

Publication

A Longitudinal Study of the Bidirectional Relations Between Anxiety Symptoms and Peer Victimization in Urban Adolescents

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The current study examined bidirectional relations between anxious symptoms and two forms of peer victimization (i.e., overt and relational) within an underrepresented sample of urban adolescents during key transition periods (i.e., elementary to middle school; middle school to high school) and the following 2 years. A predominantly African American sample (91%) of 358 adolescents (56% female, mean age = 12.10 years) living in low-income urban areas were assessed annually across 4 years. Using self-report measures, adolescents reported on their past year experiences of anxiety and peer victimization. Longitudinal path analyses tested progressively complex models for each type of victimization. Anxious symptoms predicted both overt and relational victimization at the time of transition (Wave 1 to Wave 2) and the following year (Wave 2 to Wave 3). Furthermore, whereas previous levels of victimization and future anxious symptoms were positively correlated over time, only relational victimization at Wave 1 predicted anxious symptoms at Wave 2. Prior levels of each construct were the strongest predictor of future outcomes (e.g., anxious symptoms at Wave 1 predicting anxious symptoms at Wave 2). Overall, there was little support for bidirectional relations between anxiety symptoms and peer victimization. Intervention and prevention programs seeking to reduce peer victimization or anxiety should start by targeting the symptom/behavior of interest. Interventions that target anxious thoughts and feelings during these key transition times in adolescence should be assessed as areas of priority.

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