

Study: Students feel safer in school as bullying rates drop

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Bullying is on the decline, but more work remains to continue the trend, according to a new longitudinal study.

“Although promising, it is important to emphasize that a large proportion of youth are still experiencing bullying and the current prevalence rates continue to be of great concern,” authors said in the study “Ten-Year Trends in Bullying and Related Attitudes Among 4th- to 12th-Graders” (Waasdorp TE, et al. *Pediatrics*. May 1, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2615>).

With increased attention to bullying in recent years, the authors set out to quantify the problem. Previous studies on bullying focused on older students over shorter time periods and used fewer indicators of bullying, authors wrote. In this study, they surveyed 246,306 Maryland students in grades four through 12 from 2005-’14.

The team used World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention definitions for bullying. They asked students about 13 indicators around different types of bullying and attitudes as well as their school’s climate. They found high schools showed the most improvement, while bullying peaked in middle school.

Looking collectively at all ages, researchers saw statistically significant improvement in 10 of the indicators. In 2014, 13.4% of students reported being bullied in the past month down from a peak of 28.8% in 2007. Roughly 7.1% of students in 2014 reported bullying other children, down from 21.3% in 2005. Both metrics went down nearly every year and were at or near their lowest in 2014.

About 42.7% of students said they witnessed bullying in 2014, down from a high of 66.4% in 2005. Roughly 88.5% of students in 2014 said they felt safe in school, up from a low of 76.4% in 2006.

Cyberbullying, which has received much of the attention in recent years thanks to new apps and social networks, fell to 3.6% in 2014 compared to a high of 7.8% in 2010. However, the authors said this area should be studied in greater detail as technology evolves.

When students were asked about whether adults do enough to stop bullying, there were significant improvements in the unadjusted but not adjusted models. Still, increased attention to bullying intervention in schools in recent years may have contributed to the bullying declines, authors said. They called for more study in this area as well.

In a related commentary <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0504>, the authors noted the study's "commendable rigor" and called on pediatricians to be vigilant for signs a patient is being bullied. They also recommended talking to families about establishing support networks and ongoing communication at school, home and among friends.

"While the notable improvements over the past 10 years in rates of bullying should provide us with encouragement, we need to sustain our focus to continue the decrease of bullying and victimization in schools across the nation," they wrote.

Resources

- [Information for parents about bullying](#)
- [AAP policy "Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention"](#)
- [The Resilience Project](#)
- [It Gets Better Project](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists bullying prevention resources](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education bullying resources](#)

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