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Child Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence and Parent Aggression in Two Generations

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ABSTRACT

Objectives

Intimate partner violence (IPV; also referred to as domestic violence) is a complex and significant public health problem with adverse physical and mental health consequences not only for the adults involved but also for the children who are exposed to IPV (Bedi & Goddard, 2007). Children's externalizing (e.g., aggressive behavior) and internalizing (e.g., anxious/depressed behavior) problems are the two most consistently documented factors related to IPV exposure (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Lang & Stover, 2008; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003); however, the impact of IPV exposure on child adjustment has shown substantial variability (Evans et al., 2008; Hungerford, Wait, Fritz, & Clements, 2012). The research funded under this National Institute of Justice award advances understanding of the impact of child exposure to IPV by considering the co-occurrence of parent-to-child aggression (PCA) on child adjustment including social and scholastic competence into adolescence. The likelihood that a child experiences some form of child maltreatment (also referred to as child abuse and neglect) is significantly higher when there is IPV in the home (Dong et al., 2004; Moffitt & Caspi, 2003). Children who are exposed to both IPV and PCA—the "double whammy" effect (Hughes, Parkinson, & Vargo, 1989)—have greater developmental difficulties than children exposed to only one form of family violence (Baldry, 2007; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007; Hagan, Sulik, & Lieberman, 2016). Previous work regarding IPV and PCA has largely been conducted separately (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2006), which has detracted from understanding how child exposure to these two forms of family violence confers risk for child adjustment. Study Aims were tested using a prospective multigeneration data set involving community families from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds that comprise the Three Generational Study (3GS). The 3GS focuses on the

children of the Oregon Youth Study (OYS) men, the children's fathers (OYS men), and the children's biological mothers (even if the couple has separated). At enrollment into the OYS in Grade 4, the men were at risk for aggression (by virtue of living in neighborhoods with relatively high rates of juvenile delinquency) and from lower income families. The longitudinal design enabled us to examine the developmental timing (e.g., in adolescence) of exposure to family violence, as well as mediating risk and protective factors by which child exposure to family violence was linked to short- and long-term outcomes. A particularly strong feature of the research was the unique opportunity to examine prospectively the intergenerational transmission of exposure to family violence.

Implications of Research

Children's exposure to family violence is a complex public health concern. In this research, children's adjustment at different ages ranging from ages 5 to 13–14 years and in different generations was impacted by exposure to interparent IPV and/or PCA. This research helps clarify the developmental risks of child exposure to family violence by attending to the conjoint influence of both mother and father IPV and PCA, physical (spanking or forceful physical contact—such as pushes and slaps) and psychological (or emotional behavior—such as threats and ridicule) family violence, child exposure in early childhood and adolescence, and intergenerational exposure. This research also broadens the empirical base on family and child risk and protective factors that promote or hinder child adjustment within the context of family violence exposure. Specifying predictors and mediators of the effects of child exposure to family violence using prospective longitudinal data sets can inform the developmental timing and tailoring of interventions for various public health problems, including IPV and PCA. Effective family- and child-focused violence prevention programs at key points in development may

reduce the cascading effects of early risk and prevent costly psychological and physical consequences for families and children. Thus, this research is key to advancing theory, practice, and policy.

PURPOSE

The research purpose of this project was to advance the scientific understanding of child exposure to interparent IPV and PCA and children's adjustment through the utilization of a data set that combines (a) strong developmental and dyadic theory; (b) information on both fathers and mothers as well as boys and girls; (c) multimethod/informant and longitudinal assessment of family, couple, and child factors across childhood and adolescence; (d) psychological and physical IPV and PCA; and (e) cutting-edge data analytic techniques. Primary research aims were as follows.

Aim 1. Moderation of early childhood violence exposure: Examine the extent to which (a) child gender and (b) mother-only, father-only, or co-occurring aggression toward each other and toward their children moderate the strength of the association between early childhood violence exposure and child adjustment.

Aim 2. Developmental timing of violence exposure: Examine how violence exposure (e.g., type, bidirectional) in early childhood (age 5 years), early adolescence (ages 11–14 years), and late adolescence (ages 15–18 years) relates to changes in children's adjustment across adolescence—where earlier and chronic violence exposure, as well as bidirectional intimate partner violence (IPV), are posited to lead to greater increases in child-adjustment difficulties across adolescence.

Aim 3. Risk and protective factors of violence exposure: Examine the extent to which longitudinal associations between IPV exposure (e.g., type, bidirectional, frequency,

co-occurring parent aggression) earlier in childhood and child adjustment later in adolescence are mediated through parenting (e.g., inconsistent discipline), quality of the parent-child relationship, or child emotion regulation.

