

Public Health Data Watch

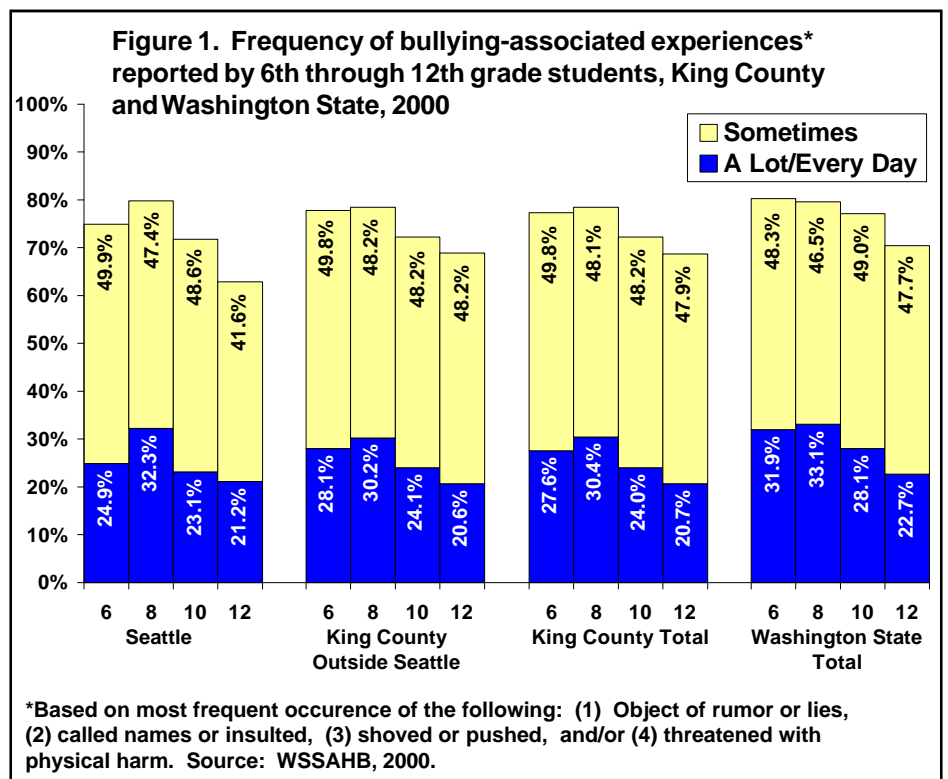
Bullying and Bias-Based Harassment in King County Schools

In recent years, bullying in schools has gained considerable media attention with reports of high profile shootings in schools by students who subsequently report having been humiliated on a regular basis by their peers. While these extreme occurrences are rare, the association of these events with bullying has prompted researchers to question how common bullying is and how it affects targeted children and adolescents. (For a definition and discussion of the terms “bullying” and “harassment”, see the box on page 14). National studies have found that:

- 8% of 6th-10th graders nationally say they are bullied once a week or more (**Nansel, 2001**).
- 68% of 12 to 15 year-old students describe teasing and bullying as a “big problem” for people their age (**Nickelodeon/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001**).
- 90% of those bullied report psychological consequences, including a drop in grades, increased anxiety, and loss of friends or social life (**Glew, 2000**).

The WSSAHB confirms that bullying-type experiences are common in all King County public schools. Specifically, of 6th to 12th grade students surveyed, 21% to 30% reported bullying-associated experiences “a lot” or “every day.” Another 48% to 50% reported these experiences “sometimes.” These experiences were more common among 6th and 8th graders than among 10th and 12th graders (see **Figure 1**). With respect to being harassed, 50% of the students in the 9th through 12th grades reported being harassed in the 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey (see Figure 5 on page 4). Although only Seattle students have been asked these questions, there is no reason to believe that the results would be different had they been asked in other districts. In fact, the WSSAHB results indicate that Seattle students might experience general bullying behaviors at a rate less than other King County school districts. A description of the Seattle School efforts to prevent and eliminate bullying and harassment is included in this report on page 3.

This issue of *Data Watch* recognizes bullying and harassment as a major public health problem which is both widespread and potentially a serious threat to the health and well-being of children and youth living in King County. The information comes primarily from two sources. General countywide and state data concerning experiences commonly associated with bullying (e.g., object of rumors or lies, called names or insulted, shoved/pushed, threatened with physical harm) are from the Washington State Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors (WSSAHB) which was conducted in the fall of 2000. Information concerning bias-based harassment (based on gender, race/ethnicity, and perceived sexual orientation) comes from the Seattle Teen Health Survey which was conducted in Seattle Public Schools in 1999. Details concerning both of these surveys are included in the box on page 15.

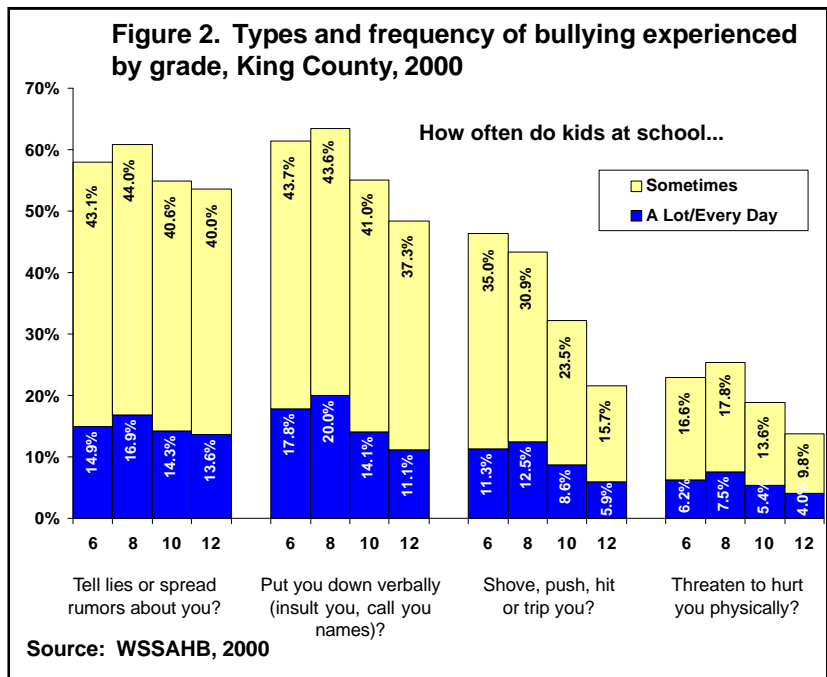


Examples of the potentially harmful effects of bullying and harassment are also highlighted in this report. In addition, it is hoped that information from this report will be helpful to schools and districts as they make and implement anti-bullying and harassment policies that are now required by state law to be in place by August 1, 2003. (see box on page 14 for details).

Bullying-associated behaviors are common in King County schools.

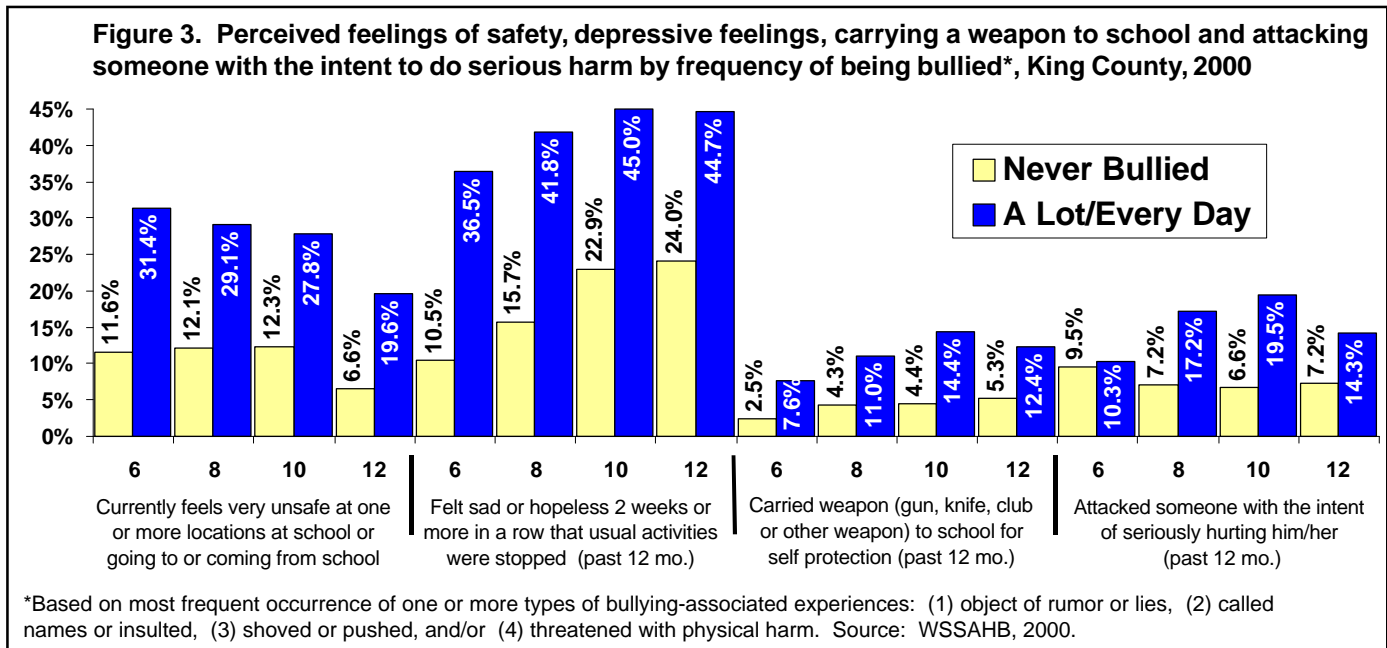
In King County, 13 school districts participated in WSSAHB as part of the statewide random sample or as an independent sample. Students participating in the survey were asked 4 questions pertaining to experiences associated with being bullied (see page 15 for details and descriptions). As mentioned previously and shown in **Figure 1** (preceding page), reports that one or more of the 4 types of bullying occurred a lot or every day ranged from a high of 30% of 8th graders to a low of 21% of 12th graders. Reports that any one or more of the 4 types occurred at most “sometimes” ranged from 50% of 6th graders to 48% of 12th graders. King County rates were similar to those observed statewide.

