Original Article

The Comparison of Emotional Processing and Self-compassion in Bully and Victim Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was performed with the aim of comparing emotional processing and self-compassion in bully and victim students. It was a cross casual-comparative study. The population consisted all male and female bully and victim students of guidance schools in Ardabli city in the second semester of 2013-14. The sample was formed of 90 students (male=45, female=45) selected via simple sampling method who completed Illinoise Bully Scale (Espelage and Holt, 2001), Emotional Processing Scale (Baker et al, 2007), and Self-compassion Scale (Neff, 2003). Data was analyzed by multivariate analysis of variance. The results indicated more problems in emotional processing in bully students. It was also revealed that scores of bully students were significantly lower in suppression, weak emotion experiences, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness compared to the victims. These findings point to sever harms in emotional processing and self-compassion in bully and victim students.

Keywords: Bully, Victim, Emotional processing, Self-compassion.

Introduction

Bullying in school environments is one of the problematic behaviors in adolescence period which has been the subject of many studies in the last three decades (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011). Bullying is a kind of aggressive behavior in which a person or a group of people repeatedly attack others, beat them, or behave aggressively with those who are weaker than them (Wang, Iannotti and Luk, 2012). Bullying can be a part of antisocial or violation of rules (conduct disorder) of behavior pattern. From this perspective, an aggressive adolescent who troubles other is diagnosed with conduct behavior (Olweus,

1994). According to Olweus's research (1994), bullying is a kind of aggressive behavior, and also a part of conduct disorders and pattern of antisocial behaviors. Victim students usually feel more worried and insecure compared to normal students. In addition, they are usually conservative, sensitive, and quite. When they receive bullying behaviors their common reaction is crying (as the students of lower grades) and seceding (Olweus, 1993). Prevalence of bullying is reported between 15% to 70% in various studies (Rosea, Espelage, Aragon and Elloitt, 2011). In a survey performed on 15686

students of the sixth to tenth grades in the United Stated, near to 29% of the participants on average or over dealt with bullying (Nansel et al, 2001). In another study, the rate of bullying prevalence among students in various countries was reported near to 50% (Henningham, Gardner and SusanWalker, 2009). Given the high rate of bullying prevalence among students, more attention to this phenomenon seems necessary.

There are three distinct groups involved in inter-school aggressions: bullies, victims, and bullies-victims. Although these groups differ, they have some common characteristics. Bullies can weakly control externalized behaviors like substance and alcohol use, and are not well-adjusted with the school environment. Victims have problems in social and emotional adjustments, and interpersonal relations. Finally, those students who are both bullies and victim have the characteristics of the both groups; in other words, they experience both social-emotional, and behavioral problems (Shin, Antonio, Son, Kim and Park; 2011).

Bullying has negative emotional, social and educational consequences for victim and bully students. In contrast, there few studies on individual differenced and personal characteristics which pave the way for bullying. In addition, findings of these studies are not in line (Veronica, 2014). It has been shown that victim, bully and normal children are different in terms of emotional processing and self-compassion. Rachman defines emotional processing as a process that absorbs affective disturbance and reduce it to help the individual to deal with other experiences and behaviors without more riot (Baker, Thomas, Thomas and Owens, 2007).

Rose and Espelage (2012) reported significantly higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems in children with bullying behaviors. Ciucci, Baroncelli and Nowicki (2014) found that boys with high rate of bullying behaviors had no problem in true understanding of emotions. Other finding of this study were that cyber bullying was related with more accuracy in fear re-cognition, and the cyber victim subjects had a total problem in emotion re-cognition and special problem in processing of fear and anger. The study of Wolke, Baumann, Strauss, Johnson & Marlow (2015) manifested that those children who had been victim for several year were mote in danger of expanding emotional problems. The research of Roos, Salmivalli and Hodges (2015) also revealed that in children with weaker emotion regulation (or higher negative emotionality), feeling of guilt and blame associated with low levels of aggression, while in children with efficient emotion regulation (or lower negative emotionality), feeling of shame and behavior externalizing were correlated with high levels of aggression.

