

The Relationship between Exposure to Domestic Violence and Adult Violent Crime

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Abstract. Domestic violence is taking a severe toll on the physical, mental, and personal health of millions worldwide. There is a lack of a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms underlying this link based on theoretical psychological ideas, even if some experts have found a strong link between being exposed to domestic abuse as a child and engaging in violent crime as an adult. In order to explain how violence is passed down through generations and the long-term impacts of domestic violence on people, this study will make use of the social learning theory, cognitive theory, and gender role theory. The findings of this study are supported by a thorough evaluation of earlier literature. According to the study's findings, children who have observed domestic violence are more likely to be socially and cognitively immature, and they are also more prone to think that using physical force to settle disputes is acceptable. They have a higher propensity to act aggressively and commit violent crimes as a result. This study concludes that domestic violence has severe, long-lasting negative impacts on people's physical, cognitive, and social development. The research concludes by urging society to provide children who have witnessed domestic violence with prompt medical and psychological care to aid in their recovery and lessen their likelihood of committing violent crimes. Such mental health services should start with a case-by-case analysis because children have different experiences and levels of physical and mental injuries and can only be tailored to the treatment of different children.

Keywords: Domestic violence, adult violent crime; Social Learning Theory; Gender Role Theory; Cognitive Theory.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence, a devastating and pervasive social issue that affects millions of people worldwide, poses a particular risk to females and children. The effects of domestic abuse on a person's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth have been thoroughly studied and documented. This includes both direct and indirect victims. To explain how violent behavior is passed down through generations and how domestic violence impacts people through time, a number of theories have been proposed, including the social learning theory, cognitive theory, and gender role theory. Despite the difficulties faced by those who have experienced domestic violence, it is essential to acknowledge the capacity for resiliency and change and to put in place focused interventions and support systems that encourage healthier, non-violent behaviors and relationships. In addition, it is essential to comprehend the intricate interplay of individual, family, and societal influences to address this complicated issue and end the cycle of violence.

2. Evidence About Domestic Violence's Negative Impact

The statistics presented by the WHO and UNICEF demonstrate that violence, particularly domestic violence, is a significant issue affecting millions worldwide. Women and children are more at risk, and a significant fraction of them experience assault both physically and sexually. The impact of violence on these individuals can be devastating, with many suffering from physical and mental health issues that can persist long into adulthood.

Domestic violence is a primary concern as it affects many women globally. According to the WHO, 30% of females have been physically or sexually abused by their husbands [1]. Furthermore, domestic

violence is one of the significant causes of disability or death for women between the ages of 15 and 44, and it can have serious repercussions [1]. It is also worth noting that men can also be victims of domestic violence, although this is less commonly reported.

Children are another vulnerable group often subjected to violence, with many experiencing physical punishment by their caregivers. Approximately 60 percent of children in worldwide between the ages of 2 and 14 regularly get physical punishment from their caregivers, according to the UNICEF Global Database [2]. This can have severe consequences for the child's physical and mental health, leading to long-term damage that can persist into adulthood.

Another concerning trend highlighted by the data is the high number of individuals who believe corporal punishment is necessary to educate children properly. The UNICEF Global Database reports that three in ten adults worldwide believe corporal discipline is required to educate children properly [2]. This idea can contribute to a vicious cycle of violence because it assumes that children who get physical punishment will always resort to it as a form of dispute resolution.

According to estimates, forced consensual sex has taken place with 120 million women under the age of 20 in their lives, according to data from the NCVDA [3]. Although there is little information on this subject, boys are also in danger. The impact of this violence on individuals can be severe, with many experiencing physical and mental health issues that can persist long into adulthood [3].

