



Child-to-parent violence: The role of exposure to violence and its relationship to social-cognitive processing



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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that child-to-parent violence (CPV) is related to a previous history of violence within the family setting. The current study was aimed to explore the exposure to violence in different settings (school, community, home, and TV) and its relationship to some variables of the social-cognitive processing (hostile social perception, impulsivity, ability to anticipate the consequences of social behaviors and to select the appropriate means to achieve the goals of social behaviors) in a group of juveniles who assaulted their parents. It is also examined how they differ from other young offenders and non-offender adolescents. The sample included 90 adolescents from Jaén (Spain). Thirty of them were juveniles who had been reported by their parents for being violent towards them and 30 were juveniles who had committed other types of offences. The third group was made up of 30 adolescents without any criminal charge. Adolescents answered measures of exposure to violence, perception of criticism/rejection from parents, hostile social perception, and social problem-solving skills. Results revealed that juveniles who abused their parents reported higher levels of exposure to violence at home when comparing to the other groups. In addition, exposure to violence at home was significantly correlated to the hostile social perception of adolescents in CPV cases. Implications for prevention and treatment are discussed.

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Violencia filio-parental: el papel de la exposición a la violencia y su relación con el procesamiento sociocognitivo

RESUMEN

La investigación sugiere que la violencia filio-parental está relacionada con la historia previa de violencia en el seno familiar. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar la exposición a la violencia en diferentes contextos (colegio, calle, hogar y TV), así como su relación con algunas variables del procesamiento socio-cognitivo (impulsividad, percepción social hostil, habilidad para anticipar y comprender las consecuencias de conductas sociales y para seleccionar los medios apropiados para lograr objetivos de conductas sociales), en un grupo de menores denunciados por maltrato hacia sus padres. Se examinó también si existían diferencias respecto a otros menores infractores y menores no infractores. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 90 adolescentes procedentes de Jaén (España). De ellos, 30 eran menores denunciados por maltrato hacia sus padres y 30 eran menores que había cometido otros delitos. El tercer grupo estuvo compuesto por menores no infractores. Los adolescentes cumplieron cuestionarios sobre exposición a la violencia, percepción de crítica/rechazo de los padres, percepción social hostil y habilidades de resolución de problemas sociales. Los resultados mostraron que los menores que agredían a sus padres presentaban mayores niveles de exposición a la violencia en el hogar. Además, la exposición a la violencia en el hogar se relacionaba significativamente con la percepción social hostil de los adolescentes. Se discuten las implicaciones de los resultados para la prevención y el tratamiento en casos de violencia filio-parental.

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Palabras clave:

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Research on family violence has been traditionally focused on both partner violence and parent-to-child abuse. However, another type of violence within the family has risen in the latest decade, with an increasing number of cases where violence is exerted by children and adolescents towards parents, which is known as child-to-parent violence (CPV). This subtype of family violence, defined by [Cottrell \(2001\)](#) as “any act of a child that is intended to cause physical, psychological, or financial damage to gain power and control over a parent” (p. 3), has become a matter of concern not only for society in general, but also among professionals and researchers from different countries ([Calvete, Gámez-Guadix, & García-Salvador, 2014](#); [Contreras & Cano, 2014a, 2014b](#); [Ibabe, Arnoso, & Elgorriaga, 2014](#); [Pagani et al., 2004, 2009](#); [Routt & Anderson, 2011](#)). However, similarly to other forms of family violence, victims tend to hide the abuse. To be precise, parents are unwilling to report their children’s abuse in the Juvenile Court, which increases the probability of being an underestimated phenomenon in terms of the number of official reports. Nevertheless, an important source of information about the extent of CPV is provided by the studies, especially with community samples, in which children and adolescents (perpetrators) report the information about CPV incidents.

Data from the United States report that CPV occurs between 7 and 18% in two-parent families, increasing to 29% in single-parent homes, whereas prevalence rates in Canada and France are lower (see review by [Kennair & Mellor, 2007](#)). Recently, [Margolin and Baucom \(2014\)](#) conducted a study with a community sample of adolescents from the US, assessing the prevalence of CPV by using an ad hoc questionnaire. These authors found that 22% of adolescents had attacked physically one of their parents, and that 75% had attacked them verbally. In Spain, a recent study with a community sample of 1,698 adolescent students (CPV was measured by using the Child-to-Parent Aggression Questionnaire; [Calvete et al., 2013](#)) revealed that 13.7% of participants had physically assaulted their parents at least once in the past year, and almost all adolescents had displayed some behavior regarded as psychological aggression against their parents (92% towards the mother and 86% towards the father) ([Calvete, Gámez-Guadix, & Orue, 2014](#)).

