

Bullying in U.S. Schools

2019 STATUS REPORT



Assessed using data collected from
the **Olweus Bullying Questionnaire™**

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Published by Hazelden Publishing, 2019



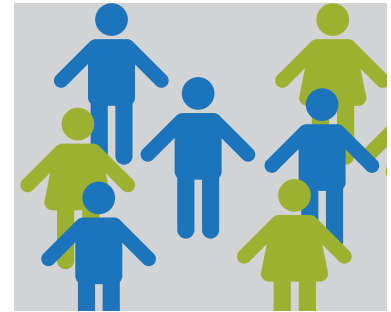
Bullying in U.S. Schools: Report Purpose

This report updates the 2013 Status Report (Luxenberg, Limber, and Olweus 2014) and reflects the status of bullying around the United States during the 2015–2019 school years (August 1, 2014, through June 30, 2019). The researchers and organizations who created the previous report updated this report, including Harlan Luxenberg and Sara Richter at Professional Data Analysts; Susan P. Limber, PhD, at Clemson University; Dan Olweus, PhD, at Uni Health, University of Bergen, Norway; and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. Using data collected from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ), a representative sample was created based on more than 245,000 questionnaires administered to students at schools that intended to, but had not yet implemented the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, an internationally respected anti-bullying program.

The same questionnaire items were asked of all students in grades three through twelve across the United States. This consistency of questions across grades and regions provides a rare opportunity to view a snapshot of bullying behavior in our nation's schools, based on the reports of children and youth themselves. A representative sample was used from this data set to explore the following bullying topics:

- What percentage of students are bullied and/or bully others?
- What are the ways in which students are most often bullied?
- In how many ways are most students bullied?
- How long does bullying last?
- Where are students bullied?
- How is bullying related to liking school?
- Whom do students tell about being bullied?
- How do students respond to bullying?
- Are students afraid of being bullied?
- How do students and adults respond to bullying?

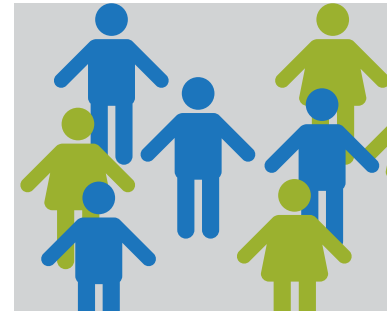
We hope that this report helps teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, and concerned citizens raise national awareness about bullying and improve school environments so every child can feel safe at school.



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Bullying in U.S. Schools: Report Background

Despite a dramatic increase in public awareness and anti-bullying legislation nationwide, the prevalence of bullying is still one of the most pressing issues facing our nation's youth. Bullying affects individuals across ethnicity, gender, grade, and socioeconomic status, whether they live in urban, suburban, or rural communities. Bullying can have serious effects during the school years and into adulthood. One of the best tools that schools have for decreasing the problems associated with bullying behavior is to implement evidence-based prevention programs.



One of the most widely researched and highly regarded of these programs is the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)*, developed by Dan Olweus, PhD. This unique program uses a comprehensive schoolwide, systems-change approach that involves teachers, students, parents, and other school and community personnel in an effort to reduce existing bullying problems and prevent future problems from occurring. The program has been used in more than a dozen countries by millions of students worldwide, receiving high accolades in the United States and abroad.¹

The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire

As part of *OBPP*, school staff administer the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, or OBQ (Olweus 1996, 2007), typically at the same time each year, to monitor and measure changes in bullying and antisocial behavior in their schools. This is an anonymous forty-item questionnaire that students in third through twelfth grades fill out about their experiences and observations related to bullying. The questionnaire has two main parts that measure a student's involvement in nine forms of bullying (as one who has experienced bullying and also as one who has bullied others). The questionnaire also includes questions about students' reactions to bullying incidents that they have observed, self-reports regarding school climate, and observations of others' reactions to bullying. The questionnaires can be administered online by using a computer or tablet, by employing an interactive whiteboard in the classroom, or by filling out a paper booklet.

The OBQ has undergone rigorous psychometric testing through the years to ensure the data collected from it can be used to accurately understand a school's or district's prevalence of bullying and to assess the effectiveness of *OBPP*. Multiple studies have demonstrated strong consistency among subgroups of questionnaire items, with alpha reliability coefficients in the 0.80 to 0.95 range (e.g., Pellegrini 2001; Solberg and Olweus 2003; see Olweus 2013; Olweus and Limber 2019 for an overview) as well as evidence of construct validity (Kyriakides, Kaloyirou, and Lindsay 2006; Solberg and Olweus 2003; Breivik and Olweus 2015) and criterion-related validity (Olweus 2010, 2012; Pellegrini 2001). Collectively, these measures provide evidence that the results of the questionnaire accurately illustrate the prevalence of bullying in schools (Olweus and Limber 2019).

1. *OBPP* is listed as a Promising Program by Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, and a large, systematic review of anti-bullying programs worldwide concluded that "programs inspired by the work of Dan Olweus worked best" (Ttofi and Farrington 2011, 41–42).

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Before students are asked about their bullying experiences, they are provided with a definition of what does and does not constitute bullying. According to *OBPP*, an individual is being bullied when he or she is the target of aggressive behavior by another student or students (for example, when others say mean things, deliberately and systematically ignore someone, physically hurt others, spread negative rumors, or do other hurtful things), and when a power imbalance exists between the individuals involved. Typically, bullying behavior happens more than once. After reading a clear definition of bullying, students are asked in the OBQ’s question 4, “How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?” and later in question 24, “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?”

Depending on their answers to these corresponding questions, students are classified into four groups. If students answer “2 or 3 times a month,” “About once a week,” or “Several times a week” to question 4, they are considered to be bullied for the purposes of the analyses. If they select these same responses to question 24, they are defined as someone who bullies others. If they select these responses to both questions, they are considered to bully others and also to be bullied (also known as “bully-victims”). If none of these responses are selected for either question, they are considered neither to have been bullied nor to have bullied others and consequently not involved in bullying (see figure 1).

Dividing students into these groups is helpful because students often share common characteristics within these groups (e.g., Jimerson, Swearer, and Espelage 2010). For example, students who are bullied are more likely than their nonbullied peers to have low self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Cook et al. 2010; Klomek et al. 2007; Olweus 1993) and experience later depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic problems (Lereya et al. 2015; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [National Academies] 2016; Reijntjes et al. 2010; Ttofi et al. 2011a). Students who participate in bullying, on the other hand, are more likely than their peers to vandalize property, to drop out of school, and to use alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana (Arcadepani et al. 2019; Byrne 1994; Haynie et al. 2001; Olweus 2011; Radliff et al. 2012), and bullying others has been found to be associated with later antisocial and criminal behavior (Olweus 1993; Ttofi et al. 2012). Children and youth who are involved in bullying others and are also being bullied may be at particularly high risk of internalizing problems (for example, depression) and externalizing problems (for example, antisocial behavior) (Cook et al. 2010).

It is important to note that the terms *victim*, *bully*, and *bully-victim* should not be used to label individual children. Wherever possible in this report, we use phrases such as “students who were bullied” and “students who bully others,” which are more appropriate terms. The shorthand terms should be used exclusively for research purposes and only when the use of longer terminology would be awkward or confusing.

