

FAMILY FACTORS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CHILD VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

Original Scientific Paper

Received: 12. 10. 2021.

Accepted: 16. 2. 2022.

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Abstract

The results from recent criminological research in the field of juvenile delinquency, address the family as an important factor that can influence on the children violent behavior. According to these findings, this paper will elaborate and analyze part of family characteristics that can influence, as a risk factors for children violent behavior. There are many characteristics that are related to the family which can be put in some correlation with the violent behavior of the child. Thus, the way the family function, the relationships that exist between family members, the size of the family, but also the circumstances in which family lives (especially economic circumstances) can further deepen or emphasize the negative individual characteristics of children. The upbringing style, the lack of attention, parental rejection, parental indulgence, negligence, the violent behavior in the home (physical and verbal aggression between parents and parent towards a child), increases the likelihood of negative behavior in children. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, based on a research review on child aggressive behavior, it has been concluded that the absence of a father, loss of a parent through divorce or death are factors that also can be associated with childhood aggression. Among the important family factors that will also be analyzed in this paper are the presence of alcoholism, criminal, and aggressive behavior in the family.

Keywords

family, child, violent behavior, effects

1. INTRODUCTION

The family is the primary social unit in which the child grows and develops, so it is justified that the analysis of the child's violent behavior to be focused first on the family beside other risk factors. (Jovanova, 2015) Because child development is largely based on the methods of upbringing and the relationship with parents, depending on the ability of parents to raise them

properly, and in accordance with the educational attitudes of parents, the family, on one side can be an optimal and stimulating environment for the child development or, on the other side, it can limit the development. (Nedimović, 2010)

The research findings related to functioning of modern families indicate that the family is losing its traditional form and there is a growing tendency to strengthen the elements of individualization of members and at the same time weakens the cohesive and educational function of the family. (Bošković, 2010) If we consider the results of certain research which indicate that the educational role, economic and demographic function of the family has a significant impact on children's behavior (Bošković, 2010) then the analysis of numerous family characteristics is inevitable when we are researching and studying the children violent behavior.

There are many family characteristics that can be related to the child violent behavior. One of the most important characteristics of the family that is correlated with the child inappropriate behavior is the presence of antisocial or criminal behavior of one of the parents. The size and structure of the family, the way it is functioning, the relationships that exist between family members (Wasserman, et al., 2003), but also the circumstances in which the child lives, can deepen or emphasize the negative individual characteristics of the children or reinforce some other risk factors for inappropriate or violent behavior. Lack of attention, parental indulgence, lack of family discipline, neglect, disruption of parent-child relationships, violent behavior in the family (physical and verbal aggression between parents and parents towards a child), increase the likelihood for child inappropriate behavior. The occurrence of abuse of alcohol, drugs and other psychotropic substances by the parents is also analyzed as a risk factor for children inappropriate behavior. In addition to these factors, based on a Wolff research review (1985) for children aggressive behavior, was concluded that some negative family events such as internal and external stressors, such as: absence of the father, loss of a parent because of a divorce (Wasserman, et al., 2003) or due to death, may be associated with the childhood aggression. (Pearce, 2002, p. 81)

When considering the grouping of family risk factors, the aim is to be identified the combinations of risk factors that give early signs for child inappropriate behavior. The number of risk factors, the stressors, and the length of exposure to them, have a strong influence on the child's behavior. (e.g., Tiet et al., 1998; Williams et al., 1990). (Wasserman, et al., 2003) Hence, it is very important their early identification with aim for early prevention and intervention on child inappropriate behavior.

