Micro-sociological Implications of Domestic Violence on Adolescents in a School Setting

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent victimization and exposure to domestic violence has the ability to yield negative psychological, social, behavioral, developmental, and cognitive outcomes. Unfortunately, violence within the home is becoming increasingly prevalent. In 2007 alone, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that roughly 794,000 adolescents were either abused or neglected within their household (Sousa et al. 2011:112). Another form of violence that is becoming recognized as a widespread public-health concern is intimate partner violence. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, intimate partner violence is present when the juvenile is not directly involved and acts more as a witness to domestic violence between his/her caregivers. Within many households where this occurs, adolescents may witness the physical and emotional pain inflicted on adult victims, or they may not actually observe the altercations but are well aware of their existence. It is conservatively estimated that over 200,000 cases of intimate partner violence occur in the United States annually (Sousa et al. 2011:112). Within this Literature Review, the overall purpose is to examine how the side effects of domestic violence impact an adolescent’s school performance. This paper will analyze several characteristics that come with the results of domestic violence separately, such as developmental, psychological, cognitive, social, and behavioral outcomes in order to sufficiently explain how this public-health problem impacts adolescents within a school setting. This paper will mainly focus on the negative outcomes associated with this phenomenon in heterosexual relationships, as they are the most commonly reported.

ANALYSIS

Compromised Family Dynamic

Typically, home is described as being a place of refuge and comfort for people of every age, regardless of their family status. Once domestic and intimate partner violence is
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introduced into this environment, the family home takes on an entirely new dynamic. First, adolescent and parental relationships are compromised. When domestic violence is present within the home, caregivers provide less support and protection towards their offspring, resulting in unhealthy relationships (Lepisto et al. 2010). Secondly, according to the relationship theory, adolescents exposed to verbal or physical abuse subsequently develop distorted views of the family and gender relationships (Carlson et al. 2000). For example, intimate partner violence generally involves a female victim who has been taken advantage of by a male partner physically, emotionally, sexually, or psychologically. Considering intimate partner violence mainly involves juveniles’ frequent exposure to violence, they are conditioned to these gender roles. Women are portrayed as being submissive and easily taken advantage of while men display aggressive and condescending behavior towards their female partners. As these types of behaviors are presented to male/female adolescent witnesses, they become socialized and accustomed to what is seen as being familiar gender roles (Carlson et al. 2000). Further, according to social learning theory, it is not uncommon for adolescents to model their parent or caregiver’s behaviors. When exposed to domestic violence, research suggests adolescents display an increased level of externalizing behaviors such as aggression, hostility, noncompliance, and disobedience. These behaviors thus support the ideas behind social learning theory, which emphasize adolescents’ inclination to develop similar behaviors to that of their parental role models (Carlson et al. 2000:323-25). Third, when violence is present within the family home and the caregivers aren’t offering adequate support or protection towards the youths within the home, adolescents tend to search for alternative attention outside the home. This includes engaging in risky behavior associated with dating relationships. When domestic and intimate partner violence is present within the home the level of violence that is experienced by adolescents is associated with sexual experiences. The more that adolescent’s witnessed or experienced domestic violence,
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the greater the chance that these individuals were to engage in sexual activity and become susceptible to sexual abuse (Lepisto et al. 2010). Therefore, experiencing and witnessing domestic violence has a negative effect on an adolescent’s ability to form and maintain healthy relationships (Lepisto et al. 2010).

*Developmental, Psychological, Cognitive, Social, and Behavioral Outcomes*

Related to the negative outcomes associated with engaging in early sexual behavior among adolescents, not only are their social and behavioral skills distorted, but their developmental and psychological capacity is underdeveloped as well. As previously mentioned, adolescents lacking attention and affection from their caregivers search for it in other relationships. Most often, the attention that they have been searching for is found within dating relationships involving risky sexual activity. Unfortunately, early sexual activity in adolescence can be linked to developmental problems such as depression and antisocial behavior (Lepisto et al. 2010). Not only does early sexual experimentation result in poor coping mechanisms and behavioral issues, but also experiencing violence on a regular basis has been linked to symptoms such as depression and thoughts of suicide (Lepisto et al. 2010). Poor living situations can cause adolescents to think less of themselves thus making their health and life satisfaction ratings lower compared to those from nonviolent homes (Lepisto et al. 2010).

The impact that domestic violence can have on adolescents differs from whether the victim is exposed to verbal and physical violence compared to those who witness domestic and intimate partner violence. Those who have been made victim to different types of abuse show greater debilitating psychological and cognitive effects considering the aggressor is directly targeting them. These adolescents suffer a great amount of unrest that commonly results in other issues such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Fernandez et al. 2011:1226). The result of domestic violence present within the juvenile is also similar with their mother’s
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reaction. It has been shown that exposed mothers experience symptoms of psychopathologies, which contribute to perceiving the troubles of their offspring as being less severe. Also the mother’s emotional distress can result in emotional distancing from their child (Fernandez et al. 2011:1226). As previously mentioned, when adolescents feel distant and uncared for by their families, they look for affection in other places. Therefore, domestic violence can lead to a chain reaction resulting in the destruction of family ties and psychological issues. Further, social learning theory suggests that the continued aggression and lack of support from a maternal figure generates low self-esteem, interpersonal difficulties, pro-violent attitudes, poor coping methods, and presenting themselves with unrealistic demands and ideas (Carlson et al. 2000:323).

