Students’ Perceptions of Bullying

The data used in this report come from the 2017 School Crime Supplement (SCS), a nationally representative sample survey of students ages 12 through 18 enrolled in public or private school for all or part of the school year (not homeschooled for all of the school year). The SCS is administered every other year to students as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The SCS collects additional information from students in NCVS survey households about their experiences with being bullied.

Since 2014, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Education have promoted the use of a uniform definition of bullying. In 2015, the SCS was updated to include two components of bullying from the uniform definition (repetition and power imbalance). “Repetition” includes students who reported being bullied more than one day or more than once in a day, as well as students who thought the bullying would happen again. “Power imbalance” includes students who reported being bullied by someone who had more power or strength (e.g., someone bigger, more popular, with more money, influence, or more power in any other way) as well as students who reported being bullied by multiple students acting as a team or acting both alone and as a team.

This report investigates the relationship between these components and the various personal characteristics that students believed to be related to the bullying they experienced. It further examines the relationship between bullying components and the negative effects of bullying on students’ feelings about themselves, their schoolwork, and their relationships with family and friends.

Bullied students who perceived a power imbalance and who experienced repeated bullying reported that they were bullied because of their race, ethnic origin, or appearance at higher rates than bullied students who reported experiencing only one component of bullying (figure 1).

- More students reported being bullied about their appearance when being bullied with power imbalance and repetition (39 percent) than when being bullied with either component but not both (12 percent) or bullied overall (30 percent).
- Similarly, more students reported being bullied about their race and ethnic origin (11 percent and 9 percent, respectively) when bullied with both power imbalance and repetition than when bullied with either component but not both (6 percent and 3 percent, respectively).

Students who experienced bullying with power imbalance and repetition reported more negative effects than those who experienced bullying overall or bullying with only one component (figure 2).

- Students who reported being bullied with both power imbalance and repetition also reported negative effects on how they felt about themselves (36 percent) and their schoolwork (27 percent) more than those who were bullied overall (19 percent and 27 percent, respectively).

- When compared to students who reported that they were bullied with either power imbalance or repetition, a higher percentage of students who reported they were bullied with both components reported negative effects on their schoolwork (6 percent vs. 27 percent), relationship with friends or family (6 percent vs. 25 percent), and their views of themselves (9 percent vs. 36 percent).

**Endnotes**


2 For the 2016–2017 school year, 20 percent of students reported being bullied at school in any way, 14 percent reported being bullied with repetition and power imbalance, and 5 percent reported being bullied with repetition or power imbalance.