Bullying victims often suffer academically, particularly high achieving blacks and Latinos

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Victims of bullying often suffer academically, and this is particularly true for high achieving black and Latino students, according to new research to be presented at the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"Although academic achievement is largely influenced by family background and school characteristics, our study suggests that the experience of being bullied also influences students' grades," said Lisa M. Williams, a doctoral student in sociology at Ohio State University, and lead author of the study. "We find that bullying has implications for achievement regardless of racial and ethnic background, but seems to be especially detrimental for subsets of certain racial and ethnic groups."

The study relies on nationally representative data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), which, among other things, asked students whether they were bullied during the 2001-2002 academic year, when they were in 10th grade. Williams and her co-author, Anthony A. Peguero, a sociology professor at Virginia Tech, compared the academic achievement (the GPAs) of ELS participants in 9th grade, before the bullying occurred, with their academic achievement during the 2003-2004 school year, when they were in 12th grade. The scale for GPA ranges from zero (lowest) to four (highest). Their sample consisted of 9,590 students in 580 schools, including 1,150 Asians, 1,360 blacks, 1,470 Latinos, and 5,610 whites. Racial and ethnic minorities are

oversampled in ELS to obtain a sufficient representation for statistical analysis.

According to the study, students who were bullied in the 10th grade experienced a .049 points decrease in 12th grade GPA. "This effect, though small, is highly significant and suggests that bullying negatively affects GPA even after factoring in previous grades, family background, and school characteristics often associated with achievement, which are all variables the study controls for," Williams said.

But, Williams said, the most striking aspect of the study is the considerable negative effect bullying has on the GPAs of high achieving black and Latino students. For example, Williams and Peguero found that black students—who had 3.5 GPAs in 9th grade and were bullied in 10th grade—experienced a .3 points decrease in their 12th grade GPAs. The effect of bullying was even greater for high achieving Latinos. Latino students with 3.5 GPAs in 9th grade, who were bullied in 10th grade, had 12th grade GPAs that were .5 points lower. By way of comparison, white students—who had 3.5 GPAs in 9th grade and were bullied in 10th grade—saw their GPAs decrease by .03 points in 12th grade.

"Stereotypes about black and Latino youth suggest that they perform poorly in school," Williams said. "High achieving blacks and Latinos who do not conform to these stereotypes may be especially vulnerable to the effect bullying has on grades."

In terms of the study's policy implications, Williams said the study makes the case that policy-makers and educators should be thinking about the effect bullying has on student achievement. "We urge them to invest resources into protecting students from bullying, which will have implications for achievement, especially the achievement of racial and ethnic minorities," Williams said.

More information: The paper, "The Impact of School Bullying on Racial/Ethnic Achievement," will be presented on Tuesday, Aug. 23, in Caesars Palace Las Vegas, at the American Sociological Association's 106th Annual Meeting.

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