AN ALARMING INCIDENT FROM THE DEEP SOUTH: COMMUNITY VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THAI AGOLESCENTS

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Tóm tắt

*Các sự cố bạo lực đang gia tăng ở 3 tỉnh biên giới phía nam của Thái Lan (Patani, Yala, và Narathiwat). Mối quan hệ giữa việc tiếp xúc với bạo lực cộng đồng, niềm tin mang tính quy phạm về hành vi hung hăng và hiếu chiến đã được điều tra trên 178 thanh thiếu niên. Kết quả cho thấy, thanh thiếu niên thường xuyên gây bạo lực trong cộng đồng có liên quan đến việc tiếp nhận niềm tin về tính hung hãn (b = 0.481**) và hành vi hung hăng (b = 0.253**). Tương tự như vậy, tác động gián tiếp giữa phơi nhiễm cao hơn đối với bạo lực cộng đồng và mức độ hung hãn cao có thể được giải thích rằng thanh thiếu niên đang coi sự hung hãn như quy phạm mới của niềm tiên. Những kết quả này là cảnh báo quan trọng cho những ảnh hưởng lâu dài và những bước đệm nhằm giảm thiểu liên kết có tính nguy hại này.*

Abstract

*There has been increasing of violent incidents in 3 southern border province of Thailand (Patani, Yala, and Narathiwat). A sample of 178 adolescents was examined about the relationship between exposure to community violence, normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behaviours. It found that adolescent frequently encounter the violence in community significantly positive related with accepting of aggressive beliefs (b = 0.481**) and aggressive behaviour. (b = 0.253**). Likewise, the indirect effect between higher exposure to community violence and high level of aggression could be explained by normative beliefs about aggression which adolescents adopted. These results highlight the important of examining the long-term effect and buffer variable that could mitigate this pernicious link.*

Keywords: *Adolescent violent community, aggressive behaviour, normative beliefs about aggression, three southern border province of Thailand.*

Introduction

In many parts of the world, community violence is widespread (Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Winton & Unlu, 2008; Scarpa & Haden, 2006). A high level of violence exposure is commonly found in form of victims, witnesses, & abusers (Guerra, Huesmann, and Spindler, 2003; Henningham, et al., 2009; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). For Thailand, the results of survey indicated that children and adolescents be slapped and hit by grownups in community around 30.4% including

getting involve in group fight about 22.4 %(Pradubmook-Sherer, 2010). Similarly, other research showed consistently results about violence that has enshrined in the daily life of children and youth as it is usual thing appearing in all dimension of their lives (Pradubmook-Shere et al., 2010).

Likewise, another crisis issue should take a closer look in high alarming area of Thailand. Of course, the three southern border provinces of Thailand (Patani, Yala, and Narathiwat), the local people have continually encountered the incidents of unrest from January 2004 to present. As consequences, the loss of lives and a number of injuries were reflected from database of deep south watch, there were a 9,446 incidents resulted in approximately 4,100 deaths and 6,509 injuries within 6 years (Jitpiromsri, 2010). Remarkably, people not only perceived the conflicts and violence, but also affected by economic downturn in local communities (Jitpiromsir, 2009). Specifically, the major problems were aroused ranging from unemployment to insurgency, although there has been a recent trend of reduction in violence, but in Pattani province, this should be most considered as it rise to be the highest number of incidents in 2010.

These consequences have obvious and stressful ramification, the past research indicated the effect of exposure to community violence in various ways. The link between exposure to community violence and a series of mental health and behaviour problems were reported (Vermeiren et al., 2002; Boxer et al., 2008; Kliewer et al., 2006). To explain these phenomenon, the repeated exposure to community violence, these individuals' emotional responses to violence become blunted as they come to viewed violence as morally acceptable, and to develop indifferent attitude toward others, it was called "pathological adaptation" (Ng-Mak et al., 2002). Huesmann & Guerra (1997) defined the cognitive standards about the acceptability of an aggressive behaviour as normative beliefs about aggression, according to this explanation, repeated exposure engendered a normative beliefs, that not only may play an important role in filtering out inappropriate behaviours (such as aggression), but also may affect emotional reactions to other behaviours.

