

## **The Student Bullying of Teachers: An Exploration of the Nature of the Phenomenon and the Ways in which it is Experienced by Teachers.**

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The student bullying of teachers (SBT) is a distinct, complex and multi-faceted problem which was first empirically examined in the late 1990s by researchers in Finland (Kivivuori, 1996) and in the United Kingdom (Terry, 1998; Pervin and Turner, 1998) who suggested that particular patterns and characteristics of student behaviour towards teachers may be identified as bullying, rather than general disruptive behaviour or violence. SBT is an emerging global issue, yet it is under-recognised in academic, societal and political spheres compared with violence against teachers and other forms of bullying, resulting in limited conceptual understanding and awareness of the phenomenon. An in-depth understanding of SBT is fundamental to establishing an effective response to address the issue. Therefore, this article seeks to advance conceptual understanding and awareness of SBT and to highlight the ways in which the phenomenon may be manifested. The difficulties associated with establishing a definitive definition of SBT are explored under the three central components of a bullying definition –intent to harm, repetition and power imbalance. These components are discussed in relation to the unique qualities and complexities of SBT. The manifestation and prevalence of SBT both in Ireland and in an international context are also explored.

### **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, academic engagement with the issue of teachers being bullied by students has become more evident in the literature (Lahelma, 1996; Terry, 1998; Pervin and Turner, 1998). However, the topic is still greatly under-researched, with the authors of the most recent U.S. study (Espelage et al., 2013) insisting that the issue is “rarely defined, empirically studied, or meaningfully discussed within academic circles” (Espelage et al., 2011, p.2). The Student Bullying of Teachers (SBT) has also remained virtually absent from both public and political discourse in most countries, resulting in a chaotic piecemeal response from schools and governments (Chen and Astor, 2010) and a sense of isolation and shame amongst victimised teachers (De Wet, 2010). Increasingly international researchers have highlighted the need for greater academic, societal and political awareness and recognition of SBT (e.g. Terry, 1998; Pervin and Turner, 1998; Munn et al., 2004; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2009; De Wet, 2010; McMahan et al., 2011; Turkum, 2011) as a critical first step in effectively addressing the issue. SBT must be recognised as an emerging global issue rather than the result of individual teachers’ inadequate teaching abilities or character flaws (Munn et al., 2004). There needs to be greater acknowledgement amongst students, teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers and the general public that SBT is “everyone’s problem and responsibility” (Espelage et al., 2013, p.11) and requires an international commitment to tackle the issue. The difficulties associated with the lack of awareness of SBT among the general population have been attributed, in part, to “overly subjective and

restrictive views about the nature of bullying” (Terry, 1998, p.256). An in-depth understanding of the phenomenon is central to establishing an effective response to address the issue. Hence, this article seeks to provide a deeper conceptual understanding of the nature of SBT and the ways in which it is manifested. This article opens with a comprehensive examination of the difficulties associated with establishing a definitive definition due to the unique qualities and complexities of this form of bullying. As SBT ultimately involves the bullying of an adult by a child, the three central components of a bullying definition—repetition, intention and power imbalance require further consideration in this context. Contemporary definitions of SBT are presented and an alternative definition which incorporates the complexity of the definitional components is offered. The article then explores the ways in which SBT may be manifested and experienced by teachers, whilst providing an overview of the most prevalent forms of SBT experienced by teachers both internationally and in Ireland.

### **Defining SBT within the Bullying Literature**

Bullying has proven a complex concept to define, (Boulton, 1995; Madsen, 1997; Sutton, Smith and Swettenham, 1999) primarily because of its multidimensional character and also owing to the fact that researchers have analysed the phenomenon from such a diverse gamut of perspectives. Chan (2009) attributes bullying’s “legacy of confused meanings” and “lack of consensus” amongst researchers to bullying being regarded as “an elusive phenomenon that has defied attempts to define it” (Chan, 2009, p.10). There is, however, a general consensus that bullying is an all-encompassing term which embodies several key factors (Farrington, 1993; Keating, 1998; Rigby, 2002; Ireland, 2008). It is an aggressive behaviour, repeated over a period of time, inflicted by an individual or group (Olweus, 1993; Harel-Fisch et al, 2010) characterised by an imbalance of power (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Einarsen, 2000), and based on the conscious, deliberate and wilful intention of causing harm to the victim (Olweus, 1991, 1993; O’ Connell, Pepler and Craig, 1999).

Smith and Sharp (1994) and Rigby (2002) define bullying as “the systematic abuse of power” (Rigby, 2002, p.2). Similar to Olweus (1993), this definition encompasses the repetitive nature of bullying, but adds an implied imbalance of power within the bully/ victim dynamic; a disparity of power which Olweus suggests may be attributed to the bully’s superior physical or “mental strength” (Smith and Sharp, 1994, p.171). Einarsen (2000) develops this concept further by arguing that the bully/victim relationship is typified by a power inequality, in which the victim cannot easily defend him/herself (Batsche, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Hazler et al., 2001; Dzuka and Dalbert, 2007) irrespective of whether there is “real or perceived asymmetrical power relationships between the bully and his or her victims” (Naito and Gielen, 2005, p.174). Whilst also adhering to Olweus’ (1993) criteria of recurrent conflictual behaviour, Einarsen et al. (2003) propose that a conflict does not qualify as bullying if it is an isolated incident or if there is equal “strength” among the conflicting parties (Einarsen et al., 2003, p.15; Branch et al., 2006). However, some researchers maintain that isolated critical incidents should also be considered as bullying owing to the long-term effects which the victim may experience (Olweus, 1993; Arora, 1996). Although there are

correlations between the phenomenon of SBT and other forms of bullying (peer, workplace etc.) the student bullying of teachers involves a distinct and unique power differential, in that a child has power over an adult, a situation comparable with parent abuse by a child. The criteria of power imbalance, repetition and intent therefore require special consideration and discussion when taken in the context of SBT as will be discussed in the next section.

The student bullying of teachers has been referred to by various terms such as “bullying” (Terry, 1998; James and Lawlor, 2008; De Wet, 2010; Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012), “teacher targeted bullying” (Pervin and Turner, 1998), “cross-peer abuse” (Terry, 1998) and “violence against teachers” (Dzuka and Dalbert, 2007; Chen and Astor, 2009; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2009; Wilson et al. et al., 2011; Turkum, 2011; Mooij, 2011). SBT has also been labelled as “bullying and harassment of teachers” (Benefield, 2004), “educator targeted bullying” (Matsui, 2005; De Wet, 2010) and “victimisation” (Dworkin, Haney and Telschow, 1988). As “bullying” is the word most widely used in the literature, it will be used within the term the “student bullying of teachers”, which has been coined for the purposes of this article. Despite the lack of consensus with respect to terminology, there remains widespread accord among researchers regarding the inclusion of key elements of traditional bullying criteria in a definition of SBT: power imbalance, intentionality and repetition. Terry (1998) defines SBT, which he terms “cross-peer abuse” as occurring

in situations where the victim cannot easily escape. It occurs when an uneven balance of power is exploited and abused by an individual or individuals who in that particular circumstance have the advantage. Bullying is characterised by persistent, repetitive acts of physical or psychological aggression. This definition includes the concept of social confinement, the abuse of an asymmetric power imbalance, and implies that the power is “usable” in that it has given the individual an advantage.

(Terry, 1998, p.261).

Terry (1998) emphasises that the teacher is under a “potent social constraint that precludes escape as a means of terminating the abusive interaction” (Terry, 1998, p.278). Victimised teachers cannot simply walk out of the lesson; they must maintain their professionalism and stay until the class period has ended, in effect making them a captive in their own classroom. In this definition, Terry (1998) also makes reference to the issue of power imbalance between the teacher and student. The possibility that students have “usable power” over their teachers is explored within a conceptual framework of “cross-peer abuse” which draws on elements of Thibaut and Kelly’s (1959) argument that power can be separated into that which is “relative” and power which is “usable” (Terry, 1998, p.256). “Usable power” is defined as that which is practical and “convenient” for an individual to use and does not “penalise the possessor” whilst “relative” power refers to an individual’s power which is rendered unusable due to the counter-power of another (Terry, 1998, p.258). Terry explains that an individual draws their usable power from a “pool of potential power” forming one side of the “power equation” (Terry, 1998, p.258). However this “potentially usable power” may be negated in part or entirely by the counter power of the other party. The teacher may be perceived to be in a position of greater potential power relative to the student by dint of both their maturity and position as teacher. However, this “formal or theoretical

power” (Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012, p.1061) may be rendered “non-usable” by a range of factors including student contempt for authority, ineffective disciplinary procedures, poor management structures and teacher inexperience, such that the “relative power imbued by the state upon the teacher becomes progressively less usable” (Terry, 1998, p.258). Thus, the teacher may find themselves victimised by students despite their recognised position of authority in the school.

Kauppi and Pörhölä (2012) acknowledge such a power differential between student and teacher, suggesting that SBT is perpetrated by a “party of lower status” against the “party of higher status” in which the latter is unable to easily defend him or herself (Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012, p.1061). However, the researchers also focus on the teachers’ subjective interpretation of bullying by students in their definition of SBT as “a communication process in which a teacher is repeatedly subjected, by one or more students, to interaction that he or she perceives as insulting, upsetting, or intimidating. Bullying can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical in nature” (Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012, p.1061). This definition of bullying does not take into account whether or not students engage in hurtful behaviour intentionally or deliberately; it is the teachers’ experience and perception of SBT which is underlined. De Wet (2010) also acknowledges the power differential in his definition of SBT, which he terms “educator targeted bullying” as “aggressive behaviour in which there is an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the educator. The aggressive acts are deliberate and repeated and aim to harm the victim physically, emotionally, socially and/or professionally. Acts of bullying may be verbal, non-verbal, physical, sexual, racial or electronic” (De Wet, 2010, p.190). He summarises that SBT is “aggression directed against those who should be sources of learners’ social, cognitive and emotional well-being and who should ensure their safety” (De Wet, 2010, p.190). De Wet’s (2010) definition focuses on the impact of the behaviour on the victims’ well-being.

