



Research Brief: Perceptions of School Safety among Students Participating in the Longitudinal Evaluation of Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E.

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Background

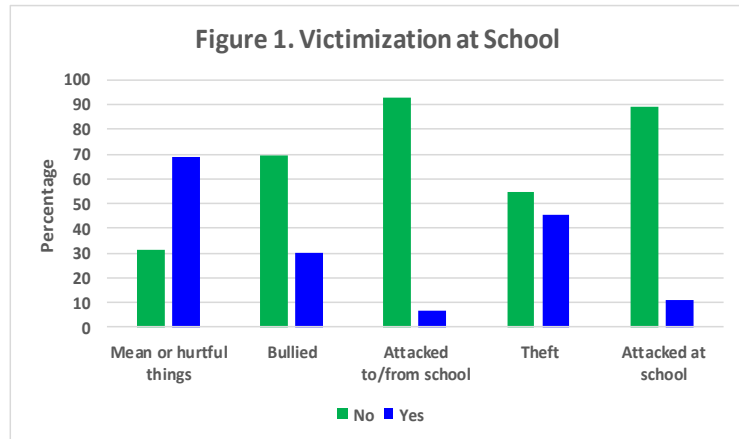
In recent years, high profile mass casualty shootings in places like Parkland, Florida and Newtown, Connecticut have drawn national attention to issues of school safety and stimulated public discussion to the ways in which schools can modify practices, policies, and the physical layout of facilities to reduce the likelihood of the violent victimization of students. Despite widespread media coverage, school shootings remain statistically rare. Instead, students are much more likely to experience non-lethal forms of victimization, such as bullying, simple assault, and theft. These experiences are associated with detrimental consequences for psychosocial well-being, academic performance, and school climate (Smithyman et al., 2014).¹ In an effort to document indicators of school safety among students participating in Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E., the following report describes victimization experiences, fear of crime, and perceptions of school climate among students attending five middle schools in North St. Louis County.

Data

Data for the study are drawn from baseline self-report surveys administered to 427 7th-grade students participating in the longitudinal evaluation of Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E.. Approximately two-thirds of the sample (N=279) is drawn from three intervention schools and the remaining one-third (N=148) from two control schools. The average age of respondents is 12.69, 58.3 percent of the sample identify as female, 76 percent identify as African American and 11 percent as multiracial.

Victimization at School

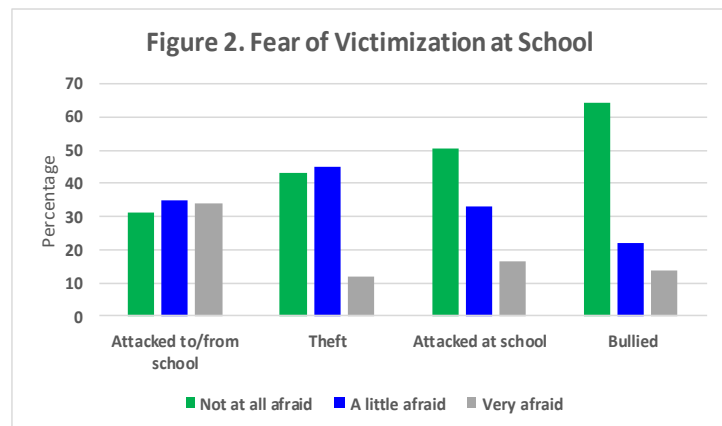
Students were asked to indicate whether they had *ever* experienced any of five types of victimization at school or on their way to or from school. These include measures of bullying, physical assault, and theft. As demonstrated in Figure 1, students in the



Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. evaluation experience relatively low levels of criminal victimization while on school premises. For instance, the majority of students report that they have never had things stolen from them at school (54.7%), been bullied (69.6%), been threatened / attacked at school (89%), or been threatened/ attacked on their way to or from school (93.1%). However, most students report that they had mean or hurtful things said about them while at school, suggesting minor forms of harassment typical of youth this age are more prevalent than more serious forms of victimization.

