Bullying can cause a number of psychological and social issues in victims such as depression, poor self-image and greater dependency on adults. Bullying is common in elementary and secondary schooling and Canadian schools are no exception. Statistics show that more than one-third of Canadian students are either bullied, involved in bullying someone else, or both. Although there are a number of anti-bullying programs in effect in Canadian schools, reviews show that most have either shown no effect on reducing bullying rates, or in some cases, have actually caused harm. There is agreement that anti-bullying programs could be improved with increased adult supervision in certain areas (i.e. cafeteria, gym, etc.) where students are frequently bullied. This research surveyed elementary and secondary school students to identify such areas.

In their 2010 study, Professor Vaillancourt and her colleagues looked to identify areas in school compounds where students report being frequently bullied. The researchers surveyed 11,152 Canadian students ranging from Grades 4 – 12 from 65 schools in a large public school district in Southern Ontario. The researchers asked the students to identify typical areas in a school where they felt “unsafe”—that is, in danger of being bullied. The respondents were also able to suggest areas that the researchers had not considered.

Although elementary school students report being more frequently bullied in playgrounds during recess than do secondary school students, all students report feeling unsafe in cafeterias, washrooms and hallways.
What did the researchers find?

The researchers found important differences between elementary and secondary schools in terms of where students report being bullied more frequently. Elementary school students reported being bullied on the playground during recess more often than secondary school students. All students identified cafeterias, washrooms and hallways as areas where they felt “unsafe”.

In terms of actual bullying, 12.3% of responding students were identified as victims of bullying, 5.3% were identified as bullying others, 4.0% were identified as both bullies and victims of bullying. 78.4% of students were identified as “non-involved”.

In a contrasting result, 15.2% of surveyed elementary school students reported being victims of bullying compared to 4.4% of surveyed secondary school students, indicating that bullying is more common in elementary school settings.

How can you use this research?

Increasing adult supervision is important in reducing bullying in schools, and identifying the areas in a school that need adult supervision is an important step in this process. The researchers in this study enabled students to not only give a clearer picture of where they feel most unsafe, but also presented them with a chance to suggest areas that researchers might have missed.

About the researchers

Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt is Professor at the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Education and School of Psychology. She is a Canada Research Chair in Children’s Mental Health and Violence Prevention and obtained her PhD from University of British Columbia.

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References

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About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE's clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject.

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