

Crime Victims' Institute

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**Bullying-Related Absenteeism from School:
The Intervening Role of Depressive Symptoms and Suicidality
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Although levels of in-school crime and victimization have declined overall in recent years (Irwin et al., 2024), estimates from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey reveal that approximately 19% of students in grades 6-12 reported being bullied at school during the 2021-2022 school year (Thomsen et al., 2024). Much prior research shows that bullying victimization is associated with extensive and long-lasting negative consequences for youths' behavior, academic success, and psychological well-being (Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Hoffman et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Schoeler et al., 2018), thus validating concerns shared by parents, educators, and policymakers. Among the many harms that stem from experiences with bullying, emerging evidence links bullying victimization with absenteeism from school (Grinshteyn & Yang, 2017; Hutzell & Payne, 2018; Nikolaou, 2022; Schlesier et al., 2023), which can heighten youths' risk of academic failure and later dropout (e.g., Gubbels et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). The goal of this research is to further examine the relationship between bullying victimization and skipping school, focusing specifically on the understudied mental health factors that may help to explain it.

Prior Research and Theoretical Framework

Bullying victimization is defined as repeated exposure to the intentional infliction of (or attempts to inflict) injury or discomfort by one or more peers, particularly when there is an imbalance of strength or power between the victim and the perpetrator (Olweus, 1993, 2013). Bullying can be direct (e.g., hitting, pushing, threatening) or indirect (e.g., teasing, social exclusion, spreading rumors), with boys more likely to be involved in the former and girls more often experiencing the latter (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010;

Rivers & Smith, 1994). Extensive scholarship has established that a host of short- and long-term harmful behavioral outcomes stem from bullying victimization early in life, including illicit substance use (Connolly, 2017; Lehmann et al., 2025; Luk et al., 2010), weapon-carrying (Esselmont, 2014; Oliphant, 2023), fighting (Chacon & Raj, 2022), violence (Nansel et al., 2003; Ttofi et al., 2012), and justice system contact (Fergusson et al., 2014; Hoffman et al., 2017). Bullying victimization is likewise closely linked to various internalizing symptoms, including hostility, anger, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and suicidality (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Moore et al., 2017; Schoeler et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2013).

The detrimental academic consequences of bullying victimization have also received some attention in prior research. Bullied youth have a heightened risk of experiencing declines in grades (Hammig & Jozkowski, 2013; Mundy et al., 2017), becoming less involved in and committed to school (Yang et al., 2018), and dropping out before graduation (Cornell et al., 2013; Nikolaou, 2022; Peguero et al., 2021). A notable precursor to these and other academic difficulties is absenteeism, as youth may avoid school altogether to avoid interactions with peers and reduce the likelihood of subsequent victimization. While skipping school may have immediate benefits along these lines, absenteeism is a robust predictor of later academic disengagement, participation in delinquent and otherwise risky behaviors, and various disadvantages that accumulate into adulthood (Cardwell et al., 2019; Hibbett et al., 1990; Klein et al., 2022; Rocque et al., 2017). Moreover, truancy (defined as chronic absenteeism within a specified timeframe, such as five or more unexcused absences in a month) can be particularly consequential, particularly because it triggers school

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sanctions that may carry legal ramifications (Flannery et al., 2012; Kearney, 2008; Mallett, 2016).

Previous research has revealed that students who are victims of bullying are more likely to skip school than non-victims (e.g., Alanko et al., 2025; Gastic, 2008; Havik et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2025). Some of this scholarship has focused on specific modes of bullying (Escario et al., 2022; Grinshteyn & Yang, 2017; Nikolaou, 2022; Steiner & Rasberry, 2015) as well as bullying related to students' weight (Lydecker et al., 2023) and sexual orientation (Rivers, 2000). Even for students who do not skip school entirely, those who are bullied can engage in avoidance behaviors, physically separating themselves from locations on or around school grounds where they may be targeted (e.g., Hutzell & Payne, 2012, 2018; Randa & Wilcox, 2010, 2012; Randa et al., 2019; Vidourek et al., 2016). Although research in this area has provided important insights, questions remain about the intervening role of mental health factors in this relationship. Indeed, prior studies using data from Norway (Hysing et al., 2021), Germany (Schlesier et al., 2023), and Japan (Mori et al., 2025) report inconsistent findings regarding whether the effects of peer victimization on school absenteeism are indirect through anxiety, depression, and other similar variables.