Based on the reasons above, the need to study the effect of exposure to community violence in three southern border province of Thailand cannot be overlooked, if we consider the extant literature in this topic. Therefore, the aim of

this study is to find the relationship between the exposure to community violence and aggressive behaviour. As victims and witnesses violent events in community are more likely to develop the belief system that supports problematic social behaviour and thus this normative belief may mediate the relationship between violent exposure and aggression. Figure 1 presents the hypothetical model of current study.

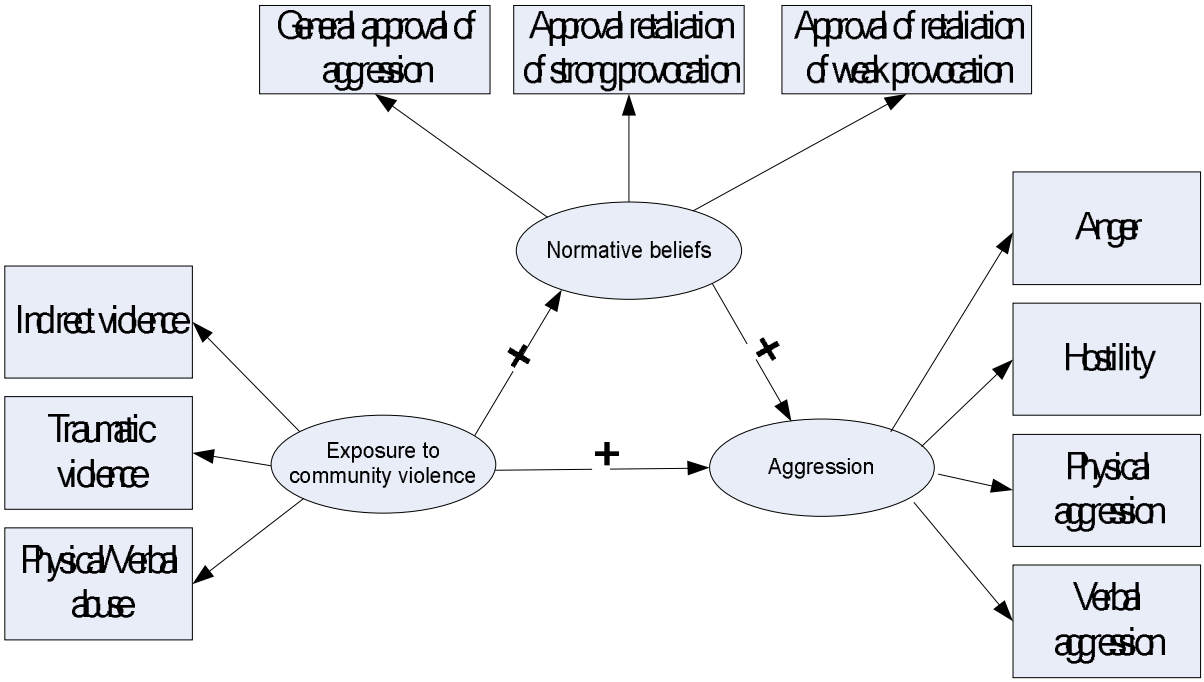

Figure 1. The relationship between exposure to community violence among adolescents and aggressive behaviour using normative beliefs about aggression as mediator.

Material and Method

Participants

The random cross-sectional design consisted of 178 adolescents (85.4% males, 12.4% females) voluntarily responded to the questionnaire (100% of consent) from Pattani province, ranging in age from 15 to 24 years (M = 19.32, SD =19.87), they earned 61.18 baht in average per day, parents' income averaged 8,378. 26 bath per month. A majority of adolescents were Muslim (84.9%), and studied in vocational school (64.5%). Mostly, respondents are Thai (96.3%). Sample statistics was summarized in **Table 1**. For missing data (6.7%), it was treated in a formal way, EM algorithm were used in imputation with incomplete data (Schafer, 1997).

Procedure

Participants were recruited voluntarily at school and completed a set of questionnaires in class room. Participants were told it wasn't necessary to write the name-surname, or number, the researchers and research assistants interested in obtaining anonymous information on the frequency of violent exposure in community occurring in the last month and described themselves with psychological inventories (aggressive questionnaire & normative beliefs about aggressive scale). Before starting the questionnaire, participants were asked to sign the consent form.

Instruments

Aggressive behaviour - it was assessed by the Aggressive Questionnaire (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992). The validity and reliability of this scale has been widely documented and accepted. This scale contained 29 items, consisted of 4 factors (Anger, Hostility, Physical Aggression & Verbal Aggression). Each item of this scale has a Likert format (a 5-point scale). Cronbach's α for overall of this scale was 0.893 (subscale; $\alpha_{\text{verbal aggression}} = 0.461$, $\alpha_{\text{anger}} = 0.664$, $\alpha_{\text{hostility}} = 0.677$, and $\alpha_{\text{physical aggression}} = 0.740$). For testing the validity of this scale, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factory Analysis (CFA) were conducted. It found that principal-component analysis with a varimax rotation; four factors were extracted as the original study (Buss & Perry, 1992), with a variance accounted for 51.07% (KMO =0.771, Bartlett's test of sphericity = 2567.681, $p<.01$). For CFA, it was employed to examine the hypothesis that aggressive construct is a second-order factor structure composed of 4 factors in the first-order, a CFA model was tested for confirming the congruent of hypothesized model and empirical data using the maximum-likelihood (ML) method in LISREL program (Joreskog & Sorbom, 2005), both chi-square result and goodness of fit indices also suggested a reasonable fit (Kline, 2005).

Table 1. Sample statistics (N=178)*

Categorical variable	**n**	**%**
Gender		
Male	152	85.4
Female	22	12.4
(missing)	4	2.2
Religious		
Buddhism	26	14.6
Muslim	146	82.0

(missing)	6	3.4
School		
Secondary	54	30.3
Vocational	98	55.1
(missing)	26	14.6
Race		
Thai	154	86.5
Other	6	3.3
(missing)	18	10.2

Note. M_{income} = 61.18, SD_{income} = 25.12 , $M_{parents' income}$ = 8378.26, $SD_{parents' income}$ = 7989.61

Exposure to community violence – The Screen for Adolescent Violent Exposure (SAVE; Hastings & Kelley, 1997) was used to assess a frequency of violence exposure in various forms (victims & witnesses). For this study, the 2 items were added from original version in order to reflect the unique of community context in 3 southern border provinces of Thailand. Finally, it yields 34 items, representing the experience of adolescents in violent community. Severity of violent exposure was assessed by asking the respondents about the frequency of violent exposure during past month, using a 5-point scale (never, very less, sometimes, often, always). Conbrach's Alpha of overall scale was 0.963 (subscale; ranging from $\alpha_{\text{indirect violence}} = 0.944$; $\alpha_{\text{physical/verbal abuse}} = 0.92$; to $\alpha_{\text{traumatic violence}} = 0.903$). To test the construct validity; 34 items were extracted using EFA technique, it also found 3 factors (Indirect Violence (IV), Traumatic Violence (TV) and Physical/Verbal Abuse (PVA)) which accounted for 62.86% (KMO = 0.870, Bartlett's test of sphericity = 5995.601, $p<.01$). CFA also yield a reasonable fit and affirm the multidimensional construct of this variable.

Normative beliefs about aggression - The Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale (NOBAG; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997) was employed. The 3 subscales composed of (1) Approval of retaliation - Weak Provocation (AWP), 2) approval of retaliation – Strong Provocation (ASP) and 3) General Approval of Aggression (GAA)). On all scales, participants expressed the attitude toward the provoked situations on a five point scale (very inappropriate to very appropriate). Alpha for a 20-items yield 0.911 (subscales; ranging from; $\alpha_{ASP} = 0.808$; $\alpha_{GAA} = 0.834$; to $\alpha_{AWP} = 0.887$). EFA technique yield consistent results with original study. It found 3 factors extracted from 20 items which accounted for 57.25% (KMO =

0.780, Bartlett's test of sphericity = 2168.621, p<.01). CFA also yield a reasonable fit and affirm the multidimensional construct of this variable.

Results

Bivariate relation among variables

In **Table 2.,** intercorrelation, mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness were presented. All variables in the model were statistically significant except the correlation between IV and ASP (*r* =.144). The overall pattern of correlation between predictor and outcome variables, hostility and traumatic violence were highly correlated (*r* =.464), followed by correlation between hostility and indirect violence (*r* = .404), physical aggression and traumatic violence (*r* =.390), respectively. While the distribution of normative beliefs about aggression score was positively skewed, but log-transforming these 2 variables (TV and PVA) did not affect the multivariate results, thus the reports were based on original.