Compassion involves having positive feelings with empathy toward others, however a concept of compassion covers the individual's feelings and thoughts about herself/himself (Radcliffe et al, 2008; Quoted by Germer, 2009). Self-compassion means affective acceptance of what happens in the individual in a moment. In fact, self-compassion is not significantly different from other-compassion. The first thing that should be attend in understanding the kind of compassion is that the individual, while is commiserating for another person, should know that he/she is suffering. When we think about socially-suffered individuals and help them, we feel compassion toward them to experience their suffers. The second point is that compassion involves emotional involvement with others and

affective responses to their suffers. In fact, compassion means trying gain a true insight about the external causes of others' mistakes and to treat them with amenity instead of judging them with a critical and strict view. The third point is that when we commiserate for others, we actually know the damaging process, comprehend it, and know that incompleteness is a part of human experiences and it is not right to except completeness more than a human's ability. Self-compassion means behaving with ourselves in the same manner. People achieve mental health when they gain an accurate comprehension about their attempts to reach success. Such a view shows that then individual takes care of herself/himself, is self-honest, has accepted his/her human nature and considers mistake as a common feature in all humans. This helps people to better conserve themselves against unpleasant experiences (Germer, 2009). Self-compassion is a form of healthy self-acceptance which indicates the ability to accept unpleasant aspects of self and life. This construct is mad of three main component including self-kindness, common humanity, and balanced awareness of personal emotions (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion may be important in understanding harms experienced by victims of behavioral and sexual abuse. Harris (2011) found a positive correlation between self-compassion and bullying behaviors in a way that low self-compassion could predict these behaviors. In the research of Tanaka, Wekerle, Schmuck and Paglia-Boak (2011), high rates of emotional abuse, emotional neglect, and physical abuse were correlated with low self-compassion in adolescents between 16 to 20 years of old. These relations were significant after controlling gender and age of abuse, even when the effect of emotional neglect and physical abuse were moderated. The results of Játiva's and Cerezo's study (2014) revealed significantly higher rates of psychological maladjustment in adolescents with repeated victimization experiences. Self-compassion plays a mediating role in the relationship between emotional maladjustment and victimization.

Most of the studies on compassion problems and emotional processing are in two groups of bullies and victims, and there a few studies that have investigated these variables in these groups. Therefore, the aim of the present research is to compare emotional processing and self-compassion in bully and victim students.

Method

This is a prospective casual-comparative study. The statistical population consisted all bully and victim students of male and female guidance schools in Ardabil city in the second semester of 2014-15. First, given the Kergesy-Morgan table (1970), 500 male and female students were selected by simple sampling method and asked to complete the study questionnaires. Then those students whose scores in Bully Scale were one standard deviation higher than the mean were chosen as victim students, while those with scores one standard deviation lower as victim ones. Since in casual-comparative studies there should be at least 15 subjects in each group (Delavar, 2009), 45 bully and 45 victim students were selected for each group to make the study validity more powerful.

Measurement

a)Illinoise Bully Scale (IBS): Illinoise Bully Scaler is an 18-item, self-report measure designed by Espelage & Holt

(2001). IBS has three subscales for measuring the frequency of fighting, peer victimization, and bully behavior. Each item is answered on a 5-point Lickert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Seven times or more). Every subscale has a distinct score and the higher the score in each subscale, the higher is the frequency of that behavior in the subject. Espelage & Holt (2001) applied Cronbach's alpha to determine ISB reliability and reported it for frequency of fighting, peer victimization, and bully behavior, 0.87, 0.79, and 0.70, respectively. In this study, the correlation between subscales of ISB and Aggression Questionnaire was desirable. Cronbach's alpha coefficients by splitting and re-test methods fluctuated between 0.62 to 0.90 for the whole scale and its dimensions.

b)Emotional Processing Scale (EPS): Emotional-Processing Scale (Baker et al, 2007) has 25 items and 5 subscales including suppression, signs of unprocessed emotions, unregulated emotions, avoidance, and improved emotional experiences. The subject is asked to show his/her agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for English and Poland samples were 0.91 and 0.90, respectively (Baker et al, 2007). EPS Cronbach's alpha confident in Iran was computed 0.90 by Abolghasmei (2013). In

this research, to determine validity coefficient, SEP was correlated with Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Baker et al, 2007). The results showed a significant negative correlation (r=0.054) between these two tools.

c) Self-compassion Scale (SCS): Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) is a self-report scale with 26 items and 6 subscales including self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, and over-identification. SCS reliability coefficient by re-test method was reported 0.93. SCS Cronbach's alpha correlation in Thailand, Taiwan, and America has been reported 0.86, 0.86 and 0.95, respectively. Basharpur (2013) computed Cronbach's alpha correlation of SCS for its subscales and total scores between 0.65 and 0.92. To perform the study, first, six (male=3, female=3) schools from two different districts of Ardabil city were selected ransom. In the next step, from each school three classes were randomly selected by their names. Finally, the first author explained the study purposes in each class separately, and after taking a written contest from parents of volunteer students, the students were asked to honestly complete the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1. Distribution of frequency, gender and birth of order in the bully and victim students

