

Analysis of the causes of juvenile school bullying and thoughts on countermeasures

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Abstract: This study analyzes the current situation of juvenile school bullying in China, examines the causes of school bullying from the perspective of mental health education, and explores strategies to curb such violence. It argues that suppressing school bullying requires the collaborative efforts of families, schools, and society to form a cohesive force in mental health education.

Keywords: school bullying, mental health education, research on countermeasures

1. Introduction

In 1996, the World Health Organization defined violence as: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." Regarding the definition of school bullying, due to differences in scholars' research perspectives, there is no unified conclusion. Some scholars believe that school bullying generally refers to "violent behavior occurring among adolescents that is directly related to school activities, including incidents that occur on campus as well as those that occur off campus but are directly related to the school" [2]. Based on the perspectives of other scholars and the scope of this paper, the definition of school bullying adopted here is: violent behavior involving intentional physical attacks initiated by adolescent students as the main participants, occurring either on or off campus, and resulting in physical or psychological harm to the individuals involved.

2. The current situation of juvenile school bullying in China

In recent years, the frequent occurrence of juvenile school bullying in China has attracted widespread attention and heated discussions from all sectors of society. In June 2015, a research report released by the Legal Public Opinion Monitoring Center showed that among the participants in 40 school bullying incidents reported by the media from January to May 2015, high school students accounted for 32.5%, while middle school students accounted for as high as 42.5% [3]. School bullying exhibits characteristics of younger age groups and high frequency, with triggers often stemming from minor daily incidents such as jokes, queuing, or collisions. In terms of addressing school bullying, current methods generally involve educational management, moral education, and disciplinary actions against perpetrators in accordance with school regulations, as there are no specific laws or regulations for punishing such behavior. Survey data indicate that approximately 70% of the perpetrators of school bullying are not held criminally liable, with most cases resolved through school criticism and education or private settlements between parents, and rarely do perpetrators face criminal responsibility [3].

Many countries place high importance on school bullying and have enacted laws and regulations to address it. Currently, in China, many people lack a correct and objective understanding of school bullying, simplistically categorizing it as physical conflicts between classmates. This has led to insufficient attention being paid to juvenile school bullying, and the methods and approaches for addressing it remain underdeveloped. Therefore, under the premise of correctly understanding school bullying, relevant authorities and personnel in China should learn from the successful experiences of other countries in dealing

with school bullying and formulate effective measures tailored to China's national conditions to curb juvenile school bullying.

3. Four-Dimensional analysis of the causes of juvenile school bullying

Compared with Western developed countries, China started relatively late in mental health education. Although certain achievements have been made, the foundation remains weak and underdeveloped. The frequent occurrence of juvenile school bullying in recent years reflects the shortcomings in China's mental health education for adolescents.

3.1. The negative impact of family education on the mental health of adolescents

When analyzing the frequent occurrence of school bullying among Chinese adolescents, parents bear significant responsibility. Firstly, domestic violence is one of the triggers for the high incidence of school bullying. Relevant surveys indicate that in families where problems are resolved peacefully, the incidence of violent behavior among adolescents is only 15%, while in families that frequently resort to violent methods, the incidence rises to 32.4%—more than double the former [4]. Domestic violence exists in many Chinese families, leaving psychological scars on adolescents living in such environments and affecting their healthy growth. Some adolescents may imitate their parents' words and actions, adopting extreme methods to resolve conflicts with their peers. Without proper guidance, the consequences could be unimaginable.

Secondly, there is a widespread phenomenon of excessive indulgence of children by parents in China, which is particularly evident among only-child families. When children make mistakes, some parents not only fail to educate them but instead try to excuse their behavior, indulging their misconduct. This leads adolescents to develop selfish, unreasonable, and unrestrained personalities, which are detrimental to their healthy development. In 2015, three Chinese students studying in the United States were sentenced to 6, 10, and 13 years in prison respectively for bullying a classmate and causing physical and psychological harm. Notably, one of the parents attempted to resolve the matter privately, sparking widespread discussion. Parental indulgence and permissiveness can foster unrestrained and harmful behavioral habits in their children, hindering their healthy growth.

3.2. Shortcomings in school-based mental health education for adolescents

Schools are not only responsible for imparting scientific and cultural knowledge but also bear the important mission of fostering healthy psychology and sound personalities in adolescents. However, there are still deficiencies in mental health education for young people. Firstly, as academic pressure and competition intensify, many teachers place excessive emphasis on enrollment rates, often neglecting students with poor academic performance or behavior. This leads to so-called "underachievers" facing parental criticism and marginalization by teachers and classmates. Adolescents labeled as "underachievers" often lack a sense of belonging and identity, making them prone to developing oppositional attitudes toward peers and teachers, which can result in school bullying. Secondly, although some schools in China offer mental health education courses, the curriculum is often dull and monotonous, failing to engage students' interest. As a result, these courses become ineffective and fail to address students' psychological issues. Thirdly, there is a shortage of professional mental health educators in China, and the capabilities of existing educators need improvement. Many current mental health education staff in schools are moral education teachers, homeroom teachers, or medical personnel who lack systematic training. Their insufficient professional knowledge and skills make it difficult to ensure the effectiveness of mental health education, thereby hindering timely and effective responses to incidents of school bullying.

