



Bullying and psychotic experiences: Type, reason, timing and gender

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Bullying

- Bullying victimisation is a commonly experienced stressful life event in childhood and adolescence, associated with a number of mental health problems in childhood and adolescence, including psychotic experiences (Arseneault, 2018)
- Intention to harm may make an adverse experience more likely to lead to psychotic experiences (Moriyama et al., 2018)
- 22.4% of Irish primary school children and 11.8% of post-primary children report having been bullied (Foody, Samara, & O'Higgins Norman, 2017)

Psychotic experiences

- A recent meta-analysis of types of trauma and psychotic experiences suggested that different types of traumatic experiences are differently associated with psychotic experiences (Croft, 2018)
- One study of a help-seeking population found different associations between different types of bullying and types of psychotic experiences, including relationships between verbal bullying and paranoia and physical bullying and grandiosity (Catone, 2017)
- Evidence showing different mediators between bullying and hallucinatory and delusional experiences suggests the existence of different but related pathways leading to the development of different PEs (Moffa et al., 2017)

Methods

- GUI child cohort asked children and parents about bullying at ages 9 and 13, including questions about the form the bullying took
- Psychotic experiences were assessed at age 13 by a subset of questions from the Adolescent Psychotic-Like Symptom Screener (Kelleher, Harley, Murtagh, & Cannon, 2011)
- Logistic regression was used to calculate ORs and 95% CIs for the relationship between each type and cause for bullying at each time-point for each reporter, and each type of psychotic experience
- Sorted secondary analyses were undertaken on the types of bullying to examine gender differences in the relationship
- Finally, the reasons for bullying were also investigated using logistic regression

Timing

- PEs were reported by 15.97% of those children who had reported bullying at age 9, and 27.33% of those who reported bullying at age 13
- PEs were reported by only 11.03% of those who had not reported bullying at age 9, and 11.55% of those who had not reported bullying at age 13
- This demonstrates a trend for proximity, with a higher risk of adolescent psychotic experiences in those who report bullying in adolescence (relative to childhood)
- Those reporting persistent bullying had an even greater risk of PEs, irrespective of whether bullying was reported by parents or children

Type

- In childhood, only verbal bullying was associated with an increased risk of PEs. Previous research has demonstrated that verbal bullying is strongly related to paranoia (Catone et al., 2017)
- Bullying by exclusion was the only type of bullying specifically associated with delusional experiences
- While childhood bullying was associated with adolescent hallucinations this association was not specific to a type of bullying, with the possible exception of physical bullying
- In adolescence, both bullying by exclusion and sexual comments were associated with an increased risk PEs

Gender

- Boys were more likely to experience physical bullying while girls were more likely to experience other forms of bullying in childhood
- Overall, there appeared to be a particularly strong relationship between bullying by exclusion and PEs but on closer inspection of the data this effect is stronger for boys than girls
- Experiencing physical bullying, written bullying and bullying by sexual comments were specifically associated with PEs in girls
- The severity or frequency of bullying may differ between boys and girls and this may account for some of these discrepancies
- Response from observers may also vary with type of bullying and gender

Reason

- Most reasons for bullying were associated with an increased risk of PEs, particularly ethnicity and jealousy in childhood and disability in adolescence
- Mechanisms for the relationship between ethnic minority position and psychotic phenomena include social adversity, low ethnic density and a heightened sense of perceived ethnic discrimination
- Previous research has highlighted that children with neurodevelopmental disorders have an elevated risk of PEs

Caveats

- We are unable to disentangle the directionality of this association as PEs were not measured in childhood, and previous research has found evidence for a bi-directional relationship between bullying and PEs (Kelleher et al., 2013)
- There are a number of common risk factors upstream of bullying which contribute both to risk of bullying and risk of psychosis, some of which were not accounted for
- The strongest results were found in the cross-sectional analysis between bullying and psychotic experiences reported at age 13. It is not possible to infer causality from this data

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