

IMPACTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Introduction

This essay will focus on psychological abuse – which has also been referred to as emotional abuse – within interpersonal relationships. The impacts of parental psychological abuse on adolescent mental health will be evaluated and discussed. The essay will also evaluate a psychoeducational intervention to help people learn and assess psychological abuse within their interpersonal relationships. Two empirical studies will be selected and evaluated. Various secondary information found in libraries and other academic results on the internet will also be utilized to provide more context and information on the different dimensions of psychological abuse and psychological trauma. Only studies that occurred and were published after the year 2000 will be evaluated in order to lessen the possibility of the information being outdated and irrelevant. Studies were chosen based on their topic of research and relatively to the topic of parental psychological abuse, emotional abuse and mental health.

Theoretical Perspective

Based on personal observations and general articles about psychological abuse, there is a correlation between people that have experienced trauma related to psychological abuse and the development of mental health issues. To further evaluate this theory, studies that pertained to the topic of parental psychological abuse, emotional abuse and mental health were chosen. The two empirical research articles selected are: *“Psychological Abuse in Family Studies: A Psychoeducational and Preventive Approach”* (O’Neil, et al., 2006) and *“Parental psychological abuse toward children and mental health problems in adolescence”* (Rizvi & Najam, 2014).

The following questions will be explored within this essay:

1. What are the most common types of psychological abuse that occurs within families?
2. What are the common effects of psychological abuse on children and adolescents?
3. How can invention methods help alleviate the negative effects of psychological abuse?

The essay will evaluate the aims, hypotheses, participants, measures, data collection procedures (methodologies), and results of each of the two empirical research selected.

Rationale

Psychological abuse is a part of interpersonal abuse that has been historically overlooked and neglected when assessing abuse within interpersonal relationships, specifically families. Psychological abuse can be defined as “a pattern of destructive interpersonal behaviors that ranges from criticizing to more severe action that threaten, dehumanize, or treat another as an object rather than a person” (O’Neil, et al., 2006). Many studies within the field of psychology focus on different aspects of abuse that can be seen and physically proven to a certain extent, such as domestic abusive, sexual abuse and other forms of physical violence that can occur within interpersonal relationships. However, psychological abuse tends to get overlooked due to its imperceptible nature by both psychologists and victims. As it cannot be seen or felt physically, many victims – especially children – live on and remain unconscious to its effects and sequelae. Failure to recognize that they have been abused ultimately leads to lower number

of reports and pursuits for treatment; thus, consequently resulting in lesser data for research studies.

Although there are very few studies that provide conclusive and concrete evidence on the effects of psychological abuse, there are also no studies that report that psychological abuse is any less harmful than other forms of abuse (O'Neil, et al., 2006). Psychological abuse can be considered the most developmentally damaging dimension and has been linked to negative outcomes such as impaired emotional, social, and cognitive development, including aggression, helplessness, emotional unresponsiveness, and neuroticism (Rizvi & Najam, 2014).

A study in Pakistan was chosen because it was relevant to the research topic and my interest on learning more about the effects of parental psychological abuse in developing countries in Asia. A study on preventive invention of psychological abuse was chosen to further evaluate the levels of awareness of psychological abuse, intervention methods and how it can prevent in family settings.

Summary:

Research #1: Parental psychological abuse toward children and mental health problems in adolescence

The first empirical study evaluates data on parental psychological abuse and its impact on adolescence mental health. The study was conducted on students with ages that range from 13 to 17. The participants were asked to provide their perception on the parental psychological abuse they experience. The participants were also diagnosed with mental illnesses using the DSM assessment to correlate their diagnosis with their perceived parental psychological abuse. The research found that there was merit in previous studies that indicate that parental abuse influences children's mental health and increases their vulnerability to developing mental illnesses. It was concluded that mothers' verbal abuse and fathers' terrorizing behavior was the most common predictor for mental health issues and that parental psychological abuse can be extremely damaging to the mental health of their children or dependents.

Aim

The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between parental psychological abuse toward their children and mental health problems in adolescence in Lahore, Pakistan.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study are: (1) There will be significant positive relationship between perceived psychological abuse by parents and mental health problems in adolescents; (2) Factors of Psychological abuse are likely to be predictors of mental health problems.

Participants

Data was gathered from three hundred participants, from the ages of 13 to 17. 57 percent of participants were boys and 43 percent were girls. They were a mix of students from both public and private schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The towns within Lahore the participants came from were selected through stratified random sampling, and the participants were selected through purposive sampling.

Measures

Psychological maltreatment experience scale (PMES) and Youth Self-Report (YSR) were used for the assessment and diagnosis within this study. PMES uses a questionnaire that consists of 53 items. Respondents would then rate the frequency of which they experienced five types of psychological abuse (terrorizing, spurning, devaluing, isolating and exploitation by their parents). Answers would be selected from a four-point Likert scale with 1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=fairly often, and 4=very often.

