



Weight, Body Image & Bullying

Dr. Elizabeth Nixon

www.growingup.ie





Background

Bullying entails more than aggression – it captures a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim (Juvonen & Graham 2013)

Bullying is rarely targeted randomly – important to consider who makes a ‘safe’ target in making the bully feel powerful

Being overweight has been associated with victimization (Griffiths et al., 2006; Pearse et al., 2002; Janssen et al., 2004)

Being overweight has been associated with perpetration – only among 15-16 year olds (not 11-12 or 13-14 year olds) (Janssen et al., 2004)

Children who are overweight may be subjected to stigmatisation, or may have health problems or low self-esteem - factors which themselves elevate the risk for being victimized.



Background

Body image has also been suggested as an important factor in understanding the link between peer victimization and weight status.

Negative body image has been linked to victimization, with those criticised over their appearance/exposed to weight-related teasing more likely to report body dissatisfaction and poor body-related self-esteem (Lunde et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2003)

Aim of the analysis was to explore associations between involvement in bullying, weight status and perception of one's body size (body image) using Growing up in Ireland data (9 year olds)



Assessment of Involvement in Bullying

N = 8568

18. Thinking back over the last year would you say that you picked on someone (either a child or an adult)?

Yes..... ₁ No..... ₂ (If you have answered no, please skip to Question 20)

19. How did you pick on them?

Yes No

- a. By shoving, pushing, hitting ₁ ₂
- b. Name calling, slagging ₁ ₂
- c. Text messaging, emails, Bebo etc ₁ ₂
- d. Written messages / notes etc ₁ ₂
- e. Leaving them out of games / chats ₁ ₂
- f. In other ways [please write it down] ₁ ₂

20. Thinking back over the last year would you say that anyone (either a child or an adult) picked on you?

Yes..... ₁ No..... ₂ (If you have answered no, please skip to Question 22)

21. A. How did they pick on you?

Yes No

- a. By shoving, pushing, hitting ₁ ₂
- b. Name calling, slagging ₁ ₂
- c. Text messaging, emails, Bebo etc ₁ ₂
- d. Written messages / notes etc ₁ ₂
- e. Leaving you out of games / chats ₁ ₂
- f. In other ways [please write it down] ₁ ₂

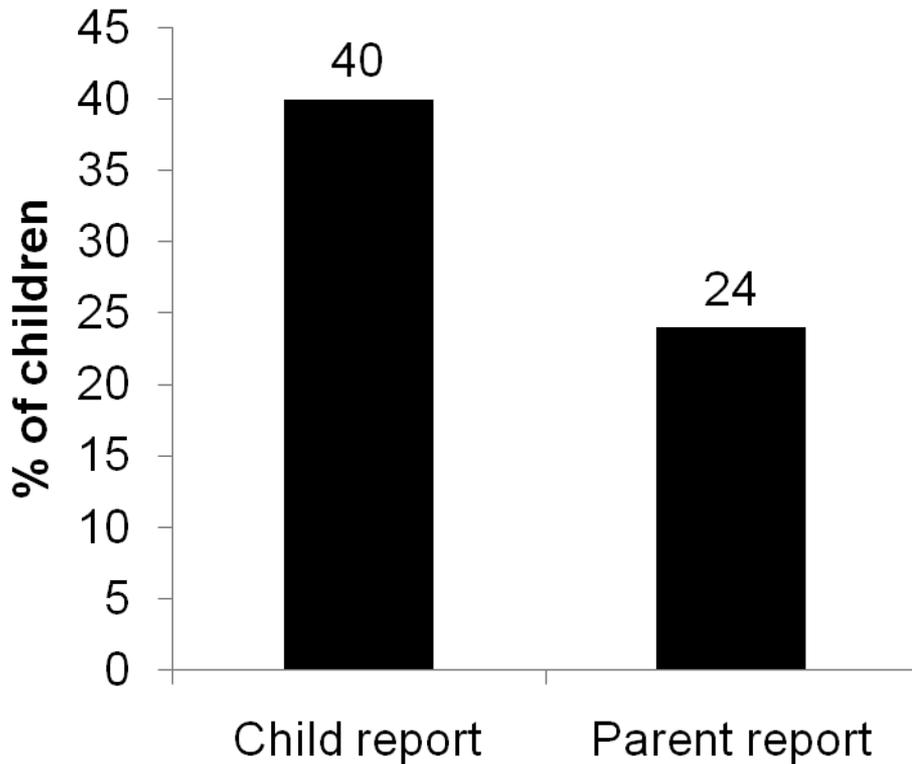
21. B. If you were picked on, did this upset you?