As noted above, the impact of bullying victimization on the psychological well-being of adolescents is well established in the literature (e.g., Arseneault et al., 2010; Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Moore et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2013), and students who struggle with mental health challenges also have an increased risk of skipping school (Mallett, 2016; Rogers et al., 2024). Not only does this existing literature suggest a logical pathway connecting bullying victimization and absenteeism through internalizing symptoms, but such a relationship also may be anticipated by general strain theory (Agnew, 1992, 2001).

According to general strain theory, developed by sociologist Robert Agnew (1992, 2001), deviant behavior can be understood as a response to negative emotions produced by harmful relationships, stressful experiences, and traumatic life events. Within this vein, especially intense or frequent bullying may evoke feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and hopelessness (Glassner & Cho, 2018; Hay et al., 2010), leading youth to contemplate self-harm (Hay & Meldrum, 2010; Stubbs-Richardson, 2020) and engage in avoidance behaviors (Agnew, 1985; Keith, 2018). Thus, there is a clear, theoretically anticipated process through which bullying victimization may be

connected to school absenteeism via depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Not only does the current study aim to advance understanding of a social problem that generates substantial public concern, but this line of inquiry also has important implications for educational policy in Texas and nationwide. David's Law, which was passed in 2017, increases penalties for cyberbullying in Texas and requires school districts to implement additional anti-bullying measures, including enhanced reporting and parental notification procedures (Middleton, 2022). Despite these efforts, however, instances of severe in-school bullying (Santos, 2025; Surette, 2025) as well as teen suicide due to bullying (Faheid & Park, 2025) have recently come to light, prompting calls for further action at the school and legislative levels. Also, as state funding in Texas is linked to schools' overall enrollment numbers and average daily attendance (Kadlubar, 2025), schools have a vested interest in recognizing how to reduce illegitimate absences that stem from bullying. Given these considerations as well as the harmful student outcomes tied to school non-attendance and disengagement, a better understanding of the relationship between bullying victimization and absenteeism may help inform intervention efforts and mitigate the effects of bullying in youths' lives. This study is guided by the following research questions:

- *Research Question 1:* Are adolescents who experience more frequent physical, verbal, and cyber bullying victimization more likely to skip school?
- *Research Question 2:* Are depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts and behaviors associated with an increased likelihood of bullying-related absenteeism from school?
- *Research Question 3:* Are the effects of bullying victimization on school absenteeism partially indirect through depressive symptoms and suicidality?

Data

To address these research questions, this study draws on data from the 2024 Florida Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS). The FYSAS is a large-scale, annual survey of adolescents enrolled in public middle and high schools in Florida, administered by the Florida Departments of Children and Families, Health, Education, and Juvenile Justice. The sampling strategy involves a multi-stage cluster design. In the first stage, schools are randomly selected at the county level, with each school's probability of selection being proportional to its

enrollment size. All educational institutions, except adult education, correctional, vocational, and special education schools, are eligible for selection. Next, classrooms are randomly selected from within the sampled schools to fulfill each school's survey quota. This administration procedure is designed to capture a cross-sectional statewide representative sample of youth.

In 2024, the FYSAS was administered to 48,352 students in grades 6 through 12 in schools across 60 of Florida's 67 counties; schools in seven districts elected not to participate. A set of validation procedures was conducted to identify and remove respondents who completed less than 25% of the survey or whose responses were inconsistent or potentially dishonest (N = 3,341). A further 256 cases were removed because the respondents completed the wrong version of the survey based on their grade level. Thus, the resulting sample contains 44,755 youth. Although this dataset contains information on Florida adolescents only, comparisons between FYSAS respondents and nationally representative cohorts of youth (e.g., *Monitoring the Future*) reveal close similarities on key behavioral indicators (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2024). Accordingly, analyses of these data can be helpful for understanding the behaviors and experiences of youth across the country, including in Texas. The descriptive statistics of all study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: 2024 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS)

