



ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

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AVA Research Review

ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Review Title: The Potential to Moderate Intergenerational Transmission of Child Maltreatment with Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships.

Reviewer(s): Stacy Ellen, DO St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, Philadelphia, PA, and Philip Scribano, DO, MSCE – The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

Article(s):

Primary Article: Schofield, TJ, Lee RD and Merrick MT. Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships as a Moderator of Intergenerational Continuity of Child Maltreatment: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53 (2013) S32-S38.

Associated commentary:

Merrick MT, Leeb RT and Lee RD. Examining the Role of Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Relationships in the Intergenerational Continuity of

Child Maltreatment: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53 (2013) S1-S3.

Article Summary:

Brief Overview of issue:

Child maltreatment includes all forms of abuse and/or neglect carried out by a guardian or custodial figure affecting children under age 18. Child maltreatment has four notable subtypes including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. In 2011, child maltreatment was estimated to occur in 9.1 per 1000 children in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Maltreatment* 2011). Beyond any immediate injuries or negative sequelae, child maltreatment is associated with many negative outcomes, including but not limited to poor social/emotional wellbeing, school failure, increased mental health diagnoses, substance abuse, high-risk sexual behaviors and

the potential for subsequent harsh parenting in adulthood. Prevention attempts require a multifaceted approach. Though at higher risk, many maltreated children do not perpetuate the cycle of violence as adults. Child maltreatment prevention efforts now include the study of factors that mitigate the continuation of the cycle of violence. Safe, stable and nurturing relationships (SSNRs) have been identified as a potential moderator of childhood maltreatment. The theme of “safety” includes security from physical or psychological harm. “Stability” refers to consistency and predictability in the child’s environment and “nurture” is a parent or guardian’s ability to respond to and meet a child’s needs. SSNRs are believed to help reduce the negative effects of child maltreatment and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They may also reduce the occurrence of child maltreatment. The primary article: “Stable, Nurturing Relationships as a Moderator of Intergenerational Continuity of Child Maltreatment: A Meta-Analysis” examines five studies which address this framework.

Aims/ hypotheses of the article:

This article examines the potential for SSNRs to moderate intergenerational

transmission of child maltreatment. Five papers met inclusion criteria in this meta-analysis and were studied for the purposes of this article. The authors hypothesize that SSNRs are a primary prevention strategy for child maltreatment and that multiple forms of relationships can be considered when evaluating the ability to moderate intergenerational continuity of child maltreatment. These relationships include parent-child, parent-grandparent and parent-co-parent/romantic partner dyads. Schofield et. al focus on nurturance within the realm of SSNRs. The papers meeting study criteria examine diverse populations and data that allow the authors to investigate distinct relationship dyads termed SSNR constructs and how they may “moderate the relationship between experiencing maltreatment as a child and perpetrating maltreatment as an adult.”

Relevant Findings:

The first article written by Jaffee et. al discusses the Environmental Risk Longitudinal Twin Study (E-Risk study) and is entitled “Safe, stable, nurturing relationships break the intergenerational cycle of abuse: A prospective nationally-representative cohort of children in the UK.” E-Risk studied twins born in England and Wales in 1994

and 1995 and collected retrospective caregiver maltreatment histories as well as mothers’ prospective accounts of child maltreatment at four time points (twin ages 5, 7, 10 and 12). Risk and protective factors were examined and showed that families with high levels of maternal support/warmth, supportive intimate partner relationships, and lack of/low level of intimate partner violence reduced the intergenerational continuity of violence. The authors concluded that time and effort should be spent helping families to maintain/improve warmth and supportive relationships and increase focus on intimate partner violence reduction in order to decrease further family violence.

The second article discusses the Family Transitions Project (FTP) by Conger et. al. and is titled “Disrupting intergenerational continuity in harsh and abusive parenting: The importance of a nurturing relationship with a romantic partner.” FTP follows over 550 youth from 1994 to 2005 with a focus on transition to adulthood. Adolescents and young adults from the rural Midwest were surveyed annually or biennially. An increased risk for abuse and neglect was observed in families with a prior history of

maltreatment. Harsh parenting and intimate partner relationship quality were assessed. Conger et. al concluded that risk for maltreatment may be reduced in the presence of a cohabiting/married nurturing relationship.

The third article by Herrenkohl, et al, is entitled “Tests of the mitigating effects of caring and supportive relationships in the study of abusive disciplining over two generations”. This prospective study of child maltreatment (Lehigh Longitudinal Study) was conducted from 1970s to 2010. Harsh physical discipline was initially measured prospectively by caregiver reports in preschool and elementary school. The same questions were later asked of the second-generation caregiver at the same time points. The second-generation caregiver was also asked to recall SSNRs (communication, warmth, emotional availability of parents and siblings). The investigators did not find an association of SSNRs to a decrease in maltreatment across generations as the previous studies suggest.

