

The Influence and Mechanism of Witness of Parental Violence on Individual Violent Behavior

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Abstract. Domestic violence is a problem all over the world. The harm of domestic violence is very great. It not only destroys family harmony and marital relationship, but also has great harm to the future development of children. Children who witness parental violence also tend to behave more violently. This paper mainly collates the research on children's behavior after witnessing domestic violence for half a century, and finds that there is less research on an individual violence after witnessing domestic violence. Therefore, this paper summarizes the characteristics and impact of children's externalized behavior problems and focuses on their causes, and finds that the causes of these problems can be summarized as reduction of attachment, emotional regulation, attitude towards violence and social learning theory. The research results can improve researchers' understanding of the impact of witnessing parental violence on individual violent behavior and its mechanism, and provide theoretical support for intervention programs to reduce individual violent behavior.

Keywords: Domestic violence, violent behavior, cognitive, social learning theory.

1. Introduction

As the incidence of domestic violence increases, the attention to those who witness domestic violence is also increasing. The definition of witnessing violence has also been constantly improved. Initially, witnessing violence refers to the occurrence of a series of violent acts directly by individuals (such as murder and beatings).[2] Depending on which places that violence takes place, thus it was then refined as witnessing domestic violence, which refers to the verbal contradictions and physical conflicts between individuals (usually children) hearing or seeing family members. In another case, the direct consequences of children witnessing domestic violence are also defined as witnessing domestic violence (such as damaged furniture, and wounds of the perpetrator). In parental violence, the father and mother are in a completely opposite states, so the child may be threatened to become a "helper" of one of them and exert pressure on it.[2] For individuals who witness domestic violence, the harm is no less than that of individuals who have suffered domestic violence. Sometimes individuals who witness violence in the early stage develop externalized behavioral characteristics more frequently than those who have experienced it. Therefore, compared with experiencing domestic violence, the impact of witnessing domestic violence is longer and more hidden. This kind of secret harm to children's physical and mental health will inevitably be affected. There are two kinds of behavior problems directly or indirectly generated by individuals. One is externalized behavior, which can be classified as aggressive, extremely indifferent to things around them, irritable and hyperactive. It is likely to develop into anti-social personality or crime in the future. The other is internalized behavior, as well as depression, anxiety, excessive vigilance and post-traumatic stress disorder, which increases the possibility of suicide and even produces some retaliatory attacks. Witnessing domestic violence not only makes children have a wrong perception of violence, but also reduces the attachment between children and their parents and makes children unable to adjust to the internalization problem, which eventually leads to the occurrence of externalized behavior.

2. Witnessing the impact of parental violence on individual behavior problems

2.1. Incidence of parental violence witnessed by children

In the United States, it is estimated that between 3.3 and 10 million children are exposed to intimate partner violence annually, and at least 3.3 million children between the ages of three and seven witness intimate partner violence and parental conflict each year.[1] These data may be underestimated, and the true figures may be higher than available due to differences in definitions of domestic violence and methods of data collection. Children exposed to domestic violence can be categorized in two ways, based on whether they have been physically abused or have witnessed parental violence, but are not targets of violence. Many studies have shown that both experiencing and witnessing violence can cause PTSD and trauma in children. Witness that domestic violence may have different types in different situations, but whatever type it is causes irreversible and long-term harm to the individual. Jaffe et al. (1990) found that children's sensitivity to violence was usually underestimated.[2] Many parents claim that they have little or can avoid showing violence in front of their children, but children can describe the details of violence in detail. Data from a study of the effects of intimate partner violence exposure on children similarly supports the above, with approximately 40 to 60 percent of school-aged children exposed to intimate partner violence having internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems.[3]

2.2. The effect of witnessed parental violence on children's externalizing behavior problems

Many studies have found that witnessing parental violence increases children's violent behavior. Litrownik, Newton, Hunter, English and Everson's longitudinal experiments have shown a link between children's exposure to or witnessing intimate partner violence and externalizing behaviour problems (including aggressive behavior, hyperactivity, and irritability) at school age.[4] Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that the earlier intimate partner violence is witnessed, the earlier the child will become violent. Another researcher Hughes found that abused witnesses show more externalization problems than children in the comparison group (non-abused witnesses).[5] Specifically, the longer children witness the duration and frequency of violence, the greater the probability of their externalization behavior in the future, and the greater the degree of externalization and being more aggressive towards others. Severe physical violence was positively associated with witnessing domestic violence in childhood. In addition, Stith's research explored the relationship between gender witnessing domestic violence and violent behavior. The study found that men are more likely to externalize and act as abusers in future families. However, compared to women, they can become anxious and depressed, and have more serious internalization problems.[6]

