

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Parent-to-Child Physical Aggression, Neighborhood Cohesion, and Development of Children's Internalizing and Externalizing

Riina, E., Martin, A., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2014). Parent-to-child physical aggression, neighborhood cohesion, and development of children's internalizing and externalizing. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 35(6), 468-477.

SUMMARY: Parental aggressiveness towards a child, even in a mild form, can lead to higher levels of internalizing and externalizing problems. Parent-child physical aggression characterized as physical acts which can range from slapping, spanking, beating, burning, and scalding. This study evaluated the impact of parent-child physical aggression, age and neighborhood cohesiveness on levels of internalizing and externalizing problems. Results showed that parent-child physical aggression has a positive relationship with both internalizing and externalizing problems, while cohesiveness of a child's neighborhood only reduced levels of internalizing problems for maltreated children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parent-child physical aggression and the level of internalizing problems as well as parent-child physical aggression and the level of externalizing had a significant positive associations.
- Children who were maltreated in high cohesion neighborhoods experienced significant lower levels of internalizing problems in comparison to children who are maltreated in low cohesion neighborhoods.
- Low cohesion neighborhoods did not impact levels of externalizing problems in children who experienced parent-child physical aggression.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with local organizations to develop programs that increase neighborhood cohesiveness
- Facilitate support groups for military children who are victims of parent-child physical aggression

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military parents who have a history of parent-child physical aggression on alternative and effective ways to discipline their child
- Provide resources for older maltreated children on how to work through their internalized and externalized problems in a healthy manner

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend integrating parenting education on discipline and anger management into existing service delivery systems for military families
- Recommend professional education for health care providers on different types of behavior problems that affect different age groups who suffer from parent-child physical aggression

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from the Project on Human Development in Chicago neighborhoods, from which a random sample was taken by a data collectors who visited their homes.
- In order to qualify to participate in the longitudinal cohort survey, the caregiver must have had a child who is within six months of the target ages (0,3,6,9,12,15 and 18 years old) and for the community survey the individual must be a resident of the neighborhood who is over the age of 18 years.
- Participants completed surveys on either child and family characteristics as well as internalizing and externalizing behaviors or on neighborhood cohesion.
- Researchers analyzed associations between parent-child physical aggression, child age, neighborhood cohesion, and the levels of internalizing and externalizing problems.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were residents of randomly selected households in Chicago.
- A total of 6,228 caregivers and their children participated in the study.
- Eighty thousand, seven hundred eighty-two adults responded to a survey about their neighborhood's cohesiveness.
- The caregivers surveyed were 14.32% White, 48.13% Hispanic, 33.77% Black and 3.78% other.

LIMITATIONS

- Data do not provide information on when parent-child physical aggression first occurred for children, and duration of parent-child physical aggression could have effected the level of internalized and externalized problems, which was not accounted for in this study.
- Data were based on caregiver reports on parent-child physical aggression and children's adjustment causing potential response bias, especially if the caregiver perpetrated parent-child physical aggression.
- Participants were only from the city of Chicago, which could limit the generalization of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data on when parent-child physical aggression first occurred, allowing for onset of parent-child physical aggression to be analyzed as a factor contributing to the level of internalized and externalized problems
- Gather information from primary caregivers and children on maltreatment and children's adjustment to eliminate potential biases
- Conduct data collection in multiple cities across the United States, allowing for generalization of findings to a national population

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