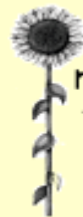


# The Development and Treatment of Girlhood Aggression

Debra Pepler

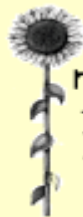
York University and The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto Canada



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# Objectives

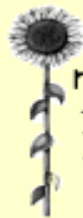
- Explore development of girls' aggression and the individual child and relationship factors that shape a girls' pathways.
- Link research on girls' aggression to components of assessment and intervention for the girl (developmental) and for her relationships (systemic).
- Review Earls court Girls' Program (EGC) and effectiveness of intervention for aggressive girls.



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# Understanding Girls' Aggression: A Focus on Relationships

- Relationships are foundation and context for development.
- Relationships -- social determinant of health.
- For healthy development, children need warm, positive, supportive relationships.
- Children require relationship capacity to form and maintain significant relationships.
- For girls, relationships are particularly salient: one of girls' primary goals is to be connected.



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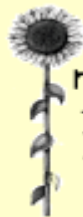
# Two Lenses on Girls' Aggression

## Developmental: Focus on Girl

- How is girl doing for this stage?
- What are her strengths and challenges?
- What can be done to support her?

## Systemic: Focus on Girl's Relationships

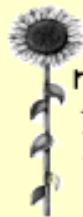
- How does girl interact with others?
- How do others interact with girl?
- What can be done to promote healthy relationships for girl?



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# Video Observation 1

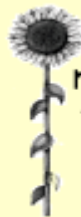
- We will watch an 8 –year-old girl, who was referred to a social skills training program for aggressive, disruptive, and noncompliant behavior problems.
- Focus on her individual risks (behaviors and understanding), as well as her relationship risks (how others relate to her and how she relates to them).



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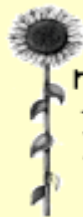
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# A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Girls' Aggression

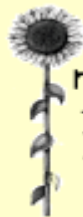
	Developmental	Relationships
Girls' Aggression		
Why Worry?		
Risk Factors		
Assessment		
Intervention		



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# Nature of Girls' Aggression

- Across lifespan, aggression rates highest when children are 2 or 3; as children acquire language and social skills, aggression decreases.
- Girls' aggression decreases at a faster rate than boys' aggression.
- Aggression less normative for girls than boys: may have a higher social cost.
- Girls and boys have similar capacities for the full range of aggression: physical, verbal, social.
- Higher proportion of girls' aggression is social, rather than physical, compared to boys.

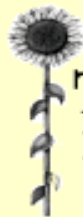


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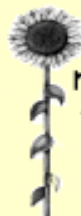
# Video Observation 2

- We will watch a group of girls interacting on the school playground. The focal girl is in Grade 5 and has individual risks: she was identified as both a girl who bullies and is victimized.
- One girl starts to talk to her with a threat. A second girl quickly joins and they walk her around asking her to do humiliating things (e.g., kiss the tree) and asking others to join in.
- Starts as rough and tumble type play (fun for all) but the girl quickly becomes distressed.
- Relationship Problems: Watch how quickly peers gather and join in the bullying interactions.



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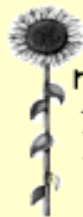
PLAY



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# Social Aggression

- Form of aggression founded on relationships.
- Aggression aimed at damaging the other's relationships through indirect aggression (e.g., gossip, exclusion), gestures, etc.
- “Advantages”: covert, safer than physical aggression, strengthens in-group relations.

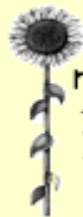


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# Why Worry about Girls' Aggression?

## Developmental Perspective

- Girls' under-regulated emotions and behavior inhibit their healthy adaptation (e.g., social skills, school achievement).
- Cumulative continuity: lack of skills seriously constrains development and opportunity for change.

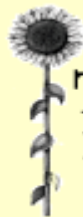


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# Why Worry About Girls' Aggression?

## Systemic Perspective

- Girls' lack of regulation and aggression inhibit development of positive relationships.
- Others become negative towards aggressive girls.
- Interactional continuity: negative interactions constrain the opportunities for positive relationships and impact on healthy development.



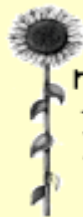
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# Why Worry? Potential Outcomes

Prevalence of girls' aggression lower than boys, but psycho-social costs may be as high.

## Developmental and Relationship Problems

- Delinquency and substance abuse
- Depression
- Risk-taking behaviors (early sexual involvement)
- Victimization
- Sexual harassment
- Dating aggression
- Academic problems
- Adult internalizing and externalizing problems

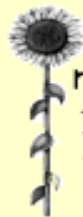


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# Aggressive Girls and Relationship Problems

Our longitudinal study of adolescents from middle school through high school reveals the risk of relationship problems for girls who are aggressive.

