Risk and protective factors for bullying and peer victimisation

This symposium, organised by Dr Claire Fox, will address new questions regarding risk and protective factors for bullying and peer victimisation (both ‘traditional’ bullying and cyberbullying). Peer victimisation is a commonly occurring adolescent stressor, which negatively impacts upon young people’s mental health, physical health, and educational outcomes. Peer victimisation refers to the experience of repetitious aggression at the hands of one’s peers. Bullying is a specific type of peer victimisation which includes notions of an imbalance of power between the victim(s) and the bully(s), and intent to cause harm. Peer victimisation may be verbal (e.g. name-calling, threatening), physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, spitting, property damage/theft), and/or indirect/relational (e.g. malicious gossip, exclusion). In more recent years, with the increasing use of new technologies, the phenomenon of cyberbullying has emerged and is becoming of increasing concern, with prevalence rates of around 12% (Tippett et al., 2013).

Peer victimisation has been found to predict an increase in adjustment problems over time. However, not all children appear to be negatively affected by the experience, leading researchers to identify factors that might moderate the association between peer victimisation and psychosocial adjustment. Research has also identified factors which might mediate the links between peer victimisation and adjustment problems. Researchers are also endeavouring to isolate risk factors relating to peer victimisation - both individual behavioural risk factors and social risk factors (e.g. not having many friends).

First, Professor Dieter Wolke will report on the effects of bullying involvement into adulthood from several longitudinal studies in the UK and USA. He will provide an overview of his research on previously neglected risk factors such as prenatal stress exposure or sibling bullying and review just recently emerging findings on what increases resilience to the ill effects of being bullied. Paper 2 by Professor Mike Boulton will report the results of an experiment to examine the effects of a cross-age teaching intervention on self-blame,
disclosure and self-esteem among victims of bullying. It tests the possibility that through developing and delivering an anti-bullying lesson to younger pupils, victims may develop resilience to some of the negative effects of bullying. Paper 3 by Dr Claire Fox will begin to unpick the causal relationships linking children’s humour styles and peer victimisation using a cross-lagged panel design. The ESRC-study on which this paper is based, investigated the extent to which humour prospectively predicts victimisation, and whether peer victimisation plays a role in the development of humour in early adolescence. Paper 4 by Dr Lucy Betts will present the findings from a study which examined links between cyberbullying, cybervictimisation, time spent online and confidence with technology. Technological confidence was predictive of both cyberbullying and cybervictimisation. Finally, Professor Peter Smith will act as a discussant. He will comment on the contributions made by each presentation, and put them within the broader framework of research on school bullying. This symposium will offer new insights into how best to intervene to enhance children’s resilience.

**Dr Claire Fox** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Keele University. Claire’s key area of expertise is social development in childhood and adolescence. She has an international reputation in the field of bullying in schools and has published over 30 articles/reports over the past 10 years. Her two main research interests are bullying in schools and domestic abuse. Supported by two research grants in 2009 (from the BPS and British Academy), Claire developed a humour styles questionnaire for children and young people and recently completed a longitudinal study funded by the ESRC to examine the links between children’s humour styles and bullying, in collaboration with Dr Simon Hunter at the University of Strathclyde and Dr Sian Jones at Oxford Brookes University (http://esrcbullyingandhumourproject.wordpress.com). Together with Prof David Gadd, Prof Ian Butler, and Dr Mary-Louise Corr, Claire was CI on the ESRC-funded ‘From Boys to Men’ project (www.boystomenproject.com), which used multi-methods to examine the question of how to prevent more boys from becoming perpetrators of domestic violence. Claire also recently completed a European wide project supported by a substantial grant under the Daphne III call. The REaDAPT project (Relationship Education and Domestic Abuse Prevention Tuition) involved working with 6 partners across Europe in the UK, Spain, Malta, France, Sweden and Belgium (www.readapt.eu). Claire has experience of researching vulnerable groups of children and young people and is committed to conducting applied social psychological research which has both theoretical and practical implications.
Paper 1

The Long Shadow Thrown by Bulling: Risk and Protective Factors

*Dieter Wolke, University of Warwick*

**Objectives**: A review of findings of the long term adverse effects of being bullied from early childhood into adulthood.

**Methods**: Participants from several prospective studies. Control for pre-existing social conditions, parenting and pre-existing psychiatric problems. Meta-analyses of the effects of parenting and socio-economic conditions and bullying involvement.

