



Study: Bullies and bullied more likely hit by crime

By [Wendy Koch](#)

As a growing number of states pass laws against bullying, new research finds that bullies and their victims are more likely than other children to be victims of crime outside of school.

"They're often victimized in the community," says Melissa Holt, research professor at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center, co-author of a new study on bullying.

The kids in the study at greatest risk are those who are both bullies and victims of bullies, Holt says. Of those, 84% had been victims of a crime, including burglary and assault, and 32% had been sexually abused. The study was based on interviews with 689 fifth-graders in 2005 in an unidentified urban, low-income school district in Massachusetts. Holt says the area's overall crime rate is

higher than average, but she believes that the pattern of victimization would hold in most places.

The study found that 70% of bullies and 66% of bullying victims were crime victims, compared with 43% of kids who were neither bullies nor victims.

Holt says bullies may be less apt to walk away from fights, and therefore more likely to be assaulted, and more likely to associate with aggressive kids who would commit crimes against them. A shy or insecure child is vulnerable in and out of school, she says.

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The research comes as more states adopt laws that prohibit bullying and set up prevention programs.

At least nine states this year have passed such a law or

expanded an existing one to address the problem of Internet bullying, says Lamar Bailey, research analyst at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Thirty-two states have passed anti-bullying laws, almost all since the 1999 mass shooting at Columbine High School. The two shooters, who killed 12 other students and a teacher before committing suicide, reportedly had been harassed at school.

"A lot of school shootings have a tie back to bullying," says Julie Hertzog, bullying prevention coordinator at PACER Center, an advocacy group for children with disabilities. Her group, with support from the National PTA and other education groups, designated next

week as National Bullying Prevention Awareness Week.

"Bullying and suicide are connected," says Brenda High, founder of Bully Police USA, a group pushing anti-bullying laws. Her son Jared, who she says was beaten at school, committed suicide in 1998 at age 13.

In Holt's study, nearly half of those who said they were victims of bullying were referred to school counselors because of thoughts about suicide.

About 20% of students are bullied at some time, whether it's teasing, name-calling or hitting, Hertzog says. She says the most vulnerable are those who react by crying, getting mad or fighting back or who are socially isolated.

"Simply having even one good friend can really help prevent bullying," says Susan Limber, professor at the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University. "There's safety in numbers."

Bullying has long been a problem in schools, but what has changed is the culture,

says Matthew Masiello, a pediatrician who is vice president of Conemaugh Health System in Jonestown, Pa. "We live in a society that exposes kids to more and more violence," he says

Masiello says children who are bullied do worse in school, have lower self-esteem and are more likely to be absent and to drop