

## **Peer Victimization, Conflict Management Strategies and Psychological Adjustment among Adolescents**

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### **Abstract:**

*Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. In this period children are going through many changes including physical and psychological. Victims of peer victimization are likely to develop psychological adjustment difficulties. The main objective of the study was to explore the relationship among peer victimization, conflict resolution strategies and psychological adjustment among adolescents. Sample was selected through non-probability convenient sampling technique. The sample comprised of 300 adolescents from different institutes of Islamabad and Rawalpindi with age range from 10-19 years. The data was collected with the help of self-reported measures i.e., Multidimensional Peer Victimization scale by Joseph and Stockton (2018), Resolving Conflicts in Relationship (RCR) by Thayer (2008), Youth Internalizing Behavior Screener (YIBS) by Aslam (2020) and Youth Externalizing Behavior Screener (YEBS) by Aslam (2018). The results of the study show significant association between study variables. Peer victimization was positively associated with the psychological adjustment. Conflict resolution strategies peer victimization and psychological adjustment is positively associated. The findings of the study suggest that peer victimization cause psychological adjustment issues for adolescent which can be resolved through conflict resolution among adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Peer Victimization, Conflict Management Strategies, Psychological Adjustment, Adolescents

### **I. Introduction**

Peer victimization is a general term that covers a variety of purposeful harming behaviors, which includes bullying, cyber bullying, peer harassment, peer assault, and intimidation susceptibility (Olweus, 2010, Collier et al., 2013; Vitoroulis&Vaillancourt, 2015).Peer victimization is widespread across cultures, countries, and schools, according to research, with 10–30% of students reporting bullying encounters (Storch&Masia-Warner, 2014). Where there is less supervision, such on a school campus, it happens more frequently (Vaillancourt et al., 2010).Peer Victimization is a widespread at academic institutions such as schools (Olweus, 1997, as cited in Hong &Espelage, 2012),

colleges, or universities, where a majority of the student, particularly newbies, are subjected to verbal and physical harassment by teams of abusers. Brendgen and colleagues (2021) reported that peer victimization at work place is 25% of times associated with the continuation of victimization at educational institute. Peer victimization at work place does not only include bullying, it also includes the mistreatment, late or no promotion and giving favors to others by higher authorities (Salmivalli, 2018).

Regarding the incidence of peer victimization, 94% of males and 85% of girls in Pakistan's sixth grade reported having been victimized by peers. Additionally, 66% of girls and 85% of boys reported being complicit in bullying your fellow students (Jan & Husain, 2015). Evidence from experiments (Jan & Husain, 2015; Stadler et al., 2010) has shown highlighted how many types of adolescent victimization might occur terms like psychological bullying, direct or indirect aggression, aggressiveness, verbal abuse (e.g., calling others names), and unkind taunting, etc.), unfavorable messages and gestures, and isolation among peers and segregation (Arif et al., 2020).

Psychological adjustment in adolescents and adulthood starts from the very start of a person's life. Children's psychological adjustment pertains to a youthful individual's mental wellbeing, which encompasses behavior and academic issues, peer connections, and overall intellectual and interpersonal competence. Psychosocial adjustment in childhood frequently refers to adaptability and performance in several of the key domains that mainly categorized as home and schooling. Furthermore, it shows a person's ability to cope with environmental challenges. Peer interactions are a decisive factor in a child's psychological functioning and overall well-being, both now and in the hereafter (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Inglés et al., 2010; Mavroveli et al., 2009).

Research on peer aggression and humiliation at school has mostly concentrated on determining the effects of being the target of such behavior. Any form of violence appears to have a bad impact on the victim's life, as evidenced by actions like skipping school or an institution, high levels of social anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, stress, as well as low self-esteem and general life satisfaction. Erath et al., (2013) and other researchers have noted that victims of school violence frequently exhibit greater difficulty in adapting emotionally to their daily experiences, which may eventually lead to a greater inability to understand others' perspectives, sometimes adversely affecting their ability to empathize.

