes. This is vital, as a sense of belonging is necessary for mental and social wellbeing, alongside the formation of interpersonal relationships (Arslan, 2018; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Overall, interpersonal relationships is a central but complex topic when looking at the experiences of children in foster care: all participants expressed positive bonds in the foster family but strained wider relationships. It is possible that the latter could have been further impacted by the educational challenges experienced and poor self-perception.

9.4.1.2 Experiences of Bullying. All seven participants documented some involvement in bullying; two participants (Claire and Charlie) fit the definition of bullying perpetrators, and six participants (Emily, Olivia, Sophie, Sarah, Milly, and Charlie) were victims of bullying. Notably, Sophie and Sarah stated that the bullying was from adult caregivers, which further highlights the power dynamics between the victim and perpetrator.

Although bullying incidents were identified as rooted within interpersonal relationships, two additional themes of bullying were discussed that expanded beyond relationships. The first of these is 'The Risk of Being in Care', whereby just being a child in foster care created a risk for bullying victimisation; the second centred around coping with bullying, which for these children was a solitary experience.

The Risk of Being in Care. Five participants (Emily, Olivia, Claire, Milly, and Charlie) mentioned risk factors for bullying involvement, which were either directly or indirectly a result of living in foster care. Three participants (Olivia, Milly, and Charlie) felt that their victimisation was a direct result of *"the situation I was in"* (Olivia).

> Charlie: *"I was also constantly asked if being in care was like Tracy Beaker. To which I had to inform them: no. It became a way for people to dig at me, if I was angry or something, it would be 'well, no wonder your parents don't want you'"*.

For Charlie, the mere identity of being child in foster care led to ridicule and comparison to *Tracy Beaker* – a popular book and television character devised by Jacqueline Wilson in the early 1990s-2000s; this character is portrayed as a 'problem child' living in a residential home between foster placements, and reinforces stereotypes that children in care are troubled, rejected, and likely to not succeed in later life. Moreover, the accusations about their parents not *wanting* them were echoed by Emily, who also experienced children saying, "*well your mum didn't want you*". This, alongside the comparison to a fictional character, implies a lack of understanding and insensitivity towards

children living in foster care. A similar issue was described by Milly, who felt that peers and teachers *"didn't really bother with me that much anymore"* as soon as she was placed into care, leading her to feel isolated and rejected. Although she began to question this later in the interview, Milly felt that this could be indicative of classmates not knowing how to talk to her, which furthers the idea that there is a wider lack of understanding of foster care and consequently poses a risk of bullying involvement.

Meanwhile, Emily and Milly identified visible differences that increased the risk of peer bullying. Emily noted *"I've known other kids to go through a lot of bullying, because you're in care you only get a certain amount of money every month for clothes"*, which caused the children to be behind on the latest fashion trends. The risk factor of financial difficulties (Jansen et al., 2012) is not necessarily specific to children in foster care but does identify a further risk for these already vulnerable children. Likewise, Milly found that she was at an increased risk as she *"wasn't brought up knowing how to shower properly or bath properly"*, leading to classmates commenting on her physical appearance. This is often an issue for children who have experienced neglect, and further increases the risk of bullying victimisation.

Relational risk factors were highlighted by Emily, Olivia, Claire, Milly, and Charlie. For instance, the differential treatment described in the Educational Challenges theme was a risk factor for bullying, with Milly finding that children treated her differently, and Emily finding that *"other kids click onto it, and there was some bullying at the start"*. This further highlights that the well-intentioned favouritism towards vulnerable children can act as a risk factor for peer bullying. Meanwhile, Claire and Charlie described difficulties in their interpersonal relationships as risk factors for bullying:

> Claire: *"In all honesty, looking back I was a bully in college. That was because of my own insecurities. I felt like nobody cared about me. Nobody was bothered about me. So, I took it out on other people. That will always be a regret of mine because I'm not a horrible person. But I felt like at that time someone had to feel some of my pain. […] If my own mum and dad didn't want me then no one else would.".*

The feeling of being alone and rejected caused Claire to bully others; peer rejection has frequently been linked to bullying perpetration (Wiertsema et al., 2023). On the flip side, Charlie felt that their

isolation was a risk factor for victimisation: *"I wouldn't be surprised if my difficulty with maintaining relationships was part of the reason I was bullied. I think I was seen as an easy target because I was mostly by myself"*. A plethora of research has identified a risk between having fewer friends and increased victimisation, with perpetrators not fearing retaliation (Perry et al., 2001).

 Coping Alone. The final theme for bullying was about interventions, except these were exclusively about dealing with bullying independently, or 'Coping Alone'. This was present in six of the interviews (Emily, Olivia, Claire, Sarah, Milly, and Charlie). For two participants, this appeared to be internalising the bullying, with Olivia stating, *"I just cried and got back to school work"* and *"I bottled things up. I taught myself how to deal with it, to be honest"*. However, Emily used retorts to abusive comments that her mother didn't want her, such as "*well, you know, I was chosen*", or reminders that she would receive triple the number of gifts on Christmas. She also felt that dealing with bullying was a case of gaining "*a thicker skin*", proposing that it is the responsibility of the victim to overcome bullying.

 Three of the participants (Emily, Olivia, and Milly) reflected that the school were informed of bullying, but ultimately did not do anything to stop it. Sarah felt that there was not anybody that she could confide in at school. Bullying interventions commonly centre around the school, and all schools are legally required to have an anti-bullying. It is therefore surprising that only four of the participants even considered the role of the school in supporting them, with all of them reflecting on an unsuccessful anti-bullying strategy. In addition, Milly shared an anecdote of how she overcame bullying herself, when the school did not help:

> *"There was one message that I remember clearly that was someone telling me I'm fat, and because I'm fat, that nothing happened to me, and I was lying about being in care. […] I probably shouldn't have done it, but I put my care leaver status and my forms on my story to make a point. It did shut everyone up. I don't know what the meeting was called where they decide whether you're going into care or not, and I put the whole transcript up. Blocking out some bits because I didn't want everyone knowing that I was beaten every day and some other things. But I was a bit like – this has made it stop, and it was the highest thing I could have done"*.

Claire acknowledges that she *"probably shouldn't have done it"*, and yet reflects positively on how it served the purpose that she intended. She felt that sharing her very personal and traumatic experiences was the only alternative to being a victim of peer bullying. Ultimately, it is not entirely surprising that those who have been in care felt that they had to address bullying alone. A large proportion of foster children will grow up experiencing situations that other children do not have to, and situations that require them to learn how to care for themselves. In a system that can feel unsafe and unstable, it is understandable how they would feel alone in bullying too.

9.4.1.3 The Need for Genuine Care. Charlie summarised a sentiment found in many of the interviews, when they said: *"No one cares about care kids, for some reason. Which is ironic considering they're care kids"*. Many of the participants felt that they had been failed by the system, and all participants had practical suggestions for how the system can be improved to fully support foster children. This was broken down into the 'Role of the School', 'Failings of Social Services', and 'Education and Collaboration'.

The Role of the School. Three participants (Olivia, Sarah, and Milly) expressed a desire for a designated staff member with proper training to support these vulnerable children. When asked about what schools could do to support foster children, Olivia summarised:

> *"Maybe if there was someone who dealt with the foster care system and mental health – like a community social worker. Who would just come in for a few hours where I could just cry and shout in anger or whatever. Or just company on lunch and break times"*.

Sarah furthered this, suggesting a *"school counsellor [...] it's intimidating to find someone to talk to"*. For those who experience being moved between schools frequently when in care, having a designated member of staff with a good understanding of their psychological needs and the care system more generally would offer them a support in an already isolating and intimidating time. But for those who have remained at the school throughout: school will have provided some stability in an otherwise turbulent time, and having a member of staff that understands the intricacies of their case and their needs would be invaluable. Sophie remained at the same school throughout, and whilst she appreciated that they respected her privacy, she felt *"it would have just made it a little bit easier if they at least disclosed a little information"*. A common theme throughout was that it should

not be the responsibility of the vulnerable children to disclose their stories just to open access to support; this should be readily available for all children, with the most vulnerable children having easy access that doesn't increase the emotional burden already placed onto them. Moreover, the specification for "*mental health*" support for children in care was repeated by Emily and Charlie, with the former stating that support needs to extend to those who have left care.

  Failings of Social Services. Arguably the biggest theme was how social services and social workers were not successful in their roles of supporting vulnerable children. Six participants (Emily, Olivia, Claire, Sophie, Milly, and Charlie) discussed specific experiences where they felt that social services had failed them and others. The first failure came in the form of constantly changing social workers: Claire noted that she had three social workers in a 10-month period, whilst Milly had ten social workers in a two-year period. Olivia had also experienced constantly changing social workers. Meanwhile, Charlie had five social workers in their entire time in the system (nine years), stating *"it's difficult to talk through all of what you've been through again"*. This amplifies the need for a single trusted adult with a thorough understanding of their case, both inside and outside of school. Worryingly, Milly received a new social worker every couple of months, with the breaking point being when asked why she couldn't live with her dad, who had passed some time ago: *"From that point, I was like, they don't know what they're doing […] not having a stable social worker who actually took the time for me just made me mad at the system"*. Many of the participants acknowledged the time and caseload pressures on social workers but felt that this was not an excuse for substandard support for vulnerable children.

  Claire: *"If they can't give you a bond or stick to one, then how are you supposed to create bonds with other people and not have difficult relationships? When the people who are meant to look after you are leaving you left, right, and centre"*.

Claire questions the role of social workers in providing some emotional stability, as well as being a role model for future relationships. As with many of the previous themes, there is an undertone of rejection in this: the participants had already discussed broken relationships with teachers, peers, and family, and now with those who represent the system that promises to help them and keep them safe. According to current government statistics, the turnover rates for children and family social workers are rising, with 17% of social workers leaving the role: 70.4% of these left the role

less than five years after starting, and 56% did not remain in a social care role (Department for Education, 2023). When asked about their role, many UK social workers report poor working conditions, extremely high stress, and poor managerial support (Ravalier et al., 2021), which could be indicative of the high turnover, and ultimately chaotic and unstable experiences reported by the foster care leavers.

Emily discussed additional failings of social services, which were experienced by two of her friends who had also lived in foster care. She shared that one of the friends had tragically commit suicide after receiving limited support from social services, and another had become entangled in recreational drugs, leading to an accident that has left him permanently paralysed. She said "*they both did that in the space of three years because of the no support. I mean, social services just don't care*". As already quoted by Charlie, this belief that the social care system in the UK is uncaring and unsupportive is common for those who have experienced it first-hand. Claire went on to describe how she was left trying to support her friends in place of their social workers. This questions whether the social care system is fit for purpose: the very children who this system is supposed to help are the same children who are left to pick up the pieces when they system fails. And from Claire's reflection, these failures lead to catastrophic outcomes for vulnerable people's lives.

A final suggestion for how to improve the social care system was for social workers to support children to establish bonds with their foster families before moving in.

Claire: *"They put your stuff in the door and leave. And I was left with these people that I'd met once for 10 minutes. And I'm supposed to settle in and crack on with it. It was difficult and I felt like I needed someone who I knew. Someone to check in on me more. My social worker didn't do that. Nobody did"*.

Charlie elaborated that they would have liked support with introductions to the foster family, *"because when you first move into a new house, you don't know them, which means you're going to avoid them"*. For both participants, this feeling of being left and forgotten are clear: to them, the role of the social worker ends the moment they are safely in a foster home, but the support that they require exceeds this.

Training and Collaboration. A final theme was the need for training around what foster care is. Claire directed this towards teachers needing training "*on what the foster care system is and how to pick out the bullies*", alongside education for other pupils, such as "*a workshop, like some sort of drama class […] where you get social workers in to explain the situation*". This would serve to normalise foster care and enhance understanding, as per the suggestions of Charlie. Moreover, the involvement of teachers, students and social workers collectively would offer a collaborative approach for understanding the experiences of children in foster care and bullying, which is commonplace in many wider anti-bullying programmes. Ultimately, Milly summarised that she was just "*trying to have a voice*", which should be central to any changes to the social care system and foster care.

9.4.2 Foster Parents

9.4.2.1 Building and Maintaining Relationships. This theme comprised of the relationships and dynamics between foster parents and their foster children, the role that the school plays in relationship formation, the impact for birth children, and the importance of respite.

Foster Parent and Foster Child Relationships. This was a vast but valuable theme that encompassed positive aspects of the parent-child relationships, the challenges that foster children can bring, and the processes to building relationships. Mia summarised that "*family doesn't have to necessarily be blood family*", which was a sentiment expressed also by Ella, Isabelle, and Rose. "*We're her parents*" (Ella), "*he's our son*" (Mia), and "*she calls him 'dad'*" (Rose) reflect how these foster parents regard the children in their care with the love and attachment of a biological parent, which is strong emotion to share.

With respect to how these relationships are built, Ella stated:

"You almost have to block out the first three to six months of the placements and kind of just go, 'we're just gonna work each other out and I'm going to work out what you need' and then after that point you start delivering that and building relationship and building safety and stuff […] I think open communication…talking to them all the time. Trying to really know their story."

From here, Ella also noted that following through with the promises – good and bad – is vital for building trust in the relationship. This gives an interesting insight into what these experiences are actually like for foster parents: building relationships with foster children is a slow process but rewarding process. Regardless, different children bring in unique challenges, and building relationships is not a one-size-fits-all process. For Mia, fostering a younger child opened the potential of personalised bedtime stories before he joined the family. As she had not fostered a child before, she reflected on her experience with rescue dogs to offer a child-friendly and hopeful tool for the child:

"*I made up stories about the four barkateers, which is the dogs and the human brother, Callum […] and I read them all to him via video link […] I wanted him to know that if the dogs came out of a bad situation and they learned to trust us, then maybe he could do the same."*

This interesting method allowed a positive comparison for the foster child, not just from the animals in the family he was joining, but the character in the stories. Moreso, it allowed him to gain some knowledge of the family that he would be joining, which has been emphasised as important to the children in foster care (Claire and Charlie).

On the other hand, the foster parents were realistic about the challenges that accompany the children joining the family. Mia was able to utilise the young age of her foster son, but the age of the child can equally bring a complexity to the situation. Ella reflected that babies are easiest to form attachments too, but teenagers are prone to *"boundary pushing",* engaging in activities that *"aren't very safe"*, and more generally because *"they're hurt, and they don't want to be here"*.

Anger was a common theme in the interviews, with negative or destructive behaviours being noted by Ella, Mia, Isabelle, and Rose, but with recognition that this was not indicative of the child themselves: "*when you know that the child is doing it not to be bad, but just because they're scared, then you just work through it and we had the support to help us to work through it*" (Mia). This understanding that the children are a product of their experience is vital to fostering, and regardless of the circumstances that lead to a child being placed into foster care, there is often feelings of rejection; this was a significant theme in the interviews with foster care leavers. These

feelings can result in foster children 'acting out' in a way to confirm the feelings that they have about themselves (Ella).

To conclude the theme of relationships between foster parents and foster children, Ella shared:

> *"One of the things that always impacted me most in any training is just how much these kids have lost […] how little control they have […] some of these kids have been given more control than they should have had […] they've had this weight of adulthood, and suddenly you're trying to take that off of them".*

Alongside potential feelings of rejection, some of the children in care will have been expected to mature beyond their ages, with some taking on parental roles for younger siblings. For these children, relinquishing this control will come as a challenge. An understanding and sensitivity of this is important.

Relationships with Schools. All foster parents discussed the role of the school in the development of interpersonal relationships for foster children, and all reported positive and supportive bonds between the school and the foster parents. This was recognised as a central factor to the success of foster children (Ella: "*It doesn't matter how good the foster placement is, if there isn't an equally attached adult in the school setting, then you're done for*").

Ella elaborated on the practical techniques of this, suggesting that assuming schools have no understanding of caring for looked-after-children is the best approach.

