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Influence of Peer Victimization and Self-Esteem on Child-to-Parent Violence Perpetration †

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Abstract: The aim of the present study was to analyze the relationship between both peer victimization (both as a victim and a witness) and self-esteem and child-to-parent violence (CPV) towards one's mother and father, while controlling for participants' substance use and age. In addition, the moderating influence of the participants' sex on those relationships was tested. A total of 855 high school students (402 female and 453 male) aged between 13 and 20 years (M = 15.29; SD = 1.10) were surveyed. Information about CPV was obtained through the Child-to-Parent Aggression Questionnaire (CPAQ). Sociodemographic data, self-esteem, and peer victimization were assessed through a self-constructed questionnaire, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS), and the Violence Exposure Questionnaire (VEQ), respectively. Regarding violence towards mothers, the results of the multiple regression analyses showed a relationship between suffering and the witnessing of peer victimization, which was also correlated with lower scores in terms of self-esteem. A moderating role of the aggressor's sex with respect to self-esteem was found, wherein the relationship between self-esteem and CPV was only significant for the male participants. With regard to violence towards fathers, the results showed a relationship with witnessing peer victimization and self-esteem. In this case, a moderating role of the aggressor's sex with respect to self-esteem and being a victim of peer violence was found, for which their relationships with CPV were only significant for male participants. The results confirm the idea that both suffering from and witnessing peer violence, as well as possessing low self-esteem levels, have an effect on the probability of CPV perpetration, which differs according to the sex of the perpetrator in the case of self-esteem.

Keywords: child-to-parent violence; peer violence; victim; witness; self-esteem

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1. Introduction

Child-to-parent violence (CPV) can be defined as "violence by which children act intentionally and consciously with the desire to cause their parents harm, damage and/or suffering, repeatedly, over time, and with the immediate purpose of obtaining power, control, and domination of their parents to get what they want, through psychological, economic, and/or physical violence" [1].

The data on the prevalence of this phenomenon show it ranges internationally from 4% to 65% [2]. However, recent studies have found that, similar to violence against women [3], child-to-parent violence rates have been increasing due to the confinement situations precipitated by the current COVID-19 pandemic [4]. As the outbreak spread across the world, nations began to close schools, disband public gatherings, and confine people to their homes. As a consequence of this confinement, a significant percentage of practitioners and parents have reported an increase in violence-against-parents episodes during lockdown. Thus, it is important to analyze the consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemic for families suffering from CPV.

Research shows different personal and social characteristics that could be considered as risk factors for the perpetration of violence towards parents [5]. CPV has been associated with variables such as parents' educational style, psychopathology, and alcohol/drug use. The present study focuses on the role of peer aggression and self-esteem in the perpetration of child-to-parent violence.

Few studies have analyzed the role of self-esteem among minors who perpetrate CPV; for those that have, it has been found that self-esteem is one of the personal predictive variables for this type of violence. Aroca, Lorenzo, and Miró [6] found a relationship between low adolescent self-esteem and aggression towards one's parents.

Regarding peer violence, this type of hostile behavior towards peers represents a serious problem for coexistence in educational centers, leading to the development of environments of conflictive relationships that are not suitable for a child's educational and personal development [7]. Peer violence presents a series of negative consequences at the scholastic, teacher, and student levels. Regarding students, several studies show that suffering this type of violence can precipitate personal maladjustment and psychopathology [8].

It is possible that adolescents who were previously attacked by their peers use violent behavior against their parents as a method of compensation for feelings of powerlessness, expressing their anger within a safe context such as the family [9]. It is also possible that repeated exposure to violence committed by peers promotes the development of aggressive thoughts, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of cognitive schemas and aggressive behaviors. Few studies have analyzed the relationship between exposure to peer violence and CPV. Ibabe and Jaureguizar [10] found that violence among peers was a predictive factor of adolescents' aggression towards parents. However, studies have not analyzed the differential effects on CPV of being a victim or witness of peer violence.

