

Impact of lack of family cohesion on child adjustment



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Does a lack of family cohesion effect child adjustment depending on the level of threat the child faces in their local area?

Abstract

The effect of a lack of family cohesion on child adjustment was examined depending on the level of threat the child faces in their local area in Northern Ireland. This is in terms of the impact that political violence and political conflict can have on the family unit and on the child. The participants were parents of primary school children who were between the ages of 6 and 10 years old and they participated in the study by completing a structured questionnaire. A multiple linear regression was carried out and the results show a significant effect of family cohesion on child adjustment. The effect was found to be significant when the family lived in an interfaced area. The high level of threat faced by the families in interfaced areas is therefore shown to be related significantly to the level of family cohesion within that family unit and the child's adjustment abilities.

Introduction

The political conflict that had a huge impact on Northern Ireland is known as 'The Troubles'. The Troubles consist of a 30-year period of conflict that started in the late 1960's. A civil rights movement commenced to achieve equality, this included things such as an end to gerrymandering by the Unionist government and fairer access to social housing for Catholics. The heart of the conflict was the issue of national identity for both sides of the conflict. The Unionist majority swore their allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen and wanted to remain as part of the United Kingdom whereas the

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Nationalist/ Republican minority wished to be reunited with the Republic of Ireland and become self-governing (BBC website, 2017).

During the 30 years of The Troubles, more than 3500 people had been killed by The British Army, Republican Paramilitaries most predominately The Provisional Irish Republican Army as well as Unionist/ Loyalist Paramilitaries which included The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and The Ulster Defence Association (UDA). There were a number of events that lead to the decommissioning of weapons and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was introduced in April 1998 and a referendum was held in Northern Ireland on the 22nd of May with 71% of voters supporting the agreement. The first executive was elected in November of 1999 and the IRA announced that arms were being put beyond use(CAIN website, 2017).

Both the Catholic and Protestant people believed that the other group were in a more favourable position than themselves, this is likely to be because even today Northern Ireland is segregated highly socially and demographically.

This high level of segregation became more realistic during ‘ The Troubles’ when Peace walls began to be constructed to place a physical barrier between the Catholic and Protestant communities. There are many interfaces in Northern Ireland and a lot of these are in Belfast, they are most popular in areas that are known as interface areas.

Examples of these interfaces include those in the Shankill and the Falls Road or Tiger's Bay and the New Lodge. Markers of interface area don't always tend to be peace walls; they can also be roads or a park. The fact that these interfaces are in place creates interface areas, the definition given to an interfaced area is " the intersection of segregated and polarized working-class residential zones, in areas with a strong link between territory and ethno-political identity." A lot of the time these areas experience a high number of incidences described to be sectarian violence (Northern Ireland Foundation, 2017).

This segregation was also obvious in the education system in Northern Ireland with most schools being segregated based on religion. In 2016 around 90% of school children still attended schools that are mainly Catholic or mainly Protestant. These schools are usually situated in Catholic or Protestant communities which are unlikely to be overly welcoming to those of the opposite side. These schools are in both interfaced and non-interfaced areas but those in interfaced areas are likely to experience differences to what children in non-interfaced areas would experience. An example of this is the blockade experienced in the Ardoyne area in 2001 when school children from Holy Cross Primary school were unable to attend school without being verbally abused on their way. This was due to issues that the close by Loyalist community had with attacks on their homes (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2017). Therefore, it is likely that attending a school in an interfaced area is likely to impact children in many ways.

In much of the previous research around political violence and conflict in

Northern Ireland, any crimes classed to be of a sectarian nature are referred <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-lack-of-family-cohesion-on-child-adjustment/>

to as Sectarian Antisocial behaviour (SAB). This is based on the SAB scale which was developed in Northern Ireland where information was gathered in order to develop a scale that would be culturally informed (Taylor, Merrilees, Campbell, Shirlow, Cairns, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2011).

Much of the SAB occurs along interfaced lines between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. These are areas that are experiencing high levels of social and economic deprivation on a daily basis (Goeke-Morey, Taylor, Merrilees, Cummings, Cairns, & Shirlow, 2013). Living in these interfaced areas has a direct and an indirect impact on the children in the area due to the political violence they experience along with the political violence their parents experience (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Merrilees, Taylor, & Shirlow, 2014). Areas of high political violence experience threat of SAB occurring on a daily basis, “ Despite peace accords, substantial rates of sectarian violence continue between the highly segregated Catholic and Protestant communities” (MacGinty, 2007 as cited in Cummings, 2012).

Youths living in interfaced areas are more likely to experience SAB which places them in a much more vulnerable state to have their adjustment impacted negatively. Emotional security has been linked on a number of occasions to adjustment problems in children, and there are a number of threats that can have an effect on the emotional security of children. These include the threat to the safety and protection of the child (Cummings, Merrilees, Taylor, Shirlow, Goeke-Morey, & Cairns, 2013).

Child adjustment has been found to be impacted greatly by political violence from many different studies. For example, child adjustment problems that

would be considered to be externalising problems were more likely to occur if the youth was aware of the sectarian behaviour that was occurring in their area (Goeke-Morey, 2013)

When it has been compared to the effect that non-sectarian anti-social behaviour has on youths, it has been found that SAB has a more significant effect on emotional security (Cummings, 2014). Emotional security is related to child adjustment, if a young person's emotional insecurity is increased towards the high level of crime occurring in their community it can lead to the child's adjustment being effected (Cummings, 2013). Findings support the belief that community violence that is motivated by politics influences both a child's internalising and externalising problems. This also occurs due to a child's emotional insecurity being increased in terms of their community. Longitudinal research that was conducted found that there is a relationship between internalising and externalising problems in children and community violence (Cummings, Merrilees, Schermerhorn, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow & Cairns, 2011).

The impact that is made on child adjustment by political violence is not only relevant in Northern Ireland, studies have found that it has become an international concern throughout the world. This is both places that are experiencing and have experienced political conflict (Cummings, Merrilees, Schermerhorn, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cairns, 2012).

Previous research has also been conducted to investigate the impact that political violence has on the relationship between family cohesion and child adjustment. It has been found that a family who is living in a community with

high political violence is likely to be effected in terms of less family cohesion within the family unit (Goeke-Morey, 2013).

Gibson found family to be the most influential support system to reduce the impact of stress on children in politically violent environments (as cited in Cummings, Schermerhorn, Merrilees, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow & Cairns, 2010). A family that are experiencing low conflict levels and high cohesion levels are likely to have a positive impact on both the mental health and social abilities of their children (Cummings, 2010). The presence of family cohesion is likely to have an impact on child adjustment problems positively as a means of preventing too much damage occurring. However, if there is a lack of family cohesion it is likely to have even more of a negative effect on child adjustment than would be occurring if only political violence was at play.

Family cohesion has been shown to protect from the higher amount of aggression involved with community violence. Aspects of family cohesion include support and prosocial behaviours. Further research is however needed to investigate whether family cohesion can reduce the negative impact that political violence has on adolescent aggression when youths experience high levels of SAB (Taylor, Merrilees, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow & Cummings 2016). However, a family who is living in a community with high political violence is likely to be effected in terms of less family cohesion within the family unit (Goeke-Morey, 2013).

There has been research conducted previously on many different occasions into the effects of family cohesion on child adjustment. Most of this research has been conducted looking at youths between the ages of 10-18 years of

age and this is a time when many factors come into play. There are many changes in the lives of these young people which begins with changing schools from primary to secondary, puberty and other factors such as becoming more independent. These could therefore have a confounding effect on the results of the study that is being conducted. It could be that the child adjustment issues are there or are made worse because of these factors that are occurring within the child themselves. It is also possible that a low family cohesion could be reported because of these confounding factors, a child that is experiencing things that they never have before might cause an upset within the family system. When a child experiences puberty it is expected that, there will be a change in the family for a while. The results from previous studies may have been found because of this rather than because of the political violence and conflict that is going on in their community.

Our research looks at children between the ages of 6-10 years old. If the lack of family cohesion effects child adjustment based on what is taking place in the community around the children and it being impactful because of the level of threat they face, then it should be present during an earlier age too. We also look at the level of threat that is faced by children in interfaced and non-interfaced areas separately. Previous research has looked at the effect of SAB when compared with NAB where as we are looking at the impact that occurs when your community is situated in a certain area.

The independent variable for the research is child adjustment and the study has two dependent variables, family cohesion and the level of threat experienced by the child in their local community. The strength and
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difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used to measure child adjustment whilst the Family Environment scale (Moos, 1990) was used to measure the level of family cohesion. The level of threat experienced by the child in their local community was measured categorically, whether the child lives in an interfaced or non-interfaced area.

The hypothesis is that ' a lack of family cohesion and a high level of threat in the child's local community will have a negative effect on child adjustment'.

The null hypothesis is as follows ' There will be no significant effect on child adjustment depending on family cohesion or the level of threat they face in their area'.

Methods

Design

The type of designed used in this study is a structured questionnaire which contained two different questionnaires that contain closed questions. The answers that the participants could provide have already been decided upon and can be selected from the questionnaire. The questionnaires that were used contained scales that the participants used to answer and which could then easily be used as quantitative data. The dependent variable in this study is child adjustment which can be split into internalising and externalising adjustment, the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used to measure this and it produced interval data.

The study has two independent variables, the level of family cohesion that is reported and the level of threat the child faces in their local area. The level
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of family cohesion is reported using the Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1990), there are two sections but we are only interested in the questions reporting family cohesion. This answered with a scale of 1 and 2 which corresponds to true or false and therefore also produces interval data. The second independent variable looks at the level of threat a child faces in their local area and this is measured categorically, a child that lives in an interfaced area is likely to face a higher level of threat than someone living in a non-interfaced area.

Participants

A total of 165 parents completed the questionnaire in regards to their children. There were 69 questionnaires returned with a male child and 91 returned questionnaires included information about a female child and 5 of the returned questionnaires didn't include a gender. The participants were recruited using opportunity sampling. Schools were contacted via their principal and asked to administer questionnaires to children to be sent home for their parents to fill in and send back to the school if they are interested in participating. These included both Catholic and Protestant schools from interfaced and non-interfaced areas. This allowed the entire relevant target sample of parents to be given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

Materials

The materials that were used in the study were an information sheet and a consent form that the participant read and signed of they were happy to take part. The questionnaire contained many different scales as well as questions to gather certain information. The questionnaires included in the <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-lack-of-family-cohesion-on-child-adjustment/>

questionnaire looked at child adjustment and family cohesion. The strength and difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used to measure child adjustment whilst the Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1990) was used to measure family cohesion.

There are questions included in the final questionnaire from the strength and difficulties questionnaire that are used to measure child adjustment. It contains the emotional problems scale, the conduct problems scale, the hyperactivity scale, peer problems scale and the prosocial scale. These are split into two sections; externalising which includes the conduct problems and hyperactivity scales as well as internalising which include emotional problems scale and the peer problems scale (Goodman & Scott, 1999). The Family Environment Scale is a measure that is used throughout family research in order to measure family cohesion and family conflict at home (Goeke-Morey et al, 2013).

Procedure

The principal of each school was contacted to ask for permission to administer the questionnaire within their school. Once permission was given, questionnaires were brought to the schools in an envelope; they contained an information sheet, a consent form and a questionnaire. The envelopes were given to the children in the classes 3-7 and were brought home to be completed. Parents were asked to complete a consent form to provide us with information about their child such as age and gender as well as providing us with the consent to use the information. This was to be

completed after parents had the chance to read the information sheet that was also provided to them.

The questionnaire is completed by the parent by thinking about the child that they have provided the information about in the consent form. The first questionnaire they complete is the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire which is concerned with the adjustment of the child. This questionnaire includes 25 questions and the parents are asked to rate the questionnaire on a scale of 1-3 depending on how true the statement is in regards to the child. This questionnaire includes statements such as ' considerate of other people's feelings' and ' often lies and cheats'.

