

The Downward Spiral of Peer Bullying – What Comes Next? **Małgorzata Wójcik, University SWPS, Warsaw Poland**

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Abstract:

Bullying at school has been shown to have serious immediate consequences and may lead to long-term detrimental effects that persist into adulthood. While numerous studies have examined the short-term impacts of bullying, far fewer have explored its enduring consequences. This study aimed to investigate how individuals interpret their experiences of peer bullying and how these experiences influence their life trajectories.

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted using a Grounded Theory framework. Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out with 20 participants who had experienced peer bullying during their school years. Data analysis revealed that the coping strategies developed in response to bullying— withholding emotional expression, heightened sensitivity to potential threats, and withdrawal from social interactions —often persisted into adulthood.

The study proposes a grounded theory of the aftermath of bullying in adulthood, offering a nuanced understanding of how early victimization is linked to long-term psychosocial outcomes. The findings underscore the need for further research into the lasting effects of childhood peer bullying and highlight the importance of early interventions aimed at mitigating its lifelong impact.