



Child protection fathers' experiences of childhood, intimate partner violence and parenting



Lee Zanoni ^{*}, Wayne Warburton, Kay Bussey, Anne McMaugh

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 June 2014

Received in revised form 11 August 2014

Accepted 12 August 2014

Available online 21 August 2014

Keywords:

Fathers

Childhood maltreatment

Intimate partner violence

Domestic violence

Child abuse

Child protection services

ABSTRACT

Research on mothers in child protection families has revealed that they often have a history of childhood abuse. Research has also shown that a considerable proportion of child maltreatment co-occurs with intimate partner violence (IPV) towards the mother. However, there is a dearth of research on the childhood histories and IPV victimization experiences of fathers in child protection families. To address these gaps in the literature this exploratory mixed method study of 35 men associated with a parenting program in Australia investigated fathers' childhood experiences, exposure to IPV and concern for their children's safety. Although this study was conducted with a specific group of fathers screened for serious personal problems, the findings suggest that, similar to mothers in child protection families, there are some fathers within typical child protection populations who have histories of childhood abuse and IPV victimization. In addition, many of the fathers in this study tried to protect their children from maltreatment related to the other parent. The main implication of the findings is that child protection fathers who have histories of abuse and IPV victimization should be afforded the same support and assistance as mothers in similar situations.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

A mother's history of childhood maltreatment and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) victimization are factors known to increase the risk of her children being maltreated (Hartley, 2002, 2004; Ross, 1996; Sidebotham & Golding, 2001; Stith et al., 2009). However, little research has investigated if these same associations exist for fathers. There is a dearth of knowledge about fathers with children who are involved in Child Protection Services (CPS), as fathers have tended to be overlooked by both child protection practitioners and researchers, and these fathers themselves have proven difficult to reach by both services and studies (Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey, & McMaugh, 2013). Although in some studies fathers have been interviewed about their experiences of being involved with CPS (Coady, Hoy, & Cameron, 2013; Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Smithers, 2012; Storhaug & Øien, 2012; Strega, Brown, Callahan, Dominelli, & Walmsley, 2009), few studies have sought to investigate fathers' childhood experiences, exposure to IPV, or concerns for their children's safety relating to the other parent. The aim of the present study was to address these gaps in the literature by exploring the life stories of a small group of fathers whose children had been involved with CPS in Australia. A review of the scant existing literature suggests that a small percentage of fathers may have similar life experiences to many women in child protection families, having suffered

maltreatment themselves as children, having endured IPV victimization, and wanting to protect their children from harm by the other parent. The association between IPV victimization and child maltreatment needs to be addressed within the larger body of knowledge on men as victims of IPV in general. Furthermore, the literature on fathers in general suggests that just as mothers can play a protective, positive role in the lives of at-risk children, so too can fathers. The extant literature also suggests that the benefit of father involvement may be transmitted to the next generation.

1.1. Fathers' Life Stories and Childhoods

A limited number of studies have investigated the life stories of fathers involved with CPS. One such study was conducted with 18 fathers in Canada, and themes such as children being a motivation for positive life changes, fathers rescuing their children from unsafe situations with their mothers, and fathers' concerns about the effect of parental conflict on children, were reported (Cameron, Coady, & Hoy, 2014). Other studies focusing on fathers' experience of CPS rather than their life stories have noted a history of childhood trauma, incidents of alleged false allegations of child sexual abuse, and disclosures of IPV perpetration as well as victimization (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Smithers, 2012; Storhaug & Øien, 2012; Strega et al., 2009). However, these findings have mostly pertained to only one or two individuals in each study. Some larger scale studies have also noted CPS fathers' frequent history of childhood maltreatment. For example, a study of 1266 families identified for child neglect in Canada found that 21% of

^{*} Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, 2109, Australia.

E-mail address: lee.zanoni@mq.edu.au (L. Zanoni).

the fathers had been maltreated as children, according to the case social workers (Dufour, Lavergne, Larrivée, & Trocmé, 2008). In a study of 162 parents with allegations of child maltreatment in the UK, forensic psychologists determined that between 22–56% of fathers believed to be the perpetrators of child maltreatment had been physically and/or sexually abused as children (Dixon, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Browne, & Ostapuik, 2007). However, the number of non-perpetrating fathers with childhood histories of abuse was not reported. The “Children of the Nineties” longitudinal study of parental risk factors for 162 maltreated children in the UK, found that 34–36% of fathers reported in a postal questionnaire that their childhood was not really happy or unhappy, 11–14% said their parents had been physically cruel, and 1–4% said they had been sexually abused in childhood (Sidebotham & Golding, 2001). While many CPS fathers report similar childhood experiences to CPS mothers, fathers' life stories also appear to contain unique features, such as confessions of IPV perpetration, and being falsely accused of sexually abusing their children.

