Childhood Bullying Experience and Its Potential Effects on Criminal Behavior

Junhao Zheng[1, *]

[1] Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, The United States

*Corresponding author: Junhaozheng@umail.ucsb.edu

Abstract. The general purpose of this article is to examine the pathway from bullying behaviors in children and adolescents to later criminal behaviors as they grow up by examining previous literature works, thus drawing some reasonable conclusions and suggestions to prevent the events. The first part of this paper focused on explaining the definition of different types of bullying, including bullying in general and cyberbullying, and criminal behaviors. Subsequently, this essay exerted effort in examining previous kinds of literature in an attempt to find some main reasons regarding the reason why children and teenagers tend to bully their counterparts based on careful rationale processes. Finally, this article examined the pathway from bullying to criminal behaviors as children and teenagers grow up in detail and finally provided some possible suggestions for easing the current bullying situation and obtaining a purpose to prevent criminal behaviors in the future.

Keywords: Childhood, Bullying, School bullying, Cyberbullying, Criminal behavior.

1. Introduction

In this fast-developed society with the merits of modern technology and harmonious regulation conducted by government authorities, criminal behaviors deteriorate this world's harmony by a wide range of means, including killing or murdering innocent citizens, rubbering grocery stores, etc. Thus, it is essential to gain knowledge regarding the potential cause for one to commit the crime, namely the trigger behind it. Recently, one proposed aspect is considering terrible childhood experiences, explicitly schooling bullying.

School bullying is a severe problem that threatens healthy growth in children and teenagers nowadays, both physically via striking with the body and psychologically as receiving abuse, ridicule, or discrimination from peers. Though most school bullying may occur in middle and high school, statistics show that school bullying also occurs in early childhood. For example, there is an astonishing rate of 20.4% of children being physically bullied, and an additional 14.6% being verbally teased by other kindergarteners [1]. In this study, the potential relationship between childhood bullying experience and later criminal behaviors will be further discussed and rationale based on previous literature and a rationale process. Yet before moving on to the examination part of the relationship between childhood bullying experience and later criminal behaviors as kids grow up, several related definitions should be clarified first.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of criminal behavior

To know the definition of criminal behavior, the first thing to know is the definition of crime as a foundation word for this phrase. Based on the definition provided by Gottfredson and Hirschi [2], the term crime is legally defined as acts or omissions forbidden by law that can be punished by imprisonment and fine. Hence, criminal behavior is the act or performance of committing a crime. For instance, expected criminal behavior includes murder, robbery, burglary, rape, drunken driving, child neglect, kidnapping, and failing to pay taxes.

2.2 Definition of bullying

Though several aspects of school bullying are mentioned above, the definition of bullying is much more formal and complicated. According to Swearer and Hymel [3], bullying can be depicted as a unique but complex form of interpersonal aggression expressed via multiple media to serve different functions in a relationship. Moreover, In the article entitled "The relationship among bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety, and aggression in elementary school children" written by Craig [4], Craig claimed that bullying could be defined as an adverse physical or verbal action, a deliberate intention to hurt others repeatedly. Also, according to Smith [5], bullying is a repetitive aggressive behavior with an imbalance of power. Smith's definition is mainly used for school bullying, where usually, stronger kids tend to bully weaker ones.

2.3 Definition of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a relatively new terminology; it first occurred in 1999 without consensus on its definition. Nevertheless, Patchin and Hinduja [6] defined cyberbullying as willful and repeated harm inflicted through electronic devices, including computers, cell phones, etc. For instance, arguing or threatening others via a call might be considered a form of cyberbullying since it brings harm to others psychologically and potentially physiologically and physically. Though the definition of cyberbullying, based on Englander et al., is evolving nowadays, the critical idea still relates to using digital devices and harming others in various ways.

2.4 Why children bully others

After defining critical related terms, it is time to move to the part that causes one, especially children or adolescents, to bully others. In the following part, further examinations regarding various potential bullying triggers will be presented with some detailed celebrations from previous literature.

2.4.1 Aggression

When considering why children bully others, the first thing to consider is aggression and emotion naturally occur or are triggered by other peers. In the article titled "Aggression and bullying," Roland [7] claimed that a strong relationship exists between proactive aggressiveness and bullying among pupils, indicating that aggression is one of the triggers for children and teenagers to start bullying their counterparts.

2.4.2 Self-esteem

Another aspect of thinking children tend to bully others is their self-esteem. For instance, bullying others may lead one to feel a sense of achievement, thus elevating their self-esteem, resulting in repetitive bullying behaviors on others. In a study conducted by Pollastri et al. [8], a longitudinal study of a sample of 307 school students with three groups (pure bullies, pure victims, and a combination of two), one of the results shows that girls in the pure bully group reported statistical significance in self-esteem elevation, supporting the idea that bullying could enhance the feeling of self-esteem among children to some extent. On the other hand, self-esteem will decrease when being bullied by others. In the research cast by Moore and Kirkham [9], after interviewing 8249 students aged from 8 to 18 in Ireland from 1993 to 1994, the results revealed that the victim of bullying or students who were frequently bullied by others generally has low self-esteem, showing the idea that bullying victim suffered from a drop of their self-esteem.

