

Lonely in the Crowd: Recollections of Bullying

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the long-term correlates of victimisation in school with aspects of functioning in adult life, using a specially designed Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire, which also included questions about short-term effects (e.g. suicidal ideation and intrusive memories) and victimisation experiences in adulthood. Current relationship quality was assessed in terms of self perception, attachment style and friendship quality. In total 884 adults (35% male) from two occupations (teacher, student) and three countries (Spain, Germany, United Kingdom) participated. Victims and especially stable victims (in both primary and secondary school) scored lower on general self-esteem and higher on emotional loneliness, and reported more difficulties in maintaining friendships, than non-victims. Victims in secondary school had lower self-esteem in relation to the opposite sex, and were more often fearfully attached. The data revealed additional differences by gender, occupation and country level, but no further interactions with victim status. This indicates a general association between victimisation in school and quality of later life predominately robust to variations in gender, occupation and country. Possible limitations caused by the retrospective nature of victimisation reports are acknowledged.

INTRODUCTION

Experiences of victimisation in school are known to be rather widespread, and to have important and negative correlates and probably, consequences. Over the last decade or so, surveys in many countries in Europe, North America, Australia and Japan have indicated that a substantial minority of school children report being victimized, or bullied – that is, aggressed against repeatedly and not being able to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993a, Smith & Brain, 2000). Both boys and girls are vulnerable to being bullied, although some studies suggest boys experience more physical bullying (being hit, having belongings taken), girls more relational or social bullying (such as having nasty rumours spread about you, or being systematically excluded from friendship groups). In addition verbal bullying (nasty forms of taunting or teasing, threats) are experienced commonly by both genders in school (Rigby, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

What are the consequences of being bullied? There are now a considerable number of cross-sectional studies showing negative correlates of being a victim, while at school. In a meta-analysis of many such studies, Hawker and Boulton (2000) reported that victimisation related strongly and significantly to depression, and quite strongly to lower social and global self-esteem, with a weaker relationship to anxiety. There is also evidence of victim status being related to psychosomatic disorders, and to suicidal ideation (Williams, Chambers, Logan & Robinson, 1996; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela & Rantanan, 1999).

In general, these studies do not indicate cause or effect, but a small number of short-term longitudinal studies indicate some causal influence of victimisation. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) followed children over one school year in a US kindergarten, and found that victimisation was a precursor of loneliness, and school avoidance, rather than vice versa. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Wardrop (2001) followed 388 US preschoolers from

kindergarten to third grade, and documented relationships to loneliness and social satisfaction. Another source of evidence for the causal effect of victimisation on later functioning comes from retrospective interviews with adults who have experienced severe bullying. Some adults have very deep and poignant memories of being bullied at school, by peers and sometimes by teachers (Smith, 1991). Besides vivid and persistent memories, many of these adults feel that the experience had long-term effects on them, such as lack of trust in relationships.

Two aspects of these findings deserve closer consideration for a further understanding of the long-term effects of bullying: One is that bullying is a collective phenomenon (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996), and given the importance of peer relationships it would be surprising if consistently experiencing negative peer attitudes and negative peer behaviours were without effect on the individual's social and socio-cognitive development. The second is that an important developmental task for school age children is to develop and maintain self-esteem in relation to others. This is a two-sided process, as relationships affect the perception of the self and the perception of the self influences relationships (Cillessen & Bellmore, 1999; Cooley, 1902; Harter, 1998). The development of social expectations, that represent internalised beliefs about the self and expectancies about partners availability as a source of comfort and support (Bowlby, 1973), is an important mechanism in this process. We argue that being bullied, perceived by victims as the loss of peer support and the development of negative expectations concerning others' behaviours, will lead to an "update" of social expectations, likely to show as an 'insecure' internal working model of relationships as well as lower self-esteem.

As social expectations become organised into generalised interactional styles by adolescence (Bowlby, 1973; Crook, 2000) we should expect differential effects dependent on whether children were confronted with being bullied early or later in

school life. Specifically, we might expect a negative impact on general self-esteem and on friendships whenever bullying is experienced in school, but with greater impact on relationships with the opposite sex, and on the kinds of intimacy captured by quality of attachment relationships, in secondary school, since adolescence is usually an important phase for the development of intimate relationships, often with the opposite sex. Moreover our confidence in the assumption that the victimisation experience as such can negatively affect the individual course of social development would increase if effects prove to be robust, that is valid irrespective of individual features (e.g. gender) or context (e.g. educational or cultural system).

