

The Role of Sex and Family Status in the Relationship between Exposure to Violence and Child-to-Parent Violence [†]

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Abstract: The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship of exposure to violence and justification of violence with child-to-parent violence (CPV) towards father and mother. The sample comprised 748 high school students (413 male and 335 female), between 13 and 20 years old. The Child-to-Parent Aggression Questionnaire (CPAQ) was employed to assess CPV. Exposure to violence in high school, at home, on the street and on television was assessed using the Violence Exposure Questionnaire (VEQ), whereas exposure to violence in video games was assessed through a questionnaire prepared by the authors. Justification of violence was analyzed using the Justification of Violence subscale of the Irrational Beliefs Scale for Adolescents (ECIA). Regarding violence towards mother, the results show that, in the case of female participants, there was a significant relationship with exposure to violence on the street and at home, and an inverse relationship with video games, as well as with violence justification, whereas in the case of male participants, there was a significant relationship with the same variables, except for violence in video games. Conversely, with regard to violence towards father, there was a significant relationship with violence at home and violence justification in the case of females, as well as with violence at home and on the street and violence justification in the case of male participants. With regard to the role of the type of family, in the case of non-divorced families, there was a significant relationship with exposure to violence on the street and at home, and an inverse relationship with video games, as well as with violence justification, whereas in the case of divorced families, the only significant variable was violence justification. Finally, with regard to violence towards father, there was a significant relationship with violence at high school, on the street and at home, along with violence justification in the case of non-divorced families, as well as violence on the street and violence justification in the case of divorced families. The present study shows the role of participant sex and family status in the relationship of exposure to violence and violence justification with CPV. These findings indicate the importance of taking into account those variables in preventing violence towards parents.

Keywords: child-to-parent violence; high school; violence exposure; video games; family; television



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1. Introduction

Child-to-parent violence (CPV) or parental abuse is a type of intra-family violence, defined as “repeated behaviors of physical, psychological (verbal or non-verbal) or economic violence, directed at parents, or those adults who take their place” [1] (p. 220).

Prevalence data of child-to-parent violence are not conclusive. Gallaguer [2] found that the international prevalence of this type of violence ranges between 10% and 18%. In Spain, some studies establish that between 8.2% and 9% of adolescents admit having exercised physical violence against their parents, and between 13.1% and 14% admit to psychological violence [3].

Furthermore, some studies suggest that, as with gender violence [4], CPV rates are increasing due to the confinement situations provoked by the current COVID-19 pandemic [5]. As the outbreak spread across the world, nations began to shut down gatherings, close schools and confine people to their homes. As a consequence, a significant percentage of parents and practitioners have reported an increase in violent episodes during the lockdown. Thus, it is important to analyze the consequences of the current pandemic for families experiencing CPV.

Regarding gender differences in violence against parents, previous research concludes that this is a type of violence exercised by both boys and girls [6]. However, there are differences regarding the type of violence exercised, physical violence being more frequent in the case of boys and psychological violence in the case of girls [7].

Research shows different family characteristics that could be considered as risk factors for the commission of violence towards parents [8]. CPV has been associated with exposure to violence, including being a victim or witness of violent behavior, and can occur in different settings (school, home, street, television). Some studies show that violence between parents or by parents towards children is related to CPV [9]. Other studies have associated child-to-parent violence with violence at school, showing that observing and/or being a victim of violence at school is positively related to the commission of violent behavior by children [10].

Exposure to violence can also occur through violent video games. Greitemeyer and Mügge [11] found that violent video games are positively related to engaging in aggressive behaviors. Some authors have proposed that, together with television, video games have an influence on CPV commission [12]. However, studies in this regard are not conclusive, since some research shows an absence of connection between general violence and video games [13].

Finally, the justification of violent behaviors has also been considered as a risk factor for the commission of CPV. For example, Calvete [14] found an association between the justification of violence and problematic behaviors. Other studies have shown that exposure to violence at home predicts behavioral problems, and these are mediated by the justification of violence [15].

