



ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH



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AVA Research Review

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Review Title: Family Polyvictimization, Addictive Behaviors, and Psychopathology Among Chinese families.

Reviewer: Mengtong Chen and Jia Li ; Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong

Article: Chan, K. L. (2015). Family Polyvictimization and Elevated Levels of Addiction and Psychopathology among Parents in a Chinese Household Sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. doi: 10.1177/0886260515592617

Introductory Comment:

Different forms of violence against individuals often occur within a single family. However, most studies fail to cover more than two forms of violence. This paper presents the concept of "family polyvictimization" and its prevalence among Chinese families, and also further

explores the association of family polyvictimization with parental addictive behaviors and psychopathology.

Background:

Different types of violence often occur within a single family. For instance, the link between parental intimate partner violence (IPV) and child maltreatment has been well established. One explanation for this link is that different types of violence are likely to be associated with the same risk factors within a family (WHO, 2005). However, there are no studies addressing the co-occurrence of more than two types of violence in a family.

Finkelhor and colleagues (2010) demonstrated that child polyvictimization tends to occur in "dangerous families" and/or disrupted families. This conceptual pathway can be borrowed to explain family polyvictimization, where family disruption, the result of impaired parental functioning,

largely stands out as the breeding ground for the co-occurrence of different forms of family violence. Past studies have shown that parental psychopathology (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and maternal depression) and addictive behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, and drug use) can significantly lower the quality of parenting, and then contribute to family disruption, leading to a heightened risk of family polyvictimization.

The current study examines how these two sets of factors (parental addictive behaviors and psychopathology) that cause family disruption are associated with the co-occurrence of different forms of violence within a family.

Aims/hypotheses of article:

The current study defines “family polyvictimization” as the co-occurrence of child victimization, parental IPV and elder abuse against different members in the same family. Based on the findings in the fields of parental psychopathology and addictive behaviors, the author hypothesized that (1) family polyvictimization would be positively associated with parental addictive behaviors, and the addictive problems would be greater among parents from polyvictimized families

than those from other families; and (2) family polyvictimization would be positively associated with parental psychopathology, and the psychopathological problems would be more severe among parents from polyvictimized families.

Methods:

The author analyzed data from 7,466 households within six purposively selected geographic regions (Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Wuhan, Xi’an, and Hong Kong) in China. A structured questionnaire was used among all parent participants, which included questions about the demographic characteristics of family members, self-report of IPV, elder abuse, parent-reported child victimization, PTSD, depression, and health-related quality of life. The distribution of addictive behaviors and mean scores of health-related factors were computed to demonstrate their relationship with the number of types of violence within a single family. An independent ordinal logistic regression was utilized to examine the associations between family polyvictimization, psychopathology, and addictive behaviors.

Relevant Findings:

The lifetime and past-year prevalence rates of child victimization, parental IPV, elder abuse, and the co-occurrence rates of these types of violence within a family are first summarized. Approximately 42.67% of the households reported child victimization, 41.35% reported parental IPV, and 16.45% reported elder abuse over their lifetime; and past-year prevalence rates were reported as 34.72%, 34.46%, and 8.16%, respectively. The lifetime prevalence and past-year prevalence of family polyvictimization was 2.53% and 1.09%, respectively.

Polyvictimized households generally reported the greatest gambling and smoking frequency, alcohol dependence, and substance abuse, followed by households exposed to only one type of violence, and lastly by households with no experience of violence. The ordinal logistic regression showed that gambling (aOR = 1.32, $p < .05$), smoking (aOR = 1.40, $p < .001$), and alcohol dependence (aOR = 1.30, $p < .05$) were positively associated with the number of types of violence within a household.

In terms of parental health, parents with more severe PTSD (aOR = 1.01, $p < .01$) or depressive symptoms (aOR

=1.08, $p < .001$) were shown to more likely, to come from victimized families. And parental mental health was negatively associated with the number of types of violence within a household (aOR = 0.98, $p < .001$).

Author's Conclusions:

The findings demonstrate that 1 in 40 families from the sample had experienced family polyvictimization over their lifetime, and roughly 1 in 83 families had been polyvictims in the past year. The results indicate that family polyvictimization is associated with higher risks of parental addictive behaviors and psychopathological problems. The author suggests that (1) child protective and family violence services screen for multiple types of violence within a family; (2) clinics and services identify at-risk families among parents who have problems with alcohol and substance abuse; and (3) the government promotes whole-family screening to identify at-risk families and then be able to deliver interventions for families as a whole.

Limitations of the Article/ Findings:

Several limitations were noted by the author. The results may not be generalizable to the entire population in China given

that the household sample was confined to six Chinese cities. Causal associations between family polyvictimization, parental addictive behaviors, and psychopathology cannot be confirmed based on the findings from this cross-sectional study. Also, several factors that may be associated with polyvictimization, such as personality characteristics, marital relationship, and the presence of community violence, were not analyzed in this study.

Reviewers Comments:

This study is among the first to examine polyvictimization in Chinese families. Using a large sample collected from six different geographical regions, this study provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of family polyvictimization and indicates that family polyvictimization is associated with parental addictive behaviors and psychopathological problems. Future research needs to explore other factors that increase the risk of family polyvictimization as well as the protective factors that could be improved through interventions. Social workers, therapists, and clinicians dealing with clients with addictive behaviors and mental health problems should be aware of the potential occurrence of polyvictimization

in the families with whom they work.

The study highlights the issue of family violence in China where there is a lack of research on this problem. Future discussions about the implications for Chinese culture are needed. This research highlights the importance of a family-oriented approach, stressing that all types of violence that an individual may experience within his/her family should be included in the screening process. Moreover, in clinics or social work services, future practice needs to explore effective interventions that treat a family as a whole in order to decrease and prevent the problem of family polyvictimization.

References:

1. World Health Organization. (2005). *World report on violence and health*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
2. Finkelhor, D. Turner, H. A., Hamby, S. L. & Ormrod, R. K. (2010). *Poly-victimization: Children's exposure of multiple types of violence, crime, and abuse*. OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin - NCJ235504 (pp. 1-12). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.