



RESEARCH ARTICLE

May Bullying Victimization and Loneliness in Adolescents be Risk Factors for Psychological Resilience?

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents who experience bullying may struggle to develop the psychological resilience needed to navigate life's adversities. Similarly, loneliness can serve as a significant risk factor for their psychological resilience, potentially hindering their ability to cope with stress and adversity. The aim of the current research is to explore the predictive relationships between bullying victimization, loneliness, and psychological resilience in adolescents. A total of 639 high school students (415 girls and 224 boys) participated in the study. The research hypothesis was tested using a hierarchical regression analysis method. The findings highlight that both bullying victimization and loneliness are significant negative predictors of psychological resilience. Based on these results, it is crucial to implement programs that focus on raising awareness about the harmful effects of bullying and promoting empathy among adolescents. Interventions aimed at improving communication skills and fostering positive peer interactions can help reduce social isolation and strengthen relationships.

Adolescence is one of the most critical developmental periods of life (Vuru et al., 1999). Protective factors for the healthy development of adolescents include strong family relationships, positive peer influences, and supportive environments, which provide emotional stability and guidance. Additionally, high self-esteem, access to mental health resources, and healthy lifestyle choices contribute to psychological resilience and overall well-being (Cairns et al., 2014). Some adolescents can demonstrate healthy development in this period despite the various negative factors they are exposed to, thanks to their psychological resilience (Ostaszewski, 2020). Psychological resilience is the ability of an individual to effectively cope with, adapt to, and recover from adversity, stress, and challenging life events. It involves maintaining mental health and well-being despite encountering difficulties, and it encompasses qualities such as emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, optimism, and a strong support network (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Resilient individuals can bounce back from setbacks and use their experiences to grow and strengthen their coping strategies for future challenges (Lerner, 2006). Some individuals may not be negatively affected despite the negative situations they have experienced thanks to their psychological resilience. Psychological resilience reduces the negative effects of stressful situations and facilitates the individual's adaptation to life and the conditions around them (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). By cultivating resilience, adolescents are better equipped to handle obstacles, maintain their mental health, and achieve long-term success (Twum-Antwi et al., 2020).

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Risk and protective factors for adolescents' psychological resilience have been identified in previous research (Shpiegel, 2016). Several factors maintain or enhance psychological resilience (Ellis et al., 2017). However, adolescents encounter several risk factors that can severely impact their psychological resilience, weakening their ability to cope with life's challenges. Risk factors are generally environmental (economic, war, earthquake), family-based (domestic neglect and abuse), and personal (illnesses, negative life experiences). But, satisfying social relationships, communication skills, and humor are some of the protective factors for adolescents' psychological resilience (Masten, 2015). Moreover, healthy development, healthy living, and the ability to withstand stressors are positive predictors of resilience (Sher, 2019). However; physical abuse, housing problems, and criminal history in the families of adolescents are risk factors for psychological resilience (Shpiegel, 2016). Similarly, bullying victimization can also be considered as a risk factor for resilience. A recent study among adolescents shows a negative correlation between bullying victimization and resilience (Ran et al., 2020).

Bullying refers to the influence, oppression and intimidation of those who are in a superior position or stronger, usually to get their way (Olweus & Limber, 2010) It is the repetitive and painful physical, psychological, social, or verbal attacks of a powerful individual on someone too weak. Bullying among adolescents is generally seen as physical, verbal, and cyber bullying (Olweus et al., 2019). A study investigating the prevalence of bullying in 71 countries shows that approximately 26% of adolescents are involved in bullying, of which 12% are victims, 10.7% are bullies, and 3.6% are both bullies and victims (Hosozawa et al., 2021). Findings from a recent study indicate that, in Türkiye, each adolescent can be both a victim twice and an offender twice throughout their educational experience (Talu & Gümüş, 2022). Bullying victimization through face-to-face or online can bring about various short- and long-term problems for adolescent mental health (Urano et al., 2020). A meta-analysis shows that bullying victimization can cause behavioral and emotional problems, especially internalized problems such as anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Schoeler et al., 2018). Similarly, longitudinal studies indicate that experiences of bullying during adolescence may have negative effects on mental health in adulthood (deLara, 2019). Being bullied is a risk factor for adolescent mental health. However, some adolescents can cope with bullying because of their resilience (Rutter, 2006). Adolescents with higher resilience are better able to cope with bullying by employing adaptive strategies, seeking support, and maintaining a positive outlook. However, persistent bullying can undermine resilience over time, highlighting the need for supportive environments and interventions to bolster resilience and address the root causes of bullying victimization (Shemesh & Heiman, 2021). Rothon et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of investigating the relationship between psychological resilience and bullying victimization. Studies have shown that adolescents who experience bullying often exhibit lower levels of resilience, leading to challenges in emotional regulation and increased negative emotional cognition, ultimately heightening the risk of developing conditions like depression and anxiety (Fang et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important how adolescents who are exposed to bullying can recover despite their negative experiences.

Loneliness, similar to bullying victimization, can have a significant negative impact on adolescents' healthy development and psychological resilience. Loneliness is related to many mental problems during adolescence when social relationships are important for the healthy development of adolescents (Cooper et al., 2021). Loneliness is defined as the physical absence of a friend, sadness caused by being alone, or lack of friends (Laursen & Hartl, 2013). Loneliness usually refers to an unpleasant feeling that arises when one's network of social relationships is quantitatively or qualitatively insufficient in a significant way. Loneliness, which is associated with mental health problems during adolescence, is also associated with symptoms of stress and depression in later life (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Adolescents may experience great fluctuations in their social relationships as they move away from their parents, with peer relationships gaining importance. Therefore, adolescents are more at risk of experiencing loneliness (von Soest et al., 2020). Loneliness in adolescents is a risk factor for depression, stress symptoms, and social anxiety (Goosby et al., 2013). Moreover, loneliness is positively associated with shyness, low self-esteem, and poor social skills (Tian et al., 2021). In addition, a long period of loneliness during adolescence is a risk factor for adolescent mental health (Loades et al., 2020). Psychological resilience plays a crucial role in how adolescents handle loneliness, as it equips them with the skills to cope with isolation and seek out meaningful connections. When adolescents are resilient, they are better able to overcome the negative impact of loneliness by actively pursuing social support and maintaining a hopeful outlook. However, without adequate social support, even the most resilient individuals may struggle,

as loneliness can erode self-esteem and emotional well-being (Lin et al., 2023). Considering the negative consequences of loneliness on adolescents, it is important to conduct studies that require a more comprehensive understanding of the factors related to loneliness. As with bullying victimization, addressing and mitigating loneliness is vital for promoting the mental well-being and resilience of adolescents.

Present Study

Research shows that bullying victimization causes isolation and increases loneliness (Seher & Küçük, 2022). Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between loneliness and bullying victimization among adolescents, suggesting that those who experience frequent bullying are more likely to report higher levels of loneliness (Talan et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be said that adolescents who are exposed to bullying have higher loneliness levels. In addition, considering that loneliness affects adolescents socially, it can be thought that loneliness levels will negatively predict their psychological resilience.

The study on predicting bullying victimization and loneliness in relation to psychological resilience in adolescents is crucial for several reasons. By identifying the predictors of resilience, this research can inform the development of targeted interventions and preventive strategies to support at-risk youths. Furthermore, the study could reveal nuanced interactions between these factors, offering a comprehensive view of how bullying and loneliness influence overall well-being. The findings may contribute significantly to creating more effective school programs, counseling approaches, and community resources aimed at enhancing resilience and reducing the adverse effects of bullying and loneliness. Ultimately, this research has the potential to foster healthier developmental environments and promote emotional stability among adolescents. In this context, it is of great importance to examine the concept of bullying victimization to protect and maintain the psychological resilience of adolescents. The current study will allow for a better understanding of prevention strategies to minimize the effects of bullying victimization. Therefore, the current study aims to analyze the predictive role of bullying victimization and loneliness on psychological resilience.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 639 adolescents, 415 girls (64.9%) and 224 boys (35.1%), attending different high schools. The ages of the adolescents ranged from 15 to 18 (Mean=16.34, $SD=.85$). The research received ethical approval from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at Necmettin Erbakan University (Board Number: 2023/486). Informed consent provided information about the purpose of the study and assured parents that their children's participation in the study was voluntary.