Aim 4. Intergenerational transmission of violence exposure: Examine the extent to which parents' developmental risk factors (e.g., criminality, exposure to IPV during childhood) both increase the occurrence of violence (toward their partners and children) as adults and decrease children's protective factors (e.g., parent monitoring and child emotion regulation), all of which ultimately negatively impact children's adjustment.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS, DESIGN, AND METHODS

Secondary analyses were conducted using a prospective multigeneration data set from the 3GS that involves the children ($N = 291$, 51% girls) of the OYS men, the children's fathers (OYS men), and the children's biological mothers (even if the couple has separated). At enrollment into the OYS in Grade 4 (74% participation rate), the men who were then boys were at risk for aggression (by virtue of living in neighborhoods with relatively high rates of juvenile delinquency) and from lower income and SES backgrounds. When the men were in adolescence ages 17 and 18 years, they were invited to participate in biannual couple sessions with a romantic partner (only two men brought in a same-sex partner). When the men became biological fathers (76%), the first two children of each mother/partner were invited to participate in 3GS. The 3GS participation rate is 91% for the children and 99% for the parents. The percentage of racial or ethnic minorities is 26% for the children, 15% for the fathers, and 27% for the mothers. In early childhood when the children were age 5 years (fathers were ages 20 to 42 years and mothers were ages 23 to 40 years), 54% of the children lived with both parents, 18% with mothers only, 17% with mothers and a stepfather, 4% part time with each parent, 4% with other guardians, 2%

with fathers only, and 1% with fathers and a stepmother. The available data set included two generations with childhood data on each (i.e., developmental history of the fathers and their offspring) using a multimethod/reporter measurement strategy.

ANALYTIC PLAN

Measures and analytic methods varied for each paper (e.g., for the developmental timing paper, homogeneous measures of child externalizing and violence exposure were required across time). Across papers, PCA and IPV were measured using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) parent-to-child version (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998) and partner version (Straus, 1979). Regarding child adjustment, externalizing and internalizing behaviors were assessed via mother, father, and teacher reports using the externalizing (aggression and rule-breaking behavior) and internalizing (anxiety/depressed, withdrawn/depressed, somatic complaints) subscales from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBC; Achenbach, 1991). Effortful control related to focusing/shifting attention and activating/inhibiting control was assessed using parent and child self-reports on the attention and inhibitory subscales of the Temperament Scale–Late Childhood (Capaldi, 2000). Social competence was assessed by mother, father, and teacher reports on the CBC (Achenbach, 1991) and the Peers and Social Skills Questionnaire (Walker & McConnell, 1988). Scholastic competence was assessed by mother, father, and teacher reports on the CBC (Achenbach, 1991).

For scholastic and social competence, observed construct scores were computed by standardizing and combining indicators by calculating the mean, first within reporting agent and second across agent scores. In two-parent families, the mean of mother and father report was calculated. To be included as an indicator, scales needed to demonstrate adequate internal consistency and convergence with other indicators (e.g., item-total correlations of 0.2 or more

with standardized Cronbach alpha equal or greater to 0.6 and factor loadings with other indicators on a one-factor solution of 0.3 or higher; Patterson & Bank, 1986). Due to some missing data, path model parameters were estimated using the robust maximum likelihood estimator and missing data option (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017).

Child exposure to family violence was modeled in a variety of ways. First, exposure to interparent IPV and PCA were examined both independently and interactively to determine risk for child adjustment. Differences in sample size due to unpartnered parents, who contributed information on PCA but not on IPV, also necessitated examining IPV and PCA as independent risk factors. Second, some models examined each type of IPV separately across parent; whereas others utilized an overall (psychological and physical) IPV factor by parent, given the specific hypotheses and significant associations between physical and psychological IPV. On the other hand, physical and psychological PCA were examined separately across parent. Mediation models using observed variables were estimated using Mplus versions 7.3 and 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017) with the complex sample option, which adjusts standard errors to account for nonindependence of cases (i.e., children/siblings clustered within parents). Hierarchical linear modeling was used to test hypotheses related to the developmental timing of violence exposure.

RESULTS

Findings from four major sets of analyses are presented in journal articles in the final stages of preparation. We first examined prevalence of child exposure to psychological and physical interparent IPV and PCA and proximal associations with child externalizing and internalizing behavior, as well as social and scholastic competence in early childhood and adolescence. Next, we examined the developmental timing and intergenerational transmission of exposure to IPV and PCA related to child externalizing behavior, and child effortful control and

positive parenting as risk and protective factors theorized to mediate associations between child exposure to family violence and later child adjustment.

