



Bullying, Victimization and Mental Health Indicators in Elementary School Children

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Objective

To compare bullying and victimization status with indicators of mental health, as measured by standardized screening tools, in elementary school students.

Background

There is extensive literature on bullying and victimization among children in the United States and throughout the world¹⁻³. Unfortunately, despite the fact that there is evidence of bullying and victimization beginning at extremely young ages⁴, the majority of research has been on middle school age children and above. This is likely due to the difficulty of conducting research in elementary school settings. Further complicating the issue is the lack of a psychometrically sound questionnaire for assessing bullying and victimization in elementary school children⁵. With the development of the Peer Interactions in Primary School (PIPS) questionnaire, there is now a reliable and valid method to assess elementary school children, and further data should be collected on this younger group of children to help with the planning, implementation, and assessment of school-based interventions.

Methods

In February 2004, 95 children in grades 4-6 at two different schools in California participated in a multi-dimensional assessment of bullying, victimization, and mental health. Children completed the PIPS survey, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) and the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC). Parents completed a Child-Behavior Checklist (CBCL), Parent version of the SDQ, and a demographic questionnaire. The primary outcome measures were the Victim and Bully scale scores from the PIPS. These scales were correlated with demographic and mental health variables derived from the other measures. Clinical cutoff values were determined from questionnaire administration guidelines or more recent literature reporting normative data.

Results – Demographics and Parent Rating Scales

Demographics

Child Age	Mean ± S.D.		
	N=95 10.2 ± 0.8		
Child Sex	Male	Female	
	N=95 51 (53.7%)	44 (46.3%)	
Parent Marital Status	Single	Married	
	N=87 19 (21.8%)	68 (78.2%)	
Family Income*	< \$50,000	\$50,000 - \$99,999	≥ \$100,000
	N=83 10 (12.0%)	24 (28.9%)	49 (59.0%)
	Child Ethnicity	White	Mixed
	N=88 59 (67.05)	17 (19.3%)	12 (13.6%)
	3 or more		