To date, retrospective studies of school bullying have been few in number, and usually focussing on specific populations. Possible effects of victimisation on close relationships were suggested in a study by Gilmartin (1987) on 'love-shy' men; many of these men, who reported difficulties in heterosexual relationships, said that they had experienced being bullied at school. A brief report from Japan (Matsui, Tzuzuki, Kakuyama & Onglatgo, 1996) was solely on male university students, and reported that victimisation at school was related to low self-esteem. Hugh-Jones and Smith (1999) focussed on adults with a stammer, finding that most had experienced considerable victimisation at school, with a substantial proportion reporting long-term effects particularly on confidence with others and social relationships. Rivers (1999) reported on deleterious consequences of victimisation for gay/lesbian young persons.

Smith, Singer, Hoel and Cooper (2003) gave a questionnaire to 5288 adults from various workplace venues. A significant relationship was found between retrospectively reported roles in school bullying, and recent experience of workplace victimisation. The highest risk of workplace victimisation was for those who were both bullies and victims at school (bully/victims), followed by those who were only victims. However

associations were modest, reaching significance through the large sample size. No other outcomes of school bullying were assessed.

As yet, no study has used retrospective methodology on a wide sample of both males and females, and used a variety of outcome measures, to attempt to assess globally the ways in which experiences of victimisation throughout the school years may impact upon later adult functioning.

Although such retrospective studies do rely on the self-reports of former victims, and also in themselves cannot objectively establish a causal relationship, they do provide a unique account of how adults view both the whole of their school experience, and what they themselves perceive the consequences to be. Recent research has established some degree of reliability and validity to retrospective research. Examining retrospective reports in general, Brewin, Andrews, and Gotlib (1993) found that the lack of reliability of autobiographical reports has been overestimated, and that when reporting facts from childhood, most adults are reasonably accurate and stable in their recollections. Reports were especially likely to be reliable for highly salient and emotionally charged events, such as experiences of victimisation could be expected to be. Looking specifically at reports of school victimisation by adults (in this case, gay/lesbian adults), Rivers (2001) established quite reasonable degrees of test-retest reliability, especially for placing important events chronologically as well as recalling specific types of bullying occurring in specific locations; although recollections of subsequent outcomes were less accurate.

In the study reported here, our overall aim was to examine the long-term correlates of experiences of victimisation in school, with aspects of functioning in adult life. We felt it important to document various aspects of the victimisation experience in school, such as type of bullying, frequency, perceived seriousness, and duration, both in primary and in secondary school. We also assessed repeated or intrusive memories of

victimisation experiences, and suicidal ideation related to them at the time. In addition, we measured whether respondents considered themselves to be currently bullied, in adult life or in the workplace. These aspects were all assessed using a specially designed questionnaire, the Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire (see Method). For further outcome measures, based on indications from previous research and assumptions outlined earlier, we examined self-perception, and two important aspects of social relationships: the nature of close relationships as indexed by attachment style, and the quality of social relationships as indexed by a friendship scale.

Primarily, we were interested in general correlates of school victimisation on later life. We hypothesised that a main pattern of victimisation experiences in school would negatively affect adults social functioning, but also that both timing (e.g. in primary or secondary school) and consistency of the victimisation experience might determine the extent to which negative influences are perceived. Gender was an important variable to take account of, as we know that boys and girls experience different types of victimisation at school (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992), and there are gender differences in response to stressful situations (such as victimisation) and in coping responses (Smith, Shu & Madsen, 2001). We therefore explored gender effects but did not generate specific hypotheses in this regard.

We also felt it interesting to compare young adults (university students who had recently left school) with older adults in a workplace setting (for which we chose teachers, as having a comparable level of education to university students and for whom some independent evidence on levels of workplace bullying exists, NASUWT, 1996). Does the time distance from the school victimisation experience affect the perception of long term effects, and does the actual working context contribute? Finally, our data sets come from three European countries – Germany, Spain and the UK. This possibility originated in the cross-national European nature of the larger project of which this study

formed a part, but provided an opportunity for inbuilt replication of findings across three different cultural contexts. Findings common to all three countries would be robust to the variations of school and later life experiences found within western Europe, whereas differences between countries would suggest further exploration of which factors might be involved in explaining them.

METHOD

Participants

In total 884 adults participated; details of the sample, by gender, occupation and nationality, are given in Table 1. All participants were informed of the nature of the questionnaire and told that filling it in was voluntary. The student samples were all at university, and were recruited through lectures and seminars in different social science departments (psychology, economics, social anthropology). Questionnaires were distributed in lectures or class sessions and collected by a research assistant after being filled in, or distributed in one session and collected in the following session. Teachers were recruited by contacting schools that had taken part in earlier investigations. Questionnaires were taken to the schools, and teachers asked to return them individually after taking them home to fill in; an addressed envelope to guarantee anonymity of responses was provided. Some schools organised a deadline to collect and send back all the filled in questionnaires.

Table 1 about here

Measures

Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire: This was developed by a research team from all 3 countries involved (Germany, Spain, UK) on the basis of extensive pilot work and on

the questionnaire used by Rivers (2001). The final version contained 44 questions, mostly multiple choice. It covered experiences of victimisation in school (6 types of victimisation, 2 physical, 2 verbal, 2 indirect), and specifically their frequency, seriousness, and duration (all 5-point scales), which gender and how many were the bullies (6 options), and any participation in active bullying. These questions were asked first for primary school, then for secondary school. This was followed by a 5-item trauma subscale of intrusive and recurrent recollections of victimisation (each 5-point scales), and a question on suicidal ideation if bullied (4-point scale). A final section asked if they had ever been bullied at college (for university students) or in the workplace (for teachers), and on frequency of being bullied over the last six months (6-point scale). The questionnaire was introduced by a definition of bullying. The anonymity of the questionnaire was stressed, and a detachable sheet of advice, helplines and useful websites was at the end for those who might wish to talk further about their experiences.

Self perception questionnaire: This consisted of 26 items from Marsh and O'Neill's (1984) self-description questionnaire (originally 28, but two items were excluded from the analyses to improve alpha levels). Participants are asked to rate items on a 5-point scale (from 'is never true' to 'completely true'). Five subscales differentiate between *general self-esteem* (Alpha = .86, 6 items, e.g. nothing I do is really important), *self-esteem with regard to the same sex* (Alpha = .61, 5 items, e.g. I have lots of friends of the same sex), *self-esteem with regard to the opposite sex* (Alpha = .71, 6 items, e.g. I can have a comfortable conversation with men/women), *emotional loneliness* (Alpha = .83, 5 items, e.g. there are people who really understand me), and *social isolation* (Alpha = .67, 4 items, e.g. I am too often alone).

Attachment style: This was based on Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), looking at self-image and the subjective perception of others in important relationships with people.

People with a *secure* relationship style have a positive self and positive others image expressed as: 'It is relatively easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me'. People with a *dismissing* relationship style have a positive self and a negative others image expressed as: 'I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me'. People with a *preoccupied* relationship style have a negative self and a positive others image expressed as: 'I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them'. People with a *fearful* relationship style have a negative self and negative others image expressed as: 'I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others'. The four possible types were presented in the short narrative forms given above (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Doll, Mentz & Witte, 1995) and participants indicated on a scale of 1-4 ('absolutely not' to 'extremely') the extent to which each style matched their own personality.

Friendship scales: To assess the quality of close friendships we used 11 items from the ADF-C5 developed by Wright (1998). The five subscales refer to a special close friend (CF) and differentiate between *utility value* (Alpha = .65, 3 items, e.g. "in case of emergency CF helps"), *ego-support value* (Alpha = .63, 2 items, e.g. "in case of success CF is happy for me"), *self affirmation value* (Alpha = .71, 2 items, e.g. "CF encourages me to be my true self"), *security value* (Alpha = .52, 2 items, e.g. "conversation is comfortable with CF") and *maintenance difficulties* (Alpha = .45, 2 items, e.g. "it's

difficult to get along with CF”). For each item participants responded on a 5-point scale (from ‘definitely not’ to ‘definitely’).

Translation: All the questionnaires – originally in English – were translated into German and Spanish, and independently back-translated to check for accuracy of wording.

Reliability: For a sample of 26 German students (3m, 23f), we assessed test-retest reliability over a two-month period. Spearman correlations coefficients showed good to acceptable reliability for victimisation (primary school: $r = .88$, secondary school: $r = .87$), trauma ($r = .77$), self perception ($r = .72$), and attachment style ($r = .63$) (all $p < .01$), and moderate reliability for friendship ($r = .49$, $p < .05$).

RESULTS

In analysing the results, we first define the term ‘victim’ for our sample, and then describe some characteristics of self-reported victims. We then consider differences on our outcome measures, our primary interest being in victim/non-victim differences (numbers vary with different analyses due to some incomplete responses). We also examine gender, occupation and country of respondents.

Definitions of victims

Victims ($N = 247$) were identified from their responses about frequency and intensity of reported physical, verbal and indirect bullying. A person was considered a *victim* when s/he reported being bullied in one or more ways “sometimes” or more (frequency) and classified this as “quite serious” or “extremely serious” (intensity). We differentiated three victim types: *primary school victims* were victims only in primary school ($N = 96$); *secondary school victims* were victims only in secondary school ($N = 81$); and *stable victims* were victims in both primary and secondary school ($N = 70$). Details of prevalence rates by nationality, occupation and gender are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

Prevalence rates differed by gender ($\chi^2_{(3)}= 17.6, p < .001$) with twice as many secondary and stable victims in females, compared to males. In contrast there were no differences by occupation. Prevalence rates did differ between countries ($\chi^2_{(6)}= 59.1, p < .001$). The UK is lowest in the non-victim group, followed by Spain and Germany; and highest for those classified as stable victims. For Spain only, nearly twice as many victims were identified in primary school as in secondary school.

Descriptions of victims

Duration: For both primary and secondary school we asked whether any victimisation experience spanned just “a few days”, “weeks” “months” or “even longer”. Over half of victims reported prolonged bullying, lasting ‘weeks or months’ or ‘even longer’. For a duration of ‘weeks or months or even longer’ percentages were 43% for primary victims; 68% for secondary victims, and for stable victims 46% (in primary school) and 55% (in secondary school).

Who were the bullies? Male victims (whether in primary or secondary school) never reported being bullied by girls. In primary school around 25% of female victims were bullied by boys, around 50% by one or several girls and another 25% by both boys and girls; in secondary school, less than 10% were bullied by boys, more than 60% by one or several girls and around 30% by both boys and girls.

Participation in active bullying: Regarding the extent of active bullying reported by victims, 26% of primary victims actively joined in bullying, 36% of secondary victims, and 30% of stable victims.

Recurrent memories: This was assessed by a sub-scale of recurrent and intrusive memories of victimisation experiences (average of 5 items, such as ‘do you have

dreams or nightmares about the bullying', on scales no, never = 0, not often = 1, sometimes = 2, often = 3, always = 4). The mean score for all participants (N = 172 valid responses) was 0.74 ($SD = 0.66$), indicating a low level of recurrent memories. One-third of victims scored 1 or above, and 5% scored 2 or above, but only 1 person above 3. Thus while recurrent and intrusive memories were seldom absent (only 14% of victims scored zero on the scale), they did not occur very often. A 3-way ANOVA on these scores found no significant effects of gender, profession (student/teacher) or country, and no significant interactions. A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences due to victim type.

Suicidal ideation: One question asked whether 'when you were being bullied, did you ever, even for a second, think about hurting yourself or taking your own life?'. From 192 valid responses, most victims responded 'no', but 9% responded 'yes, once' and 13% 'yes, more than once'. Treated as a scale, a 3-way ANOVA found no significant effects of gender, occupation (student/teacher) or country, and no significant interactions. A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences due to victim type.

Outcome measures

We next used the total sample to examine current (later life) victimisation, from the RBQ, and the main outcome measures of current social life quality (self perception, attachment and friendship).

Later life victimisation (a) ever been bullied: In response to whether they had ever been bullied 'in college' or 'at work' (yes/no), victims at school (23.3%) differed from non-victims at school (15.3%) on a chi-square analysis, ($\chi^2_{(819,1)}=7.2, p < .01$). There was no significant difference by gender. There was a significant effect of occupation, with rates for teachers (39%) significantly greater than for students (5%), ($\chi^2_{(851,1)}=152.3, p < .001$). There was also a significant country effect, with rates being higher in the UK

(23%) and Germany (20%) than Spain (12%), ($\chi^2_{(851,2)}=13.6$, $p < .001$); this interacted with occupation, as the country effect was found for teachers ($p < .01$) but not for students.

Later life victimisation (b) bullied in last 6 months: We asked about frequency of being bullied 'in college' or 'at work' over the last six months, treating the responses (not bullied, very rarely, now and then, several times a months, several times a week, daily) as a 0-5 point scale. Mean values were low, as the great majority were not bullied over the last 6 months. A 4-way ANOVA found significant main effects for victim status while in school ($F_{(1,817)}= 4.45$, $p < .05$; victim = 0.20, non-victim = 0.09); and also for occupation ($F_{(1,817)}=6.33$, $p = .01$; teachers = 0.20, students = 0.07); no significant effects were found for gender, country or any interaction.

