International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection

Resilience Among Young Victims of Bullying

By Lucy Bowes & Louise Arseneault

King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry

louise.arseneault@kcl.ac.uk, lucy.bowes@kcl.ac.uk

Bullying victimization has been shown repeatedly to be a significant risk factor for the development of mental health problems in childhood (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2010). Bullied children are more likely than their non-bullied peers to display symptoms of anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide, as well as to experience social isolation. Bullied children are also more likely than non-bullied children to develop behavioral difficulties, including problems with aggression and delinquency (Arseneault et al., 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Egan & Perry, 1998; Reijntjes et al., 2010).

Not all bullied children go on to experience adjustment difficulties, however. Indeed, resilient children function better than would be expected given their experience of being bullied. Resilience has been defined as "*a relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite risk experiences*" (Rutter, 2006). Resilience concerns individual variation in response to environmental stressors; whilst some bullied children may be damaged and show significant mental health problems, others appear to be unscathed following experiences of even severe victimization. By identifying children who show emotional and behavioral adjustment despite being bullied—and investigating the factors that promote such resilience—it is hoped that we can uncover processes that help protect bullied children from developing mental health difficulties. Supportive peer relationships may be an important buffer against the effects of bullying victimization, especially in adolescence (Rothon et al., 2010). However, for younger victims of bullying, the family environment may be a particularly important source of protection.

The capacity of supportive families to buffer children from the impact of stressful life events is well known (Masten et al., 2006). Studies also emphasize the importance of caring, sensitive and safe home environments in fostering adjustment, particularly among children exposed to environmental stressors (Collishaw et al., 2007; Jaffee, 2007). We hypothesized that several aspects of the home environment may be especially relevant for young victims of bullying, and may promote resilience to this stressful experience. Warm and supportive parenting has been repeatedly linked to children's social and emotional well-being (Egeland et al., 1990; Kim-Cohen et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that parental warmth

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may be particularly key in the context of peer difficulties. Children who were rejected by their peers but who had a warm and caring mother showed fewer behavioral problems in observational tasks than other rejected children (Patterson, Cohn & Kao, 1989). We therefore predicted that bullied children who had warm relationships with their mothers might have more favorable adjustment outcomes than would otherwise be predicted given their experiences of being bullied. Other family relationships may also help to promote resilience to peer victimization, in particular positive sibling relationships. After experiencing stressful life events, children who have affectionate relationships with their siblings are less likely to develop emotional problems compared to those without affectionate sibling relationships (Gass, Jenkins & Dunn, 2007). Siblings may impart advice on how to deal with episodes of bullying, and they may even be in a position to defend the victim from repeat attacks. In addition to positive family relationships, the overall atmosphere at home may also serve to protect bullied children from developing adjustment difficulties. Home environments—in particular the levels of routine and organization—are associated with positive behavioral development over and above other measures of parenting (Coldwell, Pike & Dunn, 2006). Having a calm, well-structured, and positive home environment may reduce overall stress levels in bullied children and increase their likelihood of achieving positive adaptation.

Using data from the Environmental Risk (E-Risk) Longitudinal Twin Study, a birth cohort of 1,116 twins and their families born in England and Wales between 1994-1995, we tested whether family factors were associated with emotional and behavioral functioning that was better than predicted given children's experience of being bullied. We regressed average scores of emotional and behavioral problems when children were aged 10

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and 12 years (to capture stable adjustment over this two year period) on levels of bullying victimization during primary school. Emotional and behavioral functioning was measured using the Achenbach family of instruments, with mothers and teachers reporting on children's symptoms of depression, anxiety and social withdrawal (for emotional problems), in addition to delinquent and aggressive behaviors (for behavioral problems) (Achenbach, 1991a; Achenbach, 1991b). Both mother and child self-reports were used to assess children's experiences of bullying victimization during primary school.

