

Being bullied throughout childhood and teens may lead to more arrests, convictions, prison time

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People who were repeatedly bullied throughout childhood and adolescence were significantly more likely to go to prison than individuals who did not suffer repeated bullying, according to a new analysis presented at the American Psychological Association's 121st Annual Convention.

Almost 14 percent of those who reported being bullied repeatedly from childhood through their teens ended up in prison as adults, compared to 6 percent of non-victims, 9 percent of childhood-only victims, and 7 percent of teen-only victims, the study found. When comparing rates of convictions, more than 20 percent of those who endured chronic bullying were convicted of crimes, compared to 11 percent of non-victims, 16 percent of childhood victims, and 13 percent of teen victims. Compared to nonwhite childhood victims, white childhood victims faced significantly greater odds of going to prison, according to the study.

"Previous research has examined bullying during specific time periods, whereas this study is the first to look at individuals' reports of bullying that lasted throughout their childhood and teen years, and the legal consequences they faced in late adolescence and as adults," said Michael G. Turner, PhD, of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

The results also revealed that women who were chronically bullied from

childhood through their teens faced significantly greater odds of using alcohol or drugs, and of being arrested and convicted than men who had grown up experiencing chronic bullying.

Turner analyzed data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The survey involved 7,335 individuals between the ages of 12 and 16 as of Dec. 31, 1996. The sample reflected the demographics of the United States.

The analysis identified four groups: non-victims (74 percent); those bullied repeatedly before the age of 12 (15 percent); those bullied repeatedly after the age of 12 (6 percent); and those repeatedly victimized before and after the age of 12 (5 percent). Accounts of repeated bullying were collected over several periods and the legal outcomes were assessed when participants' were in their late teens or adults. These relationships were also examined across gender and race. The study followed youths over a 14-year period from early adolescence into adulthood.

"This study highlights the important role that health care professionals can play early in a child's life when bullying is not adequately addressed by teachers, parents or guardians," Turner said. "With appropriate questions during routine medical checkups, they can be critical first points of contact for childhood victims. Programs that help children deal with the adverse impacts of repeated bullying could make the difference in whether they end up in the adult legal system."

More information: Presentation: "Repeat Bully Victimizations and Legal Outcomes in a National Sample: The Impact Over the Life Course," Michael Turner, PhD, poster session 2006, Thursday, 8 - 8:50 a.m. HST, Hawai'i Convention Center, level 1, Kamehameha Exhibit Hall.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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