

Peer Victimization in Childhood and Internalizing Problems in Adolescence: A Prospective Longitudinal Study

Zwierzynska, K., Wolke, D. & Lereya, T.S. (2013). Peer victimization in childhood and internalizing problems in adolescence: A prospective longitudinal study. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 41, 309-323. doi: 10.1007/s10802-012-9678-8.



3,692 British children participated in a study examining whether repeated, intentional harm by peers (peer victimization) in childhood predicted later internalizing (depression, negative emotionality) symptoms. Victimization predicted the development of internalizing symptoms in early adolescence. This association was independent of the reporter of the bullying (mothers, teachers, or children).

Key Findings:

- Peer victimization increased the risk of depression and emotional problems in early adolescence.
- Peer victimization consistently predicted scoring in the 10th percentile of depression scores (highest levels of depression) across time.
- Mother, teacher, and child reports of victimization predicted broad internalizing problems (both depression and negative emotionality).
- Being victimized consistently over the years and experiencing both direct and indirect victimization were associated with a higher risk of depressive symptoms than inconsistent victimization over the years or just one kind of victimization.
- 46% of children reported being victimized at age 8 or 10, whereas mothers reported 38% of children as having been victims in the same period.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs can offer supportive classes for parents about how to recognize the effects of being bullied in their children and what they can do to combat any negative impact.
- Programs can collaborate with public schools to help identify children who are the targets of bullying and provide appropriate supports.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funding to train educators about the serious consequences of bullying and appropriate precautions and interventions.
- Policies could recommend offering professional development for family program workers to develop and implement an anti-bullying curriculum specific to military children.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could use validated measures of teacher and parent reports of peer victimization.
- Research could follow children over a longer period of time, examining correlates of peer victimization beyond early adolescence.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Pregnant women in Avon, United Kingdom with expected due dates in 1991-1992 were recruited. They completed mailed questionnaires about their child's health and development.
- Children attended annual assessment clinics including interviews and psychological and physical tests.
- Teachers also reported on peer victimization.
- In these analyses, the following data were used: self-reported peer victimization (at 8 and 10 years), depression symptoms (at 11-14 years), negative emotions (at 12 and 13 years), and diagnoses of depression and anxiety (at 13 years).
- 25% of the total cohort had complete data and were included in the study.
- Multiple linear regression analyses were used to predict depression and negative emotionality from self-, mother- and teacher-reported victim status.

Participants:

- 3,692 children were included in this study.
- 52% of the youth were male.
- 83% of the mothers were married at the time of the child's birth.
- 85% of the mothers owned their home at the time of the child's birth.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 95% White, 5% non-white.

Limitations:

- Participants were British, and it is unknown how these findings apply to other samples of children.
- The mother-, teacher- and self- reports were different measures and couldn't be formally compared.
- Mother and teacher reports of peer victimization were assessed with a single item which may limit reliability.
- There was a significant amount of missing data that eliminated many of the participants. Data from the eliminated participants had significantly different demographics than those with complete data.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent <i>Minor Limitations</i> (★★★)	Appropriate <i>Few Limitations</i> (★★★)	Limited <i>Several Limitations</i> (★★★)	Questionable <i>Many/Severe Limitations</i> (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ★