

Characteristics of bullies and victims among incarcerated male young offenders

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the characteristics of bullies and victims in Canadian institutions for young offenders. The second aim is to investigate to what extent it is possible to develop risk scores that can predict who will become a bully or a victim.*

Design/methodology/approach – *In total, 185 male young offenders aged 16-19 in nine Ontario facilities were individually interviewed about their bullying and victimization, and two standardized inventories were completed.*

Findings – *Compared with non-bullies, bullies had spent longer in their present facility, had been bullies in a previous facility, had more previous custodial sentences, had been suspended or expelled at school, and expressed aggressive attitudes. Compared with non-victims, victims were socially isolated in custody, had failed a grade in school, had been committed to a psychiatric hospital, had been victims in a previous facility, had fewer previous custodial sentences, and were less likely to express aggressive attitudes.*

Practical implications – *Risk/needs assessment instruments should be developed to identify likely bullies and victims and guide interventions to prevent bullying in young offender institutions.*

Originality/value – *This paper shows that bullies and victims can be accurately identified based on risk factors including aggressive attitudes.*

Keywords *Canada, Bullying, Victimization, Young offenders, Aggressive attitudes, Risk scores*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

Although there has been a substantial amount of research investigating bullying among schoolchildren (see, e.g. Farrington, 1993), bullying in offender populations was virtually ignored until the 1990s. The main aim of this paper is to investigate the characteristics of bullies and victims in Canadian institutions for young offenders. The second aim is to develop risk scores that can predict who will become a bully or a victim.

The most directly relevant previous research was carried out by Beck (1994) and Power *et al.* (1997). In Beck's research, anonymous self-report questionnaires were completed by over 300 English young offenders. Generally, offenders with little prison experience tended to be victimized. In the research of Power and colleagues, questionnaires were completed by over 700 male inmates (aged 16-21) of Scottish young offender institutions. They found that bullies tended to have spent a greater total time in prison than victims. Inmates thought that the following factors contributed to being a bully: knowing a lot of inmates, aggressive behaviour, type of offence, large build, and long criminal record. Inmates thought that the following factors contributed to being a victim: type of offence (especially a sex offence), being a first offender, being odd-looking, knowing few inmates, and unusual behaviour.

Shields and Simourd (1991) investigated predatory relationships among youths incarcerated in a Canadian secure custody young offender unit. Although this study was not specifically

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concerned with bullying, it is relevant because predatory behaviour is one aspect of bullying. Residents were given the Young Offender-Level of Service Inventory (YO-LSI), a standardized and structured interview measuring offenders' background and present situation, and their behaviour was subsequently monitored independently by their unit's treatment team. The results indicated that this inventory was able to distinguish predators from non-predators, and showed satisfactory inter-observer reliability and internal consistency.

In prior research on peer aggression in prisons, inmate victims and aggressors have been found to differ significantly on a number of variables. For example, aggressors tended to have more extensive criminal and institutional histories, more substance abuse, and more educational, employment, family, peer, and psychological problems (Shields and Simourd, 1991). Interestingly, it has also been found that aggressors and victims could not be differentiated on the variables of age, height, weight, or IQ (Bartollas *et al.*, 1976).

Sekol and Farrington (in press) collected questionnaires from over 400 males aged 11-21 in Croatian residential care institutions. They found that bullies, compared to non-bullies, tended to have been bullied previously, in school and in institutions. The bullies generally agreed that "Victims deserve to be bullied" and that "Bullying is part of the way things work here". Based on the same questionnaires, Sekol and Farrington (2016) reported that victims, compared to non-victims, tended to have been victims previously, in school and in institutions. The victims did not agree that "Victims deserve to be bullied" but they were likely to agree that "Bullying is part of the way things work here". Victims tended to be relatively young, to have low self-esteem and high neuroticism, and to be bullied when new to the facility.

