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The Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Peer Bullying Victimization in Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Parenting Styles

Saeideh. Soltani Nejad[1], Marjan. Albehbahani[2*]

[1] M.A., Department of Clinical Psychology, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: marjan.albehbahai@iau.ac.ir

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization among adolescents and to examine the mediating role of parenting styles in this relationship. This descriptive-correlational study was conducted among adolescents enrolled in upper-secondary schools in Shiraz, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Using multistage cluster sampling, 250 students were selected from educational districts 2 and 4. Data were collected using the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale, the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, and the Parenting Styles Questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 21 and AMOS version 26. Pearson correlation coefficients, simultaneous multiple regression, path analysis, and structural equation modeling were applied. Indirect effects were assessed using bootstrap resampling with 2,000 samples. Childhood trauma was positively correlated with peer bullying victimization ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), permissive parenting ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), and authoritarian parenting ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), and negatively correlated with authoritative parenting ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$). In the structural model, childhood trauma significantly predicted permissive parenting ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), authoritarian parenting ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), and authoritative parenting ($\beta = -.43$, $p < .001$). Permissive parenting ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$) and authoritarian parenting ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) positively predicted peer bullying victimization, whereas authoritative parenting negatively predicted victimization ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of childhood trauma on peer victimization was not significant ($\beta = .04$, $p = .477$), but its indirect effect through parenting styles was significant ($\beta = .35$, 99% CI [.22, .48], $p < .001$). The model showed acceptable fit (CMIN/DF = 2.34, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .96). Parenting styles appear to constitute an important mediating pathway linking childhood trauma to peer bullying victimization, suggesting that family-based interventions aimed at promoting authoritative parenting and reducing maladaptive parenting patterns may help decrease adolescents' vulnerability to bullying.

Keywords: *Childhood trauma, Peer bullying victimization, Parenting styles, Adolescents, Mediation, Structural equation modeling*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by rapid biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes, during which interpersonal relationships acquire heightened significance and experiences within the family and peer group can exert lasting effects on psychological adjustment. As adolescents become increasingly involved in school-based and peer-centered social networks, their exposure to interpersonal evaluation, acceptance, rejection, dominance, and victimization also increases. Among the most consequential adverse peer experiences is bullying victimization, which involves repeated exposure to harmful behaviors in a context of perceived or actual power imbalance. Such victimization may take physical, verbal, relational, or social forms and can influence an adolescent's emotional security, self-perception, interpersonal trust, school adjustment, and broader developmental trajectory. Contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes peer victimization not as an isolated school problem but as a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon embedded within family processes, emotional development, school climate, and prior adverse experiences (Cerezo et al., 2018; Estévez et al., 2019; Moradmand et al., 2023).

Peer bullying victimization has attracted considerable attention because of its associations with a wide range of adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes. Adolescents exposed to bullying frequently report elevated anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, emotional dysregulation, and difficulties in school bonding. More severe patterns of victimization have also been linked with self-injurious thoughts and behaviors and suicidal ideation, suggesting that the effects of bullying can extend beyond transient distress and become clinically significant. Longitudinal evidence indicates that childhood and adolescent bullying victimization may follow a persistent developmental course and can be associated with later self-harm-related outcomes (Wilson et al., 2023). Similarly, peer victimization has been implicated in suicidal thoughts among adolescent girls and in broader patterns of psychosocial maladjustment (Hajiyur et al., 2023). Research has also shown that different forms of victimization, including overt and relational victimization, can contribute to loneliness and phobic anxiety, which in turn may be associated with suicidal ideation (Wang et al., 2024). In addition, victimization has been identified as a relevant predictor of self-injurious behavior, particularly when emotional dysregulation and suppressed anger are involved (Golmohammadi, 2024). These findings collectively indicate that peer bullying victimization is not merely a situational conflict between adolescents but a significant developmental risk factor with implications for emotional and mental health.

The interpersonal nature of bullying is especially important because victimization occurs in a broader social ecology. Adolescents interpret threatening or humiliating peer experiences through cognitive and emotional schemas that have developed over time in interactions with significant others. Negative peer encounters may therefore have different effects depending on the individual's previous relational history, internal models of trust and safety, and family environment. Research on the psychological adjustment of victims and aggressors has demonstrated that bullying and cyberbullying are associated with impaired adjustment across several domains, indicating that victimization may operate through complex interactions among emotional vulnerability, interpersonal stress, and social support (Estévez et al., 2019). Evidence also suggests that family communication patterns are relevant to students' experiences of bullying and victimization and may contribute to anxiety among adolescents (Salimi & Kiyani, 2023). Thus, understanding why some adolescents are more vulnerable to victimization requires attention to developmental experiences that predate peer bullying and may influence both social behavior and perceived vulnerability.

One particularly important developmental factor is childhood trauma. Childhood trauma encompasses adverse experiences such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. These experiences occur during a period in which neural, emotional, interpersonal, and self-regulatory systems are still developing. As a consequence, early traumatic experiences can shape stress responsivity, affect regulation, attachment expectations, threat perception, and patterns of interpersonal functioning. Biological research has demonstrated that childhood trauma may produce enduring effects on neurobiological systems involved in stress regulation, emotional processing, and behavioral adaptation (De Bellis & Ab, 2014). Childhood trauma has also been associated with a range of later psychological and behavioral outcomes, including depressive symptoms and health-related difficulties (Schulze et al., 2019). Moreover, the consequences of trauma may vary according to the type and intensity of exposure, highlighting the importance of

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considering childhood adversity as a multidimensional rather than unitary construct (Levin et al., 2021).

