

When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts

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Abstract

Inter-group Competitive Victimhood (CV) describes the efforts of members of groups involved in violent conflicts to establish that their group has suffered more than their adversarial group. Such efforts contribute to conflicts' escalation and impede their peaceful resolution. CV stems from groups' general tendency to compete with each other, along with the deep sense of victimization resulting from conflicts. We point to biases that contribute to groups' engagement in CV, describe five dimensions of victimhood over which groups may compete, and contend that such competition serves various functions that contribute to the maintenance of conflicts. Drawing on the Needs-Based Model, we suggest that CV may reflect groups' motivations to restore power or moral acceptance. We then review evidence of the negative consequences of CV for inter-group forgiveness and suggest potential strategies to reduce CV. Finally, we discuss potential moderators and directions for future research.

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Keywords

competitive victimhood, inter-group relations, violent conflicts, victims, perpetrators