

School Victimization and Avoidance Behaviors

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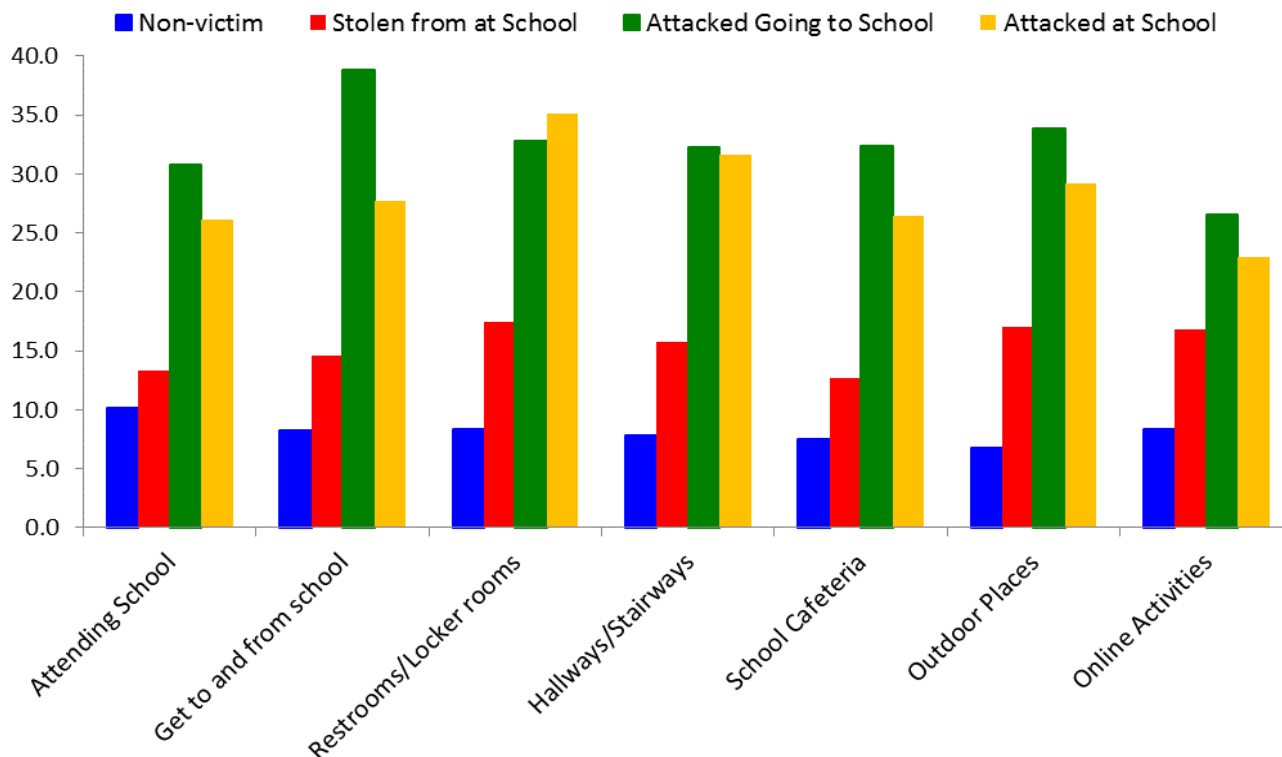
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A number of students are bullied and/or victims of crimes while at school or on their way to and from school. What are the consequences of these experiences? In this Fact Sheet we examine strategies that prior studies have found that students employ in response to school victimization. Students were asked “How often have you avoided the following places because you were afraid that someone might harm you or be mean to you?” (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, and Often). Places included: attending school; how you get to or from school; hallways or stairwells in school; the school cafeteria; school restroom or locker room; outdoor places at school; and online activities. Also in the questionnaire, students were asked about school-based victimization including: been attacked or threatened on your way to or from school (n=68); had things stolen from you at school (n=484); been attacked or threatened at school (n=130); been bullied at school (n=528); and been cyberbullied (n=196).

