

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PEER VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND  
HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: GLOBAL TRENDS, RISK FACTORS, AND  
IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION**

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School bullying and workplace harassment represent pervasive global challenges that inflict significant harm on individual well-being and impede broader societal progress [1, 2, 3]. These forms of interpersonal aggression, though occurring in distinct life stages and environments, share common underpinnings and produce similarly detrimental consequences for mental and physical health, educational attainment, and economic productivity [1, 2, 3]. The objective of this paper is to conduct a detailed comparative analysis of the data presented in the UNESCO 2019 global report on school violence, "Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying" [1], and the ILO-Lloyd's Register Foundation-Gallup 2022 global survey on workplace violence, "Experiences of violence and harassment at work" [3]. This analysis will explore the parallels and divergences in the prevalence, forms, and risk factors associated with these phenomena to identify common patterns of vulnerability and distinct contextual challenges. By juxtaposing the experiences of students with those of employed adults, this paper will use a life-course framework to interpret the data, conceptualizing school and work as critical, interconnected developmental stages where patterns of aggression are learned, expressed, and transformed.

This paper is a qualitative synthesis and comparative analysis of data from three primary sources. The core of the analysis draws upon two large-scale international reports: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2019 report, "Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying" [1], and the 2022 International Labour Organization (ILO), Lloyd's Register Foundation, and Gallup report, "Experiences of violence and harassment at work: A global first survey" [3]. These are supplemented by a 2023 academic article by G. Choi, "The Social-Psychological Aspect of Bullying in South Korea," which provides a national-level case study [2]. The UNESCO report focuses on the prevalence and nature of peer-to-peer violence among school-aged children globally [1], while the ILO report offers the first global survey of violence and harassment experienced by persons in employment [3]. The article by Choi offers a deep-dive into the specific socio-cultural drivers of bullying in the Republic of Korea, providing a contextual framework for understanding how societal pressures can manifest as harassment in both educational and occupational settings [2].

Results: A Comparative Analysis of Violence in Educational and Occupational Settings

Prevalence and Scale: A Global Perspective

Understanding the sheer scale of peer violence in schools and harassment in the workplace is of paramount strategic importance. Quantifying the prevalence of these issues provides the necessary foundation for justifying policy interventions, allocating resources effectively, and

mobilizing public and political will for change. The global data from both educational and occupational settings reveal that these are not marginal problems but widespread phenomena affecting a substantial portion of the population.

A comparison of global prevalence rates underscores the pervasive nature of these issues in their respective domains. In the educational sphere, almost one in three students (32%) has been bullied by their peers at least once in the last month [1]. In the world of work, the problem is similarly widespread, with data showing that more than one in five persons in employment (22.8%, or 743 million people) has experienced violence and harassment at some point in their working life [3]. It is crucial to critically evaluate the difference in the measurement timeframes used by these two landmark surveys.

The UNESCO report's focus on experiences "in the last month" captures recent and potentially ongoing incidents, while the ILO report's scope of "during their working life" measures cumulative lifetime exposure, effectively contrasting a measure of recent *incidence* with one of cumulative lifetime *prevalence* [1, 3]. This methodological variance prevents a direct, one-to-one statistical comparison. However, the data from both reports unequivocally underscore that these phenomena are widespread global problems affecting a significant portion of the population in key formative and productive environments. This shared scale of impact transitions the analysis from *how many* are affected to a deeper investigation of the specific forms this violence takes.

#### **Forms and Manifestations of Harassment**

Violence and harassment are not monolithic concepts; they manifest in diverse forms that require distinct analytical and preventative approaches. Analyzing their specific expressions—whether physical, psychological, or sexual—is crucial for designing targeted and effective interventions that address the nuanced realities faced by victims in different environments. A comparison of the dominant forms of aggression reveals a notable evolution in how harassment is expressed from childhood to adulthood.

