



# Hierarchies of child maltreatment types at different perceived severity levels in European Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans



Yoona Lee <sup>a,\*</sup>, Kathleen Malley-Morrison <sup>b</sup>, Mikyung Jang <sup>c</sup>, Malcolm W. Watson <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02453, USA

<sup>b</sup> Boston University, Waltham, MA 02453, USA

<sup>c</sup> Korea National Open University, Seoul, South Korea

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 June 2014

Received in revised form 20 August 2014

Accepted 22 August 2014

Available online 7 September 2014

### Keywords:

Child maltreatment

Maltreatment type

Severity

Perception

Hierarchy

Ethnicity

## ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study was to compare differences within and between ethnic groups in their perspectives on what constituted child maltreatment and how severe (extreme, moderate, or mild) they perceived different types of maltreatment to be. A sample of 150 European American, Korean American, and Korean college students completed a survey asking them to give examples of parental behaviors that would be considered by people in their culture to be extreme, moderate, and mild forms of child abuse. The responses were coded for maltreatment types (e.g., physical, psychological, neglect) and subtypes (e.g., hitting). The frequency with which different types of maltreatment were considered abusive varied within ethnicity based on designated level of severity. These findings suggest that arbitrarily categorizing a child's maltreatment experience into a rigid, pre-determined hierarchy of maltreatment types without considering the severity of different forms of maltreatment can result in overlooking valuable information. Moreover, fewer European Americans than Koreans identified psychological aggression as an extremely abusive type of abuse as well as in their total examples of abuse. European Americans placed greater emphasis on physical aggression, whereas Koreans focused more on psychological aggression and neglect. In perceptions of abuse, Korean Americans were more similar to European Americans than to Koreans. We recommend that when evaluating level of child abuse, investigators and researchers should take into account the different levels of severity within each type of maltreatment and the behaviors that are considered normative within different cultures.

© 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

Making comparisons of child abuse across cultures and even across studies has been difficult because of the imprecision of definitions of abuse. The National Research Council (1993), pointing out the absence of clear operational definitions of child abuse, recommended quantifying relevant maltreatment dimensions, especially severity, rather than focusing on the simple presence or absence of maltreatment (Herrenkohl, 2005; Litrownik et al., 2005; Runyan et al., 2005). However, difficulties in defining maltreatment types and judging the severity of different forms of abuse continue to plague researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in this field (Arruabarrena & De Paúl, 2012; Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2009; Litrownik et al., 2005; Sprang, Clark, & Bass, 2005).

Some attention (e.g., Raman & Hodge, 2012) has been given to the possibility that views concerning the severity of different types of maltreatment differ across cultures. However, there is a dearth of actual cross-cultural studies focusing on ethnic differences in perspectives on child maltreatment (Elliott & Urquiza, 2006; Fakunmoju et al., 2013; Miller & Cross, 2006). In particular, there is a need for more qualitative research on ethnic minorities that can describe culturally-divergent ethnic groups and capture the complexity of cultural constructs (Ponterotto, 2002). This is important because particular cultural constructs and behaviors may be unique to the particular sociocultural contexts within which development occurs (Ponterotto, 2005). Surprisingly, to our knowledge, there have been no empirical studies examining different definitions or conceptions of child maltreatment types within and across cultures based on a bottom-up approach. To address this gap in the literature, we administered an open-ended survey asking participants to give examples of parental behaviors that would be considered by people in their culture to be extreme, moderate, and mild forms of child abuse. After coding these specific examples, we examined the hierarchy of maltreatment types perceived as abusive at different severity levels (i.e., extreme, moderate, and mild) within and between

\* Corresponding author at: Adjunct Faculty and Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Psychology, MS 062, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02454-9110, USA. Tel.: +1 781 736 3252.

E-mail address: [yoona@brandeis.edu](mailto:yoona@brandeis.edu) (Y. Lee).

ethnic cultural groups (i.e., European American, Korean American, and Korean).

## 2. Hierarchies in severity of maltreatment types within ethnicities

A number of researchers have tried to construct hierarchical classification systems identifying the predominant types of maltreatment that best predict children's developmental outcomes following multiple maltreatment experiences. Based on the presumed seriousness of different types of maltreatment, their status in an active-passive dimension (in which neglect and emotional abuse are often seen as more passive and sexual and physical abuse as more active), and violation of social norms, researchers have assumed a hierarchy in the severity of maltreatment types; specifically, sexual abuse has been considered highest in a hierarchy of maltreatment, followed by physical abuse, then neglect, and then emotional (psychological) maltreatment (Boxer & Terranova, 2008; Hahm, Lee, Ozonoff, & Van Wert, 2010; Lau et al., 2005; Manly, Cicchetti, & Barnett, 1994). In fact, when Child Protective Service (CPS) agencies assess and screen child maltreatment reports, victims of sexual and physical types of abuse take priority over neglect and emotional types (Wells, Downing, & Fluke, 1991). Consistent with this ranking, sexual abuse has been more strongly linked with risky behavioral outcomes than physical abuse (Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2007) and neglect (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 2001). Furthermore, the impact of physical abuse on delinquency and violence outcomes appears to be slightly stronger than that of neglect (Mersky & Reynolds, 2007). However, as noted by Boxer and Terranova (2008), findings regarding the extent to which the outcomes of forms of abuse rated higher on the hierarchy are actually worse than outcomes of abuse lower in the hierarchy are mixed. The results of research by Hahm et al. (2010) did not support the idea of a hierarchy of maltreatment types. For example, they found that sexual abuse was related to only one subsequent sexual risk, but not to 12 other risk behaviors related to sexual, delinquent, and suicidal outcomes. Also, the impact of neglect, which was significantly linked with 7 out of 13 negative outcomes, was not much less than the impact of physical abuse, which was significantly related to 9 out of 13 outcomes. Moreover, Manly, Kim, Rogosch, and Cicchetti (2001) found that neglect was more likely than physical abuse to be related to higher levels of withdrawal behaviors. Given such inconsistencies, Lau et al. (2005) pointed out a need for empirical investigation of the validity of current ranking systems for severity of abuse.

