

Adult psychosocial adjustment to exposure to interparental violence in childhood



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Exposure to Interparental Violence in Childhood and Psychosocial Adjustment in Young Adulthood

Child abuse and neglect impacts developmental tasks altering biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and behavioral constructs that are important to child development. Violence between parents, also known as interparental violence, can manifest itself in the form of abuse and neglect. Chronic stress from repeated exposure to neglect and abuse results in negative effects on brain development, including executive functioning and decision making (Petersen, 2014). According to authors Peterson and Fergusson, if the stress is internalized, for example, then the child becomes more susceptible to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression later in life (Petersen, 2014). Likewise, if the stress is externalized, aggression and substance abuse have the ability to transpire as well. Understanding the confounding factors of interparental violence are needed in order to understand the psychosocial impacts on the child (Petersen, 2014). First, factors within the family environment like poverty and marital conflict have the potential to impact the child's upbringing. Second, the developmental stage that the child is in during abusive episodes can change the severity of adverse outcomes. Science is showing a relationship between early abuse and later psychopathological outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. Past literature has found that these factors are consistent with the view that there is a cause and effect association between exposure to parental conflict and children's psychosocial adjustment.

This paper will review a study conducted by (Fergusson, 1998), who examined 1, 265 New Zealand infants over an 18-year longitudinal study and reported results of the study after exposure to interparental violence for 18 years. The psychosocial impacts of interparental violence during childhood, introduce long term adjustment problems during critical periods of development. The use of a longitudinal study was needed in order to fill the gaps of previous studies about interparental violence. The study utilized four goals in order to determine whether or not familial and social contexts were important to consider. The first goal was to document the prevalence and spectrum of the violence as well as the nature and extent of the violence between parent's during childhood. The second was to examine the relationship between the extent of reported interparental violence in childhood and prevalence adverse outcomes that occurred later in life. The third was to examine the extent to which associations between exposure to interparental violence and psychosocial adjustment could be explained by social and contextual factors. Finally, the fourth was to examine the rates at which children reported mother-initiated violence versus father-initiated violence and what outcomes resulted from both.

The longitudinal study carried out by (Fergusson, 1998) used the four goals to guide the principal analysis study, which was to determine the extent of varying exposures to interparental violence were associated with increased risks of later adjustment issues when social and familial contexts were included. The data from the study was taken through Christchurch Health & Development Study (CHDS), which studied 1, 265 children born and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand. The sample size reported in the study was

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based on a sample of 1, 025 respondents. This sample represented 81. 0% of the initial cohort of 1, 265 children and 92. 3% of all cohort members still alive and resident in New Zealand at the age of 18 years (Fergusson, 1998). Observations were conducted at 4 months, 1 year, and annual intervals at the age of 16 through 18.

The interviews of the developing children were designed to question the participant about their experiences of interparental violence during childhood and were based on series of eight questions derived from the Conflict Tactics Scales. This scale was more general in nature, which asked the participant to rate a series of behaviors on a three-point scale for each parent. The psychosocial outcomes were determined through further questioning which evaluated levels of psychiatric and suicidal behavior using a questionnaire based on the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) and Self-Report Delinquency Inventory. The CIDI evaluated mood and anxiety disorders while the SRDI assessed conduct disorder (Fergusson, 1998). Mood and anxiety disorders were assessed using criteria from the American Psychological Association's DSM-IV. Diagnoses included conduct disorder, anxiety, and depression.

Factors effecting the home that the child lived in that were evaluated were family socioeconomic background, family functioning, and child abuse. Socioeconomic background of the family included factors of maternal age, maternal education, and family income. These were all assessed at the child's birth, except for income, which was assessed each year of the study(Fergusson, 1998). Family functioning was assessed based off of change of parents such as a divorce or remarry, parent criminal history, <https://assignbuster.com/adult-psychosocial-adjustment-to-exposure-to-interparental-violence-in-childhood/>

parental involvement with substances, and life events. Measures of child abuse were assessed through childhood sexual abuse and parental use of physical punishments.