Current social life quality

As these were expected to be interrelated we conducted a MANOVA with all self perception, attachment and friendship scales as dependent variables and victim status (victim/non-victim) as a between groups factor, while controlling for current victimisation experiences, gender (male/female), occupation (student/teacher) and country (Germany/ Spain /UK) as covariates.

While current victimisation had no significant overall effect, the other covariates had a significant overall effect with country ($F_{(1,828)}=11.12$, $p < .001$, $ETA^2 = .21$), sex ($F_{(1,828)}=4.30$, $p < .001$, $ETA^2 = .09$) and occupation ($F_{(1,828)}=4.15$, $p < .001$, $ETA^2 = .09$). Victim status still explained a significant proportion of the overall residual variance ($F_{(1,828)}=4.20$, $p < .001$, $ETA^2 = .09$). Cohen (1988) suggests that a relevant contribution is marked by effect sizes with ETA^2 above .02. Based on this criterion the self perception measures of emotional loneliness ($ETA^2 = .06$), general self-esteem ($ETA^2 = .03$), same-sex self-esteem ($ETA^2 = .02$) and opposite-sex self esteem ($ETA^2 = .02$) contributed most consistently to differentiate victims from non-victims, while for

attachment style type D: fearful ($ETA^2 = .03$), and for friendship quality maintenance difficulties ($ETA^2 = .02$), met the criterion.

As summarised in Table 3, post hoc tests revealed a consistent pattern; victims scored significantly lower than non-victims on general self-esteem, same-sex self-esteem, opposite-sex self esteem and higher on emotional loneliness; they scored higher than non-victims on fearful attachment type and on friendship maintenance difficulties.

Table 3 about here

To further track the influence of when or how long victimisation was experienced we differentiated four victim types (non victims, primary school victim, secondary school victim, stable victim). A MANOVA was calculated with those subscales as dependent variables, that significantly differentiated victims from non victims. Victim type served as a between groups factor while controlling for current victimisation, country, gender and occupation. In this analysis, occupation ($F_{(1,198)}=5.80$, $p < .00$, $ETA^2 = .05$), country ($F_{(1,198)}=4.82$, $p < .00$, $ETA^2 = .04$) and gender ($F_{(1,198)}=2.64$, $p < .02$, $ETA^2 = .02$), had a significant overall effect and again victim status explained a significant part of the overall residual variance ($F_{(1,198)}=3.95$, $p < .00$, $ETA^2 = .04$).

As shown in Table 4, there is a consistent increase in effect from non victims to primary school victims, secondary school victims and peaking for stable victims, for general self esteem, opposite-sex self-esteem, emotional loneliness, attachment type (D): fearful and friendship maintenance difficulties. An additional one factor ANOVA with post hoc test (Duncan, $p = .05$) showed that stable victims score significantly lower on general self-esteem and significantly higher on emotional loneliness than all other

groups, but primary and secondary school victims additionally score higher than non victims on emotional loneliness. Stable victims and secondary school victims had significantly lower opposite-sex self-esteem than primary school victims and non-victims, and were significantly higher on fearful attachment style than non-victims. Finally, stable victims scored significantly higher on friendship maintenance difficulties than all other groups.

Table 4 about here

DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the long-term correlates of experiences of victimisation in school with aspects of functioning in adult life. To document the various aspects of victimisation experiences in school drawn from participants memories we developed the Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire. The test-retest reliability of the victimisation measure in the questionnaire was established, while some evidence for reliability can be gathered from comparison with evidence from school-based self-report surveys.

Our results found a meaningful pattern in participants' responses, generally rather consistent over gender, occupation (teacher/student) and country (Germany, Spain, UK); despite some main effects of these latter variables, there were no significant interactions with victim/non victim status, suggesting a more universal pattern of findings. For example, 28% of respondents reported being victimised at school. Also, about one-half of these victims reported relatively extended victimisation, lasting for months or longer; and about 8 percent of the sample reported being victimised in both primary and secondary school (Table 2). These prevalence figures are larger than those

reported in school-based surveys, which typically ask for reports over the last 3 or 6 months (see reviews in Smith et al., 1999); but are in line with what might be expected from these school based surveys, if extrapolated to reports over the whole duration of schooling. In addition, recall of who did the bullying suggested that males recalled being victimised almost uniquely by boys, while girls recalled being victimised by both boys and girls. There are several school-based studies confirming this pattern (Smith et al., 1999). Finally, one out of three victims reported also actively participating in bullying. Although percentages of ‘bully/victims’ from school-based studies vary considerably (Wolke & Stanford, 1999), this is in line with some reports (e.g. Wolke et al., 2000, in the UK)