2.1. Long-term adverse effects of domestic violence

Widom's longitudinal study from 1989 has provided valuable insights into the long-term effects of childhood abuse and neglect on adult behavior, specifically the likelihood of criminal behavior [4]. Following a group of kids who had been neglected or mistreated, the study compared their outcomes to those of a control group of kids who hadn't been abused or neglected. According to the study, abuse or neglect survivors in the treatment group had an 11-fold increased risk of being arrested for violent crimes compared to those in the control group. This study emphasizes the significance of preventing child abuse and neglect and early intervention.

However, there are also some limitations in Widom's study. The prejudice in categorizing and reporting child abuse instances is one of the important constraints. Given that official accusations of child abuse are disproportionately made against low-income and minority communities, it is possible that the study's findings do not accurately reflect abuse in households with higher income levels. This overrepresentation may be due to social and cultural factors that make it more likely for low-income and minority groups to be involved with child welfare services. Conversely, families with higher socioeconomic levels may be less likely to report child abuse or neglect due to social and cultural reasons. Furthermore, abuse is more likely to be flagged as accidental in families with higher socioeconomic levels, which means that such cases may be underrepresented in official reports of child abuse. Therefore, Widom's findings may not be generalizable to all individuals who experience childhood abuse or neglect. Despite this limitation, Widom's research has offered important light on the long-term consequences of child maltreatment and neglect. A person's behavior and mental health can be profoundly and long-lastingly affected by childhood abuse and neglect, resulting in criminal conduct and other negative results.

3. Theoretical Analysis

Kids who experience family abuse may experience severe and long-lasting impacts on their physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Theoretical analyses, such as social learning theory, cognitive theory, and gender role theory, can provide insights into how domestic violence affects children.

3.1. Analysis according to the Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory (SLT), developed by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1960s, holds that individuals pick up new skills and behaviors by observing how others behave and the outcomes

of their actions. This theory focuses on the reciprocal relationship between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. It has been widely used to explain various social behaviors, involving the passing of domestic abuse down generations.

Domestic violence is a complicated problem that impacts people, families, and society. Children raised in homes where domestic violence is common tend to continue these practices in romantic partnerships [5]. According to SLT, children who witness domestic violence learn that aggressive behavior can resolve conflict and assert control. They may internalize these beliefs; consequently, this learned behavior can be transferred to future relationships, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The learning process through observation, as outlined in SLT, consists of several stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. First, the child must pay attention to the aggressive behavior of the domestic abuser. This is often unavoidable, as the child is exposed to violence within their home environment. The degree to which the youngster pays attention to these actions might also be influenced by the level and frequency of the violence [5]. Next, the child must retain the information about the violent behavior, which involves encoding it into memory. The child may remember the actions, the verbal expressions, and the emotional responses associated with the violence. The more vivid and emotionally charged the memory, the more likely the child retains it. During the reproduction stage, the child attempts to replicate the observed behavior. They may practice or rehearse violent actions, either physically or mentally. If the child successfully reproduces the behavior, they could think they are equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to resolve disputes through violence [6]. Finally, at the stage of motivation, the kid is more likely to engage in violent behavior if they perceive positive consequences, such as gaining power, control, or a reward. For example, if the child observes that the abuser stops the violence after the victim acquiesces to their demands, they may learn that using aggression can yield desirable outcomes. This serves to support the idea that using violence to settle disputes and further personal objectives is a viable strategy.

The effects of SLT on children exposed to domestic violence can be moderated by a number of factors. Individual variations like age, gender, and cognitive capacities are among them, as are environmental aspects like the presence of supportive individuals and networks. Additionally, preventive factors may mitigate the harmful effects of domestic violence on kids who are exposed to it. Such as good bonds with non-abusive caregivers and positive peer interaction. To further comprehend the role of SLT in domestic violence, it is essential to explore how interventions and prevention programs can utilize this understanding to break the cycle of violence. One promising approach is encouraging children and adolescents to engage with positive role models and foster healthy relationships. By exposing children to non-violent conflict resolution strategies and nurturing relationships, they can learn alternative behaviors that challenge their known aggression. Implementing school-based programs that emphasize emotional and social development is another potential strategy. These programs promote empathy, emotional regulation, and healthy communication skills, thus providing children with the tools to navigate interpersonal relationships without violence. Parenting programs can also be beneficial in addressing the intergenerational transmission of violence. By providing parents with support and guidance in developing positive parenting strategies, these programs can help them to create a more nurturing and violence-free environment for their children. Additionally, community-based initiatives that raise awareness about domestic violence and challenge social norms that perpetuate violence against intimate partners can be instrumental in changing the cultural context in which violence is learned.

