

An Examination of the Associations between Positive and Negative Friendship Qualities and Cyber-victimization from Friends during Early Adolescence

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Abstract:

During early adolescence, youth begin to rely more on their peers and friends for emotional support and acceptance. Youth are learning about positive (e.g., emotional support) and negative (e.g., criticism) aspects within the friendships they are developing. However, as youth are developing friendships, they also may be experiencing cyber-victimization from these friends. The current study explored how positive and negative aspects of friendships were associated with cyber-victimization from friends. Sixth grade students (N = 281; 50.2% male; 42% African American) from a large urban middle school completed cyber-victimization and friendship quality questionnaires. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the associations between friendship qualities and cyber-victimization from friends. Results indicated that 38.8% of youth experienced cyber-victimization from a friend. First, positive friendship qualities (i.e., disclosure, satisfaction, emotional support, approval), were examined in relation to friend cyber-victimization. Analyses showed there was a significant relationship between cyber-victimization and friendship satisfaction (B = -.40, p = < .05) and emotional support (B = .81, p < .001). Second, negative friendship qualities (i.e., pressure, conflict, criticism, dominance, exclusion) were examined. There was a significant relationship between criticism (B = .82, p = .02) and friend cyber-victimization. These results highlight specific friendship qualities may impact the cyber-victimization youth experience. More satisfaction within friendships was associated with less cyber-victimization, while emotional support and criticism placed youth at greater risk for cyber-victimization. By understanding how these relationship qualities impact friend cyber-victimization, we can begin to formulate ways to reduce cyber-victimization among friends in early adolescents.

Key Words: Cyber Victimization, Cyber Victimized by Friends, Friendship Qualities and Cyber Victimization

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Introduction

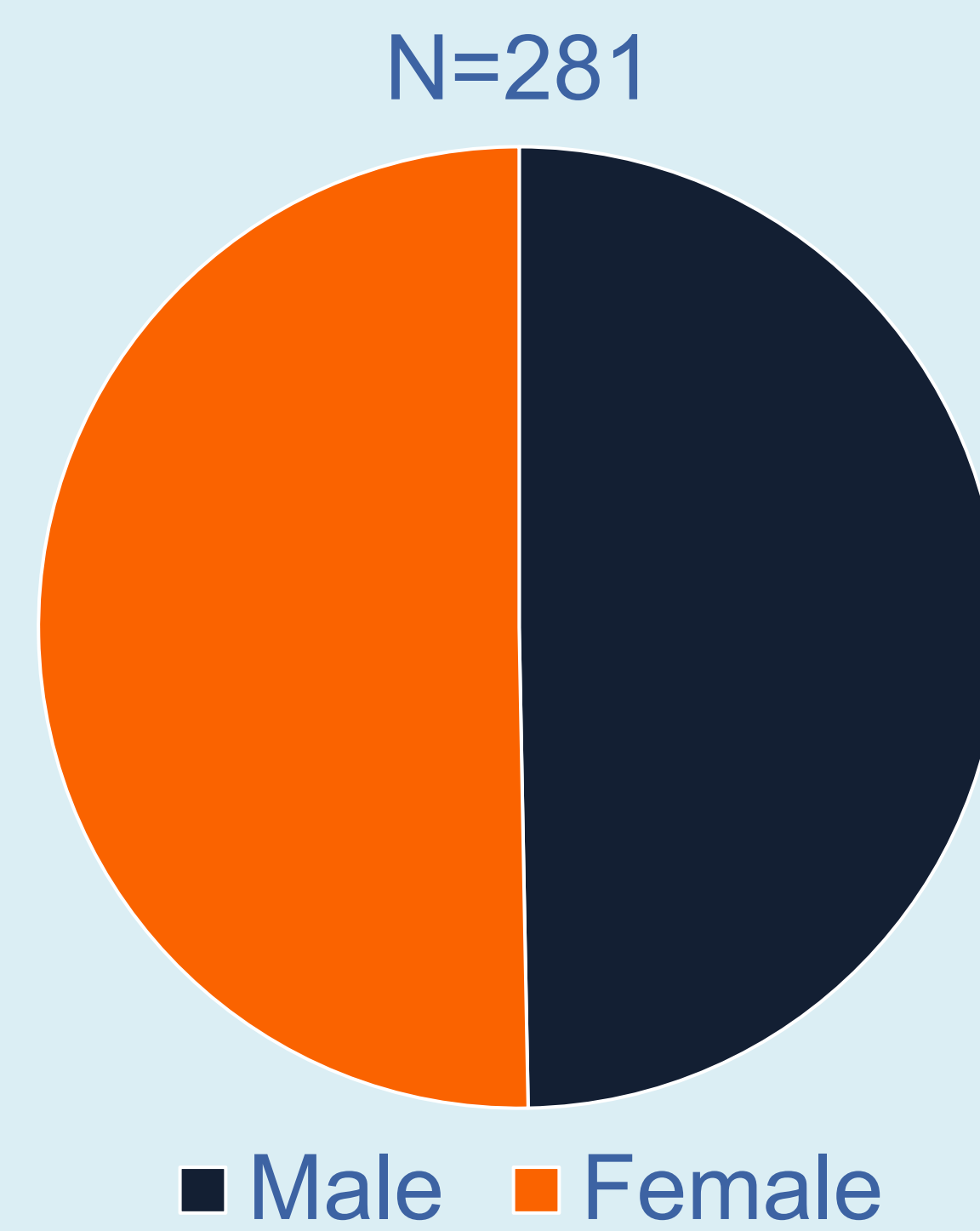
- During early adolescence children begin to heavily rely on peers for emotional support and acceptance, learning about positive and negative friendship qualities, (Bond, Lusher, Williams, & Butler, 2014).
- However, during this time, adolescents also may be experiencing *cyber-victimization*, which is defined as victimizing others using electronic means, such as social media and communication technologies, from their friends.
- To date, researchers have focused on cyber-victimization more broadly, finding that 17% of youth have experienced cyber-victimization from peers at school (Felmlee & Faris, 2016).
- One study has examined cyber-victimization from friends, finding these higher rates of victimization among close personal relationships happens due to competition, revenge, or to fend off romantic rivals (Felmlee, D., & Faris, R. (2016).
- However, studies show cyber-victimization from friends can lead to increased anxiety and higher rates of depression among early adolescents (Bond, Lusher, Williams & Butler, 2014).
- Research has yet to look at the direct associations between friendship qualities and cyber-victimization from friends.

