



The incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization between the sexes

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Abstract

The Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales (RAVS) developed by Orpinas and Horne (2006) were administered to 148 sixth-graders with the aim of knowing the differences in the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization between boys and girls. 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. To be able to determine the differences, independent samples t-test was used. Statistical analyses showed that there were differences in the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization and were significant at the 0.01 levels. With reference to the mean scores, the incidence of both peer aggression and peer victimization were higher among boys compared to girls.

Keywords: boys, girls, peer aggression, peer victimization, sixth-graders

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Introduction

The incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization in schools is very well documented (e.g. Ates & Yagmurlu, 2010; Baldry & Winkel; 2003; Card & Hodges, 2008; D'Esposito, 2006; Felix, Furlong, & Austin, 2009). Peer aggression and peer victimization in schools are concerns worth investigating and must never be taken for granted. D'Esposito (2006) concluded that the "issue concerning peer aggression is not going to disappear" (p. 85) therefore, actions must be done because if there is peer aggression, then there will always be peer victimization.

But exactly, what does peer aggression mean? D'Esposito (2006) believed that "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). In addition, APA (2004) suggested that "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)" (para. 2). Furthermore, it is considered to be an intentional act (Gutierrez, Barrios, de Dios, Montero, & del Barrio, 2008; Panayiotis, Anna, Charalambos, & Chrysostomos, 2010) that "causes physical or psychological damage" (Panayiotis et al., 2010, p. 115) to the victims.

On the other hand, 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 (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). It was considered to be a serious problem among school-aged children that need due attention (Adefunke, 2010; Felix et al., 2009) because "any involvement in victimization was related to increased risk of depression" (Felix et al., 2009, p. 1691). Additionally, peer victimization affects academic achievement (Wei & Williams, 2004). Therefore, peer victimization in schools "is a major concern of educators, policymakers, administrators, parents, and students" (DeVoe & Bauer, 2010, p. 1).

Knowing the differences in the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization between the sexes is important. For one, it can serve as bases in the development of intervention programs that can reduce the incidence of both peer aggression and peer victimization. Aggressors and victims can both benefit from intervention programs. As

Kaufman et al. (1999) suggested, solutions to problems can only be developed if the programs and policies developed to address them are built on accurate information.

In the end, it must be remembered that the reduction of peer aggression and peer victimization is equivalent to the promotion of safety in schools. A safe learning environment should be the concern of everyone. Safety in school is of prime importance because without a safe learning environment, learning will never take place (Kaufman et al., 1999) and without learning, the purpose for the mere existence of schools is defeated.

Method

This study aimed to determine the differences in the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization among sixth-graders. In line with the purpose of the study, the Reduced Aggression and Victimization Scales (RAVS) were administered to 72 boys and 76 girls (N= 148) that came from 29 elementary schools, both private and government-owned. All of which were sixth-graders. 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).

To determine if there were significant differences between the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization between boys and girls, the independent samples t-test was used via Special Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 15.0. The independent samples t-test is used when one wants to examine the mean difference between two exclusive or independent groups (Hyman & Sierra, 2010).

Results

The difference in the incidence of peer aggression between boys and girls is presented in Table 1 while the difference in the incidence of peer victimization between boys and girls is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Incidence of peer aggression between boys and girls

Sex	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (2 tailed)
				(equal variances assumed)	
Boys	72	7.31	6.27	-3.75	0.00
Girls	76	4.05	4.10		

As seen in Table 1, there was a significant difference in the incidence of peer aggression between boys and girls and was significant at the 0.01 level. With reference to the mean scores, the incidence of peer aggression was higher among boys compared to girls.

Table 2. Incidence of peer victimization between boys and girls

Sex	N	M	SD	t	Sig. (2 tailed)
				(equal variances assumed)	
Boys	72	11.40	7.42	-4.03	0.00
Girls	76	7.28	4.84		

On the other hand, as seen in Table 2, there was a significant difference in the incidence of peer victimization between boys and girls and was significant at the 0.01 level. With reference to the mean scores, the incidence of peer victimization was higher among boys compared to girls.

Discussion

The incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization is a reality in schools and this has been documented by several researchers (e.g. Ates & Yagmurlu, 2010; Baldry & Winkel; 2003; Card & Hodges, 2008; D'Esposito, 2006; Felix et al., 2009). This study also focused on the incidence of both peer aggression and peer victimization but with emphasis to sex differences.

To be more specific, the results of this study suggest that the incidence of both peer aggression and peer victimization were consistently higher in boys compared to girls. These results are parallel with several earlier researches conducted. Panayiotis et al., (2010), for example, found that boys had more tendencies to be involved in bullying incidents. Whereas, Wolke, Woods, Stanford, and Schulz (2001) concluded that "mainly boys are involved in both bullying and victimization, while girls are more often pure victims" (p. 688).

On the other hand, Ates and Yagmurlu (2010) found that boys were victimized more compared to girls. Relatively, Baldry and Winkel (2003) believed that “boys are more at risk than girls of being victimized” (p. 712).

Although, findings from earlier studies seemed to contrast, one thing was common. That was, boys were basically more at risk of being victimized and at the same time being the aggressors. That is why intervention programs undertaken with the aim of reducing the incidence of both peer aggression and victimization should take sex as an important variable. Taking into consideration sex differences can lead to more suited and directed intervention programs.

Certainly, something must be done to minimize the incidence of peer aggression and peer victimization in schools. This is so, because victimization affects the psychological (Felix et al., 2009; Wallace, Patchin, & May, 2005) and “academic well-being of students” (Felix et al., 2009, p. 1693). Therefore, giving due attention to the incidence of victimization can be useful since it serve as basis to make policies (Lewit & Baker, 1996).

Ultimately, it must be remembered that both aggressors and victims must be given thorough assessments and interventions because both victims and aggressors are vulnerable to adjustment problems (Graham, Bellemore, & Mize, 2006) and “many children who bully others also become victims of bullying at other times” (Wolke et al., 2001, p. 688). Working with both aggressors and victims is important. For aggressors, this could lower aggressive behaviors and eventually victimization of others, while for victims; this could help them overcome painful experiences.

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