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# Childhood predictors of violent victimization at age 17: The role of early social behavioral tendencies

Margit Averdijk\*, Denis Ribeaud\*, Manuel Eisner\*<sup>°</sup>

\*Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, University of Zurich (Switzerland)

<sup>°</sup>Violence Research Center, University of Cambridge

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## Overview

- Adolescents face an increased risk of violent victimization
- Violence against adolescents can have detrimental consequences
- Most prior research has focused on situational determinants (e.g. places, people)
- Research suggests importance of non-situational characteristics, e.g. socio-psychological characteristics in unwillingly increasing victimization risk



## Socio-psychological characteristics and victimization

- Lower self-control associated with higher victimization
- Internalizing problems, lacking social competencies and heightened reassurance seeking disturb interpersonal relationships
- Social isolation and lacking social support may reinforce label of being an easy prey
- Externalizing behavior related to higher victimization
  - Shared psychological, biological or environmental conditions
  - Sets process in motion, e.g., disturbed personal relationships



## This paper (1)

Draw from developmental perspectives and victimization research to ask whether childhood behavioral tendencies predict later victimization.

- Considerable stability in youths' social behavioral profile
  - Short-term relation between such profiles and victimization may extend into long-term
- Developmental cascades: early risks may accumulate and escalate over time
- Considerable stability in violent victimization over time -> underlying traits?



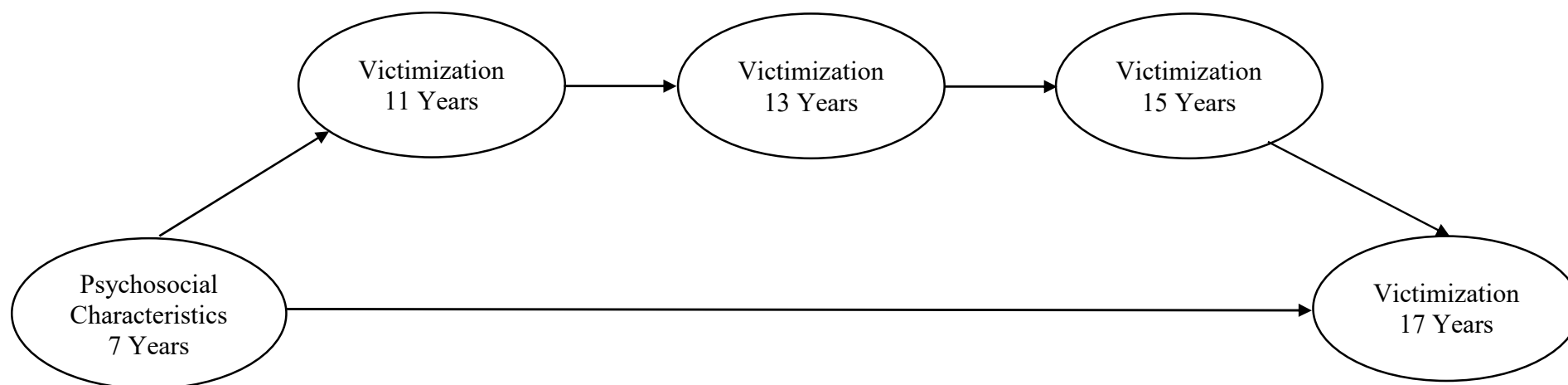
## This paper (2)

### Questions:

1. Are early social behavioral tendencies associated with violent victimization risk?
2. Is the relation mediated by victimization in early and middle adolescence (i.e., differences in victimization risk in early adolescence may be carried forward)?
3. Are there differences by gender?



