ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: http://www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expectation of Social Approval for Aggressive Behaviors in Aggressive and Nonaggressive Preschoolers

Hana Song, Ph.D.
Department of Child Psychology and Education Sugkyunkwan University

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 14 May 2015
Final Accepted: 19 June 2015
Published Online: July 2015

Key words:

Social approval, Peer, Outcome expectation, Aggressive behaviors, Preschool children

Corresponding Author

Hana Song, Ph.D.

Abstract

This study examined aggressive and nonaggressive preschoolers' predictions of social approval resulting from their aggressive behaviors. The interaction between levels of aggression and children's gender on the expectation of social approval was also examined. Data were gathered via interviews of 20 aggressive and 22 nonaggressive children who were 4 years of age. The children's levels of aggression was identified by peers' nomination and teachers' report. The children's prediction of social approval for aggressive behaviors was measured using two subscales (peers' and teachers' approval) of the Outcome Expectation Questionnaire. The results showed that aggressive children predicted that their aggressive behaviors would be socially approved by their peers. In particular, aggressive boys showed more biased expectations for teachers' approval than aggressive girls and nonaggressive peers. This study also discussed the socialization process of aggressive children by peers and adults.

Introduction

Aggressive behavior in early childhood is an important determinant of peers' rejection, and behavior problems and school maladjustment in middle childhood (Ladd and Burgess, 2001). Recent studies (Choi and Lee, 2010; Goldstein and Boxer, 2013; Gower et al, 2014) have found that not only overt aggression, such as hitting, pushing, kicking, and cursing, but also relational aggression, such as spreading rumors and excluding peers from social activities are commonly observed in young children. Social cognitive ability is rapidly developed during the preschool years, and thus aggressive behavior that occurs during this period is also likely to be influenced by children's knowledge of social display rules and perspective taking ability.

Over the past few decades, biased cognitive reasoning, which refers to the misinterpretation of others' intentions and misprediction of possible outcomes of social behaviors, has been considered to cause aggressive behavior. The most prevailing finding among previous research (Dodge and Newman, 1981; Lochman and Dodge, 1994; Quiggle et al., 1992; Perry et al., 1986) that has focused on the role of cognitive misunderstandings in children's aggressive behavior is that aggressive children's information processing pattern for social cues is different from that of nonaggressive children.

Detailed hypotheses for this finding have been supported within the framework of the social information processing model, which was developed by Dodge and Frame (1982). The model proposes five steps for making a social decision and performing a social behavior: encoding social cues, interpreting social cues, searching for a response to the cues, choosing one response, and acting out a particular behavior (Crick and Dodge, 1994).

Specifically, aggressive boys tend to judge social stimuli presented by peers as hostile, even in circumstances in which the peers have no hostile intentions toward the boys (Dodge and Frame, 1982; Nasby et al., 1980). Aggressive boys' quick attention to hostile cues and selective recall of those cues seems to be due to cognitive paths that lead to attributional bias, which is incorrect reasoning the cause and effect of a social behavior

(Dodge and Newman, 1981). That is, the distorted information processing patterns of aggressive children lead them to interpret the incoming social stimuli as hostile, and therefore, aggressive children frequently select aggressive solutions to social problems.

However, aggressive children misinterpreted the social cues of peers less often in situations in which they observed a peer's aggressive behavior toward another peer than in situations in which they were directly involved in aggressive behaviors (Burgess et al, 2006; Dorsch and Keane, 1994). Dodge and Frame(1982) also found that aggressive boys' biased interpretations of the social cues coming from peers were more likely to be salient in situations in which the children were responsible for the outcomes of their aggressive behaviors, and situations in which their aggressive behaviors had negative consequences. This implies that aggressive behaviors are influenced by the characteristics of social situations and social reinforcement.

Perry et al. (1986) noted that aggressive children were more likely to believe that their aggressive behaviors would be approved by adults and peers. That is, this biased prediction for social approval of aggression seems to motivate and encourage children's aggressive behaviors. However, most previous studies have investigated the aggressive behaviors of school-aged children or children in middle childhood.

In one study of preschool children, Hoffman-Plotkin and Twentyman (1984) reported that preschool children who were maltreated and identified as aggressive by teachers showed a lack of cognitive and social ability. On the other hand, the social cognitive ability of aggressive preschoolers did not differ from that of nonaggressive children in the study of Monks et al. (2005). That is, the findings of previous studies on preschoolers' aggression are somewhat inconsistent. It has also not been conclusively determined whether the aggressive behaviors of preschool children are influenced by the children's biased expectation of social approval from others.

