

## Poly-victimization: Childhood Exposure to Multiple Forms of Victimization Summary of Key Points

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Far too many children are exposed to abuse, violence, and crime. A new emphasis on what is being called “poly-victimization” can help professionals identify the most endangered children and youth, provide the most appropriate interventions, and protect them from additional harm.

**Poly-victimization refers to the experience of multiple victimizations of *different kinds*, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, bullying, witnessing family violence, and exposure to community violence (versus experiencing a single form of victimization).**

### ***Evidence indicates that:***

- Many children routinely identified as victims of child abuse or bullying or other single forms of violence are in fact poly-victims who have experienced many different types of victimization.
- Half of sexually victimized youth are also poly-victims.
- Poly-victimization is more highly related to trauma symptoms than experiencing repeated victimizations of a single type
- Poly-victimization explains most of the psychological consequences of victimization. Surprisingly, this is true even in comparison to commonly considered more severe forms of violence such as sexual and physical abuse.

### ***Why the powerful effect of poly-victimization? Poly-victimization:***

- Represents a life condition of victimization rather than a set of events.
- Creates threats to safety, stability, and nurturance in multiple life domains (home, school, community).
- Damages resources (e.g. social support, coping, self-esteem, social competence) that would normally help buffer the impact of victimization.

### ***Implications for practitioners:***

- All providers, no matter their focus, should inquire about victimization experiences in all the major settings of a child's life: home, school, and neighborhood.
- Practitioners can use poly-victimization assessments to better understand and promote treatment effectiveness. To learn how to assess poly-victimization see the NCAC White Paper titled “Poly-victimization: Childhood Exposure to Multiple Forms of Victimization”.
- Interventions that focus on only one form of victimization, such as sexual abuse, without attention to other types of violence exposure, may fail to identify the contexts placing children at greatest risk.
- Poly-victimization points to the importance of moving towards a more holistic and child-centered approach to evaluating and responding to victimized youth which is completely consistent with the Children's Advocacy Center model's core philosophy.

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