

Factors Related to Acts of Violence and Neglect by University Students in Japan and China

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Abstract

We studied factors related to acts of violence and/or neglect by university students of Japan and China. In both countries, whether the students perpetrated acts of violence and/or neglect was related to their past experience as victims of violence and/or neglect. Many of the Japanese students were victims of violence and/or neglect by their peers. And they directed these acts mostly towards their peers. On the other hand, many of the Chinese students were victims of such acts by their father or both parents. They frequently directed them toward their peers. As far as the parenting style of their mothers was concerned, care and overprotection were related in both countries. The personality factors of openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness showed a certain coherent relationship with whether Japanese students committed acts of violence and/or neglect, whereas agreeableness, openness and neuroticism were related in a certain coherent manner to violence and/or neglect by Chinese students. As for the relationship between sense of trust and acts of violence and/or neglect, distrust and trust of others showed a relationship with whether these acts occurred among the Japanese students, whereas among Chinese students, 3 factors, i.e., distrust, trust of others and trust of self, were related in a coherent manner to the occurrence of these acts.

Introduction

The destructiveness and aggression that people sometimes exhibit are considered to be a reflection of narcissistic rage resulting from feelings of hurt caused by insufficient sympathy towards the self-object (Kohut, 1977). Emotions of children often resonate with those of their caregivers and get integrated into their own selves through sympathy and responses by the caregivers. However, if a caregiver is unstable and cannot deal harmoniously with the emotional state of the child or repeatedly gives inappropriate responses like rejection or indifference, the children cannot integrate their emotions, and fragmentation of self occurs (Stolorow, Barandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).

The problem of violence and neglect towards others in youth is often related to this relationship with the self-object. During this stage of life, the desire of individuals for fusion, like wanting to be "understood well by others" or "accepted", becomes stronger, while at the same time, self-assertive and competitive interpersonal relationships also become active. In particular, children who had repeatedly become separated from, or felt cheated by, the objects of their love and attachment from a tender age are sensitive to the perceptions of others about

them, and even a small event can sometimes cause confusion in their selves, leading to lowered self-control. Self-centered acts of violence and neglect can occur under such conditions.

It is said that people who have spent a stressful and violent childhood because of violence and neglect by parents and others tend to resort to violence and might suffer from defective brain biochemistry throughout their lives (Regush, 1997). A stressful life increases the risk of biochemical disturbance of the mechanisms that support stable brain function and violence suppression.

It is believed that acts of violence and neglect towards others are strongly related to past experiences of the perpetrators, such as the history of their growing up. But this is an aspect where personal characteristics are manifested prominently and is therefore a problem largely related to such characteristics. As a personal characteristic, personality has a strong and persistent relationship with the parenting style of the mother in early childhood, apart from genetic factors. The mutual interaction between the child and the mother reportedly tends to be affected by the awareness of the child about his or her acceptance by the mother, and the personality as a whole and its internal structure can change significantly because of the relationship with the mother (Lewin, 1935).

Awareness about the integrity of self and the recognition shared commonly by the self and others are also based on the fundamental trust acquired through mutual interactions between the mother and the child. The child acquires such fundamental trust through attuning, mainly with the mother, during early childhood (Erikson, 1950). The trust that the university students have in themselves and in others has been built, through reexamination and restructuring in their youth, on the basis of the trust relationship they had earlier established with their mothers (Amagai, 2001).

Recent years have seen a number of reports on child abuse. Abuse includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect (indifference to or rejection of parenting), psychological abuse and combinations of these, by parents or parent figures. The children's experience of such abuse affects their behavior in later life, particularly whether they become violent individuals or not (Morton, N. & Browne, K. D., 1998; Widom, C. S., 2000).

In this study, we examined the psychological state of violent young persons by looking for factors related to acts of violence and/or neglect by university students. Concurrently, we undertook a cross-cultural study to compare the characteristics of university students of Japan and China.

