

# Healthy context paradox in internalizing and externalizing problems:

## The role of self-blaming and lack of peer support

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# Harm

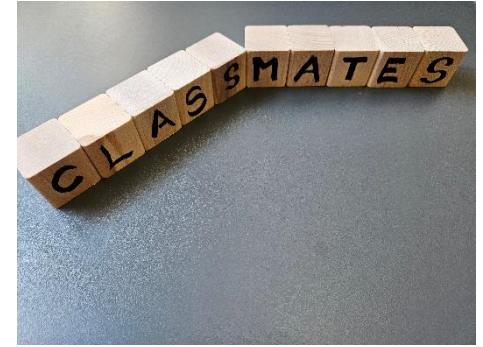
## Negative outcomes of victimization

- *Internalizing symptoms*, such as depression , anxiety, and low self-esteem,
- *Externalizing symptoms*, such as aggression, substance abuse, and other problematic behaviors (Fisher et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2017; Reijntjes et al., 2011)

## School context as a moderator

- Negative school climate (Goldberg Zacharia & Yablon, 2021)
- Lack of prosocial school environment (Martínez et al., 2024)

# Context



## The healthy context paradox

↑ *maladjustment* in victims from classrooms with ↓ *victimization* (Salmivalli et al., 2021; ; Yun & Juvonen; 2020).

## Potential key mechanisms

- self-blaming *causal attributions* (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Pan et al., 2021)
- limited *friendships* or *peer support* (Garandeau & Salmivalli, 2019; Pan et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2022, Kollerová & Smolík, 2016).

# Hypotheses

## From victimization to long-term harm

T1 victimization

↓ predicts ↓

T3 internalizing & T3 externalizing symptoms

## Healthy context paradox

T1 classroom victimization

→ weakens →

the effects of T1 victimization on T3 symptoms

## Self-blaming and peer support as mechanisms

The healthy context paradox

↓ is mediated by ↓

T2 self-blaming attributions & T2 peer support

Preregistered at OSF

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# Participants

## Procedure

- Three time-points (3-months intervals)
- Paper-pencil surveys

## Sample

- $N = 2014$  of 6-8<sup>th</sup> graders from 112 classrooms
- Gender: 48% male, 51% female, 1% non-binary
- The average T1 age: 13 years ( $SD = 12$  months)
- Ethnicity: 92% Czech, 4% Ukrainian, 1% Vietnamese, 1% Slovak, 0.2% Roma, 2% Non-Czech other



# Instruments: Victimization

## Main predictor

**Victimization** (5 items; adapted from Yanagida et al., 2016):

Definition of bullying followed by items:

*Overall, how often during the last 2-3 months has a classmate*

*... **physically** attack you (e.g. pushed, punched, kicked);*

*... **verbally** attack you (e.g. swear words, nasty nicknames, threats);*

*... intentionally **exclude** you from some activities or groups;*

*... spread a nasty **rumor** about you or incite others against you;*

*... bully you **online** (e.g. by video, photo, in a chat group, on social networks?)*

## Moderator

**Classroom victimization**

A classroom mean of individual victimization factor scores.

# Instruments: Outcomes

## Internalizing problems

**Depression** (10 items; RCADS; Chorpita et al., 2005)

*E.g., I feel sad or empty.*

**Social anxiety** (4 items; RCADS; Chorpita et al., 2005)

*E.g., I worry about what other people think of me.*

**Low self-esteem** (5 items; Rosenberg, 1965)

*E.G., I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. (reverted)*

## Externalizing problems (5 items; Waasdorp and Bradshaw, 2011).

*I do things without thinking.*

*I have trouble controlling my temper.*

*I have threatened to hit or hurt someone.*

*I get mad easily.*

*It is ok to hit someone if they hit me first.*

# Instruments: Self-blame

**Self-blaming causal attributions** (6 items; adapted from Graham and Juvonen; 1998):

A random vignette of victimization from a set of 36 vignettes: 4 forms of bullying x 3 levels of severity x 3 distinct context.