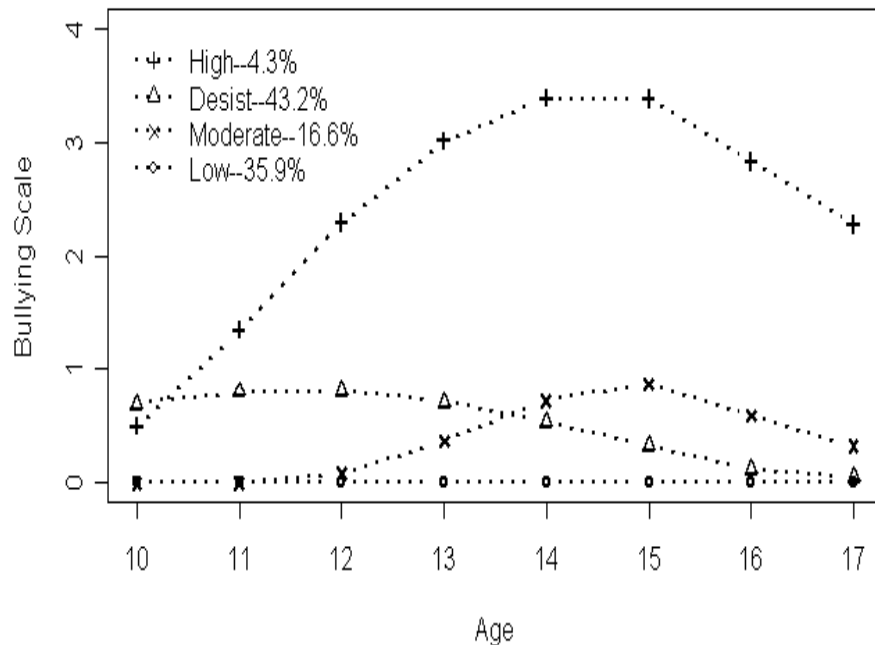
- Bullying is the use of power and aggression – a relationship problem.
- We assessed physical aggression in a dating relationship with five items adapted from CTS (Straus, 1979): slapped or kicked; choked, punched, or beaten; pushed, grabbed or shoved; threw, smashed, hit or kicked an object; hit or tried to hit with something (coded 0,1).



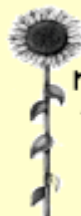
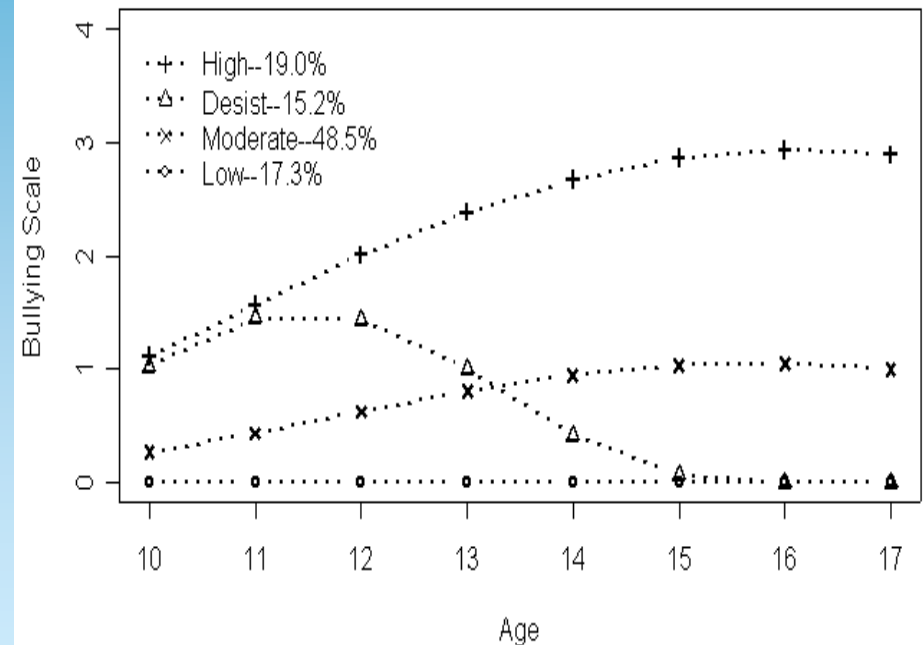
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# Girls' and Boys' Bullying Trajectories

