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Bullying in Middle School May Lead to Increased Substance Abuse in High School

(*Thousand Oaks, CA – December 28, 2005*) Over the past decade, parents, educators and policy makers have become increasingly concerned about verbal and physical harassment in schools and the subsequent effects of peer victimization on teens. A recent study by Julie C. Rusby and colleagues from the Oregon Research Institute, published in the November 2005 issue of *The Journal of Early Adolescence* by SAGE Publications, found significant associations between peer harassment of students in middle school and a variety of problem behaviors, such as alcohol abuse, once these students reach high school.. Although most previous studies have largely focused on elementary school students and have found associations between peer harassment and low self-esteem, depression, loneliness and anxiety of harassed victims, the ORI study focused on other consequences such as substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and the association with deviant peers.

Two hundred twenty-three at-risk male and female students in grades five through seven were studied through their high school years. The researchers studied the relationships between verbal and physical peer harassment in middle school and how this was associated with problem behaviors (aggression, antisocial behavior, associating with deviant peers, cigarette use, and alcohol use) during middle school and high school. The results of the study show that frequent verbal harassment is the norm in middle school rather than physical harassment and that both forms of harassment decrease once students reach the high school years.

Eighty-five percent of boys and 78% of girls in the study reported some verbal harassment in middle school; this declined to 78% and 63%, respectively, in high school. Similarly, 71% of boys and 43% of girls report some physical harassment in middle school which declines to 61% and 27%, respectively, in high school. The average middle school student experiences at least 1 verbal harassment per day; this declines to 2 harassments every 3 days for boys and once every 2 days for girls by high school. The average middle school student also experiences 2 physical harassments every 3 days in boys and once every 4 days for girls. Again, this declines to once every 3 days for boys and once every 8 days for girls (DON'T know if spelling the numbers out or not reads better. . . .

One of the most interesting findings was that verbal harassment during the middle school years increased the likelihood of alcohol use during high school almost three fold. The evidence also suggests that peer harassment may be fueling aggression and antisocial behaviors, especially among boys who tend to be harassed both verbally and physically at a higher rate than girls. Further study in this area may provide a better understanding of the prevalent school violence in today's society.

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About *The Journal of Early Adolescence*:

For over 25 years, *The Journal of Early Adolescence* (<http://jea.sagepub.com>) has provided demanding researchers and practitioners in criminology, developmental psychology, education, human development and family studies, psychology, psychiatry, public health, and sociology with the latest work concerning original theories, empirical research, literature reviews, and science-based practices regarding the early adolescent developmental period (10 through 14 years of age).

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