Who? What? Why? An Exploration of Bullying among Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

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Background
Timmermanis and Wiener (2011) found that bullying with ADHD are victimized by peers and participate in bullying behaviors more often than adolescents without ADHD. Among adolescents with ADHD, victimization by peers was strongly associated with social factors including perceived social support and parent-rated peer relations problems. However, as this was the only study examining the association between ADHD and bullying in a solely adolescent sample, we do not have a solid understanding of bullying in this population.

Research Objectives
1) Determine WHAT types of bullying adolescents with ADHD are involved in.
2) Determine WHO are the people they are bullying and being bullied by.
3) Determine the reasons they provide for WHY bullying occurred.

Method
Sample
Twenty-one adolescents had a previous diagnosis of ADHD (13 males; 8 females), and 17 (7 males; 10 females) did not have an ADHD diagnosis or ADHD – nonbully. Peers was strongly associated with social factors including perceived social support and parent-rated peer relations problems. However, as this was the only study examining the association between ADHD and bullying in a solely adolescent sample, we do not have a solid understanding of bullying in this population.

Measures
The Comprehensive Bullying Measure, which was designed for this study, assessed self-reported victimization by peers and participation in bullying others. It was designed using items taken from previously validated questionnaires including the Safe Schools Questionnaire (Craig, 1998), California Bullying Victimization Scale (Felix et al., 2011), Pacific-Rim Bullying Measure (Taki et al., 2006) and Safe Schools Survey (Totten, Quigley & Morgan, 2004).

WHY: Various types of bullying were assessed including physical, verbal, relational, sexual, and cyberbullying and destruction of property.

WHO: Participants were asked to indicate the characteristics (e.g., age, relationship) of the individuals who they bully/approach to bullying.

WHY: Participants were also asked about their perception of the reasons they are victimized. The Conners’ Rating Scale-Third Edition (Conners, 2008) is a standardized questionnaire used to assess parents’ perceptions of their adolescents’ DSM-IV inattentive and hyperactive symptoms. Parents rated the adolescents on behaviors using a 4-point scale.

Procedure
Data was collected as part of a larger program of research conducted by Dr. Judith Wiener at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Questionnaires were administered to adolescents in individual sessions with a graduate student.

Results
1) WHAT types of bullying
Adolescents were categorized as “victims” or “nonvictims” and “bullies” or “nonbullies” based on whether they had experienced any victimization by peers or participated in any bullying of others (irrespective of frequency).

There was a marginally significant trend for adolescents with ADHD to be categorized as victims more often than adolescents without ADHD. X²(1, N=37) = 3.11, p = .07.

There was no significant difference between adolescents with and without ADHD in terms of categorization as bullies.

The following graphs depict the types of bullying that adolescents with ADHD perpetuated (left) and experienced (right).

2) WHO are adolescents with ADHD bullying or being bullied by
Adolescents with ADHD were asked about the characteristics of the people they bully (left) or were victimized by (right).

Discussion
- While not statistically significant, trends indicate that adolescents with ADHD experience more victimization and bully others more than adolescents without ADHD.
- The most common type of bullying perpetrated by adolescents with ADHD was relational (e.g., exclusion, ignoring). This was followed by physical, verbal and cyber bullying.
- The most common types of bullying experienced by adolescents with ADHD were verbal (e.g., threats, name calling) and relational (e.g., spreading rumors, exclusion, ignoring).
- Among adolescents with ADHD, a majority of the bullying took place between peers (e.g., classmates and friends) of the same age.
- When adolescents with ADHD were asked why they thought people were mean and negative to them, the most common reasons endorsed were having ADHD, appearance, behaving differently and having a Learning Disability.
- The present study provides preliminary information about the bullying experiences of adolescents with ADHD. Future research should examine protective and risk factors among adolescents with ADHD to inform social interventions for this population.

References