To be specific, we studied the following aspects:

- 1) The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by university students towards others and violence and/or neglect experienced by them
- 2) The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by the students towards others and the parenting style of their mothers
- 3) The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by the students towards others and their personalities
- 4) The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by the students towards others and their sense of trust

Method

Study subjects

In Japan: 287 students [178 (62.0%) males and 109 (38.0%) females]

In China: 280 students [111 (39.6%) males and 169 (60.4%) females]

Study tools

1. Questionnaire on acts of violence and neglect experienced by the students and their own acts of violence and neglect
2. Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) [Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979]
3. NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) [Original source: Costa, & McCrae, 1992]
4. Trust scale [Amagai, 2001]

Results

Age of subjects

In Japan: Mean 18.9 years (SD=1.1), median 19.0 years, range 18-24 years

[Males: Mean 19.1 years (SD=1.2), median 19.0 years, range 18-24 years,

Females: Mean 18.7 years (SD=1.0), median 18.0 years, range 18-24 years]

In China: Mean 21.6 years (SD=1.1), median 22.0 years, range 18-24 years

[Males: Mean 21.6 years (SD=1.2), median 22.0 years, range 19-24 years,

Females: Mean 21.7 years (SD=1.1), median 22.0 years, range 18-24 years]

Age of parents

In Japan: Father: Mean 50.8 years (SD=4.1), median 50.0 years, range 42-66 years

Mother: Mean 47.9 years (SD=4.0), median 47.0 years, range 40-66 years

In China: Father: Mean 48.5 years (SD=3.6), median 48.0 years, range 40-61 years

Mother: Mean 47.1 years (SD=3.2), median 47.0 years, range 40-58 years

Data on acts of violence and/or neglect experienced and committed by the students, and test of significance

Many of the Japanese students were victims of violence and/or neglect by their peers. On the other hand, many of the Chinese students were victims of such acts by their fathers or both their parents (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1 Number of students who were victims of acts of violence and neglect and the perpetrators (Japan)

	No. of students			
	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Neglect</i>	<i>Total</i>
	& neglect			
Father	1	1	0	2
Father & mother	0	2	0	2
Father, mother & peer	1	1	0	2
Father, mother & relative	1	0	0	1
Mother	1	1	0	2

Elder brother	1	0	0	1
Elder brother & peer	2	1	0	3
Elder sister	1	0	0	1
Younger brother & peer	1	2	0	3
Younger sister	0	0	1	1
Grandmother	0	0	1	1
Peer	11	6	23	40
Others	9	8	10	27
Total	29	22	35	86

Table 2 Number of students who were victims of acts of violence and neglect and the perpetrators (China)

	No. of students			
	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Neglect</i>	<i>Total</i>
	& neglect			
Father	1	9	2	12
Father & mother	5	4	3	12
Father & elder brother	1	0	0	1
Father & relative	1	0	0	1
Mother	2	1	0	3
Elder brother	0	1	0	1
Elder brother & teacher	0	0	1	1
Grandfather	1	1	2	4
Grandmother	0	0	1	1
Elder uncle	0	0	1	1
Elder aunt	1	3	4	8
Cousin	0	0	1	1
Relative	1	0	4	5
Relative & peer	0	0	2	2
Peer	1	0	5	6
Others	2	7	15	24
Total	16	26	41	83

Tables 3 and 4 show the tallied data on the acts of violence, neglect, or both, committed by the students themselves and their targets. The acts of violence and/or neglect by students were mostly directed towards peers in Japan and China.

Table 3 Number of students who committed acts of violence and neglect and their targets (Japan)

	No. of students			
	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Neglect</i>	<i>Total</i>
	& neglect			

Father & mother	1	0	2	3
Father & mother & elder brother	0	1	0	1
Father & mother & peer	4	0	1	5
Mother	0	2	1	3
Mother & elder brother	1	0	0	1
Elder brother	1	2	0	3
Elder brother & peer	1	0	0	1
Younger brother	1	3	1	5
Younger sister	0	0	1	1
Younger sister & peer	1	1	0	2
Family member & peer	0	1	0	1
Relative	0	0	1	1
Peer	13	9	22	44
Others	9	6	26	41
Total	32	25	55	112

