

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Bullying Among Young Adolescents: The Strong, the Weak, and the Troubled

Juvonen, J., Graham, S., & Schuster, M. A. (2003). Bullying among young adolescents: The strong, the weak, and the troubled. *Pediatrics*, 112(6), 1231-1237. doi:10.1542/peds.112.6.1231

SUMMARY: Being a bully and being bullied are both associated with problems (e.g., mental health concerns, violence) among youth. Sixth-grade students who were bullies, victims of bullying, and bully-victims (i.e., were both bullied and victimized) were compared on social, emotional, and academic well-being. Bullies had high psychological and social well-being, while victims had poor well-being across domains and bully-victims were at especially high risk for poor adjustment and future outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Bullies reported the lowest psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, loneliness), while victims reported the highest levels and bully-victims reported moderately elevated levels.
- Peers rated bullies highest and victims lowest in social status; however, they avoided all students involved in bullying (i.e., bullies, victims, bully-victims), especially bully-victims.
- All students involved in bullying had somewhat elevated teacher-reported conduct problems and school disengagement, but bullies, and especially bully-victims, had the highest levels.
- Boys were much more likely than girls to be bullies (10% vs. 5%), victims (10% vs. 3%), and bully-victims (12% vs. 7%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support groups for military youth experiencing bullying
- Collaborate with school programs to develop school-wide anti-bullying campaigns to raise awareness about bullying and change student bystander responses to bullying

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide training in both emotion management and social skills for military youth being bullied
- Offer workshops for military youth engaging in bullying on anger management and effective communication

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage education for professionals working with military youth about the risks associated with bullying and victimization
- Recommend anonymous reporting or routine screening for bullying in Department of Defense (DoD) schools to increase victims and bystanders reporting and standing up to bullies

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METHODS

- Sixth-grade students were recruited through 11 public middle schools in diverse, low-income Los Angeles neighborhoods.
- Students and their teachers completed surveys regarding each students' psychological distress, social and academic well-being, and involvement in bullying.
- Bullies and victims of bullying were identified by peers; psychological, social, and academic well-being were compared between groups of students with different bullying statuses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 1,985 sixth-grade students (46% male) with an average age of 11.5 years.
- Students identified as Latino (45%), Black (26%), Asian American (11%), White (10%), or another race (8%), and 47-87% of students at each school qualified for free or reduced lunch programs.
- Students were identified by peers as bullies (7%), victims (9%), bully-victims (6%), not involved in bullying (56%), or having borderline involvement in bullying (22%).

LIMITATIONS

- Generalizability is limited since special education, gifted, and non-English students were excluded and could have been bullied specifically for these characteristics.
- Arbitrary cut-off points were used for bullying group classification, but analyses suggest they did not influence the pattern of results, limiting threats to validity.
- Due to the cross-sectional study design, directions of effects cannot be inferred.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how bullying status changes longitudinally across the course of students' schooling
- Explore whether school bullying status influences social, emotional, employment, or higher education outcomes in adulthood
- Investigate how peer perceptions of students' demographics (e.g., socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity) could influence their perceptions or interpretations of peer bullying behavior

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