		Gender		Birth order				
		Female	Male	First	Second	Third	Forth	Fifth
Bully	Frequency	22	23	14	13	8	6	4
	Percent	51.1	48.9	31.1	28.9	17.8	13.3	8.9
Victim	Frequency	22	23	14	14	9	5	3
	Percent	48.9	51.1	31.1	31.1	20	11.1	6.7

Demographic features of the participants have been presented in Table 1. As it can be seen, the ratio of male and female

gender in both groups were similar (Bully group: Male=51.1, Female=48.9; Victim group: Male=48.9; Female=51.1). In addition, most of the subjects in the bully (82.9) and victim (31.1) group were the second children of the family.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of emotional processing and its components in the bully and victim students

Variable	Group	Mean	Standard deviation	Variable	Mena	Standard deviation
Suppression	Bully	11.17	3.24	Self-kindness	10	3.25
	Victim	13.08	.96		14.86	3.26
Signs of unprocessed emotions	Bully	11.46	2.92	Self-judgment	7.33	2.04
	Victim	9.66	3.19		5.64	1.77
Unregulated emotions	Bully	12.88	3.50	Common Humanity	11.33	2.50
	Victim	10.17	3.04		13.33	2.29
Avoidance	Bully	11.37	3.09	Isolation	7.53	1.97
	Victim	12.04	3.30		5.88	1.69
Weak emotional experiences	Bully	11.60	2.79	Mindfulness	11.28	1.92
	Victim	13.13	2.36		13.02	2.03
Total	Bully	58.51	8.48	Over-identification	6.82	1.66
	Victim	58.11	7.07		5.17	1.40
				Total	54.31	7.63
					57.93	5.96

To compare the bully and victim students in terms of emotional processing and its components, multivariate analysis of variance was performed. As it is observed, the highest means in the bully group belong to unregulated emotions and common humanity, while the highest means in the victim group pertained to weak emotional experiences and self-kindness.

The results of MANOA showed that group effect is significant (Wilk Lambda F= 6.127; Fd=5; p<0.001). Eta square shows that 0.26 of the two groups differences is due to mutual effects of the dependent variables. In other words, the bully and victim students were significantly different in terms of at least one variable.

Table 3. Results of MAONA on emotional processing and its components in bully and victim students

Dependent variable	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Eta
Suppression	82.17	1	82.17	8.52	0.004	0.088
Signs of unprocessed emotions	72.90	1	72.90	7.77	0.006	0.081
Unregulated emotions	165.37	1	1.335	1.335	0.000	0.148
Avoidance	10.00	1	0.97	0.97	0.426	0.011
Weak emotional experiences	52.90	1	7.89	7.89	0.006	0.082

Data of Table 3 manifest a significant difference in suppression, signs of unprocessed emotions, unregulated emotions, weak emotion experiences, and avoidance between the bully and victim

groups. The results of MANOA showed that the total group effect is significant (Wilk Lambda F= 6.127; Fd=5; p<0.001). Eta square shows that 0.69 of the two groups differences is due to mutual effects of the dependent variables. In other words, the bully and victim students were

significantly different in terms of at least   one   variable.

Table 4. Results of MANOVA on self-compassion and its components in bullying and victim students

Dependent variable	Sum of squares	Fd	Mean of squares	F	Sig.	Eta square
Self-kindness	532.90	1	532.90	59.14	0.000	0.363
Self-judgment	64.17	1	64.17	17.52	0.000	0.166
Common humanity	90.00	1	90.00	15.59	0.000	0.151
Isolation	60.84	1	60.84	17.98	0.000	0.170
Mindfulness	67.60	1	67.60	17.18	0.000	0.163
Over-identification	60.84	1	60.84	25.60	0.000	0.225

Data of Table 4 indicate that the bully and victim students were significantly different in terms of self-kindness (F=50.14), self-judgment (F=17.52), common humanity (F=15.59), isolation (F=17.98), mindfulness (F=17.18) and over-identification (F=25.60). In fact, in the victim students, the highest and lowest means belonged to self-kindness and over-identification, respectively. However, in the bully students, common-humanity and self-judgment had the highest and lowest means, respectively.