Girls



Boys

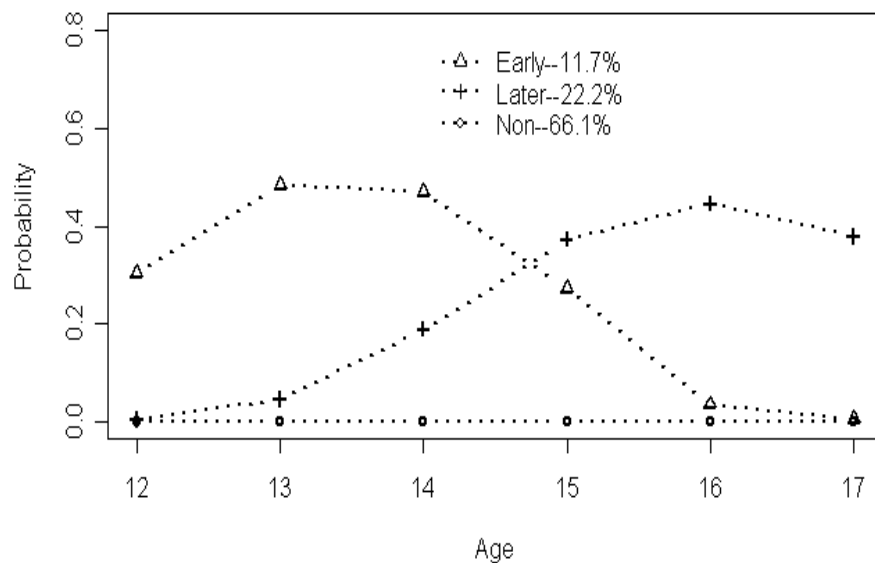


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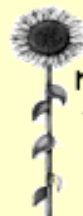
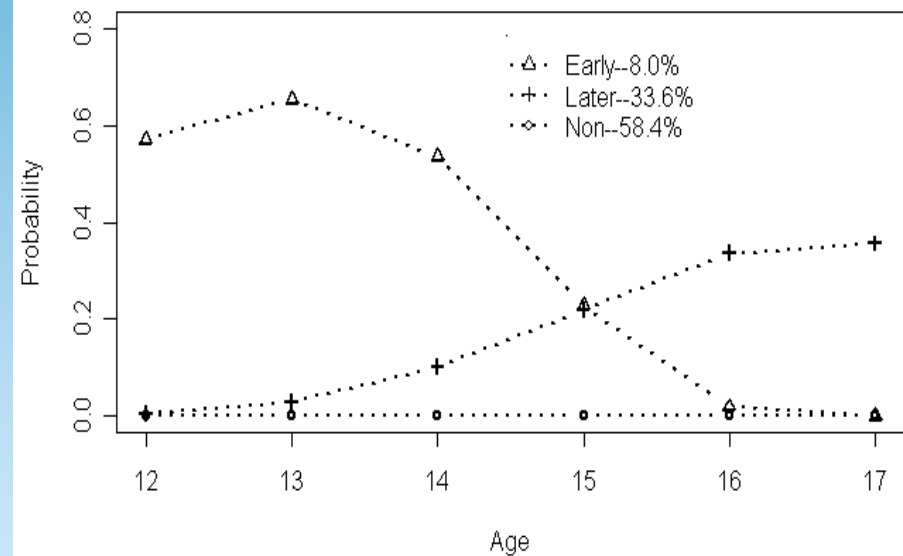


