

Original Paper

The Relationship between Students' Negative Coping Strategies with School Violence and Social Support Factors: A Case Study in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi Mai Huong^{1*} & Nguyen Thu Trang¹

¹ Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

* Nguyen Thi Mai Huong, Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

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Abstract

This study examined relationships between the social support factors such as peer relations (3 items), teacher influences (6 items), familial influences (5 items) and the negative coping strategies of students experiencing school violence including negative thought (5 items); negative emotion (7 items) and negative action (8 items). Participants were a sample of 482 students from four middle schools around Hanoi who had experienced at least 1 violence or more participating in the study. They are distributed relatively evenly by school and from grades 6 to 9. The major finding was social support factors (peer relationships, teacher-student relationship and school environment and family relationships) and negative coping strategies were negatively correlated ($p < 0.01$). Students who had negative relationships with friends, teachers, and family members often showed negative coping strategies after experiencing school violence. The article proposes the solution of social work intervention in building a safe and friendly environment to minimize the negative coping strategies of students at schools

Keywords

social work, school violence, student, Vietnam, behaviors, social factors

1. Introduction

The happen of violence in school climate had been documented that it will increase students' fears, create negative emotion on students, affect student's desire and ability to learn, reduce their trust and expectations on the school (Eisenbraun, 2007; Scheckner et al., 2002), damage the students confidence (Schreck et al., 2003), causes higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem among students (Raskauskas, 2010) and impact of students' and teachers' social, physical and psychological

wellbeing (Roffey, 2012).

School violence may occur for diverse reasons such as substance abuse, personality problems, dysfunctional families, violent media or even legal systems. There are risky factors that contribute to the rise of school violence including social (such as poverty), familial (such as negative parental model), school-related (such as low student participation, lack of social activities, unfair practices and teacher attitudes) and individual (such as developmental difficulties, antisocial behaviour, academic failure, not adapting to school) (Morrison & Furlong, 1994). Other risk factors related to school management and some teacher characteristics, such as lack of subject knowledge and communication skills, aggressive leadership styles, unfair practices, inability to manage student behaviour or not supporting student development (Finley, 2008; Mertoglu, 2015).

School violence has been associated with poor social, emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes for students directly involved in violence, as well as bystanders of violent episodes at school (Nabuzoka et al., 2009; Rivers et al., 2009; Swearer et al., 2010).

Students employ various cognitive and behavioral strategies to feel safe from school violence at school. Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) point out that students purposely congregate in specific groups to protect themselves from bullying by others (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Students modify their behavior to conform with their peers and to avoid being bullied by them (Burns et al., 2008). Coping strategies of students experiencing school violence include cognitive problem-solving skills and emotion-focused skills (Tenenbaum et al., 2011).

Lazarus (2006) defined coping as an individual's efforts to manage environmental stress and the resulting emotions. The ability to cope with the stressors of life is essential in fostering psychological and emotional well-being (Lazarus, 2006). Folkman and Lazarus (1980) developed a scale called the Ways of Coping Checklist, which used eight categories to examine coping strategies: confrontive coping, taking aggressive action to change a situation; distancing, detaching oneself from the situation and minimizing its importance; self-controlling, regulating one's feelings and emotions; seeking social support, discussing the problem with somebody else and receiving emotional and informational support; accepting responsibility, recognizing how one contributed to the problem and attempting to make a change; escape-avoidance, thoughts and behaviors to escape and avoid the problem; planful problem solving, analysing the problem in order to resolve it; and positive reappraisal, thinking positively about the situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009).

Coping could also be divided into two orientations aimed at addressing stress: approach and avoidance (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Approach coping strategies involved focusing on the threatening stimulus and addressing the threat directly. Avoidance strategies involved staying away from the stressor and escaping the threatening stimuli (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Causey and Dubow developed a Self-Report Coping Measure based on the approach-avoidance model that consisted of five subscales: social support seeking, distancing, problem solving, internalizing, and externalizing (Causey & Dubow,

2012).

