

BULLYING, CYBERBULLYING, AND MENTAL HEALTH 2010 METROWEST ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY

Recent attention to the potential negative consequences of bullying on teen mental health have underscored the importance of informed school and community responses. The 2010 *MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey* (MWAHS) collected information from nearly 38,000 middle and high school students in 24 communities. Youth reported on their involvements in bullying and cyberbullying and on a range of mental health problems.

More than a third of youth have been victims of bullying in the past year.

- 38% of middle school students and 32% of high school students have been bullied in the past 12 months.*
- 17% of middle school students and 20% of high school students have been cyberbullied in the past year.†
- Bullying perpetration is also common: 23% of middle school students and 28% of high school students have bullied and/or cyberbullied someone else in the past year.

Bullying victims report more mental health problems than youth who aren't bullied.

- In middle school, victims are 3 times more likely than non-victims to report:
 - Depressive symptoms (22% vs. 7%)
 - Self-injury (12% vs. 4%)
 - Seriously considering suicide (17% vs. 5%) [See Figure 1]
- In high school, bullying victims are 4 times more likely to report attempting suicide in the past year (8% vs. 2%).

Cyberbullying is even more strongly associated with mental health problems than general bullying.

- Middle school cyberbullying victims are 3-5 times more likely to report mental health problems than non-victims.
- In high school, where cyberbullying peaks, victims are 2-5 times more likely to report mental health problems, including:
 - Depressive symptoms (39% vs. 14%)
 - Seriously considering suicide (26% vs. 8%)
 - Attempting suicide (11% vs. 2%) [See Figure 2]

MetroWest communities are taking action. In 2010, the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation awarded nearly \$300,000 in grants to five school districts to:

- Develop new and effective anti-bullying policies
- Implement evidence-based bullying prevention curricula
- Establish peer leadership groups to train students to be active “bystanders” that can break the cycle of bullying
- Create advisory groups to enhance student-staff connections in schools
- Provide teacher and staff training on recognizing and responding to bullying incidents
- Increase community awareness of bullying and cyberbullying through parent/community forums and educational programs.

MWAHS data are informing efforts region-wide as districts work to implement policies, curriculum, and staff training to comply with the state anti-bullying laws enacted in May 2010. With these efforts underway, there is hope that the next MWAHS in Fall 2012 will show progress towards reducing bullying and improving youth mental health in the region.

*Bullying is defined as when 1 or more students tease, threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again.

†Cyberbullying is defined as using the Internet, cell phones, or other electronic devices to bully, tease, threaten, or spread rumors about someone.

Figure 1. Bullying victimization and mental health problems among middle school students, 2010 MWAHS

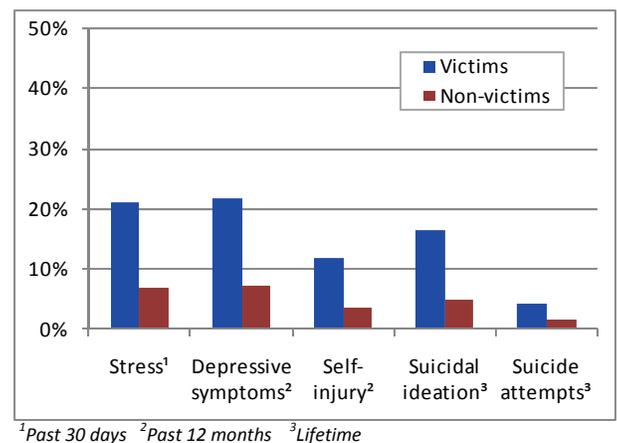


Figure 2. Cyberbullying victimization and mental health problems among high school students, 2010 MWAHS