Exposure to IPV and PCA in two generations: Effects on child competence and psychopathology symptoms (Capaldi, Tiberio, Shortt, Low, & Owen, 2018). The prevalence of children's exposure to, and the co-occurrence of, psychological and physical IPV and PCA were relatively high. Whereas psychological and physical IPV and PCA, in general, were both associated with greater child externalizing and/or internalizing behavior in early childhood and adolescence in the correlational analyses, PCA was also associated with poorer social and/or scholastic competence across ages. The interactional effects of exposure to IPV and PCA indicated stronger risks of PCA on child adjustment but only in instances of lower exposure to interparent IPV. Specifically, when exposure to interparent IPV was lower, greater exposure to psychological PCA predicted greater preschool externalizing behavior and greater exposure to physical PCA predicted lower adolescent scholastic competence.

Developmental timing of exposure to family violence on child externalizing behavior (Tiberio, Capaldi, Low, & Shortt, 2018). Findings on developmental timing of violence exposure indicated significant between-subjects' differences on child and adolescent externalizing behaviors. In early childhood, exposure to proximal physical PCA was the most salient predictor of child externalizing behavior. In adolescence, proximal PCA—specifically physical PCA at ages 11–12 years and psychological PCA at multiple points in adolescence—was the most salient predictor of adolescent externalizing behavior, even after controlling for early childhood exposure to IPV and PCA, early childhood externalizing behavior, and child gender. Furthermore, within adolescents across time, years of greater psychological PCA exposure coincided with concurrent increases in adolescent externalizing behavior.

Intergenerational effects of exposure to family violence (Shortt, Tiberio, Capaldi, Low, & Owen, 2018). The mediational risk model in which parent exposure to family violence during childhood heightens the risk for parent perpetration of family violence and child exposure to family violence in the next generation was supported for intergenerational transmission of psychological PCA. Higher levels of father exposure to psychological PCA during childhood predicted higher levels of father psychological PCA as adults and offspring exposure to psychological PCA in early childhood. Additionally, exposure to physical and psychological PCA (but not psychological or physical IPV) negatively impacted offspring adjustment by increasing child risk for poor effortful control and subsequent externalizing behavior.

Exposure to IPV on child adjustment via positive parenting (Low, Tiberio, Capaldi, Shortt, & Owen, 2018). A dyadic framework was used to assess how mothers' and fathers' psychological and physical IPV perpetration in early childhood (age 5 years) predicts both their own and each other's positive parenting behaviors in midchildhood (age 7 years), which in turn, predicts child's social and scholastic competence in late childhood (ages 11–12 years). By including separate predictions from each partner's IPV perpetration to each partner's parenting, models examined whether a victim-deficit theory (i.e., "parent-as-victim") or a personal-attributes theory (i.e., "parent-as-perpetrator") independently or conjointly predicted less maternal and paternal positive parenting behaviors, which in turn negatively impact child competence. Models examined the effects of child IPV exposure on two aspects of child competence (namely, social competence and scholastic competence) as mediated via three aspects of maternal and paternal parenting (i.e., involvement, warmth, and discipline).

Overall, study findings indicated significant associations of IPV perpetration with less positive parenting behaviors for both mothers and fathers and associations of these parenting

dimensions with social and scholastic competence for children in late childhood. Furthermore, in simple mediational models (where the IPV victimization and IPV perpetration pathways were separately examined), there were a number of significant indirect effects for both IPV perpetration and victimization on child adjustment via parental involvement and discipline although not for warmth. In the dyadic models (which included simultaneous estimation of both maternal and paternal IPV victimization and IPV perpetration pathways), however, only paternal IPV perpetration was associated with less paternal involvement, which in turn predicted poorer child social competence; whereas all of the IPV victimization mediated effects were nonsignificant. Findings thus suggest that mediational pathways from IPV perpetration to child competence via parenting are chiefly found for perpetration, but should be interpreted in light of strong associations between maternal and paternal IPV and parenting.