Previous studies have indicated that high-quality social support and positive interpersonal relationships can work as a buffer to reduce the negative impact of a stressful situation. It is believed that strong peer support and positive teacher-student relationships may enhance feelings of security and coping ability, as well as reduce or even overcome the negative impact of school violence on self-esteem and depression (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Naylor & Cowie, 1999). Additionally, the roles of parents and families should also be valued in addressing and coping with school violence among students who are victims (de Oliveira et al., 2017).

To date, empirical evidence regarding the relationship between peer support and student-teacher relationships and family relationship on the coping of school violence in Vietnamese is still limited. The present study explores how the quality of peer support and student teacher relationships and family relationships influences the coping strategies of students experiencing school violence in a Vietnamese cultural context.

The current study explored children's perceptions of how they cope with victimization using a semi-structured interview method, and three research questions were addressed: (1) What are negative strategies would students report use when coping with school violence (2) How are social factors (related to their chosen negative coping strategies?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A cross-sectional and descriptive research was developed based on the application of a structured questionnaire in a stratified random sample, consisting of 482 students from the sixth until the ninth grade of Vietnamese educational system at 02 state-owned public schools and 02 private schools in Hanoi. All four schools were contacted and invited to participate in the current study by the research team.

2.2 Procedures

Before data collection, school principals, homeroom teachers received consent letters from the authors. Students were also not surveyed if they confirmed orally that they did not want to participate. The researchers were introduced to the students by homeroom teachers who explained the purpose of the survey and several popular types of school violence including physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and others... It should be highlighted that students who indicated that they engaged in at least 3 types of school violence for three times or more (≥ 3) in the last 6 months were considered as victims of school violence. Based on that, we randomly identified 896 students and identified 482 students experiencing school violence as research criteria. The data were collected anonymously through the application of a self-report questionnaire. This tool was constructed to investigate social factors associated with school violence coping strategies. We collected data with a

questionnaire included 40 questions, subdivided in 03 parts: 1) Identification demographic factors; 2) Negative coping responses includes 20 items: negative thought (5 items); negative emotion (7 items) and negative action (8 items); 3) Social relationship factors related to their coping strategies such as peer relations (3 items), student- teacher relationship and school support (6 items), and family relationships (5 items). All items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1=Strongly disagree” to “5=Strongly disagree”. SPSS for Windows version 22 was used to analyse the data. Questionnaires were self-completed in classrooms from 25 to 30 mins. A member of the research team and a teacher supervised each class. At the end of the process, questionnaires were placed in envelopes and sealed to protect the confidentiality and to ensure standard administration procedures.

This research received approval from Hanoi National University of Education Research Ethics Committee (HNUE-REC).

2.3 Ethical considerations

This research received approval from Hanoi National University of Education Research Ethics Committee (HNUE-REC).

3. Result

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of students participating the study. Eligible participants were middle school students in Hanoi, Vietnam. As described below, we recruited 482 students including 47.72 % female (N=248) and 51.45 % male (N=230) and 1.24 % others (N=6). Specifically, we recruited participants from two stated-owned public schools (School A and C) and two private schools (school B and D). Only school A (N=117) located in the suburb area while three others including school B (N=125), School C (N=128) and School D (N=112) located in the inner city. Students are from 9th grade (N=108), 8th grade (N=129), 7th grade (N=138) and 8th grade (N=107).

Table 1. Characteristics of Participating Schools and Participants

Characteristic		N=482	Percent (%)
School	A	117	24.90
	B	125	24.90
	C	128	25.73
	D	112	24.90
Grade	9	108	24.90
	8	129	24.90

	7	138	24.90
	6	107	25.73
Gender	Male	248	51.45
	Female	230	47.72
	Other	6	1.24

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics (including mean, standard deviation, and correlation) of the latent variables in our theoretical model. The reported coping strategies of the respondents were categorized as shown in Table 1 together with the mean score of the respondents who stated each type. First, the results showed that all students being victims of school violence had negative coping strategies. The most popular coping strategies were having negative emotions (M=3.08), followed by negative thought (M=2.91) and negative behavior (M=2.70) (Table 1). Second, it can be seen that the three types of negative coping strategies (negative emotions, negative thought and negative thought) were positively correlated ($r=.348$ to $.426$, $p<.001$) with each other.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Negative Coping Strategies

	Mean	SD	Correlation		
			1	2	3
1. Negative thoughts	2.91	0.418	1	.351**	.426**
2. Negative emotions	3.08	0.623	.351**	1	.348**
3. Negative behaviors	2.74	0.542	.426**	.348**	1

(** $p<.001$)

Table 3 showed the manifestations coping thoughts with school violence among students. All items had the scores above the average, the most popular strategies was tolerance like “I see other students being treated like me, so I just let them do whatever they want” (M=2.94, SD=1.15) or I think no one can help me if I speak, so I just let others treat me badly (M=2.96, SD=0.84).