YSR would consist of 112 items and answers from range on a three-point Likert scale with 0=not true, 1=somewhat true, and 2=very true/often true. This scale was used to identify the six mental health problems from the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) that the respondents were experiencing.

Data collection procedure

First, researchers worked to obtain permission from the authors of the questionnaire to use and translate their work. Secondly, they obtained permission from the Education Department and schools to collect data on their participants. Afterwards, they would then approach the participants and teachers to brief them on the purpose of the study and ask for their consents. Once consent has been given by the participants and their parents, the researchers would then give participants a detailed verbal instructions on how to complete and interpret the questionnaires given to them. The questionnaire is self-administered, lasts approximately 20 minutes, and the researchers would remain on standby to clarify or answer any questions respondents might have.

Results

The research found that there was a positive relationship between perceptions of psychological abuse by parents and having mental health problems. Adolescents with higher perception of parental abuse significantly exhibited greater mental health problems on the DSM assessment. Although most factors of parental psychological abuse within the regression model are significant predictors of mental health problems, the most common predictors for many mental health problems were mothers' verbal abuse and fathers' terrorizing behavior.

Discussion

Issues can be attributed to Pakistan's poor education and services relating to mental health. The findings in this research agrees with previous studies that there is a link between parental psychological abuse and PTSD, depression disorder, personality disorders and low self-esteem issues. The researchers agree that terrorizing, spurning and devaluing behavior from parents can cause personality disorders, and verbal abuse can lead to development of psychopathology. Researchers also found that PTSD caused by parental psychological abuse is a similar condition to PTSD diagnosed in adults that has experienced war or major accidents. 33 percent of children who are diagnosed with parental abuse PTSD starts to develop externalized disorders such as ODD, ADHD and self-destructive behaviors. The study concludes that parents' behavior has a tremendous effect on their children and that adolescents who have experienced parental psychological abuse were found to be more vulnerable to mental health problems.

Research #2: Psychological Abuse in Family Studies: A Psychoeducational and Preventive Approach

The second empirical study assesses focused on evaluating an invention method to help prevent and confront respondents' existing traumas that emanated from experiencing psychological abuse. To achieve this, the study focused on gathering data relating to college student's knowledge and perception of psychological abuse using psychoeducational methods. Psychoeducational is defined as "the process of using psychological and learning principles to promote personal, emotional, and intellectual development" (O'Neil, et al., 2006). The study was described as "one of the first documented psychoeducational programs to educate college students about the perils of psychological abuse" (O'Neil, et al., 2006). Research methods were based off the psychoeducational intervention "Working with Emotional/Psychological Abuse" developed by the School of Family Studies at the University of Connecticut during their 2002 Prevention Series.

The research conducted illustrated psychological abuse under four dimensions: terrorizing, spurning, devaluing and isolating. Terrorizing involved verbal assaults such as threats, bullying and creating a climate of fear through speech. Spurning relates to ignoring the victim and essentially "stonewalling" them – the perpetrator would refuse to acknowledge the victim's significance, their physical and/or emotional needs, and lack of appreciation. Devaluing is the process of dehumanizing the victim, making them feel less competent, inadequate or humiliating them. Isolating involves cutting the individual from their families or social experiences. Although there were limitations to the research due to the sample size and diversity, the researchers concluded that the study was a success because the research showed that psychoeducational can help people better understand and assess psychological abuse.

Aim

The aim for this research was to determine whether psychoeducational methods would be an effective intervention for psychological abuse. One specific answer the researchers wanted to answer was: "Can psychoeducational (or family life education) programs actually help people assess psychological abuse in their lives and deepen their understanding of it personally and professional?"

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that principles of psychoeducation and family life education would be an effective preventive intervention for college students. The researchers had also hypothesized that the research would help them anticipate that many students have been and could still be experiencing negative effects of psychological abuse that they have experienced.

Participants

The participants were majorly college students – particularly undergraduate students. Approximately 220 students attended the symposium but only 127 of them completed the exit evaluations that would provide the researchers with the data they needed. 91 percent were the people who attended the symposium were women. The final respondents consisted of 115 women, 12 men, and 119 of them were undergraduate students. The students were primarily Human Development and Family Studies, and other social science majors.

Measures

The data was measured through qualitative methods. The researchers used a checklist questionnaire that provided the participants with 11 statements and their answers recorded on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Very Often (4) to Never (1).

