

INJURY UPDATE

*A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants**

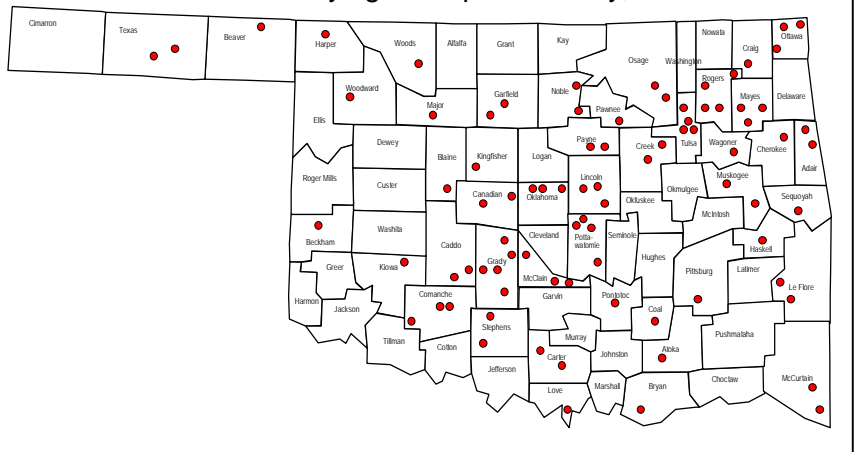
October 6, 2008

Bullying Perceptions of Third, Fifth and Seventh Grade Students in Oklahoma Public Schools, 2005

Dan Olweus, a noted psychologist who developed a systematic, school-based bullying intervention program, defines bullying as: “A student is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students...it is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts or attempts to inflict injury or discomfort upon another...” Additionally, in the “School Bullying Prevention Act” passed in 2002 and revised in 2008, the Oklahoma Legislature defines school harassment, intimidation and bullying as: “any gesture, written or verbal expression, electronic communication, or physical act that a reasonable person should know will harm another student, damage another student’s property, place another student in reasonable fear of harm to the student’s person or damage to the student’s property, or insult or demean any student or group of students in such a way as to disrupt or interfere with the school’s educational mission or the education of any student” (§70-24-100.3).

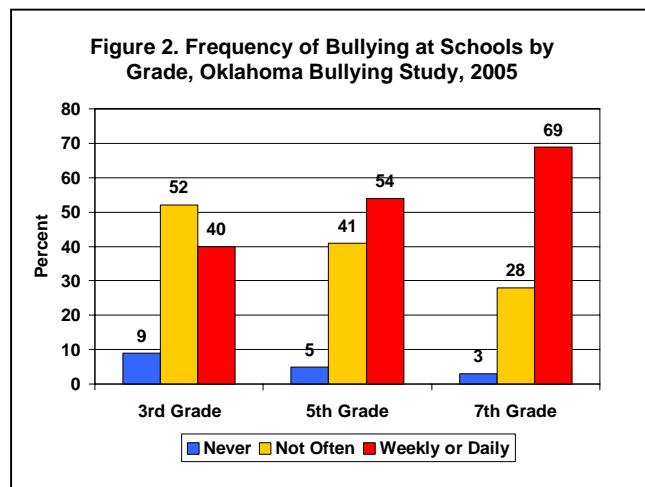
Bullying can have a negative impact on a child’s education and health. Chronic victimization by bullies is associated with lowered academic performance, increased health problems (headaches, abdominal pain, poor appetite, tension, bedwetting, sleeping difficulty and tiredness) and increased adjustment difficulties (anxiety, suicidal ideation and depression), which can continue into adulthood. Bullying may also result in consequences for the bully, the bystander, and the faculty. In a 2001 study, 30% of U.S. students reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, either as the bully (13%), the victim (11%) or both bully and victim (6%). Another study reported approximately 22% of U.S. students are involved in bullying as the bully (7%), the victim (9%) or both bully and a victim (6%). In a Kaiser Family Foundation study of 8-11 and 12-15 year olds, students identified bullying and teasing as the most serious problem for their age groups—more than drugs or alcohol, sex, violence, discrimination or other problems. The tendency to bully others at school significantly predicts subsequent antisocial and violent behavior; 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age twenty-four. In 2001, a U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education study of 37 school shooting incidents from 1974-2000 found that 71% (29/41) of the shooters felt bullied, threatened, attacked or persecuted, 78% (32/41) had suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide, and 61% (25/41) showed extreme depression or desperation.