"*Or current placement, her school have never had one before, so they don't know […] the things that need to be in place. […] we always go in very armed with, you know, these are the things that need you need to know about this child […] these are the things we expect from you*"

This preparation is an efficient way to ensure that there are no miscommunications with schools, and effectively addresses the problem that many schools are undertrained and underprepared for supporting children in care. This is particularly important, as Isabelle expanded that schools "*have to be more vigilant. They are far more answerable to the looked-after-children".* She explained how the schools that her foster children were at were well-equipped to support foster children, with proactive members of staff assigned specifically to this role. These schools maintained good communication with Isabelle, providing her with regular updates of the children's

behaviours and development. Communication with the school was highlighted as essential in all of the interviews with foster parents.

For children who have remained at the same school throughout their care experience, the school will often have been the only consistency in an otherwise turbulent period. Equally, children spend a large proportion of their waking day in the care of the school; the school will recognise changes in the child that the foster parents may not be aware of, which can impact their behaviour and ability to settle in a foster placement, such as changes in friendship groups (Isabelle).

The Impact for Birth Children. This theme was only relevant for the three participants who had birth children in the home when fostering and was a central influence on family dynamics and relationships (Ella, Isabelle, and Rose). Beyond the relationships between foster parents and foster children are those that occur between the birth children and the foster children. Participants noted that these can make or break a placement, with birth children being unwilling participants in the foster system.

Ella noted that her children were "*made for*" fostering, but expressed concerns that fostering would detrimentally impact them as adults: *"Are we damaging them? Are they going to look back and go 'you took away my childhood, you know? Those were my years to be a kid, and I didn't get that'".* To address these concerns, Ella ensured that additional support networks were available, allowing her children to have a safe place to turn to. Meanwhile, Isabelle and Rose opted for significant age differences between foster and birth children to alleviate potential struggles between the children. This was an active decision for Isabelle, who aimed to prevent a *"power struggle"*, but for Rose, this was a requirement implemented by the fostering agency to avoid "*feelings of competition*". Contrastingly, Ella did have a foster child that was the same age as her birth child, and the two children were in the same school. Ella made a point of asking the school to keep them separate, stating "*school has to be their separate space, where they can be individuals*". Despite the age similarities, there was an effort from Ella to ensure a level of individuality and separation between the children, similar to those of Isabelle and Rose.

A further benefit of age differences was noted by Rose, who found that teenagers were typically happier when having "*little children around full of the joys of life, and who want to share*

that with you". Moreover, the activities engaged in with younger children meant that the teenagers were able to experience things that they may not have been able to do as children themselves.

Nonetheless, the topic of bullying between birth children and foster children did arise. Whilst Isabelle and Rose felt that they avoided bullying between children in the home due to the age differences, there were still mentions of unkind behaviours from the foster children to birth children. Ella reported a series of incidents of intentional abuse from an older foster child towards her younger birth children, including intentionally putting drugs in reach of her birth child and foster baby, physically hurting the other children, and manipulating relationships between the birth siblings. She recalls her feelings at the time: "*you're also looking at your own kids going, they're literally being bullied in their own home. They're having their lives made into hell, and how can we keep letting this happen?*". This relates back to Ella's previous concerns that fostering would be negatively impacting her birth children to some extent. However, she went on to recognise that these behaviours were an attempt to self-sabotage and *"prove that you will ultimately reject them"*. The acceptance of this is similar to the concept that foster children are a product of their experiences, and there is an undertone that they need the unconditional love and support to counter their own negative self-perceptions.

Respite. Four of the participants (Ella, Mia, Isabelle, and Laura) discussed the occasional need for time away from the foster-parent role, which helped to maintain the positive relationships and refresh foster parents. Isabelle summarised this: *"We do find that we have to – for our relationship – take ourselves away for a minimum of a week, once a year […] We need that time to just not think about anything".* The need for respite was important to decompress and strengthen the parental bonds; fostering brings unique challenges beyond that of traditional parenthood, such as childhood trauma and complex welfare systems (Kaasbøll et al., 2019; Mancinelli et al., 2021). Interestingly, this was important for four of the participants, but was also reflected on by Emily in the foster care leaver interviews:

> "*It gives the foster carers a break. And I'm like, what break do you need? It's a school day. You've only got me for a few hours overnight. So, they try to shove you in as many clubs, classes, summer holiday camps*".

For Emily, the need for respite was confusing, leading her to feeling as though foster parents were 'shoving' her into groups and clubs to get rid of her. This offers an insight into the complexity of parent-child dynamics in foster care: for the foster child, the need for respite may reinforce feelings of abandonment or that they're an unwelcome challenge, but for the foster parents, this is a vital lifeline to support their existing family relationships. It is unclear how foster parents chose to communicate this to the children to make them feel supported.

Overall, building and maintaining relationships for foster parents was a multifaceted and complex task, with placement success at the core of these relationships.

9.4.2.2 Bullying. Bullying was discussed to a much smaller degree than that within the foster care leaver interviews, but the overarching theme within this was the identity of being a child in care was central to bullying involvement.

One of the most widely discussed risk factors for bullying was the foster children's desire to be 'normal', or their subsequent victimisation for being 'different' as a child in care (Ella, Mia, Isabelle, and Rose). Mia reflected on an incident involving her foster son and her neighbour's children: *"They've called him all sorts of horrible names because he comes out of the care system […] 'You're unwanted' or 'You're just out of the care system'"*. When confronting the perpetrators' parents, Mia was told "*you've brought the neighbourhood down by bringing a foster child in*".

Moreover, Ella and Rose felt that victimisation at the hands of their parents led foster children to have different experiences of bullying. For instance, Ella noted that foster children may be more likely to bully peers because *"it's what has been modelled"* and there is a lack of care, because they feel *"what more can you do […] take my parents away? You've already done that"*. In effect, this suggests that foster children have such little left to lose, that they seek some sort of reaction or recognition, which was somewhat similar to Claire's experiences. Yet, these perspectives are contrasting to those outlined by Olivia and Sophie, who felt that their previous victimisation prevented them from bullying others. Meanwhile, Rose noticed that her foster son cultivated an image to protect himself from bullying, stating "*if you spent your life as a victim, you turn that around and make sure you're not a victim again"*.

9.4.2.3 The Failings of the Care System. Three themes were identified for when discussing the Failings of the Care System: the perception of 'The Whole System', Failings of Social Services, and Collaboration and Support Needs.

The 'Whole System'. Like the concerns raised by foster care leavers, three foster parents (Mia, Isabelle, and Rose) felt that the problems of the social care system lay within the system as a whole, rather than a specific part. Unlike the other participants, Isabelle had previously fostered under her local authority, before moving to an IFA. Upon reflecting on the two types of fostering, she felt that moving away from local authority fostering was *"the best thing we've ever done"* but noted that *"the whole system needs a work over"*. All of the participants under IFAs reported exceptional support and training resources (Mia, Isabelle, and Rose). Yet, regardless of foster parents belonging to an IFA, the children will still have a local authority social worker. Rose felt this was difficult, as "*they're too busy"*, describing it as a *"constant fight for basic things"*. This was extended by Mia's description of a *"broken"* system, which is "*understaffed, under-resourced*". Overall, these align with the comments from foster care leavers, and portray a concerning perception of the UK's social care system.

Failings of Social Services. Described as "*a caring profession that didn't care"* (Isabelle), foster parents reported that social services are flawed. The biggest criticisms surrounded poor communication (Ella, Mia, Isabelle, and Rose), and insufficient training and support from local authorities (Ella, Mia, Isabelle, Laura, and Rose). Reinforcing the concerns of the foster care leavers, Mia noted that "*some of our children have had lots of changes in social workers, because that's just how local authority can be"*; the instability of social workers is a concern for both groups alike. Ella felt that the shortcomings of social services were "*dangerous*", both due to an insufficient amount of information being shared, and due to the risk of losing foster parents:

> They were *"not trying to fall into our mindset of, you know, you should appreciate use for doing this job anyway. I think it's easy to get into that place, and I see it in a lot of foster carers who have been doing it for a long time. It's not entitlement it's just jadedness because they've been taken advantage of for so long."*

This idea that the failings of social services is impacting not only the foster children, but also the potential availability of foster placements is important. Whilst the number of foster placements rose

from 2020 to 2021, the number of children needing these placements rose at a much faster rate (Ofsted, 2021), and efforts should be made to support existing foster parents.

Separate from the other foster parents, Laura was a kinship carer, and felt *"pressured into it"*, having been told that her nephew would be placed into a children's home if *she* did not take him in. She found herself in a situation where social workers gave very little time or support but were *"throwing money at me"*. She felt that "*they were just happy that he was with family*", and whilst she enjoyed caring for her nephew, it is still a situation that no person should feel pressured into taking on.

Collaboration and Support Needs. Ella stated that she "*didn't clock at the start of fostering just how much of a team sport it is"*, going on to note *"the better we work as a team, the better the outcomes for the child".* This has also been echoed in the attitudes towards the role of the school and the failings of social services; there are numerous groups who play pivotal roles in a child's experience in foster care, and these must work together. This is evident in many aspects of childhood experiences, including bullying intervention and prevention programmes. For instance, programmes that collaborate with teachers, parents and children are more effective in addressing bullying (Gaffney et al., 2021).

Moreover, this collaborative support expands beyond school and social services, but also into the mental health services offered to children: "*Children should be assessed by CAMHS the moment they go into care. There's so much mental health issues and trauma that they've been through. They need to be assessed as early as possible*" (Isabelle). Ultimately, foster children should be supported in their entirety, from the relationships that they form at home and school, to their mental wellbeing. Support should be accessible for foster care parents, but also the children who are seemingly forgotten about.

9.5 Discussion

Children living in foster care are significantly more likely to be perpetrators and victims of peer bullying than those living in non-care families (Barter, 2009; O'Neil, 2001; Mazzone et al., 2019; Sekol & Farrington, 2010; Sekol & Farrington, 2016a; Sekol & Farrington, 2016b), yet they are currently underrepresented in the bullying literature. The research presented in this chapter

endeavoured to address this shortfall, as well as providing a voice to those with direct experience (Barter & Lutman, 2016). Qualitative interviews with foster care leavers and foster parents were conducted, and IPA allowed for an exploration into the subjective experiences of the participants. Several themes were identified, providing an insight into why children in foster care may be at risk of peer bullying, and their wider experiences in the foster care system.

9.5.1 Comparison of Themes

This research shares the voices of foster parents and those who were foster children with respect to bullying and interpersonal relationships. Despite different approaches to the foster care system, many of the experiences and themes were visible within both groups. Firstly, both groups documented positive family bonds, with some mention of calling foster parents "mum" or referring to the children in their care as their own children. Harden (2004) notes that the foster family plays a vital role in emotional and social development, and this is evident in the experiences expressed in this research. One foster care leaver noted that she had never anticipated forming positive relationships, and those that were created were a surprise to her (Milly). Yet, the foster care leavers did mention more negative relationships. In particular, unstable and turbulent relationships with teachers, social workers, and peers were discussed in all of the interviews; relationships with teachers were acknowledged as vital for placement success by foster parents.

When considering bullying experiences, both groups acknowledged various risk factors for bullying involvement, including a general risk of being 'different' as a child in foster care, having inadequate personal hygiene or clothing, or a fear of peer rejection leading to isolation. Outside of peer bullying, some foster parents discussed the victimisation of their birth children at the hands of foster children, like that discussed by Barter and Lutman (2016). Yet only one foster care leaver mentioned an aggressive exchange with a birth child, and this was not characterised by the repetition or power imbalance that is central to bullying definitions (Olweus, 1993). The reasons for this disagreement in perspectives is unclear; the small sample utilised in this qualitative study makes it difficult to accurately compare the two groups. Finally, the foster parents discussed collaborative efforts to address bullying, whilst the foster care leavers reflected on dealing with bullying alone. This contrast is not surprising: foster parents are taught from the beginning to be

unified and collaborative, which is often opposite to the experiences that foster children have. Regardless of why they enter care, they will have witnessed first-hand the dissolution of their family and been taken away from the lives that they know. Subsequently, they may resort to self-reliance for issues like bullying, as this will be the only certainty that they have known. Foster parents should be understanding of this and work out how best to be available for their foster children to fit these experiences.

Throughout all the interviews, there was an overarching theme that the social care system in the UK is perceived as fundamentally flawed: social workers are given unreasonably large caseloads, which hinder them from doing their jobs successfully; mental health support for foster children is non-existent; training and resources are inaccessible to foster parents; foster children are not given a voice in their care plans. At the time of interviewing, two of the foster care leavers were in disputes with social services over their care. One of these reached out two months post-interview to share that she had since aged-out of social care and been made homeless by social services. The implications of living in foster care do not end when a child becomes an adult, but the current system is perceived by these groups as inadequate at supporting those within the system and those who outgrow the system.

9.5.2 Limitations

One of the most significant limitations in this research was the sample of participants. Firstly, there is a clear gender bias in the sample; 91.6% of the sample identified as female, and no males participated. Moreso, four males were recruited as foster care leavers, but all withdrew prior to the interviews being conducted. One participant – Emily – documented how two male friends had suffered with their mental health following their foster care experiences. It is possible that males in foster care have different experiences, but these are not represented in this sample. Similarly, foster fathers may differ in their approaches and attitudes to foster mothers. Likewise, the sensitivity of this topic may have limited the ability for foster care leavers to participate. Many of the participants discussed traumatic childhood experiences but expressed that they felt compelled to share their experiences to improve the system for future children. These participants were ready to face and share their experiences, but many other foster care leavers will

not be at this stage. From personal communications with a social worker, an individual who grew up in a residential home, and one of the participants, they all said that they knew people who would be eligible to participate, but that those people were not willing to share or 'address' their experiences because they had been too traumatic. They wanted to just forget about it. This was a barrier in accessing the population of foster care leavers, but one that would be difficult to avoid. Regardless, a variety of experiences were discussed, with different ages, durations, and types of foster care being documented; there are no obvious biases in the characteristics of the care experiences.

Finally, only one foster care leaver belonged to an ethnic minority, with all others being white British. As mentioned, children belonging to an ethnic minority are at an increased risk of bullying involvement (Xu et al., 2020), regardless of whether they are in care. Similarly, children in foster care are substantially more likely to belong to an ethnic minority (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012). As such, it is likely that children of ethnic minorities will have differing experiences of foster care and bullying involvement, but this is unclear from the sample.

9.5.3 Recommendations and Implications

The use of two perspectives is a considerable strength in this research, but these are not the only groups involved in the experiences of foster children. Future research should endeavour to understand these experiences from various perspectives, including those of teachers and social workers. From here, collaborative approaches to support foster children can be developed; these should be practical and realistic for all stakeholders, and only from collecting their varied perspectives can this be ensured.

Overall, foster children are an extremely vulnerable group who require adequate support. Both foster parents and foster care leavers feel that the current support is not sufficient, and this has important implications for policies. These groups call for greater collaboration from teachers and social workers, with more training and understanding of the wants of individual children; foster children should not be highlighted as different from other children, as this leads to negative feelings and an increased risk of bullying. Moreover, there is a need for better support for foster care children, with a focus on their mental health during and after living in care.

Both groups acknowledged that social workers have exceptionally high workloads but felt that this results in insufficient care for those in foster care. This should be a priority in all legislation that aims to protect these children.

9.5.4 *Reflexive Statement*

As discussed in Section '9.3.4 Data Analysis', IPA adopts a 'double hermeneutic' approach, with the participants and the researcher interpreting the same experience from different perspectives (Smith et al., 2021). This is fundamental when reflecting on the experiences of foster care, as each individual experience is unique in the events that lead up to a child entering the social care system, as well as their experiences within the system. However, when then considering my role as the researcher – an independent interpreter of these experiences – it is evident that my 'entry point' to accessing the data was substantially different to my participants. As a result, it was essential to ensure that the participants' voices were reflected in the analysis, rather than my own biases or expectations: I shall reflect on my perspectives, before outlining how these were addressed in this research.