Table 4 Number of students who committed acts of violence and neglect and their targets (China)

	No. of students			
	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Neglect</i>	<i>Total</i>
	& neglect			
Father	1	0	4	5
Father & mother	1	0	0	1
Elder brother	0	1	0	1
Younger brother	0	4	1	5
Younger sister	0	2	0	2
Younger brother & younger sister	1	1	0	2
Younger brother & classmate	0	0	1	1
Younger sister & classmate	0	0	1	1
Family member	0	0	1	1
Elder uncle	0	1	0	1
Elder aunt	1	0	2	3
Cousin	0	0	4	4
Brothers & classmate	1	0	0	1
Relative	0	0	2	2
Relative & peer	0	0	2	2
Peer	0	2	9	11

Others	3	3	19	25
Total	8	14	46	68

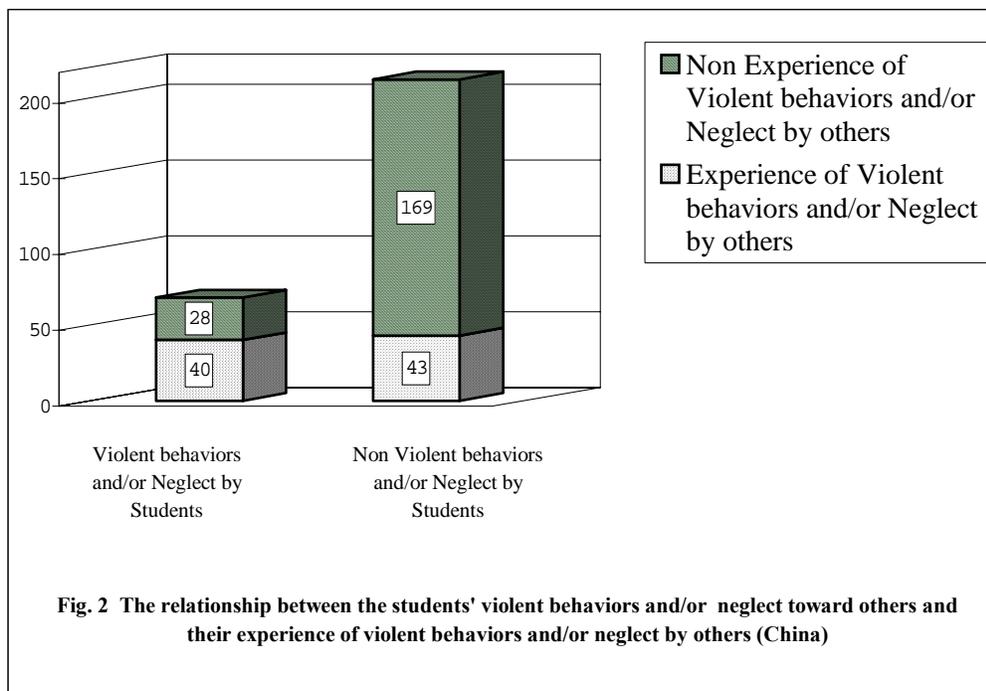
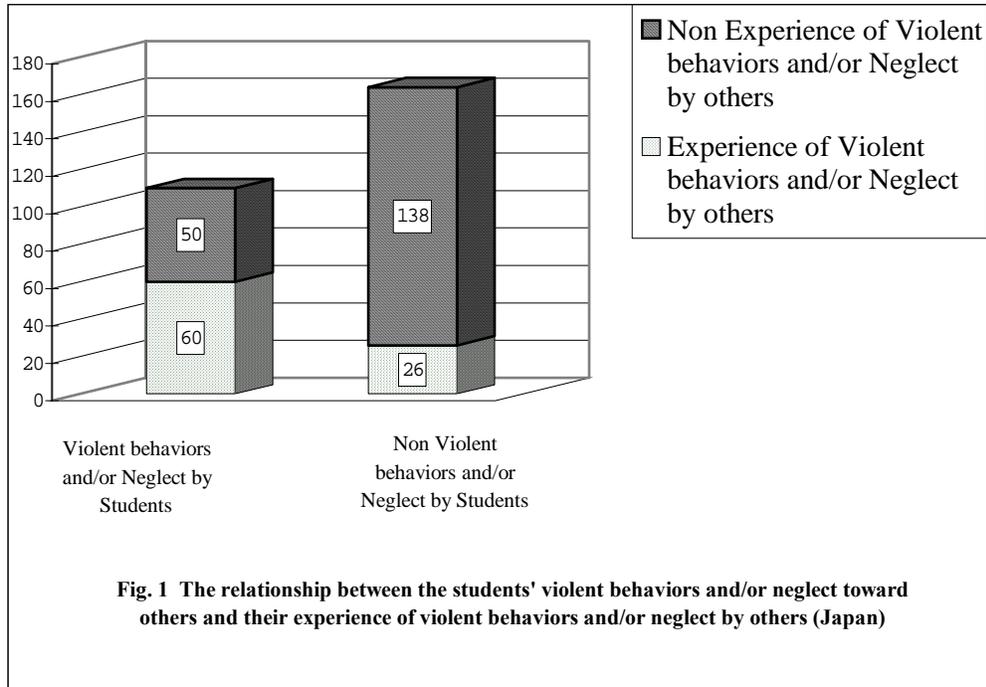
Tables 5 and 6 show the results of χ^2 test on the numbers of students who had been and who had not been victims of acts of violence and/or neglect and the numbers of students in each of these categories who committed and did not commit such acts. Both among the Japanese and the Chinese students, there was significant heterogeneity between the group of persons who were “victims of acts of violence/neglect” and the those who were “not victims acts of violence/neglect” regarding whether they had “committed acts of violence/neglect” or “not committed acts of violence/neglect” (see Fig. 1 and 2).

