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The Psychological Profile of a Future Abuser

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Abstract

This research paper explores factors contributing to the psychology that makes up an abuser by analyzing two comprehensive studies: "Intergenerational Effects of Childhood Maltreatment: A Systematic Review of the Parenting Practices of Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse, Neglect, and Violence" by C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1] and "Psychophysiological Profiles of Batterers: Autonomic Emotional Reactivity as It Predicts the Antisocial Spectrum of Behavior Among Intimate Partner Abusers" by J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]. These studies outline different aspects of what goes into making an abusive profile, as well as risk factors such as childhood maltreatment, emotional reactivity, mental disorders, and heart rhythms correlating with antisocial behaviors. The results of these studies can be further translated into improving society, rehabilitation, and psychological facilities for both the abusers and the abused. By recognizing the implications of abuse, this paper outlines the urgency of the matter and emphasizes the significance of further research to better understand and mitigate abusive relationships.

Keywords abuse, childhood maltreatment, emotional reactivity, relationships

1. INTRODUCTION

In the intricate workings of human tendencies, it is marveling to see how much of one's own behaviors science can not explain. This becomes especially concerning when it comes to behaviors that are abusive and potentially life-threatening. Society fears what it does not know. What it does not know, it can not fix. With domestic violence rates increasing by 25%-33% globally (L. Mineo [3]), abuse can not afford to continue being an issue that isn't understood. Whether it's in the form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, to a child, parent, or senior, the effects of perpetration can impact numerous generations in heavy-bearing cycles of trauma.

2. SIGNIFICANCE

It is important to study abuse as abuse can be found anywhere. Out of the 7.2 million child abuse reports in the US ([4]), only 2.1 million children received care services, and one-third of childhood abuse victims go on to become abusers themselves (D. Goleman [5]). The cycle of abuse is complex, and the more understanding science has on this matter, the earlier an abusive case can receive adequate interventions to have its effects mitigated. It is only by understanding the workings of perpetrators, that one can hope to stop them. Although there is advancing research being conducted on abuse, this topic is so multifaceted that there is a great need for further studies to truly understand the psychology behind it, making it even more significant for one to study the psychology behind abusive profiles.

2.1. Study 1

Research Methods:

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In the study titled “Intergenerational Effects of Childhood Maltreatment: A Systematic Review of the Parenting Practices of Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse, Neglect, and Violence” by C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1], the authors used a comprehensive literature review to study the effects of childhood maltreatment. This systematic review identified relevant studies using the online databases *PsycInfo* and *PubMed* and selected fit studies using a set criteria. This included solely empirical studies that (i) demonstrated an association between childhood maltreatment and parenting, (ii) assessed at least one positive/negative parenting behavior, (iii) were published in a peer-reviewed journal. The exclusion criteria were any non-empirical studies that didn’t include perpetration as an outcome variable or did not include parental figures as their primary population. Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 97 final manuscripts were used in the review. These articles were drawn with an 88% consensus from all authors and were further quality-checked by software. The finalized studies had significant variety in terms of how childhood maltreatment was operationally defined (single vs cumulative victimization), the assessment method (questionnaire, survey), the included population (mother vs father), the parenting outcomes (behavioral implications), and the research design (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or prospective), inducing heterogeneity in the review. (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]).

2.1.1. *Limitations:*

The relevancy of a literature review relies heavily on the sources chosen for the review. Any apparent biases in the studies and the selection of the studies must be avoided, thus, extensive quality analysis and selection are required for a literature review to maintain its value. With this study, the most apparent limitation is that the majority of the included research relies solely on adult participants to recall their childhood experiences. Retrospective interference, current circumstances, self-serving bias, and cognitive functioning could have affected the accuracy of the participant’s responses, hence affecting the accuracy of the studies. Confounding and third variables that failed to be accounted for in numerous studies include the effects of children’s behavior on parents, socioeconomic status of the family, and cultural factors. Confounding variables affect the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and, therefore, can call into question the true value and validity of the study. Lastly, the literature review acknowledged that over half of the studies examining the intergenerational transmission of abuse only included mothers. The lack of a representative and random sample induces sampling bias, hence, not allowing for the generalizability of that section. Consequently, this leaves the question of whether the results focusing on intergenerational transmission can be applied to fathers as well, or if this could be another potential confounding variable (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]).