Bullying in adult male institutions has been studied more extensively, and Ireland (2005) has reviewed some of the most important findings. Bullies tended to have more custodial experience and more aggressive attitudes (Turner and Ireland, 2010). Victims tended to be socially isolated, young, and lacking familiarity with prison life (Ireland and Qualter, 2008). However, height and weight were not related to bullying or victimization (Archer and Southall, 2009). The Multifactor Model of Bullying in Secure Settings (Ireland, 2012) highlights how pre-existing individual factors can interact with social aspects of prison environments (e.g. the presence of a prisoner hierarchy based on dominance and power, and an inmate code that supports the use of aggression) to promote aggression in an institution. The adoption of the inmate code and its attitudes and beliefs has been referred to as a survival mechanism (Paterline and Petersen, 1999). More established prisoners are more familiar with the inmate code, while prisoners who are newer to institutional care are less likely to be familiar with the inmate code and consequently at a greater risk of being bullied.

West and Farrington (1977) found that young offenders differed from non-offenders in many ways. In particular, offenders were more likely to spend time hanging about, to be involved with antisocial groups, heavy drinkers, heavy smokers, heavy gamblers, drug users, tattooed, and to have aggressive attitudes. In light of the association between bullying and offending (e.g. Tfofi *et al.*, 2011), it might be expected that bullies would share many of these features.

Based on prior research, the following hypotheses will be tested in this paper:

- H1. Compared to non-bullies, bullies tend to have: (a) spent longer in the institution; (b) more extensive criminal records; (c) been a bully in a previous institution; (d) been a bully in school; (e) more criminal friends; (f) more aggressive attitudes.
- H2. Compared to non-victims, victims tend to: (a) be socially isolated in custody; (b) be younger; (c) have been a victim in a previous institution; (d) have been a victim in school; (e) have mental health problems.

Method

Pilot work

Connell and Farrington (1996) developed an interview schedule for bullying. They carried out two pilot studies in Ontario, Canada, each with ten male young offenders aged 16-18 in an open custody facility. In the first pilot study, the questions were given in a self-completed questionnaire

in groups, but this was found to be unsatisfactory, because victims would not admit being bullied, because of literacy problems of young offenders, and because of varying interpretations of terms such as bullying. Therefore, in the second pilot study, the questions were given in an individual interview, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. The questions can be found in Connell and Farrington (1996). The definition of bullying (based on the definition of school bullying by Olweus, 1993) was as follows:

Here are some questions about bullying. We say that a resident is being bullied when s/he is pressured, threatened, intimidated (for example for money, food, or cigarettes) or made to do things against his/her will, including sexual acts. It is bullying if a resident is beaten up, hit, pushed, kicked, or restrained, if no one ever talks to a resident or when someone tries to bother him/her by saying mean or unpleasant things. These things happen to the resident often, usually by the same people or groups of people, and it is hard for the resident being bullied to defend him/herself. It is not bullying when two residents of about the same strength sometimes have a fight.

Using this method, Connell and Farrington (1997) then studied the reliability and validity of resident, peer and staff reports of bullying and victimization in two Ontario young offender institutions, one open custody and one secure custody. Residents, peers, and staff agreed quite well in identifying bullies and victims (out of 34 young offenders). Generally, the validity, and the prevalence of bullying, was highest in resident reports. For example, in 87 per cent of 215 cases where a resident was identified as a bully by both peers and staff, the resident self-reported that he was a bully; similarly, in 87 per cent of 148 cases where a resident was identified as a victim by both peers and staff, the resident self-reported that he was a victim.

Main study

In the main study, 190 young offenders were individually interviewed, in nine Ontario facilities; six were open custody and three were secure custody. All residents except one agreed to participate in the research. Five of the residents were female; only the 185 males are analyzed in this paper. They were all aged 16-19, and 90 per cent had been in custody before. The minimum time that they had spent in their present institution was 25 days; in light of this, all residents were asked about bullying and victimization in the previous three weeks. The average time that they had spent in their present institution was 91 days, and the median time was 48 days.