Most social approval of the behaviors of young children comes from significant adults, such as parents and teachers as well as peers. In particular, teachers and peers are considered to be major sources of social approval in preschool settings. However, the way in which biased expectation of teachers' and peers' approval affect aggressive behaviors in preschool children has not fully examined.

In addition, it has been well documented that aggressive behaviors vary with gender. Overt aggression was commonly observed in preschool boys, but preschool girls showed more relational aggression than preschool boys (Crick et al., 1997; Ostrov and Keating, 2004). Preschool girls' higher tendency in relational aggression may reflect gender differences in the socialization process because social perspective taking and responsive emotional conversation are generally more valued in girls' relationships (Maccoby, 1990; Rose and Rudolph, 2006). Therefore, it seems that girls are more socially competent than boys, and furthermore, gender difference in the social competence may influence children's levels of aggression.

The primary purpose of the present study was to explore the differences between aggressive and nonaggressive preschoolers in biased expectation for social approval of aggressive behaviors. This study also attempted to determine whether peers' or teachers' approval had the most influence on the aggressive behaviors of preschool children. Compared to nonaggressive peers, aggressive children are more likely to predict that aggressive behaviors will gain social approval from both teachers and peers. In addition, this study examined the interaction between levels of aggression and children's gender on the biased expectation for social approval.

Methods

Participants:

The participants of this study were 20 aggressive and 22 nonaggresive children who were 4 years of age. Initially, about 210 children who have attended 4 different daycare centers located in Seoul, South Korea were recruited. Each of children was identified as aggressive or nonaggressive by peers' nomination and by teachers' reports, which used the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach and Rescorla, 2000). A researcher randomly selected three children in a classroom to identify a participant as aggressive or nonaggressive. Teachers competed the Korean version of the CBCL teacher report form (Oh et al., 1997) for each child. Participants were identified as aggressive when they received T-scores of 70 or higher in the teacher report and when peers identified them as aggressive. And participants were identified as nonaggressive when their T-scores were 50 (an average of zero).

As a result, 20 children were assigned to the aggressive group, and 22 children were assigned to the nonaggressive group. There were 12 (60%) and 9 (41%) boys in the aggressive and nonaggressive groups, respectively. The average age of 42 participants were 51.64 months (SD=1.14) and no age difference was found between the aggressive (Mean=51.55, SD=1.10) and nonaggressive groups (Mean=51.75, SD=1.21).

Measure:

The Outcome Expectation Questionnaire, which was developed by Perry et al. (1986) was used to measure children's prediction of the social approval of aggressive behaviors. There are six subscales in this questionnaire: tangible rewards, adults' approval, peers' approval, control of a counterattack, victims' suffering, and self approval. Only two subscales, adults' approval and peers' approval, were used in this study. Each subscale includes eight items, and the total scores ranged from16 to 64 on a 4-point Likert scale.

The original scale has been commonly administered to school-aged children in the form of self-report. However, to make it appropriate for younger children, words that were not suitable for a preschool setting were eliminated, and the stories in the items were revised in this study. A researcher interviewed each child. The researcher read the items to the children, and let them pick one of four dots ranging from small to large to indicate that smaller dots are smaller in numbers.

The alpha coefficients of internal consistency for the revised items were calculated. The alpha coefficients were .85 for peers' approval and .84 for teachers' approval. The scores of 16 items were added to create a total score for each participant. Higher the scores represent more biased expectations.

Procedure and Analysis:

After identifying each child as aggressive or nonaggressive, the researcher interviewed each child by reading items from the questionnaire during free play. The interview took about 12 to 20 minutes. After the interview, children received a vitamin candy. The independent variables in this study were the status of aggression (aggressive vs. nonaggressive) and child gender (boy vs. girl). A two-way ANOVA was performed on peers' and adults' approval

Results

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for peers' and teachers' approval as a function of the status of aggression and child gender. The mean of peers' approval scores were higher than teachers' approval scores in both aggressive and nonaggressive groups, and for both boys and girls. However the differences were not statistically significant across groups.

