



“All the Time, Every Day, 24/7”: A Qualitative Perspective on Symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress in Long-Term Cases of Traditional and Cyber Victimizations in Norway and Ireland

Ida Sjørso¹ · Hildegunn Fandrem¹ · Erling Roland¹

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Abstract

This article investigates symptoms of post-traumatic stress in victims of long lasting cases of traditional and/or cyber victimization. The article presents findings from semi structured interviews with nine victims; eight girls and one boy, five Norwegian and four Irish—who had experienced either traditional or both traditional and cyber bullying. The informants were chosen because they had been victims of closed bullying cases lasting from 1–7 years. The findings showed that victims who had experienced only traditional bullying reported fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress than “poly victims”, i.e., those who had experienced both traditional and cyber victimization. Furthermore, differences were detected between these two groups—victims of traditional bullying and poly victims—regarding when and where the symptoms were experienced and the kind of sub-symptoms that were described. It is important to be aware of these different symptoms when working with children who have experienced traditional and/or cyber victimization to ensure that these children obtain support customized to their needs. The findings could also have practical implications for anti-bullying programs that work with victims involved in both ongoing and closed cases of bullying.

Keywords Traditional victimization · Cyber victimization · Symptoms of post-traumatic stress · Bullying · Poly-victims

Introduction

“All the time, every day, 24/7” was one informant’s answer regarding how often he worries about being bullied. Bullying is no longer limited to the school setting. Because of continuing technological development, pupils are at risk of being bullied wherever they are, from school settings to their own bedrooms. Being the victim of bullying could have great impact on their mental health and several studies have found a correlation between being a victim of bullying and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Kowalski et al. 2014; Reijntjes et al. 2010). Further, research has found a correlation between being a victim of bullying and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Idsoe et al. 2012; Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004).

However, these studies are few, and no qualitative studies were detected. In addition, to our knowledge, research examining the emotional consequences of traditional and cyber victimizations in long-term cases is nonexistent. This study attempts to contribute with knowledge regarding this, as it investigates long-term bullying cases and, more specifically, how symptoms of post-traumatic stress are reported by victims of traditional and cyber bullying.

Traditional and Cyber Victimizations

The prevalence of pupils involved in bullying varies across studies. Smith et al. (2013) suggest that this inconsistency might be due to different samples, but also different measurements. Concerning measurements, different definitions might be given in the surveys, or definitions might not be given at all. Another reason for inconsistencies between studies reporting prevalence of bullying could be different cutoff points regarding frequency of bullying others and being bullied. A cutoff on for example within the last

✉ Ida Sjørso
ida.r.sjurso@uis.no

¹ Norwegian Centre for Learning Environment and Behavioural Research in Education, University of Stavanger, Hulda Garborgs hus, Rektor N. Pedersens vei 39, 4021 Stavanger, Norway

12 months will result in a different prevalence than having a cut of on 2–3 times a month.

According to the study EU Kids Online, 15% of Irish pupils between the ages of 9 and 16 years and 18% of Norwegian pupils have experienced traditional victimization within the last 12 months (Livingstone et al. 2011). In addition, 4% of Irish and 8% of Norwegian pupils report being bullied online within the last 12 months. No definition of bullying was given in this questionnaire; the question that was asked to the pupils was “are someone saying or doing hurtful or nasty things to you” (Livingstone et al. 2011). A recent Norwegian study reports lower numbers regarding both traditional and cyber victimizations (Wendelborg 2019). In this study, 4.9% of the respondents reported that they had experienced traditional victimization and 1.9% reported that they had experienced cyber victimization 2–3 times or more the last month. The reason for the lower numbers for both traditional and cyber victimizations might somewhat be explained by the use of a lower cutoff point and the case that a definition of bullying was given in this questionnaire. Bullying was defined as “repeated, negative actions from one or several towards someone who has problems defending oneself. Bullying could be name calling, teasing, exclusion, backstabbing to hit, push or shove” (Wendelborg 2019, p. 5). This definition narrows the behavior asked for compared with the behavior asked for in the EU Kids online study. Moreover, this definition of traditional bullying is in line with the established definition presented for the first time in the early 1980s (Olweus and Roland 1983). The definition of cyberbullying given in the Norwegian survey originates from the original definition of bullying and corresponds with the one used most frequently in international studies: cyberbullying is bullying using electronic means (Smith et al. 2008).

