

## Effect of Peer Victimization on Social Behavior of Children

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### Abstract

*This essay identified peer victimization is a major societal problem that can have detrimental effects on kids' mental, emotional, and social development. It explores how peer victimization affects social behaviour and identifies coping mechanisms that can be applied to lessen these impacts. Examined along with the causes of peer victimization are the surrounding circumstances, including the family environment, community violence, and school atmosphere. The report emphasizes how crucial it is to address these issues to stop and lessen peer victimization. This study highlighted effective coping mechanisms to include self-advocacy and assertiveness, social support, mindfulness and relaxation practices, positive confession, problem-solving abilities, and cognitive restructuring. These coping mechanisms have been demonstrated to be successful in lessening the damaging effects of victimization and encouraging resilience in young children. The essay concluded that avoiding and reducing the prevalence of peer victimization requires the creation of a supportive, safe atmosphere that promotes children's social development, mental health, and wellbeing. To foster strong relationships among students, encourage good parenting techniques, and support children's mental health and wellbeing, schools, families, communities, and society can play a significant role. Effective coping techniques should be incorporated into school curricula to aid students in handling victimization and bullying occurrences and fostering resilience.*

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**Keyword:** *Peer victimization, social behaviour, coping mechanism, children, resilience, self-esteem*

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### Introduction

Peer victimization is a term used to describe a trend in which one or more peers purposefully and repeatedly act in a harmful way toward another person (Adeyele, 2021; Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Purcell et al., 2020). These behaviors can occur in a variety of contexts, including schools, communities, or online platforms, and they can be physical, verbal, or relational in nature (Raskauskas, 2010; Torres et al., 2020). Peer victimization is a problem that many children and adolescents face around the world and has been linked to detrimental effects on a range of developmental domains, including social, emotional, and academic performance (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

It is crucial to separate peer victimization from other concepts like bullying and assault. Peer victimization involves acts of hostility that are not necessarily related to power imbalance while bullying is described as a power imbalance between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s) (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005; Hunter & Storksdiack, 2017; Purcell et al., 2020). While assault on the other hand may be a one-off incident, peer victimization involves numerous reoccurrences of harm (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). As a result, the phrase peer victimization can be used to refer to a comprehensive variety of persistently hostile actions that are directed at a particular person.

Peer victimization can take many different forms, and each type of victimization may have different impacts. The use of physical force, such as pushing, kicking, or hitting, constitutes physical victimization (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). When someone is victimized verbally, it usually takes the form of name-calling, taunting, or spreading rumors (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Wolke and Lereya (2015) described relational victimization is the use of social exclusion or manipulation to injure a person, such as spreading rumors, experiencing social rejection, or being ignored. Technology abuse, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, is known as cyber-victimization (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The impact of each type of victimization on social conduct might vary, and it can combine with social, familial, and individual factors to affect the victimization outcomes.

Peer victimization is a global problem that has an enormous impact on young people all around the world. Studies have shown a high prevalence of peer victimization among primary school pupils and secondary school students in Nigeria (Adeyele, 2021; Popoola, 2005). Peer victimization rates among school-aged children and adolescents have also been reported to be high in other nations, such as the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Nigeria (Adeyele & Makinde, 2021; Popoola, 2005). Peer victimization's impact on the social behaviour of children. Victimization experiences can have a negative impact on a variety of social behavior domains, including self-esteem, aggressive behavior, social disengagement, depression, anxiety, and academic performance (Adeyele & Makinde, 2021). For instance, victimization experiences have been observed to frequently result in low self-esteem, with victims experiencing feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). In a similar vein, victims may act more violently to protect themselves or exact revenge on the offender(s) (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Additionally, victims may show signs of anxiety and depression as agitation, impatience, and anxiousness, which might limit their capacity for social contact (Pontillo et al., 2019).

Several individual, familial, and social factors can influence the impact of peer victimization on social behavior. For instance, victimization experiences might combine with personal characteristics like age, gender, and temperament to influence social behavior (Storch et al., 2005). The degree to which victimization experiences influence social behavior can also be influenced by family characteristics, such as parenting style, family conflict, and socioeconomic level (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Environmental factors such as material needs, poverty, and parental low education can also determine the extent to which victimization experiences influence social behaviour. The results of victimization experiences can also be influenced by social factors, such as peer support, school atmosphere, and community standards (Adeyele & Makinde, 2021).

