

# Bullying and Adverse Childhood Experiences

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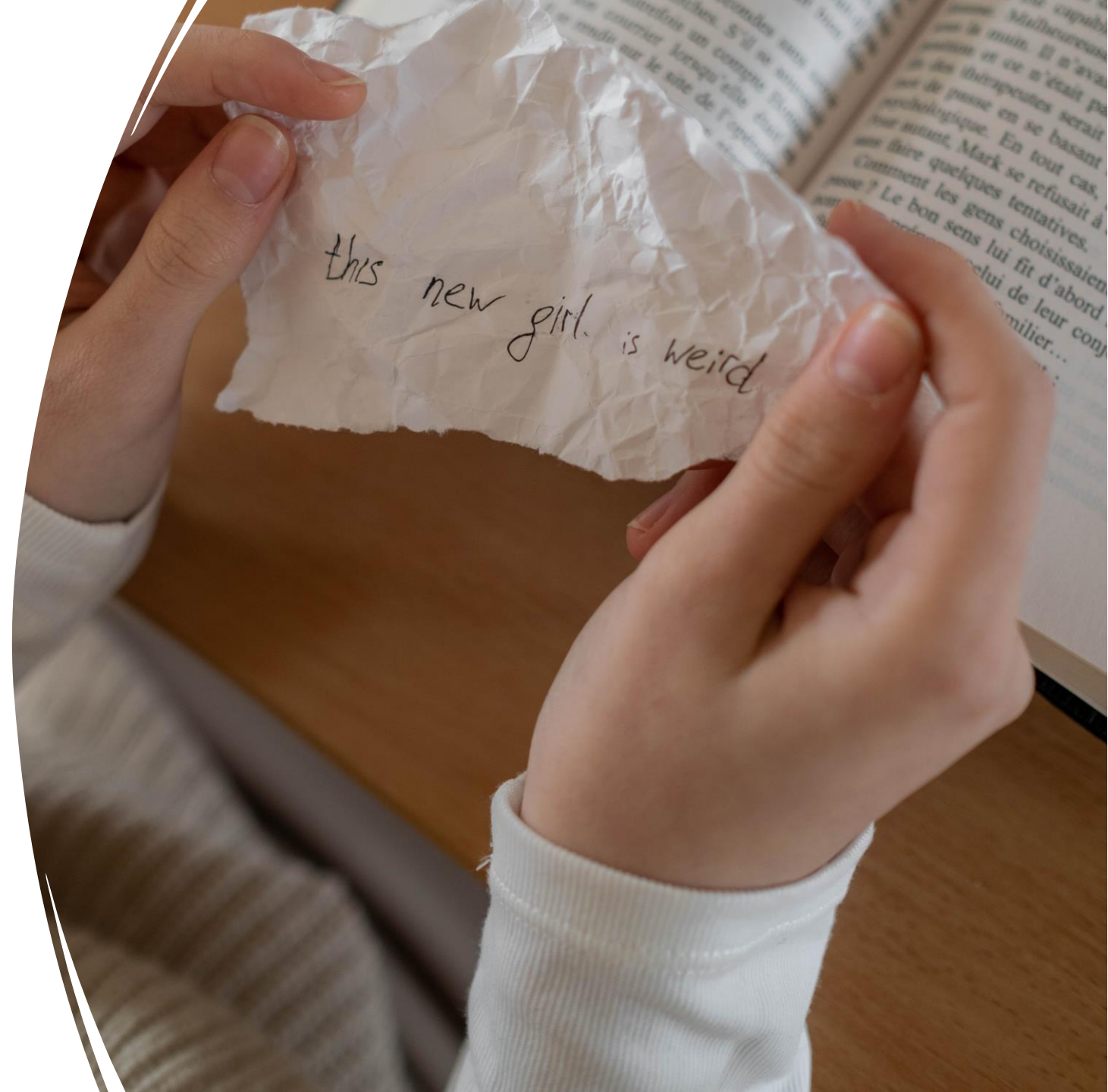
**Nora Trompeter, UCL**



# Background

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- 40% of young people report being bullied in the UK (Department of Education)
- 6% of all young people experienced bullying daily
- Around half of all adults in England have experienced at least one ACE





