

Longitudinal study confirms previously victimized children at higher risk of future victimization

Source: Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R. and Turner, H. (2006). Re-victimization patterns in a national longitudinal sample of children and youth. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31, 479-502.

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There is an increasing interest amongst researchers on what makes children vulnerable to re-victimization, particularly poly-victimization (four or more incidents of victimization in one year). Using data from the Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS), a longitudinal study designed to assess a comprehensive range of childhood victimizations (such as physical assaults, peer victimizations and maltreatment) in the United States, this research paper analyzed a sample of 1,467 respondents across two waves of data collection approximately one year apart. Four main questions were asked pertaining to re-victimization: (1) Are children victimized in one year at an increased likelihood to be re-victimized the following year? (2) Does victimization of one sort create vulnerability for victimization of another sort? (3) Are highly victimized youth in one year particularly vulnerable to re-victimization the next? (4) What are the risk factors that may lead to conditions of high victimization vulnerability and persistence, as well as resilience factors that may allow children to escape victimization? There was a high continuity of victimization over the two years, especially for poly-victims who were 5.1 times more likely than others victims to have had experienced four or more victimizations in Year 2. Children that were victims Year 1 of the study were also 2 to 7 times more likely to be victims of a different sort of act during Year 2 (for example, being victim of a property crime one year led to higher risk of sexual victimization in the second year). Living in a dangerous family (recent domestic violence or child maltreatment) or moving to a worse neighborhood were seen to be risk factors for highly victimized youth and having more good friends or more older siblings were found to be mediating factors. Suggestions were for research on the mediating effects of peer relationships and the specific reasons that they may lead to lower levels of victimization (a general self-esteem enhancer or an active protection against offenders).

Methodological Notes: This was an extensive research study with a large baseline sample (N=2030) and a fairly high rate of response (72.3%) in the second wave. Telephone interviewing is a cost-effective methodology and demonstrated as comparable in reliability and validity to in-person interviews, even on sensitive topics. Nevertheless, because this study does not guarantee confidentiality (disclosures of child maltreatment and dangerous families situations are reported to the appropriate authorities), certain categories of victimization would no doubt go underreported by parents. Similarly, the authors made every effort to speak privately to 10-17 year old children by making

arrangements to speak to them when parents were not at home or on pay phones. However, child victims of maltreatment are more likely to disclose abuse to a trusted person than a stranger on the telephone during a one time interview, which may also represent some under-reporting for the categories of maltreatment and dangerous family situations.