



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

Research article

Childhood maltreatment and Chinese adolescents' bullying and defending: The mediating role of moral disengagement

Xingchao Wang^a, Li Yang^b, Ling Gao^c, Jiping Yang^c, Li Lei^{a,*}, Caiyu Wang^d

^a The Center of Internet + Social Psychology, Department of Psychology, Renmin University of China, No. 59 Zhongguancun Street, Haidian District, Beijing 100872, China

^b School of Psychology, South China Normal University, No. 55 Zhongshan Avenue West, Tianhe District, Guangzhou 510631, China

^c School of Education Science, Shanxi University, No. 92 Wucheng Road, Taiyuan 030006, China

^d Department of Psychology, Xinyang Normal University, No. 237 Nanhu Road, Shihe District, Xinyang 464000, China

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Childhood maltreatment
Moral disengagement
Bullying
Defending
Chinese adolescents

ABSTRACT

In the present study, we tested the mediating role of moral disengagement in the effect of childhood maltreatment on bullying and defending. We also examined whether the mediating effect of moral disengagement differed between girls and boys, early and middle adolescents, as well as only and non-only children. Five hundred and fifty-two Chinese adolescents participated in this study. The results indicated that the prevalence rates of physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional abuse, and emotional neglect were 4.0%, 40.0%, 10.5%, and 27.9%, respectively. Path analysis showed that moral disengagement partially mediated the relation between childhood maltreatment and bullying, but did not mediate the relation between childhood maltreatment and defending. Moreover, multi-group analyses indicated that no significant path in the final model differed by gender. However, early adolescents exposed to high levels of childhood maltreatment were more likely to engage in bullying and less likely to engage in defending than middle adolescents, and early adolescents with high levels of moral disengagement were more likely to engage in bullying than middle adolescents. Compared to non-only children, only children exposed to high levels of childhood maltreatment were more likely to score higher on moral disengagement and less likely to engage in defending.

1. Introduction

Bullying is a specific subtype of aggression that is repeated over time against a victim who feels powerless to defend himself or herself against the perpetrator(s) (Monks et al., 2009). School bullying is common around the world. For instance, 29.9% of children reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying in the United States (Nansel et al., 2001). Most importantly, the consequences of bullying can be severe and long-lasting, including mental health problem, self-harm, and suicide (Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015). Given the negative consequences, it is of theoretical and practical importance to explore those factors (e.g., childhood maltreatment and moral disengagement) that may contribute to an increase in adolescents' bullying others in school. However, in spite of the concerted efforts to prevent this problem, bullying continues to plague most schools. One of the deep-seated reasons for this problem is that family might be the possible origin of bullying behavior, rather than the school context alone (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007; Hymel & Bonanno, 2014; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2002). Thus, the current study aimed to extend existing research by assessing the role of childhood maltreatment in the bullying of adolescents. Childhood maltreatment is

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Renmin University of China, No. 59 Zhongguancun Street, Haidian District, Beijing 100872, China.
E-mail address: dr.leili@qq.com (L. Lei).

believed to be an important factor that can potentially increase the risk of bullying perpetration in school (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007; Hong, Espelage, Grogan-Kaylor, & Allen-Meares, 2012). Moral disengagement (henceforth MD) has also been well documented as one of the most examined predictive variables of bullying (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Wang, Yang, & Yang, 2014). However, relatively little empirical research exists on the contribution of MD to the association between childhood maltreatment and later bullying in school. Accordingly, whether MD mediates the association between childhood maltreatment and bullying during adolescence remains relatively less clear.

In most school bullying situations, however, many students not directly involved as bullies or victims are present as bystander (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). These students can assume a range of different roles: (1) the reinforcer of the bully, (2) the assistant of the bully, (3) the outsider, and (4) the defender of the victim (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). Defenders take sides with the victims, comfort and support them (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). They can be used effectively for prevention (Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2008; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996). For this reason, it is also important to investigate how childhood maltreatment and MD relate to adolescents' defending in school bullying situations.

