

# ***Examining Bullying: Moving From Crisis Prone to Crisis Prepared***

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## **Introduction**

Achieving a sense of belonging and wellbeing for youth, where rewards are passed onto society, requires a holistic approach to child development. Early introduction and continued reinforcement of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, both at home and at school, have a positive impact on behaviors like bullying. The one trait perpetrators of recent school massacres had in common is that they were reported to have been bullied. Bullying and victimization have been highly correlated to arrests, weapon carrying, gang activity, and suicidal ideation. Bullying must be taken seriously if society wants to reduce high school dropout and crime rates, increase academic performance and workplace productivity, and improve mental health. As stakeholders in the fight against bullying, it is important to be able to recognize the signs of a bully and a target, and to accumulate a toolkit of effective prevention and intervention techniques and technologies to address problems. Will our schools become prison-like facilities though, with metal detectors and gun carrying teachers, or can we drill deeper to resolve underlying issues surrounding injury to ourselves and others? While we like to think resiliency can be 'bought' through programs and materials, it is ultimately families, neighbors, schools and the community at large, which have influence to spread empathy and respect; to deem harassment and violence the outcasts.

## **DEFINING THE PROBLEM**

Bullying creates unwanted notoriety overnight -- leading to health, litigation and public relations problems, medical and insurance costs.

**Bullying** is repeated, unwelcome abuse from those perceived as more powerful. Bullying has been on the rise since 2001 according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry estimates nearly half of all children will experience bullying in primary or secondary school, with 10% bullied systemically. According to our first lady, an estimated 13 million school aged children are bullied each year. There are approximately 282,000 students attacked in high schools nationwide each month (Schmitt). Teachers intervene in approximately 4 percent of cases, while 15% of teens skip school daily saying it's out of fear of being bullied, and 1 in 10 drop out or changing schools because of bullying. (DoSomething.org) Estimated that

160,000 children miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students (National Education Association).

**Cyberbullying** uses digital technology to torment or embarrass targets, affecting about half of all teens. This form of bullying spreads viral rumors and threats at record-breaking speeds, unbound by time or place. Anonymous perpetrators tend to be extraordinarily mean and material is often sexual. In ranking problems at their schools, educators placed cyberbullying above smoking and drugs. Ninety-seven (97) percent of youth have access to the Internet, with over 66% of 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders having Internet access in their bedrooms through a computer or smart phone. Statistics from i-SAFE found over half of adolescents and teens had been bullied online, with 10 to 20 percent experiencing it regularly. One in ten adolescents or teens have had embarrassing or damaging pictures taken without their permission, often using cell phone cameras; about 1 in 5 teens have posted or sent sexually suggestive or nude pictures of themselves. The consequences of minors dominating channels of communication can be frightening, yet, only 20% of incidents are reported to law enforcement and 10% to a parent.

**Bullying and victimization are precursors to risky adult behaviors associated with gang and domestic violence, workplace and sexual harassment.** Research at the Harvard School of Public Health revealed that individuals who perpetrate abusive behaviors are likely to do so across childhood into adulthood. Sixty (60) percent of youth experience violence right in their own homes. The seeds of bullying and victimization may be planted at home, and behaviors mirrored at school, when harsh or inconsistent parenting styles, domestic violence, financial strain or substance abuse are prevalent. Children who witness domestic violence are at a much higher risk of becoming both bullies and victims (Mountain Crisis Services). Bullies are 4 times as likely to be convicted of crimes by age 24; 60% of bullies receive at least one criminal conviction, 40% are charged with multiple convictions (N.Y. State Police, Olweus). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 1 in 4 children who bully will have a criminal record by the time they reach age 30. According to the Dept. of Justice, 37 to 50 percent of gang members are younger than 18, with gangs responsible for up to 80% of all crimes. Harassment and bullying have been linked to 75% of school shootings (DoSomething.org). Among boys who bullied others at least one time per week, greater than half had carried a weapon in the past month (Family & Work Institute, Groundspark.org). According to the journal Pediatrics, men who frequently bullied others in school were 4 times more likely to physically abuse their partner. In the long term, bullies are more likely to participate in domestic violence, criminality, and substance abuse because of maladaptive social skills reinforced by bullying (Crothers, Levinson).

### **WHO IS AFFECTED BY BULLYING?**

Bullying affects most youngsters: those who bully, those who are targeted, and those who witness bullying. Bullying comes about when a person is perceived as

different due to gender, appearance, sexual orientation, race, religion, ethnicity, physical challenges, performance, or mental, emotional and behavioral (MEB) issues. About 90% of 4<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> graders report being bullied, and half of 14 to 17 year olds receive cyberbully threats.

**MOST AT RISK --**

**10% of bully targets systemically harassed.** Peer victimization becomes increasingly stable over time, with the same children enduring negative experiences throughout childhood and adolescence (Archives of General Psychiatry).

**22.5% of high school bully targets experiencing suicide ideation (CDC).** Yale School of Medicine reported a strong connection between bullying, being bullied and suicide (2010). Thirty (30) percent of all child suicides can be directly related to bullying (Hawker, Boulton, 2000). According to Groundspark.org, those who are bullied are 5 times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal. Statistics indicate that from 100 to 200 attempts are made for every one suicide. Suicide accounts for 14% of all adolescent deaths. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 8.5% of students in grades 9-12 reported a suicide attempt in the past year.

**40.9% of middle school bully targets likely to intentionally harm themselves (CDC).** Research conducted in Canada, the United States, and select countries throughout Europe report consistent rates of self-injury within populations of adolescents of 20 to 23 percent (Muehlenkamp, J.). A British study of over 2,000 children showed that 12-year-olds who had endured bullying were up to 3 times more likely to bite or cut their own arms, pull out hair clumps, or attempt suicide. One in ten persons intentionally hurt themselves by the age of 16 (Stamp Out Bullying).

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GBTQ) Persons -** Approximately 9 out of 10 LGBT teens report being bullied at school, half of them physically harassed and a quarter physically assaulted (makebeatsnotbeatdowns.org). Gay and lesbian teens are 2 to 3 times more likely to commit suicide than their peers. LGBT students are 5 times more likely to miss school because they feel unsafe and have a 28 percent dropout rate. About one-third of school staff were unresponsive to gay students who came forward to report bullying. Twelve (12) percent of children are involved in homophobic bullying and a greater percent are involved in homophobic banter. According to Groundspark.org, for every LGBT student reported being harassed, four straight students said they were harassed for being perceived as gay or lesbian. (Bullystatistics.org, ViolencePreventionWorks.org).

**Persons with disabilities (visible or invisible physical, sensory, learning, intellectual, emotional or health problems - ie., Autism, 83% of those who**

**stutter, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, Tourette Syndrome)** – Children with disabilities, special needs or those who are socially isolated are at particular risk. Studies conducted in the U.S. connecting bullying and developmental disabilities found that children with disabilities were 2 to 3 times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. One study showed that 60 percent of students with disabilities reported being bullied regularly, compared to 25 percent of all students (NCD.gov) Females with disabilities are more likely to be sexually harassed than their peers.

**Persons, especially females, experiencing sexualized bullying, domestic violence and workplace harassment** - 23.6 percent of women and 11.5 percent of men reported being victims of 'intimate partner violence' at some time in their lives. The CDC estimates that 1,200 women are killed and 2 million injured in domestic violence annually. A study of over 1,600 students in grades 8 to 11, found 85 percent of girls and 76 percent of boys reported being sexually harassed in school (American Association of University Women). One in four adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse from a dating partner each year (Breaking the Cycle of Teen Dating Abuse, Verizon Foundation). According to the National Council for Research on Women, women are 9 times more likely than men to quit their jobs, 5 times more likely to transfer, and 3 times more likely to lose jobs because of harassment. Domestic Violence – 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence during their lifetime. 15.5 million children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year; 7 million children live in families where severe partner violence occurred. In 2010, 113,378 crimes of domestic violence were reported to Florida law enforcement, equating to 477,489 nights of emergency shelter and 67,810 arrests. (Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence)

**Gang members** – Bullies and targets join gangs to gain acceptance and friends, and for perceived safety that comes with membership. In fact, youth are far more likely to be violently victimized while in a gang; gang fights approximately double or triple the odds of serious injury.

**Post secondary school students** – 15 percent of college students reported being bullied and nearly 22 percent reported being cyberbullied (MacDonald, C.). When the population is 18 years old and up, bullying may lead to serious charges such as those associate with harassment, violence and stalking. If the Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act is passed, it would require colleges and universities that receive federal student aid to have a policy that prohibits harassment of students based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion. For a complete FBI report on campus attacks: <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/campus-attacks>. For statistics by campus and for aggregate statistics: The Campus Safety & Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool - <http://ope.ed.gov/security/>.

**Workers in hostile environments** - A 2007 poll found that one-third of employees, or 54 million American workers were bullied on the job. Assaults and suicides, account for 17 percent of all work-related fatal occupational injuries in 2011 or 4,609 deaths, at a rate of 3.5 full time workers/ 100,000 (U.S. Dept. of Labor).

### **WHERE BULLYING RISKS MANIFEST**

There are academic, legal, insurance, medical, financial, productivity, psychological and physical ramification resulting from bullying.

**Academically** - The ability to learn, grades, competency levels, truancy, suspension, expulsion and graduation rates are scholastic components influenced by bullying. The American Sociological Association studied 9,590 students and found that bullying has a significant outcome on grade-point average (GPA). 15% of school absences are attributed to fear of attending.

