Moderating effects of perceived classroom peer context on the relationship between shyness, victimization, and internalizing problems.

Gintautas Katulis and Goda Kaniušonytė
Mykolas Romeris University

What We Learned

Shyness predicts psychological peer victimization and internalizing symptoms
Student perception of classroom peer climate moderates the relationship between shyness and peer victimization.

Background

Being a shy pupil has been associated with more social risks (Rubin et al., 2009) and higher levels of internalizing problems (Zhang et al., 2021). Relationship between shyness and internalizing problems may be mediated through victimization (Liu et al., 2019) and victimization has been found to be associated with pupil internalizing problems (Zwierzynska et al., 2013). Nevertheless, supportive relationships in shy individuals' life have been shown to moderate the effects of shyness on victimization and internalizing problems (Liu et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). A friendly classroom climate may have a buffering effect for anxious individuals to experience less victimization (Gazelle, 2006) and increase social self-efficacy (Wachs, 2018). This suggests that classroom peer context may moderate the effects of shyness on victimization and hence, internalizing problems.
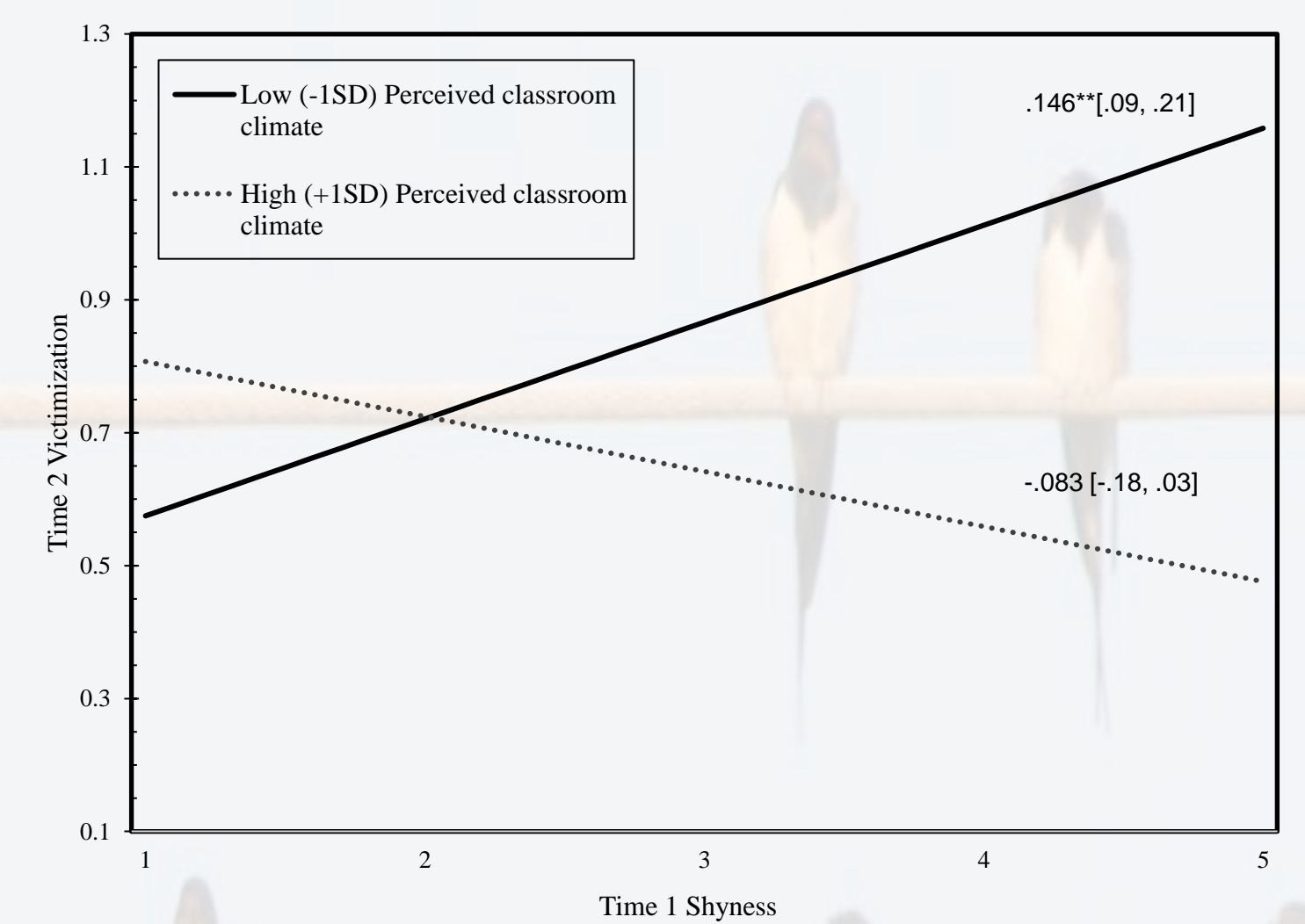
Results
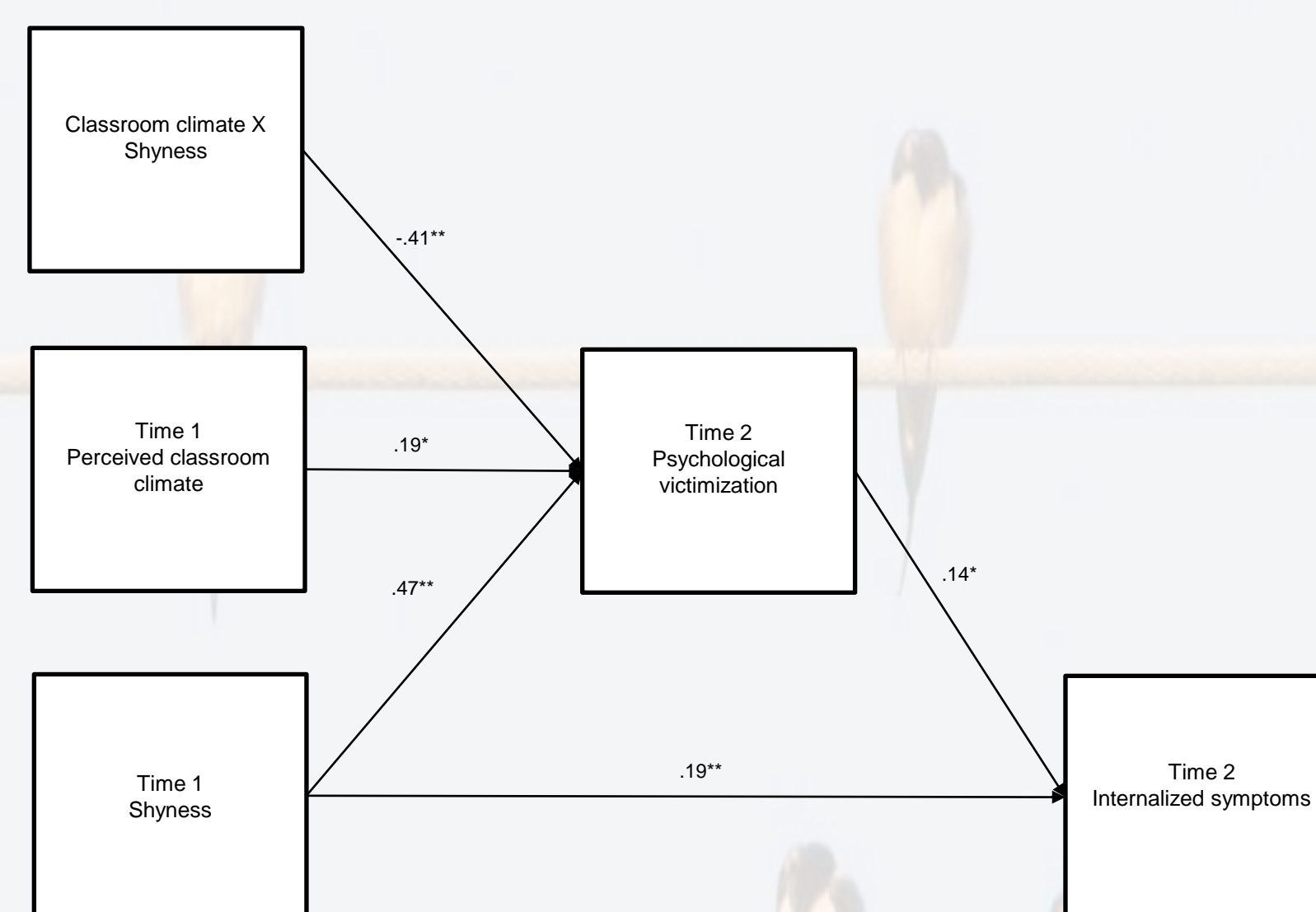
Figure 1. Standardized results. Only significant path estimates are presented.

