



I27 Bullying Victimization in Adolescence: A Precursor to Future Delinquency?

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The goals of this presentation are to: (1) understand the relationship between bully victimization in adolescence and future delinquency; (2) identify risk factors that may predispose these victims to becoming delinquent; and, (3) discuss the various types of delinquent acts that may be committed.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by better recognizing the victims of bullying who may be at risk for developing delinquency, so that early, appropriate intervention can be implemented to deter these victims from a delinquent path.

Bullying is defined generally as a specific type of aggression which includes the following: the behavior is intended to harm or disturb; the behavior occurs repeatedly over time; and, there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. National surveys conducted from 2005 to 2009 indicate that up to 28% of youth, primarily during adolescence, reported having been bullied during the survey periods. It is known that perpetrators of bullying, or "the bullies," pose a significant safety risk to their fellow peers and others. In one National Institute of Child Health and Human Development survey, bullies were seven times more likely to report they carried a weapon to school in the prior month. Other studies have shown that bullies, identified by age eight are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age 24, and five times more likely to have serious criminal records by age 30.

Little information, however, exists about the victims of bullying and whether they engage in future delinquent behaviors. While research suggests that victims of bullying may experience serious emotional sequelae, including poor social-emotional adjustment, depression, psychotic symptoms, and even suicide, there are scant data regarding the victims' propensity for future delinquency. Does being bullied in adolescence, a critical time period for development, predispose one to engage in future delinquent behaviors?

Agnew's general strain theory endorses that adolescents who experience adverse circumstances are pressed into delinquency by negative emotional reactions, such as anger. Accepting that being a victim of bullying is an adverse circumstance, are there reasons, other than anger, that adolescent bullying victims engage in delinquent behaviors? That is, are there any identifiable risk factors that may predict the likelihood of delinquency for such individuals? Another issue to consider is the kind of delinquent conduct in which these victims may engage. In the recent past, media have shed light on school shootings, with many associating the occurrence of these acts with persons who have a history of bullying victimization. But not all victims of bullying use firearms against their peers. So what may lead a bullying victim to such extreme measures? It is important for the astute forensic practitioner to remember that while a history of bullying is often present in such school shooting cases, most of these involve complex issues that are not simply limited to bullying victimization.

From a forensic psychiatric perspective, this presentation will review the literature to examine the aforementioned issues of whether bullying victimization in adolescence predisposes to future delinquency. In addition, it will identify potential risk factors for such a predisposition, as well as explore the various types of delinquent acts in which these victims may engage.

Bullying, Victimization, Delinquency