

Bullying

**Indicators of Child
and Youth Well-Being**

In 2014, 13 percent of children, ages two through 17, experienced physical bullying, and 36 percent experienced teasing or emotional bullying, in the past year.

Importance

Bullying, defined as repeated interpersonal behavior, typically between children with unequal power, which is intended to do physical or psychological harm, can lead to other negative outcomes for both the bully and the victim. Bullying itself can take different forms: physical coercion, hostile teasing or emotional bullying, or harassment via the Internet.

According to studies in multiple countries, including the U.S., children who are bullied by their peers are more lonely and unhappy, have greater difficulty making friends, have more health problems, and show more internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression, than their non-bullied peers.¹ According to one study, youths who were bullied were more likely to become suicidal than their non-bullied peers. The difference was stark: males were four times more likely, and females were eight times more likely, to have suicidal thoughts.²

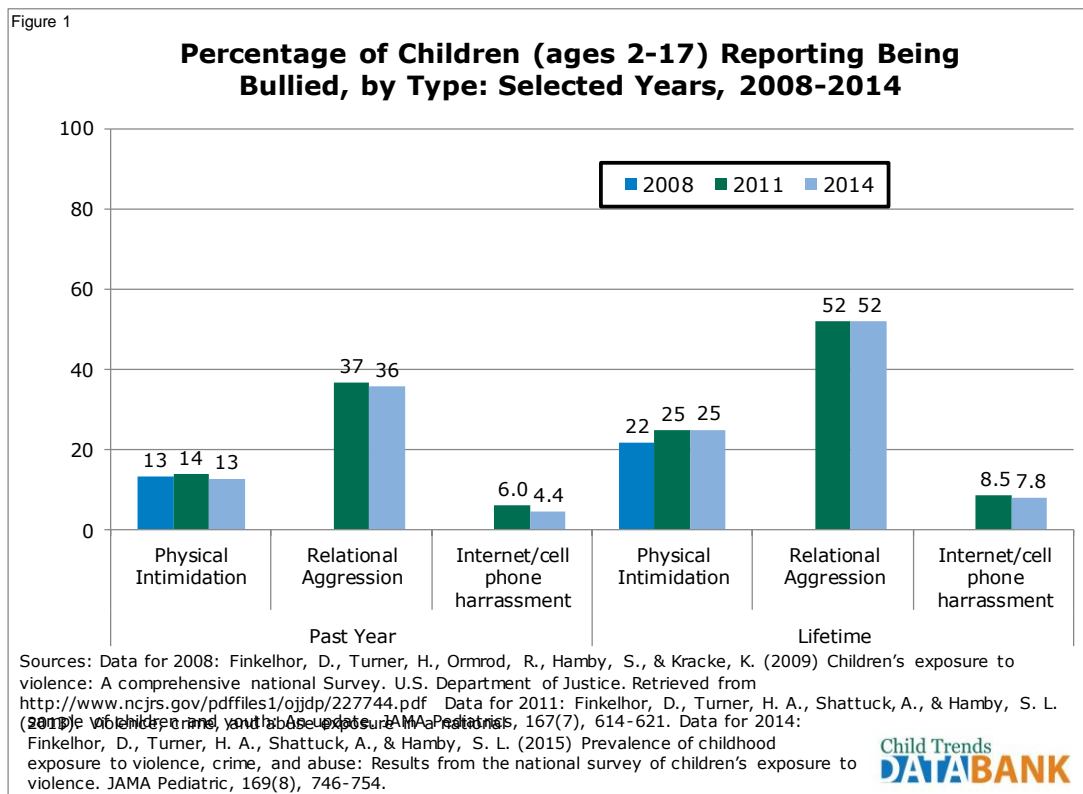
Bullies themselves are more likely to be involved in other problem behaviors, such as drinking and smoking, and to show poorer school adjustment, both in terms of academic achievement and in their perception of school climate.³ Bullies' anti-social behavior may persist into adulthood. One study found that males who were bullies in grades six through nine were more likely to commit a crime in young adulthood than were their non-bully peers: nearly 60 percent were convicted of a crime by age 24, and 40 percent had three or more convictions.⁴

