Profiles of non-victims, escaped victims, continuing victims and new victims of school bullying

Peter K. Smith,1* Lorenzo Talamelli,1 Helen Cowie,2 Paul Naylor3 and Preeti Chauhan1
1 Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK
2 University of Surrey, UK
3 University of Sheffield, UK

Background. Victims of school bullying are known to be at risk in peer relationships and to sometimes use ineffective coping strategies, but little previous research has examined differences among escaped victims, continuing victims and new victims.

Aim. A follow-up design compared friendships, behavioural characteristics, victimisation experiences and coping strategies of pupils who had 2 years previously answered a questionnaire identifying themselves as victims (V) or non-victims (NV) of school bullying and whose current victim status could be identified.

Sample. 406 pupils aged 13–16 years (190 boys, 216 girls): 175 non-victims (NV-NV), 146 escaped victims (V-NV), 27 new victims (NV-V) and 58 continuing victims (V-V).

Method. Structured interviews were given to pupils, together with the SDQ. Teachers also filled in the SDQ. School records of attendance were obtained.

Results. Escaped victims did not differ greatly from non-victims, but had some self-perception of continuing peer relationship difficulties. Continuing victims, irrespective of gender, liked other pupils and breaktime less (but did not dislike other aspects of school), had fewer friends in school (but not outside school), more often missed school (sometimes because of bullying), scored high on problem scales of the SDQ, and were more likely to be involved in bullying others as well as being bullied. New victims tended to resemble continuing victims. Continuing victims did not differ from escaped victims on type of bullying, but new and continuing victims less often reported talking to someone about a specific incident of bullying. Most victims gave mainly victim-related reasons for the bullying having taken place.

Conclusion. The results are discussed in relation to why some pupils become or continue to be victims in secondary school, and recommendations for anti-bullying procedures in schools designed to help such victims.

* Correspondence should be addressed to Peter K. Smith, Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK (e-mail: p.smith@gold.ac.uk).
The existence of bullying and social exclusion is widespread during childhood and adolescence: some 10–20% of pupils report being the victims of bullying at school at some time during the last 3 to 6 months (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1997; Smith et al., 1999). We know that some victims are long-term. Smith and Shu (2000) found that although about 65% of self-reported victims said it had only gone on for about a week or at most a month, 13% said it had continued all term, 9% for about a year, and 13% of victims said it had continued for several years. Main types of bullying are physical, verbal, and psychological (rumour telling, social exclusion), with some evidence that boys use and experience more physical forms, girls more psychological forms (Rigby, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

**Consequences of victim status**

A number of studies have been made of the correlates of victim status, most based on cross-sectional data. Victims of bullying often experience anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, physical and psychosomatic complaints (Williams, Chambers, Logan, & Robinson, 1996). In extreme cases, they may commit suicide (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantenan, 1999). Hawker and Boulton (2000), carrying out a meta-analysis of 23 studies, found that victimisation was most strongly related to depression, moderately associated for social and global self-esteem, and less strongly associated with anxiety. The cases of suicides attributable to continued harassment and bullying attest to the possible consequences of such long-term experiences.

Victims may exhibit behaviour problems at school. Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, and Karstadt (2001) found that at 6–9 years, victims scored higher than neutrals (non-involved children) on the Total Difficulties scale of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), and on most problem subscales; they did not differ on Prosocial Behaviour. Little difference was found between victims of direct bullying, and relational bullying, in this respect. Given the unpleasant experiences victims undergo at school, it would be predicted that they would show lower attendance rates than non-involved children, and that they might like school less (or at least, aspects of school related to peer groups, and to breaktime (recess) where much bullying is known to occur; Whitney & Smith, 1993). We do not know of direct data on these outcomes.

**Friendship and peer group status**

Several studies have linked being a victim to peer rejection (e.g., Boulton & Smith, 1994), whereas having friends (Hodges, Malone & Perry; 1997; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997) and especially a mutual best friend (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999) can protect against risk of victimisation. Hodges et al. (1997) also found evidence for the importance of the quality of friendships. Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) found both peer rejection and lack of friends as risk factors. In a longitudinal study, Hodges and Perry (1999) found that in middle childhood, internalising problems, physical weakness and peer rejection all contributed to gains in victimisation over time.

It may not be a simple matter for a victimised child to be assimilated into friendship groups. Research on pupil attitudes finds older pupils are generally less sympathetic than younger pupils (Rigby, 1997). Olweus and Endresen (1998) found that girls showed an increase in empathic concern from 10 years upwards for both boy and girl
victims, but boys showed a decreasing trend, especially with regard to other boy victims. Boys may be influenced by the social context (including the presence of girls) in whether they actively support peers in distress or conform to ‘macho’ values in their peer group by expressing derision for vulnerable boys (Cowie, 2000; Naylor & Cowie, 1999). Victims may ‘blame themselves’ for their experience and internalise the problem (Graham & Juvonen, 1998), though there is a lack of systematic evidence as to how victims see the cause of their situation and the reasons for bullying occurring.

Coping strategies used by victims
A few studies have reported on the actual behavioural strategies used by victims of bullying, usually based on self- or peer report. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1997) looked at the success of different strategies in a longitudinal study of 5–6 year olds in a US kindergarten. They found that telling a teacher, and having a friend help, were used more by pupils whose victimisation scores decreased over time. Fighting back, and walking away, were used more by pupils whose victimisation scores increased over time. At an older age range, Salmivalli, Karhunen, and Lagerspetz (1996) found that 12–13 year-old Finnish pupils rated nonchalance as being a more constructive response to bullying than either counter-aggression, or helplessness. Kristensen and Smith (2003) used Causey and Dubow’s (1992) five factor-analytically derived subscales with 10–15 year-old Danish pupils. The most used coping strategy reported was Self-Reliance/Problem-Solving, followed by Distancing and Seeking Social Support; least used were Internalising and Externalising. Externalising was used more by children classed as bully/victims compared with victims and not involved children.

Aggressive and non-aggressive victims respond differentially to bullying behaviour (Pepler, Craig, & Roberts, 1998; Wilton, Craig, & Pepler, 2000). Non-aggressive victims may be submissive in the face of attack (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993) and reward their attackers by submitting to extortion of their resources and displaying signs of pain and suffering (Perry, Williard, & Perry, 1990). Aggressive victims (bully/victims) try to counter-attack when they are bullied, and initiate and provoke aggression themselves. Salmivalli et al. (1996) found that both helplessness and counter-aggression in the case of girl victims and counter-aggression in the case of boy victims appeared to encourage further bullying.

Perhaps because of fear of retaliation from bullies and shame over peers’ perceptions of them, many victims do not seek help (Bijttebier & Vertommen, 1998; Naylor & Cowie, 1999, Naylor, Cowie, & del Rey, 2001). Smith and Shu (2000) found that around 30% of bullied pupils in English schools told no-one, more boys (40%) than girls (20%); although those who had told teachers or parents reported that it usually helped reduce the bullying. Further evidence about whether telling someone actually helps victims escape from victimisation is needed, given the prominence accorded to it in much school anti-bullying work, such as the pack Don’t Suffer in Silence (DfEE, 2000).

Profiles of victims over time
The majority of the research on correlates of victim status is cross-sectional, and thus cannot answer issues of cause and effect. Profiles of behaviour over time go some way to addressing these issues. Several studies have reported on profiles of aggressive and delinquent behaviour. Fergusson and Horwood (1999) identified a model of the risk factors and life processes involved in the development of adolescent deviant peer
affiliation, and Nagin and Tremblay (1999) identified four developmental trajectories for externalising behaviour in boys through childhood and adolescence, with different profiles of behaviour problems. These and other studies show the value of comparing profiles of behaviour on different trajectory types identified over time; however, this approach has as yet been little used for victims, as opposed to aggressors.

One study has compared victim profiles. In a short-term (one year) longitudinal study of 12–15 year old pupils in the USA, Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham (2000) compared 28 stable victims (at T1 and T2), 21 new victims (at T2 only), 25 old victims (at T1 only) and 32 stable non-victims (neither at T1 nor T2) on three measures of psychological adjustment: loneliness, self-worth, and depression. Stable victims scored significantly higher than old victims on loneliness, and lower on self-worth; old victims did not differ from stable non-victims, and new victims did not differ from stable victims. This suggested largely concurrent timing effects of victimisation, with good possibilities of recovery if the victimisation ended. However, the groups were only compared on the three adjustment measures, so that we do not know what attributions were made, for example, or what coping strategies were used by those who did or did not escape from victim status.

In this study we report data from a follow-up of pupils of known victim status, two years later. We assessed behaviour problems, liking of school, friendships, attributions (reasons) for bullying, and coping strategies, in relation to victim profile and experiences of victimisation described by the pupils. The opportunity to carry out such a profile study arose from the continuing relationship by some of the researchers with schools that had participated in a questionnaire survey of peer support interventions to counteract bullying (Naylor & Cowie, 1999), in which pupils were asked to identify whether they had been victims of bullying.

A particular issue here is how pupils may escape from being victims, and why others may continue as victims. Do escaped victims use different and presumably more effective coping strategies? Do they have better friendships and social adjustment? Have they experienced different types of victimisation, or attributed different causes for it? Also relevant is an understanding of why some pupils may become new victims at secondary school, having not been victims earlier, a topic scarcely touched on in previous research.