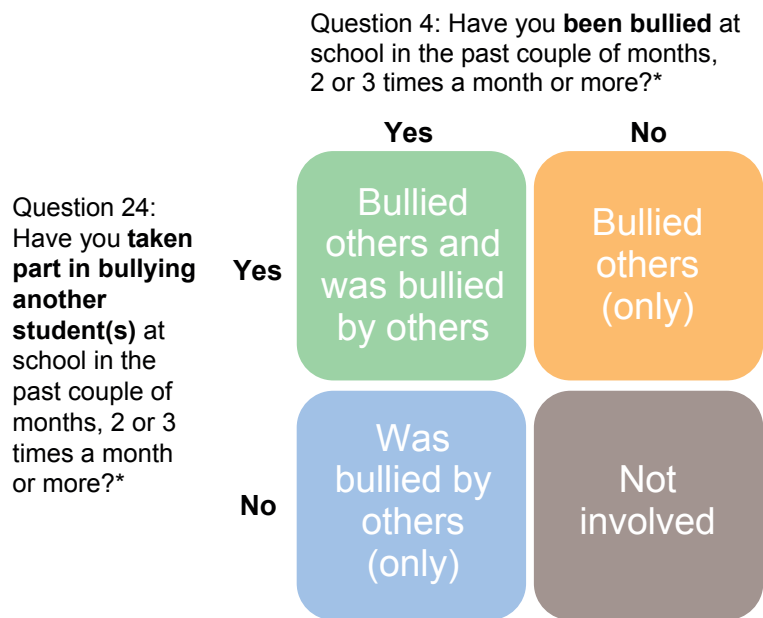


Figure 1. Students’ bullying status: Four categories*

*Paraphrased questions

Characteristics of the sample

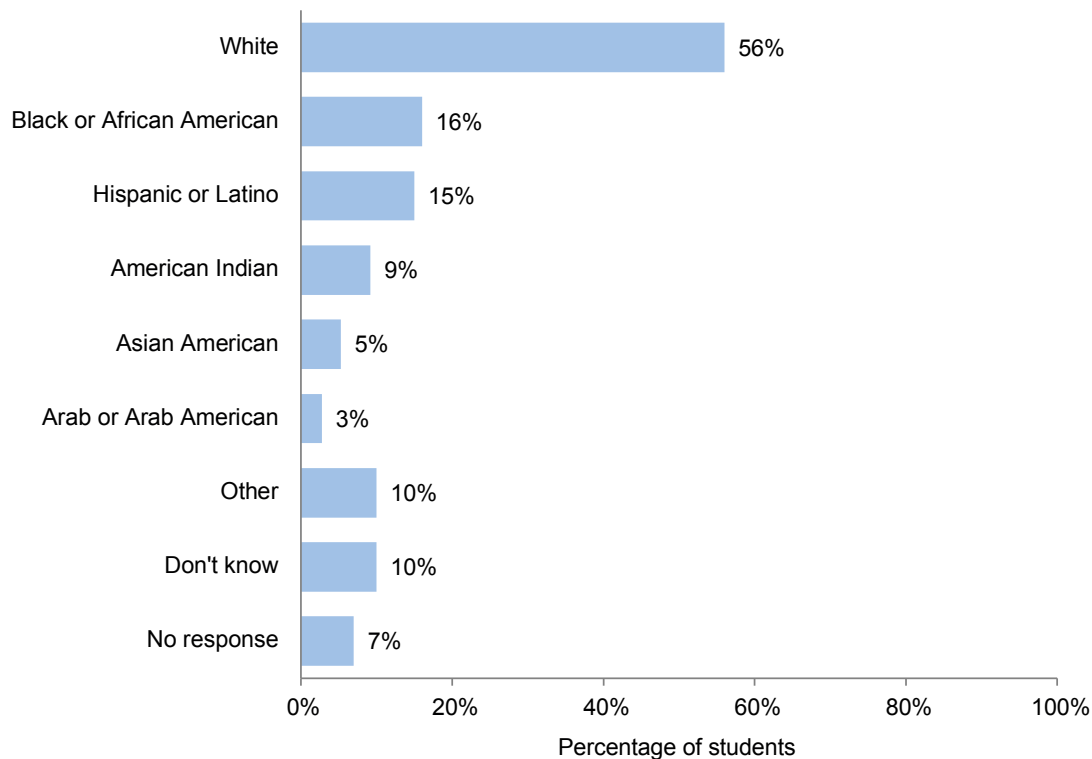
Since 2007, the OBQ has been administered more than five million times to students across the United States. During the 2015–2019 school year, more than 245,000 questionnaires were collected from 815 schools that had purchased the OBQ but not yet implemented *OBPP*. These schools had identified a need but had not yet begun using the program. It was from this collection of questionnaires that a representative sample was drawn for this report so that these data would not be affected by *OBPP*.

A stratified random sample of 2,000 questionnaires was selected from each grade (third through twelfth), with 1,000 girls and 1,000 boys in each of the ten grades for a total of 20,000 questionnaires in the sample. The sample was purposefully drawn so that the distribution of bullying status (not involved, bullied by others only, bully others only, and bully others and also are bullied) within gender, grade, and race was consistent with the distribution for all of the more than 245,000 students surveyed. This means that the 20,000 student questionnaires sampled were representative, with regard to bullying status, gender, grade, and race of all the student questionnaires collected in the 2015–2019 school year at schools that had never implemented *OBPP*.

Just over one-half (56 percent) of the total sample was composed of white students, which greatly exceeded the next largest groups, black or African American (16 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (15 percent). About 7 percent of the sample did not respond to the race/ethnicity question, and 10 percent identified as an ethnicity not listed among the response options (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Races or ethnicities of students surveyed*

*Students could select more than one response.



Limitations

It is important to keep in mind that, although the sample is representative of the questionnaires collected, it was not extracted from a representative database of the national student body. Although student questionnaires were collected at schools prior to program implementation, only schools that had decided to administer the OBQ (typically an indication that they intend to implement the program) are included in the sample. Therefore, it is possible that schools that administer the OBQ (and intend to implement *OBPP*) differ somewhat from schools that do not intend to implement *OBPP*, that use another anti-bullying program, or that do not have any anti-bullying program at all.

Nonetheless, because of the sheer quantity of the questionnaires, the diversity of the schools, and the reliability of the findings due to the large sample size, the authors believe the data presented in this report can be considered a reasonable representation of bullying behavior and related problems nationally. In particular, the patterns of results reported, including age trends and gender differences, are likely to be quite similar to what would be obtained with a large-scale nationally representative sample of students, and, in fact, many trends are consistent with available national data (see Kann et al. 2018; Musu, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, and Oudekerk 2019).

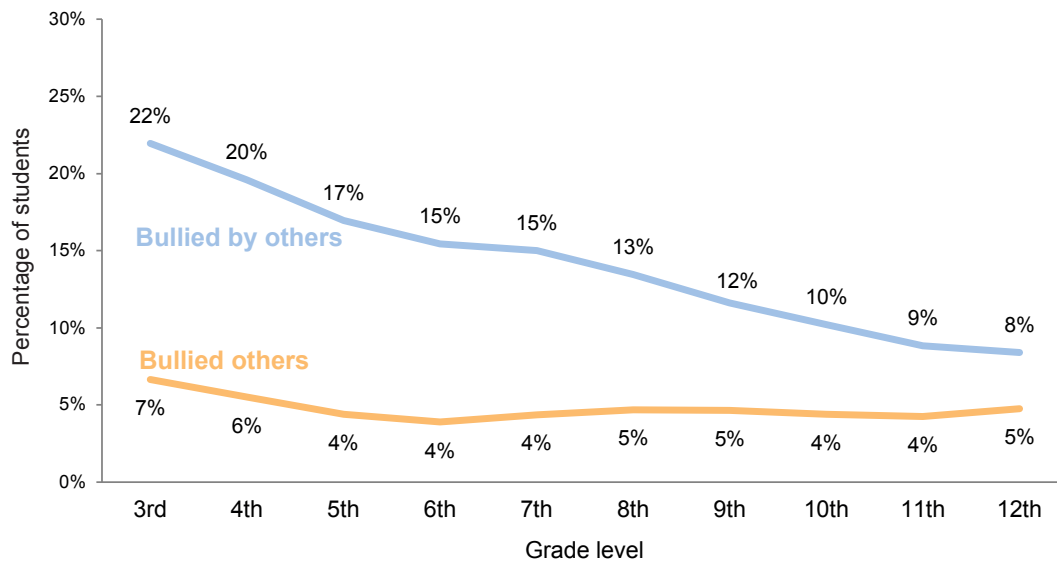
For a more detailed look at how student data are reported to individual schools, see a sample Olweus Bullying Questionnaire Standard Report, which can be accessed at www.violencepreventionworks.org.

Bullying in U.S. Schools: Report Findings

What percentage of students are bullied and/or bully others?

On average, 14 percent of students report being bullied while 5 percent report bullying others. The percentage of students who report being bullied decreases steadily with increasing grade level (see figure 3). While 22 percent of third graders report being bullied two to three times a month or more, by sixth grade this decreases to 15 percent, and by twelfth grade to 8 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of students who report bullying others is more stable over grade levels, remaining between 4 and 7 percent between third and twelfth grade.

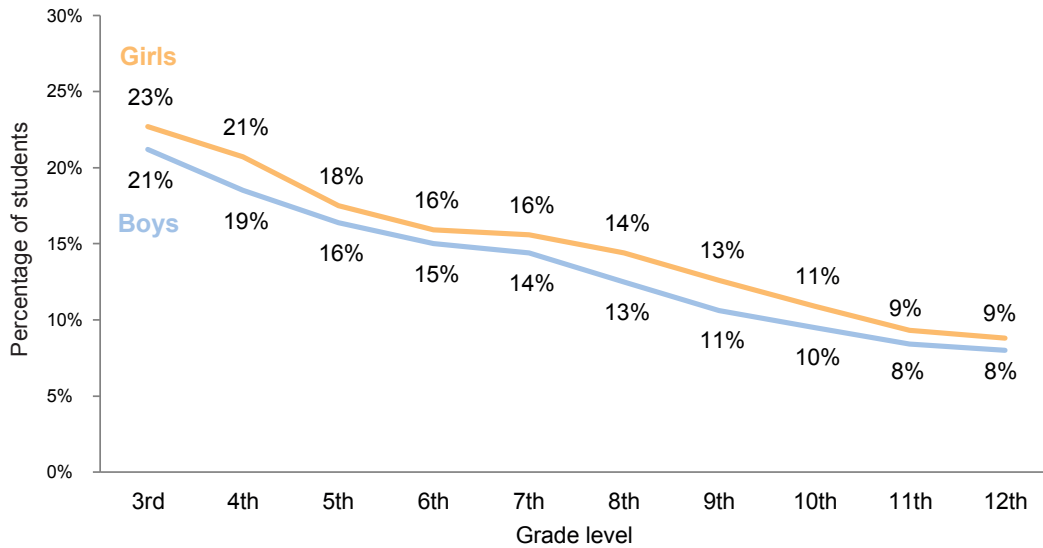
Figure 3. Students who have been involved in bullying 2–3 times a month or more