A lot A little Not at all
₁ ₂ ₃

	Bullied Others	
Victims	Yes	No
Yes	10%	30%
No	3%	57%



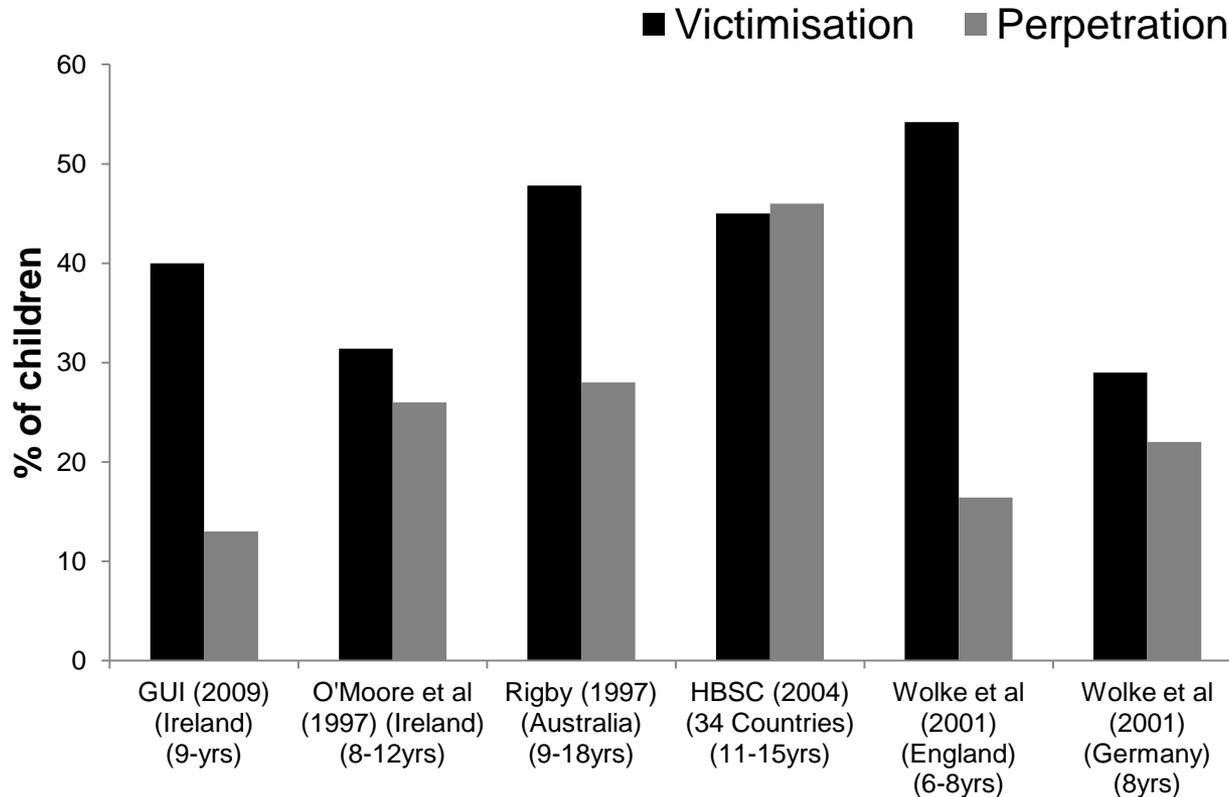
Prevalence of Victimisation among 9-year olds in Ireland



