The effects of school bullying, and social support on stress among Asian adoptees in trans-racial families

Eun-Jun Bang, MSW, Ph.D & Kathynlyn Shahan, MSW, Ph. D
Northeastern State University-Department of Social Work

Introduction

Thousands of adopted children come to the United States from various countries every year, and half of those adopted children come from different parts of Asian countries (Evan B. Donaldson Adoptions Institute, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2011). Interestingly, most Asian adoptees have been adopted by White American parents. Despite the good efforts of parents to raise their adopted children, Asian adoptees often experience many difficulties such as feelings of loss, identity issues, discrimination and racism throughout their lives (Freundlich and Libeithal, 2000). Fortunately, there have been numerous research studies conducted to provide effective post adoptions services to help adopted children and their families be successful in school and in real life (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002). However, not many studies have been focused on examining the effects of school bullying on Asian adoptees’ mental health who have been adopted by White parents. Particularly, no effort has been made to examine the relationship between school bullying and stress among Asian adoptees in trans-racial families. In addition, few studies focus on the effects of social support as a moderating factor of stress levels which are caused by school bullying among Asian Adoptees.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of school bullying on stress among Asian adoptees in trans-racial families. This study also investigated the ways that social support may act in moderating the stress related to school bullying and how this support varied in effectiveness based on their social support resources.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

(a) Do Asian adoptees in U.S. based families experience school bullying?
(b) Is there any relationship between school bullying and stress levels among Asian adoptees in U.S. based families? and
(c) How do different types of social supports moderate stress caused by school bullying among Asian adoptees in trans-racial families?

Methods

A quantitative research design was used for the study and the population were Asian adoptees in trans-racial families.

Participants were recruited across the United States through an international Adoption Agency based in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, demographic questionnaire, the Perceived Stress Scale, Social Support Scale, parental consent and child assent forms were randomly mailed to the targeted population by the agency.

One hundred sixty one questionnaire packets were mailed and 31 (19%) were completed. Participants were male (n=10) and female (n=21) students ranging from 9-16 years old (M=13, SD=1.61).

Results

The study showed that Asian adoptees who experienced school bullying had a higher level of stress than Asian adoptees who did not experience school bullying (t(30) = -2.1, p < .05). Also, an independent t-test found that Asian adoptees who witnessed other students’ intervention to put a stop to bullying had a lower level of stress compared to Asian adoptees who did not witness other students’ efforts to stop bullying (t(29) = -4.52, p < .001).

Moreover, Asian adoptees who witnessed other students’ intervention to put a stop to bullying (M = 84, SD = 8.4) had a higher level of social support than Asian adoptees who did not witness other students’ effort to stop bullying (M = 76.3, SD = 8.4), (t(29) = -2.15, p < .05).

Furthermore, this study found that the teachers or other adults’ intervention may be a moderating factor to lower stress levels among Asian adoptees who did not witness other students’ effort to stop bullying. Our analysis indicated that Asian adoptees who had almost always witnessed their teachers or other adults intervene to stop bullying had a lower level of stress (M = 12.95, SD = 6.36) than Asian adoptees who never witnessed their teacher intervene during bullying incidents (M = 19.6, SD = 3.6).

Interestingly, this analysis found that students who witnessed their teachers or other adults intervene once in a while or sometimes experienced a higher level of stress (M = 24.95, SD = 6.36) as compared to students who had always or never witnessed their teachers’ or other adults’ intervention to put a stop to bullying.

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between teacher and/or peer support intervention in a bullying situation by reducing the stress level for the Asian adoptee being bullied. The findings provide further validation of the need for intervention programs and/or training to educate teachers and students to prevent bullying among Asian adoptees in trans-racial families. School helping professions can be further supported in knowing that their efforts in monitoring and intervening in school children’s behavior in the classroom and on the playground are well-founded. Efforts to change policy and create policies that support intervention in a manner that promotes social support can enhance the ability of helping professions and educators to combat the effects of bullying. Children who were being bullied experienced significantly decreased stress levels if a teacher or student intervened during a bullying incident.

Administrators can support added costs of supervision of playgrounds and after-school activities based on the findings of this study and others. Trans-racial families can also be made more aware of the stress their children may experience due to bullying. Their awareness would hopefully lead to open-discussions with their Asian adoptees and may help parents and their children to more efficiently process the effects of bullying.

References


Corresponding Author

Eun-Jun Bang PhD, MSW
Associate Professor of Social Work
Northeastern State University
3100 E. New Orleans St.
Broken Arrow, OK, 74014
Phone: 918-449-6564
Email: bang@nsuok.edu