As a result of the two-way ANOVA, a significant main effect for the status of aggression was found on peers' approval ($F(1, 38)=5.22$, $p<.05$). Aggressive children showed a more biased expectation of peers' approval than did nonaggressive children. As to the expectation of teachers' approval, no main effect was significant, but a significant interaction was found ($F(1, 38)=4.33$, $p<.05$). As shown in Figure 1, in the nonaggressive group, boys and girls did not differ in their expectations of teachers' approval. However, in the aggressive group, boys had significantly more biased expectation of teachers' approval than did girls ($F(1, 18)=5.06$, $p<.05$).

TABLE 1. Means and standard deviations of biased outcome expectation for aggressive and nonaggressive boys and girls (N=42)

		For peers' approval		For teachers' approval	
Group	Gender	Means	SD	Means	SD
Aggressive children (n=20)	Boys	16.42	4.19	16.17	2.95
	Girls	16.38	4.14	12.75	3.85
	Total	16.40	4.06	14.80	3.66
Nonaggressive children (n=22)	Boys	13.78	3.07	13.00	3.04
	Girls	13.62	3.50	13.69	3.01
	Total	13.68	3.26	13.41	2.97
Total children (n=42)	Boys	15.29	3.90	14.80	3.33
	Girls	14.67	3.90	13.33	3.29
	Total	14.98	3.87	14.07	3.35

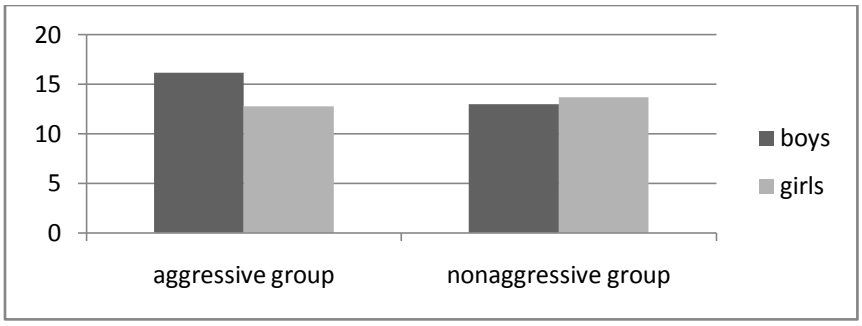

FIGURE 1. The interaction effect between the status of aggression and child gender on teachers' approval for aggressive behaviors (N=42)

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study can be summarized and discussed as follows. First, aggressive preschoolers reported more biased expectations of peers' approval, compared to their nonaggressive peers. In other words, aggressive preschoolers had a greater tendency to expect that aggressive behaviors would receive positive approval from their peers. This result is comparable to findings in previous studies (Crick and Dodge, 1994; Dodge and Freeman, 1982), which have shown that aggressive children were more likely to use aggressive behaviors as the most effective way to solve interpersonal conflicts. While these studies focused on the aggression of school-aged children, the present study suggested that a similar social cognitive distortion was found even in preschool children.

Peers provide an important social context for young children. According to Perry et al (1986), aggressive children tend to affiliate with aggressive peers because these children may receive social approval for their aggression from their aggressive peers. This may also lead to the misprediction of social approval from nonaggressive peers.

Secondly, aggressive boys showed more biased expectations of teachers' approval for aggressive behaviors in this study, indicating they were more likely to expect that their aggressive behaviors would be accepted or approved by teachers. Thus, boys' decision making regarding aggressive behaviors seems to be influenced by teachers' authority and approval.

Since the authority and approval of adults are perceived as absolute in early childhood, it is possible to assume that children's biased expectations of teachers' approval in the preschool context is related to that of parents' approval in the family context. Parents' punitive control was an important factor for children's behavior problems (Gershoff, 2002), and parents' aggression was consistently related to children's aggression across generations (Conger et al., 2003). If parents are highly aggressive or punitive toward their children at home, the children are likely to learn aggressive responses and strategies for interpersonal interaction through modeling. Moreover, aggressive parents can reinforce aggressive behaviors of their children in specific situations. Thus, family interactions involving aggressive parents and their children could results in children's biased expectations of teachers' approval for aggressive behaviors in preschool settings.

In conclusion, a social cognitive enhancement technique may be necessary to modify the biased prediction of peers' approval in order to develop intervention programs for aggressive preschoolers. In particular, interventions focusing on the biased expectations of teachers' approval could be effective in decreasing aggressive behaviors in boys, though not in girls.

However, for several reasons, the generalizability of the research findings in this study may be limited. First the characteristics of aggressive children in this study do not reflect those of severely violent children. Secondly, it needs to be noted that children's predictions of social consequences resulting from their aggressive behaviors are influenced by characteristics of the victims (Coie et al., 1991). Finally, age-related changes in expectations of social approval were not examined in this study. These limitations should be considered in future studies.