In this sense, the objective of this study was to evaluate a series of variables as risk factors in the prediction of child-to-parent violence. To do this, we analyzed the relationship between the variables of family status (divorced and non-divorced families), the sex of the aggressor and exposure and justification of violence with exercising child-parental violence.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample of the present study comprised 748 high school students (413 male and 335 female) aged between 13 and 20 years old.

2.2. Instruments

In order to collect the socio-demographic data of the participants, a set of questions was asked concerning age, sex and marital status of their parents.

The Child-to-Parent Aggression Questionnaire (CPAQ) [16] evaluates CPV through 22 parallel items concerning the father and the mother, describing psychological aggression, physical assaults and financial violence.

The Violence Exposure Questionnaire (VEQ) [17] evaluates violence exposure through 21 items assembled in 4 blocks according to the context (high school, home, street and television).

Exposure to violence in video games. A self-made questionnaire was provided in which the participants have to indicate the names of the video games they have played in the last 6 months, as well as the names of the video games they have played the most in their entire lives.

The Irrational Beliefs Scale for Adolescents (ECIA) [18] evaluates justification of violence through 12 items assembled in 6 irrational beliefs. Only violence justification was taken into account in the present study.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were based on hierarchical multiple regressions (with a probability for input F of $p = 0.05$ and output of $p = 0.10$) and were performed with IBM SPSS 26 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20. Following the protocol, centered scores were used as a means of addressing the problem of multicollinearity [19].

3. Results

First, the percentage of participants who committed severe assaults on their parents was calculated. The percentages of participants who reported threatening behavior, insults, blackmail, doing something to annoy their parents, disobeying an important order or taking money without their permission on more than six occasions were considered severe psychological or economic assaults. To assess severe physical aggression, the percentage of cases reporting physical assault on at least three–five occasions was considered. Concerning severe physical aggression, 2.3% of the participants acknowledged that they had committed it against their mother, and 1.8% against their father. A total of 25% acknowledged having committed serious psychological assaults against their mother, and 21% against their father. Finally, concerning economic violence, 9.4% had committed it against their mother, and 7% against their father.

Next, eight independent multiple regression analyses were carried out to determine the variables related to CPV towards mothers and fathers, as a function of the participants' sex (male and female) and family status (intact family and divorced family).

Regarding violence towards mother (Table 1), the results show that, in the case of female participants, there was a significant relationship with exposure to violence on the street and at home, and an inverse relationship with video games, as well as with violence justification. In the case of male participants, there was a significant relationship with the same variables, except for violence in video games. Conversely, with regard to violence towards father (Table 2), there was a significant relationship with violence at home and violence justification in the case of females, as well as with violence at home and on the street and violence justification in the case of male participants.

Table 1. CPV towards mother as a function of the participants' sex.

Variable	Adjusted R^2	$F \Delta$	Beta	t
Male	0.239	19.46 ***		
Family status			−0.02	−0.54
Violence at high school			0.10	1.80
Violence on street			0.18	3.17 ***
Violence at home			0.23	4.73 ***
Violence on tv			−0.04	−0.84
Violence in v.g.			0.00	0.14
Violence justification			0.18	3.85 ***
Female	0.322	23.65 ***		
Family status			−0.01	−0.25
Violence at high school			0.01	0.34
Violence on street			0.17	3.04 ***
Violence at home			0.28	5.61 ***
Violence on tv			0.08	1.67
Violence in v.g.			−0.14	−3.07 ***
Violence justification			0.29	0.616 ***

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. CPV towards father as a function of the participants' sex.

