

Transitioning Out of Peer Victimization in School Children: Gender and Behavioral Characteristics

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The present study investigated the characteristics of children who remain consistently peer victimized in comparison to those who transition out of victimization status. The relationships between victimization and the victim's level of overt aggression, relational aggression, impulsivity, and prosocial behaviors were examined from one year to the next. At Time 1, 1589 3rd, 4th, and 5th-grade children were administered a peer nomination instrument assessing victimization and standard sociometric variables. At Time 2 (1 year later), 1619 3rd, 4th, and 5th-grade children were administered the same measure. A mixed-design repeated measures MANOVA was conducted for boys and girls separately. Results indicated that in comparison to victims transitioning out of victimization status, consistently victimized boys were lower in prosocial behavior, and consistently victimized girls were higher in impulsivity. Results for girls also indicated that a reduction in victim's own level of relational aggression was associated with cessation of victimization.

KEY WORDS: aggression; bullying; overt victimization; peer nomination; relational victimization.

INTRODUCTION

The negative impact of peer-victimization on children has been well documented (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). The effects on children being victimized by their peers may include depression, loneliness, increased suicidal ideation, and anxiety (Boivin, Hymel, & Burkowski, 1995; Craig, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001; Rigby & Slee, 1999). Unfortunately, peer victimization is too common an occurrence. Current estimates suggest that about 10–15% of school age children are the targets of peer victimization (Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Schäfer, Werner, & Crick, 2002). One longitudinal study found that over a period of 4 years, 60% of children reported that they experienced some form of victimization (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001).

Research on children who are victimized by their peers has lacked consensus on what constitutes peer-victimization. Some researchers (e.g., Olweus, 1997) broadly define peer-victimization as being repeatedly exposed to negative actions, from at least one other person. Other researchers are more specific in their definition, distinguishing between overt forms (physical and verbal assault) and relational forms (social ostracism) of peer-victimization (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). A recent review by Schäfer et al. (2002) addressed the differing definitions of peer-victimization and suggested that research can be seen as falling into one of two traditions: the “Bully/Victim” approach, and the “general victimization” approach. The Bully/Victim research tradition depicts bullying as a subtype of aggression in which the victim is psychologically or physically weaker than the bully and the harmful act is intentional and occurs repeatedly over time. Self-report measures, such as the Bully-victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1989), are the usual methods for identifying those victimized by their peers (see Schäfer et al., 2002 for review). In contrast, the General Victimization tradition does not specify that the act must occur repeatedly over time or that the acts must occur between children who differ in psychological or physical strength.

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Schäfer et al. (2002) discuss the importance of this latter difference, reviewing studies which suggest that using the Bully/Victim approach neglects those children victimized by their close friends (being equal in physical and/or psychological strength). While the Bully/Victim research tradition has primarily utilized self-reports to assess victimization, the General Victimization research tradition has commonly used peer-reports to assess victimization. This extends the difference between the two approaches beyond definitional to methodological as well.

The majority of current research on peer-victimization no longer considers victimization as a single overt form of physical/verbal assault perpetrated by a stronger child. Crick and others (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998) have shown that peer-victimization is more appropriately defined by the form of aggression, which is used. Relational peer-victimization occurs when children are socially ostracized or have rumors spread about them. Overt peer-victimization occurs when children are physically attacked or called names. Using this technique has been shown to provide unique information about children nominated as peer-victimized and is sensitive to gender differences in behavior (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). This is consistent with prior literature on gender differences in children, finding girls to be more concerned with social and relational issues, whereas boys tend to be more aggressive and dominance oriented in their interactions (Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995; Maccoby, 1988). Because of the differences found between relational and overt forms of victimization, as well as the unique information gained by considering these two groups separately, the current research continued to differentiate between those relationally peer-victimized and those overtly peer-victimized from within the General Victimization approach.

Using the peer-nomination technique to examine victimization in relation to other sociometric variables (e.g., popularity, rejection, peer aggression, impulsivity/emotion regulation, prosocial skills) has resulted in valuable findings about children nominated as peer-victimized. For example, Crick and Bigbee (1998) found that relationally peer-victimized children reported significantly higher levels of impulsive behavior in comparison to their nonvictimized peers. Children who are peer-victimized have been found to have high rejection scores and low popularity scores (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). When victimization scores and aggression scores are used as dual predictors, over half of the variance can be accounted for in rejection scores (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Furthermore, aggressive peer-victims reported significantly higher levels of weapon carrying, alcohol use, and fighting than nonaggressive victims, aggressive nonvictims

and nonaggressive nonvictims (Brockenbrough, Cornell, & Loper, 2002).

