Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence of bullying and victimization among children in early elementary school: do family and neighborhood socioeconomic status matter?

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Reviewer: Michal Molcho

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Title: Prevalence of bullying and victimization among children in early elementary school: do family and neighborhood socioeconomic status matter?

General

The paper seeks to address two different issues, measuring the prevalence of bullying among children in younger grades, and to examine the socio-economic effect of the school-neighbourhood on bullying. While the latter question has been previously addressed, there is a paucity in research on bullying among young children. While the paper addresses some important issues, there are some flaws in the method used and some literature that could be used to addressing the results is missing. The writing of the paper could also benefit from editing. More specific comments are below.

Title
1. The title represents the paper well.

Abstract
2. Overall the abstract gives a succinct description of the paper, with good account of the findings.

Discretionary Revisions
3. Under ‘methods’: The word ‘embedded’ should be changed to ‘was part of...’

Minor Essential Revisions
4. I don’t like the use of the term ‘family level SES’ since within the context of multilevel analysis, family level suggests that data were analysed at the family level, as well as at the individual and school level, which was not done in this paper. I suggest simply using the term ‘family SES’.

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Introduction
Minor Essential Revisions

5. The introduction addresses the main literature in the areas. However, the first paragraph is not well written English wise and needs to be re-written. The following paragraphs are better written.

6. Page 3, paragraph 1: I suggested changing the term ‘uninvolved bystanders’ to ‘children that are not involved in bullying’. There is some evidence to suggest that bystanders of bullying (even uninvolved ones) could be effected by witnessing bullying.

7. Page 3, paragraph 2: The authors could refer to more current statistics about school bullying rather than relying on Nansel et al 2004. One such example is the 2005/6 HBSC international report and other papers using data collected in 2005/6.

8. Page 4 first paragraph 4th sentence from end: I assume the authors mean School neighbourhood SES and not neighbourhood SES of schools.

Research questions
Minor Essential Revisions

9. The aims of the study are clear and well articulated although the concept of bully-victim should be better explained earlier in the introduction rather than just being mentioned once.

Methods
Major Compulsory Revisions

10. Bullying is subjected to many different perceptions and definitions, hence it is normally recommended to include a definition of bullying in the questionnaire. The authors do not indicate whether such practice was used. It is also not clear if inter-rater reliability was tested. Inter-rater differences could strongly boas the results of the study.

11. As mentioned in point 4, the term ‘family level SES’ as probably not accurate. It suggest that the study tested units (children) with the family (higher level of data) and then within schools. Based on the information provided, it doesn’t seem to be the case. It seems more likely that family SES was linked to teachers’ report on the behaviour of each child hence what it really stands for is the child SES, measured through parental SES.

12. It is not clear why parent occupation (as opposed to parental employment) was not used. Occupation is considered one of the better SES measures.

Results
Minor Essential Revisions

13. Some linguistics errors throughout – need to be checked for English. For example, page 9, 2nd paragraph last sentence: ‘Boys were more often a bully (p<0.001) or a bully-victim (p<0.001)’ – the sentence is grammatically wrong.

Major Compulsory Revisions

14. page 9, last paragraph: It is not clear why one parent in employment was
used as the reference category. Conceptually it is not clear what unemployment and full employment are measuring. Are they proxy for SES? Are both proxies for low SES? These results are not clear.

15. The differences between table 2 and table 3 are not well demonstrated. Based on the explanation in the text it seems that table 2 is independent effects and table 3 is combined effects but this is not clear from the table titles and the tables themselves.

Discussion

Major Compulsory Revisions

16. The discussion is weak and does not address some of the findings around family SES, especially the findings around unemployment and full employment.

17. The authors compare their findings to other studies in other countries including studies on older children. However, it would be better to put the results in the Dutch context referring to HBSC data in which differences in bullying perpetration and victimization occur only among girls and suggest higher prevalence of victimisation compared to perpetration,

18. Page 12 2nd paragraph: the sentence “Possibly, exposure to violent television programs might stimulate bullying and peer aggression” should be backed by references. The associations between TV viewing and aggressive behaviour have been reported widely, hence it would be sensible to include such literature in that regard.

19. Generally, bullying behaviour tend to decline with age, and the literature provides few potential explanations to that decline. Hence, it may not come as a surprise that bullying is evident in the younger years of elementary school. The authors can use data from others studies in the Netherlands to show that the trends of declining bullying persist and that it is therefore not surprising to see relatively higher prevalence in younger age groups.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests