1 in 5 children in China are Bullied. (Han et al., 2017)

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1 in 5 children in the U.S. are bullied as well. (NCES, 2019)

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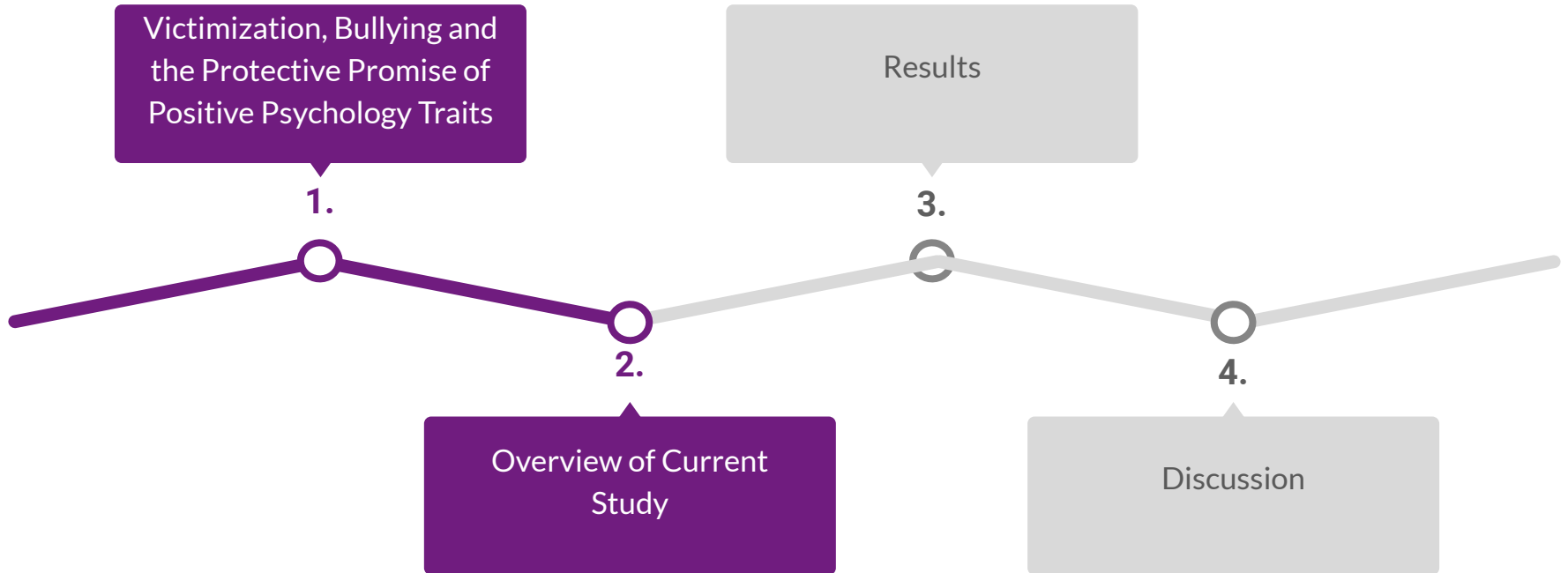# Positive Psychology Traits, Victimization & Bullying in Chinese Elementary School Students

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University of Maryland College Park

Roadmap

Victimization, Bullying and the Protective Promise of Positive Psychology Traits

1.

2.

Overview of Current Study

Results

**3.**

4.

Discussion

BACKGROUND

Bullying & Victimization

- Bullying is defined as "aggressive goal-directed behavior that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance" (Volk et al., 2014).
  - Relational bullying, verbal bullying, physical bullying, cyber bullying, sexual bullying, prejudicial bullying
- Victimization's effects are largely negative; depressed and anxious adolescents are more likely to have a history of being bullied (Ttofi et al., 2011)
- Increased prevalence of peer victimization in Chinese context (Huang et al., 2013).

