

The relationship between young peoples' attributions for bullying and poor mental health

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Introduction

- Bullying is significantly associated with poor mental health in adolescence (Agustining Sih et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Moore et al., 2017)
- Research is now focused on the mechanisms that underpin this relationship (e.g. Noret et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2016)
- Attributions for bullying are thoughts with the aim to understand and examine why something has happened (Mishna, 2012; Juoven & Graham, 2000).
- Attributions have been considered in bullying research but in several ways to try and understand why bullying may have happened (e.g. outsider perspectives, hypothetical situations).
- Research has suggested that there may be a link between attributions and the bullying- poor mental health relationship (e.g. Forsberg & Horton, 2022; Ratcliff & Burrow-Sanchez, 2022).

Aims and Hypotheses

Aims

1. To see if general bullying (E.g. not focused on appearance) is related to poor mental health in adolescence.
2. To examine mediating effects of attributions for bullying.

1

H1: There will be a significant relationship between experiencing bullying and poor mental health

2

H2: Girls will be significantly more likely to have experienced bullying and poor mental health than boys in the sample

3

H3: There will be a significant mediating effect of the several bullying attributions

4

H4: Appearance will be more likely than other attributions to be the perceived reason for being bullied with girls more likely to report this.

Method

- 3517 adolescents (1783 boys and 1715 girls)
- Aged between 11 and 13 years old ($M = 2.38$, $SD = .71$)
- Cross sectional three-year questionnaire study from the 'stand up to us' project (Noret et al., 2020)
- Olweus/ Bully/Victim questionnaire (Solberg & Olweus, 2003)
 - 12 items (7 related to bullying and 5 related to cyberbullying)
 - Reliability of both sets of questions is good (Bullying $\alpha = .84$, Cyberbullying $\alpha = .85$)
- Short 12 item version of the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988)
 - Good internal reliability ($\alpha = .91$)
- Attribution questions were created in collaboration the local authority
 - 19 items, e.g. 'because of my appearance (clothes/dress)', 'because of my possessions'.



Analysis



- Descriptive statistics
- Several attribution groupings based on previous research (e.g. Ratcliff & Burrow-Sanchez, 2022)

Don't know, Physical appearance, cultural reasons, sexual identity, status, social factors, ability and disability

- Multiple mediation analysis (model 4C) with eight attributions added as mediators

Results

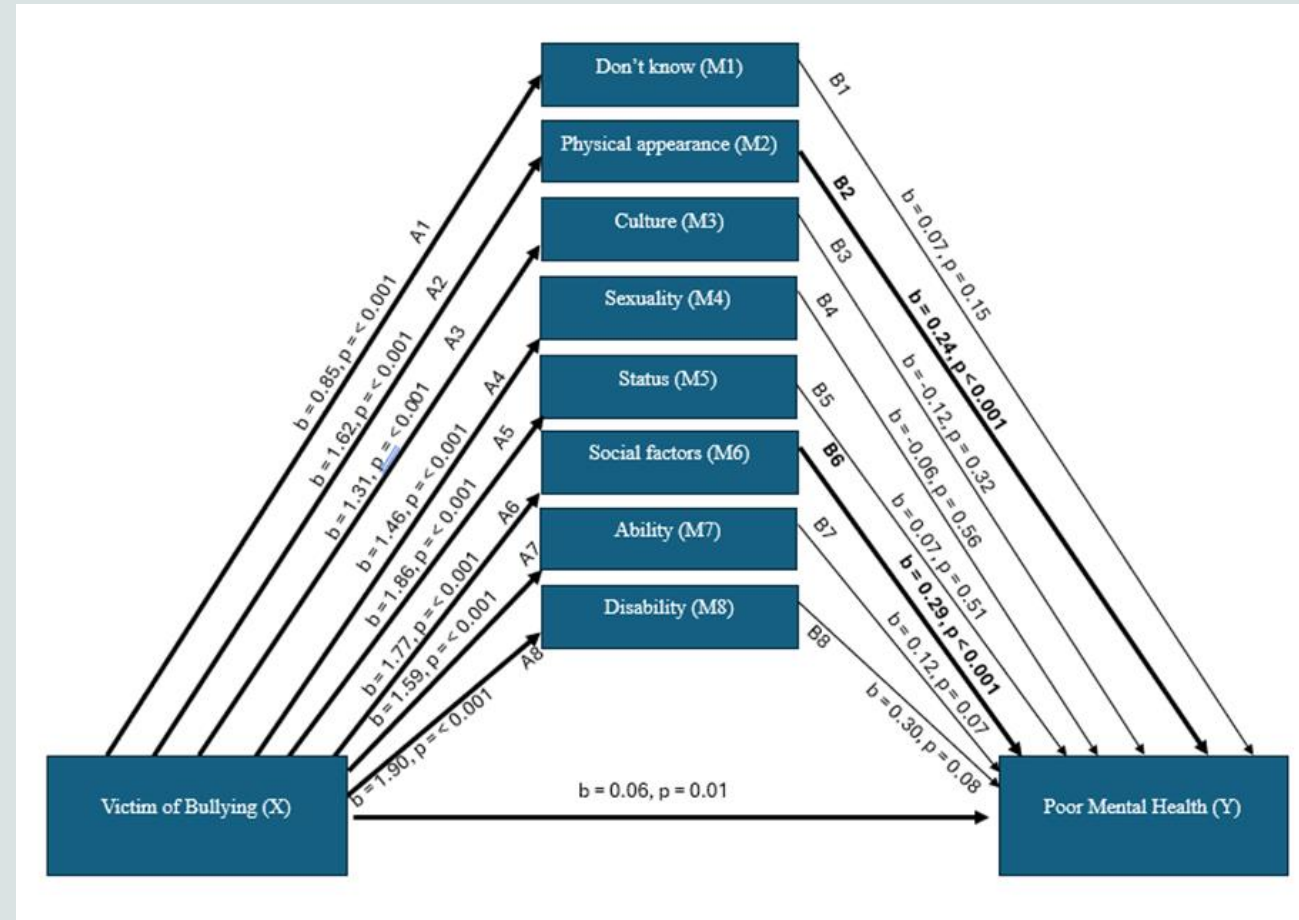
| | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------|------|-------|--------------------|
| Bullied (Whole sample) | 3517 | 14.37 | 8.66 |
| Bullied (Girls) | 1715 | 14.44 | 8.50 |
| Bullied (Boys) | 1785 | 14.30 | 8.75 |
| Bullied (No gender) | 17 | 15.53 | 14.72 |
| Mental Health | 3517 | 18.46 | 8.52 |
| Mental health (Girls) | 1715 | 19.91 | 8.92 |
| Mental Health (Boys) | 1785 | 17.13 | 7.86 |
| Mental Health (No gender) | 17 | 12.41 | 9.84 |

