

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Longitudinal Study on the Effects of Child Abuse and Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence, Parent-Child Attachments, and Antisocial Behavior in Adolescence

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SUMMARY: An examination of the unique and combined effects of child abuse and children's exposure to domestic violence on parent-child attachments and antisocial behavior during adolescence was conducted. More specifically, this study investigated single and dual exposures in children, attachment and possible gender differences in the prediction of antisocial behavior during adolescence. Overall, there were some relationships between youth who were dually exposed and antisocial behavior.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth dually exposed to abuse and domestic violence were less attached to parents in adolescence than those who were not exposed.
- For youth who were abused only and those who were exposed only to domestic violence, the relationship between exposure types and youth outcomes did not differ by level of attachment to parents.
- Stronger bonds of attachment to parents in adolescence did appear to predict a lower risk of antisocial behavior that was unrelated to exposure to child abuse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Encourage military families to seek outside help with child rearing during stressful periods
- Provide military families with comprehensive information on the negative long-term effects of child abuse

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide support for deployed Service members that focuses on relationship building with their children during reintegration
- Develop curriculum for deployed parents that focuses on the inclusion of targeted prevention of child neglect strategies

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Build awareness across military branches around the importance of supporting and promoting effective parenting for Service members and their partners
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families (e.g., child caregivers, mental health, and education professionals) on the different types and subtypes of child neglect

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from child welfare programs, Head Start centers, and child care programs in a two-county area of Pennsylvania as a part of the Lehigh Longitudinal Study which began in 1976 with children who ranged in age from 18 months to 6 years.
- Three waves of data were analyzed; (a) the first wave included 457 children and their parents, (b) second wave began four years later, and (c) third wave began eight years after the first wave, and included 416 children and their parents.
- Analysis examined whether children exposed to both abuse and domestic violence have worse outcomes in adolescence than children exposed to only one (or none) of these behaviors.

PARTICIPANTS

- The average age of primary parent respondents (mainly mothers) was 28 years old.
- Participant identified as 80.7% White, 11.2% more than one race, 5.3% Black, 1.3% Native American, or 1.5% Other.
- At the initial assessment, 86% of the families were from two-parent households; 63% of families had incomes below US\$700 per month. Parents on average had completed 12 years of schooling.

LIMITATIONS

- The chronicity of abuse or exposure to domestic violence, precise age of exposure, or effects of attachment over time were not addressed, so interpretation of the findings is more limited.
- The sample was drawn from only one small region of the U.S.; therefore, the generalizability is limited.
- Over 70% of the sample were low-income families which could bias the findings of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Establish the interaction of protective influences and chronic violence exposure in children of differing ages within military families
- Include methods that can differentiate protective effects for unique and overlapping forms of violence within military families
- Refine the parent-child relationship measures in order to provide a clearer understanding of parent-child attachments and their role in protection and resilience of children

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