Taking into account the key criteria, nature and impact of SBT as outlined, the author of the present article offers the following definition of the student bullying of teachers as

repetitive acts of aggressive behaviour directed at a teacher by a student which cause physical, psychological, emotional or professional harm. It is characterised by an imbalance of power where the student(s) is in a position of greater power than the teacher, based on factors which may not be apparent to the observer and are irrespective of the teacher’s perceived superior authority. Acts of aggression may be direct or indirect and include any behaviour which the teacher perceives to be bullying. Serious isolated negative incidents are also regarded as bullying.

The aforementioned three key components – repetition, intention and power imbalance will now be explored in more depth.

### **SBT and the Criteria of Repetition**

As discussed, the concept of repeated or systematic behaviour is fundamental to most definitions of bullying (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; O’ Moore, et al., 2000; McEvoy, 2005). Olweus (1993) suggests that bullying occurs when an individual is exposed repeatedly over time to negative actions whilst Smith and Sharp (1994, p.2) refer to bullying as “systematic abuse”. However, this view is increasingly being challenged, with researchers (Siann et al.

1993; Benefield, 2004; O' Moore, 2012) suggesting that serious, isolated negative incidents may indeed constitute bullying. In fact, many teachers insist that the long term impact of a serious bullying incident may have an equal or greater damaging effect on their physical, emotional or occupational health and well-being (Siann et al. 1993; Sullivan, 2000; West, 2007) than less serious repetitive aggressive behaviour. Lynch (2009) excludes isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour in her definition of workplace bullying but nevertheless acknowledges that such incidents may indeed "be regarded as bullying" (Lynch, 2009, p.277). Rigby (2007) concedes that bullying although "typically repeated" may include "one-off actions" and suggests that it is the victims' fear and expectation of the harassment continuing which "gives the bullying its oppressive and frightening quality" (Rigby, 2007, p.17).

Dr. Mona O' Moore, Founder and Director of the Anti-Bullying Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin, in her recent address at the Department of Education Anti-Bullying Forum (2012) on peer bullying, expressed her "strong opinion that a definition of bullying should encapsulate isolated acts of anti-social aggression that are unjustified" (O' Moore, 2012, p.7). In particular, O' Moore (2012) emphasised the devastating impact of cyber-bullying on the victim wherein a single "cyber-attack can reach an unlimited audience and can be a source of unlimited viewing thus making the experience of being abused one of repetition" (O' Moore, 2012, p.7). An isolated act of cyber bullying may lead to repeated incidents of harm as images or messages may be forwarded to countless individuals or posted online for unlimited public viewing, forcing the victim to relive the abuse repeatedly. As cyber bullying is an increasing reality for teachers (Cook et al., 2010; Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012) this understanding of repetition is applicable in the case of SBT. The indefinite recording of material and the potential audience that may witness these items suggests that teachers may be forced to relive the abuse on more than one occasion which in turn makes the bullying repetitive in nature. The present author recognises such a distinction and considers the inclusion of significant bullying incidents (Benefield, 2004) as a necessary component in the definition of the student bullying of teachers.

### **The Criteria of Perception and Intent**

The perceptions of victims and perpetrators have been explored in the literature from a plethora of perspectives. Munn et al. (2004) investigated the perceptions of secondary teachers and head teachers regarding violence in schools whilst Parzefall et al. (2010) used a social exchange perspective to explore the perceptions of and reactions to workplace bullying. A limited number of studies have also directly compared teachers' and students' perceptions of bullying (Menesini et al., 2003; Naylor et al., 2006). A United States study conducted by Blasé and Blasé (2008) measured the perceptions of 172 teachers regarding the major sources of victimisation and also the intensity of the experience of mistreatment by colleagues, regarding 38 negative behaviours. Their study was critically distinct from previous research (Keashly, 1998) because "intensity of harm" was recognised as "a function of victims' perspective, not the simple occurrence of behaviour" (Blasé and Blasé, 2008, p.292). Mishna (2004) found that there was immense confusion between parents, pupils and educators as to what constituted bullying. This difficulty in achieving consensus seemed to

stem from the unique and subjective manner in which “each individual viewed a particular incident” (Mishna, 2004, p.237). In the U.K., Maunder et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study of 1302 participants in which they explored pupil and staff perceptions regarding behavioural definitions of peer to peer bullying. The researchers revealed that students report only those incidents which they perceive as bullying and suggest that bullying may be interpreted differently by individual students (Menesini et al., 2003) and therefore teachers.

