

Child Mental Health and Bullying within the Exposure to Domestic Violence: Literature Review

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Abstract

The harmful consequences of domestic violence on children's lives have been widely reported in the literature. However, the influences of exposure to domestic violence or witnessing violence in the family on the children's experiences of being a bully or victimized of bullying have not been paid sufficient attention in child mental health field. A critical literature review was the method of this article. Electronic databases about the relationship between bullying behavior and mental health by recognizing the consequences of domestic violence on children's lives were searched. Exposure to domestic violence might be associated with children's problematic behavior. Also, children might be bullied by peers at schools and behave aggressively. This article aims to explore the relationships between experiencing domestic violence and bullying behavior, and being peer victimization by focusing on child mental health and intervention efforts. Understanding how children witness violence and how school bullying might be linked with witnessing violence is a goal of the study. Bullying can be recognized as a result of domestic violence incidence and this can improve effective interventions for children's mental health and overall well-being. Thus, a deeper understanding of how child mental health conditions might be interconnected with bullying behavior within complex and dynamic domestic violence cases was explored.

Keywords: Bullying, domestic violence, interventions, mental health

Exposing different types of violence is a significant problem in society as much evidence shows the consequences of domestic violence on individuals, children and families. Specifically, exposure to domestic violence causes serious health consequences around physical and mental well-being (Graham-Bermann and Perkins, 2010). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) defines interpersonal violence as, former or current spouse's physical, sexual, or psychological abusive acts. Importantly, children who witness intimate partner violence in the home have been often victims. A great number of studies investigated the relationship between bullying and risk factors such as domestic violence, aggression and parental skills (Baek et al., 2019; Foshee et al., 2016; Lucas et al., 2016; Nocentini et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2016; Vo et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2015). Likewise, school bullying is often interconnected with mental health issues including emotional and behavioral problems (Arslan et al., 2021). This article pays attention to how children who witness intimate partner violence might bully of victims or may be a bully by focusing on the improving their mental health during interventions.

The World Health Organization (2002) defines bullying as the "intentional use of physical or psychological force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation" (as cited Voisin and Hong, 2012, p.481). Importantly, individuals who experience trauma often are unable to develop positive relationships with family members and friends; more specifically they do not have a cohesive, independent and stable sense of self (Knight, 2009). Moreover, being bullied may be a risk factor for the symptoms around post-traumatic stress disorder (Idsoe, 2012). While the consequences of bullying are often associated with negative mental health issues, some factors interconnected with bullying. For instances, gender,

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age and ethnic background might impact on experiencing the types of bullying behavior and victimization. Furthermore, being bullied by their peers rather than older students were often reported among elementary school-aged children (Hong and Espelage, 2012). If adolescents are exposed to domestic violence, they are also more likely to bully at school (Kelleher et al. 2008).

The violence cycle of intergenerational violence theory can explain how individuals can learn violence at home and apply in their relationships in general. The cycle of intergenerational violence often cited as the violence passing from parent to child. As several scholars reported that children exposed to violence at home environment are mostly to experience behavioral problems (Marshall et al., 2022; Widom and Wilson, 2015), these are often aggressive behavior, bullying at schools, regressing, controlling behavior, and imitating behaviors. Intergenerational transmission of violence is also identified as a relationship between parent-to-child abuse.

Social identity development is a significant factor regarding being a bully. If someone faces domestic violence, their identity might become damaged and this experience may negatively affect their development of social, emotional and academic well-being. Group similarities, group norms and intra-group position are vital factors that contribute to bullying behavior among elementary school-aged children. For instance, children are likely to become an acceptable in a group when they have similar attitudes. Therefore, the idea of being in a group who are bullying may increase their negative attitudes in order to stay in a group which perceives bullying as a favorable act. Moreover, children in a group resemble each other regarding their involvement in bullying (Duffy and Nesdale, 2009). Thus, peer groups should be account for in understanding how bullying might occur in childhood bullying. According to social identity theory, peer groups can greatly influence one to become a bully (Boulton, 1995). Specifically, Fantuzzo and Mohr, (1999) have discussed that it is possible to observe more aggressive abusive actions at the schools and societies when children exposed to intimate partner violence at their home. Internalizing behavior problems include depression, suicidal behaviors, anxiety, fears, phobias, insomnia, tics, bed-wetting, and low self-esteem. These problems might be associated with cognitive and academic functioning (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 2009).