Several researchers have examined the reliability and stability of peer-victimization scales. Perry et al. (1988) found the 3-month test-retest reliability in their scale (Peer Nomination Inventory—PNI) to be substantially high ($r = .93$). Boivin et al. (1995) looked at peer-assessed victimization status across 1 year and also found the test-retest reliability to be high ($r = .71$). Hanish and Guerra (2002) looked at the stability of victimization status across 2 years and found the correlation to be much lower than other shorter-term test-retest measurements ($r = .37$). Overall, the stability of peer-nomination assessed peer-victimization decreases as the time length between assessments increases. Children typically change classrooms every school year, which results in changes in teacher and class members. In addition to altering childrens' network of peer relations in the classroom, this transition could also separate children in victimizing relationships. Changes in the composition of the classroom allows for children to be re-evaluated by their new classmates as they grow and mature. In other words, victimization may best be conceptualized as an interaction between the victim, peers, and context of situation.

Crick, Casas, and Nelson (2002) summarized the current research on victimization and called attention to the need for longitudinal studies. It has been well documented that numerous negative consequences are associated with peer victimization, such as increased depression and anxiety (Craig, 1998). Further, victimization appears to be a widespread problem, with one investigation showing that 60% of children indicate being victimized at one time or another over a period of 4 years (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001). This same study showed that the onset of victimization is associated with negative consequences (e.g., increased loneliness, decreased social satisfaction) and that consistent victimization is related to persistent levels of maladjustment. However, little is known about the variables that are associated with children becoming victimized, staying victimized, or no longer being victimized. Longitudinal data regarding the characteristics of children being victimized and the stability of that victimizing relationship may provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of childhood victimization in general. A better understanding of these variables could also contribute to the efficacy of prevention and treatment programs.

The present study is an exploratory longitudinal examination of relational and overt victimization in a large and diverse sample of school children, evaluated at two times over a 12-month time period. The characteristics of children in victimizing relationships were assessed using standard peer-nomination sociometric strategies and

variables. Given the lack of research related to characteristics of victims and transition of victimization status, the current study is descriptive in nature. However, consistent with previous literature, it was expected that more boys would be victimized overtly and more girls would be relationally victimized. Given previous research reporting that 60% of children are victimized at some point over a 4-year period (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001) and several studies indicating the overall victimization rate to be approximately 10% at any one point (Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Schäfer et al., 2002), it was expected that victimization status would be found to be a transient category. That is, numerous children were expected to be transitioning in and out of victimization status, and only a minority of the children would be shown to be victimized consistently.

METHODS

Participants

In the Spring of 2002, 515 third, 550 fourth, and 519 fifth graders (264, 288, and 240 boys and 251, 262, and 279 girls, respectively) were administered a modified version of Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) peer-nomination measure. In the Spring of 2003, 563 third, 490 fourth, and 566 fifth graders (boys: 283, 247, 296; girls: 280, 243, 270; respectively) were administered the same measure, resulting in the total number of children assessed at Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2). Children in 3rd through 5th grade were selected for the specific developmental period. Grade school is a time of marked changes in peer networks and is the age in which development and understanding in social relationships occur. The administration was part of an ongoing project with the regional urban school district. All of the assessment sites were public grade schools, located in a medium-sized Southwest city. During both waves of assessment, eight schools were used from various regions within the city. These eight schools were selected to provide a geographically representative sample of the city, providing a diverse ethnic composition of students. For the Time 1 assessment: 50.4% of the children were Caucasian, 33.1% Hispanic, 14.8% African American, 1.3% Asian, and 0.4% were Native American. For the Time 2 assessment: 51.1% of the children were Caucasian, 32.9% Hispanic, 13.6% African American, 2% Asian, and 0.3% were Native American. The peer-nomination measure was used to identify overtly peer-victimized children and relationally peer-victimized children, as well as other sociometric categories. The present effort was part of a larger collaborative research project. Given that 3rd, 4th,

and 5th graders were assessed at both time periods, only 3rd and 4th graders were followed from one year to the next in analyses on transitioning ($N = 858$; Boys = 445, Girls = 413).

