

New study: Adolescents suffering from depression more likely to be bullied

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A new study provides evidence that adolescents who suffer from depression are more likely to develop difficulty in peer relationships including being bullied at school.

It's often assumed that being bullied leads to [psychological problems](#), such as depression, but the study doesn't support this line of thought.

"Often the assumption is that problematic peer relationships drive depression. We found that [depression symptoms](#) predicted negative peer relationships," said Karen Kochel, Arizona State University School of Social and Family Dynamics assistant research professor. "We examined the issue from both directions but found no evidence to suggest that peer relationships forecasted depression among this school-based sample of adolescents."

The new research is published in the journal *Child Development*. The article, Longitudinal Associations among Youths' Depressive Symptoms, [Peer Victimization](#), and Low Peer Acceptance: An Interpersonal Process Perspective, was authored by: Arizona State University School of Social and Family Dynamics Professor Gary Ladd; Karen Kochel, who conducted the study for her dissertation; and Karen Rudolph of the University of Illinois.

Being depressed in fourth grade predicted peer victimization in fifth grade and difficulty with peer acceptance in sixth grade, according to the research.

The researchers examined data from 486 youths from fourth to sixth grade. Parents, teachers, peers and students themselves provided information through yearly surveys. Data was collected as part of a large-scale [longitudinal study](#) that began in 1992 and continued for nearly two decades.

"Adolescence is the time when we see [depressive symptoms](#) escalate, particularly in girls," Kochel said. This may be due to the onset of puberty or interpersonal challenges, such as emotionally demanding peer and [romantic relationships](#), which are often experienced during adolescence.

Teachers and parents were asked to identify classic signs of depression – crying a lot, lack of energy, etc. - when determining which children suffered from the malady. They defined peer victimization as bullying that was manifested physically, verbally, or relationally, such as hitting someone, saying mean things, talking behind someone's back or picking on someone.

"Teachers, administrators and parents need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression and the possibility that depression is a risk factor for problematic peer relations," Kochel said.

Research shows that having positive peer relationships is crucial for adapting to certain aspects of life such as scholastic achievement and functioning in a healthy manner psychologically, Kochel said.

"If adolescent depression forecasts peer relationship problems, then recognizing depression is very important at this particular age. This is especially true given that social adjustment in adolescence appears to have implications for functioning throughout an individual's lifetime," Kochel said.

School may be the best place to observe and address adolescent signs of depression since students typically start spending more time with their friends and less with their parents as they become adolescents, according to the social scientists.

"We studied peer relationships within the school context. Parents tend not to observe these relationships," Kochel said. "Because depression has the potential to undermine the maturation of key developmental skills, such as establishing healthy peer relationships, it's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of adolescent [depression](#)."

Provided by Arizona State University

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