

CYBER BULLYING, CHILDRENS' RIGHTS, AND THE UNITED NATIONS MANDATE: A NORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE 2022 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a critical appraisal of the 2022 United Nations General Assembly Resolution on protecting children from bullying, with a specific emphasis on its reliance on a child rights-based approach. Anchored in the normative principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the study explores how the resolution addresses bullying, including cyberbullying, while navigating tensions between state sovereignty and the evolving capacities of adolescents aged 12 to 18. Through qualitative document analysis, the paper examines international legal texts and peer-reviewed literature to assess the resolution's theoretical coherence and normative implications. The analysis is confined to theoretical constructs and omits empirical data on state-level implementation, thereby focusing solely on the legal and conceptual framework embedded in the resolution.

Keywords: child rights, adolescence, cyber bullying, UN Resolution, UNICEF, CRBA, protection

INTRODUCTION

Bullying wherever manifested when at school premises or in the digital sphere, remains one of the most persistent and devious violations of children's fundamental rights. It impairs not only their emotional and psychological well-being but also disrupts their education, social relationships, and developmental trajectories (UNICEF, 2023a). In an increasingly interconnected and digitized world, bullying has evolved beyond traditional spaces, now extending its reach into online platforms, making it more pervasive and, at times, anonymous.

In recognition of the multifaceted nature of this problem, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in 2022 that seeks to reinforce international efforts to prevent and respond to bullying. What distinguishes this resolution from its

previous documents, is its explicit adoption of a child rights-based approach, aligning closely with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which mandates comprehensive protection of children from all forms of violence, and affirms their right to be heard in matters affecting their lives (UNICEF, 1989; UN General Assembly, 2022).

This paper seeks to unveil the broader theoretical concepts incorporated in the 2022 UN resolution, specifically within the context of adolescents aged 12 to 18. Instead of providing superficial support, it explores how the resolution constructs young people's rights, how it finds a balance between those rights and the power states hold over their national policymaking, and how it might fail to be conceptually clear. The analysis relies exclusively on publicly

available legal texts and scientific works, thus attaining transparency of work and intellectual insight. Significantly the study refrains from case-by-case implementation details, instead concentrating on how the Resolution presents a rights framework in theory and principle.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework resource lies at the core of this research which is called as Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA), which is notional part related to directing principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Instead of only playing the role of a theoretical construct, CRBA is a structured framework based on four fundamental pillars i.e. the child's right against discrimination, preference of a child's interests over others, provision of survival and development and confirmation of a child's right to have their views heard in matters that concern them (UNICEF, 1989). This orientation differs from old traditions of protectionism by putting children not as recipients of actions, but as agents of rights to affect decision making processes that define surroundings (Vissing, 2023). It focuses on agency, inclusiveness, and engagement with policy making.

Incinerating this rights-oriented architecture, the present work invokes Carol Daiute's (2008) theoretical eye, which places the constant conflict between universal child rights and the sovereign states' power at the center of attention. This friction proves to be particularly sharp in discussion over bullying prevention, where such attempts to maintain children's autonomy may collide with reality of governments, legal, cultural or institutional arrangements. Even though the CRC goes to great lengths to recommend the participation of children in policymaking, its implementation faces such resistance as an appeal to the state sovereignty to support social norms or maintain hierarchies. Daiute's analysis is useful for understanding how these competing claims are bargained for in the 2022 UN Resolution, in the language and structure. Taken as a whole, the CRBA and sovereignty-focused critique provides a useful analytical basis for the analysis of the theoretical coherence of the resolution. They allow for a more careful examination of whether the resolution manages to strike the difficult balance sought between ideal international law and the daily

realities confronting states on meeting the subtle needs of adolescents in digital-mediated situations.

Methodology

The main research question of this study is to dig out the ways in which the 2022 UN Resolution advance a child rights-based consciousness in bullying prevention, and how does this relate to theory in adolescents between the ages of 12-18?