Overlap Between Traditional and Cyber Victimization

Children who are exposed to both traditional and cyber victimizations are often referred to as global or “poly-victims” (O’Moore 2014). Although traditional bullying and cyberbullying are presented as somehow different forms of bullying, several studies have reported a large overlap between the two forms (Auestad 2011; Olweus 2012; Raskauskas and Stoltz 2007). Research conducted by Olweus (2012) found this overlap both in the USA and in Norway. In the US sample, 88% of the informants who reported they had been exposed to cyber victimization also reported that they had been exposed to at least one type of traditional victimization. The numbers from the Norwegian sample were even higher, presenting an overlap of 93%. In a study by O’Moore (2012), Irish pupils reported high numbers, as 71% of cyber victims reported that they had been exposed to

traditional victimization. However, the numbers vary; in the most recent Norwegian study, 48.5% of the informants reporting having experienced cyber victimization also reports having experienced traditional victimization (Wendelborg 2019). Based on these studies, it seems plausible that many pupils exposed to cyber victimization also seem to be exposed to traditional victimization. It is, however, also important to state that a large percentage of pupils who have experienced traditional victimization have not been victims of cyberbullying.

Emotional Consequences of Traditional and Cyber Victimization

A previous research on traditional bullying shows a substantial relation between being bullied and different emotional problems. A positive correlation has been found between being a victim of traditional bullying and symptoms of anxiety (Hawker and Boulton 2000; Kowalski et al. 2014; Reijntjes et al. 2010), depressive symptoms (Hawker and Boulton 2000; Kowalski et al. 2014; Reijntjes et al. 2010; Ttofi et al. 2011), suicidal thoughts (Holt et al. 2015; Van der Geel et al. 2014), low self-esteem (Hawker and Boulton 2000; Kowalski et al. 2014; Tsaousis 2016), and school avoidance (Egger et al. 2003; Havik et al. 2015; Rueger and Jenkins 2014). Research on cyber victimization and emotional problems has found a correlation between cyber victimization and symptoms of depression (Olenik-Shemesh et al. 2012; Ybarra 2004) and symptoms of anxiety (Schenk and Fremouw 2012; Sjursø et al. 2016).

Cross-sectional studies in Australia and Norway comparing traditional and cyber victimizations and their relation to symptoms of depression and anxiety have shown that cyber victimization seems to have a stronger correlation to symptoms of anxiety than traditional victimization among 9–19-year-old pupils (Campbell et al. 2012; Sjursø et al. 2016). Regarding symptoms of depression, the findings differ; some studies showed that traditional victimization had a stronger correlation with symptoms of depression than cyber victimization (Bonanno and Hymel 2013; Sjursø et al. 2016), while other studies have found that cyber victimization has a stronger correlation to symptoms of depression than traditional victimization (Campbell et al. 2012). In addition to cross-sectional studies, there are also longitudinal studies examining the emotional consequences of cyber victimization when controlling for traditional victimization. One study from Switzerland found that cyber victimization seemed to be a risk factor regarding depression over and above traditional victimization for adolescents (13 years) (Machmutow et al. 2012). Another study from the USA found that cyber victimization predicted negative changes in depression over and above traditional victimization for young adolescents (9–13 years)

(Cole et al. 2016). However, there are also inconsistencies between longitudinal studies as Landoll et al. (2015) in their study of adolescents (14–18 years) from the USA found a unique effect for cyber victimization on anxiety, but not depression, when controlling for traditional victimization.

