>

Media Relations

October 20, 2014

UNH Research Highlights Extent and Effects of School Violence

DURHAM, N.H. – Six percent of U.S. children and youth missed a day of school over the course of a year because they were the victim of violence or abuse at school. This was a major finding of a study on school safety by University of New Hampshire researchers published this month in the Journal of School Violence.

"This study really highlights the way school violence can interfere with learning," says lead author David Finkelhor, professor of sociology and director of the [Crimes Against Children Research Center](#) (CCRC) at UNH. "Too many kids are missing school because they do not feel safe."

The study surveyed a national sample of students from ages 5 to 17. The researchers found that in the previous year:

- 14 percent of school-age children had been physically assaulted at school;
- 6 percent had missed a day or more of school as a result of their victimization;
- 1.8 percent had been assaulted with a weapon at school;
- 0.4 percent had been sexually assaulted at school; and
- 48 percent had been exposed to at least one form of victimization, most of which (29.8 percent) was intimidation or bullying.

Finkelhor notes that this survey is the first to focus on victimization that occurs at school. Although the most serious kinds of victimizations, like weapon and sexual assault, tended to occur more outside of school, other victimizations like sexual harassment and intimidation were more common at school. High school age youth had more overall victimization in school, but even 10 percent of children 5-9 had been physically assaulted in school during the past year.

"Schools are the one childhood environment with the greatest potential to reduce or eliminate violence, because they are intensively supervised, organized and planned by professionals... and social policy can have a considerable amount of influence," says Finkelhor. Still, school authorities were unaware of nearly a third of the victimizations that the young people experienced. They were especially unaware of the sexual harassment incidents.

Finkelhor adds that many violence prevention programs have been shown to be effective. "School violence, despite high profile tragedies like the Sandy Hook shootings, has been declining over the last couple of decades, possibly as a result of some of the new programs and strategies being adopted by educators," he says.

The newly published study, conducted in 2011, was a project jointly funded by the Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control. Unlike earlier studies limited mostly to middle or high school students, this study covered a national sample from age 5 to age 17.

The article, "At-School Victimization and Violence Exposure Assessed in a National Household Survey of Children and Youth," is by Finkelhor and Jennifer Vanderminden, Heather Turner, and Anne Shattuck, all of the Crimes against Children Research Center at UNH; and Sherry Hamby of Sewanee, the University of the South. It

appears in the Journal of School Violence and is available online here:
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15388220.2014.952816#.VET-62Nn98E.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

David Finkelhor can be reached at 603-767-1010 (cell) or david.finkelhor@unh.edu

Media Contact: Beth Potier | 603-862-1566 | UNH Media Relations | @unhnews | @unhscience

---