

APSAC Research to Practice Brief

Study Title: Disentangling the Cycle: Potential Mediators and Moderators in the Intergenerational Transmission of Parent-Child Aggression

Study Authors: Christina M. Rodriguez, Paul J. Silvia, Samantha Gonzalez, and Maria-Ernestina Christl

Student Author of this Brief: Sunghyun Hong, BS

Introduction:

There is significant evidence of an intergenerational transmission of trauma, meaning that parents who were victims of child maltreatment are more likely to use violence in disciplining their children. Nonetheless, parents can break this cycle of violence by gaining alternative disciplining methods that are more appropriate. This longitudinal study examined mediators that link parents' history of childhood abuse and their elevated parent-child aggression (PCA) risk as measured by parenting attitudes and behaviors, usage of physical and psychological aggression toward children. The study also assessed moderators related to buffering parents' history of childhood abuse on their own PCA risk. The study collected data on PCA risk across three-time points: the last trimester of the pregnancy, when the child was 6 months, and when the child was 18 months. Mediators and moderators of mothers and fathers were assessed separately. A history of harsh and/or abusive parenting was seen as time-invariant variable and was only assessed prenatally.

Research Questions/Hypotheses:

The research examined the following mediators: parents' mental health, substance use, intimate partner violence, attitudes surrounding approval of PCA, negative child attribution and compliance, and knowledge on nonphysical discipline alternatives. In addition, the researcher explored four moderators: coping skills, couple satisfaction, emotion regulation, and social support satisfaction. The study measured the effect of mediators and moderators on mothers and fathers separately.

Subjects:

Due to the nature of the longitudinal study, the number of participants varied at each time point. Overall, 180 mothers and 141 fathers were included in data analysis. If the mother changed partners, only the same fathers from time 1 were included in the analysis. On average, mothers were 26 years old and fathers were 29 years. Racial/ethnic identities of mothers and fathers followed: 51%, 54% Caucasian, 47%, 45% African Americans, 2.5%, 0.7% Asian American or Native Americans, 3%, 4% Hispanic/Latino, and 6%, 5% biracial. One-third of

mothers and one-fourth of fathers attended high school or less and had a household income under \$40,000. Seventy-four percent of mothers were living with the father of the child.

Findings:

The result suggests there are not consistent mediators and moderators over time. Significant findings were only found prenatally.

Prenatally, both parents' history of physical and psychological aggression was significantly associated with PCA risk. Both parents' lack of knowledge of nonphysical discipline alternatives and greater PCA approval attitudes mediated PCA risk. Personal vulnerabilities, such as mental health, substance use problems and intimate partner violence further significantly mediated PCA risk among mothers. In both parents, high couple satisfaction significantly buffered PCA risk. In addition, mothers' problem-focused coping strategy and fathers' emotion regulation, and social satisfaction significantly moderated PCA risk.

Post-childbirth, both parents' histories of physical and psychological aggression were significantly linked to PCA risk at 18 months. However, no significant mediators were found for buffering PCA risks. Strong moderators were not also observed during postpartum, although high couple satisfaction marginally moderated PCA risk for both parents.

Recommendation:

The study notes a challenge in developing an intervention for the parents during and post pregnancy, due to the complexity and inconsistency in risk and protective factors linked with their elevated PCA risk. In this research study, significant mediators and moderators were only found during the prenatal period. Future study is encouraged to further explore mediators and moderators significant during the postpartum period. In addition, future study should re-assess the personal history of childhood abuse each time point.

Couple satisfaction significantly moderated PCA risk in both parents before childbirth. Couples therapy for increasing couple satisfaction may help to lessen the intergenerational transmission of violence. The service may also increase access to other resources that can assist in preparation for future parenthood.

This study also suggests that mothers and fathers may need different types of support. The prospective intervention may provide prenatal psychoeducation to mitigate PCA risk. Some topics may include reducing PCA approval attitudes, increasing knowledge of nonphysical discipline alternatives, and diversifying coping skills specific to mothers and fathers.

Bottom Line:

Overall, the study supports the existing evidence on the intergenerational transmission of PCA. Parents' histories of child abuse predict their PCA risk. The mediators and moderators of PCA

may vary based on the developmental stage of the child; the impact of mediators and moderators assessed in this study were especially salient prenatally. In addition, there may be differences among mothers and fathers in how mediators and moderators influence parents' childhood abuse experiences and on their PCA risk.

Citation: Rodriguez, C. M., Silvia, P. J., Gonzalez, S., & Christl, M. E. (2018). Disentangling the cycle: Potential mediators and moderators in the intergenerational transmission of parent-child aggression. *Child Maltreatment* 23(3), 254-268. doi: 1077559518767571.

About the Student Research to Practice Brief Author

Sunghyun Hong is an MSW student at the University of Michigan. She will be starting her joint Ph.D. in Social Work and Developmental Psychology at the University of Michigan in fall 2019. She also received her BS with Honors in Biopsychology at the University of Michigan. Post undergrad, she engaged in developing a culturally competent, evidence-based intervention in underserved communities of color in Chicago. Concurrently, she volunteered as a mentor for adolescents affected by gang violence. The past experiences cultivated her desire to utilize research as advocacy for social justice.

This brief was produced as part of a collaboration between a SW708 at the University of Michigan and APSAC. The goal of this project is to teach a real-world application of research translation, offer an early opportunity for professional publication, and introduce students to how professional organizations can serve as an ongoing source of knowledge throughout their careers. By distributing the briefs among child maltreatment and child welfare professionals at all career stages, APSAC seeks to speed the dissemination of evidence-based practices and increase access to applied research findings for front line workers, while also helping to shape policy for organizations. If you would like to bring this project to your classroom, [contact Bri Stormer, MSW.](#)