Cyberbullying increases as students age

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As students' age they are verbally and physically bullied less but cyberbullied more, non-native English speakers are not bullied more often than native English speakers and bullying increases as students' transition from elementary to middle school.

Those are among the findings of a wide-ranging paper, "Examination of the Change in Latent Statuses in Bullying Behaviors Across Time," recently published in the journal *School Psychology Quarterly*.

Authors of the paper are: Cixin Wang, an assistant professor at the University of California, Riverside's Graduate School of Education; Ji Hoon Ryoo, an assistant professor at the University of Virginia; and Susan M. Swearer, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The paper is based on data about bullying victimization and perpetration obtained from 1,180 fifth- through eighth- grade students over three semesters at schools in a mid-western city in the United States.

The paper is unique in that it captures data about bullies and bully victims over time using latent transition analysis, a person-centered approach that classifies different subgroups and traces the changes in membership over time. Previous approaches have assumed bully and bully victim subgroups remain constant over time.

The subgroups created by the researchers focus on the amount students bully or are bullied and the type of bullying. The researchers also studied

variables such as gender, grade and whether students were native English speakers.

Their findings include:

- Showing that students who are bullied fall into four subgroups: frequent victim (11 percent), occasional traditional victim (29 percent), occasional cyber and traditional victim (10 percent), and infrequent victim (50 percent). (Traditional means verbal, physical and relational, but not cyber.)
- Showing the students who bully fall into three categories: frequent perpetrator (5 percent), occasional verbal/relational perpetrator (26 percent), and infrequent perpetrator (69 percent).
- Bullying victimization and perpetration decreased over time, however there was an increase from fifth to sixth grade, which corresponds with the transition from elementary to [middle school](#) at the schools the researchers studied.
- Over all, girls were more likely to experience verbal/relational and cyber victimization than boys, and boys were more likely to be physically victimized.
- Students for whom English is a second language were not bullied more often than native English speakers. This runs counter to previous studies that found students for whom English is a second language were more likely to be victimized.

The researchers also recommend a series of school-based interventions to address bullying:

- Considering the oldest students were more likely to engage in bullying, and bullying perpetration increased after students transitioned into middle school, school personnel should focus their intervention resources on students in sixth and eighth grades.Interventions should teach social-emotional learning skills

to students and appropriate ways to navigate new peer groups and social hierarchies.

- Considering the gender differences for those that bully, different interventions may be warranted for boys and girls. Interventions for girls may focus on relationship issues and appropriate use of social media, while interventions for boys may address physical bullying.
- It is important for teachers and parents to talk to students about cyber safety and to supervise internet and mobile device use to help prevent cyber victimization. It is also important for adults to take reports of verbal/relational bullying and cyberbullying seriously and to intervene in all cases.

School will only be free from bullying when interventions are gender and culturally sensitive and address all types of bullying, Wang said.

"School-based interventions need to address the differences in perpetrator and victim experiences," she said. "The key is to use individualized specific interventions for bullying, not a one-size-fits-all approach."

Wang's currently research focused on working with local schools to improve school climate and decrease bullying.

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