



All Pain, What Gain? The Link Between Peer Bullying and Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

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INTRODUCTION

- Childhood traumatic experiences, such as peer bullying (PB), have a profound impact on psychological well-being and emotional regulation (Zhao et al., 2023).
- Research consistently links PB to poorer mental health outcomes and a heightened risk of engaging in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI; Bhatia, 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Serafini et al., 2023).
- Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers to the intentional infliction of physical harm (e.g., cutting, scratching, burning) on one's own body without suicidal intent (Pingali, 2017).
- While peer bullying is a known risk factor for NSSI, its relationship with the diverse functions of NSSI remains unclear.
- The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between peer bullying experiences and the diverse functions of NSSI among youth.

METHODS

Study population

University students (N = 2,353) aged 17-25 ($M_{age} = 18.95$, $SD_{age} = 1.52$), completed self-report questionnaires assessing PB victimization and NSSI.

- 678 (556 females; $M_{age} = 18.94$, $SD_{age} = 1.58$) experienced school-based PB.
- 929 (779 females; $M_{age} = 18.84$, $SD_{age} = 1.49$) reported a history of NSSI.

Measures

- Peer Bullying: assessed using the Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire (RBQ; Schafer et al., 2004).
- NSSI: assessed using the Ottawa Self-Injury Inventory (OSI; Cloutier & Nixon, 2003).

Data analyses

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the OSI identified the four-factor structure for NSSI functions and a single-factor structure for Addictive Features.
- A two-sample t-test compared NSSI functions among participants with and without peer bullying experiences.

RESULTS

NSSI Functions	Peer Bullying				T-test
	Yes		No		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
External Emotion Regulation	3.08	1.18	2.9	1.14	1.97*
Internal Emotion Regulation	2.70	0.97	2.46	0.94	3.80**
Social Influence	1.41	0.51	1.41	0.49	0.08
Sensation Seeking	1.56	0.77	1.53	0.76	0.57
Addictive Features	2.12	0.99	1.96	0.92	2.48*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

CONCLUSION

- Youth with a history of school-based peer bullying are more likely to:
 - Engage in NSSI as a means of regulating internal distress, such as feelings of sadness or suicidal ideation.
 - Engage in NSSI to regulate externalizing symptoms, such as feelings of anger or frustration.
 - Endorse addictive features, suggesting that youth with PB histories may be more prone to repeatedly rely on self-injury.
- Social influence and Sensation Seeking showed no significant differences, suggesting that youth with peer bullying experiences are not primarily motivated by interpersonal or thrill-seeking factors when engaging in NSSI.
- These findings underscore the importance of trauma-informed interventions that focus on enhancing emotion regulation skills in youth exposed to school-based peer bullying.
- Further longitudinal research is needed to clarify the extent to which NSSI functions can be further explained based on youths' bullying experiences and trauma history.

References

