

Precollege bullying experiences

Linked with health-related quality of life in college



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Precollege bullying experiences may have long-term effects on college students' health-related quality of life (HRQOL), as measured by the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) assessment. According to a recent study by researchers at National Taiwan University (NTU), earlier verbal and relational bullying-victimization experiences affected college students' current HRQOL in social relationships and could also affect their psychological HRQOL through depression.

Conducted by Dr. Jiun-Hau Huang, Associate Professor in the Institute of Health Behaviors and Community Sciences, College of Public Health, NTU and his graduate student, Mr. Yu-Ying Chen, this study was published by the American Academy of Pediatrics in the January 2015 issue of Pediatrics, and also reported by Reuters Health.

In addition, Dr. Huang's research was featured on the Association of Schools & Programs of Public Health's website in January 2015 and in the Winter 2015 issue of Outlook, the member newsletter of the Society of Behavioral Medicine.

In an effort to communicate the research findings to the public, a press conference was held in the College of Public Health, NTU on January 6, 2015, which was well attended by news reporters and journalists from various media outlets. Dr. Huang was subsequently interviewed again on national radio programs to further discuss the results and implications of this study.

"Precollege bullying-victimization experiences are not something kids simply grow out of once they get to college. Notably, the long-term impact of bullying on their social relationships sometimes goes unnoticed, and they become hidden victims with social difficulties," said Dr. Huang, the study's senior author.

Among 1,439 surveyed Taiwanese college students, 45.7% of them reported ever being bullied. The most common type of bullying-victimization experience was verbal bullying (33.9%), followed by relational (23.4%), physical (11.7%), and cyber bullying (7.2%).

Multiple linear regression models showed that college students with verbal ($=-.086$) and relational ($=-.056$) bullying-victimization experiences, both before and in college, reported significantly lower HRQOL in social relationships. "These victimization experiences may have detrimental effects on interpersonal confidence of the victims, thereby leading to social avoidance and even self-inflicted isolation. The victims could also be marginalized after being bullied," said Dr. Huang.

Interestingly, those with cyber bullying-victimization experiences before college ($=.060$) and in college ($=.068$) reported significantly higher HRQOL in physical health and environment, respectively, suggesting that cyber bullying victimization may have a lifestyle-altering effect. In ad-

dition, the effects of verbal and relational bullying-victimization experiences on psychological HRQOL could be mediated and manifested through depression.

In conclusion, Dr. Huang said, “it is reasonable to suggest that previous exposure to bullying victimization may have latent effects that could be triggered and exacerbated by future bullying-related traumatization. Hence, further research is warranted to elucidate their causal mechanisms and to explore school policies and health education initiatives that may help ameliorate the short-term and long-term effects of bullying on HRQOL.”

Reference

Yu-Ying Chen, M.S. and Jiun-Hau Huang, S.M., Sc.D. Precollege and In-College Bullying Experiences and Health-Related Quality of Life Among College Students. *Pediatrics* 2015; 135(1):18-25.
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