



## Explaining the overlap between bullying perpetration and bullying victimization: assessing the time-ordered and correlative relationships



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### ABSTRACT

The integrated theoretical framework of lifestyles and routine activities and self-control theories is used to estimate the relationship between bullying perpetration and bullying victimization. Measures of bullying perpetration and associations with bullies are seen as risky behaviors to improve the rigor of the analysis of consistent behaviors within bullying victimization. The current study includes a comparison between the time-ordered and the reciprocal/correlative relationships between bullying perpetration and bullying victimization in path models. Both analyses of 2844 fourth grade students in South Korea from 2004 to 2008 support the main hypotheses: (1) Youth with low self-control had greater odds of being victimized by collective and verbal bullying (even after controlling for risky lifestyles), and (2) youth who were associated with bullies during the previous year were at higher risk of later collective and verbal bullying victimization (i.e., the time-ordered effect). Three different types of bullying perpetration (collective, verbal, and physical bullying) were significantly and positively correlated with each type of bullying victimization (i.e., the reciprocal effect).

To date, a large body of research has supported the notion of an overlap between violent offending and victimization (i.e., individuals most likely to engage in violent behaviors are also most likely to be victimized) (Broidy, Daday, Crandall, Sklar, & Jost, 2006; Jennings, Piquero, & Reingle, 2012; Schreck, Stewart, & Osgood, 2008; Turanovic & Pratt, 2013). While some scholars have examined the causal inferences between offending and victimization (Gibson, Swatt, Miller, Jennings, & Gover, 2012; Ousey, Wilcox, & Fisher, 2011), others have considered the two events as independent outcomes predicted by risky lifestyles (Cho, Wooldredge, & Sun Park, 2015; Henson, Wilcox, Reynolds, & Cullen, 2010). This proposition has also proven useful in explaining the similar socio-demographic and lifestyle patterns shared by bullying perpetrators and bullying victims (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Empirical findings have explored a new subcategory of bullying called “aggressive victims”<sup>1</sup> (i.e., one who perpetrated bullying behavior and was later victimized), suggesting that prior experiences in victimization can reinforce one’s aggressive behaviors (Pouwels & Cillessen, 2013; Wang, Duong, Schwartz, Chang, & Luo, 2014).

The most common theoretical framework explaining the offending-victimization overlap is the lifestyle-routine activity theory (LRAT) approach. The theory posits that individuals who engage in risky behaviors are more likely to be exposed to potential offenders that, in turn, lead to an increased risk of victimization (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007; Smith & Ecob, 2007). While it is widely acknowledged that people are

not all equally predisposed to risky behaviors that enhance higher odds of victimization, it remains unclear why some individuals are more likely to engage in risky behaviors than others. To address this line of inquiry, scholars have turned their attention to the ways in which offenders put themselves in risky situations are not so random. To this respect, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) suggested that people vary in their tendencies to avoid criminal behaviors, no matter what their circumstances. Research has, therefore, focused heavily on individual traits such as low self-control – an attribute that is argued to increase one’s likelihood of becoming more vulnerable to victimization (Pratt, Turanovic, Fox, & Wright, 2014; Schreck, 1999). With regards to adolescents more specifically, studies have shown that reactive aggressive behaviors predict higher levels of subsequent peer victimization in boys (Salmivalli & Helteenvuori, 2007), while relational aggression predict increases in relational victimization in girls (Ostrov, 2008). More recently, a short-term longitudinal study found that children with proactive relational aggression were at a decreased risk of relational victimization, whereas those with reactive relational aggression were at an increased risk of relational victimization (Ostrov, Kamper, Hart, Godleski, & Blakely-McClure, 2014). Despite strong empirical evidence to support the victim-offender overlap, a fully developed theoretical explanation of the relationship between offending and victimization remains ambiguous. Findings from the aforementioned studies have also provided evidence of the bi-directional relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Youth who are peer victimized and later perpetrate bullying and aggressive behavior (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002).

offending and victimization (i.e., the correlative/reciprocal effect), thereby making the time-ordering relationships between them rather underdeveloped.

A legitimate challenge moving forward is to apply the generalizability of both LRAT and self-control theory to bullying behaviors. Bullying is a type of delinquent/offending behavior that shares some similarities regarding offending and victimization characteristics (Chan & Wong, 2015). Bullies are more likely than non-bullies to engage in delinquent behavior (Farrington & Ttofi, 2011), and youth who bully others are more likely to be bullied by others (i.e., bully-victims and/or aggressive victims) (Chan & Wong, 2015; Chui & Chan, 2013). In Western cultures, bullying is defined as aggression that occurs both repeatedly and intentionally by perpetrators who have an imbalance of power between themselves and their victims (i.e., when more powerful youths dominate less powerful youths) (Nansel et al., 2001). In many Asian cultures, however, bullying is regarded as both group peer rejection (I. Park, 2000) and a collective act valued for the benefit of interpersonal harmony (Chan & Wong, 2015; Chui & Chan, 2013). Asian youth are thus more likely to engage in collective bullying due to their desire to maintain conformity as a group. While Western cultures highlight individualism within bullying behaviors, the potential causal pathways that suggest bullies with low self-control to be victimized due to their exposure to potential offenders has rarely been theoretically explained unlike other forms of interpersonal victimization (Pratt, 2016). On the other hand, in Asian cultures that emphasize collectivism, youth with low self-control might be at greater odds of participating in delinquent peer groups that lead to greater risks of bullying victimization due to their exposure to potential offenders. While it is reasonable to argue the potential causal pathways for bully-victims in the Asian cultures, limited efforts have been made to explain the nature of the bully-victims in South Korea.