Our first objective was to identify continuing non-victims, continuing victims, those who were no longer victims (escaped victims), and those who had become victims (new victims); and to examine how these four profiles would differ on their enjoyment of school, friendships, school attendance, and social functioning. Secondly, we aimed to document what types of victimisation were experienced, and how they were coped with; in particular, we wished to examine whether escaped victims would differ from continuing victims in their coping strategies, and functioning. Relatedly, we wished to analyse how effective telling others of your difficulties was, and whether new victims, who had not been victims two years earlier, would experience problems as severe as continuing victims. We looked at gender as a possible interacting variable, given typical gender differences in types of bullying (with girls often more involved in indirect forms; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Underwood, 2002), and in coping strategies (with girls using more seeking social support and internalising strategies, boys more externalising strategies; Kristensen & Smith, 2003).
Method

Sample
An earlier survey was carried out in 51 UK schools that had peer support systems, with Year 7 (11–12 years old) and Year 9 (13–14 years old) pupils; in a confidential questionnaire, some identified themselves as victims of bullying (Naylor & Cowie, 1999). For the present study, we focused on pupils who would still be in these schools two years later. Forty-two of the schools in the earlier study had pupils in both of these year groups, and in these schools, 331 pupils had reported that they had been bullied at school during that year (that is, two years earlier); these pupils were now in Year 9 (13–14 years old) and Year 11 (15–16 years old). The 42 schools were re-contacted. Six schools refused to participate (one was ‘too busy’, one was ‘undergoing major building works so it was not convenient’, one was concerned about the ethics of the project, and three schools gave no reason); in addition, we considered one school to be too far away for interviewing only three former victims. This left 35 schools participating in the present study, with 265 former victims. Each of these pupils was matched with another pupil from the same school and year group, and where possible gender and ethnicity, who had not reported being a victim in the earlier survey.

Some pupils had left the school during the intervening two years (31 former victims, 17 former non-victims), others were absent on the day of the interviews (20 former victims, 20 former non-victims) or were unavailable (for example, on school visits) (9 former victims and 3 former non-victims); two pupils declined to be interviewed (1 former victim, 1 former non-victim). The sample remaining for interview was 413 pupils; 204 former victims (V) and 209 former non-victims (NV).

Procedure
All of the schools were visited over a 4-month period (November-February 1999/2000). All 413 pupils voluntarily participated in a structured interview that lasted 20–25 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, anonymity was guaranteed, with the proviso that the interviewer reserved the right to inform a teacher in case of severe abuse being reported. The interviewer went through the schedule with each pupil, writing down answers and in most cases tape recording them as well, with the pupil’s previous agreement.

Interviews
The interview was divided into five main sections. Two sections are not discussed in this article: one, in which each pupil was asked for a definition of bullying and a description of a witnessed bullying incident he or she was not involved in, including the reactions of the victim; and another, focused on knowledge about and effectiveness of the peer support system in the school (see Cowie, Naylor, Talamelli, Chauhan, & Smith, 2002). The three sections analysed here were:

(1) A section on the pupil’s school life, and quality of friendships; these comprised multiple-choice questions, which the pupil went through with the interviewer. Pupils were asked, ‘Mostly, do you enjoy school?’ and replied on a 5-point scale (not at all = 0 to yes very much = 4); and ‘What do you like and dislike about school?’ with replies on a 3-point scale (dislike = 0 to like = 2) for Lessons, Homework, Teachers, Pupils and Breaktime (Recess). Pupils were then asked: ‘How many good friends do you have at school?’ and ‘… who do not go to school with you?, each on a 4-point scale (none = 0
to many = 3). The quality of friendship was assessed using eight items from the Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin (1994) scale, scored on a 3-point scale (0–2), summed to give a range of possible scores from 0 to 16 (higher score indicating better quality of friendship).

(2) Structured questions about the pupil’s own experiences about victimisation (or not being victimised) over the last two years, and whether/why things had changed during that time, with probes by the interviewer to elicit more information about what had happened and when.

(3) Structured questions about the pupil’s opinions about bullying: reasons for bullying, possible actions if witnessed, and advice giving to victims of bullying.

Five interviewers piloted the schedule and were trained on its administration. Transcripts of interviews were checked for consistency prior to and during the study. Interviewers were not blind to prior victim status, since in asking pupils about changes over the last two years it was necessary to know of their report two years ago and adjust the questioning accordingly. However, pupils were unaware of this aspect of the study; also, their answers about school life and friendship were obtained before any questions about bullying.

**Coding of the interview**

The section of the interview about pupil’s experiences over the last two years contained detailed information obtained through a series of questions, allowing open-ended answers but with prompts to provide structure to the interview. Through a content analysis we coded the answers about the personal experiences of victimisation, particularly how the pupil described the Outcomes (including Coping Strategies) of the bullying (15 categories); and the Reasons for the bullying occurring (in the opinion of the victim) (10 categories). Categories are described in the Results section.

**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**

At the end of the interview the pupil completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997). This is a behavioural screening questionnaire for young people aged between 11 and 16, consisting of 25 items, divided into five scales (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and prosocial behaviour). Each scale has five items scored on a 0–1–2 basis, with possible range of 0–10 for each scale. A teacher version of the questionnaire was also completed, by the teacher who knew the pupil best, usually the pastoral or group tutor; teachers were blind to victim status of the child so far as the research categories were concerned. (One school refused to complete the teacher SDQs.) This was done so that not all the data would be based on pupil self-report.

**Attendance**

Data were collected from school records about the participants’ absences. The first school was visited on 23 November, after the first 104 sessions (half-days) of the school year, so for reasons of comparability we scored participants’ attendance for the first 104 sessions of the current school year in all of the schools.

