

Peer Victimization as it Relates to Interparental Conflict, Friendship Support and Anxiety

by

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the relation between peer victimization and exposure to interparental conflict in the home. Specifically, the study examined whether there was a link between experiencing higher levels of peer victimization in adolescence and exposure to interparental conflict. Further examined was the relation between interparental conflict, victimization and friendship support and also whether higher anxiety levels are related to peer victimization. Measures used included the Friendship Features Interview for Young Children, Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale, Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale, the parent version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale and the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale. Participants were 41 children age six to twelve years. Findings indicated correlations between peer victimization and interparental conflict. In addition, results suggested a relation between interparental conflict and friendship support.

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I. Introduction

Peer victimization has become a topic of considerable concern among American children. Media reports of victimization or bullying of children and adolescents have become increasingly common. Peer victimization is a term used to refer to the abusive treatment directed toward an individual by their peers. It can consist of physical, verbal or nonverbal aggression and can be either direct or indirect (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). In the recent past, physical aggression typically received more attention. However, relational or indirect aggression is now receiving as much if not more attention. The following passage is illustrative of the problem:

As fifth grade progressed, the social atmosphere at school began to shift in subtle but profound ways. Many of my classmates had started forming cliques. Being accepted by one of these groups was all that mattered. You were either in or out. If you weren't a cheerleader or an athlete, an honor student, or a member of the "tough" crowd, you might as well have been invisible. I noticed other changes, too. Instead of being admired for participating in class the way we were in earlier grades, those of us who raised our hands frequently were now laughed at and labeled teacher's pet. Making fun of people, even if you didn't want to, was the new price of social acceptance by the group. The rules were simple. It was either shun or be shunned. The meaner you were to the "rejects", the more popular you became with the other members of your clique. If you weren't willing to go along with the crowd, you would become the "reject". Kids

who had always been sweet and caring were becoming unkind in order to impress their friends. (Blanco, 2010, p. 38)

Dan Olweus is often credited with being one of the earliest researchers to increase our knowledge and understanding of bullying and peer victimization (Card & Hodges, 2008; Olweus, 1993). His studies during the late seventies and early eighties helped define this phenomenon and provided insight. Since then, many have added to our knowledge about types, causes, and prevalence of victimization (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997).

While peer victimization is a term used to refer to the harassment, abuse and other forms of aggression that some children experience at the hands of their peers, alternately, these children are also described as being bullied (Olweus, 1993). According to Olweus (1993) “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 9). In addition, in order to be classified as bullying there should be a negative balance of power between the individual who is bullying and the person being victimized (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying behavior typically falls within two broad categories: physical and relational. Within these categories this behavior can be broken down even further. Physical is considered to be more direct or overt. It involves an assault or threat of assault to one’s personal being (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Relational aggression is typically more covert or indirect. It consists of an attack on a person’s interpersonal relations or friendships (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004). The ultimate goal of relational aggression is to hurt an individual’s social standing, and can take direct or indirect forms (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). It is often indirect in that it sometimes occurs when peers make negative remarks about the victim to other individuals. Frequently, the original perpetrator

remains anonymous (Underwood, 2003). For the purpose of this paper the term peer victimization will be used to collectively refer to each form of aggression.

Some have attempted to ascertain why certain individuals may be more vulnerable than others to peer victimization (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & Obrennan, 2007). The way in which someone dresses, looks, talks, choice of friends or even lack of friends are reasons some individuals may cite as to why they decided to victimize a particular individual (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

Individuals with only a few friends or those who have no friends may feel less able to protect themselves. In addition, others may be less likely to defend them if they feel no connection or attachment to the victim. The presence of close friends might provide some protection against victimization since victimizers may fear retaliation as a consequence of their bullying behavior (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997). In the current study, it was hypothesized that frequently victimized children would report less friendship support than individuals who did not report victimization.

Perceptions about bullies can be quite surprising. Bradshaw et al., (2007) found that school personnel and even some students often view bullies as being popular. This perception may in part help explain why some students choose to participate in bullying behavior rather than attempt to prevent it from occurring or continuing. They may fear being on the receiving end and thereby alienated from the “in” crowd. In addition, some findings suggest that school staff may underestimate the scope of the problem of bullying, especially at the elementary school level (Bradshaw, Sawyer & O’ Brennan, 2007). Since bullying behavior is reported to take place not only in less supervised places such as hallways but also in areas considered to be very structured and more supervised such as the classroom, this may lend some support to the view that some

school personnel may not be aware of the prevalence of the problem or the various behaviors associated with different forms of bullying.

In recent years, peer victimization has been aided by technology with the emergence of what is being referred to as cyber bullying. With cyber bullying, individuals use the internet (i.e., email, instant messages, networking sites) and/or other electronic means to spread rumors or make other negative statements about an individual (Li, 2006). This practice has the potential to disseminate information much faster and to a wider number of students than ever before, essentially taking victimization to a whole new level.

Potential Consequences of Victimization

Peer victimization can have a variety of negative consequences. Individuals who are victimized may suffer academically and have trouble socializing effectively with their peers. In addition, they may experience both internalizing and externalizing problems including withdrawal and elevated rates of anxiety and depression (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Mohr, 2006). According to Hawker and Bolton (2000) victimized children were more likely than non victimized individuals to have higher levels of depression. In addition, their results indicated that victimized individuals tended to have low self esteem as well as a negative demeanor.

Grills and Ollendick (2002) found that victimized children tended to report higher levels of anxiety which was true for both males and females. They theorized that there were two possible reasons for this outcome. Continued victimization could lead individuals to develop symptoms often associated with anxiety. In addition, individuals who exhibit anxiety related traits might have initially been targeted because of these characteristics. These issues could make some individuals more susceptible to initial and continued peer victimization.

According to the Centers for Diseases Control (2010) as of now the third leading cause of death for individuals ages 10-24 is suicide. Findings from kidshealth.org (2010) indicated that adolescents may choose to kill themselves for a variety of reasons, one of which is thought to be social isolation or lack of support from peers. Individuals who are rejected by their peers tend to have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and early dropout from school (Bornstein & Lamb, 1992; Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

Eisenberg and Aalsma (2005) found that victimized individuals tended to have higher rates of absenteeism as well as other academic difficulties. It is possible that if an individual is unable to go to school with the knowledge that they will be safe and secure, their thoughts may not be entirely focused on academics. Victimized individuals may attempt to avoid the environments in which their victimization typically occurs (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). If this is the case and the school setting is where the victimization is occurring, victimized individuals might miss the presentation of pertinent information and/or have difficulty completing class or home work which might make it hard to maintain pace with their peers.

According to Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) children who reported being victimized during the fall semester also reported continued feelings of distress during the spring. In addition, their findings suggest that the type of victimization an individual experiences might play a role in determining the sort of adjustment problems that may develop. In their study, individuals who experienced physical, direct verbal and general victimization were more likely to report feelings of loneliness. The development of anxiety might serve to fuel continued victimization. As the bullying continues, it is possible that the victim may feel as if they are somehow responsible for their treatment which could cause anxiety to increase even more. Increasing anxiety could encourage further victimization as the bully might perceive this behavior as encouragement

(Craig, 1998). In the present study, it was hypothesized that individuals who reported experiencing higher levels of peer victimization would also report higher levels of anxiety.

Helping individuals cope with emotional issues can take valuable time and resources away from classroom instruction. Combating victimization before it develops into a larger school wide issue is one method which may help keep the focus on academics and other school related activities. School faculty and parents must become aware of the seriousness of the problem and of the associated consequences in order for this to happen.

Interparental Conflict

Cummings and Davies (2010) defined interparental conflict as “any major or minor interparental interaction that involved a difference of opinion, whether it was mostly negative or even mostly positive” (p. #). Much like peer victimization, interparental conflict can take a variety of forms. It can be either overt or covert. It can consist of a wide range of behaviors such as verbal or physical abuse, withdrawal, and/or a civil discussion regarding two differing ideas (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Findings regarding the prevalence of interparental conflict within the home vary. In one study, it was reported that approximately 40% of the sample indicated that they had been exposed to interparental conflict within the home (Ferguson & Horwood, 1998).

The potential effects of interparental conflict on children’s level of adjustment are an area of concern. A considerable body of research has examined the effects of interparental conflict on a wide range of outcomes, including children’s academic and cognitive functioning, emotional adjustment and behavior, and even basic functions like sleep (Cummings & Davies, 2010; El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Mize & Acebo, 2006). Findings have indicated that exposure to destructive forms of interparental conflict can negatively impact children by increasing their risk for internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, depression and difficulty socializing with peers

(Cummings & Davies, 2010). In the present study, it was hypothesized that individuals who reported higher levels of anxiety would also have more frequent exposure to interparental conflict.

Interparental Conflict Exposure and Peer Victimization

There are a variety of damaging aspects associated with interparental conflict that could result in a child's increased vulnerability to peer victimization. According to Goeke-Morey, Cummings and Papp (2007), the failure by some adults to model effective conflict resolution tactics may be critical. If children are not exposed to appropriate conflict resolution tactics then they may be ill equipped to handle conflict when it occurs with their peers. It is possible that if they use these ineffective strategies in an attempt to resolve conflict within their social groups, they might exacerbate the problem leading to an increase in victimization.

While much focus has been placed on the association between the exposure to interparental conflict and adjustment problems in children (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003), studies have also examined the idea that there may be a link between adjustment problems and increased vulnerability to peer victimization (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999). It is possible that if a child has been exposed to destructive forms of interparental conflict which resulted in increased levels of internalizing or externalizing behaviors then these behaviors might set them apart or isolate them from their peers making them more vulnerable to victimization (Hodges et al., 1999). As a result, bullies might be encouraged to target them due to little or no fear of reprisal. Further, these behaviors might hamper a child's ability to form stable relationships with their peers.

It has been suggested that stable relationships may offer individuals the level of friendship support necessary for providing a measure of protection against bullying behavior (Hodges et al.,

1999; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Schwart, Petit, Dodge, and Bates (2000) suggested that children who were frequently exposed at an early age to destructive forms of interparental conflict were more likely to be victimized at a later age by their peers. This was especially true for those who had fewer friends when compared to those with more friends. In the current study it was hypothesized that individuals who experienced more frequent exposure to interparental conflict would also report lower levels of friendship support.

Mohr (2006) found that children who were exposed to higher levels of interparental conflict within the home appeared to experience higher levels of negative interactions with their peers. Based on these and previously mentioned findings, further research concerning the possibility of a link between interparental conflict and peer victimization might prove beneficial. Results could provide school administrators and/or parents with another means of determining which individuals might be at increased risk of peer victimization. In addition, the information may also help in the development of effective evidenced based interventions.

II. Review of Literature

Peer Victimization as it Relates to Interparental Conflict, Friendship Support and Anxiety

Peer victimization is drawing increasing attention by professionals who work with children. Much of this interest has developed in an effort to determine the consequences peer victimization may have on children's academic success as well as on their emotional and physical well being. An area of concern is the role that peer support plays in helping to ameliorate the effects of peer victimization. In addition, the consequences that a lack of peer support can have on children are also of interest.

Peer victimization is a situation in which a child is subjected to persecution or abusive treatment by his or her peers that can lead to feelings of anxiety, apprehension and trepidation (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). The victimization can be physical, verbal, or even nonverbal in nature and is often committed by either an individual or group of individuals perceived as being more powerful than the person being victimized. It can happen repeatedly and on multiple occasions (Rigby, 2000). Studies conducted in the United States have found that approximately 15 to 20% of school aged children reported having been victimized (Batsche & Knoff, 1994).

According to Bellmore and Graham (2007) numbers regarding just how many children report being victimized can vary. One reason for this might be due to variations in how victims and non victims are identified in different studies (i.e., experiences with types of victimization versus level of intensity or frequency). Nishina and Juvonen (2005) found that over a five day period of daily monitoring, 47% of their sample indicated they had experienced victimization on at least

one day. In addition, Bellmore and Graham (2007) indicated that in their study over half of the sample reported experiencing some level of victimization during the beginning of their sixth grade year.

Peer victimization, which is often referred to as overt or social/relational aggression, can be physical or social in nature. While in the past more attention was often focused on physical victimization (i.e. physical aggression, verbal threats) research has shown that social/relational victimization can be just as harmful (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Social aggression is defined by Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson and Garipey (1989) as “the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism or character defamation” (p. 328). This type of aggression can sometimes take on more of a covert rather than overt nature. In addition, when social aggression is indirect, the aggressor is not as easily identifiable (Underwood, 2003).

Social aggression can include behaviors such as the spreading of nasty rumors or gossip, to encouraging one’s peers to ignore individuals or terminate existing relationships. The goal of this form of victimization is to destroy or damage an individual’s social connections. The following is a vignette found in Brown (2003) about a girl who was in a group and suffered social aggression from other group members:

This time last year, my happy, friendly seventh-grade daughter was voted off the island. The stars aligned, the dice rolled, the ballots were cast and she was “it”. She went from being a member of the “in crowd” to becoming its designated exile. She was talked about, hated, despised, not invited, ridiculed, but mostly, most cruelly, ignored. Even the fringe girls, those not quite in the clique, started avoiding my daughter. Under strict orders from the reigning queens

not to speak to, look at or, God help you, sit near the victim, they complied until finally, the cheese stood alone. (p. 106)

To see if children would perceive social aggression to be as hurtful as physical aggression, Galen and Underwood (1997) presented children with a scenario in which they had to imagine being snubbed or shunned by a group of children that they happened upon. Responses to the scenario showed that children found this type of non verbal, socially aggressive behavior to be just as hurtful as more verbal types of physical aggression in which an individual might threaten bodily harm. In addition, children reported that this type of aggression occurred more frequently than other forms.

Peer victimization can create problems in the classroom which in turn can disrupt the learning process and the teachers' ability to teach effectively. Aggressive individuals tend to engage in more disruptive and off task behavior than non aggressive individuals. This behavior not only interferes with the learning of the aggressive individual but also with the academic achievement of non aggressive individuals (Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000).

Peer rejection has been shown to be one of the leading causes of school dropout and poor academic performance (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). It has also been associated with adult psychiatric problems, juvenile delinquency, anxiety and depression (Bornstein & Lamb, 1992). Victims of peer group rejection often suffer from low self esteem, loneliness, feelings of distrust, social isolation and can be at risk for adjustment difficulties. Unfortunately, these internalizing and externalizing behaviors can increase the risk of victimization for these individuals due to the fact that they may actually draw negative attention which further exacerbates the problem (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999).

Many victimized individuals will often act out or display actions such as social withdrawal. Some perpetrators may view these sorts of reactions as the encouragement they need to continue their bullying behavior. Either way, these responses are usually ineffective. Displaying these behaviors can lead others to think that they can bully without fear of reprisal. When the victim is anxious or withdrawn they are typically not using effective coping methods that might help them to deal with an assault. As a result, they may actually end up providing the bully with the response they are seeking.

Storch and Masia-Warner (2004) found that individuals who were victimized tended to avoid new and/or common social situations. Avoidance of these conditions occurred whether the person had experienced relational or overt aggressive behavior. When children are victimized or in fear of being victimized, they will often withdraw socially. They tend to avoid the situations in which they have previously experienced bullying behaviors (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Since adolescents spend the majority of their time in school this is often the place where most of the victimization occurs.

Eisenberg and Aalsma (2005) found that victimized individuals often have higher rates of absenteeism, lower grades and suffer from a variety of other academic problems. If victims are acting out in a negative way they may become isolated since these behaviors are often off-putting to others. The isolation may make them vulnerable to victimization because they do not have the protection that friendships can provide.

Victim Characteristics

Attempts have been made to determine whether there are certain characteristics that some victimized individuals may exhibit that might make them more vulnerable to peer victimization. Bradshaw et al., (2007) asked individuals about the reasons they felt they were targeted for

victimization. Some of the students in the study reported that their victimization was a direct result of their attire, physical appearance and/or the way they spoke. Middle school participants more often reported this than participants in high school or elementary school. Other reasons cited were socio- economic status, race and gender.

Results from a study on teenage girls and social aggression found that some teachers and adolescent girls often felt that there was something about the victim that made them a target. The victim may be unassertive or dress in a way that is considered different from everyone else or unpopular. Adolescent girls and teachers also felt that the victims themselves may have said or done something to elicit an attack (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Further, Craig et al., (2000) found that while teachers claimed they knew how to recognize bullying, they only intervened in approximately one out of six bullying episodes that occurred on the playground and approximately one out of five of those that occurred inside the classroom.

