

Bullied Female Students Are More Likely Than Males to Contemplate Suicide

The 2011 *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS), which is CAMH's Ontario-wide school survey of students in grades 7 through 12 repeated every two years, showed that 29% of students were victims of bullying at school, while 22% were victims of cyber-bullying. The survey also showed that one-tenth of students had seriously contemplated suicide in the past year. In the media, recent suicides implicated by bullying raise the need for response, but what is the scope of this problem? This *eBulletin* describes the association between being bullied at a school as well as over the Internet and suicide ideation – thoughts of committing suicide – for females and males separately, using the OSDUHS data.

As seen in Figure 1, there is a strong association between being bullied at school and suicide ideation among females. One-fifth (21%) of female students – an estimated 31,800 Ontario females – who reported being bullied at school also reported suicide ideation, a two-fold difference compared to 11% who were not bullied at school. This association held even when adjusting for grade, and thus students' age (data by grade not shown). Conversely, there is no significant association between bullying and suicide ideation among males, as those males who were bullied and those who were not bullied were equally likely to report contemplation of suicide.

Figure 2 shows the association between being cyber-bullied and suicide ideation among females and males. In this case, both sexes show a statistically significant relationship. Females who were cyber-bullied (27%) – an estimated 37,500 females – were over three times more likely than females who were not (8%) to report suicide ideation. This relationship held when adjusting for grade/age (data by grade not shown). The association for males was statistically significant, but much weaker than for females: 11% of males who were cyber-bullied reporting suicide ideation compared with 6% who were not cyber-bullied. This relationship held even when adjusting for grade/age (data by grade not shown).

Figure 1
Percentage of Female and Male Ontario Students Reporting Suicide Ideation by Bullying Victimization at School, 2011 OSDUHS (Grades 7–12, n=4,816)

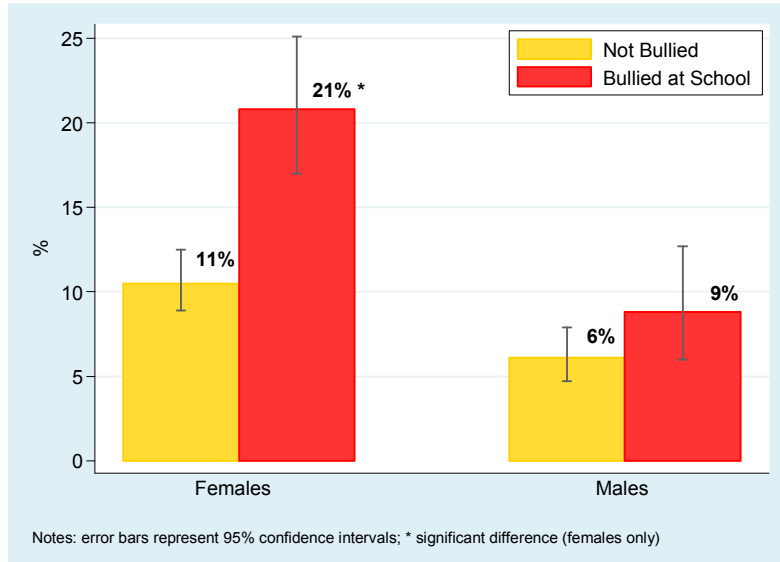
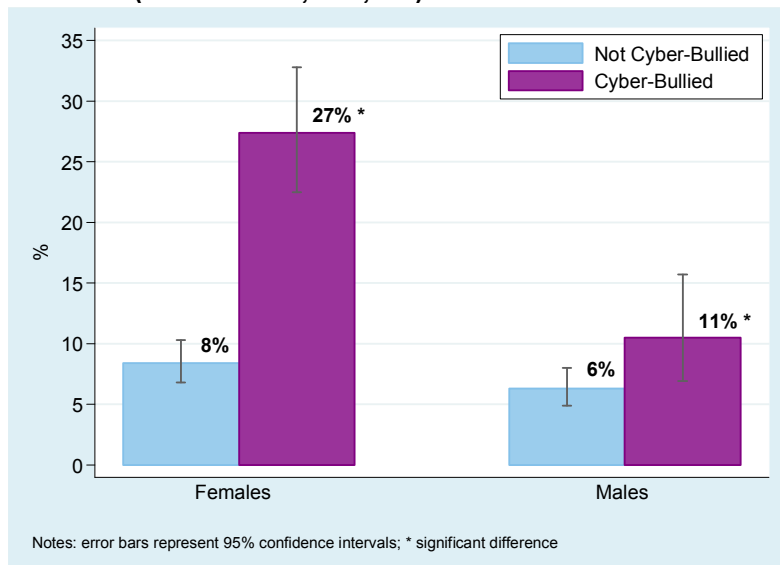


Figure 2
Percentage of Female and Male Ontario Students Reporting Suicide Ideation by Cyber-Bullying Victimization, 2011 OSDUHS (Grades 7–12, n=4,816)



Methods

CAMH's *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary/middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and secondary school students in grades 9 through 12. This repeated cross-sectional survey has been conducted every two years since 1977. The 2011 survey, which used a stratified (region by school level) two-stage (school, class) cluster design, was based on 9,288 students in grades 7 through 12 from 40 public and Catholic school boards, 181 schools, and 581 classes. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between October 2010 and June 2011. Seventy-one percent of selected schools, and 62% of eligible students in participating classes participated in the survey. The 2011 total sample of 9,288 students is representative of over one million Ontario students in grades 7 through 12 in publicly funded schools.

The findings presented here are based on data from a random half sample of students who completed the Form A questionnaire (n=4,816; 2,598 females and 2,218 males). The tests of association used were chi-square tests, confirmed by logistic regressions with grade used as a covariate. All estimates presented were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were accommodated for the complex sampling design.

Measures & Terminology

- **Bullying at school** is defined as "...when one or more people tease, hurt or upset a weaker person on purpose, again and again. It is also bullying when someone is left out of things on purpose." Students were asked about the main way they were bullied, and bullied others, since September. The response options were: (1) was not involved in bullying at school; (2) physical attacks (e.g., beat up, pushed or kicked), (3) verbal attacks (e.g., teased, threatened, spread rumours), and (4) stole or damaged possessions. The estimate for bullying victimization is based on this modal question.
- **Cyber-bullying victimization** is defined as reporting being bullied over the Internet at least once during the 12 months before the survey.
- **Suicide ideation** is defined as those reporting that they "seriously considered suicide" in the past 12 months.
- **95% confidence interval (CI)** shows the uncertainty in inferring a true population value from a single sample. The CI is interpreted as follows: with repeated sampling, 95 of 100 sample CIs would contain the "true" population value. Design-based confidence intervals also account for characteristics of the sample design (i.e., stratification, clustering, weighting).
- **Significant difference** refers to a difference between (or among) estimates that is statistically different at the $p < .05$ level, or lower, after adjusting for the sampling design. A finding of statistical significance infers that any differences are not likely due to chance alone.

Source

Paglia-Boak, A., Adlaf, E.M., Hamilton, H.A., Beitchman, J.H., Wolfe, D., & Mann, R.E. (2012). *The mental health and well-being of Ontario students, 1991-2011: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 34). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at <http://www.camh.ca/research/osduhs.aspx>]

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