



## Bullies And Victims More At Risk Of Being Victims Of Other Crimes, New Research Shows

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October 10, 2007

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DURHAM, N.H. – Bullies and their victims are more likely to be victims of other crimes than youth who are not exposed to bullying, according to new research from the Family Research Laboratory and the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

The research is presented in the article “Hidden Forms of Victimization in Elementary Students Involved in Bullying,” which appears in most recent issue of School Psychology Review. The article is authored by Melissa Holt, David Finkelhor, and Glenda Kaufman Kantor with the Family Research Laboratory and Crimes Against Children Research Center.

The researchers surveyed nearly 700 fifth-graders living in an urban area in the Northeast. They found that youth involved in bullying in any capacity, whether as bullies, victims, or both -- bully-victims -- were more likely to report that they were victims of other crimes than youth who were not involved in bullying in any capacity.

The rates of victimization were particularly striking for bully-victims, who reported markedly higher levels of being victims of conventional crime (e.g. theft, attacks by unknown individuals), child maltreatment (e.g. physical abuse, neglect), sexual victimization (e.g. sexual abuse), and peer and sibling victimization (e.g. being hit by other kids). Nearly 85 percent of the youths classified as bully-victims had been the victims of a conventional crime and more than 30 percent were victims of a sexual crime.

“Bully-victims experience a constellation of problems such as lack of school success, social isolation, and problem behaviors, which, taken together, put bully-victims at risk for deleterious outcomes. Further, the high victimization rates among bully-victims also helps to explain why long-term outcomes for this group are often poor, and why, at times, they end up needing psychiatric help,” Holt said.

The researchers also uncovered eye-opening research about victimization rates for bullies. Although bullies are primarily perpetrators at school, they often are victimized at home and in the community, and often are victims of conventional crime. Researchers found that more than 70 percent of the students classified as bullies also were conventional crime victims.

“Certain characteristics of bullies, such as aggressiveness, may make them more prone to victimizations such as being attacked on the street. Without a tendency to walk away from confrontations, conflicts might escalate and result in a crime being committed against the bully,” Holt said.

“And because bullies tend to associate with other aggressive youth, they may experience more incidents of crime outside of school at the hands of these associates. For instance, friends might break their things or steal something from them. Or, it might be that because bullies are used to being in positions of power, they incite resentment and competitive aggression from others desiring power, which results in the bully becoming victimized,” she said.

This study raises a number of issues regarding how to implement bullying prevention programs, both in and outside of schools.

“For school officials to be helpful and to intervene appropriately, they must know more about the range of victimizations students experience beyond bullying involvement. Accordingly, as part of bullying prevention programs or individual counseling interventions, it is critical to assess and address the range of victimizations to which students have potentially been exposed,” Holt said.

Researchers also note that the label of bully-victim underplays and minimizes the seriousness of victimization some youth in this category experience. Similarly, the label of bully obscures the fact that some bullies experience considerable victimization.

“Individuals who design and implement bullying prevention programs should recognize that although bullies are perpetrators at school, they might be victims at home or in the community. Accordingly, in addition to efforts in existing bullying prevention programs aimed at helping bullies to diminish their aggressive behaviors, programs should be expanded to address the internalizing problems youth might have experienced as a result of being victimized,” Holt said.