As noted by Runyan et al. (2005), in applied settings in the United States, there have been attempts to develop a standardized classification system for determining child maltreatment incidences, beyond an original CPS assessment: the LONGSCAN (Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect) Maltreatment Classification System (MCS), developed by Barnett, Manly, and Cicchetti (1993, as cited in Runyan et al., 2005) and the Second National Incidence Studies (NIS-2), developed by Sedlak (1986, as cited in Runyan et al., 2005). Both classification systems were developed in the U.S. as methods of classifying maltreatment allegations from CPS agencies using systematic and reliable standards (English, Bangdiwala, & Runyan, 2005). According to the CPS assessment system and Modified Maltreatment Classification System (MMCS) (e.g., English & the LONGSCAN Investigators, 1997; Sprang et al., 2005), sexual abuse has been considered as the most severe type of abuse (without consideration of various subtypes or domains). It is less clear whether and how physical abuse, neglect, and psychological/emotional abuse differ from each other in their actual severity because within each of these major types of abuse there are subtypes that can differ in level of severity. For example, in the MMCS, hitting involving significant bruising to lower extremities would be classified as severe maltreatment, but hitting resulting in some or minor bruising to the lower extremities would be considered moderate or even mild maltreatment. Recently, one study investigating the perceptions of 750 CPS workers in the Basque Country, Spain

(Arruabarrena & De Paúl, 2012) revealed inaccuracies and inconsistencies in CPS assessments (based on a coding system adapted from the MMCS) of the severity of maltreatment types; their results showed that among the CPS caseworkers rating the severity of different forms of maltreatment in case vignettes, only one fifth of the respondents rated the vignettes in ways that were considered accurate on the basis of CPS guidelines for assessment. This finding revealed different perceptions regarding maltreatment types and their severity even among experts.

### 2.1. The first research questions

Given the inconsistencies in judgments regarding the severity of different maltreatment types, one question of interest was whether some behaviors would be perceived as examples of maltreatment more often than other behaviors regardless of assumptions about severity levels. That is, in providing examples of child abuse, are people more likely to give examples of one type of behavior (e.g., some form of physical aggression) than other types of behavior (e.g., psychological aggression or neglect) across different levels of presumed severity of abuse (i.e., extreme, moderate, and mild)? A competing question was the extent to which people would consistently identify some types of maltreatment as more severely abusive than other types. Would incidents involving physical forms of aggression be identified more frequently than other types of aggression as severely abusive, and would neglect and psychological types of aggression be more often identified as less severely abusive (i.e., as being moderately or mildly abusive)? We expected that the frequency of references to physical maltreatment, neglect, and psychological types would vary based on the level of presumed severity of abuse; for example, physical abuse would be portrayed more often as a prototypical type of severely abusive maltreatment type than would psychological abuse and neglect. We also predicted that all references to sexual abuse would be given only as examples of extreme abuse.

## 3. Hierarchies in severity of maltreatment types between the U.S. and Korea

Also of interest in the current study was the possibility of cultural differences among European Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans in hierarchies of perceived severity of maltreatment. Given cultural differences in child rearing norms, it is likely that what is considered appropriate discipline and what is considered maltreatment may vary across cultures and thereby influence views regarding the outcomes (more or less severe) and different motives for particular parental behaviors. Lansford (2010) argued that culture functions in ways that can aggravate or diminish the effect of physical discipline on children's problematic behaviors. As compared to most cases of physical discipline performed by European American parents, physical discipline administered by some ethnic minority parents, because it may be perceived as reflecting concern for children's welfare and keeping children from engaging in antisocial behaviors, may have different implications and meanings (McLoyd & Smith, 2002; Taylor, Hamvas, & Paris, 2011).

In particular, previous literature implies some obvious differences between Western and Eastern cultures in physical discipline, which leads to potential differences in perceptions of physical abuse. Many studies demonstrate that an emphasis on physical discipline as a cultural custom and childrearing norm is common among East Asians: greater endorsement and approval of physical punishment found in Korean than in U.S. samples (Douglas, 2006; Mercurio, You, & Malley-Morrison, 2006); higher levels of physical discipline in East Asians than in other ethnic groups (Hahm & Guterman, 2001; Zhai & Gao, 2010); and a higher level of authoritarian parenting in Chinese than in U.S. parents (Porter et al., 2005). Moreover, according to the Children's Bureau, a comparison of abuse rates by the Children's Bureau (2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) revealed that Asian Americans

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6834186>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6834186>

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