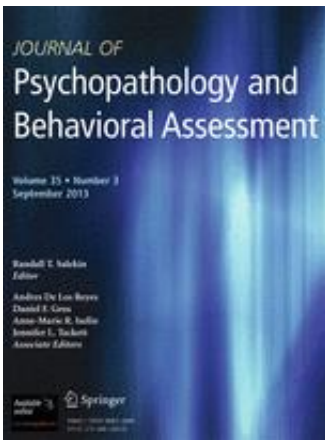


# The ups and downs of support from friends when teens experience peer victimization

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There are pros and cons to the support that victimized teenagers get from their friends. Depending on the type of aggression they are exposed to, such support may reduce youth's risk for depressive symptoms. On the other hand, it may make some young people follow the delinquent example of their friends, says a team of researchers from the University of Kansas in the US, led by John Cooley. Their findings are published in Springer's *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*.

Adolescence is an important time during which youth establish their [social identity](#). Experiences of peer victimization can therefore have an effect on their [social relationships](#), and lead to various psychological and

social adjustment problems. Peer victimization may take several forms, including overt victimization, which happens when someone is physically attacked or verbally threatened by a peer, and relational victimization, which happens when someone's relationships are manipulated through rumor spreading or social ostracism. Overt victimization is more common among younger children, while relational victimization tends to become more prevalent during adolescence.

Findings have thus far been inconclusive about whether having the [support](#) of [friends](#) can actually buffer someone from the negative effects of peer victimization. The University of Kansas research team delved further into this matter by asking 152 Midwestern 14- to 19-years-olds from a predominantly Latino, low-income background to complete a series of questionnaires. Questions focused on whether they had been victimized by peers, what type of support they received from their friends, and whether their buddies were recently involved in deviant behavior such as stealing or skipping school. Teachers also completed a questionnaire about their students' rule-breaking behavior.

Overall, the University of Kansas team found that the support of peers generally influences the effects of [peer victimization](#) on maladjustment. However, this moderating effect differs depending on the form of victimization teenagers are subjected to and what type of relationship they have with their peers.

Among teenagers who suffered from relational victimization, the more support they received from their friends, the lower their feelings of depression. Such support, however, did not have an effect on the moods of those who were overtly victimized, or in other words, who were physically attacked or verbally threatened. Cooley believes this may be because relational victimization, as opposed to overt victimization, damages relationships during a time when youth are trying to establish their social identity within the peer group.

The more [social support](#) those experiencing relational victimization received from delinquent friends, the greater the chances that they would also take part in rule-breaking activities. Those experiencing overt victimization were more likely to exhibit rule-breaking behavior, regardless of the level of support or type of friends they had.

"Our study provides additional evidence suggesting that peer social support buffers the association between experiences of relational victimization and [depressive symptoms](#) in adolescence," says Cooley.

"However, our findings also suggest that relationally victimized adolescents who receive high levels of social support and associate with delinquent peers may be more likely to exhibit rule-breaking behavior."

**More information:** Cooley, J.L., Fite, P. J., Rubens, S. L., & Tunno, A. M. (2014). Peer Victimization, Depressive Symptoms, and Rule-Breaking Behavior in Adolescence: The Moderating Role of Peer Social Support, *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, [DOI: 10.1007/s10862-014-9473-7](#)

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