KEY FINDINGS

High prevalence of child exposure to psychological family violence. In the first generation when the fathers were ages 13–14 years, based on the CTS (Straus, 1979), prevalence of exposure to violence during the past year was 95% for interparent psychological IPV, 34% for interparent physical IPV, 90% for psychological PCA, and 45% for physical PCA. In the second generation when the children/offspring of the fathers were age 5 years, based on the CTS (Straus, 1979) and the Parent–Child CTS (Straus et al., 1998), prevalence of exposure to violence during the past year was 96% for interparent psychological IPV, 22% for interparent physical IPV, 97% for psychological PCA, and 88% for physical PCA. Thus, the majority of children's exposure to family violence occurred as psychological IPV and/or psychological PCA.

Prior studies have largely focused on physical IPV and PCA (with the exception of Grasso et al. [2016] who included both psychological and physical violence and Neppl, Lohman,

Senia, Kavanaugh, & Cui [2017] who examined the intergenerational continuity of psychological violence), despite evidence that psychological IPV frequently co-occurs with and predicts physical IPV (Carney & Barner, 2012; Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009), and physical PCA does not occur in isolation of psychological PCA (Gerhoff, 2002). Also, in the second generation for children ages 5–6 years with both physical IPV and PCA data, 21% were exposed to both physical IPV and PCA, 2% to physical IPV only, 68% to physical PCA only, and 9% to neither physical IPV nor PCA. Although children exposed to IPV are also exposed to other forms of violence (Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003), there are relatively few studies on children's exposure to co-occurring physical IPV and PCA. Additional research on children's exposure to psychological family violence and co-occurring IPV and PCA is warranted, given its prevalence and importance for translational research.

Child exposure to PCA impacts child adjustment relative to exposure to IPV.

Findings are consistent with the conclusions of Maneta, White, and Mezzacappa (2017) and other studies that PCA is a more potent risk factor for child adjustment difficulties relative to exposure to interparent IPV. The interactional effects of exposure to IPV and PCA indicated stronger risks of PCA on child adjustment (Capaldi et al., 2018). Exposure to higher levels of psychological PCA (but not psychological or physical IPV) predicted concurrent increases in adolescent externalizing behavior, and the effects of proximal psychological PCA (but not psychological IPV) on adolescent externalizing behavior persisted beyond early childhood exposure to family violence, early childhood externalizing behavior, and child gender (Tiberio et al., 2018). Although the mediational risk model indicated intergenerational transmission of exposure to psychological PCA, intergenerational effects of child exposure to psychological or physical IPV were not supported (Shortt et al., 2018). Findings thus indicate that child

adjustment may likely benefit more from programs focusing on parent treatment of the child relative to those on IPV.

Risk and protective factors mediate child exposure to family violence. Using a prospective longitudinal design, positive parenting behaviors were examined as mediators of the associations between early risk indicated by child exposure to parent (psychological and physical) IPV perpetration and later child adjustment (Low et al., 2018). When the IPV victimization and IPV perpetration mediating pathways were separately examined, there were a number of significant indirect effects for both IPV perpetration and victimization on child adjustment via parental involvement and discipline although not for warmth. Child exposure to higher levels of psychological and physical PCA heightened the risk for later child externalizing behavior indirectly via the mediating effects of poorer child effortful control (Shortt et al., 2018). Findings suggest that, in general, effective programs that can strengthen parent and child factors, such as parent involvement and child effortful control, may help reduce the impact of early child exposure to family violence on later child adjustment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY AND PRACTICE

This research has high potential for significant advances in understanding the impact of child exposure to IPV and PCA in early childhood and adolescence. The lower SES community sample; the wide scope of repeated assessment with parent, teacher, and child reporters; and the prospective nature of the research design provided a unique window on child exposure to family violence in two generations. Most notably, this window sheds light on the relatively high prevalence rate of child exposure to psychological and physical IPV and/or PCA, indicating that family violence may be more common in a community sample than would be indicated from the number of individuals involved with the criminal justice system and with domestic violence agencies.

A particular focus of the research was on family and child risk and protective factors within the context of exposure to family violence and empirically supported mediational models relevant to violence prevention programs. The identification of parent involvement and child effortful control as mediators of child exposure to IPV and PCA, respectively, suggest developmental targets that may decrease the impact of family violence on child externalizing behavior. Externalizing behavior is important in the genesis and maintenance of antisocial behavior and delinquency during childhood and adolescence that, in turn, is predictive of antisocial behavior and criminal justice system involvement during adulthood. Furthermore, our findings that exposure to PCA during childhood in the first generation was a risk factor for perpetrating PCA as an adult in the second generation suggest that many of the adults already involved in the criminal justice system are likely both victims of child exposure to family violence during childhood and perpetrators of IPV and/or PCA as adults.

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APPENDIX: SCHOLARLY PRODUCTS PRODUCED OR IN PROCESS

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