

If you're popular, you are not safe from bullying, study says

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Jonah Mowry made his now viral YouTube video for his small group of friends. He made the private video public in an effort to communicate to school bullies that he was finished being their victim. Photo: Joshua Sudock/Orange County Register/MCT

LOS ANGELES—Scientists say that the more popular teens are, the more likely they are to be bullied. Nearly one-fifth of teens are bullied. Only the most popular teens can avoid it. This may come as a surprise. Most people would think that the least popular kids were the only targets.

Scientists Robert Faris and Diane Felmlee created the study. He is from the University of California and she is from Penn State University. They found that older views of [bullying](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=bullying) (<https://www.newsela.com/?tag=bullying>) do not tell the whole story. For most students, becoming more popular can "increase the likelihood of victimization," they wrote in a magazine.

As kids become more popular, the victimization also becomes more severe.

The bullies, too, often have "strong social skills." They bully others to become more popular. These bullies have tough lives at home. Trying to become more popular helps them to not re-create "their own troubled home lives."

Popularity's Up And Downs

The most popular teens can “afford” to be nice. They are already popular so they are not threatened by other kids. Yet, those kids who are just a little less popular may have to fight to keep themselves there, Faris said.

Faris and Felmlee looked at how being popular can increase the chances of being a victim. They also explored what happens when someone is bullied. Bullied kids can suffer from feelings of sadness. They can also worry a lot.

The scientists wrote that popularity can increase the risk of being bullied. So far, they say that the risks have been mostly ignored. They think they have found a new way that bullying happens. And it works, they said. Evidence suggests that bullies get more clout. Targeting popular kids in particular gives bullies more power, they found.

Perhaps it should not be a surprise that popular kids get targeted. If a bully is aiming to become more popular, targeting popular kids makes sense. And for the most popular victims, the fall from popularity can be tougher.

To sort this out, the scientists spoke with more than 8,000 students in 19 North Carolina schools. They asked them about their five closest friends, and five students who had “picked on or were mean” to them. Then they asked them about five kids who they had been mean to.

Bullying Can Affect Anyone

In the group of 8,000 students, about half the students were white and one-third were black. Most lived with two parents. The average victim was attacked by two bullies. Girls were victims more often. The scientists noted that there could be differences in other populations.

Some students found protection; being friends with teens of the opposite gender provided some sort of shield.

The scientists do not suggest that unpopular teens do not get bullied. But their study found that bullying affects more types of kids.

Faris also said there was a message in the study for teenagers and their parents. It is probably better to have a few close friends. Having 200 Facebook friends does not seem to help. In addition, the “drama” that is often discussed about teens might be taken more seriously.

Many students, Faris said, do not see what is happening as bullying. They may be used to “having a lot of drama around them.”

Quiz

- 1 Select the option that BEST describes the main idea of the article.
- (A) Black teens are more likely to be the victims of bullying.
 - (B) Studies reveal that girls are more bullied as compared to boys.
 - (C) The least popular teens have a higher risk of getting bullied.
 - (D) Increasing popularity may increase the risk of getting bullied.
- 2 Read the section "Popularity's Up and Downs." Select the paragraphs that indicate the possible reason why bullies target popular teens.
- (A) paragraphs 3 and 4
 - (B) paragraphs 2 and 5
 - (C) paragraphs 1 and 3
 - (D) paragraphs 1 and 4
- 3 What BEST describes the overall structure of the text?
- (A) cause and effect
 - (B) chronological
 - (C) problem and solution
 - (D) compare and contrast
- 4 Read the following two sentences from the article.

These bullies have tough lives at home.

Trying to become more popular helps them to not re-create "their own troubled home lives."

Which sentence BEST describes the relationship between the two sentences?

- (A) The first sentence states a fact and the second one describes its effect.
- (B) The first sentence provides a detail and the second one includes its importance.
- (C) The first sentence makes a point and the second one gives a reason for the same.
- (D) The first sentence describes the reason while the second one describes a fact.

Answer Key

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