2.4.3 Life satisfaction

Another thing to consider in figuring out why children and adolescents tend to bully others is the environment they live and study in. In a study conducted by Totan et al. [10], the survey of 317 secondary school students from the province of Van regarding bullying experience and life satisfaction, the result indicates that, with the increment in life satisfaction, the likelihood of being

bullied or bullying others will decrease, meaning that life satisfaction is negatively correlated with bullying to some extent.

In short, as well as a recap for the points described above, aggression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction are three possible and reasonable explanations for the reason lying behind why children and teenagers tend to bully others to some extent. More specifically, holding an aggressive emotion, just as Roland [7] argued, children and teenagers stand a higher chance of bullying others. It is reasonable to put this correlation as a causal relationship between bullying events conducted by adolescents or kids and aggression. Also, sharing a desire to obtain self-esteem, as mentioned in Pollastri et al.'s study [8], can be another triggering factor for kids to bully others, and in the country, kids being bullied attain a decrease in self-esteem, as appearing on Moore and Kirkham's survey results [9]. Besides, possessing different life satisfaction can also provide kids with higher opportunities and a propensity to bully others since the growing environment plays a massive role in influencing kids, as shown by Totan et al. [10].

2.5 From bullying to criminal behavior

After learning about why children and teenagers tend to bully others, it is time to connect bullying and criminal behavior as they grow up. As mentioned above, aggression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction are among the most frequent reasons for one to commit a crime, and the aggression is the most related to bullying and criminal behavior among the three.

Aggressive cognition and aggressive behavior might lead to expressing and performing very rudely and even dangerously, leading to tragic crimes. For instance, there are many injuries and deaths every year due to road rage in the United States. A total of 12610 injuries and 218 murders have been attributed to road rage over the past seven years, and 66% of traffic deaths are due to aggressive driving.

In a study conducted by Viemero in 1996 [11, 12], Viemero used a follow-up test on the aggressive and delinquent behavior of 220 pupils as they grow into adolescents by taking four aggression-related predictive factors on an outcome variable of physical aggression in adolescents and the number of arrests and traffic violation. The study results revealed that childhood aggression experience is a significant predictor of physical aggression in adolescence and criminal behavior in the youth, showing the critical role of aggression in children and later criminal behaviors.

More directedly, in a study by Kim et al. [13]. To examine childhood bullying and young adulthood criminal behaviors. In this study, Kim et al. Took a sample of 957 young citizens from the Raising Healthy Children project and conducted a longitudinal method (from age 11 to age 21). The result revealed that childhood bullying was significantly associated with violence. In other words, children who bullied others had a higher risk of expressing violent behavior as they grew up as adults, indicating a relationship between childhood bullying and adulthood criminal behavior to some extent.

Another study by Klomek et [14], al also find a strong relationship between childhood bullying experience and later criminal behavior. In Klomek et al.'s research, after finishing several longitudinal studies that were based on giant population size about childhood bullying and its later impact on adulthood life, they found that generally, bullying in childhood exerts a significant impact on later criminal behavior, meaning the childhood bullying experience and its influence on criminal behavior can be applied to a vast population. Also, Klimek et al. revealed that childhood bullying had been shown to correlate with an increased risk of later depression and other psychotic experiences. When bullying leads to depression in adolescents as they grow, these negative results might subsequently contribute to criminal behavior. For instance, depression is another reason for one to commit a crime. In the study held by Anderson et al. [15] examining the relationship between adolescent depression and later criminal behaviors, the results indicate that teenagers who suffer from major depressive disorder stand a higher opportunity to commit property crimes. The evidence revealed that about 227 million dollars per year in lost property is related to criminals who have adolescent depression.

In this highly advanced society, where individuals are teeming with high-tech electronic devices every day, another thing to consider nowadays is the role of digital devices. Please put it in other words, the role of cyberbullying in children and adolescents and its later impact on one to commit a crime.

Aggression is a massive cause of younger bullying and later crime. One negative result of digital games is leading one to think and behave aggressively as a kid, thus making them stand a higher chance of bullying others.

The General Aggression Model (GAM) is a theory arguing that aggression may be triggered and impacted by a wide range of factors, including situational influences and biological variables [16]. This theory is comprehensive and covers a broad range of areas generally. Recently a concrete application of the theory appeared, explicitly demonstrating that playing violent video games may result in an aggression increase.

