

Risk Assessment

Music students are at greater risk for being bullied.

FOR YEARS, educators have been well versed in anti-bullying awareness, rhetoric, and strategizing. But many music teachers have little concept of bullying's growing prevalence among music students themselves, with much of the aggression taking place inside the music room. Quantitative analyst and NAFME member Kenneth Elpus teamed up with colleague Bruce Carter to share with music educators the alarming data collected in their chorus rooms.

"The biggest revelation from our research is that music and theatre students are more likely than kids who are not music and theatre students to report that they have suffered some sort of bullying aggression," says Elpus, who works as associate professor of music education at the University of Maryland School of Music in College Park. Elpus and Carter's findings suggest that more than one in three music and theatre students experience bullying, with those numbers peaking in middle school.

Elpus and other experts agree: For music teachers to have a chance at reducing and eliminating bullying, awareness is critical. The

report identifies two models of adolescent bullying infecting the music room: victimization through physical aggression and victimization through social-relational aggression. Elpus argues that these models developed out of what he considers "somewhat outdated gender roles in adolescent culture," but are

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Music educators can help by teaching their students bullying-response communication strategies for both victims and witnesses.

nonetheless helpful in distinguishing two distinct categories of bullying, both of which affect music students.

"A lot of the bullying research looks at these two kinds," says Elpus, "one as being more prevalent in 'girl culture'—and that's bullying by social exclusion, rumor-spreading, or secret-sharing, versus physical aggression, which tends to

be more associated with adolescent masculine culture. One uses friendships as a weapon; the other uses threat of violence."

Female music and theatre students reported the highest incidence of social-relational victimization than any other group of adolescents, according to the study. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of this type of bullying is its inherent detection resistance.

"Social-relational aggression can happen in a choir room in two glances," says

Elpus. "You can have a kid make eye contact with a kid who's a victim and then make eye contact with a kid who's an ally-perpetrator ... and that [action] can be almost invisible, even to a really good music teacher."

Fortunately, music educators have an edge: "Music teachers often serve as an influential nonparental adult," says Elpus. "If you're serving this mentorship role for your students, you really need to have a handle on the social climate in your rehearsal room—or in and around your rehearsal room."

Elpus and his colleagues recommend music teachers and their students engage in classroom-level supports, which may include using instructional time to discuss bullying, developing social and emotional competencies among students, helping students improve peer-to-peer communication, and teaching bullying-response communication strategies for both victims and witnesses. ■