The direct relationship of these experiences to recurrent memories and suicidal ideation, appears to be present in all our samples, but to a modest extent. One in twenty reported recurrent or intrusive memories “sometimes or more”, and only 14% of the victims reported such memories to be absent. Suicidal ideation occurred at least once to 22% of former victims, and “more than once” to 13%. For both measures no differences due to gender, profession or country were found. While these findings might appear modest, they should be taken as serious in their implications, given the strength of emotional turbulence leading to recurrent memories and especially suicidal ideation.

The main aim of the study was to examine any long lasting effects of victimisation in school on adult life. One obvious area was whether victimisation was experienced in the ‘workplace’ (including college/university, for students). When we asked if victimisation was *ever* experienced in the workplace, this was somewhat more common in former school victims. We also found that teachers reported substantially more victimisation in their workplace than students in college. This is to be expected, as students would be reporting over a shorter time period (normally up to 3 years) and in a less structured social context with less opportunity for victimisation to take place.

When we asked about victimisation in the workplace over the last 6 months, rates were much lower. There was a significantly increased risk for victims compared to non-victims, but the effect remained relatively small, consistent with other recent research on this link (Olweus, 1993b, Smith et al., 2003).

The main outcome measures were of relationship quality in adult life, specifically self perception, relationship style and friendship quality. Our results show an overall effect, indicating that being a victim in school negatively affects adults' perception of the self and of relating to others, irrespective of gender, profession and cultural differences. The self-concept was considerably more affected than relationship style and friendship quality. Former victims scored significantly lower on all aspects of current self esteem (general self esteem, self esteem towards same and other sex and emotional loneliness) except social isolation.

General self esteem was rated especially low by stable victims (at both primary and secondary school) compared to all other groups including non-victims. This suggests that it is the duration of the victim experience, rather than the point in development when someone became victimised, that most impacts on self-esteem. However closer inspection of the means (see Table 4) shows a linear increase, indicating, that both consistency of experience and developmental stage might be involved. In contrast to general self-esteem, a higher degree of emotional loneliness was reported by all types of victim compared to non-victims, however significantly differentiating stable victims from those who were victims either in primary or in secondary school. In primary school, victims have reported higher degrees of loneliness and dissatisfaction even when they were no longer identified as a victim (Kochenderfer & Wardrop, 2001).

Regarding current style of attachment in relationships, we found that victims rated the 'fearful' profile higher, meaning that they are somewhat uncomfortable getting

close to others even though wanting emotionally close relationships. Thus they find it difficult to trust others, being worried that they will be hurt if they allow themselves to become too close to others. This was rated especially highly by those victimised in secondary school (both secondary and stable victims). The effect on relationship style may be related to somewhat stable victimisation experiences later on in schooling; we know that in secondary school some victims are victimised for longer than six months or over term breaks (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Smith & Shu, 2000), while victim roles are less stable in primary school (Monks, Smith & Swettenham, in press, Schäfer & Albrecht, in press). By contrast former victims did not rate significantly higher the profiles which expressed wanting less closeness to others, or more closeness than others might want to have, supporting the idea that the enduring experience of being deprived of peer support might have reduced trust in relying on others, rather than wanting to avoid others or feeling avoided by others.

Regarding current friendships, the difficulty experienced by former victims was confined to that of higher maintenance difficulties; this is assessed as the degree to which the subject finds her/his relationship with a 'Close Friend' frustrating, inconvenient, or unpleasant. This was again found especially for stable victims. With ongoing victimisation a tendency has been found for victims to narrow the circle of friends and affiliate with those showing similar (e.g. internalising) problems (Hodges & Perry, 1999). We found no impact for positive aspects of friendship such as: willingness to support the subject to meet needs or reach personal goals, encourage and reassure the subjective perception of self worth, show recognition and expression of highly valued self-attributes or to behave in ways making the individual feel safe. We know that children who are consistently disliked by peers in class disagree with friends about negative aspects of friendship (e.g. quarrels) but agree with friends about intimacy (e.g. sharing secrets) (Wanner, Krappmann & Little, 2001).

Mechthild Schäfer

Kommentar: Auutsch, this is all the instrument in one sentence????????????????????