With regard to gender differences in child-to-parent violence, previous research has concluded that this is a type of violence exercised by both boys and girls [2]. However, there are differences regarding the type of violence exercised, with psychological violence being more frequent in the case of girls and physical violence more frequent in the case of boys [11]. However, to date, no studies have attempted to clarify the differential role of participants' sex in peer violence and self-esteem's relationship with CPV. Thus, the present study aimed to analyze the interactions of participants' sex with exposure to peer aggression (as a victim and as a witness) and participants' self-esteem levels, while controlling for substance use by adolescents.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Only 1.9% of the total sample did not complete the questionnaires; there were various reasons for this, such as being a foreigner and having a poor grasp of the Spanish language, refusing to complete the questionnaire, or failing to complete some of the scales. These questionnaires were discarded from the final sample. The final sample of the present study consisted of 855 participants (453 boys and 402 girls) from secondary education schools. These participants originated from seven Secondary Education Centers chosen randomly from southern Spain. Their ages ranged between 13 and 20 years old (M = 15.29, SD = 1.10). Specifically, 732 of the participants were between ages 13 and 16, and 123 were between 17 and 20.

2.2. Instruments

In order to collect the socio-demographic data of the participants, a set of questions was asked concerning age, sex, marital status of the participants' parents, and the consumption by the participant of any type of alcohol and/or drug.

Child-to-Parent Aggression Questionnaire (CPAQ) [12] evaluates CPV through 20 parallel items: 10 refer to the mother and 10 refer to the father. In each block of 10 items, 7 of them refer to psychological violence (e.g., "You yelled at your mother/father when you were angry") and 3 to physical assault (e.g., "You have pushed or hit your mother/father

in a fight"). Participants are instructed to indicate how often they have committed these types of aggression against their parents in the past year on a Likert scale, where 0 (never, this has not happened in my relationship with my mother or father), 1 (this has happened rarely, perhaps 1 or 2 times), 2 (sometimes, i.e., it has occurred between 3 and 5 times), and 3 (very often, i.e., it has occurred 6 times or more). In our study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.66 and 0.68 for physical violence against mothers and fathers, and 0.72 and 0.73 for psychological violence against mothers and fathers, respectively.

Violence Exposure Questionnaire (VEQ) [13]. Evaluates exposure to violence in several contexts (in high school, on the street, in the home, and on television). This questionnaire includes 21 items that assess both direct and indirect violence and its items refer to verbal and physical aggression. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (every day). In our study, the internal consistency measured with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83 for victimization at home, 0.72 for witnessing violence on TV, 0.74 for violence in high school, and 76. for violence on the street.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS) [14] consists of 10 items (5 positively-worded and 5 negatively-worded) that assess global self-esteem. Response options range from 1 (Strongly agree) to 4 (Strongly disagree), with the options inverted for half the items. It has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83.

2.3. Procedure

The participants were requested to give their informed consent and were informed that the completion of the questionnaire was strictly confidential and voluntary, so none of them should specify data that could identify them. All the students who were requested to participate were willing to do so. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out in groups, in school classrooms, or the assembly hall, leaving a space between the participants to avoid influence among classmates. Confidentiality of the data was ensured through the assignment of a numeric code to each questionnaire.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses of the present study were carried out using the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 25. In order to analyze the relationship between child-to-parent aggression, suffering and witnessing peer victimization, and self-esteem, multiple linear regression was used.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive data of the subscales of substance use, peer victimization as a victim and a witness, self-esteem, and CPV towards one's mother and father.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of substance use, peer victimization as victim and witness, self-esteem, and CPV against one's mother and father.

