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## CRISIS of School Violence in KOREA: Understanding Bystanders in School Violence Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior

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### Abstract

*This study focused on the role of the bystander in the school violence situation and tried to understand the choices of the bystander by applying "Theory of Planned Behavior". In school violence situations, there are bystanders in addition to bullies and victims, and bystanders play significant roles in the situation. Sometimes their choices can determine the outcome of the school violence.*

*According to TPB(behavior, intention, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control), the reasons why they choose to be an outsider rather than a defender can be interpreted as follows. They perceive the indifferent behaviors of a bystander and its results as positive and believe that others around will remain outsiders. Also, there is no difficulty in being a bystander, as it does not require an active action.*

*On the other hand, they do not show the behavior of defenders because they perceive the defender's behavior and its result as negative, believe that the students in a classroom have the norm against the defender's behavior. Even if they want to take an action, they do not know what to do. And they may not be confident in taking an action even when they know what to do.*

*In order to resolve school violence, the bystanders should respond effectively to the situation as defenders of victims. To this end, it is necessary to actively utilize the result of verifying bystander selection in school violence applying TPB. In particular, we must improve students' attitudes toward the outsiders' and defenders' behaviors and the behavioral outcomes. And Concrete and explicit norms for helping behaviors should be built in their classroom. Finally, we need to inform students how to help victims and improve their confidence in those behaviors. So, we will be able to solve school violence problems by reducing outsiders and increasing defenders when designing and operating an anti-bullying program based on the TPB in the school environment.*

**[Keywords]** *Crisis, Theory of Planned Behavior, School Violence, Bullying, Bystander*

## 1. Introduction

School Violence has emerged as a social problem in Korea, and the government announced 'Measures for the Intervention of School Violence' in 1995, and enacted "Laws for Prevention and Intervention of School Violence" in 2004. Also, many studies have been conducted to clarify the causes of school violence. But they mainly focused on the individual's traits and environments of the bullies and victims. However, there are many bystanders besides bullies and victims

in the situations of school violence. They witness the school violence and influence on the school violence directly or indirectly. Considering that human behavior is influenced by the actions and reactions of others around them, we need to pay attention to bystanders. In the past, there was little interest in the bystanders, who account for the largest proportion in the school violence scene comparing to victims and bullies.

School Violence occurs mainly in the school, especially in the classroom. And it is the students who witness it first. Bystanders are not directly involved in a school violence but can play a variety of roles in the development of the school violence. They can take actions that help the bullies or the victim, or ignore the scene without doing anything. These behaviors can be largely divided into the outsiders, assistants of bullies, and defenders of victims. Depending on which roles the bystander chooses, school violence may be intensified or resolved early[1]. As different outcomes can be expected depending on the behaviors of the bystanders, interest in the roles of the bystanders surrounding the bully and the victim is increasing. So, beyond the approach which is focused on victims and bullies, programs for other members of the situation need to be prepared and operated for the prevention and intervention of school violence. In particular, it is necessary to reduce assistants of bullies and outsiders and increase defenders who control bullies and supports victims.

We will examine the bystander in the school violence situation and review various theories and studies that can explain the behavior of bystanders. These will enable us to understand the behavior of bystanders in the context of school violence. Finally, we will examine the choice of bystander behavior based on the theory of planned behavior(TPB) which is used to effectively explain and improve human behaviors in various domains.

## **2. School Violence and Bystander**

### **2.1. Understanding of school violence**

In “Laws for Prevention and Intervention of School Violence”, school violence refers to different actions involving physical, mental damage on people or property damage caused by various negative behaviors that occur in or out of school. This definition specifically addresses very various types of school violence so that they can set the scope of school violence. However, that has limitations that it cannot reveal the context or structure in which school violence occurs.