Interparental violence was found to be linked to a wide range of social and contextual factors. Children that were raised in homes with high rates of violence between parents were also exposed to a range of other adversities (Fergusson, 1998). These included social and economic disadvantage, parental separation, impaired family functioning, parental alcoholism and criminality, childhood physical and sexual abuse (Fergusson, 1998). These results suggest that the higher rates of adverse outcomes in children exposed to interparental violence are a result of social and family context within which violence between parents occurred. Statistical control of familial context found associations between interparental violence and a number of adverse outcomes including depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, nicotine dependence and violent crimes (Fergusson, 1998).

A limitation of this study is that the strength of using personal accounts of interparental violence from children could be biased. The children who were interviewed about their parents and the outcomes of violence may see their parents in a more negative light than those who did not experience abuse and neglect. This could have led to gaps in responses about the interparental violence experienced and influenced what types of outcomes were reported by the children.

The second stage of analysis examined the relationship between exposure to interparental violence during childhood and adjustment during young

adulthood. The results concluded that young adults from the most violent 5% of families had rates of these outcomes that were between 1.9 to 6.1 times higher than the rates for young people who reported no exposure to interparental violence (Fergusson, 1998). There was some evidence to suggest that the outcomes of interparental violence differed based on characteristics of parent. Father-initiated violence emerged was associated with a broader range of homes such as anxiety, conduct disorder, and property crime. Mother-initiated violence was associated with comes such as alcohol abuse/dependence. These results suggest that interparental violence committed by males may have more adverse outcomes for children than females (Fergusson, 1998). This conclusion is consistent with the original aim to explore the extent to which interparental assaults by males are more likely to have harmful consequences.

The study's conclusions were drawn from its original four goals. The original goal to examine associations between exposure to interparental violence and psychosocial adjustment within social and familial contexts, proved to have a strong correlation to adversities. These factors included social and economic disadvantage, parental separation, impaired family functioning, parental alcoholism, criminality, childhood physical and sexual abuse (Fergusson, 1998). The outcomes from these contexts ranged from depression to criminal offending, depending on how the stress from witnessing the violence transpired. In general, while the results are consistent with the view that there is a cause and effect association between exposure to interparental violence and particularly father-initiated violence

and later adjustment, some factors, such as genetic, family, and social background, were not controlled in the analysis (Fergusson, 1998).

Based on these results from Fergusson, early childcare givers are impacted by the behavior of young children, which exposes them to the effects of interparental violence as well. Evidence suggests that the timing, chronicity, and severity of the violence between parents matter in terms of outcomes. The more exposure to violence between parents, the more salient the impact has on development (Petersen, 2014). It is helpful for early childcare givers not only to know if the abuse and neglect is occurring, but how often it occurs. Early childhood caregivers who observe these adverse patterns of adjustment problems that are relevant to young children, such as social anxiety, aggression, and tendency to protest normal guidelines, can prevent more severe effects later on in life by alerting a child abuse prevention program or social services. Early prevention of child abuse and neglect that lead to problem behaviors have the potential to make a profound impact in a child's success later in life.

Early childhood is a time in a child's life when the absorption of information is at its peak. With the influence of violence in the home, developmental tasks become more difficult to achieve overtime as abuse and neglect continue into childhood. The impact of violence between parents during childhood can impact the rate at which a child learns, retains information, and develops healthy, stable relationships (Petersen, 2014). Without a functional home environment, important developmental tasks, such as memory and learning, are severely altered. A safe, functional home environment is critical in order to maintain a level of security and balance

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within the home during childhood, and when this is not present, intervention is needed to foster supportive relationships to improve developmental tasks.

Early childhood education should aim to intervene with the violence with prevention programs that are implemented within the school/education plan. Intervention programs should address issues of family violence that consider the general social and family context in which violence occurs rather than focusing solely on the issue of interparental violence (Fergusson, 1998). Children reared in homes with interparental violence, especially father initiated, are at greater risks for adjustment issues later in life (Fergusson, 1998). It seems that to reduce the risks faced by children in violent families will require intervention programs that address a wide range of family issues rather than isolating the violence from its context.

References

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