Bullying in Minnesota Schools:
An analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey, 2010
Brief: Victimization Across Environments

In 2010, the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) included two questions regarding relational bullying and over 130,000 sixth-, ninth- and twelfth-grade students responded to those questions. The responses were analyzed in relation to other questions regarding risk and protective factors, including experiences of victimization across environments, school factors, community connections and interpersonal relationships, family characteristics and environment, and personal characteristics. This analysis is organized into separate briefs for each category, and includes a literature review, the MSS data, as well as recommendations for bullying prevention and intervention in schools.

The student categories presented in this report are based on the response patterns to the following questions:

- *During the last 30 days, how often has another student or group of students made fun of or teased you in a hurtful way, or excluded you from friends or activities?*

- *During the last 30 days, how often have you, on your own or as part of a group, made fun of or teased another student in a hurtful way or excluded another student in from friends or activities?*

Of those students participating, 42.9 percent reported no involvement in bullying. Thirty percent (30.7%) said they had made fun of, teased, or excluded others once or twice in the last month, and 27.2% said they had experienced those things once or twice in the past month, which does not constitute bullying or victimization at this rate.[i] Of those remaining, 12.6 percent were classified as *victims* (were made fun of, teased in a hurtful way, or excluded from friends or activities by others with a frequency of weekly or more), 9.3 percent were classified as *bullies* (engaged in the actions listed above toward victims with a frequency of weekly or more), and 3.1 percent were *bully/victims* (bullied/victimized at least weekly).

Throughout the reports in this series, several findings emerged consistently.

- Students regularly involved in bullying incidents, whether victim, bully or bully/victim (*bullying-involved students*), have high rates of associated experiences, most of them negative.

- The data in these reports indicate that those classified as bullies have been victims of maltreatment themselves, in many cases.

- Nearly half of all students responding had *no* involvement with bullying as a victim or a bully. Across analyses, the "never involved" group had the lowest incidence of risk factors and the highest frequency of protective factors.

Further information regarding the Minnesota Students Survey can be found in the *Brief: Methodology*, and include the definitions of the terms used in all the briefs.

Literature Review
Nationally, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics Report, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety,* 32 percent of students age 12-18 reported having been bullied at school. The definition of bullying used in the Bureau of Justice report included the following experiences: 21 percent were made fun of; 11 percent were pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on, 6 percent where threatened with harm, 5 percent were excluded on purpose, and 4 percent said that they were pressured to do things they did not want to do or that their property was destroyed on purpose. (Dinkes, Kemp &Baum, 2009). The definition of bullying for the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) included students who had been teased or excluded from activities at a rate of weekly or more.

Studies on co-occurrence of victimization indicate that students who are victims of bullying, bullies or are bully/victims, experience other forms of victimization, including child maltreatment, conventional crime, sexual victimization, witnessing others being victimized and indirect victimization (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009; Holt, Finkelhor & Kaufman Kantor, 2007). Increased victimization is associated with heightened risk. For example, youth who experience multiple victimizations earn lower grades (Holt, et al 2006). The term "poly-victim" has been cited in the literature to refer to a group of people who suffer multiple forms of victimization.