To answer this, the current research uses a qualitative document analysis methodology. The underlying concept of this research is Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA), a normative instrument, based off the guiding principles of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Instead of just being a theoretical structure, CRBA functions as such that is based on four pillars. the right to non-discrimination, the priority of what is best for the child, the guarantee of survival and development, and affirmation of the right of the child to give his/her views on matters affecting him/her (UNICEF, 1989). This strategy departs from conventional protectionist models because it moves children from being a subject for care to being an agent for rights with the power to affect decisions that are used in shaping environments (Vissing, 2023). It highlights agency, inclusion, and substantive involvement in policy making.

Complementing the rights-based framework, the study further employs Carol Daiute's (2008) theoretical lens that brings to the fore the persistent pressure between universal child rights as against the power of sovereign states. It is highly prevalent in the debates on bullying protection, where the endeavours to preserve children's, autonomy might conflict with the legal, cultural, or institutional imperatives of governments. Despite the robust support of the CRC for the engagement of children in the formulation of policies, its implementation faces a lot of backlashes when state sovereignty is relied on to maintain social norms or support certain hierarchies. Daiute's analysis is instrumental in bringing light to the ways in which these competing claims are reconciled on the components of the 2022 UN Resolution language and structure. When combined, the CRBA and sovereignty-based criticism presents a useful analysis scaffold for considering the theoretical coherence of the resolution. They facilitate closer examination of whether the resolution is actually able to bridge international legal ideals and actualities on the

ground—especially among states grappling with the precarious demands of adolescents in the digitally mediated world.

Findings

1. Rights-Based Language and Framing

The 2022 UN General Assembly Resolution reaffirms a profound attachment to the principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), with the centrality of children's rights in its program to fight bullying. Instead of focusing only on the disciplinary aspect of bullying, this resolution identifies it as a violation of rights, and particularly so in institutional, community, and digital environments (UN General Assembly, 2022). One of its outstanding attributes is its direct reference to Article 12 of the CRC, which stresses the right for the views of the children to be considered at all matters involving them (UNICEF, 1989). This is a shift from old, protectionist paradigms to more participatory forms of governance, in which children are no longer just recipients of the safeguarding policy, but rather can be active stakeholders within its creation and unfolding. The resolution also emphasizes the effects of bullying prevention in terms of inclusion and anti-discrimination, so that protection would be targeted at those most likely to be excluded and harmed. Specific groups including girls and children with disabilities, as well as youth from low socio-economic backgrounds, are specifically targeted (UNICEF, 2023a). Such language supports a progressive, equity-oriented interpretation of the rights of children — one that not only works to protect children from harm but aims to scrutinize and deconstruct the power structures that so often constitute the root causes of such harm.

2. Addressing Cyberbullying and Digital Environments

Among the resolution's greatest strengths is its forward-looking outlook on cyberbullying, a type of abuse that has far surpassed any traditional mechanisms of prevention. Whereas other past frameworks were focused on in-school violence, this document acknowledges that a lot of the bullying is today taking place in digital spaces where monitoring, accountability, and support are most often absent. The resolution urges member states to educate children and caregivers on digital skills, to design safer

online forums, and to spread an awareness of the peculiar dangers of cyber abuse (UN General Assembly, 2022; UNICEF, 2023b). This focus and resistance are a significant change in the global child protection discourse, discourse that corresponds to contemporary policy work by the European Parliament which highlights the complex, boundaryless nature of online aggravation (European Parliament, 2022). Focusing on cyberbullying, the resolution recognizes that digital spaces are not neutral in nature but can become terrains of deep psychological damage, particularly for the adolescents wrestling with a formative sense of self and peer pressure within virtual public spaces. It is also a reflection of the increasing realization that digital threats can only be countered by more than censorship and surveillance, but by empowerment, education, and context-sensitive policy.