Impact at School

In order to adequately address this topic, considering the potential long-term affects that domestic violence and intimate partner violence has on adolescents is crucial. Thus far, this literature review has discussed the psychological, social, behavioral, developmental, and cognitive outcomes present within an adolescent facing hardship within the home. But more importantly, how do these aspects impact other areas of a person’s life? The remaining literature examines how domestic and intimate partner violence impact adolescents within a school setting. The outcomes of this topic are broad. In some instances, research suggests minimal reactions when adequate coping mechanisms are present. Further, adolescents display behavior that is common within their household and their own personal experiences. Again, social learning theory is a substantial contributor of this explanation. Not only do those exposed and made victim to domestic violence repeat and model the behavior, but they also are more likely to approve of the behavior and practice delinquent behavior in interpersonal confrontations and disagreements (Carlson et al. 2000:327).
Bullying is a common trend among students who have experienced or witnessed violence within the home. Bullying can occur in different ways: the adolescent can either be the perpetrator or victim of the act. In order for the act to constitute as bullying their needs to be a strong power differential, intent to create a feeling of fear or intimidation, and to repetitively inflict harm on the physical and mental well-being of the victim. According to social learning theory, victimized children tend to mimic the behaviors of the abuser and demonstrate these tactics on other students through experiences symbolic towards what they have previously been through. In other words, adolescents who have been verbally or physically abused repeat their experiences on their peers (Lepisto et al. 2010). This behavior can also be supported by the differential association theory. This theory argues that delinquent and aggressive behavior can potentially be learned the same way that ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ behaviors are internalized. Adolescents potentially learn such techniques and attitudes related to domestic violence and intimate partner violence, reflecting these same motives in their behaviors. Lastly, general strain theory demonstrates how the strain created by experiencing emotional and physical abuse leads to delinquency. When individuals experience feelings of being treated unjustly, or unfairly, they are likely to correct the situation by alleviating their negative emotions through ways that lead to delinquency, such as bullying (Moon et al. 2008). The toll that the difficult family situation takes on the adolescent is expressed through their behaviors that are exhibited, as they themselves become the aggressor. Therefore, the student’s hardships that are faced at home are taken out on other juveniles within the school setting. The negative psychological, behavioral, and social issues associated with domestic and intimate partner violence can lead an adolescent to display increased aggressive behaviors, as well as being disruptive, uncooperative, disobedient, and distracted.
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In contrast, a child that has been victimized or has been a witness to violence can become the victim of bullying. Since adolescents can experience decreased self-esteem, depression, and anti-social behaviors they also become susceptible to further victimization while at school. Aside from bullying, school performance is negatively impacted as well. Research shows that adolescent exposure to domestic and intimate partner violence leads to lower reading and mathematics scores across the board. Also, evidence suggests that victims have lower verbal IQ scores compared to those unaffected by different forms of domestic violence (Carlson et al. 2000:327). More research and other conclusions are necessary in order to fully examine this idea.

Whether a perpetrator or victim of bullying, adolescents who have been victimized or witnessed domestic violence have several aspects in common. First, for the purpose of this paper, it’s going to be assumed that these individuals experience domestic or intimate partner violence on a regular basis. Because of this there is immense stress on these adolescents in the form of both physical and emotional distress. Secondly, emotionally, these individuals tend to have low self-esteem, have insufficient social skills, and are unhappy at school. Third, generally with everything that these students have going on at home, it’s not hard to believe that when it comes to school, they’re not focused. Subsequently, this leads to an overall poor performance, the creation of unhealthy relationships, and involvement in risky behavior such as substance abuse and sexual activity.

CONCLUSION

After conducting thorough research and analyzing experiments and methods associated with this topic, it was surprising to find that a large number of adolescents exposed or made victim to domestic violence and intimate partner violence show few signs of any negative side effects. Accordingly, other factors, such as an adolescent’s developmental stage, access to protective resources, and socioeconomic factors, as more influential in
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determining how severely, if at all, one will react to such occurrences. In other words, several moderators influence the way that domestic violence is perceived by those exposed. If a conflict is resolved or involves infrequent and minimal use of violence, these types of discrepancies are described as being common and show little distress towards the adolescent victims. In contrast, conflicts involving physical violence and are unresolved and frequent, as researched within this literature review, are conditions that create emotional and physical distress among adolescents (Carlson et al. 2000: 329).

Domestic and intimate partner violence not only creates a stressful and dangerous living environment for all, but also results in negative and lasting behaviors, developmental, psychological, cognitive, social, and behavioral outcomes that are carried into other aspects of a person’s life. As discussed within this literature review, children manifest and display the effects of witnessing and experiencing verbal and physical violence within the home. Social learning theory suggests that the manifested behavior reveals itself in ways that reflect the distressing situations that occur within the household. Not only are adolescents impacted by witnessing or experiencing abuse, but the negative effects on the caregiver also result in a lack of acknowledgement and support for adolescents within the home. Because of this, other delinquent and risky behaviors such as sexual activity, mood disorders, bullying, and decreased achievements in school become the resulting factors.
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References


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