Results

| Attributions | Total N (%) | Total Female (%) | Total Male (%) | Total no gender (%) |
|---------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Don't Know | 348 (9.9%) | 184 (10.7%) | 163 (9.1%) | 1 (5.9%) |
| Physical appearance | 406 (11.5%) | 254 (14.8%) | 149 (8.3%) | 3 (17.6%) |
| Culture | 80 (2.3%) | 42 (2.4%) | 37 (2.1%) | 1 (5.9%) |
| Sexuality | 108 (3.1%) | 37 (2.2%) | 70 (3.9%) | 1 (5.9%) |
| Status | 110 (3.1%) | 58 (3.4%) | 51 (2.9%) | 1 (5.9%) |
| Social factors | 274 (7.8%) | 168 (9.8%) | 104 (5.8%) | 2 (11.8%) |
| Ability | 277 (7.9%) | 139 (8.1%) | 135 (7.6%) | 3 (17.6%) |
| Disability | 46 (1.3%) | 16 (0.9%) | 29 (1.6%) | 1 (5.9%) |

Results

- Significant relationship between being a victim of bullying and poor mental health ($b = 0.06$, $p = 0.01$)
- The effect of being bullied had a significant effect on all attributions
- Significant mediating effect for the attributions of appearance ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and social factors ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$).



Discussion

- Girls had higher mean scores on bullying and mental health measures (refs)
- Differences in mean scores for attributions
- A significant relationship was found between experiencing bullying as a victim and poor mental health supporting previous research (e.g. Agustiniingsih et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Moore et al., 2017)
- There was a significant mediating effect for the attributions of physical appearance and social factors (e.g. Juvonen & Graham, 2001)
- Appearance was the most reported reason for being bullied (REFS)

Next steps/what is needed going forward



- What other mechanisms work in the relationship between bullying and poor mental health?
- Does appraisal of bullying mediate the relationship between bullying and poor mental health when attributions are also included.
- Longitudinal research.
- Does the relationship between bullying, mental health and attributions change when focused on specific types of bullying and mental health outcomes?



Summary

- In adolescence, being a victim of bullying is significantly associated with all attributes for bullying.
- There are gender differences for all variables.
- Only attributions of appearance and social factors significantly mediate the relationship between being a victim of bullying and poor mental health.
- Being bullied is significantly associated with poor mental health.

Thank you!

- Questions?