First and foremost, I did not have any personal experience with the social care system in the UK – or any other country – when growing up, nor did I know any children going through the system. Upon reflection, I would consider myself to have been uneducated about the social care system and the experiences of these children. My very limited understanding came from television shows, such as 'The Fosters', offering a dramatised depiction of these families; this was a sentiment echoed in the interview with Charlie, with popular media often perpetuating negative stereotypes of looked after children. In fact, my own understanding of the social care system did not begin until I began researching for my PhD thesis.

From analysing the HBSC data in 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' and 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', I first began trying to understand the experiences of children in foster care – and social care more widely – from an academic perspective. I was curious about the experiences of these children, as well as why they would be more at risk of bullying involvement: this was an answer I expected the scientific literature to be in abundance of, but was surprised to

find a significant lack of answers. As discussed, the existing literature is sparse when considering the experiences of foster children. Regardless, I came across a small number of papers that gave a limited insight. This was frustrating, but secured in my mind that I wanted to contribute to this understanding, and to provide a voice to an unheard group (Barter & Lutman, 2016).

The qualitative research design adopted was informed by my own lack of experience, as well as the limited existing literature: this research was exploratory at its core, but I also wanted to gain a rich dataset, which could provide a deeper insight into personal experiences. Interviews were preferred over focus groups, as it allowed the individual voices to be recognised, without being impacted by any group dynamics. Nonetheless, when reflecting on the research process, I am most aware of my own lack of knowledge during the interviews. On occasion, participants would use terminology that I felt like I should have known as the researcher. Although I could have just hurriedly switched to Google to find the meaning, I felt it was important to put away my own pride and ask participants what they meant. This was important for avoiding miscommunications and ensuring that my understanding directly aligned with the participants' understanding. In practice, all participants were keen to explain the terminology, and their own subjective experiences of it.

Finally, it was important to be aware of my own understanding and biases when analysing the data, which was necessary for ensuring that the participants' voices were paramount to the themes derived, rather than my own expectations. To address this, I first needed to acknowledge and accept my own biases: in practice, this looked like the first set of themes being completely revised, as they initially reflected the questions asked, rather than the participants' subjective experiences. From here, a cycle of reflection and revision was important for deriving the themes that are now presented in this thesis. In addition, participants were provided with a list of these identified themes and their corresponding quotes, which provided an additional opportunity to put participants' voices at the forefront. All participants agreed with the themes identified.

9.5.5 Conclusions

Overall, foster children are an extremely vulnerable group, with a heightened risk of bullying involvement, mental health difficulties, and strained interpersonal relationships. Their voices –

alongside those of their carers – are vital for fully understanding the risks that these children face in life, and how best to support them.

9.6 An Informal Comment on Teachers and Social Workers

A further research project was conducted for this chapter, involving teachers and social workers. However, upon reflection of the depth and methods adopted, it was decided to exclude this from the overall thesis; some initial insights into the perspectives of these groups were identified, but not to a level that does justice to the issue at hand. Regardless, a comment on this project is necessary, both for considerations for future research, and to credit the participants who did provide their time and input. This forms a useful springboard for future research.

Following the interviews with foster care leavers and foster parents, it became evident that there is a need for further research that considers the perspectives of additional stakeholder groups: specifically social workers and teachers, who both play a crucial role in the experiences of foster children. As a result, attempts were made to recruit participants from these two groups, through contacting schools, social services teams, and word-of-mouth. Recruitment occurred between January 2023 and May 2023, following approval from the Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Once recruited, participants were directed to an online survey (Appendix F), which involved a variety of open and closed questions. Twelve teachers and eight social workers provided data, all of whom identified as female. The participating teachers had a mean of 13.54 years in service (ranging from 3-39 years), whilst social workers had a mean of 9.38 years in service (ranging from 4-24 years). Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to summarise the key aspects of the data below, but a summary of each question is outlined in Appendix G.

Firstly, only 58.3% of teachers reported having received training on addressing bullying in the classroom. When considering that all schools are now legally required to have a policy on anti-bullying (Educations and Inspections Act 2006), it is concerning that not all teachers feel trained in a policy that they would be involved in implementing to some degree. When probed, two participants criticised the use of "generic" policies in their school, whilst another noted that while they are trained to identify bullying, they wouldn't know how to address the problem directly.

In comparison, none of the social workers had received training on bullying, and only four of these reported that they 'occasionally' asked children on their caseload if they had experienced bullying. Seven social workers reported feeling unsatisfied with the level of training and support

received for addressing bullying, and three of these noted that they typically would refer bullying incidents to teachers or foster parents to deal with. Alongside acknowledging a need for training, four social workers requested greater collaboration between social workers, schools, and foster parents to ensure that "everyone is on the same page".

Yet, when reflecting on teachers' training specifically for supporting foster children, only two participants had received training; one teacher was a designated teacher for this role, whilst the other reported that it was compulsory for all teachers. Furthermore, another teacher noted that limited staffing in their school meant that even dedicated staff were unable to attend training for supporting LAC. Overall, six respondents felt that more training and resources were needed for supporting foster children at school, with collaboration with "outside agencies" and a greater understanding of "individual triggers or relevant background information". Interestingly, this aligns with the sentiments expressed in the qualitative interviews, with Olivia, Claire, and Charlie all expressing a need for school staff to have foster-specific training and a better understanding of the care system. Although only an initial insight, these findings present a fundamental issue that requires exploration: professionals directly involved with foster children do not receive adequate training.

Both groups were asked if they believed that schools and social services were adequately supporting children in foster care, but due to technical issues with the surveying system, data for the social workers was corrupted and ultimately lost. Nonetheless, most of the teachers (71.4%) felt that schools did an adequate job but expressed a need for more training. Interestingly, 71.4% of teachers reported that they did not believe social services were able to adequately support foster children, noting high staff turnover and understaffing as key issues. Similar concerns were raised by foster care leavers and foster parents in the qualitative interviews.

Both groups were asked to rate their agreement with a series of stereotypes surrounding children in foster care. The frequency of agreement is outlined in Table 9.4 for teachers, and Table 9.5 for social workers. Teachers typically agreed that foster children were interested in school but acknowledged that they are a complex group who require additional support; considering their perceived lack of training, it would be beneficial to understand if teachers feel that these additional support needs are currently being met. Further, teachers acknowledged a need for foster children

to be treated the same as all other children. It is unclear to what extent this aligns with the need for additional support, and how this would present in a typical classroom. When reflecting on foster children's experiences in school, many of the social workers agreed that foster children are complex students who require additional support but should also be treated the same as other students. Finally, both groups had a core understanding of the vulnerabilities of children in foster care towards bullying involvement: both groups agreed that there was a significant risk of victimisation but did not express the same level towards perpetration.

Overall, this survey data provides an initial insight into the perspectives of teachers and social workers surrounding bullying and foster children, but it is unwise to draw any firm conclusions from this data. The online survey methodology reduced the depth of the responses, particularly in comparison to the interview data from foster care leavers and foster parents; the voices of teachers and social workers are also important in understanding the experiences of foster children, but the method used here was not sufficient in gathering a rich insight. Focus groups would be a useful tool for exploring the perspectives of these two stakeholder groups.

Table 9.4

Teacher's Agreement with Stereotypes About Children in Foster Care

| | Frequency of agreement | | | | | | |
| | (*n*) | | | | | | |
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Mode
Foster children…							
Are uninterested in school.	.	.	3	2	2	3.86	3
Perform worse academically.	.	.	5	2	.	2.71	3
Have strained relationships with staff.	.	2	1	2	2	3.57	2[a]
Are complex students who need additional support.	1	6	.	.	.	1.86	2
Benefit from being treated the same as other students.	3	2	2	.	.	1.86	1
Are disruptive in the classroom.	.	1	4	2	.	3.14	3
Have bad behaviour.	.	.	4	3	.	3.43	3
Are more likely to bully others.	.	1	3	2	1	3.43	3
Are more likely to be victims of bullying.	1	3	3	.	.	2.29	2[a]

Note. [a]multiple modes exist, so the smallest value is shown. Scores of '1' = strongly agree; scores of '5' = strongly disagree. Five participants did not respond to these questions.

Table 9.5

Social Worker's Agreement with Stereotypes About Children in Foster Care

| | Frequency of agreement | | | | | | |
| | (n) | | | | | | |
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Mode
Foster children…							
Are uninterested in school.	.	2	3	2	.	3.00	3
Perform worse academically.	.	3	1	3	.	3.00	2ª
Have strained relationships with staff.	.	2	3	1	1	3.14	3
Are complex students who need additional support.	2	3	2	.	.	2.00	2
Benefit from being treated the same as other students.	1	4	1	1	.	2.29	2
Are disruptive in the classroom.	.	2	3	1	1	3.14	3
Have bad behaviour.	.	2	3	1	1	3.14	3
Are more likely to bully others.	.	1	4	1	1	3.29	3
Are more likely to be victims of bullying.	.	6	1	.	.	2.14	2

Note. ªmultiple modes exist, so the smallest value is shown. Scores of '1' = strongly agree; scores of '5' = strongly disagree. One participant did not respond to these questions.

Chapter Ten

General Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to better understand whether certain family characteristics increase the risk of bullying involvement for children and adolescents, alongside the mediating role of interpersonal relationships. The thesis was started during the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in restricted access to participants and a temporary ban on collecting empirical data. Whilst this meant that reliance on secondary data was vital, it also resulted in a change to the initial proposal of the thesis: when starting, I had intended to focus solely on interpersonal relationships and cyberbullying, taking an active role in conducting focus group and interviews with different stakeholders. I had hoped it would form the basis for a Participatory Action Research project, whereby the different stakeholders collaboratively formulated an intervention for supporting the development of healthy relationships and reducing cyberbullying. Although this was not possible, the resulting direction of this thesis has provided a much deeper understanding of the complexities of interpersonal relationships in the wider bullying context. This final chapter will revise the key findings from the five studies, before focusing in depth on why the research conducted here matter. In particular, the wider strengths and limitations, and implications will be discussed.

10.1 Summary of the Findings

Five studies were conducted for this thesis, and all centred around a specific family characteristic and the impact on bullying perpetration and victimisation, with attention to interpersonal relationships as a mediating variable. Each study will be summarised.

10.1.1 Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying

More than half of UK children have a legal or biological sibling (Clark, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2021), and previous research has found that the relationships formed between siblings are important for development. For instance, sibling relationships characterised by warmth and positivity can improve self-esteem, reduce delinquency, and are protective against conflicts within the family or with friends (Tippett & Wolke, 2015; Wolke & Skew, 2012). However, not all

sibling relationships will be positive, and some are characterised by aggressive and bullying behaviours. Despite this, the bullying that occurs between-siblings is currently understudied (Morrill et al., 2018; Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017). This is important, as it is essential for the issue to be fully understood before any prevention and intervention programmes can be successfully developed and implemented.

The first study conducted for this thesis was presented in 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying' and aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature, with clear recommendations for future research. For this, a scoping review was undertaken, which provided a more objective alternative to a narrative review, whist allowing for a much broader scope than a systematic review. Literature searches were conducted on four databases, identifying 45 papers that met the inclusion criteria.

In this study, a number of interesting findings were identified: there are cultural biases in the existing literature, with a majority of the studies being conducted in Western cultures; there is limited consistency in the measures and definitions utilised in this topic; the prevalence of between-sibling bullying is unclear, with reports ranging from 79.1% to 14% of children being involved; children belonging to minority groups within their own families are particularly at risk, such as those with additional educational needs, or members of the LGBTQIA+ community; the experiences of between-sibling bullying is limited to full- and half-siblings, and the experiences of children in foster families or adopted families are underrepresented in this topic. The latter is a theme which prevails throughout this thesis.

It was recommended that future research first agrees on consistent terminology and measurement tools, allowing for comparisons between-studies and reliability in the conclusions formed. It was identified that many studies modified measures used to study peer bullying, and thus it was suggested that future measurement tools should be adequately adjusted or formulated to include the dynamics that are specific only to siblings, such as living in the same home and sharing parents. It was also recommended that researchers endeavour to clearly understand the prevalence of between-sibling bullying, with a focus on cross-cultural comparisons. Moreover, it was recommended that attention to alternative family structures is provided, with a particular focus on children in foster families. Finally, it was recommended that research should focus on the

perceptions of between-sibling bullying: this type of abuse is normalised and minimised (McDonald & Martinez, 2016; Meyers, 2014), and this will inevitably impact the success of intervention programmes. Once the issue is better understood, intervention programmes must be developed to reduce this issue.

10.1.2 Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

Whilst 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying' focused on siblings and between-sibling bullying, 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' expanded the interest to the wider family unit and focused on family characteristics in the context of peer bullying, both at school and online. Although a plethora of studies have suggested that living in a traditional nuclear family is protective against peer bullying perpetration and victimisation (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Bevilacqua et al., 2017; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Wolke & Skew, 2012a; Yang et al., 2013), the findings are contradicted by other researchers (Ding et al., 2020; Ilola et al., 2016; Laursen et al., 2013; Mohaptra et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, the current literature is restricted by dichotomous measures, unreported effect sizes, and little considerations for the potential mechanisms behind why family structure may impact peer bullying involvement.

'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' presented the second study conducted for this thesis, and focused on the first of three secondary analyses using the HBSC datasets. To address the shortfalls of the existing literature, this chapter compared multiple family structures together, with attention to traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between children living with both biological parents (a traditional nuclear family) and all other family structures, with the former appearing less likely to be perpetrators or victims of traditional and online bullying. However, the effect sizes for those living with both biological parents were negligible in the British sample, and small to negligible in the Canadian sample. This suggests that the effect of living with both biological parents is not as meaningful as previously perceived. However, the results did reveal a statistically significant effect of living in social care and increased bullying perpetration and victimisation at school and online, with small to

moderate effect sizes. This highlights this group as an at-risk group, which is useful for early identification of potential bullying incidents.

The results also revealed that relationships with family members have a moderate to large effect on traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation; relationships with friends had small effects, whilst those with teachers and classmates were negligible. From this, it can be concluded that family relationships have a substantial impact on children's bullying involvement. However, due to the negligible effect of family structure on bullying, interpersonal relationships were not included as a mediating factor.

The findings from 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' highlight an importance of family relationships for adolescents' bullying involvement, alongside a risk for children living in social care. This has important implications, but a deeper exploration of the potential mediating effect of these variables is necessary; this was conducted in Chapter Eight and will be summarised in due course.

10.1.3 Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

'Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' presented the third study conducted for this thesis, and refocused attention on siblings. Whilst 'Chapter Three: Scoping Review - Between-Sibling Bullying' explored the impact of siblings on between-sibling bullying, 'Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' explored the impact of siblings on peer bullying and offered an insight into some currently unanswered questions.

The current literature surrounding the effect of siblings on peer bullying perpetration and victimisation is limited, and offers contradicted findings (Chen et al., 2018; Eslea & Smith, 2000; Ma, 2001; Panagiotou et al., 2021). Meanwhile, other important considerations – such as, sibling gender or sibling's influence on interpersonal relationships – have not been addressed. Thus, the aim of 'Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' was to better understand the complexity of siblings for bullying, focusing on the effect of sibling characteristics on peer bullying, and the potentially mediating effect of interpersonal relationships.

'Chapter Six: The Impact of Siblings on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' was the second to utilise the HBSC datasets, with analyses being conducted on the 2014 British sample only. Due to the nature of the HBSC surveys, replication was not possible in this study across time or across countries. The results revealed a statistically significant but negligible effect of the total number of siblings on traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation. It also found that sibling gender had a negligible effect on all three bullying measures, but when the participant's gender was included, these effects were statistically significant but small. Furthermore, the total number of siblings and sibling gender constellations had a negligible effect on relationships with family, friends, teachers, and classmates. These findings provide an important narrative into an understudied topic and suggests that siblings do not directly impact bullying between peers, nor interpersonal relationships.