The residents were asked questions using two standardized questionnaires. The first was the bullying inventory developed in the pilot study. The second was the self-report inventory, which asked questions concerning residents' criminal and custody history, educational and family background, substance abuse, peer relations, lifestyle on the street, psychiatric/psychological history, and delinquent attitudes. This inventory was used to investigate the extent to which those offenders who are bullies, victims, or uninvolved differ from each other in the above areas. This inventory is a paper-and-pencil version of the YO-LSI, which was revised slightly for this study.

A proposal for the present study was submitted to the Research Division of the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services for approval. Once approved, directors of a number of secure and open custody facilities in the Eastern Ontario region were contacted. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to them and copies of the questionnaires and consent forms to be used in the research were forwarded to each institution. Of the ten institutions contacted, nine expressed interest in the study and agreed that the residents could be asked to participate on a voluntary basis. The tenth facility also expressed interest, but had other projects taking place in the institution.

Residents were informed of the purpose and nature of the research at the beginning of the interview. It was made clear that their participation was completely voluntary, that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of negative consequences, and that their responses on the questionnaires, as well as anything said during the interview, were confidential and used for research purposes only. It was made clear that staff of the facilities did not have access to the questionnaires. Residents were asked to complete a written consent form.

Results

Prevalence of bullying

Table I shows that 69 residents (37.3 per cent) said that they had been verbally bullied in their present institution, compared with 55 (29.7 per cent) who had been physically bullied, 20 (10.8 per cent) who had been robbed of property, 14 (7.6 per cent) who had been beaten up, and two (1.1 per cent) who had been sexually bullied.

When the questions were restricted to bullying in the last three weeks, 83 residents (44.9 per cent) said that they had bullied someone, 52 (28.1 per cent) said they had been bullied, and 22 (1.9 per cent) said that they had been both a bully and a victim. Of the 22 bully-victims, 17 said that they were most frequently victims, while five said that they were most frequently bullies. Therefore, the 17 who were most frequently victims were added to the 30 pure victims to make a total of 47 victims; and the five who were most frequently bullies were added to the 61 pure bullies to make a total of 66 bullies. In the interests of including all residents in all analyses, the 47 victims were then compared with 138 non-victims, and the 66 bullies were compared with 119 non-bullies.

Characteristics of bullies and victims

In order to make all variables comparable, they were dichotomized. For example, age was dichotomized into the youngest offenders (45 aged 16) vs the remaining 140, in order to test the hypothesis that younger offenders are more likely to be victimized. Table II shows that there was some tendency for this to be true, since 34.0 per cent of victims were aged 16, compared with 19.7 per cent of bullies and 22.2 per cent of uninvolved residents. However, victims were not significantly different in age from non-victims (Odds Ratio or OR = 1.94, 95 per cent

	<i>n</i>	%
Verbally bullied	69	37.3
Physically bullied	55	29.7
Robbed	20	10.8
Beaten up	14	7.6
Sexually bullied	2	1.1
Bully in last 3 weeks	83	44.9
Victim in last 3 weeks	52	28.1
Bully and victim in last 3 weeks	22	11.9
Bully	66	35.7
Victim	47	25.4
Uninvolved	72	38.9

Table II Demographic and background factors

	% of bullies (66)	% of uninvolved (72)	% of victims (47)	OR bullies vs non-bullies	OR victims vs non-victims
Age 16	19.7	22.2	34.0	0.67	1.94
Height 176 cm+	48.5	59.7	55.3	0.68	1.04
Weight 71 kg+	53.0	58.3	44.7	1.00	0.64
Non-English language	12.1	5.6	17.0	1.23	2.15
Non-white	12.1	5.6	4.3	2.60	0.47
Tattoos	59.1	44.4	34.0	2.14*	0.49*
50+ days in custody	63.6	31.9	55.3	2.50*	1.39
Socially isolated in custody	16.7	2.8	76.6	0.43*	31.47*

Notes: OR, Odds Ratio. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

confidence interval or CI = 0.94 to 4.02; if the CI does not include 1.0, the OR is significant at $p = 0.05$, two-tailed). As a rule of thumb, an OR of 2.0 or greater (or conversely 0.5 or less) indicates a strong relationship (Cohen, 1996). Also, bullies were not significantly different in age from non-bullies.

