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Summary

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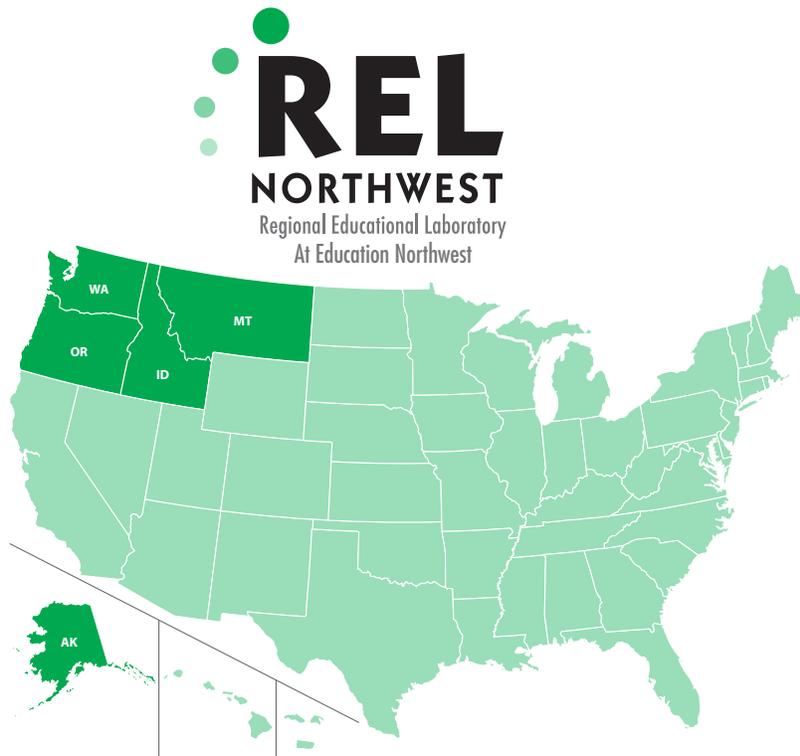
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Student-reported overt and relational aggression and victimization in grades 3–8

This secondary analysis of survey data from a voluntary sample of 11,561 grade 3–8 students examines the prevalence and distribution of aggression, victimization, and approval of aggression, both overt (verbally and physically aggressive behavior intended to threaten or harm) and relational (behavior intended to harm someone’s relationships with others).

Federal and state laws require schools to develop and implement antibullying policies, with clear procedures for responding to bullying and student aggression. The Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon School Safety Center requested this study to learn more about aggression, victimization, and approval of aggression among elementary and middle school students. Policymakers were particularly interested in relational aggression—behavior intended to hurt someone by harming that person’s relationships with others. Specifically, the study asked:

- How prevalent are student-reported victimization, aggression, and agreement with beliefs that approve of aggression among students in grades 3–8?
- How much of the variation in student-reported victimization, aggression, and

beliefs about aggression is associated with school characteristics and how much with student characteristics?

- How do student-reported victimization, aggression, and beliefs about aggression differ by gender and grade level for students in grades 3–8?

This secondary analysis of data from two surveys conducted in October 2005 covered a voluntary sample of 11,561 students in rural and urban schools in two Oregon counties. Students in grades 3–5 completed the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Survey (Huesmann and Guerra 1997), and students in grades 3–8 completed the Peer Experiences Questionnaire (Vernberg, Jacobs, and Hershberger 1999). Both surveys gathered information on students’ beliefs about aggression. The Peer Experiences Questionnaire also gathered information on how frequently students were the victims or the perpetrators of overt or relational forms of aggression. Overt aggression includes verbal and physically aggressive behavior intended to threaten or physically harm another student. Relational aggression includes behavior intended to harm another student’s relationships with others, such as intentionally ignoring or leaving the student out of group activities or telling lies so others will not like the student.

The report presents both descriptive statistics and the results of hierarchical linear modeling (all results are reported at the .05 level of statistical significance). The following are key findings:

- On the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Survey, 1–12 percent of girls and 4–20 percent of boys in grades 3–5 reported that retaliation was “sort of OK” to “perfectly OK.” For both girls and boys, the two scenarios with the highest percentage of students believing that retaliation was OK were a girl screaming at a boy who said something bad to her and a girl hitting a boy who hit her first. Aggression in general situations was considered “sort of OK” to “perfectly OK” by 2–5 percent of girls and 4–8 percent of boys.
- For the study sample, school factors were associated with 1–7 percent of the variation in student survey scores, and student characteristics, such as gender and grade level, were associated with 93–99 percent of the variation.
- On the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Survey, boys approved of aggression more than girls did both in general social situations and in situations involving retaliation. Differences were also associated with grade level, with students in grade 5 reporting higher approval of retaliation than students in grade 3.
- On the Peer Experiences Questionnaire, students in grades 7 and 8 reported higher agreement with beliefs that endorsed aggression than did students in grade 3 when asked whether bullying “pays off,” whether a student who gets bullied “deserves it,” and whether a student should intervene if others are fighting.
- For overt victimization, 12–61 percent of girls and 17–60 percent of boys reported being victimized at least once during the last 30 days, and 2–10 percent of girls and 3–14 percent of boys reported being victimized once or more a week, with the percentage varying by the behavior. For both girls and boys, the three most common types of overt victimization were mean teasing, physical aggression, and verbal threats. Twenty percent of girls also reported being victimized by mean tricks intended to scare them, and 20–22 percent of boys reported being chased by someone threatening to hurt them, having others “gang up” against them, and having mean tricks played on them.
- For relational victimization, 41–48 percent of girls and 31–42 percent of boys reported exposure during the last 30 days, and 4–6 percent of girls and boys reported exposure once or more a week, depending on the behavior. The most common type of relational victimization reported by both girls and boys was being lied about so others would not like them.
- For overt aggression, 3–37 percent of girls and 7–44 percent of boys reported perpetrating such acts during the last 30 days, and 0.4–2 percent of girls and 1–5 percent of boys reported perpetrating such acts once or more a week, depending on the behavior. Mean teasing, physical aggression, verbal threats, and playing mean tricks were the most common types of overt aggression reported by both girls and boys.

- For relational aggression, 21–28 percent of girls and 20–24 percent of boys reported perpetrating such acts during the last 30 days, and 0.8–1 percent of girls and 1–2 percent of boys reported perpetrating such acts once or more a week, depending on the behavior. For both girls and boys, the most common type of relational aggression was ignoring a student on purpose.
- Boys reported more overt victimization, overt aggression, and relational aggression toward other students than did girls. Differences in overt victimization were also associated with grade level, with students in grade 3 reporting more overt victimization than students in grades 5–8. No differences were found between students in grades 3 and 4.
- No significant differences between girls and boys were found in the frequency of relational victimization. However, differences in reported relational victimization between girls and boys varied by grade level, with larger differences in grades 5–8 than in grade 3.
- Differences between overt and relational aggression were also associated with grade level. Students in grades 3–6 reported less overt aggression toward others than did students in grades 7 and 8. Students in grade 3 reported less relational aggression than did students in each of the other grades. The difference between girls and boys was larger in grade 3 than in grade 8.

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