10.1.4 Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement

'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' presented the fourth study conducted for this thesis and was the final study using the HBSC datasets. This delved deeper into the experiences of children in social care. Analyses were conducted on the 2014 British dataset and replicated on the 2018 British dataset. As 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' identified a risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation for children living in social care in Britain, there was a need to understand why this may be. The existing literature on the bullying experiences of children in social care is relatively new, and although a risk of living in care has been identified (Barter, 2009; O'Neil, 2001; Mazzone et al., 2019; Sekol & Farrington, 2010; Sekol & Farrington, 2016a; Sekol & Farrington, 2016b), the reasons for this have not yet been interrogated.

First, analyses investigated age and gender differences in bullying involvement, in an attempt to understand if there are subgroups in social care who may be at an even greater risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation. The results found that the age and gender differences in bullying found within the general population are not mirrored in the social care population; in other words, children living in social care are at risk of bullying regardless of their age or gender.

Next, it was explored if interpersonal relationships mediate the association between living in social care and the four bullying measures. Living in social care was consistently identified as a direct risk factor for traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation. However, the indirect effects were less consistent across models or datasets. In the 2014 dataset, living in care led to poorer perceived relationships with family, teachers and classmates; in the 2018 dataset, living in care led to poorer perceived relationships with family only. However, in the 2014 dataset, the only significant mediating factor was relationships with classmates: living in care led to poorer relationships with classmates, which subsequently increased traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation. In the 2018 dataset, the mediating effects were less clear. For traditional bullying perpetration and cyberbullying perpetration, the family was the only significant mediator, but there were no indirect effects for traditional bullying perpetration or victimisation.

These results highlight some key issues. First and foremost, children living in care are substantially more at risk of bullying involvement than those living in non-care families. This is consistent for bullying perpetration and victimisation at school and online. Next, living in social care has a significant impact on interpersonal relationships, particularly within the family. And finally, there are some mediating effects of interpersonal relationships for children in care. This can help for early identification of bullying, as well as targeted interventions that focus on relationships.

10.1.5 Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children

To develop on the findings of 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children' presented the fifth study conducted for this thesis, and provided a deeper exploration of why children living in care are at an increased risk of bullying involvement, but with a focus away from social care generally, and instead into the lesser studied foster care population. Previous research has often focused on children living in residential care settings, highlighting that these children are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of peer bullying compared to those living in other family types (Barter, 2009; Mazzone et al., 2019; O'Neil, 2001;

Sekol & Farrington, 2010; Sekol & Farrington, 2016a; Sekol & Farrington, 2016b). Yet, residential care settings and foster care settings are substantially different, and it is likely that their experiences will differ. Thus, the aim of this chapter was to focus specifically on the experiences of children in foster care. For this, qualitative semi-structured interviews with foster care leavers and foster parents were conducted, and questions were asked around their experiences of interpersonal relationships, bullying at school and within the foster home (including between-sibling bullying), and their perspectives of the social care system within the UK.

A number of key themes were identified, with interpersonal relationships remaining at the forefront of all experiences within the foster care system. Notably, when reflecting on their school experiences, foster care leavers reported feeling victimised by peers just for being in care, suggesting some level of stigma towards these children. They also reported feeling that they needed to deal with bullying victimisation alone, and rarely reported these experiences to adults. Foster parents, on the other hand, emphasised the need to work collaboratively to address bullying. These participants also noted vulnerabilities for their birth children at the hands of their foster children. Both groups identified major concerns within the current social care system and suggested a need to reliable and well-trained social workers, and education for school staff.

These results provide a novel first-hand perspective into the experiences of children in foster care, and they are useful for initiating policies that work to support these children. There is also a clear need for other stakeholders – in particular, teachers and social workers – to share their perspectives and voices on the subject. This will allow researchers to formulate a holistic understanding of how and why children in foster care are vulnerable to bullying involvement, and how these children can be best supported in a collaborative manner.

10.2 Evaluation of the Methodology

10.2.1 Strengths

A major strength of the research conducted for this thesis is the mixed methods approach, whereby both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. From initially utilising quantitative secondary data, I was able to identify an at-risk group who are underrepresented in the existing bullying literature. This then allowed for a qualitative analysis of the experiences of foster

children, providing a novel insight. This is beneficial in its ability to identify an issue through objective means, before providing a deeper and subjective exploration of the topic, which allows for those directly involved to be given a voice. Almalki (2016) proposes that this shifts the research focus away from the methodology, and instead into focusing on the issue at hand. In addition, mixed method approaches allow for the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to be utilised, whilst simultaneously minimising the weaknesses of the individual methods (Almalki, 2016; Dawadi et al., 2021). Despite an increasing amount of research adopting a mixed methods approach, this is still something that the bullying field requires to progress our understanding (Smith, 2014; Smith, 2019).

In isolation, however, the use of the quantitative large-scale secondary dataset offers additional advantages. First and foremost, it offered a solution to the research ban implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. But beyond this, the secondary dataset as a resource was extremely useful. Firstly, the measures used in the HBSC survey were consistent with a large majority of the bullying research, in that it adopted the definition of bullying provided by Olweus (1993; 1999), and adopted the same definition applied in this thesis. Alongside providing consistency in the bullying literature, this enhances the validity and ease of comparisons when the same concept is being measured. Secondly, the HBSC datasets provide a representative sample across different countries and time-points. This reduces sample bias, but also aids in the replication of the findings; this will be discussed next. Finally, as the HBSC dataset is freely available online, the analyses conducted within this thesis can be easily replicated in different cultural samples or across different times.

A key aim of the quantitative secondary analyses in this thesis was to include replication, both across time and cultures. The importance of replication in Psychology has been emphasised by numerous academics (Earp & Trafimow, 2015; Laws, 2016; Plucker & Makel, 2021; Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019), as it allows for the reliability of scientific findings to be considered. The cross-cultural replication in this thesis also allows for the consideration of cultural differences, which can help in further identifying at-risk groups for early identification of bullying.

A final strength of the research conducted in this thesis is the use of qualitative interviews, which provided rich data from two stakeholder groups, and subsequently offered a deeper

exploration of the quantitative findings. The interviews provided a voice to a previously unheard group (foster care leavers), whilst also emphasising that there are real people and real lives behind what was previously only studied through numbers. Providing these participants an outlet to share their experiences is empowering (Patton et al., 2017), and the data provides a depth of knowledge that cannot not be achieved from quantitative methods and reflects their perceptions of their experiences (Ungar & Nichol, 2002). Although qualitative methods have frequently been criticised for their subjectivity (Queirós et al., 2017), I argue that the subjective experiences cannot be filtered out of bullying experiences, nor the experiences of children in foster care.

10.2.2 Limitations

On the other hand, there are some important limitations to note in this thesis. One issue that is present in both the interviews and the HBSC surveys is the use of self-report. As a method, self-report has received a considerable amount of criticism, with academics questioning the validity of the findings and rigor of the tool (Haeffel & Howard, 2010). This is evident when examining interpersonal relationships, with these largely being a subjective experience; Stevens et al. (2002) note that the perceived quality of relationships changes depending on who is being asked, highlighting the risk of variability in the findings. One potential solution to this would be to utilise multiple informants: peer nominations for measuring bullying is an effective alternative to self-reports, with a high construct validity (Branson & Cornell, 2009). Utilising peer nominations would also be useful for measuring interpersonal relationships, as well as using teachers and parents as additional informants.

Despite the aforementioned benefits of using a large secondary dataset, this resource was not without flaw; the cross-sectional nature of the HBSC survey restricts the ability to conclude the cause and effect of the findings. This is visible when looking at the direct effect of family relationships on traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation, whereby it appears that negatively perceived family relationships enhance the risk of bullying involvement. Yet, research has also shown that children who are victims of peer bullying may isolate themselves (Good et al., 2011), which could have a further negative impact on their

interpersonal relationships. Thus, from the cross-sectional design, it is unclear whether negative relationships lead to bullying involvement, or vice versa.

This is also seen in the findings that children in social care are at greater risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation. Without understanding changes in bullying involvement before and throughout the social care experience, we cannot be certain of the causal relationship. To echo the sentiments of previous researchers, there is still an evident need for longitudinal research in the bullying field (Smith, 2014; Smith, 2019), and one that should be a priority when attempting to understand the risk factors associated with the family and bullying involvement.

Moreover, cross-cultural and cross-time replications were a strength in this research, but the measures were not consistent across all surveys. This resulted in a mismatched analysis, with replications only occurring where possible. Full replication was not possible in each study due to the variables used, and thus the aim of replication could only be partially achieved. The exact reasons for the differences between studies is not specified, but it is noted that each country had some freedom in the measures and recruitment methods (Currie et al., 2014). Consequently, the ability to control the measures and the sample recruitment is hindered, which means that using this secondary dataset relies on some trust that each country recruited a representative sample and had a clear justification for their exclusion of certain measures.

10.3 Implications

The implications for each individual study have been discussed throughout, but this section will discuss the wider implications of this thesis, with reflection on the implications for the research field, families, schools, and policy-makers.

10.3.1 Implications for the Research Field

Bullying research has developed substantially in the previous few decades (Smith, 2016), but there are still areas that require further investigation, such as how certain family characteristics may contribute to children's involvement in bullying. Thus, the present thesis has important benefits for the field and for future research. Although recommendations for future research will be provided in the Section 10.4, the theoretical implications will be discussed here.

The existing literature that focuses on the effect of siblings for children's bullying involvement is relatively small, and therefore the two sibling-focused studies presented in this thesis (Chapter Three and Chapter Six) have offered novel insights into the role of this group. In particular, the negligible effects of the number of siblings or sibling gender on children's peer bullying perpetration and victimisation should serve to refine future research. Although these characteristics do not have a meaningful impact on peer bullying, the presence of siblings introduces a different concern of between-sibling bullying, which can indirectly impact peer bullying (Bowes et al., 2014; Foody et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2019; Morrill et al., 2018). Thus, the negligible findings should not lead researchers to rule siblings out as a key stakeholder in bullying, but should instead influence the way that we approach this group: the interactions between siblings are evidently more important than the mere existence of siblings.

Moreover, the identification of foster children as a vulnerable group is without a doubt one of the most important issues raised in this thesis. As a group who are already vulnerable to mental health issues (Engler et al., 2022; Zlotnick et al., 2012), poor academic achievement (Gypen et al., 2017), and substance abuse and criminality in adulthood (Lindquist & Santavitra, 2014; Maliszewski & Brown, 2014), the additional risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation is concerning. As was identified in 'Chapter Eight: The Impact of Living in Social Care on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement', these children are at an increased risk despite their age or gender, and 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children' highlighted that the bullying victimisation presents somewhat differently to bullying in the general population. One example of this is whereby the identity of being a child-in-care is used to victimise foster children. Based on this, it is unrealistic for research to group foster children into the general population when attempting to understand their experiences, and caution should be exercised when trying to generalise the experiences of children in non-care families to those in social care.

10.3.2 Implications for Families

The traditional nuclear family has historically been presented a 'superior' family structure (Popenoe, 1999), creating a stigma towards other family types. However, the findings presented in 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' challenge this notion. The findings presented in this thesis identify that children living with two biological parents are no more at risk of peer bullying than those living with single parents or stepparents. This contradicts the previous literature (Arnarsson et al., 2020; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Shetgiri et al., 2012), and underscores the idea that all families, regardless of their structure, should be equally concerned about their children's bullying involvement. All parents should be proactive in addressing bullying, and both society and academics should challenge the previous suggestion that certain families are inherently better at protecting their children from bullying involvement. However, it is crucial to note that this equality does not extend to children living in social care; these children are significantly more at risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation, and this awareness provides an opportunity for early identification and intervention.

The implications of the findings presented in this thesis are substantial for foster parents. From understanding that foster children can be victimised purely for their care status, to recognising the possibility of between-sibling bullying with birth children, foster parents can play a crucial role in the early identification of bullying. But in the instances when children are involved in bullying, foster parents should also be aware of foster children's beliefs that they should deal with bullying victimisation alone: this underreporting and potential minimising of the issue is worrying. If foster parents are aware of this coping mechanism, they can work to identify the risks that their foster children are facing, and can provide the support that they otherwise would not have known was needed.

Between-sibling bullying is also an issue within non-care families, and is ultimately normalised and underreported (Hoetger et al., 2015; Wiehe, 1997). This type of bullying can have considerable detrimental outcomes for children (Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek, 2018; Bowes et al., 2014; Coyle et al., 2017; Dantchev et al., 2019; Fite et al., 2021; Mathis & Mueller, 2015), and parents need to be aware of the issue and its potential outcomes. This awareness involves not

minimising the experiences of their children (McDonald & Martinez, 2016; Meyers, 2014), and taking any reports of sibling aggression or bullying seriously. Parents are inevitably at the forefront of any between-sibling bullying interventions, but this first requires their understanding of just how serious the problem is.

10.3.3 Implications for Schools

Unsurprisingly, my research found that relationships with teachers and classmates have a substantial impact on bullying involvement, and indirectly affect traditional bullying perpetration and victimisation, and cyberbullying victimisation, particularly for children living in social care. This emphasises the crucial role of schools in fostering a safe and supportive environment, as well as supporting the development of healthy student and staff relationships. This is not only integral to the wellbeing of students, but will act as a preventative factor for bullying at school and online.

Furthermore, schools should advocate for their students in social care. This would manifest as providing training for *all* members of staff, rather than just one or two designated staff members. All teachers and support staff have a responsibility to provide sufficient care, education and support to their students, and this task is impossible if they are ignorant to the experiences and backgrounds of a select number of students. These schools must also not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with bullying in the school, as the experiences of children from social care backgrounds will be fundamentally different to those living with biological parents. Schools should have nuanced intervention programmes for supporting children in social care, which should involve placing relationships at the forefront, reducing stigma associated with being in care, and taking an active role in supporting children who may hide their bullying experiences in an attempt to cope alone.

10.3.4 Implications for Policymakers

The implication of my research extends beyond families and schools, and is also useful for informing policies to create societal change. First and foremost, policymakers should consider revising existing anti-bullying policies: Kidwai and Smith (2023) reviewed 200 school anti-bullying policies in England, and found that many policies do not include all important elements, such as

highlighting the importance of *all* school staff, or how to address bullying outside of the school. I propose that policymakers should be more specific about what schools need to include in their anti-bullying policies, to ensure consistency across schools, but also to ensure these are truly effective. I propose that this needs to include a number of elements: first, a formal and legal definition of bullying should be constructed, and this *must* include bullying between-siblings. If this is recognised in legislation as a serious problem, the normalisation of it should reduce. Next, policies must recognise the vulnerabilities of certain children, particularly those living in social care settings. As has previously been discussed, the understanding that this group are at risk of bullying perpetration and victimisation will help for early identification. Finally, anti-bullying policies need to fully recognise the importance of positive interpersonal relationships for preventing bullying.

Beyond anti-bullying policies, there should be specific legislation that requires schools to train all staff members with a basic understanding of the social care system in the UK, and the risks that these children face. This should, in part, reduce the stigma surrounding children in care, but also allows teachers to be more sensitive and well-equipped to support these children. If these children feel supported, it is likely that their relationships with teachers will improve, and bullying involvement will reduce. Regardless, the responsibility to reduce the stigma surrounding children in care is not solely on the school. Public awareness campaigns and education for school children are vital.

Finally, there is a need for more funding in this field, both for further research and for improving the social care system in the UK. Foster care leavers and foster parents both highlighted major failings in the current system, and any attempts to fully support these children are futile without a secure and stable system. The subsequent outcomes of underfunding the social care system will inevitably have a much larger financial drain on the economy. This industry is plagued by high staff turnover in social workers, frequent foster placement breakdowns and instability, and a resulting need for access to mental health support. Finally, if the social care system was better organised to effectively support foster children, these children would not feel that they had been abandoned.