A sample vignette:

Imagine sitting in a classroom and overhearing a group of students whispering that you wear the same clothes all the time. They start giggling and you feel yourself getting upset. You try to concentrate on the lesson, but their words make you feel small and alone.  
(relational bullying, mild intensity)

*E.g., Kids do this to me because they know I won't get them in trouble.*



# Instruments: Peer support

**Perceived peer support** (5 items; selected from Malecki et al., 2000):

*My classmates think it is important to be my friend.*

*My classmates like me the way I am.*

*My classmates care about my feeling.*

*My classmates like me as much as they like others.*

*My classmates really care about me.*

# Analytical approach

## Structural After Measurement (SAM) approach (Rosseel & Loh, 2022)

1<sup>st</sup> stage:

Estimation of the *measurement part* of the model using CFA

2<sup>nd</sup> stage:

Estimation of the *structural part*

- Partial mediated moderation models
- Using factor scores

### Controlling for:

- Gender
- Age
- T1 parental support
- Severity and form of bullying in the self-blaming scenario

# Moderation for internalizing



No moderation effects on **internalizing problems**

	T2 self-blaming	T2 peer support	T3 internalizing	
<b>Classroom level predictors</b>				
• T1 classroom victimization	.03	-.03		.04
<b>Cross-level interactions</b>				
• T1 victimization x T1 classroom victimization			Direct	-.01
	-.01		Indirect via T2 self-blaming	-.00
		.00	Indirect via T2 peer support	-.01
			<b>Total</b>	<b>-.02</b>

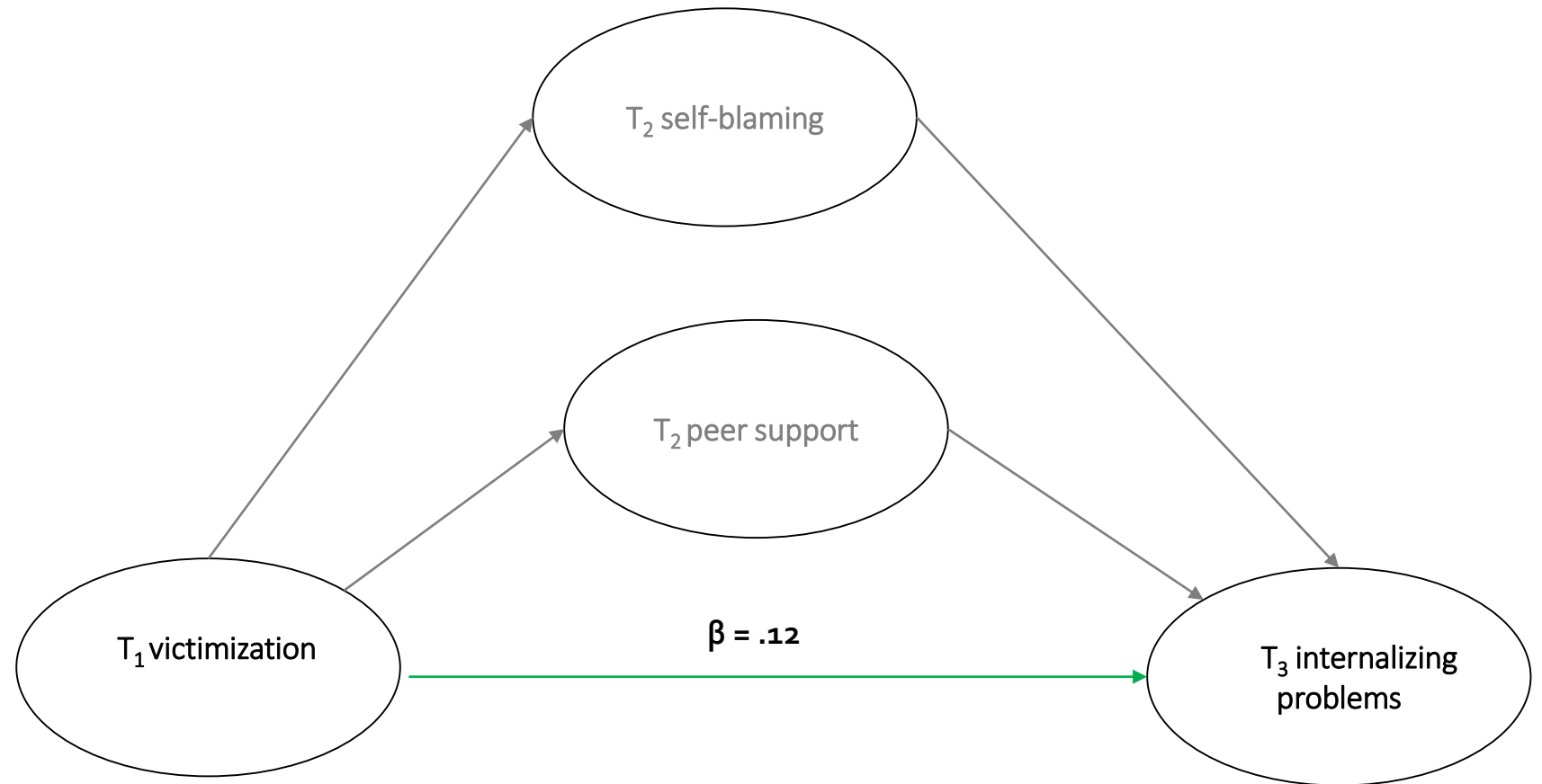
## Moderation for externalizing



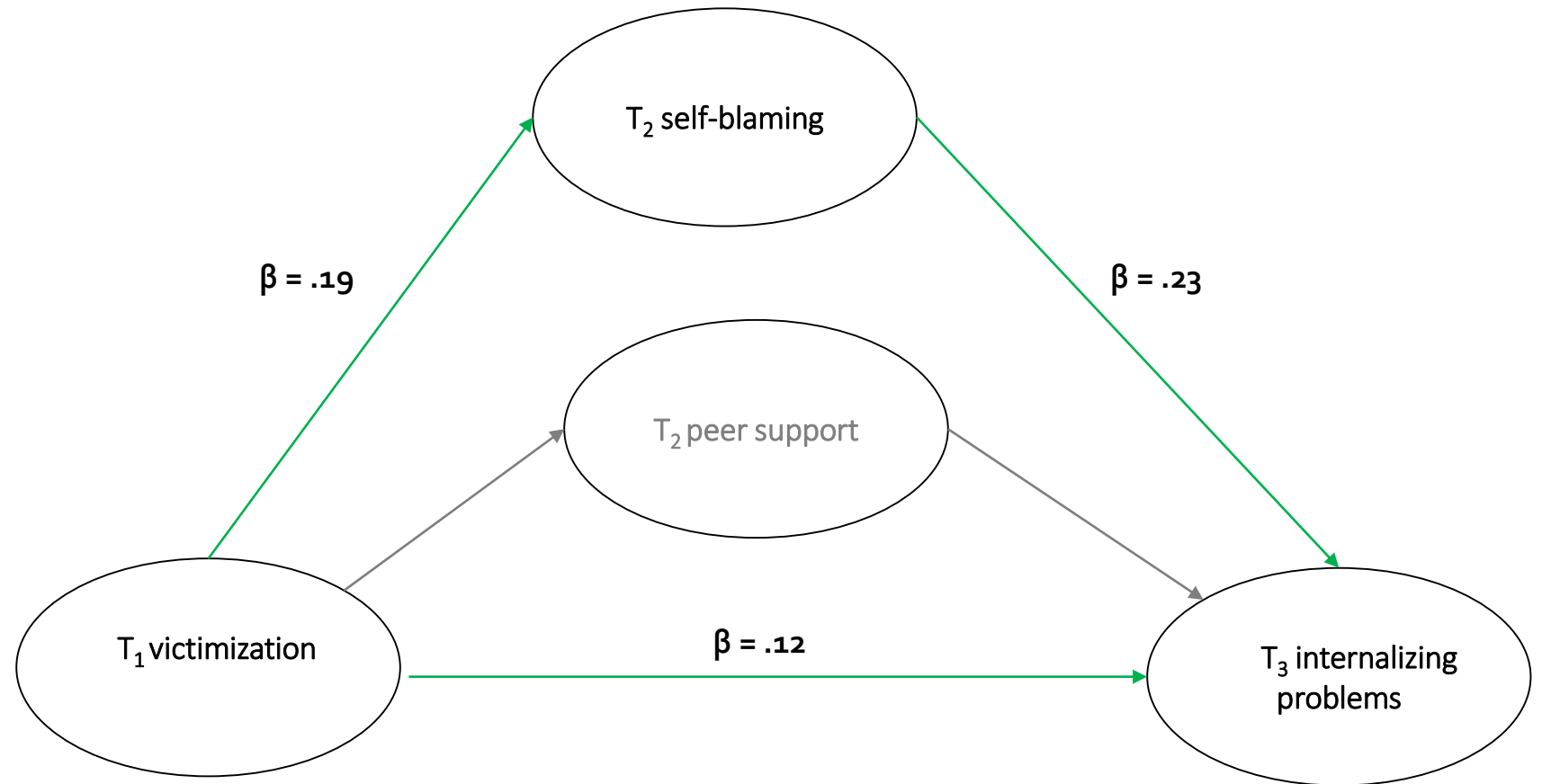
No moderation effects on **externalizing problems**