It is relatively long-term to witness the impact of violence on child violence. Some children may not have violent behavior immediately after witnessing their parents' violence, but with the gradual formation of cognition as they get older (some individuals will be aggressive to others after adulthood), they will have violent behavior and often fall into the world they build. In this world, violence is allowed and not restricted to attacking others and even committing crimes. Similarly, Megan R. Holmes studied the aggressive behavior of children who witnessed violence in the early stage. The study found that the higher the frequency of exposure on violence in children from birth to the age of three, the more aggressive behaviors they show by the age of eight.[7] This is also defined by later scholars as the delay of the impact of violent behavior. Due to individual differences, this delay may extend to adulthood, which also greatly increases the possibility of crime or deviant behavior. In the long term, witnessing violence can not only directly develop aggressive behavior, but also develop anti-social personality and other psychiatric disorders that can lead to indirect violent behavior. In 1840, Yan used junior high school students as a sample and found that witnessing parental violence would have a significant impact on junior high school students' behavior problems. Therefore, there is a very close relationship between witnessing domestic violence and children's behavioral problems in the future and can be a criterion for predicting future behavior.[8]

3. Factors associated with violent behavior

Through academic data analysis, we can witness that domestic violence has a direct impact on children's problem behavior. This impact can be summarized into three types: from the perspective of children's attachment and security, emotional expression and adjustment ability, and attitude and cognitive problems. These three factors will be discussed in detail below.

3.1. Children's attachment and security

Witnessing parental violence may lead to violent behavior by affecting a child's attachment or sense of security. The definition of attachment refers to the long-term and continuous emotional connection between individuals and another specific individual, and they generally establish a strong emotional connection. This parental violence traumatizes victims and lose their security and belonging, believing that the world is no longer safe, and adults are not playing the role of protectors anymore. Van considered that from a biological point of view, safety and attachment play a crucial role in the development of the initial core neuron function of the brain, so long-term insecurity and traumatic experience can affect the development of the brain nerves, causing emotional disorders and even affecting children's IQ level, memory and attention.[9] Children's long-term exposure to an unsafe environment will make them unable to have basic trust in their parents and become highly vigilant and then develop aggressive and low-esteem emotional reactions. Therefore, it also weakens the attachment, which Lyons-Ruth's view suggests can influence the child's behavior before forming coercive behavior and predict their violent behavior.[10] Similarly, usually the lower quality of parental marriage will affect the attachment relationship by affecting the whole family atmosphere. Once the early attachment is broken, the child will have anxiety and depression. In Wang Yuting's research, it is shown that low-quality marriage can reduce children's attachment, which leads to excessive anxiety and behavioral problems.[11] Another study shows that children's problematic behaviour is significantly negatively related to the father's attachment, and the mother's attachment, and whether the attachment of the father or mother causes damage, the child's future behavior problem will be more serious. Children are more attached to their mothers than to their fathers, so the attachment from mothers is more likely to influence children's behavior problems. For teenagers, they are in a critical period of life. At this stage, their cognition will be more mature and form an independent personality, and the society they construct will become more complete. During this period, with the gradual development of self-awareness, their mood will fluctuate greatly, and they are more prone to negative emotions such as loneliness and depression, and resistance will become more frequent. The lack of parental attachment in this critical period of time will directly affect the development of the individual's later life because the child's psychological endurance and self-control are not developed maturely. If there is no correct guidance, the world constructed will be unfaithful, thus it is easy to have behavioral problems, such as violent tendencies. There is enough evidence to prove that witnessing domestic violence will hurt children's attachment and security, and a low sense of security and attachment will make children appear aggressive in their subsequent behaviors and more likely to have behavioral problems. Overall, the sense of attachment and security can indirectly become a behavioral problem factor after witnessing domestic violence.

3.2. Emotional regulation ability

Emotional regulation ability may be a mechanism by which witnessing parental violence influences child violence. Children who witness violence have negative emotions due to immature emotional management systems, and it is difficult for them to control their aggressive behaviors and even have anti-social behaviors. At an early age, they are more likely to lose their temper and fight with their peers than untraumatized children. Boys and girls who witness parental violence tend to show more violent behaviors. Witnessing physical violence between parents is more likely to produce a cycle of inter-generational abuse. Children who witness domestic violence, they believe that violence is the most direct way to solve the problem, accompanied by internalization problems such

