Childhood Abuse Experience, Appraisal of Partner Control, Perception of Stalking, and Courtship Stalking Behaviors among College Students

Gune Gu¹, Sung Hee Lee²

¹Deptartment of Nursing, Gumi University  
gunegu@gumi.ac.kr  
²College of Nursing, Kyungpook National University  
Corresponding Author: leesh@Knu.ac.kr

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that predict university students’ courtship stalking behaviors (CSB). Data collection was conducted in September-November 2014 and September–December 2015 with 260 university students enrolled in a six four-year university in A City who had wanted to date someone that did not want to meet them. To investigate the predicting factors of the participants’ CSB, a binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted. Factors that predicted CSB in participants included male, 5 or more times dating frequency, higher experience of childhood physical abuse, lower perception of stalking. In conclusion, it is necessary to detect and manage the dangers of CSB early in university students’ romantic relationships when they have predicting factors of CSB.

Keywords: Abuse, Childhood, Control, Courtship Stalking Behaviors, College Students

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The number of stalking incidents has recently been rapidly increasing in Korea. According to Korea Women’s Hotline, Sexual Violence Counseling Center, 26% of all stalking-related counseling cases involve ordinary people [1], and according to Korea Women’s Minwoohoe, the number of counseling cases with stalking victims was 85 in 2014, which is an increase of 20 cases from 2013 [2]. Physical injury, attempted murder, and kidnapping occurred in as much as 21% of the cases involving stalking victims [3].

There have been several attempts in and outside Korea to identify the factors influencing courtship stalking. Lee and Oh [4] demonstrated a pathway in which domestic abuse experience in childhood is linked to dating violence through mediating variables.
such as their attitudes toward violence and anger control. There is a recent trend to categorize CSB as dating violence in a wider sense [5]. According to Lee and Oh [4], people who have experienced childhood abuse have difficulty in controlling anger, and those who tend to be angry have a stronger desire to control others when they experience stress or pressure in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the possibility of using violence increases when such a person is in a conflicting situation because he or she cannot solve the conflict with other methods [6]. Previous research on the perception of violence and violent behavior has reported that socially permissible violence affects violence at the individual level, and people with a high level of violence justification are more likely to commit dating or domestic violence [5]. Therefore, it follows that an overall low level of the perception of stalking behaviors in a society can affect the occurrence of stalking behaviors.

Therefore, in this study we aimed to identify the factors that predict CSB in college students, considering childhood abuse experience, control of a dating partner, and perception of stalking, and to make suggestions with regard to the need for prevention and management of college students’ CSB. An additional objective of the study was to provide basic data necessary in developing interventions for early detection and management of the CSB risk factors.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the predicting factors of the participants' CSB in college students.

2 Methods

2.1 Study Design

This study was a descriptive survey research to investigate whether childhood abuse experience, control of a dating partner, and perception of stalking predict CSB in college students.

2.2 Participants and Data Collection

Study participants were 260 college students attending six four-year universities in D city. By using G*power 3.1.9 program, the minimum sample size required to conduct logistic regression analysis was estimated to be 138 with the assumptions of effect size equal to 0.15, power equal to 0.95, significance level equal to 0.05, and five predicting variables to consider in the regression model. A total of 285 college students met the selection criteria on the screening questionnaire. The main survey was distributed to 278 students, because seven students did not want to participate in the study, and a
total of 270 out of 278 surveys were returned. Of those, ten surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses, and finally a total of 260 surveys were analyzed.

2.3 Instruments

**Childhood abuse experience:** Childhood abuse experience was measured using the measurement scale for childhood abuse experience that was revised and supplemented by Choi [7] based on the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales constructed by Straus [8]. The instrument consists of 14 items, two subdomains of emotional violence (five items) and physical violence (nine items). Each item is measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1 means “Never” and 5 means “Almost daily,” and a higher total score means a higher level of childhood abuse experience. In the research of Choi [7], the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ (a measure of reliability) was 0.78; in the present study, the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.81 for the entire instrument, and it was 0.73 and 0.69 for the subdomains of emotional and physical abuse experiences respectively.

