

# Girls who are bullied are at risk for substance use through depression

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Both boys and girls who are victims of bullying, including bullying through e-mail and the internet, are at elevated risk for depression. However, according to a new study, adolescent girls may engage in substance use as a result of bullying-related depression,.

As schools reopen following the holidays, the message to parents of [adolescent girls](#) is that [bullying](#) can have serious consequences: "If your daughter is a victim of bullying, take it seriously, do all possible to prevent recurrence, and attend to possible [depression](#) and [substance use](#). For parents of boys who are bullied: depression is still an issue, but it may not explain the relation between victimization and substance use," according to Jeremy Luk of the University of Washington. He reported his findings in the December issue of *Prevention Science*, a journal of the Society for Prevention Research. His study is the first to identify depression as a possible link to the relation between victimization and substance use among adolescents. The findings are generalizable because they are based on data from a nationally representative sample of 1,495 tenth graders.

Luk's research was funded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Drs. Jing Wang and Bruce Simons-Morton, both at NICHD, were co-authors and Luk's mentors for the study. It was based on data on bullying from the 2005/2006 U.S. Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC). Luk analyzed that data while he was on a study program at NICHD.

"Bullying is a serious problem among adolescents. Previous research has shown that it is associated with loneliness, depression and suicide. But no previous national studies have identified depression as an explanation for the relationship between victimization from bullying and substance use," Luk said.

The HBSC survey measured depression by asking tenth graders: how often in the past 30 days they: (1) were very sad; (2) were grouchy or irritable, or in a [bad mood](#); (3) felt hopeless about the future; (4) felt like not eating or eating more than usual; (5) slept a lot more or a lot less than usual; and (6) had difficulty concentrating on their school work.

Responses were coded one to five: "never," "seldom," "sometimes," "often," and "always." Substance use was measured by asking number of occasions in the past 30 days that adolescents had (1) smoked cigarettes; (2) drunk alcohol; (3) been drunk and (4) used marijuana. For each item, four categories were created: "never," "once or twice," "three to five times" and "more than five times."

Provided by Society for Prevention Research

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