$\chi 2$ (19) = 76.118, CFI = .966, RMSEA = .075 [.058 .093]; SRMR = 0.039;

Indirect path:
Shyness -> Psychological victimization -> Internalizing symptoms
β=.065; 95% CI [.01 .16]; p=.08;

Figure 2. Shyness at time 1 predicts victimization at Time 2 for pupils perceiving low but not high classroom peer climate. Standardized beta weights reported.
Note: **p < .001; CI 95%;

Aim

This study sought to reveal potential moderation of the relationship between shyness and victimization by perceived classroom climate. Additionally, we sought to confirm that victimization partially mediates the relationship between shyness and internalizing symptoms.

Method

Participants completed two assessments during the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022. Longitudinal data from these two time points 4 months apart were used.
Measures used:
For psychological Peer victimization 3 items from social experience questionnaire (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) were used.
For internalizing symptoms 5 items from the The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) were used.
For perceived peer climate we used comfort scale (3 items) from peer context questionnaire (Boor-Klip et al., 2016).
For shyness 3 items from a shyness scale were used (Barstead et. al., 2018).
Internal reliability for all scales was acceptable (α = .78 - .84).

Sample

Data were drawn from the longitudinal research project, "Navigating through secondary school: the role of friends and parents (NAVIGATE)".
The sample consisted of 540 participants (51.3% boys) from 33 classes (5th-7th grade). The age of participants ranged from 10 to 14 (M=11.81, SD=0.86).

Conclusions

Findings suggest that subjective perception of the classroom environment moderates the relationship between shyness and victimization. This suggests that classroom peer climate may buffer the effects of shyness on victimization and, potentially, internalizing symptoms, however, these results only approached significance and cannot be fully confirmed.

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Acknowledgments

Contact

Gintautas.katulis@mruni.eu

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