

The Psychological Development of Children Affected by Domestic Violence: An Examination via the Lenses of Resilience and Cognitive Development

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Abstract: Domestic violence, or DV, is a significant socioeconomic problem. Children, being the primary recipients of domestic violence, can experience its effects via either direct or indirect means. Directly, domestic violence can cause emotional problems and attention biases in children themselves. DV can also affect the mental health development of children by affecting the psychological condition of the mother. The emotional, psychological, and cognitive development of children can be adversely affected by domestic abuse. And in the long term these effects may persist into old age, causing irreversible damage to individual development, such as emotional issues and attention bias. This study aims to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of domestic violence and traumatic childhood experiences, focusing on their profound influence on the psychological development of children in both the immediate and prolonged periods. Finally, some recommendations for responding to domestic violence of which children are victims. The present study suggests that teenagers can be influenced by DV starts with the children themselves and their families, and that negative effect of DV on children's development will only be reduced by addressing domestic violence at its source.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience, Cognitive development

1. Introduction

DV is a significant societal issue that impacts individuals of many ethnic backgrounds and across all socioeconomic strata, encompassing both adults and children. In the past year, domestic violence has occurred in the homes of almost 15.5 million children in the United States. It is estimated that 19.5 percent of children have experienced domestic violence at least once in their lifetime [1]. According to the most stringent estimations, between 25% to 33% of children are likely to encounter instances of domestic abuse [2]. Between one in four and one in three children will see domestic abuse throughout their formative years (i.e., witnessing or hearing violence between adult intimate partners in the home). ACEs are negative events experienced by children while growing up, including but not limited to domestic violence, sexual assault, neglect, emotional abuse, material deprivation.

Domestic abuse and child abuse have a strong correlation, with approximately 50% of domestic violence incidents involve cases of child abuse. Children and teenagers will be indirectly impacted by DV if they witness or hear it occurring [3]. Previous studies have illustrated that negative outcomes associated with ACEs include mental health problems, smoking and many other externalizing issues, which leads to impaired health and increased mortality in later life [4].

The purpose of this paper is to summarize previous researches on DV. This project also investigates the immediate and long-term consequences of children being subjected to domestic abuse, while raising awareness about the issues associated with domestic abuse.

2. Concept Introduction

2.1. Domestic violence and adverse childhood experiences

Domestic violence (DV), which contains violent or controlling behaviour that intentional put into effort by parents or relatives, is an essential issue in the society. First, domestic violence jeopardizes physical and mental health. Domestic violence causes serious physical and mental injuries to the victim, which may lead to long-term physical and mental health problems. Second, it affects children's growth. Domestic violence may have a negative impact on their personality formation, gender role identity and social adaptability. Also, domestic violence can lead to injuries to a child physical health. For instance, behaviors such as abuse, neglect, which can result in children suffering physical pain and trauma. Additionally, it has a negative impact on children cognitive development. This could lead to poor performance at school and difficulties in understanding and acquiring knowledge. Emotional management and social interactions difficulties can be caused by domestic abuse, too. These effects may continue into their formative years and can lead to psychological problems and health issues. Children are the primary demographic affected by this phenomenon. Domestic violence (DV) is widely recognized as a significant contributing factor to child killings in the United States, accounting for around 10% to 20% of cases involving victims under the age of 14 [5].

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are often defined as a period of time when experiencing the co-occurrence of stressful problems in childhood (before the age of 18) [3]. ACEs can have long-term repercussions on one's physical and psychological well-being, as well as long-term consequences on substance misuse, interpersonal aggression, physical health, and even self-inflicted damage [4].

2.2. Characteristics of DV

DV that child suffered include physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence and economic control. Each of these types of violence can have a negative impact on children externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Physical violence refers to the infliction of physical harm on a child, such as beating, binding and maiming. Emotional violence includes verbal abuse, intimidation, degradation. Emotional abuse includes those make children feel fearful and helpless. Sexual violence refers to the sexual abuse and maltreatment of children. Economic control refers to punishing or controlling children by controlling the family economy [6].

2.3. Influencing factors

Resilience, proposed by Anthony in the 1970s that the concept of elasticity in physics be borrowed to explain the phenomenon that after people are subjected to external pressure, some of them can return to their original state while others cannot return to their normal state in the short term.