The most common types of potential bullying behaviors experienced (**Figure 2**) were being called names/insulted (reported a lot or every day by 11% to 20% of students) and being the object of rumors/lies (reported a lot or daily by 14% to 17%). Less common were reports of being shoved, pushed, hit or tripped (reported a lot or daily by 6% to 13%) and physical threats of harm (reported a lot or every day by 4% to 8%).



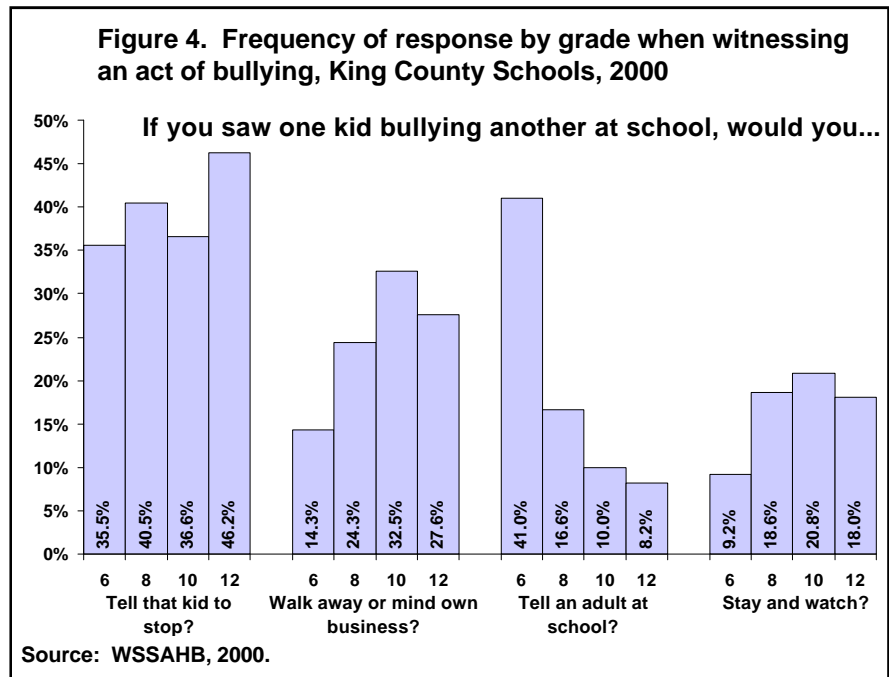
Bullying-associated experiences are often associated with other harmful outcomes.

Reports of bullying-type experiences were strongly associated with feeling unsafe, having depressive feelings, carrying a weapon to school for protection, and reports of having attacked someone with the intent of seriously hurting them (**Figure 3**). For example, 45% of 12th grade students who reported one of the 4 bully-type behaviors a lot or daily also reported feeling so sad or hopeless for 2 weeks or more in a row in the past year that they stopped some normal activities. This contrasts with 24% of 12th graders who reported no bully-type behaviors. Generally, students who reported experiencing any one of the 4 bully-type behaviors a lot or daily were nearly twice or more as likely to report concerns about safety, depressive feelings, weapon carrying or having attacked someone with the intent of seriously hurting them.



Many students would tell another student to stop bullying if they saw a bullying incident occur. However, nearly equal numbers would either “walk away” or “stay and watch.”

When students were asked what they would do if they “saw one kid bullying another at school,” many (range by grade from 36% of 6th graders to 46% of 12th graders) reported that they would “tell that kid to stop” (Figure 4). About 10% of 10th and 12th graders, said that they would tell an adult, while 41% of 6th graders and 17% of 8th graders said they would tell an adult. About one quarter to one third of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders said they would “walk away or mind their own business,” and one fifth said they would “stay and watch.”



“I think that there isn’t enough being done to make kids get along better with each other. Vicious, mean ‘cliques’ still exist, and they go around tormenting people...” Student comment in 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey

Seattle Public Schools is one of the first districts in the nation to conduct surveys concerning bias-based harassment.

Seattle Public Schools have been taking seriously comments such as the one cited above. Like most if not all districts in King County, Seattle Schools have taken a number of steps to try to ensure that students are able to attend school in a bully- and harassment-free environment (see box below).

What Seattle Public Schools is Doing to Prevent Bullying and Harassment

Seattle Schools have implemented several programs to address bullying and harassment. Aspects of these programs include:

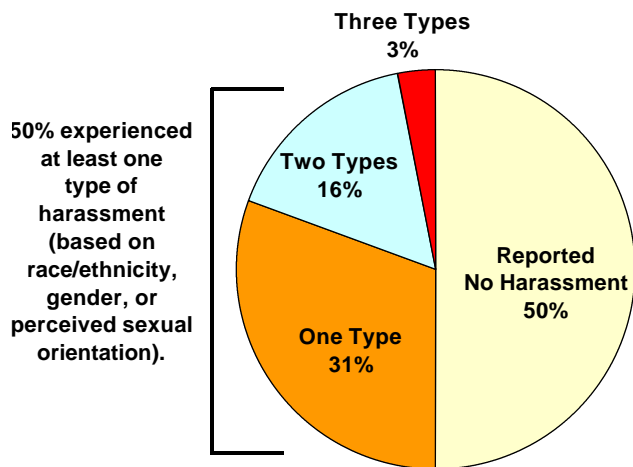
- Recognition that students must feel safe at school if they are to reach the high academic standards that have been set for them.
- A clear policy against bias-based harassment. An overall anti-aggression policy is actively being worked on and expected to be released later in 2002.
- Anti-aggression and anti-bullying curricula available to all elementary and middle schools and training of school-based staff to effectively implement this curriculum.
- Training for school-based staff to help them recognize harassment and bullying, and effectively intervene.
- Specialized counseling in cases that involve sexually aggressive youth and intensive case management for bullies and aggressors.
- Expanding the number of schools offering conflict management and peer mediation programs.
- An increased focus on prevention and anti-aggression and bullying efforts at all grade levels. This includes expanded counseling at the elementary level and expanded intervention at middle and high school.
- A Safe Schools/Healthy Students program that expands existing drug, alcohol and aggression intervention, truancy, security, mental health and adult education programs. The program, made possible by a three-year grant aimed at reducing school violence, includes a systemic analysis of school and community risk and protective factors, to be followed by appropriate interventions based on the research.

More information concerning the Seattle-related programs above can be obtained by contacting local schools or by calling Pegi McEvoy at (206) 252-0707. For information concerning programs in other King County school districts, contact the district office directly.

Starting in 1995, the Seattle School District was one of the first in the country to incorporate items regarding bias-based harassment into its biannual Teen Health Survey. Both the 1995 and 1999 Seattle Teen Health Surveys asked questions pertaining to three forms of harassment among Seattle Public High School students, grades 9-12. Among a wide range of health issues, high school students were asked about: 1) gender-based verbal bullying, 2) race-based verbal or physical attacks, and 3) sexual orientation-based verbal or physical attacks. All three forms of harassment were reported by significant numbers of students and all three correlate strongly with students' concerns about both safety and self-endangerment. (For a detailed description of the survey, see box on page 15).

Although the following information concerning bias-based harassment in schools pertain only to Seattle Schools, we have no reason to believe that if these questions had been asked in other King County school districts that the findings would be any different. The purpose of including these data is to further illustrate some of the potentially harmful effects of bullying and harassment and the great need to eliminate these behaviors. The data, however, are not intended to describe the most current state of affairs in Seattle Public Schools, since they were collected in 1999 and do not reflect the impact of programs that have been implemented since this survey was last conducted.