To address these issues, the current study uses two waves of adolescent panel data from the Korean Youth Panel Survey (KYPS) to examine both the temporal ordered and correlative relationships between bullying perpetration and victimization in a longitudinal research design. The aim of this study is to examine whether youth who are bullies are generally at higher risk of bullying victimization. This study includes a control for the impact of individual trait characteristics (low self-control) when estimating the nature of the bullying perpetration-victimization overlap. Furthermore, the study offers insight into how the exclusion of low self-control might mislead the dynamic relationship between bullying perpetration and bullying victimization. Finally, the study examines if the generalizability of this theoretical explanation can be extended to explaining bullying victimization—in particular, physical bullying, verbal bullying, and bullying by a group.

## 1. Theoretical framework

The current study uses the integrated approach of lifestyles and routine activities theory (LRAT), along with low self-control theory, to explain the relationship between bullying perpetration and bullying victimization. It is assumed that individuals with low self-control are more likely to willingly engage in risky lifestyles that may, in turn, place themselves at higher odds of being victimized. First, LRAT postulates that lifestyles create and/or facilitate criminal opportunities by enhancing the contact between potential offenders and victims, while reducing the presence of capable guardians, independent of demographic characteristics as well as structural and cultural conditions (Cohen & Cantor, 1980; Cohen, Kluegel, & Land, 1981; Hindelang, 1976; Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978). For instance, the length of time an individual spends away from home and visiting nightclubs and bars (i.e., the relatively unstructured and unsupervised nature of these environments) has the potential to enhance exposure to motivated offenders. Similarly, living in neighborhoods with high rates of crime also enhances one's proximity to crime. Individuals' suitability as targets for victimization, as well as the guardianship levels over their

person and property, are both assumed to influence a motivated offender's decision to select certain entities (i.e., individuals or property) for victimization.

There is great consistency in the extant literature that support the relevance and idea that risky lifestyles expose individuals to potential offenders, with previous studies finding significant results in the predicted directions (Chen, 2009; Cho et al., 2015; Schreck, Fisher, & Miller, 2004). For one, Schreck, Wright, and Miller (2002) have suggested that the amount of time spent on risky lifestyles and frequent association with delinquent peers significantly increases one's level of violent victimization. It was also noted that an attachment to one's family decreases the likelihood of being exposed to potential offenders, thereby decreasing the risk of victimization (Schreck & Fisher, 2004). However, Schreck, Stewart, and Fisher (2006) made certain to identify that delinquency and delinquent peer associations are direct risk factors, while family and school attachment, resulting from self-control, are not necessarily effective protective factors from victimization. This implies that individuals who are involved in criminal activities place themselves at higher risk of victimization. In much the same way, this implies that individuals can reduce victimization risk by changing their routine activities. Researchers have examined the applicability of LRAT in understanding victimization risk among Korean youth (i.e., see Cho & Wooldredge, 2016 and Cho et al., 2015). The current study views bullying perpetration as a risky behavior that puts offenders at higher risk of being bullied themselves.

In addition, certain individual trait characteristics might increase and/or decrease risks of criminal victimization. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory, individuals who possess low self-control tend to be impulsive, short-sighted, thrill seeking, risk-taking, and physically inclined as opposed to considering the long-term consequences of their behaviors. Moreover, individuals with low self-control are more likely to seek immediate gratification that coincides with crime such as smoking, drinking, and drug abuse. The notion that self-control may be linked to victimization was first solidified with Schreck's (1999) reformulation of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime. Self-control deficits have since emerged as major predictors of victimization. Many researchers have also examined the applicability of self-control theory to the understanding of victimization. Cho and Wooldredge (2016) found that youth with low self-control were at higher risk of bullying victimization even after controlling for risky lifestyles.

One's preference for and/or engagement in risky lifestyles and routine activities is not equally distributed across all people. Certain individual trait characteristics might increase and/or decrease the odds of engaging in risky behaviors – that is, individuals with low levels of self-control are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that, in turn, lead to greater odds of victimization because they have difficulty controlling their impulsive desires for thrill, fun, and pleasure. Schreck (1999) noted that individuals with low self-control tend to put themselves at higher risk of becoming targets of victimization because they are more likely to be exposed to potential offenders, fail to take safety precautions, and encounter situational contexts where capable guardians are lacking.

Given the proposition, it could be assumed that the integration of both LRAT and self-control theory may provide a more comprehensive model of offending and victimization. This may lead to causal mechanisms that explain various types of criminal victimization including bullying victimization. Some extant research has supported the offending-victimization association by integrating the two principles of LRAT and self-control theory (Pratt, 2016; Schreck et al., 2006; Turanovic & Pratt, 2014). In addition, greater consistency related to the integrated approach of both theories has been found within the Korean literature. Cho and Wooldredge (2016) discovered that youth with low self-control are at higher risk of bullying victimization, whereas those who have engaged in bullying are more likely to be victimized even when controlling for low self-control.

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