



Ipsos Reid



Alberta Children and Youth Services: Albertans' Perceptions of Family Violence and Bullying Survey 2012

Summary Report

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KEY FINDINGS

Ipsos Reid conducted a total of 900 telephone interviews with Albertans aged 16 years and older between January 4th and 16th, 2012. Data were weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/gender composition reflects that of the actual population of Albertans aged 16 years and older according to 2011 Population Estimates (based on Alberta Health Card data) provided by Children and Youth Services.

Key research objectives included examining issues related to public understanding and awareness of bullying and family violence, assessing public support for government involvement in family violence and bullying prevention, collecting data for Ministry and regional performance measures and informing future directions for the public awareness and education campaigns in the prevention of family violence and bullying.

What follows is a summary of key research findings and recommendations.

BULLYING

Behaviours, Warning Signals and Prevention

The majority of Albertans recognize a range of bullying behaviours, are generally well-equipped to identify a young person being bullied, and would take appropriate actions if they had a young person in their household being bullied. Awareness of cyberbullying is up markedly from two years ago.

- Verbal and physical behaviours among children and youth are the most recognized types of bullying. While cyberbullying is not top-of-mind for most Albertans, mentions have nearly doubled from two years ago. When asked to think about the types of behaviours that characterize bullying among children and youth, seven-in-ten (72%) Albertans identify various forms of verbal abuse while 65% (down 7 percentage points from 2010) identify various physical behaviours. Social bullying is mentioned by just under one-quarter (22%) of Albertans, while cyberbullying is cited by one-in-five (19%). Though still low, mentions of cyberbullying are up 9 percentage points from 2010 (10%).
- Further, on an aided basis, 83% (up 13 percentage points from 70% in 2010) of Albertans say they are aware of the issue of cyberbullying, and six-in-ten (62%, up 6 percentage points from 2010) think that cyberbullying occurs 'a lot' or 'a fair bit' in their own community.
- Self-harm and withdrawal are the most recognized warning signals of bullying, followed by aggression and health complaints.
- The majority of Albertans would take appropriate actions if they had a young person in their household who was being bullied by others. More than half (55%) say they would "talk to someone in charge of the environment where the bullying is taking place", 41% say they would "talk to the parents of the person or people doing the bullying", 36% say they would

“try to talk to the young person being bullied to find out what is happening”, and 33% say they would “call the police”.

Attitudes Regarding Bullying and Bullying Prevention

Albertans place extremely high priority on the prevention of bullying at the community level and, moreover, are willing to accept personal responsibility.

- The vast majority (93%) of Albertans agree that they ‘have a personal responsibility to reduce bullying in their community’ – up significantly from 88% in 2010. Further, 89% agree that ‘bullying prevention should be an urgent priority for their community’, and 87% agree ‘bullying prevention should be an urgent priority at the provincial government level’ – a significant 8 percentage point increase from 2010.

Though a minority, it is concerning that one-quarter (26%) of Albertans continue to agree that bullying is just a normal part of growing up.

- Agreement is significantly higher among males than females (33% vs. 20%).

Community Engagement and Capacity: Bullying

While awareness or engagement in community initiatives dealing with bullying is low overall (22%), the majority (64%) of Albertans feel that their community is able to help them or others with bullying issues.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Perceptions and Impacts

Albertans have a broad understanding of behaviours that constitute family violence, and generally recognize the negative impacts on children and youth.

- There is strong consensus among Albertans that ‘withholding personal care, medications or other necessities’ (94%), ‘failing to provide food, shelter or medical attention’ (92%), ‘threatening to hurt a pet’ (92%), ‘misuse, loss or damage to an elderly person’s income, savings or belongings’ (91%), and ‘taking an elderly person’s money, belongings or property without the person’s knowledge and consent’ (91%) are types of family violence. Slightly lower (82%) is agreement that ‘stalking’ constitutes family violence.
- The one action that does not fall under the umbrella of family violence for a sizeable minority of Albertans is ‘preventing an adult family member from knowing about or having access to family income or savings’ – 28% maintain they do not consider it to be family violence. Still, 70% do consider it to be family violence – a significant 7 percentage point increase from 2010.
- There is near universal agreement that children and youth exposed to family violence are likely to suffer a variety of negative emotional and behavioural consequences. The most

recognized impacts are 'loss of self confidence' (49% *strongly* agree), 'fear or anxiety' (46% *strongly* agree), and 'greater risk of growing up to be abusive' (46% *strongly* agree). Slightly less recognized consequences are 'likely to exhibit aggressive or bullying behaviours' (40% *strongly* agree), 'have difficulty learning' (38% *strongly* agree), and 'greater risk of growing up to be abused' (36% *strongly* agree).

