



The characteristics of help seeking among Palestinian adolescents following exposure to community violence



Becky Leshem^a, Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia^{b,*}, Neil B. Guterman^c

^a School of Special Education at Achva College, Ashkelon, Israel

^b Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

^c School of Social Service Administration, Chicago, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 July 2014

Received in revised form 18 December 2014

Accepted 23 December 2014

Available online 3 January 2015

Keywords:

Community violence
Palestinian adolescents
Help seeking
Barriers for help seeking

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines patterns of and barriers for help seeking after exposure to community violence (ECV) among Palestinian adolescents from the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Method: Self-administrated questionnaires were filled-out by a sample of 1930 Palestinian Junior and High school students. Participants reported on their ECV, choice of help agent, barriers for help seeking, perceived help experience, and sociodemographic factors.

Results: Informal help agents were the first choice of 48% of both male and female adolescents, 30% of the boys and 20% of the girls sought formal help, and 1.9% of the participants sought only formal help. Positive help experience was best attributed to listening and giving advice, while confronting the help seeker led to the most adverse experience. Seeking help from multiple sources produced better help experience. The common reason for not seeking help by girls was feeling that talking wouldn't help. Boys did not seek help out of fear of disclosure and feeling that the problem would go away on its own.

Conclusions: Palestinian adolescents' help seeking patterns tend to confirm with those found in other populations. Study limitations and practical implications are discussed, and future studies are suggested.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Adolescents frequently experience stressful events and require support from their environment in order to cope with distressing psychological consequences (Boyden & Mann, 2005). However, findings of previous studies suggest that up to 50% of the adolescents who display severe psychological disorders, avoid seeking help despite of their natural need for help (Garland & Zigler, 2010). Studies among Arab populations demonstrated some tendency of unwillingness to seek formal help (Ahmead, Rahhal, & Baker, 2010; Al-Krenawi, Graham, Al-Bedah, Kadri, & Sehwal, 2009).

Palestinians are constantly exposed to military violence. This characteristic of Palestinian life in the occupied territories, encouraged researchers to examine the psychological effects of their exposure to war and political violence (Abdeen, Qasrawi, Nabil, & Shaheen, 2008; Haj-Yahia, 2008; Thabet & Vostanis, 2012). Cummings, Goetze-Morey, Schermerhorn, Merrilees, and Cairns (2009) suggested an ecological framework for the effects of political violence on children. The

researchers concluded that political violence acts at the macrosystem level, interacting with community violence, intensity zones and ethnicity at the exosystem level, family violence and parental adjustment at the microsystem, interacting with individual variables. They concluded that war and conflict have multiple interdependent levels of influence on the individual and that future research should consider variables from multiple ecosystem layers.

The mental health and emotional outcomes of exposure to community violence (ECV) have been studied intensively (Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, & Baltes, 2009). For Palestinians, community violence may also act as an indirect conduit for the effects of political violence. Though recent studies have reported very high rates of community violence exposure among Palestinian youth (Haj-Yahia, Leshem, & Guterman, 2013) there is a lack of research on the possible mental health consequences of exposure and the traits of help-seeking as a coping mechanism among the Palestinians, given the collective properties of this society.

The present study examines help-seeking patterns among Palestinian high-school students, following exposure to violent events in the community. Additional study objectives include testing the relationships between help seeking, ECV, satisfaction from help seeking, and socio-demographic factors, exploring the reasons for not seeking help, and examining adolescents' subjective feelings after being helped by formal and informal agents.

* Corresponding author at: The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel. Tel.: +972 2 5882207 (work), +972 2 5828070 (home); fax: +972 2 5823587 (work).

E-mail address: mshajyah@mscc.huji.ac.il (M.M. Haj-Yahia).

2. Literature review

Community violence is typically defined as violent events experienced by youth outside their homes, excluding media violence (Fowler et al., 2009). Exposure to community violence (ECV) is a global major health problem, affecting the physical and mental wellbeing of adolescents (Haj-Yahia, Leshem, & Guterman, 2011; Klodnick, Guterman, Haj-Yahia, & Leshem, 2014; Vorhies, Guterman, & Haj-Yahia, 2011). ECV is a traumatic event and as such it has been correlated with a wide array of mental health and psychosocial consequences, including increased risk violence perpetration (Fowler et al., 2009), criminal involvement (Guerra, Huesmann, & Spindler, 2003), heightened anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, and symptoms of PTSD (Fitzpatrick, Piko, Wright, & LaGory, 2005), risky sexual behavior (Voisin, 2003), greater use of illicit psychoactive substances, and lower academic achievements (Ratner et al., 2006).

Effective treatment exists for various mental malconditions, yet many affected individuals remain untreated, causing personal, family, and society dysfunctioning. The difference between the treated proportion of persons with a disorder and the prevalence of that disorder is known as the treatment gap (World Health Organization, 2001). Direct barriers for receiving mental care include low accessibility, low availability, and high cost of services. The main internal contributor to the treatment gap is failing to seek help due to not acknowledging the problem, perceiving the treatment as ineffective, believing that the problem will go away by itself, preferring to handle the problem without outside help, and fear of stigma (Kohn, Saxena, Levav, & Saraceno, 2004).