Variables	N	Mean / %	SD	Range	Missing
Dependent Variable					
Bullying-related absenteeism	29,686	14.77%	—	0, 1	0.21%
Independent Variables					
Physical bullying victimization	29,748	0.96	1.06	0.00 – 4.00	0.00%
Verbal bullying victimization	29,748	1.83	1.11	0.00 – 4.00	0.00%
Cyber bullying victimization	29,748	0.72	0.98	0.00 – 4.00	0.00%
Intervening Variables					
Depressive symptoms	29,002	1.28	0.91	0.00 – 3.00	2.51%
Suicidal thoughts	27,599	18.86%	—	0, 1	7.22%
Suicide plan	27,469	15.50%	—	0, 1	7.66%
Suicide attempt	27,704	10.82%	—	0, 1	6.87%
Control Variables					
Black	29,519	18.31%	—	0, 1	0.77%
Hispanic	29,519	27.73%	—	0, 1	0.77%
Other race	29,519	14.13%	—	0, 1	0.77%
Male	29,534	45.44%	—	0, 1	0.72%
Age	29,687	14.06	1.92	10.00 – 19.00	0.21%
English spoken at home	29,546	85.62%	—	0, 1	0.68%
Urban/suburban	29,379	77.91%	—	0, 1	1.24%
Two-parent household	29,748	50.13%	—	0, 1	0.00%
Parents' education	23,122	3.08	1.25	0.00 – 5.00	22.27%
Attachment to parents	27,345	2.03	0.63	0.00 – 3.00	8.08%
Academic achievement	29,362	3.01	0.96	0.00 – 4.00	1.30%
Involvement	29,748	1.28	0.98	0.00 – 5.00	0.00%
School connectedness	29,746	1.77	0.53	0.00 – 4.00	0.01%
School suspension	27,035	15.59%	—	0, 1	9.12%
Delinquency	27,080	0.06	0.19	0.00 – 2.00	8.97%
Bullying perpetration	29,719	0.46	0.66	0.00 – 4.00	0.10%
Low self-control	27,731	1.08	0.67	0.00 – 3.00	6.78%
Peer drug use	29,572	0.50	0.85	0.00 – 4.00	0.59%
Sleep quantity	26,333	2.97	1.80	0.00 – 8.00	11.48%

Notes. N = 29,748. N = non-missing sample size before multiple imputation. SD = standard deviation.

Bullying-Related Absenteeism. The dependent, or outcome, variable in this study is *bullying-related absenteeism*. After being presented with a definition of bullying, respondents were asked, “Have you ever skipped school because someone was bullying you?” (“No” = 0, “Yes” = 1). Although the lifetime recall period of this survey question poses potential problems of temporal order relative to the independent variables described below, it is nonetheless advantageous as it specifies bullying victimization as the driving reason behind the absenteeism. Despite this benefit, the fact that the question wording explicitly conflates bullying victimization with absenteeism also poses a limitation. Specifically, students who responded “No” to this question may have done so for one of two reasons (besides response error): (1) they were bullying victims yet never skipped school because of it, or (2) they never experienced bullying.

Since the victimization condition specified in the survey question does not apply to some respondents, their “No” responses are generated by a systematically different process than the “No” responses of those who were bullying victims but did not skip school. For this reason, the wording of this item requires that these analyses be restricted to youth who were victims of some form of bullying. Accordingly, respondents who selected “Never” to all three questions relating to physical, verbal, and cyber bullying victimization (see below) were removed from the analytic sample. Likewise, only youth who responded to all three bullying victimization questions were retained. Eliminating these observations reduced the sample to 29,748 cases. As shown in Table 1, 14.8% of these youth skipped school due to bullying.

Bullying Victimization. The main independent, or predictor, variable is *bullying victimization (including physical, verbal, and cyber)*. Three measures contained in the FYSAS capture the frequency with which youth: (1) have been hit, kicked, shoved, physically harmed/injured, or stolen from (i.e., *physical*), (2) have been taunted or teased, experienced name-calling, or excluded or ignored by others in a mean way (i.e., *verbal*), and (3) have had mean emails, text messages, or instant messages sent or hurtful information about them posted on the Internet (i.e., *cyber*). The response options for each of these variables include “Never” (= 0), “Once or twice” (= 1), “A few times” (= 2), “Many times” (= 3), and “Every day” (= 4). These three measures are included separately in the analyses because they are modestly intercorrelated and have low inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .56$).

