

FORMS AND FREQUENCY OF PEER AGGRESSION AND PEER VICTIMIZATION AMONG SIXTH-GRADERS

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ABSTRACT

With the aim of knowing the forms and frequency of peer aggression and peer victimization among Sixth-Graders, the Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales (RAVS) by Orpinas and Horne (2006) were administered. 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 reported by the student. Statistical analyses, with reference to the mean scores of the Sixth-Graders, showed that the most frequent form of peer aggression was teasing. Interestingly, teasing was also the most frequent form of peer victimization.

Keywords: Forms of peer aggression, forms of peer victimization, frequency of peer aggression, frequency of peer victimization, sixth-graders

INTRODUCTION:

All students deserve to study in safe schools. Hull (2000) asserts that “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” (p. 1). Without a safe school learning will not take place (Kaufman *et al.*, 1999).

One component of a safe school is positive school climate. Lehr (2004) believes that “a positive school climate is an integral component of an effective school. School climate is consistently identified as a variable that is a characteristic of effective schools and one that is positively associated with academic success” (p. 76). One of the measures of school climate, Lehr (2004) suggests is the frequency of student discipline referrals. When scrutinizing student discipline referrals, there are always two concerns to consider, the aggressors and the victims.

For D’Esposito (2006), “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” (p. 2). “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” (APA, 2004, para. 2). It is an intentional and act (Gutierrez, Barrios, de Dios, Montero & del Barrio, 2008; Panayiotis, Anna, Charalambos & Chrysostomos, 2010) and “it causes physical or psychological damage” (Panayiotis, Anna, Charalambos & Chrysostomos, 2010, p. 115). Peer aggression is “relatively common and frequently experienced among children and adolescents” (D’Esposito, 2006, p. 5).

On the other hand, according to Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman (1994), peer victimization involves 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. “Victimization is a common” (Card & Hodges, 2008, p. 459) and a serious problem among school-age children that requires due concern (Adefunke, 2010; Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009) because “any involvement in victimization was related to increased risk of depression” (Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009, p. 1691). In addition, academic achievement is affected by peer victimization (Wei & Williams, 2004). Therefore, “victimization in schools is a major concern of educators, policymakers, administrators, parents, and students” (DeVoe & Bauer, 2010, p. 1).

Knowing the forms and frequency of peer aggression and peer victimization is important because it can lead to the creation of interventions that will address these concerns. Kaufman *et al.* (1999) believes that solutions can only be made if there are accurate information on the nature and extent of problems through which different programs and policies can be tailored. The prevention of peer aggression and peer victimization in schools is equivalent to the promotion of the safety of all.

METHOD:

This study aimed to determine the forms and frequency of peer aggression and peer victimization among sixth-graders. In line with the purpose of the study, the Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales were administered to 148 sixth-graders that came from 29 elementary schools, both private and government-owned. 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” (Orpinas, 2009, p. 11).

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” (Orpinas, 2009, p. 11).

The use of self-report measures like that of RAVS have some merits especially in investigating the forms and frequency of 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” (Card & Hodges, 2008, 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” (Card & Hodges, 2008, p. 452) and aggressors alike.

To determine the frequency, means and standard deviations of the responses of the sixth-graders, the Special Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 15.0 was used.

RESULTS:

The forms and frequency of peer aggression among sixth-graders is presented in Table 1 while the forms and frequency of peer victimization among sixth- graders is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Forms and Frequency of Peer Aggression among Sixth-Graders

	FREQUENCY DURING THE LAST 7 DAYS							M	SD
	0 times	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6 or more times		
1. How many times did you tease a kid from your classroom?	43	36	22	23	6	5	13	1.86	1.85
2. How many times did you push, shove, or hit a kid from your classroom?	71	34	17	13	6	4	3	1.14	1.50
3. How many times did you call a kid from your classroom a bad name?	88	28	13	3	7	4	5	0.95	1.58
4. How many times did you say that you would hit a kid in your classroom?	105	24	10	6	1	1	1	0.52	1.03
5. How many times did you leave out another classmate on purpose?	91	42	8	3	1	1	2	0.59	1.05
6. How many times did you make up something about other students in your classroom to make other kids not like them anymore?	101	28	8	8	1	1	1	0.56	1.05

As seen in Table 1, the most frequent form of peer aggression was that of teasing (M= 1.86). It was followed by pushing, shoving or hitting (M= 1.14). Next was bad name-calling (M= 0.95), leaving someone on purpose (M= 0.59), making-up stories (M= 0.56), and threatening to hit someone (M= 0.52).