- Similar prevalence rates for boys and girls
- Many primary caregivers are unaware that their child has experienced bullying in the past year
- For the 40% of children who had been bullied, 61% of primary caregivers were unaware of their child's victimisation
- Girls were more likely to report feeling upset as a result of the bullying than boys
- Few social class differences



Comparison of GUI Prevalence Rates with Literature



Challenge of comparing across studies due to methodological differences (sample profiles, time-frames and definitions used)



Assessment of Weight/ Perception of Weight Status

Child's Height and Weight were measured and BMI was derived

International Cut-Off Points for classification of normal weight, overweight and obesity for 9 year old boys and girls were used

Perception of weight status

“How would you describe yourself?”

[very skinny, a bit skinny, just the right size, a bit overweight or very overweight]



Weight Status

BMI Category	% of Boys	% of Girls
Normal Weight	78	70
Overweight	17	22
Obese	5	8

Girls were more likely to be overweight ($p < 0.001$) and obese ($p = 0.002$)



Perception of Weight Status

	Child's Self-Perception of Weight Status		
BMI Category	Very/A bit Skinny	About Right	A bit/Very overweight
Normal Weight	24.7	70.8	4.5
Overweight	7.4	78.0	14.6
Obese	5.2	60.1	34.7
All	20.2	71.5	8.3

Children are poor judges of their own weight status

(Layte & McCrory, 2011)