**Psychologically** – Targets who have been ostracized experience humiliation, low self-esteem, isolation, fear, anxiety, depression and anti-social behavior. Unless children achieve minimal social competence by about 6 years of age, they have a high probability of being at risk into adulthood (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987). Research suggests that a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and citizenship are enhanced by opportunities to strengthen social competence. Peer relationships in particular contribute to social and cognitive development, and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults (Hartup & Moore, 1990; Kinsey, 2000; Ladd & Profilet, 1996; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rogoff, 1990) Hartup (1992). The single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades or behavior, but how children get along with other children. Children who are disliked, aggressive or disruptive, or unable to sustain close relationships are at serious risk. Being a bully is predictive of future substance abuse, depression and anxiety (Sourander, et al. 2007). The Attorney General's Task Force states children exposed to violence are at much greater risk of developing lethal medical illnesses in early adult years; to utilize disproportionately costly medical, psychological, and public health services; and to die prematurely (2012).

**Financially** - Community Matters estimates the economic impact of bullying, violence and vandalism for a typical high school of 1,000 students to be \$2,314,600. Over a lifetime, when high school bullying is prevented, the cost benefits to society totals \$1,412,995 per individual (Highmark Foundation). The costs associated with treatment of health issues related to bullying over an 18 month period are: mental health disorder, \$3,567.; psychosomatic symptoms, \$609.; headaches, \$1,472.; abdominal pain, \$609.; and alcohol abuse, \$2,150. (Highmark Foundation) Direct and indirect costs associated with youth violence exceed \$158 billion annually in the U.S.; school violence costs \$7.9 billion each year (Johns Hopkins, Clique In). The estimated cost in 2007 associated with

mental, emotional and behavioral (MEB) problems of young people in the United States was roughly \$247B (Eisenberg, Neighbors). The estimated cost of treating mental health problems in children is about \$8.9B annually (Soni, A., 2006).

An average Fortune 500 company spends \$24M on turnover costs, and \$225,000 - \$1.4M on litigation costs, due to bullying (Workplace Bully Institute). According to the Bureau of National Affairs, a typical American business spends \$5 to 6 million a year on bullying.

Sexual harassment can cost the average company up to \$6.7 million a year in low productivity, low morale, and employee turnover and absenteeism, not including litigation or other legal costs.

**Medically/Physically** - Exposure to harassment and violence is connected to the use of cigarettes, drugs and alcohol, and heightened risk of lethal illnesses. Bullycide and homicide are associated with harassment, with perpetrators of homicides being twice as likely as their victims to have been bullied. According to the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), targeted adults reported the following psychological affects: 45 percent suffered stress-related problems; over 80 percent had either debilitating anxiety or panic attacks; 39 percent suffered exacerbated or new clinical depression; and 30 percent of women and 21 percent of men suffered from post traumatic stress disorder.

**Legally** - Bullying may create interaction with law enforcement and others in a position of authority when linked with substance abuse, drug trafficking, aggravated assault, sex offences, larceny, burglary, vandalism, delinquency, misdemeanors, stalking, extortion, and the confiscation of computers for FBI investigation. Legal ramifications may involve federal, state and local laws (with school held accountable for behavior of students if they knew or should have known about a case and didn't properly intervene), Title VI, VII and IX, constitutional rights, Protection from Harassment Act, Violence Against Women Act, Victims of Crime Act, Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, civil, discrimination and hate crime laws. On campuses, student conduct codes and district disciplinary practices are in effect. Institutes of higher education (IHEs) are subject to reporting disclosures stipulated by the Clery Act and Campus Security Act.

**Productivity** – 35% of the U.S. workforce (an est. 53.5 million Americans) report being bullied at work. In 2008 there were 16,330 occupational assaults or violent acts of a nonfatal nature which led to days away from work. Eighty-two (82) percent of people targeted by a bully leave their workplace (Namie, G.). American Psychological Association estimate that of 1,500 workers surveyed, about 750 lost time from work due to rude workplace behavior.

## **Conclusion**

Bullying is a subset of the larger phenomenon of violence in society. It's now understood more broadly, no longer as an innocuous rite of passage encountered in playgrounds, but as an insidious trait of humanity within every demographic. Bullying changes costumes as often as a chameleon, even adapting itself to become a powerful contagion inside the technology we use to communicate. Behavior that discriminates, intimidates or harasses frequently leads to more serious offenses. It can leave permanent scars on targets, as well as, perpetrators, witnesses and bystanders. Although bullying is systemic, it can be minimized when employing evidence based techniques and technologies within a structure of accountability. It will only truly be eradicated when each of us takes up the yoke of our brother.

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