1.1. Childhood maltreatment and adolescents' bullying and defending

Childhood maltreatment is a widespread global phenomenon with adverse effects on adolescents' short- and long-term development (Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Alink, & van Ijzendoorn, 2015; Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van Ijzendoorn, & Alink, 2013). Given the negative consequences of childhood maltreatment for many domains of adolescent development, it is important to know how often childhood maltreatment occurs (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). However, childhood maltreatment research seems to be concentrated in the countries with a Western culture (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013), whereas research in the non-Western cultures of China is lagging far behind (Cui, Xue, Connolly, & Liu, 2016; Ji & Finkelhor, 2015; Li et al., 2014; Qiao & Chan, 2005; Wong et al., 2009).

Few available studies have examined the prevalence of childhood maltreatment in China. For instance, some studies showed that the average prevalence of childhood neglect was 26–32% (Fang et al., 2015; Pan, Zhang, & Wang, 2012), and the prevalence of child physical abuse in China was 36.6% (Ji & Finkelhor, 2015). Another study found that the rates of physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, and sexual abuse were 11.13%, 68.66%, 18.76%, 49.48%, and 27.01%, respectively (Li et al., 2014). However, in these studies, there may be two methodological problems. Many empirical studies have used non-standardized and non-validated instruments, such as chart reviews and single questions (Ji & Finkelhor, 2015; Li et al., 2014). Although Li and colleagues' investigation used a standardized instrument (i.e., the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form, CTQ-SF), their sample only included the 10th grade students, which might lead to selection bias. That is, some parts of the target population (e.g., 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades students) were not included in the sample population (i.e., 10th grade students). Thus, the current study investigated the prevalence of childhood maltreatment in China using a sample of 552 adolescents ranging from 7th to 11th grades.

There is a substantial body of research investigating the effect of childhood maltreatment on adolescents' bullying others. Some theorists have claimed that victims of childhood maltreatment are at risk of becoming perpetrators of bullying and other aggressive behavior and defined this phenomenon as the "cycle of violence" (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990; Forsman & Langstrom, 2012; Hodgdon, 2009; Hovee et al., 2015). The cycle of violence hypothesis assumes that children who experience maltreatment are more likely to perpetrate bullying, aggression, and violence as they age (Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Gomez, 2011; Hong et al., 2012).

Some empirical studies support the hypothesis showing that childhood maltreatment at home can potentially increase the risk of bullying perpetration in school, and maltreated children are more likely than nonmaltreated children to bully their peers (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007; Hong et al., 2012; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001; Wang, Jiang et al., 2016). Numerous empirical studies have shown that childhood maltreatment is significantly associated with bullying perpetration and aggression (Auslander, Sterzing, Threlfall, Gerke, & Edmond, 2016; Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Bowes et al., 2009; Gomez-Ortiz, Romera, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016; Hebert, Cenat, Blais, Lavoie, & Guerrier, 2016; Hodgdon, 2009; Hovee et al., 2015; Keene & Epps, 2015). The effect of childhood maltreatment on bullying perpetration can be explained by social learning theory (Gomez, 2011; Hong et al., 2012). According to social learning theory, bullying behaviors are learned and reinforced through child observation of parental modeling and abusive caregivers (Monks et al., 2009). That is, children, who experience child maltreatment, may learn that bullying others is an acceptable way to respond to disagreements and become aggressive with their weaker peers (Godinet, Li, & Berg, 2014). Therefore, victims of childhood maltreatment enter adolescence with the belief that bullying others is a method for dealing with interpersonal conflict (Gomez, 2011).

Although considerable research has established the positive link between childhood maltreatment and adolescents' bullying perpetration, much less is known about how childhood maltreatment relates to defending among adolescents in school bullying situations. Defending, as a prosocial behavior, refers to siding with victims, supporting, helping, or consoling them, or actively intervening to stop the bullying (Caravita, Gini, & Pozzoli, 2012; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Sijtsema, Rambaran, Caravita, & Gini, 2014). Considering that the experience of people throughout their lives leads them to memorize certain knowledge structures that affect their behavior in everyday situations (Pozzoli, Gini, & Thornberg, 2016), we proposed that childhood maltreatment might be negatively associated with defending. Two reasons underlie our argument. First, defending is associated with high social self-efficacy and efficacious coping strategies (Gini et al., 2008; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010, 2013; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). However, maltreated children are likely to develop a sense of powerlessness, lower self-confidence, and inability to cope with trauma (Gomez, 2011). Thus, maltreated children may fail to protect themselves or peers due to the sense of powerlessness (Hong et al., 2012; Shields & Cicchetti,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4935991>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4935991>

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