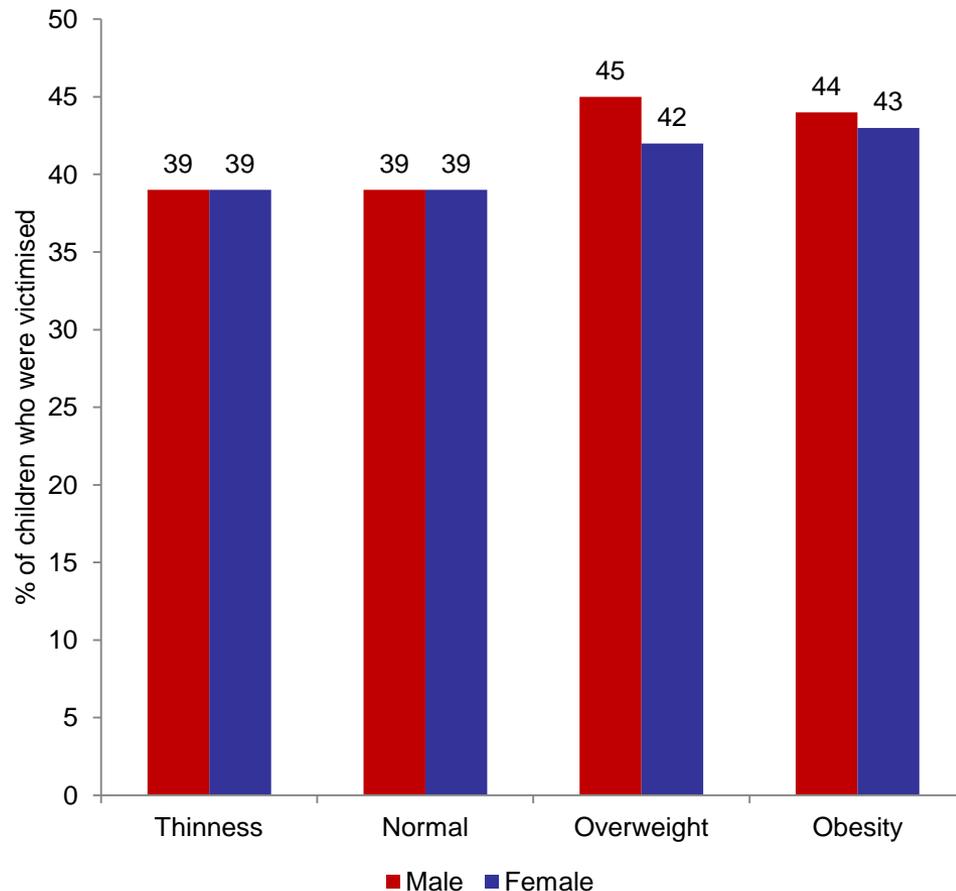
Perception of Weight Status

Mothers' perceptions appear to be important

- If a mother perceives her son to be underweight he is 5 times more likely to see himself as such; if a mother perceives her son as overweight, he is 3.7 times more likely to see himself as such (controlling for child's actual weight)
- For girls, assessment appear to be less influenced by mothers – if a mother perceives her daughter to be underweight, she is 4 times more likely to see herself as such; if a mother perceives her daughter as overweight, she is 2.5 times more likely to see herself as such
- For boys (but not girls) the likelihood of seeing oneself as underweight increases when they have a mother who herself is overweight/obese (controlling for child's BMI)



Weight Status and Bullying



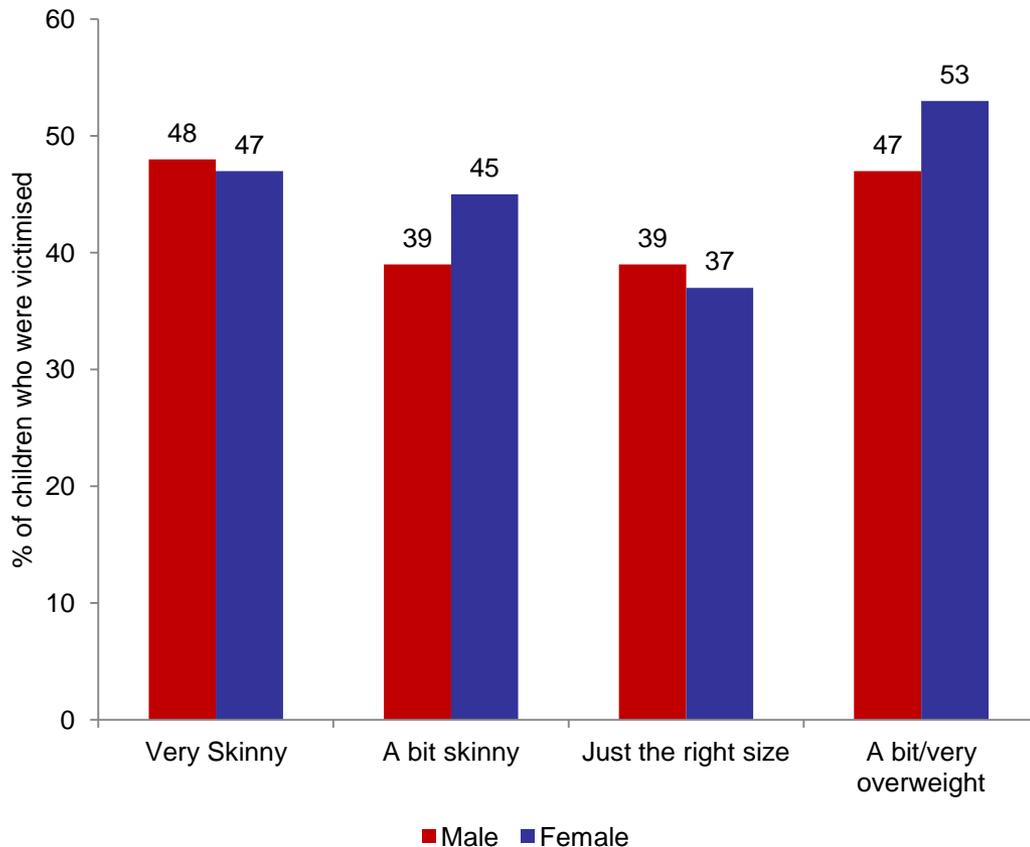
A significant relationship was found between victimisation and body weight as categorised into four weight class categories ($\chi^2=14.8$; $df=3$; $p=0.002$).