**Victim profile groups**

Identification of victim status was based on self-report. In the earlier survey (1997–1998), pupils were asked ‘Have you ever been bullied in this school?’.
who answered ‘yes’, had been asked to indicate in a table during which of their school years they had been bullied. Only those who ticked that school year were categorized as victims for the purposes of this study. In the later interview (1999–2000), pupils were asked if they had been bullied over the last two years and if so, what had happened; the answer was also evaluated in the light of follow-up questions and probes, including a question ‘How often do you get bullied now?’ Pupils were classed as victims ‘now’ if they stated that they had been bullied over the last two years and were being bullied now (in one case, an initial self-report of being bullied now was discounted when it emerged it had only happened once).

On the basis of the earlier survey and the later interview, pupils could be classified into different victim profiles. Of the 204 V pupils from two years ago, 58 could be classed as continuing victims (V-V) and 146 as escaped victims (V-NV). Of the 209 NV pupils from two years ago, 175 had never been bullied over the last two years and were classed as non-victims (NV-NV). Of the remaining 34, 27 were currently bullied and classed as new victims (NV-V). The remaining 7 had experienced some bullying, but not currently (NV-V-NV); due to their relatively small number and in-between status, we dropped them from further analysis. The four main victim profile groups totalled 406 pupils, with a breakdown by age and gender as shown in Table 1. The small number of NV-V and V-V pupils in Year 11 precluded us from including all three of age, gender and victim profile as factors in analyses. Given the relatively small difference in age between the two age groups, we focus on analyses of victim profile by gender.

Table 1. Sample sizes by victim profile and gender (numbers in year groups 9 or 11 in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim profile</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NV-NV</td>
<td>80 (60, 20)</td>
<td>95 (58, 37)</td>
<td>175 (118, 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-NV</td>
<td>64 (50, 14)</td>
<td>82 (50, 32)</td>
<td>146 (100, 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NV-V</td>
<td>17 (15, 2)</td>
<td>10 (7, 3)</td>
<td>27 (22, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-V</td>
<td>29 (27, 2)</td>
<td>29 (18, 11)</td>
<td>58 (45, 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>190 (152, 38)</td>
<td>216 (133, 83)</td>
<td>406 (285, 121)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NV-NV: non-victims; V-NV: escaped victims; NV-V: new victims; V-V: continuing victims

Results

First, we compare all four victim profile groups (NV-NV, V-NV, NV-V and V-V) on common measures: enjoyment of school and likes and dislikes, number and quality of friends, whether they have bullied themselves, SDQ scores and attendance and truancy. Second, we compare three profile groups (V-NV, NV-V and V-V) on Outcomes of being victimised, paying particular attention to whether or not they had told anyone of the bullying, and whether their friends had joined in the bullying. Finally, some Reasons given for bullying by victims are presented.
Comparison of four victim profile groups

Mostly, do you enjoy school?
The mean for girls was 2.73 and for boys 2.82; mean scores by victim profile are shown in Table 2. A two-way gender (boy/girl) by victim profile (NV-NV/V-NV/NV-V/V-V) ANOVA was carried out; a significant result was found for gender, \( F_{(3,398)} = 6.12, p<.01 \). No significant effects were found for victim profile or for gender/victim profile interaction.

Table 2. Mean scores (SDs in brackets) on enjoyment of school (5-point scale), liking of specific aspects of school (3-point scales), number of friends in and out of school (4-point scales) and quality of best friend relationship (3-point scale) for different victim profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim Profile</th>
<th>NV-NV ( n=175 )</th>
<th>V-NV ( n=146 )</th>
<th>NV-V ( n=27 )</th>
<th>V-V ( n=58 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of school</td>
<td>2.79 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.79 (0.93)</td>
<td>2.74 (0.98)</td>
<td>2.71 (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of lessons</td>
<td>1.27 (0.49)</td>
<td>1.29 (0.53)</td>
<td>1.26 (0.53)</td>
<td>1.26 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of homework</td>
<td>0.74 (0.74)</td>
<td>0.73 (0.77)</td>
<td>0.81 (0.74)</td>
<td>0.69 (0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of teachers</td>
<td>1.54 (0.52)</td>
<td>1.52 (0.53)</td>
<td>1.67 (0.48)</td>
<td>1.64 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of pupils</td>
<td>1.77 (0.42)</td>
<td>1.65 (0.51)</td>
<td>1.52 (0.64)</td>
<td>1.47 (0.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of breaktime</td>
<td>1.93 (0.30)</td>
<td>1.88 (0.34)</td>
<td>1.74 (0.66)</td>
<td>1.76 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of friends (in school)</td>
<td>2.91 (0.34)</td>
<td>2.92 (0.26)</td>
<td>2.89 (0.32)</td>
<td>2.72 (0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of friends (not in school)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.42 (0.89)</td>
<td>2.33 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.38 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of friends</td>
<td>13.10 (2.05)</td>
<td>13.00 (2.16)</td>
<td>12.52 (2.23)</td>
<td>12.45 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NV-NV: non-victims; V-NV: escaped victims; NV-V: new victims; V-V: continuing victims

What do you like and dislike about school?
Mean scores are in Table 2. Two-way ANOVAs for gender and victim profile were carried out. No significant main effects were found for gender or for gender/victim profile interactions. Main effects for victim profile were found for Pupils, \( F_{(3,398)} = 7.48, p<.001 \), and Breaktime, \( F_{(3,398)} = 3.94, p<.01 \); V-V and NV-V pupils liked these least. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests showed that for Pupils, NV-NV differs from V-V at \( p<.001 \) and from NV-V at \( p<.05 \); for Breaktime, NV-NV differs from V-V at \( p<.02 \).

