

Prevalence and Overlap of School Bullying and Cyberbullying

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Prevalence of Bullying Victimization

With the increased use of social media among our youth, the popular perception is that cyberbullying is on the rise. Educators are increasingly concerned about how to address bullying that takes place outside of the classroom. While a large majority of youth use social media, most studies find that traditional, in-person bullying is more prevalent than its online counterpart. For example, according to a recent national study, around 21% of 12-18 year-olds report being bullied at school in the past 6 months, whereas only around 7% report being cyberbullied.

The UMSL Comprehensive School Safety Initiative survey contains several questions that asked students about their experiences with bullying. The most straight-forward approach asked students if they have been bullied at school or cyberbullied. Prior research has shown that single-item measures likely underestimate the prevalence of bullying; however, this strategy allows us to compare the prevalence of online and offline bullying using a similar measure.

Table 1. Prevalence of School Bullying and Cyberbullying Victimization at Wave 2 (n=3,059)

| | Bullied at School | Cyberbullied |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | % | % |
| Male | 14 | 4.5 |
| Female | 19 | 7.9 |
| White | 20 | 7.2 |
| Black | 12 | 4.5 |
| Other | 20 | 8.3 |
| 13 and younger | 17 | 5.7 |
| 14 | 18 | 6.3 |
| 15 and older | 16 | 6.7 |
| 8 th grade | 18 | 7.2 |
| 9 th grade | 15 | 5.4 |

NOTE: There were 106 respondents excluded due to missing data on one or more item.

Table 2. Overlap of Bullying Victimization Types (n=3,059)

| Bullied at school | Cyberbullied | | Total |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| | No | Yes | |
| No | 82% | 1.2% | 83% |
| Yes | 12% | 5.1% | 17% |
| Total | 94% | 6.3% | |

NOTE: There were 106 respondents excluded due to missing data on one or more item.

When considering the full sample, around 17% of respondents reported they had been bullied at school within the past six months compared to around 6% who reported they were cyberbullied. From Table 1 we see that females were more likely to be bullied both in person and online. As for race, black students were less likely to be both bullied at school and cyberbullied. There are few differences across ages, but those who were in 8th grade were slightly more likely to be bullied at school and cyberbullied compared to those in 9th grade.

Overlap Between Offline and Online Bullying

The relatively low prevalence of cyberbullying victimization has led some researchers to suggest that schools need to focus efforts to combat traditional bullying since school bullying occurs much more frequently and there is such a large degree of overlap between types of victims. Table 2 confirms this overlap, as only 1% of the sample was only cyberbullied compared to 12% of the sample who were only bullied at school. Around 5% of the sample reported being bullied both at school and online. Aligning with prior national research, it is clear that most victims of bullying were only bullied at school.

Figure 1. Overlap among those who report school bullying and cyberbullying victimization (n=553)

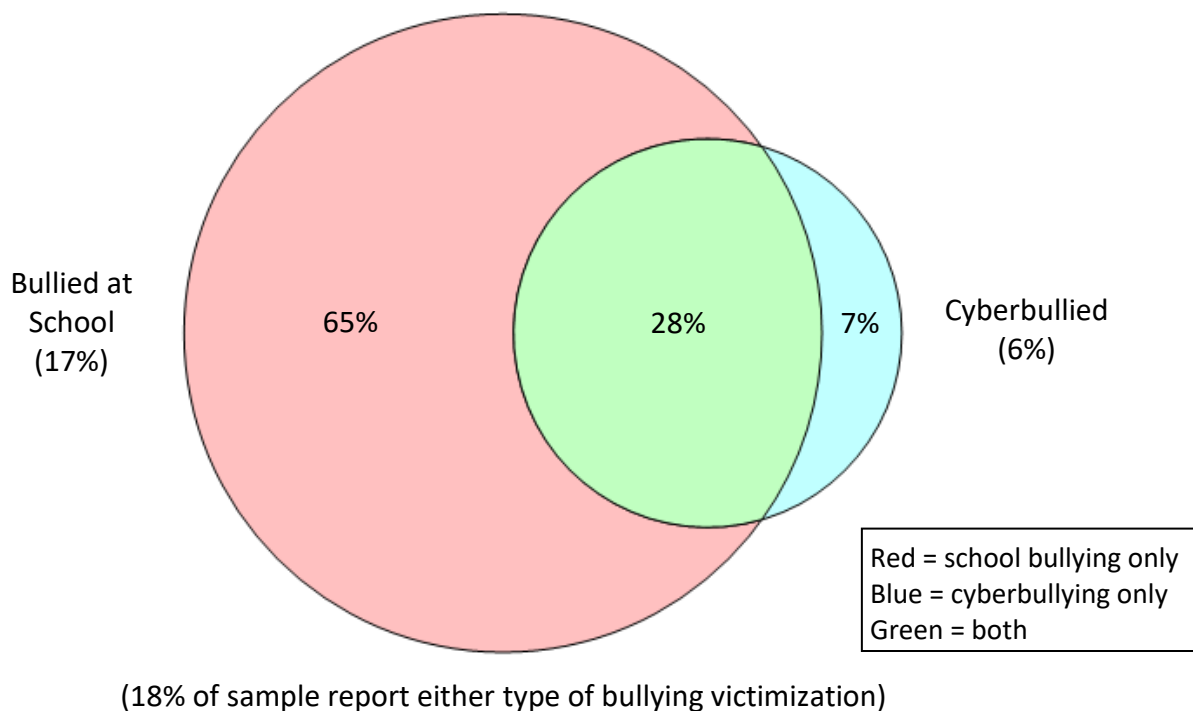


Figure 1 illustrates the findings from Table 2 where the numbers in parentheses refer to percentages of the entire sample and the Venn diagram refers to the overlap in bullying victimization among the 18% of students who report either being bullied at school or cyberbullied. Almost two out of three students who were bullied were only bullied at school, and just over a quarter of victims were bullied both at school and online. Only 7% of those who were bullied were only cyberbullied.

Conclusions

These findings demonstrate that traditional, in-school bullying is much more common than its online counterpart. In general, the same patterns that emerge for school bullying also characterize online bullying, where girls and those who are in 8th grade are more likely to be bullied and those who are black are less likely to be bullied. Cyberbullying has also created few new victims; of those students who were bullied, 7% were only victims of cyberbullying.

Despite the fact that cyberbullying affects fewer students than traditional bullying, prior research suggests that cyberbullying may be associated with more negative consequences, such as poor grades, depression, delinquency, and substance use. A number of factors may contribute to this, such as the ease of spreading mean and hurtful material online that can reach a large number of students at once, or the perceived inability to escape one's bully. Special attention should be given to those who fall within the green area of Figure 1 – victims of dual bullying often experience the most severe consequences, for example, they are more likely to avoid attending school (see UMSL CSSI Fact Sheet #5 on victimization and avoidance behaviors). Although cyberbullying has not created many new victims, this does not mean anti-bullying efforts should ignore this form of victimization given the severity of its consequences.