peDOCS
Open Access Erziehungswissenschaften

DIPF

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:

University *of Ljubljana*
Faculty of Education

http://www.pef.uni-lj.si

Mitglied der
Leibniz
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Retrospective and Concurrent Victimisation as Predictors of Social Self-Concept and Loneliness in First-Year University Students

Katja Košir*[1] and Urška Žugelj[2]

∾   Peer victimisation during school years has been found to significantly shape the way students perceive themselves and how they enter into relationships with peers, thus impacting students' current and long-term wellbeing. However, victimisation has seldom been examined in university students. The present study aimed to investigate students' current level of self-reported peer victimisation and perceived peer support and their retrospectively reported victimisation as predictors of their social self-concept and loneliness in their first year of university. First-year university students (N = 200; 26% male) participated in the study. The results indicated that retrospectively reported victimisation experiences during their years of schooling explained additional variance in social self-concept and loneliness beyond their concurrent peer experiences. These findings indicate that experiencing victimisation during school years could have consequences for students' wellbeing that are not limited to the period of primary and secondary schooling, but can persist after their transition to university. Practical implications for the promotion of mental health in the higher education context are discussed.

Keywords: victimisation, retrospective measures, loneliness, self-concept, university students

1   *Corresponding Author. Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Slovenia; katja.kosir@um.si.
2   Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

Retrospektivna in trenutna vrstniška viktimizacija kot napovednika socialne samopodobe in osamljenosti pri študentih prvega letnika

KATJA KOŠIR IN URŠKA ŽUGELJ

∼   **Izkušnja vrstniške viktimizacije v obdobju šolanja pomembno sooblikuje**, kako se mladostniki zaznavajo in na kak način vstopajo v vrstniške odnose, ter tako določa njihovo trenutno in dolgoročno blagostanje. Vendarle pa je le malo raziskav izkušnje vrstniške viktimizacije preučevalo pri študentih. V tej raziskavi smo preučevali trenutno stopnjo samoporočane viktimizacije, oporo vrstnikov in retrospektivno poročano viktimizacijo kot napovednike socialne samopodobe in osamljenosti pri študentih prvega letnika. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 200 (26 % moških) študentov prvega letnika. Rezultati so pokazali, da izkušnje retrospektivno poročane viktimizacije v letih šolanja pojasnjujejo dodaten delež variance v socialni samopodobi in osamljenosti, ki je ni mogoče pojasniti z njihovimi izkušnjami trenutne viktimizacije. Te ugotovitve nakazujejo na potencialni učinek izkušnje viktimizacije v obdobju osnovne in srednje šole za dobrobit študentov, ki presega obdobje primarnega in sekundarnega izobraževanja, ampak lahko vztraja tudi v obdobju prehoda v visokošolsko izobraževanje. Predstavljene so tudi praktične implikacije ugotovitev za promocijo duševnega zdravja v kontekstu visokošolskega izobraževanja.

Ključne besede: viktimizacija, retrospektivne mere, osamljenost, samopodoba, študentje

Introduction

Peer relationships are strong sources of joy, support and satisfaction, as well as distress, in all periods of schooling. In adolescence, the importance and impact of experiences within the peer context on students' wellbeing increases. Experiencing bullying, defined as aggressive, goal-directed behaviour that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance (Volk et al., 2017), is among the most hurtful sources of distress within the peer context (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Frequent victimisation has concurrent and long-term effects on students' physical, psychological, relational and general wellbeing (Copeland et al., 2013; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Reijntjes et al., 2010; Salmivalli, 2018).