In addition, research has compared victims experiencing traditional versus both traditional and cyber victimizations. These studies have found that “poly-victims” have significantly higher loneliness scores and poorer self-esteem than victims of traditional bullying (Brighi et al. 2012). In conclusion, research seems to find differences in the correlations between emotional consequences and different types of victimization; however, the findings are not consistent.

Bullying as a Traumatic Experience

Extensive research including longitudinal studies has established a moderate to strong relationship between being bullied and emotional problems such as anxiety and depression.

In recent years, trauma theory has been used to better understand the potential suffering experiences from being bullied (e.g., Idsoe et al. 2012). Such theory concerns the relation between certain events in the past and personal disorders in the present (Brewin 2003).

Trauma can be divided into two types: type I and type II trauma. Type I trauma is an overwhelming one-time incident, for example, an earthquake or the death of a significant other (Terr 1991). Type II trauma can be described as “the experience of multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature and early life onset” (Van der Kolk 2005, p. 402). As the established bullying definition include *repeated negative* act, done against someone who has a difficulty in defending themselves (Murray-Harvey et al. 2012; Olweus and Roland 1983), bullying could be experienced as a type II trauma.

Although research on the correlation between being a victim of bullying and symptoms of PTSD is relatively new, the studies that exist have found a correlation both in the workplace (Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2002; Tehrani 2004) and in school (Idsoe et al. 2012; McKenney et al. 2005; Mynard et al. 2000; Rivers 2004). In addition to these studies, several studies report associations between victimization and symptoms resembling symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder as, for example, sleeping problems, symptoms of anxiety, depression, irritability, somatic complaints, and lack of concentration (Arseneault et al. 2010; Bowling and Beehr 2006; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012). It has further been proposed that as these health problems may resemble the symptomatology characterizing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the experience of

victimization might lead to PTSD (e.g., Kreiner et al. 2008; Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004).

According to the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* (APA 2013), some of the main symptoms of post-traumatic stress are *intrusive memories and persistent avoidance*. Intrusive memories could be described as flashbacks of the traumatic incidents (Idsoe and Idsoe 2012), which could take the form of repetitive nightmares, discomfort in situations that remind the child of the traumatic events, and physiological unrest as a result of experiencing events that remind him/her of the traumatic incidents (Dyregrov 2010). Persistent avoidance and numbing could reflect either mental or behavioral avoidance. Mental avoidance could be defined as “avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic events” (APA 2013, p. 271). Behavioral avoidance could on the other hand be defined as “avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, object, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic events” (APA 2013, p. 271). There are strict requirements to set the diagnosis of PTSD, and in addition, to fulfill the diagnostic criteria, several of the symptoms need to be registered at the same time. Studies on the correlation between PTSD and victims of bullying usually therefore refer to *symptoms* of post-traumatic stress and not the diagnosis of PTSD.

Aims of the Study

Research on victims of bullying and symptoms of post-traumatic stress is still scarce, although some quantitative studies have been published (e.g., Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2002; Idsoe et al. 2012; McKenney et al. 2005; Mynard et al. 2000; Rivers 2004). Idsoe et al. (2012) found a very strong positive association between *frequency* of exposure to bullying and symptoms of PTSD, which is a common result (e.g., Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2002; McKenney et al. 2005). High frequency could in principle, however, reflect both short-term and long-term victimizations, which is of great relevance for symptoms of post-traumatic stress. We are not aware of any study that includes information about the *duration* of bullying and symptoms of post-traumatic stress. In general, there is a need for more in-depth research on how young people experience bullying, particularly how this relates to traditional and/or cyber victimizations (Spears and Kofoed 2013).

The main goal of this qualitative study is therefore to explore whether and how victims of closed cases of long-term bullying report symptoms of post-traumatic stress. A second goal is to see whether there are differences in the symptoms reported by victims of traditional and/or cyber bullying.