From a developmental perspective, childhood trauma may increase vulnerability to later peer victimization through several mechanisms. Adolescents who have experienced maltreatment or neglect may develop difficulties with emotion regulation, assertiveness, interpersonal trust, social information processing, or boundary-setting. These difficulties may affect the way they enter, maintain, and interpret peer relationships. Some adolescents may become socially withdrawn, submissive, fearful, or excessively sensitive to rejection, whereas others may display dysregulated or reactive behaviors that can complicate peer interactions. Such patterns may inadvertently increase the probability of being targeted by aggressive peers. The neural and psychological consequences of trauma can also heighten sensitivity to threat, making social encounters more stressful and potentially reinforcing avoidance or fear-based interpersonal responses (De Bellis & Ab, 2014). Although the experience of being a victim should never be attributed to the victim's personal characteristics, developmental vulnerabilities may influence the interpersonal contexts in which bullying becomes more likely or more persistent.

The family environment is central to understanding how childhood trauma may be translated into later patterns of social functioning. Parenting practices are among the most influential dimensions of family life because they shape the child's expectations regarding emotional availability, discipline, autonomy, control, acceptance, and communication. Parenting styles are commonly conceptualized along patterns such as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting typically combines warmth, responsiveness, clear expectations, and developmentally appropriate monitoring, whereas authoritarian parenting emphasizes control, obedience, and rigid discipline. Permissive parenting is generally characterized by relatively high acceptance but limited structure, monitoring, or behavioral regulation. These parenting patterns have been associated with children's and adolescents' social competence, emotional adjustment, risk behaviors, and quality of parent-child relationships (Aghajani & Esmaeilpour, 2021; Durmusoglu Saltali & Imir, 2018; Shahvaroughi Farahani, 2022).

Parenting styles may be particularly relevant to bullying victimization because they influence the social skills and emotional competencies adolescents bring into peer relationships. A supportive and authoritative family environment may foster self-confidence, emotion regulation, problem-solving abilities, autonomy, and adaptive social interaction, all of which may function as protective resources in difficult peer contexts. In contrast, harsh, controlling, inconsistent, or insufficiently structured parenting may contribute to anxiety, dependency, low assertiveness, insecure attachment, or poor social adjustment. Research on parenting and social behavior has shown that parenting styles can predict children's patterns of social functioning (Durmusoglu Saltali & Imir, 2018), while other studies have linked parenting styles with adolescents' social skills and maladaptive schemas (Shahvaroughi Farahani, 2022). Parenting has also been recognized as an important factor in children's mental health and attachment-related functioning (Shirabadi, 2022).

Empirical evidence increasingly supports a direct association between parenting characteristics and bullying involvement. A systematic review and meta-analysis of parenting and bullying among children and adolescents concluded that parenting practices are meaningfully associated with bullying-related outcomes, reinforcing the importance of family-level variables in understanding both victimization and aggression (Chu & Chen, 2025). Similarly, dimensions of parenting style and social climate have been associated with bullying victimization in primary and secondary school students (Cerezo et al., 2018). Negative parenting practices have also been linked with psychological consequences among students exposed to school bullying. For example, adverse parenting may interact with depressed mood, low self-esteem, and poor sleep quality in the broader context of school bullying (Qi et al., 2025). These findings suggest that parenting may not simply coexist with victimization but may influence the developmental pathways through which adolescents become more or less vulnerable to peer aggression.

The quality of the parent-child relationship may also reflect broader parenting processes. Parenting efficacy and parent-child relationship quality are closely interconnected, suggesting that how parents perceive and enact their parenting roles may shape the emotional climate of the family (Su et al., 2025). Parental behaviors can affect the degree to which children feel secure, heard, supported, and capable of managing interpersonal stress. Conversely, low parental involvement or excessive coercive control may reduce opportunities for adolescents to develop autonomous coping and effective communication. Parenting styles may therefore operate as an important intermediary mechanism between early adversity and later social outcomes. Even

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when childhood trauma has occurred, subsequent parenting experiences may either amplify vulnerability or provide corrective relational experiences that promote better adjustment.

This possibility becomes especially important when considering intergenerational processes. Childhood maltreatment may influence later parenting behavior, meaning that adverse experiences can shape not only the child's immediate psychological functioning but also the broader family relational environment. Recent evidence has shown a relationship between childhood maltreatment and current parenting, while also suggesting that positive or benevolent experiences may moderate this association (Abbasi et al., 2025). This line of research indicates that parenting practices may themselves be partly embedded in earlier histories of adversity. In the context of adolescents, childhood trauma may be associated with family environments that are more authoritarian, permissive, inconsistent, or less authoritative, and these parenting patterns may subsequently influence adolescents' social functioning and vulnerability to peer victimization.

The mediating role of parenting styles is theoretically plausible because childhood trauma and peer victimization may be linked through family-based developmental pathways. Trauma can disrupt trust, emotional security, and regulation; parenting styles can either reinforce or mitigate these disruptions; and adolescents then carry these relational patterns into peer contexts. An authoritative parenting style may buffer some of the negative consequences associated with early adversity by offering warmth, predictability, and behavioral structure. By contrast, authoritarian parenting may heighten fear, submissiveness, or reduced emotional expression, whereas permissive parenting may limit opportunities for learning boundaries, assertiveness, and adaptive self-regulation. The way parents structure interactions with their children may therefore help explain why early trauma is associated with later vulnerability in peer relationships.

This framework is consistent with evidence indicating that parenting influences well-being partly through psychological and relational processes. Parenting styles have been associated with child well-being, with perceived parental stress functioning as an important mediating mechanism (Delvecchio et al., 2020). Although the exact pathways may differ across developmental stages, these findings support the broader principle that parenting is not simply a background characteristic but a process through which family stress and relational experiences can influence youth adjustment. Similarly, parenting patterns have been linked with shyness, suggesting that parental behavior may shape interpersonal inhibition and social confidence (Darabian Jiran Aliya, 2023). Such characteristics can be highly relevant in peer settings, where socially withdrawn or inhibited adolescents may have greater difficulty defending themselves or accessing supportive peer networks.

Attachment-related processes offer another explanation for the potential mediating role of parenting styles. Parenting practices contribute to children's internal representations of relationships, which can influence later expectations about trust, support, rejection, and conflict. In adolescents, attachment to parents and peers has been associated with bullying victimization, and problem-solving has been identified as an important intervening variable (Moradmand et al., 2023). Parenting styles are also related to attachment orientations and risk behaviors during adolescence (Aghajani & Esmaeilpour, 2021). These findings indicate that the family context can influence how adolescents approach peer relationships and cope with interpersonal challenges. Adolescents raised in environments characterized by responsive monitoring and emotional support may be more likely to seek help and use constructive problem-solving strategies when exposed to bullying, whereas those from highly controlling or disengaged environments may be less likely to disclose victimization or mobilize effective support.

The broader concept of resilience also emphasizes that developmental outcomes are shaped by interacting systems rather than by single risk factors in isolation. Although resilience itself is not a variable in the present study, multisystem perspectives highlight the importance of contextual resources and relational environments in shaping responses to adversity (Dewi et al., 2025). Family relationships represent one such system, and parenting styles may function as a proximal relational mechanism through which adverse childhood experiences become linked with later social outcomes. This ecological logic is particularly relevant to bullying, because victimization occurs at the intersection of personal history, peer context, school environment, and family relationships.

Research on victim-related processes further supports the need to consider social context when examining vulnerability. Neural research on identifiable victim effects demonstrates that perceptions of victims can shape prosocial decision-making, suggesting that responses to victimization are influenced by social-cognitive and empathic processes (Zhao et al., 2024). Although such research addresses a

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broader decision-making context, it reinforces the idea that victimization is embedded in interpersonal perception and social response. In school settings, the social visibility of victims, group norms, and reactions of peers and adults can influence whether victimization persists or is interrupted. Verbal aggression in educational settings may also extend beyond peer interactions; research on verbal abuse in schools has shown that harmful linguistic behavior by authority figures can represent another form of interpersonal adversity within educational environments (Yusri et al., 2025). This underscores the broader significance of relational safety in schools and the cumulative burden that repeated interpersonal harm may impose on adolescents.

At the same time, well-being outcomes are often shaped by conflict across life domains and by the availability of supportive relationships. Research on work-life conflict in adults, for instance, has shown that well-being can be influenced through mediating mechanisms that connect environmental stressors with psychological outcomes (Sirgy et al., 2025). Although the developmental context differs from adolescence, the underlying conceptual principle is relevant: stressors often exert their effects through intervening relational and psychological processes rather than exclusively through direct pathways. This supports examining parenting styles as possible mediators rather than assuming that childhood trauma necessarily has a direct and uniform effect on peer victimization.

Similarly, lived experience and relational context are increasingly emphasized in applied and psychosocial disciplines. Work highlighting lived-experience leadership has argued for the importance of incorporating experiential knowledge into the understanding of social and psychological difficulties (Hayes et al., 2025). In bullying research, this perspective is relevant because adolescents' experiences of family adversity and peer victimization are subjective, relational, and context-dependent. Their perceptions of parenting, safety, emotional support, and interpersonal control may be as important as objectively observable family characteristics in explaining how they respond to peers.

Despite the growing body of research on childhood trauma, parenting styles, and bullying victimization, these constructs are often examined separately or in pairwise relationships. Considerable evidence documents the negative consequences of childhood trauma (De Bellis & Ab, 2014; Levin et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2019), while another body of literature has established associations between parenting and children's social and psychological adjustment (Delvecchio et al., 2020; Durmusoglu Saltali & Imir, 2018; Shirabadi, 2022). Research has also independently shown that peer victimization is related to serious psychological outcomes, including anxiety, loneliness, self-injury, and suicidal ideation (Golmohammadi, 2024; Hajiyur et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2023). However, fewer studies have integrated these variables into a single explanatory model that examines whether parenting styles account for part of the association between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization.

This gap is particularly important in adolescence because family influence remains substantial even as peer relationships become more central. Parenting practices can shape adolescents' autonomy, self-confidence, social competence, coping behavior, and willingness to seek support. The relationship between parents and children may also affect adolescents' capacity to interpret peer aggression, respond assertively, disclose victimization, and recover from interpersonal stress. As a result, studying childhood trauma without considering parenting may overlook a major relational mechanism through which early adversity influences current social functioning. Conversely, examining parenting styles without considering prior traumatic experiences may underestimate the developmental conditions under which particular parenting patterns emerge or become psychologically salient.

The available evidence also suggests that negative parenting and peer victimization can become mutually reinforcing sources of stress. Adolescents who lack emotional support or effective parental monitoring may be less likely to receive early intervention when bullying occurs, while repeated victimization may intensify family conflict, withdrawal, or communication difficulties. Negative parenting practices have been associated with poorer psychological functioning in students exposed to school bullying (Qi et al., 2025), and family communication has been linked with bullying, victimization, and anxiety (Salimi & Kiyani, 2023). Furthermore, comprehensive evidence from meta-analytic research indicates that parenting variables are systematically associated with bullying among children and adolescents (Chu & Chen, 2025). These findings provide a strong empirical basis for testing parenting styles as mediating mechanisms.

From a prevention perspective, identifying such mechanisms has practical significance. Childhood trauma cannot be retrospectively changed, but parenting practices and family interactions may be more amenable to

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intervention. If parenting styles significantly mediate the association between trauma and bullying victimization, family-based interventions could potentially focus on increasing responsive, structured, and supportive parenting while reducing harsh, inconsistent, or overly permissive practices. Such approaches may strengthen adolescents' interpersonal competence and coping resources and thereby reduce vulnerability to peer victimization. The importance of parenting efficacy and parent-child relationships further supports the value of family-centered prevention strategies (Su et al., 2025). Likewise, evidence that positive experiences may moderate the effects of childhood maltreatment on later parenting suggests that adverse developmental trajectories are not necessarily fixed (Abbasi et al., 2025).

Accordingly, an integrated examination of childhood trauma, parenting styles, and peer bullying victimization can contribute to a more developmentally informed understanding of adolescent victimization. Such a model recognizes that victimization does not emerge from a single cause but may reflect the cumulative influence of earlier adverse experiences, current family processes, and peer interactions. It also provides a framework for distinguishing direct effects from indirect pathways and clarifying whether the association between childhood trauma and peer victimization is partly transmitted through permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting patterns. Given the substantial psychological burden associated with bullying victimization and the central role of the family during adolescence, examining these pathways is both theoretically and clinically relevant.

Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization among adolescents and to examine the mediating role of parenting styles in this relationship.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational research design and was conducted among adolescents studying in Shiraz, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. The statistical population consisted of all adolescents enrolled in upper-secondary schools in Shiraz. From this population, 250 adolescents were selected as the study sample. The sample size was determined according to the number of components included in the study variables. Given that the conceptual model comprised 10 principal components, 25 participants were considered for each component, resulting in a minimum required sample of 250 participants. This sample size was also considered adequate for examining the correlations among the study variables and estimating the proposed mediation model using structural equation modeling.

Participants were selected using a multistage cluster sampling procedure. In the first stage, educational districts 2 and 4 of Shiraz were randomly selected from among the educational districts of the city. In the second stage, 10 upper-secondary schools were randomly selected from each of the two chosen districts. In the third stage, two classes were randomly selected from each participating school, and students in the selected classes were considered for participation in the study until the required sample size of 250 adolescents was reached. The sampling procedure was designed to provide sufficient diversity in terms of sex, educational grade, and educational district and to reduce systematic selection bias through random selection at successive stages.

The research was implemented after obtaining the necessary authorization from the Shiraz Department of Education and coordinating with the administrators of the selected schools. Before data collection, the purpose and general procedures of the study were explained to the students, and participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that the information obtained through the questionnaires would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for research purposes. Informed consent was obtained before participation. The questionnaires were administered in group sessions in the selected classrooms, with the relevant forms also provided to parents where required by the data-collection procedure. Before completion of the questionnaires, standardized instructions were explained to participants, and any questions or ambiguities concerning how the instruments should be completed were addressed. Participants were encouraged to respond accurately and honestly, and confidentiality and anonymity were emphasized throughout the data-collection process.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (MPVS). Peer bullying victimization was assessed using the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale, a 16-item self-report instrument developed in 2000 to assess different forms of peer victimization among children and adolescents,

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particularly those between 11 and 16 years of age. The scale contains four dimensions, with four items assigned to each dimension. Physical victimization is measured by Items 6, 7, 8, and 9; verbal victimization by Items 1, 4, 5, and 16; social manipulation by Items 2, 11, 13, and 14; and attacks on property by Items 3, 10, 12, and 15. Responses are scored on a three-point scale according to the frequency with which each experience has occurred, with "never" scored 0, "once" scored 1, and "more than once" scored 2. Accordingly, the total score ranges from 0 to 32, with higher scores indicating greater exposure to peer victimization. The original developers reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .85 for physical victimization, .75 for verbal victimization, .77 for social manipulation, and .73 for attacks on property, and evidence of convergent validity was established through associations with self-reported bullying-related experiences. In an Iranian study conducted by Akbari and Talepasand in 2016, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .87 for the total scale and .71, .73, .72, and .72 for physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, and attacks on property, respectively, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .86, demonstrating adequate reliability in the study sample.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire. Childhood trauma was assessed using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, which was developed to evaluate adverse and potentially traumatic experiences occurring during childhood. The final form of the instrument consists of 28 items and assesses five major dimensions of childhood maltreatment, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, and sexual abuse. Items are rated on a five-point Likert-type response format reflecting the frequency with which the described experiences occurred, ranging from experiences reported as never occurring to those reported as occurring very frequently. Higher scores indicate greater exposure to childhood maltreatment and traumatic experiences. Previous psychometric evaluations of the questionnaire have demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with test–retest and Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .94 across its dimensions. Bernstein and colleagues also examined the construct validity of the instrument through factor analysis, with the resulting factor structure corresponding to the theoretically proposed subscales of childhood trauma. These findings have supported the use of the questionnaire as a multidimensional measure of adverse childhood experiences. In the present study, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which was .75, indicating an acceptable level of reliability for the study sample.

Parenting Styles Questionnaire. Parenting styles were measured using a questionnaire derived from the parental authority framework based on Baumrind's conceptualization of parenting styles. The instrument was developed to assess patterns of parental influence and child-rearing practices through three major parenting styles: permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting, and authoritative or rational-authority parenting. The questionnaire consists of 30 items, with 10 items measuring the permissive parenting style, 10 items assessing the authoritarian parenting style, and the remaining 10 items measuring the authoritative parenting style. Scores obtained for the three dimensions represent the extent to which each parenting approach characterizes the parental practices perceived or reported in relation to the adolescent. Previous psychometric investigations of the questionnaire have demonstrated satisfactory temporal stability. Test–retest reliability coefficients of .81 for the permissive style, .85 for the authoritarian style, and .92 for the authoritative style have been reported, indicating adequate reliability across the three dimensions. In the present study, the overall internal consistency of the Parenting Styles Questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of .84, which supported the reliability of the instrument for assessing parenting styles in the current sample.

2.3. Data Analysis

After completion and collection of the questionnaires, the data were coded, screened, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 and AMOS version 26. Statistical analyses were performed at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, means and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the distributions of childhood trauma, peer bullying victimization, and parenting-style variables. At the inferential level, Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the direction and magnitude of the bivariate relationships among the principal study variables. Multiple regression analysis using the simultaneous entry method was also employed to examine the predictive contribution of childhood trauma and the dimensions of parenting styles to peer bullying victimization.

Structural equation modeling was subsequently performed in AMOS 26 to evaluate the hypothesized model in which parenting styles mediated the relationship between

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childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization. The structural model was used to estimate the direct effect of childhood trauma on peer victimization, the effects of childhood trauma on the parenting-style dimensions, the effects of parenting styles on peer victimization, and the indirect effects of childhood trauma on peer victimization through parenting styles. Model adequacy was evaluated using conventional goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio, the root mean square error of approximation, the comparative fit index, and other relevant fit indices generated by AMOS. The statistical significance of direct and regression effects was evaluated at the .05 significance level, while the mediating effects were assessed through the indirect pathways specified in the structural model. Before conducting the main inferential analyses, the data were screened for missing responses, unusual observations, and the assumptions required for correlation, regression, and structural equation modeling so that the estimated relationships could be interpreted appropriately.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 250 adolescents studying in upper-secondary schools in Shiraz. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 years, with a mean age of 17.12 years (SD = 1.82). The sample included 125 boys (50.0%) and 125 girls (50.0%), indicating an equal gender distribution. With respect to educational grade, 75 participants (30.0%) were in Grade 10, 80 (32.0%) were in Grade 11, and 95 (38.0%) were in Grade 12. Thus, students from all three upper-secondary grade levels were represented in the study, with Grade 12 students comprising the largest proportion of the sample.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1. Peer bullying victimization	10.25	7.34	0	28	1				
2. Permissive parenting	28.78	6.65	16	46	.74**	1			
3. Authoritarian parenting	22.32	7.09	10	40	.71**	.72**	1		
4. Authoritative parenting	42.61	5.10	29	50	−.61**	−.57**	−.59**	1	
5. Childhood trauma	35.93	7.58	13	54	.40**	.39**	.38**	−.54**	1

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for peer bullying victimization was 10.25 (SD = 7.34), while the mean scores for permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting were 28.78 (SD = 6.65), 22.32 (SD = 7.09), and 42.61 (SD = 5.10), respectively. The mean childhood trauma score was 35.93 (SD = 7.58). Pearson correlation analysis showed that childhood trauma was positively and significantly associated with peer bullying victimization ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), permissive parenting ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), and authoritarian parenting ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), whereas it was negatively and significantly associated with authoritative parenting ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$). Peer bullying victimization was positively related to permissive parenting ($r = .74$, $p < .01$) and authoritarian parenting ($r = .71$, $p < .01$), but negatively related to authoritative parenting ($r = -.61$, $p < .01$). In addition, permissive and authoritarian parenting were strongly and positively correlated ($r = .72$, $p < .01$), whereas authoritative parenting was negatively associated with both permissive parenting ($r = -.57$, $p < .01$) and authoritarian parenting ($r = -.59$, $p < .01$).

Prior to testing the structural model, the assumptions required for the inferential analyses were examined. A total of 260 questionnaires had initially been completed. Examination of univariate outliers using standardized Z scores identified six cases exceeding the predetermined ±2.5 criterion, and examination of multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis distance identified an additional four cases exceeding the relevant critical value; these cases were excluded, leaving 250 observations for the final analyses. No missing data were present in the final dataset. Univariate normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis. Skewness values were .46 for peer bullying victimization, .42 for permissive parenting, .42 for authoritarian parenting, −.61 for authoritative parenting, and −.61 for childhood trauma, while the corresponding kurtosis values were −.66, −.34, −.29, −.46, and .67, respectively. All values were within acceptable ranges, supporting the assumption of univariate normality. The absence of problematic multicollinearity was also supported, as tolerance values were .43 for permissive parenting, .43 for authoritarian parenting, .42 for authoritative parenting, and .69 for

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childhood trauma, while the corresponding variance inflation factor values were 2.26, 2.31, 2.37, and 1.43. All tolerance values exceeded .10 and all VIF values were substantially below 10. Finally, the Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.07, falling within the acceptable range of 1.50 to 2.50 and indicating independence of residuals. Collectively, these findings supported proceeding with path analysis and structural equation modeling.

Table 2

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Proposed Structural Model

Fit index	Criterion	Obtained value
RMR	Smaller values indicate better fit	.73
GFI	> .90	.94
AGFI	> .90	.90
TLI	> .90	.93
NFI	> .90	.94
CFI	> .90	.96
IFI	> .90	.95
PNFI	> .50	.51
RMSEA	< .08	.07
CMIN/DF	2.00–3.00	2.34

The goodness-of-fit indices presented in Table 2 indicated that the proposed mediation model generally provided an acceptable fit to the observed data. The relative chi-square value was 2.34, which was within the recommended range, and the RMSEA was .07, indicating an acceptable approximation of the model to the population covariance structure. The incremental and comparative fit indices were also satisfactory, including GFI = .94, AGFI = .90, TLI = .93, NFI = .94, CFI = .96, and IFI = .95. The PNFI value of .51 additionally supported acceptable parsimonious fit. Taken together, the principal fit indices indicated that the structural model specifying parenting styles as mediators of the association between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization was adequately supported by the data.

Table 3

Direct and Indirect Effects in the Structural Model

Path	β	B	SE	CR	p	Result
Childhood trauma → Permissive parenting	.32	.28	.05	5.55	< .001	Significant
Childhood trauma → Authoritarian parenting	.32	.30	.05	5.41	< .001	Significant
Childhood trauma → Authoritative parenting	−.43	−.29	.03	−8.98	< .001	Significant
Authoritative parenting → Peer bullying victimization	−.22	−.28	.06	−4.83	< .001	Significant
Authoritarian parenting → Peer bullying victimization	.33	.30	.04	7.37	< .001	Significant
Permissive parenting → Peer bullying victimization	.47	.46	.04	10.37	< .001	Significant
Childhood trauma → Peer bullying victimization	.04	.033	.047	.711	.477	Not significant
Childhood trauma → Parenting styles → Peer bullying victimization	.35	—	—	—	< .001	Significant indirect effect

As presented in Table 3, childhood trauma significantly predicted all three parenting styles. Higher childhood trauma was associated with greater permissive parenting (β = .32, B = .28, SE = .05, CR = 5.55, p < .001) and greater authoritarian parenting (β = .32, B = .30, SE = .05, CR = 5.41, p < .001), whereas it was associated with lower authoritative parenting (β = −.43, B = −.29, SE = .03, CR = −8.98, p < .001). Parenting styles, in turn, significantly predicted peer bullying victimization. Permissive parenting had the strongest positive standardized association with bullying victimization (β = .47, B = .46, SE = .04, CR = 10.37, p < .001), followed by authoritarian parenting (β = .33, B = .30, SE = .04, CR = 7.37, p < .001). In contrast, authoritative parenting negatively predicted peer bullying victimization (β = −.22, B = −.28, SE = .06, CR = −4.83, p < .001). After parenting styles were entered into the model, the direct path from childhood trauma to peer bullying victimization was no longer statistically significant (β = .04, B = .033, SE = .047, CR = .711, p = .477). Nevertheless, the bootstrap analysis based on 2,000 resamples demonstrated a significant indirect effect of childhood trauma on peer bullying victimization through parenting styles (β = .35,

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99% CI [.22, .48], $p < .001$). Because the indirect effect was significant while the direct effect was nonsignificant after inclusion of the mediators, the findings supported an indirect-only mediation pattern, indicating that parenting styles played a significant mediating role in the association between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between childhood trauma and peer bullying victimization in adolescents, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of parenting styles. The findings showed that childhood trauma was positively associated with permissive and authoritarian parenting and negatively associated with authoritative parenting. In turn, permissive and authoritarian parenting were positively associated with peer bullying victimization, whereas authoritative parenting was negatively associated with victimization. The direct effect of childhood trauma on peer bullying victimization was not statistically significant after parenting styles were included in the structural model; however, the indirect effect of childhood trauma on peer victimization through parenting styles was significant. Taken together, these findings indicate that parenting styles may constitute an important relational pathway through which adverse childhood experiences are associated with adolescents' vulnerability to peer bullying.

The first important finding was that childhood trauma had significant relationships with all three parenting styles. Specifically, greater childhood trauma was associated with higher levels of permissive and authoritarian parenting and lower levels of authoritative parenting. This pattern suggests that adverse childhood experiences may be embedded within family environments characterized by less balanced parental responsiveness and control. The finding is consistent with research showing that childhood maltreatment is related to later parenting patterns and that early adverse experiences may influence the quality and structure of parent-child interactions (Abbasi et al., 2025). Childhood trauma may alter emotional expectations within the family and contribute to patterns of insecurity, mistrust, coercion, disengagement, or inconsistency. From this perspective, parenting styles may represent not only current family practices but also the downstream relational manifestations of earlier adversity.

This interpretation is also compatible with evidence indicating that trauma can produce enduring biological and psychological effects that influence emotional regulation, stress responsiveness, and interpersonal functioning (De Bellis & Ab, 2014). Adolescents exposed to childhood trauma may become more sensitive to threat, more emotionally reactive, or more withdrawn in family interactions, while parents themselves may respond to such behaviors with greater control, inconsistency, or emotional distance. Trauma may therefore contribute to a reciprocal family process in which both child characteristics and parenting responses become progressively maladaptive. Related evidence has shown that the effects of trauma vary according to type and degree of exposure and may extend into later behavioral and psychological functioning (Levin et al., 2021). The present finding thus supports a developmental view in which childhood trauma is linked with the relational climate in which adolescents are raised.

The positive association between childhood trauma and authoritarian parenting is particularly understandable when considering the characteristics of authoritarian family environments. Authoritarian parenting typically involves rigid discipline, high control, low negotiation, and reduced emotional responsiveness. Such environments may intensify the sense of fear, unpredictability, or helplessness already associated with traumatic experiences. Previous studies have linked parenting styles with adolescent risk behaviors and attachment patterns, showing that controlling or maladaptive parenting can influence developmental adjustment (Aghajani & Esmaeilpour, 2021). Parenting practices have also been associated with children's mental health and attachment security (Shirabadi, 2022). Therefore, the current result suggests that adolescents with greater histories of trauma may be more likely to experience a family context marked by stronger parental control and lower emotional flexibility.

The association between childhood trauma and permissive parenting can be interpreted somewhat differently. Permissive parenting is often characterized by limited behavioral structure, weak monitoring, and inconsistent boundaries. In families affected by adversity, parents may experience emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, guilt, or reduced confidence in discipline, which may contribute to a less structured parenting approach. Research on parenting efficacy and parent-child relationships suggests that parental confidence and perceived competence are closely linked with the quality of parent-child functioning (Su et al., 2025). In families where trauma has occurred, reduced parenting efficacy may make it more difficult to maintain consistent rules and effective monitoring. This interpretation is also supported by findings that perceived

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parental stress can help explain the relationship between parenting styles and child well-being (Delvecchio et al., 2020).

The negative relationship between childhood trauma and authoritative parenting was also theoretically meaningful. Authoritative parenting is generally characterized by warmth, responsiveness, clear expectations, and developmentally appropriate autonomy. These qualities may be less common in family systems marked by trauma, chronic conflict, neglect, or disrupted emotional security. The present finding is consistent with evidence suggesting that beneficial parenting experiences and positive relational environments may buffer or moderate the effects of childhood maltreatment (Abbasi et al., 2025). In this sense, authoritative parenting may function as a protective relational context, whereas lower authoritative parenting may reflect the absence of such buffering experiences.

