



Disciplinary slapping is associated with bullying involvement regardless of warm parenting in early adolescence

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Bullying among adolescents can cause depression and suicidality. Identifying the risk factors for bullying in early adolescence, when its prevalence tends to increase, would assist in its prevention. Although certain parenting styles are known to be associated with bullying, the association of slapping as a parental disciplinary practice with early adolescent bullying is not sufficiently understood. Furthermore, little is known about how warm parenting modifies this association although slapping and warm parenting are not mutually exclusive. The aim of this study was to investigate the association of slapping with the experience of early adolescent bullying—categorized in terms of victims, bullies, and bully-victims—while considering how warm parenting modifies this association.

Methods: This study used data from the Tokyo Early Adolescence Survey, a cross-sectional survey of 4478 children aged 10 from the general population. Data were collected from both children and their primary parent using self-administered questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Responses from 4326 participants with no missing data were usable for the current analysis (mean age, 10.2 ± 0.3 years; 53 % boys).

Results: Frequent and occasional slapping was associated with increased odds of youth being

Abbreviations: T-EAS, Tokyo Early Adolescence Survey; TTC, Tokyo Teen Cohort; SD, standard deviation; IQ, intelligence quotient; BMI, body mass index; K6, Kessler 6; SMFQ, Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire; OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval; WISC-III, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Third Edition

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identified as bullies or bully-victims, even after adjusting for warm parenting. The likelihood of being victims, bullies or bully-victims increased as the frequency of slapping increased.

Conclusion: Disciplinary slapping was associated with increased odds of bullying in early adolescence, regardless of whether warm parenting was present or not.

1. Introduction

Bullying involvement, including victims who are only bullied, bullies who only bully others, and bully-victims who are both bullied and bully others, is a serious issue among adolescents. Bullying involvement can lead to severe psychological and behavioral problems. The experience of being a victim potentially predicts later depression (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Klomek et al., 2008; Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014), psychotic experience (Wolke, Lereya, Fisher, Lewis, & Zammit, 2014) and suicidality (Herba et al., 2008; Klomek et al., 2009, 2008; Takizawa et al., 2014; Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini, & Wolke, 2012). Likewise, being bullies and bully-victims can predict psychotic experience (Wolke et al., 2014), externalizing disorders, and criminality (Klomek, Sourander, & Elonheimo, 2015). Among boys, frequent experience as bullies and bully-victims potentially leads to depression (Klomek et al., 2008). Based on response from multiple informants, bullying has been reported to predict suicidality in preadolescence for bullies and bully-victims (Winsper et al., 2012). Furthermore, harmful effects of bullying involvement can last into adulthood (Klomek et al., 2015) and at least into middle adulthood in the case of children who experienced victimization (Takizawa et al., 2014).

As many as 26% of school children around the world are reported to have been involved in bullying (victims, 12.6%; bullies, 10.7%; bully-victims, 3.6%) (Craig et al., 2009). Moreover, bullying victimization tends to increase from early adolescence (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009) and bullying perpetration seems to mainly occur between early adolescence and late adolescence (Olweus, 1994). Therefore, risk factors for bullying involvement in early adolescence should be identified in order to prevent or reduce the incidence of bullying involvement.

Recent studies have focused on family-as well as school-related risk factors for bullying involvement (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010; Bowes et al., 2009; Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013). Violence from adult family members has been associated with adolescent bullying involvement (Fujikawa et al., 2016). Physical abuse from parents in childhood predicted becoming victims or bully-victims two years later (Bowes et al., 2009). A meta-analysis reported that parenting behaviors including abuse, neglect and maladaptive parenting were associated with being victims and bully-victims (Lereya et al., 2013). Authoritarian parenting, which could include physical discipline, has also been associated with bullying others (Stavriniades, Georgiou, & Fousiani, 2013), and being victims or bully-victims (Baldry & Farrington, 1998).

Physical discipline is defined as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behavior” (Straus & Stewart, 1999). Physical discipline by parents predicts later aggression (Lansford et al., 2014), antisocial behavior (Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997), and depressive symptoms in children (Wang & Kenny, 2014).

Despite this, there is no legal prohibition of physical discipline in the vast majority of countries where approximately 90% of the world’s children live (GITEACPOC, 2016), while physical abuse is banned by national laws or policies in most countries. In Japan, physical discipline by parents is not legally prohibited. In the US, physical discipline is lawful in the home; 94% of toddlers and more than half of 10-year-olds experience physical discipline (Straus, 2010). Cultural norms which approve of violence and cultural beliefs that physical discipline is necessary to correct children’s misbehavior have been seen as explaining the recourse to physical discipline by their parents (Straus, 2010). A study in the US elucidated that experience of physical discipline in infancy predicted aggression in children (Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013). Likewise, another study in the US showed that rarely experiencing physical discipline from childhood to early adolescence predicted the lowest level of antisocial behavior (Lansford et al., 2009). Cultural norms and beliefs run counter to the evidence regarding development from infancy to early adolescence. Thus, appropriately revealing the effects of physical discipline, particularly in early adolescence when children are able to understand their parents’ values, should be important for changing cultural norms and beliefs regarding physical discipline.

Although identifying the risks for bullying involvement in early adolescence is crucial, the association of physical discipline with bullying involvement has been examined less frequently than the above-mentioned problems. Experiencing physical discipline may easily lead to children participating in bullying—as bullies, victims, or bully-victims—as a result of the imitation of this physical discipline and/or its inhibition of the development of children’s assertion skills and morals. Several studies have reported a significant association of physical discipline with bullying involvement among early adolescents in clinical populations or school surveys (Duong, Schwartz, Chang, Kelly, & Tom, 2009; Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Gómez-Ortiz, Romera, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016; Ohene, Ireland, McNeely, & Borowsky, 2006). Cross-sectional studies of adolescents in the US elucidated that parental physical discipline was positively associated with these children bullying others (Espelage et al., 2000; Ohene et al., 2006) and being bullied (Ohene et al., 2006). A study in Spain reported a significant positive indirect effect, in the case of girls, of affection and communication on bullying aggression through physical discipline (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2016). A cross-sectional study in Hong Kong showed that physical discipline was linked to being bullied among early adolescents with high levels of aggression (Duong et al., 2009). However, these studies did not fully take some important factors into consideration.

When the association of physical discipline with bullying involvement is assessed, the following three points should be considered. First, as stated above, physical discipline could lead to all three types of bullying involvement: victims, bullies, and bully-

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