Victimization Across Environments
The nature of bullying includes facets of victimization. The bully is the perpetrator of acts that render the target a victim. However, in addition to repeated, frequent experiences of being made fun of or teased in a hurtful way and/or exclusion from friends or activities by others, students may be subjected to several other types of victimization experiences. The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) asked several questions about this broader picture of victimization. Students answered questions to indicate whether they experienced threats, physical harassment, violence, and sexual harassment at school; physical or sexual abuse at home; exposure to community violence; physical and sexual abuse by partners; and sexual abuse by others outside of the family.
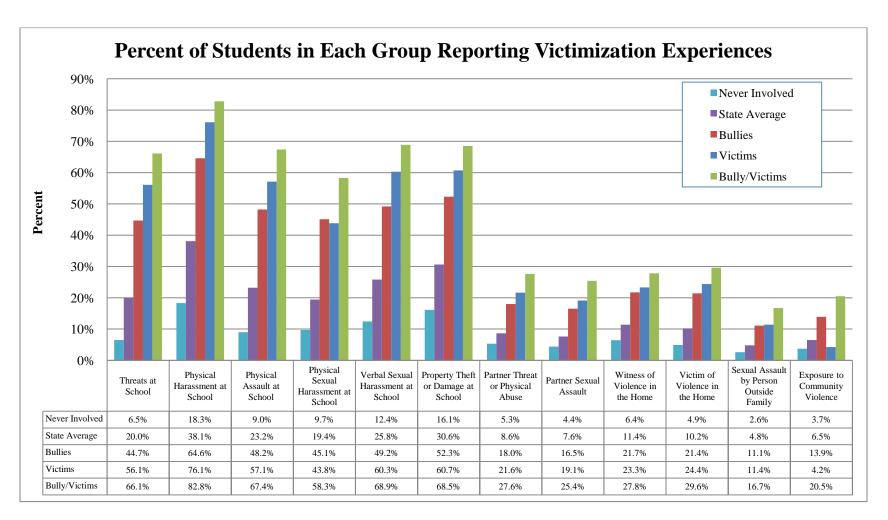
Victimization at School
State averages indicate that some form of threat or physical harassment at school is relatively common (20% reported threats and 38.1% reported physical harassment such as pushing and shoving). Verbal (25.8%) and physical (19.4%) sexual harassment were reported to be similarly common. This includes unwanted comments, touching, grabbing, looks, jokes, and gestures. Students were also asked, during the last 12 months, "how many times has someone stolen, or deliberately damaged your property such as your car, clothing or books on school property?" Most students reported that this had never happened in the past year (69.4% of all students), and another 17.4 percent had experienced theft or damage only once (total of 86.7% of students). For those involved in bullying, however, property damage was more common. The majority of victims (60.7%), bullies (52.3%) and bully/victims (68.5%) have had their property stolen or damaged during the past year. For students who have no involvement in bullying, the percentage of students reporting property damage was 16.1 percent.

Victimization Outside of School
Outside of school, students are less likely to experience victimization. Only 8.6 percent of students reported being threatened or hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend, and 7.6 percent reported being forced to engage in sexual activity by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Just over 10 percent of students witness or are subject to physical abuse in the home, and 2.6 percent have been sexually abused by a family member. Almost 5 percent of students have been sexually abused or assaulted by someone outside of the family. Finally, 6.5 percent of students rate their neighborhood as unsafe.

When examining students who have been involved in bullying either as victims, bullies, or bully/victims (bullying-involved students), the numbers in each of these categories trend upward. In addition, students who are never involved in bullying in any way showed very low averages in each victimization category. These data are presented in the table and graph below. As becomes clear in this graph, bullying-involved students at school are more likely to experience victimization experiences outside of school as well. The data follow a relatively stable pattern in which bullies fall above the average, victims above bullies, and bully/victims above victims in terms of the percent of students in each group reporting each type of victimization (Chart: Victimization Experiences).

Percent of Students in Each Group Reporting Victimization Experiences

	Threats at School	Physical Harassment at School	Physical Assault at School	Physical Sexual Harassment at School	Verbal Sexual Harassment at School	Property Theft or Damage at School	Partner Threat or Physical Abuse	Partner Sexual Assault	Witness of Violence in the Home	Victim of Violence in the Home	Sexual Assault by Person Outside Family	Exposure to Community Violence
Never Involved	6.5%	18.3%	9.0%	9.7%	12.4%	16.1%	5.3%	4.4%	6.4%	4.9%	2.6%	3.7%
State Average	20.0%	38.1%	23.2%	19.4%	25.8%	30.6%	8.6%	7.6%	11.4%	10.2%	4.8%	6.5%
Bullies	44.7%	64.6%	48.2%	45.1%	49.2%	52.3%	18.0%	16.5%	21.7%	21.4%	11.1%	13.9%
Victims	56.1%	76.1%	57.1%	43.8%	60.3%	60.7%	21.6%	19.1%	23.3%	24.4%	11.4%	4.2%
Bully/Victims	66.1%	82.8%	67.4%	58.3%	68.9%	68.5%	27.6%	25.4%	27.8%	29.6%	16.7%	20.5%

