

## Childhood Bullying

Childhood bullying has a damaging impact on the social and emotional development of both the bully and the victim. Studies indicate that bullying affects children not only while in school (i.e., bullying can lead to suicide, school violence, and poorer self-esteem) but also into adulthood.

This month *WomanView* looks at a recent study on child exposure to intimate partner violence and its relationship to bullying behavior and at an Illinois law created in response to the increasing problem of bullying in schools.

### Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence and Bullying

A study by researchers from the University of Washington is the first to look at the association of children witnessing adult intimate partner violence (IPV) and bullying.<sup>1</sup> The study found that children exposed to IPV were more likely to internalize behaviors (e.g., withdrawal) and engage in physical bullying (e.g., pushing or shoving, fighting) when compared with children whose parents had no history of IPV. The study also shows no link of child exposure to IPV with relational acts of bullying (e.g., teasing, excluding peers).

The study examined the following areas: (1) the prevalence of bullying and victimization among children (ages 6 to 13) drawn from a multigenerational, ongoing sample since 1985, (2) the relationship between exposure to IPV and ensuing bullying and victimization, and (3) the association between IPV and withdrawal behavior in children.

Primary caregivers were asked to monitor their children for physical and emotional behavior, attention, and social problems; children answered questions of bullying or victimization within a specific year; and parents rated the frequency of IPV incidents occurring in the past year between themselves and their partners at two time points in their lives (24 and 27 years of age).

The study revealed that 55 percent and 73 percent of primary caregivers at 24 and 27 years of age experienced IPV; most of the respondents were female. IPV was reported in 51 percent of the households surveyed for at least one of the two times. Children in the study experienced incidents of bullying and victimization; a majority of those bullying and victims were female. Overall 34 percent of children in the study reported bullying others, while 73 percent reported being victims of bullying. Of those who bullied, 97 percent experienced being victims of bullying.

The researchers conclude that witnessing IPV, either directly or indirectly, poses a risk on children's socioemotional development and peer relationships. Further study of this association will help better evaluate the full effects that witnessing IPV has on children.

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<sup>1</sup>Bullying is defined as "conscious, repeated acts of physical, verbal (e.g., name-calling), or relational (e.g., social exclusion, spreading rumors) aggression that causes injury or discomfort to the target between children of different physical size and strength." *Pediatrics*. Childhood Bullying Involvement and Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence, at 236, Volume 118, Number 2, August 2006. Partner Violence is defined as "physical, emotional, or sexual acts of aggression (actual or perceived) between 2 partners (e.g., marital or nonmarital, current or past) that occur repetitively with the intent to harm." *Id.*

To read the full report, visit

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/118/2/e235?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=bullying&andorexactfulltext=and&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=relevance&resourceType=HWCIT>.

## **Bullying Prevention Education in Illinois**

The Illinois School Code was amended with the passage of Senate Bill 2630, which added a provision on bullying prevention education.<sup>2</sup> This is a step in the right direction to prevent bullying and its damaging effects within a school environment of creating fear among students, disrupting the ability to learn, and contributing to antisocial behavior.

The new law provides that each school district has the option of creating provisions for bullying prevention education in all grades and in courses regularly taught. The legislation defines “bullying prevention” and curricula in light of the following areas: intimidation, student victimization, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and strategies for student-centered problem solving specific to bullying.

Local school boards may work with community-based agencies, provided that the instruction’s objective is to prevent sexual violence. The Illinois State Board of Education may assist in developing materials and training related to bullying prevention.

We encourage local school boards to implement the curricula, which would foster a safer school environment. This new law is now in effect and can be viewed at <http://ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/94/PDF/094-0937.pdf>.

While the law is moving in the right direction, it can be improved with provisions to make bullying prevention education mandatory in all schools and to deal with issues specific to the bullying and harassment of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and questioning youth.

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<sup>2</sup>105 ILCS 5/27-23.7; PA 94-0937.