How many good friends do you have at school/do not go to school with you?
See Table 2 for means by victim profile group. Two-way ANOVAs by gender and victim profile were carried out. For friends in school, significant main effects were found for victim profile, \( F_{(3,398)} = 4.47, p<.004 \); V-V pupils have fewer friends at school than NV-NV (\( p<.005 \)) and V-NV (\( p<.002 \)). No significant effects were found for gender or for gender/victim profile interaction. For friends not at school, no significant effects were found, and V-V pupils do not have the lowest score.

Quality of friendship
Means are shown by victim profile in Table 2. From a two-way gender by victim profile ANOVA, there was no significant effect of victim profile. There was a main effect for gender (girls = 13.61, boys = 12.11), \( F_{(1,397)} = 24.41, p<.001 \); there was no significant interaction. When asked later ‘Have your friends at school ever joined in the bullying?’
16 of 56 V-V (28.6%) and 7 of 26 NV-V (26.9%) said that their friends had joined in the bullying.

Whether they have bullied themselves

Pupils were asked if they had taken part in bullying someone else at school in the last two years. Seventy-five pupils said yes: 33 girls (15.3%) and 42 boys (22.2%). Numbers by victim profile are shown in Table 3. A logistic regression, entering victim profile and then gender as predictors, found that victim profile was highly significant; goodness of fit = 376.1, Wald statistic = 10.85, \( p < .001 \); gender was not significant. Continuing victims (34.5%), were more likely to have also bullied others than new victims (25.9%), escaped victims (18.6%), or non-victims (12.0%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NV-NV (n=175)</th>
<th>V-NV (n=144)</th>
<th>NV-V (n=27)</th>
<th>V-V (n=58)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES, have bullied someone</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO, have not bullied someone</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NV-NV: non-victims; V-NV: escaped victims; NV-V: new victims; V-V: continuing victims

SDQ scores

Two-way ANOVAs by gender and victim profile were carried out; Tukey tests were used for all post-hoc comparisons.

(a) Self reports. Pupil SDQ scores were missing for two pupils, leaving 174 NV-NV, 145 V-NV, 27 NV-V and 58 V-V. Mean scores by victim profile group are shown in Table 4. There were no significant main effects, or interactions, for the Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity scales. For Emotional Problems, there was a main effect of victim profile, \( F_{(3,396)} = 15.61, p < .0001 \). The V-V group scored higher than both the V-NV and NV-NV groups, \( p < .0001 \); NV-V scored higher than NV-NV, \( p < .024 \). There was a main effect of gender, \( F_{(1,396)} = 27.16, p < .0001 \), with girls (3.43) scoring higher than boys (2.52). There was no significant interaction.

For Peer Problems, there was a main effect of victim profile, \( F_{(3,396)} = 17.07, p < .0001 \). The NV-NV group scored lower than V-NV, \( p < .005 \), V-V, \( p < .0001 \) and NV-V, \( p < .001 \); also V-NV scored lower than V-V, \( p < .004 \) and NV-V, \( p < .008 \). For the Prosocial scale, there was a main effect of victim profile, \( F_{(3,398)} = 3.11, p < .026 \), and a main effect for gender, \( F_{(1,396)} = 32.33, p < .0001 \), with girls (8.00) scoring higher than boys (6.63). There was also a significant interaction, \( F_{(3,398)} = 5.33, p < .001 \); for girls, prosocial did not vary significantly with victim profile (means NV-NV=7.91, V-NV=8.16, V-V=7.62, NV-V=8.60); however for boys, V-V (7.69) scored significantly higher than V-NV (6.33), \( p < .001 \), and NV-NV (6.34), \( p < .0001 \) (the latter two groups not differing). The NV-V group (7.24) was not significantly different from the others.

(b) Teacher reports. Teacher SDQ scores were missing for one school, leaving 169 NV-NV, 139 V-NV, 26 NV-V and 56 V-V. Mean scores by victim profile group are shown in
Table 4. There were significant main effects of victim profile on all the difficulty scales; none of the interactions was significant. For Conduct Problems, $F(3,382) = 3.26, p<.02$, the V-V group scored higher than the NV-NV group, $p<.03$. For Hyperactivity, $F(3,382) = 3.12, p=.03$, the V-V group scored higher than the NV-NV group, $p<.01$; there was also a significant gender difference, $F(1,382) = 13.31, p<.0001$, with boys (3.56) scoring higher than girls (2.29). For Emotional Problems, $F(3,382) = 5.04, p<.002$, the V-V group scored higher than the NV-NV group, $p<.001$. For Peer Problems, $F(3,382) = 9.63, p<.0001$, the V-V group scored higher than both the V-NV group, $p<.003$, and the NV-NV group, $p<.0001$. There was also a significant gender difference, $F(1,382) = 8.41, p<.004$, with boys (2.11) scoring higher than girls (1.39). There was no significant effect of victim profile for the Prosocial scale, but there was a significant main effect of gender, $F(1,382) = 9.50, p<.002$, with girls (7.51) scoring higher than boys (6.14).