The manifestations of bullying, as well as the underlying motives for bullying, change during school years; in adolescence, direct forms of bullying (physical and verbal) decrease while indirect, relational bullying increases (Yeager et al., 2015). Thus, in adolescence, bullying is mainly manifested as relational bullying (e.g., spreading rumours, excluding someone from activities) (Yeager et al., 2015). In addition, the social dynamics of bullying change in adolescence: changes in students' social motivation (high aspiration for popularity, power and status among peers) can lead to the aggressive-popularity norm, which means that popularity in the classroom can be achieved through aggressive and/or bullying behaviour (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2020). Thus, the responses of peers as bystanders of bullying can maintain and even enhance the bullying dynamics. Students who do not conform to the norms of the peer group (least fitting classmates; Juvonen & Schacter, 2017) can thus become chronic victims of bullying. Due to the growing influence of bullying perpetrators on other peers, students who experience bullying become increasingly isolated. Thus, they suffer not only from bullying, but also from its consequences, which are usually manifested as increasing social isolation. This often leads to changes in self-perception: attributing the experience of violence to characteristics that are internal, uncontrollable and stable (characterological self-blaming attributions; Graham & Juvonen, 1998), which hinders them from establishing further peer interactions and enhances victimisation (Schacter et al., 2014). Hence, it is not surprising that peer support has been found to be one of the strongest protective factors of victimisation (Cook et al., 2010). This has also been confirmed in a sample of Slovenian adolescents (Košir et al., 2020).

The experience of victimisation thus shapes how students perceive themselves and how they enter into peer relationships. Students who were victims of bullying have been consistently found to be at higher risk for internalising problems in young and middle adulthood (Copeland et al., 2013; Ttofi et al.,

2011). Internalising symptoms refer to various emotional difficulties, ranging from low self-concept, social withdrawal and loneliness to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Until recently, these symptoms were perceived as "less problematic" compared to externalising symptoms, and thus received less attention in developmental research (Guzman-Holst & Bowes, 2021). In children and adolescents, internalising symptoms are manifested as feeling lonely and withdrawn, avoiding social situations and feeling unwanted or inadequate (i.e., low self-esteem). Although the relationship between being victimised and internalising symptoms is complex and very likely reciprocal, some prospective studies have been able to control this relationship for pre-existing health conditions, family situation and other exposures to violence (e.g., family violence) when exploring the effects of being victimised on subsequent health, educational and social outcomes (Wolke et al., 2015). These studies indicate that victims of frequent bullying report having more trouble making or keeping friends, and are less likely to live with a partner and have social support (Takizawa et al., 2014; Wolke et al., 2013). Recently, an increasing body of neuropsychological research has examined biological mediators between experiencing peer violence and mental health problems, explaining the psychological consequences of experiencing social exclusion through structural and functional changes in brain function. These studies (e.g., Quinlan et al., 2020) showed that experiencing chronic peer victimisation affects the development of brain structure, and that these structural brain changes predict mental health problems in late adolescence or early adulthood.

Feeling related to others and establishing positive relations is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000); the experience of victimisation grossly hinders the satisfaction of this need. Being victimised is related to lower social self-concept, as reflected in deflated perceptions of the quality of peer relations, social competence and acceptance among peers (Cook et al., 2010; Hawker & Bouton, 2000). In addition, victimisation is related to increased loneliness (Graham et al., 2006), defined as a negative emotional state associated with a perception that an individual's social needs are not met in terms of quantity or quality (Campbell, 2013). The relationship between victimisation and self-concept, as well as loneliness, is reciprocal, since students with low self-concept and lonely students are more likely to be seen as vulnerable, and thus as easy targets for bullying (see, e.g., Scholte et al., 2007). Although these relationships are well-established in adolescence, it is still quite unclear how prior victimisation is related to the ways students build their peer relations and how they perceive the quality of their social relations as they enter university.

According to the stress-buffering model (Cohen & Wills, 1985), social support is a significant protective factor that can both promote positive social outcomes as well as work as a buffer in children and adolescents with negative social experiences and protects them from developing internalising symptoms. Previous studies (e.g., Copeland et al., 2004; Rueger et al., 2008) have indicated that peer support is one of the strongest sources of their wellbeing in school and their social adjustment. It is thus hypothesised that peer support will be a strong predictor of both of the measures of students' psychosocial outcomes used in the present study (students' social self-concept and feelings of loneliness). Furthermore, the study focuses on whether students' retrospectively reported peer victimisation explains additional variation in both psychosocial outcomes beyond their current peer experiences, assessed as concurrent victimisation and peer support.

Bullying in university students

Bullying has been mostly studied in samples of early to middle adolescents, thus mostly on the lower- and upper-secondary educational level. It has seldom been studied in university students, who are typically in the developmental period of late adolescence. However, as pointed out by Cassidy et al. (2021), the risk of being bullied does not end when youths graduate from secondary school. Bullying can continue into the university level and beyond, taking different forms over the life course. According to some scholars (e.g., Francisco et al., 2015), one of the possible obstacles to the recognition of bullying and adequate responses is related to terminological issues; the term bullying carries a connotation of childish behaviour, and it can be difficult to associate it with adults and environments such as universities. An additional factor that could blur the extent of bullying at the university level is the reluctance of university students to report bullying due to their beliefs that they should be able to handle such situations on their own (Crosslin & Golman, 2014).

Research on bullying in university students is therefore scarce, but it has been gaining research attention and recognition over the last decade (Cassidy et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that being victimised at university is related to victimisation in previous years of schooling (Pörhöla, 2016); on a large sample of university students, Beran et al. (2012) found that students who had been harassed in secondary school had 2.66 times greater probability of experiencing victimisation at university. Moreover, students' prior bullying experiences are related to their mental health at university; on a sample of university students, Manrique et al. (2019) found that a history of bullying in the years of secondary

school was associated with depressive, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in students' first year of studies and again in their third year.

The small number of studies investigating bullying in the higher education context has provided evidence that bullying at university is a relevant social problem; however, the prevalence estimates vary by country, the form of bullying and the methodology. To our knowledge, there are no studies that have investigated bullying among university students in the Slovenian context. Foreign studies reported the prevalence of victimisation among university students ranging from 20 to 30% (e.g., Faucher et al., 2014; Marraccini et al., 2018) or around 8% in studies with more rigid parameters for defining bullying (e.g., Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Bullying among university students takes many forms, which can mainly be categorised as relational bullying (e.g., spreading rumours on the grounds of race, disability, gender, religion and sexual orientation; ridiculing or demeaning a person; social exclusion; Cowie & Myers, 2016). Regarding forms of victimisation, female students were found to experience bullying mostly from friends and acquaintances in the form of social exclusion, belittling and gossiping, while male students reported being more likely targeted by peers with challenges to their masculinity (Brock et al., 2014; Faucher et al., 2014).

Some studies have investigated students' experiences of victimisation during different periods of schooling using retrospective measures. Based on retrospective responses, Chen and Huang (2015) found that adolescents reported higher levels of traditional and cyberbullying and victimisation for their period of schooling prior to higher education. **Anderson and Sturm (2007) none**theless argue that studying and understanding bullying in university students is very important; retrospective studies of bullying and victimisation that have investigated students' experiences of bullying during their primary and secondary schooling have found that there is a positive association between being a bully or a victim in all three periods of schooling (Chapell et al., 2006; Chen & Huang, 2015). Despite the findings of retrospective research that students report the lowest occurrence of traditional and online peer violence during their higher education schooling, the study of peer violence among students is crucial (Anderson & Sturm, 2007).

The current study aimed to investigate students' retrospectively reported prior victimisation during school years, as well as their recent peer experiences at university – current victimisation and perceived peer support – as predictors of their social self-concept and feelings of loneliness in a sample of first-year university students. The aim of the study was twofold: (1) to examine the relationship between university students' current level of peer victimisation and

their psychosocial outcomes, and (2) to examine whether university students' retrospectively reported victimisation during their school years predicts their psychosocial outcomes beyond their current psychosocial experiences (self-reported victimisation and perceived peer support).

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 200 first-year university students (26% males) from the three biggest public Slovenian universities (35% from the University of Ljubljana, 35% from the University of Maribor and 30% from the University of Primorska). Their mean age was 19.84 years ($SD = 1.35$).

Instruments

Current and retrospectively reported victimisation. Self-reported victimisation was assessed with the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument: Bullying (APRI-B) (Marsh et al., 2011; Slovenian adaptation by Košir et al., 2020)confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated a well-defined multidimensional factor structure of reliable, highly differentiated self-concept factors. Correlations between 11 SDQII factors and 7 mental health problems (Youth Self-Report; YSR, which measures victimisation in the verbal, physical and social subdomains. The victimisation part of the questionnaire consists of 18 items in which the participants reported how often they had experienced these behaviours ((e.g., "I was teased by students saying things to me") on a six-point scale (1 = *never* to 6 = *every day*). The students were asked to report their victimisation experiences for two time periods: in the current academic year (concurrent victimisation) and in the years of their schooling.