Figure 5. Reports of harassment among students attending Seattle Public High Schools, 1999

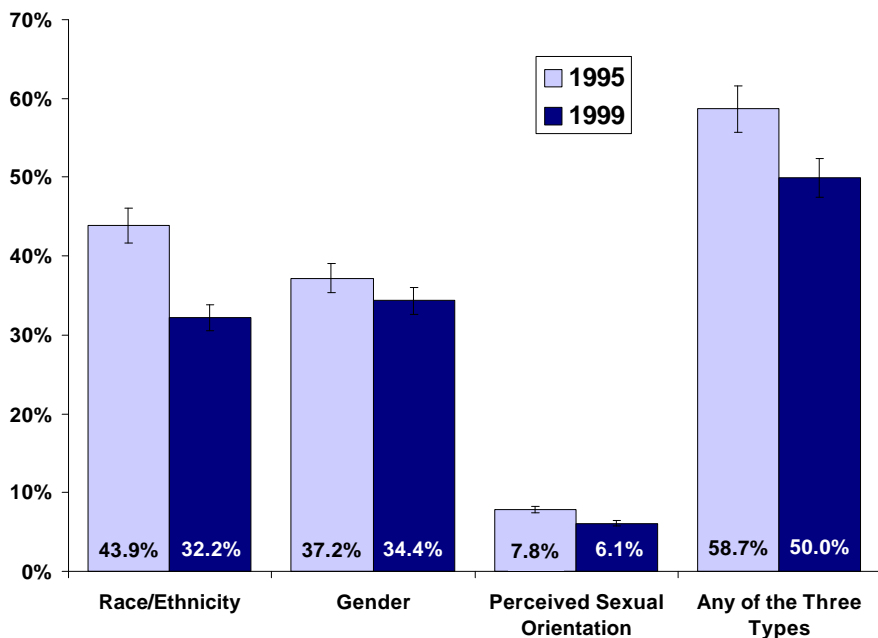


Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

50% of Seattle high school students reported being harassed in 1999, down from 59% in 1995.

Half (50%) of students in the 1999 survey reported having experienced at least one of the three forms of harassment (Figure 5). Nearly one third (31%) said they had experienced one of the three types of harassment. Another 16% reported that they had experienced two types and 3% reported experiencing all three types of harassment (race-, gender- and orientation-based).

Figure 6. Types of harassment reported over time, Seattle Public High Schools, 1995 and 1999



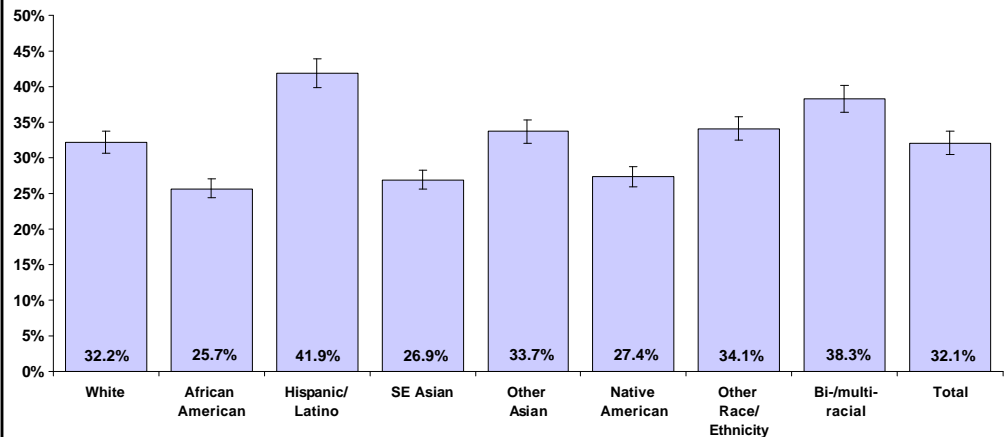
Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1995 and 1999

Comparisons of reports of harassment since these questions were initially used in 1995 show significant decreases in 1999 (Figure 6). In the 1995 survey, 59% of students reported harassment compared to 50% in 1999. Significant decreases are evident with respect to each of the three types of harassment. The greatest decrease was observed with respect to reports of harassment based on race/ethnicity which decreased from 44% in 1995 to 32% in 1999. It seems very possible, with such a large decrease, that the change reflects, at least in part, the impact of intervention activities.

Race-based harassment is reported by at least one in 4 students of every racial and ethnic heritage.

Overall, 32% of students reported being harassed or attacked based on their race or ethnicity (Figure 7). Racial harassment was reported with the greatest frequency by students of Hispanic or Latino heritage (42%) and least commonly by African-American students (26%).

Figure 7. Harassment or attack based on race/ ethnicity by student's race/ethnicity, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999

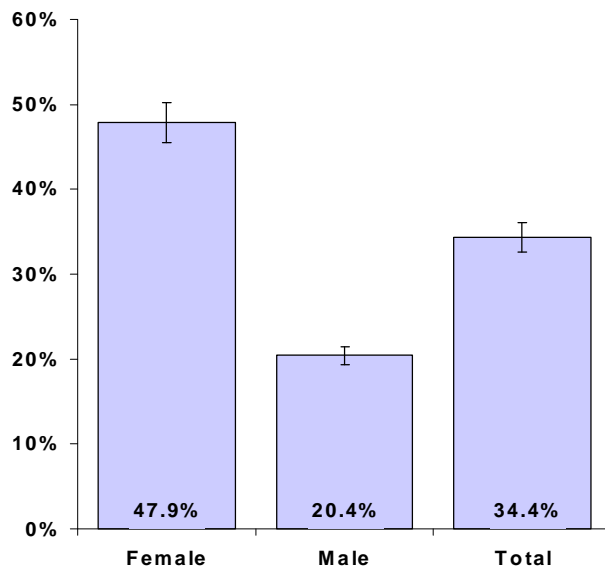


Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

- "I feel as if the issue of racism and sexual harassment need to be talked about more in schools because every year and every grade you go up it gets worse and worse."
- "I have been sexually harassed in front of a teacher, and he didn't do anything."
- "I notice how much girls get sexually and non-sexually harassed at school. I have been harassed by having people say rude and disturbing things which I find uncomfortable and also some of them will even touch girls. Sometimes when I see this happening I notice again how little the teachers do."

Comments by students, 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey

Figure 8. Harassment based on gender by student's gender, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999



Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

Gender-based or sexual harassment is most commonly reported by female students, but also by one in 5 males.

With respect to harassment based on gender, 34% of students reported this type of abuse (Figure 8). Female students were much more likely to report this form of harassment than male students (48% compared to 20%, respectively).

Nearly half of gay, lesbian and bisexual students reported having been harassed based on their perceived sexual orientation.

Harassment based on perceived sexual orientation was reported by 6% of students overall (Figure 9). This is considerably less frequent than reports of either racial/ethnic-based or sexual harassment, but still represents 60 students in a typical 1,000 person student-body. Of students who reported their sexual orientation, however, reports of this type of harassment were much more common among students who reported that they were gay or lesbian (49%) or bisexual (39%) than among students who reported they were heterosexual (4%).

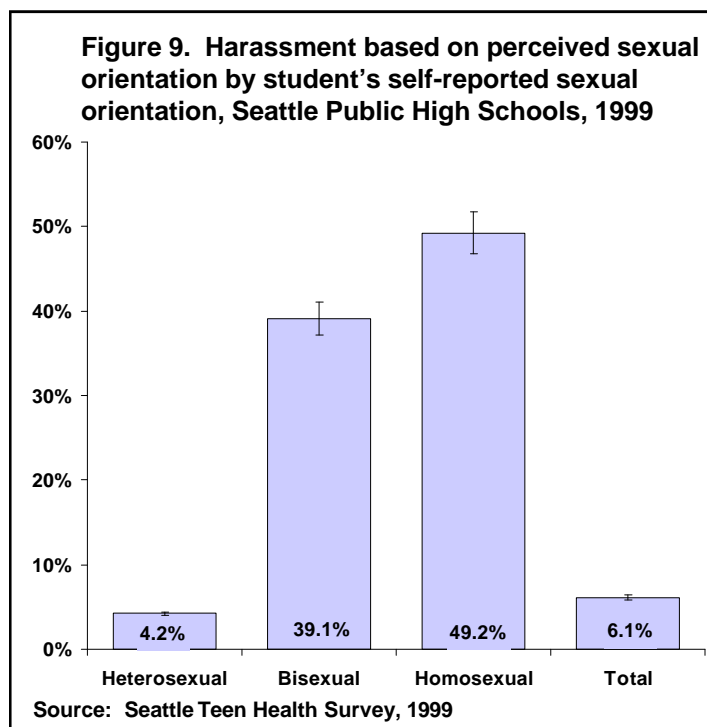
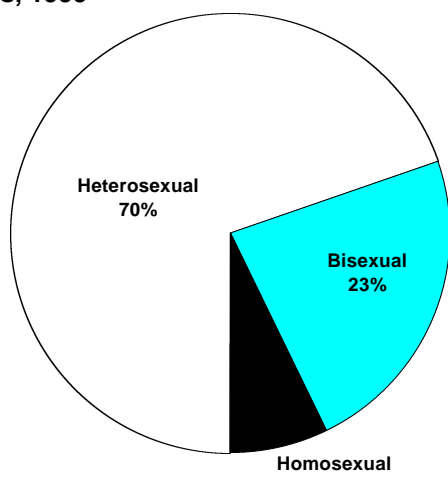


Figure 10. Sexual orientation of students reporting sexual orientation-based harassment, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999



Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

Seven out of 10 students who reported past or present harassment based on perceived sexual orientation are heterosexual.

