

Exposure to Bullying and General Psychopathology: A Prospective, Longitudinal Study

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Abstract : Although there is mounting evidence that the experience of being bullied associates with both internalizing and externalizing symptoms, it is not known yet whether the identified associations are specific to these symptoms or shared between them. The primary focus of this study is to assess the prospective associations of bullying exposure with both general and specific (i.e., internalizing, externalizing) factors of psychopathology. This study included data from 6,210 children participating in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC). Child bullying was measured by self-report at ages 8 and 10 years. Child psychopathology symptoms were assessed by parent-interview, using the Development and Well-being Assessment (DAWBA) at ages 7 and 13 years. Bullying exposure is significantly associated with the general psychopathology factor in early adolescence. In particular, chronically victimized youth exposed to multiple forms of bullying (i.e., both overt and relational) showed the highest levels of general psychopathology. Bullying exposure is also associated with both internalizing and externalizing factors from the correlated-factors model. However, the effect estimates for these factors decreased considerably in size and dropped to insignificant for the internalizing factor after extracting the shared variance that belongs to the general factor of psychopathology. In an integrative longitudinal model, higher levels of general psychopathology at age seven are associated with bullying exposure at age eight, which, in turn, is associated with general psychopathology at age 13 through its two-year continuity. Findings suggest that exposure to bullying is a risk factor for a more general vulnerability to psychopathology through mutually influencing relationships.

Keywords : bullying exposure, externalizing, general psychopathology, internalizing, longitudinal

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