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The Chain, Consequences, and Care of Aggravated Bullying Victimization:

Based on a sequential process model

(いじめ被害の悪化とその影響及びケアに関する検討)

School bullying is widely recognized as a critical global issue, with data showing that an average of 36.4% of adolescents across 168 countries and regions have experienced bullying at least once in the past couple of months. Despite decades of research and intervention efforts, bullying remains a persistent and complex problem. Although research on school bullying has grown significantly—by 23.9% annually between 1990 and 2022—the complicated dynamics of bullying leave many questions unanswered. This thesis offers a comprehensive examination of school bullying in Japan, providing insights into its prevalence, patterns of escalation, lingering psychological and social effects, and the cyclical relationship between victims and perpetrators. It begins with a theoretical overview of school bullying, reviewing definitions, forms, and the conceptualization of bullying victimization as a process in Chapter 1. Drawing on Nakai's "Political Science of School Bullying" (1997) and Toda's "Process Model of School Bullying" (2008), bullying victimization is analyzed in four stages: occurrence, escalation, responses, and lingering effects. The phenomenon of the bully-victim cycle is introduced, emphasizing the transformation from victim to perpetrator as both a lingering effect and a trigger for new bullying incidents.

Empirical findings begin with an examination of the prevalence and related factors of repetitive bullying victimization in Chapter 3. Study 2 reveals that although overall bullying prevalence showed a slight decline, high-frequency bullying remained consistent. Instances of repetitive bullying, occurring several times a week, are notably more common than other frequencies. Study 3, employing a hurdle model, identifies distinct risk factors for the occurrence and repetition of bullying victimization. While gender shows no significant relationship with the occurrence of bullying, it is significantly associated with its repetition. Furthermore, prior experience as a bully has a stronger impact on the occurrence of victimization than its repetition. These findings suggest that repetitive bullying victimization has unique characteristics that necessitate separate investigation. Additionally, bullies themselves are at increased risk of becoming victims, indicating complex underlying mechanisms driving these transitions.

The thesis then explores the aggravation, coping strategies, and cumulative effects of bullying victimization in Chapter 4. Study 4 proposes a frequency standard for defining severe bullying and

identifies four latent classes of victimization through latent class analysis. These patterns highlight overlapping forms of victimization, providing a content-based standard for severe cases. Study 5 examines coping strategies across these latent classes, revealing that victims often adjust their coping approaches to the situation. However, “fighting back” is consistently employed across most classes, except in relational bullying, and proves largely ineffective as bullying severity escalates. The cumulative effects of bullying victimization were also examined, showing a heightened risk of depressive disorders when multiple forms of victimization overlap, and coping strategies fail. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing bullying victimization early to prevent it from becoming severe and causing long-term mental health issues.

To better understand the lingering effects of bullying victimization, the thesis investigates their structure, related factors, and accumulation mechanisms in Chapter 5. Study 6 employs Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Item Response Theory (IRT) to identify the structure of lingering effects and reveals three key dimensions of lingering effects: physical symptoms, activity reduction, and depression. Study 7 explores factors influencing these lingering effects, identifying attitudes toward bullies as a significant determinant. Forgiveness was associated with lower lingering effects, while avoidance and revenge were linked to higher lingering effects. Additionally, the duration and resolution of bullying victimization played a role, with prolonged bullying experiences correlating with higher physical symptoms and depression levels. Study 8, using a cross-lagged panel model, confirms that while bullying victimization primarily has short-term effects, these can accumulate over time if not addressed. Once resolved, physical symptoms and activity reduction may return to normal levels, but depression often persists. These findings highlight the importance of prompt resolution to prevent long-lasting consequences.

Chapter 6 investigates revenge tendencies among victims and their role in the bully-victim cycle. Study 9 identifies a correlation between bullying victimization and bullying perpetration, with stronger associations observed when the forms of bullying matched (e.g., cyberbullying victims becoming cyberbullies). This suggests that victims may adopt learned behaviors from their bullies as a form of revenge. Study 10 examines the targets of revenge and reveals that direct bullying victims may become aggressive not only toward their bullies but also toward unrelated individuals in disruptive classroom environments. Retaliatory normative beliefs were identified as a mediating factor, highlighting that victims’ acceptance of revenge as a justified response can perpetuate the bully-victim cycle.

Building on these findings, Chapter 7 explores strategies to prevent the bully-victim cycle and alleviate lingering effects. Study 11 demonstrates that retaliatory normative beliefs fully mediate the relationship between bullying victimization and revenge tendencies, and self-distancing techniques effectively reducing revenge motivations. Study 12 investigates the role of self-distancing and forgiveness in mitigating lingering effects. Results show that self-distancing is highest among victims who practice forgiveness and lowest among those motivated by revenge. Additionally, while daily habits showed limited correlation with self-distancing in forgiveness and revenge groups, certain practices, such as writing down thoughts, were found to have mixed effects depending on how they were implemented. These findings suggest that self-distancing is probably more effective in addressing immediate emotional responses, while forgiveness may play

a more significant role in long-term recovery.

By synthesizing these results, the thesis proposes a sequential process model of bullying victimization, illustrating how bullying progresses from initial occurrence to severe and overlapping forms, leading to lingering effects and the potential for victims to become perpetrators in Chapter 8. Bullying typically begins with a single act of aggression, which can occur in any environment and affect anyone, but it becomes persistent when specific conditions, such as poor teacher-student relationships or particular personal vulnerabilities, are present. As bullying continues, it tends to worsen in frequency and expand into overlapping forms, becoming increasingly severe. Notably, once aggression begins, its progression often depends on how the initial aggression is handled. Ineffective responses can perpetuate victimization, while effective intervention may disrupt this progression. However, severe bullying cases, particularly those involving overlapping forms, show diminishing help-seeking behavior among those victims.

The cumulative impact of prolonged bullying victimization is particularly concerning. Victims frequently experience fatigue, heightened sensitivity to others' attitudes, and diminished confidence. Over time, these feelings evolve into social withdrawal, loss of interest in daily activities, and depression. Long-term bullying, especially cases lasting over a year, tends to exacerbate these adverse outcomes. Additionally, some victims may adopt aggressive behaviors themselves, perpetuating the cycle of bullying. Classroom environments also play a role, as disruptive classrooms may create opportunities for new bullying instances, regardless of whether existing cases are being addressed effectively.

In conclusion, this thesis underscores the critical need for early intervention and tailored strategies to address bullying victimization. Simply stopping bullying is insufficient, as lingering effects—particularly depression—may persist without targeted healing approaches. Self-distancing and forgiveness emerge as promising strategies, with self-distancing addressing immediate emotional needs and forgiveness facilitating long-term healing. Moving forward, future research should focus on refining intervention strategies and ensuring that effective, accessible, and sustainable approaches are implemented in school settings.