Help-seeking has a key role in adolescent coping mechanism, and serves as a major factor in maintaining psychological wellbeing (Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). Help source can be either formal (physician, school counselor, social worker, etc.) or informal (family and friends). Studies of adolescent help-seeking report different proportions of help source usage but the difference in measurement tools prevents comparison of the various results. Reported rates for friends as the preferred help source for emotional problems vary in the range 21.1%–88.3%, reported rates range for parents as first help source variation is 19%–59% and the reported variation in formal medical or mental professional help preference is 7%–29% (Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi, & Rickwood, 2005). Albeit the variations, adolescents are reluctant to seek formal help – they mostly seek help from friends and age-peers whereas their willingness to seek help is lower than their actual need for help (Raviv, Raviv, Vago-Gefen, & Fink, 2009). Up to 50% of the adolescents, who display severe psychological disorders, avoid seeking help (Garland & Zigler, 2010).

The decision to seek help, encouraged by the willingness to receive help, is made after resolving the conflict between the need to ease the distress and the risks of hurting one's self-esteem, feeling a lack of ability to cope, feeling of dependence or helplessness and the cost of professional help (Nadler, Peri, & Chemerinski, 1985). Willingness to seek help is related to internal, external, demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007).

2.1. Internal factors

Willingness to ask for help is linked with higher feeling of self-value, whereas other personality factors may impair the decision to get help (Tedstone Doherty & Kartalova-O'Doherty, 2010). The decision to seek help is powered by balancing the “profit” and the “cost” one would have to pay. An adolescent is not likely to seek help if the instrumental profit is lower than the psychological cost (Vogel, Wester, Wei, & Boysen, 2005). Among the psychological cost factors, we find the fear of losing-face, the fear that help-seeking would not be confidential and the fear of being considered weak and incapable of self-coping (Fox & Butler, 2007).

Adolescents' desire for autonomy and self-reliance is also known to be driving them to solve problems without external aid (Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick, & Morrissey, 1997) coupled with their notion that no one could really understand them (Gilat, Ezer, & Sagee, 2010). Seeking help from formal sources is furthermore impaired by the feeling emotionally remote from the help source (Fox & Butler, 2007).

2.2. External factors

Social and environmental factors affect adolescents' willingness to seek help (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009). Social network members can provide support and encouragement, but they can also transmit stigma and shame, acting within the environmental and cultural contexts (Lindsey, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010). Socio-cultural customs, beliefs, and norms interact with internal factors and affect adolescents' willingness to seek help. Studies of Arab populations have found relatively low levels of willingness to seek help (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009). The contemporary Arab society is still traditional (Pharaon, 2004), and characterized by a collective social system, in which coping is based on informal agents, led by the family as the main resource for help and coping (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). The Arab culture perceives the family as the main social organization. Obligations, needs, aspirations and social ties of the family as an entity, take precedence over those of the individual (Haj-Yahia, 2000). Family problems concern the family alone and that no external element should be involved (Kulwicki, Aswad, Carmona, & Ballout, 2010). Success or failure of a family member is considered as belonging to the entire family and not as a personal issue (Haj-Yahia, 2005). Lower rates of help-seeking among Arab adolescents is mostly explained by the reluctance of the Arab society to share family issues with strangers (Abu-Ras, 2007), and by the fear of the stigma and shame that could accompany help-seeking (Ahmead et al., 2010; Zawawi, 2011).

2.3. Gender

Previous studies identified gender as a significant predictor of help-seeking preferences. Women have positive attitude regarding help seeking, they consult their social network, and seek formal help agents significantly more than men (Laumann, Glasser, Neves, & Moreira, 2009; Thabet, Abu Tawahina, El Sarraj, & Vostanis, 2011; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011). Seeking help conforms to the female social stereotype that includes dependence and emotional expression (Eagly, 2009), while men are expected to be self-dependent and seeking help could threaten their masculinity (Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005). Gender roles and stereotypes are culture dependent, and can account for the variations in the effect of gender on help seeking in different cultures (Guterman, Haj-Yahia, Vorhies, Ismayilova, & Leshem, 2010; Sherer & Karnieli-Miller, 2007). Seeking mental help carries the stigma of shame, and the fear of stigma is very potent among Arabs due to cultural sensitivity, explaining the reluctance of Arab of both genders to seek formal help (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Al-Krenawi et al., 2009).

2.4. Age

Young adolescents seek help mainly from their parents. As they grow up, they prefer the company of friends over parents and spend most of their time with age-peers (Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchev, 2002). Help seeking increases with age but on their way to become self-reliant, adolescents tend not to share or consult with parents and prefer to rely on friends (Troost, Biesecker, Stattin, & Kerr, 2007).

2.5. Socio-economic status (SES)

Adolescents with higher SES are more likely to seek professional help (Tedstone Doherty & Kartalova-O'Doherty, 2010). Adolescents

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/346018>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/346018>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)