



Mediating Pathways between Peer Victimization and Internalizing and Externalizing Distress in School-Aged Children



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Introduction

- Peer victimization (PV) is a common childhood experience and highly associated with a range of emotional and behavioral problems, including depression and social anxiety (Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010).
- Research also shows that bullied youth experience a multitude of problematic emotional and social experiences subsequent to PV, including emotion dysregulation and negative perceptions of self-worth, social competence, and social support (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; McLaughlin et al., 2009).
- Furthermore, PV is associated with fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance (Storch et al., 2003). Yet, it remains unclear whether PV contributes to various mental health outcomes by way of its effect on children's discomfort in social situations.

Aims

- To examine whether social anxiety mediates the relationship between PV and depressive and externalizing symptoms in youth at baseline and one year later.
- To examine the contribution of worry dysregulation to these pathways.

Methods

Participants: Children (53% males) from five suburban elementary schools completed questionnaires in school at baseline (T1; N=189) and one year later (T2; N=138)

Measures (all self-report questionnaires completed at school):

Schwartz Peer Victimization Scale (SPVS)

- 4-point Likert scale from *never* to *almost every day*
- 5-items assessing PV in children over past two weeks
- Items assess overt and relational victimization

Problem Behaviors Frequency Scale (PBFS)

- 18-item scale assessing frequency of overt/verbal aggression (AGR)
- Students report frequency of each behavior over past 30 days on scale ranging from 0 to 9+ times

Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)

- 47-item self-report questionnaire, including 9-item subscale assessing Social Phobia (SP)

- 4-point Likert scale from *never* to *always*

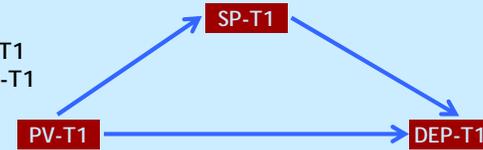
Children's Worry Management Scale (CWMS)

- 12 items assessing worry management in children
- Ratings between *hardly ever* to *often*
- Worry dysregulation (WD) score obtained by combining two scales (inhibition and dysregulated expression)

Results

- First, utilizing the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Field, 2013; Hayes, 2013), SP was examined at T1 as a possible mediator between PV at T1 and DEP and AGR at T1. There was an indirect effect of PV at T1 on DEP at T1 through SP at T1 (see Figure). No indirect effect was observed between PV at T1 and AGR at T1 through SP at T1.
- Second, SP was examined at T1 as a possible mediator between PV at T1 and DEP, AGR, and SP at T2. There was an indirect effect of PV at T1 on SP at T2 through SP at T1, $b = 6.60$, BCa CI [2.87, 11.43], representing a medium effect, $k^2 = .175$, 95% BCa CI [.087, .285]. No indirect effect was observed between PV at T1 and DEP and AGR at T2 through SP at T1.
- Third, both worry dysregulation (WD) and SP was examined at T1 as possible mediators between PV and DEP at T1. There was a significant indirect effect of PV at T1 on DEP at T1 through WD and subsequently through SP at T1, $b = 1.11$, BCa CI [.428, 2.39].

Indirect Effect of PV-T1
on DEP-T1 Through SP-T1



$b = 6.95$, BCa CI [4.28, 10.66], representing a relatively large effect, $k^2 = .202$, 95% BCa CI [.130, .294]

Discussion

- These findings suggest that PV may contribute to depressive symptoms indirectly through worry dysregulation and social anxiety, though results were not maintained after one year.
- While further research is needed, findings may inform the development of interventions for bullied children that target emotion management and social anxiety to prevent depressive symptoms and emotional distress.

References

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Lastly, the relationship between indirect bullying and PVG was partially mediated by externalizing and internalizing problems.

Conclusions: Results suggest that different types of bullying victimization are differentially associated with PVG, with mental health symptoms significantly mediating this relationship.

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Introduction. 2.To examine the contribution of worry dysregulation to these pathways. Methods. Participants: Children (53% males) from five suburban elementary schools completed questionnaires in school at baseline (T1; N=189) and one year later (T2; N=138). Schwartz Peer Victimization Scale (SPVS). Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS). a) 4-point Likert scale from never to almost every day. Although researchers have primarily examined relationships between victimization and internalizing problems, victimization in the peer group may also lead to increases in externalizing problems such as aggression, truancy, and delinquency. For instance, children who are often the target of peer victimization are at risk to develop hostile social-cognitive biases [e.g., Dodge et al., 1990], which may drive aggressive behaviors [Dodge and Schwartz, 1999]. Victims of peer torment may also use aggression to defend themselves against their bullies. Peer victimization is a common stressor, with approximately 10–20% of youth experiencing consistent victimization during the school years (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002; Graham & Juvonen, 1998). Both overt (e.g., hitting, verbally insulting, threatening) and relational (e.g., social exclusion, manipulation) victimization are associated with depressive symptoms (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, Hessel, & Schmidt, 2011). Children completed measures of peer victimization and depressive symptoms and engaged in a social challenge task. Dyad partners were kept in separate rooms prior to the interaction. Children were told they would each build a replica of a block model and whoever completed the model first would receive a prize. Explaining bidirectional spillover between parent-child relationships and peer victimization. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 15 January 2019. Tessa M. L. Kaufman [Opens in a new window] Prevalence rates of internalizing symptoms are higher for girls, whereas boys outrank girls in terms of externalizing symptoms (Bongers, Koot, Van Der Ende, & Verhulst, Reference Bongers, Koot, Van Der Ende and Verhulst 2003). Standardized associations between parent-child relationships and victimization are shown, and indirect effects are in bold. Numbers before the dash represent parental rejection and after the dash represent parental warmth. *** p < .001. Figure 2. Direct effects between parent-child relationships and victimization.