Table 3. Negative Coping Thought in Case of Experiencing School Violence

Negative coping thoughts	Mean	SD
I see other students being treated like me, so I just let them do whatever they want	2.94	1.15
I think no one can help me if I speak, so I just let others treat me badly.	2.96	0.84
I am a helpless person. I am so weak that can not to protect myself	2.80	1.08
It is someone who tried to talk bad behind my back	2.92	0.89
I think that if anyone knows that I was being bullied, I will be upbraided and punished	2.93	0.95

Table 4 showed the mean scores of emotional manifestations coping with school violence among students. Students sometimes use negative emotions (including two responses to “showing” and “avoiding” negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, depression) as a coping strategy to school violence (M=3.08, SD=0.86). More students showed emotions (M=3.18) than avoided emotions (M=2.84).

Table 4. Negative Coping Emotions in Case of Experiencing School Violence

Negative coping emotions	Mean	SD
I felt worried and fear every time my friends treat me violently	3.09	0.87
I got angry with other students who have behaved me unfairly	3.30	0.85
I felt depressed, sad and I did not want to do anything	3.15	0.84
I felt worried because I'm afraid people will find out that I was being treated badly by other students	3.15	0.78
I got irrationally angry with other people around (friends, family members, teachers...)	3.19	0.82
I hide my anxiety, fear, insecurity or anger with my friends, relatives, and teachers because I don't want people to know I was bullied	2.91	0.97
I pretend to be happy with everyone around me to hide my insecure feelings	2.78	0.91

In this survey, students also choose avoidance strategies in their coping behaviors, they “I avoid meeting, contacting with friends who have not treated me well” (M=3.10, SD=0.90), “I avoid or switch to another topic when someone asks me what I'm dealing with” (M=2.91, SD=0.97). Few students find smoking or drinking alcohol or self-harm activities “fasting, banging my head against the wall, hurting myself after being hurt by my friends” (M=2.37, SD=0.67).

Table 5. Negative Coping Behaviours in Case of Being Bullied

Negative coping behaviors	Mean	SD
I avoid meeting, contacting with friends who have not treated me well	3.10	0.90
My bruises, scratches, lost or damaged were hidden.	2.91	0.88
I avoid or switch to another topic when someone asks me what I'm dealing with	3.06	0.74
I found solutions, and planned to retaliate against the person who treats me badly	2.91	0.97
I created another groups to fight against the one who treated me	2.88	1.02
I obeyed all requests of friends so that they do not treat me badly	2.36	0.75
I hurted myself like: fasting, banging my head against the wall, hurting myself after being hurt by my friends.	2.37	0.67
I used drugs, played violent games, and tried to win to get a sense of revenge against someone who treats me badly.	2.36	0.72

In this present study, results showed that there were three factors related to students coping strategies with school violence. Among them, peer relationship influenced most (M=3.68), then parents relationship (M=3.51) and related school factors (M=3.50). Table 6 showed social support factors (peer relationships, teacher-student relationship and school environment and family relationships) and negative coping strategies were negatively correlated ($r=-0.41$ to -0.52 , $p<0.01$).

Table 6. Correlation Coefficient between the Support Factors and the Negative Coping Strategies

Latent variables	Negative thought	Negative emotion	Negative behavior
Peer relationships	-0.53	-0.52	-0.45
Teacher-student relationship and school environment	-0.46	-0.52	-0.41
Family relationships	-0.45	-0.48	-0.39

(** p < 0.01)

In terms of peer relationships, most students participating in this study all agreed that they had a quite positive friend relationship. Their friends are willing to share, encourage and help them any time they need. For example, "friends always care and listen to me anytime I meet difficulties" (M=3.73) "When having difficulties, I will share with friends" (M=3.66) "My friend immediately recognizes my feelings if I am unhappy or behave differently" (M=3.66).

