



## Dan Olweus (1931–2020)

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Dan Olweus, a founder of research on bullying, died September 29th, 2020, at his home in Bærum, Norway, at the age of 89. He was born April 18th, 1931, in Nässjö, Sweden, and trained in psychology at the University of Stockholm. Olweus obtained his PhD in 1969, studying aggressive behavior among young boys. He moved to Norway and the University of Bergen in 1970, as a Professor of Psychology (until 1995) and Research Professor (1996 to 2010). He worked at the Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare from 2010 until 2016. Olweus was affiliated with the Department for Health Promotion and Development at the University of Bergen from 2019 until his death.

In 1970, Olweus conducted what is widely viewed as the first scientific study on bullying, with 900 boys in Solna, Sweden. Findings were published in his book, *Aggression in Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (1978). In 1982,

three adolescents died by suicide in Norway after having been severely bullied. These events, together with Olweus' research, led to the First National Campaign against Bullying in Norway. As part of this effort, Olweus developed an assessment instrument (the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire), and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP).

A seminal study using the OBPP in Bergen schools, from 1983 to 1985, which followed 2500 schoolchildren, demonstrated strong reductions in both being bullied and taking part in bullying others. These findings were featured in Olweus' book *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (English version, 1993), which has been translated into at least 25 languages.

In 2000, the Norwegian government supported implementation of the OBPP in over 500 schools. Findings from this effort were also positive, and a follow-up study found continued program effects up to 8 years after original implementation (Olweus et al., 2020).

The OBPP has been implemented in several other countries. An evaluation in Pennsylvania produced very positive findings (Limber et al., 2018; Olweus & Limber, 2019). Moreover, an independent evaluation supported the cost-effectiveness of the program (Beckman & Svensson, 2015).

Olweus was involved in other areas of bullying research, including definition and measurement; outcomes of bullying; and cyberbullying. He was actively conducting research and publishing until his death.

Olweus was among the first to recognize bullying as a violation of human rights. In 1994, he noted that “it is a fundamental...right for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in bullying. No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child!” (Olweus, 1994, p. 1183).

Olweus received numerous honors and awards for his work. For his general research on aggression, he received the award for “outstanding aggression research” by the

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International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) in 1976, and he was elected President of ISRA from 1995 to 1996. In 2000, the Spirit of Crazy Horse award was conferred on him for “bringing courage to the discouraged” by the US Reclaiming Youth International organization. In 2002, he received the “Nordic Public Health Prize” by the Nordic Minister Council for his achievements to promote public health in the Nordic countries. In 2003, Olweus received the award for Distinguished Contributions to Public Policy for Children by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). In 2005, he was awarded the Queen Sofia of Spain Medal for his contributions as well as the Honorary Prize of the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen. He received American Psychological Association Awards for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology (2011) and Distinguished Contributions to Research in Public Policy (2012).

His pioneering research, writings, and prevention program have changed the lives of schoolchildren around the world and inspired the work of countless researchers and professionals. Less known was his talent as a jazz musician. He was active as a jazz pianist in several groups and in 2005 released the CD “Dan Olweus and Friends Play Jazz Standards.”

Olweus was survived by his wife (who subsequently died in March 2021), two daughters, and several beloved

grandchildren. He also is mourned by a global family of researchers, collaborators, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program trainers, and educators in schools who will carry on his important work.

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