<Abstract>

This study examined the potential mediating mechanisms underlying the association between peer victimization and school adjustment. 521 children in the fifth and sixth grades were recruited from primary schools in Korea. Peer nomination and self-reports were used to measure peer victimization, cognitive representations, and school avoidance. Academic achievement records were obtained from official school records. The findings indicated that peer victimization contributed to school avoidance and academic achievement by different pathways. The association between peer victimization and school avoidance was indirectly mediated by perceptions of the self and peers. In contrast, peer victimization was directly associated with academic achievement.

본 연구는 또래 괴롭힘 피해와 학교적응의 관계에서 자아 및 또래 지각의 매개효과를 검증하고자 하였다. 연구대상은 초등학교 5, 6학년 남녀 아동 521명이다. 또래 자명법을 사용하여 또래 괴롭힘의 피해가 측정되었고 자기 보고법을 사용하여 자아 및 또래 지각과 학교 회피가 측정되었다. 연구결과를 보면, 자아 및 또래 지각은 또래 괴롭힘 피해와 학교적응의 관계에서 완전 매개 효과가 있었으며, 반면에 또래 괴롭힘 피해는 학업 성취에 직접적인 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다.

주제어(Key Words): 또래 괴롭힘(peer victimization), 인지표상(cognitive representations), 학업성취(academic achievement), 학교회피(school avoidance)
I. Introduction

Research has suggested that a small minority of children is targeted for persistent physical and verbal harassment by their peers (Lee & Kwak, 2002; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992). These victimized children are at increased risk for psychological maladjustment: for example, peer victimization is associated with loneliness, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Lee & Kwak, 2002), and behavior problems (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Lee & Kwak, 2002; Shim, 2003). Research studies also suggest that children who experience frequent victimization are at risk of school adjustment problems. Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, and Toblin (2005) found that peer victimization predicted academic failure. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) reported an association between peer harassment and negative attitudes about school.

This study was conducted to extend the existing research by examining the influence of peer victimization on school adjustment in a Korean setting. We also investigated the potential mediating mechanisms underlying the association between peer victimization and school adjustment. Even though the association has been strongly supported, mechanisms that could explain the link have not been well investigated and it is therefore still not clear how and why frequent peer harassment would place children at risk for school adjustment problems.

In present research, we proposed that peer victimization may affect school adjustment both directly and indirectly through its impacts on social self-perceptions and peer-beliefs. As school adjustment variables, we focused on school avoidance and academic achievement. Previous research presented that peer victimization was linked to school adjustment indices such as school attitudes, school avoidance, and academic achievement (e.g., Ladd, 1990; Lee & Kwak, 2000; Troop-Gordon, 2002). Difficulties in academic achievement and aversive attitude to school are provocative sources of stress and may result in and facilitate school maladjustment (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997). Therefore, academic achievement and school avoidance were considered as indices of school adjustment in the current study.

Self- and peer-perceptions might be expected to play a critical role in explaining the association between peer victimization and school adjustment. Previous research has reported representations of self and others to explain the links between social relationships and developmental outcomes (Troop-Gordon, 2002). Self-focused thought patterns and maladaptive perceptions of others have been explored in the development of psychological disorders (Rudolph, Hammen, & Burge, 1995).

Children’s beliefs about themselves undergo rapid development during childhood (Harter, 1983). During childhood, children’s self-perceptions become more realistic and they develop a sense of self-worth and an awareness of their own competence in specific domains (Harter, 1998). As children become increasingly involved in peer relationships, their interpretation of these experiences with their peers may affect how they perceive and feel about themselves. Peer victimization might therefore have a particularly influence on a child’s developing sense of self. Research evidence shows that victimized children tend to have unfavorable views of themselves and low self-perceived competence in social relationships with their peers. Victimization may also lead to self-blame. Graham and Juvonen (1998) compared the responses of victimized and non-victimized children within an attribution theory framework and found that victims were significantly more likely than non-victims to blame themselves for attacks on them by their peers. Prolonged peer victimization increases children’s introspection regarding attributed or actual flaws (Graham & Juvonen, 1998), which may lead to low self-esteem and negative self-beliefs (Kochenderfer & Jovonen, 1996).

Compared with research on self-perceptions, relatively little research has been conducted on the cognitive representations of peers. Previous research noted that children believe either that schoolmates tend to be trustworthy and supportive or that they tend to be untrustworthy and hostile (Rabiner, Keane, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 1993). Children develop cognitive representations of others through repeated experiences with peers (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Whether children