Family Violence Prevalence

The perception among Albertans that family violence is *not* a frequent occurrence in their own community is up significantly for a second consecutive survey period.

- In 2012, half (50%) of Albertans think family violence exists 'not very often' or 'not at all' in their own community – up 6 percentage points from 44% in 2010. This follows a significant 7 percentage point increase from 2008 to 2010, and represents a 13 point increase over the past four years.

Attitudes Regarding the Prevention of Family Violence

Albertans recognize family violence prevention as an urgent priority at both the community and provincial government levels, and further, accept personal responsibility.

- As with bullying prevention, there is strong consensus that family violence prevention should be an urgent priority at both the community (91% agree) and provincial government (90%) levels. Further, nine-in-ten (90%) Albertans also agree that they have a personal responsibility to reduce family violence in their own community – up 4 percentage points from 2010.

Attitudes Regarding Family Violence: Gender Distinctions

A marked gender distinction exists regarding the ability for men and women to leave an abusive relationship.

- Four-in-ten (41%) Albertans agree that 'most women could leave an abusive relationship if they wanted to' while 58% disagree. When it comes to men, however, more than six-in-ten (62%) agree that 'most men could leave an abusive relationship if they wanted to', while 37% disagree.
- Although not as striking a difference, there is a higher level of comfort talking to a female friend who is *being abused* than a male friend. That being said, comfort talking to a male friend is up significantly from 2010. Currently, 91% of Albertans agree they 'could talk to a female friend who is being abused by a family member about the abuse' while 85% (up 6 percentage points from 2010) agree they could talk to a male friend about their abuse.
- Albertans also express a higher level of comfort talking to a female friend who is *abusing a family member* than a male friend. Eight-in-ten (80%) agree they could 'talk to a female friend who is abusing a family member about the abuse', while 72% agree they could talk to a male friend.

Recommended Resources for Victims of Family Violence

The vast majority of Albertans are able to suggest information sources or support services for someone experiencing family violence, with police and community services the most frequently suggested channels.

- If someone experiencing family violence asked them where to get information or where to go for support, half (50%) of Albertans would suggest the police while roughly one-quarter (27%) would suggest community services, 17% would suggest telephone help lines, and 15% would suggest the Internet. A wide variety of other resources are also suggested, though none by more than 13% of respondents.

Barriers to Helping in a Family Violence Situation

When asked to assess five specific barriers to helping in a family violence situation, 'believing the situation to be an isolated incident' emerges as the least prominent barrier.

- Of the five reasons tested, the biggest barrier to helping in a family violence situation is 'being unsure of exactly what action to take' (77% say this happens 'always' or 'often'), followed by 'feeling that it is a family matter and not their concern' (74% 'always' or 'often'), 'people are afraid of being harmed themselves' (71% 'always' or 'often'), and 'people are concerned that involving the authorities would make the situation worse (68% 'always' or 'often').
- 'Believing the situation to be an isolated incident' is a less prominent barrier (59% say this happens 'always' or 'often'). Still, virtually all Albertans think all five reasons are barriers to helping at least once in a while.

Community Engagement and Capacity: Family Violence

Awareness or engagement in community initiatives dealing with family violence is very low at 14%, and notably lower than for bullying initiatives (22%). More than seven-in-ten (72%) Albertans, however, feel their community has the capacity to help with family violence issues, slightly higher than the 64% who feel the same with regard to bullying issues.

RECALL OF INFORMATION ON BULLYING AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Both recall and the perceived impact of information about the prevention of bullying see significant gains from two years ago.

- Seven-in-ten (72%) Albertans recall reading, seeing or hearing information about the prevention of bullying in the past 12 months – this represents a significant 15 percentage point increase from 2010.
- Further, among Albertans who report having read, seen or heard information about the prevention of bullying, 74% agree they are now better able to help in a bullying situation – up 9 percentage points from 2010.