Most students who say that “someone has said offensive things to me or attacked me because they thought I was gay or lesbian” reported that they were heterosexual (70%) (Figure 10). In other words, more than twice as many students who identified as heterosexual reported this type of harassment than the combined numbers of gay, lesbian or bisexual students.

- “I feel quite safe at this school even though I have been assaulted by someone I didn’t know. Many people call me gay even though I am not, and they keep on accusing me of watching porn, even though I don’t. People don’t like me because I’m different from the ‘cool’ kids, but I see how chaotic and drug involved is what people call ‘cool’....”
- “Our school seems to have a problem with homophobia; unfortunately, there isn’t too much that can be done. Being bisexual myself, I once kissed another girl in the hallway and got shoved into a wall for my troubles by some random person who apparently didn’t approve.”

Comments by students, 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey

Table 1. Safety on and off school grounds, Seattle Public High Schools 1999	Not Harassed/Attacked		Any Harassment/Attack		Total (All Students)	
	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)
- Feels unsafe or afraid at school some, most, or all of the time	12.8	(11.9-13.9)	24.2*	(22.9-25.5)	18.5	(17.7-19.3)
- Has missed at least one day of school because s/he felt unsafe in past 30 days	4.4	(3.8-5.0)	10.9*	(10.0-11.8)	7.6	(7.1-8.2)
- Carried weapon at school in past month	5.3	(4.7-6.1)	13.5*	(12.5-14.6)	9.4	(8.8-10.0)
- Carried gun at school in past month	0.9	(0.6-1.2)	3.6*	(3.1-4.2)	2.2	(1.9-2.6)
- Was threatened with or injured by a weapon at school in past 12 months	4.4	(3.8-5.0)	14.8*	(13.8-15.9)	9.6	(9.0-10.2)
- Has had property stolen or deliberately damaged at school in past 12 months	22.8	(21.6-24.1)	41.1*	(39.6-42.6)	31.9	(31.0-32.9)
- Was in physical fight in past 12 months	11.5	(10.6-12.5)	21.8*	(20.6-23.1)	16.7	(15.9-17.5)
- Involved in gang	2.3	(1.9-2.8)	4.8*	(4.2-5.5)	3.5	(3.2-4.0)
- Self, family or friend shot at	27.8	(26.4-29.2)	42.7*	(41.1-44.3)	35.2	(34.1-36.3)

Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

* Statistically significant difference between those who reported being harassed/attacked and those who reported no harassment/attack.

Students who reported harassment also reported feeling less safe at school.

Reports of harassment in the Seattle Teen Health Survey are strongly related to reports of other safety concerns at school or outside of school (Table 1). Students who reported harassment also much more frequently reported feeling unsafe most or all of the time at school (24% compared to 13% among those not reporting harassment), having property stolen or deliberately damaged at school in the past 12 months (41% and 23%, respectively), and having been in a physical fight in the past 12 months (22% and 12% respectively).

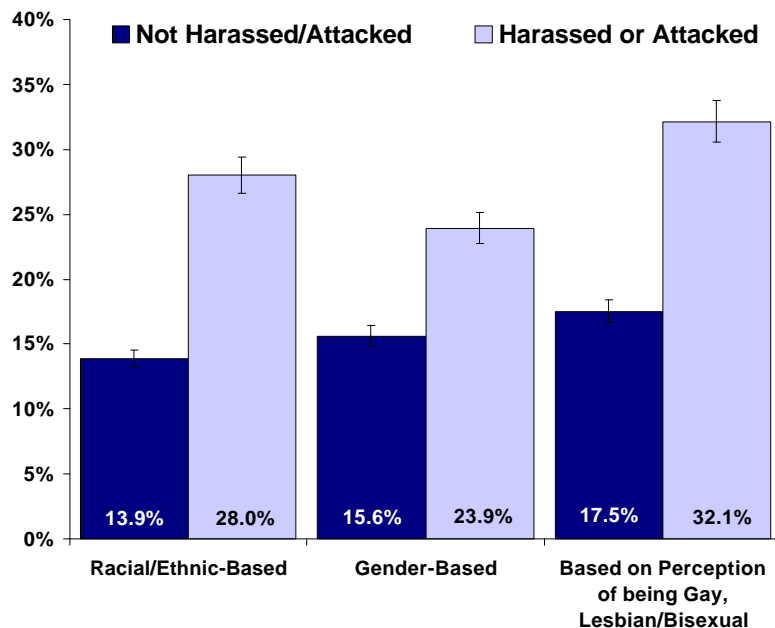
- *“I feel unsafe at school when I walk in the halls during classes. Guys yell scary comments and one guy followed me around for a week....”*

Student comment, 1999 Teen Health Survey

Other safety-related issues were also reported more frequently by students who said they experienced harassment compared to those who didn't report harassment. For example, students who reported harassment were also more likely to report being in a gang (5% and 2%, respectively) or to report a shooting incident in which they themselves, a friend or family member were the targets (43% and 28%, respectively).

In general, safety concerns were reported more frequently among students reporting harassment regardless of the type of harassment experienced (Figure 11).

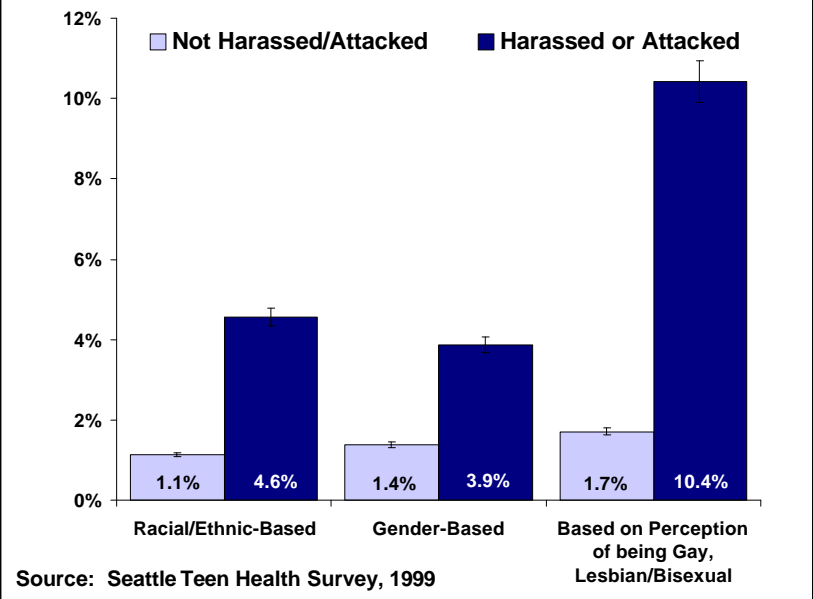
Figure 11. Feeling unsafe at school some or all of the time by type of harassment experienced, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999



Students who have been harassed are almost three times as likely to carry weapons.

It is logical that students may feel compelled to carry weapons if they fear for their safety. Students who reported experiencing harassment were almost three times as likely as their non-harassed peers to say they have ever carried a weapon at school (14% and 5%, respectively). While far fewer reported carrying a gun to school in the past month (4% and 1% respectively), it is important to note the differences in gun carrying behavior by type of harassment experienced (**Figure 12**). About 4% of students who reported race- or gender-based harassment said that they had carried a gun in the past month. Among those who reported sexual orientation-based harassment, more than 10% said they had carried a gun to school in the past month.

Figure 12. Carrying a gun to school in the past month by type of harassment experienced, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999



Harassed students were much more likely to also report engaging in self-endangering or harmful behaviors.

Reports of harassment were associated with risk-taking behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, heavy drug use, and having sexual intercourse (**Table 2**). For example, fewer non-harassed than harassed students reported having two or more sex partners in the past month (6% vs. 10%).

Some of the most dramatic differences between non-harassed and harassed students were found with respect to alcohol and other drug use. In this instance 18% of students who did not report any harassment reported heavy drug use in contrast to 31% of their harassed-peers who reported heavy drug use.

