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## Age and gender factor into bullying more than language

by Alisha Kirby

(District of Columbia) As with other life experiences, students endure bullying differently as they graduate through elementary, middle and high school, suggesting that intervention should evolve as well, new research shows.

A team of university researchers found that verbal and physical bullying occurred more in a student's younger years, but as they aged, cyberbullying became more common.

The findings come in the wake of data provided by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development that shows one in five high school students were bullied last year, with girls being twice as likely to suffer cyberbullying as boys.

The new research was based on surveys of 1,180 fifth through eighth grade students and published in this month's *School Psychology Quarterly*.

The team – which included Cixin Wang, an assistant professor at the University of California, Riverside's Graduate School of Education; Susan M. Swearer, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Ji Hoon Ryoo, an assistant professor at the University of Virginia – focused on variables such as grade, gender and whether or not students were native or non-native English speakers.

Among the findings:

Students who are bullied fell into four subgroups: frequent victims (11 percent), occasional victim of face-to-face verbal, physical or relational bullying (29 percent), occasional cyber and face-to-face victim (10 percent), and infrequent victim (50 percent).

Students who bully fell into three categories: frequent perpetrators (5 percent), occasional verbal or relational perpetrators (26 percent), and infrequent perpetrators (69 percent).

While bullying on both sides decreased over time, there was an increase from fifth to sixth grade - the transition from elementary to middle school at the schools researchers studied.

Girls were more likely to experience verbal or relational and cyber bullying than boys, and boys were more likely to be physically bullied.

Non-native English speakers were not bullied more often than native English speakers, countering previous studies which found that students whose second language was English were more likely to be bullied.

Due to the differences in the ways in which students were bullied, researchers suggest schools consider varying their intervention policies. Since girls and boys faced different types of bullying, the report authors said interventions should be tailored to those needs; girls' interventions could focus on relationships and appropriate use of social media, while boys' could address physical bullying.

In addition, intervention resources should be more focused on the grades prior to students transitioning into middle and high school. They also said that adults who hear about or witness bullying, both face-to-face and online, should take each instance seriously and intervene immediately according to researchers.

California Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation in August assuring that victims and witnesses of bullying will receive the same counseling services as the bullies themselves. Many schools have also begun implementing an intervention technique meant to handle behavioral problems and keep kids in school called restorative justice, which involves strategies including mediation and group counseling.