# Girls' and Boys' Dating Aggression Trajectories

Girls



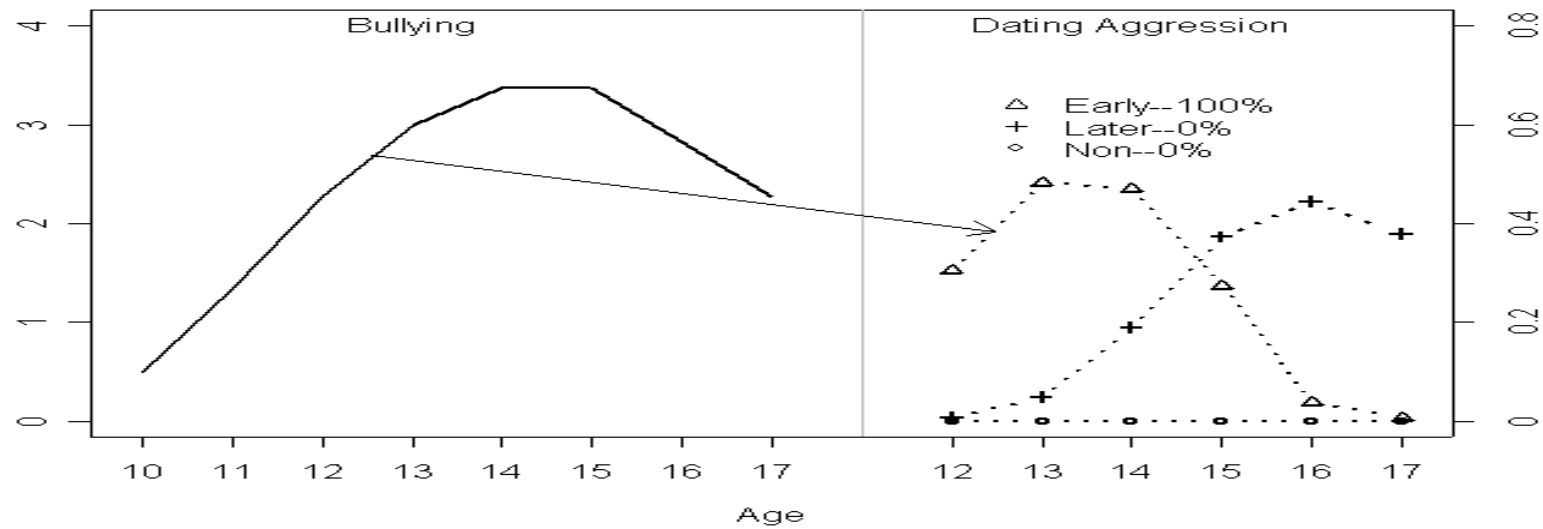
Boys



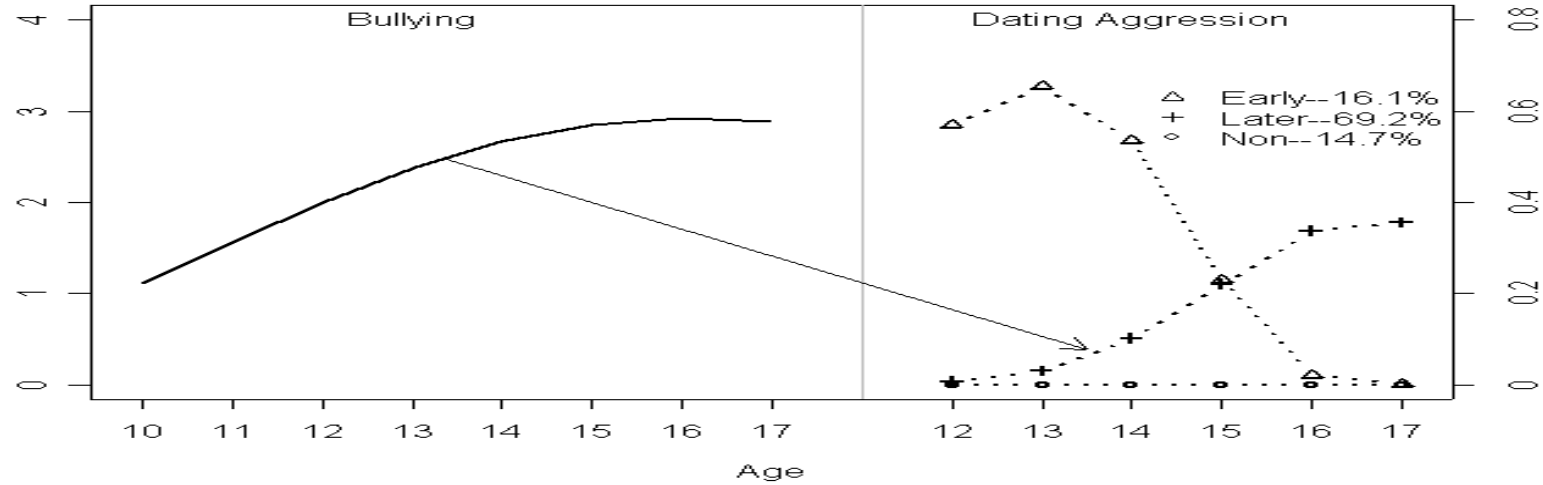
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# Links between High Bullying and Dating Aggression

**High Bullying Girls -- 4.3%**

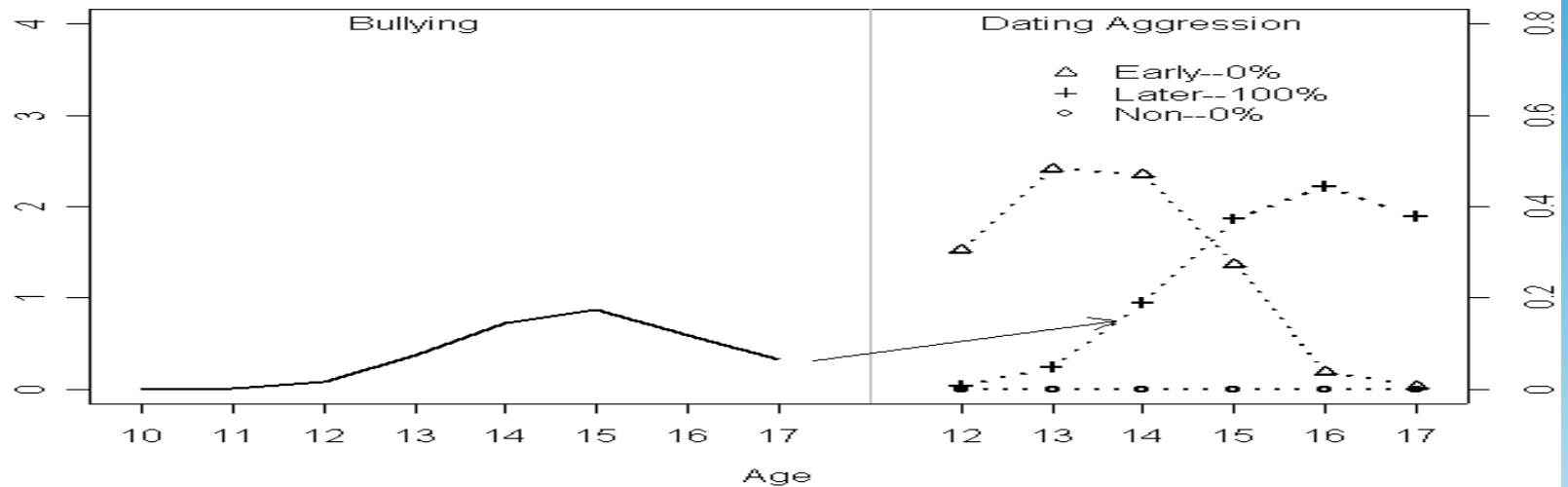


**High Bullying Boys -- 19%**

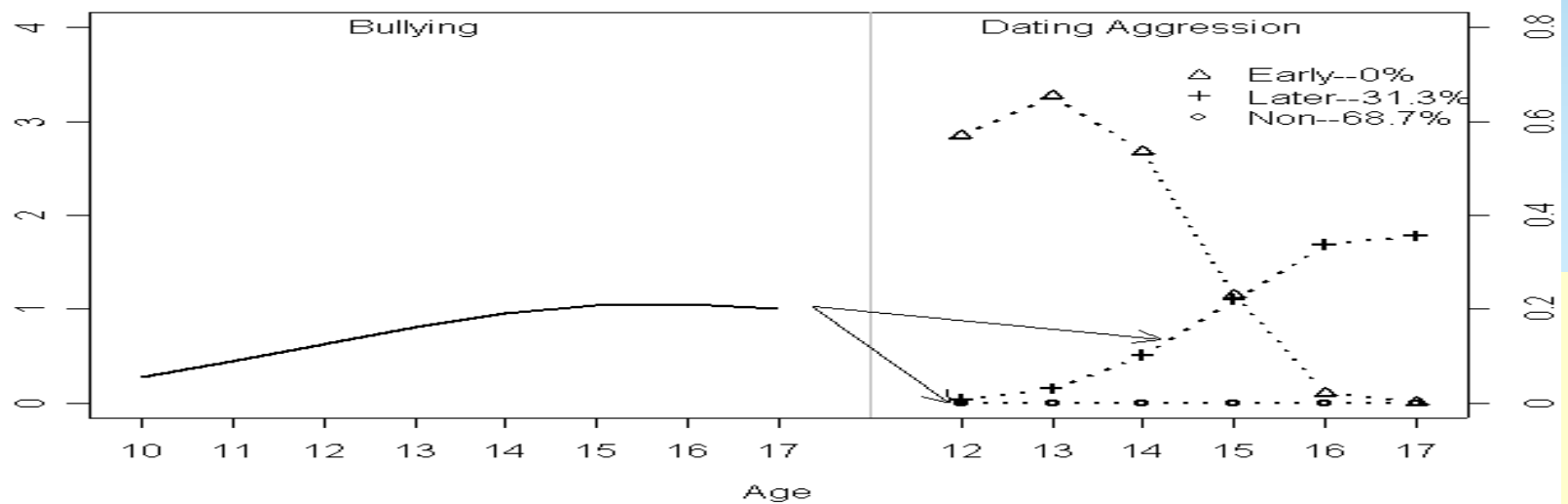


# Links between Moderate Bullying and Dating Aggression

## Moderate Bullying Girls -- 16.6%



## Moderate Bullying Boys -- 48.5%



# Individual Risk Factors for High Bullying

Differences between girls who bullied at high rate in early adolescence (high and desisting) vs low on individual risk factors:

- Cruel to people
- Manipulative
- Low trustworthiness
- Aggressive
- Substance use
- Internalizing problem
- But not different on feeling guilty

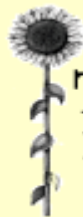


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# Relationship Risk Factors for High Bullying

Differences between girls who bullied at high rate in early adolescence (high and desisting) vs low on peer risk factors:

- Deviant friends\*
- Exposure to bullying peers
- Conflict with peers
- Susceptibility to peer influence.\*

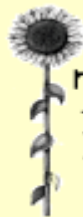


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# Family Risk Factors for High Bullying

Differences between girls who bullied at high rate in early adolescence (high and desisting) vs low on family risk factors:

- Parental monitoring\*
- Conflict with parents.



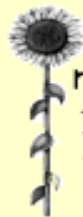
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# Assessing Aggressive Girls

## EARL21-G

*Levene, Augimeri, Pepler, Walsh, Webster, Koegl (2001)*

- Child Factors (12): hyperactivity/impulsivity, abuse/trauma/neglect, coping ability, likeability, sexual development, academic performance, antisocial attitudes, antisocial behavior
- Family Factors (7): caregiver-daughter interaction, stressors, supports, parenting style
- Responsivity Factors (2)
- Coding: 0 (not present), 1 (possibly present/low risk), 2 (present/high risk)

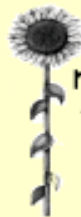
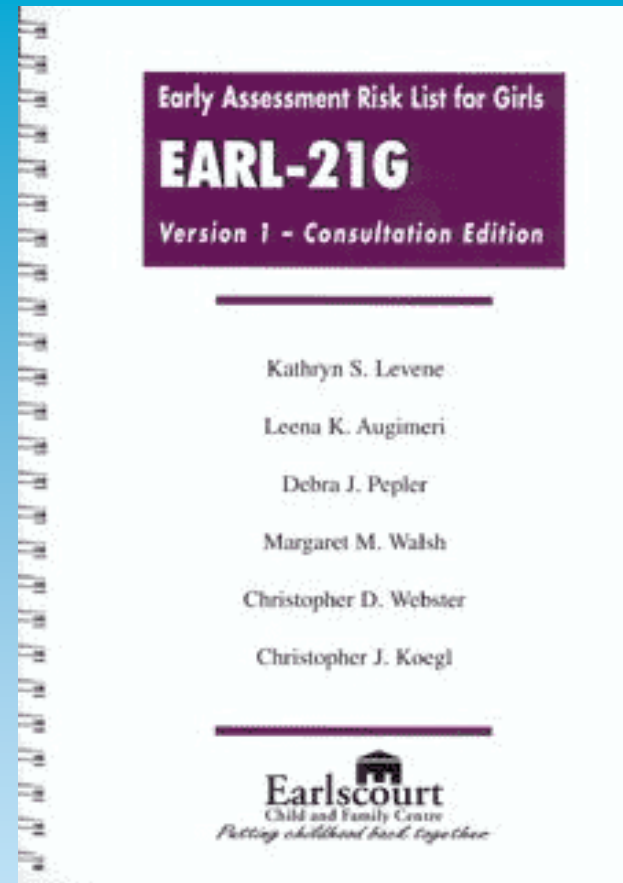


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# EARL21-G and Manuals for EGC SNAP

- Available from  
Centre for Children  
Committing Offenses:

<http://www.earls court.on.ca/CCCO.shtml>

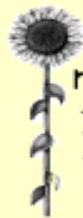


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# Individual Risks for Girls in the Earlscourt Girls Connection

