

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 096

PS 025 809

AUTHOR Moore, Timothy E.; Andres, Joy; Pepler, Debra J.
TITLE Academic Correlates of Exposure to Family Violence.
PUB DATE 1997-04-03
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research in Child Development (62nd, Washington, DC, April 3, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Battered Women; Cognitive Tests; Educationally Disadvantaged; Elementary Education; Family Problems; *Family Violence; Foreign Countries; *High Risk Students; *Homeless People; *Performance Factors; Preadolescents
IDENTIFIERS *Children of Battered Women; Shelters; Spouse Abuse Shelters

ABSTRACT

Children's exposure to family violence may lead to increased school difficulties, as shown in studies demonstrating the relationship between children's adjustment disorders and stressful family events. To examine the unique effects of violence on children's cognition, this study compared the academic performance and conflict levels of two groups of children, ages 6 to 12, and their mothers: those living in battered women's shelters and those in homeless shelters. Seventy-three families (113 children) from battered women's shelters and 55 families (82 children) from homeless shelters completed a variety of tests including the Conflict Tactics Scale, the General Health Questionnaire and the Child Behavior checklist. The children completed the Wide Range Achievement Test, the Digit Scan, and the Children's Locus of Control Scale. Few significant differences were found among the children's test results; in addition, the results were similar for homeless shelter children with no violence in their histories and for those with past exposure to violence (not within the past year). The prediction that extreme family violence would lead to extremely poor school performance also was not supported. Furthermore, when families were retested 10 months after leaving the battered women's shelter, no changes were found in children's cognitive performance. Although children in shelter situations do experience school difficulties, the data demonstrate that school performance is not uniquely affected by family violence. (Contains 12 references.) (CH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED 411 096

Academic Correlates of Exposure to Family Violence

Timothy E. Moore

Joy Andres

Debra J. Pepler

LaMarsh Research Centre on Violence and Conflict Resolution

York University

(paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Conference, Washington, DC, April 3, 1997)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

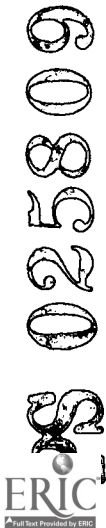
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

This paper explores some academic correlates of exposure to family violence. Numerous studies have demonstrated that children's adjustment disorders are strongly associated with chronic stressful events in the family. These include wife battering (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990), non-violent marital conflict (Emery, 1989; Grych, & Fincham, 1990), and homelessness (Masten, 1992; Rescorla, Parker, and Stolley, 1991). Children in shelters for battered women have been found to exhibit high levels of both externalizing (e.g., aggressiveness, delinquency) and internalizing (e.g., anxiety, withdrawal) behaviors, and lower levels of social competence, compared to children from nonviolent families (Jaffe, et al., 1990). When physical violence between parents becomes chronic within a family, it is highly probable that various other factors are also present that might predispose children to adjustment problems and academic difficulties. We hypothesized that shelter children might have increased academic problems because of the psychological toll of having to cope with interparental conflict. Possible contributing factors include disrupted routines, absenteeism, lack of concentration, fatigue, anxiety, a learned response of inattention, and attenuated contact with one or both parents. Are cognitive difficulties uniquely associated with exposure to family violence,

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Moore

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)



compared to other types of risk? If so, might these problems decrease when violence subsides?

Method

Participants Participants were children in the age range of 6 to 12 years, and their mothers. Data were collected on 113 children of mothers residing in several shelters for battered women (Shelter group), and 82 children of mothers residing in housing hostels (Homeless group). Shelter and Housing residents were recruited by means of notice-board announcements posted in the residences and/or through resident staff soliciting their participation. Only mothers reporting no inter-spousal violence within the previous 12 months were included in the Homeless group.

Demographic characteristics of each group are presented on Overhead 1.