As aforementioned, the criterion of intent is central to the vast majority of bullying definitions (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Smith et al., 2003). The construct of intent to hurt has evolved over time with initial definitions underlining the “attempt ... to torment” (Brodsky, 1976, p.2), “with the aim of bringing mental ... pain” (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994). Perpetrators may argue that he or she did not intend to cause distress and were merely behaving in a manner which they felt was acceptable or with intentions which entirely precluded the victim (Lynch, 2002). For instance a student may be disruptive or impudent in the classroom with the intention of gaining popularity and acceptance amongst his peer group; behaviours which the teacher may perceive as bullying. Nonetheless, this does not ease the distress or resultant psychological and emotional effects on the recipient. Even if the target of bullying behaviours does not suffer distress one could argue that such behaviours should still be regarded as bullying, as observers of bullying have been shown to be negatively impacted by such behaviours (Zeira et al. 2004).

The way in which a person may perceive or report bullying behaviour is entirely subjective to the recipient and may be influenced by an array of factors including the recipient’s prior experience of bullying and internal frames of reference as well as their psychological, social and emotional well-being at the time of the incident. Many other factors may also be involved, including age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and any combination of additional cultural or organisational factors (Twemlow et al., 2004; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). It is reasonable to expect that particular forms of behaviour, such as physical assault, are highly unacceptable regardless of individual teacher, student or school related characteristics however certain forms of behaviour may be regarded as offensive only in specific school or cultural contexts (Borg, 1998, p.69). In both Finland and the United States, for example, there is a high level of informality between pupils and teachers with students in Finland frequently addressing teachers by their first name which is not considered as offensive. However, countries such as Turkey and Japan emphasise a high level of formality in the teacher – student relationship with students in Japan expected to bow to their teachers should they meet them in public places. Increasingly, researchers (Einarsen et al., 1996; Rayner, 1997) are acknowledging that what constitutes bullying is a “subjective judgement by the recipient based on the impact it has on them” (Lynch, 2009, p.9). Rayner (1997) suggests that in assessing whether or not a situation is regarded as bullying, it is the perception of the victim and not the intentionality of the aggressor which is paramount, as the recipient may feel bullied irrespective of the aggressor’s intentions.

### **The Criteria of Power Imbalance in SBT**

Olweus (1993) states that the bullying relationship involves an “asymmetric power imbalance”. However Smith and Thompson (1991) extend their definition and acknowledge

that the bully may be stronger, or perceived to be stronger than the victim. Under the conventional definition, it would be difficult to argue that a teacher, who has maturity, size, financial independence and power vested by the state in their favour, could possibly be in a weaker position of power than a student. Such a position of reduced teacher's power is conceivable if the entire class is involved in the bullying, because in this circumstance, the power imbalance is obvious, due to the sheer number of students forming a "pack" against the teacher (Chan, 2009). However, Smith and Thompson's (1991) definition recognises that power relations are exceedingly complex and the interplay between innumerable factors must be considered when deciphering the true power exchange within any relationship. The notion of SBT has been met with scepticism as it traverses conventional ideas about power relations between adults and children (Grauerholz, 1989; Terry, 1998). Within Western culture there is a general consensus that teachers hold the power in the classroom (Manke, 1997). However Benefield (2004) reports that many teachers who had been recipients of negative behaviours from students maintained that they had felt bullied, regardless of whether it was perceived that they held a position of superior authority and status.

Westwood (2002) advocates that the concept of power should not be conceived as "some finite commodity that individuals or groups can compete to own" nor should it be considered as some "thing" to be possessed (Westwood, 2002, p.45). Similarly, Foucault asserts that power is "not a commodity, a position, a prize or a plot"; further advancing his description of power as "mobile" and "multidirectional, operating from top down and also from bottom up" (Dreyfuss and Rabinow, 1982, p.185). Foucault argues that although power and institutions are intrinsically linked, they are not interchangeable, as power is dependent upon the "micro-practices" within a given context (Dreyfuss and Rabinow, 1982, p.184). He stresses that nonegalitarian power relations must be "traced down to their actual material functioning" or they elude analysis and "continue to operate with unquestioned autonomy, maintaining the illusion that power" is enforced exclusively by those in positions of authority (Dreyfuss and Rabinow, 1982, p.185). It can therefore be surmised that those in conventionally accepted positions of power may not always and in all situations have the power advantage over those who are socially weaker than themselves.