School attendance records and self-reported school absence

Attendance data were available for all 406 pupils. The mean rates of attendance over the first 104 sessions of the school year were for boys 98.8 ($SD=8.1$) and girls 96.6 ($SD=10.2$). Combining genders, attendance was highest for NV-NV at 98.6 ($SD=8.1$), then NV-V at 97.9 ($SD=7.4$) and V-NV at 97.7 ($SD=9.4$) and lowest for V-V at 94.3 ($SD=12.5$). A two-way ANOVA found a main effect for victim profile, $F(3,398) = 3.36, p<.02$. Tukey’s post hoc test showed that the V-V group had lower attendance than NV-NV ($p<.01$). No significant main effects were found for gender or for gender/victim profile interaction.

When asked ‘How many times have you not been to school because you were afraid of being bullied last year?’ 44 of the 58 V-V pupils replied ‘never’, eight said ‘1 to 5 times’, four said ‘6 to 10 times’ and two replied ‘more than 10 times’. Of the 27 NV-V 24 said ‘never’ and three replied ‘1 to 5 times’. The trend for proportionately fewer V-V pupils to reply ‘never’ was not significant on a 2×2 chi-square ($\chi^2 = 1.95, ns$).
Comparison of three victim profile groups (V-NV, V-V and NV-V)

These analyses are based on descriptions of bullying experienced by all those who had been victims during the previous two years, either previously, currently, or both (total \( n=231 \)).

Outcomes

Responses were content analysed from the description of bullying incidents and from asking: ‘How did you react to being bullied?’ and (if no longer a victim) ‘Why do you think things have changed?’ Besides active behaviours used to tackle the bullying, pupils referred to their emotional reactions and sometimes to changes in the environment (independent of themselves) that helped reduce or stop the victimisation. Coding was possible for 217 pupils (133 V-NV, 27 NV-V, and 57 V-V). The 15 categories reached, with numbers of pupils describing each as happening to them, are as follows (many pupils described more than one category):

Coping strategies: Talk to someone (teacher, counsellor, parents, tutor) \( n=126 \); Ignore it, \( n=85 \); Stick up for yourself (take care of myself, get more mature, sort it out with bully) \( n=72 \); Avoid, stay away from the bully, \( n=47 \); More/different friends, more popular, \( n=37 \); Fight back, \( n=16 \); Different behaviour/attitude (try to be happier, behave normally, mind their own business, don’t cry), \( n=6 \); Conditional (a category scored in addition to the component categories, when two categories were linked conditionally, usually by age, size or friendship profile, e.g., ‘if the bully was same size, stick up for yourself, but if bigger then tell a teacher’), \( n=11 \).

Emotional reactions: Affected (annoyed, scared, upset, angry, nervous, worried) \( n=78 \); Not affected (not too bothered, didn’t let it affect him/her, not upset) \( n=21 \).

Changes in the environment: Intervention of a bystander, \( n=33 \); Bully matured, grew up, \( n=28 \); Bully/victim moved class, left the school, \( n=26 \); Bully got bored, \( n=9 \). Don’t know/ couldn’t cope: Don’t know/not sure/just stopped, \( n=13 \); Could not do anything, \( n=7 \).

Inter-coder reliability was checked on a random sample of 10% of the schedules, using Cohen’s kappa. Two different coders obtained a K> .78 in every category.

The percentages for each active coping strategy, by victim profile, are shown in Table 5. The five most frequently occurring categories (Talk to someone, Ignore it, Stick up for yourself, Avoid/stay away and More/different friends) had sufficient responses to justify statistical analysis by logistic regression, entering victim profile (V-NV, NV-V and V-V) and then gender as predictors. Two significant effects were found for victim profile: more V-NV reported talking to someone about it (66.9%) than NV-V (40.7%) and V-V (45.6%), goodness of fit = 216.9, Wald statistic = 8.96, \( p<.003 \); and more V-NV (24.8% cf. 0% of NV-V and 7.0% of V-V) reported getting more/different friends, goodness of fit = 199.5, Wald statistic = 10.87, \( p<.001 \). There were no significant findings for gender.

