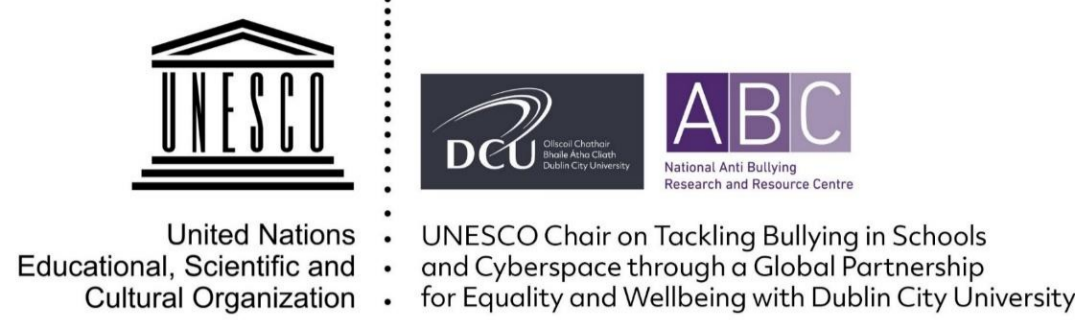


# Can defending behaviour be distressing? The Association Between Defending and Emotional Symptoms

Angela Mazzone, Mona O' Moore & James O' Higgins Norman  
National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dublin City University, Ireland

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## INTRODUCTION

Students who defend their victimised peers are usually described as children with good social and empathic skills [1]. However, recent research has shown that defending may also be associated with psychosocial difficulties, because students who defend their peers are involved in a traumatic event [2]. In addition, defending is a risky behaviour, both because perpetrators might take revenge, and because defending might negatively affect students' social status [1]. Based on these considerations, the aim of the present study was to investigate the associations between defending and a series of psychosocial difficulties of students with defending behaviour.

## METHOD



A sample of 208 Italian adolescents (50% girls;  $M_{age} = 12.28$ ; age range = 11-15;  $sd = .92$ ) participated in this study.

- *Peer nominations* were used to assess defending behaviour [3].
- The *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* was administered to assess Prosocial behaviour; Emotional Symptoms; Conduct problems; Peer problems and Hyperactivity [4].

## RESULTS

Correlation analyses showed that defending positively correlated with prosocial behaviour ( $r = .33$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and negatively with conduct problems ( $r = -.24$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and peer problems ( $r = -.14$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Regression analyses showed that defending was higher among girls. A positive association was found between defending and prosocial behaviour. Interestingly, findings showed that defending was positively associated with emotional symptoms (see Table 1).

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

Predictors	Defending behaviour		
	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	95% CI
<i>Step 1</i>	.26**		
Gender		.26***	[.04, .12]
Age		.01	[-.02, .02]
<i>Step 2</i>	.46***		
Gender		.17*	[.01, .09]
Age		.07	[-.01, .03]
Prosocial behaviour		.24**	[.04, .16]
Conduct problems		-.22	[-.17, -.02]
Hyperactivity		.03	[-.04, .06]
Emotional Symptoms		.19*	[.01, .12]
Peer problems		-.12	[-.11, .01]

## DISCUSSION

The association between defending behaviour and emotional symptoms might indicate that defending is a distressing experience. However, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents us from establishing any causal relationship between the variables investigated in this study.

Although students should be encouraged to defend their victimised peers, intervention programs should also consider the potential negative outcomes of defending. Strategies to support students who defend their peers should be developed.

### References

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