

THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED CLASSROOM PEER CONTEXT AND VICTIMIZATION ON INTERNALIZED AND EXTERNALIZED PROBLEMS.

Gintautas Katulis and Dainora Šakinytė
Mykolas Romeris University



What We Learned

Student perceptions of classroom peer context (cohesion, conflict and comfort) and victimization predict their internalized and externalized problems.

Background

The classroom environment is important to children's mental health and well-being (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). Relationships and attachments developed in the classroom are associated with internalizing problems (Gorrese, 2016). Additionally, internalizing problems are associated with victimization in the classroom (Reijntjes et al., 2010). This suggests that internalizing problems can be the result and the relative cause of victimization, which may have long-term mental health effects (Gibb et al., 2011). However, the classroom environment (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2019) and individual perceptions of it (Fite et al., 2019) play a role as well. Friendship expectations predict friendship-related behavior (MacEvoy et al., 2016), which suggests that children who perceive the classroom a certain way, act accordingly. However, it remains unclear if children's perception of their peer context is important to internalizing problems.

Results

Table 1. Regression analysis results predicting internalized problems.

Independent variables	B	t	p	R ²
Perceived classroom comfort	-.097*	-2.424	.016	.284
Perceived classroom conflict	.108*	3.268	.001	
Perceived classroom cohesion	-.056	-1.153	.249	
Psychological victimization	.234**	5.240	.000	
Physical victimization	.074	1.497	.135	
Gender	.346**	6.633	.000	

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $F(6, 685) = 45.238$; $p < 0.000$

Table 2. Regression analysis results predicting externalized problems.

Independent variables	B	t	p	R ²
Perceived classroom comfort	-.042	-1.282	.200	.323
Perceived classroom conflict	.076*	2.863	.004	
Perceived classroom cohesion	-.088*	-2.258	.024	
Psychological victimization	.192**	5.324	.000	
Physical victimization	.166**	4.180	.000	
Gender	-.101*	-2.383	.017	

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $F(6, 685) = 54.553$; $p < 0.000$

Results indicate that perceptions of classroom comfort ($B = -.097$; $p = 0.016$), conflict ($B = .108$; $p = 0.001$), and psychological victimization ($B = .234$; $p = 0.000$), predict internalized problems. Perceptions of classroom conflict ($B = .076$; $p = 0.004$), cohesion ($B = -.088$; $p = 0.024$), physical ($B = .166$; $p = 0.000$) and psychological ($B = .192$; $p = 0.000$) victimization predict externalized problems. Additionally, girls experience more internalized problems ($B = .346$; $p = 0.000$) and boys experience more externalized problems ($B = -.101$; $p = 0.017$).

Aim

This study sought to reveal potential relationships between perceived classroom peer context, victimization and internalizing problems.

Conclusions

Findings suggest that subjective perception of the classroom environment and victimization is associated with internalized and externalized problems. This highlights the importance of the relationship between the individual and the environment.

Sample

Data were drawn from the longitudinal research project, "Navigating through secondary school: the role of friends and parents (NAVIGATE)".

The sample consisted of 692 participants (51.7% boys) from 45 classes (4th-7th grade). The age of participants ranged from 9 to 14 ($M = 11.65$, $SD = 1.18$).

Method

Participants completed the assessments during the fall of the 2021-2022 academic year. Cross-sectional data were used for this linear regression analysis.

Measures used:

For Peer victimization 3 items from social experience questionnaire (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996); For internalized and externalized problems 9 items from the The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997).

For perceived peer context we used cohesion, conflict and comfort scales (3 items each) from peer context questionnaire (Boor-Klip et al., 2016).

Internal reliability for all scales was acceptable ($\alpha = .72 - .84$).

References

- Aldridge, J. M., & McChesney, K. (2018). The relationships between school climate and adolescent mental health and wellbeing: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 88, 121-145.
- Reijntjes, A., Kamphuis, J. H., Prinzie, P., & Telch, M. J. (2010). Peer victimization and internalizing problems in children: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Child abuse & neglect*, 34(4), 244-252.
- Gibb, S. J., Horwood, L. J., & Fergusson, D. M. (2011). Bullying victimization/perpetration in childhood and later adjustment: Findings from a 30 year longitudinal study. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*.
- Attar-Schwartz, S., Mishna, F., & Khoury-Kassabri, M. (2019). The role of classmates' social support, peer victimization and gender in externalizing and internalizing behaviors among Canadian youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(9), 2335-2346.
- Fite, P. J., Poquiz, J., Diaz, K. I., Williford, A., & Tampke, E. C. (2019). Links between peer victimization, perceived school safety, and internalizing symptoms in middle childhood. *School psychology review*, 48(4), 309-319.
- MacEvoy, J. P., Papadakis, A. A., Fedigan, S. K., & Ash, S. E. (2016). Friendship expectations and children's friendship-related behavior and adjustment. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* (1982-), 62(1), 74-104.
- Boor-Klip, H. J., Segers, E., Hendrickx, M. M., & Cillessen, A. H. (2016). Development and psychometric properties of the classroom peer context questionnaire. *Social Development*, 25(2), 370-389.
- Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 38(5), 581-586.
- Crick, N. R., & Grotpeter, J. K. (1996). Children's treatment by peers: Victims of relational and overt aggression. *Development and psychopathology*, 8(2), 367-380.
- Gorrese, A. (2016, April). Peer attachment and youth internalizing problems: A meta-analysis. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 177-204). Springer US.

Acknowledgments

This project has received funding from European Regional Development Fund (project No 09.3.3-LMT-K-712-71-0009) under grant agreement with the Research Council of Lithuania (LMTLT).

Contact

Gintautas.katulis@mrui.eu

