

The Impact of Bullying on Chinese Middle School Students

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Abstract: Bullying occurs all over the world, and it is also an education issue that has attracted much attention. The rates of bullying and victimization in schools worldwide are very high. In China, the problem of bullying is also very serious. Among the 9,015 middle school students, about 25.7% have suffered bullying at least once a month, and the ratio of males to females is similar. There are significant psychosocial differences between students who participated in bullying and students who did not participate in bullying. By reading related literature, I will critically explore the impact of bullying on Chinese middle school students. The research results show that in Chinese middle schools, bullying has negative effects on victims, bullies and bystanders in many aspects, such as academic performance, psychological effects, peer relationships and their future lives. The impact on victims is broader and deeper than the impact on attackers and bullying bystanders. Finally, I will make some suggestions for policy, practice, and future research.

1. Introduction

School bullying is common in a variety of cultural contexts. In other words, schools are not necessarily a 'safe haven' for students, but there may also be a significant number of students worried about being bullied and harassed (Juvonen, Wang & Espinoza, 2011). According to James (2010), the worldwide school bullying rate is 3 per cent to 27 per cent, and the victimization rate is higher between 9 per cent and 32 per cent. Male students have more participation rates than female students do. Research shows that approximately 25.7% of the total of 9015 students in Chinese middle schools are bullied at least once a month, and the male-female ratio is similar. There are significant psychosocial differences between students who participate in bullying and students who are not involved (Cheng et al., 2010). The bullying rate in Chinese middle schools is slightly lower than in other countries. The reason may be that Chinese students think that some behaviors are bullying in definition, or because some students are not willing to report being bullied. In the past 20 years, Chinese schools have attached great importance to students' academic performance and neglected the cultivation of other qualities, resulting in the lack of students' ability to resolve conflicts and problems (Cheng et al., 2010).

Olweus (1995) defines that bullying is a violent act that repeats in interpersonal relationships of power inequality. Wölfer and Scheithauer (2014) argue that bullying is a harmful act for those who are difficulty protecting themselves. Espelage and Sweener (2003) emphasize that bullying in middle school includes one or more aggressors attempting to gain dominance in all aspects, physical or linguistic attacks for the continuous improvement of status or property. Usually, bullying is associated with some severe short-term and long-term negative consequences. For instance, loneliness, depression, the risk of alcohol or drug abuse, poor academic performance and difficulty in maintaining and close relationships with friends are associated with bullying behaviour (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying in this article refers to school bullying, which includes direct physical bullying and indirect bullying. Direct physical bullying (physical attacks, including playing, kicking, pushing) occurs mostly among male students (Murray-Close, & Crick, 2006). Indirect bullying, such as name-calling, provoking, making threats, and Spreading rumours, making faces and creating social exclusion, which often occurs in girls (Hutzell & Payne, 2012).

Bullying tends to continue to increase in early education, peaking around 12-14 years old, and then gradually decreasing after the middle school period. However, studies have shown that children who

are involved in bullying for a long time, whether they are aggressors or victims, may have a wide range of behavioural and psychological problems (Bender & Lösel, 2011). Based on the high incidence of bullying in China and the rest of the world, and its impact on students, the question that this article will explore is "What is the impact of bullying on Chinese middle school students?" Hopefully, this article may raise the attention of teachers, parents and school administrators on bullying. Teachers and parents can realize that the impact of bullying on students is multifaceted. Thus, implementing some effective measures to prevent bullying.

In this article, I will critically explore the impact of bullying on many aspects of Chinese middle school students, and argue that in Chinese middle schools, bullying has negative effects on victims, aggressors and bullying bystanders in many aspects, such as academic performance, psychological impact, peer relationship and their future life. I will first discuss the effects of bullying on victims, including physical influence, psychology effect, academic impact, peer relationship and the effects for their future life. What is next is the discussion of the impact of bullying on aggressors, including psychological impact, academic outcome impact and the impact on their future life. Following this, I will explore the negative effects on bullying bystanders in terms of their psychological and physical issue. Finally, I will give some advice on policies, practice and future research.