Long-term peer abuse affects a lot of kids and teenagers, which can cause all kinds of maladjustments (Hamilton et al., 2013). The three main signs of emotional maladjustment are commonly seen as loneliness, anxiety, and depression. These theories could provide an explanation for this connection. According to the social information-processing model, kids learn to attribute causes and purposes to peers through socially encoded cues (Wu et al., 2015). Adolescence is the age where belonging to a peer group is part of good psychological adjustment, however, in some cases this is cannot be achieved due to hostile behavior of peers towards a person. The hostile attitude is not only limited to physical, verbal, emotional and psychological bullying, it also includes rejecting a person to be part of a group, spreading fake rumors or just simply not including a person in activities which requires a group (Espelage et al., 2013). This peer victimization shadows over the psychosocial adjustment a person could have done with all the support

of a peer group. Peer victimization also decreases the chances for an adolescent to be psycho-socially adjusted in future (Espelage et al., 2012).

Conflict in adolescents is an unavoidable aspect, and by the moment they hit puberty, younger folks have had enough practice dealing directly with conflicting matters, particularly with their peers of the same gender and age and family members. As individuals go through adolescence, their social environment broadens to encompass more opposite-sex acquaintances and friendly and love interactions (Madalina, 2016; Madariaga et al., 2017), increasing the likelihood of conflict in a growing number of peer interactions. Nonetheless, most study on teenage conflict has concentrated on same-gender interactions or has not distinguished between identical and cross-gender interactions (Betts et al., 2013; Johnson, 2003; Piqueras et al., 2019).

Conflict frequency and the intensity change during adolescence, according to empirical investigations. For instance, a meta-analysis revealed that disputes peak in early age of adolescence and steadily drop thereafter in sequence (Laursen et al., 1998; Van Doorn et al., 2011). The impact and use of constructive problem-solving strategies by teenagers and parents is thought to shift during adolescence for a variety of theoretical reasons. Many theorists contend that adolescence will bring about the enhancement of a mature approach to dispute managing that is greater compromising (Youniss & Smollar 1985; Sandy & Cochran 2000; Selman 1980; Herge et al., 2016b).

Peer victimization causes psychological problems in adolescents, but these problems can be mitigated if they use a solvent dispute resolution method. Adolescents who use solution-oriented tactics are more likely to cope well with disagreements, which may enhance their peer connections (Q. Gao et al., 2017; Thayer et al., 2008). Adolescents who seem to be solution-oriented in crises, for example, tend to exhibit high care for others, which can progress to enhanced closeness in peer interactions (Betts et al., 2013; Branje et al., 2009; Q. Gao et al., 2017; Thayer et al., 2008), which benefits their psychological adjustment. Thus, problem-solving methods may assist victimized adolescents in creating and maintaining a reasonably pleasant atmosphere for their emotional well-being (Marroquín & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2015).

## **II. Theoretical Framework**

According to research, prolonged or severe stress has negative impacts on wellbeing and is linked to a variety of problems with psychological, behavioral, and physical health (Gatchel and Kishino 2012). For instance, stress is linked to poorer academic, emotional, and social adjustment to university (Hirsch and Ellis 1996), increased risk of depression (Dyson and Renk 2006), anxiety (Eisenberg et al. 2007), headaches (Miczo et al. 2006), alcohol use (Werch et al. 2007), and suicidal ideation (Hirsch and Ellis 1996). Students identified stress as having the most impact on their academic performance, according to a national evaluation of college student health in the US (N=79,266) (American College Health Association 2014).

Peer victimization leaves an adolescent emotionally, psychologically and social inept. The stress from the peer victimization leaves one questioning his/her own abilities. The transactional paradigm of coping with stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman served as the primary theoretical basis for the present study. According to the given

model, the stressful encounter is fundamentally a process of evaluation, reaction, and modification.

Theories of emotion based on transactions suggest that all affective experiences are mediated by appraisal, which is defined as "an assessment of the personal significance of a specific interaction between the individual and the environment" (Lazarus 1991, p. 820). When determining if an experience is stressful, people use two forms of appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman 1984, as cited in M. E. Mitchell et al., 2015). The "dual-concern" concept, which was initially created by Blake and Mouton and later reinterpreted and revised by others, including Thomas and Rahim, serves as the foundation for the majority of conflict management research. Although it has many modifications, the dual-concern model essentially contends that there are two factors that influence people's behavioral intentions with regard to conflict-handling tactics (Azeredo et al., 2015; De Dreu et al., 2000; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; van Breukelen et al., 2004).

### **III. Method**

The study aims at identifying the direction of relationship between peer victimization, conflict management and psychological adjustment in adolescents. Considering the hypotheses that there is significant relationship between peer victimization, conflict management and psychological adjustment among adolescents. The sample comprised of 300 adolescents comprised of 170 males and 130 females age ranges from 10-19 from different institutes of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Permission from the authors was taken to use the scale. Data was collected from different schools and colleges of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Consent was taken from all participants. A demographic sheet and all the scales that were to be used in main study of this research were also included. Their participation was voluntary. Their responses were kept confidential.

#### **A. Operational definitions**

##### ***Peer Victimization***

Peer victimization involves the repeated and systematic abuse of power by one or more peers over a period of time in purposeful attempts to injure or inflict discomfort (Olweus, 1993).

##### ***Conflict Management***

Conflict Management refers to the process geared toward reaching an agreement in a dispute, debate, or any other form of conflict between two or more parties (Putnam, 1983; Thayer, 2008).

##### ***Psychological Adjustment***

Psychological adjustment refers to one's subjective sense of distress and the degree to which they function in daily life (Arslan, 2017).

#### **B. Instruments**

- The Multidimensional Peer Victimization scale (Joseph & Stockton, 2018)
- Resolving Conflicts in relationships (Thayer, 2008)
- Psychological Adjustment Scales
  - a) Youth Internalizing Behavior Screener (Arslan, 2020).
  - b) Youth Externalizing Behavior Screener (Arslan, 2018).

***The multidimensional peer victimization scale (Joseph & Stockton, 2018)***

It is a self-report instrument. It is based on four factors; physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attacks on property, electronic victimization and social rebuff. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for physical victimization  $a=0.78$ , for verbal victimization  $a=0.78$ , for social manipulation  $a=0.81$ , for attacks on property  $a=0.79$ , for electronic  $a=0.81$  for social rebuff  $a=0.84$ . The respondent is asked to rate on a four-point rating scale, possible answers included (0 = not at all, 1 = once and 2= more than once).

***Resolving Conflict in Relationships (RCR)(Thayer, 2008)***

It is self-reported scale to measure conflict Management. It has three subscale; Non-confrontation, solution-orientation and control. It is consisted of 29 items. Respondents is asked to select a response on a five-point rating scale, possible answer included (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Quite a bit and 5 = Very often). Cronbach's alpha reliability of non-confrontation is  $a = .79$ , for solution-orientation is  $a = .83$  and for control is  $a = .76$ .

***Youth Internalizing Behavior Screener (Arslan, 2020)***

It is designed to measure internal problems of psychological adjustment. It has two subscales; anxiety and depression. It consists of 10 items. The respondent is asked to rate on a four-point rating scale, possible answers included (1 = almost never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often and 4 = Almost Always). Internal consistency reliability coefficient of YIBS is .75 to .90. For subscale Anxiety is  $a = .75$  to .84 and for Depression is  $a = .79$  to .84.

***Youth Externalizing Behavior Screener (Arslan, 2018)***

It is designed to measure external problems of psychological adjustment. It has three subscales; conduct problems, hyperactivity and attention problems. It consists of 12 items. The respondent is asked to rate on a four-point rating scale, possible answers included (1 = almost never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often and 4 = Almost Always). Internal consistency reliability coefficient of YEBS is .72 to .83. For subscale Conduct Problems is  $a = .72$ , Hyperactivity is  $a = .77$  and for Attention Problems is  $a = .83$ .