- Past 12 months recall about the prevention of family violence stands at 58% – notably lower than bullying prevention recall, but consistent with 2010 findings (54%).
- Among Albertans who report reading, seeing or hearing information about the prevention of family violence in the past 12 months, 71% agree they are now better able to help in a family violence situation – on par with bullying, and consistent with 2010.

Awareness of a family violence website is up significantly.

- In 2012, two-in-ten (21%) Albertans recall hearing about a family violence website – a significant 8 percentage point increase from 2010 (13%).

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FROM 2010

Bullying Prevention

Considerable positive movement is seen in the arena of bullying prevention with significant gains in the awareness and recognition of cyberbullying, recall and perceived impact of bullying prevention information, and attitudes towards prevention.

- Unaided awareness of cyberbullying sees a significant 9 percentage point gain (19% in 2012 vs. 10% in 2010), while aided awareness is up 13 percentage points (83% in 2012 vs. 70% in 2010).
- Further, significantly more Albertans (62% in 2012 vs. 56% in 2010) recognize that cyberbullying occurs 'a lot' or 'a fair bit' in their own community (in fact, the percentage of 'a lot' ratings is up 5 percentage points – 24% in 2012 vs. 19% in 2010).
- Overall recall of information about the prevention of bullying realizes a significant 15 percentage point gain (72% in 2012 vs. 57% in 2010), and agreement that one is better able to help in a bullying situation as a result of this information climbs to 74% (up 9 percentage points from 65% in 2010).
- Agreement that one has a personal responsibility to reduce bullying in their community stands at 93% (up 5 percentage points from 88% in 2010), while agreement that bullying prevention should be a priority for the provincial government increases by 8 percentage points (87% in 2012 vs. 79% in 2010).

A diversity of significant changes are seen in the realm of family violence prevention.

- Significantly more Albertans (70% in 2012 vs. 63% in 2010) recognize that financial abuse ('preventing a family member from knowing about or having access to family income or savings') is a form of family violence.
- Significantly more Albertans agree they 'could talk to a male friend who is being abused by a family member about the abuse' (85% in 2012 vs. 79% in 2010).
- Similar to bullying, agreement that one has a personal responsibility to reduce family violence in their community is up 4 percentage points (90% in 2012 vs. 86% in 2010).

- It is interesting, however, that the perception among Albertans that family violence is *not* a frequent occurrence in their own community is up significantly for a second consecutive survey period. In 2012, half (50%) say family violence exists 'not very often' or 'not at all' in their own community (up 6 percentage points from 44% in 2010) – further, there has been a 13 point increase since 2008 (37%).
- While recall of information regarding family violence prevention is stable, awareness of a family violence info line sees a significant 8 percentage point gain (21% in 2012 vs. 13% in 2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

- Continue to educate Albertans about cyberbullying – what it is, and the negative impacts on youth. While Albertans are aware of cyberbullying, it is not top-of-mind; this is despite the fact that in an Alberta study, the percentage of cyberbullying noticed at schools significantly increased between 2007 and 2009. A higher proportion of children and youth in 2009, reported witnessing a person putting mean pictures/messages about someone on the Internet or email (11% increase from 2007), or spreading rumours over the Internet or email (8% increase from 2007).¹
- Continue to emphasize messaging that bullying is not a normal part of growing up – bullying is wrong. Target this messaging at males in particular.
- Continue to educate the public about various forms of family violence – particularly financial abuse as it is the least recognized form of family violence.
- Develop messaging aimed at breaking down key barriers to helping in a family violence situation.
- Continue to educate Albertans about what actions to take and what specific resources exist given different family violence situations.
- Continue to encourage involvement in community initiatives dealing with bullying and family violence – instill a strong call to action among Albertans.
- Maintain or increase efforts to increase awareness of the Family Violence Info Line and website as well as the Bullying Help Line and website. Further, start tracking awareness of these bullying prevention resources.
- Given that analysis and tracking by Child and Family Services Authorities regions is important, increase the survey sample size to the degree possible given budgetary constraints.

¹ System Improvement Group (2009). *Prevention of Bullying Strategy: Stage 4 summative evaluation – Interim update with 2009 data: Draft report*. Unpublished questionnaire findings, Alberta Education, Edmonton.