**Results**: Being bullied in childhood is associated with increased anxiety, depression, psychotic experiences, self-harm and psychotic experiences in adolescence and early adulthood. It also has long term adverse effects on economic function such as holding down jobs, unemployment and saving behaviour. Protective factors identified include a warm relationship with parents and siblings, a positive atmosphere at home and higher self-esteem.

**Conclusions**: Being bullied in childhood affects adolescent and adult function and economic activity for many years.

*Dieter Wolke* is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Warwick. His research interests include: developmental pathways leading to developmental psychopathology, social and emotional development, biological at-risk children (very pre-term children), school and sibling bullying, infant regulatory problems (e.g. crying, feeding, sleeping), and parenting.

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Paper 2

The effects of a cross-age teaching of social skills (CATS) intervention on victims of bullying

*Mike Boulton, University of Chester*

**Objectives**: Victims of bullying often hold self-blaming attributions, do not tell teachers, and exhibit low self-esteem. Tested a novel cross-age teaching (CATS) intervention to address these issues.

**Methods**: A wait-list control pre/post-test experimental design, with random allocation (N = 41). In small groups, participants designed and delivered a bullying-themed lesson for younger pupils, including the notion that bullies not victims were to blame and that disclosing can help in different ways.
Results: The intervention led to an improvement on all three dependent variables, effects were stronger with a bigger dose of intervention (six versus four hours), and changes in self-blame/self-esteem mediated the effect of the intervention on disclosure.

Conclusion: Theoretical and practical implications are that CATS can help build resilience in victims.

Mike Boulton is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Chester. His research focuses on children’s social relationships and their links with adjustment. He is particularly interested in how the negative effects of abusive peer relationships may be moderated and mitigated, and how perpetrators can be encouraged and enabled to change their behaviour in a pro-social direction.

Paper 3

The Relationship between Peer Victimization and Children’s Humour Styles: It’s No Laughing Matter!

Claire Fox, Keele University

Objectives: This study assessed the concurrent and prospective associations between peer victimisation and four humour styles, two of which are adaptive (affiliative and self-enhancing) and two maladaptive (aggressive and self-defeating).

Methods: Participants were 1,234 adolescents (48% female) aged 11-13 years, drawn from six secondary schools in England. Self- and peer-reports of peer victimisation were collected, as were self-reports of humour styles.

Results: In cross-sectional analyses, peer victimisation was associated with all four humour styles, most strongly with self-defeating and affiliative humour. Across the school year, peer victimisation predicted an increase in self-defeating humour and a decrease in affiliative humour (and vice-versa).

Conclusions: These results have implications for models of humour development and how we understand the continuity of peer victimisation.

Claire Fox is a Senior Lecturer at Keele University and her research interests include: children’s peer relationships, children’s humour styles and domestic abuse.

Paper 4

Young people’s cyber victimisation experiences and cyber bullying behaviours: The role of technological confidence, time spent online, and wellbeing
Objectives: Technological confidence and time spent online were examined as predictors of young people’s engagement in cyber victimisation and cyber bullying behaviours.

Methods: Four hundred and forty (281 female, 154 male) 16- to 19-year-olds ($M_{age} = 16.95$) completed measures of cyber victimisation, cyber bullying behaviours, time spent using technology, technology confidence, and wellbeing.

Results: Cluster analysis revealed distinct groups characterised by different profiles of cyber victimisation and cyber bullying behaviours. Predictors of group membership varied according intensity of cyber victimisation and cyber bullying behaviours.

Conclusion: The results reveal that the risk factors associated with cyber victimisation and cyber bullying behaviours varied according to the intensity of these experiences. Time spent online was not a significant risk.

Lucy Betts is a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. Her research focuses on the role of trust in social relationships for psychosocial adjustment and as a feature of intergroup relationships. More recently she has been examining children’s experiences of bullying and cyber bullying.

Peter Smith is an Emeritus Professor based in the Unit for School and Family Studies at Goldsmith’s, University of London. He is primarily interested in researching school bullying, cyber bullying, the causes of bullying and ways of preventing it in schools. He has recently published a book with Sage, called, ‘Understanding School Bullying: Its Nature and Prevention Strategies’.

Role: Discussant for the Symposium