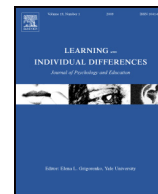




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1 Emotional intelligence, victimisation, bullying behaviours and attitudes

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A B S T R A C T

Emotional intelligence (EI) and pro-victim attitudes play an important role in adolescent bullying and victimisation. We recruited 284 male and female adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 who were attending secondary school in Australia. All participants completed the adolescent version of the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test, the Peer Relations Questionnaire and the shortened version of the Revised Pro-victim Scale. Results revealed significant associations between bullying, victimisation, pro-victim attitudes and the EI dimensions Emotion Recognition and Expression, Emotion Management and Control, Understanding the Emotions of Others and Emotions Direct Cognition. Regression analyses revealed greater Understanding Emotions, lower Emotional Management and Control, being male and having weaker Pro-Victim Attitudes to be significant predictors of being engaging in bullying. Investigation of the influence of EI and pro-victim attitudes on victimisation revealed significant independent contributions to the prediction model of victimisation by lesser Emotional Management and Control and stronger Pro-Victim Attitudes. Additionally, Pro-Social behaviours were predicted by the female gender and greater Understanding Emotions. Results have implications for management and intervention practices of school based adolescent bullying and victimisation focussed on EI development. Q2

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36 37 38 1. Introduction

39 Recently research concerning bullying behaviours in adolescents has
 40 increased markedly, with a focus on the precursors to bullying behav-
 41 iours, the types of adolescents more prone to being bullied, and the
 42 impact these bullying behaviours have upon the schooling experience
 43 and upon future life outcomes. Over 600 peer review articles have been
 44 published on bullying between 2000 and 2010 compared to fewer than
 45 190 published in the 20 years prior (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, &
 46 Sadek, 2010). In Australia, one in four students has reported being
 47 subjected to peer-victimisation on a weekly basis (Cross et al., 2009).
 48 This figure is consistent with data from the USA where 13-million stu-
 49 dents are reported to experience bullying each year (Munsey, 2011).
 50 Clearly, school based bullying is a growing global phenomenon which
 51 requires urgent attention. As such, whilst the antecedents of bullying be-
 52 haviour are obviously multi-factorial, one known predictor of bullying
 53 behaviour is anti-bullying attitudes and another promising but relatively
 54 under-researched with regard to bullying behaviours is the emotional
 55 intelligence (EI) of adolescents. Therefore the aim of the current study
 56 was to examine the independent contributions of EI to being a bully, or

a victim of bullying type behaviours after controlling for anti-bullying attitudes. 57 58

Bullying is generally defined as “repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or groups of persons” (Farrington, 1993; Rigby, 2007). Research in the field of childhood bullying has not only focused on its widespread nature but on the psychological and emotional consequences experienced by those who have been affected by bullying. Studies have shown that repeated bullying in school poses short and long-term health risk, with bullying being associated with increased stress, decreased self-esteem, reduced confidence and increased risk of developing psychiatric problems (Cook et al., 2010; Rigby, 1999, 2005; Smith & Brain, 2000) as some of the negative consequences of long term bullying as both victim and perpetrator. 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70

71 1.1. The role of emotional intelligence

EI can be defined as “the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, pp. 189). The construct of EI has been linked to a myriad of social and emotional outcomes over the past 20 years of research (Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009). In the context of adolescent development, EI has been suggested to be integral for successful social interaction (Romasz, Kantor, & Elias, 2004), with more highly evolved EI skills 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79

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80 serving to enhance emotional awareness, coordinate decision making
81 and improve conflict resolution, and contribute to stable mental health
82 and overall wellbeing (Chow, Chiu, & Wong, 2011; Izard et al., 2001;
83 Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007). Of interest to
84 this study is the relationship between the abilities encompassed by EI
85 and peer relations at school, in particular whether higher EI scores
86 facilitate pro-social behaviours and prevent anti-social behaviours
87 (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012; Lomas, Stough, Hansen, & Downey, 2012).

88 The recognition, management and utilisation of emotions has been
89 described as an important component in coordinating social interactions
90 by conveying information regarding others' emotions, thoughts
91 and intentions (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Recent findings in the field of
92 bullying have shown significant associations between children's emo-
93 tional responses, social competences and coping (Zimmer-Gembeck,
94 Lees, & Skinner, 2011). Similarly, individuals scoring high on emotion
95 regulation abilities both considered themselves and were deemed by
96 peers to show more pro-social tendencies than their counterparts
97 (Lopes, Salovey, Cote, & Beers, 2005). The examination of the relation-
98 ship between EI and empathy also points to the probable role that EI
99 abilities could have in moderating adolescents' experience of bullying.
100 The EI dimensions involved in the use of emotions to facilitate positive
101 relationships with others have previously been shown to exhibit signif-
102 icant overlap with empathy; or the ability to comprehend and re-
103 experience the feelings of another (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe,
104 2007; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Specifically, the EI dimensions involving
105 appraisal of emotions in others and accurate perception of thoughts,
106 beliefs and intentions of others are considered key factors in empathic
107 response (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) which is found to be predictive of
108 both bullying behaviours and victimisation (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012).

