

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Peer Victimization During Middle Childhood as a Lead Indicator of Internalizing Problems and Diagnostic Outcomes in Late Adolescence

Schwartz, D., Lansford, J. E., Dodge, K. A., Pettit, G. S., & Bates, J. E. (2015). Peer victimization during middle childhood as a lead indicator of internalizing problems and diagnostic outcomes in late adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 44(3), 393-404. doi:10.1080/15374416.2014.881293

SUMMARY: Peer victimization is detrimental to children's and adolescents' mental health and well-being. A sample of children's peer victimization experience was assessed at grade 3 or grade 4, and their internalizing problems were assessed consecutively over 10 years after the peer victimization assessment. Results revealed that peer victimization in middle childhood could be a marker of adolescent internalizing problems such as depression.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Peer victimization in grade 3 or grade 4 was related to internalizing problems years later in adolescence.
- At the individual level, peer victimization was also associated with an increase in internalizing problems over time.
- Unipolar depressive symptoms in late adolescence could be predicted by peer victimization in middle childhood.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Observe closely military children and adolescents who may experience peer victimization
- Receive trainings on military culture and deployment-related issues, and their effect on military children's well-being

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes and workshops for teachers and military parents on ways to detect and prevent peer victimization among military children
- Offer support groups for military adolescents who share similar experiences

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Increase awareness about the deleterious effects of peer victimization on military children's development and military families' well-being
- Continue to support research and programs that aim to prevent peer victimization in military children

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- The participants were recruited from three different geographic regions as part of a big project studying peer victimization.
- Of the 585 initial participants, 388 completed the longitudinal study.
- Peer victimization was assessed when the children were in either the 3rd or 4th grade, and internalizing problems were measured by a questionnaire completed by mothers in the subsequent nine consecutive years, and a clinical interviewed with the participants immediately after high school graduation.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 388 children (198 boys and 190 girls).
- The average age of the children at initial assessment was 8.5 years.
- The majority of the participants were White (76%), and of the participants from minority ethnic backgrounds, almost all of them were Black.

LIMITATIONS

- The design of the study did not allow the authors to draw causal conclusions, so it is unclear if peer victimization led to internalizing problems, or vice versa.
- Peer victimization was only assessed at one time point, therefore its developmental trajectory over time is unknown.
- Other characteristics of children that may potentially affect peer victimization and internalizing problems were not well-controlled in the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore protective factors and interventions that may prevent children from being bullied and developing internalizing problems
- Assess peer victimization at different time points to examine the chronicity of children's bully and victim experiences
- Investigate other characteristics of a child that may play a role in the association between peer victimization and internalizing problems

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>