#### **IV. Results**

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the adolescents ( $n=300$ ) on the basis of their age, gender, family system and socio-economic status. In present study, mean age of adolescents comprised  $M= 12.08$  and  $SD= .52$ . There were 170 male and 130 female adolescents. Furthermore, 120 adolescents live in nuclear family while 180 adolescents live in joint family system. 100 adolescents belong to lower class, 100 belongs to middle class and 100 belongs to higher class. Table 2 shows the statistics and alpha reliability coefficient for study variables. The reliability of the physical victimization, verbal victimization, social victimization, attacks on property, electronic victimization and social rebuff is .72, .75, .70, .72, .72 and .74. Reliability for conflict resolution subscales non-confrontation, solution oriented and control is .71, .72 and .75. Reliability of internalizing behavior screener subscales is .72 and .71. Reliability of externalizing behavior screener subscales is .73, .62 and .64. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation among variables under study. It indicates that physical victimization and verbal victimization has positive relationship with depression. Anxiety has positive relationship with verbal victimization and social victimization. It also reflects that

solution-oriented conflict management has weak negative correlation with social victimization, attacks on property and electronic victimization while control conflict management has negative correlation with verbal victimization.

**Table 1: Demographic statistics of participants (N=300)**

Demographics	Categories	F	%	M	SD
Age				12.08	.52
Gender	Male	170	170		
	Female	130	130		
Family	Nuclear	120	120		
	Joint	180	180		
Socioeconomic status	Lower	100	100		
	Middle	100	100		
	Upper	100	100		

**Table 2: Psychometric properties of the variables among adolescent's (N=300)**

Variables	M	SD	Range		Cronbach's <i>a</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
			Actual	Potential			
Physical	5.03	1.02	3-8	0-8	.72	-.74	1.14
Verbal	5.16	1.13	2-8	0-8	.75	-1.0	2.02
Social	4.32	1.14	1-8	0-8	.70	-.97	1.30
Property	5.12	1.25	1-8	0-8	.72	-.93	1.16
Electronic	5.18	1.01	4-8	0-8	.72	-1.02	1.43
Social rebuff	5.59	1.13	2-8	0-8	.74	.08	-.46
Non confrontation	36.93	4.21	9-20	10-50	.71	-.64	-.73
Solution oriented	31.56	4.32	5-12	9-45	.72	.68	-.84
Control	32.69	3.81	9-16	10-50	.75	-.53	.19
Depression	17.12	2.10	8-19	5-20	.72	-1.06	2.12
Anxiety	13.81	1.50	9-18	5-20	.71	.09	-.23
Conduct problem	14.78	2.02	6-19	5-20	.73	.18	-.45
Hyperactivity	11.34	1.41	3-10	3-12	.72	.14	-.58
Attention problem	11.24	1.90	4-14	4-16	.74	-1.21	-.64

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation among multidimensional peer victimization scale, resolving conflicts in relationship scale, youth internalizing behavior screener and youth externalizing behavior screener among adolescents (N=300)**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Physical	5.12	1.02	-													
Verbal	5.21	1.18	-.31	-												
Social	5.26	1.27	-.61	.13**	-											
Property	5.21	1.22	-.11*	.07	-.00	-										
Electronic	6.08	1.11	-.09	-.11**	-.03	-.12*	-									
Social rebuff	5.35	1.01	.26**	.03	.01	-.03	.12**	-								
Non confrontation	39.63	4.14	.06	.07	.02	.02	-.06	.02	-							
Solution oriented	34.16	4.23	.01	-.08	-.01*	-.06*	-.08*	-.01	-.03	-						
Control	36.92	3.41	-.05	-.13**	-.08	-.04	-.24	.05	-.05	.26**	-					
Depression	14.45	1.65	.12**	.22**	.06	.08	-.14**	.04	.06	-.12**	.22**	-				
Anxiety	14.29	1.47	.04	.16**	.20**	.07	-.01	.05	.12**	-.24**	-.04	-.07	-			
Conduct problem	14.24	2.10	-.07	.11**	.21**	.07*	-.02	-.30**	.08	-.07	-.07**	-.11*	-.05	-		
Hyper-activity	8.32	1.21	.12**	.15**	.06	.01	-.07	-.03	.12**	.07	-.01	-.16**	.02	.14**	-	
Attention problem	13.18	1.36	.01	.17**	.03	-.01	-.11*	-.05	.13**	.05	.03	.01	.11*	.10*	.24**	-