3.3. Inadequate social support for youth mental health education

Marx argued that humans are social animals who cannot survive independently of their social environment [5]. Adolescents are at a critical stage in life, and the social environment determines their level of socialization, playing a significant guiding role in their physical and mental development. During adolescence, their worldview, outlook on life, and values are not yet fully formed, and their ability to discern is limited. Negative social trends, such as extravagance and corruption, can have a detrimental impact on their "three views." According to reports, the suicide rate among adolescents in Taiwan has been rising in

recent years, with suicide becoming the second leading cause of death among Taiwanese youth, and the age of those committing suicide is trending downward. Taiwanese psychological researchers conclude that political corruption, economic stagnation, and increasing academic pressure are the main factors contributing to the rising number of adolescent suicides [6]. Sun Yunxiao, Deputy Director of the China Youth and Children Research Center, believes that school bullying incidents are a social phenomenon resulting from the combination of societal trends and the inherent characteristics of adolescents.

Furthermore, media serves as a significant influencing factor in the socialization process of adolescents. "It provides them with images of real-life situations, social norms, and models of societal expectations and life ideals" [6]. Relevant expert studies indicate that adolescents who watch violent videos tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviors compared to those who rarely view such content. Reviewing reports on school bullying in China reveals that media often tends to provide detailed descriptions of the brutal scenes of violent incidents. Some outlets even resort to sensationalism or exaggerate the authenticity of events to attract public attention. Prolonged exposure to such negative reporting may adversely influence the behavioral patterns of young individuals.

3.4. Personal reasons of the perpetrators

During adolescence, it is common for individuals to have weaker psychological resilience and experience fluctuations in their mental state. Adolescents possess a strong sense of self-awareness and independence, showing enthusiasm for independent thinking. However, due to a lack of life experience and practical abilities, coupled with pressures such as heavy academic burdens and high parental expectations, they are prone to developing one-sided or even extreme thoughts and behaviors [7]. Additionally, adolescents often lack rational thinking, are impulsive, curious, and highly imitative, making them susceptible to emotional decision-making. They may prioritize loyalty to friends as a moral guideline, which can easily lead to group conflicts. The physiological development characteristics of adolescents, along with their weak legal and life awareness—often believing that as minors, they are exempt from legal responsibility—prompt some adolescents to handle problems emotionally and extremely. This can result in minor conflicts being mishandled, ultimately leading to severe and detrimental incidents of school bullying.

4. Strategies for curbing school bullying

Adolescents are a unique social group, and the occurrence of school bullying implicates the shared responsibility of families, schools, society, and the perpetrators themselves. Curbing school bullying requires families, schools, and society to enhance their sense of responsibility, collaborate, and form a cohesive force in mental health education to effectively prevent the occurrence of school bullying.

4.1. The foundational role of families in curbing school bullying

During the 2015 Spring Festival gathering, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of family education, stating: "Families are the basic cells of society and the first school in life. No matter how much the patterns of life change, we must prioritize family development, value family, emphasize family education, and uphold family traditions" [8]. Parents are children's first teachers and lifelong educators. Their words, actions, and educational approaches are crucial in shaping children's healthy psychology and sound character. In family education, parents should avoid using harsh language or violent behavior to resolve conflicts. Instead, they should create a warm and loving family environment, allowing children to learn to love others by experiencing love themselves. In terms of educational methods, democratic family education should be advocated. Parents should respect their children's thoughts, communicate with them as equals, and listen to their voices. Discipline should be neither overly strict nor excessively indulgent. Parents and teachers should maintain regular communication, sharing observations about the child's behavior at home and in school, to promptly identify and address any abnormal conduct, thereby reducing the likelihood of school bullying.

4.2. The Key Role of Schools in Curbing School Bullying

Strengthening the development of the teaching workforce and improving the quality of educators are prerequisites and safeguards for the effective implementation of mental health education. Schools should

provide mental health education teachers with the necessary learning conditions to enhance their capabilities, actively organize professional training activities for educators, and improve their theoretical knowledge, professional expertise, and practical skills in mental health education. Educators must accurately grasp the psychological development characteristics and individual differences of adolescents, pay attention to and understand students' personal lives, and be aware of their emotional changes. Special focus should be given to student groups prone to psychological issues, such as those with poor academic performance, unusual personalities, or from single-parent families, providing them with appropriate humanistic care. Educators should learn to interact with students as friends, making them willing to confide their thoughts, and be skilled at listening. This helps address their psychological issues in a timely manner and aids in the early detection and prevention of school bullying.

