Abstract

Objective This study investigated the prevalence of child maltreatment as perpetrated by parents, its associated health outcomes, and its resilient factors among high school students in China.

Methods A multi-level stratified random school-based survey was conducted in 2005. 24 high schools were randomly chosen from eight districts in Guangzhou in South China (three from each district). Two classes were randomly selected from each of Form 1 to Form 3 (aged 12-16) in each selected school. Data from 6593 students were analysed. A number of locally validated tools were used to measure various types of maltreatment as well as physical and psychological conditions of students.

Results The half-year prevalence of psychological aggression, minor assault, severe assault, and very severe assault were 78.3%, 23.2%, 15.1%, and 2.8% respectively; while the half-year prevalence of sexual abuse was 0.6%. Maltreated students were more likely to report physical and psychological problems, and a positive relationship was also found between the severity of maltreatment and the likelihood of negative health outcomes. Male gender or having higher levels of social support and life satisfaction were identified as resilient factors to physical health of maltreated students.

Conclusions Child maltreatment as perpetrated by parents is common among high school students in Guangzhou, China. More public education programmes are needed to raise public awareness of this problem. Intervention programmes that target at improving social support and life satisfaction of students are potentially beneficial.

Keywords: Child maltreatment, China, Psychological health, Physical health, Resilient factors.