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

## V. Discussion

The purpose of the research is to study peer victimization, conflict resolution strategies and psychological adjustment among adolescents. Peer victimization is a unique or recurrent instance of participant hostility that results in actual or potential damage

toward others. Considering the heterogeneity, the most widely accepted definition is a sequence of actions that may be defined as violent or designed to hurt for recurrent and long periods, and happening in intimate situations where there is a power differential (Finkelhor et al., 2014)

Multidimensional peer victimization scale was used to assess the types of victimization experienced among adolescents. Second scale was resolving conflict in relationships to assess the conflict management style that adolescents used to manage the conflict in respond to victimizations. Youth internalizing behavior screener and youth externalizing behavior screener was used to assess the psychological adjustment of the adolescents. Psychometric properties of the instruments were computed by Cronbach's alpha reliability method on a sample of 100 adolescents from different schools and colleges. The reliability of the subscales of multidimensional peer victimization scale ranges from .72 to .75 respectively consistent the reliability reported by Joseph and Stockton (2018). Reliability of subscales of resolving conflicts in relationship: non confrontation, solution oriented and control were .71, .72 and .75 consistent with reported reliability by Thayer (2008). Whereas the reliability of youth internalizing behavior subscales; Depression and Anxiety were .61 and .62 respectively justifying the reliability reported by Arslan (2020). And reliability of youth externalizing behavior screener subscales was .73, .72 and .74. Overall result shows that scales have sound psychometric properties.

To check the association between study variables Pearson bivariate correlation method was used. And result shows that that physical victimization and verbal victimization has positive relationship with depression among adolescents. Peer victimization throughout their school life experienced either anxiety or depression in later ages (Forbes et al., 2019). Children and teenagers who are bullied say they are less pleased at school, dislike it less, feel unsafe, and do worse academically. Additionally, they complain of more stomachaches, headaches, and other somatic issues, which may be symptoms of a stress-related illness. Peer victimization such as social victimization, attacks of property and electronic victimization is negatively correlated to solution-oriented conflict management styles. Similarly, control conflict management has negative correlation with verbal victimization. adolescents who use more solution-oriented conflict management style when they have problems with their peers have at low risk of getting bullied by their peers as compared to the adolescents who used more aggressive approach (Spivak, 2016). Thus, hypotheses were to test a significant links between study variables was evidenced. Hence the finding of the study reported significant relationship among multidimensional peer victimization, resolving conflicts in relationships and psychological adjustment (youth internalizing behavior screener and youth externalizing behavior screener) among adolescents.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Adolescence is a period of high risk for the onset of many psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and thus a key period for understanding the developmental roots of disorders. Taken together with the previous studies, the current finding indicates that peer victimization is changeable risk factor for low psychological adjustment. Frequent victimization can increase the risk of many psychological problems. Depression and anxiety disorders can cause considerable functional impairment and effect quality of life. The findings of the current study indicates that peer victimization

has negative relationship with psychological adjustment, adolescence who experiences frequent victimization are more likely to have anxiety and depression.

Nevertheless, of how, the research's conclusions were reached, there were certain inescapable limits. Low sample sizes were used. Data collection from this age range was challenging because this research was relied on it. The generalizability of this study is constrained by the small sample size. Therefore, studies with significantly larger sample sizes are advised to ensure accurate generalization of this study's findings. Another drawback was the paucity of Pakistan-related literature on this subject. Therefore, further research is required to determine the factors that influence generativity, other types of life happiness, and social support. Additionally, the data came from the Rawalpindi and Islamabad twin cities. By replicating the current research in additional Pakistani cities, the generalizability of the study's findings will be improved.

The results of the current study have evident practical implications. In order to address the issue of peer victimization it is important to train adolescents on conflict management or resolution so that they can cope with the issues they are facing at their education institutions. Conflict management helps them to overcome psychological adjustment problems at every level. Future studies should also investigate whether assess to supportive people can help to amend the negative effects of victimization. There should be psychological training programs in institutes. Adolescents who experienced victimization can seek help not only for emotional support but also to seek help how to change behaviors that fuel a negative cycle of behavior.

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