Witnessing domestic violence and corporal punishment have a major effect on adolescent well-being and risk behaviors, and the study showed witnessing domestic violence was associated with experiencing all types of violence. Certain consequences of violence might be experiencing bullying behavior and low perceived health and satisfaction with life. (Lepisto et al., 2010). World Health Organization (WHO) reported that "...an estimated 31 000 children under the age of 15 years died globally as a result of domestic violence in 2002 (as cited in Lepisto et al, 2010, p. 70). The cumulative amount of violence the child has witnessed is related to greater child adjustment problems. Exposure to domestic violence was interconnected with adjustment problems such as developmental issues (Graham-Bermann and Perkins, 2010).

Living with domestic violence can affect infants and pre-school children through fear, anxiety and sleep disturbance. At the beginning of the school years, children may have difficulties relating to peers and other children. These children might be diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, which alongside other factors such as fear and anxiety (Jaffe et al., 2003). Within the general feelings of childhood exposure to domestic violence, children are more likely to act aggressively due to some emotional issues including depression and lower self-esteem (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 2009). Jaffe et al. (2012) discuss intimate partner violence is often associated with the cases of domestic homicide. Adam (2007) found that approximately 1,800 adults are killed every year as a result of domestic homicide in the US. Concerning abused adolescents and their feelings, Lepisto et al., (2010) found that victims' experiences of emotional violence such as constant feelings of fear were more harmful consequences than physical ones such as being hit.

Adolescents might witness different types of domestic violence such as between mother and father, father and siblings, mother and sibling or siblings. For example, violence between father and mother often results in witnessing violence between parents and siblings among youths. On the other hand, violence between father and siblings is mostly associated with violence between mother and siblings. Lepisto et al. (2010) found that adolescents who have witnessed violence among family members, they frequently become victims of violence. (Lepisto et al. 2010). Children might also witness different kinds of domestic violence. For example, they may experience directly observing their parents' violence or hearing violent acts (Edleson, 1999). Furthermore, the perpetrator might use their child as a tool for abusive action after the violent event (Edleson, 1999). Ganley and Schechter (1996) point out children might exposure to domestic violence in different ways. For instance, Edleson, (1999) explains these different ways to experience adult domestic violence among children as,

...hitting or threatening a child while in his or her mother's arms, taking the child hostage to force the mother's return to the home, using a child as a physical weapon against the victim, forcing the child to watch assaults against the mother or to participate in the abuse, and using the child as a spy or interrogating him or her about the mother's activities. (p. 841)

Socio-economic disadvantages may affect families' well-being and experiencing domestic violence. For example, "poverty, substance misuse, parental mental health problems, social isolation, neighborhood violence, homelessness and other forms of child abuse" may occur with domestic violence as risk factors (Stanley, Miller and Foster, 2012). To reduce or prevent these risks, building a helpful mother and child interactions can reduce the negative effects of intimate partner violence among preschool-aged children (Graham-Bermann and Perkins, 2010). Therefore, this article investigates the association between domestic violence incidence and facing bullying behavior or being a victim of bullying at schools by concentrating on available intervention efforts.

