




### SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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#### **With Whom Do Youth Fight?: Results from the Boston Youth Survey 2008**

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Although the national YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System) provides important information about risk behaviors, it yields limited information about peer fighting. Specifically, the item about having been in a physical fight does not allow for specification of the relationship between the parties. Although many researchers and practitioners presume that the prevalence of "fighting" – as captured by the YRBS – reflects the prevalence of peer fighting, it likely includes fighting between siblings and dating partners as well. We investigate this measurement issue in this study. Our aims are to: (1) identify what proportion of fights are with peers (vs. siblings and intimates), and (2) quantify the prevalence of fighting between young people and their intimates, peers, and siblings, and (3) assess the extent to which youth who fight with peers also fight with siblings and intimates.

Data come from the Boston Youth Survey 2008 (BYS), a school-based survey of Boston adolescents (n=1,878). The BYS was administered to 9th-12th graders in randomly sampled classrooms, and included 3 items on fighting within the past month, one each for fights with siblings, peers, and intimates.

Thirty-one percent reported having had a fight with a sibling, peer, intimate, or any combination thereof, 68.9% of whom indicated that they fought with a peer. The prevalence of fighting varied by the specified relationship; 21.6% reported a fight with a peer (18.0% of girls and 25.7% of boys), 7.3% reported a fight with an intimate (9.0% of girls and 5.2% of boys), and 15.3% reported a fight with a sibling (18.7% of girls and 13.5% of boys). (Percentages of fighting with siblings and intimates exclude young people without siblings or who had not dated anyone, respectively, from the denominators). Considering the 1,294 students who had siblings, who had dated someone, and who completed all three items on fighting, 28.5% fought with a peer, sibling, or intimate; 4.6% fought with two of the three; and 2.2% fought with all three.

Findings suggest that it may be inaccurate to assume that estimates of physical fighting by youth represent solely fights among peers. Therefore, we recommend specification of the relationships under study when surveying adolescents about fighting. Interestingly, we found that the prevalence of recent fighting among adolescents varies by sex and the type of relationship. The high prevalence of fighting among adolescents underscores the importance of promoting conflict resolution skills that will be applicable in multiple types of interpersonal relationships. Prevention scientists focused on specific types of violence (e.g., dating violence) should work collaboratively to develop broadly effective programs.

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