# What is bullying?

*The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online’.*

- ANTI-BULLYING ALLIANCE

# Types of bullying

## Direct bullying (“traditional bullying”)

*Physical bullying:* Pushing, hitting, kicking

*Verbal bullying:* Name calling, belittling, teasing



# Types of bullying



## Indirect bullying

*Relational bullying:* Excluding, spreading rumours, ridicule

*Online bullying/cyberbullying:* Posting on social media, social exclusion, nasty messages

# Adverse childhood experiences

*“Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence”*

- Young Minds

# Adverse childhood experiences

## Abuse



Physical abuse



Sexual abuse



Verbal abuse

## Neglect



Emotional neglect



Physical neglect

## Growing up in a household where:



There are adults with alcohol and drug problems



There are adults with mental health problems



There is domestic violence



There are adults who have spent time in prison



Parents have separated



Should bullying victimisation  
be considered an ACE?





# Bullying & ACEs - similarities

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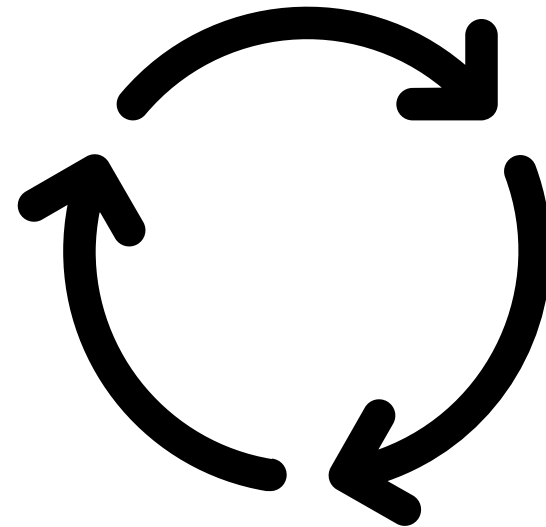
1. High co-occurrence
2. Links with poor mental health
3. More common in disadvantaged youths



# Bullying & ACEs – co-occurrence

- Victims of bullying are more likely to report history of ACEs compared to non-victims (Reisen et al., 2019)
- Same pattern is evident for cyberbullying (Nagata et al., 2022)

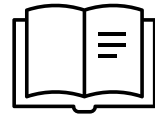
Cycle of victimization?



# Bullying & ACEs - outcomes



Heightened anxiety & depression



Lower school attendance



Higher levels of substance use

# Bullying & ACEs - prevalence

1

Both more common in areas of disadvantage (Choi et al., 2021)

2

Both more common in low SES households (Dosanjh et al., 2023; Hosozawa et al., 2021)

3

Both linked with lower education (Dosanjh et al., 2023; Hosozawa et al., 2021)

# Bullying & ACEs - differences



**Context**



**Timing**

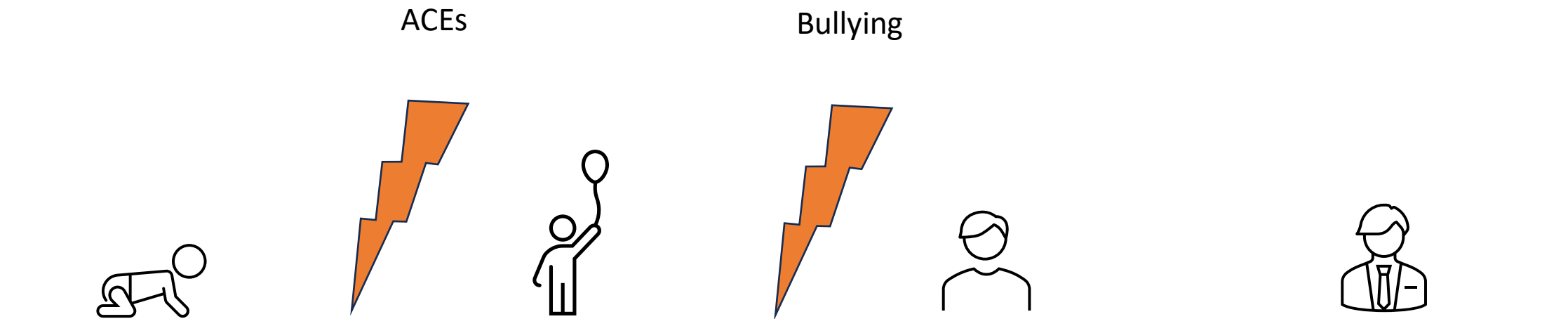
# Bullying & ACEs - context

ACEs = Family  
context

Bullying = Peer  
context

# Bullying & ACEs – timing

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Where does  
that leave us?