There has been some interesting research on individual perceptions of those engaging in bullying behavior. One characteristic that surprisingly, is sometimes attributed to bullies is popularity. According to Bradshaw et al., (2007) approximately 60% of middle school and high school participants believed that those responsible for bullying behavior were popular. Teachers often associated this attribute with bullies as well. This view contradicts the commonly held opinion that bullies are generally maladjusted outsiders who are neither liked nor accepted by others.

Bullies and bystanders often seem to place blame for their actions on the victims. It is as if there is an attitude that if the victims did not behave or look the way they did then they would not become the targets of peer victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Frequently, the motivation for

victimization has very little to do with the victim and more to do with trying to increase or maintain ones standing in their social group (Juvonen & Graham, 2001).

There are certain characteristics that are more often associated with the female gender. Unfortunately, some of these traits create more reasons why some might become the focus of victimization. Female relationships tend to be more intense and intimate. As compared to boys, their friendships are usually more exclusive and their social groups smaller. Girls are often more focused on close relationships such as who is their best friend. Females also tend to feel more of a need to disclose their private thoughts and desires to their friends (Underwood, 2003). It is the intimate nature of these relationships that can make some individuals more susceptible to victimization. The desire to disclose personal information that might be better left unsaid could be used by perpetrators as ammunition to be used when bullying. Some would use the information gathered to attempt to embarrass or damage the victim socially.

Individuals who are targets of peer victimization often become the focus because children perceive that there will be no retribution as a result of tormenting them (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997). Their status is devalued since often they have been rejected previously, and since other people dislike them the assumption is that no one will come forward to protect them from further aggression. When individuals expect some sort of retaliation or negative consequences for picking on a particular person then they will typically leave them alone. Those who have no friends frequently suffer from loneliness and low self esteem (Hodges et al., 1997). If they personify these traits this may also make them objects of ridicule because they could be perceived as being weak.

Peer Group Support

The type of friends an individual has can also determine whether they will be viewed as a potential victim. If their friends are not viewed as threats, then children who engage in peer victimization will not be deterred from targeting them. This concept is especially true if the friends they have are also victims of aggressive behavior (Juvonen & Graham, 2004). Friendships can serve as a means for learning socialization techniques. They also provide individuals with an opportunity to acquire confidence and self esteem through positive feedback. In addition, children who reported having best friends were found to be less likely to be victimized than those who did not have one (Hodges et al., 1999).

One way in which positive peer support might be valuable is that it can provide individuals with the opportunity to learn valuable socialization skills. It can provide individuals with the chance to feel as if they “belong” or have an identity during what is often a formative time in their lives. Positive peer support can also provide individuals with the chance to learn the skills necessary for coping with aggressive behavior (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). According to Hoglund (2007), positive peer relationships can decrease negative feelings and increase individual’s interest in learning and in participating in extracurricular activities. Involvement in different activities and having friends are methods that can help children build self esteem.

Schmidt and Bagwell (2007) suggested that specific friendship qualities such as security and help might serve as a protective barrier against the development of adjustment problems such as anxiety. In addition, the presence of friendship support may protect some individuals from the negative impact of victimization. Their findings indicated that girls who reported higher levels of assistance from their friends were less likely to be as impacted by overt and relational victimization when compared to those who reported receiving less help from their friends.

In a study by Demaray and Malecki (2003), victims reported feeling as though they received less support from classmates than those in the bully or comparison groups. Their reaction might be due to the perception that classmates are the ones they perceive the victimization to be coming from. In addition, their results showed that bullies reported feeling as though they received less parental support than those in the comparison group. They also reported receiving no retribution from their classmates in response to their behavior or treatment of others (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). These findings seem to lend support to the research that has suggested that bullies are often perceived as being popular by their peers as well as their teachers (Bradshaw et al., 2007) and may provide some explanation as to why they do not report receiving less support from their classmates.

Overall, both victims and bully/victims (i.e., individuals who not only engage in bullying but are also victimized) reported social support as being much more important than either those in the bully or comparison groups did. In addition, classmate and close friend support was rated as more important by the victim group than by those in the bully group (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Since victimized individuals tend to avoid situations in which bullying has previously occurred, this treatment may lead to social avoidance due to fear of negative feedback (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Intentional avoidance can serve to limit peers' exposure to positive peer relationships and may be one of the reasons why victimized individuals often report feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression.

Researchers have a variety of methods for assessing peer victimization. Self report scales are often a preferred means of assessment. They can provide the investigator with a firsthand account of a child's perception about treatment from peers. While parent and teacher reports of victimization are used as well, it has been suggested that respondents may not be completely

cognizant of a child's treatment by their peers (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2002) conducted a study to determine whether self report measures yielded more psychometrically sound information than other methods such as peer report measures. Results indicated that self report measures tended to yield more reliable data in comparison to peer reports when children were aged five to seven years. However, beyond this age group they found psychometric differences to be less pronounced. It was theorized that younger children may not have the ability to recognize victim characteristics or understand the concept of victim, hindering their ability to provide valid responses.

Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996b) theorized that if children associate school with negative experiences with classmates, then they may eventually want to withdraw or avoid the setting in which the treatment is occurring. In their study on peer victimization and school adjustment they used the 14 item School Liking and School Avoidance Scale to measure participants' attitudes toward school. In addition, they used the Perceptions of Peer Support Scale (PPSSS), a measure they developed to ascertain children's views of peer victimization in the classroom (see Appendix A for complete measure). It consisted of 12 items, eight of which were considered "filler" items. The remaining four items were designed to assess four types of victimization (i.e., Physical; "Does anyone in your class hit or kick you?" General; "Pick on you at school?", Indirect Verbal; "Say bad things about you to other kids?", and Direct Verbal; "Say mean things to you?"). Along with finding an association between peer victimization and loneliness they also found a strong link between peer victimization and negative school adjustment. Results show that children who reported being victimized at the beginning of the school year continued to report feelings of negative school adjustment during the spring.

In a separate study, Ladd, Kochenderfer and Coleman (1996) used a 30 item version of the Friendship Features Interview for Young Children Scale, a measure they developed to assess children's perceptions of various aspects of their friendships (see appendix B for 24 item version of measure), in combination with the School Liking and School Avoidance Scale. Again, they found a relation between victimization and school adjustment. Specifically, results indicated that conflict in friendships was related to negative school adjustment, especially for boys.

Anxiety and Peer Victimization

Research has suggested a connection between maladjustment and peer victimization (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Storch, Masia-Warner & Brassard, 2003). According to Leadbeater and Hoglund (2009) children with higher levels of initial anxiety were more likely to be at increased risk for victimization. These individuals might have more difficulty socializing with their peers due to characteristics often associated with this sort of behavior. Children who have trouble socializing may withdraw from their peers as a result of this deficit or feelings of inadequacy. This behavior could increase their vulnerability to victimization even more since bullies might perceive them as an easy target due to lack of protection offered by close friends.

Feelings of anxiety and loneliness may be even higher for individuals who experience both overt and relational aggression (Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003). Their findings suggested that the more types of victimization an individual experienced the more likely they were to experience higher levels of social anxiety and loneliness. However, children who only experienced relational aggression reported higher levels of anxiety and loneliness comparable to those who experienced both types (Storch et al., 2003). The increased levels in these individuals might be due to the nature of social/relational aggression (i.e., the attempted destruction of social standing and trust). Relational aggression is often covert and the source of such behavior can be

anonymous and difficult to ascertain (Underwood, 2003). In addition, it may occur with no warning and seem to the victim as if it is being committed without a specified reason. Factors such as these could cause the victim to develop a loss of trust and in part help account for an increased level of anxiety.

Davidson and Demaray (2007) found that victims of peer victimization reported higher levels of internalizing problems when they perceived that various forms of support (i.e., parental, classmate and school personnel) were low. Results also showed that close friend support did not moderate the relation between peer victimization and distress. Many victims often report not having close friends, which may stem from social avoidance of situations in which they feel the potential for victimization is highest. Anxiety about social situations and distrust about the intentions of others more than likely makes it difficult for victimized individuals to let down their guard and develop friendships.

Grills and Ollendick (2002) found that females tended to report higher levels of anxiety than males in response to peer victimization. In addition, they found that victimized individuals tended to report more feelings of loneliness and emotional anguish. They theorized that girls might be more likely to internalize in response to the actions of their peers thereby lowering their feelings of self worth and increasing their level of anxiety. Males on the other hand may not view the victimization directed at them as evidence that something is wrong with their character but might instead be of the opinion that something is wrong with the character of their peers. Therefore, their level of self worth may act as a protective barrier against victimization.

