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Peer Victimization, Internalizing Problems, and Substance Use in Urban African American Adolescents in Chicago: The Relevance of the Self-Medication Hypothesis

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the link between peer victimization and substance use and tested the mediating role of internalizing problems in urban African American adolescents in Chicago. Six hundred and thirty-eight adolescents in Chicago's Southside participated in the study. Results from the hierarchical linear regression analysis showed that youth who reported peer victimization were at risk of internalizing problems. Those who were bullied by their peers were more likely to display internalizing problems, which was also significantly associated with substance use. Consistent with the self-medication hypothesis, findings from the study suggest that bullied youth are likely to display internalizing problems and turn to substance use. Implications for mental health practice in school settings are also discussed.

Keywords: adolescents; bullying; mental health; peer victimization; substance use.

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