Jerry Tew (2002) developed the Matrix of Power Relations as a conceptual framework to distinguish between different possibilities of power which operate in social relationships between individuals and on a societal level. Four modes of power relations are identified within the Matrix: *co-operative* and *protective power* which are seen as forms of productive or enabling power and *oppressive* and *collusive power* which are categorised as limiting or damaging (Tew, 2006). *Protective power* involves "deploying power in order to safeguard vulnerable people and their possibilities for advancement" whilst *co-operative power* entails a "collective action, sharing mutual support and challenge through commonality and difference" (Tew, 2006, p.41). *Oppressive power* involves "exploiting differences to enhance one's own position and resources at the expense of others, whilst *collusive power* includes "banding together to exclude or suppress otherness" (Tew, 2002, p.166). These modes of power are not mutually exclusive and may interlink, overlap or be used simultaneously as the circumstance necessitates (Tew, 2005). Tew's Matrix is beneficial in exploring the modes of power which may be operational in preventing or assisting teachers in seeking support when affected by SBT.

Teachers, who are generally considered to hold a superior position of power, may be rendered powerless by several interrelated power dynamics. The power innately imbued in teachers through the hierarchical school structure may be challenged if students become aware of issues such as staff discontent with management, inconsequential discipline procedures, weaknesses in collegiality or in the teacher's ability to deal with student confrontation (Galloway and Roland, 2004; James et al., 2008; Chen and Astor, 2009). When there is an interruption to the normal school power relations, students may gain "usable power" (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Terry, 1998) over their teachers affecting the entire chain of power and rendering the teacher powerless to access *productive* forms of power. When students recognise that no disciplinary sanctions are imposed for their behaviour, the teacher becomes further disempowered and the *oppressive power* of the student over the teacher is intensified. An absence of training, policy guidelines or structured support leaves the teacher helpless to deconstruct the power relations in operation and thus enlist new strategies to establish a more egalitarian power dynamic. Therefore support structures and interventions to address SBT must take into consideration this innate and complex power imbalance within the SBT relationship.

Teachers may be isolated from potential networks of *protective power* due to the lack of public recognition of the phenomenon and the scarcity of supportive services which may aid them in accessing *co-operative* and *protective power* to address their situation. The stigma associated with being bullied by a child leads to a vicious circle in which teachers feel too ashamed to seek help from colleagues, management or friends, effectively alienating themselves from potential networks of support and power. Teachers are also disempowered by the dominant discourse which suggests that competent and effective teachers, who practice efficient classroom management techniques, do not have a problem maintaining cooperation and control in the classroom (Pervin and Turner, 1998; American Psychological Association, 2004; Allen, 2010). Teachers who admit to being bullied by their students may find themselves ostracised and alienated by colleagues and management who use *collusive* forms of power to disassociate themselves from victimised teachers, casting them as inferior for not being able to control their class (Zeira et al., 2004; Daniels et al., 2007; Du Plessis, 2008; De Wet, 2010). Teachers may feel blamed for being ineffectual at maintaining order in their classrooms, compounding their feelings of powerlessness and isolation. Research shows that teachers who sought help due to bullying by students or by management reported experiencing feelings of being trapped, ostracised, weak and humiliated (Du Plessis, 2008); isolated by staff (Daniels et al., 2007; De Wet, 2010); having the seriousness of the situation minimised by colleagues (Daniels et al., 2007); not being given adequate support (Terry, 1998; Zeira, 2004; Daniels et al., 2007) and being seen as incompetent (Terry, 1998). Teachers may therefore find themselves in a paradoxical position in which they are being held responsible for the abuse even when it is directed at them (Hunter, 2010; Tew and Nixon, 2010), contributing to the problem of teachers being reluctant to disclose their experience of being bullied by a student. As mentioned at the outset of the article, teachers experiencing victimisation by students urgently require public and political action to address the issue. Having focused on exploring the concept and nature of SBT, this article will now look at the ways in which SBT is manifested and experienced by teachers.

## Forms of SBT

There is strong agreement within the research literature that bullying may involve a multitude of direct or indirect behaviours (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Aluede, 2006; Marini, 2006) perpetrated both explicitly and covertly in relational, technological, physical or verbal forms. Direct forms of SBT may be physical (for example: hitting, spitting, shoving, hair pulling, inappropriate touching, and abusive telephone calls) or non-physical (Aluede, 2006). Non-physical bullying may be verbal (for example: the use of sexually inappropriate or abusive language, racist remarks, cruel and hurtful comments about teachers' personal appearance or character or intimidation and threats of violence). It may also be non-verbal (for example: making offensive gestures and noises, staring, giggling or mocking the teacher, use of intimidating and threatening facial expressions, eye contact and body language, slamming or throwing objects or damage to or theft of teachers' property).

