

Thoughts & Feelings About Bullying

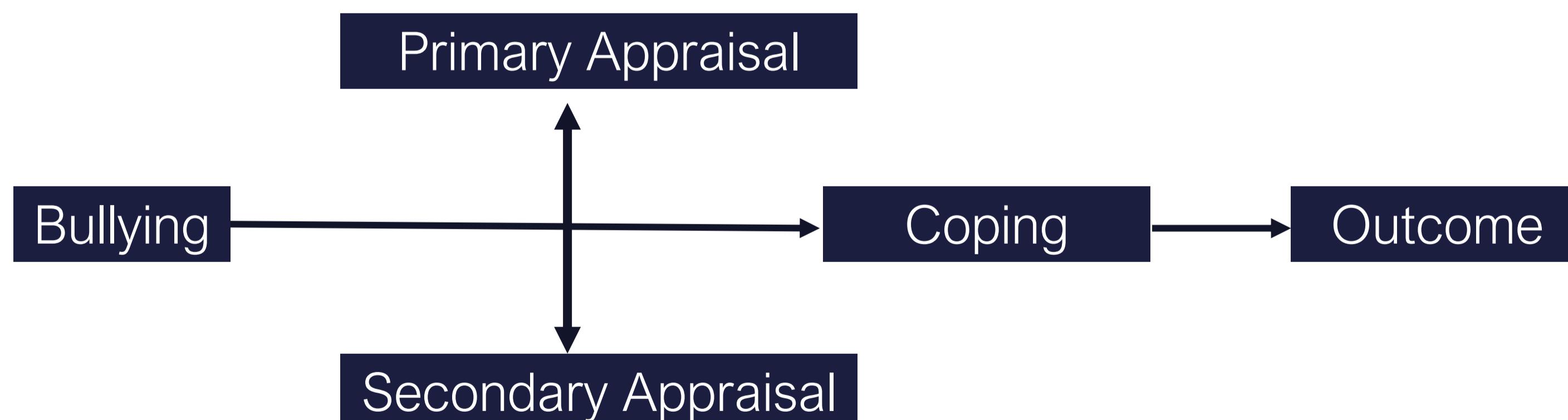
The aim of this programme of research is to better understand the relationship between being bullied and poor mental health. Specifically, this research examines the role young peoples' evaluations of their experiences (their cognitive appraisals) in the development of poor mental health following experiences of bullying.

BACKGROUND

- Bullying is a frequent experience for many young people, with international reviews suggesting that between 20 and 25% of young people are bullied in school.
- Research has highlighted the relationship between experiencing bullying and poor mental health, in the short and long term. With being bullied being related to:
 - Higher symptoms of anxiety and depression (Fisher et al., 2016)
 - More psychosomatic symptoms (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013)
 - Greater risk of suicidal ideation & behaviour (Holt et al., 2015)
 - Greater risk of eating disorders (Lie et al., 2018)
 - More sleep problems (van Geel et al., 2016)



- Bullying is a chronic stressful experience for adolescents. As such, we can use theories of stress to better understand the relationship between being bullied and poor mental health.
- The Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) proposes that following a stressful experience (such as bullying), individuals go through a process of cognitive appraisal, which in turn influences their coping responses.



- Cognitive appraisals are automatic activities that occur following an event. They reflect particular evaluations about that event, including feeling threatened, evaluating the event as a challenge that can be overcome and fearing harm or loss (*primary appraisals*).
- Appraisals can also include an evaluation of whether individuals have the resources available to manage the situation. It can reflect resources of coping options available (Secondary Appraisal). For example, the perception of available social support is often viewed as a protective factor (Cohen & Wills, 1985).
- The way people appraise their experiences of events, such as bullying, determines the outcome(s) of the event, for example, the impact on their mental health.

BULLYING & POOR MENTAL HEALTH

- Our research on the relationship between being bullied and poor mental health has found that experiencing traditional bullying (name calling, physical bullying etc.), but not cyberbullying, is associated with poor mental health (Noret et al., 2020).
- A longitudinal relationship between being bullied and the development of depressive symptoms and between depressive symptoms and being bullied over a three-month period (Noret et al., 2021).
- Being a bystander of bullying is also related to poor mental health (Miller & Noret, 2021).

BULLYING → APPRAISAL → POOR MENTAL HEALTH

- In our longitudinal research, we identified a role for threat and challenge appraisals in the relationship between being bullied and poor mental health over a three-month period (Noret et al., 2021).
- Appraising bullying experiences as threatening was associated with higher depressive symptoms, whereas appraising bullying experiences as a challenge was associated with lower depressive symptoms (Noret et al., 2021).
- Such findings offer avenues for interventions, highlighting the need to work with young people on the way they appraise their experiences.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Our systematic review highlighted that previous research on perceived social support has found mixed results. Some studies report that perceived social support protects young people from the negative impact of bullying. Other studies report that perceived social support, particularly from friends, amplifies the relationship with poor mental health. Finally, some studies report no role for perceived social support (Noret et al., 2018).
- Our research has found no protective role for perceived social support in the relationship between being bullied and poor mental health (Noret et al., 2020, Noret et al., 2021).
- These findings have implications for interventions that are based on help-seeking and reporting.



FIND OUT MORE

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