Personality and Individual Differences 87 (2015) 85–89

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

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

Victimization due to bullying and physical aggression in Samoan men and women☆

Scott W. Semenyna *, Paul L. Vasey

Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 16 April 2015
Received in revised form 16 July 2015
Accepted 21 July 2015
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Bullying
Physical aggression
Measurement
Victimization
Cross-cultural research
Samoa

ABSTRACT

In recent years, bullying has come into focus as a critically important social issue that demands empirical understanding to inform best practice regarding both intervention and prevention. In Western cultures, low physical aggression in boys, but high physical aggression in girls, predicts elevated victimization due to bullying, and we predicted that the same would be true cross-culturally. The present study sought to understand the role that physical aggression plays in victimization in Samoa, provide a prevalence estimate of the rate of bullying in the island nation, as well as validate the *Forms of Bullying Scale* (FBS; Shaw, Dooley, Cross, Zubrick, & Waters, 2013) in a cross-cultural context. In a sample of adult Samoan men and women ($n = 214$), men reported elevated rates of verbal, physical, and overall rates of victimization due to bullying in childhood compared to women, but no sex differences emerged in levels of physical aggression. Additionally, the FBS showed appreciable reliability, as well as a latent factor structure consistent with the findings of the scale's authors. Prevalence of victimization due to bullying in Samoa is comparable to that reported by other authors conducting cross-cultural research on this topic.

1. Introduction

Bullying (i.e., repeated attempts by a group or individual to gain social advantage by the use of physical, verbal, or relational aggression against a target; Crick & Dodge, 1999; Espelage & Swearer, 2003) has come to the forefront in recent years as a highly important social issue (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Research indicates that bullying has both immediate and long-term negative impacts on physical and mental health (e.g. Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Copeland et al., 2014; Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). This has led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare bullying to be a "major public health problem" (p.403) that necessitates immediate and widespread policy regarding prevention and intervention (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010).

Most bullying research has been conducted using *WEIRD* samples (i.e., those that are *White*, *Educated*, *Industrialized*, *Rich*, and *Democratic*; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) even though the prevalence and incidence of bullying is known to differ across a variety of cultural contexts (Craig et al., 2009; Due & Holstein, 2008; Due et al., 2009; Flemming & Jacobsen, 2010; UNICEF, 2014). Despite this cross-cultural variation, bullying behavior seems to be a relatively ubiquitous feature of human development (Due & Holstein, 2008), and some argue a logical manifestation of childhood aggression aimed at hierarchy formation and maintenance (Cillessen & Mayeaux, 2004; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Further cross-cultural research could help to elucidate the common unifying elements of bullying that are cross-culturally invariant.

Because bullying is often characterized as one subset of aggressive behavior (e.g. Craig et al., 2009; Crick & Dodge, 1999; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009), it is critical to understand the relationship that bullying shares with aggression more broadly. Indeed, some definitions of aggression (e.g. "any action undertaken with the apparent intent of causing physical or psychological harm" Burbank, 1987: 72) could easily function as operational definitions for bullying as well. In studies conducted on participants ranging from young children to middle-aged adults, it is widely reported that males tend to be more aggressive than females (e.g. Archer, 2004, 2009; Hyde, 1990; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980). This finding must, however, be evaluated in light of evidence that men and women tend to differ in the quality of their aggression, but not so much in quantity (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist, 1994). While males typically engage in more blatant and direct forms of aggression (Archer, 2009; Craig et al., 2009) women exhibit styles that are more subtle and covert (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). Additionally, some cultural milieus seem to foster more uniform levels and forms of aggressive behavior in both men and women (Archer, 2004; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980; Whiting & Edwards, 1973). Indeed, while men tend to be more physically aggressive cross-culturally, sex differences can be variable for verbal aggression, and either nonexistent or reversed when considering relational forms of aggression (see especially Archer, 2004).

☆ This research was supported by the University of Lethbridge, by a SSHRC Insight Grant to Paul L. Vasey, and a SSHRC CGS Scholarship to Scott W. Semenyna. The collection of this data was supported in part through the University of Lethbridge, support # 41730.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge, C866 University Hall, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada.
E-mail address: semenynas@gmail.com (S.W. Semenyna).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.07.032
0191-8869/

Sex differences in styles of aggression are echoed in much of the bullying literature. Boys suffer the ill effects of physical bullying more often, whereas girls tend to be victimized in less obvious, but equally damaging social ways (Craig et al., 2009; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012). It has also been demonstrated that boys who are unlikely to use physical aggression tend to be especially likely targets of bullies (Craig, 1998; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Young & Sweeting, 2004). The opposite is true of girls, where a tendency to employ physical aggression (among other gender-atypical traits) is associated with elevated victimization (Young & Sweeting, 2004). This may be reflective of the broader social context in which bullies operate, namely that gender-atypical behavioral expressions (i.e. low physical aggression in boys or high physical aggression in girls) provide salient cues, which bullies use to target victims.

Although numerous measurement instruments have been used by bullying researchers, there is little consensus on which one is best, and even less certainty regarding their respective validities and psychometric properties (Cornell & Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Felix, Sharkey, Green, Furlong, & Tanigawa, 2011). In response to this, a group of Australian researchers (Shaw, Dooley, Cross, Zubrick, & Waters, 2013) constructed and validated a multi-item measure of bullying victimization and perpetration in adolescence, the *Forms of Bullying Scale* (FBS), which drew extensively from the work of pioneers in the field (e.g. Olweus, 1996; Rigby, 1998).