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# Bullying & ACEs – types of associations

Cumulative = Both contribute independently to poorer outcomes

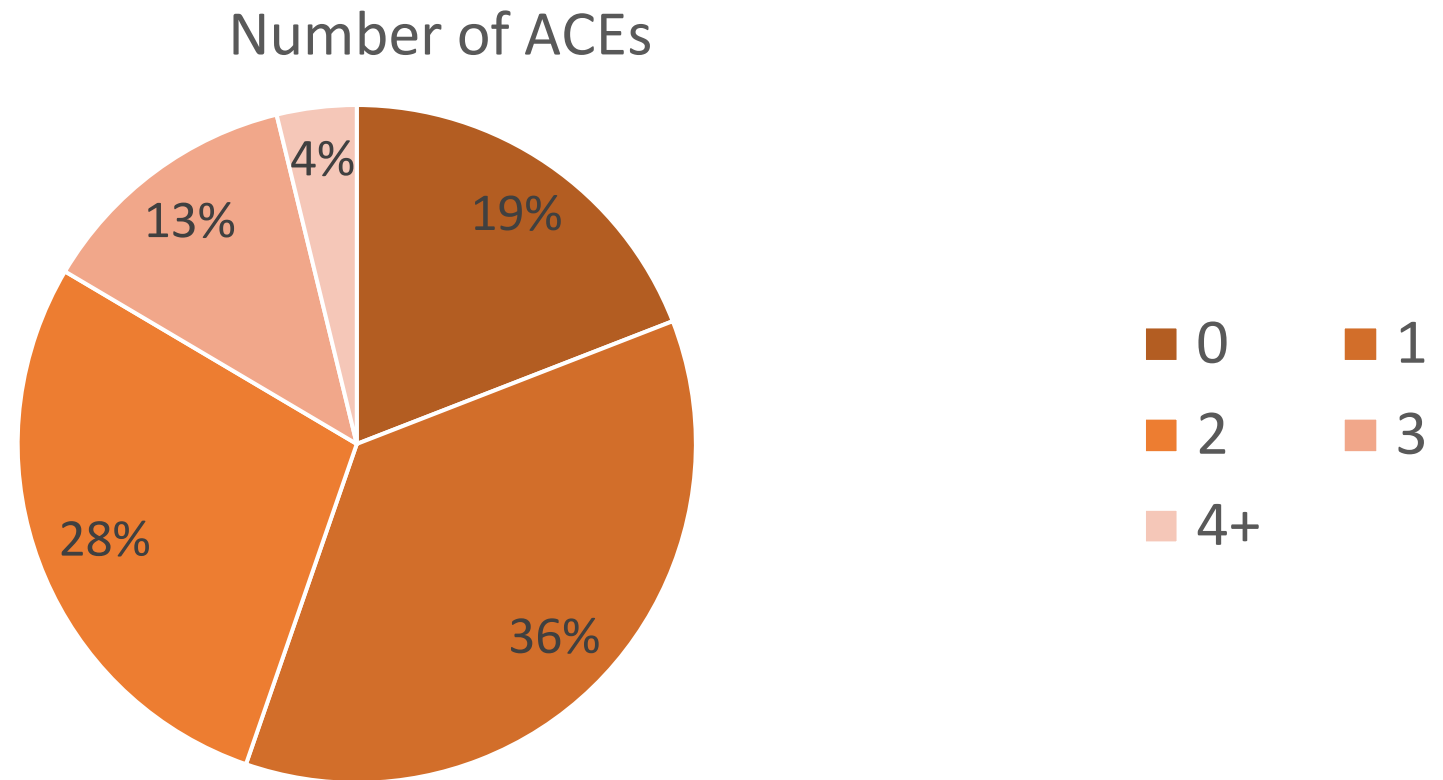
Multiplicative = Bullying exacerbates poor outcomes of ACEs