Table 7. Descriptive Statistic of Peer Relationships

Peer relationships	Mean	SD
Friends always care and listen to me anytime I meet difficulties	3.73	8.09
When having difficulties, I will share with friends	4.98	6.85

Regarding the relationship between students and teachers, the majority of students participating in this study agreed that they had a positive teacher-student relationship. They agreed that: "Teachers are always listening, sharing and willing to support me in solving difficulties at school" (M=3.55), "School has measurements to deal with violence and bullying occurring between students" (M=3.50), "Teacher treat every student the same" (M=3.43). With inverse statements like "I do not dare to share anything with teachers because I am afraid of them" (M=2.56), "teachers are very strict" (M=2.45).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistic of Teacher-student Relationships and School Environment

Teacher-student relationships	Mean	SD
Teachers are always listening, sharing and willing to support me in solving difficulties at school.	5.81	5.19
When I have difficulties, I will ask teachers to support	4.77	5.19
Teachers treat every student the same	5.81	8.51
I do not dare to share anything with teachers because I am afraid them *	24.48	27.39
School has policies to prevent school violence	5.60	8.51
Teachers are strict*	20.12	28.22

Note. Statement with (*) have inverse meaning

Results also indicated that students had support from their parents and family members. In particular, they agreed that “Parents always listen, share and support me when I have difficulties at school” (M=3.50), “My family members are willing to listen, share, sympathize and respect each other” (M=3.59), “When having difficulties at school, I will seek help from my parents” (M=3.49). With inverse statements like “My parents are so strict that I dare not actively speak out about my school difficulties” (M=2.57), “My parents are so busy that they do not have time to care about my friends” (M=2.45).

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of Family Relationships

Family relationships	Mean	SD
Parents always listen, share and support me when I have difficulties at school	3.50	0.95
When having difficulties at school, I will seek help from my parents	3.49	1.03
My family members are willing to listen, share, sympathize and respect each other.	3.59	0.89
My parents are so busy that they do not have time to care about my	2.57	0.93

friends*

My parents are so strict that I dare not actively speak out about my school difficulties*	2.45	0.87
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Note. Statement with (*) have inverse meaning

4. Discussion

In this study, we aimed to investigate reported negative coping strategies used by students experiencing school violence. We also looked for interpersonal factors related to these strategies like peer relationships, teacher-student relationships and family relationships.

Regarding the reported coping strategies, the results indicated that negative emotion was the most popular among middle-school students. The correlation between the negative coping strategies among students experiencing violence indicated that if students have negative thoughts, they would also have negative coping emotions and behaviors. Whereas, if students have positive thoughts when faced with school violence, they also have positive emotions and behaviors.

In terms of coping strategies, when being bullied, most students endured and kept negative thinking about themselves. In particular, they often “let others treat them badly”, “let them do whatever they want to do” and even think that “someone talks bad behind my back” or “I am an useless person and not strong enough to protect myself”. They often deduce the problem rather than accept them. Both coping strategies in the long run do not help students solve their problems, but also make the problem more complicated and negatively affect the student's mental health. Emotions that they expressed including “I felt depressed, sad and I did not want to do anything” or “I got irrationally angry with other people around”. Besides, some students selected avoiding such as “I pretend to be happy with everyone around me to hide my insecure feelings”. “I hide my anxiety, fear, insecurity or anger with my friends, relatives, and teachers because I don't want people to know I was bullied”. In this survey, students would also select avoidance as one behavior strategy to copy with school violence. Few students would look for smoking, drinking alcohol or taking revenge.

The presence of peer support systems, teacher-student relationships and family support encourages students to cope with school violence positively. The results indicated that the more positive and supportive peer relationships, the more support and concern from teachers, the school and the student's family, the more positive the student's response to negative actions reduction.

In conclusion, the present study highlights that students need continuing intervention in coping with school violence effectively even where the participants come from schools with well-established systems of support and active whole school anti-bullying policies. There is an urgent need for school social work to identify those students who are victims and enable them to seek out the help that they need.

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