

Adolescents' coping with relational victimization

Introduction:

The effect of an intervention on adolescents' relational victimization coping skills was investigated. Relational victimization refers to the victims of relational aggression -- behavior that attempts to harm others through the manipulation of relationships (Crick et al., 2001).

Hypothesis:

Participants would increase their use of positive coping skills while decreasing their use of negative skills.

Procedures:

127 sixth-graders from two rural schools (72 males, 55 females) were given a pretest and posttest 4 weeks apart that measured relational victimization and usage of several coping strategies. About 1 week after the pretest, participants received an interventional talk that taught about relational aggression and research-based coping skills.

References:

Crick, N., Nelson, D., Morales, J., Cullerton-Sen, C., Casas, J., & Hickman, S. (2001). Relational victimization in childhood and adolescence: I hurt you through the grapevine. In J. Juvonen, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (p. 196-214). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

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by Erin M. Bont



Figure 1 Reported mean scores for participants' use of various coping strategies

	Pre-test	Post-test
Males		
Wishful Thinking	23.91*	22.17*
Problem Focused	31.43*	29.63*
Seeking Social Support	12.94	12.86
Females		
Wishful Thinking	27.31	27.60
Problem Focused	34.38	33.71
Seeking Social Support	16.74	16.28

* = significant change at $p < .05$

Procedures (con't):

Positive coping skills presented were *Problem Focused* ("Talked to someone about how you were feeling") & *Seeks Social Support* ("Worked things out to get something good or positive from the situation"). The Negative Coping Skill presented was *Wishful Thinking* ("Thought about fantastic or unreal things like winning the lottery or being a pop star that made you feel better")

Results:

Results from a series of Paired Samples T-Test did not support my hypothesis. While male students decreased their use of Wishful Thinking, they also decreased their use of Problem Focused behaviors. Female participants did not significantly change their use of any coping strategy.

Conclusion:

These results do not support the claim that educating adolescents on relational aggression and research-based coping skills will increase their use of positive coping skills and decrease their use of negative coping skills. However, given the limitations of the short duration and non-intensive intervention employed in this study this is not surprising. It is likely that a study encompassing a long-term intensive intervention will significantly improve victims' coping with relational victimization.