2. Impact on victims

Undeniably, no matter whether the negative impact of bullying on victims is direct or indirect, the negative effect on the victims is enormous, which includes psychological effects, physical impact, academic influences, influences of peer relationships, of happiness perceptions, and of future life.

2.1 Psychological impact

Compared with the students who had not been bullied, victims are more likely to develop psychological problems (Adams & Lawrence, 2011). The effect of bullying on the mental health of adolescents is similar to that of abuse, and sometimes, the impact of bullying can be more dangerous (Lereya et al., 2015). Adams and Lawrence (2011) state that most victims who feel inferior have experienced misunderstandings and regard themselves as losers. Many studies have found that bullied students are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, and in extreme cases have had suicidal thoughts (McVie, 2014; Rivers et al., 2009;). For example, a freshman in a middle school in Ireland chose to commit suicide because he was bullied and excluded by many students (Eckholm, & Zezima, 2010). Similar phenomena are not uncommon in Chinese middle schools. In contrast, the investigators found that those who did not participate in bullying felt safe at school had a greater sense of belonging to the school, and these students did not feel depressed and lonely (Glew et al., 2005). Lereya et al., (2015) added his opinion that bullying may be the cause and risk factor for future mental health problems. Besides, the survey shows that even students who are not actively involved in bullying, the victims can increase the humiliation experienced for being insulted in public, and the negative psychological impact through the bystander passive standing or observation the process of bullying (Hazler & Denham, 2002).

2.2 Physical impact

However, in addition to the negative psychological impact of bullying, some studies also show that being bullied has a physical impact. First, direct bullying has caused severe harm to some of the victims' bodies, and even some students need hospitalization (Cheng, 2010). In addition, Rigby (2003) found that if someone was under bullying for a long time, in addition to causing depression and anxiety, it may lead to low immunity. A similar result was found in Copeland et al.'s (2014) survey, where bullying can change the stress response, leading to a continuation of the inflammatory process. Moreover, physical effects include headaches, migraine, panic, insomnia and irritability, and some symptoms of acute stress (Aluede et al., 2008). A study of bullying in the UK shows that victims are more than twice as likely to have headaches (more than once a week) than students who do not participate in bullying (Rigby, 2003).

2.3 Academic impact

Bullying also has an impact on the academic achievement of the victims, manifested by lower academic performance and a lower level of general education. The study found that although family background and school choice largely determine student academic achievement when these factors are controlled, bullying can also affect academic performance to a certain extent (Williams & Peguero, 2013). Williams and Peguero (2013) found that bullying reduced the average grade of middle school students after considering the background factors of the schools and students. Macmillan (2000) pointed out that victims may be emotionally stressed because of bullying, leading to a decline in academic performance. It may also be due to the fact that serious victims have lower attendance, thus affecting the learning effect (Rigby, 2003). For example, a study of middle school students in Australia found that 19% of boys and 25% of girls had higher absenteeism rates because they were often bullied (at least once a week) (Rigby, 2003). Juvonen, Wang and Espinoza (2011) added their view that the negative emotions after bullying hindered students from focusing and preparing for the exam, which mainly led to the victims getting lower on the exam achievements. They stressed that over time, the academic performance of victims who continue to be bullied may decline even faster (Juvonen, Wang & Espinoza, 2011).

Victims are also less educated than their peers who are not involved in bullying (Brown and Taylor, 2008). Research shows that victims also missed more opportunities to learn (Brown et al., 2011), which may be due to being bullied at school, so it reduced their willingness to go to school (Brown & Patterson, 2012), resulting in a lack of academic excellence. Hutzell and Payne (2012) support this view that education avoidance, the avoidance of all student activities and other school-related activities because of bullying, is one of the effects of bullying on victims.

2.4 Impact on peer relationship

Being bullied may result in a reduction in the victims' companions. Perren and Alsaker (2006) argue that being bullied may lead to a loss of friendship or peer relationships; this may be due to internal and external causes. The internal reason is that victims often like to be alone because they are afraid of being hurt by others. They feel lonely, incapable of making friends, dealing with improper relationships with classmates, and it is difficult to get along with classmates in a positive way (Cheng, 2010; Rivers et al., 2009). A study shows that students who are bullied, whether in elementary or middle school, found it difficult to make friends and feel that no one will listen to them. When others attack with words, they do not know how to fight back (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

The external reason for the decrease in the number of peers may be that many students believe that having a better friendship with the victims will be the target of bullying. In addition, the victims are unable to provide any status in the class for their peers. Furthermore, some of the behaviours of the victims can lead to a decrease in the attractiveness of their peers (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Nansel et al. (2001) also puts forward the same view that victims are likely to be avoided by their peers because their companions are afraid of being bullied or losing their social status among their peers.

2.5 Long term impact

Bullying may exert a negative impact on the victims' future love and family life. Victims are shy about women in future love relationships and may have complications in sexual relations (Rivers et al., 2009). Ali (2016) adds his views to the victims' future family life; they may show violent behaviour against the spouse and severe corporal punishment of the child (ALI, 2016).

Moreover, being bullied in childhood is related to the future economic situation of the victims. A survey shows that people who have been bullied in childhood have a high rate of unemployment at the age of 24-26 (Wolke et al., 2013). Another study found that women who were bullied in childhood had higher odds of being unemployed because of illness or disability. They have meager financial savings, are less likely to own property, and earn less on average than women who were not bullied in their childhood (Brimblecombe, 2018). A similar phenomenon has been found in the survey of the economic situation of men who have been bullied in childhood. That is, the higher unemployment rate

and fewer savings, the proportion of possessing real estate is small. But the only difference is that there is almost no difference in the average wage level compared to other men who have not been bullied (Brimblecombe, 2018). The survey found that the reasons for these results may be related to the low education level of the victims. Victims who have not completed secondary education and directly entered the labor market may participate in industries with low wages and little social security (Moore, 2015).

2.6 Impact on the perception of happiness

The impact of bullying is also reflected in students' perception of happiness. Study shows that students who do not participate in bullying have a better quality of life than those who are being bullied, and they can feel the support from teachers and peers (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink & Birchmeier, 2009). Perren and Alasker (2006) support this view, arguing that students who are not involved in bullying believe that school teachers can talk to them about all their problems, and think they have some close friends.

3. Impact on aggressors

Bullying not only has a negative impact on the victims, but also has many negative consequences for the aggressors, including the impact of academic performance, the impact of peer relationships and the impact on future behaviour and employment.

3.1 Academic impact

Bullying has a negative effect on the academic achievement of aggressors. Bullies who participate in bullying in any form are less likely to complete middle school ((Moore, 2015). This phenomenon may be due to the fact that they are punished by the schools because of their participation in bullying, which affects their motivation to go to school and increases the chances of leaving schools. (Cornell et al., 2013). Many studies support this view that dropout rates and graduation rates are closely related (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & fan, 2011).

3.2 Impact on peer relationship

Peer aggression may affect the relationship between the aggressors and their classmates. A study found that because they were hostile, they had very few friends and were not good at maintaining good relationships (Murray-Close & Crick, 2006) and This phenomenon is more obvious among female students. Research has shown that if girls are more aggressive, they may lose some friends because other people are afraid to get along with them (Murray-Close & Crick, 2006). From a psychological perspective, bullies are mostly associated with drug abuse and drug use, and they have no control over their aggressiveness. (Simonsen & Nielsen, 2014).

3.3 Long term Impact

Aggressors often have lower employment rates and a higher chance of being involved in violent crimes in the future. Moore (2015) believes that because some bullies do not complete higher education in schools, premature dropouts limit their future employment opportunities. Rivers et al. (2009) support this view that aggressors have shown lower working abilities in their employment environment in later years.

As aggressors grow older, they are likely to take part in some behaviors against social morality (James, 2010). According to a survey by McVie (2014), aggressors who have been bullied at aged between 13 and 16, and some who are serious may be accused of violence after the age of 17. Another study also supports the view that when the aggressors are 24 years old, their crime rate has increased fourfold, 60% of aggressors have been convicted once, and 30%-40% have been convicted three times or more (Nansel et al., 2001). In other words, those who were involved in bullying in the early stages of adolescence were more likely to have repeated violent behavior e after adolescence than those who were not involved in bullying. Bender and Losel (2011) support the view that aggressors involved in

bullying are more likely to be involved in general, violent and criminal crimes when they enter the adulthood.