3. Conflicts of Children's Rights and State Sovereignty

While the resolution daringly promotes child participation and the safeguarding of rights, it at the same time bows to states' powers in the developing and implementation of national laws. This double-sidedness shows an uneasy dialectic of international child rights activism: the friction between universal norms and local sovereignties. Although children's agency is supported rhetorically, the resolution does not provide for requirements long enough to pre-empt national choice (UN General Assembly, 2022). According to what Daiute (2008) insightfully observes, this tension frequently appears when this children right collides with the cultural expectations, or political system where state control, tradition hierarchies, or parental authority is privileged. In practice, this means that, even though the resolution promotes inclusive and participatory approaches to prepare for and respond to emergencies, governments have the discretionary power to implement it or not implement it at all, by virtue of domestic legal and cultural order. This generates alarming questions about whether adolescent rights, such as digital privacy and freedom of expression, can be protected uniformly between different jurisdictions. It also paves the way for more stake to be taken on the methodology through which international norms can be implemented as enforceable domestic policies while preserving their

transformative essence. 4. Vulnerabilities and Intersectionality The focus on intersectionality in the resolution reflects a significant step in the evolution of the global discussion of bullying. Instead of assuming that every child is equally at risk, it openly acknowledges that intersectionality, wherein identities, such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status intersect, can augment the risk and severity of bullying (UNICEF, 2023a). This acknowledgment is consistent with an accumulating amount of research that underscores the fact that successful anti-bullying tactics must be cultivated to recognize layered manifestations of discrimination and exclusion. However, even with this positive transition, the resolution falls short to provide clear operational tips on how to actualize intersectional awareness as an active practice. Marginalized groups like LGBTQ+ youth and digitally disenfranchised adolescents are referenced in general terms but are not accompanied by very specific plans for meeting their unique needs. Without such direction, the resolution may be wishful than practical. To genuinely embody an intersectional ethos, future tools will need to produce frameworks which are flexible, inclusive, guided by the lived realities of those children who are frequently on the periphery of both policy and protection.

The 2022 UN General Assembly Resolution marks a pivotal moment in global child protection discourse by placing children's rights—particularly those of adolescents—at the forefront of anti-bullying policy. Its emphasis on protection, active participation, and inclusive policymaking mirrors the foundational commitments of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and suggests a growing international consensus that young people must be involved not just as beneficiaries but as co-creators of the systems that affect their lives (UNICEF, 1989; UN General Assembly, 2022).

What sets this resolution apart is its strong recognition of cyberbullying as a contemporary and deeply embedded threat. Unlike earlier instruments that focused largely on school-based or interpersonal bullying, this document engages with the realities of digital harm, acknowledging the often-invisible abuse children face online. It reflects current thinking found in academic work and policy briefings, including those by Castleberry (2022) and the European Parliament (2022), which underscore the nuanced

dangers of virtual spaces. The call for investment in digital literacy, creation of safe online environments, and public awareness campaigns reflects a future-oriented strategy, one that recognizes the shifting terrain in which bullying now takes place.

Nonetheless, the resolution's strengths are tempered by certain conceptual limitations. While it encourages participatory frameworks and acknowledges the need to empower children, its reliance on state-led implementation mechanisms reveals an enduring fragility in global children's rights advocacy. As Daiute (2008) articulates, there is a recurring tension between the universal principles endorsed by international law and the discretionary powers retained by individual states. This becomes particularly problematic in societies where adolescent agency is constrained by cultural conservatism, institutional gatekeeping, or restrictive legal frameworks. The resolution affirms participation but offers little recourse when national systems dilute or override that principle.