Children themselves view bullying as an important problem, particularly at school, which is where most bullying occurs. More 8- to 15-year-olds named teasing and bullying as "big problems," than those who named drugs or alcohol, racism, AIDS, or the pressure to have sex, in one study.⁵ According to children, ages 12-18, who reported being bullied in the 2007-2008 school year, 79 percent of this behavior occurred within the school, 23 percent on school grounds, 8 percent on the school bus, and 4 percent somewhere else.⁶ Targeting the victim's physical appearance and stature is the most frequent type of bullying, followed by starting and passing rumors; hitting, slapping, or pushing; and subjecting victims to sexual comments or gestures. Negative comments about the victim's race or religion were named least often as the subject of bullying.⁷

A 2013 survey found that only 39 percent of students who were bullied at school had notified a teacher or another adult at school about the incident(s), suggesting that most bullying goes unreported.⁸

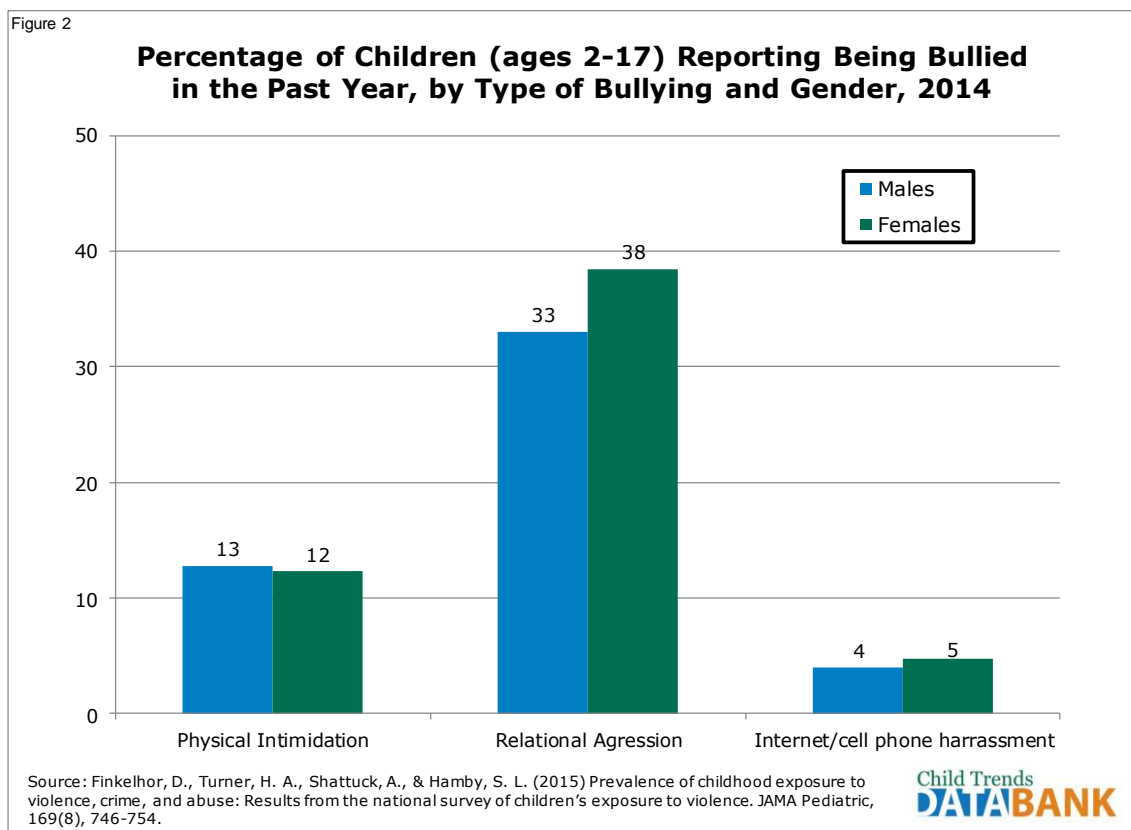
Trends

Data from the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) are available for 2008, 2011, and 2014. There were no significant changes in any type of bullying over these years. (Figure 1) Other trend data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that, while bullying at school was generally steady between 2005 and 2011, it was much lower in 2013. Twenty-two percent of students, ages 12 through 18, reported being bullied at school in 2013, compared with 28 percent in 2005, 2009, and 2011.⁹ Due to changes in the questionnaire, comparable earlier data are not available.