It appears that experience of victimisation in school relates especially to difficulties as an adult in feeling good about oneself (most measures of self-esteem), and in having trust in relationships. The trends in Table 4 indicate that being a victim at either primary or secondary school has a negative impact on most aspects of self-esteem. However, as anticipated, negative aspects on self-esteem in relation to the opposite sex, were confined to secondary school (including stable) victims. The main impact on intimate relationships as indexed by the attachment measure, was also only significant for secondary (including stable) victims. The more fearful relationship style is possibly, at least in part, responsible for the higher maintenance difficulties in friendships, which might be seen as a very concrete behavioural synonym of what attachment style is on the perceptive level. Further longitudinal research into friendships and partnerships of victims and non-victims could throw more light on these issues, as well as on the possible causal nature of the relationships.

Since these findings are correlational, no causal direction is proved. It is possible that adults who have lower self-esteem and less trust in relationships, are also more liable to report being victimised at school, irrespective of the extent to which this actually happened. However, a general 'shared-method' bias (of generally self-reporting negative experiences) can be discounted, because many of the outcome measure scales were *not* related to the victim/non-victim factor. Furthermore, the pattern of findings is consistent with previous research on more selected groups (Gilmartin, 1987; Matsui et al., 1996; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Rivers, 1999; Schäfer, 1996) that found outcomes especially related to self-esteem and confidence with others. A causal direction from school victimisation to these adult outcomes seems also plausible, given the likely impact of prolonged school victimisation. Continued denigration and harassment by others would be expected to lower self-esteem (and this is a well-replicated finding in the school years, Hawker & Boulton, 2000), and a failure by others to protect you (or

sometimes, supposed ‘friends’ turning on you) would naturally lead to a lack of trust in close relationships. Although not established on a causal basis by retrospective reports, case studies of retrospective accounts certainly suggest these sorts of processes are operating (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Rivers, 1999).

These outcomes seem more likely or serious for those bullied at secondary school, or at both primary and secondary school. There is separate evidence that victimisation at secondary school is more serious than at primary school (e.g. Smith et al., 2001; Schäfer, Werner & Crick, 2002). In primary school the social structure, based on predominantly dyadic relationships, more readily allows children to escape from unfavourably perceived (bullying) relationships (Krappmann & Oswald, 1995). Secondary school victims have often failed to cope earlier with peer harassment, and appear to have less good quality friends than is the case with primary school victims; they are also more reluctant to seek help (Smith et al., 2001). This highlights the role of context as an influential factor in mediating the effects of bullying experiences.

In secondary school a hierarchical structure in class is common and prone to sustain bullying as it provides opportunities for socially skilled bullies (Sutton, Smith & Swettenham, 1999). It flags low status children as easy victims; and social norms can be manipulated by the bully. Siding with a victim can put peers’ status at risk which is likely to worsen the victim’s situation by diminishing the chances of peer support. This, for victims, increases the likelihood of perceiving their situation as consistently running out of control, while experiencing their peers as unpredictable and unreliable. From an outside perspective it leaves the victim more stigmatised (Olweus & Endresen, 1998; Rigby, 1997). From a victims perspective it might leave them traumatised, as confidence in both their own value and in the reliability of peer relationships is shattered. Future longitudinal research is needed to clarify to what extent this can lead to an update of the victim’s “internal working model” (Bowlby, 1973), as psychological

representations of relationships reflect both cognitive constructions and objective aspects of the social environment (Crook, 2000).

Another question to be addressed in future research is whether particular social experiences after leaving school can counteract effects of earlier bullying experiences. Schäfer & Korn (2001) argue that university life can provide an environment with low hierarchical structuring and very low frequency of victimisation, allowing individuals formerly victimised at school to develop new relationships and better self esteem. A comparatively openly structured university life may let a former victim recover, at least partially, from feeling degraded in front of and within the peer group. Such possibilities may be less open to those moving directly to a more hierarchically structured occupation after school.

Our sample, consisting of people that are or were exposed to a university setting for a considerable length in time, might then show less later victimisation, and less enduring effects of school victimisation experiences, than other samples without tertiary education. However this does not negate the robust findings we have obtained; that school victimisation relates to reduced quality in adult self- and other-perceptions, and relationships. It seems of practical value to address the moderating effects of social structuring on the stability of victimisation in future research, for example, by comparing different occupational careers, comprising none to several years of university life exposure.

Finally, apart from differences between those victimised and those not victimised, our data revealed some differences by gender, occupation and country. These were reported for completeness, but were not part of the main aims of our study. The precise nature of these differences might be affected by sample selection factors, and in the case of country differences, by possible issues of translation despite the care taken in this.

