

*Issues in Children's
and Families' Lives*

Vol.

11

Violence in Homes and Communities

*Prevention, Intervention,
and Treatment*

Editors

Thomas P. Gullotta
Sandra J. McElhaney

National Mental Health Association TM

书馆



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SAGE Publications

International Educational and Professional Publisher

Thousand Oaks London New Delhi

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For information:



SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Violence in homes and communities: Prevention, intervention, and treatment /
edited by Thomas P. Gullotta and Sandra J. McElhaney.

p. cm.— (Issues in children's and families' lives ; v. 11)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7619-1003-4 (cloth : acid-free paper)

ISBN 0-7619-1004-2 (pbk. : acid-free paper)

1. Family violence—United States—Prevention. 2. Spouse abuse—United States—Prevention. 3. Child abuse—United States—Prevention.

4. Violence—United States—Prevention. 5. Abused wives—Services for—United States. 6. Abused children—Services for—United States.

I. Gullotta, Thomas P. II. McElhaney, Sandra J. III. Series.

HV6626.2 .V57 1999

362.82'927'0973—dc21

98-51237

01 02 03 04 05 7 6 5 4 3 2

Acquiring Editor:	C. Deborah Laughton
Editorial Assistant:	Eileen Carr
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Typesetter:	Marion Warren

***Violence in
Homes and
Communities***



Issues in Children's and Families' Lives

AN ANNUAL BOOK SERIES

Senior Series Editor

Thomas P. Gullotta, *Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut*

Editors

Gerald R. Adams, *University of
Guelph, Ontario, Canada*

Bruce A. Ryan, *University of
Guelph, Ontario, Canada*

Robert L. Hampton, *University of
Maryland, College Park*

Roger P. Weissberg, *University of
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Drawing upon the resources of the Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut, one of this nation's leading family service agencies, **Issues in Children's and Families' Lives** is designed to focus attention on the pressing social problems facing children and their families today. Each volume in this series will analyze, integrate, and critique the clinical and research literature on children and their families as it relates to a particular theme. Believing that integrated multidisciplinary approaches offer greater opportunities for program success, volume contributors will reflect the research and clinical knowledge base of the many different disciplines that are committed to enhancing the physical, social, and emotional health of children and their families. Intended for graduate and professional audiences, chapters will be written by scholars and practitioners who will encourage readers to apply their practice skills and intellect to reducing the suffering of children and their families in the society in which those families live and work.

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Bruce A. Ryan, and Roger P. Weissberg

Violence: Understandings and Preventive Interventions

For nearly one hundred years the *National Mental Health Association* has served as a vehicle for bringing together scholars, practitioners, and consumers to address those problems that cause individuals and families emotional pain and suffering. Thus, it is appropriate that this volume addresses the subject of community violence. Across the 11 chapters that make up this volume, the reader will be introduced to the principal understandings and research that try to make sense of child abuse, domestic violence, and community violence. Further, the reader will explore, with the talented authors who wrote this book, methods to reduce the incidence of violent behavior toward children, spouses, in the workplace, and in our communities.

Acts of violence are not uncommon. While, as a society, we espouse peaceful solutions to disagreements, tolerance to those unlike ourselves, and kindness to loved ones and others, these words are but whispers in the night. Much louder and more shrill are the disturbing sounds of children crying, fists upon the flesh of spouses, gunfire in the workplace and in our neighborhoods. To gain a better appreciation of this subject, this book is organized into three sections.

The first section provides a foundational overview of child, spousal, workplace, and community violence. In the first chapter, Kotch, Muller, and Blakely examine child abuse and neglect from an ecological perspective. They discuss the individual, family, community, and cultural factors that contribute to child abuse. Significantly, the authors give attention to those qualities that place some children at higher risk of abuse. The chapter concludes with an

examination of prevention and treatment interventions. Next, Hampton, Vandergriff-Avery, and Kim explore the causes of spousal violence from a historical time when wife beating was acceptable in North America to the present. Using several different theoretical perspectives, the authors provide an overview of the origins, consequences, and interventions possible to reduce the incidence of this behavior. The third chapter in this section focuses on violence in the workplace. McClure's overview covers definitional, demographic, and theoretical perspectives. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the approaches currently in use to reduce workplace violence. This section concludes with a discussion of violence in the community. Potter uses the public health model to define the problem, identify its causes, and describe promising interventions for reducing violent behavior.

With this background, the second section examines three special topics. In Chapter 5, Jason, Hanaway, and Brackshaw review the long-standing research on the powerful influence television exerts on youth and then discuss approaches to moderating this influence. Chapter 6, by Winborne and Cohen, discusses stereotypes and their relationship to racial, ethnic, and religious hatred and violence. In Chapter 7, the issue of stereotypes is revisited. This time the subject matter is mental illness and violence. Faenza, Glover, Hutchings, and Radack challenge understandings that the mentally ill are inevitably violent. Rather, their search of the literature reveals that the mentally ill are more often victims than aggressors.