4. Impact on bullying bystanders

In addition to having a negative impact on victims and aggressors, bullying also has a negative impact on the psychology and body of bystanders. In particular, bystanders who directly observe bullying are more influential than the students who do not watch bullying.

4.1 Psychological and physical effects

Bullying has a negative impact on bystanders in terms of their psychological and physical health. Twemlow, Sack, and Williams (1996) argue that bystanders who witness bullying should be seen as common victims of bullying. Rivers et al. (2009) agree with this view that the psychological impact of witnessing bullying on bystanders cannot be ignored. Bystanders report that seeing bullying makes them feel separated from their peers, not by group exclusion, but by psychological isolation (Hutchinson, 2012). The survey found that compared with those who just stayed aloof and those who did not participate in bullying, the psychological and physical symptoms of those who witnessed bullying were similar to those of aggressors, with lower life satisfaction and health issue (Callaghan, Kelly & Molcho, 2019). Moreover, when witnessing bullying, if the bystanders choose to do nothing, they may feel guilty because they did not stop it and helped the victims against bullying. Bystanders are also under pressure to choose, if they choose to help the victims, their status among their peers may decline, and they may also become victims of bullying. (Callaghan, Kelly & Molcho, 2019).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in Chinese middle schools, bullying has negative impacts on victims, aggressors and bystanders. The impact on the victim is broader and deeper than the that on the aggressors and bullying bystanders. The negative impact of bullying on victims is reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, on the psychological point, the victims feel inferior, depressed, and at increased risk of depression. Secondly, the physical impact, in addition to being hurt by direct bullying, indirect bullying can make victims more likely to have headaches and fragile immune system. Thirdly, bullying also has an impact on the academic achievement of the victims, manifested by lower academic performance and a lower level of general education. Fourthly, bullying affects the relationship between the victims and the companions. Fifthly, long-term impacts include impacts on future family life and future economic impacts. Sixthly, victims generally have a lower perception of happiness.

The impact on aggressors is reflected in the following aspects. The first one is aggressors have a lower chance of completing their studies because of the low motivation to go to school. The second one is because the aggressors are too dominant and not good at maintaining relationships with classmates; peer relationships may be affected. The third one is for their future life impact; aggressors usually have lower employment rates and a higher probability of being involved in violent crimes in the future. For bystanders who witness bullying, witnessing bullying also exerts a negative impact on their psychological and physical health.

6. Implications

Because bullying has brought enormous psychological and academic negative effects on victims, aggressors and bystanders, schools and parents must take some measures to reduce the incidence of bullying. In terms of teachers and parents, teachers should be trained for bullying prevention. At the same time, when bullying occurs, teachers should immediately halt the action and give students corresponding help. Parents should have more communication with the teacher in order to comprehend the circumstances of the students at schools. Parents should also develop their children's ability to get along well with their peers in order to reduce the risk of being bullied at school.

In terms of the policy, the government should enact and improve rules and regulations related to bullying, and there should also be some punitive measures for young aggressors with serious bullying behavior. Schools should carry out some programs to prevent bullying. For example, regular meetings should be provided to support the communication between teachers and parents about children's behavior and attendance in schools. Schools can offer courses about bullying so that students can learn about the serious consequences of bullying and how to effectively prevent bullying. In addition, the school should provide psychological counselling to students to ensure that students' psychological problems are resolved promptly.

As for students who do not participate in bully, they need to work with teachers to actively fight bullying. Because students and teachers who are not involved in bullying are the most effective players against bullying, students should be bully interveners rather than bystanders. The victims need to change their weak character and not always obey others. At the same time, it is necessary to develop effective social skills of victims to ensure that the incidence of bullying is reduced.

With regard to future research, future research should focus on the causes of bullying, identify specific ways to prevent bullying, and test the effectiveness of preventive methods. This can reduce the negative impact of bullying on students, improve students' graduation rate and employment rate, and prevent students' psychological problems and violent crimes.

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