



A longitudinal study of victimization among South Korean youth: The integrative approach between lifestyle and control theory



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ABSTRACT

Even though, studies on juvenile victimization have been ongoing for decades, longitudinal studies on the explanation of juvenile victimization have been under-researched.

This study employed Latent Growth Modeling in order to identify a trajectory of juvenile victimization and to examine the association between parental attachment, juvenile offending, and juvenile victimization using longitudinal data from the Korea Youth Panel Study. Parental attachment demonstrated weak evidence of direct effect on the developmental trajectory of juvenile victimization during adolescence. However, there is meaningful evidence of indirect effects of changes in parental attachment on juvenile victimization through juvenile offending over time. Theoretical relevance and limitations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Understanding a criminal opportunity theory has long been applied in our understanding of crime and victimization risks. During the last three decades, the most important theoretical development in the study of criminal victimization has been lifestyle-exposure and routine activity theories. These theories focus on where crime events occur as well as how the contextual or situational factors create the criminal opportunity, which, in turn, affect vulnerability to crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, & Lu, 1998).

Specifically, opportunity theories put importance on individual lifestyles and routine activities that can alter immediate circumstances, which can increase or decrease criminal opportunities without changing the criminal motivation of potential offenders (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978). An enormous body of research has used the Lifestyle Routine Activity Theory (LRAT) as a theoretical framework to study criminal victimization. Indeed, the theoretical premise of LRAT has received empirical support in successfully predicting various types of property and violent victimization (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1998; Thompson & Fisher, 1996; Tseloni & Farrell, 2002; Turanovic & Pratt, 2014; Turanovic, Reisig, & Pratt, 2015).

In addition, opportunities such as involvement in a high risk lifestyle (Meier & Miethe, 1993), weak parental attachment (Schreck & Fisher, 2004), and delinquent activities (Jensen & Brownfield, 1986) have all been associated with an increased risk of victimization within a multitude of samples and in a variety of contexts. Nearly all of the studies described the relationship between opportunities and victimization with a

single assessment from one moment in time. Therefore, much less is known about specific factors associated with developmental trajectories of juvenile victimization over time. However, a longitudinal approach, such as latent growth model (LGM), provides a powerful statistical technique for analyzing the risk factors of individual differences in change over time. There are a number of studies that have assessed longitudinal data by applying LGMs, and it can be extended in several ways. It is important to note that there are many latent growth models, and over the past two decades these models have been employed in criminological and psychological studies. Curran, Muthen, and Harford (1998) assessed data collected in four waves by using a time-specific method. This model not only examined the influence of time-variant variables but also examined multiple measures of status change simultaneously with an estimation of the normative growth trajectory over time (Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2010; Kline, 2005; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

In the current study, Curran's time-specific method was extended to examine the influence of changes in parental attachment and juvenile offending on the developmental growth trajectory of juvenile victimization. In order to understand the developmental trajectory of juvenile victimization, there are two primary questions that are the focus of this study. First, although previous empirical studies had identified rather strong effects of parental attachment and juvenile offending on victimization within a single time point, the question remained as to whether changes in parental attachment and juvenile offending affect the developmental trajectory of juvenile victimization over time. Second, if parental attachment and juvenile offending are related to the developmental trajectory of juvenile victimization, are there interdependency effects between parental attachment and juvenile offending on juvenile victimization?

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1.1. Lifestyle risk and victimization

Crime stems from a potential offender's perception of an immediate situation, which provides criminal opportunities. These opportunities are viewed as a significant cause of all crime. For this reason, researchers have started focusing on situational and ecological factors that create or facilitate criminal opportunities. LRAT has become a staple theoretical framework to explain differences in victimization risk by integrating routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) with lifestyle-exposure theory (Hindelang et al., 1978). This theory at the micro-level involved the mediating effects of four risk predictors: exposure, proximity to potential offenders, target attractiveness, and guardianship (Miethe & Meier, 1994).

Delinquent activities, which are indicative of the key concept of LRAT (i.e., exposure to motivated offenders), contribute significantly to the prediction of violent victimization. Individuals are exposed to higher risks of victimization when “routine activities and lifestyles place them in risky or vulnerable situations at particular times, under particular circumstances, and with particular kinds of persons” (Miethe & Meier, 1994, p. 48). These risky lifestyles generate not merely an exposure to potential offenders, but they also lead to potential involvement in criminal activities that increase the risks of violent victimization. Jensen and Brownfield (1986) presented that individuals who carry out delinquent activities are more likely to be victimized because they are not only highly exposed to would-be offenders but also actually involved in delinquent acts. Sampson and Lauritsen (1990) demonstrated that offense activity, whether violence or deviant lifestyles, which may lead to situations in which other factors coincide to decrease guardianship, were a significant predictor of violent victimization. Several studies (Holtfreter, Reisig, Piquero, & Piquero, 2010; Lauritsen & Laub, 2007; Lauritsen, Laub, & Sampson, 1992; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990; Ousey, Wilcox & Fisher, 2011) have consistently showed that the amount of time spent on risky lifestyles as well as contact with delinquent peers increased the risks of violent victimization, supporting the earlier work of Jensen and Brownfield (1986).