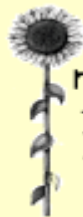
- 72% bully peers, 47% victimized
- 69% witness domestic violence
- 59% suicidal ideations
- 58% externalizing behaviors before age 7
- 42% Children's Aid Society (CAS) contact
- 38% special education, 15% behavioral class
- 35% self-harming behaviors
- 32% precocious sexual behaviors/interests
- 25% body image concerns



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# Family Risks for Girls in Earlscourt Girls Connection

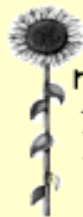
- 78% inconsistent parenting style, 49% punitive
- 71% highly conflictual caregiver-daughter relationship
- 58% poor problem solving
- 53% mothers current or past depression
- 41% mothers have high school education or less
- 27% parental criminal activity



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# Theoretical Framework for Developing a Gender-Sensitive Intervention

- Developmental-contextual model of risk and protective factors within the individual girl and within her relationship contexts (family, peers, school, community).
- Focus on relationship processes (relationship, social learning, and feminist theories).
- Multisystemic approach to helping troubled girls and their families in childhood and through adolescence.



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# The Earlscourt Girls Connection (EGC)

- Gender-sensitive intervention for girls under age 12 who display externalizing behavior problems
- EGC has served over 400 girls and their families
- Manualized, strong theoretical foundation

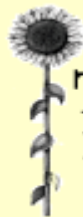
Supports girls' development of:

- ◆ Social problem-solving skills
- ◆ Anger management

Supports caregivers' development of:

- ◆ Parenting management skills
- ◆ Anger management

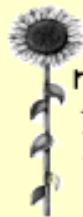
Focus on developing mother-daughter relationships



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# Treatment Components

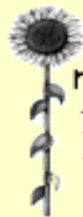
- SNAP™ (Stop Now And Plan) FOR GIRLS GROUP
- SNAP™ PARENTING GROUP
- GIRLS GROWING UP HEALTHY GROUP (GGUH)
- Individual parent training and family counseling
- Tutoring
- Individual Befriending
- Advocacy (e.g., school)
- Leader-in Training Program
- Follow-up Parenting Groups



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# SNAP™ for Girls

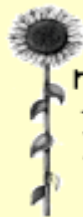
- Structured group work with aggressive girls.
- Cognitive-behavioral approach emphasizing SNAP™ (Stop Now and Plan).
- Six segments of each of the 14 weekly sessions:
  - ◆ Check In, Home Practice Review, Goal Review, Skill Building, Home Practice Assignment, and Circle Time.
- Focus of sessions on: self-control, problem-solving and assertion skills aimed at remediating social and physical aggression in young girls.



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# SNAPP™ for Parents

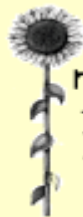
- Structured parent training group work with parents of children with disruptive behavior disorders.
- Group sessions focus on SNAP™ (Stop Now and Plan) for parents:
  - ◆ tracking, monitoring, routines, listening and encouraging, giving commands, charting rewards, timeout and problem-solving, stopping stealing.
  - ◆ involves discussion and role-plays to facilitate parents trying new parenting skills.



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# Methodology

- Quasi-experimental design features:
  - ◆ Stratified random assignment (severity of problems)
  - ◆ Treatment and waitlist control groups
  - ◆ Data collected at several time points (Pre, Post & up to 2 years)
  - ◆ Multiple informants, multiple standardized measurement questionnaires
  - ◆ Program Integrity:
    - Manualized programs, trained staff, video-taped sessions, integrity monitoring & feedback to staff
  - ◆ Process replicated in second year



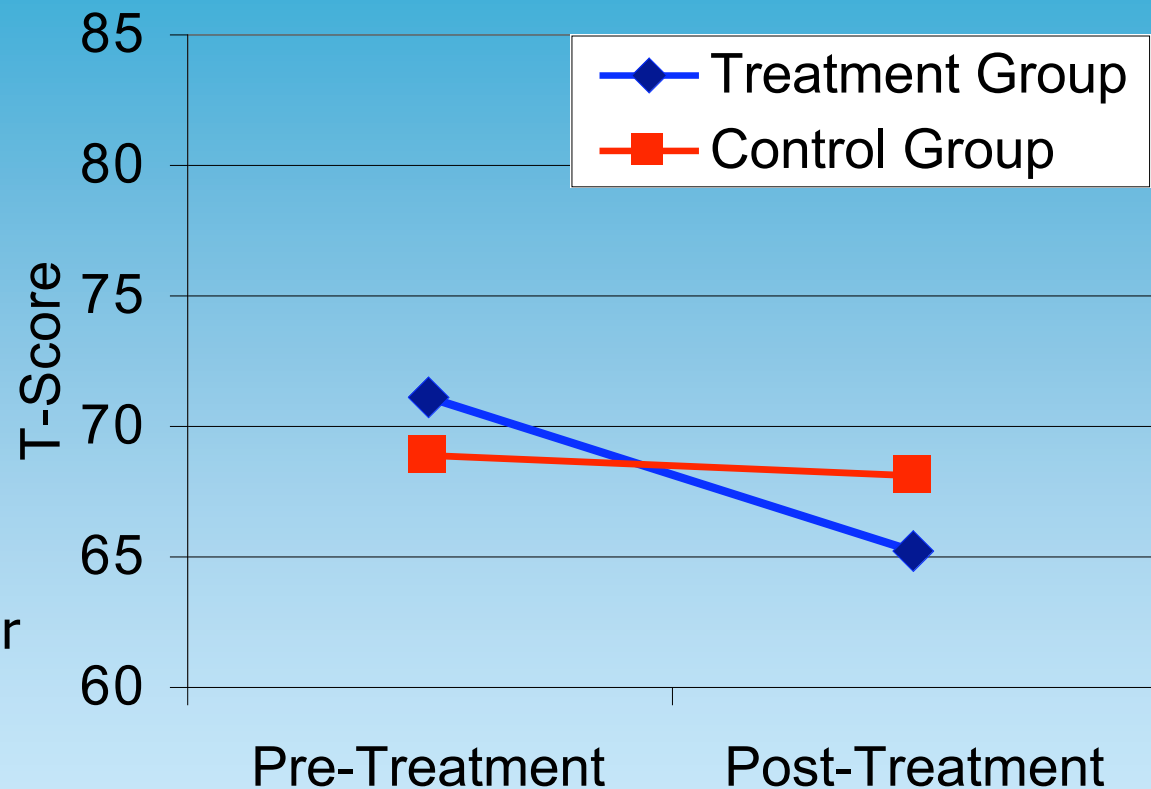
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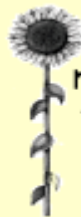
# Externalizing Behaviour: Parent Report

