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From Family to Friends: Does Witnessing Interparental Violence Affect Young Adults' Relationships With Friends?

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 A B S T R A C T

Purpose: Childhood exposure to violence in one's family of origin has been closely linked to subsequent perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence. There is, however, little research on the relationship between witnessing violence and subsequent peer violence. This study investigates the effects of witnessing interparental violence among Filipino young adults on their use and experience of psychological aggression with friends.

Methods: The data source for this study was the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey. Recent perpetration and victimization of friend psychological aggression among young adults ages 21–22 years was assessed through self-reports from the 2005 survey; witnessing interparental violence during childhood was assessed through self-reports from the 2002 survey. Multinomial logistic regression was used to examine the effects of witnessing interparental violence on subsequent use and experience of friend psychological aggression. Analyses were stratified by gender.

Results: About 13% of females and 4% of males perpetrated psychological aggression toward close friends, and about 4% of females and males were victims. Fourteen percent of females and 3% of males experienced bidirectional psychological aggression. About 44% of females and 47% of males had, during childhood, witnessed their parents physically hurt one another. Witnessing maternal and reciprocal interparental violence during childhood significantly predicted bidirectional friend psychological aggression among males. Among females, witnessing interparental violence did not significantly predict involvement with friend psychological aggression.

Conclusions: Violence prevention programs should consider using family-centered interventions, and apply a gendered lens to their application. Further research on gender differences in friend aggression is recommended.

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 IMPLICATIONS AND
 CONTRIBUTION

Using a population-based sample in Cebu, Philippines, this study found that males who witnessed maternal-perpetrated and bidirectional interparental violence as children were more likely to be involved with bidirectional friend psychological aggression as young adults. Violence prevention strategies should include addressing parents' violence as part of preventing adolescent violence.

Peer violence among adolescents has been well studied in the United States and other developed countries, but to a lesser extent in developing countries [1]. The limited number of studies in non-Western countries show that peer violence is common [2,3]. A study among seventh and eighth graders in two Korean middle schools showed that 40% of students psychologically and

physically bullied and/or were bullied by other students [2]. Another study from Bangkok, Thailand showed that about 30% of seventh through 12th graders had been involved in a violent event on or outside of school property [3]. These figures likely underestimate the prevalence of peer violence because they are based on in-school children, who generally have less risky behaviors than out-of-school children [4].

There is evidence that a large proportion of physically violent and psychologically aggressive adolescents continue on a path of violence into adulthood [5], displaying what has been termed a "life course persistent development pathway" [1]. This is

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especially the case among individuals who are unable to access social and personal resources, such as positive role models, that can mitigate a negative course of development [5]. Understanding peer violence among adolescents is necessary not only to reduce violence during this vital period of development, but also to prevent the continuity of violence into adulthood.

Witnessing interparental violence has been linked to poor emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and general health functioning among children [6–8], and particular attention has been given to assessing the impact on children's violent behaviors [6,7]. Social learning theory posits that youth learn to be violent and be victims of violence by observing the behaviors of primary intimate groups, such as parents [9]. Empirical studies demonstrate that childhood exposure to violence in one's family is closely linked to subsequent violence with intimate partners in later life [10–13]. There is, however, little research on the effects of witnessing interparental violence on young adults' use and experience of psychological aggression with peers [11,14]. Additionally, most research on the intergenerational transmission of violence has been conducted in developed countries [6,7,10,13].

One Finnish study of 12- to 17-year-old psychiatric patients found that boys who witnessed interparental violence had a 2.5 times increased odds of being a victim of psychological and/or physical peer bullying compared with those who had not witnessed violence (95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.10–5.51). This relationship did not hold for girls [15]. Among sixth graders and first- and second-year high school students in the Philippines, witnessing interparental violence was strongly associated with adolescent physical aggression toward peers (OR = 2.12, 95% CI = 1.77–2.53). This relationship did not differ by adolescents' gender [14]. The results of both studies must be interpreted with caution, however, because neither used a representative sample of youth.

Adolescent violence prevalence in the Philippines

Although there are few data on the prevalence of interpersonal psychological aggression among adolescents in the Philippines, there is a high prevalence of physical violence [16,17]. According to the 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study, a population-based study of Filipino adolescents, 14% of 15–24 year olds said they physically injured someone or were physically hurt by someone in the past 3 months. Sixteen percent of males and 12% females had perpetrated violence, whereas 16% of males and 11% of females had been victims [16]. Additionally, a 2003–2004 nationally representative study of second- to fourth-year level Filipino students in secondary education found that about 50% of males and females were involved in a physical fight at least once in the past 12 months [17].

Adolescent friendships in the Philippines

Although the family continues to be an important social institution in the Philippines [18], another source of affirmation and support for Filipino adolescents are *barkadas*, or peer groups [19]. Literally translated, a *barkada* is a group of passengers together on a boat and implies a tight-knit crew of adolescent peers embarking on parallel journeys through life. *Barkadas* serve as the center for social activity for young people and are often continued into adulthood. Although both male and female youth form *barkadas*, these groups are more often seen among males. Parents of adolescents tend to see *barkadas* as unproductive, and even negative, influences on their children [20].

Using population-based data, this study examines the relationship between witnessing interparental intimate partner violence and young adults' involvement with psychological aggression with close friends (a subset of peers) in Cebu, Philippines. This study also investigates if the impact of witnessing interparental violence differs based on the gender of the perpetrating parent and the young adult. In this study, psychological aggression is defined as active, passive, verbal or nonverbal communication that is intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or communication perceived as having that intent [21].

Methods

Study design

This study used secondary data from the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey (CLHNS), an ongoing study of Filipino women who gave birth between May 1, 1983, and April 30, 1984. A one-stage cluster sampling procedure was used to select participants for the baseline survey. All pregnant women living in 33 randomly selected communities in metropolitan Cebu were invited to take part in the study. The baseline interview was conducted with 3,327 pregnant women. Follow-up continued for these women and their index children (ICs) in 1991–92, 1994–95, 1998–99, 2002, and 2005. All survey were approved by the Internal Review Board of the University of North Carolina-Carolina Population Center [22,23]. Details of the survey design and implementation have been published elsewhere [22].

Sample

The sample for this manuscript consists of 1,912 ICs (children born to the cohort of women pregnant in 1983–84) ages 21–22 interviewed in 2005 and 2002. Eight pairs of twin ICs and 15 ICs missing data on violence experience were dropped from the analyses. Remaining missing data were checked to see if they were related to the outcome. The nearest neighbor hotdeck imputation, in which every missing value is replaced with an observed response from a “similar” unit [24], was used to replace missing data. The final sample size was 1,881.

Study measures

Young adults' use and experience of friend psychological aggression was taken from the IC's 2005 survey, and predictors were taken from the 2002 IC and maternal surveys.

Friend psychological aggression. The 2005 CLHNS included a violence scale based on Straus' Conflict Tactics Scale [25] and Revised Conflict Tactics Scale [26]. ICs were asked if they had used or experienced acts of negotiation, psychological aggression, and physical violence with nonromantic close friends in the context of a disagreement, annoyance, “spat,” or fight in the previous 12 months of the survey. Using the psychological aggression scale of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale [26] and results from Kuder-Richardson-20 (KR-20) statistics as guidance, we included the following items from the full violence scale to create a *psychological aggression* subscale: (1) excessively nagged; (2) yelled or insulted; (3) swore; (4) sulked or refused to talk; or (5) stomped out of room. (KR-20 = .66; victimization KR-20 = .60). Respondents who reported using and/or experiencing at least one of the

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