	T2 self-blaming	T2 peer support	T3 externalizing	
<b>Classroom level predictors</b>				
• T1 classroom victimization	.03	-.03		.04
<b>Cross-level interactions</b>				
• T1 victimization x T1 classroom victimization			Direct	-.01
	-.01		Indirect via T2 self-blaming	-.00
		.00	Indirect via T2 peer support	-.01
			<b>Total</b>	<b>-.01</b>

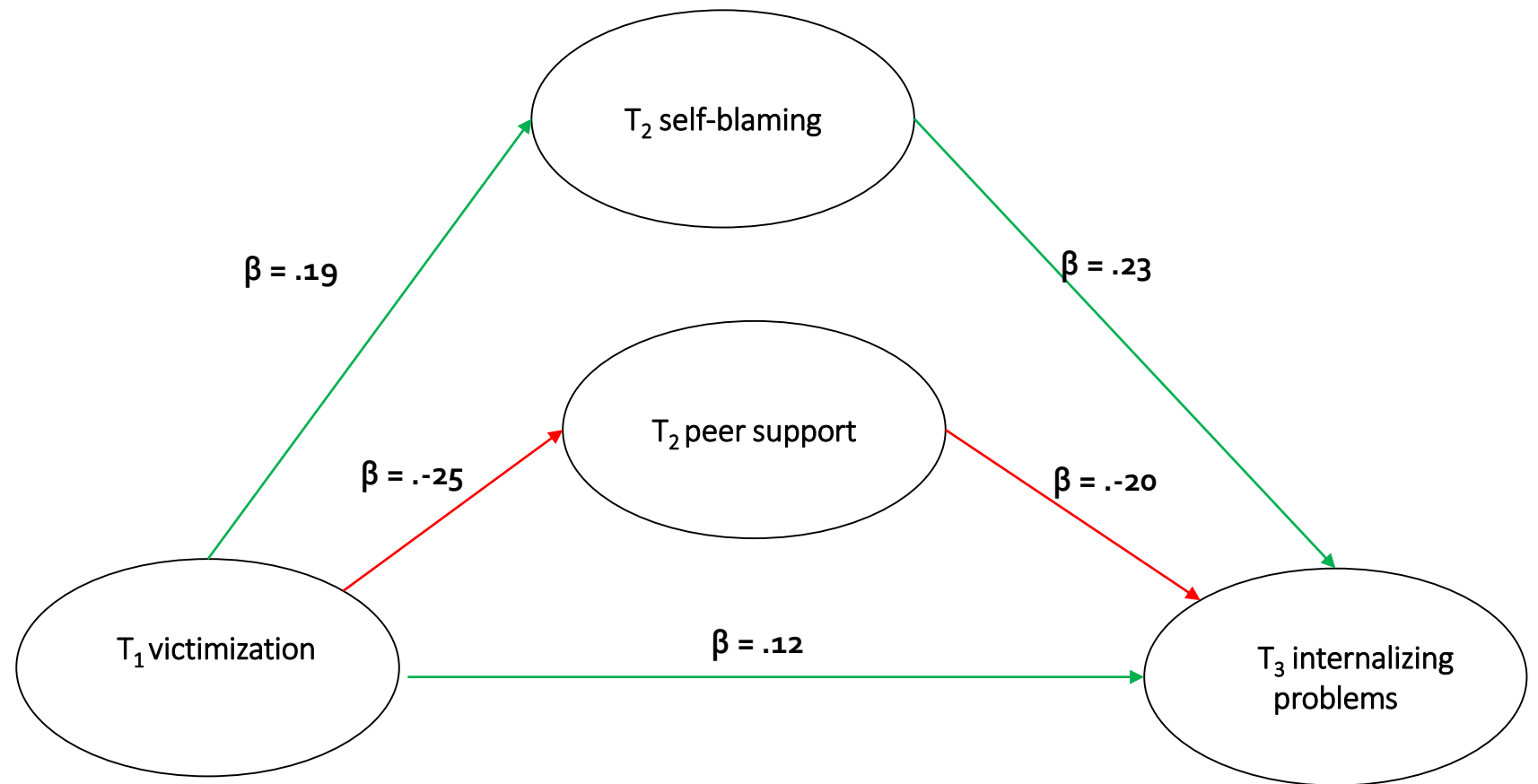