To understand the phenomenal nature of school violence, it is noteworthy of referring to Olweus’ definition of bullying. He named the violence in school as “bullying” and defined as behavior that one or more people are doing constantly and repeatedly harm other people[2]. Its main characteristics are the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, repetition, and persistence. And it includes physical, verbal, and relational behaviors to harass or deliberately disturb others. School bullying discussed in Korea can be seen in a similar context and is sometimes referred to as peer victimization or group alienation. Compared with the legal definition of school violence, his definition emphasizes characteristics that have not been studied yet, and it excludes temporary and casual aggressive behaviors in the relation of equal counterparts.

As mentioned earlier, the studies on School Violence have traditionally sought to identify and characterize personal characteristics of bullies and the victims- psychological characteristics in the cognitive, the emotional and the behavioral domains. However, as research has deepened, doubts have arisen if personal characteristics could diagnose the cause of bullying precisely. The one of criticism was that there were some cases in which those who were once bullied became bullies and those who bullied became victims of school violence. There were no fixed personal characteristics of victims and bullies, and they could be changed. The second is that the individual characteristics presented are not a causal factor directly related to school violence, but tentative or unidentified characteristics. The third criticism is that it did not consider the characteristics of the school environments where the characteristics of bullies and victims were made and enforced. In general, individual characteristics are formed by the influence of family and social environments. But school violence occurs in the context of the school environment[3].

The bullying in Korea has reflected a special characteristic of the school environment. Students have school life in the same class with the same classmates all year round. Furthermore, the teacher responsible for the

class is the same for the year. In such an environment, it is difficult for a student to reveal one's tendencies, and these cannot be the objects of interest. Also, the harmony and unity of the class become important values. As a result, many researchers have become interested in the atmosphere and norms in classes or schools[4]. There have also been efforts to identify the collective phenomenon in the context of school violence [5].

## **2.2. Role of bystanders in school violence**

A bystander is a person who has been "uninvolved in the event" in its dictionary meaning. However, a bystander in school violence situations is a person who has witnessed bullying behavior. There are many bullies, victims, and bystanders who have watched school violence situations[6]. As bystander's behaviors have a decisive influence on the bully's subsequent actions, bystanders play an important role in the further development of the situation[7].

The roles of bystanders in school violence can be divided into 4 different categories such as outsider, defenders of the victims, enforcers of bullies and assistants of bullies[8]. But there are some difficulties in distinguishing between enforcers and assistants of bullies because these two types show high correlation. Thus, it is commonly classified into three categories such as outsiders, defenders of victims and assistants of the bullies[9]. Defenders of a victim try to console or help victims, and can play a role in breaking the imbalance of power. Assistants of bullies are those who engage in or encourage bully's actions. They conform to bullies because they get vicarious satisfaction from bully's actions or are afraid of becoming a victim if they don't assist bullies. Finally, outsiders pretend not to see the incident and making no actions. If the bystander does not stop him, bullies become more confident in his violent behavior and continue their bullying behaviors. On the contrary, bystanders can reduce school violence if they are on the side of victims. It is certain that helping victims may act as a burden on the bully as they are the major part of bystanders.

As such, the role of the bystanders in the

school violence situation is important. Positive feedbacks in verbal or nonverbal ways to support or encourage bullies make them repeat the action. On the other hand, the behaviors to control the bullies or to defend the victim are effective interventions against the bully's violent behaviors. So It is necessary to examine the process and reasons for the bystander's choice by expanding the subjects of the study to all the youth constituting the school environment rather than confining them to the bullies and the victims.

## **2.3. Bystander's attitude and behavior in school violence**

In general violence cases, the presence of a witness affects the aggressors to stop the violence. They think that they have to follow social norms better than when he is alone without a witness. However, Even if school violence is done in the classroom where most of the classmates are present, this phenomenon tends not to occur. That's because students who have witnessed the situation have a negative attitude toward violence, but they act as outsiders without the act of controlling the bully. Also, they may behave differently from their own positive attitudes toward helping behaviors in real situations[10].

Olweus suggested the model effects, responsibility diffusion, and changes in the perceptions of victims[2]. The model effect refers to the social transmission of aggressive behavior. It means that those who have observed the bully's behavior become aggressive for a variety of reasons, although they were not aggressive before the observation. Responsibility diffusion means that the guilty feeling for aggressive behaviors decreases when there are many aggressors, and the responsibility to help the victim decreases when there are many witnesses[11]. Finally, there is a change in perception that the victim deserves that. At first, they feel compassion for the victim, but it is justified that he deserves being bullied to mitigate their guiltiness.