In order to investigate whether bullies were relatively tall and heavy, height and weight were dichotomized at the median value; however, this was not found. It might be expected that residents whose first language was not English would be differentially victimized, because they were perceived to be different, and there were some indications that this was true; 17.0 per cent of victims were in this category, compared with 8.7 per cent of non-victims. However, because of small numbers, the large OR was not statistically significant (OR = 2.15, CI = 0.82-5.65). Unlike non-English residents, non-white residents tended to be bullies; 12.1 per cent of bullies were non-white, compared with 5.0 per cent of the non-bullies, but again the large OR was not statistically significant because of small numbers (OR = 2.60, CI = 0.86-7.84).

In light of the association between tattoos and criminality (see, e.g. Jennings *et al.*, 2014), it might be expected that more bullies would be tattooed, and this was indeed found; 59.1 per cent of bullies were tattooed, compared with 40.3 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.14, CI = 1.16-3.94). It was less expected to find that victims were significantly unlikely to be tattooed (34.0 per cent of victims vs 51.4 per cent of non-victims; OR = 0.49, CI = 0.24-0.97).

As expected, bullies had spent significantly longer in custody than non-bullies; 63.6 per cent of bullies had spent 50 days or more in their present facility, compared with 41.2 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.50, CI = 1.34-4.65). The most dramatic finding was that 76.6 per cent of victims said that they were occasionally, often or always socially isolated in custody, compared with only 9.4 per cent of non-victims (OR = 31.47, CI = 13.00-76.20).

As expected, Table III shows that bullies in the institution tended to have been bullies in school; this was true of 50.0 per cent of bullies, compared with 32.8 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.05, CI = 1.11-3.81). However, there was no significant tendency for victims in the institution to have been victims of bullying in school. Victims were significantly likely to have failed a grade in school (72.3 per cent of victims, compared with 51.4 per cent of non-victims; OR = 2.47, CI = 1.20-5.08). Bullies were significantly likely to have been suspended or expelled from school (97.0 per cent of bullies, compared with 84.9 per cent of non-bullies; OR = 5.70, CI = 1.28-25.41).

As expected, bullies tended to have been bullies in a previous custodial facility; excluding those with no previous custody, this applied to 67.2 per cent of bullies, compared with 30.5 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 4.66, CI = 2.36-9.20). Similarly, victims tended to have been victims in a previous custodial facility; excluding those with no previous custody, this applied to 61.8 per cent of victims, compared with 22.2 per cent of non-victims (OR = 5.65, CI = 2.52-12.70). There was also a significant tendency for victims to have been committed to a psychiatric hospital; this was true of 38.3 per cent of victims, compared with 12.3 per cent of non-victims (OR = 4.42, CI = 2.03-9.61).

It was expected that bullies would have a more extensive criminal history, but Table IV shows that there was only a weak tendency for bullies to have had more criminal convictions since age 14.

Table III Previous history

	% of bullies (66)	% of uninvolved (72)	% of victims (47)	OR bullies vs non-bullies	OR victims vs non-victims
Bully in school	50.0	29.0	38.3	2.05*	0.96
Victim in school	37.9	24.3	27.7	1.77	0.86
Failed a grade	63.6	40.3	72.3	1.56	2.47*
Suspended/expelled	97.0	86.1	83.0	5.70*	0.46
Bully in previous custody	67.2	31.1	29.4	4.66*	0.42*
Victim in previous custody	17.2	27.4	61.8	0.32*	5.65*
Committed to psychiatric hospital	10.6	13.9	38.3	0.39*	4.42*

