



Healthy context paradox: Peer acceptance and peer rejection of victimized early adolescents in different classrooms

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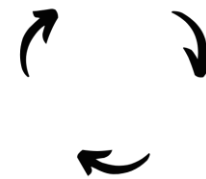
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Peer status of victimized students

Vicious cycle of maladjustment

Victimization associates with being *less liked* and *more disliked (rejected)*, both concurrently and over time. Lowered peer status precedes and follows victimization (e.g., Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Lessard & Juvonen, 2022; Pouwels et al., 2016; Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005; Serdiouk et al.; 2015).

Why victimization decreases peer status

Peer status of victimized students decreases, because

- bullying communicates that the victim is *devalued and non-accepted* (Leary et al., 2003),
- deserves to be treated badly (Buhs et al., 2006),
- and evokes heightened *concerns* about becoming victimized oneself (Boulton, 2013), peer pressure to avoid the victim, and fear of social contamination (Thornberg, 2015).

Healthy context paradox

The paradox

Victimized students were repeatedly found to experience higher levels of *social and emotional maladjustment* in classrooms with lower numbers of victimized students (for reviews see Salmivalli et al., 2021; ; Yun & Juvonen; 2020).

The main suggested mechanisms are self-blaming causal attributions and limited ***opportunities for friendships*** (Garandean & Salmivalli, 2019). Supported by documenting mediating role of received friendships nominations and decreased social self-concept in depressive symptoms of victims (Pan et al., 2021).

Decomposing opportunities for friendships

Given that conceptually friendships are allowed be a relation of *liking* and limited by a relation of *disliking* (Cillessen and Marks, 2011), a detailed investigation of the moderating role of classroom victimization for both the links between victimization and peer acceptance and victimization and peer rejection could inform future considerations on the healthy context paradox.

Hidden heterogeneity of liking and disliking victimized students

Students form heterogeneous subgroups that differ in their affective ties toward the victimized students. Despite potential social costs, not all students worsen their affective ties toward victimized students.

- *Bullies* dislike and do not like the students that they target (Veenstra et al., 2007).
- On the other hand, *defenders* have positive relations to victimized peers in terms of high liking and low disliking (Oldenburg et al., 2018; Rambran et al., 2022).
- As well, *victimized students* tend to befriend with each other over time (Lodder et al., 2016; Shin, 2022).

Self- and peer-reported victimization

Studies on the healthy context paradox focus on peer-reported victimization. However, both peer-and self-reports are valid and complementary sources of information on victimization (Hunter et al., 2021).

- Peer reports assess victimization *visible to the larger peer group*.
- Self reports may capture also *more subtle or covert forms* of victimization.

Hypotheses

Peer status and victimization

Peer- and self-rated victimization will be

- *negatively associated with peer acceptance,*
- *positively with peer rejection,*
- *and both the effects will be stronger in classrooms with low percentage of victims.*

Peer relations and physical victimization

Perceiving a classmate as a victim of physical bullying leads to

- *a lower tendency to like him/her*
- *a higher tendency to reject him/her*

Selection effects: Victims of physical bullying tend to *start liking each other over time.*

Participants

Early adolescents ($N = 751$) of 7th graders retrieved from 39 classrooms of 20 randomly selected elementary schools in Prague.

Gender

50.6% female

Age

The average age of the participants was 12.9 years ($SD = 5$ months; range: 11-15) at the beginning of the study.

Assessment

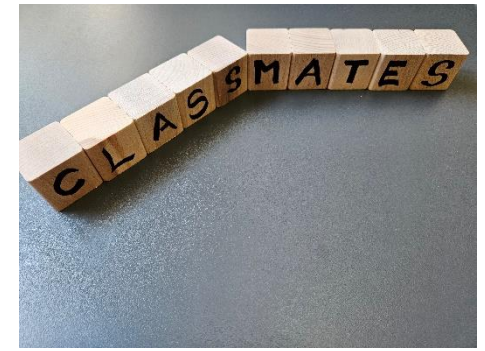
Data were collected by trained administrators using paper-pencil procedure in classrooms *at two time points* (with a 6-month interval)

Participation rate

77% at Time 1 and 73% at Time 2



Instruments: Peer status/peer relations



Liking and disliking (ties between students)

Students nominated their *best liked* and *least liked* classmates in a peer nomination procedure (Kollerová a Smolík., 2016) with unlimited nominations scored 0 or 1 for absence or existence of a tie.