Materials

Peer Nomination Measure

A modified version of Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) peer-nomination measure, with additional questions assessing impulsivity (Pope, Bierman, & Mumma, 1991), was administered during both waves of assessment. This 24-item instrument included items, which assessed relational and overt peer-victimization, and the remaining questions measured peer sociometric status (rejected, popular, or average), relational aggression, overt aggression, prosocial behavior, and impulsivity. The original peer-nomination measure used four questions per victimization category (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The current modified version used two questions per victimization category (see Appendix). Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found their subscales to be highly reliable (Cronbach α values between .83 and .94) and reported a 1-week test-retest reliability of this measure to be $r = .65$.

Rejected and average groups were defined according to the procedure used by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982). This consisted of having the children nominate the three children that they liked the most and the three children they liked the least in their classroom. The number of "like most" and "like least" nominations were computed and then standardized across classroom, within grade, per school. This resulted in a z -score for each child. Social Preference scores were calculated by subtracting each child's "like least" score from their "like most" score. Social Impact scores were calculated by adding together a child's "like most" and "like least" score. A child was categorized as rejected if he/she had a social preference score less than -1.0 , a "like least" z -score greater than 0, and a "like most" z -score less than 0. Consistent with Coie et al. (1982), a child was categorized as Average if he or she received a social preference score between -0.5 and 0.5.

Children were classified as relationally aggressive, overtly aggressive, relationally victimized, overtly victimized, prosocial, or impulsive based on nominations by their peers. A child was considered a member of a category if his or her nominated score was a standard deviation or more above the mean (within grade level, per school). Children could be assigned to multiple categories if their scores were at or above a standard deviation for multiple categories.

Procedure

Undergraduate and graduate students were trained to administer the peer-nomination measure. Practice sessions were conducted in the laboratory, with administrators rehearsing by reading instructions aloud from a protocol script. Administrators were also trained on the proper procedures to minimize the risk of a child becoming distressed and the actions to be taken if this were to happen. This included instructing children to not look at other classmates during the assessment and stress the importance of keeping his or her answers private. If a child were to become distressed, administrators were instructed to cease administration for that classroom and if necessary refer the child to the school counselor. Administration was conducted in pairs, with an experienced research assistant supervising new administrators to ensure reliability.

The peer-nomination measure was given to all third, fourth, and fifth-grade students participating in the study. Children were instructed to have only a pencil and a sheet of paper on their desk. A class roster with class members' names and an arbitrary identification code next to each name was handed out. Children were also given a Scantron[®] to record their answers. The children were instructed to cover their answers with the blank piece of paper to ensure privacy. The administrators then read each question out loud. The children followed along, nominating up to three classmates for each question. Children were instructed to not discuss their answers with any of their peers, as to not "hurt anyone's feelings." Additionally, a brief pre- and postsession discussion was conducted where the children were encouraged to give examples regarding the potential consequences of talking about nomination responses with their peers (e.g., hurt feelings, friendship problems). Prior to administration, consent was obtained by the school district. The current study was also approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas Tech University.

RESULTS

Peer Victimization

Four different victimization groups were identified for this study: relationally victimized only (Time 1, $N = 133$, 8.4%; Time 2, $N = 126$, 7.76%), overtly victimized only (Time 1, $N = 123$, 7.77%; Time 2, $N = 127$, 7.82%), both relationally and overtly victimized (Time 1, $N = 87$, 5.49%; Time 2, $N = 88$, 5.42%), and nonvictimized (Time 1, $N = 1241$, 78.35%; Time 2, $N = 1278$, 78.69%). Relational and overt victimization correlated .49 ($p < .01$)

Table I. Percentage of Boys and Girls Classified into Each Peer-Victimization Group