10.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Alongside the aforementioned implications for different stakeholder groups and policy makers, there are also implications for future research; specific recommendations for future research were presented within each respective chapter, but there are some remaining recommendations from the overall thesis.

Future research should aim to better understand between-sibling bullying, particularly with respect to social perceptions of sibling bullying, how sibling dynamics play a role in this form of abuse, and a deeper exploration of different sibling types. In particular, understanding the impact of between-sibling bullying in social care populations is important. These children have three possible types of sibling: biological siblings, who may or may not share the foster home; foster siblings who are also other foster children; and foster siblings who are the birth children of the foster parents. The dynamics for each of these will be substantially different, and understanding this will have a considerable impact on our understanding of dynamics within the foster home. Interestingly, 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children' found evidence that there is an 'unspoken rule' that foster children do not bully other foster children. Understanding the mechanisms of this would be extremely useful for creating protective relationships, and perhaps informing prevention and intervention strategies.

Future research should endeavour to understand cross-cultural differences in bullying perpetration and victimisation, particularly for children living in social care. For example, 'Chapter Five: The Role of Family Structure on Adolescents' Bullying Involvement' found that the risk of bullying involvement for children in social care was not replicated in the Canadian samples in 2014 or 2018. This poses the question of why: Is there something within the Canadian social care system that is protective against bullying, and if so, how can this be utilised in other countries to protect children in the welfare system? Moreover, replication remains an integral part of Psychology (Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019), and cross-cultural replications are essential for assessing the reliability of the findings and the application to other populations. This should be a central part of future research in this field.

Finally, participants in 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children' offered some discussion of the role that teachers and social workers play, both

in foster children's relationships and placement success, and in their bullying experiences. Yet, forming conclusions without consulting teachers and social workers directly would be unrepresentative and biased towards the former two stakeholder groups. Future research should explore the perceptions of teachers and social workers, first focusing on similar topics to those covered in 'Chapter Nine: A Qualitative Exploration of the Bullying Experiences of Foster Children'. This should also focus on their understandings of how to support children in foster care, both inside and outside of the school.

A pilot of this was conducted for this thesis, but the methodology adopted was flawed and unsuccessful in gaining rich insights into the experiences of teachers and social workers. Instead of mixed qualitative and quantitative surveys, future research should adopt qualitative methods for this research. This could include semi-structured interviews like those utilised in this thesis, but focus groups would also be effective.

One of the main difficulties identified in the pilot study was the recruitment of these two groups: both teachers and social workers are inundated with high workloads, and findings time and capacity to share their perspectives is complicated. In this sense, focus groups may act as a slightly less formal and quicker resource for gaining rich data and deeper insights, and would place less strain on individuals. However, their experiences and perceptions are incredibly important, and recruitment difficulties should not act as a barrier in truly understanding the experiences for children in care.

10.5 Conclusions

To finish, this thesis explored the impact of family factors and interpersonal relationships on traditional- and cyber-bullying involvement. Although no one biological family structure is 'better' or more protective than the other, there is a real and concerning risk for children living in social care. Inside of the family, siblings bring about their own risk of between-sibling bullying. This should not be normalised and needs to be properly considered by parents and researchers alike. Finally, interpersonal relationships play a complex role in bullying involvement, but ultimately it appears that relationships within the family are central to efforts to intervene with bullying.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Overview of studies included in 'Scoping review: Between-sibling bullying' from Chapter Three

Author(s)	Date published	Date conducted	Country	Hypotheses / research question	Participant characteristics	Measure of sibling bullying	Findings	Theme
Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek	2018	-	Israel	Depression and suicidal ideation will be higher for those involved in SB.	*N* = 279 Ages 10-17	TBQ *Terminology*: Bullying	SB increased the risk of suicide by 2.3 times, depression by 3.7, and insecure attachments to parents.	Outcomes
Bowes et al.	2014	2003/4 and 2009/10	UK	SB during childhood will increased depression, anxiety and self-harm at 18.	*N* = 3452 Longitudinal: T1 – age 12, T2 – age 18	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB increased the risk of peer bullying. SB linked to higher rates of depression, self-harm, and anxiety.	Outcomes
Corralejo et al.	2018	-	-	What is the shortest duration of 'time out' to reduce SB?	*N* = 4 families Children aged 3-7	Coded observation	One minute of time out is sufficient for	Intervention

					All females	*Terminology:* Aggression	reducing SB in young children.	
Coyle et al.	2017	-	USA	Does SB predict issues above peer bullying?	*N* = 372 Ages 9-12	OBQ *Terminology*: Bullying	SB was independently related to internalising issues above those of peer bullying.	Outcomes
Dantchev & Wolke	2019a	2003/04; 2009/10; 2011/12	UK	SB will be linked to high-risk behaviours.	*N* = 6988 Longitudinal Aged 12, 18, and 20	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB victims were 3 times more likely to smoke, and 1.5 times more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours.	Outcomes
Dantchev & Wolke	2019b	2003/04	UK	What family characteristics predict SB?	*N* = 6838 Aged 12	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Having more siblings, older brothers, or being the first born all increased the risk of involvement.	Predictors
Dantchev et al.	2018	2003/04; 2009/10	UK	SB bully-victims will have the highest	*N* = 6988 Longitudinal	OBQ	SB victims were 3 times more likely to have psychiatric	Outcomes

				rates of psychotic disorders.	Aged 12 and 18	*Terminology:* Bullying	difficulties in later life.
Dantchev et al.	2019	2003/04; 2009/10; 2015/16	UK	Are different roles associated with different outcomes?	*N* = 3881 Longitudinal Aged 12 and 24	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Bully-victims were 2 times more likely to be depressed at age 24. All SB involvement was linked to suicidal ideation.	Outcomes
Deniz & Toseeb	In press	-	UK	SB will be linked to higher internalising and externalising issues; SB will also be linked to lower self-esteem; self-esteem will mediate the link.	*N* = 416 Adolescents with ASD Aged 11, 14, and 17.	Novel for MCS *Terminology:* Bullying	SB reduced self-esteem, which in turn reduced mental wellbeing.	Outcomes
Deniz et al.	2022	-	Turkey	Is the SBQ a reliable and valid measure on Turkish populations?	*N* = 301 Aged 10-18	SBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Good internal consistency and high convergent validity of the SBQ.	Measure/ tool

Duncan	1999	-	USA	Utilising a new tool to assess TB and SB.	*N* = 375 Mean age = 13.35	PRQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB was linked to peer bullying and resulted in poorer mental wellbeing and increased loneliness.	Outcomes
Eriksen & Jensen	2006	1976	USA	What family characteristics predict SB?	*N* = 994 married couples with 2+ children aged 0-17	CTS *Terminology:* Violence	Younger children and males were more likely to be violent towards siblings, as well as those in 'unhappy' families.	Predictors
Eriksen & Jensen	2009	1976	USA	How does the severity of SB differ for predictors?	*N* = 994 married couples with 2+ children aged 0-17	CTS *Terminology:* Violence	Males and white children were more likely to be severe perpetrators.	Predictors
Fite et al.	2021	-	USA	Proactive and reactive bullying will be higher for siblings than peers and will	*N* = 321 Aged 7-11	P/RAT *Terminology:*	Both proactive and reactive SB increased risk of depression and anxiety.	Outcomes

						OBQ		

				lead to higher anxiety and depression.		Aggression		
Foody et al.	2020	-	Ireland	How does polyvictimisation lead to depression and negative behaviours?	$N = 2,247$ Aged 12-15	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB increases the risk of peer bullying involvement	Outcomes
Hoetger et al.	2015	-	USA	SB will be viewed as a normative experience and will be under-reported	$N = 392$ Mean age = 19.09 Retrospective	IBS *Terminology:* Bullying	Participants reported greater involvement in SB than peer bullying. Less than half perceived it as bullying and were less likely to report.	Perceptions
Ingram et al.	2020	2008/09 and 2012	USA	There will be two distinct profiles for predicting peer bullying and SB. Family violence will predict SB.	$N = 894$ T1 grades 5-7	IBS *Terminology:* Aggression	Family violence predicted SB, as well as peer bullying. Those involved in SB and peer bullying displayed the most	Predictors & Outcomes

						negative behaviours.	
Kim & Kim	2019	-	Korea	How does parenting style impact SB?	*N* = 584 Aged 9-12	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Rejecting parenting increased SB and peer bullying. Poorer friendship quality increased SB. No gender differences.	Predictors & Outcomes
Linares et al.	2015	-	USA	Will parental mediation aid conflict resolution?	*N* = 44 (22 sibling pairs). Aged 5-11, living in foster care with a biological sibling	SAS *Terminology:* Aggression	The intervention successfully improved positive interactions and reduced SB.	Intervention
Liu et al.	2020	2018	China	To explore SB in a Chinese sample.	*N* = 5,926 Aged 10-18	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB increased the risk of depression and anxiety, but this depended on the role and frequency.	Outcomes

Liu et al.	2021	-	China	How do psychotic experiences relate to SB?	N = 3231 Aged 11-16	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	SB was linked to higher rates of psychotic experiences.	Predictors & Outcomes
Mackey et al.	2010	-	USA	Does sibling rivalry and conflict moderate the link between SB and depression/anxiety?	N = 144 Aged 18+ Retrospective	CTS *Terminology:* Abuse	There was no significant correlation between SB and mental illness.	Outcomes
Martinez & McDonald	2016	-	USA	How do LGBT groups experience SB?	N =64 cis women Aged 18+ Retrospective	Novel to this *Terminology:* Aggression	No significant differences for LGBT experiences of SB; brothers were more likely to perpetrate against LGB sisters.	Predictors
Martinez & McDonald	2021	2018-19	USA	How do LGBT groups experience SB?	N = 31 LGBTQ+ Aged 18+ Retrospective	Novel to this *Terminology:* Violence	Transgender and non-binary individuals had the poorest family relationships;	Predictors

						women were most at risk for SB.	
Mathis & Mueller	2015	-	-	The relationship between SB and adult aggression will be highest for men, and emotional outcomes will be highest for women.	*N* = 322 Mean age = 22.83 Retrospective	CTS *Terminology:* Aggression	SB led to emotional difficulties in adulthood, but this was not moderated by gender.	Outcomes
McDonald & Martinez	2016	2012 – 2013	USA	How did adults respond to sibling bullying during childhood?	*N* = 20 Aged 18+ Retrospective	Thematic analysis coding developed for this *Terminology:* Violence	12/20 reported that adults took sibling bullying seriously, but 9/20 experienced minimisation. Parental responses impacted wellbeing.	Perceptions
Menesini et al.	2010	-	Italy	Older children and boys will be more involved.	*N* = 195 Aged 10-12	BVQ *Terminology*: Bullying	Males bullied siblings the most. Low empathy increased SB, and	Predictors

						increased peer bullying.	
Meyers	2014	-	USA	How do adults perceive their childhood experiences of SB?	*N* = 19 Aged 25-65 Retrospective	Narrative analysis coding developed for this *Terminology:* Abuse	SB typically started between the age of 3-11. Parents often responded 'badly', favouring one child.	Perceptions
Morrill et al.	2018	-	USA	SB will be linked to greater involvement in peer bullying.	*N* = 81 Aged 22-58 Retrospective	CTS *Terminology:* Abuse	SB was linked to peer bullying involvement as both a perpetrator and victim.	Outcomes
Plamondon et al.	2021	-	Canada	Negative family dynamics will be linked to greater SB, and poorer wellbeing.	*N* = 216 Mean age = 19.01 Retrospective	SBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Parental hostility and sibling rivalry predicted SB. SB reduced overall wellbeing.	Predictors & Outcomes

Rose et al.	2016	-	USA	How do disabilities and school-belonging impact SB?	*N* = 14,508 *n* = 1183 with disabilities Mean age: 14.4	IBS *Terminology:* Aggression	Disability did not predict higher SB but reduced it. School belonging did not directly impact SB, but indirectly.	Predictors
Tanrikulu & Campbell	2015	2012	Australia	What predicts physical and online SB?	*N* = 455 Aged 11-17	SBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	Cyberbullying between siblings was very low. Trait anger increased SB.	Predictors
Tanskanen et al.	2017	2012/13	UK	How does household composition predict SB?	*N* = 7527 Aged 11	Novel to MCS *Terminology:* Conflict	Full biological siblings had higher rates of SB.	Predictors
Tippett & Wolke	2015	2009/10	UK	What home characteristics predict SB?	*N* = 4,237 Aged 10-15	Novel *Terminology:* Aggression	Gender, age, poverty, and family characteristics all predicted SB.	Predictors

Toseeb	2022	2020	UK	How did the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown impact SB?	*N* = 504 parents with children with special educational needs (SEND)	Novel *Terminology:* Conflict	SB increased during the lockdown and decreased after. Children with SENDs were protected from SB.	Predictors
Toseeb & Wolke	2021	2007/11	UK	What precursors are there for SB?	*N* = 16,987 Aged 7-11 (longitudinal)	Novel to MCS *Terminology:* Bullying	Structural family characteristics were the strongest predictors of SB.	Predictors
Toseeb et al.	2018	2005-2013	UK	Children with ASD will experience greater SB.	*N* = 14,177 Ages 5, 7, and 11 (longitudinal)	Developed for MCS *Terminology:* Bullying	Having ASD, being female, being white, harsh parenting, and having more siblings increased the risk of SB. Children with ASD were more likely to be bully-victims and displayed more emotional difficulties and	Predictors & Outcomes

						lower prosocial skills.	
Toseeb et al.	2020a	2011-19	UK	SB at age 11 will be linked to poorer mental health at age 17.	*N* = 17,152 Longitudinal aged 11, 14 and 17	Novel to MCS *Terminology:* Bullying	Involvement in SB as either a victim or bully-victim was linked to poorer mental health. A dose-response was observed.	Outcomes
Toseeb et al.	2020b	2014	UK	How does SB change between the ages of 11 and 14, and what are the longitudinal psychosocial outcomes?	*N* = 8411 All with ASD Aged 11 and 14 (longitudinal)	Developed for MCS *Terminology:* Bullying	Children with ASD were more likely to be involved in SB and peer bullying. SB was linked to various psychosocial difficulties.	Predictors & Outcomes
Tucker et al.	2013	2008	USA	What predicts SB?	*N* = 1705 Aged 0-17	JVQ *Terminology:* Aggression	Gender, ethnicity, and age constellations predicted SB.	Predictors

Tucker et al.	2017	2011	USA	Does disability or weight increase SB victimisation?	*N* = 780 Aged 2-9	JVQ *Terminology:* Aggression	Disabilities and weight predicted SB.	Predictors
Tucker et al.	2015	2008	USA	Proactive and reactive aggression will be linked to adjustment.	*N* = 356 7th graders and 11th graders, and then a year later follow-up	PRA *Terminology:* Aggression	Proactive aggression was linked to increased substance abuse and delinquency, whilst reactive was linked to increased depression and delinquency.	Outcomes
Valido et al.	2021	2008/9	USA	How does family violence impact SB, and does school belonging moderate this?	*N* = 1611 Mean age = 12.7	Novel (surveyed at 4 points) *Terminology:* Aggression	Family violence predicted peer bullying and SB, and school belonging moderated this.	Predictors
Walters & Espelage	2020	-	USA	How does hostility, anger and dominance mediate	*N* = 713 Aged 10-15	Novel	Hostile biases mediated the relationship	Predictors

				the SB-peer bullying relationship?		*Terminology:* Aggression	between SB and peer bullying.	
Wolke & Samara	2004	-	Israel	What is the overlap in peer bullying and SB in an Israeli population?	*N* = 921 Aged 12-15	OBQ *Terminology:* Bullying	There was an overlap between peer bullying and SB. Poor social relationships increased the risk of SB.	Predictors & Outcomes

Appendix B

Bullying prevalence rates of all studies included in 'Scoping review: Between-sibling bullying' from Chapter Three

Author(s) and Date of Publication	Prevalence of sibling bullying
Bar-Zomer & Brunstein Klomek (2018)	30.8% total involvement, regardless of role
Bowes et al. (2014)	30.3% total victimisation, regardless of role
Corralejo et al. (2018)	No prevalence reported
Coyle et al. (2017)	No prevalence reported
Dantchev & Wolke (2019a)	28.1% total involvement, regardless of role
Dantchev & Wolke (2019b)	7.1% perpetration, 9.7% victimisation, 11.3% bully-victim (28.1% overall)
Dantchev et al. (2018)	7.1% perpetration, 9.7% victimisation, 11.3% bully-victim (28.1% overall)
Dantchev et al. (2019)	31.2% total involvement, regardless of role
Deniz & Toseeb (In press)	53% of early adolescents with ASD victims, and 40% perpetrators; 30% of mid-adolescents with ASD victims, and 24% perpetrators
Deniz et al. (2022)	51% total involvement, regardless of role

Duncan (1999)	29.9% victimisation
Eriksen & Jensen (2006)	No prevalence reported
Eriksen & Jensen (2009)	79.1% minor sibling bullying (hitting, kicking, low injury), and 14% severe (using weapons)
Fite et al. (2021)	No prevalence reported
Foody et al. (2020)	3.2% perpetration, 13.2% victimisation, 15.4% bully-victim
Hoetger et al. (2015)	No prevalence reported
Ingram et al. (2020)	No prevalence reported
Kim & Kim (2019)	No prevalence reported
Linares et al. (2015)	No prevalence reported
Liu et al. (2020)	20.8% victimisation
Liu et al. (2021)	10.8% perpetration, 12.9% victimisation

Mackey et al. (2010)	Emotional bullying: perpetration – 97% minor and 80% severe; victimisation – 97% minor and 83% severe Physical bullying: perpetration – 82% minor and 53% severe; victimisation – 83% minor and 56% severe
Martinez & McDonald (2016)	Victimisation of LGBTQ siblings: 77.8% verbal abuse, 80% physical abuse, and 66.7% sexual abuse
Martinez & McDonald (2021)	82.99% total involvement for LGBT siblings, regardless of role
Mathis & Mueller (2015)	No prevalence reported
McDonald & Martinez (2016)	No prevalence reported
Menesini et al. (2010)	No prevalence reported
Meyers (2014)	No prevalence reported
Morrill et al. (2018)	No prevalence reported
Plamondon et al. (2021)	27.8% total involvement, inclusive of frequencies from once/twice to several times a week

Rose et al. (2016)	12.9% of those with disabilities perpetrated sibling bullying, and 15% of those without disabilities
Tanrikulu & Campbell (2015)	39.0% perpetrated sibling bullying either online or in person
Tanskanen et al. (2017)	No prevalence reported
Tippett & Wolke (2015)	35.6% perpetration, and 45.8% victimisation
Toseeb (2022)	No prevalence reported
Toseeb & Wolke (2021)	At age 11, 48% were involved in sibling bullying, regardless of role (4% perpetrators, 15% victims, 29% bully-victims), and at age 14, 34% were involved (5% perpetrators, 8% victims, 21% bully-victims)
Toseeb et al. (2018)	49% perpetration, and 58% victimisation
Toseeb et al. (2020a)	At age 11, 4% were perpetrators, 16% were victims, and 28% were bully-victims
Toseeb et al. (2020b)	At age 11, 49% were involved in sibling bullying, regardless of role (4% perpetrators, 16% victims, 29% bully-victims), and at age 14, 34% were involved (5% perpetrators, 8% victims, 21% bully-victims)

Tucker et al. (2013)	39.8% males were victims, and 35.4% females were victims
Tucker et al. (2017)	No prevalence reported
Tucker et al. (2015)	No prevalence reported
Valido et al. (2021)	No prevalence reported
Walters & Espelage (2020)	No prevalence reported
Wolke & Samara (2004)	Perpetrators: 3.2% physical, 6.6% verbal, 3.3% relational
	Victims: 4.6% physical, 4.2% verbal, 6.8% relational
	Bully-victims: 1.3% physical, 2.3% verbal, 1.2 relational

Appendix C

Replications of analyses conducted in Chapter Five using the 2014 HBSC datasets

C.1 Family Structure and Bullying Involvement

For the British dataset, traditional bullying perpetration significantly differed between family structures, χ^2 (5) = 69.21, $p <$ .001, $\varepsilon^2 =$ .005. Consistent with the 2018 British dataset, children living in social care were at greater risk of traditional bullying perpetration than all other family structures: both biological parents ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.75, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .52) with a moderate effect size, single mothers ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.18, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .45), single fathers ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.54, $p =$ .006, $d =$ .41), stepparents ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.69, $p =$ .003, $d =$ .41), or an unspecified family type ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.58, $p =$ .005, $d =$ .38), with small effect sizes. Children living with both biological parents were also less likely to be perpetrators of traditional bullying than children with single mothers ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.06, $p =$ .03, $d =$ .07), stepparents ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.59, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .13), or living in an unspecified family type ($Z_{kw} =$ -5.65, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .15).

When replicated on the Canadian dataset, traditional bullying perpetration significantly differed between family structures, χ^2 (5) = 60.97, $p <$ .001, $\varepsilon^2 =$ .005. Consistent with the 2018 Canadian sample, the only differences were for those living with both biological parents. These children were protected against traditional bullying perpetration compared to those living with a single mother ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.92, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .13), a single father ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.61, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .27), a stepparent ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.90, $p =$ .001, $d =$ .12), in social care ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.00, $p =$ .04, $d =$ .28), or an unspecified family type ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.67, $p =$ .004, $d =$ .12).

Similar results to the 2018 dataset were also found for traditional bullying victimisation. There was a significant difference between the family structures and traditional bullying victimisation, χ^2 (5) = 69.21, $p <$ .001, $\varepsilon^2 =$ .008. Children living with both biological parents reported significantly less bullying victimisation than those living with a single mother ($Z_{kw} =$ -5.16, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .12), a single father ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.59, $p =$ .005, $d =$ .22), a stepparent ($Z_{kw} =$ -6.85, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .21), or in an unspecified family structure ($Z_{kw} =$ -5.16, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .14). Children living in social care reported more victimisation than those living with both biological parents ($Z_{kw} =$ -5.35, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .68), a single mother ($Z_{kw} =$ -4.41, $p <$ .001, $d =$ .57), a single father ($Z_{kw} =$ -3.29, $p =$ .02, $d =$ .48),

or a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -3.81, p = .002, d = .48), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = 4.27, p < .001, d = .55). Effect sizes were moderate.

Analyses were run on the Canadian dataset, and the same results were found, χ^2 (5) = 72.18, p < .001, ε^2 = .006. The pairwise comparisons identified that children living with both biological parents reported less victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -4.18, p < .001, d = .12, a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -4.71, p < .001, d = .14), or an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -6.10, p < .001, d = .18). Children in social care reported greater victimisation than those living with both biological parents (Z_{kw} = -4.19, p < .001, d = .43), a single mother (Z_{kw} = -3.05, p = .04, d = .31), or a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.02, p = .04, d = .34).

Cyberbullying victimisation differed between family structures in the British dataset, χ^2 (5) = 63.48, p < .001, ε^2 = .005. Unlike in the 2018 dataset, the only significant differences were found for children living with both biological children and those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -5.20, p < .001, d = .12), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -6.12, p < .001, d = .17), or in social care (Z_{kw} = -3.00, p = .04, d = .37). There were no differences for children in social care compared to any other family structure.

When tested on the Canadian dataset, these differences remained, χ^2 (5) = 71.77. p < .001, ε^2 = .006. Children living with both biological parents reported significantly less cyberbullying victimisation than those living with a single mother (Z_{kw} = -4.88, p < .001, d = .13), a single father (Z_{kw} = -3.90, p - .001, d = .21), a stepparent (Z_{kw} = -5.68, p < .001, d = .18), in social care (Z_{kw} = -3.81, p = .002, d = .38), or in an unspecified family structure (Z_{kw} = -3.20, p = .02, d = .10), but effect sizes were small.

In the British datasets, effect sizes for comparisons involving children in social care were typically moderate; this further emphasises the risk for these children outlined in Chapters Five and Eight. All other effect sizes were small to negligible, supporting the findings from the 2018 analyses. Based on these replications, the conclusions remain the same.

C.2 Age and Gender on Interpersonal Relationships

Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to assess if gender impacted interpersonal relationships with family, friends, teachers, and classmates. In the British dataset, gender

differences existed for some relationships, but effect sizes were negligible (Family: $U = -4.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .002$; Friends: $U = 12.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .005$; Classmates: $U = -7.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .004$). Girls reported significantly poorer relationships with family and classmates compared to their male counterparts, but higher relationships with friends. There were no gender differences for relationships with teachers ($p = .09$). In the Canadian dataset, there were no gender differences in relationships with teachers ($p = .78$, or classmates ($p = .10$).

Similarly, Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to explore age differences in interpersonal relationships. In the British dataset, there were significant differences between the age groups and bullying involvement, but effect sizes were negligible to small (Family: $H(2) = 230.60$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .001$; Friends: $H(2) = 32.66$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .0$; Teachers: $H(2) = 1319.08$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 > .001$; Classmates: $H(2) = 738.32$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .004$). Similar results again found in the Canadian dataset (Teachers: $H(2) = 804.36$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 07$; Classmates: $H(2) = 349.91$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .03$).

Due to the negligible effect sizes, the conclusions formed for these analyses remain the same.

The correlation matrix for the 2014 British and Canadian datasets is presented in the following table (Table C.1)

Table C.1

Correlation matrix for all variables included in the 2014 HBSC secondary analyses for Britain and Canada

	Gender	Age	Traditional Bullying Perpetration	Traditional Bullying Victimisation	Cyberbullying Victimisation	Family Structure	Total Number of Siblings	Sibling Gender	Gender Constellations	Family Relationships	Friend Relationships	Teacher Relationships	Student Relationships
						Great Britain 2014							
Gender	1												
Age	.006	1											
Traditional Bullying Perpetration	-.109**	.043**	1										
Traditional Bullying Victimisation	.029**	-.043**	.248**	1									
Cyberbullying Victimisation	.122**	.059**	.157**	.349**	1								
Family Structure	-.025**	-.022**	.059**	.065**	.055**	1							
Total Number of Siblings	.006	-.041**	.061**	.024**	.017	.055**	1						
Sibling Gender	-.010	-.024**	.031**	.005	.010	-.021**	.686**	1					
Gender Constellations	.888**	-.007	-.079**	.028**	.115**	-.021**	.344**	.437**	1				
Family Relationships	-.042**	-.090**	-.072**	-.084**	-.098**	-.058**	-.050**	-.028**	-.053**	1			
Friend Relationships	.071**	-.023**	-.054**	-.110**	-.049**	-.024**	-.029**	-.019**	.054**	.624**	1		
Teacher Relationships	-.012	-.259**	-.102**	-.106**	-.145**	-.046**	-.013	-.004	-.014	.159**	.093**	1	
Student Relationships	-.063**	-.219**	-.092**	-.276**	-.174**	-.046**	-.015	-.004	-.061**	.116**	.144**	.384**	1

Canada 2014

	Gender	Age	Traditional Bullying Perpetration	Traditional Bullying Victimisation	Cyberbullying Victimisation	Family Structure	Total Number of Siblings	Sibling Gender	Gender Constellations	Family Relationships	Friend Relationships	Teacher Relationships	Student Relationships
Gender	1												
Age	.000	1											
Traditional Bullying Perpetration	.017	.047**	1										
Traditional Bullying Victimisation	.020	-.076**	.266**	1									
Cyberbullying Victimisation	-.007	.063**	.221**	.369**	1								
Family Structure	.011	-.048**	.047**	.076**	.053**	1							
Total Number of Siblings	.008	-.032**	.037**	.012	.015	.079**	1						
Sibling Gender	.001	-.019	.001	-.013	-.013	-.010	.694**	1					
Gender Constellations	.888**	-.008	.020	.015	-.010	.016	.352**	.448**	1				
Family Relationships	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
Friend Relationships	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Teacher Relationships	.001	-.234**	-.161**	-.143**	-.159**	-.038**	-.021**	-.008	-.005	-	-	1	
Student Relationships	-.017	-.155**	-.150**	-.298**	-.181**	-.036**	.005	.006	-.012	-	-	.397**	1

Appendix D

Semi-structured interview schedule for foster care leavers

Introductions

- A link will be sent <u>prior</u> to the interview starting (but on the same day). This provides participants with the information sheet, asks them to fully consent to participating, and asks participants to provide their age, gender, and ethnicity. No other questions are on this form.

- Upon starting the interview, I will take some time to introduce myself, what I'm doing, and thank participants for their time.

- I will remind participants that they are free to not answer any questions, or to withdraw at any time.

- I will finally ask participants to confirm that they are still happy to participate, and that they consent to having the interviews recorded for transcribing purposes.

Section One: Demographics

The first few questions are just standard questions regarding how your foster family was structured. These are less about your feelings or emotional experiences, and more about the specific parts of where you lived.

(1) How old were you when you went into foster care?

(2) How long were you in foster care, in total?

(3) Was this a kinship foster situation, or was the carers strangers to you?

(4) Was your foster home close in location to your biological family or were you moved far away?

(5) Can you tell me about the structure of the family? Were there two parents heading the household?

(6) Were there other children in the foster home? Were they biologically related to the foster parents, you, or were they unrelated foster children?

Section Two: Relationships

These next questions are going to involve more of a reflection of your person experiences, which may be quite emotional. You absolutely don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to. These first set are regarding the relationships that you had with those around you.

(1)   Thinking back to your time in foster care, did you feel that you had someone that you could trust or go to when you needed support? This could be anyone: friends, family, teachers, siblings. If so, who were they?

(2)   Did you feel like you had a positive relationship with your foster parents?

(3)   Did you feel like you had a positive relationship with your siblings, foster or otherwise?

(4)   Did you attend school? If yes: Did you feel like you had a positive relationship with your teachers and staff at school?

(5)   Did you feel like you had a positive relationship with your classmates and other children in your school?

(6)   Did you have contact with any of your biological family at the time? Would you define this as overall positive or negative?

Section Three: Bullying Experiences

The next questions are regarding bullying experiences DURING your time in foster care. It's first important to share with you the research definition of bullying that we are using. For something to be bullying, it needs to be INTENTIONAL, so the bullies mean to cause harm or upset; it needs to involve a power imbalance, which could be anything from age or strength to even social popularity; and it needs to have occurred on more than one occasion, making it repetitive. I also want to mention that there will be absolutely no judgement during this stage.

(1)   During your time in foster care, did you have any involvement in bullying? Either as a victim, or as a perpetrator?

(2)   Where did this occur? At school, home, online, or elsewhere?

(3)   Did you tell anyone about it? If so, who? Did this do anything to help?

(4)   Do you feel like your foster care status played a role in this? How?

(5)   Do you feel like your relationships with others played a role? How?

Final Section: Changes

(1)   From your personal experiences and understanding of the social care system, are there any particular areas or improvements that you feel are essential for supporting foster children in their experiences? You can focus either on their relationships, bullying experiences, or both.

Appendix E

Semi-structured interview schedule for foster care parents

Introductions

- A link will be sent <u>prior</u> to the interview starting (but on the same day). This provides participants with the information sheet, asks them to fully consent to participating, and asks participants to provide their age, gender, and ethnicity. No other questions are on this form.

- Upon starting the interview, I will take some time to introduce myself, what I'm doing, and thank participants for their time.

- I will remind participants that they are free to not answer any questions, or to withdraw at any time.

- I will finally ask participants to confirm that they are still happy to participate, and that they consent to having the interviews recorded for transcribing purposes.

Section One: Demographics

The first few questions are surrounding the structure of your family and your general fostering information.

(1) How long have you been a foster carer?

(2) What are the age ranges of the children that you tend to take in? Do you have a preference for age?

