Bullying, Safety, and Fear in Schools:
What Role Do Adults, School Fairness, and Reporting Play?

Bureau of Justice Statistics Student Research Expo
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Introduction

- School resource officers (SROs) are increasingly prevalent in schools throughout the U.S.[1] Despite this, the actualized role and effectiveness of SROs are unclear.
  - Some studies suggest that SROs perceive their role to be one of crime control, with students – particularly those of color – as potential offenders.[1,2]
  - Although having SROs is intended to increase school safety, students of color and victimized students often report feeling less safe given the presence of SRO(s).[3,4]
- Presently, there is a research gap concerning potential connections between SROs and bullying.
  - Other important factors to consider in bullying prevention may be adult supports, school rule fairness, and anonymous reporting options. [5–9]

Research Aims

- Investigate how:
  - bias-based vs. general bullying
  - solo vs. group bullying
  - frequency of bullying
  - locations of bullying
  - opportunity to anonymously report threats
  - reports of bullying to teachers/adults
  - feelings of safety and fear of harm
  - avoidance within school
  - perceptions of school fairness

 relate to the presence of SROs in schools, with each other, and across student race, age, and sex.

Research
Data and Methodology

- Data analyzed from the 2022 School Crime Supplement (N = 12,335)
  - Age: 12-18 years (M = 14.99, SD = 1.98)
  - 52% male, 48% female; 77.5% White, 22.5% non-White
  - 18.6% of respondents reported experiencing general bullying in the last year (N = 878)
  - 34.1% of respondents reported experiencing bias-based bullying in the year (N = 300)
  - 86.6% of respondents reported having an anonymous way to report threats to safety (N = 3,434)
  - 79.7% of respondents reported having an SRO(s) in their school (N = 3,580)
  - 90.6% of respondents reported having other forms of adult supervision in their school (N = 4,113)
- Regressions and logistic regressions were employed to understand potential links between school safety measures, bullying factors, school supports, students' feelings of fear and safety, and student characteristics.

Days Bullied

More than 10 — 20%
One — 32%
Three to ten — 30%
Two — 18%

Results

- Students who were more likely to have reported experiencing generalized bullying than to have not:
  - White (25.2%*), female (30.2%**), and younger (17.1%***)
  - Did not have an anonymous reporting option for threats to safety (22%*)
  - Perceived the school rules as less fair (more than 5 times***)
  - Felt less teacher support (28%**)
  - Reported less adult supervision (51%**)
- Students who were more likely to have reported experiencing bias-based bullying than to have not:
  - Non-white (33.2%*) and female (47.1%*)
  - Perceived the school rules as less fair (55.4%*)

- Students who were more likely to perceive the school rules as fairer and reported lower fear of harm and higher feelings of safety:
  - Had an anonymous reporting option for threats to safety (β = -.127***, -.082*, -.117**)
  - Felt more teacher support (β = .311***, .082*, .284***)
- Students who reported less teacher support (β = .181*) and more days being bullied (β = .317***) reported avoiding more places/class in school.
- Students who were more likely to tell a teacher or adult about being bullied:
  - Felt more teacher support (38.3%*)
  - Were bullied in 'hidden' locations (50.2%*)
  - Bullied by group(s) (more than 2 times**)
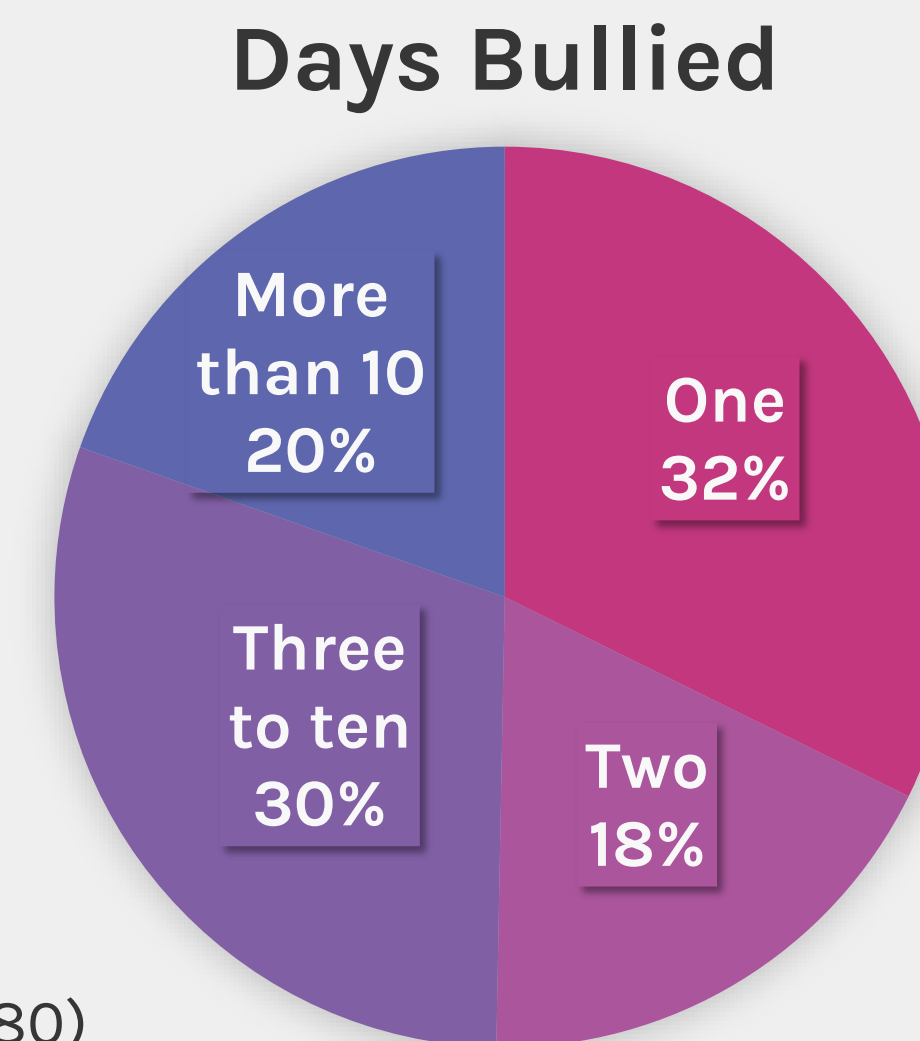
Discussion

- Based on these findings, it appears that SRO presence in schools did not have a significant relationship with bullying and perceptions of safety and fear — rather, perceptions of fairness, adult supervision, reporting, and supportive teachers do play a significant role.
  - Thus, school efforts and resources may be better allocated for reassessing rule fairness, adopting anonymous reporting mechanisms, and fostering positive student–teacher/adult relationships. [5–9]

Limitations

- Although the SCS contains a large sample size, there is a high percentage of missing data related to bullying and school safety variables, which is further limited to 12- to 18-year-old students.
- The majority of reported schools did have SROs (nearly 80%), making it important to consider investigating these relationships in more schools without SROs.

Future Directions

- More information should be collected from students who have experienced both types of bullying within schools and students without SROs in their schools to potentially reinforce the relationship strength between variables.
- Because perception of rule fairness appears to be extremely important, future research should explore what types of rules foster climates in which kids are bullying less and are more comfortable reporting being bullied.

References

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001; (X) = % or times likelihood; β = standardized coefficients*