1.2. Fathers as victims of IPV

The topic of male victims of IPV is contentious, with some researchers asserting that IPV is symmetrical (i.e. perpetrated equally by men and women) (Dutton, 2008; Straus, 2008, 2011). However, the majority of researchers in the domestic violence field contend that IPV is not symmetrical, as most perpetrators of serious IPV are men, and those women who are violent usually act in self-defense (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 2006, 2011). Both research perspectives claim that the other is motivated by political agendas (i.e. feminism or men' rights) and that the other's studies contain methodological and sampling flaws (Dutton, 2012; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Johnson, 2011). In an attempt to resolve this debate, Johnson (2006) proposed that there are four different types of IPV. Of most relevance are two very distinct types of IPV, ‘situational’ or ‘common’ couple violence, and ‘patriarchal’ or ‘intimate’ terrorism. According to these paradigms, most IPV is situational couple violence and is symmetrical, whereas a small proportion of IPV is intimate terrorism and is almost exclusively male perpetrated (Johnson, 2006). Large-scale, nationally representative studies conducted by the governments of the UK, US and Australia have supported the gender asymmetric view by demonstrating that women report significantly more violence and injuries from their partner than do men, and the majority of victims of sexual violence are women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Smith, Osborne, Lau, & Britton, 2012; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The rate of male IPV victimization in the community according to these studies is 5–11%, compared to 17–24% of women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Coker et al., 2002; Office for National Statistics, 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Interestingly, a nationally representative study of 703 young adults in Sweden who reported exposure to IPV in childhood found that 5% of participants had witnessed unidirectional mother-to-father violence, 22% had witnessed unidirectional father-to-mother violence, and 71% reported bidirectional violence (Miller, Cater, Howell, & Graham-Bermann, 2014).

Although there are significantly less male, compared to female, victims of IPV, even 5% of the total population of a country equates to a substantial number of male victims. Additionally, there is now evidence, from self-report and third party sources, that some of these men experience severe and non-mutual IPV (Dixon et al., 2007; Dufour et al., 2008; Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Male victims can experience physical and psychological abuse that is as damaging as the intimate terrorism experienced by some women (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Coker et al., 2002; Douglas & Hines, 2011; Dutton, 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010; Migliaccio, 2002). Studies also show that female perpetrators use strategies similar to those of male perpetrators to control and diminish their victims. However, female perpetrators are more likely to compensate for their lesser

physical strength by using an object, such as a bat or knife, to injure their partner (Capaldi et al., 2009). Additionally, male victims are less likely to report the abuse and seek help. This appears to reflect an unwillingness to acknowledge their victimization, the shame and stigma of being abused by and afraid of a woman, the fear that they will not be believed, and the fear of being accused of being a perpetrator and arrested (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Douglas & Hines, 2011; Hines & Douglas, 2010; Hogan, Hegarty, Ward, & Dodd, 2011; Migliaccio, 2002; Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010). Research suggests these fears may be well-founded. A study of 190 male callers to a domestic abuse helpline for men in the US showed that men who did call the police or standard domestic violence helplines reported being disbelieved or accused of being a batterer, and were often referred to batterer programs (Hines et al., 2007). The 2012 Personal Safety survey of 17,201 Australians found that 58% of women never contacted police regarding their experience of past partner violence, whereas 80% of men never contacted police (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This Australian survey also found that 39% of women currently experiencing partner violence never sought advice or support, whereas 70% of men in this situation never sought advice or support. Another difference between male and female victims of IPV is that male victims are more vulnerable to false allegations of partner and child abuse due to the common stereotype that men are predisposed to aggression and violence. For example, a study of 302 men who reported severe IPV from their female partners found that 67% of participants reported being falsely accused of IPV against their partner, 49% of those with children were falsely accused of physically abusing their children, and 15% were falsely accused of sexually abusing their children (Hines & Douglas, 2010).

A further difficulty with the issue of men as victims of IPV is that it is well recognized by those who work with male perpetrators of IPV that these men often claim to be the IPV victim, blame their partner, and refuse to take responsibility for their own abusive behavior (Bancroft, 2002; Morris, 2009; No to Violence, 2011). This has likely contributed to the widespread cynicism towards men who claim to be victims of IPV and deny being the primary perpetrators of IPV. A study conducted on the Men's Advice Line, a telephone service dedicated to supporting male victims of IPV in the UK, reveals some relevant statistics. It found that of 2903 men who initially identified themselves as victims of IPV, the trained helpline workers determined that 51% were actual victims of abuse, 16% were the primary perpetrators of abuse, 1.4% were engaged in mutual domestic violence, 13% were in unhappy but not abusive relationships, and in 17% of cases the final domestic violence category was unknown or uncategorized (Respect, 2013). Additionally, 15% of the callers initially identifying themselves as the victims of abuse shifted their identification by the end of the call, with 3% finally identifying themselves as perpetrators (Respect, 2013). Therefore, although there is evidence that some men do make false claims of being victims when in reality they are the primary aggressors, it appears that the majority do not. Given the controversial nature of this issue, it is pertinent to highlight that the organization managing this helpline (Respect) was created by an informal group of practitioners working with male perpetrators of domestic violence (Respect, 2014). After seven years of focusing solely on perpetrators, they expanded to include services to male victims of domestic violence.

Another factor to note is that abused men display similar characteristics to abused women, usually exhibiting low self-esteem and depression, accepting the blame for the abuse, minimizing or excusing the perpetrator's behaviors, and minimizing or denying the extent of injuries they have incurred at the hands of their partner (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Hogan et al., 2011; Migliaccio, 2002). Furthermore, female perpetrators of intimate terrorism appear to use similar strategies of blaming their victim, denying responsibility, and falsely accusing their victim of abusing them (Hines et al., 2007). It is of critical importance, therefore, that practitioners are able to distinguish between genuine victims of non-mutual IPV and primary perpetrators of IPV, regardless of gender.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6834136>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6834136>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)