They are then asked to complete the Family Environment Scale while thinking about their entire which includes the immediate family that live in the same house. The questionnaire is answered depending on whether it is true or false for most of the people in the family. It is a scale 1 or 2, 1 is used regarding statements that are true and 2 is related to statements that are false. This questionnaire includes statements such as ' we fight a lot in our family' and ' we really get along well with each other'.

Results

The assumptions that must be met for a regression to be carried out have been met and are as follows. The data being used is interval data, the sample size is acceptable with a sample of 165. The third assumption is linearity and a partial regression plot was conducted and the plot shows a linear relationship, therefore the assumption is not violated. A histogram was constructed and the residuals are of a normal distribution. Homoscedity is <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-lack-of-family-cohesion-on-child-adjustment/>

not violated as random distribution is shown on a scatterplot and the residuals at each level of the predictors must have similar variances which they do.

Table 1: Model summary Table

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.397a	.153	6.66848

Table 2: ANOVA table

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1584.934	1	1584.934	35.642	.000
Residual	8493.503	191	44.469		
Total	10078.44	192			

Table 3: Coefficients table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients

s

1

(Consta
nt)

Family Cohesion	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig
total**	10.499	.617		17.025	.000
Higher scores indicate poor family cohesion	1.998	.335	.397	5.970	.000

A multiple linear regression was carried out in order to investigate the effect that a lack of family cohesion and a level of threat faced in a local area can have on child adjustment. This model was found to be statistically significant ($F=(2, 165)= 35.642, p < .000$) which indicates that the results found are unlikely to have arisen by chance. The adjusted R^2 indicated that 15.3% of the variance in child adjustment can be explained by the variances between the two predictor variables. The analysis suggests that a lack of family cohesion ($\hat{\beta}^2=.397$) was the most influential predictor, however a lack of family cohesion ($t= 17.025, p < .000$) and the level of threat faced in their

local area ($t= 5.970, p < .000$) were shown to be statistically significant predictors of child adjustment.

Table 4: Model summary table showing results for participants from non-interfaced areas

Model R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1 248	.061	.042	6.35916

Table 5: ANOVA table showing results for participants living in non-interfaced areas

1. Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2. Regression	129.601	1	129.601	3.	.
Residual	1981.504	49	40.439	205	.080
Total	2111.105	50			

Table 6: Coefficients table showing results for participants from non-interfaced areas

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized
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				coefficient	
				s	
1	(Constant)				
Family Cohesion total**	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Higher scores indicate poor family cohesion	12.543	1.124	.248	11.162	.000
	1.275	.712		1.790	.080
				0	

Table 7: Model summary table for participants living in an interfaced area

Model	R	Adjusted R	Std. Error of the Estimate
	Square	Square	
1	.247	.240	6.51634
	497		

Table 8: ANOVA table showing the results for participants living in interfaced areas.

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1. Regression	1367.322	1	1367.322	32.44	.000
Residual	4161.344	98	42.463	201	.000
Total	5528.665	99			

Table 9: Coefficients table showing results for participants living in interfaced areas.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	9.753	.852	.497	.627
Family Cohesion	2.313	.408	5.67	.000
Higher total**			5	

scores

indicate

poor

family

cohesio

n

A multiple linear regression was repeated in order to investigate the effect of low family cohesion when level of threat was sorted in to interface areas and non-interface areas. In terms of non-interfaced areas the results were to be statistically insignificant ($F = 2, 165 = 3.25, p < .008$) which shows that it is unlikely that the results were found by chance. The Adjusted R^2 indicated that 4.2% of the variance in child adjustment can be explained by the variances between the two predictor variables that when the level of threat is tested in non-interfaced areas. A lack of family cohesion ($t = 11.162, p < .000$) was found to be statistically significant, however non-interfaced areas were not ($t = 1.790, p < .008$).

However the results in the interfaced areas were found to significantly significant ($F = 2, 165 = 32.201, p < .000$) and they were found to be unlikely to have occurred by chance. The Adjusted R^2 indicated that 24% of the variance in child adjustment can be explained by the variances between the two predictor variables that when the level of threat is tested in interfaced areas. A lack of family cohesion was found to be statistically significant ($t = 11.449, p < .000$) as well as interfaced areas being found to be significant ($t = 5.675, p < .000$).

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