In schools, physical bullying is the most common form in a majority of global regions, followed by sexual bullying, which often manifests as sexual jokes, comments, or gestures [1]. A significant regional divergence exists, however, as psychological bullying is the most prevalent form reported in Europe and North America [1]. This contrasts sharply with the workplace, where psychological violence and harassment is unequivocally the most common form experienced globally, affecting 17.9% of all workers [3]. Following psychological harassment in the workplace are physical violence (8.5%) and sexual violence and harassment (affecting 6.3%, or approximately one in fifteen, of workers) [3]. This divergence suggests a potential developmental shift in the nature of aggression. The patterns indicate a transition from more overt physical acts that are common among youth to subtler, yet equally damaging, psychological forms of harassment in professional adult settings. This shift may be attributable to several factors, including the formal rules and legal consequences of physical violence in professional settings, the different nature of power dynamics which emphasize social and reputational capital over physical dominance, and the maturation of social-cognitive skills that enable more sophisticated, non-physical forms of aggression. This examination of the *what* of violence naturally leads to an analysis of *who* is most affected by these different manifestations.

#### **Comparative Analysis of Vulnerability and Risk Factors**

Identifying populations that are disproportionately at risk is a prerequisite for creating equitable and effective support systems and prevention policies. A comparative analysis of vulnerability factors in schools and workplaces reveals that while some risks are context-specific, many of the underlying drivers of victimization—such as gender, age, and social marginalization—are remarkably consistent across the lifespan, even as their specific manifestations change.

Gender emerges as a significant and persistent risk factor, shaping the nature of violence experienced in both schools and workplaces. Among students, boys are more likely to be involved in physical fights, to be physically attacked, and to experience physical bullying [1]. Conversely, girls report higher rates of psychological bullying [1]. A similar pattern is observed in the workplace, where men are more likely to experience physical violence [3]. However, the data on workplace harassment also highlight a critical gendered disparity: women are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence and harassment. Globally, 8.2% of women in employment have faced sexual violence and harassment, compared to 5.0% of men [3].

This reveals that clear gendered patterns of aggression are evident in both settings, with physical aggression more commonly directed at males and other forms of violence, particularly psychological among schoolgirls and sexual in the workplace, disproportionately affecting females.

The role of age as a risk factor presents a striking and pivotal divergence between the two environments. In the context of peer violence in schools, risk generally *decreases* as children grow older [1]. Global data show a decline in bullying from age 11 to 15, with the notable exception of cyberbullying, where older students may be more at risk [1]. This trend is completely inverted upon entry into the world of work. The ILO report finds that youth in the workplace are *more* likely to face violence and harassment than their older colleagues [3]. This sharp reversal marks a key transition point in the life course, where age shifts from a protective factor in late adolescence to a significant vulnerability factor for young adults navigating their early careers.

A powerful common thread linking vulnerability in both schools and workplaces is the experience of social and economic marginalization. The UNESCO report details that students who are perceived as "different" in any way are more likely to be bullied [1]. The most common reasons cited for being bullied are physical appearance, followed by race, nationality, or color, with children from poorer families and migrant children also appearing to be more vulnerable [1]. This pattern is directly mirrored in the workplace. The ILO report identifies migrant status—especially for women—and a history of discrimination based on gender, disability, or ethnicity as significant risk factors for experiencing violence and harassment [3]. This parallel demonstrates that vulnerability is consistently and fundamentally linked to social marginalization and perceived deviation from established norms, whether in the schoolyard or the office.

The consistent targeting of marginalized groups, combined with the pivotal reversal of age as a risk factor, strongly indicates that vulnerability to interpersonal aggression is not episodic but is a dynamic process that evolves across the life course, shaped by the distinct social ecologies of education and employment.

### **The Role of Socio-Cultural Context**

To understand the deeper root causes of bullying and harassment, it is essential to examine the socio-cultural context in which they occur. The case of the Republic of Korea provides a

compelling framework for this analysis, illustrating how specific societal pressures can foster a climate conducive to interpersonal aggression across different life stages [2]. The study of bullying in South Korea identifies several cultural factors that are key drivers of this behavior, including a rigidly hierarchical society, intense and pervasive academic and professional competition, and a strong cultural emphasis on social conformity [2]. These societal pressures create an environment that enables harassment in both schools, where verbal abuse is a dominant form (41.8%), and in workplaces, where over 60% of workers report experiencing some form of bullying [2]. The intense competition, which begins in early childhood and continues throughout one's career, combined with a social structure that emphasizes deference to authority and conformity to group norms, can normalize the targeting of individuals who are perceived as weaker or different [2]. While these factors are specific to the Korean context, they offer a valuable model for understanding how broader societal values related to hierarchy, competition, and conformity can foster a climate that enables and perpetuates harassment across educational and occupational settings globally.

#### **Discussion: Common Threads, Key Divergences, and Policy Implications**

A comparative analysis of the global data on school and workplace violence moves beyond a simple presentation of statistics to an interpretation of their deeper meaning. By synthesizing the findings, it is possible to identify the core linkages and critical differences between these two phenomena. This synthesis illuminates how interpersonal aggression evolves across the lifespan and provides clear implications for creating more comprehensive, cross-sectoral prevention strategies that are not confined to a single environment or age group.

The analysis reveals that school bullying and workplace harassment are not isolated issues but rather distinct points on a continuum of interpersonal aggression. They are driven by similar power dynamics and consistently target individuals based on perceived vulnerability and social marginalization [1, 3]. Factors such as migrant status and a history of discrimination are potent risk indicators in both the school and the workplace, demonstrating a persistent pattern of victimization against those outside the dominant social norms [1, 3]. Furthermore, both contexts share the formidable challenge of ensuring victims come forward. In the workplace, underreporting is a documented problem, with many citing a belief that it is a 'waste of time' as a significant barrier [3]. In the educational context, the challenge of disclosure is implied by strong international recommendations for creating safe and effective reporting mechanisms for students [1]. The consequences of this violence are also tragically parallel, frequently leading to severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and a diminished quality of life for victims [1, 2].

Alongside these common threads, there are key divergences that highlight an evolution in the nature of violence across the life course. The most significant divergence is in the primary *form* of violence. While physical aggression is predominant among youth in most global regions, it gives way to a rise in psychological and sexual harassment in adult professional life [1, 3]. This suggests that as individuals mature, the methods of exerting power and causing harm become less overt and more relational or psychological. Another critical divergence is the contrasting role of age as a risk factor. Age and seniority can be protective in the later years of schooling, but this trend sharply reverses in the workplace, where youth become a key vulnerable group [1, 3]. This shift underscores the unique vulnerabilities faced by individuals transitioning into the workforce.

From a policy development perspective, the clear overlap in root causes and vulnerable populations mandates a shift away from siloed interventions. Prevention efforts should not be confined to the education or labor sectors but should be integrated into a cohesive, life-course strategy. The analysis of successful national responses to school violence offers a robust model that can be adapted for the world of work. Key strategies identified by UNESCO, such as fostering a positive climate through strong leadership, implementing robust legal and policy frameworks, promoting collaboration between all stakeholders, and empowering individuals with knowledge of their rights and support systems, are directly transferable to workplace environments [1]. By applying these proven principles, organizations can work to foster cultures of safety, respect, and accountability, thereby extending protection from harassment beyond the school gates and into professional life through an integrated life-course model for violence prevention.

### **Conclusion**

This comparative analysis demonstrates that school violence and workplace harassment, while situated in distinct contexts, are deeply interconnected phenomena. They are driven by similar dynamics of power, social marginalization, and pervasive societal pressures that sanction the targeting of individuals perceived as different or vulnerable.

The forms of aggression may evolve from the physical to the psychological, and the specific risk factors may shift with age, but the underlying pattern of harm remains consistent. The findings strongly support the conclusion that these are not separate problems but are two manifestations of a single, continuous challenge that requires a holistic response. Therefore, to build a safer and more equitable society for all, we must move beyond siloed interventions and embrace an integrated, life-course approach to violence prevention—one that begins with fostering respect and safety in schools and extends those protections throughout the world of work.

### **References**

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