Variable	Adjusted R^2	$F \Delta$	Beta	t
Male	0.192	14.82 ***		
Sex			−0.03	−0.67
Violence at h. school			0.08	1.40
Violence on street			0.20	3.47 ***
Violence at home			0.19	3.77 ***
Violence on tv			−0.04	−0.87
Violence in v.g.			−0.00	−0.15
Violence justification			0.15	3.18 ***
Female	0.188	11.83 ***		
Sex			−0.08	−1.67
Violence at h. school			0.03	0.65
Violence on street			0.07	1.15
Violence at home			0.21	3.87 ***
Violence on tv			0.06	1.19
Violence in v.g.			−0.08	−1.61
Violence justification			0.27	5.27 ***

*** $p < 0.001$.

With regard to the role of the type of family (Table 3), in the case of non-divorced families, there was a significant relationship with exposure to violence on the street and at home, and an inverse relationship with video games, as well as with violence justification. In the case of divorced families, the only significant variable was violence justification. Finally, with regard to violence towards father (Table 4), there was a significant relationship with violence at high school, on the street and at home, along with violence justification in the case of non-divorced families, as well as violence on the street and violence justification in the case of divorced families.

Table 3. CPV towards mother as a function of family status.

Variable	Adjusted R^2	$F \Delta$	Beta	t
Intact family	0.314	38.99 ***		
Sex			0.31	0.75
Violence at h. school			0.32	0.74
Violence on street			0.20	4.47 ***
Violence at home			0.32	8.41 ***
Violence on tv			0.00	0.07
Violence in v.g.			−0.08	−2.08 *
Violence justification			0.22	6.05 ***
Divorced family	0.138	4.80 ***		
Sex			0.09	1.03
Violence at h. school			0.06	0.71
Violence on street			0.16	1.72
Violence at home			0.08	1.05
Violence on tv			0.02	0.32
Violence in v.g.			−0.05	−0.63
Violence justification			0.23	2.96 **

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

Table 4. CPV towards father as a function of family status.

Variable	Adjusted R^2	$F \Delta$	Beta	t
Intact family	0.204	22.11 ***		
Sex			−0.01	−0.25
Violence at h. school			0.09	1.98 *
Violence on street			0.11	2.25 *
Violence at home			.22	5.48 ***
Violence on tv			0.03	0.82
Violence in v.g.			−0.06	−1.41
Violence justification			0.20	4.98 ***
Divorced family	0.158	5.25 ***		
Sex			−0.00	−0.07
Violence at h. school			−0.03	−0.38
Violence on street			0.32	3.31 ***
Violence at home			0.09	1.10
Violence on tv			−0.14	−1.69
Violence in v.g.			−0.01	−0.12
Violence justification			0.23	2.84 **

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

4. Discussion

The present study provides data that can contribute to clarifying the relationships between the role of participant sex and family status in the relationship of exposure to violence and violence justification with CPV. In relation to exposure to violence, strong relationships with CPV were found in the case of violence at home, on the street, at high school and in video games. However, important differences were found as a function of participants' sex and family status. For example, there was a direct relationship between exposure to violence at high school and CPV, but only in the case of non-divorced parents. Calvete and Orue [20] confirmed the effects of exposure to violence, where most adolescents that committed CPV were previously exposed to violence at home. In relation to this result, Martin and Hernandez [21] studied the difference between adolescents who committed violent and non-violent behavior, finding that the first group were more exposed to violence on the street than the second group.

In relation to violent video games, we found an inverse relationship with CPV towards mother in the case of non-divorced parents. The study of Jones [22] found that video games decrease aggressive behavior. However, some studies have shown different results, finding that violent behavior increases as a consequence of video game exposure [23,24]. Regarding the sex of the participants, it is interesting to point out the fact that violent video games were connected with CPV towards mother in the case of female participants.

In the case of violence justification, the results are different depending on the family status and participants' sex. In this regard, Calvete and Orue [25] found a direct relationship, concluding that justification is a severe cognitive schema which influences violent behavior. Moreover, in our study, we found that if the aggressive behavior was committed on the mother, the relationship between violence justification and CPV was inverse, and if those behaviors were committed on the father, the relationship between these variables was direct.

The present study shows the role of participant sex and family status in the relationship of exposure to violence and violence justification with CPV. These findings indicate the importance of taking into account those variables in preventing violence towards parents.

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