The second major finding was that parenting styles significantly predicted peer bullying victimization. Permissive parenting showed the strongest positive association with victimization, followed by authoritarian parenting, whereas authoritative parenting had a significant negative association with peer bullying victimization. These results are broadly consistent with previous research demonstrating a meaningful relationship between parenting patterns and bullying outcomes. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis concluded that parenting practices are significantly associated with bullying and victimization among children and adolescents (Chu & Chen, 2025). Similarly, dimensions of parenting style and social climate have been linked with bullying victimization in both primary and secondary education (Cerezo et al., 2018).

The positive association between permissive parenting and bullying victimization may be explained by the reduced structure and monitoring that often characterize permissive family environments. Adolescents who receive few consistent boundaries may have fewer opportunities to develop effective self-regulation, assertive communication, and strategies for managing interpersonal conflict. Limited parental monitoring may also reduce the likelihood that parents notice emerging peer problems or intervene early when bullying begins. Parenting styles have previously been linked with children's social behavior and patterns of adjustment (Durmusoglu Saltali & Imir, 2018). In addition, parenting has been associated with social skills, suggesting that family practices can shape adolescents' capacity to navigate interpersonal situations effectively (Shahvaroughi Farahani, 2022). The present result therefore suggests that permissive parenting may increase vulnerability to peer victimization partly by weakening behavioral structure and interpersonal preparedness.

The positive relationship between authoritarian parenting and peer victimization may reflect a different developmental pathway. Adolescents exposed to highly controlling parenting may become more fearful of conflict, less assertive, or less confident in expressing their needs. They may also develop maladaptive expectations about power and obedience that affect their peer relationships. If an adolescent learns that interpersonal interactions are organized around rigid authority and low negotiation, the adolescent may have difficulty responding effectively when confronted by dominant or aggressive peers. Prior studies have shown that parenting style is associated with attachment, risk behavior, and psychosocial functioning in adolescence (Aghajani & Esmaeilpour, 2021). Moreover, family communication has been shown to contribute to the prediction of bullying, victimization, and anxiety among students (Salimi & Kiyani, 2023). These findings support the interpretation that authoritarian parenting may contribute to social vulnerability through its effects on communication, self-confidence, and conflict management.

The negative relationship between authoritative parenting and peer victimization supports the protective role of balanced parenting. Authoritative parenting combines warmth with clear expectations and appropriate monitoring, allowing adolescents to experience both support and autonomy. Such a family climate may facilitate emotional regulation, social competence, self-confidence, and help-seeking behavior. When adolescents encounter bullying, those raised in authoritative families may be more likely to disclose the experience, seek parental support, and use adaptive problem-solving strategies. Research has linked attachment to parents and peers with bullying victimization and has identified problem-solving as an important intervening mechanism (Moradmand et al., 2023). This supports the idea that authoritative parenting may reduce victimization by strengthening relational security and coping resources.

The finding is also consistent with research showing that parenting styles contribute to children's social behavior (Durmusoglu Saltali & Imir, 2018) and that adaptive parenting is associated with better mental health and interpersonal functioning (Shirabadi, 2022). In the context of bullying, such strengths may help adolescents set boundaries, identify inappropriate peer behavior, and mobilize social support. Furthermore, the broader literature

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indicates that negative parenting practices may worsen the psychological consequences of school bullying, particularly through pathways involving depressive mood, low self-esteem, and poor sleep quality (Qi et al., 2025). Thus, the present results reinforce the importance of considering parenting not merely as a background variable but as a meaningful correlate of adolescents' vulnerability to peer victimization.

Another important finding was that the direct effect of childhood trauma on peer bullying victimization became nonsignificant after parenting styles were included in the model. At the bivariate level, childhood trauma was significantly and positively correlated with peer victimization; however, this direct path was no longer significant in the structural model. This suggests that the relationship between childhood trauma and victimization may operate primarily through intermediate relational mechanisms rather than through a simple direct pathway. In other words, childhood trauma may shape the family context and parenting environment, which in turn influence adolescents' social functioning and vulnerability in peer interactions.

This finding is theoretically important because it emphasizes mechanism over simple association. Childhood trauma has been linked with a range of later difficulties, including emotional, behavioral, and health-related outcomes (Levin et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2019). Peer victimization, meanwhile, is associated with serious adjustment problems, including loneliness, phobic anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-injurious thoughts and behaviors (Wang et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2023). However, the present findings suggest that trauma may not inevitably or directly result in peer victimization. Instead, its influence may depend substantially on the relational environment that develops around the adolescent.

The significant indirect effect of childhood trauma on peer bullying victimization through parenting styles provides the strongest evidence for this interpretation. Parenting styles acted as meaningful mediators in the relationship between early adversity and later peer victimization. This result is consistent with a developmental systems perspective in which childhood experiences influence later outcomes through intervening family and relational processes. The finding also aligns with evidence that parenting is associated with bullying-related outcomes (Chu & Chen, 2025) and that family and parent-child relationship factors contribute to vulnerability and adjustment in adolescents (Cerezo et al., 2018; Moradmand et al., 2023).

More specifically, childhood trauma may increase the likelihood of permissive or authoritarian parenting while reducing authoritative parenting, and these parenting patterns may then influence social competence, emotional regulation, autonomy, and coping with peer aggression. The mediating role of parenting is therefore plausible from both relational and behavioral perspectives. Adolescents exposed to harsh or inconsistent parenting may enter peer relationships with less confidence, poorer conflict management, and lower expectations of support. In contrast, adolescents exposed to authoritative parenting may develop stronger self-efficacy and interpersonal security. This mechanism may explain why the direct effect of trauma disappeared once parenting styles were entered into the model.