Perceived peer support. The peer personal support scale from the Classroom Life Instrument (Johnson et al., 1983; Slovenian adaptation by Košir et al., 2007) was used to assess perceived peer support at university. The scale consists of five items (e.g., "My colleagues at university really care about me"). The answers were given using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never true* to 5 = *always true*).

Social self-concept. Students' social self-concept was assessed using the same-sex relationship subscale from the Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQ II-S, Marsh et al., 2004; Slovenian adaptation by Brajdot, 2001). This questionnaire measures adolescents' perceptions of their popularity among peers of the same sex, their perceptions of how easily they make friends with

same-sex peers, and the perceived quality of their interactions with same-sex peers. It consists of ten items (e.g., "I make friends easily") assessed using a 4-point scale (1 = *never true for me* to 4 = *always true for me*).

Loneliness. The UCLA loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Slovenian adaptation by Avsec & Bajec, n.d.) was used to measure the students' subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation. The scale consists of 20 items (e.g., "How often do you feel that you lack companionship?") rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 4 = *often*).

Research design

The participants were recruited from the three biggest public Slovenian universities via e-mails sent to university teachers and student tutors, who were asked to distribute the link to the online questionnaire to their first-year undergraduate students. Only students who provided complete answers were included in the analyses.

The data were collected online in March 2020 (i.e., after six months at university). The study participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor.

Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are presented in Table 1. The participants reported relatively low levels of victimisation; higher levels of victimisation were reported retrospectively for the period of primary and secondary schooling. The students' victimisation in the current academic year was positively related to retrospectively reported victimisation and negatively related to perceived peer support; both correlations are low. The students who reported higher victimisation during their schooling reported a lower social self-concept and higher feelings of loneliness. The correlations between the students' current victimisation and their social self-concept and loneliness were not significant. The students who perceived lower peer support reported lower social self-concept and higher feelings of loneliness; the correlation was moderate. Social self-concept and loneliness are highly negatively correlated. The reliability coefficients were appropriate (good to excellent) for all measures.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Victimisation – concurrent	1.07	1.18	(.93)				
2. Victimisation – retrospective	1.74	0.63	.21**	(.93)			
3. Perceived peer support	3.48	0.72	-.20**	-.07	(.87)		
4. Social self-concept	3.42	0.83	-.11	-.31**	.50**	(.88)	
5. Loneliness	2.22	0.54	.10	.31**	-.47**	-.77**	(.91)

*Note. * p < .05, ** p < .001. Cronbach's α reliability coefficients are shown on the diagonal (in brackets).*

Table 2

Hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting social self-concept and loneliness

	Social self-concept						Loneliness					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β
Step 1: control variables												
Gender	0.25	0.14	0.06	.03	0.10	.05	-0.27	-.22**	-0.16	-.13*	-0.18	-.15*
ΔR2		.02						.05**				
Step 2: concurrent peer experiences												
Victimisation - concurrent			-0.5	-.01	0.21	.05			0.03	.01	-0.14	-.05
Peer support			0.58	.50***	0.56	.48***			-0.33	-.44***	-0.32	-.43***
ΔR2				.24***						.19***		
Step 3: retrospectively reported peer experiences												
Victimisation - retrospective					-0.37	-.29***					0.25	.30***
ΔR2						.08***						.06***
Total R2		.02		.26		.34		.05		.24		.32
F for ΔR2		3.75		22.56***		24.52***		9.92**		20.19***		23.19***

*Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001; Gender: 0 – males; 1 – females.*

In order to examine the students' concurrent and retrospective victimisation and perceived peer support as predictors of social self-concept and loneliness, two series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. As shown in Table 2, gender as a control variable entered in the first step did not account for a significant portion of variance in predicting social self-concept, while it explained a small portion of variance in loneliness, with male students

reporting higher loneliness. Concurrent peer experiences entered in the second step accounted for a significant portion of variance in social self-concept (24%) and loneliness (19%), with perceived peer support being a positive predictor of social self-concept and a negative predictor of loneliness. However, concurrent peer victimisation showed no significant relation to either social self-concept or loneliness. In the third step, retrospectively reported victimisation during school years was entered. It accounted for a significant increase in explained variance in both social self-concept (8%) and loneliness (6%), negatively predicting the students' social self-concept and positively predicting loneliness. Thus, retrospectively reported victimisation during school years explained additional variation in both the students' social self-concept and loneliness that is not explained by their concurrent peer victimisation.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated students' concurrent peer experiences at university (operationalised as peer victimisation and perceived peer support) and their retrospectively reported victimisation during school years in first-year university students. We found that the retrospectively reported victimisation during school years predicted students' self-concept and loneliness beyond their concurrent peer experiences. Students who reported higher victimisation during school years had a lower social self-concept and reported higher loneliness in their first year at university. Students' current level of victimisation was not a significant predictor of either social self-concept or loneliness.

Despite the cross-sectional research design of our study, these findings could indicate that the experience of victimisation during school years affects students' relationship pathways as they enter university. It is likely that these experiences shape the way they perceive themselves in social relations (i.e., their social cognitions; Juvonen & Schachter, 2017) and their social behaviour. Students who have experienced long-lasting victimisation may develop distorted beliefs about themselves and about their social environment that enhance the development of negative cognitive biases as characteristics of internalising symptoms; however, there is a lack of studies investigating the mediating role of cognitions in the relationship between negative peer experiences and psychosocial outcomes. Furthermore, students who were bullied during their schooling may, due to the social exclusion that usually accompanies victimisation in adolescence, also lack social skills to effectively build peer relations in new social contexts (see, e.g., Pörhöla, 2016). Future studies should

address the psychological mechanisms that would, in addition to neurological processes (see, e.g., Quinlan, 2020), explain the associations between students' victimisation experiences and their future psychosocial functioning. The finding that retrospectively reported victimisation during schooling predicts students' psychosocial outcomes at university is of particular importance, since the correlation between retrospectively reported and concurrent victimisation was low and since university students' concurrent victimisation did not predict their psychosocial outcomes. Thus, students' social self-concept and feelings of loneliness could not be explained by their concurrent victimisation experience. Since our participants were first-year students, it is possible that the social dynamics of their academic groups were not yet established. This limitation should be taken into account when interpreting the finding that the students' concurrent self-reported victimisation did not predict their psychosocial outcomes. It would therefore be relevant to investigate the relationship between peer victimisation at university and students' psychosocial outcomes on a more representative sample of university students.

In addition, our findings are consistent with previous studies that have reported the experiences of victimisation in different periods of schooling being correlated (Beran et al., 2012; Chapell et al., 2006; Chen and Huang, 2015), although, as mentioned above, the correlation between concurrent and retrospectively reported victimisation was low in our study.

We also found that university students who perceived higher support from their peers at university reported a higher social self-concept and fewer feelings of loneliness. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have investigated the role of peer support in students' psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Holt & Espelage; Košir et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2007; Salmivalli & Peets, 2011). Nevertheless, since the role of peer relations has seldom been investigated in university students, our finding significantly contributes to the scientific understanding of the importance of quality peer relations in higher education.

Several limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results of our study. Due to the cross-sectional research design, causal interpretations of the relations between the students' (prior and current) victimisation and their self-concept and loneliness should be avoided. Additionally, the validity of the retrospective reports of victimisation during school years is likely to be limited, since it relies on autobiographical memory that is both reconstructive and constructive (Grant & Ceci, 2000); people tend to remember their construction or reconstruction of past events. Despite being subject to distortions, autobiographical memory is nevertheless considered to be quite accurate, especially when reporters have personally experienced the behaviours (Bovaird, 2010),

which is the case in our study. On a minor note, common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) can be seen as a further study limitation, as all of the variables were assessed using self-report measures. Lastly, since the participants were recruited via e-mail, a random sampling procedure was not provided, which also resulted in the unrepresentativeness of the sample with respect to gender.

Conclusions

Despite these limitations, our findings indicate that experiencing victimisation during primary and secondary school years is related to students' wellbeing later in life. Although the research does not allow for causal conclusions, this finding could indicate that the consequences of experiencing victimisation are not limited to the period of schooling, but can persist after students transition to university. Experiencing peer victimisation during school years is a formative experience that contributes to students' social and emotional learning in a negative way. Thus, our findings advocate a need for designing and implementing interventions that promote inclusive classroom environments and enable all students to develop positive social behaviours (e.g., positive youth development programmes; see, e.g., Bonell et al., 2016). The formative potential of the educational context in higher education should be recognised; peer experiences that students gain in higher education can work as reparative experiences. Thus, implementing social and emotional learning programmes in higher education could be of special relevance in promoting students' social, emotional, cognitive and moral competence. In order to effectively design tailored interventions that address the needs of university students, future studies should further investigate students' retrospectively reported bullying experiences, as well as the specifics and characteristics of bullying in higher education, also using qualitative research methodologies that would enable a deeper understanding of victimisation experiences in this developmental period. In addition, future studies should further investigate the risk and protective factors for students' victimisation in the Slovenian context, since foreign studies indicated that there are subgroups of students with a higher risk of being victimised in the university context (e.g., sexual, racial, or ethnic minorities, students with disabilities; Cassidy et al., 2021; Wensley & Campbell, 2012).

The findings of our study and other studies that have investigated various aspects of bullying in university students clearly indicate the need for a stronger emphasis on students' psychological wellbeing at the university level. Thus, university students should not be left out of strategies and programmes for the promotion of mental health at the systemic level. Moreover, Slovenian

universities could rethink strategies that would enhance the supportive, safe and inclusive social environment for students, not only focusing on academic challenges, but also providing support for coping with issues such as victimisation, social exclusion and loneliness.

Acknowledgments

References

Anderson, T., & Sturm, B. (2007). Cyberbullying: From playground to computer. *Young Adult Library Services, 5*(2), 24–27.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497–529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Beran, T. N., Rinaldi, C., Bickham, D. S., & Rich, M. (2012). Evidence for the need to support adolescents dealing with harassment and cyber-harassment: Prevalence, progression, and impact. *School Psychology International, 33*(5), 562–576. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034312446976

Bonell, C., Hinds, K., Dickson, K., Thomas, J., Fletcher, A., Murphy, S., … Campbell, R., (2016). What is positive youth development and how might it reduce substance use and violence? A systematic review and synthesis of theoretical literature. *BMC Public Health, 16*(1), 135. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-2817-3

Bovaird, J. A., (2010). Scales and surveys. Some problems with measuring bullying behavior. In S. R. Jimerson, S. M. Swearer, & D. L. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 277–292). Routledge.

Brajdot, A. (2001). *Povezanost trpinčenja med vrstniki s samopodobo in odnosi med učenci* [The association of peer bullying with self-concept and student relationships] (Graduation thesis). Graduation thesis. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

Brock, C., Oikonomidoy, E. M., Wulfing, K., Pennington, J. L., & Obenchain, K. M. (2014). "Mean girls" go to college: Exploring female-female relational bullying in an undergraduate literacy methods course. *Peace & Conflict, 20*(4), 516–535. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000035

Campbell, M. A. (2013). Loneliness, social anxiety and bullying victimization in young people: A literature review. *Psychology & Education, 50*(3/4), 1–9

Cassidy, W., Faucher, C., & Jackson, M. (2021). Bullying among college and university students. In P. K. Smith & J. O'Higgins Norman (Eds.), *The Willey Blackwell handbook of bullying. A comprehensive and nternational review of research and iIntervention* (Vol. 2, pp. 37–54). Willey Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118482650.ch37

Chapell, M. S., Hasselman, S. L., Kitchin, T., Lomon, S. N., MacIver, K. W., & Sarullo, P. L. (2006). Bullying in elementary school, high school, and university. *Adolescence, 41*(164), 633–648.

Chen, Y., & Haung, J. (2015). Precollege and in-college bullying experiences and health-related quality of life among college students. *PEDIATRICS, 135*(1), 18–25. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-1798

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310–357. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310

Cook, C., Williams, K. R., Guerra, N. G., Kim, T., & Sadek, S., (2010). Predictors of bullying and victimization in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analytic investigation. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25*(2), 65–83. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020149

Copeland, S. R., Hughes, C., Carter, E. W., Guth, C., Presley, J. A., Williams, C. R., & Fowler, S. E. (2004). Increasing access to general education: Perspectives of participants in a high school peer support program. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(6), 342–352. https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325040250060201.