"*Who do you like best?*"

"*Who do you like least?*"

Peer acceptance and peer rejection (individual characteristics)

Following the established measurement of peer acceptance and peer rejection as peer-reported individual characteristics (Cillessen and Marks, 2011), an individual *average of received relational nominations* for liking and disliking were used to compute peer acceptance and peer rejection scores.

Instruments: Victimization



Perceptions of victimization (ties between students)

Ratings (1 - never, 2 - sometimes, and 3 - often) of all students in the classroom on 3 items (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010):

“Some classmates attack him/her hard or hit or push him/her.” (physical victimization)

“Some classmates give him/her nasty nicknames or offend him/her.” (verbal victimization)

“Some classmates spread nasty rumors about him/her.” (relational victimization)

Peer- and self-rated victimization (individual characteristic)

Peer-rated victimization: An individual *average of received reputational ratings* on the 3 items above.

Self-rated victimization: An *average of self-ratings* on the 3 items.

Classroom victimization rate (classroom characteristic)

Classroom victimization rate referred to the *percentage of victims in a classroom*. To identify victims, we used a cut-off point of 1 *SD* above the sample victimization mean.

Main analyses: MLM



Separate linear multilevel models predicting peer acceptance and peer rejection based on

- victimization,
- classroom victimization rate (percentage of victims in the classroom),
- and their cross-level interaction.

Random effects were specified as *students nested in classrooms* and the fixed effects of main interest were controlled by effects of:

- time (two measurement waves),
- age
- gender

MLM for peer acceptance and peer rejection (self-rated victimization)