Data Collection Procedures

The intervention lasted for two hours and were divided into eight parts: introduction of the program, definition of psychological abuse, audience assessment of psychological abuse, working through psychological abuse, research on psychological abuse, historical perspectives of psychological abuse, services available to help with psychological abuse, and a question-and-answer period. These dimensions were showcased in the symposium through live performance skits, lectures, music, thought provoking questions and self-assessment checklists. After the question-and-answer section, the audience were then giving seven minutes to complete their questionnaires while listening to classical music.

Afterwards, respondents were recalled for a follow-up evaluation one week after the symposium. There were give an eight-item questionnaire with the same Likert scale answers.

Results

85 percent of respondents found the symposium to be effective in raising their consciousness about abuse in their own lives. 71 percent found that the questionnaire helped them personalize how they had been hurt by psychological abuse in the past and present. 69 percent felt that they were stimulated to learn more about the topic and 64 percent thought about enrolling in courses to learn more about psychological abuse.

94 percent of respondents stated that they found the statement, “Emotional/psychological violence can be as harmful as physical or sexual violence” to be true. The three percent who answered false felt that psychological violence is even more harmful than other forms of abuse. No respondents thought that psychological abuse was less harmful than physical or sexual abuse. 58 percent of respondents returned for the follow-up evaluation and 60-70 percent of them agreed that their awareness and assessment of psychological abuse has increased. Most respondents who provided comments stated that the symposium made them recognize more instances of abuse within their interpersonal relationships or the relationships of people close to them.

Discussion

It was very interesting to learn that many young people had limited knowledge about psychological abuse. Respondents had stated that they used the knowledge they had obtained through the symposium determine whether any aspects of their relationships were abusive and to also reflect upon themselves. However, the number of people who identified as perpetrators were not recorded. Nonetheless, this still shows that psychoeducational methods can be an effective intervention for psychological abuse.

Furthermore, although the experiment was insightful, it is very limiting in terms of sample size. As mentioned by the researchers as well, their respondents were majorly women and undergraduate students. Therefore, it does not provide any meaningful data on whether psychoeducation would have the same effectiveness on men and people from other age groups. It would be interesting to see if the symposium and psychoeducation would be as effective with children as they do with young adults, as children are generally the victims of abuse that have the

least awareness that they are being abused. Additionally, it would also be insightful to gather data on parents and how they would have reacted to the symposium and collect their perspectives on psychological abuse – especially those that occurs within families.

Critical Evaluation of Articles

The strength of these articles is that both articles had a relatively good sample size with 100 to 300 respondents. The moderate sample size for this qualitative research allows researchers to achieve a higher statistical power; thus, increasing the confidence of their research and the findings produced. Additionally, both articles were also meticulously planned and followed an established model. This ensures that the data collection procedure is controlled— every respondent answers the same questions with the same options; questionnaires are taken in the same environment and in the same manner.

However, some weaknesses of articles pertain to their sample. In the first empirical research, teachers were requested to help researchers select students that exhibited problematic behaviors as well as those who appeared to be neglected by their parents. This can be an issue with sampling as there might be bias present and the sampling would be reliant on the teachers' subjective perception. As only kids who exhibited negative behaviors were selected, the study is overlooking the kids who are well-behaved but also have negligent parents or experience psychological abuse; thus, resulting in biased results. Furthermore, as the effects of psychological abuse cannot always be seen – effects such as low self-esteem or neuroticism – the data collected is also biased towards visible negative effects such as low grades and unagreeable behavior at school.

Similarly, the second empirical research had faced a more severe error to their sampling size as their respondents were not controlled and majority of them were women. This limits the accuracy of their finding as it cannot be certain that their results can be applied to men and/or people who are not undergraduates or people with less or more education. Furthermore, as racial factors were not reported, it cannot be determined which culture or races this psychoeducational intervention would be effective to.

Furthermore, another weakness of the first empirical research is that the items within the questionnaire had to be translated into Urdu, Mother Form and Father Form (the different Indic dialect used in Pakistan) – therefore, there is a possibility that some essence or context of the question can get lost in translation and thus, leading to potential misinterpretation and invalid answers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is very evident that psychological abuse has many adverse effects regardless of whether it occurs in an intimate relationship or within a family dynamic. The dangers of psychological abuse need to be more widely researched and reported as its invisible can often be misconstrued with insignificance. As shown in the research, many respondents and researchers alike believe that psychological abuse is as harmful, if not more harmful, than physical or sexual abuse. Parental psychological abuse, specifically, has more damaging effects as experiencing trauma and abuse can significantly alter a child's brain, resulting in the development of psychopathy (Herman, 2015). Parents behavior can have traumatizing effects on

children which is why it is necessary and important for mental health services to be widely accessible and available to anyone who needs it. People and parents should have access to psychoeducational interventions that increases their awareness on the topic and help perpetrators realize their own abusive behaviors. Families should also have access to family education that helps guide parents and caretakers handle their issues without passing down trauma and abuse to their children and dependents.

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