This research suggests that, although long-term correlates of experiences of school bullying are not global and, for many persons, not unduly serious, there are specific correlates that are found in different European countries and irrespective of gender. These appear to be located in areas of self-esteem, trust in others, and maintaining close friendships. On a practical basis, work in schools that deals with these issues – such as assertiveness training, peer support, friendship skills and ‘buddying’ schemes – may not only help to reduce victimisation but also help address these issues of difficulty (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). Research on a longitudinal basis, making use of findings such as in this study for hypothesis building, could give more insight into the causal relationships involved in these long-term developmental processes.

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Table 1. Numbers of participants, by country, gender and occupation (student or teacher)

| | Germany | | | Spain | | | United Kingdom | | |
|----------|---------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|----------------|-------|--------|
| | m. | f. | Total | m. | f. | Total | m. | f. | Total |
| Students | 67 | 76 | 143 | 102 | 146 | 248 | 28 | 130 | 158 |
| | (47%) | (53%) | (100%) | (41%) | (59%) | (100%) | (18%) | (82%) | (100%) |
| Teachers | 57 | 70 | 127 | 34 | 72 | 106 | 23 | 89 | 112 |
| | (45%) | (55%) | (100%) | (32%) | (68%) | (100%) | (21%) | (79%) | (100%) |

Table 2. Percentages of non-victims, victims in primary or secondary school only, and stable victims (in both primary and secondary school), in the whole sample and split by nationality, occupation and gender

| | Overall | Germany | Spain | UK | Students | Teachers | Males | Females |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|-------|----|----------|----------|-------|---------|
| Non Victim | 72 | 82 | 74 | 58 | 72 | 70 | 80 | 67 |
| Primary school victim | 11 | 8 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 12 |
| Secondary school victim | 9 | 8 | 7 | 14 | 9 | 11 | 5 | 12 |
| Stable victim | 8 | 2 | 6 | 16 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 10 |

Table 3. MANOVA results comparing mean scores for victims and non-victims on self perception, attachment and friendship

| Source | | Victim | Non-Victim | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>part. Eta</i> ² |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------|------------|----------|----------|-------------------------------|
| Self perception | general | 2.90 | 3.21 | 20.54 | .00 | .03 |
| | same sex | 2.83 | 3.00 | 9.61 | .01 | .02 |
| | opposite sex | 2.68 | 2.87 | 9.25 | .01 | .02 |
| | emotional loneliness | 0.93 | 0.52 | 41.83 | .00 | .06 |
| | social isolation | 0.60 | 0.45 | 9.00 | .01 | .01 |
| Attachment | A: secure | 2.21 | 2.39 | 3.84 | .06 | .01 |
| | B: dismissing | 1.59 | 1.65 | 0.46 | .55 | .00 |
| | C: preoccupied | 1.49 | 1.21 | 10.22 | .01 | .01 |
| | D: fearful | 1.40 | 0.98 | 17.76 | .00 | .03 |
| Friendship | utility value | 3.02 | 3.08 | 0.77 | .38 | .00 |
| | ego support value | 3.43 | 3.39 | 0.51 | .48 | .01 |
| | self affirmation | 3.37 | 3.41 | 0.22 | .64 | .00 |
| | security value | 3.53 | 3.62 | 0.97 | .13 | .01 |
| | maintenance difficulty | 1.10 | 0.82 | 12.69 | .00 | .02 |

Table 4. MANOVA results comparing mean scores for victim types on selected aspects of self perception, attachment and friendship

| Source | | Victim type | | | | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Eta</i> ² |
|-----------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|-------------------------|
| | | Non Victims | Primary school victim | Secondary school victim | Stable victim | | | |
| Self perception | general | 3.20 | 3.13 | 2.91 | 2.54 | 12.85 | .00 | .06 |
| | same sex | 2.99 | 2.84 | 2.84 | 2.83 | 2.87 | .05 | .01 |
| | opposite sex | 2.87 | 2.84 | 2.62 | 2.51 | 5.73 | .01 | .03 |
| | emotional loneliness | 0.54 | 0.82 | 0.91 | 1.06 | 14.09 | .00 | .06 |
| Attachment | Type D: fearful | 0.98 | 1.25 | 1.54 | 1.49 | 7.46 | .00 | .03 |
| Friendship | maintenance difficulty | 0.84 | 1.02 | 1.02 | 1.34 | 5.56 | .00 | .03 |