RESEARCH PROGRAM

Bullying and Other Victimization Exposures among Youth:
Understanding Implications and Intervening Effectively

Currently 49 states have enacted legislation mandating schools to address bullying, yet research findings remain mixed about the effectiveness of existing bullying prevention programs. As such, it has become even more incumbent to better understand the etiology and effects of bullying such that more effective prevention programs can be implemented.

Dr. Holt’s research program is embedded in a social-ecological model which reflects the need to consider how both individual (e.g., sexual minority status) and contextual (e.g., peer groups, school climate) variables relate to bullying involvement, and how these factors also potentially influence effects of such involvement. Importantly, other victimization forms (e.g., child maltreatment) are often ignored when trying to address bullying at the individual or school level, despite strong evidence that victimization not only puts youth at greater risk for bullying involvement, but also is linked to similar psychological, educational, and health effects. Further, while significant efforts are underway at K-12 schools to reduce bullying, there remains a gap at the post-secondary level. Specifically, it is unclear the degree to which incoming college students with bullying histories experience differential adjustment than those without bullying histories. It might be that students who experienced bullying prior to college would benefit from tailored programming. In sum, the overarching goal of this research program is to clarify the complexities of bullying from a social-ecological perspective, to identify potentially modifiable risk and protective factors that could in turn be addressed as part of bullying prevention programs, and to utilize findings to inform policy.

Biographical Sketch

Melissa K. Holt, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Counseling and Human Development at Boston University’s School of Education. Prior to this faculty position, Dr. Holt was a Behavioral Scientist in the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She is an active member of the American Educational Research Association’s Division E (Counseling and Human Development) as well as the Bullying Research Network. Dr. Holt serves on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Youth and Adolescence, as an ad hoc reviewer for 15 other peer-reviewed journals, and as an external review for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Dr. Holt co-leads a research laboratory (The Social Adjustment and Bullying Prevention Laboratory) with Dr. Jennifer Greif Green, the website for which is: www.bu.edu/bullying. Publications from Dr. Holt’s program of research can be solicited directly from her via email (holtm@bu.edu).