In summary, while SLT offers significant insights into how children exposed to domestic violence may develop aggressive behaviors, it is crucial to recognize the potential for resilience and change. Implementing targeted interventions that promote positive relationships, social and emotional learning, and healthy parenting strategies can disrupt the cycle of violence and foster the development of more beneficial, non-violent behaviors in future generations.

3.2. Analysis according to the Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory focuses on the internal learning processes, including acquiring and integrating new information, problem-solving, and the interrelationships between concepts and ideas. According to this theoretical framework, research suggests that kids who witness domestic violence may develop erroneous beliefs, such as the notion that using violence to settle disputes is acceptable and effective.

Children who experience domestic violence as they grow up may learn that using physical force to resolve conflicts and deal with stress is acceptable. This belief can become ingrained and influence their behavior throughout their lives, including their interactions with peers and family members, potentially leading to further violence in their adult relationships. This distorted perception can also lead to normalizing violent behavior and believing it is an acceptable way to solve problems. In a study published in 2012, Simmons et al. investigated how exposure to domestic violence affects kids and teenagers. The results showed that exposure to domestic violence had a considerable negative influence on children and adolescents' physical and mental health. Children who experience domestic violence are more likely to experience delayed social and cognitive development, academic failure, and behavioral behaviors including aggression and crime. The study also discovered that children who had directly watched or experienced domestic violence between their parents were more susceptible to its adverse effects. This shows that the only direct physical injury children may experience from domestic violence and the potential psychological trauma brought on by seeing violent behavior are the latter two.

In general, cognitive theory offers a valuable foundation for comprehending how domestic abuse in childhood affects the formation of skewed views and harmful behaviors. Children and adolescents' physical and emotional health, as well as their social and cognitive development, are all significantly impacted by exposure to domestic violence. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the long-term impacts of domestic violence in infancy and work to prevent and address it by providing support for those affected and their families as well as using the right solutions.

3.3. Analysis according to the Gender Role Theory

According to gender role theory, social and cultural expectations of how individuals should behave based on their sex contribute to developing gender stereotypes [7]. This study aims to analyze how childhood domestic violence can lead to the formation of such gender role stereotypes, particularly the belief that males should be aggressive, dominant, and controlling. These stereotypes may subsequently increase the likelihood of violent behavior in men who have experienced domestic violence during childhood.

Children who suffered domestic abuse were more likely to adopt traditional gender roles, found by Levendosky and Graham-Bermann's study [8]. The study involved 63 mothers and their children, ages 6 to 12, recruited from domestic violence shelters. The researchers found that the children who had witnessed domestic violence exhibited more gender role stereotyping than those who had not. Specifically, they were more likely to endorse traditional gender norms, such as men being aggressive and dominant and women being submissive and nurturing. Eagly and Wood's study also found evidence of gender role stereotyping in a different context [7]. Their meta-analysis of over 200 studies on gender stereotypes found that people tend to perceive men and women as having other traits and abilities and that these perceptions are consistent across cultures. Men were specifically perceived as being more agentic (assertive and competitive), whilst women were perceived as being more communal (empathetic and nurturing). These stereotypes are often reinforced through media and socialization. These studies suggest that gender role stereotypes are pervasive and can be internalized from exposure to domestic violence, media, and socialization. It is critical to acknowledge and challenge these stereotypes in order to advance gender equality and reduce violence against women. Exposure to violence in the family environment may reinforce these beliefs by modeling aggressive and dominant behavior as acceptable and normative [5]. Researchers discovered that adult PTSD, depression, and anxiety symptoms were likelier to appear in children who had witnessed domestic abuse as youngsters. The study also showed that the severity and frequency of the violence witnessed