As [Brezina \(1999\)](#) pointed out, this type of family violence presents some peculiarities, especially concerning the victim and the perpetrator who are implied, which makes it a special issue, since adolescents abuse those who should represent authority and should be their carers ([Ibabe & Bentler, 2016](#)). Thus, it represents a different category of family violence characterized by an inversion of normal family power relationships among family members whereby teenagers believe they are “in charge” of the home ([Tew & Nixon, 2010](#)). In respect of the perpetrator gender, results vary according to the research methodology used. Studies with forensic samples reveal that the majority of offenders are males, whereas the victims are usually females ([Condry & Miles, 2014](#); [Contreras & Cano, 2014b](#); [Kethineni, 2004](#); [Ibabe et al., 2014](#); [Routt & Anderson, 2011](#)), being the peak age of offending between 14 and 17 years ([Condry & Miles, 2014](#); [Kethineni, 2004](#)). However, research with community samples reports different results according to the perpetrator and the victim gender, along with the type and severity of violence. For example, [Calvete et al. \(2013\)](#) found that girls showed higher rates of aggression than boys in psychological and physical aggression against parents, with no significant differences in severe physical aggression. Regarding parents gender, the prevalence of psychological aggression against the mother was greater than against the father, although there were no differences in terms of severe psychological aggression. Otherwise, [Ibabe, Jaureguizar, and Bentler \(2013\)](#) reported that in general, adolescents were found to be more psychologically violent and emotionally violent towards mothers than towards fathers, with no differences for physical violence. Furthermore, sons directed more physical violence towards

their parents than daughters, whereas there were no significant differences for psychological and emotional violence.

There are different frameworks to explain the variables underlying the development of CPV, which are briefly described below. The ecological theories, as for example The Nested Ecological Theory ([Cottrell & Monk, 2004](#)) and The Social Ecology Theory ([Hong, Kral, Espelage, & Allen-Mearns, 2012](#)), propose that there are multiple levels of influence concerning CPV, emphasizing the reciprocal interactions of these levels. Thus, there are diverse variables, from the immediate setting of the individual to a broader cultural and social context: family variables, individual features, a history of previous violence within the family, cultural values, socialization of the male power, and so on. On the other hand, some strain and social learning theorists posed that CPV represents a functional response to family adversity (or strain) ([Brezina, 1999](#)). Related to this perspective, the influence of violence exposure within the family setting is one of the approaches gaining momentum in the literature on this issue that could partially explain the development of CPV. Exposure to family violence can be direct (when children are victimized, that is, parent-to-child abuse) and indirect (when children witness violence, as inter-parental violence). Thus, on the basis of results from the intergenerational transmission of violence approach (e.g., [Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003](#); [McCloskey & Lichter, 2003](#); [Stith et al., 2000](#)), it is hypothesized that, through observational learning and imitation of an adult model ([Bandura, 1977](#)), children from violent homes could become aggressors themselves, as they internalize that using aggression is an appropriate way to deal with interpersonal conflicts.

A number of studies in the field of CPV have obtained results in line with this hypothesis. Concretely, previous research suggests that witnessing inter-parental violence seems to be related to abusive behaviors from children toward their parents (e.g., [McCloskey & Lichter, 2003](#)). As for parent-to-child violence as precursor of CPV, [Pagani et al. \(2004, 2009\)](#) conducted a longitudinal study with a community sample and found an association between parents’ use of physical and verbal punishment to their children and adolescents’ physical and verbal aggression to their parents. In this line, [Margolin and Baucom \(2014\)](#) carried out a prospective longitudinal study with adolescents and their parents, demonstrating that the risk for CPV was related to prior parental aggression and, specifically, that mother-to-child physical aggression was the strongest indicator of physical CPV. In addition, other studies with community samples reveal that adolescents in families where both inter-parental and parent-to-child violence were present are more likely to engage in CPV when comparing to those adolescents who did not suffered violence at home ([Calvete, Orue, & Sampedro, 2011](#); [Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2012](#); [Ibabe et al., 2013](#); [Routt & Anderson, 2011](#)). Research with clinical and forensic samples has reported similar results ([Boxer, Lakin, & Mahoney, 2009](#); [Ibabe, Jaureguizar, & Díaz, 2009](#)). In fact, there is evidence supporting that inter-parental violence and parent-to-child violence are likely to coexist within the same family ([Cui, Durtschi, Donnellan, Lorenz, & Conger, 2010](#); [Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008](#); [Slep & O’Leary, 2005](#)). Although some authors have not found differences by sex (e.g., [Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2012](#)), other studies reported that the bidirectionality of family violence is higher in sons than in daughters ([Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2011](#); [Ibabe et al., 2013](#)). In this regards, an explanation of this finding could be the interaction between different socialization practices and the modelling of same-gender parent behavior, that is, sons’ abusive behavior could be influenced by the role modelling of masculine stereotypes that promote the use of power and control in relationships ([Cottrell & Monk, 2004](#)), so they are reinforced more often for being aggressive. By contrast, girls are reinforced for being more passive. In addition, males may learn the role of perpetrators if their fathers abuse them or in the

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