The mediation finding is also consistent with research showing that parenting styles can influence child well-being through intervening stress and relational processes (Delvecchio et al., 2020). Similarly, parental practices have been associated with social inhibition and shyness (Darabian Jiran Aliya, 2023), both of which may be relevant to peer victimization. Adolescents who are socially hesitant or lack confidence in asserting themselves may be more vulnerable in aggressive peer contexts. At the same time, parental warmth and effective monitoring may provide a protective framework that reduces these vulnerabilities.

The broader bullying literature also supports the importance of interpersonal context. Peer victimization has been associated with self-injury, suicidal ideation, emotional dysregulation, and reduced school bonding (Golmohammadi, 2024; Hajiyur et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2023). These outcomes suggest that bullying is deeply connected to adolescents' emotional and relational worlds. The role of parenting in the present study therefore adds an important family-level dimension to the understanding of bullying victimization. Rather than viewing victimization solely as a school-based phenomenon, the findings suggest that adolescents' family experiences may shape how vulnerable or protected they are in peer contexts.

The findings also resonate with evidence that bullying and victimization are associated with psychological maladjustment in adolescence (Estévez et al., 2019). If family environments are emotionally supportive and structured, they may reduce the psychological impact of adverse peer experiences and facilitate adaptive responses. Conversely, negative parenting may compound the effects of

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victimization by increasing emotional insecurity or reducing access to support. This possibility is consistent with evidence linking negative parenting practices with poorer psychological functioning in the context of school bullying (Qi et al., 2025). It also corresponds with research indicating that verbal abuse and harmful interpersonal communication in educational settings can become additional sources of psychological stress for young people (Yusri et al., 2025).

Although the present study focused on parenting styles, the findings can also be understood within a broader ecological framework. Developmental outcomes are shaped by interacting systems, including family, peers, schools, and wider social environments. Multisystem perspectives emphasize that adaptation to adversity depends on the availability and quality of relational and contextual resources (Dewi et al., 2025). In the current study, parenting styles appear to represent one such proximal resource or risk factor. This does not imply that bullying victimization can be reduced to family causes, but rather that family relationships are one important component of a larger social ecology.

The findings may also be interpreted in light of research on prosocial decision-making and victim perception, which indicates that responses to victims are shaped by social-cognitive processes (Zhao et al., 2024). Adolescents differ in how they are perceived by peers, how they respond to aggression, and how others intervene on their behalf. Parenting styles may indirectly influence these processes through adolescents' communication style, emotional expression, confidence, and help-seeking behavior. In this way, family experiences may affect not only how adolescents respond to bullying but also how they are positioned within peer networks.

The current results further underscore the importance of considering subjective and lived experience in understanding relational difficulties. Contemporary psychosocial approaches increasingly recognize that experiential knowledge provides important insight into how individuals interpret adversity and social relationships (Hayes et al., 2025). This is relevant to bullying research because two adolescents exposed to superficially similar peer behavior may experience it differently depending on their prior trauma history, family climate, and perceived availability of support. Parenting styles may therefore shape not only objective social behavior but also the meaning adolescents assign to interpersonal threat and victimization.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the findings are compatible with broader models suggesting that environmental stressors often influence well-being through mediating mechanisms rather than exclusively through direct effects. Research in other domains has demonstrated that conflict and stress can affect well-being through intervening psychological and relational processes (Sirgy et al., 2025). The present study extends this logic to adolescent peer victimization by showing that parenting styles may function as a relational mechanism connecting childhood trauma with later vulnerability to bullying. This pathway is especially important because parenting is potentially modifiable, whereas earlier traumatic experiences cannot be changed. The results therefore identify a family process that may be relevant to both prevention and intervention.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional and correlational design does not permit definitive causal conclusions regarding the direction of relationships among childhood trauma, parenting styles, and peer bullying victimization. Although the structural model was theoretically specified, reciprocal or bidirectional relationships are also plausible. Second, all principal variables were assessed using self-report questionnaires, which may increase the possibility of shared method variance, recall bias, and socially desirable responding. Retrospective reporting of childhood trauma may also be influenced by current emotional state and memory processes. Third, the study was conducted among upper-secondary school students in Shiraz, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to adolescents from other regions, cultural contexts, age groups, or educational settings. Finally, although several important assumptions were examined and the model demonstrated acceptable fit, other potentially relevant variables such as peer support, school climate, attachment security, socioeconomic status, family conflict, and emotion regulation were not included in the model.

Future studies should examine the proposed relationships using longitudinal designs that follow children and adolescents across developmental periods in order to clarify temporal ordering and test whether changes in parenting styles precede changes in peer victimization. Multi-informant approaches incorporating reports from adolescents, parents, teachers, and peers could also reduce reliance on a single source of information and provide a

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more comprehensive assessment of both parenting and bullying experiences. Future research may additionally compare boys and girls, different age groups, and different cultural or socioeconomic contexts to determine whether the mediation model operates similarly across subgroups. It would also be useful to examine the separate mediating effects of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting rather than treating parenting styles only as a combined mediating system. Including variables such as attachment, emotion regulation, self-esteem, social competence, school belonging, family communication, and peer support may further clarify the mechanisms connecting childhood trauma with bullying victimization.

From a practical perspective, the findings support the value of integrating family-based components into school bullying prevention programs. Interventions may benefit from helping parents establish clear and consistent boundaries while maintaining emotional warmth, responsiveness, and developmentally appropriate autonomy. Parent training programs could focus on reducing excessively harsh or inconsistent parenting and strengthening authoritative practices, effective communication, monitoring, and supportive problem-solving. School counselors and psychologists should also consider adolescents' family histories and possible exposure to childhood trauma when assessing repeated peer victimization. Early identification of students who experience both family adversity and bullying may allow for more targeted intervention. Collaboration among schools, families, counselors, and mental health professionals may be particularly useful in developing coordinated support plans that address both the adolescent's peer environment and the family processes that may influence vulnerability or recovery.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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