A summary of these experiences can be compiled by examining victimization in various contexts. For example, about one-third of bullies (29.3%) and victims (32.2%), and 37.6 percent of bully/victims have either witnessed to or been a victim of abuse in the home. For female students, nearly a quarter of victims (24.2%), slightly more bullies (26.7%) and one-third (32.4%) of bully/victims have also suffered sexual assault or abuse at some point in their life. A full record of these percentages is presented in Table X below (Table 1).

Table 1: Victimization by Source/Location

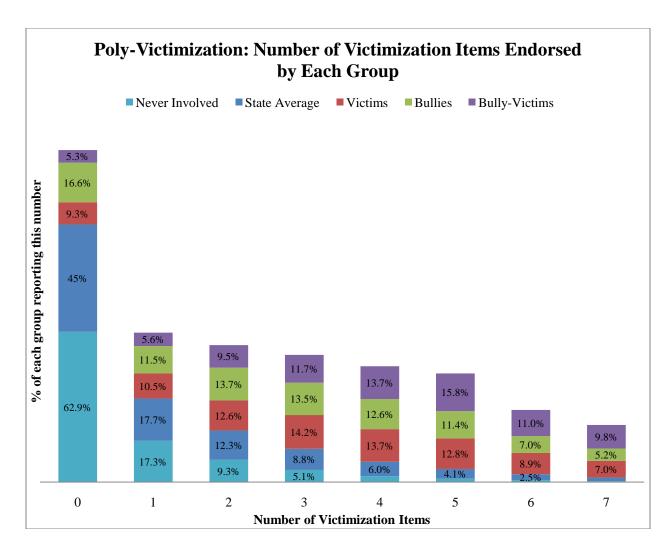|	Victims		Bullies		Bully/Victims		State Average	
Threat, Harassment or Violence at School	87.3%		79.7%		92.3%		51.1%	
Abuse by Partner (Physical *or* Sexual)	13.7%		16.3%		22.4%		7.6%	
Witness or Victim of Abuse in the Home	32.2%		29.3%		37.6%		15.6%	
Sexual Abuse or Assault by Partner, Family, or Other	24.2% (F)	12.2% (M)	26.7% (F)	13.9% (M)	32.4% (F)	22.1% (M)	12.7% (F)	5.0% (M)

(F) = Female   (M) = Male

Poly-victimization
The data collected in this survey indicated that students in Minnesota who are involved in bullying in some way may likely fall into the category of "poly-victim". This term includes all individuals who are subject to multiple types and sources of victimization. Victims, bullies and bully/victims were all more likely to endorse higher numbers of victimization items than were other students.

In order to examine rates of poly-victimization, the distribution of total number of victimization items endorsed was examined. The average number of victimization experiences for a student in the state is 1.578 (SD 2.09). For bullies, the number increases to 3.454 (SD 2.77). Victims (mean 4.001, SD 2.74) and bully/victims (Mean 4.989, SD 2.93) report even higher average numbers of different victimization experiences. When the differences between victims, those who reported some victimization and those who were never victims at school were compared in an ANOVA, significant differences emerged (F = 9825.982; *p*<.001). Those who were never bullied were reported significantly fewer total victimization experiences than those who were rarely bullied, who in turn reported significantly fewer than victims.

It is important to keep in mind that these numbers do not indicate the *frequency* of victimization, but the total types of victimization. Comparisons were run for bullies and bully/victims with the same results (Bully F = 5546.660, *p*<.001; Bully/victims F = 6053.413, *p*<.001). These differences persisted even when all school-related victimization was removed from the number of types of victimization faced by respondents. As involvement with bullying increases, we observed a significant associated increase in types of victimization faced by students (Chart: Poly-Victimization).