Table 5 Relationship between having been victims of acts of violence and/or neglect and committing such acts later (χ^2 test) (Japan)

	No. of students who committed acts of violence and/or neglect	No. of students who did not commit acts of violence and/or neglect	χ^2 value	p value
Victim of violence and/or neglect	61	25	49.847	.000
Not a victim of violence and/or neglect	47	136		

Table 6 Relationship between having been victims of acts of violence and/or neglect and committing such acts later (χ^2 test) (China)

	No. of students who committed acts of violence and/or neglect	No. of students who did not commit acts of violence and/or neglect	χ^2 value	p value
Victim of violence and/or neglect	40	43	36.669	.000
Not a victim of violence and/or neglect	28	169		



Mean (SD), median and range of PBI, NEO-FFI, and Trust scores

Tables 7 and 8 show the mean (SD), median and range of PBI, NEO-FFI, and Trust scores.

Japan	Mean (SD)	Median	Range
PBI			
Care	26.8(6.0)	28.0	8-36
Overprotection	13.6(6.6)	13.0	0-35
NEO-FFI			
Neuroticism	40.9(6.9)	41.0	22-58
Extraversion	37.8(6.9)	38.0	15-55
Openness	41.2(5.7)	41.0	26-57
Agreeableness	40.7(5.8)	41.0	23-54
Conscientiousness	38.0(6.0)	38.0	19-56
Trust			
Distrust	31.6(8.0)	31.0	13-60
Trust of self	25.0(4.7)	25.0	6-36
Trust of others	35.1(5.7)	36.0	16-48

Table 7 Mean (SD), median and range of the scores of PBI, NEO-FFI, and Trust

China	Mean (SD)	Median	Range
PBI			
Care	26.1(5.6)	27.0	10-36
Overprotection	15.2(5.2)	15.0	3-34
NEO-FFI			
Neuroticism	35.0(6.3)	35.0	18-54
Extraversion	39.5(6.7)	40.0	16-58
Openness	37.8(4.7)	38.0	26-53
Agreeableness	40.8(4.2)	41.0	27-54
Conscientiousness	43.6(5.0)	44.0	28-57
Trust			
Distrust	34.9(6.3)	35.0	15-54
Trust of self	29.6(3.4)	30.0	18-36
Trust of others	37.6(4.7)	38.0	22-48

Table 8 Mean (SD), median and range of the scores of PBI, NEO-FFI, and Trust

Relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by university students and the parenting style of their mothers (care and overprotection)

Acts of violence and/or neglect by Japanese students were related to the parenting style (care and overprotection) of their mothers. 47 persons (42%) fitted this rule (Fig. 3). The characteristic features of this rule were an above average care score and low overprotection score.

