

Social Perceptions: the influence of context on the perception of social behaviors and the social consequences of becoming a victim. Multi-study project involving adults and children.

According to a 2020 UNESCO report, at least 30% of students are victims of bullying, physical or verbal abuse at school. In 2014, the Educational Research Institute indicated that 40% of boys and 26% of girls in Poland were victims of psychological violence at school, and 10% of them were regularly bullied. These data show that a lot of children of various ages become victims of immoral behavior several times during their school years. In the case of adults, the statistics seem even more frightening. For instance, an online survey conducted in 2019 by the non-profit organization Stop Street Harassment shows that over 80% of women and 43% of men in the United States have experienced some form of sexual harassment. Of course, this is a select data set. If we were to include all the statistics on immoral behaviors such as theft, violence in the workplace, mobbing, robberies, assaults, one can only imagine the numbers.

In social psychology, a lot of space is devoted to examining the perception of the perpetrators of immoral acts and how immoral behavior is assessed from the perspective of third parties. It is surprising, however, that the analyses in the field of social psychology almost completely ignore the other side of the dyad — the victim of an immoral act — and how being a victim affects how the person is perceived by others. It turns out that victims often declare experiencing negative reactions from the environment. Children who are victims of bullying have fewer reciprocal relationships than non-involved children and very often lose their friends or at least their playmates, and among adult victims reports of social ostracism or rejection by their current friends are more than common.

In the proposed research project, we will look in detail at how victims are perceived socially. In particular, we will answer the following questions: how being a victim influences the perception of a given person by others in the context of their moral and agentic traits such as competences and intelligence; how the victim who becomes a perpetrator afterwards is morally assessed by others; how the victims view themselves in terms of morality and competence; and how children across cultures perceive harm to the victim in the context of pro- and anti-social behavior and its goal. To answer these questions, we will conduct 7 studies which will include adults and preschool children (13 experiments in all). With this research, we will be able to understand not only how the victims are perceived by others, but also how and when this phenomenon emerges and evolves in human development.

The proposed project will serve to explain the reasons and mechanisms behind the social consequences of being a victim of immoral behavior in both children and adults, making a significant contribution to the knowledge across the fields of social psychology, moral psychology, and developmental psychology.