The Impact of Bullying on Mental Health in Adulthood

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Where….. (is Singapore?)

- Masters of Clinical Psychology
- Research Thesis
- National University Hospital (outpatient department)
What quantitative research tells us

Bullying → mental health problems

Negative psychosocial outcomes

– Anger
– Sadness
– Low self-esteem
– Excessive worrying
– Withdrawal
– Increased emotional arousal
– Fewer friends
– Depression
– Anxiety
– Suicidal ideation and attempts
What qualitative research can add

- Understanding the experience of being bullied from the perspective of the victim
  - Their individual reactions
  - Choices they made
  - Their unique outcomes

- Understanding what adult psychotherapy clients need from mental health services
  - Self-perceived long-term effects of victimisation

Mental Health Problems
The Study

Participants
• 10 participants
• Aged 21 – 30
• Diagnosis of mood or anxiety disorder
• Self-identified victim of school bullying

Method
• 40-60 minute individual interview
• Semi-structured interview schedule
• IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003)
• Primary and secondary analysts
• Auditing of themes
Results – The Themes

Fear of Others
- Isolation
- Lack of trust
- Self-protection

Dislike of Self
- I’m not good enough
- Nothing good can happen to me

Not within my control
- Nothing I could do
- Keeping Quiet

Troubled by Torment & Unfairness
- Unable to make sense
- Struggling to cope
Fear of Others

Impact on interpersonal relationships:

• Difficulties trusting others
• Hypervigilance to betrayal
• Avoidance of intimacy

That was worse because... they wouldn't be my friend, they would gossip about me then wherever they go, they wouldn't call me so I felt excluded.'

go away from me or ignore me and I seen that so many times in my entire life, I just know what to expect and I don't want to it happen

I have to protect myself ... just to be fierce... When they see me come here, they all go away.
Dislike of Self

Impact on self-concept

- Attribution of fault to themselves for not measuring up to standards
- Affected self and future view

I’m not very smart.. it’s either you have to do very well in your studies, be a very good looking girl, or be very exceptionally talented... or like you are very rich, you could be part of the cool gang, otherwise.. you know, people would alienate you, gossip about you, insult you, make fun of you.

bullying kills your confidence ... and once you don’t have much confidence in one self, you will doubt yourself.’

I mean that I can see in my everyday life is that ... don’t worry about today because tomorrow is going to get worse’
Not within my control

Impact on self & other-efficacy

- Helplessness and powerlessness
- Passivity
- Low expectations of support

Every time I watch movie ah ... bullying, tell teacher then teacher help .. but I realized that no such thing ah .. if he want to bully you he will just bully you .. There’s nothing you can do about it lah.

‘the boy will disturb me more and more.... so I just ignore him lah ... I tried to ignore him and just continue with my own life.
Impact on emotional regulation

- Overwhelming resources
- Sadness at being targeted
- Anger at perceived injustice
- Self-harm

Troubled by Torment & Unfairness

Anger and sad and nothing and just want to .... why is she here like to make my life difficult.

‘Because children is either... you play, if not you sleep, or if not you cry ... that’s all.

Why should I go through all these things?.. that’s the first thought of suicide and the first thought of why I am being born.
Impact on Mental Health

Mental Health Problems

- Emotional Development
  - ↑ trait anger & anxiety
  - ↓ trait optimism
- Isolation
  - ↓ approach behaviours
  - & self-disclosure
- Negative core beliefs
  - Self & others
- Maladaptive coping
  - Avoidance & Escape
Being pessimistic….

As long as there is life, there will be bullying