Effects and Factors of Childhood Bullying: An Associational Study

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between loneliness as a consequence of overt and relational forms of childhood peer victimization (bullying) and resiliency. The study period was from September 2007 until May 2008. A 258-question questionnaire was administered to thirty-three graduate students in Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Service. Demographics used were participants' age, which ranged from twenty-three to fifty-five, and gender which were thirty-one females, two males. There was no power calculation or other justification for the sample size. The thirty-three students presented a sufficient sample size needed to answer the research question. The questionnaire was valid and reliable, and this investigation was approved by the local Ethics Committee. This was an associational study designed to allow us to explore what factors influence an individual's level of resiliency. Hypotheses were not tested until after the completion of the data collection. The data was submitted to statistics analysis, and descriptive statistics were used in our analysis of the student's responses.

Findings supported the hypothesis that loneliness because of overt and relational childhood peer victimization was positively associated with resiliency. Implications of these findings for the field of social work and policy development are discussed.

Keywords: Peer Rejection, Resiliency, Loneliness, Bullying.

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, the field of mental health has gathered and organized an impressive amount of knowledge on the contributing factors, and effects, of childhood bullying. This includes analytical data on both the bully and their victim. Therapeutic skills and knowledge have been accumulated, and applied by mental health professionals, to working with clients suffering from the effects of bullying. Resilience, as one major consequence of having been bullied, is not often discussed by practitioners seeking to aid those that have suffered. The value in acknowledging and highlighting the resilience factor, lies in the opportunity for the once-victim to face, perhaps for the first time, their strength and possibility for their pain to be lessened to some degree.

There are those bullying victims that will continue in life too uncomfortable to confront their own memories, affects, and emotions on having encountered this unfortunate childhood experience. Examining their resiliency is offered to overcome their negative self-image or self-blame as to why they were sought out or picked on aggressively. This focus may also enable therapeutic methods, based on the strengths perspective, to be utilized in a way that complements the client's inherent need for positive self-regard. For some victims of bullying, it may be difficult to address their personal difficulties, if they cannot locate and identify some basic goodness in themselves. A negative self-view is common for victims of bullying, including an internal critical view and distrust for the kind of vulnerability that comes along with enlarging and examining what was once a painful and humiliating experience. The result of this approach, fueled by the data presented herein, includes a complimentary interaction to examine their self-perceptions. Without an examination of such painful experiences, the survivor continues to long-suffer from the physical experience, and persistent emotional pain. Such painful memories can be "forgotten" by the survivor, until years later their unprocessed triggers are 'awakened' via emotional and cognitive responses.

While there are numerous studies on human resilience, this paper takes a closer look at the potential factors that may influence one's level of resiliency. Not everyone who has been bullied develops resiliency, and this paper will shed light on why or why not this occurs. A word on resiliency: Science has demonstrated, quite convincingly, that genetics, family interaction, biology, and a combination thereof, play a role in how one survives, develops, and responds to adversity. We can safely state that when examining the resilience factor, it is not in the black or white criteria, but rather, a combination that should be acknowledged.

The research study presented in this paper discusses the factors which measured the influential factors and variables based on previous research. Thus, it is hypothesized that if one is bullied in childhood they will experience loneliness in life, and will be more resilient in adulthood than those who did not have such an experience. Loneliness is a sad or aching experience of isolation, like being cut-off, alone or distanced from others, and is associated

with the feeling of longing for closeness, contact and association with others [1].

Method
Participants
A total of thirty-three graduate students (N = 33) from Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service voluntarily participated in this study.

Measures
Graduate students took a questionnaire comprised of 258 questions, with informed consent, debriefing participants on the study's procedures, confirming anonymity and confidentiality. This is a non-random sample; however, putting no identification on the questionnaire other than the student's birth date controls anonymity. The questionnaire was a series of open and close-ended questions. The first section was comprised of questions to collect the demographics of the participants. The second section was comprised of items that asked about the student's resiliency factors. This was comprised of mutually exclusive questions. The third section measured loneliness experienced in childhood. This section was comprised of 20 close-ended questions measured on a Likert scale (ordinal) ranging from 1-4. The categories were defined as never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), and often (4). These questions asked for the student's experience and perception on factors that may have influenced the reason as to why they were victimized by their peers in childhood. Other sections addressed different research topics not discussed in this paper.

Results
Students received an average loneliness score of 38. 1 with a minimum score of 24 and a maximum score of 70.

Relationship between Loneliness score and Demographic Variables: Those with many luxuries had the LOWEST average loneliness score. There was no significant relationship between Loneliness and Religion, Race or Age.

Relationship between Loneliness Score and Resiliency Variables: There is a negative relationship between the Loneliness Score and the Self Efficacy score (r= - 270, p= -1). Therefore, the lonelier one was in childhood, the lower their Self-Efficacy score in adulthood. There was no significant relationship found between Loneliness and Problem Solving score, Empathy score, and Purpose in Life. One aspect of having experienced loneliness might have been the bullying experienced in childhood. The following summarizes the data on bullying.

Reason Bullied: Appearance
70% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to their appearance. 80% of those bullied because of their appearance attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 56% attributed it to their being spiritual and 83% attributed it to their being religious. 90% of those who were bullied because of their appearance were of minority status in comparison to 61 % who were of majority status. 100% of those who were bullied because of their appearance had their basic needs met, compared to 81% who had some luxuries and 42% with many luxuries. To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected no significance by reason of religion. However, the second and third t-tests indicated a strong relationship between having been bullied because of

appearance and one's race (P =. 06), and having been bullied because of appearance and one's finances (P =. 02). The fourth t-test detected no significance by reason of age.

Resiliency Variables
The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied because of their appearance, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 29.9, Self-Efficacy: 43.7, Empathy: 62.3, and Purpose in Life: 48.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed NOT having been bullied because of their appearance, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 27.4, Self-Efficacy: 43.3, Empathy: 60.6, and Purpose in Life: 44.4.

To determine the significance of these scores, four t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected a significant relationship between having been bullied because of Appearance and Problem Solving (P =.06). However, the second and third t-tests indicated no relationship between having been bullied because of Appearance, Self- Efficacy and Empathy. The fourth t-test detected a significant relationship between having been bullied because of Appearance and Purpose in Life (P =. 04).

Reason Bullied: Competence
21% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to their competence level, 0% of those bullied because of their competence level, attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 25% attributed it to their being spiritual, and 25% attributed it to their being religious. 30% of those who were bullied because of their competence level were of minority status, in comparison to 17% who were of majority status. 20% of those who were bullied because of their competence level had their basic needs met, compared to 25% who had some luxuries, and 17% who had many luxuries. To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed, all of which detected no significance in having been bullied because of competence by reason of religion, race, finances and age.

Resiliency Variables
The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied because of their competence, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 31.8, Self-Efficacy: 43.4, Empathy: 65.1, and Purpose in Life: 48.4.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed NOT having been bullied because of their competence, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 28.4, Self-Efficacy: 43.6, Empathy: 60.8, and Purpose in Life: 46.5.

To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected a significant relationship between having been bullied because of Competence and Problem Solving (P =. 03).

The second t-test indicated that there is no relationship between having been bullied by reason of Competence and Self Efficacy score.

The third t-test detected a relationship between having been bullied by reason of Competence and Empathy Score (P = .08).

The fourth t-test detected no relationship between having been bullied because of Competence and Purpose in Life.

Reason Bullied: Shyness

30% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to their shyness, 40% of those bullied because of their shyness attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 13% attributed it to being spiritual, and 50% attributed it to being religious. 30% of those who were bullied because of their shyness were of minority status, and (the same), 30% were of majority status. 40% of those who were bullied because of their shyness had their basic needs met, compared to 31% who had some luxuries and 25% who had many luxuries. To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected significance in having been bullied because of shyness connected to religiosity (P =. 04). However, the second, third and fourth t-tests indicated that there is no relationship between having been bullied because of shyness connected to race, finances, and age.

Resiliency Variables

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied because of their shyness, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 28.6, Self-Efficacy: 42.5, Empathy: 61.8, and Purpose in Life: 45.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed not having been bullied because of their shyness, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 29.3, Self-Efficacy: 44.0, Empathy: 61.7, and Purpose in Life: 47.8.

To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The first three t-tests detected no significant relationship between having been bullied because of Shyness and Problem Solving, Self-Efficacy, and Empathy scores. However, the fourth t-test detected a significant relationship between having been bullied because of Shyness and Purpose in Life (P = .09).

Reason Bullied: Family

18% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to their family. 0% of those bullied because of their family attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 25% attributed it to being spiritual, and 17% attributed it to being religious. 40% of those who were bullied because of their family were of minority status, in comparison to 9% who were of majority status. 60% of those who were bullied because of their family, had their basic needs met, compared to 19% who had some luxuries, and 0% who had many luxuries. To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected no significance between having been bullied because of family by reason of religion. However, the second and third t-tests indicated a strong relationship between having been bullied because of family and one's race (P =. 02), and having been bullied because of family and one's finances (P = .01). The fourth t-test detected no significance because of age.

Resiliency Variables

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied because of their family, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 30.5 Self-Efficacy: 42.5 Empathy: 62.1 Purpose in Life: 47.5.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed not having been bullied because of their family, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 28.8 Self-Efficacy: 43.8 Empathy: 61.7 Purpose in Life: 46.8

Reason Bullied: Gender

15% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to their gender. 20% of those bullied because of their gender attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 13% attributed it to being spiritual, and 17% attributed it to being religious. 10% of those who were bullied because of their gender were of minority status, in comparison to 17% who were of majority status. 40% of those who were bullied because of their gender had their basic needs met, compared to 13% who had some luxuries, and 8% who had many luxuries. To determine the significance, 4 t-tests were performed, all of which detected no significance in having been bullied because of gender by reason of religion, race, finances and age.

Resiliency Variables:

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied because of their gender, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 27.8, Self-Efficacy: 44.2, Empathy: 58.8, and Purpose in Life: 46.2.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants who attributed not having been bullied because of their gender are as follows:

Problem Solving: 29.3, Self-Efficacy: 43.5, Empathy: 62.3, and Purpose in Life: 47.1.

To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The four t-tests detected no relationship between having been bullied because of Gender and Problem Solving, Self-Efficacy, Empathy, and Purpose in Life scores.

Reason Bullied: Fearful

12% of the sample attributed the cause of why they were bullied to having been fearful. 0% of those bullied because they were fearful, attributed it to being an atheist/agnostic, 6% attributed it to being spiritual and 25% attributed it to being religious. 20% of those who were bullied, because they were fearful, were of minority status in comparison to 9% who were of majority status. 20% of those who were bullied, because they were fearful, had their basic needs met compared to 19% who had some luxuries and 0% who had many luxuries.

To determine the significance, 4 t-tests were performed. The first t-test detected significance in having been bullied because of fearfulness by reason of religion (P =. 10). However, the second,

third, and fourth t-tests indicated that there is no relationship between having been bullied because of fearfulness by reason of race, finances and age.

Resiliency Variables
The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed having been bullied, because they were fearful, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 28, Self-Efficacy: 44, Empathy: 64.2, and Purpose in Life: 46.2.

The mean scores for resiliency factors of the participants, who attributed not having been bullied because of their fearfulness, are as follows:

Problem Solving: 29.3, Self-Efficacy: 43.5, Empathy: 61.4, and Purpose in Life: 47.

To determine the significance, four t-tests were performed. The four t-tests detected no relationship between having been bullied because of Fearfulness and Problem Solving, Self-Efficacy, and Empathy and Purpose in Life scores.

There is a significant relationship between the Total Numbers of Reasons Bullied and Childhood Finances. Those with only their basic needs met were MORE likely to bullied for multiples reasons.

Findings
1. There is no relationship between the Total Number of Reasons Bullied and Religiosity.
2. There is no relationship between Loneliness and Religiosity.
3. There is no significant relationship between Loneliness and Race.

Significant Correlation Findings
There is a strong positive correlation between the Total Number of Reasons Bullied and the Loneliness Score (r = .451). Therefore, the more reasons one was bullied for in childhood, the higher their Loneliness score. There is a negative relationship between the Loneliness Score and the Self Efficacy score (r = -.270). Therefore, the lonelier one was in childhood, the lower their Self-Efficacy score in adulthood. There is a positive relationship between the Total Number of Reasons one was bullied for in childhood, and their Problem Solving score (r = .281). Therefore, those that were bullied for more reasons in childhood rate themselves as having more problem-solving skills.

Discussion
The current study examined eight specific hypotheses to explore the broad hypothesis that: 1) Loneliness is related to demographics and resiliency variables, 2) Reasons for, and amount of bullying, are related to Demographics and Resiliency, and 3) There is a relationship between the Loneliness Score to the Average Number of Reasons Bullied.

First Set of Four Hypothesis
Hypothesis One Examined Loneliness where it was predicted that participants would be lonely because of Religiosity. The current study found no significant relationship between experiencing loneliness due to Religiosity. Hypothesis Two examined loneliness where it was predicted that participants would be lonely by reason

of Race. The current study found no significant relationship between experiencing loneliness by reason of Race. Hypothesis Three examined loneliness where it was predicted that participants would be lonely due to Finances. The current study confirmed this hypothesis (ANOVA P = .06). Hypothesis Four examined loneliness where it was predicted that participants would be lonely due to Age. The current study found no significant relationship between experiencing Loneliness due to Age.

Second Set of Four Hypothesis
The second set of hypotheses examined the relationship between experiencing Loneliness and Resiliency. Hypothesis Five predicted that there would be a significant relationship between the Loneliness score and the Problem-Solving score. This hypothesis was not supported as the study found an insignificant correlation between these two variables (r = .110). Hypothesis Six predicted that there would be a significant relationship between the Loneliness score and the Self-Efficacy score. This hypothesis was supported as the study found a significant correlation between these two variables (r = -.270). Hypothesis Seven predicted that there would be a significant relationship between the Loneliness score and the Empathy score. This hypothesis was not supported as the study found an insignificant correlation between these two variables (r= -.016). Hypothesis Eight predicted that there would be a significant relationship between the Loneliness score and the Purpose in Life score. This hypothesis was not supported as the study found an insignificant correlation between these two variables (r= .116).

The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient (r) for Loneliness score and Resiliency indicates a strong negative correlation between the amount of loneliness one experiences and Self-Efficacy (r = -.270), which is only one out of the four resiliency variables. Therefore, the lonelier one is, the less self-efficacious (less confident) they feel, and vice versa. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient for Total Reasons Bullied and Loneliness score, r =. 451, indicates that the amount of childhood bullying one experiences can contribute to a prediction of experiencing loneliness in life. Therefore, the more one is bullied, the more loneliness they will experience. Supported by this information, I can accept my original hypotheses which supports my belief that there is a likelihood that childhood peer-victimization influences the level of loneliness one will experience. Furthermore, such people are more resilient, to a degree, than those who did not have this experience.

Strengths and Limitations
There were several limitations to this study. The sample size was very small and the students who participated were chosen by the professor and not at random. In addition, the class consisted of mostly females, thus skewing gender in the study, which may have an effect on the outcome. In addition, while the questionnaire was anonymous and confidential, it is possible that students may have felt unwilling to put themselves in the vulnerable position of answering questions and attributing reasons to why they were bullied and the loneliness they experience.

Significance of findings for Social Work Practice and Policy Development
I think it is important to take from our study that many influential factors contribute to an individual's levels of resiliency. It is critical

to explore the prevalence of childhood peer victimization as one of the reasons why people experience significant loneliness in their life. Our study helped to show what factors and how strongly they effect student's level of loneliness and resiliency. Furthermore, it is my belief that people who were bullied in childhood, as a group, are subject to much more hardship than their counterparts, because experiencing loneliness goes against our human nature as social creatures. In addition, there is growing research that links experiences of childhood peer victimization to problematic patterns of emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment among youth [2].

In the paper written and discussed by Dr. Elaine Norman the specific skills necessary for one to develop resiliency are social problem -solving skills, self-efficacy skills, empathy skills, and a purpose in life [3]. The purpose of the research conducted was to examine if students who experience excessive loneliness can develop the skills needed for adulthood resiliency. One of the significant findings from this research is that minorities report being bullied for appearance, and somewhat more bullied for their families, than those of the majority. On the same level of significance, the results indicate that those who only had their basic needs met, were more likely to be bullied for their appearance and their families.

The social work profession continually deals with those in the population that are at-risk for hurting themselves, and others in society. School shootings are a primary, tragic example of this.

The research conducted in this study seems to point in the direction that children who are bullied, grow up to be people who feel very lonely and may struggle with coping with life. The result of this research project show a significant correlation between loneliness, and the skills involved in resiliency - a very significant implication for social work practice. Those who scored high on loneliness did not show a significant difference between those who did not score high on levels of problem - solving skills, empathy, and purpose in life.

They did, however, show a negative correlation between the loneliness score and the self-efficacy score. It can safely be concluded that the lonelier one is, the less self-efficacy they feel. Bandura defines self-efficacy as: "…concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" [4]. Self-efficacy beliefs determine which activities one will engage with, and which activities should be avoided. It further provides one with the belief that one does have the inner resources to learn new skills, handle difficulties that arise, and face uncertainty. We can empathize and empower those children who are lonely because they are, or were bullied, and may suffer with not feeling in control over their own lives. This is not just because this is a painful experience - but also because if brought into adulthood, other problems such as criminal behavior, can play a part of their personal, and societies' difficulties.

Recommendations for Future Research
I would recommend carrying out this study with a large, more diversified sample size. Included in the diversified sample size, I would be interested in knowing if there is a relationship between bullying and resilience based on gender. In the study conducted by Marta Angélica Iossi Silva et al the researchers examined bullying from a gender standpoint, and while not including resilience in

their exploration, they did discover an equal, but different level of involvement from both genders, in terms of perpetrating bullying on others, and experiencing it themselves [5].

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