



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2011)

BSc (University of Victoria, 2008)

**“Trajectories of Peer Victimization in Elementary School Children and
Associated Changes in Mental Health, Social Competence, and School Climate”**

Department of Psychology

Monday, January 9, 2016

1:00PM

David Turpin Building

Room A137

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Andrea Piccinin, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

Dr. Sibylle Talmon-Gros Artz, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Outside Member)

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Dr. Shelley Hymel, Education & Counselling Psychology & Special Education, UBC

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. April Nowell, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Abstract

Peer victimization among children is a major concern in our society as it is associated with a number of adjustment difficulties that manifest over time. Although peer victimization declines for most children during the elementary school years, research suggests that a considerable percentage of children continue to report high-stable or increasing levels of peer victimization over time. However, little is known about the developmental changes that explain why children become locked into these high-risk groups. Using a longitudinal sample of children in grades 1-4 followed across 5 waves of assessments, this dissertation investigated how differences in the chronicity of children's peer victimization experiences relate to changes in their mental health (internalizing and externalizing symptoms), social competence (prosocial leadership and social responsibility), and experiences of school climate.

Latent class analyses revealed that children follow 4 distinct trajectory groups of physical and relational victimization characterized by chronically high ($ns = 102$ & 199), increasing ($ns = 115$ & 169), decreasing ($ns = 466$ & 174) or low stable ($ns = 1260$ & 1402) levels of physical and relational peer victimization across time. Findings from multilevel analyses showed that the peer victimization subgroups also varied in their longitudinal patterns of mental health, social competence and school climate. Children who had chronically high levels of peer victimization had corresponding elevated mental health symptoms, low levels of social competence and poor experiences of school climate over time. Children who reported increasing levels of peer victimization over time had slower rates of improvement in their social competence than children in the low stable group. Furthermore, children with increasing levels of peer victimization also had declining experiences of school climate over time compared to children in the low stable peer victimization group. The heterogeneity in children's experiences of peer victimization suggest that programs need to tailor prevention efforts to the specific needs of at-risk children who adjust differently to their victimization experiences.