Bullying & Victimization

- Victimization may lead to internalizing symptoms and later aggression due to lack of alternative coping mechanisms and hostile attribution bias (Kaynak et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2014)

- Reciprocal relationship between victimization and aggression in both Chinese and Western contexts (Lam et al., 2018)
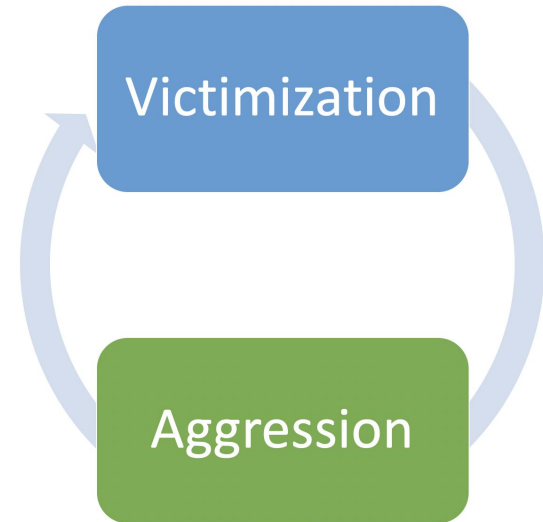
What are Positive Psychology (PP) Traits?

- Positive psychology: "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005)
  - What helps things "go right" for people's well-being?
    - Some psychological constructs that have been studied: meaning-making, gratitude, optimism, joy, forgiveness, belongingness, savoring…

Positive Psychology Influences in Bullying Impact & Perpetration

- Resilience framework: positive psychological orientations support positive youth development, would likely reduce frequency and impact of bullying (Masten et al. 2008)
- This is not to say that PP is the solution to all adverse environments! ("Just look on the bright side…and deny your problems!")
- Toxic positivity vs. optimism (Sokal et al., 2020)

Toxic Positivity
- being negative won't help you
- good vibes only
- you'll get over it
- other people have it a lot worse
- smile, crying won't help
- just stay positive

Genuine Optimism
- it's important to let it out. is there anything i can do to make this easier for you?
- i love you through all your emotional states
- you are so resilient, and your strength will get you through it
- you are not alone, and there is support to help you
- it's okay to cry, we all do. can i get you a tissue or a hug?
- things are tough right now. do you wanna talk about it or do something lighthearted?

PERMA+ Model
(Seligman, 2018)
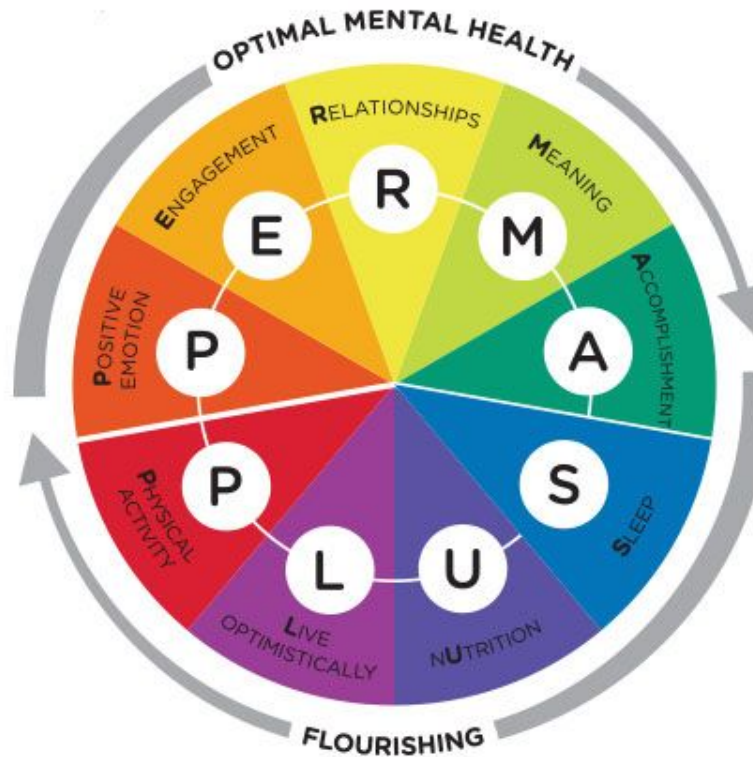
PP Constructs in this Study: Covitality & Belonging

- Covitality: is a co-occurrence of positive psychological building blocks, including: gratitude, zest, optimism and persistence (Furlong et al., 2013).

- Belonging: combination of students' feelings of respect, inclusion, and support within the school environment (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80).
  - Encompasses three factors: caring relations, sense of acceptance, sense of rejection (You et al., 2011).
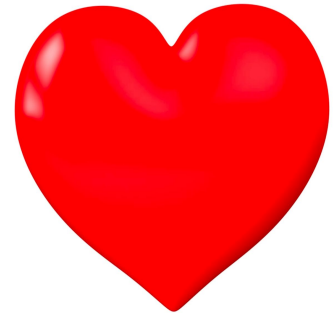
PP Constructs in this Study: Belonging

- Positive psychology orientations found to mediate the effects of victimization on adolescent emotional problems (Arslan et al., 2021)
- Feelings of school belonging can:
  - reduce bullying perpetration (Slaten et al., 2019)
  - reduce internalizing symptomatology in cases of victimization (Arslan, 2021)
- Previous work in this same sample, in Chinese context, showed that **belonging, covitality independently predicted victimization's negative longitudinal impacts on loneliness (Wang et al., 2021)**
  - Students who experienced more bullying victimisation, lower levels of school belonging, and lower covitality reported more loneliness 6 months later.
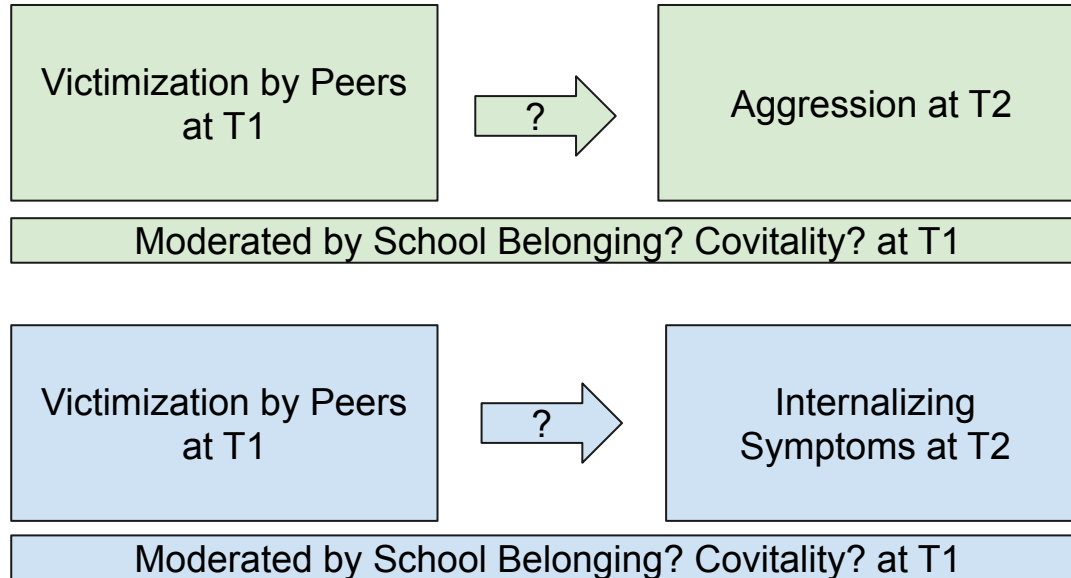
Chinese Cultural Norms Relevant to this Study

- Aggression could be particularly problematic in the Chinese context, which typically values social harmony and places emphasis on self-regulation (Chen & French, 2008; Jia et al., 2009)
  - Adults and children could both reject more aggressive children
- Chinese schools typically emphasize building student-teacher relationships; children tend to have the same classroom for multiple years (Chen & French, 2008)
- Chinese students typically feel more respect for teachers (Jia et al., 2009), which likely comes from the Confucian ideal of respecting folx in authority (Hui et al., 2011)

CURRENT STUDY

Research Questions

| Victimization by Peers at T1 | ? → | Aggression at T2 |

Moderated by School Belonging? Covitality? at T1

| Victimization by Peers at T1 | ? → | Internalizing Symptoms at T2 |

Moderated by School Belonging? Covitality? at T1

Participants & Measures

- 510, 4th grade students (M_{age} at T1 = 9.69, 47.1% female) from 4 schools in Sichuan, China
- Data collected in November 2016 and May 2017 , 22% attrition rate: final sample ~400
- Parents – ~50% university educated, 50% high school or less
- 3% of the children had no working parents.
- 19% of the children had only permanently employed parent (17% was just father).
- 78% had two working parents.

Participants & Measures

- Measures of:
  - School Belonging, *Psychological Sense of School Membership Chinese.*
  - Covitality, *Social Emotional Health Survey-Primary-Chinese Version.*
  - Bullying Victimization, *Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale-Student-Chinese*
  - Aggression, *Me and My School (MMS), Chinese*
  - Internalizing Behaviors, *Me and My School (MMS), Chinese*

Regression Models
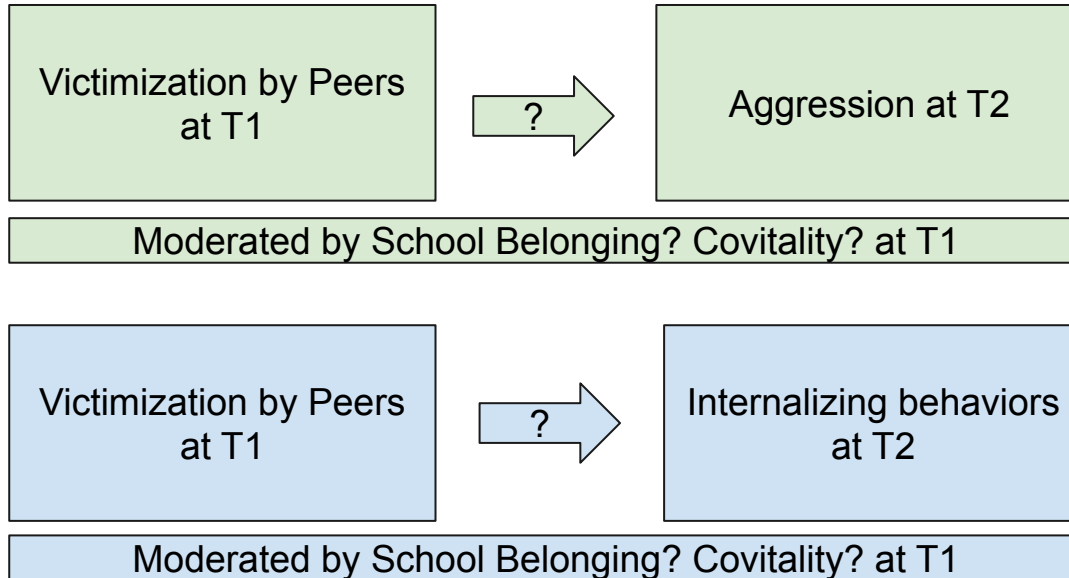
Model 1: Aggression predicted by Victimization, PP traits?

Descriptives (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Possible Min-Max
Aggression @ Time 2	1.4047	0.38447	1-3 Likert scale
Victimization @ Time 1	1.8698	1.00302	1-6 Likert scale
Covitality @ Time 1	5.028	0.8833	1-6 Likert Scale
Belonging @ Time 1	4.5095	0.82058	1-6 Likert scale

Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Aggression T2	Covitality T1	Belonging T1	Victimization T1
Aggression T2	1	-.349**	-.308**	.311**
Covitality T1		1	.692**	-.231**
Belonging T1			1	-.227**
Victimization T1				1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results - Predicting Aggression at T2

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.	Effect (partial eta^2)
(Constant)	1.137	0.388		2.933	0.004	.023
Victimization @ Time 1*	0.254	0.115	0.663	2.204	0.028	.013 (Small)
Covitality * Victimization	0.026	0.024	0.333	1.053	0.293	.003
Belonging * Victimization*	-0.067	0.032	-0.763	-2.06	0.04	.011 (Small)
Covitality @ Time 1*	-0.144	0.061	-0.33	-2.356	0.019	.015 (Small)
Belonging @ Time 1	0.08	0.069	0.171	1.156	0.248	.004
Sex=Male	0.05	0.037	0.065	1.372	0.171	.005
Father Regularly Employed	0.119	0.073	0.079	1.629	0.104	.007
Mother Regularly Employed	-0.072	0.047	-0.074	-1.544	0.123	.006
Age (@ Time 1)	0.04	0.024	0.081	1.646	0.101	.007

- Victimization at T1 predicts Aggression at T2
  - *Belonging moderates this relationship (is a buffer)*
- Covitality at T1 negatively predicts aggression at T2, independently of victimization's effects
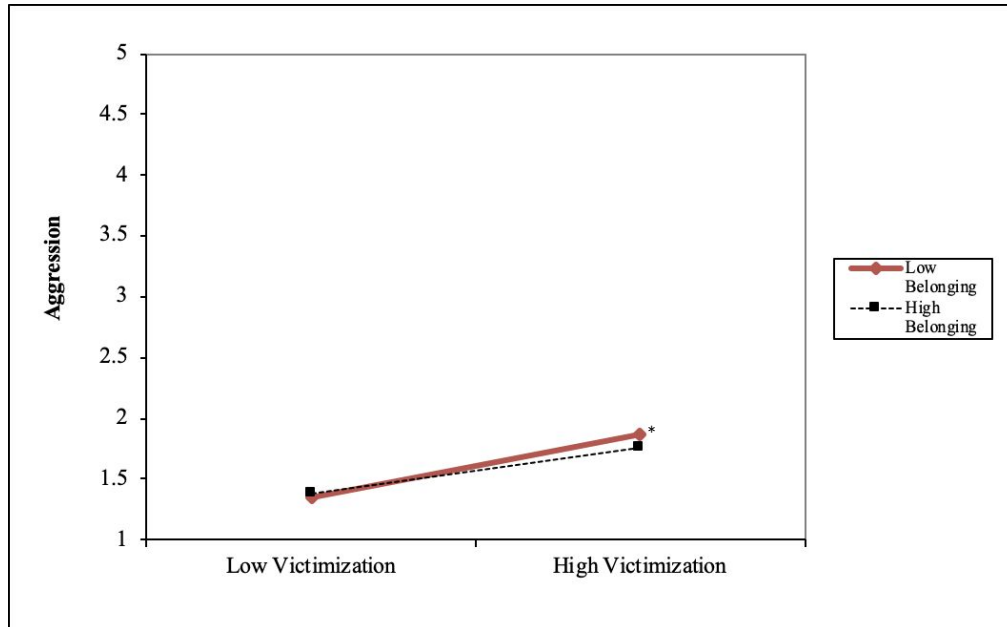 - *At any level of victimization, covitality helps protect against later aggressive behavior*

η2 = .01 indicates a small effect.
η2 = .06 indicates a medium effect.
η2 = .14 indicates a large effect.

What do you make of these findings around aggression?

Interaction Effects - Belonging(t1) * Victimization(t1)

- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization → as victimization increases, children with higher belonging develop less aggression.

- **I.e. – Belonging seems to buffer against the relationship between victimization and later aggression**

Model 2: Internalizing predicted by Victimization, PP traits?

Descriptives (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Possible Min-Max
Internalizing @ Time 2	1.5144	0.40202	1-3 Likert scale
Victimization @ Time 1	1.8698	1.00302	1-6 Likert scale
Covitality @ Time 1	5.028	0.8833	1-6 Likert Scale
Belonging @ Time 1	4.5095	0.82058	1-6 Likert scale

Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Internalizing T2	Covitality T1	Belonging T1	Victimization T1
Internalizing T2	1	-.301**	-.321**	.387**
Covitality T1		1	.692**	-.231**
Belonging T1			1	-.227**
Victimization T1				1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Covitality & belonging appear to be protective.

