

## Chapter 15

# Virtual Reality in Bullying Prevention at School Age

**Ana Filipa Cunha**

*School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal*

**Fabiana Rocha**

*School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal*

**Telma Costa Silva**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0147-2536>

*School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal*

**Joaquim Faias**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6389-6284>

*School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal*

**Patrícia Cruz**

*School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal*

### ABSTRACT

*Bullying refers to a specific form of violence that triggers anxiety and difficult social situations, and has now been identified as a problem at school age, a stage that is characterized by physical and socioemotional changes and challenges. The difficult situations that characterize bullying are possible to experience or relive through virtual reality. This can thus enable the resolution of these problems, since it provides, through a simulated environment, different stimuli, and evocations of real experiences. Thus, this chapter aims to understand how virtual reality can contribute to the prevention of bullying at school age. For this purpose, the authors address topics such as information and communication technologies; virtual reality; virtual reality in mental health, and virtual reality in bullying. The aim is to emphasize the importance of preventing bullying at school age and the consequent improvement in the quality of life of these individuals.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-9251-2.ch015

## INTRODUCTION

School age is a phase characterized by various physical and socioemotional challenges that affect the mental well-being of individuals. Currently, bullying and cyberbullying behaviors represent a major social problem at this stage (Gabrielli et al., 2021).

Over four decades ago, the exploration of bullying commenced, characterizing the conduct as the repetitive and deliberate engagement of an individual or a collective, exhibiting aggression towards a vulnerable victim who faces challenges in mounting an effective defense (Olweus, 1994). Although there is some debate about the definition, most researchers agree that bullying involves the intent to hurt and an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim that occurs repeatedly (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Olweus, 1994). Bullying involves a dynamic interaction between the aggressor and the victim. On the one hand, the bully increases his power while the victim loses power. As a result, it is difficult for the victim to react or cope (Menesini et al., 2012; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). The power imbalance can be derived from physical strength, social status in the group, or the size of the group (e.g., a group targeting a single person). Power can also be achieved by knowing a person's vulnerabilities (e.g., appearance, learning problem, family situation, personal characteristics) and using that knowledge to harm that person (Monks & Smith, 2006; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Bullying includes verbal attacks (e.g., name-calling, threats), physical behaviors (e.g., hitting, kicking, damaging the victim's property), and relational/social aggression (e.g., social exclusion, spreading rumors) to more recent forms of attacks via the Internet and new technologies (also called cyberbullying) (Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, n.d.; Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

In contrast to bullying, cyberbullying is conducted indirectly and may afford aggressors anonymity and involves the use of electronic communication devices taking place on a variety of information and communication technology platforms, including text messaging, email, public or private social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok), videos via YouTube, or other platforms. The fact that cyberbullying can be practiced anonymously makes bullies feel more comfortable bullying their victims (Gabrielli et al., 2021; Polanin et al., 2022).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), bullying is a specific form of violence that triggers anxious moments or difficult social situations in which one or more students intentionally torment and/or cause harm with repeated behaviors to the victim, encompassing physical, psychological, and/or sexual violence (UNESCO, 2019). It takes many forms and presents a negative and prolonged impact on the victims' lives. It occurs through a power dynamic, either a relative social power dynamic or a systemic power imbalance, such as racism or homophobia (MacHimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018). Students consistently report that they believe victims experience bullying because they are different from the bully or different from the norm in some way (MacHimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018).

In 2019, UNESCO studied the global prevalence of bullying in childhood and adolescence. It found that nearly one in three children (32%) globally were victims of bullying on one or more days in the month and that 1 in 13 (7.3%) were bullied on six or more days in the same period. A study revealed that the occurrence of bullying varies across different regions globally, with Europe exhibiting a prevalence rate of 31.7% according to UNESCO, 2019 report. Significant disparities in the types of reported bullying are evident across geographical locations. High-and-middle-income countries tend to experience a prevalence of physical and sexual bullying, whereas indirect bullying emerges as the most prevalent type in high-income regions, as indicated by UNESCO 2019 findings (UNESCO, 2019).

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the product's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/virtual-reality-in-bullying-prevention-at-school-age/334919?camid=4v1](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/virtual-reality-in-bullying-prevention-at-school-age/334919?camid=4v1)

## Related Content

---

### Dance Movement Therapy Treatment for Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating

Heather Kroesche (2023). *Exploring the Benefit of Creative Arts Therapies for Children, Adolescents, and Adults* (pp. 203-215).

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/dance-movement-therapy-treatment-for-eating-disorders-and-disordered-eating/323987?camid=4v1a](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/dance-movement-therapy-treatment-for-eating-disorders-and-disordered-eating/323987?camid=4v1a)

### Infusions and Explosions: Reframing Through Belly Laughs

Joy Todd and Susan Avanzino (2021). *Cases on Applied and Therapeutic Humor* (pp. 11-12).

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/infusions-and-explosions/277806?camid=4v1a](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/infusions-and-explosions/277806?camid=4v1a)

### Digital Mental Health Interventions for Children and Youth

Alexandra Silva Machado, Bianca Ferreira, Catarina Ye Pereira, Carolina Carrola, Bruno Bastos Vieira de Melo and Carlos Campos (2024). *Handbook of Research on Advances in Digital Technologies to Promote Rehabilitation and Community Participation* (pp. 20-47).

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-mental-health-interventions-for-children-and-youth/334906?camid=4v1a](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-mental-health-interventions-for-children-and-youth/334906?camid=4v1a)

### RIP 2855

Elena Gabor and Octavian Gabor (2021). *Cases on Applied and Therapeutic Humor* (pp. 77-79).

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/rip-2855/277818?camid=4v1a](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/rip-2855/277818?camid=4v1a)