

Let's Talk About It: The Perception of Bullying Experiences as Reported by Adolescents with ASD

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Parents report that nearly half (46.3%) to almost all (94%) adolescents with autism spectrum disorders are victims of bullying, as compared to the estimated national prevalence rate of 10.6% of students in the general population

Little, 2002; Sterzing et al., 2013

What is Bullying?

Type of Bullying	Definition	Examples
Physical	Physical force by the perpetrator against the targeted youth	Hitting, kicking, punching, spitting on, tripping, pushing
Verbal	Oral or written communication by the perpetrator against the targeted youth that causes the victim harm	Taunting, name calling, teasing, threatening or offensive notes or hand gestures, intimidation
Relational	Behaviors by a perpetrator designed to harm the reputation or relationships of the targeted youth	Shunning, purposeful efforts to isolate, spreading false or harmful rumors
Damage to Property	Theft, alteration, or damaging of the target youth's property by the perpetrator to cause harm	Taking personal property and refusing to give it back, destroying property

ASD and Bullying

Increased risk factors


-  **limited social skills** (Kloosterman, et al., 2013; Schroeder et al., 2014)
-  **fewer or lower quality peer relationships** (Rowley, et al., 2012; Wainscot et al., 2008)
-  **communication difficulties** (Nabuzoka, 2003)
-  **difficulty regulating emotions** (Schroeder et al., 2014)

Issues with reporting

- ⬆ Most studies rely on teacher or parent report
 - ⬆ Answer questions about whether individual with ASD had been bullied
 - ⬆ How do they know?
 - ⬆ Large-scale studies- few questions or details
 - ⬆ What does it look like?
- ⬆ Less is know about the experience of bullying as **perceived and described** by students with ASD

Self-Report

When compared to parent report

-  **responses do not correspond** (Adams et al., 2014; Chen & Schwartz, 2012; Kloosterman et al., 2013; Rowley et al., 2012; van Roekel et al., 2010)
-  **parents report higher rates of bullying than the students themselves** (Adams et al., 2014; Chen & Schwartz; Rowley et al., 2012; van Roekel et al., 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2014)

Lack of Correspondence?

- ⦿ Bullying questionnaires have not been validated for use with students with ASD
 - ⦿ rendering self-report unreliable (Adams et al., 2014)
 - ⦿ bullying questionnaire adapted for students with ASD
 - ⦿ still found students' and parents' responses did not correlate for all forms of bullying (Adams et al., 2014)
- ⦿ Different interpretations of bullying episodes (van Roekel et al., 2010)
 - ⦿ students with ASD not aware they were bullied
 - ⦿ might interpret situation as victimization that others would not
 - ⦿ problematic for self-report bullying questionnaires
 - ⦿ students with ASD might not generalize their experience to the general definitions of bullying

The Problem

- ⬆ The perception of bullying
 - ⬆ Student might perceive he was victimized, even if that event does not fit into a specific bullying category
 - ⬆ Goes unreported
 - ⬆ Student still affected
 - ⬆ parents' reports of bullying were not related to reports of internalizing symptoms
 - ⬆ students' reports of bullying were significantly related to increased internalizing symptoms (Adams et al., 2014)

So how do we measure it?

- ⬆️ Talk to them! Ask them!
- ⬆️ Qualitative data analysis through semi-structured interviews
- ⬆️ Allows them to determine what experiences they interpret and report as victimization
 - ⬆️ Identifies a broader range of experiences than traditional questionnaires
- ⬆️ Humphrey and Lewis (2008)
 - ⬆️ examples related to social exploitation, name-calling, and physical violence
 - ⬆️ sought protection from teachers and peers
(Humphrey & Symes, 2010)

This Study

- ⬆ (1) When asked about being teased or bullied, what types of experiences do adolescents with ASD describe?
- ⬆ (2) Are adolescents with ASD able to provide reasons as to why they are targeted?
- ⬆ (3) How did students with ASD react to instances of bullying?

Method

Participants

- Adolescents with ASD from larger study examining transition from high school
 - within 12 months of high school exit
 - living at home with parents
 - Received ASD diagnosis from an educational or health professional
- Recruited through a number of venues
 - local clinics, other autism-related research studies, local support groups, service providers, and autism organizations
- 30 Eligible for the present analysis if
 - completed Module 4 of the ADOS
 - consented to being video- or audio-taped for transcription