Victimization group	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Time 1		
Nonvictims	75.9	80.8
Relational victims	4.0	12.8
Overt victims	13.1	2.4
Relational and overt victims	6.9	4.0
Time 2		
Nonvictims	79.9	77.9
Relational victims	4.6	11.1
Overt victims	9.9	5.7
Relational and overt victims	5.6	5.3

for Time 1, and .52 ($p < .01$) for Time 2. A χ^2 analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of girls were classified as relationally victimized, and a significantly higher proportion of boys were classified as overtly victimized. This was true for both Time 1 [$\chi^2(3, N = 1584) = 101.84, p < .001$] and for Time 2 [$\chi^2(3, N = 1619) = 31.52, p < .001$]. Nonvictimized children did not differ in gender distribution for both Time 1 and Time 2 (see Table I for victimization group proportions). As for children nominated as dually overtly and relationally victimized, Time 1 showed significantly more boys being nominated [$\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 6.08, p = .014$], while time 2 showed no gender difference in this category [$\chi^2(1, N = 88) = .18, p = .67$]. Follow-up analysis on Time 2 comparing the number of dual overt and relation victims per grade (e.g., number of Time 1 third graders versus number of Time 2 third graders that were dually nominated overt and relational victims) showed no differences in the number of grade-specific dual overt and relational victims between times [Grade 3: $\chi^2(1, N = 55) = .02, p = .89$; Grade 4: $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = .08, p = .78$; Grade 5: $\chi^2(1, N = 68) = .24, p = .63$].

At both Time 1 and Time 2, there were similar numbers of children dually nominated as peer victimized and rejected. However, Time 1 and Time 2 data were not independent (36.9% of children assessed during both waves). For boys, of those who were not victimized, 17% (Time 1) and 17% (Time 2) were nominated as rejected. Of those boys nominated as overtly victimized, 25% (Time 1) and 22% (Time 2) were also nominated as rejected. Of those relationally victimized, 66% (Time 1) and 68% (Time 2) were also rejected. Of those dually nominated as both overtly and relationally victimized, 75% (Time 1) and 74% (Time 2) were also nominated as rejected. For girls, of those who were not victimized, 14% (Time 1) and 12% (Time 2) were rejected, overtly victimized and rejected: 26% (Time 1) and 27% (Time 2), relationally victimized

and rejected: 41% (Time 1) and 44% (Time 2), dually nominated as overtly and relationally victimized and rejected: 75% (Time 1) and 74% (Time 2). In other words, for both boys and girls, relationally victimized children were more frequently rejected than overtly victimized children, and dual overt and relational victims were the most often rejected by their peers.

In order to examine long-term reliability of victimization, correlations between Time 1 victimization and Time 2 victimization scores were conducted for those children tested at both assessment periods ($N = 858$). For boys, overt victimization and relational victimization significantly correlated from Time 1 to Time 2 [$r(445) = .364, p < .001; r(445) = .475, p < .001$; respectively]. For girls, overt victimization and relational victimization also significantly correlated from Time 1 to Time 2 [$r(413) = .442, p < .001; r(413) = .413, p < .001$; respectively]. Given the moderate strength of these correlations (as per Cohen, 1988) it appears as though victimization assessed by the modified peer-nomination measure is a reliable instrument (Table II)

Victimization Transitions

The examination of transitions into and out of victimization categories revealed that the majority of children were nonvictimized during Time 1 and stayed nonvictimized during Time 2 (67.9% of boys, 67.6% of girls). As for change in victimization status, 8.1% of the boys and 14.5% of the girls transitioned from nonvictimized to vic-

timized status. For transitions out of victimized status, 14.4% of the boys and 10.7% of the girls did so. As for continued victimization, 9.7% of boys and 7.3% of girls experienced some form of victimization during both Time 1 and Time 2. Thus, although a minority of children stayed consistently victimized, many others transitioned in and out of victimization status (Table III).

To examine the magnitude of change of those who transitioned versus those who did not, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted using transition status (transition, nontransition) as the between-subjects variable and changes in z -scores of relational victimization and overt victimization as dependent variables. Given well-documented gender differences in peer victimization (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996), these analyses were conducted separately for boys and girls. Boys who transitioned had significantly more change in relational victimization than those who did not [1.183 and .573, respectively; $F(1, 443) = 84.072, p < .001$], as well as significantly more change in overt victimization [1.679 and .645, respectively; $F(1, 443) = 159.895, p < .001$]. Girls who transitioned had more change in relational victimization than those who did not (1.437 and .611, respectively; $F(1, 411) = 152.907, p < .001$), and more change in overt victimization [1.098 and .524, respectively; $F(1, 411) = 81.241, p < .001$]. Thus, these transitions into and out of victimization status are related to significant changes in victimization scores, and not simply methodological artifacts (i.e., insignificant movement around arbitrary cutoff scores).