Procedure

Individual interviews were conducted separately and simultaneously for mothers and children. Shelter mothers and children were tested at the shelter within three weeks of their arrival. Housing mothers and their children were interviewed in the housing hostels. The research was described to the participants as a survey of family problem-solving tactics and child development. A brief description of the testing instruments was provided to mothers expressing interest in participating. Consent was obtained by explaining to mothers that they could terminate the interview at any point, and that confidentiality of the data was assured, with the proviso that the researchers were required by law to report any suspected instances of child abuse to child welfare authorities. It is possible that some mothers may have declined participation in order to avoid possible legal complications.

The measures described below were completed by all participating mothers and their children.

Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979) The CTS provided a measure of the use of verbal aggression and physical violence between family members during the previous year. Conflict tactics were assessed between parents,

between each parent and each child in the target age range, and between children. Mothers also indicated the frequency and severity of abusive parent-to-child behaviors. Verbal aggression included insults, swearing, and physical threats. Physical aggression included pushing, grabbing, shoving, hitting, slapping, choking, and threatening with or using weapons.

General Health Questionnaire-30 (GHQ) (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979). The GHQ is a self-report measure designed to assess general psychological health or illness in community-based individuals. The instrument focuses on interruptions in normal functioning, and or the appearance of new symptoms of a distressing nature. Mothers were instructed to report on whether they had recently (past few weeks) experienced a particular symptom. The 4-point response scale ranges from "less than usual" to "much more than usual". Scores of 5 or more are considered indicators of mental health problems, and scores exceeding 10 indicate immediate need for intervention.

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, & Edelbrock, 1983). In this paper only the Social Competence scale, and its components (Activities, Social, and School) will be discussed.

The following tests were administered to the children:

Wide Range Achievement Test - Revised (Jastak & Wilkinson, 1984). The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT-R) was designed to measure scholastic achievement ranging from kindergarten to college. The measure consists of three scales: reading, spelling, and arithmetic. For this study only the reading and math subscales were used. The reading subscale measures the child's ability to recognize letters and read words in isolation (i.e., out of context). The math subscale assesses the child's ability to recognize and read numbers, solve math problems orally, and perform written computations. Individual performances are compared to standardized age norms with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Scores of 80-89 are "low average", 70-79 "borderline", <70 "deficient".

Digit Span (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised, Wechsler, 1991). The Digit Span is a subtest of the WISC-R. It is a measure of attention and short-term memory. It comprises two tasks: Digits Forward and Digits Backward. There are two series for each sequence length. The Digits Forward task requires the child to remember a series of three to nine numbers that have no logical relationship to each other. The Digits Backward task requires the child not only to remember from two to eight numbers but also to reorganize the numbers in reverse order. Raw scores are converted to scaled scores and compared to age norms. A scaled score of 10 is considered average.

Children's Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). This scale was designed to measure children's perceptions of their power to control or cause effectual change in their environment. Those with an internal control orientation feel that they can change what happens around them, whereas those with an external orientation feel themselves to be victims of circumstance and powerless to change their situation.

To summarize, mothers' interviews entailed the administration of the following instruments: Conflict Tactics Scale, General Health Questionnaire, and the Child Behavior Checklist. Children were administered the reading and math subscales of the WRAT-R, the Digit Span subtest of the WISC, and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale.

Results

Shelter and Homeless families were compared on the variables listed on Overhead 1. The two groups were quite comparable, with the exception of poorer mental health on the part of Shelter mothers, and lower income in the Homeless families. Most (71%) of the Homeless families were single mothers, whereas the Shelter families had been comprised of couples (albeit conflicted) prior to the mothers' move to a Shelter.

Overhead 2 compares the means of the two groups of children on Reading, Math, Digit Span, Locus of Control, and Social Competence.

Significant differences were few and when they occurred, modest. Shelter children had superior scores on Reading and Math ($p < .05$), and were more likely to have Social Competence scores in the clinical range.

Overhead 3 displays the same set of means when the Homeless group is partitioned into those with no violence in their backgrounds, and those with violence 12 months prior to testing. We reasoned that recent exposure to violence, the increased stress associated with a recent move to a Shelter, plus the suboptimal testing conditions might have a particularly deleterious effect on Shelter children's test performance. This prediction was not supported. Prior violence was not associated with declining performance, relative to the 'no violence' comparison group.

Although regression analyses did not reveal any significant predictors of cognitive functioning within the Shelter group, we thought that a comparison of the two subgroups of children who performed at the extremes on the cognitive measures might provide some clues that the regression analysis had missed. Overhead 4 shows how the 2 subgroups compared on math, reading, and digit span performance. At the high end, performance is at or above the norms for these tests. Low end performance is dramatically inferior. The symmetrical distribution of males and females in the two extremes occurred by co-incidence rather than by design.

These two groups were compared on various subscales of the Conflicts Tactics Scale, on mothers' general health (GHQ) and on locus of control (see Overhead 5). We anticipated that extremely poor academic performance might characterize children from families where spousal assault was particularly severe. This prediction was not supported. In fact, the severity of violence was greater in the high performance group. Previous analyses had revealed that maternal verbal aggression was a particularly potent predictor of children's adjustment in the Shelter group. It did not, however, predict cognitive performance, nor did parent-to-child physical aggression, mothers' health, or locus of control.

Some of the Shelter children were retested 10 months after leaving the Shelter. If children's functioning at Time 1 is influenced, in part, by the stressful nature of Shelter residence, and the violence that preceded the move to a shelter, both maternal and child functioning might be expected to improve as a result of a more stable, non-violent living arrangement. Indeed, children's adjustment (CBCL), locus of control, and mothers' health showed significant improvement 10 months after leaving the shelter. Reading, Math, and Digit Span performance, however, remained unchanged (Overhead 6).

Conclusion

Various stressful experiences and negative living conditions may place children at risk. Different forms of abuse or neglect may be similar in terms of the adjustment disorders and impairments that they induce. Low income levels, less education, frequent moves, and relatively poor maternal health characterized both Shelter and Homeless families. Children from both groups share a number of familial and contextual variables that predispose these populations to conduct problems and lower levels of cognitive functioning. Both populations are heterogeneous, however, with significant numbers in both samples showing remarkably good performance, in spite of exposure to multiple stressors.

The data reported here do not indicate that academic performance is affected in some unique way by exposure to family violence. It is likely that school-related difficulties are a result of disrupted routines, unpredictable and upsetting family dynamics, and maternal stress, rather than exposure to violence per se. The school difficulties are nevertheless severe for a substantial proportion of these children, and the deficits persist several months after mothers have moved from the shelters. It is possible that the poor performance of shelter children on these cognitive measures is a reflection of fundamental deficiencies in basic academic skills, as opposed to their temporary suppression brought about by shelter residency and the precipitating violence. If so,

educational planning and intervention should be included in the programming provided to children from violent families.

References

Achenbach, T. M., & Edelbrock, C. S. (1983). Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist and Revised Child Behavior Profile. Burlington, VT: Thomas N. Achenbach, Department of Psychiatry, University of Vermont.

Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M. (1994). Marital conflict and child adjustment: An emotional security hypothesis. Psychological Bulletin, 116, 387-411.

Emery, R. E. (1989). Family violence. American Psychologist, 44, 321-328.

Goldberg, D. P., & Hillier, V. F. (1979). A scaled version of the General Health Questionnaire. Psychological Medicine, 9, 139-145.

Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework. Psychological Bulletin, 108, 267-290.

Jaffe, P., Wolfe, D., Wilson, S. (1990). Children of battered women. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Jastak, S., & Wilkinson, G. S. (1984). Wide range achievement test. Wilmington, Delaware: Jastak Associates, Inc.

Masten, A. S. (1992). Homeless children in the United States: Mark of a nation at risk. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 1, 41-44.

Nowicki, S., & Strickland, B. R. (1973). A locus of control scale for children. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 40, 148-154.

Rescorla, L., Parker, R., Stolley, P. (1991). Ability, achievement, and adjustment in homeless children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 61, 210-220.

Straus, M. A. (1979). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The conflict tactics (CT) scales. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 41, 75-88.

Wechsler, D. (1991). Manual for the Wechsler intelligence scale for children: 3rd edition. New York: Psychological Association.



Descriptive Characteristics

	Shelter	Homeless
Families n =	73	55
Children n =	113	82
Child's Age (M)	9.4	9.4
Mother's Health* (M) (GHQ)	14.2 (8.4)	10.5 (8.2)
Mothers' Education		
% with < grade 9	16	18
% with post hs	22	21
Number of children in family (M)	2.49	2.61
Family Income * (in \$, 000) (M)	22.2	15.1
% earning < \$20K	51	88
% single	0	71

Group Differences on Cognitive Measures

2

Measure	Shelter (n = 113)	Homeless (n = 82)
Reading *	87.7	81.7
Math *	84.9	80.9
Digit Span	8.6	8.9
Locus of Control	8.2	7.8
Social Competence	40.1	44.2
% in clinical range	23	11

Prior Violence & Cognitive Measures

3

Measures	Recent Violence	Violence >12 months prior	No Violence
n =	113	48	34
Read	87.7	81.1	81.9
Math	84.9	82.2	79.9
Digit Span	8.6	9.2	8.8
Locus of Control	8.2	7.9	7.7
Social Competence	40.1	42.1	44.9
% in clinical range	23	12	10

Shelter Group Extremes (M's)

4

	High End	Low End
n =	20 (10m/10f)	20 (10m/10f)
Read	110	62
Math	96	69
Digit Span	10.4	7.0

=====

High Achieving and Low Achieving Shelter Children did NOT Differ on:

father to mother physical violence

mother to child verbal aggression

parent to child physical aggression

mother's general health

locus of control

they DID differ on Social Competence, (20% v 40% in clinical range)

5

=====

Changes in Shelter Children 10 Months After Leaving Shelter

Improvement in: adjustment (CBCL)

locus of control

social competence

No Change in: Read

Math

Digit Span

6



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>Academic Correlates of Exposure to Family Violence</i>	
Author(s): <i>Moore, Andres, & Pepler</i>	
Corporate Source: <i>York University</i>	Publication Date: <i>Apr 3/97</i>

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.



Check here

For Level 1 Release:

Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2 documents



Check here

For Level 2 Release:

Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but *not* in paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: <i>T. Moore</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>T. MOORE, Assoc. Professor of Psychology</i>	
Organization/Address: <i>see card</i>	Telephone: <i>416 487 6738</i>	FAX: <i>487-6728</i>
	E-Mail Address: <i>T.MOORE@Glendon.YorkU.ca</i>	Date: <i>Aug 25/97</i>

60809
252
Sign here please



University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign



Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
National Parent Information Network

Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820-7469

217 333-1386
217 333-3767 fax

800 583-4135 toll free
ericeece@uiuc.edu e-mail

August 22, 1997

Dear Colleague:

After doing a blanket solicitation for papers at the **62nd Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development** held in Washington, D.C., April 3-6, 1997, I am now contacting individual presenters, particularly in our scope of early childhood through early adolescence, to consider sending two copies of your presentations for possible inclusion in the ERIC database. As you may know, **ERIC (the Educational Resources Information Center)** is a federally-sponsored information system for the field of education. Its main product is the ERIC database, the world's largest source of education information. **The Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education** is one of sixteen subject-specialized clearinghouses making up the ERIC system. We collect and disseminate information relating to all aspects of children's development, care, and education.

Ideally, your paper should be at least eight pages long and not have been published elsewhere at the time of submission. **Announcement in ERIC does not prevent you from publishing your paper elsewhere** because you still retain complete copyright. Your paper will be reviewed and we will let you know within six weeks if it has been accepted.

Please complete and sign the reproduction release on the back of this letter and return it with two copies of your presentation to **ERIC/EECE**. If you have any questions, please call me at (800) 583-4135 or by (e-mail at ksmith5@uiuc.edu). I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karen E. Smith
Acquisitions Coordinator

Enclosures