




### SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Category/Theme: Context and Prevention

#### The School Context of Adolescent Bullying

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Bullying is pervasive in schools across the US, with multi-school studies reporting that 9-32% of youth are victims (Berger, 2007). Although research has identified student-level characteristics associated with bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003), school-level predictors have been largely ignored (Bradshaw et al., 2009). This gap in knowledge persists despite theoretical evidence that the school context influences bullying and the fact that several school-wide bullying prevention and intervention programs are based on the assumption that bullying can be reduced by modifying the school environment (Frey et al., 2009; Olweus et al., 1999). In this research we quantify between-school variation in bullying and identify school-level predictors of bullying experiences, so that schools and districts can make informed decisions about universal prevention programs.

Data are from the 2008 Boston Youth Survey (BYS), a survey of 1,878 9-12th graders in 22 schools in the Boston Public Schools (BPS) district. School variables were obtained from BPS administrative records and by aggregating student-level data within each school. Youth completed 5 items assessing forms of bully victimization, including: teasing, electronic victimization, rumors and lies, sexual harassment, and property theft. At the school-level, we assessed: socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., racial/ethnic composition); resources (e.g., percentage of "highly qualified" teachers); academic performance variables (e.g., performance on achievement tests); and prevalence of risk behaviors (e.g., drug/alcohol use).

Forty-one percent of students reported experiencing some type of bully victimization. Experiencing rumors and lies was the most common type (22%), and electronic victimization was the least common (7.8%). The proportion of students in each school reporting exposure to bullying ranged from 25-58%. Results indicate a modest level of between-school variation in bullying ( $\sigma^2_{\text{uo}} = 0.50$ ,  $p=0.13$ ). School-level factors associated with increased bully victimization included indicators of limited school resources (fewer highly qualified teachers,  $\beta_{1j} -0.008$ ;  $p=0.0003$ ), and academic performance (more students meeting adequate yearly progress in math,  $\beta_{1j} 0.25$ ;  $p=0.09$ ). Bully victimization was also associated with the percentage of students in the school reporting sadness/depression ( $\beta_{1j} 0.02$ ;  $p=0.03$ ) and who visited a counselor ( $\beta_{1j} 0.03$ ,  $p=0.02$ ).

School resources, academic performance variables, and general indicators of emotional distress were found to be associated with bullying. These data provide useful information to inform the allocation of resources and selection of prevention and intervention programs for schools where students are most at-risk for bully victimization.

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