Intervening Variables. Four mental health indicators are analyzed in this study. First, *depressive symptoms* consists of an index ($\alpha = 90$) calculated using the average of youths' responses to four statements: (1) "Sometimes I think that life is not worth it," (2) "At times I think I am no good at all," (3) "All in all, I am inclined to think I am a failure," and (4) "In the past year, have you felt depressed or sad MOST days, even if you felt OK sometimes?" ("NO!" = 0, "no" = 1, "yes" = 2, and "YES!" = 3). Second, adolescents' *suicidal thoughts* are captured using a question asking, "During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?" ("No" = 0, "Yes" = 1). Third, this study uses a measure denoting whether youth made a *suicide plan*: "During the past 12 months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?" ("No" = 0, "Yes" = 1). Finally, this study uses a measure denoting whether youth made a *suicide attempt*: "During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?" Respondents who answered "0 times" were coded as 0, and all respondents who reported at least one *suicide attempt* were coded as 1. Perhaps surprisingly, these four variables are only moderately strongly intercorrelated, and no multicollinearity issues emerge when all of them are included in the analyses simultaneously.

Control Variables. The analyses consider several control variables. The inclusion of controls is intended to help isolate the relationship between the main variables of interest by accounting for other factors that could influence the outcome. The control measures include race/ethnicity (*Black*, *Hispanic*, *Other race*, and *White*), sex (reference category is *male*, coded as 1), age in years, the language spoken at home (reference category is *English*, coded as 1), and whether youth live in an urban/suburban context versus in the country or on a farm (reference category is *urban/suburban*, coded as 1). Additionally, this study accounts for youths' household structure (reference category is *two-parent household* with both biological parents, coded as 1), and the average of two items ($r = 0.52$) capturing youths' *parents' education* level ("Completed grade school or less" = 0, "Graduate or professional school" = 5). Other protective factors included as control variables are a 15-item index of *attachment to parents* ($\alpha = 89$), *involvement* in up to five types of extracurricular activities, and a 15-item index of *school connectedness* ($\alpha = 84$). This study also

controls for several additional risk factors, including *school suspension* in the past year (Yes = 1) and indices of self-reported *delinquency* ($\alpha = 72$), physical, verbal, and cyber *bullying perpetration* ($\alpha = 70$), *low self-control* ($\alpha = 80$), and *peer drug use* ($\alpha = 89$). Finally, the analyses account for adolescents' self-reported *sleep quantity* on an average school night ("4 hours or less" = 0, "12 hours or more" = 8).

Analytic Strategy

Missing data were addressed using multiple imputation by chained equations.² The imputation model included all study variables, and 30 imputations were used. After the imputed datasets were generated, cases with data missing on the bullying-related absenteeism outcome were removed. Thus, the final analytic sample contains 29,686 participants, all of whom reported being the victim of at least one form of bullying with a frequency of "once or twice" or more.

The analyses proceed in the following stages. First, binary logistic regression is used to estimate the effects of physical, verbal, and cyber bullying victimization on the likelihood of bullying-related absenteeism, net of all the control variables (except for the mental health-related intervening variables). Cluster-robust standard errors are employed to account for the nested structure of the data (i.e., students within counties). Next, a fully specified regression model is estimated, identical to that described above, but includes the mental health indicators (i.e., depressive symptoms; suicidal thoughts and behaviors). Finally, this study uses the Karlson, Holm, and Breen (2012) (KHB) method to formally test whether the effect of each form of bullying victimization on absenteeism is indirect through the four mental health variables.³ This approach allows for the total effect of each form of bullying victimization to be decomposed into its direct and indirect effects: the direct effect represents the effect of that variable net of the included controls; and the indirect effect represents the portion of the total effect that occurs through its relationship with the specified intervening variable(s).

Results

Table 2 presents the results from Model 1, the reduced binary logistic regression model estimating the effects of

² Multiple imputation is a statistical method for handling missing data by replacing missing values with multiple plausible values. This method typically yields more accurate, less biased conclusions than simply deleting missing values or filling them with a single value. It is especially useful when data are missing at random rather than systematically (Azur et al., 2011).

³ The KHB approach is useful in this context because nested nonlinear models are not directly comparable due to the issue of rescaling, which occurs when the regression coefficients change across models solely because of differences in the error variance (Breen et al., 2013; Kohler et al., 2011). The KHB method adjusts the regression estimates and standard errors to account for rescaling when estimating nonlinear models (Karlson et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2019).

physical, verbal, and cyber bullying victimization on absenteeism, excluding the mental health indicators.