Table 2. Self-endangerment, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999	Not Harassed/Attacked		Any Harassment/Attack		Total (All Students)	
	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)
Going Along With Peers						
- Doesn't go along with peers most/all of the time when they're doing something bad	48.8	(47.3-50.3)	48.1	(46.6-49.7)	48.5	(47.4-49.5)
Riding in a Motor Vehicle						
- Always wears seatbelt	46.0	(44.5-47.5)	41.6*	(40.2-43.1)	43.8	(42.8-44.9)
- Ridden in vehicle with driver who was 'high' in past month	24.6	(23.4-25.9)	36.3*	(34.9-37.7)	30.5	(29.5-31.4)
Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drug Use						
- Smoked tobacco at least once in past month	20.5	(19.3-21.8)	31.4*	(30.0-32.8)	25.9	(25.0-26.9)
- Smoked marijuana at least once in past month	22.7	(21.4-24.0)	34.0*	(32.6-35.5)	28.3	(27.4-29.3)
- Drank alcohol at least once in past month	30.8	(29.4-32.2)	47.1*	(45.6-48.6)	39.0	(38.0-40.1)
- Binge drinking at least once in past month	17.1	(15.9-18.2)	28.4*	(27.1-29.8)	22.8	(21.9-23.7)
- Heavy drug use†	18.1	(17.0-19.3)	31.2*	(29.8-32.6)	24.6	(23.7-25.6)
Sexual Behavior						
- Has had sexual intercourse	32.0	(30.6-33.4)	47.0*	(45.5-48.5)	39.5	(38.5-40.5)
- Used condom last time had sex	40.6	(37.9-43.3)	41.8	(39.6-44.0)	41.3	(39.6-43.0)
- Two or more sex partners in past 3 months	5.7	(5.0-6.4)	10.1*	(9.2-11.1)	7.9	(7.3-8.5)
- Been pregnant or has gotten someone pregnant	4.9	(4.3-5.6)	9.2*	(8.3-10.1)	7.0	(6.5-7.6)
Dieting Behavior						
- Risky dieting among those trying to lose weight	32.5	(27.4-38.2)	39.2	(35.2-43.4)	36.9	(33.7-40.2)

Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

* Statistically significant difference between those who reported being harassed/attacked and those who reported no harassment/attack.

†Heavy drug use is defined as reported use of 3+ drugs, or 2+ drugs at least 3 times, or heroin or cocaine 1+ times, or any drug 10+ times, or had 3+ episodes of binge drinking, or was high at school 3+ times in the past month, or injected an illegal drug or shared needles.

Table 3. Suicide and other mental health concerns, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999	Not Harassed/ Attacked	Any Harassment/ Attack	Total (All Students)
	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)
- Felt so sad or hopeless for 2 weeks or more that stopped doing normal activities	22.1 (21.0-23.2)	41.6* (39.8-43.4)	28.9 (27.9-29.8)
- Has seriously considered suicide in past 12 months	12.1 (11.1-13.1)	27.3* (26.0-28.7)	19.7 (18.9-20.6)
- Has made suicide plan in past 12 months	6.6 (5.9-7.4)	16.9* (15.8-18.0)	11.7 (11.1-12.4)
- Has actually attempted suicide at least once in past 12 months	4.4 (3.9-5.1)	11.6* (10.7-12.6)	8.0 (7.5-8.6)
- Has attempted suicide and had to be treated by a doctor or nurse in past 12 months	1.2 (0.9-1.6)	4.6* (4.0-5.2)	2.9 (2.6-3.3)

Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

* Statistically significant difference between those who reported being harassed/attacked and those who reported no harassment/attack.

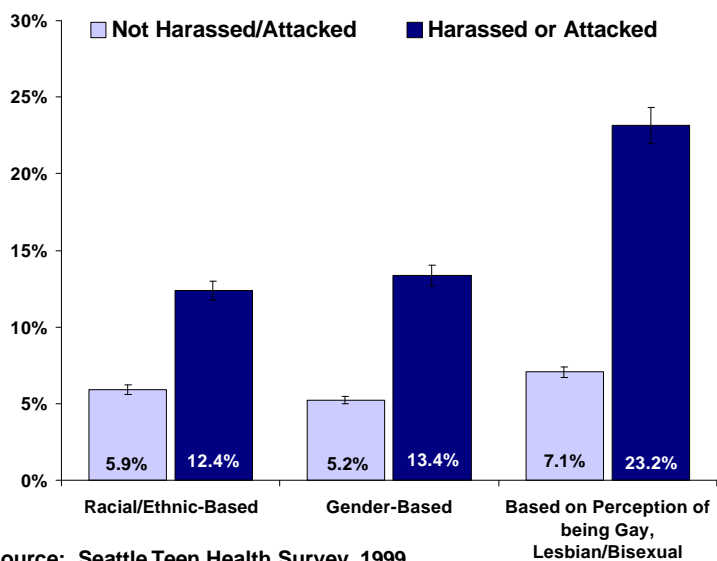
Students reporting harassment may be at greater risk for suicide or have other mental health concerns.

The association between harassment and prolonged feelings of sadness (two weeks or more) and considering or attempting suicide is very strong. Generally, students who reported being harassed were more likely to report the mental health problems and suicide-related indicators listed in **Table 3** as well. Students who reported harassment, for example, were more than twice as likely as non-harassed students to report feeling so sad or hopeless for 2 weeks or more that they stopped their normal activities (42% and 22%, respectively).

Similarly, harassed students reported considering or attempting suicide at rates at least twice as high as students who did not report being harassed. Considering suicide in the past 12 months, for instance, was reported by 27% of students who also reported harassment compared to 12% of students who reported no harassment.

This pattern remained regardless of the type of harassment experienced (**Figure 13**). Suicide attempts were reported twice as frequently among those who had been racially harassed (by 12% vs. 6% of their non-racially-harassed peers). Suicide attempts were almost three times as common among those who reported having been sexually harassed (by 13% vs. 5% of their non-sexually-harassed peers). And students who reported having been harassed because someone thought they were gay or lesbian were nearly four times as likely as their non-harassed peers to have attempted suicide in the previous year (23% of those harassed for perceived sexual orientation compared to 7% of their peers).

Figure 13. Reported suicide attempts in the past year by type of harassment experienced, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999



- *[High School A] is good at times but the safety here is bad! The gay and lesbian youth get attacked by youth here and GLBTY [gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender youth] are most likely to kill themselves....*
- *"I am a gay male, sophomore, attending [High School B]. Last year I went to [High School C] (9th grade) and I just have to say [High School B] is better. But, there needs to be more enforcement of harassment (meaning stopping harassment from happening). [High School C] was hell! I hated every day and wish I could have died...."*

Comments by students, 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey

Students reporting harassment may have less support in terms of developmental assets and perceived resources for help (protective factors).

Developmental assets are factors that help children and adolescents to become competent, healthy and caring. These factors, when present, may give children and youth the strength and resiliency to resist harmful behaviors and overcome adversity. The Seattle Teen Health Survey included some questions relating to both developmental assets (e.g., encouragement from teachers or parents) and also resources (places and people to whom a student might turn for support).

Although the difference was small, a combined protective factor scale of all developmental assets surveyed indicated that students who reported harassment were also less likely to report having many protective factors than those who did not report harassment (15% and 17% respectively). With respect to specific indicators (**Table 4**), harassed students were less likely than students who did not report any harassment to feel that their parents gave them encouragement to do their best (88% and 92%, respectively). Harassed students were also less likely to believe their future would be good (68% and 73%, respectively).

With regard to perceived support, harassed students were more likely than their non-harassed peers to report *not* being able to get help for stress, depression, or family problems (31% and 13%, respectively). This pattern of reporting unmet need was similar, regardless of the type of harassment experienced (**Figure 14**), although students who reported experiencing sexual orientation-based harassment reported the greatest unmet need.

Seattle Public Schools, in collaboration with the City of Seattle and Public Health – Seattle & King County, have increased their health services over the past decade. In addition to school nursing services, there are now Teen Health Centers staffed by nurse practitioners and counselors in nearly every high school. In terms of using these facilities, harassed students were one-third more likely than their non-harassed peers to report using a Teen Health Center (45% and 33%, respectively).