# Empirical study: Trompeter et al., 2023



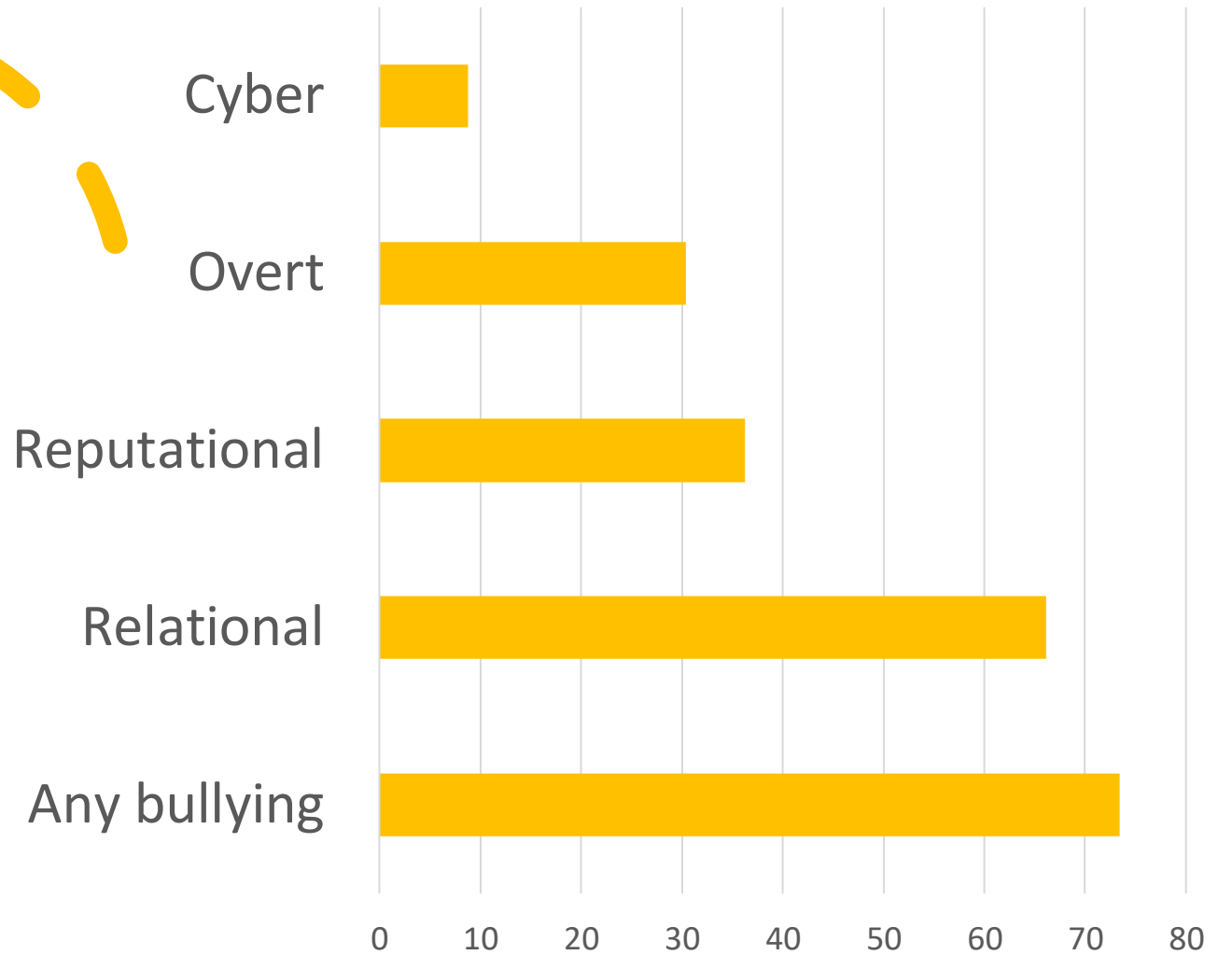
- 8,085 early adolescents from the ABCD study
- Mean age: 12 years; 52% male
- 55.9% White, 16.8% Latino, 16.9% Black, 6% Asian, 3.5% Native American, 0.9% Other
- Self-report measures on bullying
- Parent-reported mental health (CBCL) and ACEs