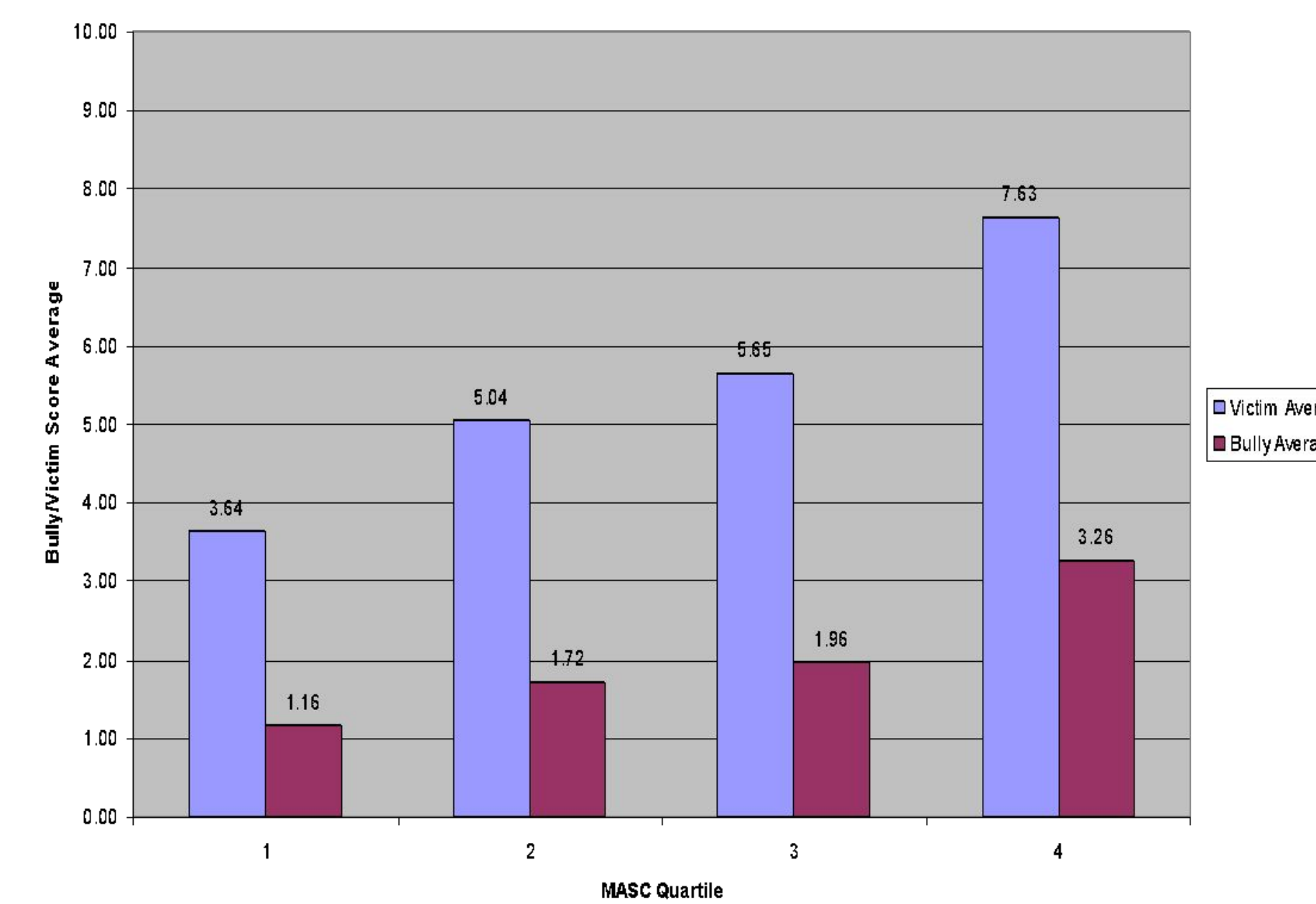


Parent Completed Rating Scales and Bully/Victim Scale Correlations

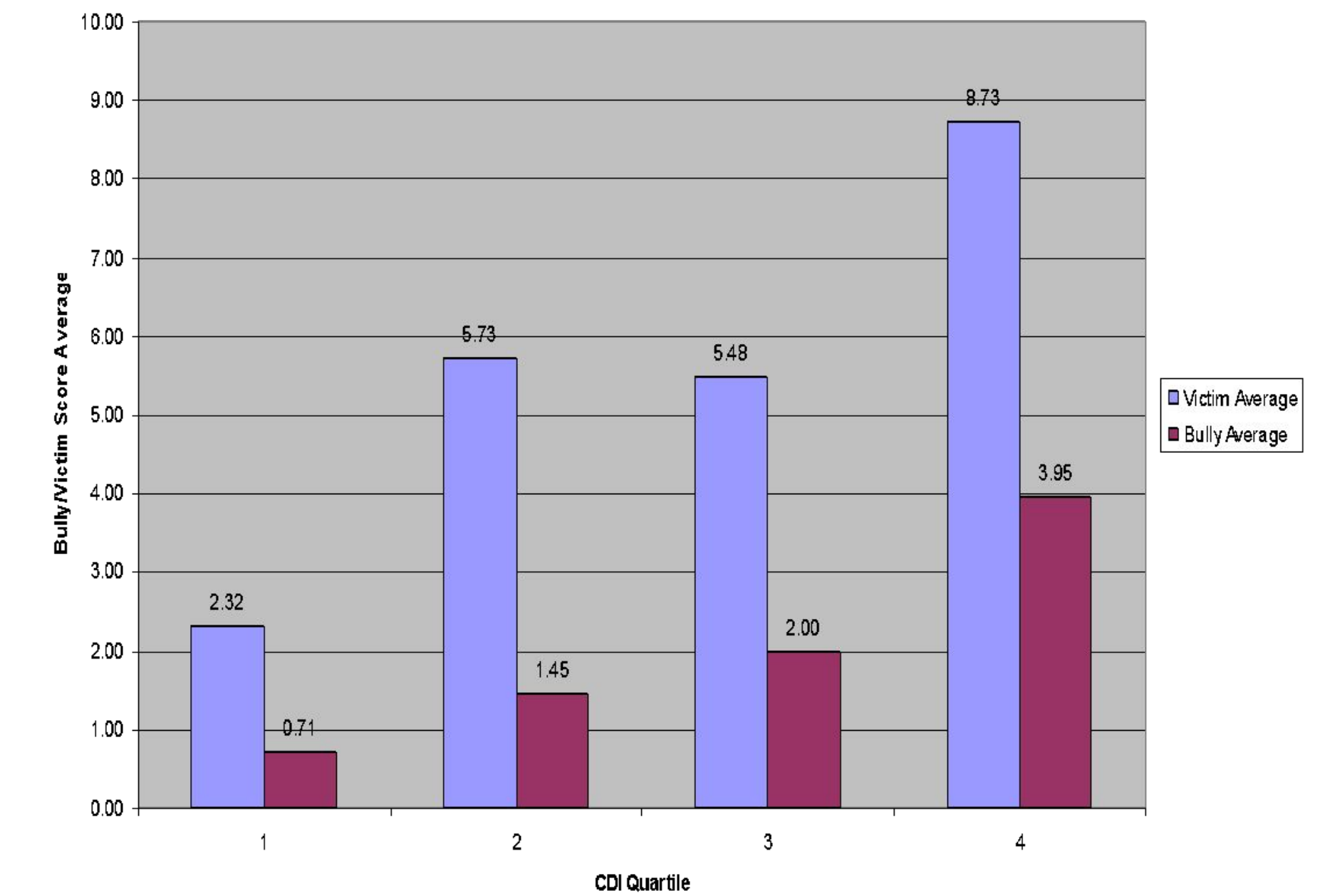
CBCL Scale	Anxious/Depressed	Withdrawn/Depressed	Somatic	Social	Thought Disorder	Attention	RuleBreak	Aggressive	Internalizing	Externalizing	Total
Victim/Bully Scale Correlations				Victim			Bully			Bully	Bully
				r=.25, p<.05			r=.23, p<.05			r=.24, p<.05	r=.21, p<.05
SDQ Scale	Emotional Problems	Conduct	Hyperactive	Peer Relations	Pro-Social Behavior	Total Problems					
Victim/Bully Scale Correlations				Victim							
				r= .29, p<.01							

Results – Child Self-Report Scales

Bully/Victim Scores and Anxiety



Bully/Victim Score and Depression



Child Completed Strengths and Difficulties Scores and Bully/Victim Scores

SDQ Scale	Emotional Problems	Conduct	Hyperactive	Peer Relations	Pro-Social Behavior	Total Problems
Victim Scale	r=.46 p<.01	r=.29 p<.01	r=.26 p<.01	r=.37 p<.01	r= -.05 p=.65	r=.47 p<.01
Bully Scale	r=.31 p<.01	r=.47 p<.01	r=.43 p<.01	r=.15 p=.16	r= -.27 p<.01	r=.47 p<.01

Conclusion

Self-report data on bullying and victimization from elementary school children were correlated with multiple mental health measures. Most importantly, children who scored higher on either the self-report PIPS Bully Scale or PIPS Victim Scale were more likely to have high scores on self-reports of depression, anxiety, and general behavior problem measures, as measured by the self-report Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. With respect to parent ratings, children with self-reported higher Victim Scale scores were identified as having parent-rated social problems, and children with self-reported higher Bully Scale scores had higher parent-rated Externalizing Scale scores. The fact that demographic variables had little association with bully and victim scales suggest that bullying and victimization in schools is a public health concern that affects all children.

References

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