Variable	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Alcohol	0.42	0.84	0	5
Drugs	0.18	0.78	0	5
Tobacco	0.41	1.18	0	5
Peer victimization—victim	2.34	2.35	0	12
Peer victimization—witness	6.26	2.71	0	12
Self-esteem	31.41	5.90	11	40
CPV—mother	4.03	3.97	0	28
CPV—father	3.63	3.63	0	25

Next, four independent multiple regression analyses were carried out to determine the variables related to CPV toward mothers and fathers as a function of a participant's sex (male or female).

Regarding violence towards mothers (Table 2), the results of the multiple regression analyses showed a relationship with both suffering and witnessing peer victimization, along with lower scores on self-esteem. A moderating role of the aggressor's sex with respect to self-esteem was found, for which the relationship between self-esteem and CPV was only significant among male participants.

Table 2. CPV towards mother as a function of participant's sex.

Variable	R^2	$F\ \Delta$	Beta	t
Male	0.20	16.08 ***		
Alcohol			0.14	2.65 **
Drugs			0.02	0.37
Tobacco			−0.04	−0.83
Age			−0.07	−1.51
Peer victimization—victim			0.24	4.42 ***
Peer victimization—witness			0.19	3.52 ***
Self-esteem			−0.11	−2.49 *
Female	0.24	18.37 ***		
Alcohol			0.05	0.99
Drugs			−0.01	−0.31
Tobacco			0.11	2.13 *
Age			0.02	0.50
Peer victimization—victim			0.30	5.75 ***
Peer victimization—witness			0.21	4.04 ***
Self-esteem			−0.01	−0.01

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

With regard to the control variables, an effect of alcohol use in the case of males and tobacco use in the case of females was found.

With regard to violence towards fathers (Table 3), the results showed a relationship with witnessing and suffering peer victimization as well as with self-esteem. In this case, a moderating role of the aggressor's sex with respect to self-esteem was found, for which its relationship with CPV was only significant among male participants.

Table 3. CPV towards father as a function of participant's sex.

Variable	R^2	$F\ \Delta$	Beta	t
Male	0.19	14.64 ***		
Alcohol			0.18	3.90 ***
Drugs			0.02	1.16
Tobacco			−0.06	−0.52
Age			−0.11	−2.48 *
Peer victimization—victim			0.20	2.92 ***
Peer victimization—witness			0.18	3.03 ***
Self-esteem			−0.15	−3.24 ***
Female	0.16	11.50 ***		
Alcohol			0.11	1.88
Drugs			0.27	4.74 ***
Tobacco			−1.68	−2.83 *
Age			0.03	0.79
Peer victimization—victim			0.12	2.29 *
Peer victimization—witness			0.17	3.17 **
Self-esteem			−0.02	−0.46

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Finally, regarding the control variables, an effect of alcohol and age in the case of males, and drugs and alcohol use in the case of females, was found.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to clarify the role of the participants' sex in peer violence and self-esteem's relationship with CPV.

Regarding peer violence, the results obtained agree with those found in the studies conducted by Ibabe and Jaureguizar [10]. Strong relationships of both suffering and witnessing violence with CPV were found in the case of mothers. In the case of CPV towards fathers, a significant relationship was found with witnessing peer victimization and being a victim of peer violence.

As in Aroca et al.'s [6] study, a relationship between low self-esteem and child-to-parent violence towards mothers and fathers was also found. However, a moderating role of the aggressor's sex with respect to self-esteem was found regarding CPV towards both parents, wherein the relationship of self-esteem with CPV was only significant in the case of male participants. This result suggests that male participants may engage in aggression towards their parents as a means of regaining a sense of self-worth.

Although this study contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon of CPV, this research has various limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. First, it has a correlational design, which means that causal associations cannot be established between the different variables studied. The study should, therefore, be replicated using longitudinal designs to determine any causal relationships. Moreover, the order and circumstances of the presentation of the material mean that the priming and sensitization of the responders were almost inevitable.

In conclusion, the present study shows the role of the participants' sex in peer victimization and self-esteem's relationship with CPV violence. These findings indicate the importance of accounting for these variables when attempting to prevent violence towards mothers and fathers.

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