

KidsHealth® KidsPoll—Bullying Poll: Summary of Findings

KidsHealth KidsPoll is collaboration among the Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth, the Department of Health Education and Recreation at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, the National Association of Health Education Centers, and participating health education centers. The purpose is to gather information (opinions, attitudes, and feelings etc.) about current health issues from children. The information is gathered using handheld data collection devices from children ages 9 to 13 as they attend classes in the health education centers. The information is shared with educators, caregivers, healthcare organizations, the media and other interested parties at the national and local levels. The goal is to provide insightful information that will enable them to develop programs to help children to make healthy life decisions, prevent disease and injury, and understand their bodies. This poll focused on issues related to bullying.

Individual Demographics

Individual-level information was collected anonymously from each child who participated.

- 1,229 children
- 52% boys, 48% girls
- 9-13 (average age 10.8)
- 11 centers participated in this poll:
 - Byrnes Health Education Center—York, PA
 - Children’s Health Education Center—Milwaukee, WI
 - Crown Center for Health Education—Hinsdale, IL
 - Health Exploration Station—Canton, MI
 - HealthSpace—Cleveland, OH
 - Health World Children’s Museum—Barrington, IL
 - HealthWorks! Kids’ Museum—South Bend, IN
 - Lilly Health Education Center—Indianapolis, IN
 - McMillen Center for Health Education—Ft. Wayne, IN
 - Poe Center for Health Education—Raleigh, NC
 - Weller Health Education Center—Easton, PA

School demographics

School-level information was not collected from each child, but is based on statistics for the schools that the children were from. Seven non-public school groups also participated (e.g., private or home school groups); school-level data for these non-school groups were not available and therefore were not included in the school-level analyses.

- 31 schools (24 public, 7 private school/groups)
- 56% White, 27% Black, 14% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific, 1% Native American

- 40% of the schools had student bodies that were 0-33% Black / Hispanic / Asian/Pacific / Native American combined
 - 17% of the schools had student bodies that were 33-67% of these groups
 - 33% of the schools had student bodies that were 67-100% of these groups
- 42% students in participating schools qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 49% of the schools had 0-33% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 18% of the schools had 33-67% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 33% of the schools had 67-100% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch

The U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Dept of Education use a measure of city size and location called a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The categories for MSA are:

- *Large city center = center of a MSA city with population >250,000*
 - *Midsize city center = center of a MSA city with a population <250,000*
 - *Large city fringe = urban fringe of a large MSA city*
 - *Midsize city fringe = urban fringe of a midsize MSA city*
 - *Large town = not within a MSA with a population >25,000*
 - *Small town = not within an MSA with a population 2,500-25,000*
 - *Rural outside = not within an MSA with a population <2,500*
 - *Rural inside = population <2,500, coded rural, with in a census MSA*
- Of the participating schools: 19% large city center, 28% midsize city center, 22% large city fringe, 11% rural outside MSA, 20% rural inside MSA
 - Average school size—566
 - 35% of the schools had enrollment of <300
 - 11% of the schools had enrollment of 300-500
 - 35% of the schools had enrollment of 500-700
 - 9% of the schools had enrollment of 700+

Significant Demographic Associations

- There was a high correlation between proportion of schools with more non-white students and proportion receiving lunch assistance ($r = 0.81$).
- In addition, kids from schools with high Black/Hispanic/Asian/Native American student bodies were more likely to be from schools in more urban settings.
- Older kids were more likely to attend schools with higher enrollments

Statistically Significant Findings—overall

- *Question: Kids who bully are usually:*
 - A. Very cool*
 - B. Sort of cool*
 - C. Sort of un-cool*
 - D. Very un-cool*

Over 2/3 of the children said bullying is un-cool (64% very un-cool, 9% un-cool). Older children were more likely to say that bullying is cool (see table). Children who bully others are also more likely to say that it is *sort of* or *very cool* (41% of daily bullies, 39%--weekly, 30%, once-in-a-while, and 21% never).

- *Question: How often have you been bullied?*
 - A. Every day*
 - B. Every week, but not every day*
 - C. Once in a while, but not every week*
 - D. never*

Over half the children said they are never bullied. Another 1/3 report being bullied once in a while. Fifteen percent say they are bullied at least weekly. Boys are slightly more likely to say they are bullied daily (boys—11%, girls—6%). Children who bully others are also more likely to say that they are bullied daily (bully others daily—16%, weekly—10%, once-in-a-while—7%, never—6%).

- *Question: What do you usually do when someone bullies you?*
 - A. Fight back*
 - B. Try to talk to the bully*
 - C. Just walk away and do nothing*
 - D. Talk to an adult*
 - E. I have never been bullied*

Of those children who say they have been bullied, nearly half (46%) say they respond by fighting back. Another 20% say they walk away and do nothing. One quarter talk to an adult about it. Only 9% try to talk to the bully. Boys are more likely to fight (53% vs. 38%) and girls are more likely to talk to an adult (32% vs. 19%). Older children are more likely to fight; whereas, younger children are more likely to talk to the bully or talk to an adult (see table). Frequent bully victims are more likely to fight back than occasional victims (daily—56%, weekly—42%, once-in-a-while—37%). As may be expected, the more often children bully others, the more likely they are to fight back when they feel they are being bullied (bully daily—82%, weekly—65%, once-in-a-while—56%, never—27%).

- *Question: What do you usually do when someone else is being bullied?*
 - A. Just watch or walk away and do nothing*
 - B. Join in*
 - C. Say or do something to try to stop it*
 - D. Tell someone who could help*
 - E. I have never seen anyone bullied*

Only 14% of the children responding say they have never seen anyone bullied. Of those who have, 41% say they say or do something to try to stop it and another 23% tell someone they think could help. Sixteen percent watch or walk away and do nothing, and 20% admit to joining in. Boys are more likely to either join in or do nothing (42% vs. 26%); whereas, girls more often tell someone who could help (30% vs. 17%). Older children are more likely to join in or do nothing and younger children are more likely to try to stop it or tell (see table). As could be expected, children who bully others frequently are also more likely to join in or do nothing when they see others bullied (bully daily—74%, weekly—59%, once-in-a-while—43%, never—18%).

- *Question: How often are you afraid to go to school because of bullying?*
 - A. Every day*
 - B. Every week, but not every day*
 - C. Once in a while, but not every week*
 - D. never*

Only a small proportion of the children surveyed report being frequently afraid to go to school due to bullying (4%--daily, 2%--weekly). Girls are afraid once-in-a-while slightly more often than boys are (girls—11%, boys—5%). As could be expected, victims of frequent bullying are also afraid more often (see table).

- *Question: If kids bully, which of the following is the most important reason for it?*
 - A. Other kids are not friendly to them*
 - B. They are not doing well in school*
 - C. They don't feel good about themselves*
 - D. They think it will make them popular*
 - E. They want to get their own way or to push others around*

For all the students, the two most common answers were: they think it will make them popular (35%), and to get their own way or push others around (32%). Another 18% chose: they don't feel good about themselves. Only 15% combined said it was school or friend problems. Older children were more likely to name don't feel good about themselves (9—13%, 10—15%, 11—18%, 21/13—24%) and less likely to choose get their own way/push other around (9—42%, 10—39%, 11—26%, 12/13—26%). This question is limited to the five response categories due to the response methods used. The five categories were identified during pilot testing.

- *Question: What do you think is the best way to stop bullying?*
 - A. Tell a teacher or parent*
 - B. Discipline kids who bully*
 - C. Have teachers or other adults watch over kids*
 - D. Teach lessons at school*
 - E. I don't know*

One third of the respondents said they did not know. Of those who identified a way, half said tell a teacher or parent. The least favored answer was "teach lessons at school" (11%). Girls were more likely to say tell (58% vs. 42%) and less likely to say discipline (15% vs. 28%). Older children were more likely to say discipline or lesson; younger children were more apt to respond tell or watch over (see table).

- *Question: How often do you bully others?*
 - A. *never*
 - B. *once in a while, but not every week*
 - C. *every week, but not every day*
 - D. *every day*

Over forty percent of the respondents admitted to bullying *at least* once in a while (15%--daily, 5%--weekly, 22% once-in-a-while). Older children are more likely to admit bully others *at least* once in a while (9—24%, 10—39%, 11—40%, 12—53%, 13—60%)

Other Interesting findings

- Locale, ethnicity, and S.E.S. (i.e., lunch qualification) data were collected at the school level. These three variables were highly correlated. In other words, schools that had more white students enrolled also tended to be more rural and have fewer students qualifying for school lunch. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the effect of each of these variable because of the way the data were collected. They can, however, be discussed as a group of school-level traits. Students from schools with more of the above-mentioned traits were generally more likely to believe that bullying is un-cool, to talk to an adult instead of fighting back when bullied, to try to stop bullying of others or to tell when it happens, and to be afraid to go to school because of bullying. However, there were no statistical differences in being victims of bullying or explanations of why it occurs based on these traits.
- Children who responded that bullying is cool, were also more likely to say that they fight back when being bullied, that they join in or watch when others are being bullied, and that discipline is the best way to decrease bullying. They were also more likely to be boys.
- As may be expected, children who fight back when bullied are also more likely to watch or join in when others are bullied. Children who talk to the bully or walk away are more likely to try to stop bullying when it happens to others. Children who tell when they are bullied are more likely to tell when others are bullied. In addition, these “tellers” also believe telling is a good way to stop bullying. The “fighters/joiners” are more likely to think discipline is the answer. Finally, those who walk or tell when they are bullied and try to stop it or tell when others are bullied are more likely to endorse having teachers and adults watch over kids.
- In summary, as seen in other work, bullies are more likely to be boys, older, from urban, low SES, black/Hispanic schools. They are also more likely to be victims of bullying. Victims are also more likely to be boys and older, but from no particular school profile.
- About 14% of all the respondents considered themselves frequent victims (bullied at least weekly). These frequent victims appear to fall into two categories: those who never or seldom bully others (“non-bully/victims”) and those who also frequently (weekly or daily) bully others (“bully/victims”). Compared to victims who don’t bully, bully/victims are more likely to be boys (65% vs. 57%), to think bullying is cool (46% vs. 28%), to fight back when bullied (67% vs. 35%), and to join in or doing nothing when others are bullied (74% vs. 25%). Interestingly, these bully/victims are more afraid daily or weekly to come to school than the victims who never or seldom bully (22% vs. 17%).

- In addition, bully victims are more likely to name "others are not friendly" (20% vs 15%) or "to get their way" (41% vs 24%) as the primary reasons for bullying. They are also more likely to say they "don't know" a way to stop bullying (43% vs. 28%). The victims who never or seldom bully are more likely than any other group to do nothing when they are bullied and more likely than any group to try to stop bullying of others. This dichotomy of bully victims may point to the need to customize anti-bullying campaigns.

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