Method

Sample

Our study was part of the larger “Stigma project” comprising interviews about bullying with head teachers, parents, and pupils. The cases included in the present study were localized in Norway and Ireland. Finding cases that had been ongoing for a long time in addition to being closed recently was challenging and contributed to a restricted number of cases. In Norway, the cases were reported closed by the school administration, and in Ireland, we used closed cases reported to the Anti-Bullying Centre. Ten victims of bullying were interviewed. However, one informant provided too little information about his reported emotional problems and was therefore excluded. The final sample consisted of 2 cases of traditional bullying and 7 cases of both traditional and cyberbullying. The informants ranged in age from 12 to 18, 5 Norwegian and 4 Irish, 8 girls and 1 boy. The cases were defined as long term and were reported to have a duration between 1 and 7 years. The 2 cases of traditional victimization were reported to last for 1 and 2 years. The 8 cases of both traditional and cyber victimizations were reported to last from 2 to 7 years.

Access and Ethics

Ethical committees in both Norway and Ireland were informed about the study, and the study was approved in both countries. The informants and parents were first informed about the study by receiving a letter containing information. The parents of pupils under the age of 18 years filled out a parental consent form and were then contacted by phone to set a date for the interview. In addition, consent was received from all the informants. Eight of the informants were below 18 years of age and received information about the research customized to their age. In addition, all the informants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interview guide was piloted before use and was originally written in Norwegian before being translated into English for the interviews in Ireland. In Ireland, the Norwegian researcher who also is fluent in English conducted all the interviews to secure the same meaning in both countries. In Norway, three members of a research group addressing bullying conducted the interviews, which lasted from 30 to 90 min. The interviews were conducted between 1 and 12 months after the cases were closed. The interviews were held in an out-of-the-way room in the child’s school or in a private setting and were tape-recorded.

The informants were all presented with the same definition of bullying before the interview started. The definition used was based on definitions from previous research on bullying (Olweus and Roland 1983; Olweus 2012; Smith et al. 2008) as bullying was defined as a negative act, with an imbalance of power, towards someone who cannot easily defend himself/herself. In addition, it was stated that “bullying can happen in different ways. It is, for example in traditional bullying, common to divide between relational, verbal and physical bullying, the latter is not relevant regarding cyberbullying as cyberbullying contains using electronic means.”

The interviews were semi-structured; thus, the interview guide had a list of relevant themes selected for the Stigma project: how the bullying started and ended, description of specific episodes, who they told about the bullying, experienced emotional problems and social network, and what was done by the school. The informants were probed for further elaboration.

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed thoroughly, inspired by standardized methods by Kvale and Brinkmann (2010). The transcribed interviews were transferred to the Nvivo 11 program for analysis. A stepwise analysis was performed. In the first step, all the interviews were read through to get an overview of emerging themes related to experienced emotional problems. During a second read, the descriptions regarding emotional problems were gathered in one main node. In the third read, the dominating themes relating to the description of different types of emotional problems were identified. The different themes emerging were as follows: fear, problems concentrating, trouble sleeping, and avoidance. The second step in the analysis was a thematic approach to identify, analyze, and report the patterns found (Braun and Clarke 2006). Here, a theoretical approach was used rather than inductive, fitting the data in to the pre-existing coding frames which related to the symptoms: intrusive memories and avoidance resulted in the main nodes; intrusive memories and avoidance. These were further divided into sub-nodes where this was appropriate. Intrusive memories were divided into the following: feeling frightened and anxious, problems concentrating, and having trouble sleeping. Avoidance were divided into mental and behavioral avoidance.

Findings

Two of the informants reported experiencing only traditional victimization, while seven reported experiencing both traditional and cyber victimizations. None reported experiencing only cyber victimization. All the informants, independent of type of victimization, provided descriptions that could be categorized into some of the main categories of symptoms of post-traumatic stress. However, differences were detected between the victims of traditional bullying and the poly-victims

regarding the kind of symptoms they experienced and when and where they experienced the symptoms. The presentation of the findings will be structured according to the main nodes: intrusive memories and avoidance. These categories will further be divided into the mentioned sub-nodes dependent on the symptoms described by the informants.

Intrusive Memories

Fear and Worrying

The informants who had experienced traditional victimization described fear related specifically to what might happen during recess: “I was always thinking about what would happen during recess, what could happen, what would happen, if I was going to be by myself or not?” (Norwegian girl, 13). According to the informants who had experienced traditional victimization, the fear and worrying they described was related to the school setting only.

The poly-victims also reported being scared in school: “I’m scared of them, they were very very popular in my class.” The young girl who said this also described being scared of her phone when on her way home: “I was just too afraid to look at it” (Irish girl, 17). Another informant described being frightened in school: “I was kind of thinking maybe they’ll do this, maybe they’ll do that, like so it was kind of like still in the back of my mind, you know.” Some of the poly-victims also described experiencing fear in their spare time: “I’d kind of be like eh, just thinking, ‘is she plotting something?’ or like yeah. Like if I saw she was typing, I’d be like panicking or something. I’d be thinking maybe she is doing something even bigger now, maybe she’s thinking of something bigger to do” (Irish girl, 13). For the poly-victims, fear and worrying was related to both the school setting and their spare time.

Problems Concentrating

Having problems concentrating seemed to be mainly related to the school setting: “I was always looking out, I had eyes in my neck in a way, always following everything else but what the teacher was saying” (Norwegian girl, 14), “I was just like keeping my head down, just not paying attention to anything. I was, like I was occasionally barely hearing the teacher calling my name to hear if I was alright” (Irish girl, 18). The differences between school and home were also described: “At home, I do not have that much to concentrate about, but when it comes to school, it has ruined my grades a little bit. Everything that has happened” (Norwegian girl, 12). Problems concentrating were reported by both informants having experienced traditional victimization and poly-victims.

Although problems concentrating seemed to be mostly related to the school setting, one informant described how thinking about bullying affected his concentration all the time. In

response to the question “Did you think about this when not on the internet as well?,” the informant said, “All the time. Every day. 24/7. I couldn’t sleep, couldn’t eat. Could barely go to school” (Irish boy, 18). This informant had experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations.

Trouble Sleeping

Over half of the poly-victims reported having difficulties sleeping: “I can almost not remember sleeping” (Norwegian girl, 17) and “I’ve had trouble sleeping. I slept a couple of nights, then I almost didn’t sleep at all; I was awake all night and only slept for a couple of minutes” (Norwegian girl, 12). In addition, one informant described how thoughts about the victimization affected her sleep: “Like if it just happened that day, I’d probably like be just thinking about it, but like eventually go to sleep” (Irish girl, 13). Trouble sleeping was described only by the poly-victims.

Avoidance

As avoidance can be divided in to behavioral and mental avoidance (APA 2013), the findings regarding avoidance is categorized according to this.

Behavioral Avoidance

Behavioral avoidance was described by all the informants. Both informants having experienced traditional victimization and poly-victims described not wanting to go to school: “I hated school, I wanted to do anything other than go to school” (Norwegian girl, 13), “I just wanted to be at home” (Norwegian boy, 8), “I could barely go to school” (Irish boy, 18), and “I started missing school more and more” (Irish girl, 18). The informants also described avoiding certain places when at school: “I just didn’t want to see her in school, I’d be kind of afraid to go in to class just in case she was there. Then, sometimes she’d be at the gym, so I’d be like, ok, I can’t go to the gym, so I’ll just stay inside, you know” (Irish girl, 13).

Both informants having experienced traditional victimization and poly-victims also described faking sickness when explaining how they were able to avoid going to school: “I’d never let myself stay home sick long enough to need the doctor. I was always back in, but yeah, I was always back sick again a few days later, but I put a little thought into it; I was faking sick on Saturday to make it look like I hadn’t suddenly turned sick. I was always rather vague with the symptoms as well” (Irish girl, 18). Many of the informants described Sundays as the worst day of the week because it was the day before school started: “Really, I always dreaded going back to school after Sunday. In fact, the whole Sunday was ruined” (Norwegian girl, 17).

One informant described avoiding school as a kind of sickness and that it was a necessity to be able to face the next day: “You’re able to face the next day if you take one day off. It’s a sickness that people don’t understand, but it’s still sick” (Irish girl, 17). The most common form of behavioral avoidance described of both informants having experienced traditional victimization and poly-victims was avoiding certain places, and the most frequently mentioned place to avoid was school.

In addition to school, some of the informants described other specific places they avoided in their spare time: “I avoided birthday parties, didn’t bother having them either. I tried ones when I was twelve, cause mum was making a big deal about being twelve. At that time I was on crutches cause I had a swimming injury. And they *all* just went on the trampoline. So I ended up sitting inside, watching telly cause I wasn’t allowed to go on the trampoline obviously” (Irish girl, 17). The same informant also described avoiding the school bus: “I used to think about the bullying on the way to school on the school bus, so I got in the habit of cycling to school” (Irish girl, 17). This girl had experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations.

Behavioral avoidance also included avoiding certain people by, for example, choosing isolation: “I was afraid of getting bullied again, so I kind of, sorting out books in the library seemed a nicer option than talking to the girls at lunch” (Irish girl, 17), “I just sat at the table by myself, but it was more out of choice, ‘cause like at that point, I had nothing to say to them. I willingly didn’t want to talk to them. I was generally avoiding anyone I knew that had any link with it” (Irish girl, 18). In addition, some of the informants chose to be with people other than those bullying them: “I kind of avoid people she knows” (Irish girl, 13). “I hang out a lot with younger children” (Norwegian girl, 12). Avoiding certain people was described by both informants having experienced traditional victimization and poly-victims.

One informant described the Internet as a way out, a means of fleeing reality: “I became very antisocial, living my social life on the internet instead. I could live a totally different life there” (Norwegian girl, 17). This informant had experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations.

However, other poly-victims described the Internet as a problem they wanted to avoid, and some blocked the people who were bullying them: “I blocked her from Instagram so she can’t see any of my pictures or comment on anything, so...” (Irish girl, 13). In addition to blocking, some of the informants left places on the Internet where they had experienced bullying: “I deleted her from Skype. Left the group and the website” (Irish boy, 18). The informants describing the Internet as something they wanted to avoid was only the informants having experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations.

Mental Avoidance

A strategy of mental avoidance seems to be to shut off one’s feelings: one girl said, “I just block it out” (Irish girl, 17). Other informants described a process of repression: “Actually, I can’t remember. I almost can’t remember anything because I’ve used so much time trying to repress it” (Norwegian girl, 17 “I just kind of kept it dead inside, you know” (Irish, girl, 13). This is only reported by poly-victims.

Differences Between Victims of Traditional Bullying and Poly-Victims

The victims of traditional and traditional and cyber victimizations described many of the same symptoms; however, differences were detected. The poly-victims over all described more symptoms related to both intrusive memories and avoidance than the informants having experienced traditional victimization. Concerning intrusive memories, there were differences between the two groups of informants regarding both fear and trouble sleeping. The informants having experienced traditional victimization reported experiencing fear and worry only in school whereas the poly-victims reported experiencing fear and worry both in school and in their spare time. Poly-victims were the only ones reporting having trouble sleeping. Differences between the two groups were also detected regarding avoidance. Both groups of victims reported behavioral avoidance; however, only the poly-victims described having experienced mental avoidance.

Discussion of Findings

The main goal of this study was to explore whether and how pupils having experienced long-term victimization reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and a subgoal was to see if there were differences between the description of the informants having experienced only traditional versus victims having experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations. The overall findings show that all the informants describe emotional symptoms that could be associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress in the form of intrusive memories and/or avoidance. There were, however, interesting differences between the descriptions of symptoms from the informants having experienced only traditional and the informants having experienced traditional and cyber victimization.