In China also, there was a relationship between whether a student perpetrated acts of

students fitted this rule (Fig. 5). According to this rule, acts of violence and/or neglect were associated with medium openness, low agreeableness and somewhat low conscientiousness.

In China, on the other hand, 68 (24.2%) had committed acts of violence and/or neglect. Their personalities were associated with agreeableness, openness and neuroticism in a certain coherent manner. 23 (33.8%) of the students fitted this rule (Fig. 6). According to this rule, acts of violence and neglect were associated with low agreeableness, high openness, and high neuroticism.

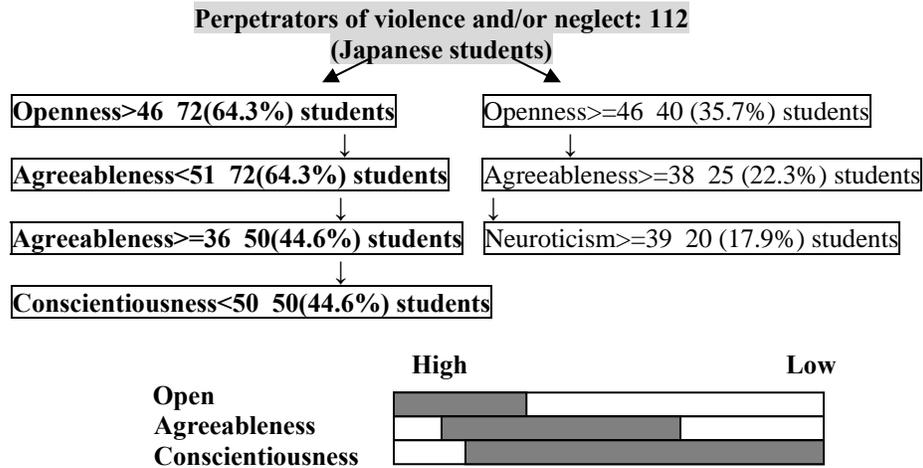


Fig.5 The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect and personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) (Japan)

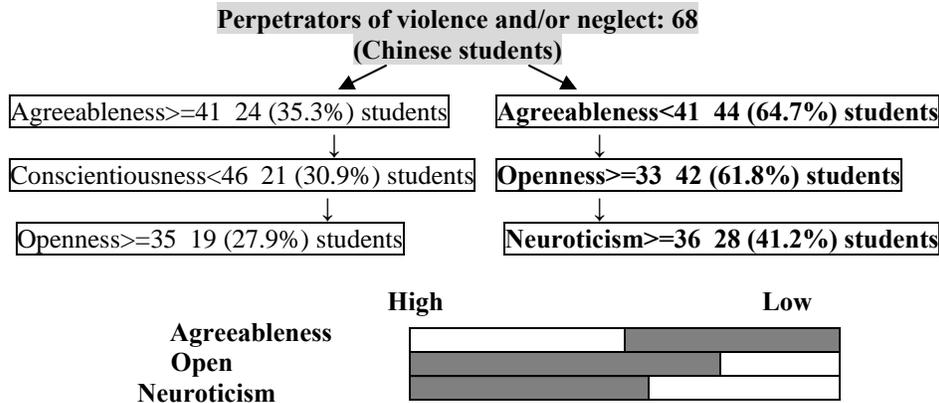


Fig.6 The relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect and personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) (China)

Relationship between acts of violence and/or neglect by university students and their sense of trust (distrust, trust of self and trust of others)

Discussion

Among university students in Japan and China, acts of violence and/or neglect were related to whether they had themselves been victims of violence and/or neglect. Perpetration of acts of violence and/or neglect in youth was a reflection of such acts that they were subjected to at an early age by peers and parents, etc. This cycle is likely to be repeated. Moreover, because of the childhood experience, they appeared to resort to violence and/or neglect towards others as a valid means of self-expression.

