

School Bullying as Educational Disadvantage: Long-Term Consequences for Educational Attainment in Japan

Research Overview

This study examines whether school bullying victimization is associated with long-term educational disadvantage in Japan. By treating bullying not only as an interpersonal or psychological problem but also as an adverse school experience, the study connects research on school climate, educational inequality, and life-course stratification.

Purpose of Study

Bullying has often been examined as a problem of peer relationships, mental health, or school maladjustment. However, if victimization during school years disrupts learning, school belonging, and educational transitions, bullying may also be understood as part of the process through which educational inequality is produced and reproduced. This perspective is especially important in societies such as Japan, where educational attainment is closely linked to later life chances and where school adaptation plays a central role in students' educational trajectories.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether experiences of school bullying are associated with later educational attainment. Rather than treating bullying as an isolated event within childhood, this study conceptualizes bullying victimization as an adverse school experience that may leave long-term consequences for educational trajectories. It asks the following research questions. First, are individuals who experienced bullying during school years less likely to attain higher levels of education? Second, does this association remain after considering family background and other relevant characteristics? Third, how can bullying victimization be located within broader discussions of educational inequality and cumulative disadvantage?

Through these questions, the study aims to contribute to education research in two ways. First, it expands the discussion of bullying beyond immediate psychological or behavioral outcomes by focusing on long-term educational consequences. Second, it connects school bullying research with the sociology of education by examining whether adverse experiences within school can shape stratified educational outcomes.

Research Methods

The study uses quantitative survey data from Japan that include retrospective information on school bullying victimization and later educational outcomes. The dependent variable is educational attainment, operationalized through indicators such as completion of higher education or years of schooling. The key independent variable is whether the respondent experienced bullying during school years. The analysis also considers family background and individual characteristics, including parental

education, socioeconomic background, gender, age, and academic performance where available.

The empirical strategy is based on regression analysis. First, descriptive analyses compare educational attainment between those who experienced bullying and those who did not. Second, multivariate models estimate the association between bullying victimization and educational attainment while controlling for family background and other covariates. Third, additional models examine whether the association differs by social background. This allows the study to consider whether bullying victimization works as a general disadvantage across social groups or whether its consequences are amplified among students from less advantaged backgrounds.

This approach does not claim to identify a simple causal effect of bullying. Instead, the study aims to clarify whether bullying victimization is systematically associated with later educational outcomes and how this association can be interpreted within educational inequality research.

Results and Discussion

The analysis suggests that school bullying victimization is associated with later educational disadvantage. Individuals who experienced bullying during school years tend to show lower levels of educational attainment than those who did not. This association is reduced but does not necessarily disappear after controlling for family background and other characteristics, suggesting that bullying victimization may capture a dimension of school experience that is not fully explained by socioeconomic origin alone.

These findings imply that bullying should not be understood only as a short-term interpersonal problem. It may also be an educational experience that affects students' subsequent trajectories. Bullying can undermine school belonging, reduce confidence in school life, and weaken the continuity of educational aspirations. In this sense, victimization may become part of a broader process of cumulative disadvantage, in which adverse experiences within school contribute to later inequality.

The findings also have implications for international discussions on inclusive education. Policies against bullying are often justified in terms of safety, well-being, and mental health. These are undoubtedly important. However, the present study suggests that preventing bullying may also be relevant to educational equity. If victimization is linked to educational attainment, then anti-bullying policies should be understood not only as protective measures for individual students but also as part of a broader effort to reduce educational inequality.

The Japanese case is useful for international education research because it illustrates how school-based experiences can have consequences beyond the school setting. In education systems where credentials strongly structure later life chances, adverse school experiences may become linked to long-term stratification. By examining bullying as educational disadvantage, this study bridges research on school climate, student well-being, and educational inequality.

Keywords

Bullying victimization; Educational attainment; Educational inequality; School experience; Japan