Peer victimization is still a concern as new forms keep evolving, such as cyberbullying. As a result, research on peer victimization and its impact on social behavior must continue to answer emerging problems and guarantee the effectiveness of interventions and policies put in place. Hence, this study examines peer victimization and its implications on social behavior. The

goal of the study is to comprehend the causes of peer victimization, the variables that affect how it affects social behaviour, and the coping mechanisms that may be used to lessen its negative impacts.

## Literature Review

### A. Causes of Peer Victimization

Peer victimization is a complex trend that is characterized by several social, individual, environmental, and family factors. Peer victimization can affect a child for a variety of reasons, none of which can be entirely explained by a single component, but a few possible contributing factors. Therefore, studies have shown numerous potential causes that may contribute to this problem.

#### **Individual factors**

The individual factors can be referred to as victims' unique traits that may make them more susceptible to victimization by peers. These factors include physical characteristics, mental ability, and character traits. Research has shown that victimization behaviour is more likely to target children who are weak physically, and not as attractive as their peers (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996; Savolainen et al., 2020). Likewise, timid, socially awkward, and anxious children may find it difficult to make friends, which might leave them more open to victimization (Kumpulainen et al., 2001). In addition, because of their perceived fragility and lack of social skills, children with cognitive or developmental disabilities may be more likely to be victimized (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Savolainen et al., 2020).

#### **Family factors**

When talking about family factors, it may perhaps mean the victim's home context that could facilitate peer victimization. Parenting style, family conflict, parents' low education, and socioeconomic level are some of these variables. Studies have shown that children with authoritarian or inattentive parenting may be more disposed to victimization because they lack assertiveness and social skills (Adeyeye & Makinde, 2021; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). In a similar vein, children who have erratic or high levels of conflict in their families could find it challenging to build positive and constructive relationships with their peers and might be more likely to be the target of victimization (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Savolainen et al., 2020). Finally, due to their restricted access to opportunities and resources, children from poorer socioeconomic situations may be more vulnerable to victimization (Adeyeye, 2021).

#### **Environmental Factors**

One of the most important environmental factors that can foster peer victimization is the school environment. Peer victimization may be more prevailing in schools with unclear rules and regulations. Also, peer victimization may be more prevalent in schools when there is inadequate learners care, support, and supervision. Peer victimization is said to be predominant in schools with poor student care, supervision, and support (Fekkes et al., 2006; Graham, 2006). The family environment is another environmental factor that encourages peer victimization. Children from homes with a lack of warmth, poor communication, and less parental participation may be more likely to experience peer victimization. LaFontana and Cillessen, (2002) posited that children whose parents are negligent and are constantly in conflict with their parents may be victimized by their peers.

### **Social factors**

In the context of peer victimization, social factors are features of the victim's social surroundings. Peer interactions, school climate, and local norms are a few of these factors. Studies have revealed that children who are socially isolated or have few friends and acquaintances may be at great risk of aggression (Hawker & Boulton, 2002). O'Brennan et al., (2009) posited that children who attend schools with high levels of aggressiveness or little adult supervision may be more likely to become victims. Finally, by fostering a culture of bullying, societal norms that normalize or downplay the intensity of aggressiveness may also contribute to peer victimization (Adeyele & Makinde, 2021).

### **Cultural factors**

Broader social and cultural effects are referred to as cultural factors when discussing peer victimization. These factors include social values, gender norms, and media influences. Boys may experience peer victimization because of gender norms that encourage dominance and aggression (Graham, 2006; Olweus & Breivik, 2014). Likewise, bullying behaviour may become more common due to media portrayals of violence and hostility (O'Brennan et al., 2009). Finally, by encouraging a survival-of-the-fittest mentality, societal norms that place an emphasis on competitiveness and individualism above community and cooperation may lead to a culture of bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

### **B. Effects of Peer Victimization on Social behaviour**

A child's social behaviour may be significantly impacted by peer victimization. The effects of victimization can be devastating, that can affect social behaviour as well as mental health and well-being (Adeyele, 2021). Social behaviour refers to the way people behave and how they interact with others in society. These include skills such as interpersonal relationships and interaction, communication skills, empathy, and ability to build and sustain relationships. Social skills, social support, and peer connections are just a few of the areas where peer victimization can be proven to have an impact on the social behaviour of children (Adeyele et al., 2018).

#### **Social Skill**

Peer victimization can be detrimental to a child's social abilities and skills. Victimization can cause social anxiety or a fear of social situations in children, which can cause them to become isolated and have trouble making new friends (Masten, 2011). Victimization can also lower a child's sense of self-worth, which makes them less eager to interact with others or take social risks (Adeyele & Makinde, 2021). These consequences may accumulate over time and make it harder for the youngster to establish healthy social bonds.

