Childhood Trauma and Physical Violence

Yichen Li[(✉)]

College of Letter and Science, University of California, Davis 95616, USA
jessie001213@gmail.com

Abstract. Society pressure has brought not only mental illness and psychological problems to an increasing number of adults but also an increasing number of children with anxiety and behavioral problems. This study will focus on the relationship between childhood trauma and physical violence. The author used a scoping review to investigate the factors that lead to the emergence of physical violence in children. The findings show that unstable parent-child relationships, poor home environments, neglectful parents, depressing life, and inappropriate media use can cause behavioral problems in children and affect the stability of their interpersonal interactions. Children with traumatic childhood experiences are more likely to develop physical violence and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can lead to emotional instability and impulsivity. It gives a reference for future studies to make more in-depth and accurate judgments and interventions.

Keywords: Childhood trauma · physical violence · parenting style · emotional disorders

1 Introduction

The brain and body are still developing in childhood. It is the most significant period of a person's life. Trauma in childhood usually has a very strong impact on personality development, cognitive development, and behavioral development. Little is known about the impact of trauma on children compared to adult patients with trauma. In addition, there is always a focus on the traumatic effects of big accidents on children, such as earthquakes and separations, while ignoring the little things in life that hurt children's hearts, such as forcing them to do certain things, refusing to communicate with them, arguments between parents, and so forth. Long-term trauma in childhood is associated with a greater risk of PTSD, anxiety, antisocial behavior, and greater alcohol and substance use disorders [1]. The trauma referred to in this article is not necessarily a car accident, exposure to war, bullying, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. Rather, it refers more to the home environment, parental relationships, parenting styles, and oppressive life and educational philosophies. Parents, as the closest people in their children's lives, should identify and solve their children's problems in time to prevent them from becoming a big problem later.

2   Home Environment

Studies have found that parents with low levels of education have more negative family interaction patterns [2]. These parents are often likely to use unhealthy parenting practices such as corporal punishment, mislead their children, and show more negative messages in front of them. Parents usually cannot control their emotions very well. They may use bad words to scold their children or even hit them when they get angry. They usually have a hard time having calm, constructive, and meaningful conversations with their children, which makes it difficult for the children to build good relationships with others in the future. Warm authoritative parents who encourage open discussion raise children with the highest self-esteem and social competence, while authoritative parents who control their children using punishment are associated with a variety of child problems, including lower levels of social awareness, inappropriate language and behavior, and violent tendencies [3]. It also leads to a significant negative impact on the children's mental health, personality development and behavior. Due to a lack of knowledge or literacy, these parents lack proper guidance for their children. Children are more likely to have behavioral problems, such as physical and verbal violence, because their parents have not taught them standards of ethical behavior and have not provided them with an environment conducive to healthy physical and mental growth [2]. They are more vulnerable to influences from parental conflicts, violent programs, and violent games than children who are well-educated by their parents. In communication, the family environment has been identified as a key factor in influencing children's attitudes and behaviors. In particular, the family communication climate plays a crucial role in the development of children's personalities [4]. People in a diverse family environment have higher self-esteem. In contrast, people in protective families are less sociable and have low self-esteem. The study has found that high self-esteem is associated with happiness and life satisfaction, while low self-esteem is associated with depression, anxiety, and aggression [4]. Children in families with a lack of communication have more aggressive tendencies and episodes of misanthropy. In other words, these children do not understand how to express their needs and emotions in calm words and quiet conversations, they do not have role models in their lives that they can learn, and their parents do not guide them on how to relate to society, so they are more likely to use inappropriate ways to solve problems.

3   Parental Relationship

Children who grow up in an environment of long-term conflict are more likely to become irritable, sensitive, have low self-esteem, develop interpersonal difficulties, and even develop violent tendencies [3]. Parents usually have a more direct and influential influence on their children than any other person, such as a teacher or friend, because children spend most of their time with their parents. A good or bad parental relationship is usually reflected in their children's personality and attitude toward the world. Parents should avoid fighting in front of their children when they are young and have not yet formed their values. Mom and dad are the closest people in their lives. If they find that the two people they love the most are always attacking each other whether in words or behavior, that may cast a big shadow in children's memory. That will make them unable to

maintain relationships or solve problems with others in an appropriate way in the future. These children are more likely to learn from their parents to use physical violence against others in the future. They may lose their trust in others and their ability to love others. Studies have found that family relationship breakdown is considered a risk factor for negative psychological outcomes in children of all ages [5]. Children whose parents are separated, divorced, and remarried have been shown to experience anxiety, depression, resentment toward all people, frequent use of violence and increased delinquency. A child affected by parental relationship distress (CAPRD) refers to children who are troubled by their parent's relationship. If one parent always distorts the truth and belittles the other parent in front of the children, this is likewise a form of psychological abuse of them [6]. Bandura's social learning theory claims that children learn behaviors by observing the behavioral strategies used by their parents in conflicts [7]. In addition, the higher the frequency of conflict between parents, the more harmful it is to the child's psychological development. If the conflict is about the children themselves, children may feel shame and anxiety upon hearing it. Then, they may show signs of aggression and violence.

4   Parenting Style

Nowadays, many parents are always busy working or enjoying their own lives, thus may ignore the companionship, care, and education of their children. The study has found that neglect is a potential factor to antisocial personality disorder (ASPD); children with ASPD are unable to adapt to social norms while growing up [8]. Individuals with APSD lack compassion for others and lack remorse for hurting others. They are unable to control their anger and are more likely to blame others for problems in their own lives. A higher quality parent-child relationship has a protective effect on the development of the child's antisocial personality, which can prevent the child from having physical violence. Specifically, a quality parent-child relationship includes two-way love and dependence between parents and children, equal and effective communication, and mutual respect. An assessment called the Parenting Bonding Instrument (PBI) is considered to be the most representative and authoritative measure used to assess parenting style. It has been used to assess two dimensions of parenting style, warmth versus coldness and freedom versus control. Through this assessment, one study found that overprotective or over-controlling parenting was positively associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and anxiety disorders [9]. Overprotective parents prevent children from completing necessary developmental tasks and learning about real society and life [3]. Adult children of overindulgence (ACOs) who are usually overindulged by both parents have difficulty maintaining relationships with others and are more likely to commit physical and sexual violence against others [3]. A study found that prolonged exposure of children to overindulgence was associated with physical abuse, sexual abuse, and addiction [3]. In contrast, neglectful parents usually have no control or limits on their children's behavior, thoughts, and words. These children are forever forgivable, and their parents never pay timely attention to their children's problems, which makes them unable to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. As a result, they usually have a number of childhood problems, which include lower cognitive abilities, lack of individualization, social awareness, autonomy, and self-control.

5   Depressing Life

Researchers have different definitions of stress, one of which is emotional tension caused by a prolonged traumatic life event [10]. As indicated by D'aurora & Fimian, children's distress usually comes from two main factors. The first is excessive academic stress, including poor grades, punishment from teachers, difficulties communicating with teachers, and student rankings at school. The second is social pressure brought on them by their parents. It includes the inability to play with friends, lack of leisure time, excessive parental expectations, comparing them to others, lack of encouragement and demotivation of children. Some children are at risk of developing the psychological condition of "burnout" [10]. It refers to children being tired of everything, cynical, lacking a sense of accomplishment, and alienated from teachers, classmates, and parents. If the stress level is too high, children can develop physical and emotional disorders. Emotional disorders include confusion, frustration, anger, and sadness. Behavioral manifestations include fighting, yelling, self-harm, and physical violence against others. These children are usually more emotionally vulnerable than normal children. They may cry and rage over a small matter that seems insignificant to others. Excessive parental demands may trigger perfectionism in children. Perfectionism is not a mental illness, but it is associated with anxiety and other mental health problems. Research has found that childhood perfectionism increases symptoms of depression [11]. Research shows a direct link between academic stress, and aggression. When children are repeatedly frustrated in achieving their goals and are belittled by their peers and parents, they often use negative coping styles. The main manifestations are feelings of helplessness, anger, and physical violence [12]. Academic pressure and aggression usually interact with each other. Chronic stress negatively affects the hippocampus, which reduces memory. Memory loss can intensify children's stress, leading to more severe depression and violent tendencies. Study has also shown that girls tend to suppress the expression of negative emotions, while boys are more likely to express negative emotions, such as expressing anger through physical violence.

6   Mass Communication Media

Since some parents may ignore the care of their children, these children are prone to use much more mass communication media in the wrong way. Today's media resources are so abundant that children are more likely to see content unsuitable for them, such as violent and sexual content. Young children are not yet fully developed in their independent thinking and judgment skills, so they may learn bad behaviors or words from videos and TV programs without parental mediation. Studies have found that television, movies, and video games containing violence increase the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior [13]. Frequent exposure to violent media during childhood is positively associated with physical violence later in life [13]. The most desirable parent mediation is active mediation. These parents like to talk about media content and make comments while watching TV with their children, such as whether it's good behavior or bad behavior, and they tell their children that they cannot watch certain videos [14]. In contrast, under co-use mediation, parents and their children share experiences but without comment [14]. Children without parental direction may have inappropriate language and

behavior in real life, as well as violent tendencies. They may think some behaviors look cool, and then they may imitate those behaviors, which are dangerous and harmful. In the long run, these children may become accustomed to using physical violence to resolve conflicts and problems. Setting limits and boundaries are healthy and needed for children. Therefore, parental interventions such as parental supervision, explanation, and control of children's media use are critical [13].

7   Conclusion

In conclusion, childhood trauma is usually inseparable from parents and family. The developmental process of children is a continuous socialization process. One of the key periods of socialization is childhood. One's personality and behavioral demeanor are usually formed at an early age. Childhood shadows will influence children's behavior to varying degrees. Unhealthy home environments, parental relationships, and educational styles can all lead to violence in children. They will be more inclined to use violence to solve problems. This may lead to more serious consequences in the future. To prevent violent behavior in children, parents should be good role models, pay attention to their children's mental health, communicate with them more, understand their inner thoughts, encourage them, and give them the right guidance on their morals and values. Based on the results of the current study, people can make more effective interventions for different types of triggers of physical violence in children in future study. The earlier the intervention, the more beneficial it is for the child's cognitive development and behavioral development.

References

1. De Bellis, M. D., & Zisk, A. (2014). The biological effects of childhood trauma. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics*, *23*(2), 185-222.
2. Dubow, E. F., Boxer, P., & Huesmann, L. R. (2009). Long-term effects of parents' education on children's educational and occupational success: Mediation by family interactions, child aggression, and teenage aspirations. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly (Wayne State University. Press), 55*(3), 224.
3. Bredehoft, D. J., MENNICKE, S. A., Potter, A. M., & Clarke, J. I. (1998). Perceptions attributed by adults to parental overindulgence during childhood. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 16*(2), 1998.
4. Huang, L. N. (1999). Family communication patterns and personality characteristics. *Communication Quarterly, 47*(2), 230-243.
5. Harold, G. T., & Leve, L. D. (2018). Parents as partners: How the parental relationship affects children's psychological development. *In How Couple Relationships Shape Our World* (pp. 25–56). Routledge.
6. Bernet, W., Wamboldt, M. Z., & Narrow, W. E. (2016). Child affected by parental relationship distress. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 55*(7), 571-579.
7. Sarrazin, J., & Cyr, F. (2007). Parental conflicts and their damaging effects on children. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 47*(1-2), 77-93.
8. Schorr, M. T., Tietbohl-Santos, B., de Oliveira, L. M., Terra, L., de Borba Telles, L. E., & Hauck, S. (2020). Association between different types of childhood trauma and parental bonding with antisocial traits in adulthood: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 107*, 104621.

9. Cavedo, L. C., & Parker, G. (1994). Parental bonding instrument. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 29*(2), 78-82.
10. D'aurora, D. L., & Fimian, M. J. (1988). Dimensions of life and school stress experienced by young people. *Psychology In The Schools, 25*(1), 44-53.
11. Oros, L. B., Iuorno, O., & Serppe, M. (2017). Child perfectionism and its relationship with personality, excessive parental demands, depressive symptoms and experience of positive emotions. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology, 20.*
12. Khanehkeshi, A. L. I. (2011). The Relationship of Academic Stress with Aggression, Depression and Academic Performance of College Students in Iran. *Journal on Educational Psychology, 5*(1), 24-31.
13. Anderson, C. A., Berkowitz, L., Donnerstein, E., Huesmann, L. R., Johnson, J. D., Linz, D., ... & Wartella, E. (2003). The influence of media violence on youth. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *4*(3), 81-110.
14. Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. J. (2008). Parental mediation of children's internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 52*(4), 581-599.