Strengthening the moral integrity of educators and cultivating their sense of responsibility are essential to preventing the negative impact of inappropriate words or actions on adolescents. As the saying goes, "Respect the person, and trust their words." For educators to establish authority and a positive image in the hearts of students, they must not only possess professional knowledge but also continuously enhance their moral cultivation and personal charisma. Only educators with noble moral sentiments and genuine care for students can become role models in the eyes of their students. Teachers with high moral standards, sound mental health, and solid professional expertise can serve as mentors and friends to students, helping them internalize the knowledge imparted by teachers and translate it into action, thereby effectively curbing the occurrence of school bullying.

Strengthen Legal and Life Education. In the context of "governing schools by law," schools should gradually institutionalize legal and life education. Regular legal lectures and case studies tailored to the physiological and psychological characteristics of adolescents should be conducted, and assessment methods should be employed to ensure that young people acquire essential legal knowledge. As an ancient saying goes, "Fear restrains recklessness and nurtures virtue, while fearlessness leads to indulgence and disaster" [9]. Enhancing adolescents' reverence for the law and life will enable them to understand, respect, and abide by the law, consciously restraining their own undesirable behaviors.

4.3. The supportive role of society in curbing school bullying

In addition to the joint efforts of families and schools, mental health education also requires support from society. Businesses should refrain from selling violent tools to minors. Government departments should clean up and regulate the environment around schools, cracking down on illegally operated internet cafes, gaming arcades, and other entertainment venues. Governments and communities need to work together to optimize the social environment, fully leveraging society's positive role in curbing school bullying among adolescents, and fostering the healthy growth of young people in a harmonious social environment.

Furthermore, it is essential to purify the online space for mental health education. The internet is a primary source of exposure to violent information for adolescents. Despite the government's intensified efforts in online supervision, a significant amount of violent media content and vulgar online games still exist on the internet, severely misleading the value orientations of young people. Adolescents, with their strong curiosity, weak self-control, and limited discernment, are prone to blind admiration and imitation. Therefore, the negative influence of the internet on school bullying among adolescents cannot be underestimated. Relevant authorities must resolutely implement the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's speech at the Symposium on Cybersecurity and Informatization, strengthen online governance, divide the internet into adult and minor access zones, introduce management measures for rating online content, and strictly prohibit the dissemination of information detrimental to the mental health of minors in their browsing areas, preventing the internet from becoming a trigger for school bullying. The communicative strengths of the internet should be fully utilized to promote positive social energy, enhance its guiding role for adolescents, and create a "green" online space for mental health education for minors.

4.4. Adolescents should learn self-awareness and improve their personal qualities

While school, family, and society serve as external triggers for adolescent violence, fundamentally curbing school bullying requires adolescents to play an active role themselves. Adolescents should not only

proactively learn about mental health basics, regulate their emotions, think calmly in challenging situations, and properly handle relationships with others to prevent intense conflicts and physical confrontations, but also learn to accurately understand themselves, evaluate themselves objectively, and face difficulties and setbacks with a positive and optimistic mindset. In terms of interpersonal interactions, adolescents should actively participate in group activities, enhance communication with peers, and build healthy interpersonal "friend circles." Additionally, adolescents should learn to protect themselves. When threatened or bullied, they should communicate with parents or teachers. In the face of violence, they must have the courage and strategy to address problems using appropriate methods, and be adept at safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests.

4.5. Strengthening legislation plays a crucial role in curbing school bullying

The current lack of clear laws and unclear accountability for handling school bullying incidents in China has, to some extent, contributed to the rise of such violence. "Governing education by law" is not only an integral part of "governing the country by law" but also a vital strategy for curbing school bullying among adolescents. Most perpetrators of school bullying are minors who lack criminal responsibility under the law. China can draw on the successful experiences of Western countries in addressing school bullying. For instance, the United Kingdom sets the age of criminal responsibility at 10, while the United States adopts a zero-tolerance policy toward school bullying. By strengthening legislation and establishing clear standards for identifying school bullying, these measures have proven effective in curbing such incidents. It is necessary for China to expedite revisions to the age of criminal responsibility in criminal law, potentially lowering the age for criminal liability appropriately. Furthermore, the formulation of an "Anti-Juvenile Violence Law" should specify responsibilities clearly, emphasizing the enforceability of legislation to ensure that the law both protects the healthy development of minors and penalizes violent offenses committed by them.

5. Conclusion

Curbing school bullying among adolescents was a hot topic at the 2016 "Two Sessions." The Central Committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy specifically submitted a "Proposal on Preventing School Bullying Incidents." This proposal is expected to address the legal gaps in China's efforts to tackle school bullying among adolescents and ensure that perpetrators of such violence are punished in accordance with the law.

6. References

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