

Study links prevalence of bullying, teasing to high dropout rates

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Teasing and bullying is linked to the dropout rate of students, according to the latest report from the Virginia High School Safety Study, directed by Dewey Cornell, a professor at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education.

"This study suggests that teasing and bullying at the high [school](#) level is a noteworthy problem that is associated with the most serious negative outcome, failure to graduate," he said.

The prevalence of teasing and bullying in Virginia high schools was assessed through surveying 7,082 ninth-grade [students](#) and 2,764 teachers in Virginia on their perceptions of school climate. Researchers measured the dropout rates of students who were high school freshmen in 2007 over their four years of high school.

Previous bullying studies have focused on the effects of bullying on individual victims, but this study showed a school-wide impact. "It adds new evidence to the importance of school climate for [academic success](#) in high school," Cornell said.

The study was published Oct. 22 in the online edition of the [Journal of Educational Psychology](#) and will appear in its printed edition early next year. Researchers include Anne Gregory of Rutgers University; Francis Huang, also of the Curry School; and Xitao Fan of the University of Macao, China. (Gregory and Fan are former Curry faculty members.) Cornell is also associate director for the program area studying teen risk

at Youth-Nex: The Center to Promote Effective Youth Development at U.Va.

According to Cornell, the survey found that the dropout rate was 29 percent above average in schools with high levels of teasing and bullying, but 28 percent below average in schools with comparatively low levels of teasing and bullying.

"The study demonstrated that the link between bullying and dropout rates was not due to differences in student demographics, such as the number of students from low-income families," Cornell said. "The study found that high levels of bullying in the school increased dropout counts from 18.6 students to 25.3 students in schools with high levels of low-income students and increased the dropout counts from 13.7 students to 18.6 students in schools with few low-income students."

Other analyses showed that the effects of teasing and bullying were not due to the [academic performance](#) of the students.

"We found that student demographics and academic performance are indeed predictive of dropout rates, as is commonly known," Cornell said. "But we showed that [bullying](#) was predictive of dropout rates, independent of those other factors. Moreover, the effects associated with school climate were just as large as those associated with student demographics and academic performance."

Cornell said that academic performance is clearly important, but that schools trying to reduce their dropout rates should pay more attention to the school climate and strive to create safer social environments for students.

"This study adds to growing evidence of the effects of school climate on student learning," Cornell said.

Cornell pointed out that the Virginia [High School](#) Safety Study has led to a new statewide effort to assess school climate systematically in all secondary schools, from seventh to 12th grades.

"Starting next spring," he said, "we plan to provide schools with regular, standardized reports of school climate conditions in order to help them in making data-based decisions about the needs of their students."

More information: psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2012-28392-001/

Provided by University of Virginia

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