2.1.2. *Results:*

The empirical studies analyzed in this literature review yielded significant insight into understanding the role of child maltreatment in intergenerational parenting outcomes. Nearly all of the studies identified an association between experiencing childhood physical abuse or witnessing violence and an increased risk of engaging in abusive or neglectful parenting with a rate of 75% or higher. There was additional support for the association between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and the use of physical punishment among mothers. The greatest risk for perpetrating child abuse was found amongst adults experiencing a cumulative effect of maltreatment; the more of a victim somebody is, the more of a perpetrator they will become. Even mothers who experienced both physical abuse and intimate partner violence automatically became twice as likely to abuse physically as opposed to mothers who only experienced one. The research identified that explanations (mediators) for this direct relationship include poor education, stress levels,

substance use disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms that contribute to abusive parenting. Furthermore, victims of child maltreatment have an even greater chance of engaging in a variety of poor parenting behaviors such as hostile, inconsistent, authoritarian, controlling, permissive, and role-reversal parenting. Parents experiencing CSA can also be associated with withdrawal from their children's needs and a flattened affect. Social support and the presence of an adult intimate relationship have been proven effective in moderating physical abuse and emotional over-involvement (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]).

2.2. Study 2

2.2.1. Research Methods:

In the study titled “Psychophysiological Profiles of Batterers: Autonomic Emotional Reactivity as It Predicts the Antisocial Spectrum of Behavior Among Intimate Partner Abusers” by J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2], the researchers conducted an extensive questionnaire screening followed by a conflict discussion to understand the results of battering amongst couples. Using flyers, 101 couples were recruited, all of whom needed to have been married and living together for at least 6 months. These couples were further divided into domestic violence (DV) or nonviolence (NV) groups using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). To be eligible for the DV group, any one partner had to report at least one incident of aggression (beaten up, threatened) in the past year. To be eligible for the NV group, both partners had to report no violence in the entirety of the relationship. Couples were paid 40 to 50 for participation. After the participants were finalized, they completed a three-hour-long questionnaire individually. This questionnaire assessed factors such as intimate partner violence, psychopathy, antisocial personality, and anger levels using standardized scales such as the CTS2, The Self-Report of Psychopathy-II, the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III, the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory, and more. One part of the questionnaire included using the Articulated Thoughts in Simulated Situations test (ATSS), which involves using two audiotaped scenarios designed to induce anger with maritally violent men. These men listened to these audiotapes for four minutes and were asked to imagine their wife in the role of the protagonist, as the protagonist engages in behaviors of complaining about the husband and subtly flirting with other males. In the collective conflict discussion afterward, couples sat quietly for four minutes to get a baseline heart rate before the discussion began, and heart rate and skin conductance levels were both constantly monitored. Debriefing was conducted and the participants' identities were kept confidential. (J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2])

2.2.2. Limitations:

The limitations of using a questionnaire include incorrect feedback and social influences impacting the responses. Discussions can be long and tedious, resulting in a longer duration of data collection in order to yield adequate results. For this study specifically, the research included a relatively small sample of couples. Additionally, the flyers to recruit participants for the study were only posted in low-income African American and Hispanic communities and were placed specifically near the employment section of the newspapers in order to attract the unemployed. Due to the sampling bias, the participants were not representative of the population, hence limiting the scope for the generalizability of this study. Although it was intentional, choosing low-income minorities can also skew the results of the study as it can interfere with the measurements of heart rate and anger reactivity.

2.2.3. Results:

The study mentioned numerous mediators contributing to antisocial behaviors in intimate significant relationships, with a strong emphasis on psychophysiological factors. These factors included extreme cardiac hyporeactivity and hyperreactivity, Type A/B personalities, and temperaments. Low temperaments and cardiac reactivity can demonstrate how the batterer can become desensitized to interpersonal conflict, which is more commonly found in low-level violence abusers (LLV). The study stated that the lack of expressed emotions from the avid abuser stems from poor operant conditioning which had impaired the development of affection and behavioral responses, hence allowing for the expression of more aggressive and criminal behavior. High temperaments and cardiac reactivity stem from poor anger and emotional control, commonly characterized among severely violent (SV) men. The study also acknowledged correlations between income and culture in battering behaviors (J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]).