(3) Do you provide any particular type of fostering, such as emergency-only, long-term, specialist?

(4) Do you have any birth children in the home?

(5) How old are your birth children?

Section Two: Relationships

These next questions are going to involve more of a reflection of your person experiences, which may be quite emotional. You don't have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

- These questions are intentionally vague, and will be developed and explored depending on the types of answers that participants give/what they have already shared.

(1)   Do you have any routines or processes that your typically do to build relationships when you take in a new foster child?

(2)   Reflecting on either a specific foster child, or more generally, how would you describe the relationships with their school? Is there anything that you do to try and create good relationships with the school? Is this typically a positive experience, or do you find some resistance from schools? (3)   How would you describe relationships between your foster children and birth children?

(4)   How about the relationships with other children at school?

Section Three: Bullying Experiences

It's first important to share with you the research definition of bullying that we are using. For something to be bullying, it needs to be INTENTIONAL, so the bullies mean to cause harm or upset; it needs to involve a power imbalance, which could be anything from age or strength to even social popularity; and it needs to have occurred on more than one occasion, making it repetitive. I also want to mention that there will be absolutely no judgement during this stage.

(1)   Do you receive training as a foster parent for recognising and addressing bullying involving foster children?

(2)   Are you aware of any incidents where a foster child in your care has been involved in bullying as either a victim or a perpetrator?

(3)   How did you address this, if at all?

(4)   Do you feel like their status as a foster child played a role in this? How?

(5)   Do you feel like their relationships with others played a role? How?

(6)   Are you aware of any bullying between your foster child and birth children? How did you address this?

Final Section: Changes

(1)　From your personal experiences and understanding of the social care system, are there any particular areas or improvements that you feel are essential for supporting foster children and foster parents? You can focus either on their relationships, bullying experiences, or both.

Appendix F

Survey aimed at teachers and social workers

Information sheet

We would like to invite teachers and social workers to take part in a new study looking that is exploring the experiences of bullying for foster children. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

Our previous work found an association between living in foster care and an increased risk of bullying victimisation, alongside poorer perceived relationships with their family, teachers, and classmates. We have since conducted interviews with foster care leavers and foster parents, and have established the essential role of teachers and social workers for the wellbeing of these children. Previous research has not yet attempted to understand the perspectives of these two key groups, and we believe that understanding your perspectives as a professional could have practical implications for supporting children in care, and in the prevention of bullying.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary. You are free to stop the survey at any time and incomplete data will be automatically removed. You are also free to withdraw your data for one month following your interview.

What will I have to do?

If you decide to take part, you will be redirected to an anonymous online survey. This will involve a mixture of multiple choice questions and written answers. These will explore your personal and professional opinions, as well as reflecting on the feedback provided by foster care leavers into the role of teachers and social workers. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. There are no wrong answers, and your responses will not be traceable to you. Any

identifying information will be changed.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

The questions asked will be surrounding your perspectives and experiences of dealing with

vulnerable children, and we appreciate that this could lead to some upsetting feelings. We do not

perceive there to be any other risks of taking part.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Foster children are often a neglected community in bullying research, and we believe that

hearing from the professionals directly involved could offer a unique insight into these children's

experiences. We hope that this will be beneficial for creating successful anti-bullying policies,

alongside improving the experiences of all stakeholders.

What will happen next?

The data will be analysed by the research team, and the findings will be written up for publication

in an academic journal. These will be considered with respect to other stakeholders to build a

comprehensive understanding of the experiences of foster children. This research will also

contribute to the PhD thesis for Hannah Brett.

If you have any questions at any point, please contact Hannah at hbret001@gold.ac.uk. This

project has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Goldsmiths is committed to compliance with the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat.

We would like to thank you for your participation and assistance in this project.

<u>Consent</u>

- o   I am over the age of 18
- o   I have read and understood the Information Sheet (previous page)
- o   I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the survey, and can
    withdraw my data up to one month from completion

o   I consent to participating in this research

Demographics

Please create an anonymous participant code. If you wish to withdraw your data after completing the survey, you will need to quote this code. This should be unique to yourself and should not include any personal identifiers, which will ensure full anonymity. _____

Q1 What is your profession?

Please note that this question is necessary for displaying questions relevant to your profession. If you do not provide an answer, the survey will automatically end following these questions.

o   Teacher

o   Social worker

Q2 What is your age? _____

Q3 What is your gender? _____

Q4 What is your ethnicity? _____

Q5 As a child, did you ever live in foster care?

o   Yes

o   No

o   Prefer not to answer

Q6 Have you ever been/ are you a foster parent?

- o Yes

- o No

- o Prefer not to answer

The next set of questions were displayed according to which option was selected in Question 1

Branch: Teachers	**Branch:** Social Workers
Teachers Block 1 (Training)	*Social Workers Block 1 (Training)*
Q1 How long have you been a teacher?	**Q1** How long have you been a social worker?
Q2 Which of these best describes the ages of the children that you teach? If your school includes multiple of these, please select which group fits best with your primary class. o Infant school (reception to year 2) o Primary school (year 3 to year 6) o Secondary school (year 7 to year 13) o Higher education o Prefer not to answer	**Q2** Do you work in a team that deals with foster children specifically? Please note that this question will not be used to classify or identify respondents, but is to understand if attitudes are consistent across the social services workplace. o Yes o No o Prefer not to answer

Q3 Have you received any specific training for dealing with bullying, either in the playground or classroom, or online?
 	
   o   Yes
 	
   o   No
 	
   o   Unsure
 	
   o   Prefer not to answer
 	
If 'yes' is selected for Q3, display the following:
 	
Q3a What training did you receive? _____
 	
Q3b How long ago did you receive this? _____
 	
Q4 How confident do you feel in addressing bullying in the classroom or playground?
 	
   o   Not at all confident
 	
   o   A little confident (e.g. I'd know who to refer it to, but perhaps not how to address it myself)
 	
   o   Mostly confident (e.g. I would be confident in dealing with some types of bullying, but maybe not all)
 	
   o   Very confident
	Q3 Have you received any specific training for approaching the issue of peer bullying **at school**?
	
	   o Yes
	
	   o No
	
	   o Unsure
	
	   o Prefer not to answer
	
	If 'yes' is selected for Q3, display the following
	
	Q3a What training did you receive? _____
	
	Q3b How long ago did you receive this? ____
	
	Q4 Have you received any specific training for approaching the issue of peer bullying **in the foster home**?
	
	   o Yes
	
	   o No
	
	   o Unsure
	
	   o Prefer not to answer
	
	If 'yes' is selected for Q4, display the following:
	
	Q4a What training did you receive? _____
	
	Q4b How long ago did you receive this? ____

Q5 Are you aware of which (if any) children are currently in foster care at your school?

- o Yes, throughout the whole school
- o Yes, but only the ones in my class
- o No
- o We do not currently have any foster children at our school
- o Prefer not to answer

Q6 Have you received any training for supporting foster children in the classroom? Please only include training provided as a part of your job as a teacher.

- o Yes
- o No
- o Unsure
- o Prefer not to answer

If 'yes' is selected for Q6, display the following:

Q6a What training did you receive? _____

Q6b How long ago did you receive this? _____

Q5 When visiting children on your caseload, do you actively ask them if they are involved in bullying at school?

- o Yes, always
- o Occasionally
- o Only for those who have reported bullying involvement
- o No
- o Prefer not to answer

Q6 How confident do you feel in dealing with bullying involvement for children on your caseload, whether this is at school or in the foster home (between children)?

- o Not confident at all
- o A little confident (e.g., I'd know who to refer it to, but perhaps not how to address it myself)
- o Mostly confident (e.g., I would be confident in dealing with some types of bullying, but maybe not all)
- o Very confident

Q7 Are you satisfied with the level of training and support that you have received at work for addressing bullying in foster children? Please

Q6c Is this compulsory for all teachers in your school, or were you specifically chosen for this training?

- o It is compulsory for all
- o It is not compulsory, but I was chosen to do it
- o It is not compulsory, but I asked/opted for it
- o Unsure
- o Prefer not to answer

If 'no' or 'unsure' is selected for Q6, display the following:

Q6d Are you aware of any teachers in your school who do receive training for supporting children in care? If yes, please specify who.

___

Q7 How confident do you feel in supporting foster children in the classroom or playground?

- o Extremely confident
- o Somewhat confident
- o Neither confident nor unconfident
- o Somewhat confident
- o Extremely confident

provide a written response, and elaborate on your answers where possible.

Q8 With respect to Q7, are there any additional things that you feel you would benefit from in terms of supporting these vulnerable children at school?

Q8 Are you satisfied with the level of training and support that your school provides to teachers in **dealing with bullying** at school? Please provide a written response and elaborate on your answers where possible.

Q9 Are you satisfied with the level of training and support that your school provides to teachers in **supporting foster children** at school?

Please provide a written response and elaborate on your answers where possible.

Q10 With respect to Q8 and Q9, are there any additional things that you feel you would benefit from in terms of supporting these vulnerable children at school?

Teachers Block 2 (Perspectives)	*Social Workers Block 2 (Perspectives)*
Q1 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	**Q1** To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
[*1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree*]	[*1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree*]
Foster children…	Foster children…
…are uninterested in school?	…are uninterested in school?
… perform worse than non-foster children at school?	… perform worse than non-foster children at school?

… have strained relationships with school staff?	… have strained relationships with school staff?
… are complex students who require additional support?	… are complex students who require additional support?
… benefit from being treated the same as all other students?	… benefit from being treated the same as all other students?
… are disruptive in the classroom?	… are disruptive in the classroom?
… have bad behaviour?	… have bad behaviour?
… are more likely to bully others?	… are more likely to bully others?
… are more likely to be victims of bullying?	… are more likely to be victims of bullying?
Q2 With regard to the previous statements, are there any additional comments that you would like to elaborate on?	**Q2** With regard to the previous statements, are there any additional comments that you would like to elaborate on?

Q3 Have you taught any children in foster care in your class?

- o Yes
- o No
- o Unsure
- o Prefer not to answer

Q4 Thinking about your experience of foster children in the classroom, please answer the following questions. If you have not had any experience of foster children in the classroom, please answer these questions with respect to what you would *expect* these children to be like.

A) How would you describe their behaviour overall? _____

B) How would you describe how they interacted with classmates? _____

C) Did you change your teaching approach with them? Why/ why not? _____

D) What would you say were their greatest educational needs? _____

E) What was your experience like with their foster parents? _____

Q3 Thinking about the experiences of foster children at school, please answer the following questions.

A) How would you describe their behaviour overall? _____

B) How may they interact with classmates?

_____

C) Should teachers adapt their teaching styles to accommodate foster children? _____

D) What may be their greatest educational needs? _____

Q4 To what extent do you agree with the following:

A) Foster children are adequately supported by teachers and SLT?

- o Strongly agree
- o Agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly disagree

A.1) Please expand on your answer.

_____

Q5 To what extent do you agree with the following:

A) Foster children are adequately supported by teachers and SLT?

- o Strongly agree
- o Agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly disagree

A.1) Please expand on your answer. _____

B) Foster children are adequately supported by social services?

- o Strongly agree
- o Agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly disagree

B.1) Please expand on your answer. _____

Q6 What more do you think is needed to support foster children, both in their education and in their vulnerabilities towards bullying involvement? _____

B) Foster children are adequately supported by social services?

- o Strongly agree
- o Agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly disagree

B.1) Please expand on your answer. _____

C) It is the responsibility of social services to help foster children succeed at school?

- o Strongly agree
- o Agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly disagree

C.1) Please expand on your answer. _____

Q5 Are you confident in your role as a social worker in helping children in foster care to succeed at school? Please elaborate on your answers where possible.

Q6 Are you confident in your role as a social worker in preventing bullying involvement for foster children?

	Q7 What more do you think is needed to support foster children, both in their education and in their vulnerabilities towards bullying involvement? _____

Debrief

Thank you for your participating in this research.

We really appreciate your time and care in spending time to talk about your experiences; this research will help to gain an understanding of the experiences of children in foster care, and how interpersonal relationships can impact involvement in bullying.

All data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. If you decide that you wish to withdraw your data from the research, you can do so by contacting Hannah Brett (hbret001@gold.ac.uk) and quoting the personal identification code that you made at the start of the survey. The final date for data withdrawal is 31st March 2023, after which point data analysis will have begun and all identifying codes will have been removed.

If you feel like you'd like to talk more about your participation in this research, then please do ask to speak to Hannah Brett again. If you feel unable for whatever reason to talk with the researcher then please contact Professor Alice Jones Bartoli (a.jones@gold.ac.uk), who is supervising this PhD research.

We understand that the sensitive topics in this study may have caused feelings of discomfort of stress; if you feel as though you have been affected by this study, please contact you GP or one of the support systems below.

 Mind - https://www.mind.org.uk/ - for a number of specialist services, or to find your local

support group

Shout - For confidential and fast mental health support in the UK, with a 24/7 free texting facility

Text 'SHOUT' to 85258, or visit https://giveusashout.org/

Samaritans - The Samaritans offer 24/7 emotional support to anyone who is struggling or at

risk. Call them on 116 123 or visit their website at https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-

help/contact-samaritan/

Finally, if you have any concerns about a child in your class or caseload, or if you would like

further guidance on how to support foster children and/or children involved in bullying, then we

hope the below resources may be able to guide you.

- Bullying resources Professional learning resources (bullyingnoway.gov.au)

- https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/anti-bullying-week-primary-and-secondary-resources/zrq6rj6

At the moment, there is a substantial lack of resources for teachers to support children. We hope

that this research will be an essential first step for creating these resources. However, an

understanding of the experiences of foster children is extremely important, and thus the following

resources may provide vital information.

- https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide07/education/

- https://tinybeans.com/10-ways-teachers-can-help-students-from-foster-care/slide/1

Appendix G

Summary of survey responses from teachers and social workers

Teachers' Responses	*Social Workers' Responses*
Demographics	

Teachers' Responses	Social Workers' Responses
Q1 Profession	**Q1 Profession**
Teachers = 12	Social workers = 8
Q2 Age	**Q2 Age**
Mean = 40.42, Range = 26-55	Mean = 34.13, Range = 26-56
Q3 Gender	**Q3 Gender**
Female = 12 (100%)	Female = 8 (100%)
Q4 Ethnicity	**Q4 Ethnicity**
Black African = 1	Asian = 1
White-British = 10	South African = 1
White Other = 1	White-British = 5
Q5 Lived in foster care?	White-Mixed = 1
No = 12 (100%)	**Q5 Lived in foster care?**
Q6 Foster parent?	No = 8 (100%)
No = 12 (100%)	**Q6 Foster parent?**
	No = 7
	Yes = 1

Training

Q1 Length in job

Mean = 13.54, Range = 3-39

Q2 Ages of class

Infant school = 3

Primary school = 5

Secondary school = 3

Further/higher education = 1

Q3 Bullying training?

Yes = 7

No = 4

Unsure = 1

Q3a What training?

CPD training = 2

Attachment training = 1

HAYS online training = 1

In-house training = 1

Identifying bullying = 2

Q3b When training?

Annually = 3

Q1 Length in job

Mean = 9.38, Range = 4-24

Q2 Foster-specific team?

Yes = 5

No = 3

Q3 Bullying training for school?

No = 8

Q4 Bullying training for home?

No = 8

Q5 Do you ask about bullying?

Occasionally = 4

Only for those who have reported = 4

Q6 Confidence for addressing bullying?

A little = 4

Mostly = 3

Very confident = 1

Constant = 2

Bi-yearly = 1

Q4 Confidence for bullying?

Mostly confident = 7

Very confident = 5

Q5 Aware of foster children at school?

Yes, for whole school = 6

Yes, for my class only = 4

None in school = 2

Q6 Foster training

Yes = 2

No = 9

Unsure = 1

Q6a What training?

Designated teacher training = 2

Q6b When training?

