Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence: Do Adults Really Understand Them?
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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence (DV) is a serious problem. An estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence against their mothers or female caretakers each year (Jaffe et al. 1990). Witnessing such violence as a child has been linked to a number of negative outcomes, and yet these children often go unnoticed, unheard - unhealed. Perhaps this is because DV is a scary thing for a child to talk about. In addition, it is likely hard for stressed-out and scared parents to understand.

This study will examine potential differences between parent-child dyads who have either been exposed to DV or not. Differences in children's pain and anguish and how parents perceive those emotions will be examined. A total of 100 dyads will be voluntarily consented into this project. Efforts will be made to include approximately equal numbers of DV and non-DV exposed dyads. Each parent will take a survey about child emotion and parenting skills. Each child will complete the same survey about their emotions. I hypothesize a significant difference between children on measures of emotional distress. I also hypothesize that the ability of parents to perceive child emotion will differ between the two groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many children all over the world experience some type of abuse in their homes, including witnessing domestic violence. Children who are witnesses to such life changing behavior need an outlet for their emotions. Most children who have witnessed their father beating their mother, their parent abusing a sibling, a parent touching them in a sexual way, or seeing a parent murdered have kept their emotions bottled up inside because they are afraid of the consequences of what that parent might do to them. There is strong evidence for the link between domestic violence and child abuse that is on the rise (Waugh & Bonner, 2002). Many children do not know how to effectively communicate to an adult that “I am hurting or I’m in pain;” and many adults do not comprehend when a child is sad, or hurting.

PURPOSE AND METHODLOGY

Purpose: The purpose of this experiment is twofold: to examine the effects of DV on children and to determine if their parents understand the effects on children.

Methodology: Participants will be recruited through the UNT psychology pool and Denton County Friends of the Family, a center that treats family violence. All recruited participants will first be consented into the project. The researcher will explain all the risks and how the experiment will proceed. Participants will be given a chance to ask questions and then they will sign the consent form. By signing the consent form, they are voluntarily participating in this experiment. A total of 100 parent-child dyads will be assigned to either a DV-exposed or non-DV-exposed group. Each parent will take a survey about his/her child and how the child feels. Parents will also rate their parenting skills, particularly focusing on recognizing when their child is hurting. This is often measured via an attunement questionnaire, so such a measure will be used. A t-test will be used to assess differences in parental attunement between the groups. Children will provide information about their feelings, using the child self-report form of the same measure given to parents. This will allow for comparison of child and parent scores, thus assessing parental accuracy of child emotion. Kappa coefficients will be correlated for each dyad and then a Fisher’s z-test will be used to compare the mean correlations between the two groups.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References


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Sincerely,
Ryeshia Jackson