



Development and validation of the Multidimensional Offline and Online Peer Victimization Scale



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ABSTRACT

Peer victimization can seriously impair one's well-being. As youth spend more time on the Internet, a new form of peer victimization has emerged, namely, online peer victimization. To fully comprehend peer victimization among today's youth, there is a need for a psychometrically sound measure that can assess peer victimization occurring both offline and online. In addition, research has shown that it is also important to distinguish between direct and indirect peer victimization. Thus, the aim of this study was to develop and validate the Multidimensional Offline and Online Peer Victimization Scale (MOOPV). The MOOPV measures how often adolescents experience direct and indirect forms of offline and online peer victimization. The four-factor structure of the MOOPV was confirmed using exploratory ($n = 325$) and confirmatory factor analyses ($n = 799$) among adolescents aged 9–18 years. As expected, higher scores on all subscales were related to lower levels of psychosocial wellbeing, i.e., less life satisfaction, more loneliness and less social self-esteem. In all, the 20-item MOOPV proved to be a valid, reliable and highly useful instrument. Importantly, because the MOOPV is not linked to specific technologies, it will remain viable even after new technologies for online communication become available.

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1. Introduction

Peer victimization is an age-old problem. It includes, but is not limited to, being kicked, shoved, bullied, gossiped about, or excluded. Peer victimization seems to peak during school transition phases, especially from primary to secondary education, while gradually diminishing during adolescence (e.g., Hong & Espelage, 2012; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001). Although peer victimization can be seen as a natural and inevitable part of growing up, for some adolescents it seriously impairs their mental and physical well-being (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010). Traditionally, peer victimization took place in offline settings particularly in the school or neighborhood. However, as youth increasingly embrace social media, a new form of peer victimization has emerged. This form of peer victimization, where a child or adolescent is victimized by a peer who uses an Internet-based technology, is referred to as online peer victimization.

Research on online peer victimization has been burgeoning in the last decade (e.g., Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013; Tokunaga, 2010; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011). Whereas the earliest studies of online peer victimization focused mainly on prevalence rates, more studies have recently been conducted on the correlates of being victimized online (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013). In line with studies on offline peer victimization, these studies have shown that online peer victimization is negatively related to indicators of psychosocial well-being, including depression (e.g., Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Chang et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman, & Eden, 2012; Schultze-Krumbholz, Jäkel, Schultze, & Scheithauer, 2012), loneliness (e.g., Jackson & Cohen, 2012; Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2012), and social anxiety (e.g., Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Navarro, Yubero, Larrañaga, & Martínez, 2012).

The strength of the relationship between online peer victimization and psychosocial well-being seems to depend on the extent to which offline peer victimization is taken into account. When researchers control for offline peer victimization, the relationship between online peer victimization and internalizing problems seems to decrease. For instance, Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, and Storch (2009) showed that online peer victimization had only a weak relationship with social anxiety and was no longer related

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to depression, after controlling for offline peer victimization. Thus, in order to fully understand how online peer victimization contributes to adolescents' psychosocial well-being, it is important to assess both types of peer victimization. In addition, the potentially detrimental effects of both offline and online peer victimization necessitate the availability of psychometrically sound measures of peer victimization in both settings.

Although a number of measures are available for both offline and online peer victimization, some important limitations have been identified. In a systematic review, [Berne et al. \(2013\)](#) identified the strengths and weaknesses of the 44 scales measuring online peer victimization that were available in October 2010. The authors of the review also provided advice and suggested criteria that should be met when developing a new measure. Moreover, the authors identified some important shortcomings of existing scales.

First, many measures include media-specific items. These items assess peer victimization via a specific medium or Internet platform, such as victimization via hurtful emails or a Facebook profile (e.g., [Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2010](#); [Menesini, Nocentini, & Calussi, 2011](#)). Due to the fast-changing media landscape, however, these media-specific measures must be updated continuously. For example, whereas a decade ago emails were very prominent among youth, they are rarely used anymore, replaced by messaging services such as WhatsApp, Snapchat or YikYak ([Bellware, 2014](#)). Medium-specific measures, therefore, become quickly outdated and are difficult to use in longitudinal studies conducted over several years.

Second, information about the psychometric properties of measures of online peer victimization is minimal because few studies have provided information about reliability or validity. For example, in one review, information about internal consistency was available for only 18 of the 44 evaluated measures ([Berne et al., 2013](#)). Only eight studies tested the validity of their measure by investigating the relationship to psychosocial well-being. Without information about reliability or validity, it is difficult to assess a measure's quality. Thus, when new scales are developed, it is necessary to rigidly test the psychometric properties, to clearly outline the steps that have been taken when developing the measure, and to present the psychometric properties in detail.