Table 2. Forms and Frequency of Peer Victimization among Sixth-Graders

	FREQUENCY DURING THE LAST 7 DAYS							M	SD
	0 times	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6 or more times		
1. How many times did a kid from your classroom tease you?	10	19	29	42	12	5	31	3.12	1.85
2. How many times did a kid from your classroom push, shove, or hit you?	45	35	25	18	5	7	13	1.84	1.88
3. How many times did a kid from your classroom call you a bad name?	58	28	21	8	5	8	19	1.82	2.12
4. How many times did kids from your classroom say that they were going to hit you?	88	30	11	5	7	4	3	0.90	1.47
5. How many times did other kids in your classroom leave you out on purpose?	84	35	13	11	3	2	0	0.78	1.15
6. How many times did a student in your classroom make up something about you to make other kids not like you anymore?	85	32	18	4	6	0	3	0.82	1.29

On the other hand, as seen in Table 2, with reference to the means, the most frequent form of peer victimization among sixth-graders was being teased (M= 3.12). It was followed by being pushed, shoved, or hit (M= 1.84). Next was being called a bad name (M= 1.82), being threatened to be hit (M= 0.90), being made of stories with the intention of being disliked by others (M= 0.82), and being left-out on purpose (M= 0.78).

DISCUSSION:

The results of this study suggest that peer aggression and peer victimization, as reflected in their forms and frequency, were indeed happening. Surely, if there were aggressors, then there were victims and vice-versa.

The incidence of peer victimization in schools was parallel with the findings of Ates and Yagmurlu (2010). Results of their study showed that “victimization is a relatively common and frequent experience” (p. 33). Also, results from the study conducted by Felix, Furlong and Austin (2009) revealed “that more than one half of students reported at least one experience of victimization at school in the past 12 months” (p. 1688). Additionally, results from the study of Baldry and Winkel (2003) “indicated that more than half of the students reported being victimized” (p. 712).

The weakness and small physical stature of many children and their dependency status put them at greater risk” (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994, p.176) of victimization. “There is a

growing literature documenting that child victimization has grave short- and long term effects on children's mental health" (Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman p. 181) like being fearful of school, inhibition of their learning potentials (Adefunke, 2010), significant maladjustments (Card & Hodges, 2008), "worst performance on indicators of student well-being" (Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009, p. 1690), and "increased risk of depression" (Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009, p. 1691). Generally, "peer aggression, should not be an everyday occurrence in school" (D'Esposito, 2006, p. 84).

One important finding from this study was that teasing was both the most frequent form of peer victimization and peer aggression. Similarly, several studies also found teasing to be the most common form of peer victimization (e.g. Ates & Yagmurlu, 2010; Baldry & Winkel, 2003; Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009; Wolke, Woods, Stanford & Schulz, 2001). Storch, Roth, Coles, Heimberg, Bravata and Moser (2008) believes that "anxious, withdrawn children are most likely to be the targets of teasing and probably less likely than more outgoing children to go to adults for help when they are teased" (p. 692).

Teasing may sound trivial to some but teasing has serious implications. For one, APA (2004) recognizes teasing as a form of bullying. "The negative effects of teasing are not only immediate, but can be pervasive into adulthood" (Bias, 2005, p. 66). It must be remembered though that both aggressors and victims must be given thorough assessments and interventions.

In relation, Graham, Bellemore and Mize (2006) found that both victims and aggressors are vulnerable to adjustment problems. Wolke, Woods, Stanford and Schulz (2001) equally found "that many children who bully others also become victims of bullying at other times" (p. 688). "Recognizing that juveniles who are considered to be troublemakers are also likely to experience victimization and working with such students could lower their own victimization and potentially the indirect victimization of others" (Nofziger, 2008, p. 20).

In the end, 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" (D'Esposito, 2006, p. 85). Results of researches can be used to "promote evidence-based prevention and intervention efforts" (Felix, Furlong & Austin, 2009, p.1673).

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