Using a series of regression analyses, we found that family factors were associated with children's emotional and behavioral resilience to being bullied. Importantly, associations remained significant when controlling for the effects of several important covariates, including early emotional and behavioral difficulties measured prior to children being bullied at school, socioeconomic disadvantage, children's IQ, and gender. As warm family relationships and positive home environments are likely to be associated with positive emotional and behavioral development in non-bullied as well as bullied children, we tested whether family factors were *particularly* important in promoting positive developmental outcomes in bullied children compared to non-bullied children. We observed significant interactions between being bullied and each family factor in predicting both emotional and behavioral problems. Thus, although warm family relationships and positive home environments were associated with positive outcomes for both bullied and non-bullied children, the effects of these protective family factors were significantly stronger among bullied children.

At least two processes could explain the association between protective family factors and children's resilience to being bullied. One possibility is that families have an environmental effect in helping bullied children from developing adjustment difficulties, perhaps by providing important sources of support, alleviating stress, or helping children to develop coping mechanisms to deal with bullying victimization. However, a second possibility is that the association between family factors and bullied children's adjustment could reflect genetic confounding. For example, parents who provide caring home environments for their children and who have good parenting skills may also pass on genes associated with resilient outcomes to their children (Kendler & Baker, 2007). In the case of genetic confounding, changing parenting behaviors would have no effect on children's resilience to bullying victimization. We aimed to investigate whether the protective effect of families on children's resilience to bullying victimization is environmental by using a genetically sensitive monozygotic (MZ) twin differences design. Such an approach has unique advantages in being able to separate out environmental protective factors in twins who are genetically identical. Among MZ twin pairs where both twins were bullied in primary school, we found that bullied twins who received more maternal warmth showed significantly less behavioral problems than their bullied co-twins who received less warmth from their mothers. Our powerful research design therefore shows that the effect of maternal warmth on bullied children's behavioral adjustment over time is, at least in part, environmentally mediated. Mothers who are warm and caring toward their children help protect against the development of adjustment difficulties for victims of bullying independent of other protective factors common to members of the family in which the bullied twins grew up. Such factors include family income and level of parental education. Our research design also indicates that the

association between maternal warmth and bullied children's adjustment does not simply reflect a genetic tendency to both elicit maternal warmth and to cope with adversity.

These findings highlight the importance of family relationships in protecting bullied children from developing emotional and behavioral problems. Children who experience troubled peer relationships appear to benefit from warm, supportive relationships with family members even more than children who do not experience bullying.

This article was adapted by the authors from: Bowes, L., Maughan, B., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T.E., & Arseneault, L. (2010). Families promote emotional and behavioural resilience to bullying: Evidence of an environmental effect. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 51, 809-17.

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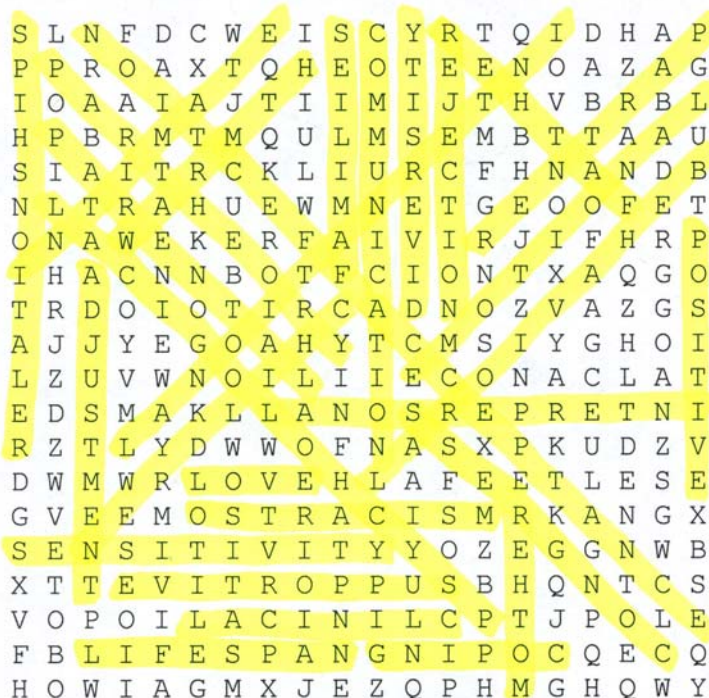
Mark Your Calendar

UPCOMING CONFERENCES in 2011

The annual meeting of the **Society for Cross-Cultural Research** will be held February 16-20, 2011 in the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina, USA. http://psych.wfu.edu/admin/sccr/index.html

International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) Regional Conference will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, June 30 to July 3, 2011. This conference will precede the European Federation of Psychologists' Association conference (July 4-8, 2011). http://www.iaccp.org/conferences/Conferences.html

SOLUTION TO INTERPERSONAL WORD SEARCH
TRY IT ON PAGE 7!

Source: Jmtsd.org

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

2014 International Congress Meeting Site in Moldova

The Executive Council voted unanimously to approve **Moldova** as the biennial meeting site for the 5th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection in 2014. Professors Vadim Moldovan (Moldovan@york.cuny.edu) and William Divale (DivaleBill@aol.com) will act jointly as local organizers for the Conference. The specific location and dates will be announced at a later time.

Source: Baltic Review

Source: SavingAdvice.com

Reminder: The 4th International Congress will be held in **India** in 2012. Professor Parminder Parmar (prp104@psu.edu) will serve as local organizer for that conference. The specific location and dates will be announced soon.

Source: Stock Images

Four-year Dues-Reduction Schedule for Membership in ISIPAR

At the request of ISIPAR members, the Executive Council unanimously approved a new four-year dues-reduction fee-schedule for membership in the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance Rejection. The Society now has a regular annual dues structure based on a sliding scale derived from the World Bank's economic categories. The Society also has a two-year membership dues schedule at a reduced rate of approximately 15%. The new four-year dues schedule reduces the annual rate by 20%. Specific information about all membership categories is posted on the Membership Application page of ISIPAR's website (isipar.org). The Executive Council urges members and prospective members to take advantage of the new four-year membership rate!

Please arrange to participate in both conferences!

Review of Rohner, R.P (Ed.). (2010). Teacher Acceptance, Parental Acceptance, and the Adjustment, Achievement and Behavior of School-Going Youths. [Special Issue] *Cross-Cultural Research*, 44 (3).

By Elias E. Kourkoutas
University of Crete
hkourk@edc.uoc.gr

This special issue of *Cross-Cultural Research* focuses on the role of perceived teacher and parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance in various domains of school-age children's and adolescents' psychosocial development and functioning. More specifically, drawing from parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) and associated measures, authors in the special issue, investigated the relative contribution of perceived teacher and parental acceptance and behavioral control to the psychological adjustment, school conduct, and academic achievement of school-going youths (boys and girls) within six nations. Research in this issue reveals the essential contribution of PARTheory to the cross-cultural study of these dimensions for school-age youths. In fact, a growing body of research internationally confirms the strong relation between a positive and supportive teacher-student relationship and the psychological adjustment, school conduct, and academic achievement of students. The relationship between students and teachers operates symbolically at the same level as the relation between parents and children, affecting at a variety of levels youth's social, emotional, and academic achievement within the school context. This has proven to be particularly true for children entering school with mild or more serious social-emotional and behavioral difficulties.

It is widely acknowledged that PARTheory has significantly and uniquely contributed to the study of how children's perceptions of their relationships with their parents may affect their development. PARTheory has also focused in the past on the study of student-teacher relationships and the way students' perceptions of their relationships affect their academic performance as well as their psychosocial adjustment within classroom contexts. But until now relatively little research has been available linking adolescents' perceptions of teachers' acceptance and behavioral control to specific adolescent outcomes.