2. CONNECTION BETWEEN PARENTAL ADDICTION OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND OTHER PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES ON CHILDREN BEHAVIOR

Among the important family factors associated with children violent behavior is the addiction to alcohol, drugs or psychotropic substances in the family. A family member who is substance abuser is easily irritable, intolerant for themselves and for the others, and develops a tendency toward inappropriate behavior (including antisocial, violent, or criminal behavior). His/her unfavorable psychological situation reflects on the well-being of the children. Children living with parents who abuse alcohol or drug are often abused, underestimated, ignored and otherwise emotionally abused, which can ultimately end in physical abuse (Jovanovska, 2011, p. 90) Chandy, Harris, Blum, & Resnick (1993) noted the following consequences for children liv-

ing with parents who have a problem with alcoholism: for these children is more likely to miss or drop out of the school, to have negative attitudes toward school, and to have lower school achievement (Gledhill, 2002) cited in (Connolly, Casswell, Steward, Silva, & O'Brien, 1993) Besides the risk for addictive behaviors, children of substance abusers are at higher risk of developing emotional, behavioral, criminal and other social problems (Barnow, Ulrich, Grabe, Freyberger, & Spitzer, 2007) cited in (Vilela, Silva, Grandi, Rocha, & Buzi Figlie, 2016) Generally speaking, parental substance abuse may not be a direct cause for children aggressive or violent behavior, but can contribute to a number of social problems that could have a strong impact on the child's behavior. For example, parental substance abuse is more likely to be associated with higher risk for child abuse and neglect. Children whose parents use substances and consume alcohol, are three times more likelihood to be physically, emotionally, or sexually abused and four times more likely to be emotionally or physically neglected. (Smith, Wilson, & COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE USE AND PREVENTION, 2016) In this regard, research confirm that children from families where parental substance abuse is present, felt socially excluded, are often home alone, have a feeling that they are not loved, have low self-esteem, and often even have to take care of their parents. (Burke, Schmied, & Montrose, 2006, p. 1) Whether it is parental inconsistency, disruption or lack of healthy family routines and rituals, or parental conflict and stress, children of substance abusers have no security related to the stability that should be provided by appropriate parenting. (Smith, Wilson, & COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE USE AND PREVENTION, 2016)

Parental substance abuse has also been associated with a reduction in the extent that parents monitor their children, which may undermine the ability to provide a safe and nurturing home environment (Barnard & McKeganey, 2004) cited in (Kuppens, Moore, Gros, Lowthian, & Siddaway, 2020) Instability with respect to employment, family structure, housing, child-care, and household finances has also been shown to co-occur with parental substance abuse, with consequences that extend beyond the family environment to influence children's social functioning (e.g., Berger, Paxson, & Waldfogel, 2009; De Goede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2009; Giesbrecht, Cukier, & Steeves, 2010;; Lander, Howsare, & Byrne, 2013; Martin, Razza, & Brooks-Gunn, 2012; Öberg, Jaakkola, Woodward, Peruga, & Prüss-Ustün, 2011; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982;) cited in (Kuppens, Moore, Gros, Lowthian, & Siddaway, 2020)

The association between parental alcoholism and the behavior of 9- to 13-year-old children had been examined in a longitudinal study by Connolly, Casswell, Steward, Silva, & O'Brien (1993). The study concluded that the children who have parents with serious problems with alcohol as opposed to children from families where there are no or minor problems with alcoholism, showed behavioral problems at the age of nine. (Connolly, Casswell, Steward, Silva, & O'Brien, 1993) Although substance abuse by the mother and the father are both important, previous research has often found more pronounced associations with multiple adverse child outcomes of maternal substance abuse (Mitchell et al., 2012; Straussner & Fewell, 2011) cited in (Kuppens, Moore, Gros, Lowthian, & Siddaway, 2020) These gender differences may be due to children spending more time in the presence of their mothers than their fathers, as mothers traditionally take a more active role in child rearing. It is also possible that parental substance abuse effects may manifest differently in boys and girls.

