

## Report reveals daily violence

**A study of sexual harassment, aggression and bullying at schools shows 'cause for concern.'**

By MEGHAN MOLONEY, SPECIAL TO THE FREE PRESS

Sexual harassment, verbal aggression and bullying occur daily in Ontario high schools, but get less attention than more "dramatic" issues such as weapons, says the author of a report that surveyed more than 1,800 Southwestern Ontario students.

David Wolfe, principal investigator for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, released the report yesterday. It examines violence, sexual harassment and bullying at 23 schools.

"The cause for concern is that this is everyday violence and it doesn't get the same attention as more dramatic violence like kids carrying guns," Wolfe said. "But we do have to worry about it. We don't want kids to think it's OK to bully and harass others."

Wolfe, an honorary psychology professor at UWO, headed the research, conducted between 2003 and 2007. The study surveyed 1,819 students in Grades 9 and 11 in rural and city schools. Wolfe declined to say precisely where the surveys were conducted.

The study found:

- 29 per cent of Grade 9 girls and 33 per cent of Grade 9 boys reported feeling unsafe at school;
- 16 per cent of girls and 32 per cent of boys reported being physically harmed;
- 10 per cent of girls and 25 per cent of boys admitted they had harmed others;
- 12 per cent of boys and 14 per cent of girls reported being harassed online.

"Part of the reason we wanted to present this was because the only data that's been out there lately is from Toronto schools, which paints a pretty bad picture, and we wanted to indicate the picture can be similarly bad in other parts of the province," Wolfe said.

The important aspect of the research is change over time, Wolfe said. Results indicated Grade 9 students who experience violence are more than twice as likely to be harassed in Grade 11.

"We're looking at the pattern across time and that's a bit alarming," Wolfe said. "When you can predict by a factor of two or three times that someone will have a problem, that's significant."

The research showed students as young as Grade 9 are reporting suicidal thoughts.

"They're not happy and this is not innocuous," Wolfe said.

Grade 9 is a tough year for students, many of them being harassed by older students, he said. Some boys deal with the problem by harassing others.

Girls are more likely to spread rumours and use verbal insults as aggression, but Wolfe said name-calling can have similar consequences to physical violence.

"It's not just about a fear of safety, but a fear of emotional humiliation."

Researchers asked about students sexually pressuring or being sexually pressured by other students:

- Four per cent of Grade 11 males admitted they've tried to force someone to have sex with them;



- 10 per cent of males and 27 per cent of females were pressured into sexual acts they did not want to do;
- 15 per cent of girls said they had oral sex to avoid having intercourse;
- Girls were more likely to experience unwanted sexual comments, looks and touching, whereas boys were more likely to experience homo-phobic insults.

The study comes as Mike and Brenda Neuts mark the 10th anniversary of their son's being found hanging unconscious on a washroom stall door hook in Chatham-Kent. Ten-year-old Myles died six days later. His family continues to make anti-bullying presentations to school children and other groups. (A story is on Page C4).

Wolfe said schools have begun to add more education on healthy relationships and discrimination. He said parents and communities need to deal with harassment as well as students and schools.

"This is everyone's issue."

"The purpose of releasing this study is not just to scare people. The positive message here is we're starting to teach people that kids shouldn't have to put up with this, no more than (adults) should."