as depression and deviance. They release emotions through aggressive behavior and rationalize aggressive behavior. Moreover, low-quality parental marriage can also be regarded as an indirect manifestation of violence, so long-term life in a family with low-quality parental marriage as the background can also cause individual behavioral problems. For example, to become more aggressive. When parents' marriage becomes tense (such as conflicts and divorces, even beatings or physical collisions), it will make children very painful, resulting in frequent crying and anger, which will seriously affect children's future social relationships and make it difficult for children to adapt to society to become lonely and vigilant, which is also extremely likely to develop anti-social personality in the future. Low-quality marriage will not only have a direct negative impact on children's emotions, but also reduce children's emotional security, making them highly emotional, unable to control their emotions and emotionalize their behaviors. Similarly, as a basic socialized institution, the family plays a role in the emotional socialization education of the younger generation. In other words, parents are the emotional role models for their children. The interaction between parents and children and the way parents expresses their emotions provide a most direct model for children to identify different emotions and learn how to manage and express their emotions. In another case, the perpetrator who has been under high pressure for a long time will complain to their children about their situation to release their pressure, and it is very easy for children to accept negative emotions in communication with them.[2] Being in this negative state for a long time will make the child depressed, resulting in personality distortion and more prone to external behavior problems. Many studies have shown that the higher the frequency of parents expressing negative emotions, the worse children's ability to control their emotions and adjust their emotions, and the worse their acceptance of their peers, so they are more likely to have externalized behavior problems. Research on the emotional processing of children witnessing domestic violence is mature. Witnessing that domestic violence is negatively correlated to emotional processing ability, while emotional processing and expression ability is positively related to behavioral problems.[11]

3.3. The attitude of violence behavior

Witnessing parental violence may lead to violent behavior in children by influencing their attitudes toward violence. Individuals who have witnessed parental violence may find it appropriate to use violence to solve problems, only if they are inclined to use violence to solve problems. Furthermore, parents communicate to their children that aggression is perfectly acceptable, since it is favored as a method to obtain compliance. Thus, individuals who witnessed parental violence were more likely to form approving attitudes toward violence. According to the social-cognitive perspective, individuals tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their attitudes about what is and is not appropriate and effective. When children directly witness their parents' violence, the most direct manifestation is fear, but some surveys show that as the frequency of violence increases, children are likely to have resentment and reject future relationships. They are usually very indifferent to the people around them and have a negative attitude towards family and friendship. Because there are very few emotional connections with others and will not have empathy for others, they are prone to violent behavior. Another reason for violence is that the gradually alienated people and the violence they have witnessed for a long time will turn their hostility to their parents into hostility to others and thus have a negative and indifferent attitude towards the whole society or feel marginalized. Therefore, they will also prove that they have attracted the attention of others through deviant behavior, which is also very likely to develop into an anti-social personality. Spaccarell et al. (1995) took 213 adolescent boys who had been incarcerated for violent behavior as a sample and found that those children who had witnessed domestic violence would believe that violent behavior could consolidate their reputation and personal image.[12] In the process of cognitive development, the higher the child's sense of recognition of violent behavior, the higher the tolerance for violence. This proves that on the one hand, they can accept violence around them or themselves, and on the other hand, it also increases the possibility of future violence.

3.4. Social learning ability

Bandura's social learning theory can also be used to explain the formation of violent behavior after witnessing violence. This theory proposes three behavioral learning models for families. Among them, the second and three models are introduced respectively.[13] First, after witnessing violence in the family, individuals will learn similar violent behaviors through observation and imitation and develop into the subsequent relationship between the sexes, and the third is the inter-generational transmission of behavioral violence. These learning models prove that an individual who has grown up in a domestic violence environment for a long time will directly learn the violence of family members, and the violence between parents is the best demonstration material for child violence, and it is the right behavior to instill violence in children's subconscious, so as to impose violence in the future and the generational transmission of violence will be developed. He believes that for the special age stage of teenagers, problem behaviors are mainly obtained through external reinforcement, alternative reinforcement and observational imitation. When victims directly witness violence committed by their worshipped or authoritative family members, individuals in the adolescence stage will imitate the positive attitude of family members towards violence, thus maintaining the continuation of violence.

4. Conclusion

Most people's perception of domestic violence is that domestic violence will affect the direct victims and safeguard the rights of these victims, thus ignoring a group of people who are implicitly harmed by domestic violence, who are the called "third party" of domestic violence - witnesses. If people do not intervene early to witness the psychological and behavioral problems of victims of domestic violence, it is likely to breed more serious crimes in the future. Therefore, various social institutions need to cooperate with each other to raise residents' attention and protection awareness of victims of domestic violence. The government needs to pay more attention to both children's mental health and behavior at the same time and resolutely resist the occurrence of domestic violence. If children's behavioral problems are found, schools and other secondary socialization institutions need to consider whether children are being exposed to direct or indirect domestic violence and then standardize children's behavior in a timely manner to interfere with their wrong perception, thus reducing the possibility of serious deviant behavior in the future and reducing the inter-generational transmission of violence.

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