Intersectionality, too, is introduced into the discussion, as the resolution recognizes layered risks that affect children of multilayer vulnerabilities – girls, disabled, ethnic, economically disadvantaged. This is a positive change in direction to more sophisticated policy design. However, a large part of the resolution's treatment of intersectionality is aspirational. Its allusions to the marginalized groups, i.e., the LGBTQ+ adolescents or digitally disenfranchised youth, is more symbolic than operational. When clear, operational mechanisms that suit these groups lack, the resolution can strengthen a divide between rhetoric and enactment. All in all, the resolution is a document that leans forward and is morally anchored, which contributes to the international discussion on preventing bullying. Yet, the lack of necessary binding strategies as well as references to state power and ambiguous promises to intersectional equity calls into question how well its ideals can be realized in practical, equitable protections. The test, however, will not rest in the language, but whether the necessary governments and institutions can meet the challenge of making these declarations into something to truly protect the children most in need. The stance that the resolution takes in favor of inclusive education, awareness programs, and direct adolescent participation in policymaking assists in the creation of a more responsive and participatory ecosystem. These measures are particularly

necessitated in the digital space where often enough, adolescents find themselves being hyper visible while, at the same time, structurally unsupported. Online conditions put them in the situation of being exposed to novel types of risk (from cyberbullying to violations of privacy) and without likely resources of redress and representation. When viewing the resolution's appeal to establish digital resilience in terms of literacy and institutional protections as a step towards ensuring that the international protections reflect the digital realities, this call is thus a significant move. However, this protective ethos, however, must be treated with caution. There is a subdued, but real danger that policies designed under the shield of protecting, will go paternalistic. Movements that are designed to pursue harm prevention – like digital surveillance or content censorship – may accidentally violate the freedom of expression or disregard the agency of adolescents specifically, those who do not conform to normative expectations, or rebel against dominant sources of authority. In the absence of mechanisms that emphasize the perspective of adolescents – in both terms of design and overseership, well-meaning interventions run the risk of further marginalizing rather than reducing their impact. Therefore, the focus of the resolution on intersectionality and age-sensitivity is consequently central but insufficient. Implementation strategies need to get beyond token inclusion to grapple with the complexity of adolescent experience. It involves understanding the layers of youth identity (their gender, sexuality, ability, and class) and building spaces where their views guide not just policy but the machinery that plays it out. If adolescents are seen as equal contributors instead of passive beneficiaries of change, the possibility of meaningful, sustainable change is much more within reach.

In this regard, it is not the protective scope of the resolution that holds its true promise, but the potential of the resolution to develop adolescent agency as a basic belief of global child rights governance. An approach that considers that which adolescents hear, respect, value and address, is looking to the exclusion of this, which is more likely to help prevent them from it than one that seeks to just shield them from it.

Strengths and Limitations

One major strength of this research is that it draws upon authentic open access international legal texts as well as peer reviewed literature, which ensures openness and academic rigor. Focusing on the globally recognized documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2022 UN General Assembly Resolution, the analysis is still based on the stable normative grounds. This approach supports a constructive theoretical assessment that is founded on the universally recognized child protection, participation, and inclusion principles. In addition, the qualitative document analysis as methodology introduces subtle ways of interpreting the language of the resolution and the conceptual orientation. The narrowing down to children aged between 12 and 18 years provides further specificity and understood insights into the placement of a specific particularly vulnerable age group within the context of the more general discourse on bullying prevention. But the limitations attached to the study arise from its scope. Most importantly, no empirical evidence is included in the analysis regarding a way the resolution has been implemented in the context of various nations. This exclusion implies that the practical barriers, institutional responses as well as lived experiences of children are not explored. In addition, limiting the attention to adolescents, one excludes how bullying impacts younger schoolchildren or adolescents; the latter might experience similar forms of violence in different sociocultural or developmental situations.

These limitations, while deliberate and justified by the study's theoretical objectives, suggest the need for complementary empirical research to assess the effectiveness, adaptability, and enforcement of the resolution's recommendations at the national and local levels.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and limitations discussed, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the practical and normative effectiveness of future international efforts to combat bullying, particularly among adolescents:

1. Provide Clearer Guidance on Emerging Forms of Bullying
Future UN resolutions and technical briefs should go beyond broad policy statements to offer detailed

guidance on addressing novel and rapidly evolving forms of bullying—especially those facilitated by digital platforms. This includes algorithmic targeting, online hate speech, and the cyber-victimization of LGBTQ and youth or children with non-normative identities.