3. COMPARISON

The studies in this paper explored unique aspects of abuse and studied using different ways and participant populations. C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]'s study focused on the effects of various types of childhood maltreatment, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and negligence, and the various ways it can resurface as poor parenting techniques in adulthood. Hence, C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]'s study required studies focusing on a participant population of parental figures. This study made effective use of a systematic literature review and had highly selective criteria for the studies to abide by (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]). Whereas, J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]'s study used a questionnaire followed by a discussion to test the association between psychophysiology and battering. Unlike the results of C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]'s study, this one focused on mediators regarding emotional reactivity, jealousy, and antisocial behaviors in a participant population of couples living together (J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]).

Despite their differences, both studies contribute to the field of psychology and abuse research. Both studies have shown the negative impacts of heightened anger, as they demonstrate it as a common significant mediator. Lastly, both studies consistently reference the work of Gottman and aim to further his numerous studies of abuse. (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]) (J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]).

4. APPLICATION

Abusive studies have proven that certain traditional practices, such as spanking and negligence, easily instill fear and resentment in children which can often maliciously resurface in adulthood. These findings can be applied to improve parenting methods from an early stage by informing the public of healthy behavior-shaping techniques. Whether it's by implementing positive reinforcement instead of physical punishment, or by hiring babysitters to avoid leaving infants alone for prolonged periods of time, new societal improvements can foster healthier and stronger relationships. In doing so, one is informed of and implements the evidence-based methods to reduce the likelihood of distress in family and future relationships henceforth.

Shedding light on abusive mediators such as emotional reactivity and hostility informs the public of triggers, signs, and common behaviors exhibited by abusers. Such educational awareness empowers individuals to reach out and report cases that one witnesses or even suspects. The results of abuse studies can be put towards reducing the

stigma attached to speaking up by encouraging individuals to prioritize individual well-being over traditional societal thinking. This especially applies to rural or conservative regions where such multiple taboo topics may not have been addressed, and many are still forced to stay silent in the face of abusive relationships and acts.

Additionally, understanding the biopsychosocial aspects behind abusers encourages community engagement by pushing for collective efforts. Whether these stem from support groups, rehabilitation and outreach programs, or the creation of public awareness campaigns, such community interventions can allow for a holistic approach to effective aid against all forms of abuse. Such efforts can even be translated into improved workplace policies and alert hotlines.

Ultimately, by embracing evidence-based practices in society, both collective and individualistic changes can be made to respond to instances of abuse proactively. The more understanding the world has about the dynamics of abuse, the better-equipped individuals can be to make safe and resilient changes for all members. In doing so, society can work together to finally end the endless cycles of abuse and provide prompt intervention and care to those who need it.

5. RELEVANCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to appropriately interpret and respond to both external and internal emotional stimuli. Abusive actions generally stem from a low level of emotional management and are reinforced by the sensations of superiority. These low EI levels can be linked to the way that abusers have been operantly conditioned to view violence and manipulation as acceptable responses, and thus, continue with the expression of aggressive behaviors with other relations.

Poor parenting techniques and anxious-ambivalent attachments are prominent benchmarks for future abusive tendencies. Experiencing negligence or deceitful behaviors during childhood can serve as early trauma for a future abuser. Authoritarian parents are very stringent and more likely to resort to physical punishment. Children of authoritarian parents often grow up to be troubled and likely continue using physical punishment on their own children in the future as well.

Abuse is multifaceted, incorporating numerous mediators such as temperament, anger, and hostility, and furthered by aggression and personal dehumanization. This multifaceted nature also relates to the biopsychosocial approach. Whether it is due to substance abuse (biological), mental health (psychological), or past abusive relationships (social), it is evident that concepts relating to abuse are heavily engraved into psychology's teachings and interests.

6. CONCLUSION

The two studies by (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]) and J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2] collectively provide valuable insight into the topic of abuse. Abusive tendencies stem from a variety

of factors, including economic health, childhood maltreatment, mental health (C. A. Greene, L. Haisley, C. Wallace, and J. D. Ford [1]) emotional reactivity, and antisocial behaviors (J. C. Babcock, C. E. Green, S. A. Webb, and T. P. Yerington [2]). This only emphasizes the complexities left to unfold the puzzling workings of human behavior. From understanding the multifaceted mediators to applying the moderators of abuse, science has come a long way in its efforts to mitigate its effects. By continuing efforts to research abusive actions and relations, society can work to prioritize this urgent manner

so that it can be a prominent topic addressed in public forums and gain the recognition and priority it requires.

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