Copeland, W. E., Wolke, D., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J., (2013). Adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying and being bullied by peers in childhood and adolescence. *JAMA, 70*(4), 419–726. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.504

Cowie, H., & Myers, C. A. 2016. What we know about bullying among university students. In H. Cowie & C. A. Myers (Eds.), *Bullying among university students* (pp. 3–14). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750132-1

Crosslin, K., & Golman, M. (2014). "Maybe you don't want to face it." – College students' perspectives on cyberbullying. *Computers in Human Behavior, 41*, 14–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.09.007

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Faucher, C., Jackson, M., & Cassidy, W. (2014). Cyberbullying among university students: Gendered experiences, impacts, and perspectives. *Education Research International.* Article ID 698545. https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/698545

Francisco, S. M., Simão, A. M. V., Ferreira, P. C., & Martins, M. J. D. D. (2015). Cyberbullying. The hidden side of college students. *Computers in Human Behavior, 43,* 167–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.10.045

Gini, G., & Pozzoli, T., (2009). Association between bullying and psychosomatic problems: A meta-analysis. *Pediatrics, 123*(3), 1059–1065. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2008-1215

Graham, S., Bellmore, A. D., & Mize, J., (2006). Peer victimization, aggression, and their co-occurrence in middle school: Pathways to adjustment problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 34*(3), 349–364. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-006-9030-2

Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (1998). Self-blame and peer victimization in middle school: An attributional analysis. *Developmental Psychology, 34*(3), 587–599. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.34.3.587

Grant, E. R., & Ceci, S. J., (2000). Memory: Constructive processes. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology* (Vol. 5, pp. 166–169). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10520-080

Guzman-Holst, C., & Bowes, L. (2021). Bullying and internalizing symptoms. In P. K. Smith & J. O'Higgins Norman (Eds.). *The Willey Blackwell Handbook of bullying. A comprehensive and international review of research and intervention* (Vol. 1, pp. 561–579). Willey Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118482650.ch37

Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment: A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 41*(4), 441–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-7610.00629

Holt, M. K., & Espelage, D. L. (2007). Perceived social support among bullies, victims, and bully-victims. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36*(8), 984–994. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9153-3

Juvonen, J., & Graham, S., (2014). Bullying in schools: The power of bullies and the plight of victims. *Annual Review of Psychology, 65*, 159–185. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115030

Juvonen, J., & Schacter, H. L. (2017). Bullying in school and online contexts: Social dominance, bystander compliance, and the emotional pain of victims. In A. Rutland, D. Nesdale, & C. S. Brown (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of groups processes in children and adolescents* (pp. 317–332). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118773123.ch15

Košir, K., Sočan, G., & Pečjak, S. (2007). The role of interpersonal relationships with peers and with teachers in students' academic achievement. *Review of Psychology, 14*(1), 43–58.

Košir, K., Klasinc, L, Pivec, T., Špes, T., Cankar, G., & Horvat, M. (2020). Predictors of self-reported and peer-reported victimization and bullying behavior in early adolescents. The role of school, classroom and individual factors. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 35*, 381–402. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-019-00430-y

Laninga-Wijnen, L., Harakeh, Z., Dijkstra, J. K., Veenstra, R., & Vollebergh, W. A. M. (2020). Who sets the aggressive popularity norm? It's the number and strength of aggressive, prosocial and bi-strategic adolescents in classrooms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 48*(1), 13–27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-019-00571-0

Manrique, M., Allwood, M. A., Pugach, C. P., Amoh, N., & Cerbone, A. (2019). Time and support do not heal all wounds: Mental health correlates of past bullying among college students. *Journal of American College Health, 7*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1538999

Marraccini, M. E., Brick, L. A. D., & Weyandt, L. L. (2018). Instructor and peer bullying in college students: Distinct typologies based on latent class analysis. *Journal of American College Health, 66*(8), 799–808. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1454926

