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A longitudinal study on the relationship between parental aggressive discipline and preschooler anxiety in China

Using a longitudinal design, this study aims to investigate the rate of parental aggressive discipline (corporal punishment and psychological aggression) and its prospective linkage to preschoolers' anxiety symptoms in a Chinese context and examine whether preschoolers' two positive psychological attributes (altruism and forgiveness) have direct and moderating effects in the relationship between parental aggressive discipline and preschoolers' anxiety symptoms. Adopting stratified random sampling, self-administered questionnaires were completed by 368 parents (mean age=35.8 years) with children studying in nurseries (mean age=3.97 years) in four geographic districts in Hong Kong, China, in January and December of 2014 respectively. Child anxiety symptoms (Time 2) were predicted by the parents' use of psychological aggression (Time 1), child altruism (Time 1) and child forgiveness (Time 1) but not by the parents' use of corporal punishment (Time 1). Moreover, the predictive effect of parental psychological aggression on child anxiety symptoms was moderated by child altruism (Time 1). The study has several significant contributions. First, the predictive effect of parental aggressive discipline on preschooler anxiety is supported. Second, altruism and forgiveness are relatively stable psychological attributes possessed by preschoolers, which negatively predict preschoolers' anxiety symptoms. Third, it is evidenced that preschoolers' altruism moderate the prospective relation between parental psychological aggression and preschoolers' anxiety symptoms, implying that positive psychological attributes can protect children against family adversities. A dual-focus approach to early prevention and intervention of child anxiety is proposed to reduce aggressive discipline of parents as well as to enhance altruism and forgiveness in children. Parent training programs could be provided to teach parents positive discipline strategies. Home-based or school-based interventions could be designed for preschool children to foster and enhance their altruism and forgiveness so as to decrease anxiety.

Biography

Sylvia Kwok has completed her PhD from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is the Convener of the Positive Education Training and Research Unit at City University of Hong Kong. She has published more than 30 papers in reputed international refereed journals, e.g. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *Journal of Happiness Studies*. She has been the Reviewers and Editors of different international refereed journals and the Reviewer for general research fund proposals. She is also the External Academic Advisors of different social sciences programs in different universities.

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