# Mediation for internalizing



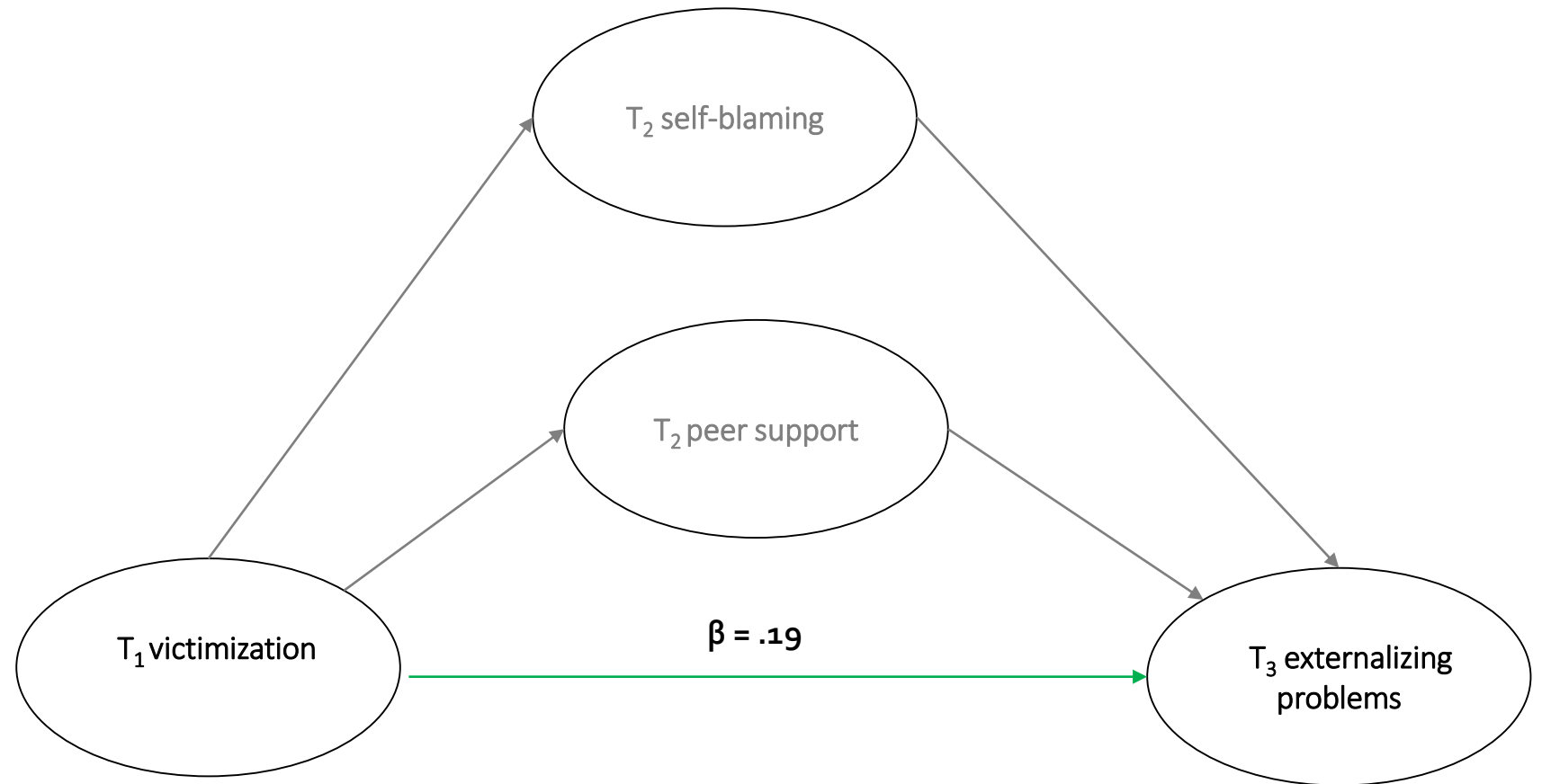
# Mediation for internalizing



# Mediation for internalizing

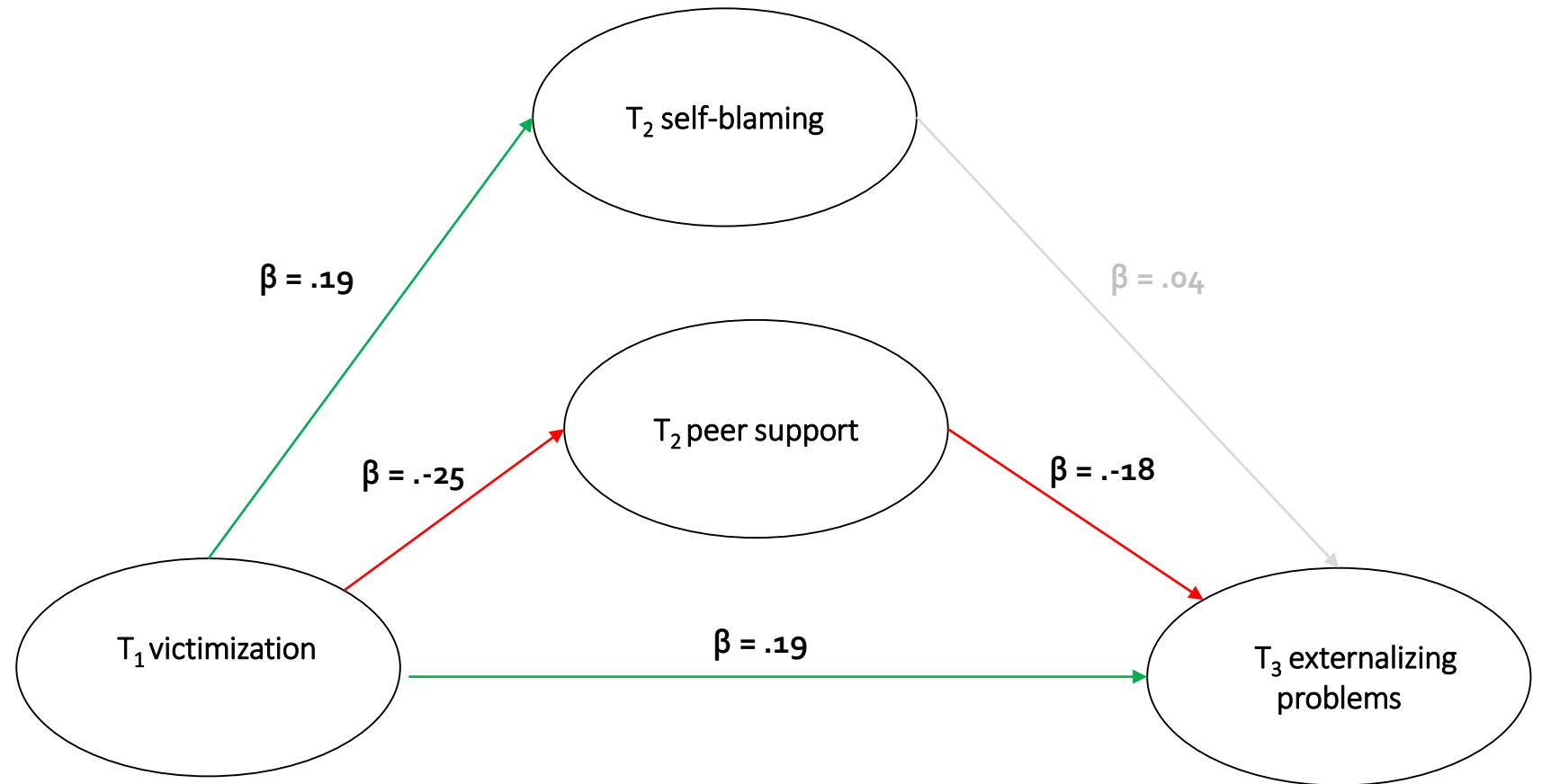


# Mediation for externalizing





# Mediation for externalizing



# Future directions

- (1) Reinvestigate the paradox with *diverse outcomes and time intervals*.
- (2) Revisit the mediating role of self-blame versus *other forms of negative perceptions* of self and others (Liu et al., 2021).

# Practical implications

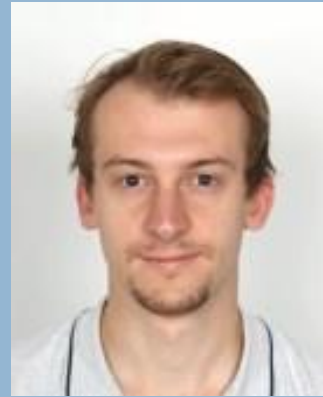
- (1) Promote *self-understanding* in victims and help them recognize *the responsibility of bullies*.
- (2) Boost *peer support* toward victimized students.



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# Thank you for your attention!

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