

The Effect of Childhood Maltreatment on Violent Behavior in Adulthood

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Abstract. Childhood is the fastest and most critical developmental period for individuals to develop emotional and cognitive abilities. If children are abused, neglected, or raised in a family with traumatic experiences and dysfunctional dynamics during childhood, it is very likely to have an impact on their future development during adulthood. This review mainly discusses the contribution of childhood maltreatment to adult violent behavior. Previous studies on different aspects in the same direction were analyzed. It was found that with the trajectory, the negative impact of childhood maltreatment will not be reduced. Severity of maltreatment and later violent behavior, gender, experiences of different types of abuse, shame, personality disorder and some protective factors serve as mediators to varying degrees. Among them, psychopathy is a controversial intermediary factor. One study indicated that it could function as an intermediary factor, while another article only found it as a factor leading to violent behavior, and there was no evidence to prove the impact of maltreatment on it. This review can provide some guidance to the design of intervention programs for children in need.

Keywords: Childhood maltreatment, Adverse childhood experiences (ACE), violence, abuse.

1. Introduction

Child maltreatment refers to the abuse and neglect experienced by a person during his childhood under the age of 18. This kind of abuse may come from parents, caregivers or teachers who have access to the child and who are responsible for the child. There are four common types of abuse, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Violence is an act that endangers the personal safety of others and often has a negative impact on the community. Violence is an acquired behavior that may arise from witnessing or experiencing violent scenes.

Childhood is the most developed period for children, during which they will build a sense of health. If children develop good lifestyle habits during this period, such as a balanced diet, this habit will be maintained. At the same time, this is also a critical period for children's intellectual development, which is the most rapid and sensitive period for brain development. If they are well trained at this time, their thinking, language, creativity and problem-solving skills will be improved. Childhood is an important period for children's emotional development, which is a critical stage for children to build an emotional foundation and interpersonal relationships. If children can learn how to interact and communicate with others during this period, their emotional and social skills will be well developed. On the contrary, if children lack love and companionship during this period, their emotional development may be damaged and affect their future relationship [1].

Child maltreatment is a model of a toxic relationship environment and poses a major risk to the development of adaptation in the biological and psychological fields according to Cicchetti and Toth's research on childhood maltreatment. In order to solve the problem of child abuse, people need to understand the problem from various angles. For example, mental theory enables researchers to understand children's emotions. In addition, psychological sequelae are one of the main research areas. Cicchetti and Toth believe that several things are indispensable for understanding the psychological consequences of children. Including the effects on regulation, peer relationships, attachment relationships, self-system processes, and school adaptation. Impact regulation refers to the internal and external factors that awaken emotions that are redirected, controlled, adjusted and modified, so that individuals can adapt to the role in the case of emotional challenges. However, abused children

face major challenges in regulating their influence, because they may not be able to express their emotions. In addition, child abuse will affect children's ability to form safe attachment relationships, that is, the integration of cognitive, emotional and behavioral abilities, and ultimately affect current and future relationships [2].

Youth violence is an important world public health issue. The research of Williams et al. shows the progress made in the past decade in researching the factors that lead to violence. Although many studies have deepened the understanding of the factors that lead to youth violence and prevent youth violence, the research on the root causes and the design of effective intervention strategies is limited. Some underrepresented studies on youth violence include the development of violence. Including mediation and mitigation of youth violence, how culture and media affect it, school bullying, and how health professionals are trained to deal with youth violence. In most cases, many young people will stop using violence in adulthood. It is worth noting that the field of violence prevention is becoming more focused on risk factors and different levels of protection. In today's society, people must be aware of the impact of culture and media on youth violence. Some media that spread violence may have a negative impact on youth violence. Childhood abuse and violence may be related to them. Most types of crimes involve violence, which not only brings physical and mental harm to the victims, but also brings panic to society. If they can be proved to be interrelated, the rate of violent crime can be reduced by educating society about child abuse.

2. The Relationship between Different Types of Childhood Abuse and Later Violent Behaviors

2.1. Trajectories of Childhood Maltreatment and Adulthood Violence

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include not only childhood maltreatment mentioned above, but also household dysfunction. Family environment factors can also affect children's personality development. ACEs show a strong reactive relationship with physical combat and carrying weapons, especially in puberty and early adulthood. The more abuse experienced in late childhood is closely related to early adulthood, because the time interval is short. The cumulative number of different types of bad childhood experiences will increase the risk of adolescent violence. The article also divides the survey subjects into different groups that are low adversity and high adversity. Compared with those teenagers with low levels of adversity, high adversity means that teenagers who experience different adversity at different times have significantly higher risks in physical combat and carrying weapons. The high adversity group, that is, teenagers who were in high-level adversity in the first half of their childhood, have a very high risk of physical fighting and carrying weapons. These findings illustrate how cumulative childhood adversity can have negative consequences. The increased risk of violence during adolescence and adulthood also exists in those who have reduced early childhood adversity in late childhood. The critical cognitive and attachment processes of vulnerable children who have not yet formed a mechanism to cope with adversity can be destroyed by exposure to adversity during early development. It has been observed among adolescent and adult criminals that cumulative childhood adversity has an impact on sustained violence [3].

ACEs do not only affect early adulthood, which often lasts a lifetime. While the risk factors of violence in childhood have an impact, some protection factors also reduce the risk of people's future violence. This violation measures the factors that can reduce the probability of violent behavior in adulthood. The researchers interviewed participants when they were 8, 19, 30 and 48 years old. The results show that there are many protective factors. For example, the number of visits to church with family at the age of eight, the reduction of negative family interactions, and the high level of education and popularity at the age of 19 will reduce the risk of violence in the future. This means that the increase of protection factors in youth and adolescence (8 and 19 years old) will reduce the risk factors of adulthood (30 and 48 years old). The risk factors are high aggression and low socio-economic status. At the same time, it can also reduce the likelihood of violence among adolescents who are not at risk of violence [4].

Trajectories are certainly a research aspect, but gender factors and family participation also contribute to the relationship between ACEs and adult violence. A previous study aims to explore the relationship between child abuse, violence and gender differences. The method conducts a potential class analysis, asking all participants to report their violence after the age of 15, as well as ACEs (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, etc.) experienced in childhood, and further it is classified into four categories. The conclusive findings revealed a hierarchy of child abuse severity within the four subgroups: low adversity, moderate abuse with high family dysfunction, severe abuse with moderate family dysfunction, and severe multiple types of adversity. The results indicate that increasing child abuse correlates with an increase in violent tendencies, it may be attributed to the fact that children acquire corresponding skills through parental observation. Additionally, ACEs can induce alterations in cortisol levels, then impact the stress responses in adulthood. Decreased pain tolerance increases the likelihood of remission in order to adopt maladaptive behaviors. Males generally exhibit higher propensity to violence, but the link between ACE and violence is more pronounced in women, who experience more adverse effects and traumatic responses in adulthood [5].

2.2. The Special Case of Sexual Abuse

There are researchers who focus on the connection between sexual and non-sexual abuse and sexual and non-sexual violent behavior. The rate of experiencing sexual violence was studied among those incarcerated for offenses related to both sexual and non-sexual violence. Other incarcerated individuals were also examined for the rate of non-sexual violence, and a distinction was made between sexual violence in childhood and adulthood. Various categories of prisoners and sexual and non-sexual violence crimes were compared by researchers, so that different types of ACE types can be obtained. The findings revealed that, in contrast to the other incarcerated individuals, prisoners who convicted sexual and non-sexual violence crimes tend to have higher level of trauma and other ACEs. On top of that, individuals who commit non-sexual violent crimes were more likely to experience ACEs compared to those who commit sexual crimes. There is a clear association between childhood abuse and the risk of being convicted of non-sexual violence crimes, and there is no association between violence experienced in adulthood and an increased risk of conviction for non-sexual violence crimes [6].

3. The Impact of Psychological Factors on the Relationship

3.1. The Role of Personality Development in the Relationship

ACEs will not only bring physical trauma, but also affect a person's personality. This article primarily explores the impact of ACE and intimate partner attacks (IPA) on adult personality disorders (PD). The findings indicate a minimal connection between child abuse and adult IPA, though it does influence daily anger. ACE significantly elevates the possibility to develop a PD. In IPA couples, it is found that one of them will have a certain degree of personality disorder, acting as an intermediary factor. Verbal attacks are more general than physical attacks in IPAs, probably because childhood trauma disrupts the development of safe attachment relationships. Thereby compromising emotional and verbal communication in adulthood relationships. The most pronounced effect of ACE was observed in borderline PD. This performance is related to the response of borderline PD to abandonment, which hinders their healthy self-development. Borderline PD has unstable emotions, unstable interpersonal relationships and impulses in behavior. These characteristics make such people more likely to commit violent acts in a relationship. Additionally, paranoid, schizotypal, histrionic, and dependent PDs serve as intervening variables between ACEs to IPA [7].

Compared with studying the intermediary role of each PD, this article focuses on whether psychopathy, a personality disorder, can become a mediator for ACE and later violence behavior. The study aimed to explore psychopathy's role as a mediator between abuse and aggression, by

incorporating psychopathy to the investigation. the survey used a self-assessment questionnaire format to ask the participants if they have ever experienced ACEs. The conclusive findings reveal that psychopathy significantly influences violent offenders more than sex offenders and other offender types. While the inclination toward violence tends to decrease with age, the enduring impact of ACEs on aggression persists throughout life. Individuals will be influenced by childhood violence in the whole lifespan, but as they grow up and become more rational, they are less prone to attacking others. Psychopathy directly affects aggressive violence but does not serve as a mediator. Simultaneously, latent maltreatment, which was assessed through latent factor structural equation modeling, also influences violent crimes. For instance, childhood sexual violence is particularly significant for sex offenders [8].

As mentioned above, psychopathy cannot be used as an mediator to affect ACE and adult violence, and this article has expressed different views. This study relies on two independent adult samples to analyze the relationship between exposure to violence (ETV) and violent crime. Community samples are collected from questionnaires in high crime-rate areas in New Haven County. The questionnaire will ask them if they have experienced violence or witnessed others being subjected to violence. At the same time, the mental assessment of these people in the community was carried out. The test population was distinguished by age, race, gender and degree of mental illness. It turns out that people who are subjected to violence in the community or have witnessed others being beaten, stabbed or shot will be disturbed. As long as there is contact with violence, it will increase the risk of violence. Men are more likely to produce violence than women, and non-white is more likely to produce violence than white. Age is not a key factor, because everyone at all ages has it. Personality is a disruptive intermediary factor. Personality disorders, such as psychopathy, can play an intermediary role in ETV and violent behavior. The mediator effect of impulsive-antisocial traits of psychopathy is the strongest, compared with interpersonal-affective traits. The discovery also emphasizes that demographic characteristics may be more convincing than childhood maltreatment [9].

3.2. Childhood Abuse, Shame, and Aggression

Some victims with high self-shame may feel that he deserves to be treated like this, thus reducing the risk of violence against others. The interaction between ACE and injury, as well as shame or self-sympathy, was studied. This changeable psychological factor can reduce the risk of injury and improve post-traumatic recovery. The results show that shame and self-compassion play an intermediary role in ACE and injury, but the roles are different. ACE, shame and self-sympathy are directly related to injury. Self-sympathy can ease the relationship between ACE and injury. Different behaviors of shame will also lead to the difference between direct and intermediary roles. The study divided shame behavior into shame-attack-other, shame-attack-self and shame-withdrawal. Shame-attack-other increases the risk of hurting others, while shame-de-reduces the risk of hurting others. The way of self-harm is actually to reduce one's own pain inside [10].

4. Conclusion

This paper mainly discussed the impact of child abuse on subsequent violence. Childhood abuse is more likely to be manifested in the form of violence in adolescence and early adulthood. Protection factors, including family members going to church and reducing negative family interactions, can reduce the risk of future violence. On the contrary, negative family interaction, that is, household dysfunction, increases the risk of violence. Men affected by ACE are more likely to have violent behavior in the future than women, but women's traumatic response tend to be more severe. When different PDs serve as mediators, this connection is more obvious in borderline PD. ACE hinders healthy self-development and increases the possibility of violence in interpersonal relationships. The research project on sexual and non-sexual abuse concluded that people sentenced to prison for sexual or non-sexual abuse were more likely to experience ACE than the general population. People who commit non-sexually violent crimes on this basis are more likely to experience ACE. Psychopathy

was investigated as a potential mediator between abuse and assault. Some studies have shown that it can act as an intermediate factor between ACE and violent behavior. However, another article only found that it was a factor leading to violent behavior, with no evidence of the effect of abuse on it. The difference in sample numbers and sample requirements may be the cause of the mismatch between the results of the two studies. In addition, the study examined the relationship between child abuse, shame, and aggression. High levels of self-shame can help reduce the risk of violence against others. These studies provide a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted links between child abuse, violence and psychological factors, providing insights into intervention strategies and prevention measures.

One limitation of previous studies is the lack of cross-cultural studies. Some cultures might discourage the assertiveness and self-advocacy of the victims due to religious reasons or social norms, which might add another layer to the relationship between childhood maltreatment and later violent behavior. The inconsistent results regarding psychopathy as a mediator need further investigation. Once the factors leading to the later violent behavior can be clarified, psychologists can develop more targeted treatment.

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