Resilience, recognized as a characteristic enabling individuals to effectively manage stress and flourish in the presence of difficulties, is being explored in relation to the issues faced by child

protection staffing. Resilience is hard to define. According to Van Breda, it is the multilayered procedures that systems use to overcome obstacles and provide outcomes that are better than anticipated [7]. To avoid the oversimplification, by concentrating on certain protective variables and processes that are part of the larger social-ecological system. Ultimately, the resilience of an individual depends only on the possession of specific intrinsic characteristics or capacities [8].

Cognitive development, which includes natural self-organizing systems and information processing systems, is responsible for perception, learning, reasoning, communication, and behaviors. Early socioemotional and cognitive growth is crucial for predicting mental health problems in the future [8]. Cognitive functions generally consist of four categories: storage and extraction, information processing, input and output, and knowledge utilization, which is the process of mentally manipulating knowledge. Cognitive development can be correlated with risk of internalizing behaviors such as depression.

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3. Impact of DV on resilience

People who do not produce negative outcomes or who are able to successfully adapt when faced with challenges and difficulties stressful situations and recover are considered resilient [9]. It involves positive adaptation to significant adversity in the environment. Several research investigations have indicated that a minority of youngsters who are exposed to circumstances that may be potentially traumatic demonstrate effective coping mechanisms in response to such adversity [10]. Children's personal characteristics and individual differences may contribute to different manifestations of psychological resilience in the face of DV. Demographic variables are linked to preschoolers' potential resilience in combined with their personal characteristics.

Hildebrand, Celeri and Morcillo wanted to understand how psychological resilience and mental health issues are affected for children exposed to DV [11]. Participants were divided into two groups. Group 1 comprised a total of 100 individuals, including children and adolescents ranging in age from nine to sixteen years old. These individuals were identified as victims of domestic abuse. 66 public school students were located in the same area as G1 group and reported no DV, forming Group 2. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to identify the participants' alternatives of developing mental health problems. The individuals' resilience was assessed using Prince-Embury12's Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA) [11]. The Social Support Appraisals (SSA) was also used to test the support network.

The result illustrated that for the G1, For SDQ/CA, the rate of mental health issues proved 65%, which were much higher than the prevalence for G2 (33% for SDQ/CA). Girls tended to have low resilience than boys.

Gender can be considered as one of the protective factors. Qualities of an individual or environment that forecast better results, particularly in high-risk situations, are known as protective factors. The findings of the study indicate that male individuals who were raised in homes characterized by violence are more prone to engaging in abusive behaviors within their early relationship with others. For female victims, internalized behavior problems seem to appear more. That may be the main reason of the gender difference.

Nevertheless, domestic violence can effect children's resilience indirectly. For children themselves, domestic violence may not necessarily a negative factor affecting psychological resilience. However, domestic violence may affect the home environment and parenting styles, which can ultimately influence children resilience.

The research of Satomi, Isumi and Fujiwara in 2022 proved that maternal adverse childhood could influence children resilience negatively [12]. The researchers conducted an investigation into the living conditions and health status of students in the first and fifth grades from a total of 196 elementary schools, eighth-grade students from all 115 junior high schools, and eleventh-grade pupils from forty-eight high schools in Japan. This investigation utilized data obtained from the K-CHILD study. The researchers conducted interviews with both mothers and children in order to investigate the association between maternal ACEs and the psychological well-being of their future generations, which mainly about resilience and self-esteem. The following indicators were used to evaluate maternal ACEs: parent death, divorce, financial hardships, aggressive actions by an intimate partner against the mother, and both psychological and physical assault by parents. To assess child resilience, Children's Resilient Coping Scale (CRCS) was applied. The results of the study revealed a significant association between a mother's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and the levels of resilience as well as self-worth observed in her youngsters. Because mothers childhood abuse by parents influenced their mental health, which could impact mothers' SES (socioeconomic status) and parenting styles.

4. Domestic violence has a long-term impact on a children's cognitive development

4.1. The impact of DV on children emotional issues

The research population in the article by Qiong Wang consisted of adults aged 45 years and older, namely of middle age and older persons, in order to assess the long-term effects. The analysis utilized datasets obtained from the 2014 Life Course Survey and longitudinal information collected from the 2018 China Health and Aging Tracking Survey [13]. The experimental material was the Depression Scale (CESD-10). For the childhood domestic violence, authors used their self-administered questionnaires to test the frequency of participants childhood DV. Self-assessment of childhood status, instrumental activities of daily living and other relevant factors were considered as mediating variables.