## Model





## Data

- Zurich Project on the Social Development of Childhood into Adulthood (z-proso, Switzerland) (Eisner & Ribeaud, 2005)
- First wave: age 7, most recent wave: age 17
- Target sample wave 1: 1,675 first graders in 56 schools
- Participation rate at age 17: 78% of initial target sample
- Informants: children/youths, parents, teachers



## Violent victimization at age 11-17

Self-report 12-month prevalence of:

- Robbery
- Assault with injury with weapon/object
- Assault with injury without weapon/object
- Sexual assault (not at age 11)
- Simple assault
- Sexual harassment (not at age 11)





## Social behavior at age 7

- Social Behavior Questionnaire (children, parents, teachers)
  - Internalizing (anxiety and depression)
  - Externalizing (aggression, ADHD, non-aggressive conduct disorder)
  - Prosocial behavior
- Peer relations: popular, bullied, avoided/isolated
- Competent problem solving: responses to vignettes
- Dominance
- Sensation seeking: board game
- Control variables: ethnicity, SES



## Analysis

- Path models in Mplus
- Maximum likelihood with robust standard errors
- Corrected for clustering within classes
- Models for all youths and males were modeled using negative binomial models due to dispersion

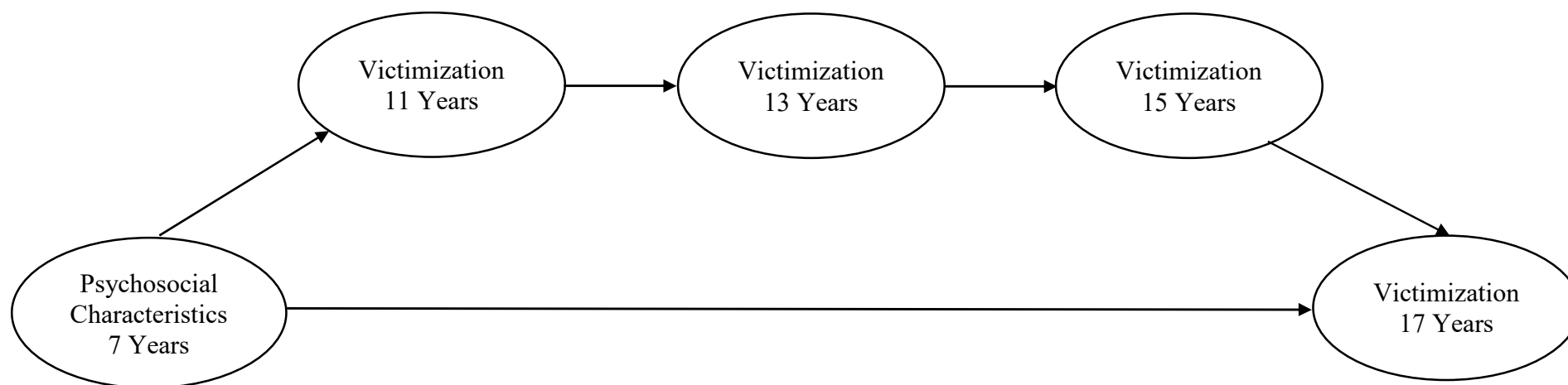


## Victimization among 17-year-olds

	All	Males	Females
Violent victimization	31%	23%	39%
Per crime-type			
Robbery	3%	4%	2%
Assault with weapon	2%	3%	1%
Assault without weapon	4%	6%	3%
Sexual assault	1%	0%	1%
Physical violence	10%	13%	6%
Sexual harassment	20%	6%	33%



## Direct effects



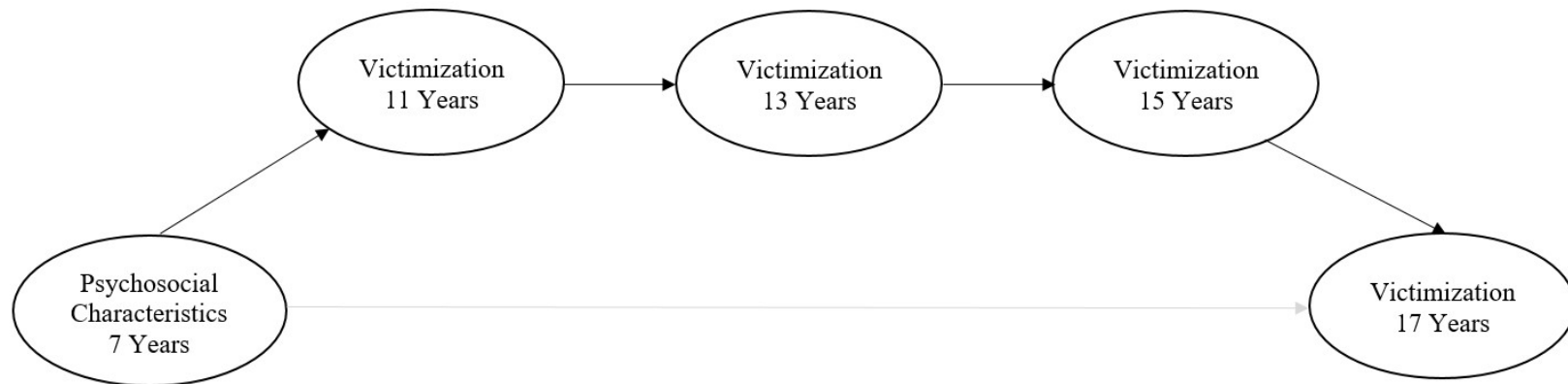


## Direct effects

Variable	All	Males	Females
Effects on W7 Victimization			
W6 Victimization	0.425**	0.455**	0.434**
Anxiety and depression	-0.216*	-0.246	-0.183†
Externalizing behavior	0.069	0.030	0.036
Prosocial behavior	0.087	-0.001	0.164
Negative peer relations	0.096	0.260†	0.050
Competent problem solving	-0.191	-0.502†	0.207
Dominance	0.079	-0.083	0.178**
Sensation seeking	0.588**	1.284**	0.295
Sex (male)	0.531**	--	--
Swiss	0.040	0.139	-0.090
SES	-0.001	-0.006	0.004
Effects on W6 Victimization			
W5 Victimization	0.282**	0.228**	0.367**
Effects on W5 Victimization			
W4 Victimization	0.253**	0.245**	0.249**
Effects on W4 Victimization			
Anxiety and depression	0.056	0.102	0.026
Externalizing behavior	0.213**	0.231**	0.191*
Prosocial behavior	0.143**	0.228**	0.021
Negative peer relations	0.110*	0.162*	0.043
Competent problem solving	-0.004	-0.061	0.101
Dominance	-0.032	-0.048	-0.010
Sensation seeking	0.124	0.053	0.182
Sex (male)	-0.249**	--	--
Swiss	0.011	0.134	-0.118
SES	0.003	0.006*	-0.001



## Indirect effects (1)





## Indirect effects (2)

Indirect effects	All	Males	Females
Anxiety and Depression->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.002	0.003	0.001
Externalizing->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.006**	0.006*	0.008*
Prosocial behavior->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.004*	0.006*	0.001
Negative peer relations->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.003*	0.004†	0.002
Social problem solving->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.000	-0.002	0.004
Dominance->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	-0.001	-0.001	0.000
Sensation seeking->W4Vict->W5Vict->W6Vict->W7Vict	0.004	0.001	0.007



## Conclusion (1)

- Several early behavioral tendencies are related to victimization risk ten years later
- Suggest potential importance of:
  - person-specific factors besides situational perspectives
  - life-course model: increased victimization risk of children with certain behavioral tendencies is carried forward into late adolescence
  - -> childhood behavior problems may be early indicators for a long-term pattern in victimization





## Conclusion (2)

- Differences between males and females:
  - Males: Sensation-seeking, externalizing, prosociality, negative peer relations
  - Females: Dominance, externalizing
  - -> To some extent indicative of gender atypicality



## Conclusion (3)

- Prior victimization consistently related to later victimization
  - General propensity underlying both (risk heterogeneity)
  - Prior victimization may exacerbate risk by instigating a process of increased vulnerability (e.g., maladaptive coping strategies)
- Implications for prevention:
  - Early programs that mitigate the effects of or reduce early risk factors have the potential to reduce later victimization
  - RCTs with long-term follow-ups are rare though, esp. for victimization