**Appraisal of partner control:** Control of a dating partner was assessed using the measurement scale for the desire to control a dating partner used in Nam [9]. The instrument has four items measured in a four-point Likert scale where 1 means “Almost never” and 4 means “Very often.” The total score ranges from four to sixteen points, and a higher total score means a higher level of partner control. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.81 in Nam’s study [9] and 0.71 in the present study.

**Perception of stalking:** The perception of stalking was measured with the scale for Courtship Stalking Behaviors (CSB) constructed by Sinclair and Frieze [10]. The instrument was originally developed to measure CSB, but in this study, we modified the items regarding stalking behaviors to measure the perception of stalking. It has 41 items measured in a five-point Likert scale where 1 means “Never” and 5 means “Highly.” The total score ranges from 41 to 205 points, and a higher total score means a higher level of perceiving CSB as stalking. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ of the modified scale was 0.83.

**Courtship stalking behaviors (CSB):** CSB was measured by the CSB scale developed by Sinclair and Frieze [10] and translated into Korean by Lee and Ko [11]. The original instrument comprises six subdomains—approach, surveillance, intimidation, harming oneself, verbal abuse/mild physical harm, and extreme physical harm—with a total of 41 items. In the US state of Oregon, stalking is legally defined as repeatedly occurring behavior [12], and Fremouw et al. [13] also define stalking behavior as a consideration or an action not wanted by the other person that occurs twice or more times and involves one or more types of behavior. Therefore, in the present study, participants responded to each item of the CSB scale with “Yes” or “No,” and those who responded “Yes” to two or more items were classified into the CSB group and all others were classified into the non-CSB group. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.78 in the study in which the instrument was originally developed, and 0.81 in the present study.
2.4 Data Analysis

Binomial logistic regression was performed to identify the predictors of CSB.

3 Results

Male participants were more likely than female participants to commit CSB (AOR: 2.885, 95% CI: 1.636-5.088, p < 0.001). Participants with an experience of three-four dating relationships with a person of the opposite sex were less likely to commit CSB compared to those with an experience of five or more dating relationships (AOR: 0.409, 95% CI: 0.174-0.964, p = 0.001). Additionally, the likelihood of CSB increased as the score for physical abuse experience of the two subdomains of childhood abuse experience increased (AOR: 1.254, 95% CI: 1.055-1.49, p = 0.010), whereas the likelihood of CSB decreased as the perception of stalking increased (AOR: 0.941, 95% CI: 0.900-0.984, p = 0.008).

Therefore, being a male, having five or more dating relationships with a person of the opposite sex, a high level of physical abuse experience, and a low perception of stalking were identified as the predictors of CSB (Table 1).

Table 1. Predicting Factors on Courtship Stalking Behaviors in College Students (N=260)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Adjusted Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Reference: Female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.885</td>
<td>1.636</td>
<td>5.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade (Reference: 3-4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>0.635</td>
<td>1.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (Reference: No)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.074</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td>1.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating frequency (Reference: ≥ 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>0.374</td>
<td>1.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>0.964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood abuse experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional violence Experience</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>1.027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Physical violence Experience  
Appraisal of partner control  
Perception of stalking  
Constant  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1.254</th>
<th>1.055</th>
<th>1.49</th>
<th>.010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.121</td>
<td>0.983</td>
<td>1.277</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.599</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\chi^2(p) = 40.916 (p < 0.001)
\]

Cox and Snell $R^2$ / Nagelkerke $R^2$ 0.146/0.195

Predicted group membership 68.0%

4 Conclusions

The study was conducted to identify the predictors of CSB in college students. The results show that college students had experiences of committing some types of CSB, i.e., approach, surveillance, and intimidation and that being a male, having five or more dating relationships with a person of the opposite sex, physical abuse experience in childhood, and a low perception of stalking increased the likelihood of CSB. The study is significant because it provides basic data necessary to develop prevention and intervention programs by investigating the current status of college students’ CSB and identifying the predictors of CSB. We suggest that based on the study findings, interventional programs should be developed to detect and manage in advance CSB among college students and that further research should be conducted to confirm the effect of such programs.

References