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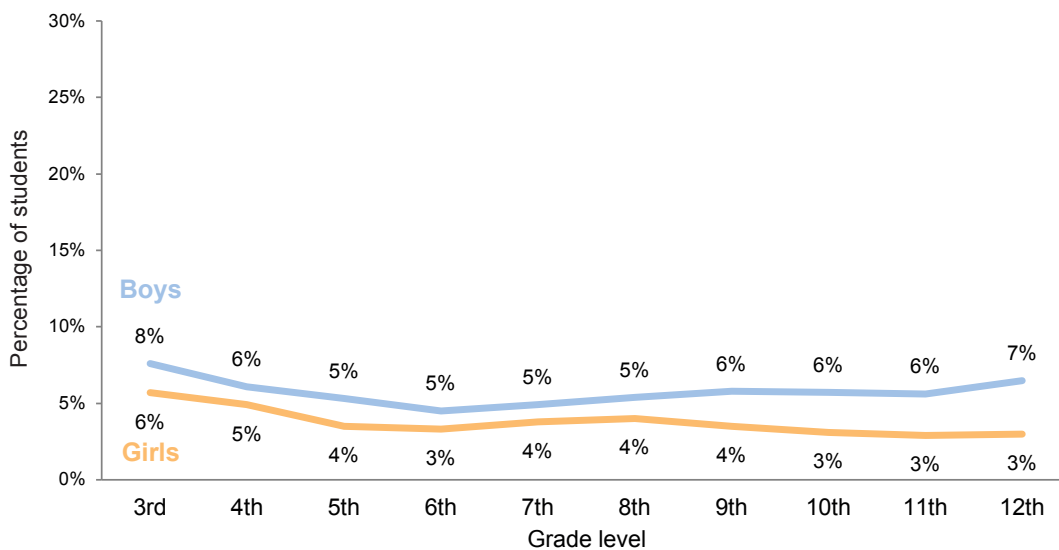
A strong negative correlation exists between age (grade) and bullying victimization for both genders. Across all grades, the victimization rates by gender are within 2 percentage points of each other, with girls having a slightly higher prevalence of bullying victimization than boys (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Students who have been bullied 2-3 times a month or more, by gender



The trends across grades for self-reported bullying behavior are also similar between girls and boys until high school, when the percentage of boys who report bullying others slightly increases with increasing grade while the percentage of girls who report bullying others remains stable (see figure 5). Among elementary and middle school students, there is a 1 to 2 percent difference between boys and girls in bullying behavior, but this difference increases to 3 percent by tenth and eleventh grade and 4 percent in twelfth grade. Boys consistently bully other students more than girls do, especially in high school.

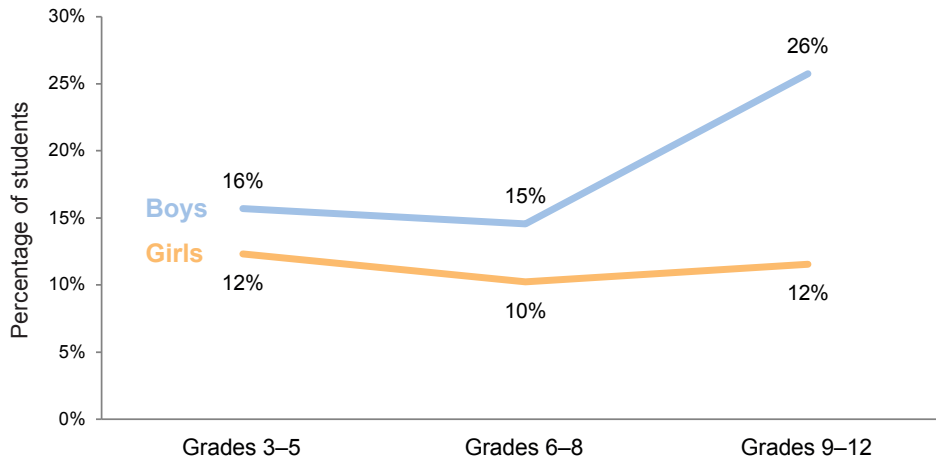
Figure 5. Students who have bullied another student(s) 2-3 times a month or more, by gender



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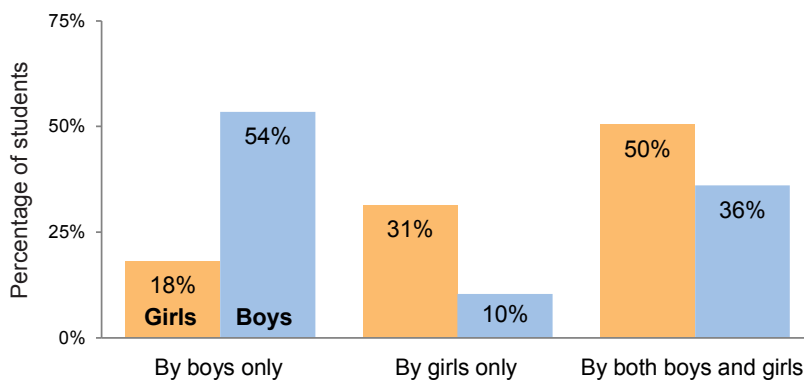
The amount of bullying perpetrated by students who are also bullied two to three times a month or more (sometimes referred to as bully-victims) increases with age for boys but stays relatively constant for girls. Just over one-quarter of high school boys who are bullied report that they also bully others, which is much higher than the rate that occurs for elementary and middle school boys (see figure 6). On average, 11 percent of girls who have been bullied also bully others, and this number stays relatively constant across all grade levels. The average percentage of boys who report bullying others and being bullied is higher at 18 percent.

Figure 6. Students who are bullied and who also bully other students (both occurring 2–3 times a month or more)



Boys report that they were most frequently bullied by other boys, while it was more common for girls to be bullied by both girls and boys (see figure 7). Among bullied girls, half (50 percent) report being bullied by both boys and girls, 18 percent by boys only, and 31 percent by girls only. In contrast, among bullied boys, 36 percent report being bullied by both boys and girls, 54 percent by boys only, and 10 percent by girls only.

Figure 7. Gender of students who are bullied 2–3 times a month or more, and of those who bully them



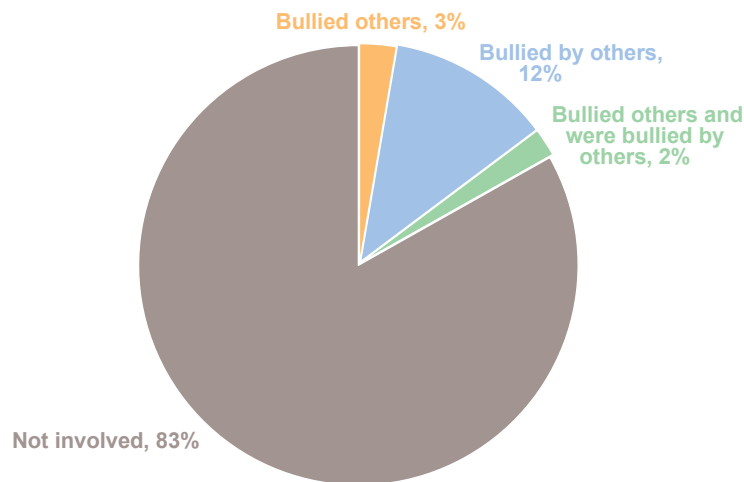
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As mentioned earlier, to get a reasonable estimate of the percentage of children and youth involved in bullying, it is useful to classify students into one of four categories:

- were bullied only (were bullied two to three times per month or more but did not bully others)
- bullied others only (were bullied others two to three times per month or more but were not bullied)
- bullied others and were bullied (bullied two to three times per month or more and bullied others two to three times per month or more)
- not involved

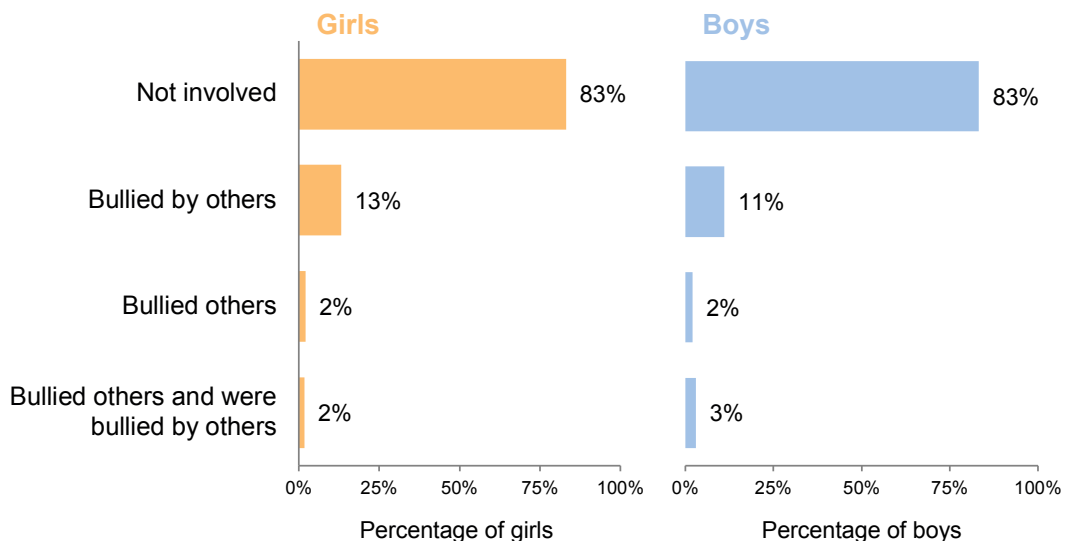
About 17 percent of all students were involved in bullying (see figure 8). Twelve percent of students in grades three through twelve were only bullied by others, 3 percent only bullied other students, and 2 percent were both bullied and bullied others.

Figure 8. Students involved in bullying, in total by bullying type



Rates of bullying involvement are similar for boys and girls, although (to a slight degree) girls are more likely to be bullied (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Students involved in bullying, by gender and bullying type (as percentage of all students)



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The percentage of students involved in bullying behavior is highest among third graders, with one in four students reporting that they engage in bullying behavior, are bullied by others, or both (see figures 10 and 11). That percentage steadily declines within each grade for both boys and girls. The vast majority of girls who report involvement with bullying are bullied by others; only a small percentage indicated that they bully others or are bullied by others and are also bullied. Most boys in elementary and middle school who report involvement with bullying are bullied. However, later in high school this is no longer the case; in the twelfth grade, there is a more even split between those who are bullied and those who bully others.