Ongoing = 1

Months ago = 1

Q6c Is this compulsory?

Yes, for all = 1

No, I was chosen = 1

Q7 Confidence for foster?

Extremely = 3

Somewhat confident = 6

Neither confident nor unconfident = 2

Q8 Satisfied with bullying training?	**Q7 Are you satisfied with training?**
- No, I think they rely heavily on the pastoral team (eg heads of years) when dealing with bullying - Yes, all staff are trained in an approach called 'Restorative Justice' which not only stops bullying, but helps find the cause of it as well. Children in Year 6 are trained to be 'Peer Mediators' in the same approach where they help sort disputes on the playground during lunchtimes. - Identifying bullying- yes, but actually dealing with it no. I - Yes confident - Our school always us to looks at all individuals involved, and never takes anything at face value . Children attend ELSA Support given by trained staff if necessary	- I don't think this topic is widely discussed, I feel as though we could be offered more specific training to widen our experience and knowledge to support foster children. - No, I feel that there could be more. But often as the social worker, we refer to teachers or foster carer / supervising social worker (for the foster carer) to be the one to offer the support to address the bullying. - zZNo, I don't feel that I have received any training specifically related to bullying at school or in the foster home. - We look at vulnerabilities - which includes being bullied or being the bully. When assessing foster carers we address this - looking at their experiences of bullying as children and adults. We also focus on indicators that

- We have not had formal training. Minor CPD sessions.

- Yes

- There is an anti bullying policy but seems to have been written more for parents/guardians rather than as a guideline/support mechanism for staff

- There is a anti bullying policy but it is too generic It doesn't change in reaction to 'new' issues whereby a student might be bullied. Also doesn't address the other side of the issue and 'support' the bully; intervening and educating the perpetrators from a place of kindness

- I feel supported by SLT when dealing with instances of bullying. Other than specific training on Prejudice related incidents, I don't think I have had any training in dealing with bullying. I think that being in a Primary school, we tend to nip things in the bud, as soon as any conflicts and / or bullying happen, dealing with incidents, as they happen. I think this is more so the case in Primary as both children and parents are more likely to come forward to us if

a child is experiencing this - and how we can sensitively support and address

- No

- No, we don't get enough

- No it's nothing somewhat has been raised

- No, we receive very little specific for this. There should be more, but we often rely on teachers or carers to deal with it.

something has happened. I imagine

this is much less the case in secondary.

- No

Q9 Satisfied with foster training?

- No, no different to general training for

  all students affected by bullying

- No, but I am not sure what training the

  Local Authority offer as I do not feel like

  it is the school's fault there is not

  training. Senior Leadership go to LAC

  (Looked After Children) meetings but

  this is not offered to teachers, mainly

  due to lack of staffing and cover. Even

  members of SLT have not been able to

  attend some of these meetings due to

  lack of staffing.

- I have had children in my class who are

  bio children of current foster parents as

  well as children living with other family

  members under a guardianship

  agreement. I haven't had specific

  training as I have not yet had a child in

  foster care in my own class.

- Yes

- Not had anything involving LAC

  predominantly.

- Not covered even in CPD.

- Yes, the VS are excellent

- There is no specific training

- Nothing specific for looked after children

- In 20 years, I have not actually ever taught a child in foster care, or been aware of any children in the school who are in foster care, therefore it has never been needed. If I had a child in my class in foster care, I would definitely request training.

- No

Q10 Additional comments?	Q8 Additional things needed?
- Resources, eg role plays highlighting impact of bullying Activities and workshops to address bullying - More training provided to all staff members. - Yes, we provide ELSA Support , small groups for all children to attend such as lucky lunch library time and other specific clubs for all children that feel vulnerable for whatever reason. - Training. - Support from outside agencies to provide info on how best to support these students - There are interventions in place to promote their academic achievement	- It would be helpful to have specific training on bullying, alongside teacher and foster carer colleagues. - Perhaps a more joined up approach between social services and school and foster parents so that everyone is on the same page. - The school have strict anti-bullying policies - however are at times reluctant to enforce. I have a young person who is suffering discrimination from peers and bullying - and at times I feel the school are complicit in this - It would be helpful to know about schools bullying policies and what

but nothing specific pastorally. Supporting these students in school might further single them out but having an outside agency regularly see these students in school would help. Other students would not know what the appointment was for - Explanations of individual triggers or relevant background information.	resources schools use to address the issue - More collaboration between schools and social services

Perspectives

Q1 Agreement (mode and mean scores)	**Q1 Agreement** (mode and mean scores)

…are uninterested in school?
 	
   Mode = 3, Mean = 3.86
	…are uninterested in school?
	
	   Mode = 3, Mean = 3.00

… perform worse than non-foster children at school?
 	
   Mode = 2, Mean = 2.71
	… perform worse than non-foster children at school?
	
	   Mode = 2 & 4, Mean = 3.00

… have strained relationships with school staff?
 	
   Mode = 2, 4, & 5, Mean = 3.57
	… have strained relationships with school staff?
	
	   Mode = 3, Mean = 3.14

… are complex students who require additional support?
 	
   Mode = 2, Mean = 1.86
	… are complex students who require additional support?
	
	   Mode = 2, Mean = 2.00

… benefit from being treated the same as all other students?	… benefit from being treated the same as all other students?

Mode = 1, Mean = 1.86

Mode = 2, Mean = 2.29

… are disruptive in the classroom?

… are disruptive in the classroom?

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.14

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.14

… have bad behaviour?

… have bad behaviour?

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.43

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.14

… are more likely to bully others?

… are more likely to bully others?

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.43

Mode = 3, Mean = 3.29

… are more likely to be victims of bullying?

… are more likely to be victims of bullying?

Mode = 2 & 3, Mean = 2.29

Mode = 2, Mean = 2.14

Q2 Additional comments?

Q2 Additional comments?

- In my year group, I have 2 children who are jn foster care. One doesn't like school and presents challenging behaviour in school, the other loves school and is determined to work hard. It just depends in the child and their experiences and where they are mentally.

- We have found that some foster children have stronger relationships with staff at school than other children might do because school is sometimes their safe place

- I think the questions are too generalised and judgemental of foster children. Whilst I understand the importance of considering how ACES will impact children in care I think it is circumstantial to the child their surroundings and experiences. I don't think we can say every or most foster children would are uninterested in school for example as this could be influenced many factors. Children in care are not a 'one box fits all' whilst there are many similar characteristics that have been gathered from research

- As I work with reception age children I feel some of the quiet aren't applicable. Such as are they more disruptive .

- I think have some bigger issues going on at home which make it harder to focus on school

- This is in my setting with my foster children, it is of course very different in other settings and age ranges

- Looked after children tend to be very quiet, potential school refusers or show challenging behaviours. They are all unique with individual needs

Q3 Taught foster children?

Yes = 5

No = 2

Missing = 5

Q4a Describe behaviour overall?

- Good

- Withdrawn and quieter than other children

- Unsettled initially, high attachment, seeking attention (positive and negative), seeks friendships, seeks some level of control

- Good. Inquisitive

I don't think they can all be grouped together as all children have different experiences and are exposed to differences throughout their lives, some positive and some negative.

- You find that whilst in the transition period of moving from a difficult home life to foster care, or alternatively when transferring from a failed placement to a new one, that is when the children's behaviour reflects their unsettled home life. It then depends on the child's personal characteristics and the success of their care plan, as to how they later present within school when within a settled placement.

- No

- Some children will benefit from being treated the same and not being highlighted as different, but for some kids this is what they need. Some of the neglect victims do need more emotional and physical attention.

- It depends on the child and the school that they attend. I have known Foster children to be gifted and talented and very engaged in school. I also know

- Needy, attention seeking, disruptive

- A little disruptive occasionally
  dependent on what is happening

- Mixed

Q4b Describe interactions?

- Good

- Very hesitant to start play or a
  conversation

- Happy to be at school, less secure
  friendships

- At times well, but then at other times
  found it difficult to maintain friendship

- Indifferent

- Fine

- Either withdrawn, prone to display
  bullying tendencies or they can be
  'normal'

Q4c Change teaching approach?

- No, taught in similarly ability classes

- Yes, you have to be very calm, relaxed
  and more undersanding

- Regular check ins, monitoring language
  (mum/dad etc.) Used by others and
  how that impacted them, 1:1 Elsa
  support programs

Foster children who are very
disengaged from education.

- No

Q3a Describe behaviour overall?

- Some are either extremely withdrawn or
  very confident. Most of them are
  untrusting of professionals and
  skeptical of the support they will
  receive. A lot of the children I work with
  struggle to regulate their emotions and
  display behaviours they've witnessed
  previously from their support network.

- I currently only have one child on my
  caseload expecting to enter the care
  system - their behaviour at home is
  more challenging due to mental health
  and past trauma; they also display
  difficulties within school but not to the
  same extent.

- Some - not all struggle in traditional
  classroom settings. Behaviour depends
  on how the teacher manages the class
  and makes them feel heard and safe

- Typically okay, if not a bit withdrawn

- The majority are well behaved ? Its
  7sually older teenagers or pupils with
  SEN who struggle

- No. Because we are I clusocd of all children and deal with every child on an individual need

- No - class of special needs students so all needed adaptations

- No, they want to be treated the same with no labels

- All students treated the same in class. Would potentially be more likely to refer LAC students to pastoral or safeguarding or speak to them quietly alone without singling them out

Q4d Greatest educational needs?

- Making work simple and easy to follow

- Reading and writing as there might not be as much support at home

- Social development and self image

- Psed

- Time, attention, praise

- Emotional and making sure any gaps are filled academically

- Self confidence is usually not great. LAC tend to have missed time from school so need intervention to fill the gaps where possible

Q4e Experience with foster parents?

- Positive, they were supportive

- It depends on the child and situation, but they are often challenging in different ways

Q3b Describe interactions?

- Depending on their education setting, most the young people I work with struggle to form and maintain friendships, in most cases they lack trust and the relationships they do form are at times deemed 'unhealthy' by professionals

- They hold some good friendships and have been able to identify those more positive than others and subsequently start to break away from the negative influences; they can still get into altercations with other students though.

- Generally good - they have good friendships

- Usually good

- Good most have positive friendships

- Usually well, may have bad experience

Q3c Should teachers change their approach?

Due to a technical issue, no responses for this question.

- Fairly positive, foster parents have seemed more worried than other parents
- Positive and supportive
- Good
- Minimal
- Excellent
- Mixed. Some are proactive others very much less so

Q5a Foster adequately supported by SLT?

Strongly agree = 2

Agree = 3

Neither = 1

Disagree = 1

Missing = 5

Q5a.1 Expand

- My school has a member of staff on SLT who oversees are the LAC children
- Some teachers might not be able to meet the emotional needs of some foster children, possibly through lack of training
- Our senco is always at hand for support either for parents, staff or child

Q3d Greatest educational needs?

- Their social, emotional, mental health needs due to childhood trauma. They have strong learning skills.
- Retention of information and ability to concentrate. Being academically behind because early foundations were missed. Late diagnosis of additional needs
- Moving around a lot is very disruptive socially and academically
- Emotional support, remedial work to catch up from poor attendance
- Lost lessons from meetings and moving around

Q4a Foster adequately supported by SLT?

Agree = 1

Neither = 1

Missing = 6

Q4a.1 Expand

- I think the system is there in terms of looking at holding regular PEP meetings for education in a timely manner to explore supporting the young person however I think that at times this can be more task focused

- Fairly unaware of who is in foster care - need to know basis

- I am SLT and the DT and DSL of the school, I make sure all pupils are supported

- As part of the safeguarding and pastoral team at school I pride myself on organising counselling, referrals to youth workers, anger management, bereavement support etc

Q5b Foster adequately supported by social?

Agree = 2

Disagree = 5

Missing = 5

Q5b.1 Expand

- I think the system doesn't support them enough post-16. I think foster children deserve to be involved in decisions making and informed on why certain decisions are made about their life or else they end up resenting the system.

- Social services do not have enough staff members to cope with the workload

instead of child focused therefore actions are not always achieved in a SMART manner.

- I feel most settings have sufficient support to offer to those children who require such.

Q4b Foster adequately supported by social?

Agree = 1

Disagree = 1

Missing = 6

Q4b.1 Expand

- I think in many cases decisions are made for children and not with them and whilst this is done to safeguard I don't think the child's voice is always heard. I think Social Work teams are extremely over stretched and lack in resources to support young people to achieve their full potential.

- As a social worker, I can say that myself and my colleagues try to provide the upmost support for children in care - the children in the Local Authority who have access to the most support from services.

- Staff always seem to change and are not consistent

- I believe so. Sure that some have meetings during school time.

- Depends on the SW

- Little contact from SS once student has been placed

Q6 Additional support?

- Yes, however I don't think a child in care is more susceptible to bullying than those not in care

- Therapy

- External support must be robust as schools do not have the resources and facilities to support some of these children in their needs. External support to train adults and work with children would ensure that schools can focus on helping the child meet a wider range of targets within the school setting.

- Not sure

- Keyworker in school

- Adequate Social care theraputic support is needed

- At least a half day training from experts from care agencies on what to look out for and how best to support these vulnerable students

Q4c Social responsibility?

Strongly agree = 1

Agree = 1

Missing = 6

Q4c.1 Expand

- Absolutely! I think children services should be the branch to schools, other professionals and the families to help. The child achieve their full potential and increase their motivation and self esteem.

- It is a social worker's responsibility to work closely with other services, including school, to formulate and implement the best plan of support for the young person. This is done via a Personal Education Plan and the young person's Care Plan / Pathway Plan.

- I know what the expectations are - but I feel there is sometimes too much onus on academic achievement.

- Yes, but there is only so much we can do. The schools need to be as equally invested

- I am confident working with schools and if necessary challenging schools &

education professionals. I am confident writing PEP and contributing to EHCPs. I do think social work needs to recognise the needs of SEN children more and there needs to be more support for carers

- Yes, I do my best for each child

Q5 Confidence in role for foster?

- I'd like to think I use a holistic approach when working with children in care to obtain their views and wishes about education. I think I have more to learn in terms of training and experience to continue to develop this. In the local authority I work for there is a passionate group of professionals who help children in care access education however I am concerned that the child's voice is not always heard amongst this 😊

- Yes, I am confident in working with schools, carers, and virtual school of our Local Authority, to help a child succeed.

- Yes

- Yes, but it again it needs to be a joint effort

- Yes I would challenge this strongly but I do worry that I don't have much time for 1-1 work with children and they do not have opportunities to tell me if they are unhappy including bullying

- No, I would need better training for it specifically. I do my best and can deal with many things, but I appreciate it's probably a lot more complex than social workers know

Q6 Confident in preventing bullying?

- I feel as though I could gain further training and develop my learning around this .

- Only to a certain extent, as I am not the one directly present when this bullying could be taking place, and therefore it is more of a role for the teachers / foster carers to directly try to manage and address the difficulties occurring for that child.

- This cohort of children sometimes are walking with an invisible sign which shows their vulnerabilities to others. If children are not managing in traditional classroom settings - the school and TAC should look at creative ways of engaging them - which will result in less

outbursts and dysregulation - and
ultimately they will not be seen by
peers as troubled or problematic

- Our current caseloads are too high. In
an ideal world, there would be greater
resources and more time to support
individual children. But at the moment,
there's not enough.

- More mental health support, more
access to therapeutic services, better
joint training with social workers and
education staff, clearer guidance on
PEPs and accessing finances

- So much more training for us

Q7 Additional support?

- Further training for foster parents and
professional so they can implement
boundaries for the child

- I feel there is already sufficient support,
both online and within schools /
colleges that I work with, for children to
highlight and gain input about any
bullying experience. If anything, it
would be providing the student
populations more education around the
care system and foster care, so there is
not such a stigma and reducing bullying

	tendencies towards the young people in care.

Note. Open questions outlined above are the raw responses from participants. Not all participants provided written feedback.