Reasons for victimisation

Responses were content analysed from a specific question ‘Can you describe one occasion when you were bullied?’ and open-ended questions about experiences during the last two years: ‘Can you tell me more? What happened?’ plus a question ‘Why do you think you are getting bullied at the moment?’ (for V-V and NV-V), or ‘Why do you
think things have changed? (for V-NV). Besides their own behaviours, some pupils referred to their relationship with the bully or bullies, and possible factors affecting their behaviour that were causative in the victimisation. Coding was possible for 217 pupils (132 V-NV, 27 NV-V, 58 V-V). Ten categories were obtained; these were non-overlapping conceptually, although longer pupil responses could of course often be scored in more than one category. The numbers of pupils describing each as happening to them are as follows:

**Victim-related**
- **Victim characteristics** (physical characteristics, looks, social characteristics, race, being different) \(n = 53\);
- **Victim behaviour** (stuck up for someone, said something wrong, done something stupid) \(n = 34\);
- **Victim loneliness** (no friends, no-one to talk to, standing on his own, not popular, new in the area) \(n = 13\).

**Relationship between bully and victim**:
- **Bully-victim relationship** (don’t like the victim, arguments, fell out with friends, competition at school) \(n = 44\).

**Bully-related**
- **Bully emotional gains** (for fun, feel better, like picking on weakest, to upset, bored, for revenge) \(n = 23\);
- **Personality characteristics of bully** (strong character, immaturity, jealousy, anger, cowardice) \(n = 15\);
- **Bully social gains** (look big, be popular, have attention) \(n = 8\);
- **Bully physical gains** (get money, material things) \(n = 3\);
- **Experiences of bully** (problems at home, picked on themselves, don’t have friends themselves) \(n = 0\) (this category was included as the response came up in other parts of the interview not considered here).

**No reasons/don’t know** \(n = 87\) (of these, 61 were V-NV pupils)

Inter-coder reliability was checked on a random sample of 10% of the schedules, using Cohen’s kappa. Two different coders obtained a \(K > .85\) in every category.

Victim-related reasons (especially characteristics, and behaviour) were much more frequent than bully-related reasons. We excluded the V-NV group from the statistical comparisons on reasons for victimisation, because V-NV were much more likely to be coded ‘No reason/don’t know’ and only V-V and NV-V were asked: ‘Why do you think you are getting bullied at the moment?’ No significant differences were found between

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**Table 5.** How pupils report coping with victimisation; percentages by victim profile, ranked by overall frequency. Comparisons are for actual victimisation over the last two years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>V-NV (n=133)</th>
<th>NV-V (n=27)</th>
<th>V-V (n=57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk to someone</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore it</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick up for yourself</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid bully</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More friends</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight back</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different behaviour</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V-NV: escaped victims; NV-V: new victims; V-V: continuing victims.
V-V and NV-V. We examined for gender differences for the four responses with the most answers: victim’s behaviour, victim’s characteristics, bully-victim relationship and bully emotional gains. One significant difference was found: the bully-victim relationship was given as a reason more often by girls (31/114; 27.2%) than boys (13/103; 12.6%), $\chi^2 = 7.11, p < .006$.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study give insight not only into how victims of bullying differ from non-victims but also how continuing victims (still victims two years later) and new victims differ from escaped victims. Besides characteristics of the children involved, the study has yielded important information on the kinds of responses used by pupils to bullying, and the kinds of coping strategies which appear to be successful in escaping victim profile.

There are some limitations to our study. The schools all had some form of peer support system, and this might result in higher rates of pupils ‘telling’ than in schools without (Naylor et al., 2001). The identification of victim profile, and much of the outcome data, are based on pupil self-reports. However, we did obtain teacher ratings of behaviour problems, and objective records of school attendance, results from which gave a pattern of findings generally consistent with the data from the children themselves. Numbers of new victims were relatively low, reducing statistical power for this category. By contrast, there were a large number of escaped victims; this might be due to the face-to-face format of the second interview compared to anonymous questionnaire previously, although a reduction in victim rates was expected from general survey findings (Smith et al., 1999). Strengths of the study include detailed real-life explanations of the child about perceived changes in his/her social context, particularly in situations where considerable pain and distress has been experienced and where the child would be acutely aware of changes in the incidence and type of bullying over time; these may have a greater value than data from hypothetical situations that are often reported.

The four victim profile groups clearly differed in their adjustment and functioning in school. Comparing the four victim profile groups, there was usually a consistent trend in the data, with non-victims (NV-NV) being the most well-adjusted, followed by escaped victims (V-NV), new victims (NV-V) and continuing victims (V-V) the least well adjusted (Tables 2, 3, 4). In making these comparisons, the relatively smaller number of new victims (NV-V) needs to be borne in mind. Often, the continuing victims emerged as the group significantly different from the rest, as well as the worst affected. These findings partially agree with those of Juvonen et al. (2000) in the USA. However, they found no differences between old (escaped) victims and stable victims, whereas we found some residual effects. Also, in their comparisons new victims appeared just as lonely, and even tending (non-significantly) to be more depressed and have lower self-worth, than stable victims. We did not find such a trend; this may be because our stable victims had been in victim status for at least two years (compared to at least one year in Juvonen et al.). Our findings present a more detailed and graded picture comparing the four victim profile groups.

