

The Correlation between Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization: Are Aggressors Victims Too?

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Abstract—To investigate the possible correlation between peer aggression and peer victimization, 148 sixth-graders were asked to respond to the Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales (RAVS). RAVS measures the frequency of reporting aggressive behaviors or of being victimized during the previous week prior to the survey. The scales are composed of six items each. Each point represents one instance of aggression or victimization. Specifically, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PMCC) was used to determine the correlations between the scores of the sixth-graders in the two scales, both in individual items and total scores. Positive correlations were established and correlations were significant at the 0.01 levels.

Keywords—correlation, peer aggression, peer victimization, sixth-graders.

I. INTRODUCTION

PEER aggression and victimization is a common experience among children. These are happening on a daily basis and usually left unnoticed. This is so because peer aggression and victimization are normally viewed as rites of passages every child is expected to go through. Also, “there is a tendency to minimize victimization by dismissing experiences of child-to-child violence as part of growing up” [1, p. 154]. Moreover, adults believe that these are only between children and children must settle them among themselves.

In a school setting a research conducted found out that “less than half of the teachers were aware of the bullying acts and only sixty percent of these teachers used strategies to prevent bullying” [2, p. 33]. Trivial to some as it may seem but these are still concerns worth-investigating because incidences of peer aggression and peer victimization have some impact on the overall safety of schools. The extent of the impact however still remains to be thoroughly analyzed.

Safety in schools is a necessary requirement of sound schooling experience and “safe schools are those where students, staff members and visitors feel safe and welcome and have the opportunity to learn, teach, work, and engage in activities without being threatened, intimidated, bullied, harassed, or made the victim of crime” [3, p. 1]. Additionally, “perhaps most importantly, a safe school is one where students are connected and feel a part of the school” [3, p. 1]. Giving due attention to peer aggression and peer victimization in schools is important if what is aimed for is overall safety in schools which will in turn effect changes in the whole schooling experience.

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A. Peer Aggression

“Peer aggression encompasses a wide range of aggressive acts among children and adolescents; the term bullying also can be used to describe these acts of aggression” [4, p. 2]. Additionally, “bullying may take many forms, including physical bullying; teasing or name-calling; social exclusion; peer sexual harassment; bullying about race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity; and cyber bullying (bullying through email, text messaging, or other digital means)” [5, para. 2]. It is considered to be an intentional act [6-7] that “causes physical or psychological damage” [7, p. 115] to the victims. Based on the findings of a study conducted, aggressors “appeared to have the fewest psychological adjustment difficulties. Their self-views were just as positive as those of their socially adjusted classmates” [8, p. 374]. Furthermore, it was found that aggressors “enjoyed a unique kind of social status in that they were perceived by their peers as particularly “cool.” Perceived coolness implies popularity (notoriety?) as well as having characteristics that are admired by peers” [8, p. 375].

B. Peer Victimization

Child victimization includes a wide-range of acts against children [1]. For purposes of specificity however, peer victimization is defined as the experience of any act of aggression from similar-age peers. It is in opposition with victimization from parents or other adults, siblings, or specific members of the community [9]. Peer victimization in schools “is a major concern of educators, policymakers, administrators, parents, and students” [10, p. 1]. It is a serious problem among school-age children that need due concern [11] because “any involvement in victimization was related to increased risk of depression” [12, p. 1691] and affects academic achievement [13].

“Victims, more so than aggressors, attributed harassment experiences to characterological self-blame. From an attributional perspective, characterological self-blame is internal and therefore reflects on the self; it is stable and therefore leads to an expectation that harassment will be chronic” [8, p. 374]. The victims of aggression based on the data obtained from a study were those with “lower self-esteem, a higher external locus of control, higher levels of anxiety, and lower levels of social support” [4, p. 77].

In general, “victimization is a problem that most children experience at least at some point, and frequent victimization is at least as common as many more frequently considered disorders” [14].

C. Peer Aggressors being Victims too

There is little investigation conducted on bully-victims who represents a group of children who bully others and also become victims at other times [15] despite the fact that such is

a reality. While trying to demarcate peer aggression from peer victimization is important, it must be remembered that peer aggressors can also be victims of peers. "In some circumstances it is difficult to divorce children as victims from children as perpetrators" [1]. Focusing on the experience of being a peer aggressor and being a victim is important because "many bullies also become victims at other times in primary school and this group appear to be at particular risk for persistent peer and behavior problems" [15, pp. 692-693]. Likewise, "being the target of peer harassment, the perpetrator of that harassment or having characteristics of both can place students at risk for many kinds of adjustment difficulties. Some of those adjustment challenges relate to self-appraisals, whereas others can be linked to one's social status among peers" [8, p. 374] and "other consequences involve achievement outcomes like academic engagement and grades" [8, p. 374].

