

Student survey says some likely to throw punches, others taunts

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(RNS) A recent survey of 43,000 high school students found that public school students were more likely to participate in physical violence, while private school students were more likely to have teased or taunted someone, and more likely to have felt bullied themselves.

Fifty-two percent of public school students say they have hit someone in anger in the past year, according to the study by the Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics, compared to 47 percent of students in private religious high schools and 41 percent of students in secular private high schools.

The study found that 60 percent of boys at religious school have "bullied, teased or taunted" someone at least once in the past year, compared to 55 percent of boys in public or secular private schools.

Girls in religious schools also were more likely to have verbally bullied someone than girls in the other two categories.

About a quarter (23 percent) of religious-school students have "mistreated someone because he or she belonged to a different group," compared to 21 percent of public school students and 15 percent of secular private students.

A major conclusion that can be drawn from the survey is that girls from all types of schools are nicer to their schoolmates than boys -- or perhaps the boys are more honest.

Overall, boys were more likely than girls to agree with these statements: "I'm prejudice against certain groups," "It's sometimes OK to hit or threaten someone when I am very angry," "I have bullied, teased or taunted someone," "I have used racial slurs or insults," and "I have been under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol at school."

Boys were three times more likely than girls to "strongly agree" with the question on prejudice. Boys also were 50 percent more likely to have bullied or teased someone twice or more in the past year, or hit someone because they were angry.

The survey did not detect much difference in civility -- or lack of it -- when comparing different regions of the country. Seniors are more civil than freshmen, but not by a huge margin.

Student leaders, college-bound students, honor students, female athletes and those in youth activities reported more civil behavior than others. Male athletes, however, were slightly more likely to have bullied than male non-athletes.

Officials at the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute said the real take-away of the survey is not the demographic differences, but the fact that bullying is so pervasive in American high schools.

"If the saying, 'Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never harm me,' was ever true, it certainly is not so today," Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Institute, said in a statement.

"Insults, name calling, relentless teasing and malicious gossip often inflict deep and enduring pain," he said. "It's not only the prevalence of bullying behavior and victimization that's troublesome. The Internet has intensified the injury. What's posted on the Internet is permanent, and it spreads like a virus -- there is no refuge."