



Bullying among urban Mexican-heritage youth: Exploring risk for substance use by status as a bully, victim, and bully-victim[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Little is known about adolescent bullying behavior and its relationship to substance use in ethnic minority populations. In a sample of youth of Mexican heritage, the current study aimed to examine the prevalence of bullying behavior subtypes and its co-occurrence with recent alcohol, cigarette, and inhalant use. Data come from a school-based substance use prevention study in the Southwestern U.S. ($n = 809$). We explored the prevalence of bullying behavior by status among youth classified as bullies, victims, bully-victims, and rarely-involved bully-victims in an urban context. We also investigated risk of past 30-day use of alcohol, cigarettes, and inhalants by bullying behavior status. Compared to non-involved youth, rarely-involved bully-victims were more likely to use alcohol, bullies were more likely to engage in alcohol and cigarette use, and bully-victims were more likely to use alcohol, cigarettes, and inhalants. In contrast, victims were not significantly at risk of substance use compared to non-involved youth. Chronic bullies and bully-victims are particularly at risk for substance use, with chronic bully-victims reflecting the greatest risk of using multiple substances. Prevention and early intervention programs aimed to reduce bullying can also work to decrease other risky behaviors, such as substance use, and should attend to the growing ethnic diversity among youth.

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Bullying is a widespread form of violence that adversely affects health and well-being of youth and individuals of all ages. In the U.S., nationally representative data indicate approximately 30% of students in grades 6 through 12 report engaging in bullying or being bullied by others (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Bullying and peer victimization appear to be associated with poorer social and emotional functioning (Juvonen & Graham, 2014) as well as greater involvement in risky behaviors, including substance use (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Goldweber, & Johnson, 2013; Radliff, Wheaton, Robinson, & Morris, 2012; Tharp-Taylor, Haviland, & D'Amico, 2009).

Although existing research supports a link between bullying and substance use, few studies have explored involvement in bullying as it relates to substance use among ethnic minority youth. Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. and across several states Latinos make up a large proportion of students enrolled in K-12 education, including New Mexico (58%), California, (51%), and Texas (48%) (Pew Research Center, 2011), and in Arizona there are more Latino

children (43%) than White children (42%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In addition, initiation of substance use during early adolescence is a concern for Latinos, with data showing that nationally Latino youth have the highest use rates of alcohol and other illicit drugs by 8th grade compared to White and African American youth (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2013).

In the current study, we aim to address knowledge gaps regarding bullying and substance use among youth of Mexican heritage, who constitute the largest and one of the fastest growing Latino groups in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2011). Specifically, we build upon extant research investigating patterns of bullying involvement by status as a bully, victim, or both bully and victim (bully-victim) (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Radliff et al., 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Additionally, we explore bullying status in relation to multiple substances, namely, alcohol, cigarette, and inhalant use (Radliff et al., 2012; Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009). The overall hypothesis guiding the study is that there is a positive association between substance use and bullying for both perpetrators and victims, such that the risk of involvement across substances would be greatest for youth who are both bullies and victims (bully-victims). This hypothesis is based on the ecodevelopmental theory's understanding that youth's individual behavior is influenced by the different social and cultural contexts in which they live and the interactions with others in those contexts (Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999).

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1. Background

1.1. Youth involvement in bullying

Bullying is generally defined as behavior intended to harm, intimidate, or alienate another person (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Within schools, bullying behaviors can take on direct forms that are verbal (e.g., teasing, name-calling, or taunting) or physical (e.g., hitting, kicking, or tripping) and indirect forms that are relational and social in nature (e.g., spreading rumors, social exclusion, or public embarrassment) (Wang et al., 2009). Bullying is generally viewed as aggressive behavior that occurs repeatedly and over time (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Central to the conceptualization of bullying is an imbalance of power wherein the target of bullying has difficulty defending him-/herself against the aggressor (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

Youth involved in bullying are typically categorized as bullies, victims, and bully-victims (Haynie et al., 2001; Leiner et al., 2014; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Bullies are characterized by aggressive behavior and are more likely to exhibit externalizing problems (Juvonen & Graham, 2014), while victims are more likely to be withdrawn, lack confidence in social settings, and manifest internalizing problems (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2001; Romero, Wiggs, Valencia, & Bauman, 2013). Bully-victims – youth who are both perpetrators and victims of bullying – are often at greatest risk of conduct, academic, and peer relationship problems compared to youth considered victims or bullies alone (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). In contrast to bullies, bully-victims suffer from lower self-esteem, greater anxiety, and more psychosomatic symptoms (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000). Some research suggests bully-victims constitute a small proportion of overall youth (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005), although other research drawing on diverse samples of youth in urban contexts suggests youth involvement in both bullying perpetration and victimization may be more pervasive (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Leiner et al., 2014).