The result showed that based on controlling for a range of individual differences such as gender, age, household registration, and marital status, child DV directly had a substantial impact on the levels of depression experienced by older persons. The adverse impact of dysfunctional family dynamics on children's well-being can have lasting consequences that extend into their middle and later stages of life. ACEs have a basic effect on the psychological, physiological, and socially adaptive welfare of individuals in old age. Life course theory suggests that health inequalities in middle and old age stem primarily from the critical period of child development.

4.2. The effect of DV on attention bias

Attention comprises a variety of cognitive functions that enable the brain to allocate and analyze particular stimuli. The objective of the research conducted by Mastorakos and Scott was to examine the cognitive response of individuals in the preschool age range who had been exposed to domestic abuse [1]. Specifically, the study aimed to determine whether these children would demonstrate heightened attention towards facial expressions depicting anger and sadness, as opposed to happiness, as well as non-facial stimuli, and whether this alertness was related to children's social-emotional development contrasted to children who had not experienced DV [1]. Fifty-five children, ranged from 18 to 70 months, and their mothers participated in the study. The participants were divided into two groups. One was DV exposed group (23 children), the other one was participants who did not experienced DV. The participants in this study were children who were instructed to engage in an eye-tracking activity in order to evaluate their level of attention towards facial stimuli. Concurrently, the mothers of these children were tasked with assessing their children's social-emotional

development by completing two distinct questionnaires, namely the demographics questionnaire and the ASQ-SE-2 questionnaire. The total duration of fixations was also analyzed.

The findings indicate that early children that suffered from exposure to domestic aggression in the past have similar levels of attention towards non-face stimuli as young children who have not been subjected to DV. However, their gaze duration was significantly shorter for sad faces and neutral faces. Hence, DV may have influence on children attention bias and their emotional problems, which eventually impact child long-term development.

5. Discussion

Overall, the phenomenon of domestic abuse exerts both immediate and enduring consequences on children. The results of Hildebrand in 2019 illustrated that children resilience can be affected negatively by exposing to DV and boys have higher risk than girls [9]. The research of Satomi, Isumi and Fujiwara also proved that maternal adverse childhood could influence children resilience negatively [12]. The study conducted by Qiong Wang, He-Ting Wu, and Chen Liu has provided empirical evidence supporting the notion that DV might have enduring implications for children's emotional development and self-esteem [13]. Besides, Mastorakos and Scott have showed that DV can do harm to children attention bias, which has negative impact on their later life [1].

6. Conclusion

The research has proved that children's psychological resilience can be affected by both aspects of DV. Children can be direct victims of domestic abuse. Also, children as indirect victims (mothers as direct victims of domestic violence) suffer loss of psychological resilience. This phenomenon can perhaps be attributed to the impact of domestic violence experienced by the mother, which may have repercussions on her financial circumstances and parenting approach in the upbringing of her children. The attachment patterns of children may undergo modifications due to the maternal involvement in DV. The aforementioned data indicates that in order to effectively tackle the issue of children's exposure to DV, it is imperative to take certain measures. Educators need to focus not only on the children themselves, but also on the family situation. Educators and child protection agency need to focus on the situation of their parents in terms of DV.

Long-term studies have illustrated that DV can have an effect on children cognitive development, such as emotional problems and attention biases, which may even persist into adulthood and even into later life. This may be due to the fact that when children are exposed to DV problems, they become low self-esteem and depressed, leading to deficiencies in their emotional development. Also, since children may over-recognize the emotional faces associated with violence when exposed to DV, this leads to victims being more sensitive in recognizing the faces of anger and depressive emotions. These long-term problems in emotional and cognitive development may ultimately lead to problems in children's healthy levels of physical and mental development.

Consequently, parents and educators need to pay attention to the problem of DV, which may have long-term effects on children, which is very unfavorable to their personal development. Both the relevant protection agencies, schools and parents should pay timely attention to the problem of DV. In this way, the irreparable harm caused to children by DV can be curbed in a timely manner.

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