

Bullying, Victimization, and their Co-Occurrence in Rural Early Adolescents

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Abstract

This study assesses not only prevalence rates and predictors of bullying and victimization, but also the degree of overlap between these categories. Participants were 340 students in grades 3-8 from 3 rural school districts in Minnesota. Students completed the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). Also 67 of their teachers completed a questionnaire assessing beliefs about bullying. Results showed that 49% of the students reported being victimized and 16% reported bullying others. These groups overlap: 82% of the bullies were also victims, and 27% of the victims were also bullies. Victimization declined, but bullying and co-occurring bullying and victimization increased with grade. Boys and girls bullied others at comparable rates but differed in the means they used, with girls favoring social exclusion and spreading rumors and boys employing more physical means. Teachers or peers put a stop to bullying only sometimes. Teachers were more likely to view bullying among boys as a normative process and to suggest to girls that they avoid or ignore the bully. Peers who felt more empathy and perceived that other students try to put a stop to bullying were more likely to attempt to intervene.

Background

- Bullying is a critical antecedent of more serious mental health disorders and youth violence.
- Because aggressive children themselves are often victims, it is important to simultaneously measure both bullying and victimization.
- The rural cultural context may contribute to higher prevalence rates and a greater tendency for children and adolescents not to report being bullied.
- Past research is inconsistent in definition of bullying and fails to consider that a child can be both a bully and a victim.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

- Rural schools in the current study will have a higher prevalence rate of victimization than has been reported in urban studies (15%-20%).
 - How many bullies are also victims?
- Boys will use more physical means and girls more indirect means but there will be no gender differences in overall prevalence.
- Victimization will decrease with age; bullying will increase with age.
- What are teachers' beliefs about bullying and do they vary by gender of student?
- How often do teachers and peers try to stop bullying?
- What predicts whether a student will try to help or not?

Methods

- Participants
 - 3rd-8th grade students in three rural public school districts in Minnesota, $N = 340$.
 - 50% of entire student population participated
 - 55% girls; 92% Caucasian
 - Mean age 10.9, range 8 to 15.
 - SES: Lower-middle to middle
 - 67 teachers of these students

Measures

- Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996).
 - 39 items, self-administered
 - Bullying definition:
 - Say mean or hurtful things, or make fun of
 - Exclusion from group or activities
 - Hit, kick, push, shove, lock in a room
 - Tell lies or spread false rumors
 - These happen repeatedly and over time, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself/herself
 - Reference period: “past couple of months”
 - Cronbach’s alphas: .81 for being bullied; .79 for bullying

Operational Definitions

- Pure bullies: indicated they had bullied others 2 or 3 times a month or more and are not victims
- Pure victims: indicated they had been bullied 2 or 3 times a month or more and are not bullies
- Bully/victims: both had bullied and had been bullied 2 or 3 times a month or more
- Bystanders: all others

Measures, continued

- Student Social Behavior Questionnaire (Troop-Gordon, 2004)
 - 35 items, completed by teachers
 - Measures teachers' attitudes and beliefs about bullying among both boys and girls
 - Advocate avoidance subscale (alpha = .90)
 - e.g. “Students will stop picking on boys who ignore them.”
 - Advocate assertion subscale (alpha = .78)
 - e.g. “Girls who get picked on need to learn to stand up for themselves.”
 - Normative process subscale (alpha = .91)
 - e.g. “For boys, teasing other children is just part of growing up.”

