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Study suggests link between childhood bullying and adult intimate partner violence perpetration

Men who report having bullied peers in childhood appear to have an increased risk of perpetrating violence against an intimate partner in adulthood, according to a report posted online today by the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, one of the JAMA/Archives journals.

The authors point out, as background information, that roughly one-quarter of women will experience violence from intimate partners, and that prior research suggests up to 40 percent of men have been perpetrators of such violence. The authors sought to determine whether a history of school bullying has any relationship to intimate-partner violence (IPV). "Recent evidence," they explain, "strongly indicates that bullying peers in school may share common prior causes with IPV perpetration."

Kathryn L. Falb, M.H.S., from the Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, and colleagues conducted a survey at three urban community health centers. The 1,491 participants were men ages 18 to 35 years old. The survey included questions about past-year IPV perpetration, school bullying perpetration, bullying victimization, exposure to parental IPV and to community violence, childhood experiences of physical or sexual abuse and participation in nonviolent or violent delinquency.

More than 40 percent of respondents reported that they rarely or frequently bullied others as children. Approximately 16 percent of men reported perpetrating physical or sexual IPV in the last year (n = 241). Of those men, 38.2 percent (n = 92) reported that they had frequently bullied other students in childhood and 26.1 percent (n = 63) reported that they had rarely bullied other students. When other risk factors were taken into account, infrequent bullies had 1.53 times the odds as nonbullies to perpetrate IPV, whereas frequent bullies had 3.82 times the odds of perpetrating past-year IPV.

"Critically, this analysis demonstrates that those reporting school bullying are significantly more likely to perpetrate physical or sexual IPV," state the authors. They call for additional research to clarify why these behaviors may be related. In the meantime, the researchers add, "Potential programs that may seek to reduce bullying peers during school may also be effective avenues to reduce future violence perpetration within intimate partner relationships by focusing on the reduction of abusive behaviors and the promotion of equitable attitudes across settings, life stages, and relationships."

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Editor's Note: Please see the article for additional information, including other authors, author contributions and affiliations, financial disclosures, funding and support, etc.

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