Indirect bullying behaviours are intended to cause psychological and emotional distress to the recipient and damage to their social status amongst their peers (Bjorkqvist, et al., 2004). These acts are carried out in such a way that the perpetrator "attempts to inflict pain in such a manner that he or she makes it seem as though there is no intention to hurt at all" (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992, p.118). In many cases, the identity of the perpetrator remains unknown as the pupil conceals his or her aggressive intent against the teacher to avoid reprisal or reprimand for the attack. However, some instances of indirect bullying, such as ignoring the teacher or on-going classroom disruption (Maunder, 2010) may involve knowledge of the perpetrator's identity (Archer and Coyne, 2005). Indirect SBT is usually non-physical however, in some cases a third party may be manipulated into causing physical harm to the teacher (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Crick and Nelson, 2002) or the teacher may be put in the way of physical harm through, for example, damage to their personal property. Indirect SBT typically takes the form of non-verbal behaviours which may include: purposely ignoring or isolating the teacher (Sullivan et al., 2004), covert damage or theft of personal property, (Aluede et al., 2006), spreading malicious rumours and lies (James and Lawlor, 2008), destroying the teacher's reputation or making unfounded, disparaging remarks about his or her personal or professional character (Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012). Persistent, low grade, disruptive behaviour has also been recognised as a form of indirect SBT (Debarbieux 2003), which may include: students talking out of turn and making insolent comments (Parzell and Salin, 2010), persistent tardiness or refusal to obey instructions (James and Lawlor, 2008), undermining the teacher's relationship with other students and humiliating the teacher in front of staff or other students (Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012). Kivivouri (1997) and Salmi and Kivivouri (2009) also cite the targeting of a teacher's own children by students as a form of indirect harassment directed at themselves.

Whilst most bullying between pupils appears to take place in the school yard (Smith and Shu, 2000) and to a lesser extent in classrooms and corridors, bullying can, in fact, occur in any location. Almost two thirds (62%) of the respondents in Pervin and Turner's (1998) U.K. study indicated that incidents of bullying had taken place during regular lessons in the classroom whilst 32% of teachers stated that it occurred in the school corridor. A further U.K. study (Terry, 1998) reported that the majority of respondents (42%) identified their own and different classrooms as the locations where bullying had most often taken place. However,

the study also revealed that 29% of survey respondents admitted to being bullied outside of the school premises, suggesting that teachers not only endure student abuse on the school premises but may be targets for victimisation in their personal lives as well. A South African study by De Wet et al. (2010) reported incidents of teachers being attacked in the street, having stones and eggs thrown at their home and having their private property defaced with graffiti. Teachers in another Finnish study (Lahelma et al., 2000) were also the victims of out of school attacks with some reporting that personally offensive graffiti was scrawled in public places whilst others were called “whore” or “gay” in social and recreational areas (Lahelma et al., 2000, p.469). One respondent recounted an incident in which she was cycling past a bus stop close to the school when some pupils shouted “whore, whore, whore”; the teacher expressed feeling “paralysed up to my soul” and on return home confided that she had “collapsed and could not stop crying” (Lahelma et al., 2000, p.469). A male teacher in the same study, admitted to almost going crazy with rage and shock upon seeing the walls and benches of his local community filled with graffiti naming him and making reference to his inferred homosexuality.

A systematic review of the literature has established that the most prevalent forms of SBT are physical assault, sexually orientated offences, persistent class disruption, verbal abuse, intimidating and threatening behaviour, cyber bullying and personal property offences. In Ireland, a number of studies which explore student disruptive behaviour have been carried out by the teacher trade unions (Teachers’ Union of Ireland; Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation). In 2006, 5% of teachers surveyed by the TUI reported that they had experienced student physical aggression whilst, an ASTI (2007) commissioned survey revealed that 9% of teachers had been victims of physical abuse perpetrated by students, parents and school management, with students being the perpetrators in 37.5% of these cases. In Northern Ireland, a survey commissioned by the INTO (2011) showed that 50% of respondents had witnessed incidents of school violence whilst an alarming 57% of teachers had been subjected to some form of violence or physical abuse. A particular case highlighted in the report described how a twenty eight year old female teacher was restrained against a wall by an eleven year old child resulting in her suffering a dislocated shoulder. Schools with high levels of teacher victimisation cannot be expected to create positive teacher-student relationships or an environment conducive to effectual learning or teaching (McMahon et al., 2011) as even the most seemingly innocuous and minor incidents can be detrimental and terrifying for the teachers involved.

Research relating to the sexual harassment of teachers by students has revealed that, although less prevalent than physical violence, sexual aggression remains a serious problem for some teachers (Mooij, 2011; Robinson, 2000; James and Lawlor, 2008; Lahelma et al., 2000). An ASTI (2004) study revealed that 7% of Irish teachers experienced some form of student sexual harassment or innuendo whilst a TUI survey (2006) reported a prevalence rate of 8% amongst respondents. Consistent findings were reported in Finland with 7% of teachers being sexually harassed by students during their teaching career (Kivivuori, 1997). Sexually orientated offences against teachers include sexual comments or innuendo, sexual gestures, unwanted sexual touching, sexually abusing someone and rape (Mooij, 2010, p.24). Lahelma et al. (2000) in their qualitative analysis of teacher responses regarding sexual harassment by students suggest that the most prevalent forms of verbal sexual harassment