Figure 1. Location of School Districts Participating in the Oklahoma Bullying Perception Survey, 2005



*The INJURY UPDATE is a report produced by the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Other issues of the INJURY UPDATE may be obtained from the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 1000 N.E. 10th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73117-1299, 405/271-3430 or 1-800-522-0204 (in Oklahoma). INJURY UPDATES and other IPS information are also available at <http://ips.health.ok.gov>.

In the spring of 2005, a study was conducted by the Oklahoma State Department of Health to determine 1) the perceptions of Oklahoma students about the seriousness of bullying, 2) student involvement in bullying (as a victim or perpetrator), 3) responses to being bullied or witnessing the bullying of others, and 4) actions that students wanted adults to take to make the situation better. Eighty-five (16%) of 540 public school districts participated from forty-five counties across the state (Figure 1). A total of 7,848 students in third (n=2,651), fifth (n=2,731), and seventh (n=2,466) grades completed a survey.



Of the 7,848 students surveyed, 33% reported occasional, often or daily involvement in bullying, as a bully (12%), victim (14%), or both (7%). When categorizing by type of bullying, 14% reported being physically bullied (pushed, hit, had things taken away) often or daily and 23% reported being socially bullied (name-calling, put downs, hurtful teasing, or purposely being left out of a group) often or daily. When the fifth and seventh graders were asked about sexual bullying, 8% reported experiencing frequent or daily bullying by words, touches or gestures of a sexual nature.

Students reported the frequency of bullying at their school as never (6%), not very often (40%), weekly (22%) or daily (32%). Sixty-nine percent of seventh graders, 54% of fifth graders, and 40% of third graders reported that bullying occurred weekly or daily at their schools (Figure 2). Children reported the most frequent places for bullying to occur was on the playground (70%), the bus (42%), halls (36%) bathrooms (28%), classrooms (23%), and cafeteria (23%).

Overall, 90% of the children stated that bullying others was hurtful to people sometimes (33%) or very hurtful (58%). One in five students worried often or daily about being bullied. Children who were bullied more frequently worried more about bullying than children who were not bullied.

When witnessing bullying, only 34% of students said they helped the student being bullied, 22% of students reported telling an adult at school and 9% reported telling a parent. Among students who had ever been bullied, 48% told an adult at school and 41% told a parent. Seventh graders reported bullying to a parent or adult less frequently than third or fifth graders (Table 1).

When asked what adults could do to make students feel safer at school, nearly two-thirds of children who were frequently bullied and half of children who had not been bullied wanted better adult supervision. Frequently bullied children also wanted teachers to take action by making rules, enforcing them, and teaching lessons about how to get along better.

Table 1. Students' Self-Reported Actions When Bullied by Grade, Oklahoma Bullying Study, 2005

Action when bullied	3 rd Graders	5 th Graders	7 th Graders	Total
Tell an adult at school	1420 (67%)	932 (49%)	282 (20%)	2634 (48%)
Tell a parent	960 (46%)	865 (45%)	386 (27%)	2211 (41%)
Total*	2105	1912	1421	5438

*Includes students who self-reported they had ever been bullied.

CASE BRIEFS

Comments from Oklahoma students who were bullied:

- “Teachers need to care more. I had a girl call me a snitch right in front of the whole class and she didn’t do anything except say ‘that’s mean’ and made her apologize in front of the whole class. The whole class laughed at me ‘cause I started crying.”
- “It’s getting out of control. Whether it’s prejudice remarks, most remarks or anything. Bigotry is horrible, too. I can’t stand it. It hurts...”
- “I got bullied all last week. Whatever you’re doing about this, it isn’t working.”
- “It happens a lot more than adults think. They better get it under control, because people are beginning to take their own actions. Especially me.”
- “If this bullying continues someone might commit suicide.”
- “They are mean to us. They make me want to kill them.”

PREVENTION

Certification standards for Oklahoma schools require schools to provide a climate conducive to learning (*Oklahoma Standards for Accreditation of Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary, and Career and Technology Schools*; 210:35-3-69). Further, the Oklahoma Bullying Prevention Act requires each school to have a bullying prevention policy addressing prevention education, and a procedure for investigating incidents (§70-24-100.4). The Act requires each school to establish a Safe School Committee to make recommendations to the principal regarding unsafe conditions, bullying, school violence and professional development needs of faculty and staff (§70-24-100.5). Research emphasizes that parents and teachers are rarely aware of the extent and impact of bullying at school. Bullying can be reduced in schools through coordinated adult efforts with schools, parents and the community.

The following strategies are considered best practices for bullying prevention by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and are available at: www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp.

Bullying Prevention Best Practices:

- 1) Focus on the social environment (school climate) of the school.** It is important to change the social climate at school and the norms pertaining to bullying so that bullying is seen as “uncool” and helping someone is viewed as “cool.” Through education, it becomes the norm for students, parents, administrators, faculty and all non-teaching staff to notice and act when a student is bullied or left out.
- 2) Assess the extent of bullying at your school.** Adults are not always very good at estimating the nature, extent and impact of bullying. An anonymous questionnaire of students about bullying should be administered to more accurately assess the frequency of bullying.
- 3) Obtain parent and staff support for bullying prevention.** Bullying prevention cannot be the sole responsibility of any single individual at a school. To be effective, bullying prevention requires buy-in from principals, the majority of the staff, and from parents.
- 4) Form a group to coordinate the school’s bullying prevention activities.** Efforts work best if coordinated by a representative group from the school. The team should include teachers, staff, an administrator, counselor, parent, and community member. The group should meet regularly to study data from the student survey; plan bullying prevention rules, policies, and activities; motivate staff, students, and parents; and ensure that efforts continue over time.
- 5) Train school staff in bullying prevention.** All administrators, teaching staff and non-teaching staff should be trained in bullying and its effects, how to respond to bullying, and how to work with others at the school to help prevent bullying.

- 6) **Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying.** Although many school behavior codes specifically forbid bullying, many codes do not use the term, or provide clear expectations for student behavior. Developing simple, clear rules about bullying can help to ensure that students are aware of adults' expectations that they refrain from bullying and help students who are bullied. For example, one comprehensive program, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (which has been shown to reduce school bullying by 50% when implemented with fidelity) recommends that schools adopt four straightforward rules about bullying:
- a) We will not bully others.
 - b) We will try to help students who are bullied.
 - c) We will include students who are easily left out.
 - d) When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.
- School rules should be posted and discussed with students and parents. Appropriate positive and negative consequences should be developed for following or not following the school's rules.
- 7) **Increase adult supervision in hot spots where bullying occurs.** Bullying tends to thrive in locations where adults are not present or are not vigilant. Once school personnel have identified hot spots for bullying from the student questionnaires, look for creative ways to increase adults' presence in these locations.
- 8) **Intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations.** All staff should be able to intervene effectively on the spot to stop bullying (i.e., in the 1-2 minutes that one frequently has to deal with bullying). Designated staff should hold follow-up meetings with children who are bullied and (separately) with children who bully. Staff should involve parents of affected students whenever possible.
- 9) **Focus some class time on bullying prevention.** It is important that bullying prevention programs include a classroom component. Teachers (with the support of administrators) should set aside 20-30 minutes each week (or every other week) to discuss bullying and peer relations with students. Anti-bullying themes and messages also can be incorporated throughout the school curriculum.
- 10) **Continue these efforts over time.** Bullying prevention should be continued with no program end date and woven into the entire school environment.

More information on school bullying prevention can be found at:

- OK State Department of Education, Safe and Healthy Schools Program:
<http://sde.state.ok.us/Schools/SafeHealthy/default.html>
- OK State Department of Education, bullying prevention programs per statute:
<http://sde.state.ok.us/Schools/SafeHealthy/pdf/Bullying.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration
<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov>
- Eyes on Bullying Toolkit: <http://www.Eyesonbullying.org>
- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's online course ABC's of Bullying, CEU credits for health educators, social workers, counselors: http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/bully_intro_pg1.htm
- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in the United States:
<http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/index.html>
- International Bullying Prevention Association: <http://www.stopbullyingworld.org/>

Additionally, the Oklahoma Department of Education provides a statewide school safety hot line (1-877-SAFE-CALL, ext. OK-1) and an online website (www.oksafecall.com) for anonymous reporting of suspicious or potentially dangerous activity in Oklahoma schools.

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