

## *A Closer Look at:* **Bullying and immigrant youth in Ontario**

Bullying is a problem in schools that can result in emotional, behavioural and social difficulties in youth. Bullying is a relationship problem that is characterized by: a) intention to cause harm; b) repetitive aggression; and c) a power imbalance (students who experience victimization by their peers are usually unable to defend themselves).

Immigrant youth often experience a variety of barriers during their integration to the Canadian school system. Some of the most common difficulties include learning a new language, adjusting to a new education system, and forming supportive relationships with adults and peers from different backgrounds.

During this process, positive peer interactions can be particularly beneficial for learning the norms of the new culture, and for creating social support networks that can help immigrant youth with psychosocial integration. However, some immigrant students may be at risk for social exclusion and bullying by their peers at school. This may happen because they exhibit behaviours and characteristics that are different from their school's social norms, or because they have lower proficiency in the host language.

Educators and schools play an important role in immigrant and non-immigrant youths' peer relationships. Previous research from Europe and the United States has demonstrated positive associations between students' perceptions of their school environment as promoting inter-cultural contact and students' well-being and academic achievement.

The demographic composition of schools may also be associated with bullying involvement between groups. For example, past studies conducted in Europe have shown that a higher proportion of immigrant or ethnic minority students in school has been associated with reduced bullying victimization among these students.

These schools may provide more opportunities to create friendships with peers who have similar experiences and backgrounds. During the first years of resettlement, these friendships may help students feel a sense of belonging to their new school.

### *Why does this matter?*

- ⇒ The researchers found that a higher representation of immigrant students in school has a protective effect against bullying for immigrant youth.
- ⇒ Schools that are characterized by higher levels of immigrant concentration may provide opportunities for creating friendships based on shared experiences that protect immigrant youth against bullying.
- ⇒ Educators' attitudes and practices that foster a climate of inclusion and positive inter-cultural contact between students are associated with lower levels of bullying for all students.

The Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being is a project of the **Knowledge Network for Applied Educational Research** ([www.knaer-recrae.ca](http://www.knaer-recrae.ca))

Communities of practice in the KNSWB include: **Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, PREVNet, School Mental Health ASSIST, and the Social Planning Network of Ontario**

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KNAER-RECRAE is funded by the government of Ontario. The views expressed in this brief are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Ontario government.

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### **What did the researchers do?**

The researchers analyzed data from the Hamilton Youth Study (HYS) to examine whether school immigrant concentration (i.e., the percentage of foreign-born students in a school) is associated with bullying involvement among immigrant and non-immigrant students.

The researchers also examined whether students' sense of belonging to their school and their perceptions of teachers as being accepting of, and promoting cultural diversity and inter-cultural contact between students are associated with lower levels of bullying

### *Methodology:*

The results were based on 1,300 early adolescents and their teachers in grades 5-8 across 36 schools in a large urban and suburban district in Ontario, Canada. Participants were equally distributed across boys and girls, and across groups (899 immigrant and 410 non-immigrant students) The proportion of foreign-born students in schools (i.e., immigrant concentration) was derived from school administrative data.

Students completed a survey about their involvement in bullying perpetration and experiences of victimization, their perceptions of teachers' support for cultural diversity, and the extent to which they felt a part of their school (belongingness).

### **What did they learn?**

#### *Bullying victimization:*

Based on youths' own reports of their bullying involvement, immigrant students were less likely to be victimized by peers in schools with a higher concentration of other immigrant students.

In contrast, non-immigrant students experienced more bullying victimization in schools with moderate and high levels of immigrant concentration, compared to schools with lower immigrant concentration.

#### *Bullying perpetration:*

According to students' self-reported bullying involvement, immigrant students were less likely to

perpetrate bullying in schools with a higher immigrant concentration, compared to schools with lower immigrant concentration.

#### *Students' sense of school belonging and perceived teacher support for cultural diversity:*

For all students, perceived teacher support for cultural diversity, and students' sense of belonging to their school were associated with lower levels of bullying victimization and perpetration.

#### *Additional Findings:*

The researchers also obtained teachers' ratings on students' bullying involvement. Teachers' reports on students' bullying victimization experiences revealed a similar pattern: immigrant students experienced lower levels of victimization in schools with higher representation of immigrant students.

The researchers found no differences in levels of bullying perpetration, as reported by teachers, between immigrant and non-immigrant students across schools with varying levels of immigrant concentration.



*This brief summary was prepared from:*

Vitoroulis, Irene, & Georgiades, Katholiki. (2017). Bullying among immigrant and non-immigrant early adolescents: School- and student-level effects. *J Adolesc*, 61(Supplement C), 141-151. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.10.008>