In addition, there were efforts to investigate the causes why the bystanders failed to intervene focusing on the group and try to explain them through social norms. Social

norms are the expectations of a particular group in relation to the appropriate attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that group members think that they should have[12]. Because the members of a group are not likely to choose a behavior that violates the norms of the group, their behaviors may be decided depending on how they understand the group norms. In school violence, the norms of the class or peers act as the social norms. In the context of school violence, the bystanders are aware of the implicit and explicit social norms and take actions on assistants of bullies, defense of victims or outsiders[13].

As such, bystanders make decisions considering situational elements and make actions in the context of school violence. According to the Decision-Making Model by Latané and Darley, bystanders identify the problem, determine if it is an emergency situation, consider the level of individual responsibility, select the specific intervention method, and then exercise interventions[14]. Reversely, lack of awareness, failure to judge a high-risk situation, lack of responsibility for intervention, lack of intervention, and audience inhibition make the intervention unavailable[15]. Situational characteristics have an influence on individual choice. If there is a problem in decision making at each step, it can lead to 'cycling' between the steps and result in 'blocking', which means it does not go to the next step. When this process is lengthened, the likelihood of indecision and inaction becomes higher. By applying this theory, we can understand why bystanders are choosing the roles. It is also possible to explain why those who have negative attitudes against bullying show uninterested behaviors.

But they have a limitation that they do not include broader cognitive elements such as attitudes and beliefs. TPB can help to understand bystander behaviors in school violence situations because it can explain the relationship between attitude and behavior.

### **3. Theory of Planned Behavior and the Bystander Intervention in School Violence**

#### **3.1. Understanding the theory of planned behavior**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB hereunder) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA hereunder)[16]. It is the theory that is used to predict and explain various human behaviors[17]. TPB considers social behaviors of human as reasoned and planned. That's because people make actions considering behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs. Of course, these beliefs may be inaccurate, unfounded, and biased, but people think and act according to these beliefs, resulting in behaviors that fit these beliefs.

Behavioral beliefs form attitudes to specific behaviors that are favored or unfavored. Normative beliefs lead to subjective norms related to the perception of social pressure and Control beliefs are shown as perceived behavioral control. These three elements are combined to create the intention of behavior. The intention of the specific behavior is the strongest predictor of human behaviors[18][19].

According to the logic of TPB, the way human behavior is chosen can be understood as follows. The stronger the attitude of a certain behavior is, the more positive the evaluation is to the people around them, and the greater the confidence that the person can perform the action, the greater the intention to perform the action. Especially, perceived behavioral control can influence behavior through intent to perform certain behaviors as well as directly through behaviors. Once actual behavioral control becomes possible, it becomes possible for the person to move one's intentions into action when there is an opportunity for actions[18].

TPB has a rigorous social-cognitive structure that is theoretically helpful to understand human behaviors. And that has been empirically validated and used in the studies on sexual health and condom use, consumer attitudes, market research, alcohol and drug use, exercise, blood donation or organ donation, and general health behaviors.

### 3.2. Bystander intervention in school violence by applying the theory of planned behavior

TPB is generally well suited as a framework for bystander behavior studies. That's because TPB can explain the elements influencing the intervention behaviors of bystanders. Since TPB includes social influences related to intention, the effects of social norms on communication processes can be taken into account[20]. There are studies that address the conceptual relations between bystander behaviors and the components of the TPB in various types of violence. In particular, studies have been made that show that TPB theory and its components are empirically useful when explaining the involvement of nearby people in the bullying situations[21] [22][23].

