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## News and Announcements



### Wayne State social work researchers say Michigan schools must do more to reduce bullying

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Wayne State social work researchers this month will present Michigan policymakers, youth advocates, religious leaders and educators with the results of a new study suggesting five-year-old legislation requiring school districts throughout the state to develop and implement anti-bullying policies has not been effective.

The study, based on a survey of more than 200 Michigan high school students, reveals that 50% of respondents feel bullying is a problem in their schools and nearly three-quarters are aware of or have witnessed bullying while at school. Moreover, roughly 60% said they feel the prevalence of bullying at their schools has not changed during the past 12 months. These and other results from the study will be shared on Oct. 26 from 8:30 to 11 a.m. at a press conference at Zion Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor hosted by the Wayne State School of Social Work, School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan, Michigan's Children, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Michigan Board of Education, Michigan Attorney General's Office, and Michigan Community Adolescent Health Center Program.

Michigan's anti-bullying legislation was signed in 2011 by Governor Rick Snyder and amended in 2015 to include cyberbullying. To gauge the success of the anti-bullying law, Wayne State assistant social work professors Jun Sung Hong and Angelique Day and social work doctoral students Jeoung Min Lee and Shantel Crosby surveyed high schools students attending a large Detroit-area rally organized around youth issues. The surveyed students, the majority of whom attend suburban or rural public schools, were largely in agreement that bullying is both wrong and harmful and that there are teachers they can turn to for help. Nevertheless, only about 42% of respondents who witnessed bullying said something to the perpetrator, only 27% told a teacher about the incident, and 23% did nothing at all. These findings, notes Hong, explain why school anti-bullying programs need to reach beyond perpetrators and victims and address the role of bystander behavior and adult support.

"Adolescents' peer groups are important in bullying prevention," Hong said. "Programs also need to consider peer groups' behavior in bullying situations, given that such situations occur when peers are present. Peers can either encourage the bullying situation or mitigate it by speaking up and defending the victim. Also, many teachers and administrators are not as informed about bullying, and it is imperative that teachers are informed of bullying and what they can do to prevent or stop it."

The study warns against a "one size fits all" approach to combating bullying in schools, noting that anti-bullying programs should be responsive to the unique psychosocial factors impacting students of differing races, sexual orientations, and physical and cognitive abilities. Programs that promote prosocial behavior and socio-emotional development and learning have proven to be effecting in reducing bullying behavior, the authors note, particularly when they consider adolescents' primary peer groups.

According to Day, bullying needs to be addressed with the same urgency assigned to any other public health issues.

"The evidence is very strong that exposure to bullying leads to negative psychosomatic and psychosocial outcomes, not only during adolescence but also in adulthood," said Day, noting that suicide is significantly associated with peer victimization. "Freedom from bullying and harassment in schools is a fundamental right for all children, and needs to be at the forefront of policymakers' minds when addressing the overarching issue of safety in our schools."

For more information about the press conference, contact Kevin Lignell, communications director for School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan, at 517-908-0847 ext. 231 or at [Klignell@scha-mi.org](mailto:Klignell@scha-mi.org).