Table II. Correlations of Victimization Scores and Other Factors

		Relational aggression	Overt aggression	Impulsivity	Prosocial
Time 1					
Boy	Relational victimization	.358	.270	.389	-.295
	<i>N</i>	792	792	792	792
	Overt victimization	.176	.192	.357	-.156
	<i>N</i>	792	792	792	792
Girl	Relational victimization	.432	.307	.559	-.353
	<i>N</i>	792	792	792	792
	Overt victimization	.221	.223	.469	-.209
	<i>N</i>	792	792	792	792
Time 2					
Boy	Relational victimization	.358	.285	.392	-.291
	<i>N</i>	826	826	826	826
	Overt victimization	.129	.161	.319	-.154
	<i>N</i>	826	826	826	826
Girl	Relational victimization	.572	.456	.575	-.352
	<i>N</i>	793	793	793	793
	Overt victimization	.234	.262	.504	-.160
	<i>N</i>	793	793	793	793

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .001$.

Table III. Change in Victimization Status From Time 1 to Time 2

Time 1 – Time 2	Frequency	Percent
Boys		
NV to NV	302	67.9
NV to OV	22	4.9
NV to RV	7	1.6
NV to OV+RV	7	1.6
OV to NV	39	8.8
OV to OV	16	3.6
OV to RV	1	.2
OV to OV+RV	3	.7
RV to NV	16	3.6
RV to OV	1	.2
RV to RV	1	.2
RV to OV+RV	6	1.3
OV+RV to NV	9	2.0
OV+RV to OV	4	.9
OV+RV to RV	2	.4
OV+RV to OV+RV	9	2.0
Girls		
NV to NV	279	67.6
NV to OV	16	3.9
NV to RV	39	9.4
NV to OV+RV	5	1.2
OV to NV	6	1.5
OV to OV	3	.7
OV to RV	2	.5
OV to OV+RV	1	.2
RV to NV	34	8.2
RV to OV	1	.2
RV to RV	9	2.2
RV to OV+RV	3	.7
OV+RV to NV	4	1.0
OV+RV to OV	0	0
OV+RV to RV	4	1.0
OV+RV to OV+RV	7	1.7

To examine further the consistency of victimization status, the differences between those children classified as consistently victimized versus those who transitioned out of victimization status were compared. Children were categorized as either consistently experiencing some form of victimization at both Time 1 and Time 2 (consistent victims), or experiencing some form of victimization at Time 1 and not at Time 2 (previous victims). A 2 (consistent victim, previous victim) \times 2 (Time 1, Time 2) mixed-design repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with victimization consistency as a between-subjects factor and levels of overt aggression, relational aggression, impulsivity, and prosocial behavior as dependent variables, was conducted to determine the difference between children who transition out of victimization status and those who stay consistently victimized. Consistent with the previous analyses, boys and girls were analyzed separately. Table IV presents the means and standard deviations for each group at Time 1 and Time 2.

For boys, the mixed-design repeated measures MANOVA revealed a significant decrease in level of relational aggression and impulsivity, in both groups, from Time 1 to Time 2 [Relational Aggression: $F(1, 105) = 22.582, p < .001$; Impulsivity: $F(1, 105) = 4.231, p < .042$]. Level of overt aggression also decreased but was not significant [$F(1, 105) = 3.802, p = .054$]. There was no significant interaction between time and victimization transition status for any of the dependent variables. To assess differences in victimization transition groups at each point in time, a between group one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted separately at Times 1 and 2. Results showed that boys who were consistently victimized were significantly lower in prosocial scores at Time 1, in comparison to those boys who transitioned out of victimization status [$F(1, 105) = 4.572, p = .035$]. There were no other significant differences between consistent and previous victim groups at Time 1 or Time 2.