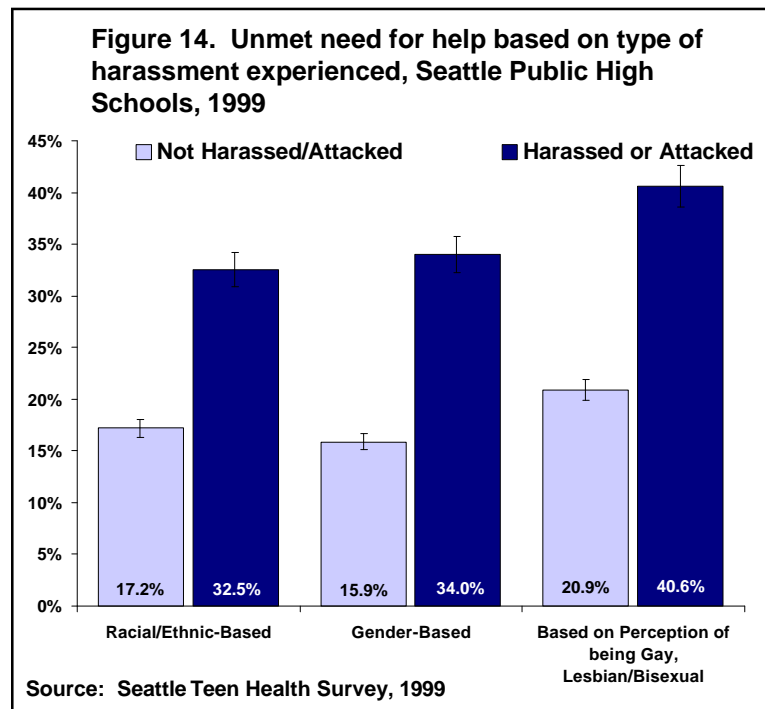


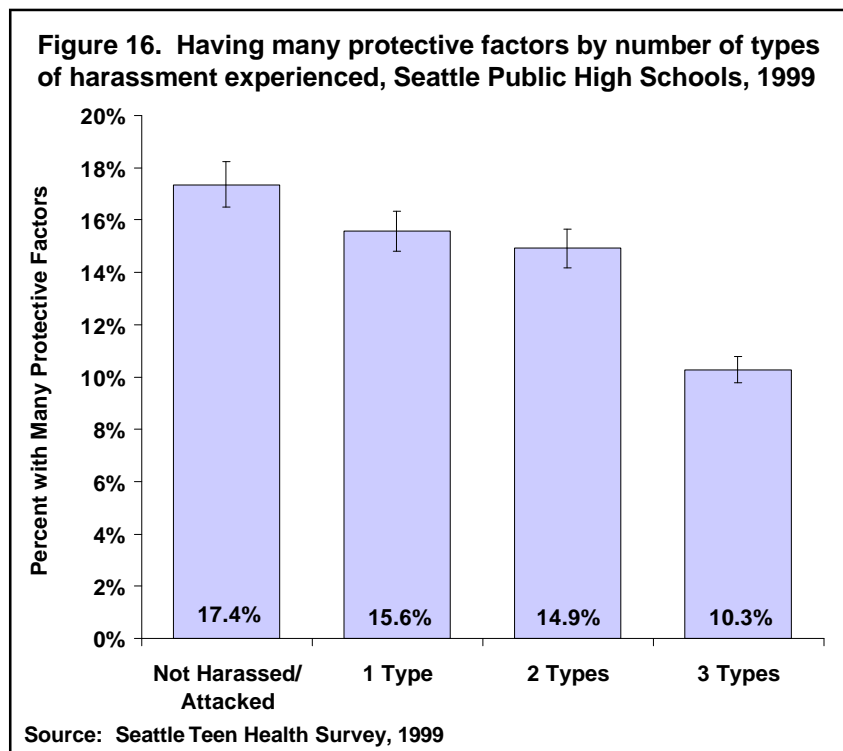
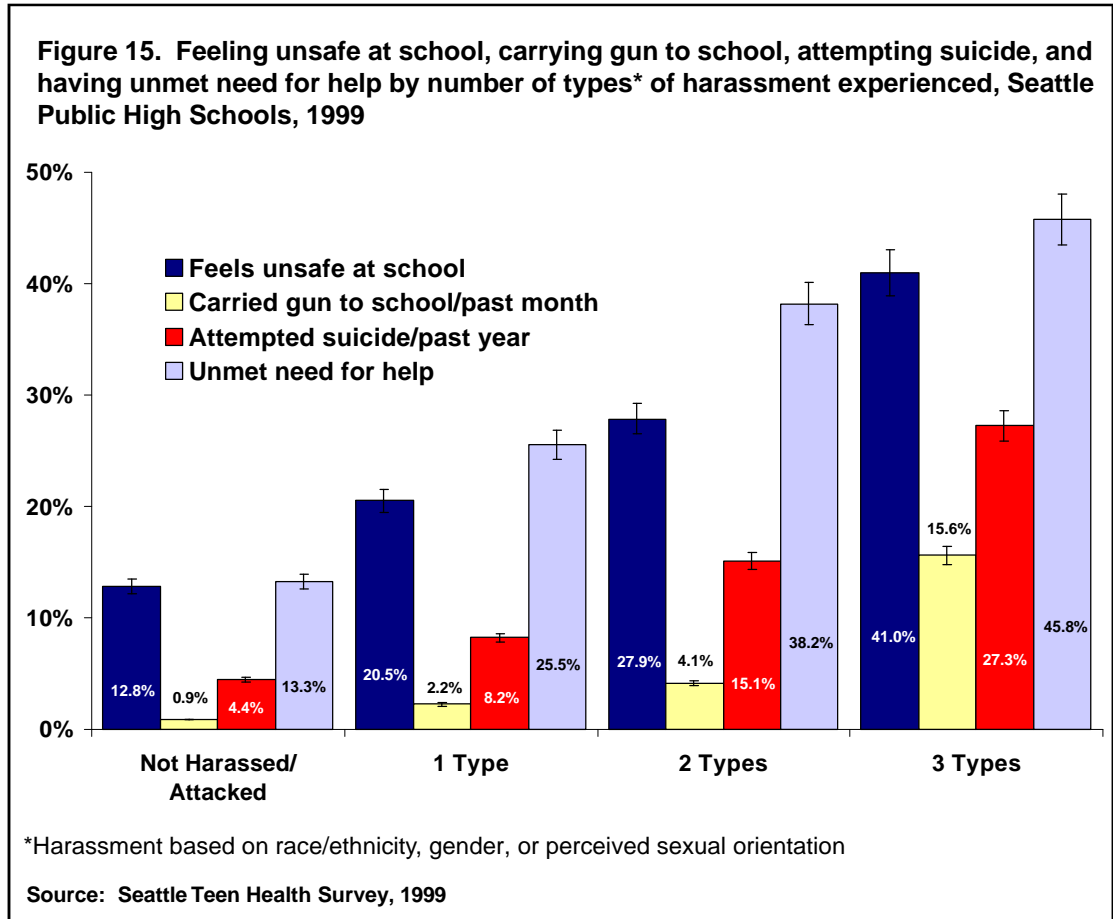
Table 4. Developmental assets and resources for help, Seattle Public High Schools, 1999	Not Harassed/Attacked		Any Harassment/Attack		Total (All Students)	
	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)	%	(95% CI)
Developmental Assets and Academic Performance						
- Has few problems or even if there are many, s/he knows how to handle them	92.5	(91.6-93.2)	86.0*	(85.0-87.0)	89.3	(88.6-89.9)
- Thinks future will be good	73.0	(71.5-74.5)	68.1*	(66.6-69.7)	70.6	(69.5-71.6)
- Gets mostly A's or B's	45.6	(43.9-47.3)	47.8	(46.1-49.6)	46.7	(45.5-47.9)
- Parent encourage him/her to do best most of the time or always	92.3	(91.3-93.2)	88.3*	(87.2-89.4)	90.3	(89.6-91.0)
- Has one or more teachers who encourage him/her to do best	83.1	(81.8-84.4)	83.7	(82.4-84.9)	83.4	(82.5-84.3)
- Has many protective factors (scale based on combination of assets listed above)	17.4	(16.1-18.7)	15.0*	(13.9-16.3)	16.2	(15.3-17.1)
Resources						
- At least one adult at school to whom s/he can talk to about personal problems	61.6	(60.1-63.1)	58.5*	(57.0-60.0)	60.1	(59.0-61.1)
- Unable to get help for stress/depression/family problem	13.3	(12.2-14.4)	31.0*	(29.5-32.6)	22.2	(21.2-23.2)
- Has regular place to go to for personal health care	74.3	(72.9-75.6)	78.0*	(76.7-79.2)	76.2	(75.2-77.1)
- Used Teen Health Center in past year	33.3	(31.7-35.0)	45.1*	(43.4-46.8)	39.2	(38.0-40.4)

Source: Seattle Teen Health Survey, 1999

* Statistically significant difference between those who reported being harassed/attacked and those who reported no harassment/attack.

The impact of harassment may be greater when more types of harassment are reported.

Although it is difficult to measure the true impact of harassment, intimidation, or bullying on the health and well-being of students, there is strong evidence that the effect may be great. The detrimental effects become clearer when looking at the compounding effects of reports of different types of bullying. Some students reported being harassed in multiple ways (race and gender, for example, or race and sexual orientation).



