The association between school exclusion, delinquency and subtypes of cyber- and F2F-victimizations: Identifying and predicting risk profiles and subtypes using latent class analysis

Gia Elise Barboza*

African American Studies and Criminology, Northeastern University, 200F Renaissance Park, 360 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02115, USA

A B S T R A C T

This purpose of this paper is to identify risk profiles of youth who are victimized by on- and offline harassment and to explore the consequences of victimization on school outcomes. Latent class analysis is used to explore the overlap and co-occurrence of different clusters of victims and to examine the relationship between class membership and school exclusion and delinquency. Participants were a random sample of youth between the ages of 12 and 18 selected for inclusion to participate in the 2011 National Crime Victimization Survey: School Supplement. The latent class analysis resulted in four categories of victims: approximately 3.1% of students were highly victimized by both bullying and cyberbullying behaviors; 11.6% of youth were classified as being victims of relational bullying, verbal bullying and cyberbullying; a third class of students were victims of relational bullying, verbal bullying and physical bullying but were not cyberbullied (8%); the fourth and final class, characteristic of the majority of students (77.3%), was comprised of non-victims. The inclusion of covariates to the latent class model indicated that gender, grade and race were significant predictors of at least one of the four victim classes. School delinquency measures were included as distal outcomes to test for both overall and pairwise associations between classes. With one exception, the results were indicative of a significant relationship between school delinquency and the victim subtypes. Implications for these findings are discussed.

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Introduction

The upsurge in school shootings during the past decade has been paralleled by a dramatic increase in research on the criminogenic effects of peer victimization at school (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Garbarino & DeLara, 2004; Rubinlicht, 2011; Hong & Espelage, 2012). The impact that bullying has on future criminal behavior and/or delinquency has made it a particularly fruitful area of investigation. While bullying typically conjures up images of physical intimidation, the reality is that youth are victimized in a variety of ways, any or all of which may result in irreparable psychological and/or physical harm (Cullen, Unnever, Hartman, Turner, & Agnew, 2008). In addition to overt acts of hostility, covert forms of harassment

* Corresponding author.

including spreading rumors or lies and excluding and/or ignoring other students from school activities are commonplace. Moreover, as a result of today's electronic age, the Internet is supplanting traditional forms of schoolyard bullying however victims characteristics differ according to the type of harm being inflicted (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012). The differences in form and function between traditional bullying and cyberbullying begs for consideration of whether this "new" form of harassment (Wade & Beran, 2011) that uses "email, instant messages, cell phones, text messages, photos, videos and social networking websites to humiliate and threaten others" (Grim, 2008, p. 157) is really just a new way to implement the same behavior or rather whether it is indeed a distinct phenomenon.

Despite significant advances in our understanding of bully victimization over the past decade, much remains to be understood. An important area of research is to examine potential overlaps in harassment and bullying across all possible environments to gain understanding of the sum total of youth's experiences with victimization (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). For example, what victim profiles emerge when multiple indicators of both online and offline harassment are analyzed? Also, what is the association between victim profiles and delinquent behavior at school such as skipping class, absenteeism and/or weapon-carrying and physical fighting? The aim of this paper is to document the co-occurrence of online and face-to-face peer harassment and bullying and its effect on several measures of school alienation, avoidance and delinquency. Latent class analysis is used to identify the nature and form of victimization and bullying in early adolescence, explore the overlap and co-occurrence among different clusters of victims, and to examine the relationship between multiple risk factors for school exclusion, delinquency and membership in each 'victim' class.

Prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying

Aggression includes any single act of physical, emotional and/or psychological harm including physical or sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). Common to most definitions of bullying, on the other hand, is that it is repetitive, results in harm and occurs in the context of an imbalance of either psychological or physical power. While fights, one-time attacks, or "harmless" teasing are appropriately considered aggressive behaviors (Berger, 2007), individuals subjected to these same behaviors *repeatedly* are considered bullied in a more general sense. Examples of bullying include being called names, being physically hurt, being threatened, being the subject of rumors, being socially isolated and having one's belongings taken repeatedly (Glew, Rivara, & Feudtner, 2000).

Similar to traditional bullying, cyber bullying is often defined as "willful and repeated harm" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 5) inflicted toward another. In contradistinction to traditional face-to-face bullying, however, cyberbullying utilizes electronic communication to threaten, harass embarrass, or socially exclude (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Williams & Guerra, 2007). While there is no universally accepted definition of cyberbullying (Smith, del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013), the very nature of the Internet as being anonymous, accessible and wide-reaching implies that all the elements of bullying are present in a single online interaction. Cyberbullying involves repetition not only because material such as email, text, or pictures can be viewed by anyone with online access (Campbell, 2005; Slonje & Smith, 2008) but also because the same communication can be repeated a number of times through mass communication. The anonymous nature of the interaction endows the perpetrator with power regardless of his or her personal characteristics. The difficulty associated with removing unwanted or harmful communication as well as its permanency only serves to reinforce the power and repetitiveness of the interaction (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007).

A large body of research documenting the prevalence, magnitude and impact of peer-to-peer victimization challenges commonly held assumptions that school is a place where children are safe. Nansel, Overpeck, and Pilla (2001) at the National Institute of Child Health reported that bullying affects approximately 30% of adolescents in the United States, 13.6% as bullies, 10.6% as victims, and 6.3% as bully-victims. While estimates differ greatly due to different methodologies and conceptualizations of "bullying," most scholars agree that between approximately 15–20% of students are regular victims of bullying behavior while about 10% of children in the US experience "extreme victimization" by bullying (Seals & Young, 2003; Peskin, Tortolero, Markham, Addy, & Baumler, 2007). The most prevalent form of bully victimization is name-calling (13.5%) followed by physical aggression (10.8%), teasing (9.0%), exclusion (7.3%) and threats of harm (6.6%) (Seals & Young, 2003).

Characteristics of bully and cyberbully victims

Initial research on bullying reported that physical bullying declines as youth get older (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988), however later research clarified the existence of a parabolic relationship between physical bullying and age. Bullying is less common among younger and older students, peaking sometime during elementary school (Borg, 1998) around age 7, and declines steadily thereafter through the age of 15 (Glew et al., 2000). Although physical bullying tends to lessen over time, verbal abuse continues to remain high and to be associated with physical abuse as children age (Perry et al., 1988)

Type of bully victimization differs according to gender. Girls are more often the targets and perpetrators of passive, indirect bullying, also known as "relational" bullying, such as being the object of gossip and social isolation. Boys on the other hand are more commonly the targets and perpetrators of aggressive, physical bullying (Glew et al., 2000). More recent studies confirm that boys experience physical bullying to a greater extent than girls, the latter being more likely to report being teased or joked about (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010). Similarly, Dukes, Stein, and Zane (2010) found that adolescent girls reported more relational victimization and adolescent boys reported more physical bullying and victimization, more weapon carrying, and more injury.