This special issue provides a new and comprehensive body of cross-cultural research that enriches our knowledge about the adolescent period and about the way youths experience their relations with significant others. Specifically, the volume validates the essential contribution of PARTheory to our understanding of the way adolescents perceive their relationships with their teachers, and how these relationships are mediated by youth's perceptions of their relationships with parents—and vice versa. Furthermore, the volume discloses the way these relationships may affect youth's overall school-adjustment and academic performance in various cultural and educational contexts. Overall, studies in this volume exemplify a comprehensive way of investigating major issues in that they are based on a coherent methodology that utilizes standardized measures within different cultural contexts. Each study's limitations are also clearly identified.

In the introductory chapter Rohner highlights the key theoretical and research contributions of PARTheory, and he synthesizes all main findings of this cross-cultural research project.

The first research-based article, by Tulviste and Rohner addresses the issue of the relationship between perceived maternal, paternal, and teacher acceptance and behavioral control, and psychological adjustment, school conduct, and academic achievement in an Estonian sample of 224 sixth grade adolescents. Results of the study show that, on average, the adolescents perceived themselves to be accepted and moderately controlled by their mothers, fathers, and teachers. The students also tended to do quite well in school, not to have serious conduct problems, and to self-report fair though not excellent psychological adjustment. Estonian adolescents appear to feel that they are neither more seriously controlled nor less accepted by their mothers than are adolescents in most other nations where the issue has been studied (Rohner & Khaleque, in press). The authors advanced the hypothesis that strict parental control is sometimes interpreted less negatively by adolescents in countries where it is more positively endorsed culturally than in countries where it is not (Bao & Lam, 2008; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). An unexpected finding of the study was the fact that gender differences appeared in all measures of perceived school relationships and school outcomes.

The overall conclusion of this study was that perceived paternal behavioral control was the only significant predictor of boys' behavior in school. This finding is striking because a great deal of prior research has shown that the apparent effect of perceived behavioral control on adolescents' psychological adjustment is usually mediated to a large degree by perceived acceptance-rejection (Rohner & Khaleque, in press). The authors speculate that this mediated effect may not necessarily hold true for issues of behavior problems in school. Moreover, the authors acknowledged that they were not in position at this time to conclude whether this fact is unique to Estonia or whether it generalizes more widely to other nations cross-culturally.

Review continued

The second article, by Rohner, Khaleque, Elias, and Sultana, explored the relationship between students' perceptions of their teachers' and parents' (mothers' and fathers') acceptance, and teachers' reports of the students' conduct in school as well as students' reports of their own psychological adjustment in Bangladesh. The study was conducted on a sample of 200 high school students there. Results revealed that both perceived teachers' acceptance and parental (both maternal and paternal) acceptance were significantly correlated with the self-reported psychological adjustment of adolescent males and females. The study also revealed that perceived teachers' acceptance appeared to almost entirely mediate the contribution that perceived parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance made to the psychological adjustment of Bangladeshi adolescents, though perceived paternal acceptance tended weakly to affect the adjustment of males (but not females). These findings are not entirely consistent with previous research showing that youths' perceptions of teachers' acceptance sometimes mediates the apparent influence of perceived parental acceptance on students' behavior. The authors acknowledged the need for further research to learn more about this issue.

In the following article Parmar and Rohner explored the relationship between Indian adolescents' perceptions of their teachers' and parents' (mothers' and fathers') acceptance and behavioral control, students' conduct in school, and students' psychological adjustment. The sample consisted of 217 high school students in India. Results showed that the students perceived their teachers, mothers, and fathers to be warm and accepting, but boys experienced more teacher acceptance than girls. The study also showed that both boys and girls perceived teachers as well as parents to be firm in behavioral control. As also found in several other studies of this volume, teachers reported both genders to be well behaved, though girls tended to be somewhat better behaved than boys. Another interesting finding confirming previous results was that both boys and girls self-reported minor psychological adjustment problems, though the more caring students perceived both their teachers and parents to be, the better was their adjustment. Additionally, regarding school conduct, only perceived paternal and maternal, but not teacher acceptance was associated with boys' behavior in school. In contrast, both teachers' and parents' acceptance and behavioral control were significantly correlated with girls' school conduct, though only perceived teacher acceptance made a unique contribution to their behavior in school.