Measurements

Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale. Bulut et al. (2013) developed the scale to determine the psychological resilience levels of adolescents. The scale, which consists of 6 sub-dimensions: family support, peer support, school support, adaptation, perseverance to struggle, and empathy, has a total of 29 items and a 4-point Likert structure. In the construct validity study, it was found that the item factor loadings ranged between .59 and .81. Bulut et al. (2013) calculated the Cronbach's alpha value .81. Similarly, the Cronbach alpha value of the scale was found to be adequate in this study ($\alpha = .82$)

Multidimensional Bullying Victimization Scale. Harbin et al. (2019) developed the scale to determine bullying victimization in adolescent samples was adapted into Turkish by İme et al. (2020). The 24-item scale consists of 3 sub-dimensions: direct, indirect, and evaluative victimization. The bullying victimization experienced by the adolescent is determined by the average score on the scale. High scores indicate a high level of bullying victimization. The construct validity analysis demonstrated that the fit indices of the scale were satisfactory. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was found to be adequate in this study ($\alpha = .87$).

Short Form of UCLA Loneliness Scale. Russell et al. (1980) initially developed the scale, which was later adapted into Turkish by Yıldız and Duy (2014). This unidimensional scale comprises 7 items and utilizes a 4-point Likert scale. The psychometric evaluation of the scale indicates that it is a valid and reliable measurement

instrument. In the adaptation study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was reported as .74, while the current study found the reliability coefficient to be adequate at $\alpha = .82$.

Data Analysis

The present study examined the relationships between bullying victimization, loneliness, and psychological resilience. Initially, means, standard deviations, and interrelationships among the variables were computed. Subsequently, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the predictive contributions of bullying victimization and loneliness to psychological resilience. Before starting the analysis, VIF and IF values were calculated and found as 1.02-1.21 and 0.63-0.97 respectively. Durbin Watson's coefficient value was also calculated and found to be 1.92. Therefore, it was determined that there is no multicollinearity and residual problem in line with the recommendations of Field (2013).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The relationships between the variables, descriptive statistics, and reliability coefficients of the scales used are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations between variables and descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Ss	α	1	2	3
1. Bullying Victimization	.24	.52	.87	-	-.35**	.58**
2. Psychological Resilience	3.27	.50	.82		-	-.64**
3. Loneliness	1.57	.77	.82			-

** $p < .001$

A significant negative relationship was found between bullying victimization and psychological resilience ($r = -.35, p < .001$). On the other hand, a significant positive relationship was found between bullying victimization and loneliness ($r = .58, p < .001$). Finally, a significant negative correlation was found between psychological resilience and loneliness ($r = -.64, p < .001$).

Regression Analysis

In the regression analysis, a hierarchical multiple regression approach was used to predict psychological resilience. The study variables were incorporated into the model in three stages: initially, gender and age were included, followed by the variables for bullying victimization and loneliness. The results for each variable within the model are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis results predicting Psychological Resilience level

Variable	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	B	Ss	β	t	B	Ss	β	t	B	Ss	β	t
Age	.14	.02	.24	6.17**	.15	.02	.26	7.16**	.09	.01	.16	5.24**
Gender	-.02	.04	-.02	-.65	.01	.03	.01	.43	.14	.03	.13	4.33**
B.Victi.					-.36	.03	-.36	-10.21**	.00	.03	.00	.13
Loneliness									-.43	.02	-.65	-17.20**
R ²	.06				.19				.25			
Adj R ²	.06				.19				.25			
Ss	.49				.45				.37			
F (dfn,dfd)	21.48 _(2,636)				51.44 _(3,635)				130.55 _(4,634)			

Note. ** $p < .001$, B.Victi: Bullying victimization.

The analysis revealed that bullying victimization and loneliness accounted for 64% of the variance in psychological resilience, with the model being statistically significant ($p < .001$). After controlling for age and gender variables, bullying victimization was first included in the model and was found to explain 19% of the variance in predicting psychological resilience ($R^2 = .19$, Adj. $R^2 = .19$). Then, loneliness, which explained 26% of the variance, was entered into the model in the third step ($\Delta R^2 = .256$). As a result, bullying victimization ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$) and loneliness ($\beta = -.65, p < .001$) were found to be significant negative predictors of psychological resilience.

Discussion

This study seeks to investigate the predictive associations between bullying victimization, loneliness, and psychological resilience in adolescents. The findings indicate that both bullying victimization and loneliness are significant negative predictors of adolescents' psychological resilience.

