**Health and Risk behaviours of bystanders - an Integrative theoretical Model of bystanders’ reactions to mistreatment.**

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**Abstract**

The current paper’s overreaching goal is to construct a comprehensive theoretical model that outlines bystanders’ emotional and behavioural responses to mistreatment of adolescent peers that captures bystanders' risk and health risks behaviours, which were overlooked thus far in the context of bystanders’ reactions. When addressed, risk and health behaviours were treated separately concerning the bystanders of bullying among adolescents. Specifically, we will present the emotional and cognitive routes that start with observing mistreatment and, consequently, lead to the bully/victim's reactions. Our model takes into account a set of responses that demonstrate bystanders’ risk and health risks behaviours directed to the bystander himself as a victim by proxy. The current study’s theoretical framework is the conservation of resources theory, positing that personal resources (i.e., potency and moral disengagement) and social resources impacts the process which leads to bystanders’ reactions.

Thus far, scholars have overlooked bystanders' integrative viewpoint, and comprehensive models that explain bystanders’ behavioural and emotional responses are scantly addressed. Recently two models concerning workplace bullying were presented. Nevertheless, these models overlooked core features integrated into the current model, such as risk and health risk behaviours embedded in the proposed model. All in all, the present work will enable a more comprehensive understanding of bystanders' motivations and reactions.

**Introduction**

Bullying among adolescents in schools has been widely addressed (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). A plethora of research on the subject (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012) focused mainly on the dyadic interplay between bullies and victims (Cowie, 2014; Hutchinson, 2014). As bullying rarely occurs without others observing it, a comprehensive viewpoint of studying bullying should include bystanders, who are pushed to become the most prominent group impacted by bullying by directly observing acts of bullying or being exposed to bullying mediated by technology (Gaete et al., 2017; Knauf et al.2018; Midgett et al., 2020).

One route of studying bullying bystanders considered bystanders as ‘victims by proxy. This research line focused on how witnessing bullying acts impacts bystanders’ well-being and psychological health (Midgett et al., 2020). This theme of research demonstrated a correlation between witnessing an act of bullying and suicide ideation (Rivers & Noret, 2013), symptoms of depression among bystanders (Rivers et al.,2009), repression of empathy of bystanders (Janson & Hazler, 2004) and increased guilt feelings (Hutchinson, 2012). The underlying assumption of this research route is that bystanders are passively victimized in the act of bullying.

Other researchers took a different perspective by noting that bystanders are more than victims by proxy. This separated approach's underlying assumption is that bystanders’ behaviours and actions can have pronounced effects on all elements of the bullying process and, more specifically, on the continuation or inhibition of bullying (Espelage et al., 2012). These impacts consist of various emotional and behavioural responses of the bystander, some of which are constructive (e.g., active or passive), driven by the bystander's willingness to help the victim out of taking responsibility (Espelage et al., 2012; Midgett et al., 2020).

Another set of reactions are destructive (Chen et al., 2016; Midgett et al., 2020). While active destructive behaviours are driven by the belief that the victim deserves to be mistreated and are actively become part of the perpetration, passive destructive behaviours are avoidance reactions that enhances the offender’s sense of control, power, and position. In this sense especially when it comes to adolescents who are shaping their identity, the audience (i.e passive bystanders are used and needed and as such they also shape their own identity as merely audience (sheep role).

Beyond scant evidence for a wide stance on bystanders' roles, such as Chen et al. (2016), who mentioned all six roles of bystanders, including victims, these two distinct viewpoints were separately addressed for the most part. Moreover, by focusing on bystanders as victims, beyond the mental implications noted, an additional route of behavioural responses of witnesses directed toward the bystanders themselves was overlooked (Giorgi 2010; Nielsen et al., 2017). Conceptually, looking at risk and health risk behaviours as bystanders' reactions to bullying can bridge the gap between the two separated perspectives mentioned above. It allows integration of bystanders' standpoint as ‘victims by proxy’ view with the alternative viewpoint, which views bystanders as part of the process under a unified set of bystanders’ behaviours.

Looking at the complete portfolio of reactions raises two profound questions concerning the determinants of the different perspectives and the process that directs them. The first question focuses on the nature of the factors that determine the bystander's choice, and the second concerns the process underlying this choice.

Concerning the first question, various scholars focused on different determinants, yet none draw a complete model that addresses multiple antecedents. In this regards, Gaete et al. (2017) focused on former experience as an antecedent for substance abuse among bystanders; Hutchinson (2012) focused on the social context of bystanders and the psychological costs of bystanding; Knauf et al. (2018) focused on various determinants such as moral disengagement, empathy and self-efficacy and feeling of responsibility as antecedents of bystanders’ reactions; Espelage et al. (2012) focused on age, gender, social context (i.e., norms) willingness to intervene and attitudes towards bullying. Still, a more comprehensive viewpoint of antecedents was presented thus far.

The second question concerns the process. Thus far, various studies have adopted the Latané and Darley (1970) model who draws a five-step orbit for bystanders' intervention: (1) noticing an event, (2) realizing the stress for action, (3) taking personal responsibility, (4) choosing an intervention, and (5) implementing the intervention. This model was utilized in social abuse situations, namely bullying (Knauf et al., 2018). The model was recently applied to bystanders’ roles (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017), yet Knauf et al. (2018) called for a profound understanding of the affective and cognitive process underlying bystanders' decisions.

In this respect, two models concerning bystanders' reactions to workplace bullying, which has the potential to address this gap, were put to the front recently and presented an integrated viewpoint of responses in one integrated model (Ng et al., 2020; Niven et al., 2020). These models captured a more integrative view regarding bystanders' reactions by suggesting an active/passive constructive/destructive idea of bystanders' reactions. Niven et al. (2020) answered Knauf et al. (2018) call. They outlined a cognitive-emotional process triggered by witnessing bullying and ignites a set of active/passive constructive/destructive responses driven by emotions. This illuminating approach, although it captures a broader range of reactions, has three lacunas. Firstly, the authors overlooked the dynamic nature of emotions as a trigger to a dynamic set of responses, as described by (Dolev et al., 2020). Secondly, the authors overlooked the possible implication of these reactions on future events beyond the bully-perpetrator repeated interaction, namely hypervigilance of the bystander in future unrelated events. Lastly, the model ignores the bystander's behaviours, which affect the bystander himself, namely risk and health risk behaviours. Ng et al. (2020) presented an advanced version of the model in terms of its dynamicity. The authors proposed a dynamic model that considers the transformation of behaviours over time in a continuous bullying episode. The authors groundbreaking model embedded Bandora et al. (1996) conceptualization of Moral disengagement as suggested by Knauf et al. (2018). Yet it fails to capture those behaviours directed toward the self, namely risk and health risks behaviours of bystanders (Giorgi 2015; Nielsen et al., 2017), overlooking the role of emotions in the ongoing process and overlooking the impact on bystanders’ future hypervigilance in future distinct episodes of bullying.

Thus, to address these gaps, the overarching purpose of the current work is to present a comprehensive model that will integrate two separated perspectives of bystanders, namely, victims, by proxy and bystanders, as part of the process viewpoints to a comprehensive model that includes risk and health risks behaviours as representations of the victims by proxy approach.

The proposed model will also illustrate an ongoing process that follows bystanders’ reactions in a continuous circular process. Compared to former models, the proposed model is an attempt to contribute by considering feelings and behaviours' dynamicity overtime.

**The current models’ framework.**

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, used in this work as a theoretical framework, proposes a dynamic model of stress that helps us understand how individuals' coping resources function in the process of reducing their exposed stressors (Hobfull, 2001; Hobfoll et al.,2018; Lev-Wiesel et al., 2013; Lev-Wiesel et al., 1998). Several studies have consistently shown that individual psychological differences lead to the adoption of different coping strategies and other emotional and regulatory resources in the face of difficult situations (Dolev et al .,2020). In 30 years of research, COR was utilized in a wide array of stress-related situations mostly in organizations (Hobfoll et al.,2018) but also to explain adolescents' social rejection (Beeri and Lev-Wiesel, 2012).

COR underlying assumptions make it appropriate for understanding the drivers of bystanders’ reactions and its underlying process based on individual response to a complicated sequence of stressful conditions that occur over time (Hobfoll et al.,2018). In that sense, it takes into account the dynamicity of stress and the process underlying it. Moreover, COR can predict future behaviour (i.e. bystander behavioural response to their bystanding) not only explain reactions to a stressful event.

COR theory is based on four underlying assumptions: Firstly, it stresses that people are motivated by resource loss more than they are motivated by resource gain. Secondly, it postulates that people must invest resources to protect against resource loss, recover from loss, or gain resources. Thirdly, it stresses that Resource gain is more prominent in the context of resource loss. Fourthly, it notes that when people’s resources are outstretched or exhausted, they enter a defensive mode to preserve the self that is often defensive, aggressive, and may become irrational (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Moreover, the authors stress that losing resources impacts the resources in hand over time, which could be utilized in future stressful iterations. This notion illustrates both the dynamicity of processes as well as their predictive power.