Participants

	Mean (SD) or %	N or range
Age	18.19 (0.49)	17.18 to 19.28
Gender (% male)	86.7%	N = 26
IQ	93.45 (19.07)	50.00 to 137.00
Race		
White, Non-Hispanic	90.0%	N = 27
African American	10.0%	N = 3
ADOS-4 Total Scores		
Communication	4.03 (1.30)	1 to 7
Social Interaction	8.33 (2.82)	3 to 14
Communication and Social Interaction	12.40 (3.91)	4 to 20
Stereotyped Behaviors and Restricted Interests	1.37 (1.30)	0 to 5

Participant's Educational Setting

	Mean (SD) or %	N or range
Type of School		
Regular Public School	60.0%	N = 18
Regular Private School	6.7%	N = 2
Services only students with disabilities/ Alternative School	13.3%	N = 4
Magnet School	6.7%	N = 2
Homeschool	13.3%	N = 4
Hours/week spent in school	32.07 (9.17)	6 to 42
Inclusion		
Full inclusion	60.0%	N = 18
Partial Inclusion	16.7%	N = 5
No inclusion in school	10.0%	N = 3
N/A (Homeschool)	13.3	N = 4

Measures

- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-
Module 4 (ADOS; Lord, et al., 2000)
 - standardized diagnostic assessment tool for ASD
 - Module 4
 - adolescents and adults who are verbally fluent
 - Section 6: Social Difficulties and Annoyance
 - “Have you ever had problems getting along with people at school or at work?”
 - “Do you do things that annoy others?”
 - “Have you ever been teased or bullied? Why do you think?”
 - “Have you ever tried to change these things? Have you ever done anything so that others wouldn’t tease you? How has it worked?”

Data Analysis

- ⬆ Transcribed responses to ADOS questions verbatim
- ⬆ Conventional qualitative content analysis
 - ⬆ Read all of the transcripts to become familiar with the data
 - ⬆ Derived codes and sorted into themes based on relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)
 - ⬆ highlighting exact words that described an instance of bullying, reason why the individual was bullied, or reaction to bullying
 - ⬆ Codes sorted into themes based on how they were related and linked
 - ⬆ Reviewed theme definitions to ensure they were clear and understandable until consensus was met

Findings

Types of Victimization

- 22 of 30 reported they had experienced teasing or bullying
- Some provided more general descriptions
- Others provided details of specific instances of bullying
 - Verbal Victimization
 - Physical Victimization
 - Relational Victimization

Verbal Victimization

N = 9

- ⦿ picked on or teased by peers
- ⦿ “Well some kids would just pick on me like try to steal my books or call me names. Which I didn’t like.”
- ⦿ “Oh yes I used to have long long hair. I used to have long long hair and there was a girl when I was in school, she didn’t like that. In fact there were two girls and they did not like that. They teased me all the time. Yep. Didn’t like that. I ended up cutting it. *[Did you cut it because of that?]* Yes, it was long, well it was because of that”

Physical Victimization

N = 6

- ⬆ Varied from minor experiences to severe instances of physical bullying
- ⬆ Two individuals reported that peers “poked me over and over.”
- ⬆ “tied my shoes together”

more serious physical altercation :

- ⬆ “I got bit by some jerks. (*Yeah? What happened with those jerks?*) Well, I had some guys, decided to hiss like in my very previous years and still like in sophomore year. (*Oh, no, they hissed at you?*) Like [adolescent hisses]. And it was unexpected, like it was like [adolescent gasps] (*Oh, so it scared you a little bit?*) And it was like ‘why those annoying jerks’.”

Relational Victimization

N = 4

- ⬆ instances of peers ignoring them or not being nice
- ⬆ peers would “stare at me in a weird manner”
- ⬆ “he annoys me on purpose”
- ⬆ “mostly talk behind my back”

Some had trouble determining whether they were a specific target:

- ⬆ “he irritates everyone”
- ⬆ “I would get teased around in public in front of my friends and I know they’re just kidding...kind of hurts in a way”

Unspecified Victimization

N = 7

- ⬆ did not provide specific details
- ⬆ “I did get bullied quite severely by most of the school actually, well by most of my grade in school”
- ⬆ “all the time”

Didn't want to talk about it

- ⬆ “um, I don't want to go into detail with it”

Reasons for Bullying

- ⬆ Some offered reasons as to why they thought others might target them
 - ⬆ personal attributes
 - ⬆ other's opinions of them

Personal Attributes

Blame on themselves

- ⬆ “maybe that was kind of my fault”
- ⬆ “I’m not exactly approachable”
- ⬆ “I haven’t exactly made an attempt”
- ⬆ “[it was an] awkward phase of early teens”

Easy targets

- ⬆ “I’m easy to aggravate, pretty much. At times, at least. Um, yeah. I was way too easy to target, I was easy pickings is the word”
- ⬆ Others felt bullies noticed their disability (e.g., “I was obviously different”)