The primary finding of the study shows that bullying victimization is a significant negative predictor of psychological resilience in adolescents. Bullying victimization in adolescents significantly undermines their psychological resilience by exacerbating stress and emotional turmoil. When adolescents are subjected to bullying, they often experience a profound sense of helplessness, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem, all of which can impair their ability to effectively cope with challenges (Lin et al., 2022). The current finding suggests that adolescents with high psychological resilience may be less likely to be exposed to bullying. For example, Donnon (2010) found that adolescents with high psychological resilience were less likely to engage in aggressive behavior or be bullied. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2017) stated that bullying victimization is associated with depression in children and may be a risk factor for psychological resilience. In a study conducted with adolescents, VÍllora et al. (2020) found that adolescents with high levels of bullying victimization had low levels of subjective well-being and psychological resilience. Similarly, Güçlü and Çam (2022) conducted a study with high school students and found that those who were exposed to cyberbullying had lower levels of psychological resilience than those who were not. As a result, exposure to bullying may be a risk factor for adolescents' psychological resilience. In other words, the psychological resilience levels of adolescents exposed to bullying may decrease.

Secondly, loneliness is a negative predictor of psychological resilience in adolescents. Loneliness in adolescents poses a significant risk to their psychological resilience, as it can deeply affect their emotional well-being and coping abilities. When adolescents experience prolonged periods of isolation or a lack of meaningful social connections, they may struggle with feelings of inadequacy, depression, and anxiety, which can undermine their ability to effectively manage stress and challenges (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020). In support of the research findings, Han et al. (2021) stated that adolescents exposed to bullying experience higher levels of loneliness and that there is a negative relationship between loneliness and psychological resilience. Loneliness is often strongly linked to psychosocial risk factors such as psychiatric problems, depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, social anxiety, alcohol dependence, aggressive behaviors, and impulsivity, and may be associated with low psychological resilience (Cacioppo et al., 2015). Margalit (2010) emphasizes the importance of social relationships in the healthy development of adolescents and states that loneliness may be a risk factor for adolescents' psychological resilience. Jakobsen et al. (2020) found a negative correlation between loneliness and psychological resilience in their study. The results of the current study support these earlier findings, indicating that loneliness could be a significant risk factor influencing adolescents' psychological resilience.

Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal a significant relationship between bullying victimization, loneliness, and psychological resilience among adolescents. The negative predictive relationship indicates that higher levels of bullying victimization and loneliness are associated with lower levels of psychological resilience. This underscores the profound impact that social adversity and isolation can have on an adolescent's ability to cope with stress and maintain mental well-being. Such insights are crucial, as they highlight the need for targeted interventions that address both the immediate and underlying factors contributing to diminished resilience in this vulnerable population.

The significance of these findings lies in their potential to inform and enhance strategies aimed at bolstering adolescent resilience. By acknowledging the detrimental effects of bullying and loneliness, educators, counselors, and policymakers can develop more effective support systems and programs tailored to mitigate these risks. Interventions that focus on reducing bullying, fostering social connections, and promoting emotional support can be instrumental in improving resilience among adolescents. Additionally, these findings pave the way for future research to explore specific mechanisms through which bullying and loneliness impact

resilience, ultimately contributing to more nuanced and effective approaches to adolescent mental health and well-being.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current study can be evaluated with some limitations along with important results. Since the current study employs a cross-sectional design, it is not possible to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. To address this limitation, future research could benefit from longitudinal or experimental studies. Additionally, the data were gathered through self-reports from participants, which may introduce potential biases or inaccuracies in the findings. It should be taken into consideration that this may cause biased evaluations. Another limitation is that the convenience sampling method was used to collect data from adolescents attending public high schools where students from lower socio-economic levels are concentrated. This may limit the generalizability of the research findings. In this sense, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in different samples in future studies.

Despite these limitations, this study holds significant implications. It suggests that interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of bullying victimization should focus on enhancing adolescents' psychological resilience and awareness. For instance, educators and parents can prioritize helping adolescents strengthen their resilience to better manage bullying victimization. Fostering positive life experiences, minimizing negative life events, encouraging positive emotions, and teaching effective coping strategies can all contribute to improving adolescents' resilience. Adolescence is a period of development that can involve high risk in personality and emotions. However, the development of social communication skills and satisfying social relationships may prevent adolescents from loneliness and may be protective factors for their mental health. Likewise, implementing preventive and remedial psychological counseling interventions designed to reduce bullying victimization among adolescents could enhance their psychological resilience.

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Data Availability: The data used in the study can be requested from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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