The fourth article describes the Rochester Youth Development study (“Breaking the cycle of maltreatment: The role of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships”), and utilizes CPS reports of suspected child

abuse and neglect to evaluate child maltreatment victimization and perpetration. In this longitudinal study involving three generations, Thornberry et. al follow 1000 adolescents into young adulthood (age 31) and also studies one of their parents. Child maltreatment victimization and perpetration (substantiated cases only) were collected from birth to age 18 and ages 21-30. SSNRs were then measured in early adulthood and include relationship satisfaction, parental satisfaction, attachment to child(ren), attachment to a parental figure and support from a parental figure. Thornberry et. al concluded that SSNRs mitigate the continuity of maltreatment across generations. Of note, relationship satisfaction, parental satisfaction and parental attachment were shown to have a direct protective effect on continuity of maltreatment.

Finally, in the fifth study, the Minneapolis Maternal and Infant Care Project (Egeland et. al “Breaking the cycle of abuse”) reviewed 267 families in Minneapolis area in 1980. Mothers were asked to retrospectively report child maltreatment upon recruitment from a prenatal clinic. When their children were age 2 the maltreatment of the second generation was analyzed.

The first step of this meta-analysis was to determine overall significance of the association between experiencing maltreatment in childhood and child maltreatment continuity in the second generation. In order to analyze the five studies, Schofield et. al used the sum of Zs method to collect aggregate probability and effect size. Next, the moderating effects of SSNRs on continuity of maltreatment across generations was analyzed. The authors included analyses of weighted and unweighted data with non-significant differences between the two approaches, signifying that larger studies did not drive the end results.

Authors' Conclusions:

The five studies were considered a random sample from a larger population of studies. Analysis of the studies using the sum of Zs method highlighted an intergenerational association of childhood maltreatment. Statistical analysis of the protective role of SSNRs on the continuity of child maltreatment found that there likely is a protective role of SSNRs. Prior focus on SSNRs between child and caregiver was expanded in this meta-analysis to include other SSNR types (parent and co-parent and parent and romantic partner dyads, as well as adult

social support). The variety of samples and assessments among the five studies reviewed allowed for a heterogeneous sample that helps strengthen the evidence found supporting the moderation of SSNRs on maltreatment continuity.

Potential Limitations:

Though the third study by Herrenkohl et. al did not find a significant difference in the ability of SSNRs to moderate continuity of harsh physical discipline specifically, overall SSNRs proved protective. From these data, one cannot determine causality of the continuity of maltreatment, nor can one attribute additional protective factors (i.e. a supportive, nurturing co-parent also provides help with positive parenting and age appropriate discipline, faith-based services) as causal; however, the data do provide significant associations to the outcome of maltreatment. The studies vary in sample size and also each brings their own limitations. The small number of studies reviewed may limit the power of the meta-analysis as well. Replications and further studies are needed to confirm results and consider other variables in SSNR's protective capabilities. Future researchers in this field may also consider looking at specific maltreatment subtypes.

Reviewers' Comments:

The studies reviewed suggest that promotion of supportive relationships and improved relationship satisfaction among caregivers who experienced child maltreatment may help foster safe, stable and nurturing environments in their environments and reduce risk of perpetration of child maltreatment. Community programs that support healthy and safe parental relationships, including but not limited to parenting classes, early home visitation, parental substance abuse and/or emotional-behavioral therapy, relationship classes/therapy, religious communities, family programs and violence prevention programs, can help break the cycle of child maltreatment, especially those that are implemented prior to parenthood. Based on the findings of these studies, providers caring for adolescents and adults with known maltreatment histories should make efforts toward referral to community programs and evaluate and discuss the importance of continued safe, stable, healthy relationships. Primary care providers who are caring for young children, and who become aware of a prior history of childhood maltreatment in the parent must make every effort to effectively screen and intervene to address family

stressors and violence and to evaluate for SSNRs.

Reviewer's Summary:

These studies support the hypothesis that there is an increased risk of intergenerational continuity of child maltreatment. Research in the field of child maltreatment continues to strive to find protective and mitigating factors that may reduce the intergenerational continuity of maltreatment. In the meta-analysis reviewed by Schofield et. al it is apparent that safe, stable and nurturing relationships moderate the continuity of child maltreatment across generations. Development of interventions and supports to enhance SSNRs seems to be a good overall strategy to improve adult and child-well-being.

Articles Referenced:

Conger RD, Schofield TJ, Neppl TK, Merrick M. Disrupting intergenerational continuity in harsh and abusive parenting: The importance of a nurturing relationship with a romantic partner. *J Adolesc Health* 2013; 53(4 Suppl): S11e7.

Egeland B, Jacobvitz D, Sroufe LA. Breaking the cycle of abuse. *Child Dev* 1988;59:1080e8.

Herrenkohl TI, Klika JB, Brown EC, et al. Tests of the mitigating effects of caring and supportive relationships in the study of abusive disciplining over two generations. *J Adolesc Health* 2013;53(4 Suppl):S18e24.

Jaffee SR, Bowes L, Ouellet-Morin I, et al. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships break the intergenerational cycle of abuse: A prospective nationally-representative cohort of children in the UK. *J Adolesc Health* 2013;53(4 Suppl): S4e10.

Thornberry TP, Henry KL, Smith C, et al. Breaking the cycle of maltreatment: The role of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. *J Adolesc Health* 2013;53(4 Suppl):S25e31.