In the next article, Parmar, Rohner, and Ibrahim explored the relationship between Kuwaiti students' perceptions of their teachers' and parents' (mothers' and fathers') acceptance and behavioral control, and students' conduct in school and psychological adjustment in a sample of 205 middle school students. As in most of the other studies in this volume, the authors found that both boys and girls

perceived their parents and teachers to be fairly loving and moderately behaviorally controlling. One major finding was correlated significantly with both perceived teacher and parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance. Simple regression analyses, however, showed that perceived teacher acceptance did not make an independent contribution to the psychological adjustment of either boys or girls, but both perceived maternal and paternal acceptance did.

In the next study, Khan, Haynes, Armstrong, and Rohner examined the effects of perceived teacher acceptance as well as perceived maternal and paternal acceptance on the academic achievement and school conduct of 362 seventh-grade adolescents in the Mississippi Delta region of the USA. Results of this study suggest that neither maternal nor paternal acceptance was correlated with girls' academic achievement. However, the more accepting both girls and boys perceived their teachers to be, the better behaved teachers reported the students to be. Overall, the outcome of multiple regression analysis confirmed that perceived teacher acceptance contributed significantly and independently to the variance attributed to both school conduct and grade point average (GPA) among boys, but not girls.

Finally, in the last study of this volume, Erkman, Caner, Sart, Börkan, and ª ahanü examined the influence of perceived teacher acceptance, children's self-concept, and children's attitude toward school on children's academic achievement. The sample consisted of 223 fifth-grade students from Istanbul, Turkey. Results showed that the perception of teacher acceptance was significantly correlated with both boys' and girls' positive school attitude and higher self-concept. A second main finding was that perceived teacher acceptance and academic self-perception were significant and independent predictors of boys' academic achievement, but only academic self-perception significantly predicted girls' academic achievement.

To sum up, one finding in this volume, as predicted by PARTheory, is that both perceived teacher acceptance and parental (maternal as well as paternal) acceptance tend to be significantly correlated with the adjustment of both boys and girls in all nations where this relationship was studied, though in two nations perceived parental acceptance was the sole independent predictor. Beyond this, a growing literature suggests that schools play an important role in adolescents' development, academic outcomes, and adjustment. Teachers are often perceived by their students as mentors, friends, role models, and sometimes even confidants. Schools and teachers are well equipped to provide environments and relations that support and promote student motivation, academic performance, and psychological adjustment, even in the cases of "problematic" children and adolescents.

Review continued

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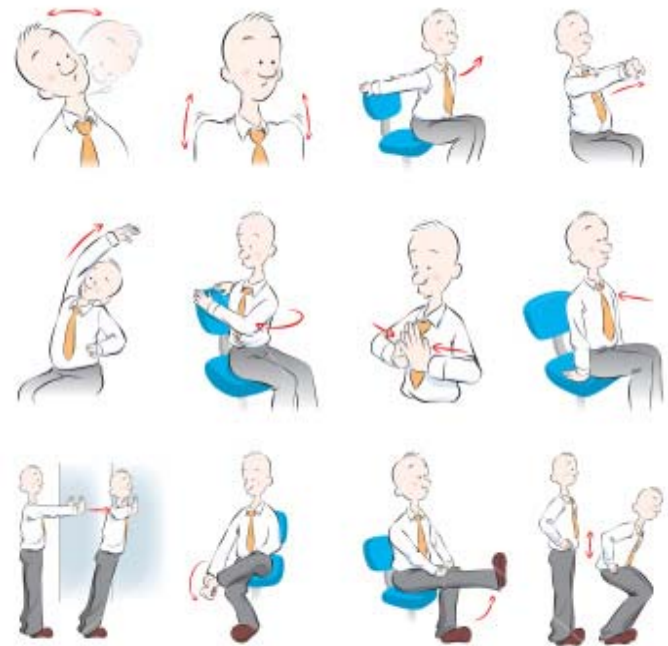
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MOTHER
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PARENTAL
PARTHEORY
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