Causes of Peer Victimization

There are many reasons why some individuals engage in peer victimization. The behavior may be a method by which some members of adolescent peer groups maintain boundaries and

control (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). One specific way that an individual may attempt to maintain control within a group is by instructing other members not to speak to or become friends with a particular person. Not wanting to face rejection themselves, most children tend to go along with these sorts of demands.

Peer victimization can also be a way for some individuals to relieve boredom. By spreading rumors or gossip, individuals can create short term excitement, which gives the peer group something to discuss. It is a way to seek attention from other group members by sharing information that others may be unaware of. This sort of aggressive behavior can also be used by an individual to create a sense of belonging (Juvonen & Graham, 2001).

There are a variety of reasons as to the causes of aggressive behavior or bullying by adolescents. One of the possible explanations for this type of behavior is based on social learning theories. According to Eron (1987) reinforcement of certain behaviors within the home may be one cause of aggression by adolescents in other arenas. Reinforcement, a concept that is a part of Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, is defined by Gredler (2005) as "any behavioral consequence that strengthens behavior" (p. 120). If the child is reinforced by the parents for committing acts of aggression within the home, the child may feel it is appropriate to engage in this type of behavior in other places, including school. If parents punish or do not reinforce aggressive behavior and instead reinforce non-aggressive responses, then the child's aggressive behavior would more than likely diminish (Eron, 1987).

Another way individuals may learn to engage in aggressive behavior is through modeling (Eron, 1987). If the child observes their parents or others committing aggressive behavior, they may choose to model it themselves. Modeling is more likely to occur if they perceive that the models suffer no negative consequences as a result of performing these behaviors (Gredler,

2005). They may come to believe that if their parents are engaging in aggression, then this must be an appropriate way to resolve problems.

According to Loukas, Paulos and Robinson (2005) psychological control on the part of the parents may also have something to do with social aggression by adolescents. Psychological control can involve the use of covert or hidden behaviors, one of the main aspects of social aggression. Females who engage in social aggression use tactics such as spreading rumors, or the ignoring of others as a means of intimidation. Parents who engage in psychological control against their children may withhold affection, ignore or use other forms of emotional manipulation to control their children (Loukas et al., 2005). Their children in turn may model this behavior and use it as a way of bullying others.

Peer Group Structure

The ranking within a female adolescent peer group that engages in relational aggression may be similar to the structure in a model used by Juvonen and Graham (2001) to describe the roles and reactions of individuals who are involved in what they classify as a bullying circle. In the top rank is the individual designated as the bully. They are typically the ring leader and the one who starts the aggressive behavior. In the next rank is the individual classified as the henchmen or follower. They are not the ones who start the aggressive behavior but they support the leader by taking an active part.

The next position is occupied by a supporter. The supporter is a more passive position and while individuals in this rank may sustain the behavior of others, they do not actively participate. The fourth position is termed passive supporter. These individuals like the bullying but they do not openly support it. The fifth position is filled by individuals who are designated as disengaged onlookers. These children do not take a stand because they do not feel it has anything to do with

them. The next position is designated for those who are potential defenders. They want to step in and put a stop to the bullying due to the fact that they do not like it. However, they do nothing to terminate the situation. Finally, there are the defenders of the victim. They do not agree with or like the aggressive behavior and have the courage at least to attempt to help the victim (Juvonen & Graham, 2001).

The makeup or structure of the group is always changing and can do so at any moment and with little or no warning. Changes in structure go according to who is currently considered popular and who is now in isolation. The unpredictability can create a great deal of anxiety, stress and feelings of depression. One of the keys to maintaining one's position in the group is the ability to remain composed in the face of social aggression. Outward signs of anger are not acceptable, the reason for this being the desire to not alienate oneself from the group. By following along with the group, a child is reassured that he or she belongs. This is especially true for girls who tend to be more fearful than boys of social exclusion (Brown, 2003).

Interparental Conflict and Children's Adjustment

Much effort has been made in an attempt to assess the impact of interparental conflict on children's level of social and emotional adjustment. According to Ferguson and Horwood (1998), approximately 40% of their adolescent sample reported exposure to some form of interparental conflict. Interparental conflict much like peer victimization can be overt and/or covert in nature. Further, this type of conflict can fall into two forms, destructive and constructive. McCoy, Cummings and Davies (2009) theorized that destructive conflict is characterized by the use of various forms of aggression as well as expressions of anger and antagonism while constructive conflict is typically marked by positive exchanges and productive resolution such as compromise and/or lack of withdrawal.

There are several factors which may help determine whether the conflict is considered constructive or destructive. The way in which the conflict is or is not resolved may help to establish the category into which it falls as well as the level of potential harm it may have on the children who are exposed to it. The type of response generated from the conflict (i.e., positive or negative) could also play a part in whether the conflict was either constructive or destructive (Cummings & Davies, 2010, Goeke-Morey et al., 2003). Finally, the behavior that occurs between spouses or partners once the conflict has ended might also contribute to whether the conflict is deemed destructive or constructive (Cummings et al., 2003).

Even after the negative interaction has subsided, the conflict may continue well afterwards in one form or another. Those involved may continue to have negative interactions associated with the initial problem. These interactions may include hostility, or other indirect, anger fueled exchanges (Cummings & Davies, 2010).

Parents may unknowingly provide a model for how children might behave when faced with certain situations or circumstances. The way in which parents display conflict and/or handle disagreements may serve to alter the way a child behaves or reacts when confronted with conflict type situations amongst their peers (Grych & Fincham, 1990). It may also affect the way they display their emotions or the strategies they use to cope with stressful situations

When there is a positive or productive resolution to interparental conflict, children may have the opportunity to witness effective methods for resolving conflict and reaching a resolution that is beneficial to both sides. In turn, they may use similar methods when conflict arises amongst their peers. When children are able to witness successful conflict resolution tactics it may actually help them to develop their own problem solving skills that they can then use when faced with peer conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Finally, witnessing positive or constructive conflict

resolution may serve to foster children's feelings of security in the family unit (McCoy, Cummings, & Davies, 2009).

If parents are using ineffective or negative conflict resolution strategies, their children may in turn use similar methods for resolving trouble with their peers (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Goeke-Morey et al., (2007) found that exposure to parental withdrawal during conflict affected children negatively by increasing their level of emotional anguish. Replicating these and other responses during conflict may increase their vulnerability to victimization.

Children who witness frequent unresolved conflict may have higher rates of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Cummings et al., (2003) found that various behaviors (i.e., verbal and nonverbal expressions of hostility, insults, and withdrawal) led to higher levels of negative emotionality in children whereas calmer, more productive conflict resolution tactics resulted in higher levels of positive emotionality. Further, less productive forms of conflict resolution tactics were associated with higher levels of marital discord while behaviors more conducive to successful resolution were linked to higher levels of marital satisfaction. It is likely that the higher the level of discord the higher the possibility that the adults may be using ineffective conflict resolution tactics that may increase the risk of adjustment difficulties in their children.

Children's perceptions of the seriousness of the conflict (i.e., whether they blame themselves for the conflict) could also determine the level of impact the conflict may have on their adjustment (Harold, Aitken, & Shelton, 2007). Shelton and Harold (2008) suggested that children who believed they were in some way responsible for the conflict between their parents were more likely to become involved in attempting to resolve the conflict. In addition, if a child

who blamed themselves was not allowed to become involved in implementing a resolution, the child may act out as a means of expressing frustration over their inability to intervene.

Feelings of blame and/or responsibility might also lead to what has been referred to as masking (i.e., dampening the appearance of an emotional response in the face of marital conflict). Children may choose to mask any signs of feelings when exposed to interparental conflict in order to avoid involvement or hostility (Shelton & Harold, 2008).

It is possible that these sorts of ineffective strategies could result in adjustment problems as well as in difficulty socializing with peers. If children use these strategies when interacting with peers, it could result in increased vulnerability to peer victimization. Masking emotions could encourage victimizers to increase their bullying behavior since the victim is not offering any resistance. Expressions of frustration may also serve to feed or motivate the victimizer to continue their behavior.

Exposure to high levels of destructive interparental conflict may result in any number of negative consequences. Children who report elevated levels of exposure might have greater risk of developing adjustment problems in school (Sturge-Apple, Davies, Cummings, Schermerhorn, & Winter, 2008). Research findings have suggested that children who are exposed to interparental conflict may even be more likely to experience problems with academic functioning (Cummings & Davies, 2010).

The Impact of Peer Support

Wasserstein and La Greca (1996) indicated a possible link between peer support and interparental conflict. Specifically, their findings showed that the presence of peer support might play an important role in preventing the development of adjustment problems in children who are exposed to high levels of interparental conflict.

Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos (1995) found that adolescents who experienced increased levels of support from their parents appeared better adjusted than those children with lower levels of support. However, children exposed to detrimental or negative forms of interparental conflict may feel as if they are not receiving the level of parental support and attention they need. Therefore, peer support from close friends may be even more crucial in maintaining children's social and/or behavioral adjustment (Davidson & Demaray, 2007). If children feel that their parents are more focused on conflict and less focused on providing them with attention, then friendship support may help to compensate for the perceived loss.

Having peer support may provide opportunities for disclosure or sharing of similar experiences as well as satisfying a need for emotional support. Without this, children from homes characterized by high conflict may have a higher likelihood of developing problem behaviors (Wasserstein & La Greca, 1996). Such issues can make some children more vulnerable to victimization (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999). As a result, they may unknowingly alienate peers with the potential to provide friendship support due to increased levels of problem behaviors or adjustment issues.

According to Davidson and Demaray (2007) adult support may be even more beneficial than friendship support in the face of peer victimization. For those who report having few if any close friends this may be especially true. Parental support may help to alleviate or even protect against the development of internalizing behaviors (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1995). If victimized individuals' perceptions of interparental conflict translate into feeling as if they are receiving less support from their parents, then intensification of any internalizing feelings they may be experiencing is possible and could result in difficulty with peer interactions.

Lindsey, Colwell, Frabutt, and MacKinnon-Lewis (2006) indicated that boys who came from families with a high level of conflict tended to have fewer mutual friends. Lack of friendship support or having fewer friends might make an individual more susceptible to bullying behavior due to lack of perceived protection (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997). Having fewer friends may mean that the bully feels there is no fear of reprisal from friends who might be inclined to protect the victim.

Effects of Conflict Exposure on Children

The potential consequences of children's exposure to interparental conflict can be far reaching and affect individuals in a wide variety of ways. Stocker and Richmond (2007) have even indicated a relation between children's exposure to interparental conflict and later hostility in their adolescent romantic relationships. Witnessing high levels of destructive parental conflict may not only have a negative impact on basic social interactions with their peers but also in the way children eventually handle conflict in their personal relationships. Children may view the inefficient conflict resolution tactics modeled by their parents and replicate them in their own affairs of the heart.

Exposure to interparental conflict has also been linked to problems with sleep. Findings suggest that children who experience emotional turmoil may have lower quality of sleep and more activity throughout the duration of the sleep period (El-Sheikh & Buckhalt, 2005). It is possible that when an individual has trouble controlling an emotional response to some event or they continue to think about or anticipate further turmoil or victimization then their thought processes may make it hard for them to relax in order to enter into and maintain a state of sleep.

Conflict and Victimization

Much of the research on interparental conflict and children has focused on the impact on outcomes such as academic functioning, emotional adjustment and sleep (El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Mize & Acebo, 2006; Harold, Aitken & Shelton, 2007; Wasserstein & La Greca, 1996). While some research has touched on the effects of exposure to interparental conflict on children's ability to effectively resolve conflict amongst their peers, less attention has been given to whether it may play a role in increasing an individual's vulnerability to peer victimization. If interparental conflict does increase levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in some individuals as some researchers have found, then this may be a possibility.

Mohr (2006) explored the relation between family interactions and peer victimization. He found a relation between conflict exposure in the home and negative interactions with peers. Results indicated that victimized individuals were more likely to report experiencing higher levels of internalizing issues (i.e., anxiety, low self esteem, somatic complaints...etc). In addition, non aggressive individuals who experienced peer victimization were more likely to respond to such conflict in a submissive, nonthreatening manner.

Hodges et al., (1999) found that children who appeared to experience higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviors are often more likely to be victimized by their peers. When children are upset they may behave in ways (i.e., anxious, withdrawn...etc.) that could alienate them from their peers. As a result, there might be a lack of friendship support which could increase their likelihood of becoming targeted for victimization. If increased exposure to interparental conflict leads to higher levels of internalizing or externalizing behavior then this might be another factor that could increase some children's vulnerability to victimization due to potential difficulty engaging in interactions with peers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relation between peer victimization and interparental conflict. Specifically, the study will examine whether there is a correlation between the amount of peer victimization an individual reports experiencing and their level of exposure to interparental conflict within the home. In addition, the study will also explore whether individuals who report experiencing higher levels of peer victimization or exposure to frequent displays of interparental conflict also report having lower levels of friendship support. Finally, it will also attempt to discover whether there is a relation between anxiety and reported exposure to peer victimization.

Significance

Peer victimization can create problems in the classroom which in turn can disrupt the learning process and the teachers' ability to instruct effectively (Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000). Victims of peer group rejection often suffer from low self esteem, loneliness, feelings of distrust, social isolation and can be at risk for adjustment difficulties (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999). Research has shown that individuals suffering from peer victimization often report experiencing feelings of anxiety (Storch, Masia-Warner and Brassard, 2003).

Finding a link between peer victimization and exposure to interparental conflict in children can have implications for families and school personnel. Due to the potential effect that exposure to interparental conflict can have on children, it may be beneficial for parents to monitor the types and/or level of conflict displayed in front of children. In addition, they may need to be cognizant of the methods they use when attempting to resolve the conflict. The behaviors they model may play a role in increasing the risk of some children for developing adjustment problems which could possibly make them more vulnerable to peer victimization. The time

needed to deal with behavior and bullying issues can draw valuable time away from instruction and may result in decreased productivity at work for some parents who must take time off to come in to the school to assist with the problem.

Many students are referred for exceptional education assessment due to poor school performance. Some of these children also have behavior problems which may be the reason why they are not performing well in school. It is possible that some of these students may be acting out due to problems they are having with other children.

Research Questions

1. Do individuals who report higher levels of peer victimization report higher levels of anxiety?
2. Do individuals who report higher levels of peer victimization experience more exposure to marital conflict?
3. Do individuals who report higher levels of peer victimization report lower levels of friendship support?
4. Do individuals who report higher levels of exposure to marital conflict report lower levels of friendship support?

Operational Definitions

There are several terms that will be discussed throughout this study, specifically peer victimization, social/relational aggression, and interparental conflict. Peer victimization is a situation in which a child is subjected to persecution or abusive treatment by his or her peers that can lead to feelings of anxiety, apprehension and trepidation (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). The victimization can be physical consisting of an assault or threat of assault to ones physical being (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), verbal or nonverbal in nature. Verbal and nonverbal aggression is often referred to as social or relational aggression. Social aggression (i.e., relational

aggression) is defined by Cairns et al., (1989) as “the manipulation of group acceptance through alienation, ostracism or character defamation” (p. 328). While it can be either direct or indirect the ultimate goal of relational aggression is to hurt an individual’s social standing (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). For the purposes of this paper, peer victimization will be assessed through the use of the Perceptions of Peer Support Scale (PPSSS), a measure developed and utilized within studies conducted by Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996b).

III. Method

Participants

Data collected from participants in a larger study previously approved by the Auburn University Institutional Review Board were used for this study. The larger study examined links between family functioning, children's sleep, and child adjustment. Participants of the study came to the Child Development Laboratory located on the campus of Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. Once they arrived, parents of the participants were asked to complete several questionnaires. In addition, research assistants interviewed the child participants through the use of various questionnaires. The participant's parents received financial compensation for their time. The sample consisted of 41 participants (18 females and 23 males) ranging in age from 6 to 12 years. Five percent of the sample was composed of African Americans while 95% were Caucasian American. Children were from middle and upper middle class families. Participants were recruited from Lee County Alabama through the use of flyers as well as by word of mouth.

Procedure

Measures used in this study included the Friendship Features Interview for Young Children (FFIYC), the Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale (PPSSS), the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC), and the parent version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The Friendship Features Interview is a 24 item measure designed to assess children's awareness of their friendships that occur in the classroom (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996). Response choices consist of Yes, No and Sometimes. Variables include Validation, Conflict, Exclusivity, Aid, and Disclosing Negative

Affect. In one study by Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman (1996b) coefficient alphas ranged from .63 to .80. However, in the current study, alphas ranged from .26 to .81 (See Table 1). Therefore, the two subscales with the strongest coefficients alphas, Exclusivity and Aid, were used for the purpose of correlational analysis. The Exclusivity scale evaluates “the extent to which children perceived their friendship as mutually selective in both liking and association” (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996, p. 1107). The Aid scale evaluates the level of assistance an individual receives from a friend when faced with a tough situation.

The Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale (PPSSS) is a 12 item scale designed to measure children’s views of their classmates. Four of the scale’s items assess children’s exposure to peer victimization (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996b). Subscales of interest include Indirect Verbal, Direct Verbal, General and Physical Victimization. Response choices include Never, Sometimes, and A Lot. Responses were coded from one to three and raw scores were used for correlational analysis. In this study, all four subscales were combined in order to form a total victimization variable. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996b) indicated a coefficient alpha for all four items of .74. For the current study statistical analysis yielded a coefficient alpha of .75 (See Table 2). The PPSSS has been found to have good psychometric properties (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996a).

The Revised Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) is a 49 item scale with a Yes/No response format designed to measure anxiety in children age six to nineteen years (Reynolds & Richmond, 1997). Subscales include Physiological Anxiety, Worry/Over Sensitivity, Social Concerns and Total Anxiety. Subscales examined for the purposes of this paper include Total Anxiety, Worry/Oversensitivity, and Social Concerns/Concentration. The Worry/Over Sensitivity scale measures an individual’s tendency to worry about a variety of issues as well as fear of experiencing isolation. The Social Concerns/Concentration scale assesses the concern

and/or anxiety regarding interpersonal issues which might impact an individual's ability to focus. Finally, the Total Anxiety scale is composed of all of the items and provides an overall score. Raw scores are converted to scaled scores except for the Total Anxiety scale where the scaled score is converted into a Tscore. Raw scores were used for the purposes of correlational analysis and reliability coefficients ranged from .58 to .86 (See Table 3). The RCMAS has been found to have good psychometric properties (Reynolds & Richmond, 1997).

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC) is a 51 item scale designed to measure children's perceptions regarding marital conflict between their parents (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). Response choices include True, Sort of True, and False. Variables of interest include Perceived Threat, Destructive Conflict, and Self Blame. The Perceived Threat scale is designed to measure how threatened children feel and their ability to cope during interparental conflict. The Destructive Conflict scale assesses frequency, resolution, hostility and aggression sometimes associated with interparental conflict. Finally, the Self Blame scale evaluates how often child related interparental conflict occurs as well as whether children feel responsible for the conflict. Raw scores were used for the purpose of correlational analysis. Previous research has found the CPIC to demonstrate good psychometric properties (Grych et al., 1992). In the current study alphas ranged from .58 to .84 (See Table 4).

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale is a 64 item scale designed to assess frequency of occurrence of certain relationship behaviors between children's parents (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Variables derived on this measure include Negotiation (i.e., "I suggested a compromise to a disagreement."), Psychological Aggression (i.e., "I insulted or swore at my partner."), Physical Aggression (i.e., "I twisted my partner's arm or hair."), and Injury ("I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner."). Response choices are scored from 0

to 7. Raw scores were used for correlational analysis. An interparental conflict variable was created by combining the Psychological and Physical Aggression scales. The CTS has been found to have good psychometric properties (Straus et al., 1996). In the current study, the reliability coefficient for the interparental conflict scale was .77 (See Table 5).

Data Analysis

The Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) program was utilized for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were completed in order to ascertain the sample characteristics as well as the frequency and percentage of responses to the various forms of victimization as measured by the PPSSS. Means and standard deviations were computed for each instrument. In addition, bivariate correlations were conducted to determine the relation between victimization, friendship support, marital conflict and anxiety.

IV. Results

Means and standard deviations for sample characteristics and each measure as well as PPSSS response totals and percentages are presented in Tables 1 - 7. Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the relation between victimization, friendship support, marital conflict and anxiety. Correlations are presented in Tables 8 – 14.

Of those who completed the PPSSS (see Table 7 for a complete list of response totals and percentages), approximately 28 percent of respondents reported experiencing indirect verbal victimization at least “sometimes” while five percent reported experiencing it “a lot”. Approximately forty eight percent of respondents reported having experienced general victimization “sometimes” while roughly eleven percent claimed to have experienced this type of behavior “a lot”. Findings for both direct verbal and physical victimization were close; approximately 37 percent and 31 percent “sometimes”, and around five percent “a lot” respectively.

The age range of participants in the sample was six to twelve years with a mean age of ten years. General victimization appeared to be the most common form of victimization in this sample. Bivariate correlations were run with age and all of the victimization variables in order to determine whether there was a relation involving the ages of the sample members and reports of experiencing victimization (see Table 8). Due to their young age, it was theorized that the low percentages of respondents who reported experiencing various forms of victimization might have been attributed to their lack of experience with such behavior. However, results did not indicate a significant relation between age and any of the variables.

Findings regarding the relation between anxiety and victimization and the association between victimization and interparental conflict were not as expected. Bivariate correlations were conducted between three of the subscales of the RCMAS (Worry/Oversensitivity, Social Concerns/Concentration and Total Anxiety) and the victimization subscales. However, results did not indicate any significant relation between the measures (see Table 9). In addition, findings regarding peer victimization and reports of interparental conflict as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale or the CPIC did not indicate any significant relation either (see Table 10 and Table 11).

Bivariate correlations were conducted between two of the subscales on the FFIYC (Aid and Exclusivity) and the CTS as well as with the CPIC (see Table 12 and Table 13). However, results did not indicate any significant relation between friendship support and interparental conflict ($r = .16$ and $r = .10$) or children's perception of interparental conflict. In addition, bivariate correlations were conducted between the same scales from the FFIYC and victimization with no indication of a significant relation (see Table 14).

V. Discussion

Peer victimization is a topic receiving increasing attention. Some concerns involve the consequences of victimization for academic performance, mental health and general well being. Increased knowledge of this topic may aid in the creation of preventative measures. Further, this study may also help better identify individuals who may be more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of victimization. As a result, it is possible that children as well as parents and school personnel could be empowered with various techniques for combating victimization. The purpose of this study was to explore the relation between anxiety, friendship support, interparental conflict and peer victimization. No significant association was found between any type of victimization and anxiety as measured by the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS). Since somatic complaints, withdrawal and symptoms of internalization are often associated with anxiety (Hodges et al., 1999), and research has indicated the possibility of an association between individuals who experience peer victimization having higher levels of internalizing behaviors (Davidson and Demaray, 2007), the expected result was that there would be a significant relation between the two variables. It is possible that the small sample size used in this study may have limited the amount of variation in responses.

According to Davidson and Demaray (2009) internalizing behaviors could make some more susceptible to peer victimization. Further, individuals with adjustment problems may lose out on opportunities to engage in social interactions with their peers due to a tendency to withdraw because of a fear of rejection or negative judgment (Storch & Masia-Walker, 2004). While

findings suggest that internalizing behaviors may increase an individual's risk for victimization, surely not every anxious child will be victimized.

According to Gazelle (2008) there may be specific factors that could increase or decrease the risk of victimization for anxious individuals. Findings from her study indicated that anxious individuals who were more agreeable were less likely to be victimized by their peers than anxious children classified as "attention seeking/immature" or "externalizing anxious/solitary". In addition, those who fell into the agreeable category were more likely to be rated by their peers as intelligent and fun and when compared to those that fell within the other two categories, were less likely to be rejected by their peers.

Children who were classified as immature, requiring much attention or externalizing were more likely to face rejection from their peers as well as victimization. In addition, their peers rated them as having fewer attractive qualities than those in the agreeable group. Gazelle (2008) suggested that although classified as anxious solitary, individuals in the agreeable group seemed to have more effective socialization skills while those in the other groups appeared lacking in this area. It is possible that although there are children who may experience anxiety some might have other skills or traits that could make them less vulnerable to peer victimization. This could at least in part account for the unexpected findings regarding the relation between victimization and anxiety in the current study.

According to Harold and Conger (1997) the way in which an individual perceives interparental conflict and whether they think parental hostility is directed towards them can also play a role in the development of adjustment problems in children. It is possible that the participants within this study were exposed to interparental conflict but their perception regarding the conflict might not have lead to the development of anxiety. Finally, some findings

suggest that long-term victimization is what may lead to the further development of anxiety related behaviors (Craig, 1998). Children with symptoms often related to anxiety might be more susceptible to victimization. Continuous victimization might cause these symptoms to heighten. It is possible that although some of the participants in this study might have reported some level of anxiety they may not have experienced peer victimization as frequently or as continuously as might be necessary to significantly increase these feelings.

Results regarding the relation between friendship support and victimization were surprising in that there was no correlation with friendship support (see Table 13). The expected result was that there would be a significant negative relation between friendship support and victimization. Lack of friendship support is commonly thought to be an important component of peer victimization. Researchers have suggested that individuals who reported victimization may be more vulnerable due to lack of support from close friends. In addition, victims have also reported feeling as though they did not have much support from classmates (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Consequently, bullies might choose to target certain individuals if they do not perceive any sort of potential for retribution from others (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997).

One possible explanation why no significant relation was found amongst the friendship support variables and victimization is that individuals who experience victimization often withdraw or avoid situations in which the bullying has occurred (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Since most children spend the majority of their time in school, it stands to reason that school may be where the majority of the victimization occurs. One possibility is that victimized individuals have developed a level of distrust towards their classmates and may tend to evade opportunities for socialization. As a result of their increasing levels of distrust and diminishing opportunities to form strong friendships, they might not report having many good friends, thereby decreasing

their ability to respond to certain questions regarding friendship support. Another possibility might be due to the young age of the sample. They may not yet have had the opportunity to experience the type of close friendships that often do not develop until the individuals become older and increase in maturity. As a result, they may not have experienced the sort of characteristics assessed by the FFIYC.

Finally, the majority of participants in the current study reported that they had either never experienced victimization or had only experienced it occasionally. Given this trend it is possible that many of the respondents may not have had the lack of friendship support often associated with individuals who are victimized on a more frequent basis (Hodges et al., 1999). This may at least in part help account for the lack of interaction between the two variables. According to Card and Hodges (2008) the characteristics a friend might possess can also determine the level of protection they could potentially provide to the victim. It is possible that even though some of the participants reported varying levels of victimization, they may have also had friends that offered up some amount of support that could have protected them from more frequent victimization.

According to Nansel, Overbeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simon-Morton, and Scheidt (2001) victimization often increases in frequency during middle school. Reports from older children might have yielded higher levels of exposure to victimization. It is also likely that due to the low level of victimization the participants reported experiencing they may not have developed the level of adjustment problems often associated with those who suffer more frequent victimization (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999) perhaps decreasing their level of vulnerability to this sort of treatment. Finally, only one self report measure was used in order to assess occurrence and frequency of peer victimization. It is possible that some children may not have

been completely honest about whether they had experienced victimization. If they had experienced more victimization than they admitted to, these individuals may have feared further retribution for reporting their mistreatment (Card & Hodges, 2008).

Findings regarding interparental conflict and peer victimization were inconsistent with expectations. Bivariate correlations completed between peer victimization as measured by the PPSSS and interparental conflict on the CTS and the CPIC revealed no relation. Research has suggested a connection between frequency of exposure to interparental conflict and adjustment problems in children (Grych & Fincham, 1990). According to Cummings & Davies (2010) it is frequent exposure to interparental conflict that may increase the level of adjustment problems in children. Some have also suggested that adjustment problems might amplify the vulnerability of certain children to victimization (Hodges et al., 1999). Children with adjustment problems (i.e., withdrawal, anxiety, etc.) may be more vulnerable to peer victimization due to a potential decrease in social interactions and therefore a lack of friendship support which can offer some protection (Hodges et al., 1999).

The majority of the participants in the current study reported either never or only occasionally experiencing victimization. It is possible that the participants may not have had much exposure to destructive forms of interparental conflict. It is also probable that some of the respondents may have been exposed to more constructive forms of conflict resolution which might have resulted in increased levels of emotional security (Goeke-Morey, Cummings & Papp, 2007). Perhaps these feelings lessened their potential for experiencing higher levels of victimization at the hands of their peers.

In the current study it was thought that if individuals had been exposed to frequent destructive conflict not only would they report higher levels of anxiety but they might also utilize ineffective conflict strategies modeled by their parents when interacting with their peers. As a result of these factors, the participants might report higher levels of peer victimization. According to Grych and Fincham (1990), adults may unknowingly model unsuccessful means of dealing with conflict by using inefficient conflict resolution tactics. Children may in turn use these unproductive tactics when attempting to resolve their own conflict with peers. In addition, Cummings et al., (2003) suggested that children who witness such tactics as withdrawal may have higher levels of negative emotionality. If children use withdrawal strategies, they may be susceptible to victimization. Their peers may view them as easier targets due to a lowered expectation of retaliation. Finally, higher amounts of negative emotionality might increase their level of vulnerability to victimization as it could hamper their ability to socialize appropriately with their peers (Hodges et al., 1999). As indicated by Gazelle (2008) it is possible that if some participants were experiencing anxiety they may possess other characteristics such as agreeableness that could increase their level of friendship support thereby making them less vulnerable to victimization.

An additional goal of this study was to examine whether individuals who reported higher levels of exposure to interparental conflict also reported lower levels of friendship support. Findings indicated no significant correlations between either the CTS or the CPIC and the FFIYC (see Table 12 and Table 13). Based on research the expected result was that higher levels of exposure to interparental conflict would result in lower amounts of friendship support (Demaray, 2007; Harold et al., 2007).

According to Harold et al., (2007), children who thought they were to blame for their parent's conflict might put themselves at risk for increased levels of adjustment problems. In addition, Demaray (2007) indicated that frequent exposure to destructive forms of interparental conflict could also result in higher levels of adjustment problems in some children. These adjustment problems might lead individuals to withdraw from their peers resulting in increased vulnerability to victimization due to lack of friendship support. In addition, Lindsey et al., (2006) found that boys exposed to high levels of interparental conflict were less likely to have a close friend than those exposed to lower levels.

It is possible that if some of the participants had been exposed to destructive forms of interparental conflict and developed adjustment issues as a result, they might have other attributes or qualities that their peers may find attractive and would facilitate their efforts to socialize appropriately. According to Gazelle (2008) individuals classified as anxious agreeable were more likely to have some reciprocated friendships though still fewer than those without adjustment issues. Although they may have been exposed to negative forms of interparental conflict, their ability to socialize even if on a limited level when compared to their peers, might have provided them with some peer support.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study was the relatively small number of participants. A larger number may have elicited a wider range of responses. Further, the participants' age range may be another limitation. Participants in the sample ranged in age from six to twelve years with a mean age of ten. Many of them may not have begun experiencing peer victimization of any considerable amount. Future studies should perhaps be focused on older individuals attending either middle or high school when this type of behavior may become more prevalent.

Another potential limitation is that only one measure of peer victimization was used. It may be useful to use multiple self report instruments. In addition, there are new forms of victimization. Cyber bullying, a type of victimization that occurs electronically (Qing Li, 2006), can involve such actions as the posting or spreading of damaging information, rumors, pictures and even threats. It can be carried out through the use of a computer or cell phone to name a few methods. Cyber bullying can provide the perpetrator with even more anonymity and a larger audience. Information can be disseminated at an even faster rate than more traditional methods. While some items on typical victimization questionnaires might cover some aspects of cyber bullying a measure that includes items specifically related to cyber bullying could yield information regarding prevalence, rates amongst different age groups and even information specific to various methods used to carry out this type of behavior. The data gathered could be used to further educate school officials, parents and students.

Teacher reports regarding certain aspects of children's behavior might have provided additional information regarding potential adjustment problems. Since adjustment issues could be one factor that might make some children more susceptible to victimization, teachers may be able to offer firsthand knowledge based on their observations. Further, they frequently witness the interactions that occur between students. As a result, they could give added information especially since children may withhold some or miss subtle cues regarding the potential cause of certain situations. It may have been prudent to have multiple measures of anxiety as well. In this study the RCMAS was used in order to provide an assessment of children's level of anxiety. Using multiple measures may have elicited more information regarding participant's potential anxiety.

The parent version of the CTS scale was one of the measures used to assess various aspects of interparental conflict. It might have been useful to administer the children's version regarding interparental conflict of the CTS. It is possible that some parents might not have been completely forthcoming while answering the questionnaire. Therefore, children's responses might have provided additional information not disclosed by the parents. In addition, other children measures assessing exposure and perception pertaining to interparental conflict would provide more information as well. Finally, gathering more information regarding whether children perceive themselves as actually implementing the ineffectual conflict tactics modeled by their parents during conflict with their peers could also prove helpful.