Figure 10. Girls involved in bullying, in total and by bullying type (as percentage of all girls)

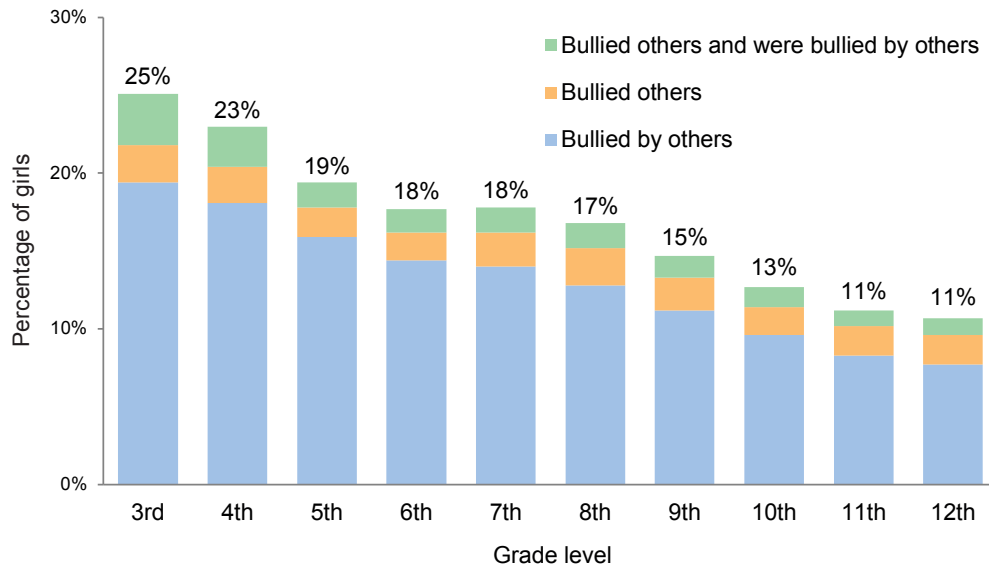
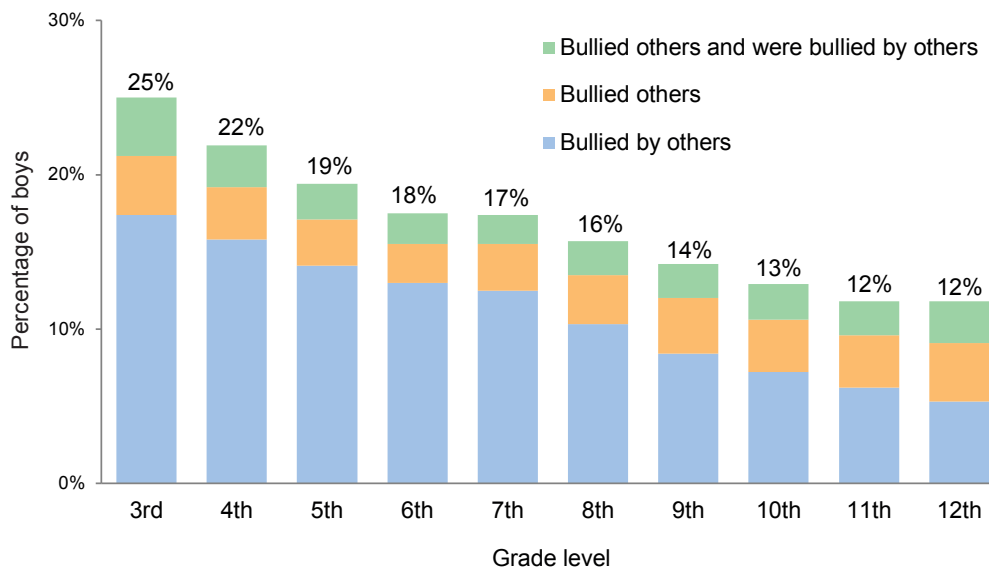


Figure 11. Boys involved in bullying, in total and by bullying type (as percentage of all boys)



What are the ways in which students are most often being bullied?

Many types of behaviors can be classified as bullying if the behaviors meet the definition presented earlier. On the OBQ, students are asked about the frequency with which they are bullied in ten different ways (see figure 12), which are summarized here:

Verbal: the student is called mean names or teased in a hurtful way

Rumors: the student is the target of false rumors or lies

Exclusion: the student is left out on purpose or completely ignored

Sexual: the student is bullied with words or gestures having a sexual meaning

Racial: the student’s race is the focus of the bullying

Physical: the student is hit, kicked, or pushed

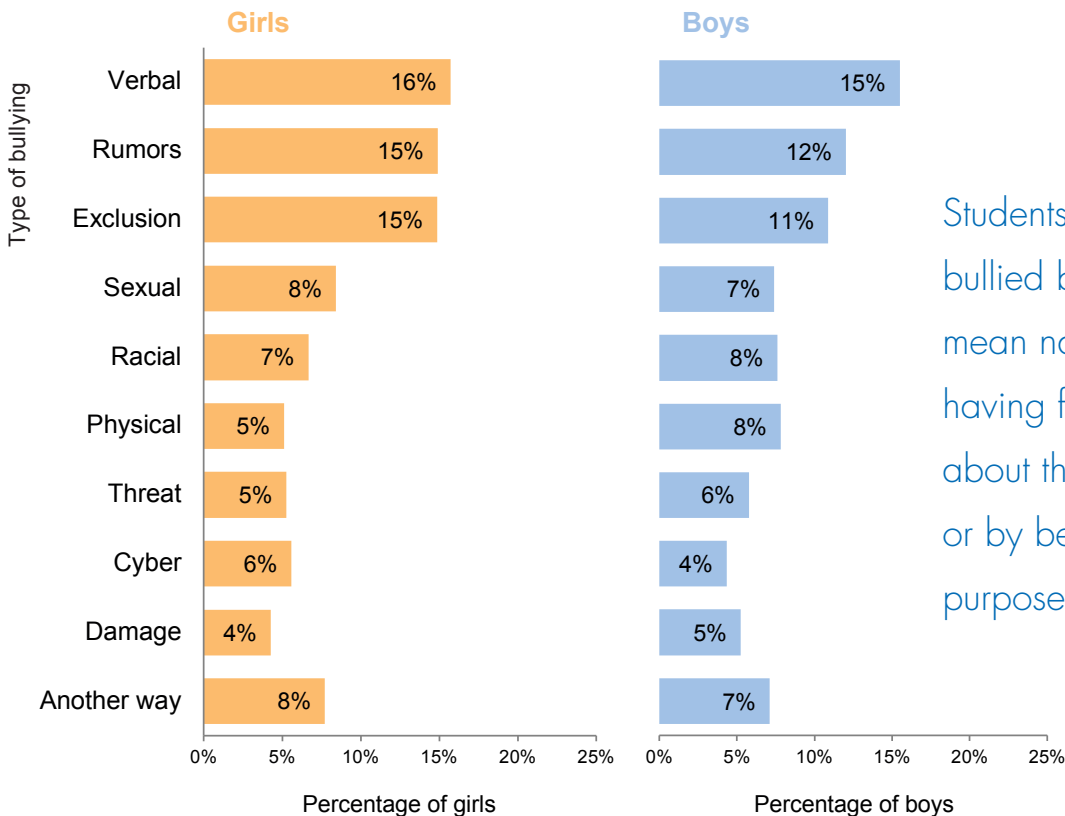
Threat: the student is threatened or forced to do things against his or her will

Cyber: the student is bullied via a mobile phone or other electronic device

Damage: the student has personal property taken or damaged

Another way²: a student is bullied in any way not previously discussed

Figure 12. Forms of bullying: Students affected, by gender



Students are most often bullied by being called mean names (verbal), having false rumors spread about them (rumors), or by being left out on purpose (exclusion).

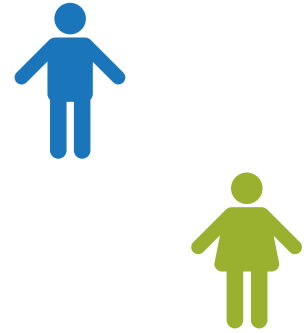
2. The results for “Another way” are only reported in figures 12 and 16 since previous investigation by the authors has shown that a high proportion of these responses overlap with the nine defined forms of bullying

Among all boys and girls, being verbally bullied occurs more often than any other form of bullying, with 16 percent of girls and 15 percent of boys reporting being verbally bullied two to three times a month or more. The spreading of rumors and being excluded are the next most common ways students report being bullied and occur more often for girls than boys. Another gender difference is observed for physical bullying, where 8 percent of boys report being physically bullied compared to 5 percent of girls (see also Musu et al. 2019 for findings of similar gender differences in rumor spreading, social exclusion, and physical bullying among a nationally representative sample).

Cyberbullying ranks as the least commonly reported form of bullying for boys (4 percent) and one of the lowest for girls (6 percent). This low rate of cyberbullying may seem counterintuitive given the great deal of media attention it has received in recent years, suggesting a more widespread prevalence. These results and a good deal of empirical research, however, suggest that the threat of cyberbullying is exaggerated in the media (see Olweus 2013). Nonetheless, cyberbullying can certainly be very hurtful and devastating and needs to be taken seriously. It is also important to note that a high percentage of students who are cyberbullied are also involved in traditional bullying (Olweus 2012).