Notes: OR, Odds Ratio. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

Table IV Criminal history

	% of bullies (66)	% of uninvolved (72)	% of victims (47)	OR bullies vs non-bullies	OR victims vs non-victims
6+ convictions since 14	56.1	48.6	46.8	1.39	0.81
3+ times in custody	62.1	40.3	31.9	2.80*	0.46*
Committed serious offence	18.2	22.2	40.4	0.53	2.67*
Spends a lot of time in criminal activity	66.7	40.3	42.6	2.86*	0.66
Family criminality	78.8	77.8	66.0	1.37	0.54
Almost all friends criminal	87.9	79.2	70.2	2.34*	0.47
Drank alcohol most of the time	42.4	29.2	27.7	1.84	0.69
Has taken hard drugs	77.3	61.1	74.5	1.72	1.32
Has taken soft drugs	86.4	66.7	83.0	2.33*	1.53

Notes: OR, Odds Ratio. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

However, bullies tended to have more previous custodial sentences; 62.1 per cent of bullies had three or more previous sentences, compared with 37.0 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.80, CI = 1.50-5.20). It was expected that bullies would be more likely to have committed a serious offence (defined here as attempted murder, manslaughter, armed robbery, robbery, rape, assault, or indecent assault). However, Table IV shows that victims were more likely to have committed such an offence; 40.4 per cent of victims, compared with 20.3 per cent of non-victims (OR = 2.67, CI = 1.30-5.45).

It was expected that bullies would be more likely to have other family members with a criminal record, but Table IV shows that victims were (non-significantly) less likely to have criminality in the family; 66.0 per cent of victims had a criminal family member, compared with 78.3 per cent of non-victims (OR = 0.54, CI = 0.26-1.11). However, bullies were more likely to have almost all or all their friends with criminal records; 87.9 per cent of bullies, compared with 75.6 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.34, CI = 1.00-5.46).

It was expected that bullies would disproportionately be substance abusers. However, while bullies were the most likely to say that (before custody) they drank alcohol most or all of the time, they were not significantly different from non-bullies. It was also expected that bullies would be the most likely to have taken drugs (both hard and soft), but Table IV shows that bullies were only slightly worse than victims in their drug use. The only significant result was that bullies were more likely than non-bullies to have taken soft drugs such as marijuana (86.4 per cent compared with 73.1 per cent; OR = 2.33, CI = 1.03-5.24).

It was expected that bullies would be more likely to say that victims deserve to be bullied, and Table V shows that this was indeed true; 65.2 per cent of bullies agreed with this statement, compared with 37.0 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 3.19, CI = 1.70-5.97). Conversely, victims

Table V Attitudinal factors

	% of bullies (66)	% of uninvolved (72)	% of victims (47)	OR bullies vs non-bullies	OR victims vs non-victims
Victims deserve to be bullied	71.7	49.2	29.8	3.19*	0.38*
Bullying is just part of the way things work	75.8	52.8	61.7	2.43*	0.92
Anyone who insults me is asking for a fight	69.7	40.3	38.3	3.52*	0.52
I enjoy a fight	68.2	36.1	21.3	4.94*	0.26*
If anyone hits me first, I really let them have it	75.8	63.9	36.2	2.78*	0.25*
I am somewhat of a loner	19.7	13.9	40.4	0.76	3.39*

Notes: OR, Odds Ratio. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

were significantly unlikely to agree with this statement; 29.8 per cent of victims agreed, compared with 52.9 per cent of non-victims (OR = 0.38, CI = 0.19-0.77). Bullies also said that bullying was just part of the way things worked in their facility; 75.8 per cent of bullies said this, compared with 56.3 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.43, CI = 1.24-4.74).

It was expected that bullies would endorse aggressive attitudes, and this was indeed found. Table V shows that bullies tended to agree that “Anyone who insults me is asking for a fight”; 69.7 per cent of bullies agreed with this, compared with 39.5 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 3.52, CI = 1.86-6.69). Similarly, 68.2 per cent of bullies said that they enjoyed a fight, compared with 30.3 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 4.94, CI = 2.58-9.45). Victims were significantly unlikely to say that they enjoyed a fight; only 21.3 per cent of victims agreed with this, compared with 51.4 per cent of non-victims (OR = 0.26, CI = 0.12-0.55).