include inappropriate comments about a teacher's clothing or personal appearance, being threatened with rape and students' claims concerning teachers' sexual orientation. Epstein and Johnson (1998) suggest that for teachers, sexuality is both inescapable and extremely perilous. When female teachers are objectified by their students in terms of their sexuality or physical appearance, feelings of offense, confusion or pleasure may ensue. Some teachers become acutely aware of their sexuality or appearance irrespective of whether the comments were experienced as positive or negative. Female students may attempt to disempower a male teacher by behaving in an over sexualised manner resulting in possible feelings of discomfort, embarrassment or confusion in the teacher. Male teachers are left most vulnerable however when they are labelled as homosexual by their students as such a label both eliminates their superior position of masculinity and questions hegemonic masculinity in general (Ferfolja, 1998; Lahelma et al., 2000).

A more insidious form of bullying involves on-going disruptive behaviour which may be defined as "any event or incident which frustrates" the school's role, which is "to provide teaching and to promote learning for its student body" (Martin, 2006, p.53). Persistent disruptive behaviour is recognised in the research literature as both a direct and an indirect form of teacher bullying (James et al., 2008; De Wet, 2010) in which the student attempts to humiliate, threaten or discredit the teacher. The relentless and repetitive nature of the acts leads to teachers' feeling de-motivated, disillusioned and weary. The British Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) (2009) survey involving over 1,000 respondents focused on student behaviour in the classroom. In excess of 40% of respondents believed that student behaviour had worsened in the preceding two years whilst 58% felt it had deteriorated over the past five years. 87% of teachers had been confronted with an unruly pupil during the 2008-2009 school year with 90% of these instances involving "low level disruption such as talking in class, not paying attention or horsing around" (ATL, 2009, p.4). Teachers participating in the Irish TUI study (2006) estimated that addressing persistent disruptive behaviour had generally kept them from their teaching duties for approximately ten minutes each time that it took place. A further TUI (2011) survey of its members ascertained that 81% of teachers agreed that addressing student indiscipline had increased their workload in the previous five years.

A frequent component of disruptive behaviour involves verbal abuse which has been identified by teachers as the most common transgression by students (Matsui, 2005; TUI, 2006; Dzuka and Dalbert, 2007; West, 2007; De Wet, 2010; Turkum, 2011). Data findings from The Irish Task Force on Student Behaviour (2006) evidenced threats to teachers, the use of obscene language by students and also remarks of a deeply offensive or overt sexual nature directed at teachers by pupils in Irish schools. The TUI (2006) survey supports these findings, with 36% of respondents being subjected to verbal abuse from students, a significantly lower figure than the 85% reported by O' Dowd Lernihan (2011). The most significant account of verbal aggression directed at teachers however comes from the Welsh Teacher Support Cymru, Violence and Disruption Survey for 2009, which indicates that a remarkable 95% of respondents had been subjected to swearing and verbal abuse by pupils (Miloudi, 2009).

In addition to verbal abuse, international studies (Zeira, 2004; Chen and Astor, 2009; De Wet, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011; McMahon, 2011) show that teachers endure considerable levels of intimidation and threatening behaviour from students. Almost half, (49%) of the

participants in a New Zealand survey (Benefield, 2004) indicated that they had been intimidated by pupils; while a Welsh study (Miloudi, 2009) highlighted the case of a teacher threatened with scissors by a pupil. The British ATL (2010) revealed that 44% of respondents had experienced intimidation in the form of threats from students whilst 30% of Finnish teachers, surveyed by Salmi and Kivivuori (2009) had encountered direct threats or had felt fear of violence by their pupils at some point in their teaching careers. Actual physical violence, verbal threats and general harassment were higher for men whilst women experienced more intimidation from students (McMahon, 2011). Figures relating to the prevalence of student intimidation in Ireland are especially interesting; a recent report (O’Dowd Lernihan, 2011) reveals that 68% of respondents had felt intimidated by a student, a figure considerably higher than any other obtained by researchers internationally. In 2006, 21% of Irish teachers had reported threatening or intimidating behaviour with almost 42% of teachers experiencing it on a weekly basis and 25% on a daily basis (TUI, 2006).