Fear of Victimization at School

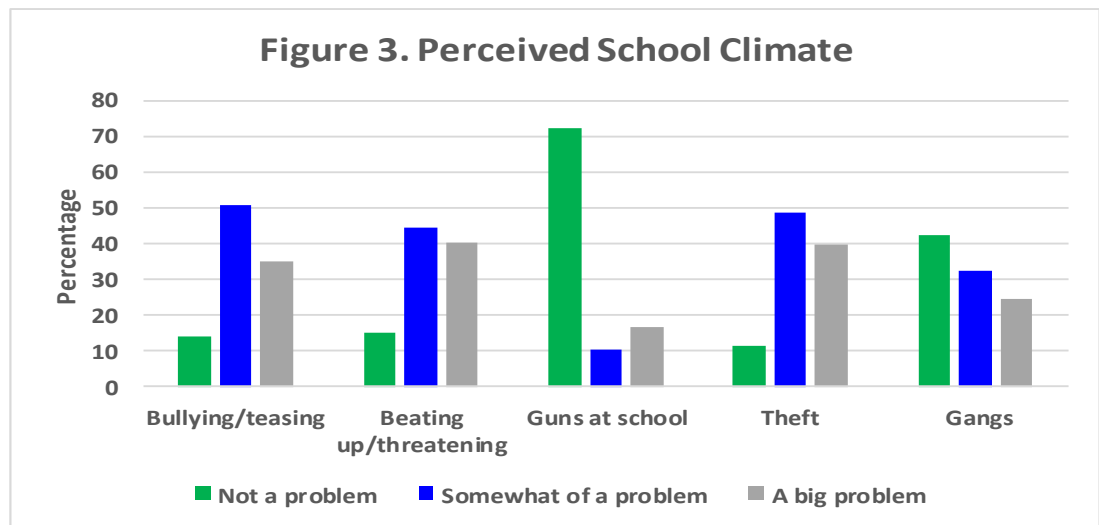
Students were also asked how fearful they were of experiencing certain types of victimization while at school, including being attacked/ threatened while at school and being bullied. Figure 2 presents results regarding students' fear of these



victimization types. Most students report being somewhat afraid or very afraid of being attacked on their way to or from school or having things stolen from them at school. However, notably fewer students reported being afraid of being attacked or threatened at schools (approximately half) or being bullied (approximately one-third).

Perceived School Climate

Students were also asked about how much they perceived various types of delinquency being a problem in their school. Figure 3 presents the results regarding students' opinions on how much of a problem they think these issues are. The majority of students thought that bullying (85.8%), students beating up or threatening others (84.7%), theft (88.3%), and gangs (57.3%) were at least somewhat of a problem in their school. Notably, a majority of students (72.2%) indicated that students bringing guns to their school was not a problem. That being said, a full one-third of all students reported guns in their schools were at least somewhat of a problem. While certainly much smaller than the proportion of students reporting on more common forms of victimization, this still reflects a non-trivial proportion of all students participating in the longitudinal evaluation.



Conclusion

The findings reported here suggest that most students have experienced some level of interpersonal conflict while at school, the majority of whom report having had mean or hurtful things said about them. When contrasted against the proportion of students who report having been bullied, this suggests that students may not interpret more minor forms of harassment as bullying, per se. As Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. continues to work with the students in the intervention cohort, this seems like an impactful way to address minor forms of interpersonal conflict which might otherwise escalate into bullying behavior or more serious forms of victimization as students

transition to high school and beyond. Additionally, the vast majority of students indicated that they had not been attacked at school or on their way to or from school. Thus, these data indicate that “minor” forms of victimization are more prevalent at school. However, students seem to be much more afraid of violent victimization. From this vantage point, students in Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. might benefit from curriculum that addresses steps students may take to protect themselves and their property while out in the community. Finally, many students, regardless of personal experiences, see bullying, violence, and gangs as a problem in their schools. Insofar as perceptions of school climate contribute to a healthy developmental context, Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. curriculum should continue to focus on ways to make students feel safer in their schools environments.

Contact Information

For further information on Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. or the longitudinal evaluation efforts, please contact:

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References

¹Smithyman, T. F., Fireman, G. D., & Asher, Y. (2014). Long-term psychosocial consequences of peer victimization: From elementary to high school. *School Psychology Quarterly, 29* (1), 64.