3. CONNECTION BETWEEN PARENTAL ANTISOCIAL AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR AND CHILDREN VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

In the criminological research, parental aggressive, antisocial, and criminal behavior is often associated with children inappropriate behavior. (Olweus, 1993) A long history of research shows that aggressive behavior and crime are more prevalent in some families than in others. For example, the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, which followed 411 families, found that offending was strongly concentrated in a small group of families and that approximately 5 percent of families accounted for about half of juvenile criminal convictions (West and Farrington, 1977). Overall, antisocial parents show increased levels of family conflict, exercise poorer supervision, experience more family breakdown, and direct more hostility toward their children. In such family circumstances, it is assumed that the opportunities for inappropriate behavior of children increase. In addition, having an antisocial sibling also increases a child's likelihood of antisocial behaviors (e.g., Farrington, 1995). The influences of siblings are stronger when the siblings are close in age. (Wasserman, et al., 2003)

When we discuss about aggressive behavior, the often confirmed assumption is that there is a correlation between the children aggression and the parental aggression when they were the same age (Huesmann et al., 1984) cited in (Nedimović, 2010). According to Farrington (2011) parental criminal behavior is among the strongest family factors that predict the criminal behavior of the children. However, when considering the impact of adult criminal behavior on children's behavior, it is important to consider the frequency and timing of its occurrence. Besemer et al. (2011) investigated the timing of parental imprisonment and found that the impact of parental imprisonment was associated with child criminal behavior only when it occurred after the child was seven years old. When it comes to the frequency of parental criminality it is expected that those parents who are more likely to commit criminal activities, their children to manifest more likely the same behavior, according to theory for social learning (Besemer, 2012). This assumption was not established by West & Farrington (1977), because their research did not found differences between children in terms of the manifestation of criminal behavior depending on whether their fathers were convicted once or more. (Besemer, 2012)

4. CONNECTION BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

Children's exposure to the domestic violence can take many forms: direct child abuse, neglect or emotional abuse, or by witnessing intimate partner violence as indirect forms of violence. It is assumed that the more experience with parental violence, there is a higher risk for future social, mental, and physical health problems for children.

Exposure and witnessing of intimate partner violence (IPV) involving caregivers, is also known to predict aggressive and antisocial behavior. (Labella & Masten, 2018) In fact, when there is violence or corporal punishment or maltreatment in the family, parents send a message to the child that anger, violence, and getting what they want by intimidation are common. (Hotton, 2003) Children who are exposed to violence, learn that violence is best or least the way the family manages conflict. Most importantly, violence against children destroys the trust and respect that should exist between parents and their children. When a child loses the sense of belonging to the family, it is more likely to show violent behavior (Orpinas & Horhe, 2006, p. 45)

Research confirms the thesis of association between domestic violence and bullying or children violent behavior among middle schoolers. (Labella & Masten, 2018) Recently, Davis and colleagues, reported on the heterogeneity in exposure to domestic violence and the association with peer aggression and victimization. (Ingram, Espelage, Davis, & Merrin, 2020) Results indicated youth exposed to parental violence early in adolescence were more likely to engage in bullying and be victims of peer aggression. (Ingram, Espelage, Davis, & Merrin, 2020) (Mansel, 2001; Fuchs & Schmalz, 2009) cited in (Fuchs Marek, 2009, p. 88) There are studies that differentiate the impact of violent parental behavior on children, depending on whether was committed in childhood or adolescence. The results showed that the adolescents who are victims of parental violence have higher likelihood for behavioral problems in adolescence and for adulthood behavioral problems than maltreatment in early childhood (Eckenrode et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2002; Smith, Ireland, & Thornberry, 2005) cited in (Besemer, 2012). Focusing specifically on the relationship between physical abuse and children's aggression, one study suggests that 20 percent of abused children become delinquent before reaching adulthood (Lewis, Mallouh, and Webb, 1989). Clearly, most physically abused children do not go on to become antisocial or violent. However, one study that had compared the children without a history of abuse or neglect with children who had been abused or neglected, found that the latter group accrued more juvenile and adult arrests by the age of 25 (Widom, 1989). Little is known about the age range in which children may be most vulnerable or how long associations persist. In most families, when the woman is battered, children are also battered (McKibben, De Vos, and Newberger, 1989). The co-occurrence of child abuse and witnessing domestic violence affects children's adjustment more than twice as much as witnessing domestic violence alone (Hughes, Parkinson, and Vargo, 1989). (Wasserman, et al., 2003)

However, it must be noted that the dilemma always will be reconsidered, whether the presence of domestic violence (inter-partner or parental violence against children) will necessarily lead to the manifestation of child violent behavior, because often there are some protective factors that are protecting the child to stay resilient to many risk factors for violent behavior.

5. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PARENT-CHILDREN RELATIONSHIP AND CHILDREN VIOLENCE BEHAVIOR

Special emphasis regard children violent behavior is placed on several aspects of the parent-child relationship: relationship between parents and children, communication, and parental supervision. (Jovanovska, 2011, p. 85)

When parents do not develop a strong bond with their child, do not communicate with them, and do not set boundaries or control over children's activities, children are more likely to engage in a variety of risky behaviors. (Cohen, Farley, Taylor, Martin, & Schuster, 2002; Ledoux, Miller, Choquet, & Plant, 2002; L. Steinberg, Fletcher, & Darling, 1994) In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, the co-occurrence of low levels of monitoring and high levels of punishment increased the risk of delinquency in 7- to 13-year-old boys. Conversely, attachments to conventional parents and to society's institutions are hypothesized to protect against developing antisocial behavior (Hirschi, 1969). (Wasserman, et al., 2003)

Among the family risk factors that can be associated with child violent behavior is the parental rejection. Eron (1987) argue that when there is more rejection and punishing of child by the

parents, there is more likelihood for child aggressive behavior at school (Orpinas & Horhe, 2006, p. 45). According to Orpinas & Horhe, children coming from families where there is little supervision and care because of parental rejection, are more likely to accepted or to choose groups of peers who behave violently. (Orpinas & Horhe, 2006, p. 45)

In terms of the relationship between parents and children, research has shown that families of children who manifest violent behavior are characterized by low emotional warmth and high levels of mutual hostility (Seydlitz & Jenkins, 1998). These data were confirmed in a McCord study in 1983, which showed that there is a positive correlation between hostile relationship between parents and children and violent or aggressive behavior, as opposed to the warm emotional relationship between children and parents, which protects children from the manifestation of violent behavior. (Nedimović, 2010)

The second aspect of the parent-child relationship concerns what they communicate with their children and how communicate with them about inappropriate behaviors (Herrenkohl, Aisenberg, Williams, & Jenson, 2011). For example, some parents praise their children for being rude. In one survey who include pupils from fifth to eighth grade in Texas, parental support for beatings was found to be the strongest predictor for child aggressive behavior, beatings, and carrying weapons in schools (Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999). When parents believe that the best defense is violent defense, schools and other professional services are facing with difficult challenge in trying to influence on the child to exhibit nonviolent behavior. In essence, schools and communities are included in a bitter "war" with the family values. Often, parents who tell their children to fight back if someone else hits them, have good intentions—they do not want their children to become victims. But this means that some parents often do not know about another solution for the problem due to lack of verbal problem-solving skills.

The third aspect is the parental supervision. In the case when the parents forget that an important element in the development of the children is the supervision and the control over what they do, where they go, with whom they associate, how they behave, there is a high probability that the children will manifest violent behavior. The negative impact of the absence of parental supervision and control will be even stronger if the child in the absence of communication with the parents becomes attached to persons who manifest violent behavior. However, parental supervision does not mean absolute control and supervision over every step and behavior in children, because overemphasized control can have negative effects on his later behavior.

Based on these three aspects of the parent-child relationship, the overall atmosphere that exists in the family can be determined. If there is a cold relationship between the parents and children and there is a lack of communication, the children are more likely to show behavioral disorders. In that direction are the results of the empirical research of the doctoral dissertation of Jovanova (Jovanova, 2014). The research showed that the atmosphere in the family is related to the manifestation of violent behavior, i.e., those children who said that there is a cold atmosphere in their family showed higher likelihood for violent behavior. This indicates that the overall communication and atmosphere in the family is a risk factor for the manifestation of violent behavior. Rejection or lack of sufficient communication, support, help from parents, exists as a risk factor for behavioral disorders, such as manifesting violent behavior or withdrawal and isolation of the child.

6. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE NEGATIVE EVENTS IN THE FAMILY AND THE CHILDREN BEHAVIOR

Absence of the parent due to death, divorce, serious illness in the family can affect on the dysfunction of the family. Symptoms of dysfunction can be caused by internal stressors, such as an illness of a family member, divorce, or by external stressors, such as natural disasters, war or some other social events or circumstances. Unexpected stressors are death, divorce, unemployment, and various social changes (Batić, 2010, p. 18). In one research that make comparison between boys whose parents are in marriage and boys whose parents are divorced, it was concluded that the boys whose parents are divorced, were more likely to have problems with antisocial and inappropriate behaviors (Hetherington, 1989). As with all family factors, determining the true effects of the divorce on children is difficult because of other risk factors that can arise, such as parental loss, other related negative life events (e.g., predivorce child behavior problems, family conflict, decrease in family income), and a parent's subsequent remarriage. When these related factors are considered, the impact of the divorce itself will sometimes be substantially less. (Wasserman, et al., 2003)

Among external stressors, the disruption of economic conditions in the family often is associated with children violent behavior. Economic circumstances, especially in the case of single parents, can reduce parents' social support for their children. Children from families with poor socioeconomic status have been shown to be more violent than children from families with normal socioeconomic status (Fuchs & Schmalz, 2009) cited in (Fuchs Marek, 2009) The research results in the literature showed that this applies to children whose parents do not have a job or receive social aid. However, if the results of the research are more precisely analyzed, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether this effect is a direct result of absolutely unfavorable socio-economic status or whether relative poverty compared to those with better socio-economic status stimulates violent behavior in these children (Fuchs Marek, 2009, p. 88) In the literature there are opposite views that indicate that children from families with very good economic status show a higher likelihood for violent behavior. Economic comfort in the family can also mean increased absence of parents, insufficient supervision, control, close relationships and thus stimulate violent behavior in them. For some of the children who come from such families, the violent pattern of behavior is a way of showing power or with aim to attract the attention of the parents. According to these considerations, the unfavorable economic situation does not usually mean poor parenting skills. Understanding the conditions that lead to poor parenting skills can help in identifying the appropriate means to help parents and children. For example, parents who work hard to meet the basic needs of the family, spend less time with their children for different reasons than parents who are financially comfortable but indifferent to parenting. (Herrenkohl, Aisenberg, Williams, & Jenson, 2011)

In general, it can be concluded that all families on the internal and external stressors react differently. Whether the family will be functioning normally or will become dysfunctional and with that will influence on child behavior, depends on the way the family adapts to the negative events that occurred. (Batić, 2010, p. 18)

7. CONCLUSION

The family and its characteristics, both in scientific and research terms, are always associated with children's behavior in any aspect. Especially when we talk about children's violent behavior, an integral part of the analysis are the numerous family characteristics that can influence on children's behavior. Numerous studies confirm the thesis of the influence of the family characteristics on children's behavior. However, the evidence for the negative effects of certain risk family factors does not always mean that children who face with number of family related risk factors will have behavioral problems. There are other significant influences on children's development that can mitigate the negative effects of the family related risk factors. Research focusing on the resilience and vulnerability of children exposed to some negative family factors identifies a number of individual, family, and community support factors that minimize the risk among children for inappropriate behavior. On an individual level, a child's high self-esteem, psychological strength, and intellectual ability have been identified as protective factors that reduce the negative effects of, for example, witnessing domestic violence. Hence, the key for preventing violent behavior in children is to focus not only on reducing risk factors but also on encouraging protection factors that have influence on children positive behavior.

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