Girls in the treatment group improved significantly more than the control group over time.

- Rule-Breaking
- Aggression
- DSM-IV Conduct Disorder
- Social Problems
- Internalizing Problems



Age, cognitive ability, & academic performance not significant.

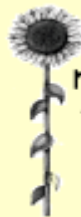
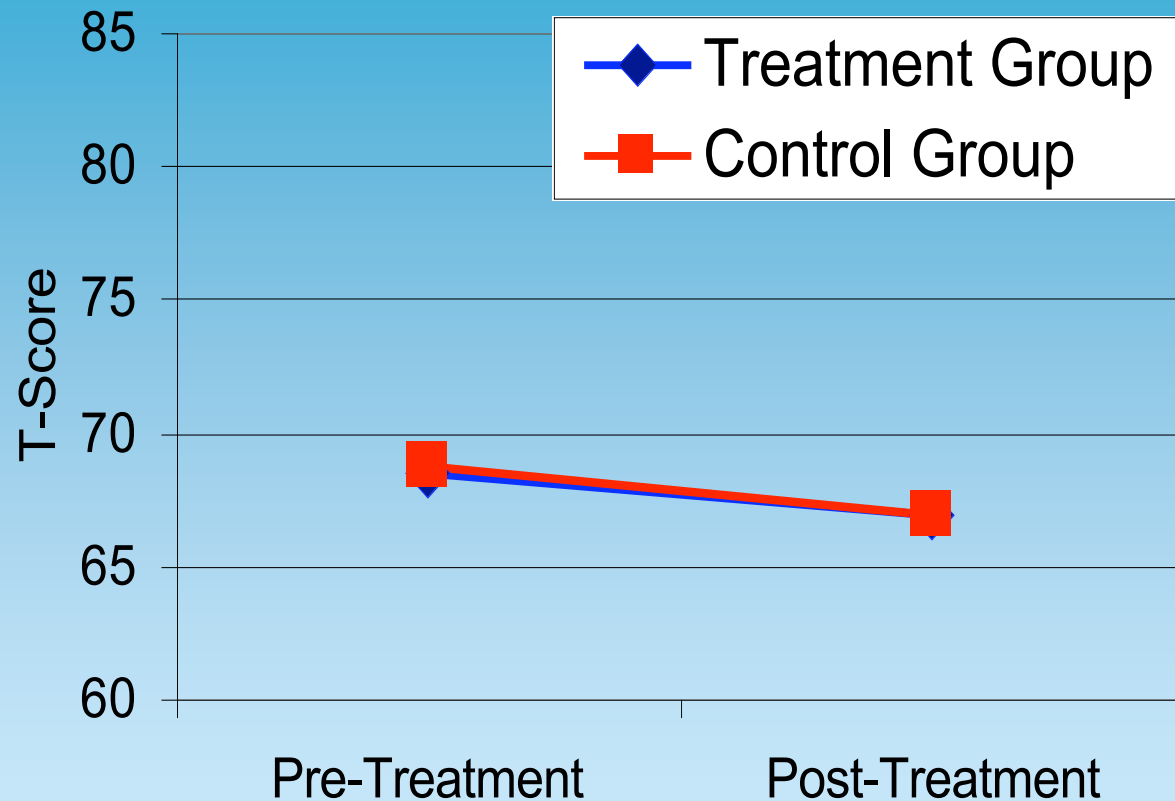


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# Externalizing Behavior: Teacher Report

No effect of treatment was found.

(N = 53)



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# Clinical Significance of Change