Our escaped victims differed significantly from non-victims only on one measure: greater peer problems on the self-rated SDQ. When weighed against a much larger number of non-significant findings, this can be seen as encouraging; in most respects, escaped victims do not differ significantly from non-victims. Nevertheless, the ‘residual’
significant finding, and consistent if not statistically significant trends in the SDQ data (Table 4), do suggest that these escaped victims remain somewhat less well adjusted in the peer group than those who were not victims of bullying.

The continuing victims form a much more clearly differing group from the non-victims. They like other pupils, and breaktime, less than the others do, and they miss school more often. This is not because of any general lack of enjoyment of school, or disliking of lessons, homework or teachers (they tend to a high score on liking teachers), and may be related to peer problems. Indeed, one-third of continuing victims admitted that fear of bullying had led them to truant from school. They also reported fewer friends at school; this was reported as a school-specific problem and they did not report fewer friends outside school (Table 2). Continuing victims also tended to report less good quality friends (Table 2) but this did not reach statistical significance; nevertheless over one-quarter of continuing victims reported that their friends had joined in bullying them, suggesting that some of their friends at least could not be trusted.

Continuing victims are rated by themselves, and by their teachers, as particularly high on Peer Problems and Emotional Problems on the SDQ. Teachers also rate them high on Conduct Disorders (and over one-third of these pupils admit that they have also bullied other pupils), and on Hyperactivity. The continuing victims rate themselves as more Prosocial (boys only), but their teachers did not agree – in fact the opposite; the clearest example of an opposite trend between pupil and teacher ratings in the SDQ scores (Table 4). Continuing victims are also mostly likely to report having bullied others (Table 3), thus (at least at some point) being bully/victims.

The new victims often appear rather similar to the continuing victims, though with fewer significant differences from non-victims (possibly due to the smaller sample). They liked other pupils less than non-victims, and rated themselves high on Peer Problems and Emotional Problems on the SDQ. Teachers generally did not rate them so high on the SDQ (Table 4). However, new victims were rather similar to continuing victims in the proportions that were absent from school because of bullying, had friends who bullied them, and who also bullied others.

For the three groups who had ever been victims, we could assess the outcomes of bullying, and in particular, what coping strategies were reported in relation to actual incidents experienced. We were able to code these responses into seven discrete categories; in addition, some responses were conditional (see Table 5). The most common response overall was talking to someone about it. Two-thirds of escaped victims reported talking to someone in regard to an actual incident. However, less than half of either new victims or continuing victims reported talking to someone in regard to an actual incident, significantly less than for escaped victims. Instead, there was a (non-significant) trend for them more often to report trying to ignore the bullying (Table 5). By contrast, escaped victims significantly more often cited trying to have more or different friends, or be more popular – probably a more successful strategy. In both cases, escaped victims were more likely to use categories that might be described as ‘seeking social support’ in the Causey and Dubow (1992) typology of coping responses.

When explaining the reasons for bullying happening in an actual incident, both new and continuing victims often ‘blamed themselves’, invoking perhaps their appearance, being different in some way, or doing something that annoyed the bully. Quite a number also invoked the bully-victim relationship. Interestingly, this was done more often by girls – for example falling out with the bullying child in a friendship quarrel. Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) and Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000) have
commented on the greater incidence of aggression and bullying by means of friendship networks (spreading rumours, social exclusion) in girls' groups, and girl victims may have particular problems in this area.

These findings suggest certain recommendations to teachers and parents concerned to help long-standing victims of bullying. Our study strongly indicates the value to a victimised child of seeking social support as a response strategy. This could take the form of talking to someone about the problem, or seeking out more or different friends. A significantly higher proportion of escaped victims than current victims reported these strategies. Current anti-bullying strategies (DfEE, 2002) do indeed stress the importance of pupils telling adults, if they need help from repeated victimisation. The existence of peer support systems in schools (including buddying schemes) creates a more positive ethos to counteract bullying and other negative behaviours in schools, and may be one effective way to help victims build a more effective friendship network (Naylor & Cowie, 1999).

On the other hand, it may be important to counter the tendency of new and continuing victims to blame themselves for the problem (which may be a contributory factor to their being bullied). More victim-related characteristics or behaviour were given as justifications for the bullying, than were bully-related reasons. Girls especially blamed the bully-victim relationship. Attribution retraining (to encourage victims to ascribe blame for the problem elsewhere) could be a useful avenue to explore in this respect.

Besides focusing on individual characteristics of victims, these findings thus draw attention to a more systemic analysis of bully/victim relationships; the strategy of making more or different friends - used especially by escaped victims - implies an awareness of social-structural issues, or an ability to use this knowledge, that could be of use to current victims with appropriate help from peers, teachers or school systems. Such findings may be relevant for practitioners, and for handbooks and packs used in schools to prevent bullying (DfEE, 2002; Sharp & Smith, 1994). These are ways of helping victims, and potential victims, cope with possible bullying. Research on a full longitudinal basis (with pre- and post-test measures of all variables) could further test their generalisability. Finally, ways of helping victims and potential victims should not replace, but rather augment, strategies to help bullying children change, and to develop effective policies on a whole school and community basis.

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**References**


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