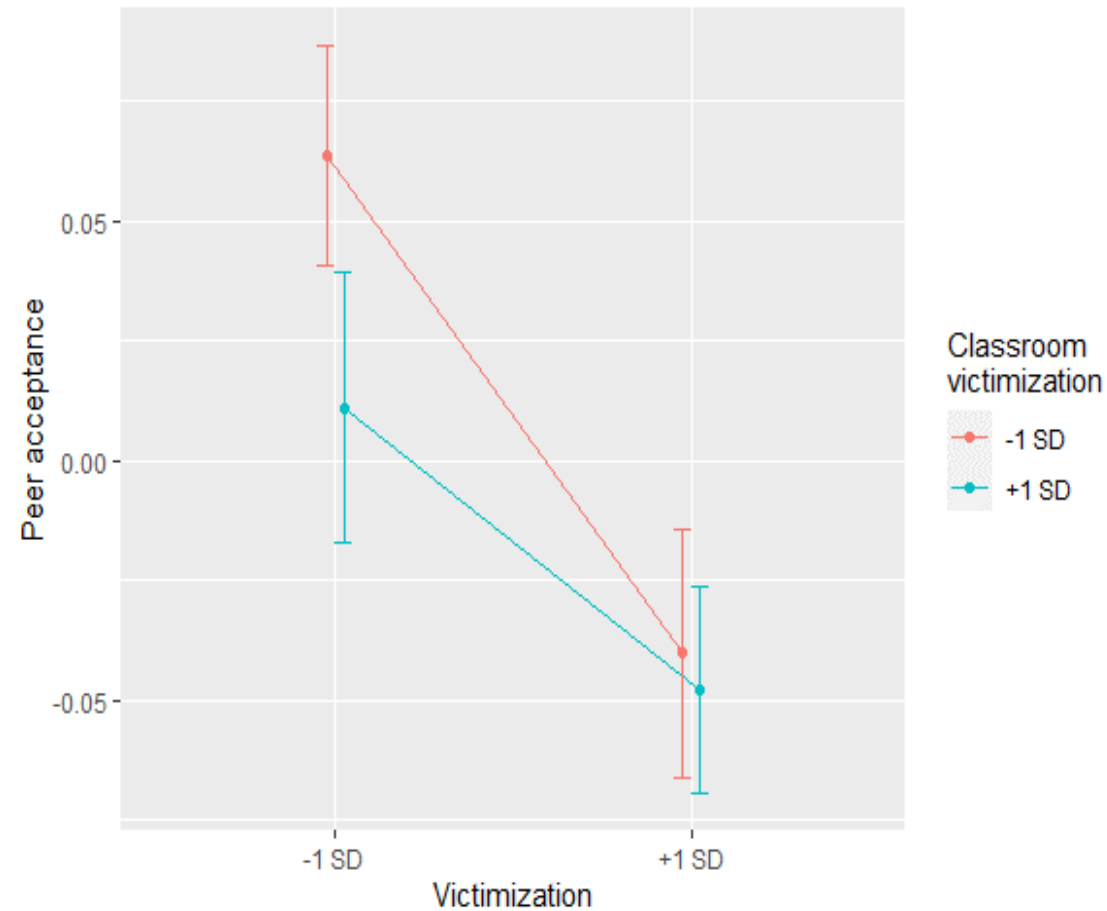
Self-rated victimization was

- negatively associated with peer acceptance and positively with peer rejection,
- but *no significant interaction* between self-rated victimization and classroom victimization rate was found.

MLM for peer acceptance (peer-rated victimization)

	Estimates	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	-0.24	0.12	-1.95	0.051
Time	-0.01	0.01	-1.49	0.137
Victimization	-0.22	0.03	-7.55	0.000
Classroom victimization rate	-0.88	0.33	-2.62	0.009
Age	0.02	0.01	1.95	0.052
Gender	0.00	0.01	-0.07	0.942
Victimization*classroom victimization rate	-0.24	0.12	-1.95	0.000
	<i>N</i>	Variance	<i>SD</i>	ICC
Students: Classes	737	0.007	0.086	0.50
Classes	39	0.002	0.048	0.15
Residual		0.005	0.072	

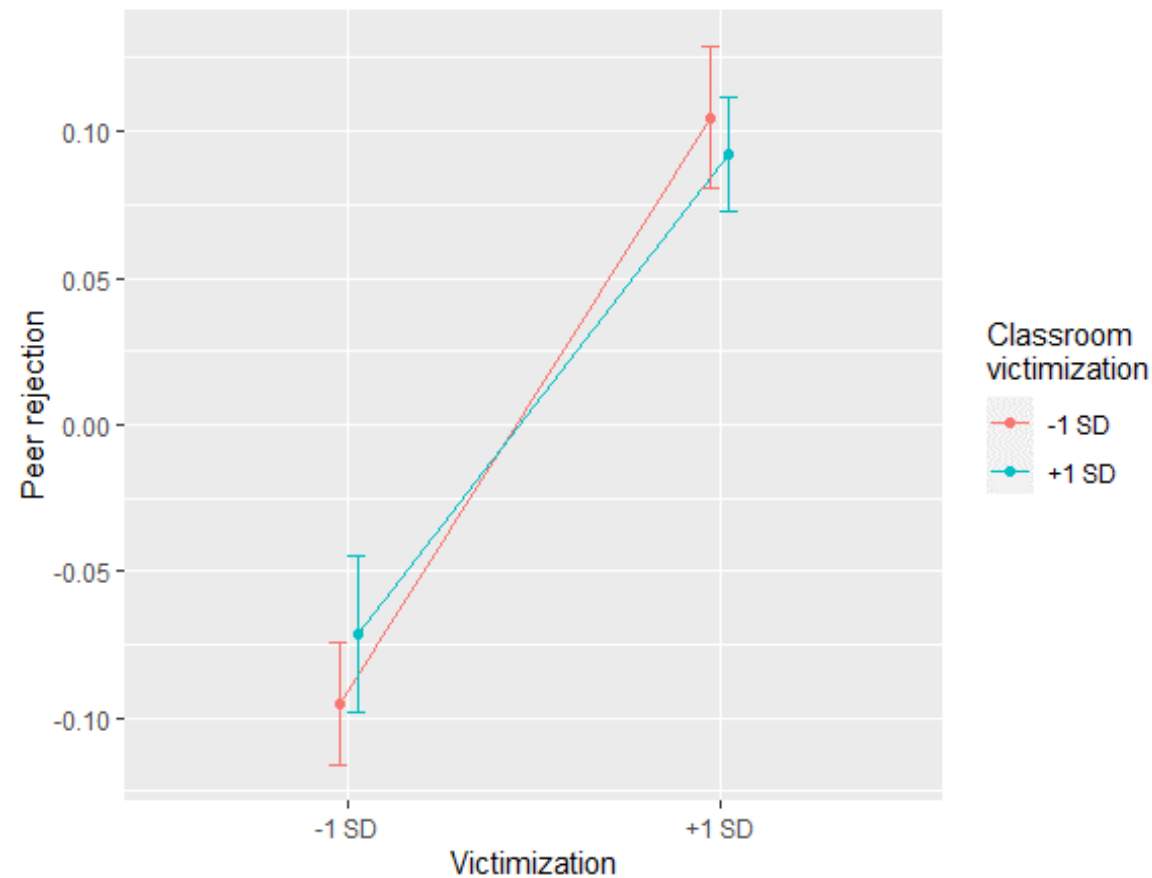
Classroom victimization protects victims from being less accepted (liked) by peers