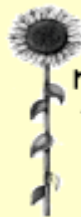
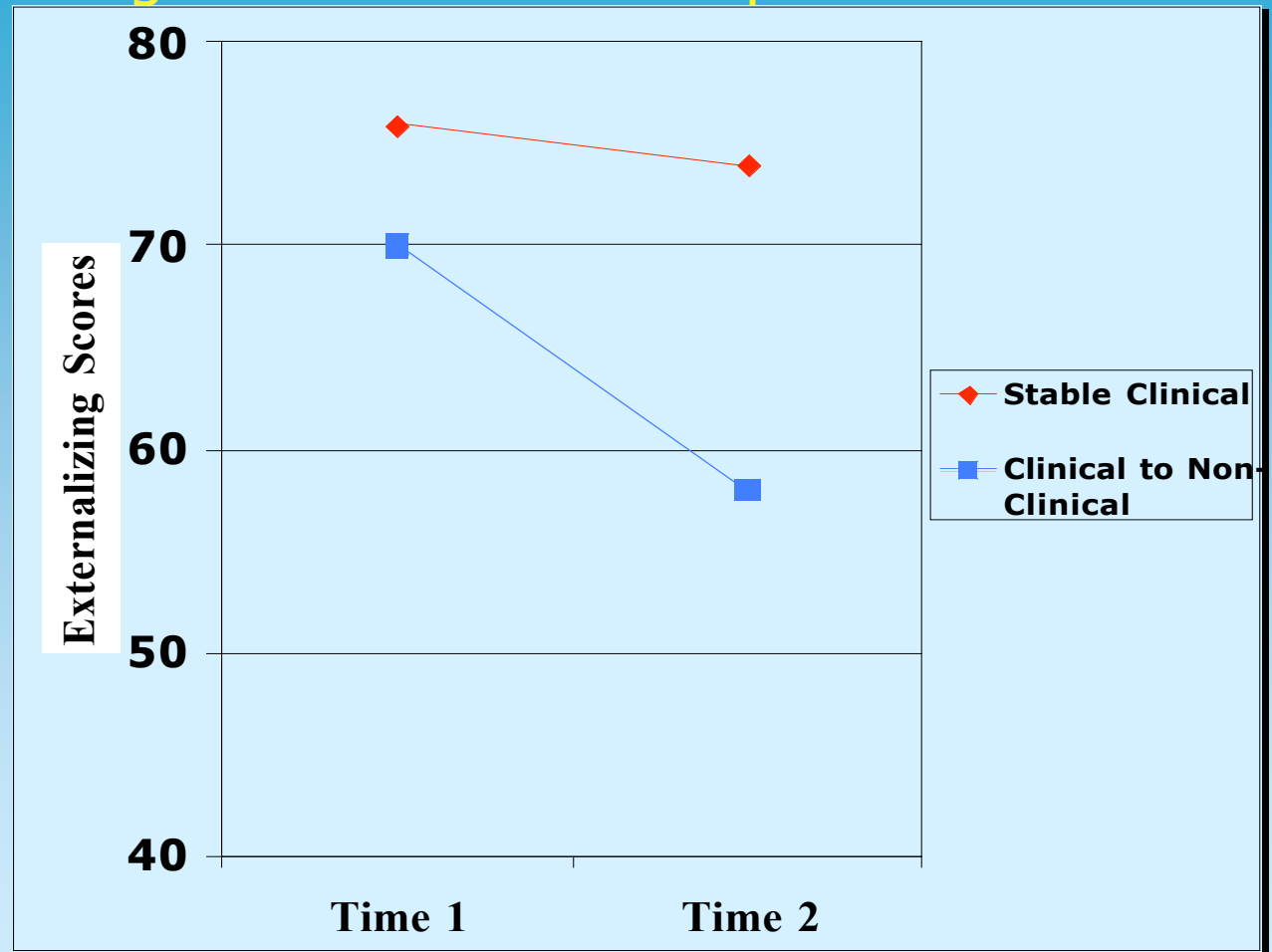
## Externalizing Behavior: Parent Report

In the treatment group:

- 15 girls shifted a mean of 12 points.

- 19 girls remained in a clinical range.

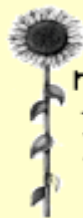
- Sexual development and coping risks associated with lack of change.



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# What Changed for Parents in EGC?

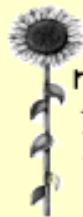
- Rational Parenting (Parent Report)
  - ◆ Less yelling, scolding, & physical violence
  - ◆ More calm discussions & coaching appropriate behaviors
- Ineffective Parenting (Parent Report)
  - ◆ Less angry, disapproving, reactive when disciplining
- Consistency in Parenting (Parent Report)
  - ◆ More limit setting, issuing requests, ensuring compliance
- Inconsistent/Hostile Parenting (Child Report)
  - ◆ Parents less often get angry, threaten physical punishment, forget rules, enforce depending on mood



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# ECG Evaluation: Implications

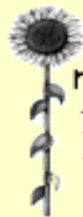
- Evidence suggests theoretically-guided intervention for girls, the EGC:
  - ◆ reduces girls' aggression
  - ◆ increases girls' prosocial skills and coping
  - ◆ supports development of effective parenting skills
- Findings indicate a need for school-based SNAP training to support girls and teachers in the school setting



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# Future Directions

- ◆ An analysis of factors associated with change vs limited change following the SNAP program
- ◆ An analysis of the process of change through treatment by comparing those who improved and did not improve on brain activity and mother-daughter behavioral interactions (in collaboration with Granic, Lewis, & Zelazo)
- ◆ Follow up of the girls who have been in the program (2 and 3 years after SNAP)
- ◆ Plans for further RCT of enhanced version of the program with hopes of reaching some of the girls who do not change with the standard program.



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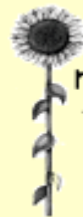
# A Sincere Thank You

To The Melissa Institute for encouragement of my research and for many opportunities to learn from those in The Melissa Institute community in Miami.

To my collaborators: Amy Yuile, Margaret Walsh, Kathy Levene, Depeng Jiang, Alice Vaughan, Leena Augimeri, and Jeanine Webber.

To the girls and families who participated in the study.

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