We examined the relationship between violence and/or neglect by the students and their mothers' parenting style when they were small, which affects character building. Mother's care is a form of bonding she shows towards the child. Japanese university students who resorted to acts of violence and/or neglect had a sense of bonding with their mothers.

On the other hand, Chinese students who resorted to violence and/or neglect had a high sense of overprotection with their mothers. At the same time, they strongly felt that their mothers interfered too much and that their own feelings were not respected. The Chinese students appeared to have less bonding with their mothers because the proportion of them that experienced violence or neglect from their mothers was larger than among Japanese students. Care and overprotection, which constitute the parenting style of mothers, were those actually perceived by the students. We may conclude that acts of violence and/or neglect by students can be prevented if they have a strong bonding with their mothers.

The problem of emergence of children who are indulgent towards themselves and are dependent on others to satisfy their desires, and of children with immature egos who cannot control themselves right up to their youth, because of the increasing number of homes where the mother is over-protective and excessively interfering, while the father's presence is weak, has surfaced in Japan in recent years. It appears that the acts of violence and neglect by university students of Japan and China are because of their difficulties with interpersonal relationships arising from their earlier failure to establish appropriate relationships with others in the interplay of their own personalities and environmental factors, i.e., the parenting styles of their parents.

Next we examined in detail the relationship of violence and/or neglect by university students with the subscales of the current personalities of the students, their mothers' parenting style when they were children, and their sense of trust. There were some commonalities in personality between Japanese and Chinese students in relation to acts of violence and/or neglect. These were a high level of openness and low agreeableness. The acts of violence and neglect were not directed towards themselves but outwards, and, therefore, were associated with a high openness score. Persons with a high level of openness have a personality associated with certain aspects of intelligence such as divergent thinking, which contribute to creativity (McCrae, 1987). But the fact that they cannot achieve a suitable level of agreeableness with others seems to suggest emotional immaturity.

Children build up trust of self and others on the basis of fundamental trust relationships formed in childhood between themselves and mothers. The Japanese students who had committed acts of violence and neglect tended to be highly distrustful while their trust of others was moderately high to high. These are somewhat contradictory feelings that reflect the instability of youth. The violence and neglect appear to be the result of internal discord with their selves.

In the Chinese students who committed acts of violence and neglect, all the three trust factors were negative. When someone trusts another person, it is not a belief in

something tangible, it is a belief about another person's mind, which has no definite form and is difficult to describe in words. Acts of violence and neglect appear to reflect a state in which the person is incapable of trust, harboring a sense of distrust of others and even oneself. Because of the lack of the fundamental trust relationship normally formed between mother and child, later interpersonal relationships, which are built on this fundamental trust relationship, become inappropriate. Therefore, there are difficulties in developing a sense of trust towards themselves and towards others.

Results

The acts of violence and neglect by university students are essentially a problem of the students themselves. But factors responsible for this problem include their own personalities and also how they were brought up in the context of their relationship with their mothers. We could understand the critical importance of personality developed under the influence of the interaction between mother and child, and also the mother's affection, which appears to have a direct bearing on the acts of violence and neglect. Besides this, basically, the sense of trust that a child acquired through interactions with his or her mother affected the acts of violence and/or neglect in their youth. Moreover, the acts of violence and/or neglect by students were rooted in their own experience of having been victims of violence and /or neglect. Such experiences increase the possibility of a switching of roles by them, leading to perpetration of acts of violence and/or neglect in their youth on persons weaker than themselves.

Acts of violence and/or neglect are not confined to Japanese or Chinese students. These are problems of students everywhere, who are under certain restraints, trying to release their selves through such acts, when their interpersonal relationships are still immature. For human beings to live humanely, it is necessary that each one becomes aware of the need to stamp out violence and/or neglect and to make conscious efforts to achieve this.

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