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Indirect aggression in early adolescence: Examining the role of parental attachment and empathy

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Background: Indirect aggression, a covert form of aggressive behaviors is as harmful as the direct form of aggression in early adolescents. This study sought to explore the unique and interactive roles of parental attachment and empathy in predicting indirect aggression during early adolescence.

Methodology: A sample of 6,301 early adolescents (49.2% boys and 50.8% girls) in urban China aged from 11 to 14 years, completed self-administrated measures of parent-adolescent attachment, empathy and indirect aggression. Two series of hierarchical regression analysis were conducted separately by gender to explore the interactive role of empathy (perspective taking, empathetic concern) and parental attachment (mother attachment, father attachment) in predicting indirect aggression.

Results: The study indicated that low perspective taking was associated with more indirect aggression but empathetic concern had no direct links to indirect aggression in total population. However, hierarchical regression analyses revealed that empathetic concern moderated the association between mother attachment and girls' indirect aggression [R^2 change=0.002, $F(1, 3192)=7.47$, $P<0.05$] and perspective taking and empathetic concern were interacted in predicting boys' indirect aggression [R^2 change=0.001, $F(1, 3095)=4.42$, $P<0.05$].

Conclusions: The findings suggested that relatively high empathetic concern might not be a sufficient protective factor of indirect aggression in Chinese early adolescents.

Biography

Yu Yizhen is the Professor of Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology. His major area of research interest is psychological development and mental health of child and adolescent, especially on the risk factors and molecular mechanism of aggression in adolescent. As a PI, he undertook 3 projects of National Natural Science Foundation of China and 11 projects of Ministry of Health of Public Republic of China.

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