1.2. Control theory and victimization

A source of victimization risk might be drawn from social ties (relationships). However, it is counterintuitive for child abuse or domestic violence (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Menard, 1999). For example, one would expect parents to act as protectors; however in child abuse cases, parents are often the offenders. It is also difficult to think about how the social relationship acts as a barrier to offending (Hirschi, 1969). Social ties suggest bonds of social obligation, which may affect individual decision making to encourage less-risky behavior. Parental attachment could be viewed as the affective or emotionally charged bond. Adolescents, for example, who had positive relationships with their parents, would think about the impacts of their deviant behavior and also their relationship with their parents when confronted with a criminal opportunity. Thus, they would be less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. It is reasonable then, that individuals having strong social bonds to others would be less vulnerable to crime.

1.3. Integration between LRAT and control theory

A necessary step to bring these two theories into a coherent single theory is to determine that they are appropriate for theoretical integration. The primary purpose of the integration of two traditional theories in criminology, viewed as “competing theories,” is to provide a more comprehensive theory than either one alone. LRAT and control theory are complementary perspectives. However, previous studies on theoretical integration have been discredited, because they have not paid attention to the compatibility between the constituent theories.

The focus of LRAT suggests that it is appropriate for integrating social bonds, which can influence criminal opportunities. The initial presupposition is the idea that all of individual- and aggregate-level criminal opportunities are influenced by social bonds. The foundations of LRAT, which indicate that individual routine activities and social bonds influence crime and victimization, make it more compatible with control theories. The components of social bonds and criminal opportunity are inextricably linked in both constituent theories. The idea that incapable and insufficient social bonds create criminal opportunities is compatible with both theoretical approaches (Wilcox, Land, & Hunt, 2003).

The social bond of attachment corresponds to the degree of emotional intimacy among individuals (Hirschi, 1969). Despite the direct impact of emotional intimacy on risk, the link between the bond of attachment and lifestyles and routine activities is better acknowledged (Felson, 1986; Tillyer, Tillyer, Miller, & Pangrac, 2011; Schreck & Fisher, 2004). Parental attachment, for instance, might serve to constrain children's routine activities with social obligation as a mechanism of supervision and protection. The following section explores how parental attachment is related to the main theoretical concepts of LRAT – proximity to crime, exposure to motivated offenders, target attractiveness, and guardianship – to explain the risk of juvenile victimization.

1.3.1. Parental attachment and proximity to crime

Proximity to crime is defined as “the physical distance between the areas where potential targets of crime reside and where relatively large populations of potential offenders are found” (Cohen, Kluegel, & Land, 1981, p. 507; Meier & Miethe, 1993). It is assumed that motivated offenders select their targets in close proximity to their residence, implying that living in a high crime area means being in close proximity to potential offenders. Parental attachment should be instrumental in reducing the likelihood of their children being close to potential offenders. Parents who have a strong and positive relationship with their children tend to keep them closer to home, which thus, can keep them away from motivated offenders. This is because those parents believe that being away from their home increases the risk of encountering potential offenders (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1978; Tillyer et al., 2011).

1.3.2. Parental attachment and exposure to motivated offenders

Exposure to crime is referred to as vulnerability to crime, involving visibility and accessibility of possible targets to potential offenders (Cohen et al., 1981; Miethe, Stafford, & Long, 1987). Parental attachment should play a significant role in removing potential victims from exposure to motivated offenders. Parents with strong attachment to their children tend to keep them closer to the household and away from strangers who can be motivated offenders. This is because parents assume that children who spend time away from their house would be more visible and accessible to potential offenders, which leads to increased chances of exposure to a high crime situation (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen et al., 1981; Hindelang et al., 1978; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Tillyer et al., 2011). Additionally, parents with strong attachments tend to control their children's peer associations, such as knowing peers and their families, because delinquent peers increase the likelihood of coming in contact with motivated offenders as well as getting involved in delinquent actions (Schreck & Fisher, 2004).

1.3.3. Parental attachment and target attractiveness

Target attractiveness is the symbolic or economic value and inertia (i.e., inability to pose resistance) to motivated offenders (Cohen et al., 1981; Meier & Miethe, 1993). More attractive targets are assumed to be at a higher risk of victimization. The social bond of attachment might be a proxy measure as a handler who is socially obligated to prevent potential targets from making themselves attractive targets. It also requests that children take precautions to encourage safety (e.g., “come directly home after school” or “do not walk home alone”) (Felson, 1986; Schreck & Fisher, 2004). However, deviant parents who are less inclined

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