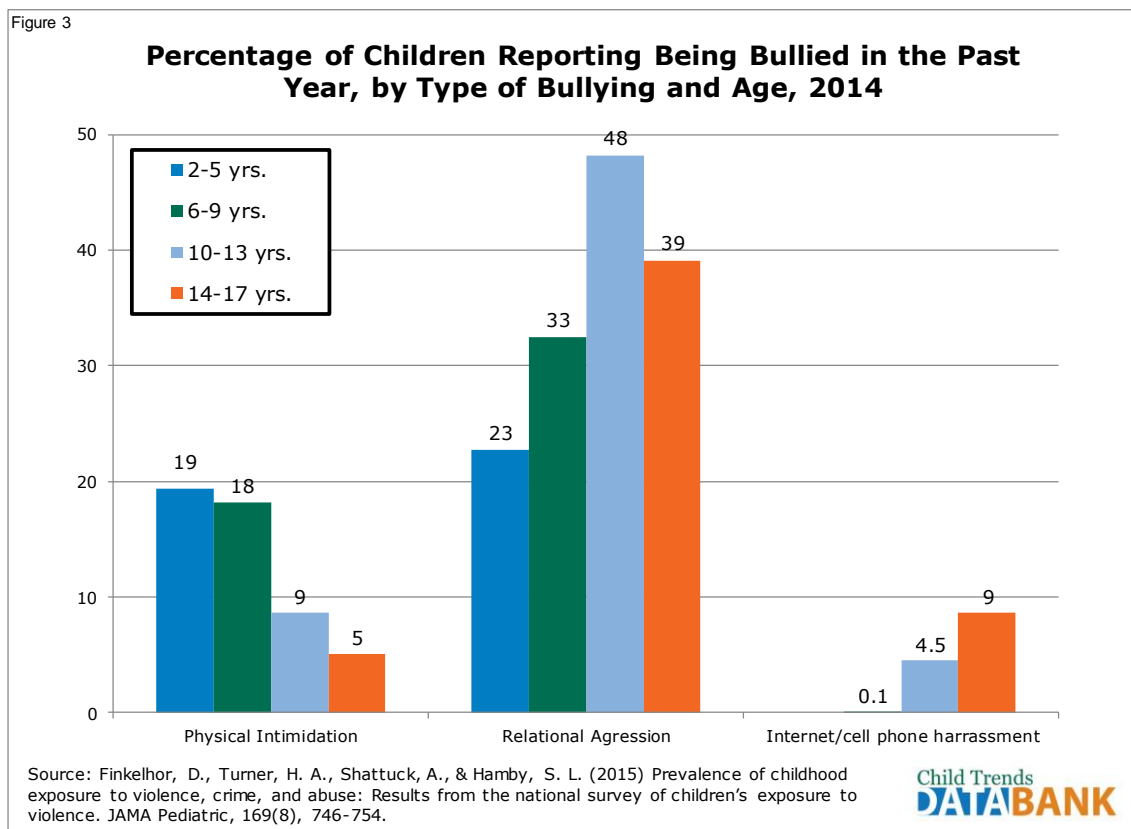
Differences by Gender

In 2014, males and females were equally likely to experience physical intimidation (e.g., being hit, slapped, or pushed), at 13 and 12 percent, respectively, as well as Internet or cell phone harassment (5 and 4 percent, respectively), within the past year. Females were more likely to be the targets of relational aggression (teasing or emotional bullying, 38 versus 33 percent, in the past year). (Figure 2) However, in terms of lifetime exposure, females were more likely than males to have experienced all types of bullying. (Appendix 1)



Differences by Age

The risk for bullying peaks at different ages for different types of bullying. In 2014, physical intimidation was most commonly reported by children under 10 years: its prevalence was 19 percent among children ages two to five, and 18 percent among children ages six to nine, compared with 9 percent among children ages 10 to 13, and 5 percent among children ages 14 to 17. Relational aggression peaks later, with 23 percent of children ages two to five reporting it in the past year, compared with 33 percent of children ages six to nine, 48 percent of children ages 10 to 13, and 39 percent of youth 14 to 17. Internet and cell phone harassment was most common at ages 14-17 (nine percent, compared with less than five percent among younger children). (Figure 3)



Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin¹⁰

During the 2013 school year, 24 percent of white students ages 12 to 18 were bullied at school or cyber-bullied anywhere. That is higher than the proportion among Hispanic students (19 percent), or Asian students (9 percent). Twenty percent of black students were bullied at school or cyber-bullied anywhere, a proportion which is higher than that among Asian students but similar to those for white and Hispanic students.¹¹

State and Local Estimates

State-level estimates of the proportion of children ages 6 to 17 who bullied peers in the past month (as reported by parents) are available from the Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health at <http://childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=1248>

International Estimates

According to a study including 25 countries, involvement in bullying varies widely across nations, ranging from nine to 54 percent. The share of children who identified themselves as victims ranged from 5 to 20 percent, by country, with an average of 11 percent. The proportion identifying themselves as bullies ranged from 3 to 20 percent, with an average of 10 percent. Those classifying themselves as both bullies and victims ranged from 1 to 20 percent, with an average of six percent.¹²

The full report is available here: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2556236/>

Another study, Health Behavior in School-Aged Children, reports on bullies and bully victims in 39 countries by the following categories: age, gender, geography, and family affluence.

More information is available here: <http://www.euro.who.int/Document/E91416.pdf> (see page 191)

National Goals

Through its *Healthy People 2020* initiative, the federal government has set a national goal to reduce bullying among adolescents (on school grounds only), from 19.9 percent in 2009, to 17.9 percent in 2020.

More information available at:

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/objectiveslist.aspx?topicId=37> (See goal IVP-35)

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

See Lawner, E. K., & Terzian, M. A. (2013). *What works for bullying programs: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and interventions*. Available at <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=what-works-for-bullying-programs-lessons-from-experimental-evaluations-of-programs-and-interventions> and

DeVooght, K., Daily, S., Darling-Churchill, K., Temkin, D., Novak, M., & VanderVen, K. (2015). *Bullies in the block area: The early childhood origins of "mean" behavior*. Available at <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2015-31BulliesBlockArea.pdf>

Also see Child Trends' LINKS database ("Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully"), for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective:

- Steps to Respect Bullying Prevention Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=steps-to-respect-bullying-prevention-program
- Positive Action Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=positive-action-program
- Positive Parenting: www.childtrends.org/?programs=positive-parenting-and-the-pediatric-symptom-checklist
- Resolve It, Solve It: www.childtrends.org/?programs=resolve-it-solve-it
- Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT): www.childtrends.org/?programs=linking-the-interests-of-families-and-teachers-lift
- Playworks: <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=playworks>

Also, see: the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: <http://www.olweus.org/public/index.page>

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Preventing bullying through science, policy, and practice*. F. Rivera and S. Le Menestrel, Eds. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Related Indicators

- Children's Exposure to Violence: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=childrens-exposure-to-violence
- Victims of Hate Speech: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=victims-of-hate-speech
- Unsafe at School: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=unsafe-at-school
- Physical Fighting by Youth: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=physical-fighting-by-youth
- Dating Violence: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dating-violence>

Definition

According to the NatSCEV research team, physical intimidation is defined as when “a peer picked on [a] child (for example, by chasing, grabbing hair or clothes, or making [a] child do something he or she did not want to do). Relational aggression includes teasing or emotional bullying—when a child was scared or made to feel really bad because he or she was harassed by a peer for example, by name calling, having mean things said, or being told that he or she was unwelcome, as well as peers’ telling lies or spreading rumors about the child, trying to make others dislike the child, keeping the child out of things on purpose, excluding the child from their group of friends, or completely ignoring the child. Cell phone or Internet harassment is defined as when someone used the Internet or a cell phone to bother or harass a child (including posting messages or pictures).¹³

Data come from telephone interviews conducted with a randomly selected child in the household, or if the selected child was younger than 10, with the adult caregiver “most familiar with the child’s daily routines and experiences.”

Data Sources

- Data for 2014: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. L. (2015) Prevalence of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: Results from the national survey of children’s exposure to violence. *JAMA Pediatric*, 169(8), 746-754.
- Data for 2011: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. L. (2013). Violence, crime, and abuse exposure in a national sample of children and youth: An update. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 167(7), 614-621.
- Data for 2008: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (2009) *Children’s exposure to violence: A comprehensive national Survey*. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf>

Raw Data Source

National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence.