Although COR was initially utilized in an organizational setting, it was embraced by other scholars to explain the social rejection of adolescents (Beeri & Lev-Wiesel, 2012). In this respect, the authors considered potency, a personal resource, and social support as a social resource, as resources that buffer the interrelations between social rejection, depression and post-traumatic stress drivers. In the COR framework, these resources will explain bystanders' cognitive emotional and behavioural reactions.

Individuals' ability to achieve specific goals is conditioned by their personal resources, which are defined as traits that enable people to deal with adverse life events and stressful situations (Ben-Sira 1993; Goldner et al., 2019; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Among others, these traits include potency (Ben-Sira 1985). The potency is defined as self-control, self-confidence, belief in society as significant and just, and the belief in social support. Unlike self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience, which refer mainly to a person’s intrapersonal resources and are manifested through one’s sense of mastery, the concept of potency beyond its self-centered focus also has to do with the individual’s commitment to the social environment, which is perceived as basically meaningful, predictable, and just (Goldner et al., 2019). Additionally, Moral disengagement will explain risk and health risk behaviours as part of the model.

Moral Disengagement (MD) theory focuses on the processes by which self-regulatory mechanisms are deactivated to maintain a moral image of oneself (Bandura, 2002), eliciting unethical behaviours without violating internal standards of morality (Bandura, 2002) and without producing feelings of remorse, guilt or shame (Martin et al., 2014). As ethical and unethical behaviours are products of the reciprocal interplay between personal and social influences and are thus socially embedded (Bandura, 2002), it can be expected that once MD is activated it would be socially learned by others. Bandura (2002) argued that the relationship between moral reasoning and action is mediated by Moral Disengagement: a self-regulatory process that enables moral agency and helps individuals reduce tensions associated with unethical behaviours. In particular, he suggested eight mechanisms which enhance moral disengagement by distortion of moral judgment: Moral justification; Euphemistic language; Advantageous comparison; Distortion of consequences; Diffusion of responsibility; Displacement of responsibility; Attribution of blame; and Dehumanization (Bandura, 2002)

In particular, we suggest that bystanders may use some of these mechanisms to justify their reactions toward the victim and perpetrator and their self-risk and health risk behaviours in congruence with their resources inventory.

Personal and social resources

Bystander morals and values

Moral Disengagement

Locus of control

Active

Passive

Hypervigilance

Destructive

Health and risk behaviours

Active constructive

Passive constructive

Passive destructive

Active destructive

Supporting perpetrator

Active constructive

Passive constructive

Passive destructive

Active destructive

Ignoring the victim

Active constructive

Passive constructive

Passive destructive

Active destructive

Withnessing mistreatment

Emotional Reaction

Cognitive Appraisal

Supporting victim activtivly

Active constructive

Passive constructive

Passive destructive

Active destructive

Supporting victim passivly

Active constructive

Passive constructive

Passive destructive

Active destructive

Constructive

**Process and dynamics of bystanders’ reactions in the framework of COR: The current model**

INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

Figure one provides an overview of our model. To start with, our proposed model suggests that the observation of bullying triggers a process leading to bystanders’ responses. Once bullying is observed, a cognitive appraisal process is ignited (Ng et al., 2020; Niven et al.,2020), followed by an emotional response (Niven et al.,2020). Emotions provide invaluable self-information and information about various interactions between individuals and their environments (Ben-Zeev, 2001). Indeed, cognitive appraisals underlying emotions and emotional responses are crucial to studying emotional experiences (Lazarus, 1991). According to the Theory of Cognitive Appraisal of Emotions (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), cognitive appraisal denotes a process by which individuals assess why, and to what extent social encounters are stressful. At the same time, coping describes processes by which individuals manage the demands of person-environment relationships and their emotions (Lazarus, 1991). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), psychological stress occurs when individuals appraise relationships with their environments as potentially damaging to their well-being. In particular, it has been argued that negative appraisals of the experience (i.e. observing an act of bullying), induce negative emotions which trigger bystander reactions.

In this respect, active emotions, such as anger, based on high personal resources, were found to lead to actions aimed at supporting the?, while passive emotions such as fear lead to avoidance (Dolev et al., 2020). Passive and active emotions may co-exist as part of a single reaction and change over time (Dolev et al., 2020). Thus, we can view emotions as Ng et al. (2020) consider the appraisal an ongoing dynamic process. Other scholars similarly stressed that fear would lead to withdrawal behaviour, and anger will actively support the victim. The authors also noted that schadenfreude would lead to revictimizing the victim and sympathy will lead to passive helping the victim (Niven et al.,2020).