Experienced Fear

One of the main differences regarding the descriptions of symptoms between informants having experienced traditional and poly-victims can be related to *where* they experience fear. The findings show that the informants having experienced

traditional victimization only describe fear related to the school setting; however, the poly-victims experienced fear not only in the school context, but also in their spare time. The anxious feelings seemed to occur where the informants had experienced victimization; thus, the informants who had experienced victimization in school experienced fear and worrying in school settings, and the informants who had experienced victimization both in school and at home on their phone, or computer, described feeling fear and worry in both places. This result may be related to what Dyregrov (2010) described as discomfort in situations that remind one of the traumatic event. However, the fear experienced in school for poly-victims may also be related to what happened in the spare time as social media makes them constantly available. Research shows that there is a stronger correlation between cyber victimization and symptoms of anxiety than traditional victimization and anxiety (Campbell et al. 2012; Sjørso et al. 2016). This anxiety could affect the lives of the poly-victims both online and offline, thus outside and in school. Also, the aspect of publicity (Slonje and Smith 2008) may contribute to the feeling of fear both places independent of where and when the bullying has happened.

Trouble Sleeping

In addition to differences regarding *where* the informants describe they have experienced fear, the findings show that only the informants having experienced both traditional and cyber victimizations report having trouble sleeping. Research has shown a correlation between being bullied in general and trouble falling asleep. One study found that 20.3% of girls being bullied reported that they often had trouble sleeping compared with 8% in the non-bullied group (Haddow 2006). In addition to this, another study found that cyberbullied youth were more likely to have sleep disturbances than non-bullied youth (Låftman et al. 2013). Having thoughts about the traumatic events is a well-known characteristic distinguishing the traumas of childhood. Intrusive memories could, for example, make falling asleep difficult (Terr 1991).

There could however be many explanations for why there seems to be differences regarding trouble sleeping between the informants who have experienced traditional victimization and the poly-victims. The description of differences related to feelings of fear and worrying in school and at home could also be seen in relation to the differences in the sleep-related issues described by the informants. The fear and worrying in their spare time only described by the poly-victims could lead to trouble sleeping.

Another explanation could be related to the poly-victims being more prone to having emotional problems. This could again make them more vulnerable to sleep-related issues on a general basis. Research has shown that being exposed to both types of victimization is more emotionally challenging and is

significantly correlated with, for example, being lonelier and having greater risk for depression and suicide (O'Moore 2014).

Avoidance

Differences between the informants having experienced traditional victimization and the poly-victims are also found related to behavioral avoidance. However, many of the informants independent of type of victimization describe not wanting to go to school. This phenomenon is supported by previous research (Egger et al. 2003; Havik et al. 2015; Rueger and Jenkins 2014). Only poly-victims describe behavioral avoidance *outside* the school setting for instance avoiding birthday parties and different social media sites. The reasons for this could be many, however, as the findings also show that the poly-victims describe fear and worrying in their spare time, compared with the informants having only experienced traditional victimization, might be a contributing factor to being the only ones who describe avoiding places also in their spare time. The description of avoiding the social media is also supported by other studies. Research on cyberbullying and coping has for example shown that 24% of victims choose online avoidance instead of trying to fix the problem (Livingstone et al. 2011). Although online avoidance could lead to a short-term solution for the victims, O'Moore (2014) emphasizes that one limitation for avoiding or blocking a cyberbully simply could be that they create new nicknames and new accounts, as their accounts are getting blocked. When examining which coping strategy is the most successful in reducing the negative emotions, research finds that problem-focused coping led to fewer health complaints than trying to avoid the problem (O'Moore 2014).