Not only will video games make children think and behave aggressively, but playing violent video games also makes people less empathetic about the world and their peers since they undergo a change named desensitization, a reduction in one's cognitive and emotional responses to a stimulus. In Brockmyer's study, teenage participants were randomly assigned to play either violent or nonviolent video games. Then participants measured their heart and respiratory rate after undergoing a series of empathetic tests. The result shows that the overall heart and respiratory rate were low in the group where participants played violent video games, suggesting a desensitization phenomenon occurred among these participants. It is reasonable to think that bullying might occur when children feel less empathetic about others. This childhood bullying experience might bring them an elevation of self-esteem and give them a sense of achievement, thus keeping them from bullying others. As a result, the childhood bullying experience might lead to adulthood criminal behaviors.

2.6 Solution

What individuals can do to prevent the childhood experience is always hotly debated. Yet, from aspects mentioned in this article, solutions could be suggested based on aggression, life satisfaction, cyber regulation, and legislation of laws. Firstly, parenting and schooling should be bettered to give children an overall calm characteristic, or at least not get angry quickly. To do this, one way is to provide citizens with generally higher education so they can judge things more reasonably, thus leaving unnecessary arguments, not to mention aggressive fighting or quarrels. Secondly, government authorities should come up with specific regulations regarding cyber control. For instance, some violent video games should not be allowed to play by one under 18 or set up some "period" to regulate violent video games. Finally, the government should legislate some laws regarding bullying to prevent children from hurting and hurting others as those children who bully others grow. Also, more strict laws regarding criminal behaviors should arise, making one fear and thus not dare to commit similar affairs.

3 Conclusion

All in all, if all the statements above are put into consideration when figuring out why confident children, as well as teenagers, tend to bully others, it is reasonable to argue that aggression, self-esteem, as well as life satisfaction play a huge role in affecting their thoughts and behaviors in the great extent. The children or adolescents who bully others in their childhood or teenage years hold a higher opportunity to commit a crime as they grow up since the same three factors regarding why they bully others can still be applied in explaining their criminal behaviors. Also, as this fast-developed society soars daily, bullying on the internet should be considered. In other words, cyberbullying is another considerable impact that has the potential to lead children or teenagers to commit criminal behavior as they enjoy easy access to the internet nowadays, and video games, especially those containing violent content, can effortlessly make them feel anger and hence conducting a crime as they grow up. However, just as every coin has two sides, some suggestions and solutions can be posted to counter this negative outcome, including appropriate and responsible

parenting and schooling, regulation about cyberbullying and violent video games conducted by the governments, as well as some legislation of laws from government authorities regarding this content, can ease the current and future situation of both bullying and criminal behaviors respectively.

References

[1] Hirschi, T. Gottfredson, Michael. Age and the Explanation of Crime. American Journal of Sociology, 1983, 89: 552-584.

[2] Swearer, S. M., Hymel, S. Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis–stress model. American Psychologist, 2015,70(4): 344.

[3] Craig, W. M. The relationship among bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety, and aggression in elementary school children. Personality and individual differences, 1998, 24(1): 123-130.

[4] Smith, P. K. Bullying: Definition, types, causes, consequences and intervention. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2016, 10(9): 519-532.

[5] Patchin J. W., Hinduja S. Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: a preliminary look at cyberbullying. Youth Violence Juv Justice. 2006, 4(2): 148–169.

[6] Roland, E., Idsøe, T. Aggression and bullying. Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 2001, 27(6): 446-462..

[7] Pollastri, A. R., Cardemil, E. V., O'Donnell, E. H. Self-esteem in pure bullies and bully/victims: A longitudinal analysis. Journal of interpersonal violence, 2010, 25(8): 1489-1502.

[8] O'Moore, M., Kirkham, C. Self-esteem and its relationship to bullying behaviour. Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 2001, 27(4): 269-283.

[9] Totan, T., Özer, A., Özmen, O. The role of hope, life satisfaction, and motivation in bullying among adolescents. International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 2017, 9(2): 1-15.

[10] Viemerö, V. Factors in childhood that predict later criminal behavior. Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 1996, 22(2): 87-97.

[11] Kim, M. J., Catalano, R. F., Haggerty, K. P., Abbott, R. D. Bullying at elementary school and problem behaviour in young adulthood: A study of bullying, violence and substance use from age 11 to age 21. Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health, 2011, 21(2): 136-144.

[12] Klomek, A. B., Sourander, A., Elonheimo, H. Bullying by peers in childhood and effects on psychopathology, suicidality, and criminality in adulthood. The Lancet Psychiatry, 2015, 2(10): 930-941.

[13] Anderson, D. M., Cesur, R., Tekin, E. Youth depression and future criminal behavior. Economic Inquiry, 2015, 53(1): 294-317.

[14] Allen, J. J., Anderson, C. A., Bushman, B. J. The General Aggression Model. Current Opinion in Psychology, 2018,19: 75-80.

[15] DeWall, C. N., Anderson, C. A., Bushman, B. J. The general aggression model: Theoretical extensions to violence. Psychology of Violence, 2011,1(3): 245-258.

[16] Brockmyer, J. F. Playing violent video games and desensitization to violence. Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 2015, 24(1): 65-77.