

Sample Study 1.1 Summary of a Postpositivist Research Study

Research Problem: Very little is known about the victimization experiences of adolescents with disabilities, yet previous research has suggested that people with mental retardation are vulnerable to economic, psychological, and physical abuse.

Research Question: What are the predictors of victimization for a sample of adolescents with disabilities in transition from high school to adult life?

Method: Students with disabilities and their parents in two western states were interviewed during the students' last year in school and once again when students were 1 year out of school.

Participants: Participants were students with disabilities who were identified by their schools as in their last year of high school or who had dropped out of high school sometime during what would have been their last year (sample size = 422).

Instruments and Procedures: A fixed-response interview was conducted by telephone with students and their parents by trained interviewers. Predictor variables were selected based on previous research; these included gender, minority status, serious emotional disturbance (SED), specific learning disability (SLD), dropout status, family socioeconomic status, parent rating of academic skills, and a rating of personal-social skills. The outcome variable of victimization was defined as experiencing more than one of the following: being teased or bothered, having something stolen from them, or being hit hard or beat up.

Results: The following characteristics were associated with a greater likelihood of being victimized during the first year out of school: prior victimization while still in school in the previous year, being female, having low postschool personal-social achievement, and having both SED and an arrest record within 1 year of leaving school.

Discussion: The greatest risk for victimization was for the group who had a serious emotional disturbance and low personal-social achievement. The authors recommend increasing social skill training directed to this specific group in terms of appropriate ways to behave in community settings where victimization could occur.

SOURCE: Based on Doren, Bullis, and Benz (1996).

An example of research conducted within the postpositivist paradigm summarized in Sample Study 1.1. The study has been summarized according to main categories typically included in a report of research in this paradigm—the research problem, question, methods (participants, instruments, and procedures), results, and conclusions. The researchers acknowledge several limitations to their work, such as low representation of people from minority populations, the use of a numeric scale to summarize such complex variables as social skills, and

Sample Study 1.2 Summary of a Constructivist Research Study

Research Problem: Previous research on adolescent rejection has focused on the causes of rejection. Merten's (1996) study focused on the responses of adolescent boys to rejection.

Research Questions: What changes did the boys make and how effective were those changes in altering their rejected status? How did the rejected students construe their rejection? What did they understand to be the reasons for their rejection and how did their evaluation of those reasons guide their decisions whether to change?

Method: In this longitudinal study, an ethnographic approach was used to examine the responses to peer rejection of junior high school boys during seventh and eighth grades.

Participants: Four boys who were frequently mentioned by their peers as being examples of rejected students were the focus of this study. The researchers did conduct interviews with 160 students (male = 77; female = 83) to identify the 4 "rejected" students, as well as to collect data from the broader school community.

Instruments and Procedures: Three teachers were given 3 months of intensive training in ethnography before school started. The ethnographers taught one class per semester, and spent time observing students in the cafeteria, library, halls, and other school settings. Their observations were tape-recorded and later transcribed, as were the tape-recorded interviews with the students. The interviews were open-ended and lasted about 40 minutes for each student. The same individuals were interviewed many times (resulting in approximately 600 interviews), and the questions were modified each time to provide a running account of the students' experiences handling the transitions in domains such as relationships with friends, peers, teachers, and family.

Results: Each of the four boys' responses was detailed in the journal article. The boys experienced harassment in the forms of teasing, ridicule, or being tripped or spit at. The boys' responses ranged from trying to become "invisible" (withdrawing, daydreaming), to denying friendship with other rejected students, to intentionally choosing not to act "babyish" by breaking adult (school) rules (e.g., cheating, lying, swearing).

Discussion: The boys changed their behaviors in response to the rejection; however, the changes they made were largely ineffective. Only one boy was successful in changing his image during eighth grade by surpassing what his peers would do and doing something that no one with his reputation would be expected to do. He responded directly and forcefully by yelling at his antagonists, broke school rules, and generally negated the image of his "babyish" label.

should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000). The constructivist paradigm emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them. The answers to the paradigm-defining questions for the constructivist approach are as follows.