From the suggestion of Kline (2005), multiple indexes were used to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model. These included the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), goodness of fit index (GFI; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996), Adjusted GFI (AGFI), Standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR), Root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), Normed fit index (NFI) (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Each of these indexes were assessed a slightly different aspect of model fit and together covered the main facets recommended by Kline (2005). A more formal definition of each fit index was provided in the Figure 2 note. Acceptable fit in the current study was defined as CFI, GFI, AGFI, and NFI values of .90 or greater (Kline, 2005) and an SRMR and RMSEA of .05 or less (Byrne, 2001).

Table 2. Intercorrelation, mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness (N=178)

Variables	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
1. AGG1	1									
2. AGG2	.723**	1								
3. AGG3	.735**	.746**	1							
4. AGG4	.703**	.733**	.645**	1						
5. IV	.259*	.404*	.286*	.237*	1					

	*	*	*	*						
6. TV	.355**	.464**	.391**	.295**	.767**	1				
7. PVA	.250**	.390**	.308**	.267**	.541**	.776**	1			
8. GAA	.321**	.299**	.344**	.327**	.292**	.403**	.392**	1		
9. ASP	.413**	.329**	.345**	.376**	.144	.193**	.193**	.582**	1	
10. AWP	.332**	.458**	.421**	.421**	.314**	.324**	.282**	.538**	.454**	1
M	17.69	18.87	21.57	12.58	37.27	19.00	8.98	19.92	10.16	20.01
SD	4.60	4.85	5.90	2.89	14.68	8.51	4.47	6.50	3.63	6.03
Range	8-32	9-33	10-38	7-23	18-85	11-55	6-30	8-40	4-20	8-32
Kurtosis	.17	.31	.51	.39	1.14	1.73	2.61	.26	.17	-.23
Skewness	.20	-.08	.27	.99	.94	3.67	8.07	.12	-.56	-.80

Note. AGG1 = Anger, AGG2= Hostility, AGG3 = Physical aggression, AGG4 = Verbal aggression, IV=Indirect violence, TV = Traumatic violence, PAV = Physical/Verbal abuse, GAA = General approval of aggression, ASP = Approval retaliation of strong provocation, AWP = Approval of retaliation of weak provocation; 5 – 7 = predictor variables, 8 – 10 = mediator variables, and 1 – 4 = outcome variables.

***p<.01*

This study used structural equation model (SEM) approach to examine the relationship between predictor, mediator and outcome variable. This model included a latent exogenous variable (exposure to community violence) and three indicators (IV, TV and PVA). In addition, this model also included two latent endogenous variables (normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behaviour), normative beliefs about aggression consisted of three indicators (GAA, ASP and AWP), aggressive behaviour consisted of four indicators (AGG1 to AGG4).

Overall, this pattern consistent with hypotheses; the goodness of fit indices indicated adequate fit and (χ^2 = 31.221, p <.05, CFI = 0.994, GFI = 0.966, AGFI = 0.919, NFI = 0.980, SRMR = 0.044, and RMSEA = 0.0449) structural R^2s suggested that the model explained mediocre level of variance proportion (R^2 = 0.232, p<.01

for normative beliefs about aggression & R^2 = 0.406, $p<.01$ for aggressive behaviour). There were significantly direct paths linking between experienced violence in community and adolescents' normative beliefs about aggression (b = 0.481**) and aggression (b = 0.253**). It could be explained that adolescents who more likely experience as victims and witnesses in indirect violence, traumatic violence, and physical/verbal abuse incidents reported higher approval of problematic behaviour and higher aggressive behaviours. Finally, regarding the normalisation path way, the influence of violence exposure on aggressive behaviour could be explained by normative beliefs; adolescents frequently observed and victimized the context of community violence, they were more likely increase the level of approval of aggression and retaliation (b = 0.475**), relating the higher level of aggression.