References

Achenbach, T. and Rescorla, L. (2000): Manual for the ASEBA preschool forms & profiles. Burlington:University of Vermont, Research Centre for Children, Youth, and Families.

Burgess, K.B., Wojslawowicz, J.C., Rubin, K.H., Rose-Krasnor, L. and Booth-LaForce, C. (2006): Social information processing and coping strategies of shy/withdrawn and aggressive children: does friendship matter? Child Dev., 77(2): 371-383.

Coie, J.D., Dodge, K.A., Terry, R. and Wright, V. (1991): The role of aggression in peer relations: an analysis of aggression episodes in boys' play groups. Child Dev., 62: 812-826.

Conger, R.D., Neppl, T., Kim, K.J. and Scaramella, L. (2003): Angry and aggressive behavior across three generations: a prospective, longitudinal study of parents and children. J. Abnorm. Child Psych., 31(2): 143-160.

Crick, N.R., Casas, J.F. and Mosher, M. (1997): Relational and overt aggression in preschool. Dev. Psychol., 33(4): 579-588.

Crick, N.R. and Dodge, K.A. (1994): A review and reformulation of social information-processing mechanisms in children's social adjustment. Psychol. Bull. 115(1): 74-101.

Dodge, K.A. and Frame, C.L. (1982): Social cognitive biases and deficits in aggressive boys. Child Dev., 53: 620-635.

Dodge, K.A. and Newman, J.P. (1981): Biased decision-making processes in aggressive boys. J. Abnorm. Psychol., 90: 375-379.

Dorsch, A. and Keane, S.P.(1994). Contextual factors in children's social information processing. Dev. Psychol., 30: 611-616.

Gershoff, E.T. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: a meta-analytic and theoretical review. Psychol. Bull., 128(4): 539-579.

Goldstein, S. and Boxer, P. (2013). Parenting practices and the early socialisation of relational aggression among preschoolers. Early Child Dev. and Care, 183(11): 1559-1575.

Gower, A.L., Lingras, K.A., Mathieson, L.C., Kawabata, Y. and Crick, N.R. (2014). The role of preschool relational and physical aggression in the transition to kindergarten: links with social-psychological adjustment. Early Educ. and Dev., 25(5): 619-640.

Hoffman-Plotkin, D. and Twentyman, C.T. (1984). A multimodal assessment of behavioral and cognitive deficits in abused and neglected preschoolers. Child Dev., 55: 794-802.

Ladd, G.W. and Burgess, K.B. (2001). Do relational risks and protective factors moderate the linkages between childhood aggression and early psychological and school adjustment? Child Dev., 72(5): 1579-1601.

Lochman, J. E. and Dodge, K.A. (1994). Social-cognitive process of severely violent, moderately aggressive, and nonaggressive boys. J. Consult. Clin. Psych., 62: 366-374.

Maccoby, E.E. (1990). Gender and relationships: a developmental account. Am. Psychol., 45(4): 513-520.

Monks, C.P., Smith, P.K., and Swettenham, J. (2005). Psychological correlates of peer victimisation in preschool: social cognitive skills, executive function and attachment profiles. Aggressive Behav., 31(6): 571-588.

Nasby, W., Hayden, B., and Defaulo, B.M. (1980). Attributional bias among aggressive boys to interpret unambiguous social stimuli as displays of hostility. J. Abnorm. Psychol., 89: 459-468.

Oh, K.J., Lee, H.R., Hong, K.E. and Ha E.H. (1997). The Korean version of Child Behavior Checklist. Seoul: Jungangjeokseong publisher.

Ostrov, J.M. and Keating, C.F. (2004). Gender differences in preschool aggression during free play and structured interactions: an observational study. Soc. Dev., 13(2): 255-277.

Perry, D.G., Perry, L.C. and Rasmussen, P. (1986). Cognitive social mediators of aggression. Child Dev., 57: 700-711.

Quiggle, N.L., Garber, J., Panak, W.F. and Dodge, K.A. (1992). Social information processing in aggressive and depressed children. Child Dev., 63: 1305-1320.

Rose, A.J. and Rudolph, K.D. (2006). A review of sex differences in peer relationship processes: potential trade-offs for the emotional and behavioral development of girls and boys. Psychol. Bull., 132(1): 9-131.