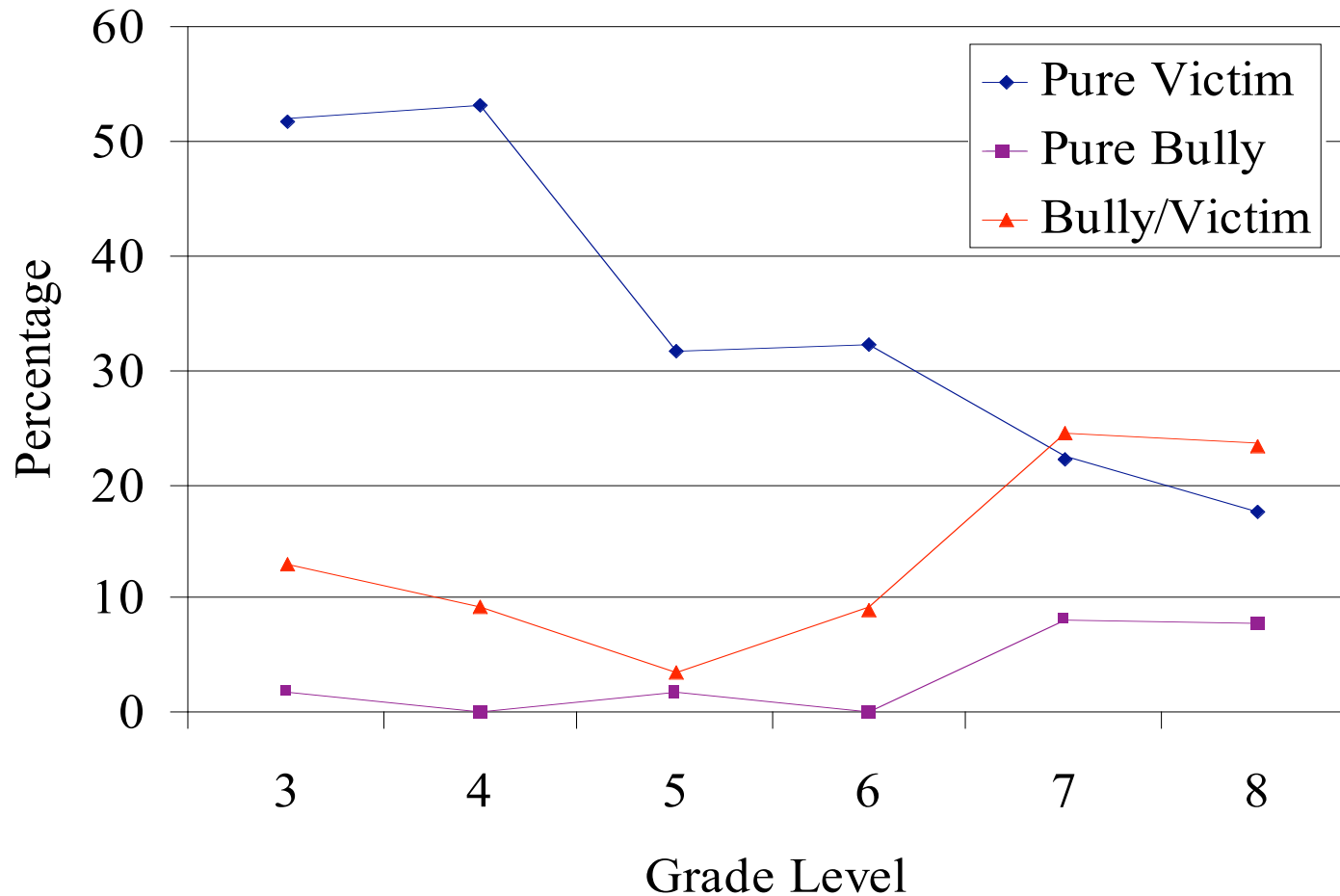
Results

- Prevalence of victimization
 - 48.8% reported being a victim of bullying
 - Of these, 35.6% were pure victims
- Prevalence of self-admitted bullying
 - 16.2% reported bullying others
 - Of these, 2.9% were pure bullies
- **Overlap: 13.2% were bully/victims**
- No gender differences in prevalence of bullies, victims, or bully/victims
- Most common type: social/relational (mean names, exclusion, rumors)
 - Physical harm: 27% of all bullying incidents
 - Boys more physical; girls more social/relational

Where It Occurs & Whom Victims Told

Where	%	Whom told	%
Recess/break	56.6	Friend	48.2
School bus	44.0	Parent	45.8
Hallways	37.3	Sibling	25.3
Lunch room	36.1	No one	24.7
Class (no teacher)	33.7	School adult	22.3
To/from school	33.7	Teacher	17.5
Gym/locker room	25.3	Extended family	6.1
Class (w/ teacher)	24.7		
Bathroom	19.9		
Bus stop	9.6		

Prevalence Across Grades 3 to 8



Significant differences across grades in proportion in each group.

Teacher Attitudes Differ by Gender

- Teachers more likely to believe bullying is a normative process for boys ($M = 1.68$) than it is for girls ($M = 1.42$), $t(66) = 5.8, p < .001$
- Teachers more likely to advocate that girls avoid or ignore bully ($M = 2.44$) than to advocate this strategy for boys ($M = 2.28$), $t(66) = 2.9, p = .005$.
- Advocating assertion was the highest rated strategy ($M = 2.52$), with no gender differences.
- Teachers on average did not express agreement (above 3 on 5 point scale) with any strategy

Student Perceptions of Teacher Reaction

- How often teachers put a stop to bullying
 - “Sometimes” ($M = 2.16$ on 0-4 scale)
 - Bully/victims < victims, bullies, bystanders*
 - Boys < girls*
 - Mean drops with grade from grade 5 to 8*
- How much teacher does to counteract
 - Less than “Somewhat” ($M = 1.82$ on 0-4 scale)
 - Bully/victims < bystanders*
 - 3rd-6th grade > 7th & 8th grade*

* $p < .05$ from post hoc comparisons following significant ANOVA

Student Perceptions of Peer Reaction

- How often other students put a stop to bullying
 - Between “once in a while” and “sometimes”
($M = 1.5$ on 0-4 scale)

Predictors of Trying to Help

- How do you usually react if you see or understand that a student is being bullied?
 - Of those who've noticed bullying, 54.4% say they would try to help the bullied student
 - Predictors of trying to help: (odds ratios resulting from logistic regression are given)
 - Being a bully (negative predictor, OR = .39)
 - The more often that other students try to put a stop to it (OR = 1.3)
 - The more empathy felt for the bullied student (OR = 2.5)
 - Gender, age and teacher reaction were not significant predictors

Discussion

- The victimization rate of nearly 50% is higher than that reported in urban studies.
 - Prevalence of bullying (16%) is consistent with past rural and urban studies
- 82% of bullies were also victims and 27% of victims were also bullies
- As predicted, no gender difference in overall prevalence but differences do exist in means used (social vs. physical)

- With age, drop in pure victims but a rise in pure bullies and bully/victims
 - By 8th grade, there are more bully/victims than pure bullies or pure victims
 - May reflect a middle school culture of reciprocal bullying
 - Calls into question the “imbalance of power” component of Olweus’ definition of bullying
- Teachers do not strongly endorse any strategy for how victims should respond
 - Apparently do not intervene often themselves
- Most peers say they would try to help, but also say that students rarely put a stop to other students’ bullying
 - Feelings of empathy and a perception that other students do try to put a stop to bullying are related to efforts to help

Implications for Intervention

- Focus on boys and girls and on both social and physical forms
- Include efforts at multiple levels of sociocultural context
 - Peer relationships, teacher practices, school culture, family/parent involvement
- Focus on both bullying and victimization
 - Also include a focus on bystanders—how and when to intervene