Personal Attributes

Because of their disability

- ⦿ “I was obviously different”
- ⦿ “To get a reaction out of me, that’s what they were after...thought it was funny seeing my re-seeing me react....Cause I was different like my disability. They took advantage of it”
- ⦿ “I guess I just don’t do what they do. It’s so hard to tell you how it works. I don’t know. Maybe I talk different than them maybe. I’m not interested in the same stuff all the time, or, I don’t know, I just don’t do well with kids in high school. It’s just hard to explain”

Other's Opinions of Them

Felt that other students in the school did not like them or want to be around them

- ⬆ “because um the other kids just seem not to want to be around me”
- ⬆ “they all hate me, too”
- ⬆ “it’s hard to keep friends”

Reactions to Victimization

- ⬆ Offered various ways in which they reacted to the bullies
- ⬆ varied widely
 - ⬆ their own actions in the present moment
 - ⬆ their own actions after the incident
 - ⬆ attempts at retaliation and intimidation
 - ⬆ emotional responses
 - ⬆ minimizing the seriousness
 - ⬆ changes in relationships

Own Actions in the Moment

Tried to ignore the bully

- ⬆️ “I first ignore them, they’re persistent. Very persistent. And you can’t ignore it when it’s physical”

Control emotions

- ⬆️ “I don’t get angry”
- ⬆️ “I say stop right now”

Own Actions After the Fact

Report the incident

- ⬆ Office
- ⬆ Teacher
- ⬆ Parent

Changing behavior

- ⬆ “I’ve learned to be more nonconfrontational and just mellow out I guess”
- ⬆ “paid more attention to what came out of my mouth”

Documenting the incident

- ⬆ “I responded by documenting them fervently and thoroughly”
- ⬆ “just write down what happened”.
- ⬆ “As soon as I graduate I am ratting out everyone who wronged me...(the school) introduced a way of making it hard to snitch on people... it is a network they have, they adopted, maybe the entire school system”

Retaliation

- ⬆ During a bullying incident
 - ⬆ “I’m lucky I didn’t get angry enough to beat them up”
- ⬆ In the future
 - ⬆ “And you don’t want to see what happens”
 - ⬆ “if I’m ever in this situation, I’ll, I’ll have, I’m going to be ready”

Intimidation

- ⬆ “make myself an established threat”
- ⬆ “a few of them can’t look me in the eye”
- ⬆ “Um, my responses were at times not the best. [*Ok, why do you say that?*] Well, threatening to cut someone up and describing in detail of what you would do, not the smartest thing to do. I have a very active imagination, not the best at times, especially when you’re really angry and you want to scare someone”

Minimizing

- ⬆ added qualifiers to minimize the seriousness of the situation
- ⬆ “I know, poor me”
- ⬆ “sad for me, oh well”
- ⬆ stated that the bullying was “not too serious” or “nothing that was too mean”
- ⬆ “anywhere you go, you’ll have that”

Changes in Relationships

- ⬆️ “I don’t remember most of it but... I am not very trusting of people most of the time. (*Why’s that?*) You know because of what happened back then. I am not exactly one who’s easily tricked as someone who might be”

Discussion

Were they bullied?

- ⬆ Yes, 73% experienced bullying (compared to 10.6% of general population)
- ⬆ Experienced each type of bullying
- ⬆ BUT, specific examples differed markedly from those often-described in research-based questionnaires

So what?






- ⬆ We aren't assessing the right things
 - ⬆ Olweus Bullying Questionnaire
 - ⬆ physical bullying
 - ⬆ “I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors”
 - ⬆ Self-Report
 - ⬆ Physical bullying
 - ⬆ “poked” , “bit”
- ⬆ Need to further explore what bullying looks like among youth with ASD
 - ⬆ more subtle
 - ⬆ differently defined
 - ⬆ Just as impactful

Why do they think they are they bullied?

- ⬆ Blame themselves
- ⬆ Blame others

So what?

Bullying Prevention Programs

-  Behavior management program for students with ASD to address specifically targeted behaviors
-  Individualized, capitalizing on the methods they have already developed
 -  Teach students to discern effective responses from non-effective responses
-  Acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities
 -  Peer mentoring program

How do they respond to bullying?

- ⬆ Tried to ignore
- ⬆ Wanted to retaliate
- ⬆ Minimize the seriousness
- ⬆ Impacted relationships
 - ⬆ withdraw from future friendships

So what?

- Need more information on bullying and long-term impact for students with ASD
- Need to provide a support group
 - Circle of Friends
 - Peer Mentoring

<http://relentlesstour.com/meet-anthony-ianni/>

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THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS?