1 in 5 children in China are Bullied. (Han et al., 2017)
1 in 5 children in the U.S. are bullied as well. (NCES, 2019)
Positive Psychology Traits, Victimization & Bullying in Chinese Elementary School Students

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Contributors: Cixin Wang, Ph.D. & Kate Sullivan, Ph.D.
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1. Victimization, Bullying and the Protective Promise of Positive Psychology Traits
2. Overview of Current Study
3. Results
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)
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 folks in authority (Hui et al., 2011)
CURRENT STUDY
Research Questions

Victimization by Peers at T1 → Aggression at T2

Victimization by Peers at T1 → Internalizing Symptoms at T2

Moderated by School Belonging? Covitality? at T1

Moderated by School Belonging? Covitality? at T1
Participants & Measures

● 510, 4th grade students (M\(_{\text{age}}\) 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

Victimization by Peers at T1 → Aggression at T2

Victimization by Peers at T1 → Internalizing behaviors at T2

Covariates included:
- Age
- Father employment
- Mother employment
- Child Sex

Moderated by School Belonging? Covitality? at T1
Model 1: Aggression predicted by Victimization, PP traits?
### Descriptives (n=375, listwise deletion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Possible Min-Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggression @ Time 2</td>
<td>1.4047</td>
<td>0.38447</td>
<td>1-3 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization @ Time 1</td>
<td>1.8698</td>
<td>1.00302</td>
<td>1-6 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality @ Time 1</td>
<td>5.028</td>
<td>0.8833</td>
<td>1-6 Likert Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging @ Time 1</td>
<td>4.5095</td>
<td>0.82058</td>
<td>1-6 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aggression T2</th>
<th>Covitality T1</th>
<th>Belonging T1</th>
<th>Victimization T1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggression T2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.349**</td>
<td>-.308**</td>
<td>.311**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality T1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.692**</td>
<td>-.231**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging T1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.227**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization T1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Standardized Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Effect (partial eta²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.137</td>
<td>0.388</td>
<td>2.933</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization @ Time 1*</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>2.204</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.013 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality * Victimization</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.333</td>
<td>1.053</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging * Victimization*</td>
<td>-0.067</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>-0.763</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.011 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality @ Time 1*</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-2.356</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.015 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging @ Time 1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>1.156</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex=Male</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>1.372</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Regularly Employed</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>1.629</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Regularly Employed</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>-1.544</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (@ Time 1)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>1.646</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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

$\eta^2 = .01$ indicates a small effect.
$\eta^2 = .06$ indicates a medium effect.
$\eta^2 = .14$ 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)

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<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Possible Min-Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internalizing @ Time 2</strong></td>
<td>1.5144</td>
<td>0.40202</td>
<td>1-3 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victimization @ Time 1</strong></td>
<td>1.8698</td>
<td>1.00302</td>
<td>1-6 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covitality @ Time 1</strong></td>
<td>5.028</td>
<td>0.8833</td>
<td>1-6 Likert Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging @ Time 1</strong></td>
<td>4.5095</td>
<td>0.82058</td>
<td>1-6 Likert scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internalizing T2</th>
<th>Covitality T1</th>
<th>Belonging T1</th>
<th>Victimization T1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing T2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.301**</td>
<td>-.321**</td>
<td>.387**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality T1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.692**</td>
<td>-.231**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging T1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.227**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization T1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Standardized Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Effect (partial $\eta^2$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
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<td>0.397</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.246</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization @ Time 1*</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>2.515</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.017 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality * Victimization</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>1.768</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging * Victimization*</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.942</td>
<td>-2.598</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.018 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covitality @ Time 1*</td>
<td>-0.154</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>-0.339</td>
<td>-2.476</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>.017 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging @ Time 1</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>1.145</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex=Male*</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-2.362</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>.015 (Small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Regularly Employed</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.051</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Regularly Employed</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (@ Time 1)</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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 male internalizing symptoms at T2

$\eta^2 = .01$ indicates a small effect.
$\eta^2 = .06$ indicates a medium effect.
$\eta^2 = .14$ 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
References


References


References


