



Risk factor profile of youth incarcerated for child to parent violence: A nationally representative sample

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Intra-familial violence occurs in many forms yet few researchers examine child to parent violence (CPV), which occurs in almost 20% of single parent homes. Studies have neither developed a risk factor profile for youth involved in the most severe cases of CPV resulting in incarceration, nor included a comparison of gender-specific correlates.

Methods: Data from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) 2003, a large-scale, nationally representative sample of justice-involved youth between the ages of 10 and 20 who were surveyed using a multi-stage cluster sampling procedure is utilized.

Results: Youth incarcerated for CPV are typically white and male. Youth, particularly female aggressors, tend to have substantial histories of substance use and/or victimization. Issues of mental health, poor school performance, and other maladaptive behaviors are also common.

Conclusions: Relative concordance between CPV arrest and CPV incarceration risk profiles demonstrates youth who initially come into contact with law enforcement due to a report of CPV will continue and/or escalate the behaviors in a manner that will eventually result in arrest and out of home placement decisions. Interventions that focus on breaking the cycle of interfamilial violence through using collaborative, coordinated law enforcement and social services approaches are needed.

1. Introduction

Although intra-familial violence occurs in many forms, researchers tend to focus on child abuse and intimate partner violence, with few published studies that examine child to parent violence (CPV). Yet, physical violence perpetrated against a parent occurs in an estimated 7–18% of two-parent homes, and 18–29% of single parent homes within the United States (see Kennair & Mellor, 2007). Existing knowledge on individual and situational dynamics underlying CPV has developed with a reliance on data that is culled from the “front end” of the system, whether that be survey data from affected families (Agnew & Huguley, 1989), interviews with parent victims (Calvete, Orue, Gamez-Guadix, Hoyo-Bilbao, & de Arroyabe, 2015), or official criminal justice system data including CPV incidents documented by law enforcement (Armstrong, Muftić, & Bouffard, forthcoming; Miles & Condry, 2016; Strom, Warner, Tichavsky, & Zahn, 2014; Walsh & Krienert, 2009), court records that include parent narratives (Edenborough, Jackson, Mannix, & Wilkes, 2008), records of judicial proceedings (Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010), and probation or diversion

records (Kethineni, 2004). Missing are studies that pull data from the “back end” of the system; those CPV incidents for which youth have been incarcerated.

This oversight is unfortunate as CPV incidents present issues distinct from other forms of intra-familial violence that may affect decision-making at various stages of case processing. For instance, since the parent victim usually has legal responsibility for the aggressor, the victim may be reluctant to pursue or participate in formal actions affecting the child, particularly during latter stages of case processing. As such, we anticipate that the risk profile of youth who have entered farther into the system (i.e., youth incarcerated for CPV) may be unique from the risk profile of youth commonly identified by “front end” data including non-system involved youth. This study provides what is believed to be one of the first attempts to create a risk profile of youth incarcerated for CPV utilizing a nationally representative sample.

1.1. Risk factors associated with child to parent violence

Researchers have sought to identify demographic characteristics of

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both youth and parent(s) involved in CPV incidents (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Calvete et al., 2015; Calvete, Orue, & Gamez-Guadix, 2013; Condry & Miles, 2014; Contreras & Cano, 2014; Ibabe, Jaureguizar, & Bentler, 2013; Lyons, Bell, Frechette, & Romano, 2015; Routt & Anderson, 2011; Walsh & Krienert, 2009). Studies have demonstrated that, in part, the resulting demographic risk profile of CPV offenders and their parent victims depends upon the sample utilized, as well as the stage in case processing (e.g., initial reporting versus placement decision) at which the incidents were drawn. By and large, the risk profiles generated have come from CPV offender samples that were either non-system involved (e.g., community samples) or, if system involved, from earlier points in criminal justice system processing (e.g., arrest records).

A growing body of research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) has underscored the damaging effects of childhood abuse, neglect and household dysfunction on youth's subsequent antisocial behavior (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE framework may be particularly informative regarding CPV as it suggests that the number, severity, and variety of adverse events that children are exposed to affects their later maladaptive behavior (Baglivio, Wolff, Piquero, & Epps, 2015; Dong et al., 2004; Felitti et al., 1998). Indeed several scholars find that exposure to various forms of family violence (e.g., witnessing domestic violence or being the abused/neglected by a parent) is related to adolescent violence toward a parent (Beckmann, Bergmann, Fischer, & Mößle, 2017; Contreras & Cano, 2016; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2012; Ibabe et al., 2013; Kennedy, Edmonds, Dann, & Burnett, 2010; Lyons et al., 2015). The ACE framework has gained popularity among criminologists in recent years as a means to explain the link between negative life experiences in childhood and offending patterns in adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Baglivio & Epps, 2015; Levenson & Socia, 2016; Wolff, Baglivio, & Piquero, 2016).