COR framework can contribute to Lazarus Cognitive Appraisal of Emotions (1991) theory in two aspects: Firstly, it can deepen the underlying process behind the decision concerning coping strategy. Secondly, it enables predicting future behaviour based on current perceived stress and correspondence with future implications on the individual resource inventory (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

In terms of COR, a cognitive appraisal is focused on both, the current threatening to one's resources, and the future implications of reactions to these resources (Hobfull, 2001; Hobfoll et al.,2018). On the one hand, witnessing the bullying act itself threatens the personal perception of the self-control and the belief in a just and ordered society, two potency components (Beeri & Lev-Wiesel, 2012). Thus, it calls for an action to defend these resources. On the other hand, any future reaction of the bystander can have implications on these components and other potency components such as individual self-confidence and individuals’ perception of his relationship with society. In this sense, we posit that four types of responses can be elicited out of the cognitive evaluation and emotional stimuli following it, all of which depends upon the inventory of personal and social resources, namely potency and social support. In line with Paull et al. (2012), these reactions can be divided into four categories of responses on two dimensions - active-passive and constructive- destructive.

Individuals with high potency (i.e. high self-confidence, a heightened sense of control, and belief in the existence of a just and supportive society), will be motivated and cognitively tuned to support the victim actively. Such support is shaped by their potency (Goldner et al., 2019), will help them maintain their future potency, especially with relation to their view of society and presumably restore peaceful life, identified by Hobfoll (2001) as a resource.

In this regard especially if they have social support, they can actively confront the perpetrator or call for external assistance(Espelage et al., 2012). This notion leans on social setting and personal resources nourished from the social environment (Hobfoll, 2001). Thus far research showed various antecedents of active support towards the victim such as empathy (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2018); Willingness to intervene (Espelage et al., 2012); Gender which was considered as an antecedent of empathy (Espelage et al., 2012; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2018); or taking responsibility (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012), all which can be regarded as components of potency.

In case individuals cognitively evaluate that active confrontation with the perpetrator will jeopardize some of their resources, they can still support the victim passively (Ng et al. (2020). They maintain their potency regarding their commitment to the society and their belief in a just world without jeopardizing other potency components such as their self-confidence that might be demanded when confronting a strong perpetrator.

The two other suggested recreations in our model collapse to a destructive type of reactions. Firstly, bystanders can actively support the bully in a set of responses identified in the literature as reinforcers (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). We posit that such behaviour is more prevalent among individuals with low potency that do not believe in a just world or in their ability to make it such. Former studies identified a higher correlation between moral disengagement and ? incomplete sentence

We believe that low resources (i.e. potency) can’t solely explain the willingness to help the perpetrator and overlook the victims' feelings, and overall experience. We stress that the utilization of moral disengagement is also required. An individual who assists a bully or ignores the act would predictably develop guilt and remorse, impacting his future self-esteem resources. This notion relies on Hutchinson (2012), who found that feelings of guilt due to bystanders' inaction challenge self-esteem. To avoid these resources' loss, these individuals can utilize moral disengagement as a defensive shield. Indeed findings from various studies indicate the connection between moral disengagement and passive or active destructive bystanders’ reactions explained through MD (Hymel et al., 2005). Although helping us understand the interrelations between various antecedents and bystander reactions, these findings are not grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework.

The difference between active and passive destructive behaviour can lean on the utilization of different disengagement mechanisms. Attribution of victims’ fault (i.e. “Some kids get bullied because they deserve it, or cognitive restructuring (i. e it’s okay to join in when someone you don’t like is being bullied. “ ) can allow the bystander to cooperate with the bully. Avoiding the victim can lean on the distortion of negative consequences (i.e. getting bullied helps to make people tougher” ) or minimizing agency (i.e. adults at school should be responsible for protecting kids from bullies”; (Hymel et al., 2005’ p. 5).

COR and MD utilisation allow us to look into an additional passive destructive possible set of bystanders' behaviours, namely risk and health risk behaviours. Incorporating risk behaviours into a unified model of bystanders reactions, allows us to encompass two distinct viewpoints that thus far where separately addressed namely bystander as a victim by proxy and bystander a player in the act of bullying and part of its process.