For girls, the mixed-design repeated measures MANOVA revealed a significant decrease in the level of impulsivity from Time 1 to Time 2 in both victimization groups [$F(1, 72) = 4.697, p = .034$]. Furthermore, a significant interaction was found between time and victimization transition group, for level of relational aggression [$F(1, 72) = 5.324, p = .024$]. Consistently victimized girls maintained a high level of relational aggression from Time 1 to Time 2, whereas girls who transitioned out of victimization status did not differ from the consistent victims in level of relational aggression at Time 1 but significantly decreased in relational aggression at Time 2 (see Fig. 1). Between-subjects results showed that girls who transitioned out of victimization status were significantly lower in overt aggression and impulsivity and significantly higher in prosocial level, compared to consistently victimized girls [Overt Aggression: $F(1, 72) = 5.044, p = .028$; Impulsivity: $F(1, 72) = 15.702, p < .001$; Prosocial: $F(1, 72) = 5.052, p = .028$]. Subsequent one-way ANOVAs were conducted at Time 1 and Time 2 to determine if the significant differences were consistent at both times. Results showed that consistently victimized girls were higher in overt aggression at both Time 1 and Time 2. However, these differences were significant at Time 2 [$F(1, 72) = 9.319, p = .003$] but not at Time 1 [$F(1, 72) = 1.422, p = .237$]. Results also showed that consistently victimized girls were significantly higher in impulsivity at both Time 1 [$F(1, 72) = 6.473, p = .013$] and at Time 2 [$F(1, 72) = 18.70, p < .001$]. Consistently victimized girls were also lower in prosocial behaviors at both times, but significance was reached only at Time 1 [$F(1, 72) = 6.806, p = .011$] and not at Time 2 [$F(1, 72) = 2.472, p = .120$].

Table IV. Victimization Transition Groups by Time

	Time 1			Time 2		
	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N
Boy						
Consistent victims						
Overt agg	0.634	1.064	43	0.420	1.059	43
Relational agg	0.279	1.045	43	-0.193	0.789	43
Impulsivity	1.072	0.989	43	0.825	1.112	43
Prosocial behav	-0.648	0.452	43	-0.552	0.542	43
Previous victims						
Overt agg	0.810	1.302	64	0.631	1.160	64
Relational agg	0.408	1.041	64	0.080	0.947	64
Impulsivity	0.893	1.187	64	0.713	1.273	64
Prosocial behav	-0.394	0.687	64	-0.435	0.651	64
Girl						
Consistent victims						
Overt agg	0.318	1.121	30	0.374	0.976	30
Relational agg	0.764	1.091	30	0.828	1.162	30
Impulsivity	0.769	1.030	30	0.642	0.960	30
Prosocial behav	-0.527	0.717	30	-0.338	0.836	30
Previous victims						
Overt agg	0.027	0.966	44	-0.210	0.673	44
Relational agg	0.924	1.264	44	0.363	1.021	44
Impulsivity	0.189	0.916	44	-0.174	0.665	44
Prosocial behav	0.018	0.977	44	0.020	1.040	44

DISCUSSION

Peer Victimization

Prior findings of peer sociometric factors associated with peer victimization were supported in the current

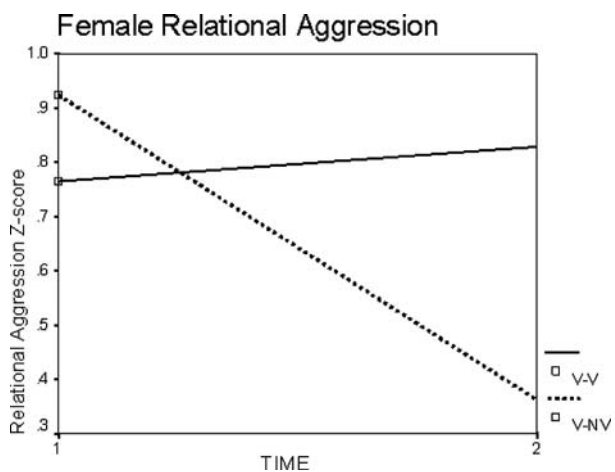


Fig. 1. Interaction effects for changes in relational aggression over time by victimization transition type (V-V: consistently victimized girls; V-NV: girls who transitioned out of victimization status at Time 2).

study, both in direction and strength of relationships. Similar to Crick and Grotpeter (1996), there were no gender differences among the nonvictimized children, there were significantly more boys overtly victimized, and significantly more girls victimized relationally. Also consistent with the literature, results revealed low magnitude but significant correlations between matched-type victimization and aggression scores (e.g., correlations between overt victimization and overt aggression). Finally, a moderate reliability for victimization scores was demonstrated over 1 year (Time 1 to Time 2). Across two grades children physically and cognitively mature, transition into new classrooms, and typically acquire new teachers and a different network of classmates and friends. Since any and all of these factors may influence victimizing relationships, a moderate, long-term reliability is notable given the plethora of research documenting the negative consequences of long-term victimization (e.g., Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001).