Third, not only do few studies report internal consistency, statistical support for a measure and its subscales has been limited. When subscales have been distinguished in online peer victimization assessment, authors clustered items based only on theoretical assumptions. Of these 18 studies that provided information about internal consistency, only 11 also reported factor analyses. Furthermore, only one of these studies conducted both an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. When subscales are distinguished, it is crucial that researchers "confirm or dismiss theoretically based items through statistical analysis such as factor analysis" ([Berne et al., 2013, p. 329](#)).

Fourth, measures of online peer victimization have not yet distinguished between direct and indirect forms of peer victimization. This is problematic because research on offline peer victimization has shown that it is important to make this distinction. Direct peer victimization is usually the result of aggressive acts during which the victim is physically harmed or verbally threatened. These experiences often involve a direct confrontation between the perpetrator and the victim. Indirect peer victimization, on the other hand, is the result of more covert forms of aggression, such as relational aggression ([Grotperter & Crick, 1996](#)), reputational aggression ([De Los Reyes & Prinstein, 2004](#)) and social exclusion ([Lopez & DuBois, 2005](#)). Although the distinction between direct and indirect aggression is common for offline peer victimization, it has not been made for online peer victimization.

Differentiating between direct and indirect offline and online peer victimization is important for three reasons. First, indirect off-

line peer victimization typically occurs more often than direct offline peer victimization ([Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010](#); [Woods & White, 2005](#)). If a scale does not strike a balance between indirect and direct peer victimization, the reported prevalence rate of peer victimization may be biased toward the dominant form of peer victimization that is measured. Second, a uni-dimensional approach may obscure gender differences. Gender differences in direct offline aggression are typically robust, with boys showing more direct aggression than girls ([Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008](#)). In online peer victimization, however, gender differences are less consistent ([Tokunaga, 2010](#)). Distinguishing between indirect and direct online peer victimization may improve our understanding of gender differences in online peer victimization. Finally, a distinction between indirect and direct peer victimization enables us to more precisely predict the psychosocial consequences of peer victimization. Whereas direct peer victimization has negative consequences for boys and girls, indirect peer victimization seems to affect girls more strongly than boys ([Storch, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003](#)).

Experiences of peer victimization have often been studied in the context of bullying (e.g., [Olweus, 1997](#)). Researchers in the field of bullying emphasize that aggressive acts should only be considered bullying when they meet the following three criteria: (1) the perpetrator intends to hurt the victim; (2) the aggressive behaviors occur frequently; and (3) there exists a power imbalance which is often related to differences in physique between the victim and his/her perpetrator ([Smith & Brain, 2000](#)). However, these specific characteristics of bullying do not easily transfer to online peer victimization in which face-to-face contact is absent (e.g., [Smith, 2012](#)). For instance, an insulting comment posted on a social network site is a onetime act by the perpetrator but is viewed and possibly commented on many times after the original posting. We are also primarily interested in the victim's perspective, for which a perpetrator's intent-to-harm is less relevant. Although these three criteria have often been used to differentiate bullying from more general experiences with aggression, this distinction is not unanimously accepted neither by traditional nor cyberbullying researchers (e.g., [Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009](#); [Smith, 2012](#)). For these reasons, the terms "offline" and "online peer victimization" more closely reflect the negative experiences that we are interested in studying than bullying does.

1.1. The current study

In light of the limitations of existing measures of peer victimization, several authors have argued that the assessment of offline and online peer victimization must be systematized (e.g., [Berne et al., 2013](#); [Crothers & Levinson, 2004](#); [Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004](#); [Tokunaga, 2010](#)). This study aims to address this call by developing a sound measure of direct and indirect offline and online peer victimization, the Multidimensional Offline and Online Peer Victimization Scale (MOOPV). The MOOPV, a self-report measure developed for children 9 years of age and older, is meant to allow for reliable and direct comparisons between youth's offline and online experiences with peer victimization, and should be relatively robust to the ever changing digital media landscape by including items that are not media-platform specific.

All items that were used to create the MOOPV were drawn from previous studies on offline and online peer victimization. In line with [Berne et al.'s \(2013\)](#) advice and recommended criteria for developing new measures of peer victimization, the MOOPV had to meet several quality standards. As such, the development of the MOOPV followed a systematic approach. The four MOOPV subscales (offline and online direct and indirect victimization) had to meet standards of reliability (i.e., high internal consistency, $>.70$; [Nunnally, 1978](#)), utility (i.e., smallest number of items that cover

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