The Relationship between Physical Abuse during Childhood and Intimate Partner Violence

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Research Question
- Does being physically abused as a child affect physical violent behavior towards an intimate partner as a young adult?
- Does the association vary by gender?

Significance
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious problem that 1 out of 6 U.S. couples experience annually (Widom et al., 2014).
- Child abuse is a public health problem (Widom et al., 2014).

Previous Research
- For both males and females, physical childhood abuse is associated with an increase in IPV perpetration (Richards et al., 2017).
- Adverse consequences of childhood abuse such as posttraumatic stress disorder and development of ineffective coping strategies may explain why childhood abuse is linked to IPV perpetration (Widom et al., 2014).
- Being physically abused as a child has a positive effect on young adult IPV perpetration for females but not for males (Fang and Corso, 2008).

Hypotheses
- Physical abuse during childhood will be associated with higher odds of perpetrating physical violence towards intimate partner.
- Females with physical abuse during childhood will be associated with higher odds of perpetrating physical violence towards intimate partner than males.

Data
- The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health
- Wave 3 Public-Use Data (N = 4,882)
- Ages from 18-26
- The analytical sample: respondents who reported having been in an intimate relationship (N = 4,882)

Dependent Variable
Perpetration of IPV
- Three questions about each partner in the past: How often (a) have you slapped, hit, or kicked your partner? (b) have you threatened your partner with violence, pushed/shoved, or thrown something at partner that could hurt? (c) has your partner had an injury because of fight with you?
  - 0 = Never 71.8%
  - 1 = Once 14.9%
  - 2 = Twice or more 13.4%

Independent Variable
Physical Abuse in Childhood
- By 6th grade, how often has your parent or adult caregivers slapped, hit, or kicked you?
  - 0 = No abuse 73.2%
  - 1 = At least one abuse 26.8%

Control Measure
Gender
- Female 53.9%
- Male 46.1%

Results

Figure 1. % Distribution for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by Childhood Physical Abuse for Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Abuse</th>
<th>At least one abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only once</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice or more</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square test is significant at p < .001.

Figure 2. % Distribution for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by Childhood Physical Abuse for Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Abuse</th>
<th>At least one abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only once</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice or more</td>
<td>17,818.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square test is significant at p < .001.

Summary of Results
- Regardless of gender, young adults are more likely to behave violently towards partners if they had endured physical abuse from a parent or an adult caregiver during childhood.

Implications
- Parents need to reduce physically abusing their children because it could increase the risk of them being violent towards their partners.
- Professional counselors who take on patients that have been physically violent towards partners should ask if they’ve experienced physical abuse during childhood.

References