Impact of Peer Victimization on Psychosocial Functioning: High School to University

Contact 2017 Transitions
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Carie M. Buchanan, PhD
St. Thomas More College
Overview

• Define peer victimization and bullying
• Review different types of aggression used and experienced
• Describe the roles one can take on in a bully situation
• Describe psychological and social implications of peer victimization and bullying
• Discuss what peer victimization and bullying may look like in university
• Discuss future directions for research
What is bullying?

How do you define bullying?
A scholarly perspective on bullying...

- Developmental researchers (generally) define bullying as:
  
  - Acts of aggression with the intention to do harm
  
  - Negative peer interactions repeated over time
  
  - Power imbalance between bully and victim

Based on Olweus (1996)
Moral criterion

“Bullying is a behaviour which can be defined as the repeated attack – physical, psychological, social or verbal – by those in a position of power, which is formally or situationally defined, on those who are powerless to resist, with the intention of causing distress for their own gain or gratification.”

(Besag, 1989, p. 4)
Problems defining bullying

• Different measures used to assess bullying result in variable prevalence rates
  • Difficult to translate across different cultural contexts

• Age differences in how young people understand bullying
Are there different types of aggression?
Consider peer victimization and bullying in...

- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Emerging adulthood
Types of aggression

- Physical
- Verbal
- Social
- Cyberbullying
Physical aggression

• E.g., hitting, kicking, pushing, etc.

• Boys experience and perpetrate more physical aggression than girls

• Physical aggression decreases with age
Verbal aggression

- E.g., name-calling, threatening, swearing, etc.

- Boys and girls experience and perpetrate similar levels of verbal aggression

- Verbal aggression increases with age then plateaus
Social aggression

- E.g., spreading rumours, exclusion, turning friends against someone, etc.

- Girls experience and perpetrate more social aggression than boys, but this gender difference decreases with age

- Social aggression increases with age
Cyberbullying

• What is cyberbullying?

• Can we accurately assess cyberbullying using Olweus’ criteria for identifying bullying?
  • Acts of aggression with the intention to do harm
  • Negative peer interactions repeated over time
  • Power imbalance between bully and victim
Classifying a bully and victim

• Bully
  • Someone who bullies others

• Victim
  • Someone who is bullied by others

• Bully-victim
  • Someone who is bullied by and bullies other
Involvement in bullying more than twice during the current school term in 25 countries.
Bullying as a group process

- Bully: Active, initiative-taking, leads in bullying incident
- Assistant: Active, follower of bullying
- Reinforcer: Provides attention to bullying (watching and laughing), encourages bully
- Defender: Offers support to victim (defends and consoles)
- Victim: Target of bully’s aggression
- Outsider: Stays clear of bullying incident

Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen (1996)
Characteristics of victims

- Insecure
- Childlike
- Shy
- Race
- Disabilities
- LGBT youth
Characteristics of bullies

• Physically larger
• Unpopular/rejected
• Antisocial
• Social deficiencies
• Socially competent
• Socially intelligent
• Popular
• Attractive
• Disabled
Short-term psychological outcomes

Bully
• Low self-esteem
• Depression
• Anxiety
• Emotional problems
• Suicide ideation
• Hyperactivity
• Substance use

Victim
• Low self-esteem
• Depression
• Anxiety
• Emotional problems
• Suicide ideation
• Somatic symptoms (and actual illness)
Short-term social outcomes

Bully
- Social loneliness
- Peer rejection
- Aggression
- Delinquency
- Truancy
- Poorer school adjustment
- Lower academic achievement

Victim
- Social loneliness and withdrawal
- Peer rejection
- Aggression
- Delinquency
- Truancy
- Poorer school adjustment
- Lower academic achievement
Figure Legend:
Standardized mean scores on psychosocial adjustment dimensions by involvement in bullying with the use of combined data from 25 countries (adjusted for age and sex).
Long-term psychosocial outcomes

Bully
- Substance abuse
- Bully in adulthood
- Antisocial personality disorder
- Criminal behaviour
- Unemployment

Victim
- Substance abuse
- Victim in adulthood
- Variety of psychotic experiences
- Less likely to obtain post-secondary education
- Poorer mental health
What do we know about peer victimization and bullying beyond adolescence?

- Variability in developmental trajectories
  - Some may experience lifetime status of bully and victim

- Some experience continued maladjustment into adulthood (even when bullying involvement ceases)

- Some recover
  - Strong social support (family, friends, peers, and teachers)
  - Positive self-evaluations
  - Psychosocial well-being
Peer victimization and bullying in university

• What may contribute to a decrease in peer victimization and/or bullying in transitioning into university?

• What may contribute to an increase in peer victimization and/or bullying in transitioning into university?

• How could experiences of peer victimization and/or bullying change across the student lifecycle?
Current Research
Impact of peer victimization on well-being and adjustment in university

❖ Participants:
   ❖ 381 university students (257 females)

❖ Constructs assessed:
   ❖ Experiences of social and verbal PV in online and offline contexts in high school and university, psychosocial functioning (self-esteem, depressed affect, and loneliness), and adjustment to university

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Predicting psychosocial functioning and adjustment to university

| ↑Depressed affect | • ↑Social PV experienced in both online and offline contexts  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced in only online contexts  
|                  | • ↑Verbal PV experienced in only online contexts  |
| ↑Loneliness      | • ↑Social PV experienced in only offline contexts  
|                  | • ↑Verbal PV experiences in only offline contexts  |
| ↓Adjustment to university | • ↑Social PV experienced in only online contexts  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced in only offline contexts  |

PV = peer victimization

Presented at the 7th Conference on Emerging Adulthood October 2015, Miami, Florida
Manuscript in progress, co-authored with M. Kaczur
Predicting psychosocial functioning and adjustment to university

| ↑Depressed affect | • ↑Verbal PV experienced in only online contexts while in HS  
|                  | • ↑Verbal PV experienced in only offline contexts while in HS  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced in only online contexts while in HS  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced in only online contexts while in HS  
| ↑Loneliness      | • ↑Verbal PV experienced only in offline contexts while in HS  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced only in offline contexts while in HS  
|                  | • ↑Social PV experienced only in online contexts while in HS  
| ↑Adjustment to university | • NA 

PV = peer victimization, HS = high school

Presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, March 2016, Baltimore, MD
Manuscript in progress, co-authored with M. Kaczur
Conclusions

❖ Different types of peer victimization related to different aspects of psychosocial functioning in emerging adulthood and adjustment to university.

❖ Context of where negative peer interactions occur may impact different aspects of psychosocial functioning in emerging adulthood and adjustment to university.

❖ Peer victimization experienced in high school may have a lasting impact on young people’s psychological and social functioning.
Questions?

cbuchanan@stmcollege.ca