Whereas figure 12 (previous page) shows the percentage of all students who report being bullied by the various forms of bullying, the following two figures look at a smaller group of students, only those students who report being bullied two or three times a month or more to question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?). In figures 13 and 14 (next page), we can see possible changes in how often certain forms of bullying are used at various grade levels as perceived by students who are frequently bullied (i.e., bullied two to three times a month or more often). In the higher grades, for example, girls are bullied significantly more often through verbal bullying, the spreading of rumors, sexual bullying, and cyberbullying than in the lower grades. They are also bullied less frequently with more physical forms of bullying (physical, threats, and property damage). Some of these differences are quite marked: girls report that they are bullied through cyberbullying twice as much in high school as in elementary school. Being bullied by exclusion is the only type of bullying that stays steady for girls across their school years and occurs for over half of girls who are bullied two or more times a month (see figure 13).

Boys who are bullied experience more bullying through rumor spreading, bullying with a sexual meaning, racial bullying, and cyberbullying in high school than in elementary school grades (see figure 14). As with girls, cyberbullying is experienced about twice as often by high school boys than by boys in elementary school.



Among students reporting that they have been bullied, 42 percent indicated the bullying lasted for one year or longer.

Figure 13. Forms of bullying for girls who reported being bullied 2-3 times a month or more*

*According to question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?)

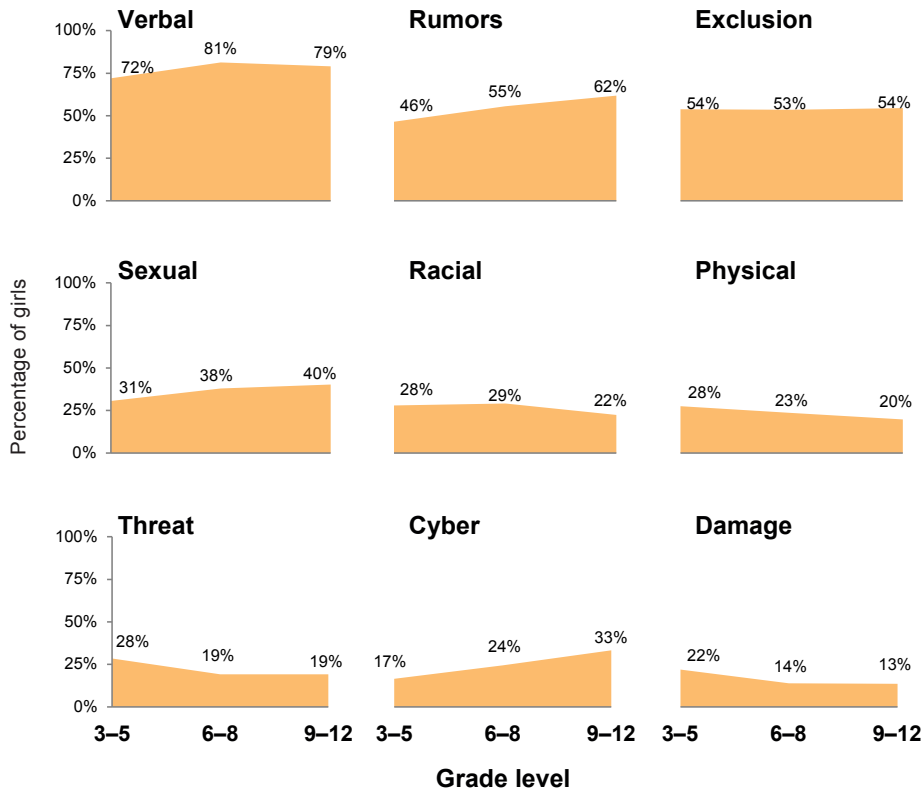
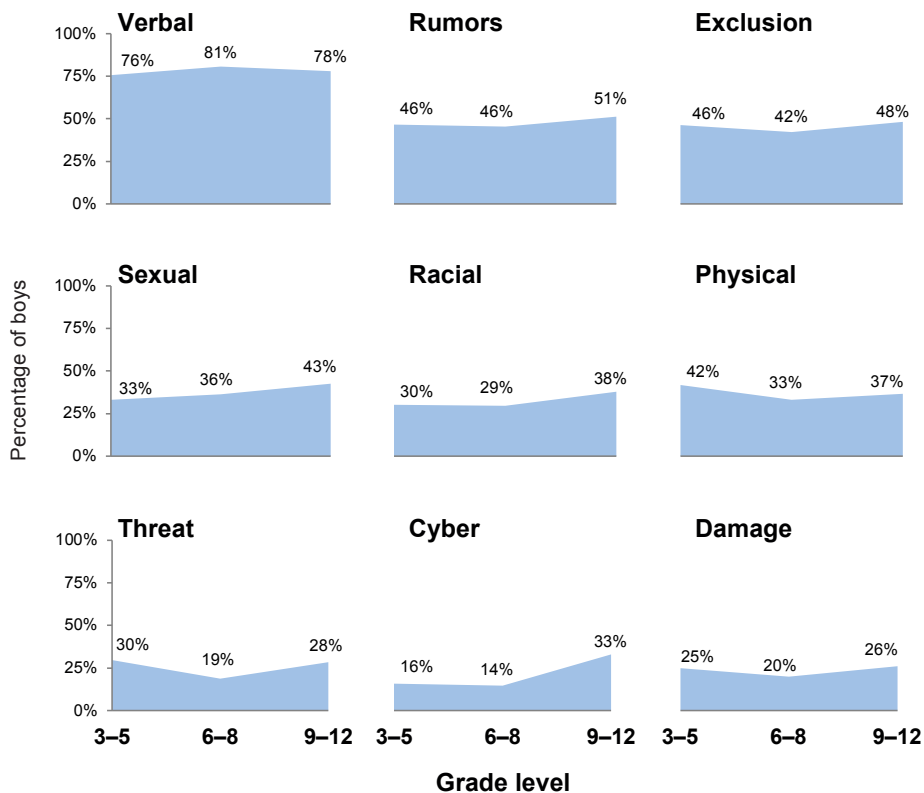


Figure 14. Forms of bullying for boys who reported being bullied 2-3 times a month or more*

*According to question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?)



In how many ways are most students bullied?

On average, students report being bullied in four different ways. Approximately one-sixth of them (16 percent) report being bullied in a single way. Of these, almost two-thirds report being verbally bullied (63 percent), 14 percent report being socially excluded, and 8 percent report being bullied through the spreading of rumors (see figure 15). The other forms of bullying occur infrequently in isolation, including cyberbullying. Only 1 percent of students who are bullied in a single way are cyberbullied.

The number of different ways that students are bullied depends on whether they are bullied only or whether they are bullied and also bully others (see figure 16). Those who are bullied (only) report experiencing about three types of bullying across all grades. Students who are both bullied and bully others report being bullied on average about five ways in elementary school and nearly six ways in high school.

How long does bullying last?

The length of time that students are bullied varies considerably. Approximately one-fourth (24 percent) of bullied students indicate that the bullying lasted only one to two weeks, and another one-fourth (27 percent) of bullied students report that they have been bullied for several years or longer (see figure 17). Fifty-five percent of bullied students report that the bullying has lasted six or more months, and an alarming 42 percent indicate that it has lasted for one year or longer.

Figure 15. Bullying in a single form: Students affected 2–3 times or more per month by a single form of bullying

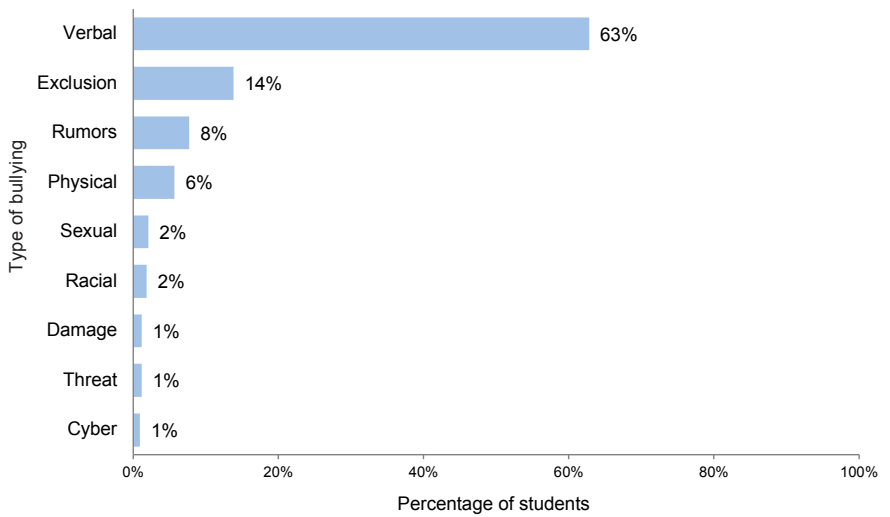


Figure 16. Experiencing multiple forms of bullying: Average number of forms reported (out of 10 possible forms, among students who were bullied 2–3 times a month or more)

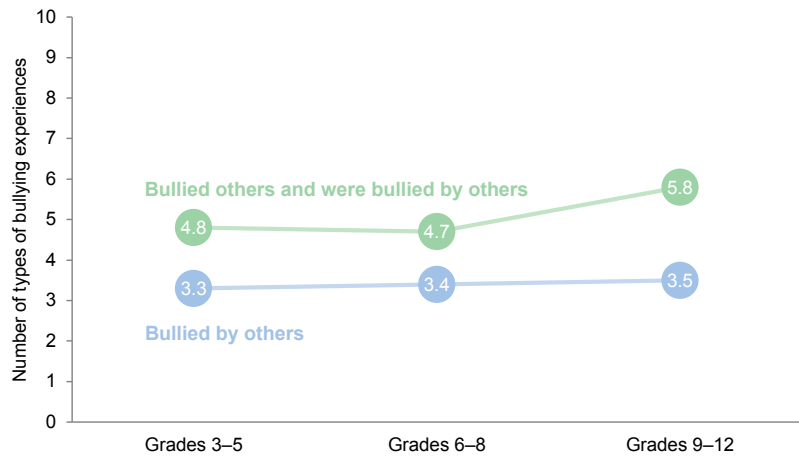
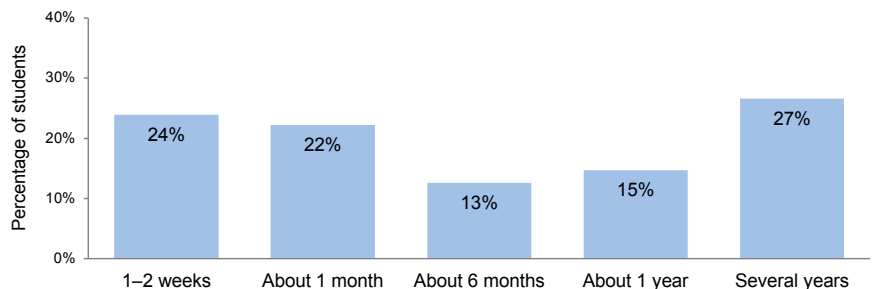


Figure 17. Duration of bullying, reported by students bullied 2–3 times per month or more



Where are students bullied?