To sum up, the overall conclusion seems to be that all the informants independent of what type of victimization experienced describe what could be characterized as symptoms of post-traumatic stress. This could indicate that having experienced victimization over a long period of time in itself could cause symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Further, this explorative study indicates differences regarding symptoms of post-traumatic stress and informants having experienced traditional versus traditional and cyber victimizations when it comes to experienced fear and worrying, sleep-related issues, and behavioral avoidance. Overall, these findings correspond with earlier research findings showing that poly-victims seem to experience more symptoms of anxiety than victims of traditional bullying (Brighi et al. 2012). Having more symptoms of anxiety could make poly-victims more prone to developing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and further down the line possibly PTSD, as PTSD is a serious anxiety disorder.

Practical Implications

There seems to be some different results in research regarding what emotional problems are related to traditional and cyber victimizations. It is therefore important to be aware of that experiencing both types of victimization might result in different emotional consequences than having experienced traditional victimization.

When working with pupils who have had different experiences with victimization, teachers should be sensitive to the occurrence of possible symptoms of post-traumatic stress and be aware of that these pupils might have different ways of reacting than pupils who have not experienced victimization, for example, to be aware that school could be a place related to a lot of fear and therefore an arena that these pupils may try to avoid; in addition, the fear also affect the life outside school, especially for the pupils experiencing victimization outside school. Thus, some of the pupils are living in a constant state of fear, which might affect their life in school and at home and even their sleep. It is also important for the teacher to follow these pupils so close that they manage to identify the symptoms and thus can advise them to get help.

This could have practical implications for anti-bullying programs as the focus her often has been related to stopping the bullying; however, the descriptions of the emotional problems from informants having experienced victimization indicate the need for rehabilitation after the bullying has stopped. Finne et al. (2018) suggest using what they refer to as the *model of relational rehabilitation* in this work. This model includes three steps: (1) ensuring teacher authority, (2) redistributing power and promoting a supportive class community, and (3) providing social emotional learning to the entire class. Ensuring teacher authority is argued to be important for having the rehabilitation process as having a weak teacher would not be productive. As the relational structure in a class often will be in a vacuum for a certain period after terminating bullying, Finne et al. (2018) suggest that the second step includes screening roles, relational practice, building alliances, and promoting a supportive class community. Working with the third step, they emphasize the importance of social support and prosocial interaction in the work with pupils having experienced victimization and how this can function as a buffer for the negative effects of bullying. Social emotional learning (SEL) programs including elements from cognitive-based theory (CBT) are recommended for concrete work in the class that could have a positive effect regarding for example internalizing problems for pupils having experienced victimization. In addition to this, social perception training (SPT) is suggested as a program that could be beneficial for school classes in need of rehabilitating their relations and social structure (Finne et al. 2018).

Limitations

First, this study could have limitations related to the interviews being retrospective, as the informants could have been influenced by the life they lived after the bullying stopped. However, it was important to perform the interviews with informants whose cases were closed because this could create a certain distance from the experience, which, again, could lead to better descriptions.

Second, several researchers were involved in the data collection, which may have offered the informants different opportunities to talk about their problems; however, as our aim was not to compare cases, this is not seen as a serious threat to our study.

Third, the phenomenon of social desirability is also a risk when interviewing informants, especially since the informants were children, rendering the power balance even more skewed. A method that could narrow the chances of this could, for example, include diagnostic tests that could contribute quantitative information regarding symptoms.

Further Research

There are many questions still to be answered. Further research could for example include qualitative interviews of teachers and parents regarding the symptoms of post-traumatic stress already described by the informants in this study. Another interesting study could be to interview the same informants about symptoms of post-traumatic stress 4 years later, to see if the symptoms are as strong as previously described. The findings also raise important questions that would be interesting to investigate further using a larger sample. It would for example be interesting performing a large-scale quantitative study to investigate the correlation between symptoms of post-traumatic stress and different types of victimization. In addition, these findings could be controlled against for example factors like teacher authority. This is to investigate if the teacher's warmth and protective control (Sjursø et al. 2019) could have an impact on the symptoms reported by the informants.

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