Results - Predicting Internalizing Behavior at T2

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.	Effect (partial eta^2)
(Constant)	1.685	0.397		4.246	<.001	.047
Victimization @ Time 1*	0.297	0.118	0.741	2.515	0.012	.017 (Small)
Covitality * Victimization	0.044	0.025	0.547	1.768	0.078	.008
Belonging * Victimization*	-0.086	0.033	-0.942	-2.598	0.01	.018 (Small)
Covitality @ Time 1*	-0.154	0.062	-0.339	-2.476	0.014	.017 (Small)
Belonging @ Time 1	0.081	0.071	0.166	1.145	0.253	.004
Sex=Male*	-0.089	0.037	-0.11	-2.362	0.019	.015 (Small)
Father Regularly Employed	0.079	0.075	0.05	1.051	0.294	.003
Mother Regularly Employed	-0.022	0.048	-0.022	-0.46	0.646	.001
Age (@ Time 1)	-0.002	0.025	-0.004	-0.081	0.935	.000

- Victimization at T1 predicts Internalizing Symptoms at T2
  - *Belonging buffers this relationship*
- Covitality at T1 negatively predicts aggression at T2
  - *At any level of victimization, covitality helps protect against later internalizing behavior*
- Being male negatively predicts internalizing symptoms at T2

η2 = .01 indicates a small effect.
η2 = .06 indicates a medium effect.
η2 = .14 indicates a large effect.

Interaction Effects - Belonging(t1) * Victimization(t1)
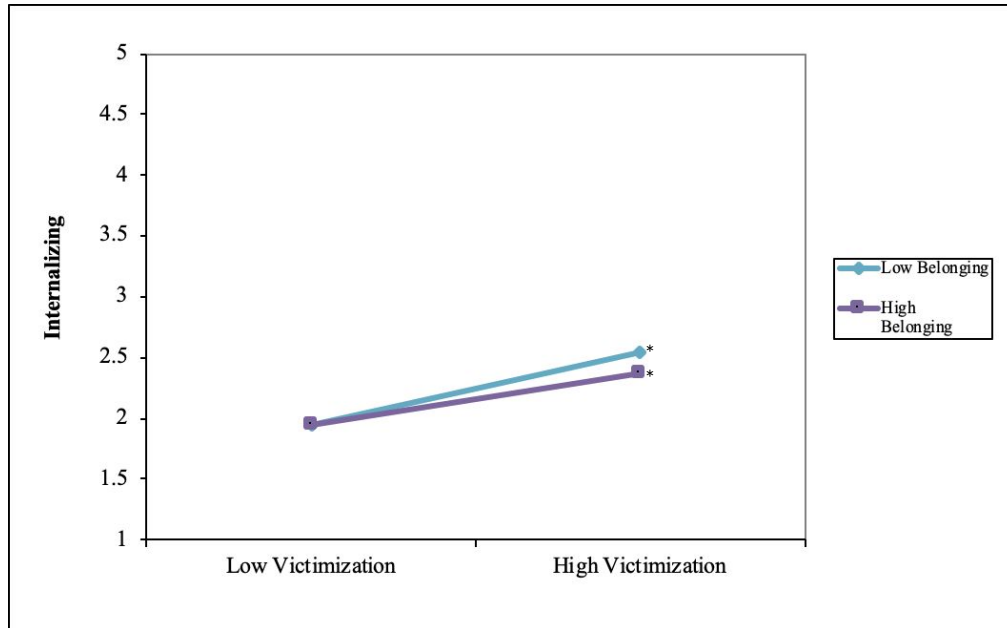
- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization → as victimization increases, children with higher belonging develop fewer internalizing symptoms.

- **I.e. – Belonging seems to buffer against the relationship between victimization and later internalizing symptoms**

What do you make of these findings around internalizing symptoms?

IMPLICATIONS

"Bottom Line" Takeaways

- Replicated the results that victimization can lead to subsequent aggression, internalizing symptoms

- Sex difference in the Chinese context with regards internalizing symptoms, but not aggression – females more likely to develop internalizing symptoms, but no difference in aggression development in males and female

- Covitality is protective no matter the level of victimization

- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization, buffers against its effects

My Theories, The Group's Theories

- How have you seen these takeaways manifest in students?
- Unique role of Chinese cultural norms when interpreting findings
- Limitations & future directions

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