

Negative Peer Experiences, Shame, and Internalizing Outcomes During Early Adolescence



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Introduction

- The focus of the current study is on two types of peer relations experiences: (1) *peer rejection* and (2) *peer victimization*.
- Peer rejection** involves active dislike by the peer group (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).
- Peer victimization** refers to youth who are bullied and subjected to peer abuse (which could be physical, verbal, or relational in nature; Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Olweus, 1993).
- The negative psychological correlates and consequences of peer rejection and victimization have been well-established. However, little is known about possible mechanisms that explain why young adolescents who are rejected and victimized fare so poorly psychologically.
- Shame, a *self-conscious* emotion that involves the painful, global, and devastatingly-negative evaluation of the self (Muris & Meesters, 2014), is one possible mechanism given its established links with negative peer experiences and internalizing outcomes.
- The current study evaluates for the first time whether the associations between peer rejection and victimization and social anxiety and depression can be explained by shame during early adolescence (10-14 years).

Hypotheses:

- Shame will mediate the association between peer rejection and victimization and social anxiety and depression.
- The associations between shame and the internalizing outcomes will be stronger for girls than for boys as some research has shown stronger linkages between shame and the worsening of girls' anxious and depressive symptoms.

Method & Participants

- N=149 young adolescents; $M_{age} = 13.73$ years
- 2 private schools in Hubli, India; 56% boys; 76% Hindu
- Participants completed a packet of questionnaires in their classrooms.

Measures

Peer nomination items were used to assess:

- Peer rejection:** "Someone you like to be with the least"
- Physical victimization:** "Someone who gets hit or pushed around by other kids"
- Relational victimization:** "Someone who other kids say mean things or gossip about"

Self-reports were used to assess:

- Shame:** Test of Self-Conscious Affect for Adolescents; 15 hypothetical vignettes; 4-5 associated responses rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale.
- Depression:** Child Depression Inventory: Short Version; 10 items; e.g., "I am sad all the time".
- Social Anxiety:** Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents; 18 items e.g., "I worry about what other kids think of me".

Tables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Peer Rejection		.02	.60**	-.05	-.08	-.03	.03
2. Physical Vic.			.11	-.23**	.07	-.11	-.17**
3. Relational Vic.				-.24**	-.11	-.04	.02
4. Shame					.02	.31**	-.01
5. Depression						.28**	-.14
6. Social Anxiety							.12
7. Gender							
<i>M</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.80	0.33	2.28	0.41
<i>SD</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.54	0.28	0.66	0.49

Note. Physical Vic = physical victimization; Relational Vic = relational victimization; Gender was coded as 0 = boys, 1 = girls

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2: Physical Victimization Predicting Depression with Shame as a Moderator

		Depression	
		B	β
Step 1	Physical Victimization	0.01	0.05
	Relational Victimization	-0.03	-0.12
	Sex	-0.07	-0.13
Step 2	Shame	0.00	0.01
Step 3	Shame X Physical Victimization	0.06	0.65

Results

Zero-Order Correlations (Table 1)

- Unexpectedly, both types of victimization were associated **negatively** with shame.
- Shame was related positively to social anxiety but not depression.

Testing the Mediation of Shame

- Following the procedures of Baron and Kenny (1986), four regression models tested each possible mediation model however none of the mediation models were supported.

Exploratory Analyses

- A series of hierarchical linear regression models tested shame as a **moderator**, with one significant interaction effect emerging involving shame and physical victimization when predicting depression. Simple slope analyses revealed that physical victimization was positively associated with depression for youth who reported high levels of shame ($\beta = 0.35, p = .05$) but not for those who reported average ($\beta = 0.20, p = .09$) or low ($\beta = 0.05, p = .57$) levels of shame.

Conclusions

- Although study hypotheses were not supported, exploratory analyses revealed that physical victimization is related to depression for young adolescents with high levels of shame.
- These results suggest that shame is not experienced by all adolescents who are victimized, but that for those who do experience shame, it enhances the negative psychological costs.
- It is not clear why the results were found for depression but not anxiety but it is possible that in collectivistic contexts, negative social experiences may play a central role in the development of internalizing problems that are self-focused.
- There was no evidence of gender differences in this study, suggesting that shame functions similarly for young adolescent boys and girls.
- Future studies should explore whether the results are specific to *Indian* young adolescents who are *Hindu*. There is some research suggesting that shame plays a unique role in the socialization practices in Hindu Indian families (Wong & Tsai, 2007). Longitudinal research is also needed.