**Health and Risk behaviours of bystanders in the framework of COR and moral disengagement**

In our proposed model, we suggest another route of bystander reactions overlooked thus far when addressing bystanders' responses to bullying. These reactions collapse into the passive destructive facet of bystander reactions. Yet, their course expresses their uniqueness. Differently from other passive destructive behaviours presented, these behaviours are directed to the bystander himself.

Various studies have found an association between bullying behaviours and substance use among adolescents. Specifically, findings demonstrate a strong association between legal substance usage and being a victim of bullying (Vieno et al.2011). Other studies supported the findings adding the use of illegal drugs such as Marijuana due to victimization from bullying (Harp-Taylor et al., 2009).

It was found that victimization triggers a similar emotional and physical impact on victims and bystanders of bullying. Specifically, the authors noted that repetitive abuse might affect bystanders and victims when the events occur later in life (Janson and Hazler, 2004). Thus, it can be assumed that bystanders will also consume substance after exposure to bullying. Indeed, Gaete et al. (2017) found that bystanders use legal and illegal substances following their bullying experience. The authors assume that distress and helplessness are rooted in this risk and health risk behaviours. Supporting evidence for that can be found that observation of bullying is interrelated with suicide ideation (Rivers and Noret, 2013).

In the framework of COR, it seems that these bystanders are reluctant to defend the victims due to low potency, yet they still have to deal with their helplessness and feeling of sympathy towards the victims. They are morally distressed as they feel they need to help but lacking the ability (or courage) to do so (Gaete et al. 2017). They may feel empathy for the victim, but they lack social self-efficacy resources that together elicit feelings of fear and empathy (Byers, 2016).

Byers (2016) argues that bystanders tend to use MD due to anxiety and frustration as a coping mechanism. Yet, in our model's framework, we argue that to cope with the frustration, they engage in substance use and tend to justify the use by utilizing MD justifications. Indeed recently, Basharpoor and Ahmadi (2020) found that moral disengagement could be a compelling factor in predicting the tendency toward high-risk behaviours among students.

In the framework of COR, we see two additional paths that allow us a developmental view of the process.

Once risk and health risks behaviours are being employed the self-confidence and self-perception is damaged. Hutchinson (2012) implied these implications by noting that the inaction by itself triggers bystanders’ shame. In terms of resources, we expect that the chances for these bystanders' constructive actions in recurrent bullying bystanding experience are reduced. This is because the resource inventory in terms of their place in society and a sense of worthiness is reduced impacting the subsequent cognitive evaluation.

Additionally, as COR is an ongoing process, it can also account for future events unrelated to the current bullying incident. Recently Salin and Notelaers (2020) shown that bystanding bullying can also be seen as an occurrence of psychological contract violation. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the process underlying psychological contract violation will explain bystander future reaction. Rousseau (1995) in her illuminating model to explain psychological contract violation, suggested that once the contract was violated, hypervigilance of the individual whose contract was violated is triggered. This arousal will trigger future bystanding according to the individual’s sensitivity level to future violence, and thus, more incidents will be notable.

**Discussion**

All in All, our model offers a novel view concerning bystander reactions. It accounts for all bystander reactions, including those typically not discussed as part of bystanders’ responses, namely risk and health risks behaviours. This is the first model that introduces a complete model of reactions in the framework of COR.

COR as a framework allows us to account for the various types of responses and the process of bystanding, suggesting a rationale for the different reactions and a developmental viewpoint of the process as a whole. Thus far, Latané and Darley (1970) were utilized as a framework for understanding bystander reactions. Yet, their model is limited in explaining the underlying rationale of the various types of responses, and it overlooks future implications of bystanding beyond the discussed incident. Specifically, our proposed model explains risk and health risks behaviours of bystanders which are scantly addressed and now are incorporated in a model that illustrates the complete range of bystanders’ behaviours.

This is the first time that the two dimensional typologies of reactions commonly used in workplace bullying research (Ng et al.,2020; Paull et al.,2012), were used to describe bullying in educational settings.

Our model also considers the dynamic nature of bullying and the dynamic nature of emotions and reactions. Only one model account for emotions and dynamicity of responses (Niven et al., 2020). Yet, it fails to incorporate risk and health risks behaviours that their incorporation in a theoretical framework, is the main contribution in our model. Thus far, the findings concerning bystanders and health and risk behaviours are scantly addressed Gaete et al.,2017) and when addressed, they are missing an integrative framework.

Our proposed model, although highlighting bystanding from a novel viewpoint, is theoretical. Future research must validate its components. Still, it suggests a comprehensive view which was fragmentary addressed thus far.

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