



Rates and psychological effects of exposure to family violence among Sri Lankan university students[☆]

Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia^{a,*}, Piyanjli de Zoysa^b

^a Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel

^b Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 November 2004

Received in revised form 26 March 2008

Accepted 29 May 2008

Available online 7 November 2008

Keywords:

Family violence

Sri Lankan family

Exposure to family violence

Witnessing interparental violence

Experiencing parental violence

Effects of family violence

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The study had two objectives: to examine the rates of exposure to family violence among students in a non-Western society, with Sri Lanka as a case study and to examine the psychological effects of their exposure.

Method: Four hundred seventy six medical students in Sri Lanka were surveyed. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized, which included two forms of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) to measure the extent to which the students witnessed interparental violence and experienced parental violence in childhood and adolescence. Additional instruments included the Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-33), which measures dissociation, anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance, and the Family Functioning in Adolescence Questionnaire (FFAQ), which measures the students' perceptions of the functioning and environment in their families.

Results: Between 16% and 18% of the participants indicated that they had witnessed at least one act of interparental psychological aggression, and between 2% and 16% indicated that they had witnessed at least one act of interparental physical violence before the age of 18. Between 11% and 84% of the participants had experienced at least one act of parental psychological aggression, and between 2% and 22% had experienced at least one act of parental physical violence during childhood. Significant amounts of the variance in participants' dissociation, anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance were explained by their witnessing interparental violence and experiencing parental violence.

Conclusions: The present study provides strong evidence that the rates of family violence in a non-Western society (i.e., Sri Lankan families) are within the range of violence found in Western societies. In addition, the psychological effects of exposure to family violence in non-Western societies are similar to those in Western societies, although the relevance of familial, cultural, and political contexts as well as socio-demographic characteristics to those effects in non-Western societies should be taken into consideration.

Practice implications: Counseling centers at universities should focus on developing better routine screening to reach students who are victims of family violence. The importance of sensitivity to risks associated with asking students about these problems should be taken into consideration. Interventions should aim to increase the students' safety, to alleviate the mental health consequences of their exposure to family violence, and to help those victims to develop productive help-seeking behaviors and coping resources to ensure their safety. Collaboration between the university and community and within the university for the benefit of those victims may help in facilitating the identification of and intervention with students' victims of family violence.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

[☆] Entry of the study data was partially supported by the Research Group on Mental Health and Well-Being in Childhood and Adolescence, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare.

* Corresponding author.

Background

The rates and consequences of children's exposure to family violence have been investigated extensively in recent decades. Early research was carried out among children and families from Western and individualist societies, whereas similar studies in non-Western societies have only been conducted recently (e.g., De Zoysa, 2006; Haj-Yahia & Abdo-Kaloti, 2003; Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000). In view of the limited research in non-Western contexts, this paper presents a study on young adults' exposure to family violence in Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon) as an example of a non-Western society. The study aims to investigate the rates of personal experiences with parental violence and witnessing interparental violence during childhood and adolescence among young adults in a non-Western society, as well as their reports regarding long-term psychological effects of such exposure.

Sri Lanka is an island located off the southeastern tip of India. The population of Sri Lanka is about 19 million, with at least 10 separate ethnic groups of varying sizes. Of those, the two main groups can be distinguished: the Sinhalese (of Indo-Arya origin), who are predominantly Buddhist and comprise approximately 74% of the population; and the Tamils, who are predominantly Hindu, comprise approximately 18% of the population. Regarding religious composition, 68% of the population is Buddhist, 15% Hindu, 8% Christian, and 8% Muslim. Notwithstanding a strong emphasis on the institution of marriage and family cohesion in Sri Lankan society, rates of separation, divorce and single parenthood have increased somewhat over the years. Furthermore, the fragile Sri Lankan economy and prevalence of poverty as well as the dearth of family welfare policies, lack of social protection, weak criminal justice system, and protracted ethnic conflict have created a host of stressors for citizens of the country (Department of Census & Statistics, 2005). Civil war has ravaged the country for more than two decades, and there have been at least 50,000 casualties as a result of the war (Tribe & De Silva, 1999).

Literature review

Although research on the topic of family violence has dealt specifically with child abuse or with witnessing interparental violence (mainly witnessing abuse and violence against mothers), some studies have also investigated both experiences in children's lives (e.g., Edleson, 1999a; Haj-Yahia & Abdo-Kaloti, 2003; Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Suh & Abel, 1990). Notably, Suh and Abel (1990) found that 40% of the women who were victims of spousal assault reported that their partners had physically abused their children. Straus and Gelles (1990) revealed that 50% of the fathers who frequently beat their wives also frequently abused their children (for a detailed review on the rates of overlap in child abuse and wife abuse, see Edleson, 1999a).

Effects of child abuse and neglect

During the past three decades, researchers and mental health practitioners have expressed considerable interest in the short-term and long-term effects of direct child abuse and neglect. Previous studies have revealed that children who have been victims of abuse and neglect have more psychosocial adjustment problems, and function less adaptively in several areas than do their nonabused peers (Cicchetti, Rogosch, Lynch, & Holt, 1993; Haj-Yahia, Musleh, & Haj-Yahia, 2002; Stockhammer, Salzinger, Feldman, Mojica, & Primavera, 2001). Studies have also shown that abused children behave aggressively toward their peers and toward adults, have difficulty developing friendships with peers, and, in general, have difficulty empathizing with others (Kolko, 1996; Veltman & Browne, 2001; Wolfe & McGee, 1994). Among abused children, findings have also shown lower levels of social competence and social acceptance, as well as higher levels of self-abusive behavior, aggression, cruelty, thought and concentration problems, and substance abuse (Futa, Nash, Hansen, & Garbin, 2003; Stockhammer et al., 2001). Additionally, high levels of depression, anxiety, hopelessness, low self-esteem, fear, somatic complaints, learned helplessness, ineffectiveness, and worthlessness have been identified among abused children (Cicchetti et al., 1993; Futa et al., 2003; Higgins & McCabe, 2001; Horwitz, Widom, McLaughlin, & White, 2001; Veltman & Browne, 2001). Studies have also revealed low achievements among abused children in cognitive assessments, especially in language and intelligence measures (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2006; Veltman & Browne, 2001).

Effects of witnessing interparental violence

Research conducted over the past two decades, which has focused mainly on the children of battered women, indicates that witnessing interparental abuse and violence has significant effects on children. Many researchers have shown that witnessing interparental violence puts children at risk of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive problems, and that the consequences are short-term as well as long-term (e.g., Carlson, 2000; Onyskiw, 2003). In particular, research has revealed that children and adolescents who witness family violence are characterized by higher levels of aggression, substance abuse, disobedience, noncompliance, hostility, and oppositional behavior compared with their counterparts who are not exposed to domestic violence (e.g., Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997; Carlson, 2000; Copping, 1996; Edleson, 1999b; Mohr, Lutz, Fantuzzo, & Perry, 2000; Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998). Furthermore, witnessing domestic violence has several socioemotional effects on children, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, suicide attempts, withdrawal, trauma and stress reactions, feelings of loss, anger, sadness, worries, confusion, fear, deficits in social competence, and inhibited or overcontrolled behavior (Barnett

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات