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The relationships of adolescent school-related deviant behaviour and victimization with psychological distress: Testing a general model of the mediational role of parents and teachers across groups of gender and age

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Abstract

Deviant behaviour and victimization at school have been consistently related to poor psychological adjustment in adolescents. This research explores the mediating role that parents and teachers have in adolescent psychological distress in 973 Spanish students aged 11–16 years old. Structural equation analyses results showed that adolescent deviant behaviour and victimization were positively related to psychological distress as seen by the total effects. However, while victimization was directly related to psychological distress, the association of deviant behaviour and psychological distress was mediated by adolescent–parent communication and adolescent–teacher relationships. Multigroup analyses showed that relationships among variables were not significantly different for groups of age and gender.

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Introduction

In this study, we analyse the association of adolescent deviant behaviour and victimization with psychological distress, exploring the mediational roles of adolescent relationships with parents and teachers. We conceptualize school-based deviant behaviour as a global concept that reflects behaviour at school that differ from accepted school standards and brings disapproval (see Haralambos & Holborn, 1992), and it comprises both school-based antisocial behaviour (theft, vandalism and damage to school property) and aggression at school (verbal and physical) (see examples in Dishion, Nelson, & Bullock, 2004; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; McCaghy, Capron, & Jamieson, 2002; Miranda & Claes, 2004; Sokol-Katz & Dunham, 1997).

Previous research has documented how elements of deviant behaviour such as antisocial behaviour (Caron & Rutter, 1991; Russo & Beidel, 1994) and aggression (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Ritakallio, Haltiala-Heino, Kivivouri, & Rimpelä, 2005; Stanger, Achenbach, & Verhulst, 1997) are significantly associated with adolescent psychological distress. For victimization, a recent meta-analysis of studies with cross-sectional data between 1978 and 1997 (Hawker & Boulton, 2000) found in the studies analysed a great deal of agreement in that victims of peer aggression suffer a variety of feelings of psychosocial distress (see also Hodges & Perry, 1999, for a review).

Findings from previous empirical research suggest that these associations of deviant behaviour and victimization with psychological distress might be mediated by the adolescent's positive relationships with parents and teachers (Baldry, 2004; Rigby, 2000). Baldry (2004) has suggested that the negative psychological outcomes of deviant behaviour and victimization might be mediated by a positive relationship with one or both parents, and Rigby (2000) has also added that teachers might play a significant role, reducing the risk of developing poor mental health for those students most at risk. If relationships of adolescents with parents and teachers play a mediational role, these relationships should be associated both with deviant behaviour/victimization and with psychological distress. Below we review the empirical evidence documenting these associations (see Fig. 1).

The mediational role of parents and teachers in adolescent psychological distress

Victimization, deviant behaviour and relationships with parents and teachers

Previous research has found that parental support (Demaray, Kilpatrick, & Malecki, 2003; Rigby, 2000) and family relations (Beran & Violato, 2004) are not related to victimization, and that parents of victimized boys are not different from those of boys who are not victims (Pavel, Marta, & Tatiana, 1993). Baldry (2004) reported a non-significant correlation between victimization and a positive relationship with the father in a sample of 661 Italian adolescents 11–15 years old. Similar non-significant correlations were reported by Beran and Violato (2004) between general bullying ('I am bullied at school'), verbal bullying ('children say nasty and unpleasant things to me at school') and parental warmth in a national representative sample of 3434 Canadian students 10–11 years old. Also, students who are victimized by peers at school do not have poorer relationships with teachers as compared to those who are not victimized (Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004) and there is research documenting that the teachers'

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