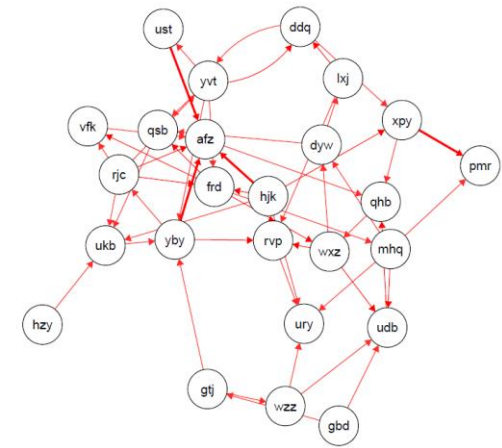
MLM for peer rejection (peer-rated victimization)

	Estimates	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.09	0.12	0.78	0.438
Time	0.00	0.01	0.80	0.423
Victimization	0.48	0.03	16.82	0.000
Classroom victimization rate	0.17	0.34	0.51	0.613
Age	-0.01	0.01	-0.77	0.444
Gender	0.01	0.01	1.11	0.267
Victimization*classroom victimization rate	-2.80	0.94	-2.97	0.003
	<i>N</i>	Variance	<i>SD</i>	ICC
Students: Classes	737	0.007	0.085	0.52
Classes	39	0.001	0.037	0.10
Residual		0.005	0.074	

Classroom victimization protects victims from being more rejected (disliked) by peers



Complementary analyses: SAOM



Stochastic Actor Oriented Models (R Siena) investigating longitudinal social network effects

- dyadic cross-product effects:
 - perceiving a classmate as a victim* → *liking the classmate*
 - perceiving a classmate as a victim* → *disliking the classmate*
- tendency of victims *to start liking each other*
- tendency of victims to become less liked and more disliked
- structural liking effects (out-degree activity, in-degree popularity, reciprocity, balance (structural equivalence for out-ties), transitivity)
- structural disliking effects (out-degree activity, in-degree popularity)
- controlling for all other dyadic cross-product effects and gender

The effects were computed for each of the 39 classrooms separately, meta-analytically aggregated, and meta-regression was applied.

SAOM preliminary results (physical victimization)

As expected:

- Perceiving a classmate as a victim of physical bullying led to *a higher tendency to reject him/her.*

Contrary to our expectation:

- Perceiving a classmate as a victim of physical bullying *did not lead to a lower tendency to like him/her.*
- Victims of physical bullying *did not tend to start liking each other* over time.

! This is a work in progress and not all convergence issues have been addressed.

Implications for future research

- Further investigation of potential *differential effects* of the complementary constructs *of self- and peer-reported* victimization on peer status.
- Future healthy context paradox research could trace the role of *peer acceptance and peer rejection simultaneously*.
- *Longitudinal social network analysis* that allows for investigation of interdependencies of multiple positive and negative relations (Veenstra & Huitsing, 2021) could elucidate whether the moderating role of classroom victimization on the links between victimization and peer acceptance and rejection could be explained by affective relations of defenders (Oldenburg et al., 2018; Rambran et al., 2022) and other victims (Lodder et al., 2016; Shin, 2022).

Implications for teacher education



- ***Raising awareness*** of teachers. Specifically, the education should inform teachers that students who are victimized in classrooms with relatively low numbers of victims may be particularly less liked and more disliked.
- Guiding teachers to focus on ***active support of positive relations*** (liking, friendships, inclusive relations) to help protect students from negative outcomes of victimization.

Acknowledgements

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Thank you for your attention!

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