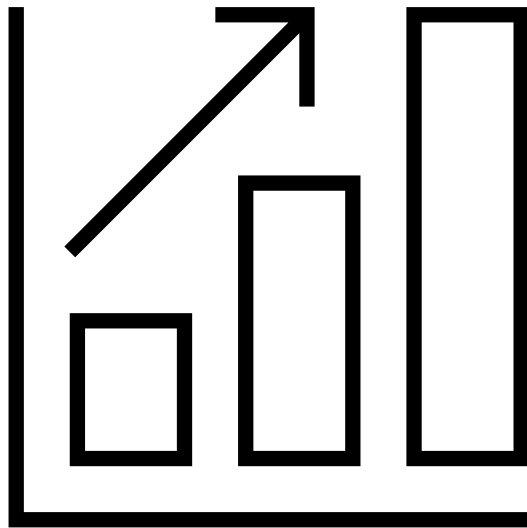
# Results – sample characteristics



Results –  
sample  
characteristics

Bullying victimization prevalence





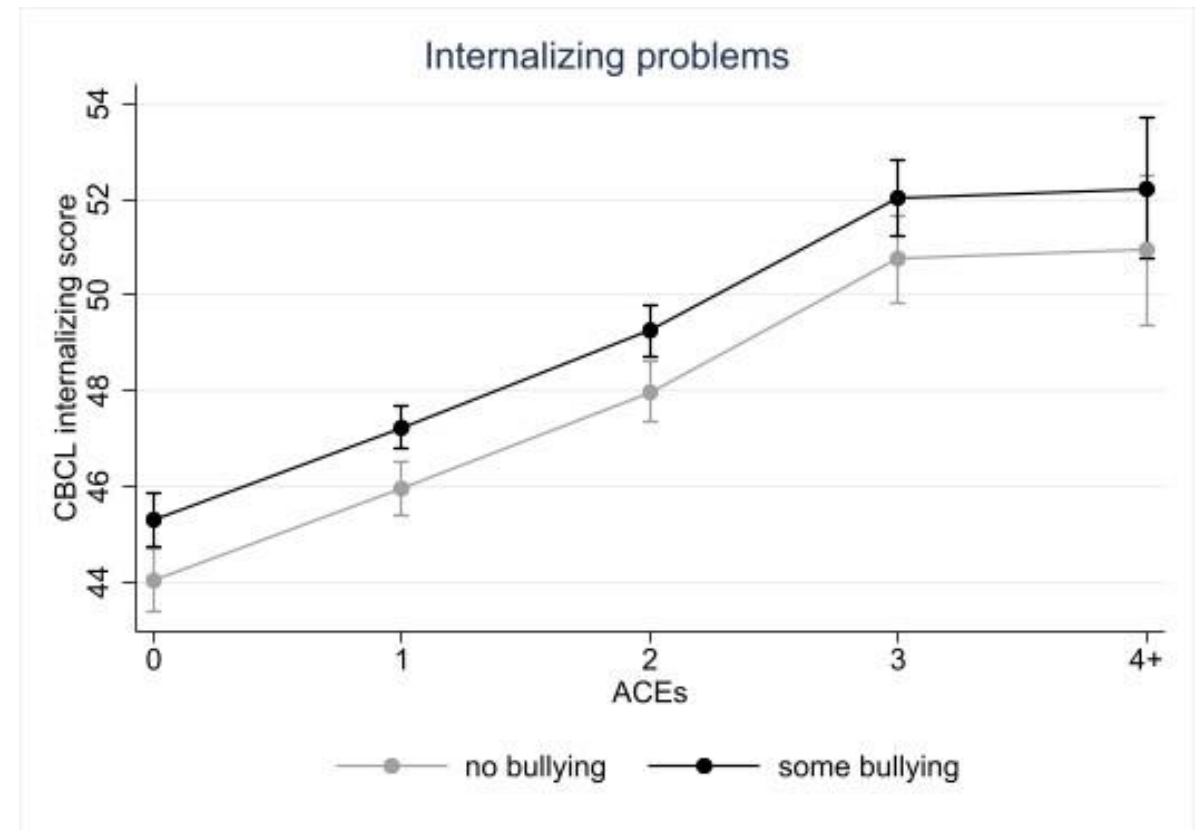
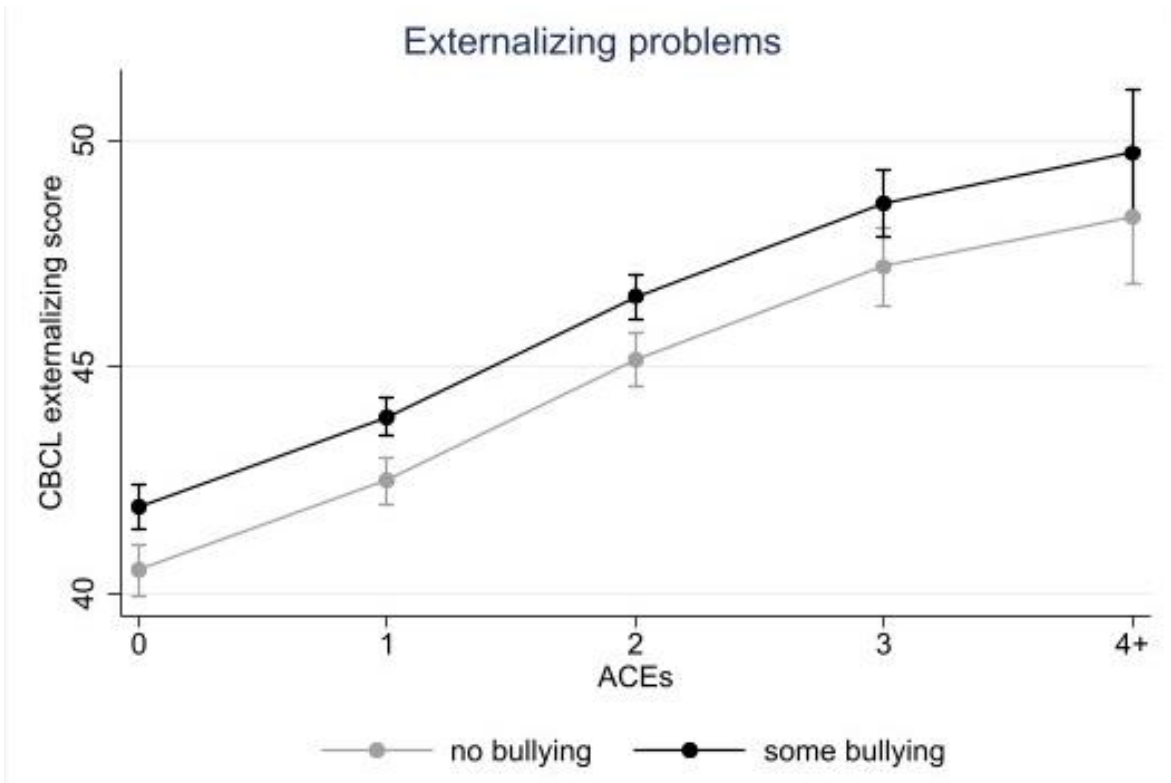
# Results – cumulative effects

Both ACEs and bullying victimisation were associated with internalising & externalising problems



# Results - multiplicative

NO SIGNIFICANT INTERACTIONS EMERGED



# Bullying & ACEs – types of associations

Cumulative = Both contribute independently to poorer outcomes

Multiplicative = Bullying exacerbates poor outcomes of ACEs



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What can we  
learn from  
this?

