Research Regarding Peer Aggression and Victimization

Paula Fite
University of Kansas
Research Areas

- Risk factors and outcomes associated with peer aggression and peer victimization
- Ways of reducing negative outcomes associated with experiencing peer victimization/aggression
- Strategies for preventing and reducing peer victimization
What is peer victimization?

- Relationship-based pattern of behavior that involves the use of bullying and other aggressive acts to intentionally oppress, humiliate or dominate others.

CDC, 2012; Vernberg & Biggs, 2010
Peer Victimization

INvolves

- Bully(ies)
- Victim(s)
- Bystander(s)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Impact</th>
<th>Behavioral Difficulties</th>
<th>School Performance</th>
<th>Peer Relationships</th>
<th>Physical Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Frequent Nurse Visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Emotion Dysregulation</td>
<td>Negative School Attitudes</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Illnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidality</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>Affiliate with other rejected youth</td>
<td>Injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bodily Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>Dropping Out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Impact</td>
<td>Behavioral Difficulties</td>
<td>School Performance</td>
<td>Peer Relationships</td>
<td>Physical Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Dislike School</td>
<td>High conflict friendships</td>
<td>Frequent Nurse Visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Illnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/ Criminality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bodily Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Common Consequences for Bystanders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Impact</th>
<th>Behavioral Difficulties</th>
<th>School Performance</th>
<th>Peer Relationships</th>
<th>Physical Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Bodily Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prevention and Intervention is NEEDED
Importance of Environment
Starting with a good Policy

1. It is recommended that an anti-bullying policy explicitly state that any form or type of bullying regardless of the severity is unacceptable and will be taken seriously by school personnel, students, and their families.
Policy Considerations

2. Policies may benefit from clearly defining bullying, including its various forms, to reduce ambiguity about what behaviors the policy covers.
3. At minimum a policy should be clear about the contexts in which it covers, such as bullying behavior that occurs on school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity or event (on or off campus), on school-associated transportation, or through school-owned technology.
4. It is recommended that a bullying policy includes consistent reporting, investigating and tracking procedures that all teachers and staff are aware of and trained on how to use any forms the school requires.
Policy Considerations

5. At a minimum, anti-bullying policies should include reporting procedures for students, families, and community members such that it is clear to whom they can report the incident and how the incident will be investigated.
6. Policies may benefit from stating that bullying that is motivated by race, gender, social class, religious beliefs, sexual or gender identity, and other relevant characteristics is strictly prohibited.
7. School policies should consider outlining the disciplinary actions and sanctions for bullying.
8. It is recommended to share and post the school’s policy and procedures so that staff, students, and parents are all informed of the school’s response to bullying.
Understanding Where Peer Victimization Occurs


Background

- Need to know where victimization occurs to inform prevention and intervention

- Limitations from prior studies:
  - Focused solely on school locations
  - Did not specify the forms of aggression
  - Did not consider gender differences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Physical n = 129</th>
<th>Relational n = 155</th>
<th>Cyber n = 36</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lunchroom</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallway</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playground</strong></td>
<td><strong>56.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.1%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On the bus</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program or club</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting activity</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babysitter</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
<td><strong>31%</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>52.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhood</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At a party</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another fun activity</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At a friend’s house</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- Victimization occurs both at home and school

- Locations in which child:adult ratio is greater and less adult monitoring are risks

- Although cyber victimization is occurring off school ground can also impact schools

- Findings are similar overall for males and females
Intervention can include:

- More monitoring
- Removing the aggressors from these scenarios if possible
- Changing routine, avoiding situations in which victimization occurs
School Safety

Perceived School Safety

- The degree to which students perceive that it is safe to go to school and safe to be at school (feeling that their well-being is not threatened)

- Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009.
IF students don’t feel safe

- Lack of connectedness to students and teachers
- Less likely to report incidents
- Feelings of hopelessness and worry
Found That

- low levels of perceived school safety contributed to symptoms of depression and anxiety and exacerbated the associations between relational victimization and these symptoms
Association between Relational Victimization and Anxiety Symptoms at High and Low Levels of Perceived School Safety
Implications

Schools may need to include issues of safety when addressing students’ social/emotional development.

Creating an environment where youth feel comfortable expressing safety concerns.

Helping students to identify what they have control over and promoting effective problem solving skills.

- School’s behavioral expectations and rules posted
- Having easy access to adults
- Making sure all students are aware of reporting procedures
- Monitoring places in which youth may feel unsafe (e.g., bathroom, bus, or hallways).
Parental School Involvement as a Moderator of the Association between Peer Victimization and Academic Performance.

Fite, Cooley, Williford, A., Frazer, & DiPierro (2014)

*Children and Youth Services Review*
A link between experiences of peer victimization and poor academic performance has been established (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010).

However, the specific links between overt and relational forms of victimization and academic performance are not well understood.

Further, factors that may help to mitigate this association are not known.
High levels of parental school involvement have been found to be associated with high levels of academic performance (e.g., Domina, 2005; Englund et al., 2004; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Stewart, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Parenting behavior has also been found to buffer the deleterious effects of peer victimization on child outcomes (e.g., Davidson and Demaray, 2007; Stadler, Feifel, Rohrmann, Vermeiren, & Poustka, 2010).

High levels of parental school involvement may help prevent victimized youth from experiencing negative academic outcomes.
Association between Relational Victimization and Academic Performance at High and Low Levels of Parental Involvement

Academic Performance

Relational Victimization

High Involvement
Low Involvement
Conclusions

Peer victimization, particularly relational, and parental involvement are linked to academic performance.

Parental school involvement buffers the link between peer victimization and academic outcomes.

Parental school involvement should be a target of intervention for victimized youth.
Need for Targeted Intervention
Pilot Evaluation of a Targeted Intervention for Peer-Victimized Youth

Fite, Cooley, Poquiz, & Williford (2019).

Journal of Clinical Psychology
Peer victimization and internalizing symptoms bidirectionally associated (Card et al., 2007; Schacter, White, Chang, & Juvonen, 2014)

- Individuals who do not regulate their emotions effectively tend to respond to peer aggression in ways that put them at risk for experiencing subsequent victimization.
- Being victimized by peers is associated with increases in internalizing symptoms.
Interventions for peer victimization that focus on changing negative (i.e., self-blaming) cognitions and implementing effective coping strategies in order to reduce negative emotions may prevent subsequent peer victimization and internalizing symptoms.
Taking Action

- Group-based cognitive behavioral intervention

- Focuses on problem-solving, behavioral activation, coping skills, and positive self-evaluation by targeting negative cognitions among elementary school-age children (Stark & Kendall, 1996).

- Found to reduce both depressive and anxiety symptoms (Stark, Reynolds, & Kaslow, 1987; Stark, Rouse, & Livingston, 1991)

- May be useful in reducing the negative emotions and social withdrawal that victimized youth experience, ultimately preventing subsequent victimization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Taking Action Session Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish a sense of hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discuss, model, and practice problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Establish goals and subgoals for self-improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Introduce and practice &quot;what if&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Identify negative emotions and associated thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Identify internal emotion cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Coping strategies – including pleasant events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Develop coping counters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Identify thoughts that interfere with coping strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Build a positive sense of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Identify and counter pessimistic thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Self-monitor positive thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Self-monitor personal positive qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Build a positive sense of self-reframing activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

Current findings, in conjunction with limited previous research, provide preliminary support for the use of cognitive behavioral interventions for victimized youth.

Observed changes in youths’ level of peer victimization, as well as depressive symptoms and passive coping, are likely tied to the targeted intervention’s focus on cognitive restructuring of victims’ attributions.
Take Home Messages

- Virtually all children and adolescents face issues regarding peer victimization
- Pay attention to patterns and problem solve locations
- Safe environment is crucial
- Encourage parental school involvement
- Targeted intervention is needed for victims and aggressors
Helpful Resources

Websites
- CDC’s information: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/bullyingresearch/
- Government site: www.stopbullying.gov

Books
Acknowledgements

- Anne Williford, Colorado State University
- Fite Lab
- Lochman Research Group
- Colder Lab

Funders:
- University of Kansas
- Kansas Department of Education
- American Psychological Foundation
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
Social or Relational Victimization

Ostracism
Social exclusion
Gossip/"trash talking"/rumor spreading
Nonverbal gestures such as: eye rolling directed laughter mimicking
Cybervictimization

- Circulating Electronic Images or Videos
- Insulting Text Messages
- Harassment Through Online Games
- Harassment Through Social Media
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Instagram
### Physical victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tripping</th>
<th>Pushing</th>
<th>Tackling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poking</td>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>Tugging/tearing Clothes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*****WARNING*****
DISTURBING FOOTAGE

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vkhEYcbAlo
How Frequent Is Bullying?

- Approximately 19% of children engage in bullying behavior
- At least 60% of youth report experiencing peer victimization
- As many as 10-20% of youth experiencing chronic victimization by their peers.
- Virtually ALL children will be a witness or bystander to bullying behavior

Bradshaw et al., 2007; Cooley, Fite, & Pederson, 2018; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001; Ladd, Ettekal, & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2017; Vernberg & Biggs, 2010;