Both boys and girls are most often bullied at school in very public places, such as the playground/athletic fields, lunchroom, hallways/stairwells, and in class—with and without the teacher present (see figure 18). In all of these locations, potential exists for many other students and teachers to be present. This finding suggests that students and educators may benefit from more training about how to observe, identify, and react to a bullying situation. Using a comprehensive bullying prevention program may help students and teachers recognize acts of bullying behavior and learn techniques for how best to help the bullied student.

Although most locations are mentioned by similar numbers of both boys and girls, a few appear more problematic to one gender than to the other. Compared to boys, girls report being bullied more frequently in the lunchroom, in hallways/stairwells, and in the classroom. Boys report being bullied more frequently on the playground/athletic field, in the bathroom, or in physical education class or the locker room/shower than girls.

Figure 18. Sites of bullying, reported by gender (for students bullied 1–2 times or more)*

*Students could select more than one location.

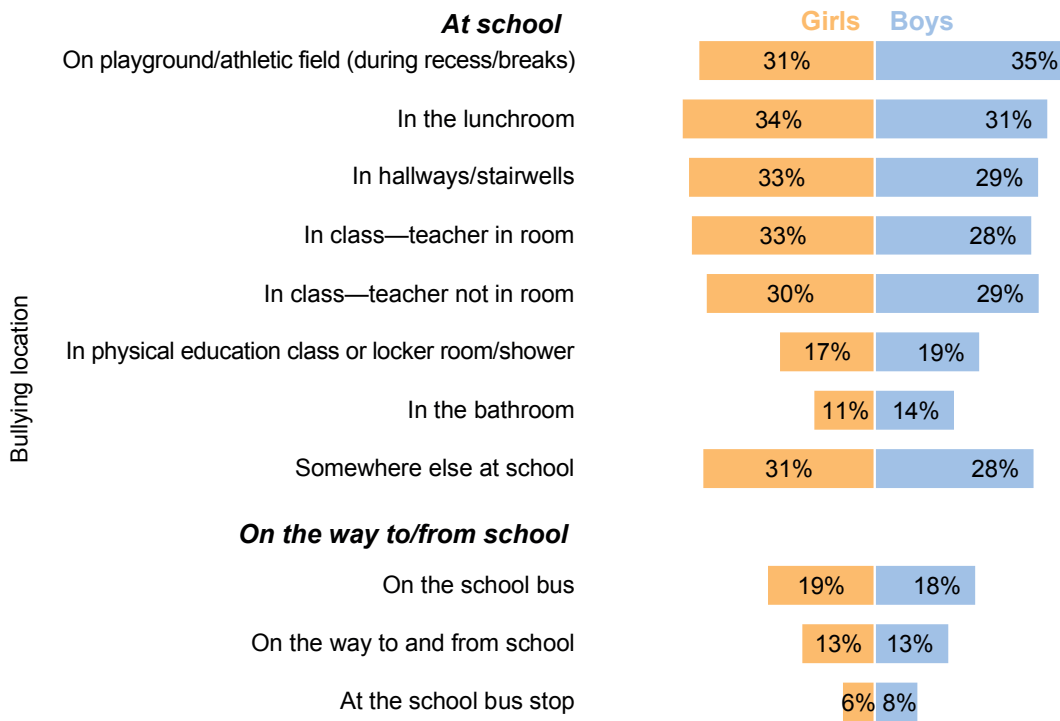
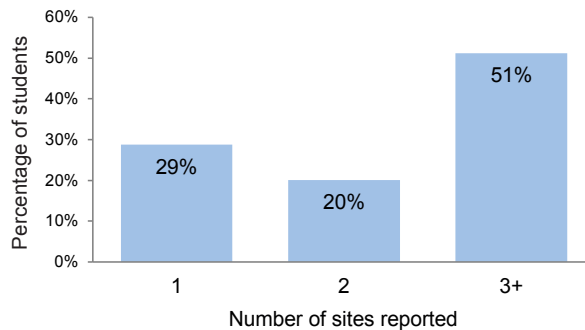


Figure 19. Number of places students report being bullied 1–2 times or more

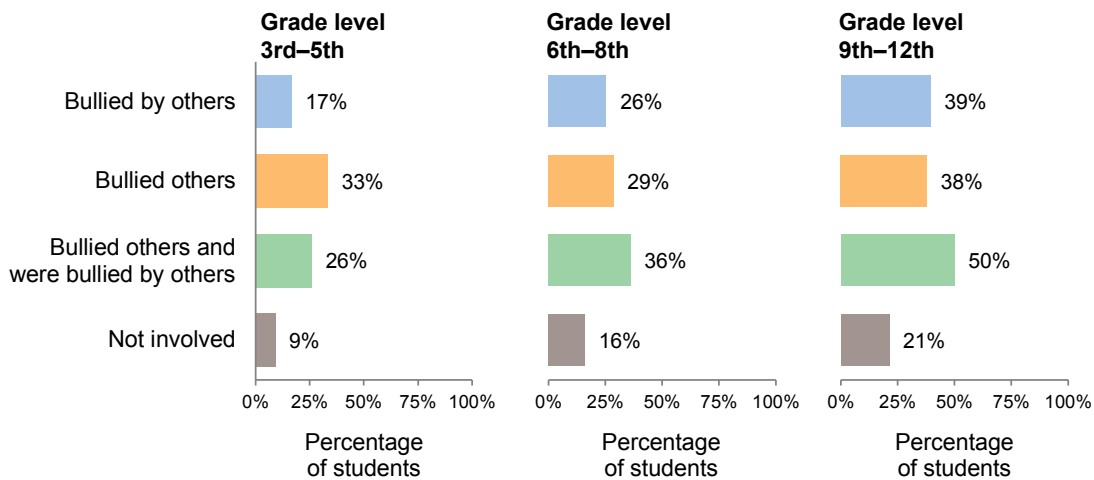


Students who are bullied also report that the bullying typically does not occur in just one place in the school (see figure 19 on the previous page). One-half (51 percent) of bullied students report that it happens in three or more locations.

How is bullying related to liking school?

Compared with students who are not involved, students involved in bullying (as students who are bullied, who bully others, or both) are about twice as likely to dislike school (see figure 20). For students who are involved, the proportion who dislike school dramatically rises with increasing grade levels across bullying types. In elementary grades, 17 percent of students who are bullied (only) dislike school. This number increases to 26 percent in middle school and 39 percent in high school. This difference is even greater for students who are bullied and also bully others. In elementary grades, 26 percent of students who bully others and also are bullied dislike school, and this number almost doubles to 50 percent in high school. These data suggest that involvement with bullying has the potential to negatively impact students’ school experience.

Figure 20. Students who dislike school, by bullying type and grade level



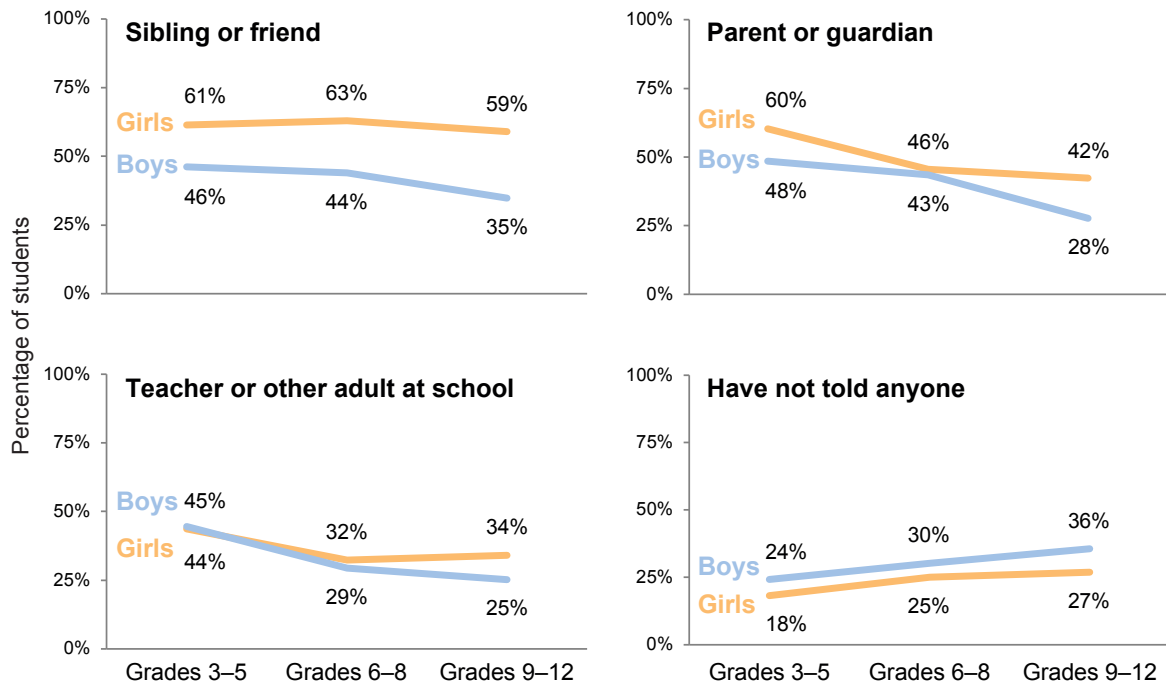
Of high school students who both bully and are bullied, half dislike school.

Whom do students tell about being bullied?

Among almost all students, siblings or friends are most likely to serve as confidants about the bullying, followed by parents or guardians (see figure 21). Teachers or other adults at school are the least likely to be told that a student is being bullied. Girls are more likely than boys to tell siblings/friends or parents/guardians.

Of particular concern are the numbers of boys and girls who do not tell anyone about being bullied. Boys are more likely than girls to have told no one. For both boys and girls, the percentage who tell no one increases substantially as they get older. For instance, while 24 percent of third- through fifth-grade boys have not told anyone about being bullied, this number increases to 30 percent for sixth through eighth graders and 36 percent for ninth through twelfth graders. Similarly, 18 percent of third- through fifth-grade girls have not told anyone about being bullied, and this number increases to 25 percent for sixth through eighth graders and 27 percent for ninth through twelfth graders.

Figure 21. Choice of confidants about bullying, by gender of student (bullied 2-3 times per month or more)



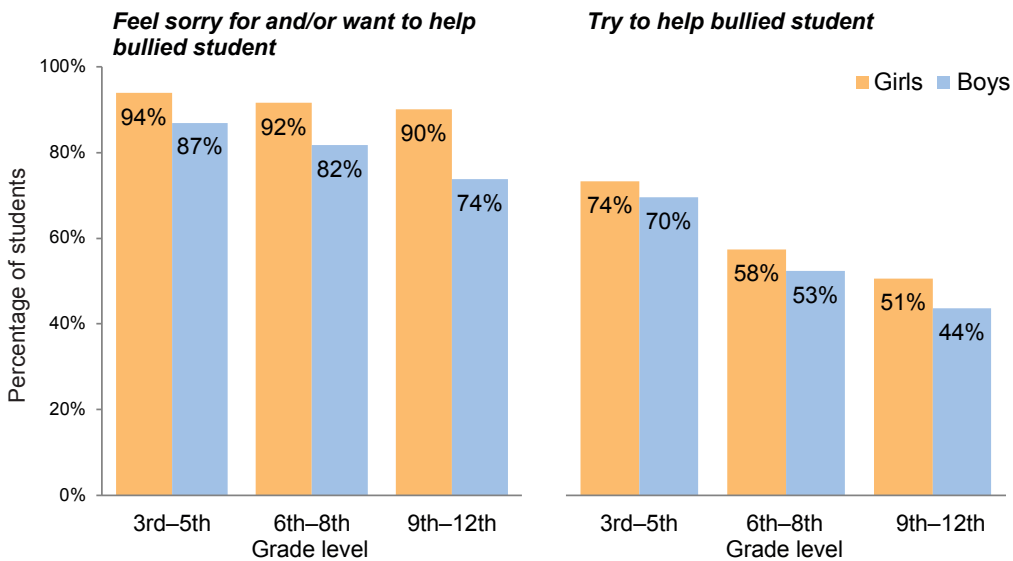
Siblings or friends are the people students are most likely to confide in about being bullied.

How do students respond to bullying?

Empathy, at its core, is the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes. Although empirical research is needed to investigate potential effects that empathy might have on reducing the prevalence of bullying, it is nevertheless encouraging that most students in this sample do report feeling sorry for students who are bullied. On average, 92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys feel sorry for bullied students. Across grade levels, more than 90 percent of girls feel sorry for bullied students. Among boys, empathy rates are somewhat lower and drop more dramatically with age (see figure 22). Although 87 percent of third- through fifth-grade boys report feeling sorry for bullied students, this falls to 82 percent among sixth through eighth graders and 74 percent among ninth through twelfth graders.

A high level of empathy provides some indication that the vast majority of students do not approve of bullying. However, despite high levels of empathy, many students do not report helping bullied students (see figure 22). Across all age groups, girls are more likely to try to help a bullied student than boys are, but those numbers drop sharply for both genders after elementary school. Among students in high school, half of girls and fewer than half of boys indicate that they try to help bullied students. This disparity between empathy and action indicates that students need the right tools to help respond to bullying. Giving students tools to respond to bullying in appropriate and safe ways is an important focus of *OBPP*. One of the four simple rules students learn as part of the program is “We will try to help students who are bullied.”

Figure 22. Response to peers’ bullying incidents: Empathy and desire to help versus taking action to help



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Boys are more likely than girls to “just watch” and not respond to bullying that they witness or are aware of, and the percentage increases with age (see figure 23). More boys than girls also indicate that they could join in bullying a student they did not like (see figure 24), and the percentage increases markedly with age. The number of students in middle and high school who report they could participate in bullying others (see figure 24) is higher than the number of students who admit that they have actually bullied others (see figure 5). This finding suggests there are other students who feel willing to bully others but are not currently doing so.

Figure 23. Students who “just watch what goes on” if they find that a peer is being bullied by another student

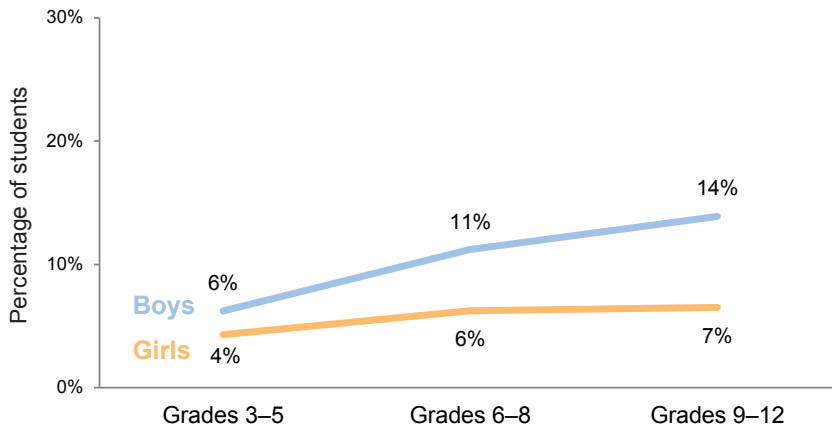
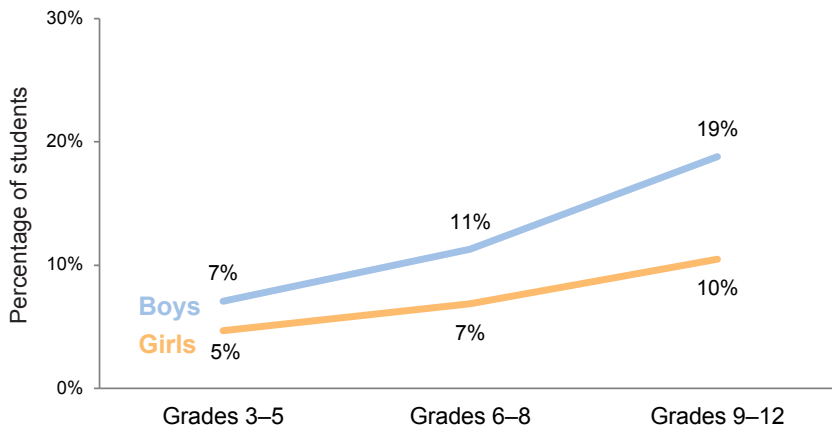


Figure 24. Students who think they could join in bullying a student they do not like



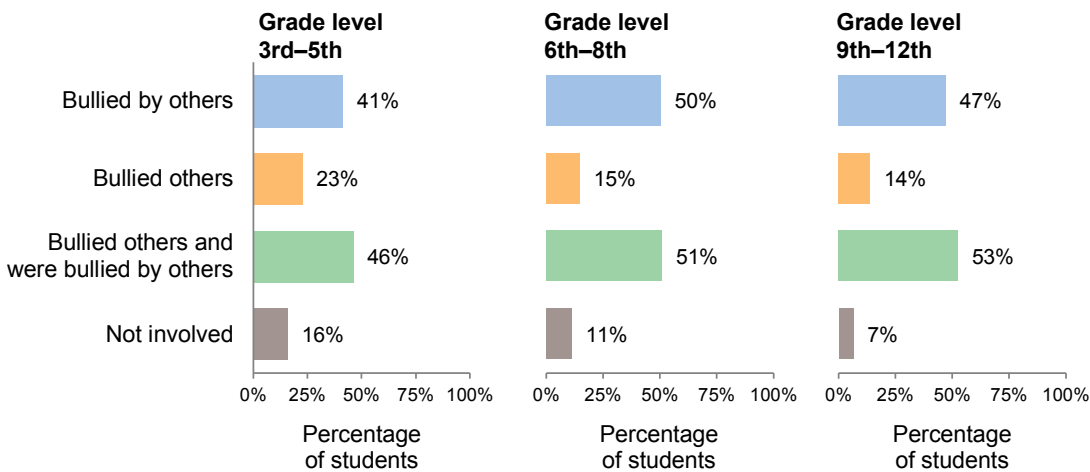
Are students afraid of being bullied?

One of the fundamental functions of a school is to provide a safe learning environment for all students. One way to measure a safe and healthy school climate is to determine the proportion of students who are fearful while at school. Findings indicate that 16 percent of all students are often afraid of being bullied at school. Not surprisingly, students’ involvement in bullying is strongly related to their fear of bullying. In fact, 41 percent or more of students who are bullied are often afraid of being involved in future incidents of bullying (see figure 25). This fear is likely to have negative effects on their learning and academic achievement.

Students who have been bullied are at least two times more likely to be afraid of being bullied than students who bully others. By middle school, one in two students (50 percent) who are bullied—those who are bullied (only) and those who are bullied and also bully others (bully-victims)—are frequently afraid of being bullied.

Some students who are not involved in bullying are also afraid of being bullied, but to a far lesser extent. In third through fifth grade, 16 percent of students not involved in bullying are often afraid of being bullied, a number that decreases with age. That 16 percent are nonetheless afraid of being bullied is a strong indicator of the omnipresence of bullying and its effects even on those not directly involved.

Figure 25. Students who are often afraid of being bullied at school

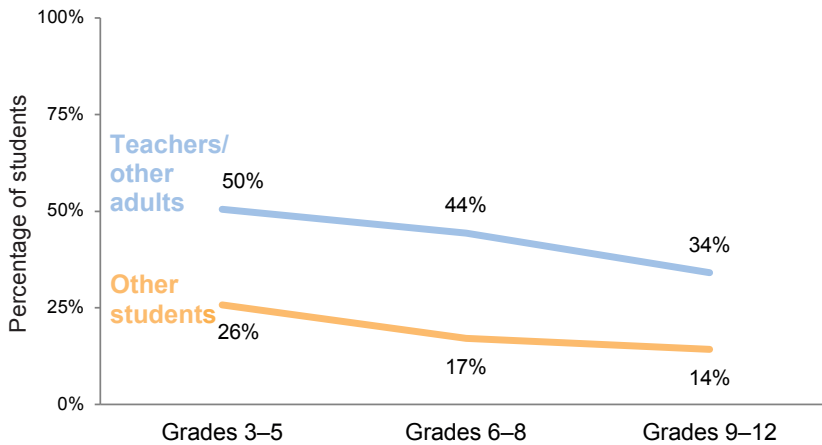


Findings indicate that 16 percent of all students are often afraid of being bullied at school.

How do students and adults respond to bullying?

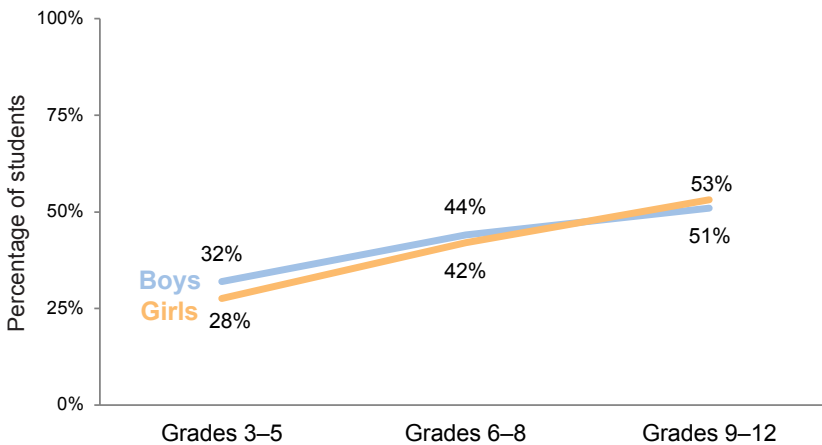
One indicator that shows how well schools are addressing bullying is the degree to which students indicate others in the school (fellow students and adults) respond appropriately to bullying. As shown in figure 26, a minority of students report that fellow students frequently try to stop bullying, and this number decreases in higher grades. Students report that teachers are much more responsive than students when they witness bullying, although this number also decreases in higher grade levels.

Figure 26. Intervening in bullying: Students who said that other students or adults at their school “often” or “almost always” try to stop a bullying incident at school



Students report that high school teachers are nearly twice as likely as elementary teachers to do little or nothing to reduce the amount of classroom bullying (see figure 27). Although bullying occurs less frequently during the high school years than when students are younger (see figure 4), nearly one in ten students are still bullied at least two or three times a month in high school grades, so it is of concern that such high percentages of students do not feel their teachers appropriately address bullying.

Figure 27. Students who feel their teacher has done “little or nothing” or “fairly little” in the past couple of months to reduce classroom bullying

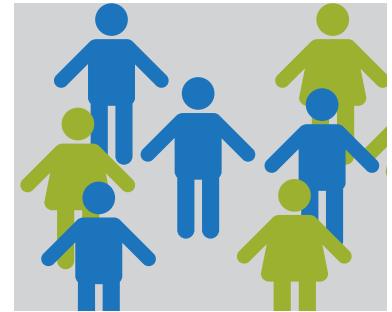


Bullying in U.S. Schools: Report Discussion

This report reviews key findings related to children’s self-reported observations about the nature and prevalence of bullying across the United States during the 2015–2019 school years. Some findings are worrisome, but others are more positive. These analyses indicate that bullying continues to affect a great number of children in all age groups, with the highest prevalence observed in third and fourth grades, where just over 20 percent of schoolchildren report that they are bullied two or three times or more per month. Bullied students are more likely to dislike school and feel afraid of being bullied than uninvolved students. Over 41 percent of bullied students are often afraid of being bullied.

Cyberbullying, despite high media attention and elevated concerns in our communities, is not as common as many other forms of bullying. In fact, only 4 percent of boys and 6 percent of girls report being cyberbullied two or three times a month or more. Although cyberbullying can be devastating to those who experience it, the small number of children it affects compared with other forms of bullying suggests it is important not to sensationalize this phenomenon. Moreover, just 1 percent of all students who experienced a single form of bullying report being bullied through cyber technology alone. This very low percentage is supported by empirical research that has shown that those who are bullied via cyber technology are very often also bullied by more traditional means (Olweus 2012). In addition, several meta-analyses have found that being a target of traditional bullying was the strongest predictor of cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski, Limber, and McCord 2019). These findings suggest that systematic efforts to address traditional forms of bullying will have positive effects with regard to cyberbullying.

Students who are bullied report that they are usually not the targets of only one form of bullying, but are bullied in slightly more than three different ways on average. The frequency with which these forms of bullying are reported changes depending on the students’ grade level. For instance, there are four forms of bullying that are more likely among bullied girls in higher grades than lower grades (verbal, rumors, sexual, and cyber) and four forms that are more likely among bullied girls in lower grades compared with higher grades (racial, physical, threats, and damage). Boys also report that they are bullied more in high school than elementary school grades for four types of bullying (rumors, sexual, racial, and cyber). There are three types of bullying that affect both genders more often in high school than in lower grades (rumors, sexual, and cyber). These numbers showcase the complexity of bullying and how, despite the overall reduction in bullying behavior by high school, certain forms of bullying are still prevalent and must be effectively addressed.



On average, 92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys feel sorry for bullied students.

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While just 18 percent of boys who are bullied and 11 percent of girls who are bullied also report bullying others, this group of students is bullied in more ways than students who report being bullied only. In addition to their known risk for internalizing and externalizing problems, a large proportion of these students report disliking school. These numbers suggest that the school environment may be especially difficult for these students and demonstrate a need for school personnel to adequately distinguish and address the needs of these youth.

One of the positive trends to emerge from these analyses is the large proportion of students who feel empathy toward students being bullied. On average, 92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys across all grade levels feel sorry for bullied students. However, even though an overwhelming majority of students empathize with bullied students, far fewer report actually reaching out to help them. To teach students how to help other students who are bullied, we need to provide them with the appropriate tools and guidance. One of the best ways to help students help others, as well as to reduce the overall prevalence of bullying, is to implement a schoolwide anti-bullying program, such as the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* (e.g., Limber, Olweus, Wang, Massiello, and Breivik 2018; Olweus and Limber 2010; Olweus, Limber, and Breivik 2019). According to several meta-analyses reviewing the effects of anti-bullying programs throughout the world (Gaffney, Farrington, and Ttofi 2019; Ttofi and Farrington 2009, 2011), researchers noted that anti-bullying programs are an effective way to reduce victimization.

A good evidence-based anti-bullying program will have the power to restructure and strengthen the school environment by teaching everyone how to identify acts of bullying, how to react to bullying, and how to work together to reduce opportunities and rewards for bullying behavior. The results from this report show that bullying remains a major issue facing a large number of our nation's students and that further commitment is needed from schools and communities around the country to work together to systematically counteract bullying and make schools a safe place for all students to learn.

One of the best ways to help students help others, as well as to reduce the overall prevalence of bullying, is to implement a schoolwide anti-bullying program.

For more information about the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* or the *Olweus Bullying Questionnaire*, visit www.violencepreventionworks.org or call Hazelden Publishing at 1-800-328-9000.

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Bullying in U.S. Schools: Declaration of Interests

Since 2007, Professional Data Analysts (PDA) has been providing reports for a fee to schools and school districts that use the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* about their prevalence of bullying recorded using the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. PDA also received a small fee from Hazelden Publishing for its work on this report.

For more information about the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* or the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, visit www.violencepreventionworks.org or call [1-800-328-9000](tel:1-800-328-9000).

