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UNH Research: Children Benefit from High Quality Violence Prevention Programs

DURHAM, N.H. -- A new national study conducted by the University of New Hampshire finds that two-thirds of school-age children in the United States have received some formal bullying or violence prevention program, and it has made a measurable difference for some of them.

The researchers found children ages 5 to 9 who had received higher quality prevention education had lower levels of both peer victimization and perpetration. Education was also associated with more disclosure to authorities.

“The good news in these findings is that we see some of the safety improvements that the programs are intended to produce,” said David Finkelhor, director of the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center, professor of sociology, and lead author of the study. Finkelhor noted that various national surveys have shown declining rates of peer victimization over the last decade.

The research results are reported in the article “Youth exposure to violence prevention programs in a national sample” in the journal Child Abuse and Neglect. In addition to Finkelhor, the study is authored by UNH Crimes against Children Research Center researchers Jennifer Vanderminden, Heather Turner, and Anne Shattuck, and Sherry Hamby with Sewanee the University of the South.

The study failed to find reduced victimization and perpetration among the youth ages 10 to 17 who had higher quality education. Nonetheless, these older youth did make more disclosures about victimization to parents and authorities, suggesting that they had learned something of value.

The study suggested there was ample room to improve the programming that young people are receiving. The majority of the programs children received in schools and elsewhere were just single-day presentations with no opportunity to practice.

Research has shown that, to be effective, programs need multiple presentations, information to take home, and opportunities to practice, hallmarks of the kind of programs that were associated with improved safety in the present study.

Programs to prevent violence have multiplied in schools, churches and other environments over the last two decades. These programs cover a multitude of topics from kidnapping to Internet safety. The new study found that programs targeted at bullying are the most common at the present moment.

“Schools are struggling with resources these days,” said Finkelhor, “but this study suggests that violence prevention has some pay off for students that is worth preserving.”

The study, the National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence, was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, and conducted interviews with a representative sample of parents and children in 4500 families nationwide.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against
children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence against children. Visit the center online at [http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc](http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc).

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