Method

A critical literature review is the method of this study. The following keywords were examined in the literature: "bullying, intervention efforts, victims of domestic violence, children's bullying behavior, domestic violence, consequences of domestic violence on children's lives, bullying interventions, domestic violence interventions". The English language articles were searched. The timeframe was 1989 to 2022 for the search. This timeframe was selected based on the time of recognizing the interventions of bullying and recognizing the consequences of domestic violence on children's lives. The following databases were primarily searched: Google Scholar, Web of Science, Taylor and Francis Online Library, PubMed, PsycINFO, ProQuest, Science Direct, Wiley Online Library, and Sage Journals. This study explores the following questions: (1) What are the available evidence on the relationship between bullying incidence at schools and exposure to domestic violence by focusing on interventions? (2) How do interventions apply sources and tools to reduce and stop bullying as well as the consequences of domestic violence?

Results

Consequences of Domestic Violence on Children

Lepisto et al. (2010) found that a father's lack of positive fatherhood skills was more likely to related to exposure to domestic violence among children. Topolski et al (2001) point out in terms of family relationships; domestic violence causes under protective family relationships and insufficient supportive systems. It is vital to understand the association between different types of domestic violence and over-protective and under-protective behavior because these relationships also might be risk factors for children's well-being (Lepisto et al, 2010). If children experience not only interpersonal violence but also parent-child aggression, children might more internalize problems and feel more threatened (McDonald et al., 2009). Prolonged exposure to domestic violence may affect children's brain development very early on in children's lives. This may cause post-traumatic stress disorder when children get older (Harne, 2011). Graham-Bermann (2008) highlighted the strong relationship between staying in a violent environment and experiencing trauma and stress. Stanley, Miller and Foster (2012) found that while some women survivors recognized how their children witnessed domestic violence and this harmfully affected them, some argued how they prevented their children from witnessing violent behavior. If the interventions aim to respond to these traumatic stressors, women survivors often benefit from such interventions and heal in effective ways. When we consider the harmful consequences of domestic violence on children's lives, being a bully or being victimized at schools concerning the exposure to domestic violence can be better understood. The strong association between bullying and exposure to domestic violence can help school staff to develop effective bullying prevention and interventions.

The Link between Bullying Behavior and Mental Health

Some scholars explored the consequences of bullying among children by focusing on the mental health (L. Arseneault et al., 2010; Louise Arseneault, 2017; Kumpulainen et al., 2001; Turcotte Benedict et al., 2015). The relationship between the use of mental health services and bullying among children has been examined (Kumpulainen et al., 2001). Importantly, many studies discuss the correlation between bullying behaviors and intimate partner violence (Baldry, 2003; Foshee et al., 2016; Lucas et al., 2016; Nocentini et al., 2019; Sharma et

al., 2016; Vo et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2015). For example, Baldry (2003) found that when girls witnessed violence against their mothers or a mother's violence against their fathers, they were frequently bully others, compared with girls who had not been exposed to any form of intimate partner violence among Italian elementary and middle school students. Bowes et al (2009) had similar findings, when children witnessed intimate partner violence, they were often bully other students, over and above socio-environmental factors. Moreover, Bauer et al (2006) highlight the association between witnessing intimate partner violence and bullying behavior, domestic violence highly impacts bullying or becoming victimized by peers among young people. Overall, the literature pays attention to the relationship between bullying behavior or peer victimization and witnessing or exposure to domestic violence among young people.

Many scholars reported that young people act extremely on aggressive signals in their relationship with children and this may increase bullying behaviors to peers (Brauer et al., 2006; Lundy and Grossman, 2005). However, one study of the link between exposure intimate partner violence and problematic behavior showed that exposure intimate partner violence was not linked to victimization by peers based on the child reports (Bauer et al, 2006). On the other hand, Hurt, et al., (2001) discussed school bullying as a consequence of domestic violence; many adolescents escape the violent family environment by taking risks such as bullying within other behavioral issues. Furthermore, Lepisto et al., (2010) found that the experiences of severe domestic violence were related to adolescents' bullying behavior. It was also noted that these young people can seek acceptance from their school friends such as their romantic relationship.

According to the study by Lepisto et al., (2010), witnessing intimate partner violence was correlated with being victims of bullying. However, experiencing violence between mother and siblings was associated with being a bully. Therefore, how young people witness or exposure to intimate partner violence can shape their positions whether being a bully or being victimized. All in all, a great number of studies has found a link between domestic violence and bullying behavior and peer victimization. However, these studies point out many other potential factors that might impel children's problematic behaviors. Fathers' violent behavior and neglectful parenting practices might affect older children and young peoples' social and educational development (Harne, 2011). Different types of violence and lack of affection may increase the children's aggressive and violent behavior (McDonald et al, 2009).

Treatment Approaches, and Interventions.

Taking into account key elements of bullying and its relationship with witnessing or exposure to intimate partner violence is significant to discuss how children can begin the process of healing from exposure to domestic violence. It is essential to provide a sense of physical and emotional safety in children's needs (Bancroft and Silverman, 2004). Bosse and McGinn, (2009) emphasized that children need clear structure, boundaries, and a degree of certainty. In this clear structure and boundaries in their family relationships, children can develop an idea that they are not responsible for parents' any violent and abusive actions.

Many human services, social policies and intervention programs strive to prevent children from violent at home and school. Several shelters and communities support women survivors of intimate partner violence and their children with education and intervention programs. In general, these programs' goals are to reduce partner violence against the mother and to protect the child from witnessing the violence and experiencing the consequences of intimate partner violence including post-traumatic stress (Graham-Bermann, 2008). Importantly, the evaluation of the interventions for women and children survivors reported some improvements in well-being. For instance, Pepler, Catallo, and Moore, (2018) found that Peer Group Counselling Program provides effective support for children who witness domestic violence. According to the recent meta-analysis on interventions for children exposed to intimate partner violence, Romano, Weegar, Gallitto, Zak, and Saini, (2021) found that interventions rest on the children needs are effective improving children's well-being. Importantly, interventions with trauma-based as well as non-trauma specific approaches should be considered based on the children's needs and experiences. Recently, positive couple therapy is also reported as important intervention approach for satisfying intimate relationship (Genç, 2021). Improve positive interactions among couples and reducing abusive acts in positive couple therapy might develop children's well-being.

Graham-Bermann and Hughes (2003) have discussed exemplary programs such as the learning club, project kid and the kids' club. The Learning Club was one of the effective intervention programs which were funded by the government. The most effective part of the learning club was providing mothers and children with essential

needs such as foods, information about their legal rights, employment opportunities, and educational tools. Moreover, it provides social support sources, child care, housing and transportation. Empowerment is a major theory of this program. This theory assumes that mothers and children survivors hold a lack of or limited information about community resources. Therefore, offering them to resources such as educational materials and community support can help them leave a violent environment (Graham-Bermann and Hughes, 2003).

Sullivan, Campbell, Angelique, Eby and Davidson (1994) stated that intervention programs were highly effective regarding the mother's level of depression and self-esteem and in reducing child abuse. Graham-Bermann and Hughes (2003) noted that children's group education program was successful in significantly changing children's perceptions of themselves. Graham-Bermann (2008) has discussed that primarily universal intervention programs do not impact of domestic violence on children later in life; specifically, emotional or social adjustment, school success, employment rates and violence in intimate relationships.

Humphreys (2001) emphasizes that family interventions are key interventions to reduce the negative and adverse impact and these interventions support the healing and recovery process for children exposed to domestic violence. Interventions seek to change a child's attitudes about violence, such as increasing self-esteem and appropriate social behavior, and reducing anxiety and self-blame (Graham-Bermann, 2000). These interventions might result in a child's positive and appropriate behavior. In protecting a mother's mental health, family interventions are effective ways and this helps children's well-being. Although family interventions can be successful, recent research indicates that building support across families, schools, and communities is the most important intervention that builds resiliency in children exposed to violence (Iwaniec et al, 2006). Bosse and McGinn (2009) discuss the importance of the presence of external factors and they emphasize that family support, school opportunities, and connections to prosocially adults and organizations can support and increase resiliency in children who are experiencing domestic violence from parents.

Bosse and McGinn (2009) found that the potential outcomes improved for children exposed to domestic violence if the violence is correctly identified and addressed within the family system. For instance, providing a safe space for children can improve their disclosure. This safe environment can be built by professionals by strengthening the resilience among children (Bosse and McGinn, 2009). Moreover, providing perpetrator interventions for violent men who are fathers have also described as an important factor to reduce and end the harmful consequences of domestic violence. Importantly, improving positive parenting skills among fathers with intimate partner violence may improve safe father-child connections. When these safe and positive interactions are built, bullying behavior or being victimized at schools might be decreased or stopped.

Discussion

During interventions, implications of practice might exist. For example, Stanley, Miller and Foster (2012) define survivors' feelings such as denial, evasion or outburst of aggression during direct attempts in the intervention. In the process of social work interventions, experiencing domestic violence causes shame and guilt for survivors. This makes a risky venture for social workers as well as children and parents. In this sense, social workers should be sufficiently confident and skilled to be able to acknowledge these feelings and work with them while maintaining a focus on the impact of domestic violence on the child. Therefore, social workers should assess each family member separately in the context of disclosure by recognizing the safety issues (Stanley, Miller and Foster, 2012).

The violence cycle of intergenerational violence theory is one of the key theories in understanding bullying among children as intergenerational transmission of violence illustrates the influences of the abusive relationship at families on children bullying behavior as well as mental health. Moreover, social identity theory clarified the impact of groups on children's attitudes. Therefore, these two theories are critical to reduce potential bullying and improve child mental health. In terms of gender differences, Voisin and Hong, (2012) found that girls were more frequently than boys to be victims of violence. For instance, the experiences of a financial struggles in the family were associated with the adolescents' violent acts. Moretti et al. (2006) found that girls who had witnessed their mothers' aggressive and abusive acts toward their partners were more aggressive toward friends than girls who had not observed intimate partner violence among adolescents in a Canadian study. The findings of boys were similar, boys who observed their fathers' aggression were more likely to act aggressively towards friends. When both female and male youths witnessed mothers' aggression, they were more likely to act aggressively to their girl

or boy friends in their romantic relationships. These youths are often diagnosed with post-traumatic stress (Voisin and Hong, 2012).

Bosse and McGinn (2009) discuss adolescent bullying behavior could be a sign of domestic violence. Therefore, school staff should pay attention to victims as well as perpetrators of bullying. During interventions, social workers or nurses should explain about the dynamics of domestic violence and its consequences to adolescents. However, children or adolescents are not the ones to disclose it, so understanding the elements of domestic violence is a significant step for effective interventions. Close relationships between mothers and children can be a protective factor in violent situations, and effective parenting skills might protect their children's possible problematic behavior. Therefore, providing parenting programs or interventions for improving parents' motherhood and fatherhood skills can enhance healthy parenting practices. When parents improve their parenting abilities, children may less likely to develop problematic behavior such as bullying.

Conclusion

Overall, in terms of practical implication, we need to consider dynamic and complex circumstances around bullying at schools. It is possible to reduce the negative impact of domestic violence on bullying and victimization through interventions at the relational and societal levels. For example, parenting practices should be improved to achieve the quality of parent-child relationships by offering effective interventions for all family members. These interventions might include domestic violence perpetrator programs and interventions for mothers and children's survivors. When human services work collaboratively in domestic violence cases, all family members' positions and vulnerabilities can be taken into account in effective ways. Thus, schools and domestic violence interventions might work together to end bullying related to exposure to domestic violence. Practitioners who work with domestic violence and school staff should recognize the consequences of domestic violence on children's lives. When they recognize such harmful consequences, they can take action to improve children's well-being.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Standards

The ethical review application was not needed as this research did not require the collection of data with human participants.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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