Marsh, H. W., Nagengast, B., Morin, A. J. S., Parada, R. H., Craven, R. G., & Hamilton, L. R. (2011). Construct validity of the multidimensional structure of bullying and victimization: An application of exploratory structural equation modeling. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 103*(3), 701–732. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024122

Newman, B. M., Newman, P. R., Griffen, S., O'Connor, K., & Spas, J. (2007). The relationship of social support to depressive symptoms in the transition to high school. *Adolescence, 42*(167), 441–459.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

Pörhöla, M., (2016). Do the roles of bully and victim remain stable from school to university? Theoretical considerations. In H. Cowie & C. A. Myers (Eds.), *Bullying among university students* (pp. 35–47). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750132-4

Quinlan, E. B., Barker, E. D., Luo, Q., Banaschewski, T., Bokde, A. L. W., Bromberg, U., ... Schumann, G. (2020). Peer victimization and its impact on adolescent brain development and psychopathology. *Molecular Psychiatry, 25*(11), 3066–3076. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-018-0297-9

Rueger, S. Y., Malecki, C. K., & Demaray, M. K. (2008). Gender differences in the relationship between perceived social support and student adjustment in early adolescence. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23*(4), 496–514. https://doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.4.496

Reijntjes, A., Kamphuis, J. H., Prinzie, P., & Telch, M. J., (2010). Peer victimization and internalizing problems in children: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 34*(4), 244–252. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.07.009

Russell, D., Peplau, L., & Cutrona, C. (1980). The Revised UCLA loneliness scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(3), 472–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.3.472

Samivalli, C. (2018). Peer victimization and adjustment in young adulthood: Commentary on the special section. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 46*(1), 67–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-017- 0372-8

Salmivalli, C., & Peets, K. (2011). Bullies, victims, and bully-victim relationships in middle childhood and early adolescence. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups* (pp. 322–340). The Guilford Press.

Schacter, H. L., & Juvonen, J. (2015). The effects of school-level victimization on self-blame: Evidence for contextualized social cognitions. *Developmental Psychology, 51*(6), 841–847. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000016

Schenk, A. M., & Fremouw, W. J. (2012). Prevalence, psychological impact, and coping of cyberbully victims among college students. *Journal of School Violence, 11*(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.630310

Scholte, R. H. J., Engels, R. C. M. E., Overbeek, G., Kemp, R. A. T., & Haselager, G. J. T. (2007). Stability in bullying and victimization and its association with social adjustment in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 35*(2), 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-006-9074-3

Takizawa, R., Maughan, B., & Arseneault, L. (2014). Adult health outcomes of childhood bullying victimization: Evidence from a five-decade longitudinal British birth cohort. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 171*(7), 777–784. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13101401

Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 7*(1), 27–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-010-9109-1

Volk, A. A., Veenstra, R., & Espelage, D. L., (2017). So you want to study bullying? Recommendations to enhance the validity, transparency, and comparability of bullying research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 36*, 34–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.07.003

Wensley, K., & Campbell, M. (2012). Heterosexual and nonheterosexual young university students' involvement in traditional and cyber forms of bullying. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15*(2), 649–654. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0132

Wolke, D., Copeland, W. E., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J. (2013). Impact of bullying in childhood on adult health, wealth, crime, and social outcomes. *Psychological Science, 24*(10), 1958–1970. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613481608

Wolke, D., & Lereya, S. T. (2015). Long-term effects of bullying. *Archives of Disease in Childhood, 100*(9), 879–885. https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2014-306667

Yeager, D. S., Fong, C. J., Lee, H. Y., & Espelage, D. L., (2015). Declines in efficacy of anti-bullying programs among older adolescents: Theory and a three-level meta-analysis, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 37*(1), 35–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2014.11.005

Biographical note

Katja Košir, PhD, is an associate professor of psychology at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts at the University of Maribor. Her research interests are mainly focused on psychosocial factors of academic performance, various aspects of motivation in students and teachers, teachers' professional development, social and emotional learning in school, peer relations and student' teacher relations, and bullying.

Urška Žugelj, PhD, is engaged as an assistant professor of psychology at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts at the University of Maribor. Her research interests are mainly focused on attachment development, relationships between children and adults in home and school contexts and lifelong development in social context. She is currently pursuing certification in body psychotherapy.