Discussion

The study results showed significantly higher scores in unprocessed emotions, unregulated emotions, self-judgment, and over-identification in the bully students compared to the victims. This finding is consistent with that of Shields, and Cicchetti (2001), Rose and Espelage (2012) since they had also founded significantly higher rates of bullying behaviors in children with behavioral and emotional problems. Garner and Hinton (2010) discovered weaker self-regulation skills in bully students compared to the victims. In addition, the study of Gia Veronica (2014) revealed a correlation between low empathy and bully and bully-victim behaviors in female students. Wolke et al (2015) reported that children with several years of receiving bullying behaviors are more in danger of

developing and expanding emotional problems. However, the finding of the present study is not consisted with it. Woods et al (2009) concluded that physically-victimized and bully children are significantly different in terms of ability to recognize emotions. In fact, physically-victimized children were weak in recognition of negative emotions of facial anger and fear, and had lower ability to comprehend emotional information compared to bully children. Furthermore, Ciucci et al (2014) observed that boys with high rates of bullying behaviors had no problem in accurately comprehending emotions, however they tended to interpret various facial emotions as happiness and fear. Roos et al (2015) also concluded that feel of guilt and blame were correlated with low levels of aggression in children with weak emotion regulation, although in those with efficient emotion regulation, feeling of shame and blame externalization had a positive relation with high levels of aggression.

In explanation of the fact that bully students have more problems in emotional processing compared to victims, it can be said that inability to emotion regulation is a feature that distinct these children from other normal ones. Abused children are in danger of becoming bully or victim in future, and this is done via inability to regulate emotions (Shields and Cicchetti, 2001). In

fact, bullying threats emotional and social functions of children (Lindsey et al, 2009). Given the model of emotional processing of social information, bullies have low levels of empathy (Woods et al, 2009), which may cause high levels of bullying and aggressive behaviors. Gia Veronica (2014) points to the role of low empathy in bullying behaviors and reports a correlation between it and weak empathy. Garner and Hinton (2010) concluded that family and economic factors may affect bullying behaviors in children. In their study, family income had a negative correlation with bullying behaviors and emotional negativism while it was positively correlated with self-emotion regulation. Emotion self-regulation had a mediate role in the relationship between family income and bullying behaviors. Rose, CA. Espelage (2012) believe that personal characteristics can influence bullying behaviors, in a way that emotional and behavioral problems can predict bullying behaviors. Based on the emotional irregularity theory, some patterns of emotion regulation may interrupt the individual's function and develop and preserves signs of cognitive harms (Cole, Michel, and Teti, 1994). According to research, emotion regulation is lower in children with externalizing problems including those with bullying behavior and conduct disorder, compared to children who tend to internalize their problems, and also normal ones. Additionally, their recognition of facial emotions is weaker (Blair, Colledge, Murray, Mitchell, 2001).

The other finding of the current study was significantly lower scores of bully students in suppression, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness compared to the victims. Gottheim (2009) reported a similar finding and stated that self-compassion could significantly and conversely predict aggressive behaviors. This finding is also consistent with the results of Tanaka et al (2011) study since they found a correlation between rate of emotional and physical abuse and emotional neglect, and low levels of self-compassion. With control of the gender and age of emotional abuse, even after moderating the effect of emotional neglect and physical abuse, this relation still persisted. In line with this finding, Harris's study (2011) also showed a converse relation between bullying behaviors and self-compassion. Moreover, Játiva and Cerezo (2014) discovered that psychological maladjustment is significantly higher in adolescents had experienced victimization repeatedly, and self-compassion played a mediating role between emotional maladjustment and victimization. So, self-compassion and victimization have a significant and negative correlation. Given this finding it can be stated that victims of bullying behaviors treat others more conscientiously due to self-compassion. Self-compassion is a definite factor in one's victimization. Therefore, conscientious behaviors can predict probable victimization in future which is mediated through mediating role of self-compassion and is affected by factors including self-esteem. Those who treat others with bullying behaviors cannot be kind with them and this usually occurs throughout their life time. They are less probable to show kindness toward others and this makes them to have more bullying behaviors. Therefore, self-compassion is weaker in those who have bullying behaviors (Harris, 2011). Also, bully persons have fewer hearty friendships and they feel alone (Walden and Beran, 2010), and it is clear that feeling of loneliness is a part of weak self-compassion. So, weak self-compassion in

bullies can be attributed to their feeling of loneliness and fragile friendship (Harris, 2011).

Given findings of the present study, emotional processing and self-compassion may be severely damaged in bully and victim students. These results can be used by authorities' of educational organization and schools counselors to properly design plans in order to prevent development of such behaviors and to help students to improve self-compassion and learn emotion regulation skills.

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