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Research article

Family factors and parenting in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to estimate the use of positive and negative parenting practices in Ukraine and explore relationships between parenting practices, intimate partner violence (IPV), alcohol use, and sociodemographics. Parents of children (N = 320) ages 9–16 from three Ukrainian regions answered questions from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ), the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS-R), Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES), and the Alcohol Use Section of the Drinking and Drug History and Current Use Patterns questionnaire. Ukrainian parents who reported lower use of alcohol, balanced family functioning and lower intimate partner violence were more likely to use positive parenting and less likely to use negative parenting practices. Parents with lower education were more likely to use negative parenting practices. Furthermore, alcohol use, IPV, parent education and higher family income were significantly and indirectly related with positive and negative parenting scores. The model explained 61% of variance in the positive parenting, 67% in the negative parenting.

1. Introduction

Parenting, the act of support and development of children, has been well-studied in developed countries (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Anderson & Henry, 1994; Anderson, Sabatelli, & Kosutic, 2013; Belsky, 1984; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). However, very little is known about parenting in Ukraine. In a recent study, the risk for externalizing behaviors was higher for Ukrainian children if their parents did not use positive parenting, were not providing adequate monitoring and relied on corporal punishment (Burlaka, 2016). This study aims to extend understanding of parenting in Ukraine by testing the association of parent- and family-level factors with two clusters of parenting behaviors: (1) parenting practices associated with optimal development and socialization of the child (positive parenting); and (2) parenting practices associated with inconsistent discipline and increased risk for child abuse and neglect (negative parenting).

The ecological systems theoretical framework posits that children grow in environments that influence their growth and individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). The family systems theory regards parenting as one of the family's basic tasks (Anderson et al., 2013). Positive parenting can propel children to mastery of interpersonal relations and successful career. Belsky (1984) proposed that the child's self-esteem, academic achievement and ability for self-control are positively correlated with parental warmth and consistent discipline. To reinforce child's desired behaviors, rules, routines and predictable schedules should be key targets in effective parenting (Webster-Stratton, 2012). Webster-Stratton (2012) argued there is a great benefit in structured and positive parent-child interactions that may contribute to emotional and behavioral stability of children across all ages. Additionally,

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parental involvement with the child's daily activities, such as attending parent-teacher conferences and attending extracurricular activities, is related with children's higher academic achievement (Spera, 2005; Stright & Yeo, 2014). Even for high-risk families, effective parenting is a key component that can mediate and moderate the impact of adversity on child behavior outcomes and help raise resilient children (Burlaka, 2016, 2017; Masten, 2001).

In contrast, negative parenting can contribute to the early onset of aggressive and defiant behaviors that may continue into adulthood and contribute to other mental health problems, such as substance abuse (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2008; Kawabata, Alink, Tseng, van IJzendoorn, & Crick, 2011). Children independent decision-making and responsibility is developed through consistent parenting—clearly communicated behavior expectations followed up with natural and logical consequences when children make mistakes or violate rules (Webster-Stratton, 2012). In addition to the lacking consistency, negative parenting is associated with child abuse and neglect. Neglectful parents fail to provide proper care, do not encourage school attendance, provide very little supervision, fail to establish norms or provide emotional and practical support to their children. Lack of child monitoring increases the risk of conduct problems, rule breaking and aggression (Burlaka, 2016; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Snyder, Schrepferman, Bullard, McEachern, & Patterson, 2012). Additionally, the use of physical punishment as a logical consequence of misbehavior can result in physical child abuse, the “nonaccidental injury inflicted on a child” (Crosson-Tower, 2013, p. 180). The corporal punishment is also linked with increased externalizing psychopathology in Ukraine and globally (Burlaka, 2016; Gershoff, 2002, 2010, 2013; Ma, Han, Grogan-Kaylor, Delva, & Castillo, 2012). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged member States to address “any level of legalized violence against children” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2007, p. 6). Although Ukraine has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2015), its implementation has not been very successful. In a recent study, 75% of Ukrainian parents reported spanking, slapping and hitting children with objects (Burlaka, 2016).

1.1. Parent and family characteristics related to parenting behavior

Several sociodemographic characteristics have been found to influence the quality of parenting. For example, lower income, unstable work and high debt may contribute to caregiver depressive symptomatology and impact the ability to provide nurturing, warm and involved parenting (Conger et al., 1992; Dovgopol, 2009). Chumak and Tkachenko (2008) also proposed that constructive and respectful relations with the child largely depend on family socioeconomic status, the psychological climate in the home, and education of parents. Furthermore, older parents may be more mature and psychologically stable, and able to provide quality care for children (Belsky, 1984). In fact, older mothers may feel more pleasure from spending time taking care of their children (Ragozin, Basham, Crnic, Greenberg, & Robinson, 1982). Interestingly, Fergusson and Woodward (1999) found that children who were born to mothers under 30 years of age had 1.5–8.9 times higher risk to develop conduct and mental health problems.

Additionally, alcohol use can significantly impact the ability to parent children, particularly in the context of Ukraine, one of the top drinking nations in the world (World Health Organization, 2014). Misuse of alcohol is an important factor that can set the stressful dynamics in the entire family (Loukas, Fitzgerald, Zucker, & von Eye, 2001) and limit parents' personal psychological resources and the ability to parent (Dovgopol, 2009; Iakunchykova & Andreeva, 2012; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). In a world mental health (WMH) survey in Ukraine (Webb et al., 2005), 8.5% of Ukrainian women reported heavy alcohol use in the past 12-month.

The increased frequency of alcohol use among Ukrainian mothers is associated with lower spirituality and the use of escape-avoidant coping strategies, confrontation and less frequent use of positive reappraisal of stressful life situations (Churakova, Burlaka, & Parker, 2017), which may have negative “trickle down” effects on children, ultimately leading to less successful child adjustment. Children of parents with alcoholism had increased internalizing behavior symptomatology that was mediated by negative parenting (Burstein, Stanger, Kamon, & Dumenci, 2006) as well as externalizing psychopathology that was mediated by parent-child conflict as well as by family conflict (Loukas et al., 2001).

According to conflict theory, conflicts are inevitable and family members use various tactics to resolve them, ranging from peaceful negotiations to physical violence (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). In a recent study, 58% of Ukrainian women reported being physically assaulted during last year, 34% were victims of sexual coercion, and 44% reported being injured as a result of intimate partner violence (IPV; Burlaka, Grogan-Kaylor, Savchuk, & Graham-Bermann, 2017). In that study, mothers who had lower education were more likely to experience IPV. The IPV is a major issue that can affect parenting ability (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001).

Balanced family cohesion and flexibility represent other basic family systems processes frequently associated with better psychosocial functioning of the parents and higher quality of parent-child interactions (Anderson et al., 2013; Huth-Bocks & Hughes, 2008). A balanced cohesion exists in families where members are neither overly enmeshed nor disengaged in relationships with each other while families with a balanced flexibility have a healthy “amount of change in its leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules” (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983, p. 519). Poor emotional bonding and problem power and role structures in the family were related to children's criminal, addictive behaviors and increased mortality in the U.S., Norway, Sweden, Italy and in former Soviet Union republics (Ogden & Halliday-Boykins, 2004; Olsson, 2010; Redmond & Spooner, 2009; Schaeffer & Bordin, 2005; Tafà & Baiocco, 2009).

1.2. The present study

Given recent data suggesting a link between child externalizing behaviors and lower use of positive parenting, poor monitoring, and corporal punishment, it is critical to investigate specific family processes associated with parenting in the Ukrainian families. The

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