<http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/projects/natscev.html>

Appendix 1 - Percentage of Children (ages 2-17) who are Bullying Victims, by Type of Bullying, Gender, and Age-Group: 2008, 2011, and 2014

	Past Year			Lifetime		
	2008	2011	2014	2008	2011	2014
Physical intimidation	13.2	13.7	12.6	21.6	24.6	24.7
Gender						
Males	16.7	14.1	12.8	25.9	24.3	22.6
Females	12.8	13.3	12.3	22.4	25.0	27.0
Age						
2-5 yrs.	19.1	18.3	19.4	20.4	-	-
6-9 yrs.	21.5	16.3	18.2	28.0	-	-
10-13 yrs.	10.7	10.9	8.6	19.9	-	-
14-17 yrs.	8.0	9.6	5.1	28.5	33.7	29.9
Relational aggression	-	36.5	35.6	-	51.8	51.8
Gender						
Males	-	31.9	33.0	-	48.4	48.7
Females	-	41.4	38.4	-	55.5	55.1
Age						
2-5 yrs.	-	22.0	22.7	-	-	-
6-9 yrs.	-	40.5	32.5	-	-	-
10-13 yrs.	-	44.5	48.2	-	-	-
14-17 yrs.	-	39.6	39.1	-	72.3	75.0
Internet/cell phone harassment	-	6.0	4.4	-	8.5	7.8
Gender						
Males	-	3.8	4.0	-	5.8	5.7
Females	-	8.3	4.8	-	11.3	10.1
Age						
2-5 yrs.	-	-	-	-	-	-
6-9 yrs.	-	0.5	0.1	-	-	-
10-13 yrs.	-	4.4	4.5	-	-	-
14-17 yrs.	-	13.9	8.6	-	20.3	17.9

"-"Data are not available.

Sources: Data for 2008: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (2009) *Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national Survey*. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf> Data for 2011: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. L. (2013). Violence, crime, and abuse exposure in a national sample of children and youth: An update. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 167(7), 614-621. Data for 2014: Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. L. (2015) Prevalence of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: Results from the national survey of children's exposure to violence. *JAMA Pediatric*, 169(8), 746-754.

Endnotes

¹ Takizawa, R., Maughan, B., Arseneault, L. (2014). Adult health outcomes of childhood bullying victimization: Evidence from a five-decade longitudinal British cohort. *American Journal of Psychology*, 7, 777-84.

Copeland, W. E., Wolke, D., Lereya, S. T., Shanahan, L., Worthman, C., & Costello, E. J. (2014). Childhood bullying involvement predicts low-grade systemic inflammation into adulthood. *PNAS Early Edition*, 111(21), 7570-7575

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, J. W, Simons-Morton, B., Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 16, 2094-2100. Retrieved from <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/285/16/2094>

² Kaltiala-Heino, R., Rimpela, M., Marttunen, M., Rimpela, A., and Rantanen, P. (1999). Bullying, depression, and suicidal ideation in Finnish adolescents: school survey. *British Journal of Medicine*, 319, 348-351.

³ Nansel, T. R., et al. (2001). Op. cit.

⁴ Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1999). Bullying prevention program. In D. S. Elliott (Series Ed.). *Blueprints for violence prevention: Book nine*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

⁵ The Kaiser Family Foundation and International Communications Research (ICR) (2001) Talking with kids about tough issues. Retrieved from <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=13791>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nansel, T. R., et al. (2001). Op. cit.

⁸ Zhang, A., Musu-Gillette, L., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2016). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2015*. (NCES 2016-079 and NCJ 249758). U. S. Department of Education and the U. S. Department of Justice. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016079>

⁹ Zhang, A., Musu-Gillette, L., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2016). Op cit. Table 11.1

¹⁰ Hispanics may be of any race.

¹¹ Zhang, A., Musu-Gillette, L., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2016). Op. cit.

¹² Nansel, T. R., et al. Op. cit.

¹³ Personal correspondence with Anne M. Shattuck, M.A., researcher at the Crimes Against Children Research Center <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/>