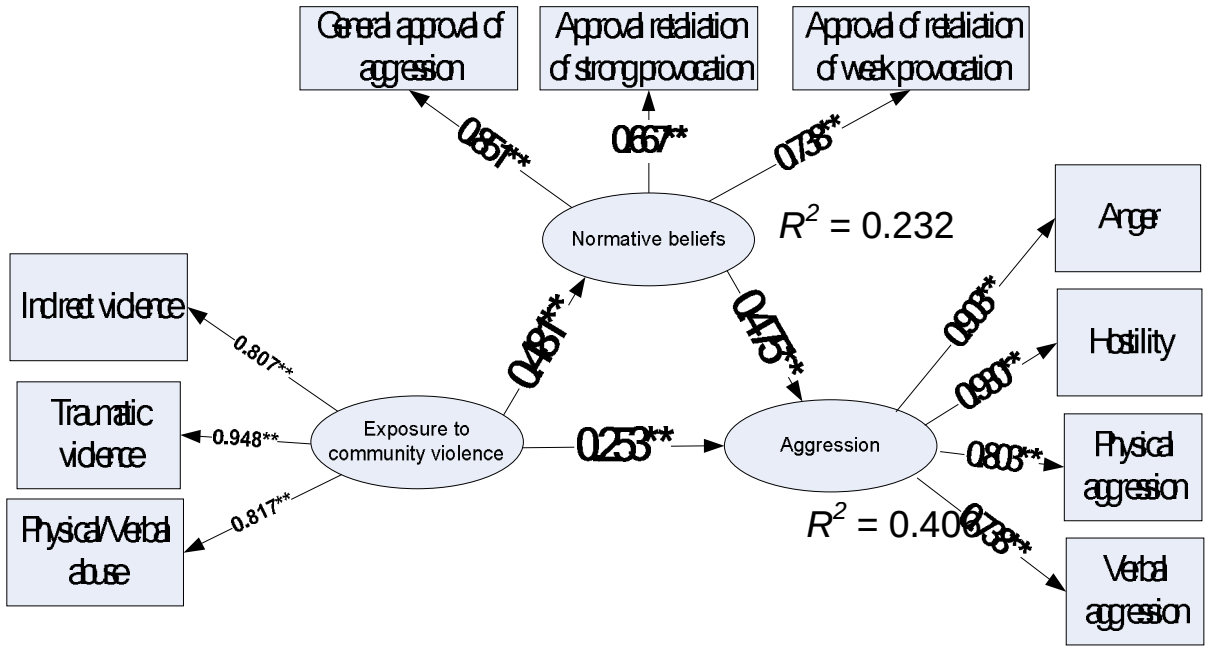

Figure 3. Structural equation model of association between violence exposure, normative beliefs about aggression, and aggressive behaviour among adolescents in 3 southern border province of Thailand (N=178). Standardized path coefficients and factor loadings in boldface are significant at $p<.01$. χ^2 = 31.221, $p<.05$, CFI = 0.994, GFI = 0.966, AGFI = 0.919, NFI = 0.980, SRMR = 0.044, and RMSEA = 0.0449.

Discussion

Although, several prediction from this line of thinking could not be implied the causation between violent exposure and increased over time in aggression because of lack of control the confounding variables, but this results were consistent

with enormous literature (survey, longitudinal, quasi-experiment design) in Western (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Miller, Wasserman, Neugebauer, Gorman-Smith, & Kamboukos, 1999)

In current study, it found the direct and indirect effect between violent exposure and aggressive behavior; the indirect effect frequently encounters affect violent behaviour via the mechanism of normalising inappropriateness of social behaviour. This finding suggested the direct influence of community violence on the aggressive behaviour but its influence was more likely explained by individual's own cognition about acceptability of aggressive behaviours or cognitive normalization (Ng-Mak et al., 2004). An important for evaluating the effect of community violence and aggression should be considered. Accordingly, the process of normalising aggressive behaviours, it found that there was virtually no stability in child and adolescent's beliefs (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). Thus adolescents will be more solid cognitive scheme, it urged a major concern about a series of mental health problems that will be emerged in the future.

In late 2007, there was a new increase in the number of military, up to approximately 60,000 personnel. Although it decreased a number of incidents to some extent, but in long-term, military force and special legal measures should be more paid attention including the media and communication. Whether mitigated or exacerbated the problems, the role of family that should be act as the primary source in cultivating adaptive cognitive function and ameliorating the adverse adolescent experiences (Proctor, 2006), thus buffer effect should also be investigated in this sample.

Limitation

This research was preliminary study that it's the first part in finding the relationship between the community violence and problem behaviour. Accordingly, the second part of the first phase was conducting in non-violent affected samples in order to compare the difference between violent affected and non-violent affected samples. However, this study was restricted by small sample size (N=178). Furthermore, the male sample (85.4%) outnumbered the female, thus research interpretation should be cautious.

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