Generally, the more ways in which a student has been harassed, the more likely he or she is to report feeling unsafe at school, carrying a gun to school, attempting suicide, or not being able to get help when needed (Figure 15). It should be noted that this effect is independent of other risk factors (i.e., this effect remains for students regardless of whether or not they engage in "risky" behaviors such as drug use).

At the same time, students who experience more types of harassment may be even more vulnerable, since they also reported having fewer resources and developmental assets to help them buffer the negative effects of harassment (Figure 16).

Summary and Limitations

Bullying-associated experiences as reflected in the 2000 WSSAHB are common among King County public school students in the 6th through 12th grades. Three types of bias-based harassment (based on race/ethnicity, gender, and perceived sexual orientation) were also commonly reported by high school students attending Seattle Public Schools. Although the harassment measures were not assessed in other King County school districts, we have no reason to believe that other districts would differ by much from Seattle due to the similarity of WSSAHB results found in Seattle and in the 12 participating districts outside Seattle. The strong association of bullying and harassment with indicators such as lack of perceived safety, weapon carrying behavior, poorer mental health and unmet need for help among students who report harassment is cause for great concern. This association, however, does not necessarily imply that bullying and harassment cause these concerns or problems. On the one hand, the bullying/harassment itself may result in the particular concern (e.g., a previously non-depressed student becomes depressed and suicidal after being bullied or harassed). On the other hand, there may be an earlier tendency or vulnerability on the part of the student, which in conjunction with bullying/harassment, causes the concern to manifest as a serious problem or become even worse. An example of this scenario might be a student who is already depressed becoming suicidal after experiencing bullying/harassment from his/her peers.

Harassment and bullying behavior are not limited to middle and high schools. Other studies indicate high rates of bullying and harassment in elementary schools. Although data were more limited in the sample of 7th and 8th grade students participating in the 1999 Seattle Teen Health Survey, race-based harassment was reported even more frequently among these students than among their high school counterparts (41% and 35%, respectively). Gender-based harassment was reported slightly less frequently (30% compared to 34% among high school students).

While the WSSAHB and the Seattle Teen Health Survey raise important concerns with regard to bullying and harassment, additional information may be necessary to gain a fuller understanding of these behaviors. WSSAHB questions do not define "bullying", so reported experiences may or may not reflect current definitions of the term. With respect to the Seattle Teen Health Survey, questions regarding harassment have no time reference, so that it is not known how recent the reported experiences are. The harassment questions also do not specify whether the harasser is a fellow student or a teacher or other adult. Neither do we know from this particular study the frequency or severity of the bullying and violence nor the ratio of bullies to targeted students.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this *Data Watch* on harassment and bullying in King County public schools, a number of recommendations are proposed to better address the issues of harassment and bullying. In particular, there is a clear need for several specific efforts:

- **Provide an environment and a curriculum that will prevent all forms of bullying and bias-based harassment.** Information concerning the development of anti-bullying/harassment programs is listed in the resources section which follows this section.
- **Improve the handling of bullying and harassment.** Staff, parents, volunteers and peers need to be trained to intervene quickly and firmly, regardless of the nature of the bias involved.
- **Take actions to increase the reporting of bullying and harassment.** Students need to know to whom they can report an incident and how it will be handled. They especially need to know that they will be taken seriously, incidents will be investigated rigorously, offenders will be disciplined appropriately, their confidentiality will be protected to the extent it legally can be, and the staff will do their utmost to prevent retaliation.
- **Monitor harassment and bullying regularly through incident reports and student surveys** such as the Healthy Youth Survey planned for implementation in the fall of 2002. School districts are encouraged to participate. More information concerning this survey can be

obtained by contacting Judy Schoder at (360) 236-3520 (e-mail: judy.schoder@doh.wa.gov).

- **Collect data about other forms of harassment** such as harassment due to religion, (dis)ability, country of origin (and recentness of immigration and English fluency), socioeconomic class and body size/appearance.
- **Develop surveys to better understand violence.** Just as the Teen Health Survey already asks about suicidal ideation and having made a plan, it would be useful to ask about having violent thoughts and having made a plan to commit acts of violence.

Finally, although several of the tragic school shootings in other parts of the country in recent years have involved students who reported being bullied, we must remember that these occurrences are the exception, not the rule. Howard Spivak and Deborah Prothrow-Stith (2001) in their national editorial published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* also caution us not to "... blame children for problem behaviors rather than trying to understand what may be underlying their behavior." They go on to recommend that we consider "environmental and social influences" and ask questions such as, "What role does the media play? What kind of role modeling by parents, teachers, and other adults promotes bullying or healthy social interaction? What is the relationship between bullying and exposure to family violence which is a well-described and frequently occurring risk factor for involvement in violence?"

Resources

A number of resources are available for children, students, parents, teachers and other school staff concerning bullying and harassment. To report a specific incident or for questions about anti-harassment or anti-bullying programs, contact the local school or district involved. A school's health center may also be able to help. Other resources include:

- **“Balancing Students’ Rights: A Child’s Right to Free Speech and Another Child’s Right to a Harassment-Free Learning Environment”**: a paper available online by Doug Honig, ACLU of Washington: www.safeschoolscoalition.org/ss_aclu.pdf.
- **Mothers Against Violence in America (MAVIA)** and **Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE)** offer a model for educating about violence in general (not specifically about biased-based violence). Phone: 1-800-896-7697; website: www.mavia.org.
- **Northwest Women’s Law Center** offers legal advocacy on numerous family and personal issues family and personal issues. General information: 206-682-9552; legal information/referral: 206-621-7691, TTY: 206-521-4317; E-mail: nwwlc@nwwlc.org; Web site: www.nwwlc.org.
- **Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime: A Guide for Schools**: Practical advice for school boards and administrators from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and the National Association of Attorneys General, 1999. Hard copies are free or available online. Phone: 1-877-4ED-Pubs; Website: www.ed.gov/pubs/Harassment.
- **Safe Schools Coalition (SSC)** works to reduce bias-based bullying and violence in schools and to help schools better meet the needs of sexual minority youth and children with sexual minority parents. SSC can provide an Intervention Specialist to assist with ongoing anti-gay harassment (1-888-307-9275 or intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org) and speakers/trainers for student, staff and parent workshops anywhere in Washington (206-461-4546, ask for Robert Raketty or training@safeschoolscoalition.org). Website: www.safeschoolscoalition.org
- **Seattle Public Schools’ Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minorities** is a project promoting safe schools for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. It convenes the advisory committee Schools Are For Everyone and provides education and support to students, staff and parents. Contact person: Lisa Love, phone: 206-252-0982; e-mail: LLove@seattleschools.org.
- **U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Seattle field office** provides technical assistance in collaboration with state and local education and law enforcement agencies to encourage educational institutions to improve their anti-harassment policies and procedures and to assist students and their parents to work with schools to enhance the schools’ anti-harassment capability. Phone: 206-220-7900, TDD: 206-220-7907; E-mail: OCR_Seattle@ed.gov; Web site: www.ed.gov/OCR
- **Washington Education Association (WEA)**: WEA offers training and technical assistance on diversity issues to promote a safe schools environment. It also provides legal counsel and support to represented employees of Washington State schools. Contact people: Frieda Takamura, Human Rights (Phone: 253-765-7062, E-mail: ftakamura@wa.nea.org) and Jerry Painter, General Counsel (Phone: 253-765-7020, E-mail: jpainter@wa.nea.org); Toll-free phone: 1-800-622-3393.
- **Washington State Attorney Generals’ Office** offers a number of resources for parents and schools on the internet at: <http://www.wa.gov/ago/safetytools.html>.
- **Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction** offers a model policy for districts on the internet at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/bullying.asp>.

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Defining Bullying and Harassment

Educators often use the term “bullying” to describe elementary school-aged behaviors such as name-calling and ostracizing which, especially when unchecked, can lead to harassment. A more specific definition of bullying has also been developed which includes physical or psychological aggression which is (1) intended to harm or disturb, (2) occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) has an imbalance of power with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one (Narsel, 2001). The term “harassment,” because it is also used in the criminal code, is usually reserved to describe more severe behaviors, especially at older ages. Harassment, when not addressed adequately, can escalate to physical and sexual assault. “A 1991 study found that 60% of boys labeled as bullies in grades six to nine had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 years; 35% to 40% had three or more convictions by age 24 years compared with 10% of control boys who were neither bullies nor victims as children” (O’weus, 1995).

Washington State’s new “Anti-Bullying” law (SHB 1444) defines “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” as “any intentional written, verbal, or physical act, including but not limited to one shown to be motivated by ... [race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, or sensory handicap], or other distinguishing characteristics, when the intentional written, verbal, or physical act: (a) physically harms a student or damages the student’s property; or (b) has the effect of substantially interfering with a student’s education; or (c) is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or (d) has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.” The law goes on to state that, “Nothing in this section requires the affected student to actually possess a characteristic that is a basis for the harassment, intimidation, or bullying.”

