



Pergamon

Child Abuse & Neglect 27 (2003) 781–806

Child Abuse
& Neglect

The rates and correlates of the exposure of Palestinian adolescents to family violence: toward an integrative-holistic approach[☆]

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Received 17 August 2001; received in revised form 3 December 2002; accepted 3 December 2002

Abstract

Objectives: First, to examine the rates of Palestinian adolescents' exposure to (i.e., witnessing and experiencing) different patterns of psychological aggression and physical violence in their families of origin; and second, to examine the correlation between this exposure and sociodemographic characteristics, parents' psychological adjustment problems, and family exposure to political stressors.

Method: A cross-sectional survey was carried out among a sample of 1,185 Palestinian secondary school students.

Results: The study reveals very alarming rates of witnessing interparental and parent-to-sibling aggression and violence, and high rates of experiencing aggression and violence by parents and siblings during childhood and adolescence. In addition, these rates were found to be intercorrelated, and correlated significantly with several sociodemographic characteristics such as parents' levels of education, place of residence, family size, religious affiliation, family income, and housing conditions, as well as with parents' psychological adjustment problems and with family exposure to political stressors.

Conclusions: The results of the study reveal strong evidence that emphasizes the importance of studying violence in the family from an integrative, comprehensive, and ecological perspective that incorporates

[☆] This study was partially supported by a grant from Novah Mitchell Fund. This paper is based on a study jointly carried out by the two authors. A portion of this project served as the basis for Mrs. Rula Abdo-Kaloti's M.S.W. thesis.

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intrapersonal traits, family stress theory, family resources theory, social learning theory, and sociological and environmental factors, to explain the risk factors and predictors of violence in the family.

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Keywords: Exposure to family violence; Witnessing family violence; Experiencing family violence; Palestinian adolescents; Ecological and integrative theory of family violence

Introduction

There is a serious dearth of research on exposure of children and adolescents in Arab societies to violence in their families. One of the few studies dealing with the problem in an Arab society was conducted by [Yousef, Attia, and Kamel \(1998\)](#), who investigated family violence among Egyptian preparatory and secondary school children. Undoubtedly, this study provides extensive data on the rates and some correlates of corporal punishment in a certain Arab society, such as in Egypt. Nonetheless, the study did not investigate the experience of children and adolescents with psychological aggression and abuse. Moreover, while the study investigated the use of corporal punishment by parents, the researchers did not specify which parent gave the punishment. Nor did the study investigate the use of physical punishment and aggression by siblings or interparental aggression and violence. Furthermore, although [Yousef et al. \(1998\)](#) considered a comprehensive set of family background variables and variables related to children's characteristics and behavior as correlates and predictors of corporal punishment, parents' psychological problems and the political context of Egyptian society were not considered as possible correlates and predictors of their use of corporal punishment.

Haj-Yahia's surveys ([Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000](#); [Haj-Yahia & Dawud-Noursi, 1998](#)) are perhaps the most comprehensive studies on the annual prevalence of Arab adolescents' exposure to (i.e., witnessing and experiencing) psychological aggression and physical violence in their families of origin. Both surveys revealed that different patterns of aggression and violence in the Arab family correlate significantly with several variables, such as: both parents' low levels of education; father's unemployment; place of residence (rural and Bedouin areas more than in urban areas); family size (large families); and religion (Muslim and Druze families more than Christian families). Furthermore, both surveys found that violence in the Arab family is intercorrelated, learned, and correlates significantly with family stress, and lack of resources (detailed information about the rates of different patterns of violence in the Arab family is presented in both papers—[Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000](#); [Haj-Yahia & Dawud-Noursi, 1998](#)).

It should be noted, however, that any attempt to generalize the results of these surveys to other Arab societies, including Palestinian society in West Bank and Gaza Strip, should be taken with caution. First, both surveys investigated the annual prevalence of Arab adolescents' exposure to different patterns of family violence, while ignoring the lifetime prevalence of this problem (i.e., during the period of residence in the parental home). Second, both surveys provide extensive data on the sociodemographic characteristics of adolescents and their families as correlates to their exposure to family violence. However, previous studies conducted in Arab societies ignore the parents' psychological adjustment problems and the political context in which participants and their families live, as possible correlates to different patterns of family

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