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# Implications for practice

1

Include bullying in screening for ACEs/adversity

2

Raise awareness of bullying & ACE overlap

3

Provide extra support for both disadvantaged youth and bullied youth

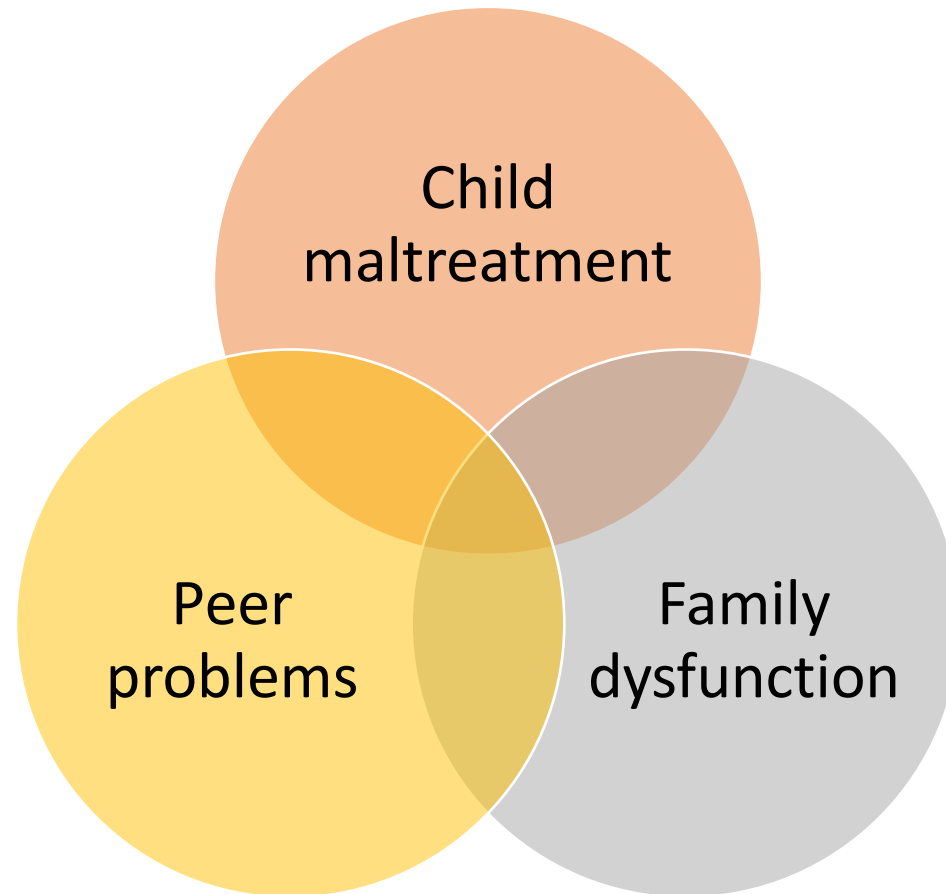
Should bullying  
be considered  
an ACE?

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Probably yes – but maybe  
a peer-specific ACE

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# Bullying & ACEs



Supported by some emerging evidence (Karatekin & Hill, 2019) → more evidence needed



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## Next steps for research

- Need more longitudinal studies
- Grouping of ACEs into composite measure → look at ACEs separately to further understanding



# Questions?

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# Want to learn more?

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Trompeter, N., Testa, A., Raney, J.H. *et al.* The Association Between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Bullying Victimization, and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among Early Adolescents: Examining Cumulative and Interactive Associations. *J. Youth Adolescence* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01907-2>





# Other resources

Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.04.001>.

Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H., & Hamby, S. (2013). Improving the adverse childhood experiences study scale. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 167(1), 70–75. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.420>.

Karatekin, C., & Hill, M. (2019). Expanding the original definition of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 12(3), 289–306. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-018-0237-5>.

Nagata, J. M., Trompeter, N., Singh, G., Raney, J., Ganson, K. T., Testa, A., Jackson, D. B., Murray, S. B., & Baker, F. C. (2023). Adverse childhood experiences and early adolescent cyberbullying in the United States. *Journal of Adolescence*, 95, 609–616. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12124>

Reisen et al., 2019A. Reisen, M.C. Viana, E.T. dos Santos Neto (2019). Adverse childhood experiences and bullying in late adolescence in a metropolitan region of Brazil. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 92, 146–156, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.04.003>