109 Further evidence to the role of EI in altering adolescents' emo-
110 tional experience of bullying could be taken from a study by
111 Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2011) who assessed the role of emotional
112 reactivity in altering the link between children's social competence and
113 adaptive coping. Bullying was one of the three interpersonal stressors
114 presented to children and findings showed that the relationship be-
115 tween social competence and coping was better explained after consid-
116 eration of emotional reactions to stressful events (Zimmer-Gembeck
117 et al., 2011). Whilst emotional expression is one aspect of EI, findings
118 of this kind suggest the potential for emotions to impact on social
119 interactions. Similar findings resulted from work on emotion regulation
120 abilities and quality of social interaction where researchers observed
121 that individuals scoring high on emotion regulation abilities both
122 considered themselves and were deemed by peers to show more pro-
123 social tendencies than their counterparts (Lopes et al., 2005). Downey,
124 Johnston, Hansen, Birney, and Stough (2010) also examined antisocial
125 behaviour as another subtype of social interaction and investigated
126 the link between EI, coping and problem behaviours. Their findings sug-
127 gested that higher levels of the ability to manage and control emotions
128 were more effective (via the chosen coping strategies) in dealing with
129 stressful situations common in adolescence, and reduced the display
130 of antisocial behaviours. Together these findings suggest that EI as
131 broadly defined as a set of abilities concerned with the regulation,
132 management, control and use of emotions in decision-making, that
133 seem particularly relevant to the promotion of healthy and adaptive
134 mental functioning (Downey et al., 2008) should intuitively play a
135 role in how adolescents experience or engage in bullying behaviours.

136 A small number of studies have attempted to examine the putative
137 role of EI (or social-emotional competencies) in predicting levels of
138 bullying behaviours and peer victimisation (Gower et al., 2014;
139 Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012; Lomas et al., 2012; Polan, Sieving, &
140 McMorris, 2013). In a small sample (N = 68) of Australian adolescents,
141 the study of Lomas et al. (2012) was designed to assess whether any
142 relationship existed between specific dimensions of EI and engagement
143 in bullying behaviours or being a victim of bullying. This study observed
144 that lower scores on the EI dimensions measuring the utilisation of
145 emotional information in thought/decision-making and managing and

control of emotions significantly predicted the propensity of adoles- 146
cents to be subjected to peer victimisation, and lower scores on 147
understanding the emotions of others predicted increased bullying 148
behaviours. Similarly, Kokkinos and Kipritsi observed significant rela- 149
tionships between higher EI and lower bullying and victimisation 150
using the Greek translation of the Trait Emotional Intelligence 151
Questionnaire Adolescent Short-Form (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, 152
& Frederickson, 2006) in a larger sample (N = 206), but they only ex- 153
amined a global EI score and did not consider specific EI competencies. 154
More recently in a sample of adolescent girls, Gower et al. (2014) exam- 155
ined the role of specific social-emotional competencies using the Em- 156
otional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version and violence perpetration. 157
They observed that deficits in interpersonal understanding/empathy 158
and emotion regulation/management were related to the experience 159
of higher instances of bullying and concluded that these social- 160
emotional based competencies and stress management skills may be 161
protective against the perpetration of relational aggression and physical 162
violence in female adolescents (Gower et al., 2014). The study by Polan 163
et al. (2013) also identified greater interpersonal skills and greater 164
stress management skills to be significantly associated with a lower 165
amount of violence involvement as well as greater stress management 166
also being significantly associated with lower involvement in both 167
physical bullying and relational aggression. Together these four studies 168
point the importance of the abilities encompassed by EI, as they appear 169
to be inter-related with engagement in bullying, protective of the effects 170
of victimisation and predictive of the engagement in more pro-social 171
behaviour. Our specific interest is in extending these findings by consid- 172
ering the role of attitudes towards bullying behaviours by examining 173
the unique contributions of EI competencies, alongside pro-victim atti- 174
tudes, to the prediction of bullying and victimisation. 175

176 1.2. The role of attitudes towards bullying

Accurate perception of thoughts, beliefs and intentions of others 177
have been considered be predictive of both bullying behaviours and 178
victimisation (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012) and understanding how 179
attitudes towards these behaviours and their consequences impact ad- 180
olescents' engagement in bullying or being the target of victimisation 181
is the aim of this paper. Attitudes are suggested to be predictors of spon- 182
taneous and deliberate social and non-social behaviour (Goethem, 183
Scholte, & Wiers, 2010), with pro-attitudes towards bullying-type 184
behaviour for example, being associated with increased propensity to 185
engage in bullying of others (Rigby, 2005). The importance of attitudes 186
in sustaining and orienting children's behaviour has also been regarded 187
as an important aspect in both curriculum and policy development 188
(Berger, 2007; Menesini et al., 1997), with students becoming more re- 189
sistant to the adoption of pro-victim attitudes towards bullying as they 190
progress through school (Hunt, 2007; Menesini et al., 1997; Rigby & 191
Slee, 1991). It is unclear as to why this could be, particularly as it runs 192
counter to the typical development of empathy (Rigby & Slee, 1991), 193
however, these findings may be more interpretable given what we 194
know regarding the relatively permanent nature of attitudes, that they 195
persist across time and situations (Vaughan & Hogg, 2008). In a study 196
involving 210 Swedish and English secondary school pupils, researchers 197
compared student attitudes towards bullying with peer nominations of 198
classmates thought to be bullies and victims (Boulton, Bucci, & Hawker, 199
1999). Their results reported that pupil anti-bullying attitudes were a 200
significant predictor of lower involvement in bullying. Conversely, 201
those who were most often identified by their peers as bullies held 202
the most accepting attitudes towards bullying. These findings are con- 203
sistent with research on aggression showing that children who condone 204
the use of aggression are more likely to be aggressive (Huesmann & 205
Guerra, 1997; Tapper & Boulton, 2004). Similarly, two Australian 206
based studies examining bullying related attitudes have reported 207
results showing that self-reported attitudes towards victims made an 208
independent contribution in accounting for reported bullying behaviour 209

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