Similar to previous literature (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Perry et al., 1988), results showed that victimized children were also rejected by their peers at a high rate. Adding to this previously documented phenomenon is the finding that those victims dually nominated as both overtly and relationally victimized were by far the most rejected children (approximately 75% rejection rate).

Results suggest that dually victimized children may not be simply “bullied” but are also rejected by most of their peers. Lack of positive peer relations and peer support in the school environment are particularly troubling and have been identified as risk factors for development of adolescent alienation, isolation, depression, substance use, and violence.

Crick and Bigbee (1998) found significantly more boys were dually nominated as both overtly and relationally victimized. While this was true for the Time 1 results, Time 2 results showed no gender differences in this category. Subsequent analyses conducted to clarify these results failed to show any differences between the Time 1 and Time 2, and it is unclear why analyses at Time 2 revealed no gender differences in this category. While Crick and Bigbee provided no interpretation for their gender differences in this area, one possibility may be that this effect is more prominent in Caucasian samples. Crick and Bigbee’s sample was approximately 90% Caucasian, whereas the samples recruited for the current study were substantially more diverse with 50% Caucasian, 33% Hispanic, and 14% African American students.

No previous studies of overt and relational victimization that included impulsivity measures could be found. However, the results obtained suggest that this is an important category that relates to victimization and may be important to consider for further research. Pope and Bierman (1999) suggested that this measure of impulsivity reflects a child who has difficulty inhibiting negative arousal and regulating negative emotion. They proposed that this “emotional dysregulation” may be related to peer victimization. Indeed, impulsivity was consistently the highest correlating sociometric category with victimization measures, for both Time 1 and Time 2. However, since the relationship was assessed with bivariate correlations, the intricacies of the relationship could not be determined. It is possible that the characteristic of impulsivity (e.g., “crying,” “acting like a baby”) leave children more vulnerable to being victimized. On the other hand, it seems just as plausible that being consistently bullied or ostracized may engender poor emotional regulation, or impulsivity. Victimizing situations may interact reciprocally to interfere with the development of social competence and healthy peer relationships. In fact, children in the current study were identified as displaying significantly fewer prosocial behaviors than nonvictimized children. Research is needed to explore further relationships between impulsivity, peer victimization, and social competence.

The majority of children were nonvictimized and remained nonvictimized, and approximately 20% of chil-

dren were nominated as experiencing some form of victimization at each assessment period. This is somewhat higher than previous estimates of 10–15% of children being victimized (Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Schäfer et al. 2002). In looking more specifically at the number of children consistently victimized, categories of victimization appear to be highly transitory. The percentage of children who were consistently victimized during both assessment waves, transitioned out of victimization status, and transitioned into victimization status, ranged from 8.1 to 14.5%. While previous research shows approximately 10–15% of children are victimized, when assessed at one time period, this does not appear to describe adequately the complex phenomenon of victimization. Victimization appears to be a multifaceted social situation, in which a variety of behavioral, psychological, relational, social, and cultural factors interact to maintain the aggressive acts. For example, peer cohort and teacher changes, as well as developmental issues, are likely to play a role in the consistency and transitioning of victimization status. The large number of transitions in victimization status raises important concerns about the mental health and psychological well being of children in the classroom.

Transitioning in Peer Victimization

Given the lack of previous longitudinal research on victim characteristics and victimization transitioning, the present exploratory study, as an initial step, was designed to describe the relationship between sociometric measures of those children who stayed consistently victimized to those children who transitioned out of victimization status over 1 year. For girls, a significant interaction in relational aggression was found with consistently victimized girls maintaining a high level of relational aggression from Time 1 to Time 2. Girls who transitioned out of victimization status exhibited significantly lower relational aggression than consistent victims at Time 2, but not at Time 1. The decrease in relational aggression at Time 2, concurrent with the decrease in relational victimization, suggests that these externalizing behaviors may ameliorate once the victimization ceases. However, it is also possible that a decrease in relational aggression may be proactive among victims, such that they decrease their own hostility and in turn contribute to cessation of their victimization. Research is needed to understand better the concurrent decrease in relational aggression and relational victimization in girls.

