

Teens who feel empowered are less likely to bully, harass, commit sexual violence

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Teens who feel personally empowered are less likely to bully, harass or commit acts of sexual violence, according to a study by Rutgers University, the University of Nebraska, and the University of New

Hampshire.

The study, published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, also found that teens who think their friends support [violence](#) prevention and healthy relationships are less likely to mistreat their peers.

"Coping mechanisms that help adolescents thrive and do well, even in the face of stress and adversity, are important to preventing interpersonal violence. This is an important finding, as studies of bullying typically examine [risk factors](#) rather than protective factors," said lead author Victoria Banyard, professor and associate director of the Center on Violence Against Women and Children at the Rutgers School of Social Work.

The findings suggest that bullying, harassment and sexual violence can be reduced when adolescents learn to cope with stress, build community connections, engage with individuals from [diverse backgrounds](#) and feel empowered and able to build a positive future.

Adults can help young people develop these strengths, said Banyard. "Positive conversations with teens about healthy relationships support the positive social norms we know are important."

Adolescence is a high-risk age for perpetration of different forms of peer-based violence including in-person and online bullying, harassment, racial bullying, and unwanted sexual contact, the researchers explained.

The researchers surveyed a set of 2,232 middle and high [school](#) students online during the [school year](#) by seeking their level of agreement or disagreement with statements including "If I am feeling sad, I can cheer myself up," "My opinion is important because it could someday make a difference in my community," "I work hard now to make a good future for myself," "I am comfortable being with people who are of a different

race than I am," and others. They were asked about bullying and harassment, alcohol use, positive social norms related to violence prevention, and a combination of interpersonal strengths.

The teens were surveyed again six months later.

The findings are part of a larger study on involving youth as leaders in order to help prevent [sexual violence](#) among middle and [high school students](#).

Banyard partnered with the University of Nebraska Lincoln Center on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools and the University of New Hampshire.

More information: Victoria Banyard et al, Poly-Strengths and Peer Violence Perpetration: What Strengths Can Add to Risk Factor Analyses, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-020-01197-y](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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