The Chicken and the Egg: Longitudinal Associations Between Moral Deficiencies and Bullying: A Parallel Process Latent Growth Model

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960 adolescents from the three Swiss Cantons Ticino, Valais, and Thurgau

## Implications For Educators About

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# Abstract

The present study investigated the longitudinal association between the development
of bullying (traditional bullying and cyberbullying) and the development of moral deficiencies (moral disengagement, low moral responsibility, and weak feelings of remorse) during adolescence. A total of 960 Swiss adolescents completed an electronic questionnaire in schools four times, with 6-month intervals. Results of a parallel process model showed that the initial levels of moral deficiencies were positively associated with initial scores of bullying. Furthermore, the initial levels of moral deficiencies were positively associated with the development of bullying (i.e., initial trend and changes in trend across time). In contrast, the initial level of bullying was not found to be associated with the development (i.e., the slope) of moral deficiencies. Accordingly, we conclude that moral deficiencies might be a trait that predicts the development of bullying and not vice versa. Implications of the findings for bullying prevention are discussed.

# Outcome

"... [H]igher bullying scores were associated with higher moral deficiencies scores in the cross-sectional view....initial levels of moral deficiencies predicted the development of bullying, whereas the contrary was not the case (i.e., initial levels of involvement in bullying were not associated with changes in moral deficiencies)....Thus, moral deficiencies seem to antecede and, therefore, to be a possible cause of bullying......Moral deficiencies were found to be relatively stable, which also speaks to the concept of moral deficiencies as a trait instead of a state. The development of bullying over the four assessments was found to be linear on average, and its shape was found to depend on the initial level of moral deficiencies....The present findings suggest that moral deficiencies can be thought of as a trait that is associated with the development of bullying during adolescence." (Sticca Perren, 2015, p. 96-97)