Poly-Victimization: Number of Victimization Items Endorsed by Each Group

Legend: ■ Never Involved ■ State Average ■ Victims ■ Bullies ■ Bully-Victims

Y-axis: % of each group reporting this number
X-axis: Number of Victimization Items

Number of Victimization Items	Never Involved	State Average	Victims	Bullies	Bully-Victims
0	62.9%	45%	9.3%	16.6%	5.3%
1	17.3%	17.7%	10.5%	11.5%	5.6%
2	9.3%	12.3%	12.6%	13.7%	9.5%
3	5.1%	8.8%	14.2%	13.5%	11.7%
4	6.0%		13.7%	12.6%	13.7%
5	4.1%		12.8%	11.4%	15.8%
6	2.5%		8.9%	7.0%	11.0%
7			7.0%	5.2%	9.8%

Summary

Most students experience some form of threat or harassment at school at some time or another. However, for students who participate in bullying as bullies and/or victims, the intensity and variety of these experiences increase. Furthermore, bullying-involved students are significantly more likely to report victimization in other contexts as well, including in the home, community, and with partners. This finding of "poly-victim" status among bullies and victims indicates that these students are at higher risk than their school-based bullying experiences alone can explain.

Recommendations

Prevention and intervention
Bullying is best prevented by working to reduce its prevalence, increasing the capacity of adults and students to identify and respond, and utilizing formative (non-punitive) discipline. (Morrison, 2011). To prevent bullying, school staff need to be intentional and consistent in teaching the skills of respect, responsibility and reparation/restoration (Morrison, 2007).

Tiered levels of support
Implementing and maintaining a comprehensive, whole-school bullying prevention or positive school climate program using tiered levels of support is necessary to re-affirm, restore and re-build relationships damaged by bullying (Hopkins, 2004, Morrison, 2007).

Increase bystander and adult skills to intervene

Teach all students how to intervene assertively—walk away, support the child who is the target, report to a responsible adult, or assertively tell the child who is bullying to stop. Adults can treat all students with respect, help all students look valuable in the eyes of their classmates, and learn to intervene in a non-shaming manner to harmful, hurtful behaviors (Pepler, 2007).

Promote students' assets and protective factors

Adults should build students assets and strengths by providing both students who bully and students who have been bullied opportunities in school and out of school to build social skills, find safe places to contribute to the school or community, and connect with caring adults (Benson, 2008).

Differentiate discipline and expand interventions

If a student is identified as bullying other students, in addition to any disciplinary intervention sanctioned by the school, the student should be referred to student assistance staff to explore other experiences of victimization in their life, whether in the family, community or in dating relationships. School policy should allow administrators to differentiate discipline that is formative rather than punitive. (See PrevNet, http://prevnet.ca/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx > Downloads > formative consequences.)

Attend to the needs of the victim

Districts should establish a policy of attending to the needs of victims of bullying, which may include discussions with student support staff, family members and family health care providers. Interventions such as restorative measures, when applied by a trained, experienced restorative facilitator, can help address the needs of victims, bullies, and other affected parties (Anderson, 1977).

Educate school staff

Teach principals, deans, assistant principals, behavior specialists and staff about the associated behaviors and experiences of victims, offenders and bully-victims. Because the students regularly involved in bullying experiences may have other forms of victimization or trauma, all staff should be trained in the universal precautions for trauma informed care (Hodas, 2006).

Coordinate policy, curriculum and practice

Interconnect bullying data, research, prevention and intervention best practices and that of other victimizations, risk behaviors or perpetration in curriculum, policy and practice. See the Common Principles of Effective Practice regarding "coherent alignment of policies and practices" (implementation teams, continuous feedback loop, shared vision, collaboration, data support, professional development) at: http://education.state.mn.us > Implementation of Effective Practice.

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[i] Both questions had the response options of "never", "once or twice", "about once a week", "several times a week" or "every day". A calculated response option for both questions was created that included student responses of "about once a week", "several times a week", and "every day". This category was renamed "weekly or more". Definitions of bullying vary, but there are common elements, including an imbalance of power, intent to cause harm and repetition. According to the U.S. Government website on bullying prevention, StopBullying.gov, "incidents of bullying happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group of people." For more information, go to http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/.