1.2. Bullying status and substance use risk

A number of studies provide evidence for a link between bullying status and substance use, as substance use and problem behaviors have similar risk factors and often overlap (Nieri, Apkarian, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2015). Some research suggests that bullies and bully-victims are more likely than victims and non-involved youth to engage in substance use (Nansel et al., 2001; Radliff et al., 2012). For example, research has found that bully-victims comparatively had the highest odds of engaging in cigarette, marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drug use after controlling for access to drugs relative to youth with low involvement in bullying. In contrast, other research indicates that bullies are more likely than bully-victims to engage in excessive drinking and other substances (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000). Furthermore, bullying victimization can pose risk for substance use directly (Radliff et al., 2012) or indirectly through its direct influence on internalizing problems (Hong et al., 2014). Prospective studies have found early involvement in bullying is linked to subsequent substance use as an adult (Min, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011; Niemelä et al., 2011). Although the available research characterizes the linkages between bullying and substance use, less research has consistently offered a comparative perspective of risk based on status as a bully, victim, and bully-victim (Hong et al., 2014).

1.3. Bullying, substance use, and youth of Mexican heritage

Few studies have examined the risk for substance use posed by bullying experiences for Latino youth in general or by Latino subgroups such as Mexican Americans. A study using national data revealed that Latino youth classified as bullies are at heightened risk of substance

use compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Luk, Wang, & Simons-Morton, 2012). However, this study did not distinguish between subtypes of bullying behavior involvement (as a bully, victim, or bully-victim) as it relates to different substances. In addition, extant research on youth of Mexican heritage specifically has found that bullying victimization is associated with greater depressive symptoms (Bauman & Summers, 2009), psychological distress and academic problems (Espinosa, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2013), and suicide ideation and behavior (Romero et al., 2013). Despite the contributions of this growing work, the available research has not accounted for other risky behaviors, such as substance use, in relation to bullying among youth of Mexican heritage. This gap in current research is of concern considering that, among Latino youth, Mexican-heritage youth have higher rates of heavy drinking and marijuana use compared to Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and other Latin American youth (Delva et al., 2005).

1.4. The current study

According to ecodesvelopmental theory, youth's individual behavior is influenced by the different social and cultural contexts in which they live and the interactions with others in those contexts (Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999). Accordingly, individual development and health is embedded within and results from interaction between various systems. These include proximal factors within the individual's immediate context of the microsystem (e.g., family, neighborhood), relationships between microsystems (e.g., parental monitoring of peers), and broader macrosystem contexts (e.g., socioeconomic disadvantage). An ecodesvelopmental perspective takes into account the notion that risk and protective influences on youth outcomes do not occur in isolation, such that individual- and family-level risk factors can be linked to or compounded by sociocultural or structural risk factors (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002). For youth of color in urban neighborhoods, this framework is appropriate for understanding bullying and substance use as youth behavioral outcomes that occur within broader environmental contexts characterized by poverty and societal marginalization.

In the current study, we aim to address knowledge gaps regarding bullying and substance use among youth of Mexican heritage, who constitute the largest and one of the fastest growing Latino groups in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2011). Our aims in the current study are twofold: (1) to explore patterns of bullying behavior involvement, and (2) to examine the association between bullying and substance use in a sample of urban Mexican-heritage youth. We are interested in exploring the proportion of youth classified as bullies, victims, bully-victims, and rarely involved bully-victims compared to noninvolved youth. We also look at demographic correlates of each classification. As a strength of our approach, we distinguished rarely-involved from frequent bully-victims to account for varying degrees of bullying involvement in an urban context as well as less frequent, episodic forms of bullying and victimization that can still have harmful mental health consequences (Espinosa et al., 2013; Turner, Finkelhor, Shattuck, Hamby, & Mitchell, 2015). Drawing from existing findings (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Leiner et al., 2014; Radliff et al., 2012; Weiss, Cen, Mouttapa, Johnson, & Unger, 2011) and guided by the ecodesvelopmental theory (Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999), we hypothesized that involvement in bullying would be linked to various forms of substance use, expecting that the risk of involvement across substances would be greatest for bully-victims.

2. Methods

2.1. Data and sample

Data for this study come from the last wave of a 5-year randomized controlled trial which tested the efficaciousness of the substance use prevention intervention, *keepin' it REAL* (Hecht, Elek, Wagstaff, Kam,

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