

# SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT OF TEENAGERS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BULLYING, VICTIMIZATION AND RESILIENCE FACTORS

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## Abstract

Bullying and victimization are among the most worrying problems that can undermine school climate. Worldwide, studies show that between 6% and 45% of students are involved in those kinds of behaviours, depending on countries and methodologies (Bowen et al., 2018). In addition to reaching a significant proportion of students, studies list a variety of short- and long-term consequences related to school violence such as various psychological difficulties (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), poor grades and school dropout (PISA, 2015). While school violence is widespread and devastating, some adolescents maintain positive adjustment throughout their schooling despite victimization. Resilience can take a variety of meanings, but it's mostly associated with the ability to maintain normal functioning despite adversity (Luthar et al., 2000). In this context, objectives of the study are: 1) to provide a global picture of bullying and victimization in high schools in Quebec (Canada); 2) to study the relationship between bullying, victimization, resilience factors and school adjustment. A total of 165 high school students completed a survey on bullying, victimization, resilience, and related topics. Results show that 23% of teenagers have adopted bullying behaviours in the past two months, while 31% reported being bullied. Furthermore, 44% of adolescents reported bullying behaviours at some point in their schooling and 61% reported being a victim. Hierarchical regression analysis shows that reported victimization and resilience factors account for 44% of the school adjustment variance, with resilience factors contributing more to the predictive model (26%) than reported victimization (18%). This study highlights the extent of violence in the school context and how resilience components can act as protective factors and maintain positive coping.

**Keywords:** *School-adjustment, teenagers, victimization, resilience, assessment.*

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## 1. Introduction

Bullying and victimization are among the most worrying problems that can undermine school climate. Worldwide, studies show that 6% to 45% of students are involved in those kinds of behaviours, depending on countries and methodologies (Bowen et al., 2018). In addition to reaching a significant proportion of students, studies list a variety of short- and long-term consequences related to school violence such as various psychological difficulties (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), poor grades and school dropout (PISA, 2015). In the long term, youth involved in school violence are also likely to present social problems such as low life satisfaction, addictions, and mental health problems (Moore et al., 2017). In addition, being involved in such violence leads to antisocial behaviours (Astor et al., 2004), and in some cases, suicide (Klomek et al., 2006). In this context, better understanding of school violence is important, to reduce it and moderate its consequences. While school violence is widespread and devastating, some adolescents maintain positive adjustment throughout their schooling despite victimization. Resilience can take a variety of meanings, but it's mostly associated with the ability to maintain normal functioning despite adversity (Luthar et al., 2000). The idea of seeing resilience as a capacity or trait is to say that the individual has characteristics that help him maintain a good adjustment despite exposure to risk factors. Rutter (1987) argues that this concept is connected to characteristics such as self-esteem, positive coping, and stable and secure relationships. Scientific literature on teen resilience suggests that protection processes are at three levels: individual, family and community (Southwick et al. 2014).

## 2. Objectives

Objectives of the study are: 1) to provide a global picture of bullying and victimization in high schools in Quebec (Canada); 2) to study the relationship between bullying, victimization, resilience factors and school adjustment among adolescents from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

### 3. Method

**Participants:** Target population of this study is high school students who attend public schools (Quebec, Canada). The sample includes 165 students (112 girls and 53 boys), 62 in 10th Grade (37.58%) and 98 in 11th Grade (59.39%). Ages range from 15.6 to 18.7 years ( $M=16.9$   $SD=0.63$ ). Teens are Caucasian in 86.06% of cases ( $n=142$ ). Participants were recruited by phone from a list of potential participants provided by the Ministry of Education (under the right of access to information). The list included contact information of 1000 randomly selected adolescents attending a public high school in low-socioeconomic areas. Teens who agreed to participate received information about the study by e-mail and a link to complete an online survey on bullying, victimization, resilience, and related topics.

**Measures:** Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire-Modified (B/VQM; Strohmeier, Kärnä et al., 2011) assesses school bullying and victimization in the last two months and throughout school life. It includes 9 items on various forms of victimization such as verbal victimization, social exclusion, physical victimization, items robbery, spreading rumors, racist or sexual insults. B/VQM includes two parts: one on bullying and the other one, on victimization. Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ; Hjemdal et al., 2006) includes 28 items answered on five-points Likert scale to assess five factors of resilience: 1) Personal Competence, 2) Social Competence, 3) Structured Style, 4) Family Cohesion and 5) Social Resources. School adjustment is assessed by an index score including measures of global self-esteem, positive attitude toward school, no recent bullying and victimization as measured by B/VQM, and a planned future indicator according to what the student will do after high school. Global self-esteem is assessed by 6 items of the Self-Perception Scale for Children (SPSC; Harter, 2012) and Attitude toward school is assessed by 15 items of the Student Motivational Profile (PME; Parent et al., 2012).

### 4. Results

Table 1. School victimization and bullying of the participants at different times of school life

	Within the last two months	In the Past	Throughout school life (total)
Victimization	30.91 % (n=51)	58.18 % (n=96)	60.61 % (n=100)
Bullying	23.03 % (n=38)	38.18 % (n=63)	44.22 % (n=73)

Table 2. Percentage of victimization and bullying throughout school life

Bullying throughout school life	Victimization throughout school life		
	No	Yes	Total
No	32.12% (n=53)	23.64% (n=39)	55.76% (n=92)
Yes	7.27% (n=12)	36.97% (n=61)	44.24% (n=73)
Total	39.39% (n=65)	60.61% (n=100)	100% (n=165)

Correlations between school adjustment variables and factors of resilience showed that self-esteem, attitude toward school and adjustment index score share moderate correlations with each factor of resilience while bullying and victimization in the last two months show low correlations with factors of resilience. In addition, a hierarchical regression was performed including victimization experienced by teens and resilience factors to predict school adjustment of students. Previous victimization was entered into the model in a first step and all resilience factors in a second step. Table 3 contains the final solution of the regression model ( $F_{(5,158)} = 21.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It shows that reported victimization and resilience factors account for 44% of the school adjustment variance, with resilience factors contributing more to the predictive model (26%) than reported victimization (18%).

Table 3. Correlations et standardized betas at the final step of hierarchic regression model

Predictive variables	School adjustment index
	$\beta$
Adversity factor	
Past Victimization	-.25***
R <sup>2</sup>	.18***
Factors of Resilience	
Personal Competence	.41***
Social Competence	.01
Family Cohesion	.18*
Social Resources	.10
Structured Style	-.10
R <sup>2</sup>	.26***
R <sup>2</sup> total	.44***

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

## 5. Discussion

Almost 70% of the participants were bullies or victims at some point in their schooling. This shows how violence in schools is a widespread phenomenon. Despite popular belief, bullying and victimization are interrelated: most of bullies (83.56%) and more than a half of victims (61%) report having experienced both situations during their schooling. These findings highlight the complex relationship between bullying and victimization and how the cycle of violence continues.

Nearly 45% (44%) of school adjustment variance can be explained by adversity and resilience factors. Moreover, resilience factors account for a significantly larger portion of adaptation (26%) than adversity (18%). These results show the extent and diversity of the consequences regarding bullying on school adjustment. They also highlight the positive and important role played by resilience factors in maintaining good adjustment. Among the resilience factors, Personal Competence and Family Cohesion are the ones that contribute the most to the understanding of school adjustment. This is in line with the findings of Rutter (1987) for whom a person's ability to demonstrate positive adjustment depends particularly on their self-esteem, the ability to use positive strategies to cope with difficulties and the quality of the family relationship that limits the psychological impact of adversity.

The role of the school is not only to promote academic learning. It must also help young people becoming good citizens and live quality life. In this regard, helping teenagers develop key resilience factors such as self-esteem and social skills is just as important as learning to read or write. Although interesting, this study focuses on teens and most participants were girls (68%). Conducting a study to understand victimization and bullying of boys and at all ages should be done.

## 6. Conclusion

This study highlights the extent of violence in the school context and how resilience components can act as protective factors and maintain positive coping. Promoting development of resilience factors at home and at school is an interesting way to empower teens in face of adversity, lower violence in school and maintain a good adjustment throughout life.

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