In school violence, the bystanders can be an assistant of bullies, a defender of victims or an outsider. School violence can be resolved early if bystanders who occupy the majority in the situation change their positions from an outsider to a defender of controlling the bully or helping the victim. Therefore, it is important to interpret the reasons why they become outsiders and do not take action as defenders using TPB. As we have seen above, Human behavior can be predicted through intent to act. Such intentions are influenced by the attitude(positive or negative the evaluation of the action and the outcome), subjective norms(the perception on the peer groups' evaluation of the behavior), and perceived behavioral control(confidence in conducting the behavior).

The reason why bystanders choose an outsider role is that they think that indifferent behaviors or the outcomes are positive, that most of the surrounding students take the same position and think it positive, and that it is easy because they do not need to take any actions. In a similar way, bystanders don't choose defender behaviors because they negatively recognize the result of the defender behavior and its outcomes, and the classmates do not behave as a defender or view the defender behavior negatively, and they do not know what action to take to be a de-

fender or don't have the confidence to actually make it even if they know what to do.

In Korea, researchers found that bystanders chose to be an outsider because of the distrust of adults and fear of retaliation in responsibility and indifference[24]. Girls in the middle school knew that they should understand and help the victim, although they had a conflict between helping the victim and recognizing herself as a third person[25]. Also, elementary school students chose to engage themselves or act to help victims directly or indirectly under the influence of a classroom atmosphere encouraging behavior to help victims, sympathy for the victim, and moral judgement[26]. Middle school boys chose defender behavior even in situations where helping behavior was difficult and the results of helping behavior were frightening.

Therefore, based on the results of applying TPB, the following efforts should be made to reduce the outsider behaviors and increase defender behaviors in school violence. In the dimension of attitude, it is necessary to let them perceive that the result of the outsiders' behavior is negative and that the problem can be solved by the defender action. The program content should include reasons why the school violence problem is resolved through defender behavior in bullying situations. Second, in the case of subjective norms, it is necessary to specify and clearly articulate the class norms that reject outsider behaviors and encourage defender behaviors. Since students take into account the judgments and standards of classmates on specific behaviors, schools and teachers should provide opportunities to make formal norms after students have determined the actions necessary to resolve school violence. In the case of perceived behavioral control, the following method can be considered. The outsider's actions are not difficult to practice because they do not use special methods. But defender action requires special effort. The students will not practice defender behavior when students have a desire to help but do not know how to help, or students know how to help but do not have the ability or confidence to do it. Therefore, to improve defender behaviors,

students need to be trained and have opportunities to practice how to help in school violence situations. Besides, an environment should be established in which helping victims can lead to positive outcomes.

#### 4. Conclusion

School Violence has become a social problem in Korean society. Strategies and programs have been implemented according to various research results to solve school violence. Although various approaches have been taken to intervene and resolve school violence problems, existing methods have mainly dealt with bullies and victims only. However, it is the bystanders that occupy the largest part of the school violence situation, and school violence may be resolved at an early stage depending on the behaviors that bystanders choose. If they choose wrong roles, school violence can be more serious in the course of the continuously repeated processes.

In this respect, it is important to take a comprehensive look at the reasons why bystanders choose the specific roles. We have to develop strategies to improve their behaviors based on the reasons why they choose their behaviors. Previous researchers tried to explain the bystander phenomenon in school violence and understood it as a result of the model effect, responsibility diffusion and change of perception of the victim. Also, they have used the bystanders' intervention decision-making model. However, there are cases where it is difficult to explain the intervention behavior with existing approaches.

Therefore, this study has investigated the reason why bystanders choose outsider or defender actions applying TPB. The reason why the bystander becomes an outsider in school violence is as follows. They perceived the behavior as an outsider and the outcomes as positive. They also thought that their friends would show the similar behavior by evaluating the outsider behavior positively. Moreover, the outsider role does not require any special effort, so students are easy to choose the role.

The reasons why there are only a few defender behaviors are as follows. They perceived the defender behavior and its consequences as negative. They also thought that the peer students would negatively evaluate helping behavior for victims. Furthermore, Students need enough confidence to practice helping behavior as well as knowledge of how to help. Based on the interpretation of TPB, applying methods and programs to reduce bystander behavior and increase defender behavior will increase the likelihood of addressing school violence.

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