In recent years with the explosion of increasingly more sophisticated electronic communication devices and widespread instant internet access, cyber bullying is becoming one of the most prevalent forms of teacher victimisation by students (ASTI, 2004; Williams and Guerra, 2007; ATL, 2009; Cook et al., 2010; Kauppi and Pörhölä, 2012). The rapid increase in electronic and online communication has meant that the bullying of teachers by students is no longer restricted to the confines of the school grounds (Juvonen, 2008). The most common forms of abuse experienced by teachers include students creating fake Facebook pages in the teacher’s name, posting video clips of teachers on YouTube or leaving abusive and hurtful comments about teachers on RateMyTeacher.com (U.K. Safer Internet Centre, 2011). In addition, teachers may also be subjected to hacking of their email account, the sending of viruses or the circulation of doctored videos involving the superimposition of the teacher’s face on the body of a pornographic actor (Llewellyn, 2008). In Ireland, the issue of cyber bullying was investigated by the ASTI (2004) revealing that 3% of Irish second level teachers have been subjected to offensive comments from students via e-mail, text message or on websites such as Facebook and RateMyTeacher. Sugden (2010) asserts that teachers are being subjected to online smear campaigns, highlighting the case of a fake Facebook page created by a student which declared the teacher’s interests as enjoying under-age sex with both boys and girls. Such a smear campaign was unearthed in a Dublin secondary school, in 2012, resulting in four students being expelled and a further forty students receiving detention for tagging the offending page as a “like” on Facebook. The incident involved the posting of vulgar and unfounded allegations of a sexual nature against a male and female teacher, as well as abusive comments regarding the working hours of a third teacher at the school. Meanwhile, the Norton Online Family Report (2011) which polled 19,636 people including 2,379 teachers from twenty four countries found that 20% of teachers have personally experienced or know another teacher who has experienced cyber-baiting. Cyber-baiting is a recent form of bullying which involves students taunting their teachers and subsequently recording and posting or threatening to post their reaction on the internet (Fox, 2011). In addition to the vast range of physical and verbal abuses experienced by teachers, many also suffer theft or damage to their personal property (Borg, 1998; Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams, 1998; NIOSH, 2008; Wilson et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2011). Although some teachers perceive the theft or damage of their personal property to be a form of bullying,

there are others who do not deem property offences to fall within the realms of SBT. A recent Canadian study, conducted by Wilson et al. (2011) showed that 11% of respondents had been the victims of property offences in the previous year with that figure increasing to 34% when considering property offences throughout their teaching career. In the United States, over one-third of educators had experienced property offences, the second most prevalent form of SBT identified in a nationally representative study carried out by McMahon et al. (2011). A recent South African study (De Wet, 2010) reported that teachers' classrooms were vandalised with spray paint, their cars were scratched and their tyres were slashed by delinquent pupils. Meanwhile, U.K. findings (ATL, 2009) reveal widespread malicious damage to teachers' property with over 200 personal insurance claims being lodged by teachers in the 2007-2009 period including sixty nine incidents of deliberate damage to vehicles and 146 cases of serious damage to teachers' personal property by pupils. Irish studies also paint a dismal picture with an increase from 11% (ASTI, 2004) in 2004 to 30% (TUI, 2006) in 2006 of teachers reporting damage by students to their own, student or school property.

## **Conclusion**

In recent decades, the issue of teachers being bullied by their pupils is increasingly emerging as an area of international concern (Debarbieux, 2003). In comparison with the plethora of studies pertaining to peer to peer and workplace bullying, SBT has received relatively little research attention; in fact literature exploring teacher perpetrated bullying is more widely available (Olweus, 1999; Bjorkqvist and Osterman, 1999; Yoneyama and Naito, 2003). Researchers (Pervin and Turner, 1998; Chen and Astor, 2009; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2009) maintain that effective teaching and learning cannot occur in a school environment "where those who are supposed to lead, supervise and act as role models are targeted by those whom they are supposed to lead, supervise and protect" (De Wet, 2010, p.190). Systematic empirical research which explores the fundamental components and parameters of the phenomenon is central to achieving an in-depth understanding of SBT. This article has explored the ways in which SBT differs from all other forms of bullying in that it involves the bullying of an adult by a child signalling a unique power differential. The author offers an alternative definition of SBT which takes account of the complexities of these power relations which traverse conventional ideas about power relations between adults and children. This definition also recognises that teachers do not consider repetition to be a necessary component of a bullying definition as individual acts of aggression, such as cyber bullying may have such a significant impact on the teacher to warrant re-living of the event, making it repetitive in nature. The criterion of intent to harm was discussed in tandem with the issue of perception, stressing that it is the teachers' perception of the behaviour as aggressive and offensive which is imperative regardless of whether the student had intended for the behaviour to be perceived in this manner. The most prevalent forms of SBT were explored in the article to facilitate a deeper awareness and recognition of the ways in which SBT may be manifested and ultimately to inform policy responses which assist teachers ineffectively addressing the issue. This article has therefore focused exclusively on the nature and manifestation of the phenomenon. Further exploration of the causes and effects and

indeed an indication of the prevalence of the issue would be beneficial in contextualising and shedding further light on the phenomenon. In particular, individual and school contextual factors which may influence both the prevalence and patterns of SBT should be explored as should the characteristics or developmental course of the teacher-student relationship to determine the possible patterns of conflict or tension between the parties which may trigger SBT. Finally, future studies should also explore and evaluate the current international and national responses in place to address SBT. However the author acknowledges that sufficiently responding to the issue requires in the first instance a thorough understanding of the problem in need of address, an understanding which this article has attempted to advance.

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