D. Incidence of Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization

Several researches conducted on peer aggression and peer victimization recognized their incidences in schools. For example, one study found that "victimization is a relatively common and frequent experience" [2, p. 33]. Also, results from another study revealed "that more than one half of students reported at least one experience of victimization at school in the past 12 months" [12, p. 1688]. Additionally, another study "indicated that more than half of the students reported being victimized" [16, p. 712]. Surely, if there were victims, there were also aggressors.

E. The Need to Conduct Researches on Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization

"The concept of child victimization assists in raising public awareness about the extent to which children experience victimizations in their daily lives" [1, p. 155]. For one, school victimization affects the psychological and academic well-being of students and the plight of those chronically victimized must not be ignored [12]. In addition, there is "the need for more comprehensive assessments of victimization" [17, p. 513]. It must be remembered though that "attention to and measurement of child victimization will prove useful if such activities lead to a better understanding of the interrelationships of different types of victimization and to more effective policies to reduce the frequency of child victimization" [1, p. 154]. Results from researches can be used to "promote evidence-based prevention and intervention efforts" [12, p. 1673]. Ultimately, "acknowledgment that children are victims of violence from many sources, including from their siblings and peers, establishes the need to keep children safe and allows comparisons of different types of victimizations" [1, p. 155]. On the other hand, the "issue concerning peer aggression is not going to disappear and more research on what predisposes students to bullying behaviors and becoming victims can help school personnel, parents, counselors, and other professionals provide safer schools and environments for children" [4, p. 85]. Conducting researches on peer aggression and peer victimization are equally important.

II. THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study aimed to determine the possible correlation between peer aggression and peer victimization among sixth-graders. Specifically, the experience of both being a peer aggressor and at the same time being a peer victim was the main concern of this study. The forms of peer aggression and peer victimization investigated in this study were limited to teasing, pushing/shoving/ hitting, name-calling, threatening, exclusion and, spreading rumors.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was guided by these objectives:

- a. to determine the correlation between the scores of the participants in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales; and
- b. to determine the correlation between the total scores of the participants in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales.

IV. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

This study tested these hypotheses:

- a. There is a relationship between the scores of the participants in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales.
- b. There is a relationship between the total scores of the participants in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales.

V. METHOD

A. Participants

There were 148 sixth-grader participants in this study. These sixth-graders came from 29 elementary schools, both private and government-owned primarily located in Magalang and Angeles City, Pampanga, Philippines. Thirty-seven participants came from private schools while 111 came from government-owned schools. There were 72 boys and 76 girls. Their mean age was 11.83 with a standard deviation of 0.59. Said participants were seeking admission in the laboratory high school of a state college and were all Filipinos.

B. Measures

The Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales (RAVS) were used in this study. The RAVS "were designed to measure the self-reported frequency of being victimized or being the perpetrator of aggressive behaviors during the week prior to the survey" [18, p. 11]. "The scales were developed by Pamela Orpinas as an elementary school version of the Aggression Scale" [18, p. 11]. The scales were published in 2006 [19].

Specifically, "each scale is composed of six items. The first four items of each scale measure overt aggression/victimization behaviors (teasing, name-calling, threats, and pushing or hitting). The last two items of each scale measure relational aggression/victimization" [18, p. 11]. Responses in the scales "can range from 0 times to 6 or more times per week. Scale scores are additive; thus, each scale can range from 0 to 36 points. Each point represents one instance of victimization or aggression" [18, p. 11].

The use of self-report measures like that of RAVS have some merits especially in investigating the correlation between peer aggression and peer victimization among sixth-graders. For one, “the child’s view is arguably the most important given that victims are likely most aware of, and impacted by their victimization experiences” [14, p. 452]. This argument also hold true among the aggressors. Additionally, “self-reports also have practical advantages of requiring less time to administer and allowing confidentiality in the assessment and treatment of victims” [14, p. 452] and aggressors alike.

C. Procedure

The RAVS were administered on February 15 to 18, 2011 by examination proctors in the guidance and testing center of a state college to 148 sixth-graders seeking admission in the laboratory high school of said state college. This was done because of the perceived need to have an insight on the experiences regarding peer aggression and peer victimization of would-be students.

D. Statistical Analysis

To determine whether a correlation exist between peer aggression and peer victimization, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PMCC) was used both in the scores of the 148 sixth-graders in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales and in their total scores in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales of the RAVS. PMCC which is typically denoted by “r,” is a measure of the correlation (linear dependence) between two variables [20].