For children who maintained a victimized status, results suggest that distinct sociometric variables are evident. Consistently victimized boys were found to be

significantly lower on the prosocial measure at both Time 1 and Time 2, in comparison to those boys who later transitioned out of victimization status. Consistently victimized girls were found to be significantly higher on the measure of impulsivity at both Time 1 and Time 2, in comparison to girls who transition out of victimization status. In addition to shedding light on children at increased risk for continued victimization, results may also have implications for intervention programs targeting school bullying. It is not implied that consistently victimized children are responsible for their situations. However, it may be of interest to investigate whether facilitating increased prosocial behavior in victimized boys, and reducing impulsive behavior in victimized girls, improves victimization situations. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) reported that victims fighting back was related to increased victimization, whereas having a friend help with victimization situations was related to decreases in victimization. Increasing prosocial behavior in victimized boys may help increase or improve friendships, thus increasing the opportunity for the intervening situation identified by Kochenderfer and Ladd. Overall, these results suggest that it may be beneficial for peer victimization prevention and intervention programs to incorporate gender-specific regimens.

In sum, the findings support those reported in earlier research studies on peer victimization, but results are extended to a racially diverse sample and reveal additional sociometric characteristics related to victimization status. Additionally, gender-specific factors are shown to be critical in the maintenance of victimization in children. For victimized boys, a lack of prosocial behavior is particularly important in maintaining victimization. For victimized girls, high level of impulsivity and relational aggression seem to be important factors in the maintenance of victimization. Although there are similarities between boys and girls who are victimized, there are also clear gender differences that require consideration in attempts to understand the distinct and complex experience of being victimized. Peer groups offer children the opportunity to learn about themselves and other children, to develop social and communication skills, and to explore the complexities of peer interaction. Positive peer group experiences bolster self-worth and emotional security. Children who are continuously victimized are unlikely to engage fully in and be supported by such positive peer experiences. Current results extend knowledge of victimization phenomena over time in school children and suggest the importance of taking into account gender-specific factors in planning victimization intervention and prevention programs for children in school.

APPENDIX

Peer Nomination Questions Assessing Victimization and Other Sociometric Categories

1. Find the names of three kids you like to play with, or do activities with, the most.
2. Find the names of three kids you like to play with or do activities with the least. You might like to play with all the kids in your class, but there might be some you like to play with less than others.
3. Find the names of three kids you think would make good leaders if you were playing a game. These are the kids you would like to have in charge during a game or activity.
4. Find the names of three kids who try to make other kids not like a certain person by spreading rumors about them or talking behind their backs.
5. Now find the names of three kids who hit, kick, or punch other kids at school.
6. Find the names of three kids who say or do nice things for other kids.
7. Find the names of three kids who, when they are mad at a person, get even by keeping that person from being in their group of friends.
8. Find the names of three kids who say mean things to other kids to insult them or put them down.
9. Find the names of three kids who help out others when they need it.
10. Find the names of three kids who, when they are mad at a person, ignore the person or stop talking to them.
11. Find the names of three kids who push and shove other kids around.
12. Find the names of three kids who tell their friends that they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they say.
13. Find the names of three kids who try to cheer up other kids who are upset or sad about something. They try to make the kids feel happy again.
14. Find the names of three kids who tell others they will beat them up unless the kids do what they say.
15. Find the names of three kids who try to keep certain people from being in their group when it's time to play or do an activity.
16. Find the names of three kids who call others mean names.
17. Find the names of three kids who are out of their seat a lot.
18. Find the names of three kids who play the clown and try to get others to laugh.

19. Find the names of three kids who act like babies.
20. Find the names of three kids who get upset when they are called on to answer questions in class.
21. Find the names of three kids who get picked on by being hit, kicked, or scratched by others.
22. Find the names of three kids who get left out of the group when someone is mad at them or wants to get back at them.
23. Find the names of three kids who get pushed, shoved, or have their hair pulled by other kids.
24. Find the names of three kids who get told "you aren't my friend" if they don't go along with what a classmate asks.

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