Current Study

The current study is unique by helping understand the friendship contexts that place early adolescents at a greater risk for cyber-victimization from their friends. The current study examined positive (approval, emotional support, intimate disclosure, and satisfaction) and negative (conflict, criticism, dominance, exclusion, and pressure) friendship qualities in relation to cyber-victimization from friends.

Method

- Participants included sixth grade students (N = 281; 50.2% male; 42% African American) from a large urban middle school who completed cyber-victimization and friendship quality questionnaires.



Procedure

- Students completed mental and behavioral health assessments on tablets
- An institutional review board approved all study procedures, including obtaining passive parental consent and active student assent.

Data Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the associations between friendship qualities and cyber-victimization from friends, using SPSS software.

Results

Results indicated that 38.8% of youth experienced cyber-victimization from a friend.

Results, cont.

Multiple regression analyses showed there was a significant relationship between cyber-victimization and positive friendship qualities, including friendship satisfaction (B = -.40, $p < .05$) and emotional support (B = .81, $p < .001$). Interestingly, this association with cyber-victimization was negative for friendship satisfaction, and positive for emotional support.

In examining cyber-victimization from friends and negative friendship qualities, there was a significant relationship between criticism (B = .82, $p = .02$) and friend cyber-victimization.

	Cyber-Victimization from Friends		
Positive Friendship Qualities	B	β	p
Approval	-.27	-.11	.23
Emotional Support	.81	.38	.00
Intimate Disclosure	-.06	-.03	.75
Satisfaction	-.40	-.21	.04
	Cyber-Victimization From Friends		
Negative Friendship Qualities	B	β	p
Conflict	.47	.18	.06
Criticism	0.82	.27	.02
Dominance	-.34	-.12	.17
Exclusion	.12	.042	.64
Pressure	.12	.04	.64

Discussion

Addressing the need to research cyber-victimization among early adolescents, these results highlight that specific friendship qualities were associated with cyber-victimization youth experience from their friends.

Higher friendship satisfaction has less of a risk factor for cyber-victimization. However, the emotional support provided by friends leads to a higher risk of being victimized by knowing intimate details about this person.

Limitations of the current study include the generalization of findings among 6th graders across the United States. These are also cross-sectional findings.

By following the 6th grade cohort into 7th and 8th grade, we can better understand how friendship qualities affect victimization from friends and mental health symptoms of victims across time.

By understanding how these relationship qualities impact friend cyber-victimization, we can begin to formulate ways to reduce cyber-victimization among friends in early adolescence.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact Ashley Ruebling, at ashleyr5@Illinois.edu

References

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