The current study sought to utilize the FBS in a sample of men and women from Samoa in order to assess its cross-cultural validity and provide a prevalence estimate of victimization due to bullying in this country. UNICEF released information regarding the prevalence of bullying throughout the developing world (UNICEF, 2014), including Samoa, where 74% of youth aged 13–15 reported having experienced bullying in the previous 12 months. Although this figure suggests that bullying is a salient social issue in Samoa, the measures employed did not fully capture the types or severity of victimization that researchers gain when using multi-item inventories such as the FBS. Additionally, we sought to understand the connections between physical aggression and bullying in the Samoan context. Specifically, we anticipate that men and women will differ in their reported levels of physical aggression, and that low physical aggression in men, but high physical aggression in women, will significantly predict reported victimization due to bullying in childhood.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Data were collected on Samoa's most populated island, Upolu. Adult participants (104 women, 110 men, M_{age} = 31.1 years, age range: 18–61; for further details see Results) were recruited using a network sampling procedure which involves an initial participant recommending other individuals that could be interviewed, who themselves provide further referrals, and so on. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the author's University Human Subjects Research Committee approved all materials and procedures.

2.2. Materials and procedure

All measures were translated and back-translated by two fluent Samoan–English speakers. A Samoan research assistant was present for all interviews in order to clarify questions and assist with data collection. Participants first completed a brief biographic questionnaire. This included questions about participant gender, age, education level, and income. Education level was based on completion of primary (1), secondary (2), or tertiary (3) level of education. Income was assessed on a ten-point scale by asking about weekly income (1: 0–100 *tala* per week, 5: 400–500 *tala* per week, 10: More than 1000 *tala* per week). The *Forms of Bullying Scale-Victimization* (FBS-V; Shaw et al., 2013) was utilized in order to assess childhood victimization due to bullying. Participants were asked to recall their experiences with various forms of bullying while they were children (i.e. less than 12 years old). Ten questions were rated on a five-point scale (1: "This did not happen to me"; 2: "Once or twice"; 3: "Every few weeks"; 4: "About once a week"; and 5: "Several times a week or more"). Reliability of the *FBS-V* was appreciable in this sample (α = .79). Physical aggression was evaluated via the relevant subscale of the *Aggression Questionnaire* (*AQ*; Buss & Perry, 1992), which consists of nine questions such as "Once in a while I can't control the urge to strike another person" rated on a 5-point scale (1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me; 5 = extremely characteristic of me). This questionnaire was administered twice, once with specific reference to when the participant was a child (i.e. 12 years old or younger), and again with reference to when they were adults (i.e. over 18 years of age). Reliability of both the *Childhood* and *Adult Aggression Questionnaires* was appreciable (α = .56, α = .58 respectively) but was significantly improved (α = .69 for both) by the removal of one reverse coded item, possibly due to the difficulty of translating a double negative (i.e. "I can think of no good reason for ever hitting a person"). This question was thus excluded from subsequent analysis, and only the eight (8) questions with higher reliability were retained.

3. Results

Biographic variables were compared between men and women using independent sample *t*-tests. Men and women did not differ in their age (p = .85), education level (p = .45), or income (p = .22). Age did not correlate with adult levels of physical aggression in either men or women (both p > .50).

Means ($\pm SD$) were calculated separately for men and women for both childhood and adult levels of physical aggression, the five types of bullying recommended by Shaw et al. (2013), as well as *Overt/Direct* (questions 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8) and *Covert/Indirect* (questions 2, 3, 7, 9, and 10) bullying (see Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Prinstein et al., 2001). These values were then compared using independent sample *t*-tests, which indicated that men did not differ from women in levels of physical aggression, but were more likely to report significantly higher levels of childhood verbal, physical, overt and overall victimization due to bullying than were women (Table 1).

In line with previous research (e.g. Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011), individuals were parsed into groups of low, medium, and high victimization on the *FSB-V* (i.e., low victimization = 10–19 points; medium = 20–29 points, high ≥ 30 points) in order to calculate a prevalence estimate for childhood victimization due to bullying in Samoa. Overall, 57.5% (68 women, 55 men) of individuals reported low, 29.9% (24 women, 40 men) medium, and 12.6% (12 women, 15 men) high victimization as children. The distribution of victimization

Table 1
Comparisons of various forms of bullying between men and women.

	Men		Women					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Childhood *AQ*	19.06	6.43	18.49	7.13	0.62	212	.538	–
Adult *AQ*	19.17	6.26	18.22	7.04	1.05	212	.297	–
Type of victimization:								
Verbal	3.86	1.93	3.08	1.41	2.62	199.4[a]	.009*	.46
Threatened	4.12	2.06	3.64	1.84	1.77	212	.078	–
Physical	3.95	1.93	3.30	1.71	2.63	212	.009*	.36
Relational	4.27	2.36	3.92	2.01	1.17	209.7[b]	.246	–
Social	4.56	2.17	4.35	2.15	0.74	212	.463	–
Overt/direct	9.74	3.88	8.24	3.51	2.95	212	.004*	.41
Covert/indirect	10.85	4.57	10.05	4.06	1.36	212	.174	–
Overall bullying	20.59	7.63	18.29	6.66	2.35	212	.020*	.32

[a] *Df* adjusted based on Levene's test for equality of variances: F = 10.33, p = .002.
[b] *Df* adjusted based on Levene's test for equality of variances: F = 4.81, p = .03.
* p < .05.