

Polyvictimization among a juvenile Portuguese sample

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To cite this article: Telma C. Almeida, Catarina Ramos & Jorge Cardoso (2021) Polyvictimization among a juvenile Portuguese sample, *Annals of Medicine*, 53:sup1, S124-S124, DOI: [10.1080/07853890.2021.1896152](https://doi.org/10.1080/07853890.2021.1896152)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07853890.2021.1896152>



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Published online: 28 Sep 2021.



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Some adolescents experience more than one type of abuse [1] that can occur under different incidents during childhood and/or juvenile development [2]. Polyvictimization can be defined as the experience of four or more types of violence, including childhood neglect, psychological, physical or sexual abuse, witnessing violence [3]. In Portugal, studies on polyvictimization are very scarce [4]. The objectives of the current study are to analyse the prevalence of polyvictimization in a sample of Portuguese youth, to compare differences in polyvictimization between age and gender groups, and to verify the probability of occurrence of different types of victimisation among boys and girls.

Materials and methods: The sample was composed of 849 participants, with 459 girls and 390 boys, and ages between 12 and 17 years old ($M = 13.70$, $SD = 1.43$). The study was conducted in Portuguese schools. The data collection was conducted according to ethical principles, with the authorisation of the schools, the parents, and the youth. Participants answered face to face to a sociodemographic questionnaire and to the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ) that assesses to conventional crimes, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimisation, sexual victimisation, and witnessing and indirect victimisation [4].

Results: Over the last year, 67% ($n = 388$) of the participants had experienced at least one type of victimisation. The results reported differences in polyvictimization concerning age groups and not between gender groups. The difference between the group 12–14 years and the group 15–17 years was significant [$\chi^2(3, n = 849) = 8.793, p = .032$], and dependent on polyvictimization. Concerning gender groups, the difference in victimisation levels between boys and girls was not significant. However, the probability of occurrence of the various forms of victimisation was different between genders. Boys showed higher probability of occurrence of assault without weapon ($OR = 0.430; p < .01$; boys = 20.8%, girls = 14.2%), attempted assault ($OR = 0.540; p < .01$; boys = 18.5%; girls = 10.9%), nonsexual genital assault ($OR = 0.241; p < .001$; boys = 15.9%; girls = 4.4%), and burglary of family household ($OR = 0.407; p < .05$; boys = 6.2%, girls = 2.6%). However, girls revealed higher probability of occurrence of psychological/emotional abuse ($OR = 1.672; p < .01$; boys = 17.9%; girls = 26.8%).

Discussion and conclusions: This research studies the polyvictimization in a Portuguese sample of youth. The results highlight the high prevalence of victimisation among young Portuguese youth. They also point out the differences between boys and girls concerning the types of victimisation and between the oldest and the youngest concerning polyvictimization. Our results are in line with some recent researches [5,6], and they can help to develop future psychosocial prevention programs.

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DOI: 10.1080/07853890.2021.1896152

Predictors of peer victimisation in the context of secondary school

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Peer victimisation is defined as the experience of being the target of aggressive behaviour, by one or more peers. This presents several configurations, and in this sense the study of multiple types of victimisation is

emphasised [1]. Research supports the need of studying protective and risk factors for victimisation in light of the ecological model, once it highlights the connection between individual characteristics, family, school and community [2]. Two main objectives will be analysed: (a) the risk factors associated with four global types of victimisation (overt, reactive overt, relational and reactive relational) and seven subtypes of victimisation behaviours that the adolescent's might experience (e.g. social manipulation, social exclusion) using the ecological model; (b) discuss how the study of risk factors contributes to the strategies to be outlined in the context of an intervention program.

Materials and methods: 584 high school adolescents participated in this quasi-experimental study, aged between 12 and 19 years ($M = 15.20$; $DP = 1.90$). The participants completed: School aggression and violence: Victimization symptoms and behaviours Questionnaire [3], Perception of Social-Family Support and Perception of Peer Support Scales [4], Parental Support Questionnaire – Short Form [5], and School Climate Questionnaire [6]. Ethics committee approved the investigation and informed consent was obtained from parents. The questionnaires (anonymous and confidential) were completed in a classroom context. Using Hierarchical Linear Regression, two models were built, in which the qualitative variables (e.g. age, gender) were first inserted, followed by the factors peer support, family and school climate.

Results: The global types of victimisation were better explained by reactive relational victimisation (18.60% of total variance) while the specific types of victimisation by the harassment model (19.30% of the total variance), both by the factor social support from family and friends (respectively 13.80% and 10.70% of the variance). In short, boys showed a higher risk of overt victimisation, while girls reported more relational victimisation. Perceiving a poor support from family and friends places the adolescents at a higher risk of peer victimisation by harassment, but also by exclusion/social isolation, coercion, intimidation, threats and aggressiveness. The higher the perception of a school climate characterised by violence, the higher the risk of peer victimisation, specifically by harassment. No cases of victimisation per bullying were identified.

Discussion and conclusions: The risk factors found were indicative that these adolescents would benefit from a universal intervention model. These are developed in the classroom context for all students and do not include a selection of subjects with a specific need for intervention. Strategies should be oriented towards socio-emotional interventions, which include emotional management and interpersonal conflicts. These have shown good results in reducing violence in young people, including bullying, but also in reducing disruptive behaviours in the classroom. Greater knowledge of teachers and administrative staff, but also parents, and using rules that promote social inclusion, would facilitate the identification and signalling of students at risk. School administrations should adopt more integrated prevention policies and not only sanctioning measures, promoting a school climate perceived as protective and without violence.

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) [Foundation for Science and Technology] – PhD Grant SFRH/BD/81009/2011, for the support granted to this research.

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DOI: 10.1080/07853890.2021.1896153

The impact of childhood abuse on adult self-esteem and emotional regulation

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