2. Strengthen Adolescent Participation Mechanisms

The national governments and the international agencies need to establish the age-appropriate, child-friendly platforms where adolescents can actively contribute to the shape of the anti-bullying laws and educational programs. This could be through consultative forums, youth panels, or digital mechanisms for feedback provided within policy development.

3. Balance Protection with Autonomy

Protective measures to prevent adolescents from bullying, especially in digital spaces, should be algorithmically constructed to avoid stepping over onto paternalism. Although protecting young people from online abuse is a valid and urgent issue, it should not be achieved at the expense of young people's autonomy and silence their voices. Any successful anti-bullying strategy must be built on mutual respect and knowing that adolescents are not just its objects of protection, but active participants in the development of policies that target their protection. When the young are regarded as collaborators and not liabilities, balance between protection and freedom becomes way too much sustainable.

4. Adopt Stronger Intersectional Approaches

It is impossible to apply an approach to bullying prevention that would fit all situations. Children feel vulnerability differently, and this decision often influenced by intersectionality of their genders, disabilities, race, and socio-economic status. For policies to be effective, they must capture the above complexities. It means collecting data that has been disaggregated, engaging with youth from marginalized backgrounds, and developing interventions that recognize and account for the risks they are exposed to. Unless they are customized, even the most altruistic of policies can fail to reach out to the people who need it the most.

5. Invest in Multisectoral Capacity Building

Preventing bullying in both offline and online settings requires more than legal frameworks—it demands robust, cross-sectoral implementation. International actors such as the UN and UNICEF have a vital role

to play in helping states build the institutional infrastructure necessary for meaningful, rights-based protection. This includes training frontline educators, healthcare providers, digital platform moderators, and child protection officers in the values and practical tools of the Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA). Only through coordinated, well-resourced efforts can the resolution's goals translate into real-world impact. These recommendations point to a broader imperative: aligning child protection efforts with the lived realities of adolescents across various social and cultural contexts. To move beyond aspirational language, the resolution's ideals must be embedded in actionable, inclusive, and adaptive systems of care and accountability.

Conclusion

The 2022 United Nations General Assembly Resolution on bullying prevention represents a milestone in the global recognition of children's rights, particularly through its embrace of a child rights-based framework. Grounded in the principles of protection, inclusion, participation, and equity—as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child—the resolution lays a foundational path for rethinking how states address both traditional and emerging forms of bullying.

Among its most forward-thinking aspects is the resolution's explicit attention to cyberbullying, an area long neglected in international child protection discourse. Its call for digital literacy and safer online environments reflects an awareness of the new arenas in which young people are vulnerable. Equally important is the resolution's emphasis on adolescent participation, affirming the idea that protective policies must be co-created with those they aim to serve. This acknowledgment of adolescents' evolving capacities is a welcome and necessary shift from conventional, adult-centric approaches.

Still, notable tensions remain unresolved. The dual allegiance to universal rights and state sovereignty raises implementation challenges, particularly in contexts where local norms or political structures suppress adolescent voice and agency. While the document nods toward intersectionality, it does so without offering detailed, practical tools for addressing the specific vulnerabilities of groups such as LGBTQ+ youth or those impacted by digital inequities and algorithmic discrimination.

For the resolution to live up to its transformative potential, global efforts must extend beyond rhetorical commitments. What is needed are enforceable, equity-driven strategies that prioritize adolescent engagement, integrate lived experiences, and remain responsive to the rapidly shifting digital and social landscape. This requires not only policy innovation but sustained investment, cross-sectoral collaboration, and above all, a commitment to treating young people as rights-holders—not merely as individuals to be protected, but as partners in shaping a more just and inclusive world. The resolution signals important progress but its true effectiveness will depend on how deeply and how justly its principles are realized on the ground.

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