This *Data Watch* uses the term “bias-based harassment” to distinguish behaviors which are based on the bully’s ignorance about or prejudice against a group of people from behaviors that involve other motivations (such as weight, physical appearance, or the dislike of a particular individual). Effectively preventing and responding to these bias-based conflicts may depend upon understanding their origins.

What is Washington State’s New “Anti-Bullying” Law?

Washington State’s “Anti-Bullying” law was signed by Governor Locke on March 27, 2002. It specifically requires all school districts in the state *to ban bullying, harassment and intimidation* as defined above no later than August, 2003. Currently, nearly 45% of school districts have no policy or training that is required to address these issues. (Washington Association of School Administrators, 2001).

Some of the main provisions of the law require that:

- School districts have an anti-bullying policy in place by August 1, 2003;
- School districts notify students and staff of the policy;
- Superintendent of Public Instruction make model policies, training materials and other resources available on its website.

The new law also makes it clear that students and staff have a right to report harassment without fear of retaliation. Employees who witness bullying are encouraged to report it to the proper authorities, and are granted civil immunity from damages if they make such reports promptly.

For further information, contact Denise Fitch at the State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) (phone: 360-725-6059; e-mail: dfitch@ospi.wed.net.edu). As required by the new State law, OSPI also offers a Model Policy as an aid to districts as they develop their own local policies. Copies of the Policy may be found on the internet at: www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/bullying.asp.

Technical Notes on Using This Report

Confidence Intervals and Statistical Significance: All WSSAHB charts and figures are best available estimates and do not include confidence intervals or tests of statistical significance due to a non-random survey design which may make these statistical measures unreliable. All charts and tables in this report pertaining to the Seattle Teen Health Survey, however, do include a 95% error bar (designated with **I**) or confidence interval (CI). Since the percentages reported are based on samples of students there is always some statistical uncertainty as to what the *true* percentage would be if all students were included in the survey. By using 95% confidence intervals, we are able to estimate with 95% certainty that the *true* values will fall between the given ranges stated in parentheses in tables and by error bars (designated by **I**) on charts. When making comparisons between two percentages, we say that the differences between the two values are (*statistically significant*) when the confidence intervals or error bars do not overlap.

About the Surveys

The Washington State Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors (WSSAHB) was conducted in the fall of 2000 among 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students attending public schools in Washington State. The survey included two types of samples, a random sample of schools and an optional add-on sample of schools or districts that wanted to participate in the survey but were not selected for the state's random sample. Of the students included in the statewide random sample, 17,870 students participated of whom 3,212 were from King County. From the add-on schools, another 14,658 students participated in the survey from King County schools. The add-on sample expanded the participation of Seattle Public School students as well as added 4 King County school districts that were not originally included in the statewide random sample. For results presented in this report, statewide results are derived from the statewide random sample. The random sample of King County students, however, is not considered representative due to an irregular pattern on the part of schools or districts that declined to participate in the survey. The results presented in this report for Seattle, King County outside Seattle, and King County overall are derived from 19,507 students participating in either the random or add-on samples which represent 13 of 19 King County school districts. *While these results do not constitute a statistically valid sample, they reflect our best attempt to estimate the extent to which students in King County experience bullying-type behaviors.* Despite the limitations of the King County sample, the sample results appear to be well in line with statewide results. To improve sampling, schools selected for random samples are encouraged to participate in future surveys to ensure the most reliable results possible.

Questions pertaining to bullying on the WSSAHB included 4 questions about experiences commonly associated with bullying. The questions were: *How often do kids at school: A) Tell lies or spread rumors about you? B) Put you down verbally (insult you, call you names)? C) Shove, push, hit or trip you? And D) Threaten to hurt you physically?* Possible answers included: *Never, Sometimes, A lot, and Every day.*

Another question concerning response to witnessing another student being bullied was also included: *If you saw one kid bullying another at school, would you: A) Tell that kid to stop? B) Walk away or mind your own business? C) Tell an adult at school? Or D) Stay and watch?*

In addition to other WSSAHB questions mentioned in this report concerning several questions were pertaining to feelings of safety at school. The safety-related questions reported in this *Data Watch* (Figure 3) were taken from a series asking about safety in 9 separate locations (in class, in the halls or stairs, in the bathroom, in the locker rooms, on the playground/school grounds/ in the lunchroom, on the bus, on the way to school, and on the way home after school). Possible answers were: *Very unsafe, A little unsafe, Mostly safe, and Very safe.*

An analytic report on the survey (Document No. 01-0025) or more information concerning the survey can be obtained by contacting the State Superintendent of Public Instructions Office at 1-888-595-3276.

The Seattle Teen Health Survey has been conducted periodically as a part of the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) since 1989. Questions on harassment were first included in the survey in 1995 and again in 1999. Seattle requested the participation of a sample of students in the 7th and 8th grades (680 completed the survey in 1995; 1,827 in 1999) and of all students in grades 9 through 12 who were present on the day the survey was administered; 8,406 or 69% of enrolled students participated in 1995 as did 8,665 or 66% of enrolled students in 1999. While 1995 data are referenced for time comparisons in **Figure 6**, this report otherwise reports solely the results of the 1999 survey among high school students.

These were the questions concerning harassment that were asked:

- *Has anyone ever made offensive racial comments or attacked you based on your race or ethnicity – at school or on your way to or from school? (9th-12th grades only).*
- *Has anyone ever made offensive sexual comments to you – at school or on your way to or from school? (7th-12th grades).*
- *Has anyone ever made offensive comments or attacked you because they thought you were gay or lesbian – at school or on your way to or from school? (9th-12th grades only).*

Students were also allowed to write comments about their schools or the topics addressed in the survey. The comments included in this *Data Watch* are selected from among many others that concerned harassment. These comments have been edited to correct spelling and grammar. All comments on this topic are included in the full survey report published by Seattle Public Schools in 2000. Copies of the report may be obtained by calling the Seattle Public Schools Health Education Office at (206) 368-7192 or (206) 252-7192.

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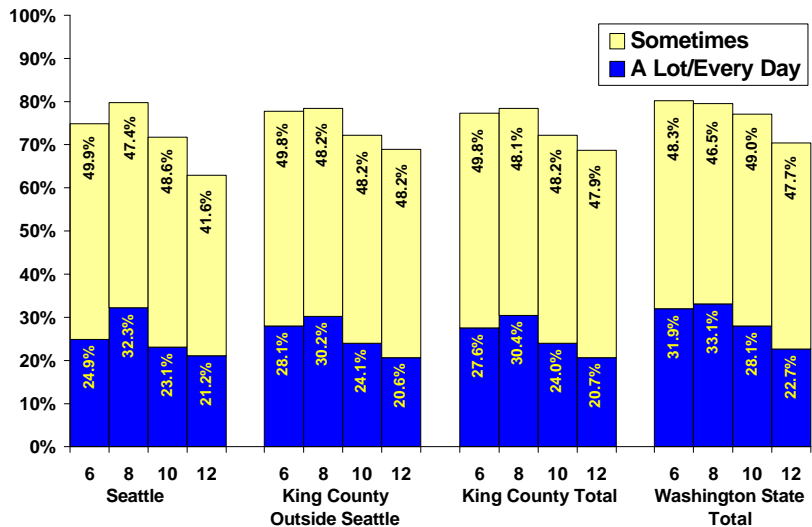


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This issue of *Public Health Data Watch* reports on bullying-type experiences and bias-based harassment among middle and high school students attending public schools in King County. General data concerning experiences commonly associated with bullying (e.g., object of rumors or lies, called names or insulted, shoved/pushed, threatened with physical harm) are from the Washington State Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors (WSSAHB) which was conducted in the fall of 2000. Information concerning harassment (based on gender, race/ethnicity, and perceived sexual orientation) comes from the Seattle Teen Health Survey which was conducted in Seattle Public Schools in 1999. The WSSAHB confirms that bullying and harassment are likely to be common in all King County public schools (see figure at right). Of students surveyed, 21%-30% report bullying-associated experiences a lot or daily. Another 48%-50% report these experiences sometimes. With respect to harassment, half (50%) of the Seattle high school students surveyed reported being harassed and there is no reason to believe that the results would be different for other King County school districts.

Students who reported bullying/harassment were more likely than those who did not report these experiences to mention other harmful experiences (e.g., feeling unsafe at school; carrying weapons; or having prolonged depressive feelings).

Frequency of bullying-associated experiences* reported by 6th through 12th graders, King County and Washington State, 2000.



*Based on most frequent occurrence of the following: (1) Object of rumor or lies, (2) called names or insulted, (3) shoved or pushed, and/or (4) threatened with physical harm. Source: WSSAHB, 2000.