Table 2. Binary Logistic Regression Models: Reduced and Full Models of Bullying-Related Absenteeism

Variables	Model 1: Reduced		Model 2: Full	
	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>
Independent Variables				
Physical bullying victimization	0.177***	(.017)	0.151***	(.018)
Verbal bullying victimization	0.528***	(.018)	0.481***	(.018)
Cyber bullying victimization	0.386***	(.016)	0.371***	(.016)
Intervening Variables				
Depressive symptoms	—	—	0.200***	(.026)
Suicidal thoughts	—	—	0.134*	(.062)
Suicide plan	—	—	0.212**	(.064)
Suicide attempt	—	—	0.180**	(.064)
Control Variables				
Black	-0.491***	(.059)	-0.512***	(.059)
Hispanic	-0.232***	(.059)	-0.262***	(.060)
Other race	-0.161**	(.062)	-0.181**	(.063)
Male	-1.024***	(.051)	-0.918***	(.053)
Age	0.021	(.011)	0.036**	(.011)
English spoken at home	-0.060	(.075)	-0.061	(.077)
Urban/suburban	-0.132**	(.050)	-0.147**	(.049)
Two-parent household	-0.128**	(.043)	-0.110*	(.045)
Parents' education	-0.009	(.018)	-0.011	(.019)
Attachment to parents	-0.093*	(.036)	-0.029	(.039)
Academic achievement	-0.230***	(.020)	-0.233***	(.020)
Involvement	0.049*	(.019)	0.060**	(.020)
School connectedness	-0.108**	(.035)	-0.064	(.036)
School suspension	0.269***	(.068)	0.278***	(.067)
Delinquency	-0.156	(.122)	-0.298*	(.126)
Bullying perpetration	-0.294***	(.033)	-0.271***	(.034)
Low self-control	0.118***	(.030)	0.002	(.031)
Peer drug use	0.169***	(.020)	0.139***	(.021)
Sleep quantity	-0.046***	(.012)	-0.021	(.012)
Intercept	-1.974***	(.239)	-2.594***	(.251)

Note. *N* = 29,686. *b* = unstandardized logistic regression coefficient. *RSE* = robust standard error (adjusted for clustering within 60 counties).

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

These findings reveal that youth who experience more frequent physical bullying ($b = 0.177, p < .001$), verbal bullying ($b = 0.528, p < .001$), and cyber bullying ($b = 0.386, p < .001$) are more likely to skip school due to bullying. These coefficients may be exponentiated to calculate the odds ratios (ORs). These values indicate that a one-unit increase in physical, verbal, and cyber bullying victimization (e.g., moving from “A few times” to “Many times”) is associated with an increase in the odds of bullying-related absenteeism by 19.4%, (OR = 1.194), 69.6% (OR = 1.696), and 47.1% (OR = 1.471), respectively. To better illustrate the magnitudes of these total effects, the average adjusted predictions from Model 1 are presented in Figure 1.

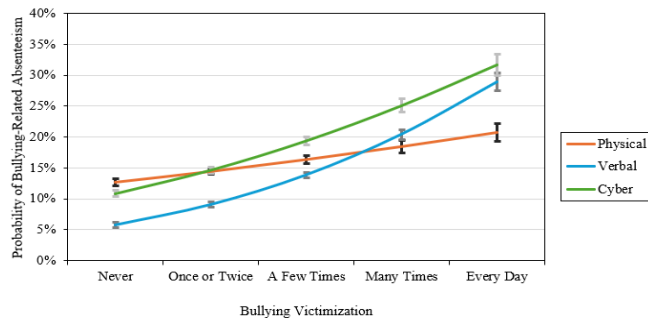


Figure 1. Average Adjusted Predictions: Total Effects of Physical, Verbal, and Cyber Bullying Victimization on Bullying-Related Absenteeism

To examine whether depressive symptoms and suicidality are also risk factors for absenteeism due to bullying victimization, Model 2 in Table 2 presents the fully specified binary logistic regression model that includes these four mental health variables. The findings show that youth who have experienced more intense depressive symptoms ($b = 0.200, p < .001$) as well as those who report suicidal thoughts ($b = 0.134, p < .05$), making a suicide plan ($b = 0.212, p < .01$), and having attempted suicide ($b = 0.180, p < .01$) are more likely to report bullying-related absenteeism, net of the controls. Interpreted as an odds ratio, the coefficient for depressive symptoms indicates that each one-unit increase in this variable is associated with a 22.1% increase in the odds of absenteeism due to bullying (OR = 1.221). Likewise, those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, made a suicide plan, or attempted suicide have increased odds of physical, verbal, and cyber bullying-related absenteeism by 14.3% (OR = 1.143), 23.6% (OR = 1.236), and 19.7% (OR = 1.197), respectively.