1.2. Gender and race

Gender is one of the most frequently studied correlates of CPV with findings indicating that CPV is most commonly perpetrated by sons toward their mothers (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Armstrong et al., forthcoming; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010; Walsh & Krienert, 2007). As a result, CPV is often labeled a “gendered” crime; however, the existence of this gender dyad differs by at the point in the system from which the sample was drawn. Research that has examined the prevalence of CPV among families not involved in the criminal justice system finds males and females were equally as likely to engage in violence toward their parents (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Beckmann et al., 2017; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Pagani et al., 2004, 2009; Ulman & Straus, 2003).

Research that includes CPV incidents reported to law enforcement produces a different offender risk profile. These studies find that males are more often CPV aggressors as opposed to females, particularly physical aggressors (Armstrong et al., forthcoming; Walsh & Krienert, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, males who commit CPV are more likely to be older than females who commit CPV (Kethineni, 2004; Walsh & Krienert, 2007). Age is an important consideration because studies find as male aggressors age, the assault becomes more severe (Walsh & Krienert, 2007).

One explanation for the differences in findings for the youth-parent gender dyads may result from the victim's reluctance to report this type of familial violence to law enforcement (Charles, 1986; Kethineni, 2004; Pelletier & Coutu, 1992). Reporting behavior may be influenced by parental concern about how the incident will reflect on their parenting capabilities (Bobic, 2004) and by the aggressor characteristics that produce a real, or perceived, threat to the parent (Brezina, 1999; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988). For instance, a parent may perceive an older male youth as more threatening or to hold the capability to produce greater injury to the parent than a younger female youth. As a

result, a parent or parents may be more likely to report older male youth to law enforcement. The gender of the victim may also influence parental reporting because mothers may feel less embarrassed about the incident than fathers, especially when sons commit the violence. Walsh and Krienert (2007) note fathers may feel societal pressures to not only maintain an image of strength, but that they are “in control” of family matters.

In terms of race, there appears to be greater CPV prevalence in white families overall than families of other races or ethnicities. This finding is consistent across non-system and system involved samples (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Armstrong et al., forthcoming; Charles, 1986; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Walsh & Krienert, 2007) including one study that examined a small sample of incarcerated youth (Kethineni, 2004); however, gender may moderate these findings. Agnew and Huguley (1989) discovered that while white females had significantly higher rates of CPV perpetration than black females, CPV perpetration rates for white males was not significantly higher than black males. Although race is a consistent correlate of CPV in the literature, limitations in the research warrant caution for robust confidence in these findings. Few studies have included a representative sample of the racial and ethnic groups from which they are drawn (Kennedy et al., 2010).

Studies failing to find demographic differences in CPV aggressors have used national random samples that rely on data that have not necessarily been reported (or gone unreported) to law enforcement, whereas studies finding gender and race differences utilized officially reported incidents although these latter studies did not utilize national random samples. Perhaps parents, especially white mothers, are more likely to report incidents of CPV when the violence is committed by their sons because incidents involving female aggressors are either not as serious, or are not perceived as being as serious (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988). Moreover, white families may be overall more likely to involve law enforcement in familial incidents. In a similar vein, law enforcement may respond more formally to incidents involving males and their mothers because of real or perceived threat, which is supported by findings that indicate a higher likelihood of arrest for incidents with an injury (Armstrong et al., forthcoming). The potential for differences in reporting behavior and categorical differences in CPV incidents, either real or perceived, are anticipated to influence subsequent stages of processing including placement decisions, making gender and race critical considerations moving forward.

1.3. Substance use, mental health, and family composition

While adolescent substance use can directly result in family conflict, it can also create indirect conflict stemming from poor school performance and anti-social peer relationships. Furthermore, substance use may also play a role if an adolescent becomes violent toward a parent while intoxicated or high (Cottrell & Monk, 2004). Pagani et al. (2004, 2009) found that adolescent substance use, defined as drinking “often” or “always” or using drugs at least five times in the past 6 months, predicted verbal aggression toward either parent, but not physical aggression (Pagani et al., 2009). With respect to substance use at the time of the event, Walsh and Krienert (2007) found that only a small proportion of both male and female adolescents reported being under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the assault toward their parents (10% and 3%, respectively).

With respect to mental health, studies find youth CPV offenders had some mental health or emotional concerns (Kethineni, 2004) or had previous contact with mental health counseling or psychiatric hospitalization (Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Kennedy et al., 2010). Specifically, studies have reported that youth who have assaulted a parent often have Axis I diagnoses, including schizophrenia or other hallucinations, depression or bipolar disorder, behavioral disorders such as ADD/ADHD, ODD, or conduct disorder, reactive attachment

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