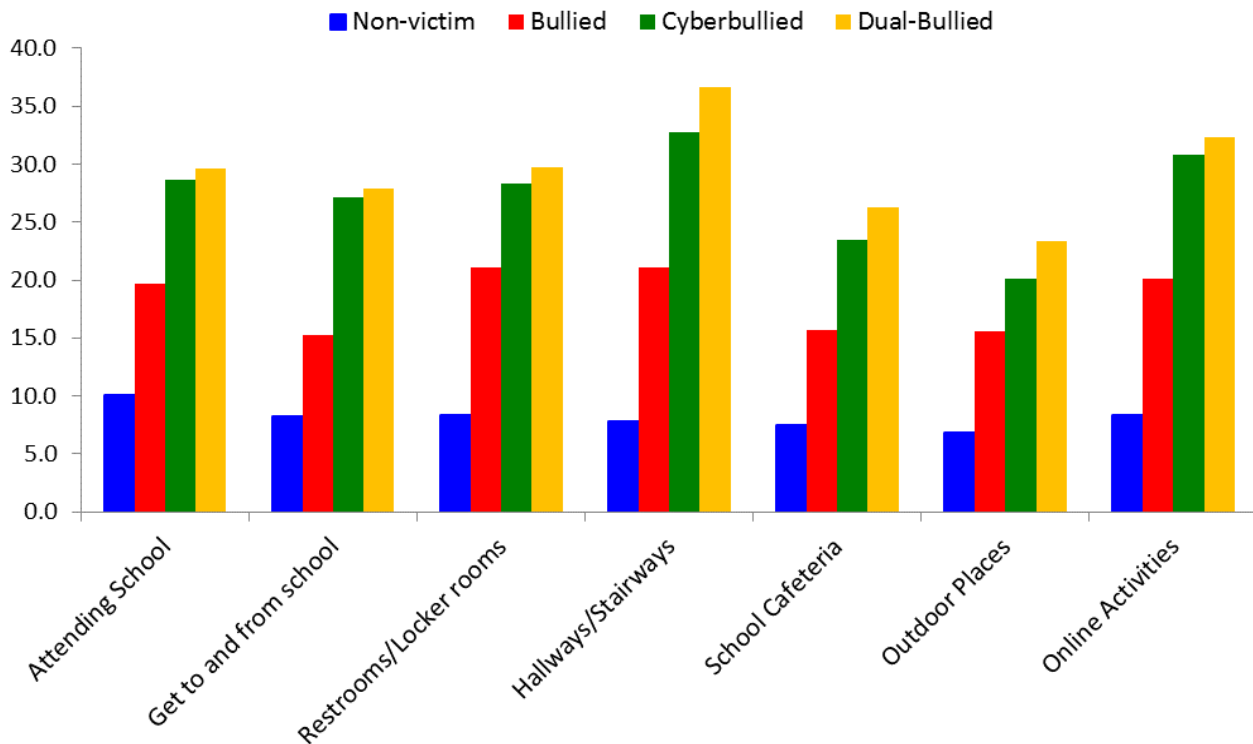
Victimization and Avoidance Behaviors

In Figure 1 we see that the consequences of victimization are quite pronounced. The blue bar in Figure 1 indicates that approximately 10% of students with no victimizations had sometimes or often avoided going to school. The next (red) bar shows that a similar percentage of students (13%) who had experienced theft at school had avoided school. In contrast, 31% of students who had been attacked going to school and 26% of students who had been attacked at school had sometimes or often avoided attending school. Moreover, there appears to be a high correlation between the type of victimization experienced and the avoidance strategies utilized by the students; 39% of students who had been attacked going to or from school had sometimes or often avoided how they got to or from school. Similarly, 30% to 35% of students who had been attacked or threatened at

Figure 1. Percent of Students who Avoid Areas Sometimes or Often: Comparison of Non-Victims and Those Victimized in Past Year



**Figure 2. Percent of Students who Avoid Areas Sometimes or Often:
Comparison of Non-Victims and Those Bullied in Past Year**



school avoided places that often have low guardianship – the restrooms/locker rooms and hallways/stairways.

Bullying Victimization and Avoidance Behaviors

Turning to bullying and cyberbullying, we see similar patterns (see Figure 2); those students who have experienced either or both forms of bullying are more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors. See additional UMSL CSSI Fact Sheets for more information about the measurement of bullying and cyberbullying (Fact Sheet #3) and the overlap of bullying and cyberbullying (Fact Sheet #2). For each type of avoidance behavior, approximately 10% of non-victims report sometimes or often using the avoidance behavior compared with 15% to 20% of students who have experienced in-school, face-to-face bullying. Students who have been cyberbullied are more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors with close to 30% of these students reporting sometimes or often avoiding school all together, avoiding hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, restrooms, changing their online

activities and altering the way they get to and from school. For each avoidance behavior, it should be highlighted that those students who report experiencing both bullying and cyberbullying (n=156) indicate the highest levels of using each type of avoidance behavior.

Conclusion

School safety is a laudable goal for every school administrator. In this Fact Sheet we have reported on the consequences of various forms of victimization in school and on the way to and from school. Students who are victimized engage in a number of strategies to avoid repeat victimization, including not going to school. A significant number of students report avoiding specific locations in schools to reduce their likelihood of further victimization. It is imperative that administrators and other school personnel recognize the consequences of bullying and victimization. Taking steps to increase the safety of hallways, restrooms, and locker rooms is a recommended strategy.