

Genetics plays major role in victimization in elementary school

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Genetics plays a major role in peer rejection and victimization in early elementary school, according to a study recently published on the website of the journal *Child Development* by a team directed by Dr. Michel Boivin, a research professor at Université Laval's School of Psychology.

To come to this conclusion, Boivin and his team tested over 800 twins at three time points: when they were in kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 4. This sample consisted of 41% [monozygotic twins](#)—"true" twins who share 100% of their genes—and 59% "false," or fraternal twins who share an average of 50% of their genes. Each subject, their [classmates](#), and their teacher were asked questions relating to [peer rejection](#) and victimization.

The research revealed that pairs of twins presented significant similarities with respect to relationship problems. Their analyses determined that these similarities were over 73% attributable to genetic factors. "Certain genetically transmissible traits that underlie physical appearance or behavior—particularly aggressive, impulsive, and hyperactive behaviors—increase the risk of rejection or victimization," asserts Michel Boivin, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Child Development.

Researchers also noted that [relationship problems](#) persisted between kindergarten and Grade 4, largely due to genetic factors.

"The good news is that it is possible, in kindergarten if not earlier, to identify children who might have trouble relating to their peers and quickly intervene," stresses Boivin. "We have to keep the personal characteristics that make them less popular with other kids from creating a vicious circle of rejection and victimization."

Between 5 and 10% of children experience chronic rejection or victimization in elementary school. These relationship difficulties can lead to [academic problems](#), health issues, and a series of mental health complications like depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. "That's why it's so important to know when and how these problems appear and develop," concludes Dr. Boivin.

Provided by Laval University

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