Finally, this study assesses whether the effects of bullying victimization on absenteeism are indirect through depressive symptoms and suicidality. For each bullying victimization measure, the total effect, direct effect, and indirect effect via depressive symptoms and suicidality are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. KHB Decomposition: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>	% Reduced
Physical bullying victimization			
Total effect	0.176***	(.017)	—
Direct effect	0.151***	(.018)	—
Indirect effect (via intervening variables)	0.024***	(.003)	13.87%
Verbal bullying victimization			
Total effect	0.529***	(.018)	—
Direct effect	0.482***	(.018)	—
Indirect effect (via intervening variables)	0.046***	(.005)	8.74%
Cyber bullying victimization			
Total effect	0.393***	(.016)	—
Direct effect	0.372***	(.016)	—
Indirect effect (via intervening variables)	0.021***	(.003)	5.36%

Note. *N* = 29,686. *b* = unstandardized logistic regression coefficient. *RSE* = robust standard error (adjusted for clustering within 60 counties).

****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

Also reported is the percent reduction between each total effect and direct effect that is attributable to the indirect effects of the intervening variables. The findings reveal that the total effect of physical bullying victimization ($b = 0.176, p < .001$) is both a direct effect ($b = 0.151, p < .001$) and a statistically significant indirect effect ($b = 0.024, p < .001$), and 13.9% of physical bullying's effect on absenteeism is indirect through depressive symptoms and suicidality. The total, direct, and indirect effects of verbal and cyber bullying victimization on this outcome are likewise statistically significant ($p < .001$); however, the

proportion of each total effect explained by the intervening mental health variables is somewhat lower (8.7% and 5.4%, respectively).

Discussion and Implications

Prior research has established close connections between bullying victimization and a wide range of negative behavioral, academic, and psychological outcomes among adolescents, including illegitimate absenteeism from school. The linkage between bullying and skipping school follows closely from the expectations of general strain theory, as Agnew (1985) posits that “status offenses like truancy and cutting class represent fairly direct ways of escaping from an aversive environment” (p. 159) in which one might be exposed to further bullying. Because skipping school is a precursor to serious academic disengagement and dropout, additional scholarship is needed to help identify the mechanisms through which peer victimization might drive absenteeism.

Using data from the Florida Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS), a large representative sample of youth, this study builds on previous work by incorporating four key mental health risk factors to assess whether they might intervene in this association. The findings provided robust support for the theorized expectations. Not only were youth who experienced more frequent physical, verbal, and cyber victimization more likely to skip school due to bullying, but depressive symptoms and suicidality explained between 5% and 14% of these effects.

The previous research exploring these same indirect pathways has not revealed consistent patterns (Hysing et al., 2021; Mori et al., 2025; Schlesier et al., 2023), though these latter studies analyzed data collected in countries where bullying may be interpreted and addressed differently than in the United States. Nonetheless, the finding that mental health challenges partially explain the bullying-absenteeism relationship was expected in light of prior research on the detrimental impact of bullying on youths’ well-being, academic performance, and school attendance. It must be noted, however, that the total effects of bullying victimization on school absenteeism emerging in this study were relatively modest in magnitude, as evidenced by the predicted probabilities shown in Figure 1. Likewise, depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts and behaviors explained only a limited proportion of the bullying-absenteeism association, which suggests that other unmeasured social-psychological and emotional factors also may connect bullying and school non-attendance. Building on these observations, a logical

next step for future research in this area might involve examining potential heterogeneity in these direct and indirect effects according to adolescents’ racial/ethnic, gender, and age.

Although this study was not designed to assess the impact of anti-bullying legislation or to evaluate the effectiveness of bullying-related school policies in Florida, Texas, or elsewhere, it provides insights that may inform educators and legislators motivated to reduce bullying and mitigate its consequences. Because schools are incentivized to reduce unexcused absences and ensure that students remain academically integrated, youth who experience intense and persistent physical, verbal, and cyber bullying should be prioritized for intervention efforts. Moreover, school staff are encouraged to continue developing and implementing comprehensive school-based programs to address bullying concerns, and to identify risk and protective factors that may influence the extent to which students rely on avoidance behaviors as a means of coping. The success of anti-bullying initiatives for reducing victimization and supporting students is highly mixed, possibly suggesting that conventional approaches may not be beneficial for all youth (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2007; Hikmat et al., 2024; Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2016). Thus, even as school safety has improved in recent years, additional work is needed to further improve school climate and reduce the traumatic effects of bullying.

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