Teacher's observations regarding the conflict tactics that some children use might also be beneficial. Since they spend a significant amount of time with their students they have the potential to provide a wealth of information about children they view as vulnerable and the mannerisms they might display. In addition, children's parents often share information with teachers and other school faculty, making them privy to some of what may be occurring within various households.

Future research could focus on children's involvement in activities and groups (i.e., girl scouts, sports...etc.) outside of the school setting. Peguero (2008) indicated interesting findings regarding differences in the victimization of students involved in within school versus between school extracurricular activities. In addition, Feldman and Matjasko (2005) found that certain aspects of extracurricular activities might offer adolescents a level of protection against violence. It might be prudent to assess what role having a community of social support outside of school would play in a child's life when there is no support from peers within school or minimal support from parents frequently engaged in conflict at home. This could provide additional information

to parents and school officials regarding additional factors which could increase vulnerability to victimization and assist in the implementation of interventions that may help to children deal with such behavior.

Finally, the diversity of the sample of participants was limited. Thirty nine of the participants were Caucasian American while two were African American. A more varied sample might provide additional information regarding peer victimization. According to Vervoort, Scholte and Overbeck (2008) victimization was more prevalent in ethnically diverse classes. In addition, findings also indicated that under this condition there were more displays of bullying behavior by ethnic minorities than in less diverse or ethnically homogenous environments. It could be helpful to determine if there are differences between various cultures in the identification, prevalence and handling of this behavior and even in the way in which this behavior is conducted or viewed. This information could affect the types of interventions suggested or implemented in various communities.

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Table 1

Cronbach Coefficient Alphas for the Friendship Features Interview for Young Children Subscales.

Subscales	Alphas	Means	Standard Deviation
Validation	.26	5.03	1.11
Aid	.81	9.66	2.53
Conflict	.45	4.78	1.17
Exclusivity	.78	9.41	2.39
Disclosing Negative Affect	.47	3.49	1.17

Table 2

Cronbach Coefficient Alpha, Scale Mean and Standard Deviation for the Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale (PPSSS).

Subscales	Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Peer Victimization	.75	6.03	1.89

Table 3

Cronbach Coefficient Alphas, Scale Means and Standard Deviations for the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale.

Subscales	Alphas	Means	Standard Deviation
Physiological	.58	3.83	2.16
Worry/Oversensitivity	.78	3.07	2.64
Social Concerns/Concentration	.80	2.05	2.12
Total Anxiety	.86	8.90	5.83

Table 4

Cronbach Coefficient Alphas, Scale Means and Standard Deviations for the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale.

Subscales	Alphas	Means	Standard Deviation
Destructive Conflict	.82	9.74	5.96
Perceived Threat	.84	8.96	5.96
Self Blame	.58	2.76	2.38

Table 5

Cronbach Coefficient Alpha, Scale Mean and Standard Deviation for the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Parent Version).

Subscales	Alphas	Means	Standard Deviation
Interparental Conflict	.77	21.03	19

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations and Percentages for Sample Characteristics

<u>Variables</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
Age (months)	41	77	160	120.71	20.870
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>			
Male	23	56.1			
Female	18	43.9			
African American	2	4.9			
Caucasian American	39	95.1			

Table 7

Numbers and Percentages of Participants Reporting Each Type of Victimization as Measured by the Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale.

<u>General Victimization</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
No	14	40
Sometimes	17	48.6
A lot	4	11.4
<u>Indirect Verbal Victimization</u>		
No	23	65.7
Sometimes	10	28.6
A lot	2	5.7
<u>Direct Verbal Victimization</u>		
No	20	57.1
Sometimes	13	37.1
A lot	2	5.7
<u>Physical Victimization</u>		
No	22	62.9
Sometimes	11	31.4
A lot	2	5.7

Table 8

Bivariate Correlations between Victimization and ages of sample.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	–	.27	.26	.22	.06	.27
2. General Victimization		–	.42*	.37*	.27	.75
3. Direct Verbal Victimization			–	.65**	.37*	.80
4. Indirect Verbal Victimization				–	.32	.76
5. Physical Victimization					–	.71
6. Peer Victimization						–

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9

Bivariate Correlations between the Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale (Victimization) and Anxiety as Measured by the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale.

Subscales	1	2	3	4
1. Peer Victimization	—	.12	.12	.04
2. Social Concerns		—	.59**	.79**
3. Worry/Sensitivity			—	.86**
4. Total Anxiety Score				—

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 10

Bivariate Correlations between Victimization and the parent form of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale

Subscales	1	2
1. Peer Victimization	—	.03
2. Interparental Conflict		—

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11

Bivariate Correlations between Victimization and Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

Subscales	1	2	3	4
1. Peer Victimization	–	.02	.13	.14
2. Perceived Threat		–	.34*	.62**
3. Self Blame			–	.43**
4. Destructive Conflict Scale				–

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12

Bivariate Correlations between Friendship Features Interview for Young Children Subscales and Parent form of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale

Subscales	1	2	3
1. Aid	–	.19	.16
2. Exclusivity		–	.10
3. Interparental Conflict			–

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 13

Bivariate Correlations between Friendship Features Interview for Young Children Subscales and Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

Subscales	1	2	3	4	5
1. Aid	–	.19	-.02	.02	-.01
2. Exclusivity		–	.03	-.14	-.08
3. Perceived Threat			–	.34*	.62**
4. Self Blame				–	.43**
5. Destructive Conflict					–

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 14

Bivariate Correlations between Victimization and Friendship Support

Subscales	1	2	3
1. Peer Victimization	—	.02	-.02
2. Aid		—	.19
3. Exclusivity			—

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix A

Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale

(Training Items) ARE THERE TIMES WHEN YOU:	Never	Sometimes	A lot
Have ice cream for dessert?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
Ride the bus to school?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
Eat breakfast at night-time?	Never	Sometimes	A lot

WHEN IN SCHOOL, DOES ANYONE IN YOUR CLASS:

1. Pick on you at school?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
2. Play games with you?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
3. Tell you you're good at doing things?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
4. Make you feel better if you are having a bad day?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
5. Let you play with them?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
6. Say mean things to you?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
7. Say bad things about you to other kids?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
8. Share things like stickers, toys and games with you?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
9. Hit or kick you?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
10. Miss you if you weren't in school?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
11. Cheer you up if you feel sad?	Never	Sometimes	A lot
12. Help you if kids are being mean to you?	Never	Sometimes	A lot

Appendix B

The Friendship Features Interview for Young Children

1. If a kid took something that was yours, would (friend's name) tell them to give it back? Yes No Sometimes
2. Does (friend's name) like you more than anybody else in your Class? Yes No Sometimes
3. Does (friend's name) say you're his/her friend? Yes No Sometimes
4. Do you feel happy when your with (friend's name)? Yes No Sometimes
5. Is school fun when (friend's name) is not here? Yes No Sometimes
6. Do you and (friend's name) talk about things that make you sad? Yes No Sometimes
7. Does (friend's name) tell you you're good at things you do in class? Yes No Sometimes
8. When you feel bad about something at school, do you talk to (friend's name) about it? Yes No Sometimes
9. Does (friend's name) tell you that you're good at sports and games? Yes No Sometimes
10. If your teacher yelled at you and it made you feel bad, would (friend's name) make you feel better? Yes No Sometimes
11. Some friends say things that aren't so nice. Does (friend's name) ever say she/he won't be your friend anymore? Yes No Sometimes
12. Does (friend's name) play mostly with you on the playground? Yes No Sometimes
13. If kids were being mean to you, would (friend's name) try to make Them stop? Yes No Sometimes
14. Does (friend's name) say nice things to you? Yes No Sometimes
15. Does (friend's name) mostly do things with you at school? Yes No Sometimes
16. If some kids at school were teasing you, would (friend's name) tell them to stop? Yes No Sometimes
17. Some friends boss each other around. Does (friend's name) ever boss you around? Yes No Sometimes
18. Do you have fun when you're with (friend's name) at school? Yes No Sometimes
19. How much do you like being with (friend's name)? Yes No Sometimes

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 20. If (friend's name) wasn't at school one day, would you feel sad? | Yes No Sometimes |
| 21. Do you like (friend's name) more than you like any other kids? | Yes No Sometimes |
| 22. Is (friend's name) a good friend to you? | Yes No Sometimes |
| 23. Some friends make fun of each other. Does (friend's name) ever make fun of you? | Yes No Sometimes |
| 24. How glad are you that you're friends with (friend's name)? | Yes No Sometimes |