Children who were overweight or obese had an odds ratio (OR) of 1.17 (95% CI: 1.05-1.30; $p=0.004$) of being victimised when compared to children who were not overweight or obese

(Reulbach, Ladewig, Nixon, O'Moore, Williams & O'Dowd, 2013)



Perception of Weight Status and Bullying



Children who described their body image as bit or very overweight were significantly ($\chi^2=30.7$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$) more likely to be victimised when compared to children who declared their body size as not overweight (49.8% vs. 39.0%).

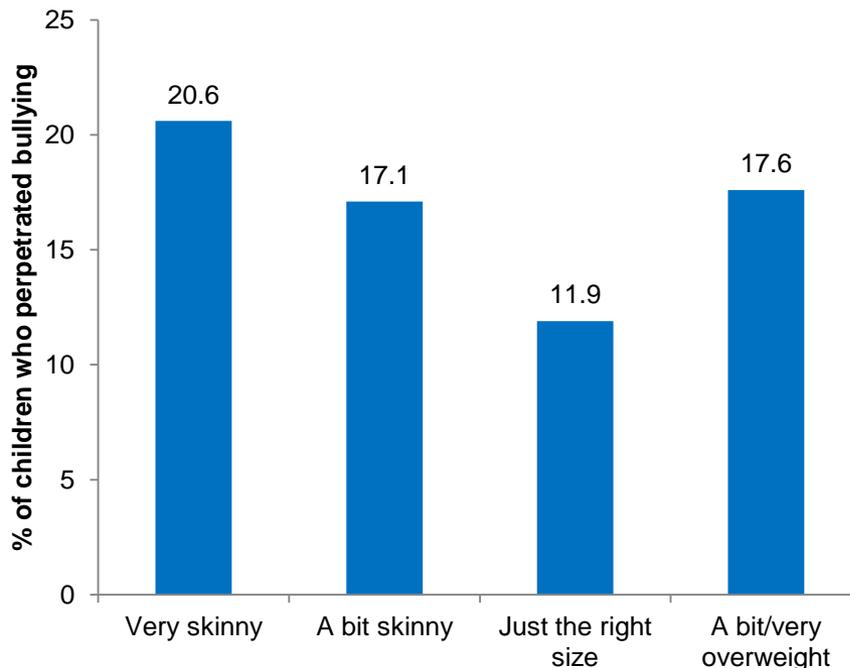
Self-perception of being skinny or very skinny was significantly associated with being victimised ($\chi^2=5.9$; $df=1$; $p=0.015$).

(Reulbach, Ladewig, Nixon, O'Moore, Williams & O'Dowd, 2013)



Perception of Weight Status and Perpetration of Bullying

Bullying others was not significantly associated with BMI derived weight category.



Children who described themselves as very skinny (20.6%), a bit skinny (17.1%), or a bit/very overweight (17.6%) were more likely to perpetrate bullying against another compared with children who described themselves as 'just the right size' (11.9%).



Conclusions

- Associations between peer victimization and weight status, and perception of weight status were found.
- This points to sub-groups of children who may be at risk of peer victimization
 - Cross-sectional nature of the data means that cause-effect relationships cannot be inferred
 - Peer victimization predicts increased adjustment difficulties and health problems over time (Arseneault et al. 2006) – it is plausible that ‘symptoms’ and victimization are likely to be cyclically related over time.
 - Longitudinal analysis to tease apart the nature of these relationships will be possible with subsequent data waves.
- Assessment of involvement in bullying was not very fine-grained – going forward (13 year data sweep) more detailed information on involvement in bullying has been collected