were essential factors that influenced the level of psychological distress experienced by the children. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to offer children who experience domestic violence the right support and treatments in order to avoid long-lasting psychological effects. These psychological effects may contribute to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as aggressive and dominant behaviors to control others. Consequently, men who have experienced domestic violence in their childhood may be more inclined to adopt these gender role stereotypes and engage in violent behavior. Strong empirical data suggests that exposing children to domestic violence increases their likelihood of engaging in aggressive behavior as adults. Men exposed to domestic violence during their formative years are likelier to perpetrate violence in their intimate relationships, perpetuating a cycle of violence [9]. This supports the notion that early exposure to domestic violence may contribute to developing aggressive and controlling gender role stereotypes.

Gender role theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how childhood domestic violence can lead to the formation of gender role stereotypes, including the belief that males should be aggressive, dominant, and controlling [10]. Due to internalizing these preconceptions, men who observed domestic violence as youngsters may be more inclined to act violently.

4. Discussion

One drawback of theoretical assessments of domestic violence's impacts on children is that they might not adequately represent its complex and dynamic nature and its repercussions on children. Examples of such theories are social learning theory, cognitive theory, and gender role theory. There are several facets to the problem of domestic violence, including individual, familial, and societal influences. Depending on the degree and frequency of the violence, the age and developmental stage of the kid, the presence of other stressors, and the accessibility of supportive resources, there may be a range of effects of domestic abuse on children. Furthermore, Despite the fact that theoretical analyses offer a useful foundation for comprehending the potential mechanisms underpinning the transmission of violence from one generation to the next, they may not fully capture the complexity and variability of human behavior. Therefore, grasp and tackling the problem of domestic violence and its effects on children require a grasp of the limitations of theoretical analyses as well as the significance of interdisciplinary and contextual approaches. Future studies should try to understand how domestic violence affects children more thoroughly and nuancedly. To capture the complexity and variety of the experiences of children exposed to domestic abuse, this could involve using mixed-method study designs that incorporate qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, research should consider protective factors, such as social support networks and access to mental health services, in reducing the negative consequences that domestic violence has on kids. Finally, it is vital for future research to prioritize the perspectives and experiences of children themselves, as they are often overlooked in the literature on domestic violence. By taking a more comprehensive and contextual approach, future research can better inform interventions and policies to prevent and address domestic violence's impact on children.

5. Conclusion

Domestic violence can significantly affect children, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Theoretical analyses such as Social Learning Theory, Cognitive Theory, and Gender Role Theory can provide insights into how domestic violence affects children. The Social Learning Theory asserts that children who see domestic violence learn that using force to resolve conflicts and establish authority is acceptable. Cognitive Theory focuses on the internal learning processes, including acquiring and integrating new information, problem-solving, and the interrelationships between concepts and ideas. In addition, children who experience domestic violence can develop distorted perceptions, including the belief that violence is a legitimate and effective way to solve problems. Gender Role Theory suggests that traditional gender roles and

expectations can perpetuate domestic violence. Therefore, it is crucial to address gender inequality and promote healthy relationships to prevent domestic violence.

While theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights, it is vital to recognize the potential for resilience and change. Targeted interventions such as positive relationships, social and emotional learning, and healthy parenting strategies can disrupt the cycle of violence and foster the development of more beneficial, non-violent behaviors in future generations. Additionally, community-based initiatives that raise awareness about domestic violence and challenge social norms that perpetuate violence against intimate partners can be instrumental in changing the cultural context in which violence is learned. Ultimately, ending domestic violence involves a multifaceted strategy that addresses its underlying causes and assists both victims and offenders. By promoting healthy relationships and addressing gender inequality, we can work towards a future free from domestic violence.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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