Perhaps not surprisingly, bullies also tended to agree that “If anyone hits me first, I really let them have it”; 75.8 per cent of bullies said this, compared with 52.9 per cent of non-bullies (OR = 2.78, CI = 1.42-5.42). Again, victims were significantly unlikely to agree with this; 36.2 per cent of victims agreed, compared with 69.6 per cent of non-victims (OR = 0.25, CI = 0.12-0.50). However, victims were significantly likely to agree that they were “somewhat of a loner”; 40.4 per cent of victims said this, compared with 16.7 per cent of non-victims (OR = 3.39, CI = 1.63-7.07).

Risk scores

In order to investigate which variables independently predicted bullying and victimization, logistic regression analyses were carried out. Table VI shows that five variables independently predicted bullying: having spent 50 days or more in the current facility, being suspended or expelled from school, and three indicators of aggressive attitudes: “I enjoy a fight”, “Victims deserve to be bullied”, and “Anyone who insults me is asking for a fight”. Three variables independently predicted victimization: being socially isolated in custody (which was by far the strongest predictor), less than three times in custody previously, and disagreeing with the statement “If anyone hits me first, I really let them have it”. Bullying and victimization in a previous facility were excluded from these analyses, in order to include all young offenders in all analyses.

These independent predictors were then used to construct risk scores for bullying and victimization. The scores were very simple, because one point was given for every risk factor that the person possessed. Thus, the bullying risk score varied from 0 to 5 and the victimization risk score varied from 0 to 3. Table VII shows that these risk scores were remarkably efficient in identifying bullies and victims. The percentage who were bullies increased from none of those scoring 0-1 to 81.3 per cent of those with all five risk factors. Similarly, the percentage who were victims increased from none of those scoring 0 to 90 per cent of those with all three risk factors. The area under the ROC curve was high in both cases: 0.801 for bullying and 0.830 for victimization.

Table VI Logistic regression analyses

	<i>LRCS change</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>POR</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Bullies</i>				
I enjoy a fight	25.14	0.0001	2.56	0.008
Victims deserve to be bullied	10.80	0.0005	2.65	0.004
50+ days in custody	5.52	0.009	3.84	0.0007
Suspended/expelled	6.63	0.005	11.34	0.003
Anyone who insults me is asking for a fight	9.57	0.001	3.85	0.001
<i>Victims</i>				
Socially isolated in custody	76.59	0.0001	36.02	0.0001
3+ times in custody (–)	8.43	0.002	0.28	0.008
If anyone hits me first, I really let them have it (–)	2.57	0.055	0.47	0.054

Notes: *n* = 185. LRCS, Likelihood Ratio Chi-Squared; POR, Partial Odds Ratio. *p* values two-tailed

Table VII Predicting bullies and victims

Bullying risk score	Non-bullies	Bullies	% bullies
0-1	29	0	0.0
2	42	6	12.5
3	27	25	48.1
4	18	22	55.0
5	3	13	81.3
Total	119	66	35.7
Victimization risk score	Non-victims	Victims	% victims
0	47	0	0.0
1	61	14	18.7
2	28	15	34.9
3	2	18	90.0
Total	138	47	25.4

Note: Area under the ROC curve = 0.801 (SE = 0.032) for the bullying risk score, and 0.830 (SE = 0.033) for the victimization risk score

Discussion

The results of the present research indicate that bullies and victims differ significantly on a number of important variables. Generally, the results suggest that bullies can be characterized as having extensive custody and offending histories, tend to use drugs, and have difficulty staying in school, most likely due to conduct problems or disruptive behaviour. They lead criminal lifestyles on the street and spend time with a predominantly criminal peer group. They have aggressive personalities and hold attitudes supportive of the use of physical aggression in interpersonal situations. It might be said that bullies are the most “criminal” of the offender population. Their high overall level of risk and need suggests that they are at high risk of reoffending upon release.

Not surprisingly, bullies were significantly more likely than others to have bullied in both school and previous custody. Therefore, bullying behaviour, like aggressive behaviour in general, appears to persist over time and across situations. Victims tend to be “loners” with psychiatric needs, have low school attainment, and they were often victims in previous facilities. Interestingly, they were no more likely than other young offenders to have been bullied in school. They tend to be non-aggressive, less experienced with custody and the criminal lifestyle, and socially isolated in custody.

The finding that bullies and victims did not differ significantly from uninvolved residents with respect to weight and height dispels the simple notion that bullying behaviour consists of larger offenders picking on smaller offenders.

There were two specific attitudes of particular interest in the current study, namely “Anyone who insults me is asking for a fight” and “If anyone hits me first I really let them have it”. Both can be described as normative beliefs supporting the use of aggression, in that each is likely to trigger an aggressive script and thereby increase the risk of aggression taking place (Huesmann, 1998; Ireland, 2008a). Although the current study could not ascertain cause and effect, the identification of such beliefs as held by bullies does suggest that these are particularly characteristic of those who are willing to bully others. This also supports previous research with prisoners that has identified the importance of such beliefs in the perpetrators of bullying (Ireland, 2011). Beliefs and attitudes are important targets for treatment.

It is also worth noting the other two beliefs that appeared to distinguish bullies, namely “Victims deserve to be bullied” and “I enjoy a fight”. The former is consistent with beliefs aligned with victim blaming and arguably is utilized to justify or excuse acts of aggression towards others. The latter belief is particularly important in that it is a belief that positively reinforces the use of future aggression. Enjoyment following an act of aggression is a positive reinforcer and therefore is linked to the likelihood of increased future aggression. The presence of an identified positive reinforcer (i.e. enjoyment) is an indicator of an important treatment target when trying to address factors promoting the use of aggression (Ireland, 2008b).

Victims did not have similarly aggressive attitudes to bullies, and nor did they have considerable experience of custodial care. This suggests that the victims in the current sample were not particularly acclimatized to life in the facility. This could expose them to an increased risk of being victimized, as they are not as familiar with the social structure of the institution, which is desirable for survival in prison (Paterline and Petersen, 1999).

The finding that victims were socially isolated is consistent with much previous research (e.g. Ireland and Qualter, 2008). It suggests that these victims were individuals who did not have friends who could protect them against bullying. This is speculative but the combination of the finding that they were socially isolated, coupled with their lack of experience with custodial care, does suggest that these factors may be useful in explaining their victimization. Future research could address this topic in more detail by investigating the process by which people become victims.

The current study is limited by the fact that it is not a longitudinal study and cannot therefore identify causal processes. For example, a longitudinal study could investigate whether residents were victims soon after they entered the facility and then became bullies later. Also, the sample size was not large enough to study residents who were both bullies and victims. A further problem is that the presence of the interviewer may have influenced the results. However, the pilot studies showed that more complete and valid data was obtained by asking questions (with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality) in the context of an individual interview rather than by using self-completed questionnaires.

The risk scores suggest that it might be possible to develop risk/needs assessment instruments at prison entry that identify likely bullies and victims (see Andrews *et al.*, 1990). However, if young offenders knew that their attitudes might influence their treatment, they might not answer honestly. It would then be desirable to search for non-transparent items that correlated with the more transparent attitudinal items. The results in this paper are not based on true prediction, with risk factors clearly measured before outcomes; however, it seems likely that risk/needs assessment instruments with predictive validity could be developed. Such instruments are needed to guide the targets for and choice of intervention to reduce institutional bullying and victimization.

The present research has implications for both future research and correctional policy. The results discussed in the paper provide basic information about the prevalence and types of bullying, and about the characteristics of bullies and victims. Information about the types of offenders who are likely to become bullies and victims should be useful to correctional practitioners and policy makers. This knowledge could help them to identify likely bullies and victims and to develop effective prevention measures. Like offending, bullying arises from interactions between potential offenders and potential victims in environments that provide opportunities. However, bullying is potentially more controllable than offending. It is easier to implement and evaluate bullying prevention programmes in penal institutions than more general crime prevention programmes in the community. Prevention measures that are successful in reducing bullying would not only facilitate the management of young offender institutions, but would also help to ensure the welfare of residents. That would be in everyone's interests.

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