VI. RESULTS

The correlations of the scores of the 148 sixth-graders in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales of RAVS is presented in Table I while their total scores in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales of the RAVS is presented in Table II.

TABLE I
 CORRELATION BETWEEN THE SCORES OF THE 148 SIXTH-GRADERS IN EACH OF THE CORRESPONDING ITEMS IN THE PEER AGGRESSION AND PEER VICTIMIZATION SCALE

Act	Form	N	M	SD	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Teasing	Aggression	148	1.86	1.85	0.36	0.00	Significant Moderate Correlation
	Victimization		3.12	1.85			
Pushing/ Shoving/Hitting	Aggression	148	1.14	1.50	0.52	0.00	Significant High Correlation
	Victimization		1.84	1.88			
Name-calling	Aggression	148	0.95	1.58	0.40	0.00	Significant Moderate Correlation
	Victimization		1.82	2.12			
Threatening	Aggression	148	0.52	1.03	0.53	0.00	Significant High Correlation
	Victimization		0.90	1.47			
Exclusion	Aggression	148	0.59	1.05	0.48	0.00	Significant Moderate Correlation
	Victimization		0.78	1.15			
Spreading Rumors	Aggression	148	0.56	1.05	0.23	0.00	Significant Negligible Correlation
	Victimization		0.82	1.29			

TABLE II
 CORRELATION BETWEEN THE TOTAL SCORES OF THE 148 SIXTH-GRADERS IN THE PEER AGGRESSION AND PEER VICTIMIZATION SCALES

Scale	N	M	SD	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Aggression	148	5.64	5.50	0.59	0.00	Significant High Correlation
Victimization		9.28	6.54			

The strengths of correlations were reflected in the r-values while the significances of the correlations were reflected in the p-values. The strengths of correlations were interpreted using the following guidelines: 0.00 to +0.10 (no correlation), +0.11to +0.25 (negligible correlation), +0.26 to +0.50 (moderate correlation), +0.51 to + 0.75 (high correlation), +0.76 to +1.00 (very high/ perfect correlation) [21]. As seen in Table I, an item in the aggression scale significantly correlated with its corresponding item in the victimization scale. It must be further noted that all correlations were positive. A significant positive correlation meant that there was a strong relationship between the two variables. This meant that as the scores of the sixth-graders increases in an item in the aggression scale, their scores in its corresponding item the victimization scale also increases and vice-versa. On the other hand, as seen in Table II, the total scores in the aggression scale and total scores in the victimization scale significantly correlated and the correlation was high. It must be further noted that the correlation was positive. A significant positive correlation meant that there was a strong relationship between the two variables. This meant that as the total scores of the sixth-graders increases in the aggression scale, their total scores in the victimization scale also increases and vice-versa.

VII. DISCUSSION

The experiences of both being a peer aggressor and at the same time being a peer victim was the main concern of this study and the forms of peer aggression and peer victimization in this study were limited to teasing, pushing/shoving/ hitting, name-calling, threatening, exclusion and, spreading rumors. All of the participants of this study were Filipino sixth-graders. This study was guided by these objectives: (a) to determine the correlation between the scores of the participants in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales, and (b) to determine the correlation between the total scores of the participants in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales. On the other hand, this study tested these hypotheses: (a) there is a relationship between the scores of the participants in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales, and (b) there is a relationship between the total scores of the participants in the peer aggression and peer victimization scales.

In line with the objectives of this study, significant correlations were found between the scores of the 148 sixth-graders in each of the corresponding items in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales and their total scores in the peer aggression and the peer victimization scales of RAVS. Worth-noting was that the correlations were all positive and meant that there was a strong correlation between peer aggressions and peer victimization. Furthermore, the two hypotheses of the study were proven. Therefore, it could be concluded that children who have experienced teasing, pushing/shoving/ hitting, name-calling, threatening, exclusion and, spreading rumors could also be doing the same to other children and vice-versa.

The results of this study were parallel with the results of studies conducted in other countries. For example, it was found in a study conducted in Cyprus that “4.2% of the children in elementary and junior high school are classified as bully/victims. That means that approximately one in every twenty-five student acts as a perpetrator in some instances and as victim in others” [7, p. 112]. The researchers believed that the main contribution of their study which they claimed was in line with earlier studies was that “a significant percentage of Cypriot students are involved in bullying either as bullies, victims, or bully/victims. This percentage of 17% indicates that bullying is not an isolated phenomenon in Cyprus schools” [7, p. 124]. They also firmly believed that their study “may serve in the process of awareness of policy makers, educators, and specialists in order to promote practices of prevention and intervention” [7, p.124].

