Correlates of diverse pathways in violent victimization in early adolescence

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Abstract
Despite a significant increase in research on victimization, limited studies explored similarities/differences in correlates across different pathways of violent victimization, such as onset, repeat and discontinuation of victimization. The current study examines factors distinguishing these pathways from non-victimization using a South Korean adolescent sample. The findings show significant differences in most variables between onset/repeat victimization and non-victimization. There appear similarities and differences in factors discriminating onset/repeat victimization from non-victimization. In contrast, prior interpersonal misbehavior is the only factor which differentiates discontinuation of victimization from non-victimization. Implications of the findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

One distinct trend in recent victimization research is to apply criminological theories to explain onset/repeat victimization after finding a significant overlap between offenders and victims in Western countries (Averdijk and Loeber, 2012; Fisher et al., 2010; Lauritsen and Carbone-Lopez, 2011; Pratt et al., 2014) as well as in South Korea (Hong and Yeon, 2014; Min, 2004; Park, 2009; Shin, 2006). For example, Park found that between 21 percent and 49 percent of middle or high school students who had an experience of violent crime victimization also involved in a violent crime.

Criminological theories frequently applied for correlates of victimization tend to fall into one of two explanations. The first explanation, rooted in population heterogeneity (also called risk or persistent heterogeneity), highlights time-stable correlates to explain continuity of victimization over time. According to this approach, people are born with risk factors of victimization or develop them at the early stage of life, and these risk factors become stabilized thereafter. Thus, individuals who have more of the risk factors are more likely and more often to get victimized than those who exhibit less of them. Applying this framework, it is arguable that the same factors (i.e. time-stable factors) affect both onset of victimization and repeat victimization. However, this approach is limited in explaining discontinuation of victimization.

The second explanation of victimization is relevant to state dependence approach which emphasizes time-variant factors of change in risk of victimization. According to this framework, there are correlates of victimization which are influenced by changes in environments. Therefore, changes in risk of victimization can be explained by changes in these variables after controlling for time-stable factors. The second framework seems to assume that not only the same factors but different factors

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influence different pathways of victimization. That is, the correlates of onset of victimization might be different from those of repeat victimization or discontinuation of victimization.

Findings of research on victimization within these two approaches showed that time-variant factors, such as an individual’s life style or relationship with other people as well as time-stable factors, including low self-control had significant influence on risk of victimization, individually. In addition, a model including both types of variables provided better explanation of victimization (Averdijk and Loeb, 2012; Chen, 2009; Fisher et al., 2010; Pratt et al., 2014; Tillyer et al., 2011a,b; Turanovic and Pratt, 2014). While findings of prior research using criminological theories have helped researchers and practitioners better understand the correlates of victimization, research is limited in understanding variation in correlates across onset, repeat, and discontinuation of victimization.

Victimization rate of children in preadolescence (i.e. students at an elementary school) is quite high in South Korea. According to Crime Analysis in 2005, crime data provided by Supreme Prosecutor’s Office of South Korea, violent crime victimization rate of youth aged 7 to 12 was around 35 percent of that of youth aged 13 to 15 and 10 percent of that of those aged 16 to 20. This trend remained similar in 2015 (http://www.spo.go.kr/spo/index.jsp). In South Korea, most research on crime victimization, however, focuses primarily on adolescents (i.e. students at a middle school or a high school) (Hong and Yoon, 2014; Kim et al., 1991; Min, 2004; Park, 2009; Shin, 2006). As a result, there is lack of knowledge about correlates of crime victimization among younger children (i.e. students at an elementary school).

The purpose of the current study is to contribute to the literature of victimization by examining variation in correlates of onset, repeat and discontinuation of victimization with data of South Korean elementary students. Based on the theoretical framework and the findings of prior research, we hypothesize that both time stable and time-variant factors will affect both onset of victimization and repeat victimization while only time-variant factors will influence discontinuation of victimization.

2. Literature review

A recent increase in research on causes of victimization help researchers and practitioners better understand risk factors of victimization. Some of the factors develop at the early stage of life and become stabilized thereafter. The factors can be understood within population heterogeneity explanation. The population heterogeneity approach posits that individuals are born with enduring traits or develop them at the early state of life which affect their behaviors or reactions to stimulations, placing them at risk of victimization over time. Therefore, individuals who exhibit more of the factors will be more likely to be victimized than those who do not.

Low self-control appears to be a promising time-stable factor of onset/repeat victimization. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), individuals who have low levels of self-control pursue risky and physical activities on the spur of the moment to maximize temporal pleasure without careful consideration of others and consequences of their actions. These people, thus, often place themselves at dangerous situation. In addition, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that self-control fully develops at the early stage of life, and differences in levels of self-control among people become stabilized thereafter, causing stable between-individual differences in probability of victimization.

Prior research on the relationship between low self-control and victimization provided mixed results. Schreck (1999) was the first applying self-control theory to explain the incidence of victimization. The results of the study showed that low self-control significantly increased property and violent crime victimization net of sex, income and criminality. Researchers also found a significant influence of low self-control on victimization of assault (Ousey et al., 2008), fraud (Holtfreter et al., 2008; Holtfreter et al., 2010), cybercrime (Bosslar and Holt, 2010; Reisig et al., 2009), sexual assault (Franklin, 2011), school crime (Tillyer et al., 2011a), and intimate partner violence (Kerley et al., 2008).

However, there are also some studies which showed non-significant or inconsistent association between low self-control and victimization. Low self-control, for example, did not affect violent victimization among adolescents (Tillyer et al., 2011b), bullying victimization among students at middle schools (Unnever and Cornell, 2003), and annual individual victimization rates (Taylor et al., 2007). In a recent study, Pratt et al. (2014) reviewed 66 studies including 102,716 individual cases, and found a modest yet consistent effect of low self-control on victimization when risky behavior was controlled for. However, the influence of low self-control on victimization decreased to a considerable degree. The findings imply that both low self-control and lifestyles/routine activities should be included in analyses simultaneously to obtain more reliable estimations.

Contrary to the propositions by the population heterogeneity approach, there are time-variant risk factors which might account for the change in risk of victimization after controlling for time-stable factors. Explanation of the relationship between the factors and victimization is rooted in the framework of state dependence explanation. According to state dependence approach, life events influence an individual’s perception of environments and/or life styles in ways that affect risk of victimization. For example, increase in attachment to parents or in monitoring by parents might decrease the chance of being victimized. However, the risk of future victimization might increase when a child spend more time with a deviant peer.

Risky lifestyles/routine activities theory has been widely applied to explain the occurrence and continuity of crime victimization within this approach. This explanation suggests that criminal opportunities are significantly related to our routine activities of everyday life (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1978). When three major conditions, motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of guardianship, converge in time and place, a crime is likely to occur, as victimization...
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