#### **Peer Interactions**

The effects of peer victimization on a child's peer interactions may be the most important ones. Children who are victimized may have difficulty establishing wholesome relationships with their peers (Jeong & Lee, 2013). They might struggle with social cues and social standards, have trouble trusting others, dread rejection, or all the above (Masten, 2011). Victimization can also harm a child's reputation and social status, making it more difficult for them to make new friends or mend broken ones (Torres et al., 2020; Vidourek & King, 2019). These consequences have the potential to cause social disengagement and isolation over time, which can have a negative influence on a children's mental health and well-being.

#### **Social Support**

Peer victimization can also have an impact on a child's social network. As a result of their

withdrawal from their peers, victimized children may find it harder to receive social support (Woods & Wolke, 2004). Peers may also avoid contact with victims of abuse, either out of concern for their own safety or because they think the victim is weak or unattractive. Children who are victimized may consequently feel alone and unsupported, which can worsen the harmful impacts of victimization (Adeyele, 2021).

### ***C. Effects of Peer Victimization on Social Behaviour***

Peer victimization can have a serious adverse effect on a child's social behaviour as well as mental health and overall wellbeing. To help children deal with victimization occurrences, it is crucial to educate and sensitize them with effective coping mechanisms. Coping techniques can boost resilience, lessen anxiety, and despair, promote self-esteem and help children in handling life issues. Here are a few peers' victimization coping mechanisms that have been discovered through studies.

Self-Advocacy and assertiveness is one of the crucial coping strategies that can assist children in the case of peer victimization. Teaching children to speak up for themselves and fight for what they need is an essential coping mechanism. Children who are assertive can better define their limits, express their demands, and confront perpetrators. Yoneyama and Rigby (2006) described that assertiveness training significantly lowers victimization rates. Also, Children can cope with peer victimization by being encouraged to seek support from dependable friends, family members, or teachers. A strong social network can offer guidance, comfort, and a sense of community. Hawker and Boulton (2002) suggested social support can serve as a barrier against bullying.

Furthermore, children can manage stress and anxiety connected to peer bullying by using mindfulness and relaxation strategies including deep breathing and meditation. Study by Olweus and Breivik (2014); Woods and Wolke (2004) highlighted that mindfulness training increased resilience and decreased depression symptoms among bullied teenagers. Likewise, it is important to teach children to utilize positive confession will strengthen their resilience and boost their self-esteem. Positive confession entails substituting positive statements with negative ones, such as "I can do anything if I try" or "I am possible." Encouraging confession can lessen the damaging consequences of bullying on one's self-esteem (Hartikainen, 2019).

Developing good problem-solving skills can aid in the promotion of coping mechanisms for victimization occurrences. Identification of the issue, generation of potential solutions, and selection of the best alternative are all part of the problem-solving process. Study has shown that children who are taught problem-solving techniques are less likely to become involved in bullying situations (Gini et al., 2014). Change negative thought patterns to positive ones by engaging in cognitive restructuring. It works well as a coping mechanism to lessen the anxiety and melancholy brought on by peer victimization. Studies have suggested that cognitive restructuring helps victimized young ones with their depression symptoms (Clabby, 2006; Weersing et al., 2017).

Moreover, while avoidance and withdrawal may offer momentary comfort from peer victimization, they are not seen to be long-term solutions. Social isolation, despair, and anxiety can result from avoidance and withdrawal. Therefore, it is crucial to give children appropriate coping mechanisms so they can handle victimization and bullying occurrences.



## Conclusion

Conclusively, peer victimization is a serious problem that can seriously damage children's social development, mental, emotional, and holistic wellbeing. To prevent and lessen the prevalence of peer victimization, environmental factors such the school climate, local violence, and home environment should be taken into consideration. To combat peer victimization and foster resilience, it is crucial to teach children good coping techniques. A pleasant and secure environment that promotes children's mental health and wellbeing can be created with the help of schools, families, communities, and society at large. Based on the detrimental effect of peer victimization on social behaviour of children, schools should develop anti-bullying rules and initiatives that foster wholesome interactions between pupils, positive parenting techniques like open communication and positive reinforcement should be encouraged by parents, and assisting children's mental health and wellbeing through community-based programs ought to be created. Moreover, incorporating coping skills into the curriculum and fostering a supportive learning environment at school are two things that should be done by schools. The effectiveness of coping mechanisms and therapies for peer victimization in various cultural and socioeconomic circumstances need further study.

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