Similarly, a study “found that in both England and Germany, many or most of the children who bully others also become victims of bullying frequently or very frequently” [15, p. 688]. However, the researchers suggested that “researchers need to place more emphasis on explicit and consistent methodologies with clear definitions of what is meant by bullying” [15, p. 692] just like what they did in their study because according to them, “this will allow studies to be compared more meaningfully” [15, p. 692].

Additionally, they believed that “cultural differences regarding school-related factors indicate that interventions against bullying need to be adapted according to the local

school and cultural setting” [15, p. 693]. Also, a study conducted in the United States of America found that “bullying was highly correlated with victimization, meaning that there is a high probability that an adolescent who identifies as a victim may also identify as a bully” [4, p. 82]. However, the researcher cautioned that the “study did not control for the effects of bullying in its victimization scores, so it is possible that reported associations between victimization and social supports are, at least partially, a function of comorbid bullying” [4, p. 82]. The researcher concluded that “school violence, particularly peer aggression, should not be an everyday occurrence in school” [4, p. 84].

Being an aggressor and a victim or being both is a reality. However, “little is known about the group categorized as ‘bully/victims’ vs. pure bullies and pure victims. Bully/victims represent a substantial group of young children involved in carrying out bullying” [15, p. 692]. Additionally, they believed that “many bullies also become victims at other times in primary school and this group appears to be at particular risk for persistent peer and behavior problems” [15, pp. 692-693]. The observations made by the authors are true. Most of the time, acts of children are only simply categorized as an act of aggression or an act of victimization.

When a student is subjected to disciplinary actions because of peer aggression, focus is initially given to aggression itself however, a student who is also viewed as an aggressor may also be victimized and vice-versa. Therefore, it is must be investigated whether a student is both as an aggressor and a victim and his/her experiences must be analyzed in their totality. It must be remembered that the “hostility by one child toward another entails a dyadic interchange between perpetrator and target. Focusing on only one member of this dyad in the absence of the other therefore provides an incomplete picture of the complex interplay between aggressor and victim status” [8, p. 364].

With the results of this study and other cited studies as bases, indeed, aggressors can also be victims and victims can also be aggressors. And since the results of this study (conducted in the Philippines) and several cited studies (conducted in Cyprus, Britain, Germany and United States) were parallel, this only suggests that attention must be given to such reality. “Being the target of peer harassment, the perpetrator of that harassment or having characteristics of both can place students at risk for many kinds of adjustment difficulties” [8, p. 374]. Actions need to be done. Peer aggression and peer victimization need not be tolerated because victims can also victimize others in the long run. If such is permitted, then it would be a vicious cycle and the hoped healthy experience of whole schooling is doomed.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study was only limited to 148 sixth-graders as participants coming from 29 elementary schools, both private and government-owned with the used of the RAVS as main measures. The measures only surveyed the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization prior to the week of the survey with teasing, pushing/shoving/ hitting, name-calling, threatening, exclusion, and spreading rumors as forms of aggression and victimization. And since the study was limited

to those who sought admission to the laboratory high school of a state college in Pampanga (Philippines), the results of the study cannot be generalized to other elementary schools either in the Philippines or abroad.

However, despite of the many limitations of this study, the results of this study proved the possible relationship between peer aggression and peer victimization which most of the time is regarded as two distinct concerns in the school setting. In line with this, it is suggested that the study be replicated in other locations, provinces and regions in the Philippines or abroad, using the same measures (RAVS) used in the study with greater number of participants and with greater number of schools to see if such results were true. Results from other studies to be conducted can be used to compare and contrast with the results of this study. The use of other measures on peer aggression and peer victimization are also encouraged to have a more thorough and extensive understanding of peer aggression and peer victimization.

IX. CONCLUSION

The results of this study only proved that there was a relationship between peer aggression and peer victimization. In this regard, peer aggression and peer victimization must be understood in their totality. Focus could not be given only to aggressors or only to victims. Instead, what must also be given due concern was whether aggressors were being victimized by others too. While focusing on aggressive behaviors could sound logical, exploring what lead to such behaviors could be equally important.

“Although aggressors and victims may fall at different points along a social maladjustment continuum, those placements are more dynamic than static and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive” [8, p. 364]. And since the “issue concerning peer aggression is not going to disappear” [4, p. 85], actions must be done because if there is peer aggression, then there will always be peer victimization or there can be both. Schooling-related concerns need to be analyzed in their totality and the results from this study proved that point.

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