



Study Finds Young Kids Harmed By Peer And Sibling Hitting

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DURHAM, N.H. -- If the kids in your family come to blows this holiday break over who gets to play with the new Elmo TMX, parents may need to do more than just dismiss it as "kid's stuff," according to a new study by University of New Hampshire researchers.

The study suggests that parents and other child authorities have underestimated the impact on younger children of being hit by peers and siblings. "Kid's stuff: The nature and impact of peer and sibling violence on younger and older children" was published recently in the journal *Child Abuse and Neglect*.

"Most of us have just assumed when a 6-year-old child gets punched by a friend or hit with an object by a sibling, it is far from the same as an adult punching another adult or a teenager another teen," said lead author David Finkelhor, director of UNH's Crimes against Children Research Center. "We resist calling it an 'assault,' and we assume it is less likely to cause injury or long-term distress."

But the research suggests otherwise. In a nationwide survey of the experiences of more than 2,000 children ages 2-17, the researchers could find no evidence that the harm of being hit was any less for younger kids. The younger children were just as likely as older children to be physically injured when hit. The younger kids were also just as likely to have psychological symptoms connected to being hit, suggesting that they weren't any more resilient to the offense, just by virtue of being younger.

"I can think of reasons why it would be worse for me to be punched by a colleague than it would for my 10-year-old son to be punched by a classmate," Finkelhor said. "But I can also think of reasons why it might be worse for him. Among other things, there would be a lot more people outraged about what happened to me."

In the end, he said, we have to look at the evidence, not just assume or speculate about comparative harm. He said that while the study does not resolve the issue, it certainly casts doubt on what many people would expect.

If young children are just as affected, Finkelhor said he is not in favor of bringing in police and

judges to deal with 8-year-old bullies. He is simply interested in creating more empathy and better support for victimized youngsters.

KEY STATISTICS

- 20 percent of the children were hit or attacked by a peer in the last year and 35 percent by a sibling.
- Sibling victimizations were most common for children between 6 and 9 year olds.
- Children ages 2 to 5 experienced the most injuries from peer assaults (44 percent) and were the most likely to be injured with an object or weapon (34 percent).
- Youths 14 to 17 were the least likely to be injured by an object or a weapon (11 percent).
- Children ages 10 to 17 experienced more multiple perpetrator peer assaults than younger children (33 percent of 10 to 13-year-olds and 29 percent of 14 to 17-year-olds vs. 25 percent of all victims).
- Sibling violence was different from peer violence: less injury (13 percent of sibling vs. 33 percent of peer), fewer objects (6 percent of sibling vs. 21 percent of peer) and fewer multi-perpetrator assailants (8 percent of sibling vs. 25 percent of peer).
- On the other hand, sibling victimization involved considerably more chronic situations (more than four in one year) than peer victimization (40 percent of sibling vs. 15 percent of peer).
- Injury and the use of an object/weapon by siblings was most common for 14 to 17-year-olds (injury: 20 percent of 14 to 17-year-olds vs. 13 percent of all sibling victims; object/weapon use: 11 percent of 14 to 17-year-olds vs. 6 percent for all sibling victims).
- Chronic sibling victimization was more common for the younger children ages 2 to 9 (49 percent), than the youths ages 10 to 17 (28 percent).