The third section of this volume discusses efforts to reduce violent behavior in families, among youth, and in communities. Flannery and Williams review the literature identifying the most promising approaches for reducing youth violence. In Chapter 9, Jenkins and Davidson search the domestic violence program literature to form recommendations for policy and model programs. McElhaney and Effley follow this discussion with an examination of community-based approaches to violence prevention. In addition to identifying three promising approaches, these authors provide a useful framework for the design of community interventions. In the epilogue, Faenza and McElhaney identify reoccurring themes and make several recommendations for reducing violence in families, the workplace, and in communities.

This *National Mental Health Association* sponsored book is intended for graduate students and practitioners wanting a compre-

hensive overview of the origins of violent behavior. It is for program developers wishing to identify programs that appear to reduce violence in families, among youth, in the workplace, and in the community. Finally, it can be used by policymakers to craft new legislation to reduce the incidence of violent behavior, for the editors of this book long for the day when peaceful solutions to disagreements, tolerance for those unlike ourselves, and kindness to all are no longer whispers in the night.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge Kathi Barr-Chapa, Clare Miller, and Gwen Dixon for their help with the index and the continued support of Mike Faenza, President of the National Mental Health Association.

—THOMAS P. GULLOTTA
Child and Family Agency

—SANDRA J. MCELHANEY
National Mental Health Association

*To my two beautiful sons, Ian Joseph
and Logan Griffith with the hopes that the
information contained in the book will make
a difference and that they can grow up
in a nation of peace.*

Your mother,

Sandy McElhaney

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Understanding the Origins and Incidence of Child Maltreatment

JONATHAN B. KOTCH

GREG O. MULLER

CRAIG H. BLAKELY

Over the past generation there has been increasing interest among social scientists and public health practitioners with regard to family violence generally, and child maltreatment in particular. We have witnessed an increasing interest in identifying the factors associated with child maltreatment. In this chapter we review the literature on maltreating families from an ecological perspective. The first section of the chapter focuses on the etiology of maltreatment, while the latter section focuses on the incidence, consequences, and prevention of maltreatment and maltreatment interventions.

Definition

One of the difficulties in reviewing the etiology of child abuse and neglect lies in the wide variation in the way these terms are used. Throughout the literature, the terms researchers use to refer to specific types of maltreatment (sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, dependency, etc.) are often used interchangeably. This creates conceptual challenges in the collection of data and analysis and interpretation of findings.

This lack of conceptual precision is not simply the result of researchers' different theoretical backgrounds, but is a product of the complex nature of the phenomenon under study. Behavior that constitutes maltreatment for some (e.g., researchers and practitioners) may not for others (e.g., judges and laypersons). Similarly, the context within which the specified behavior is performed often determines whether the behavior is maltreatment or not.

Child abuse and neglect may be defined within the legal sphere as acts of omission or commission resulting in physical or mental harm (i.e., injury) to a child less than 18 years of age. Less narrow definitions have been adopted by researchers of child abuse and neglect, defining it as "any act of omission or commission which deprives a child of equal rights, liberty, or interferes with his/her development" (Gil, 1975). "Sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given (Finkelhor, 1979). This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity" (Berliner & Elliot, 1996).

In this chapter we shall broadly consider the literature on child maltreatment. Where possible, we will draw implications from the literature separately for different types of child abuse and neglect.

The problem of definition is not limited to the concepts of child abuse and neglect. While mention is often made of the challenges of defining child abuse and neglect, equally important and daunting is the task of defining the hypothesized correlates of maltreatment. For example, low self-esteem has been found in some studies, though not others, to be a significant predictor of maltreatment. Within the field of social psychology there has been much concern about how to conceptualize self-esteem (Smelser, 1989; Wylie, 1979). Some argue that it is a global aspect of the self, while others argue that it is a multidimensional construct. It could be that the inconsistencies of findings on the link between self-esteem and maltreatment are due in part to discrepancies in how this variable is defined and measured. Family provides another example. There are many ways family can be conceptualized (Weis, 1989). Accurately defining the family and relationships within the family has become all the more important to consider and clarify given recent

social trends affecting family patterns, such as divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation.

In addition to problems of definition, there are a host of methodological problems associated with many of the studies of child abuse and neglect. Most have been of small clinical samples that have not been randomly selected from the population, and have lacked adequate control groups necessary to make valid comparisons between abused/abusers and nonabused/nonabusers. Similarly, there have been a limited number of longitudinal prospective studies. While our review of the literature will consider retrospective studies, where we can, we will focus on longitudinal research.

Etiology

The etiology of child maltreatment has been approached through diverse theoretical frameworks that have employed a broad range of methodological orientations. Explanations of child maltreatment have included theories relating to biology, environmental conditions, stress, patterns of deviance, family violence, social learning, and attachment. While it is generally acknowledged that different types of maltreatment have different explanatory factors, there is also general agreement that there is much overlap. Different theories address different questions (e.g., why individuals initiate child maltreatment vs. why individuals continue to maltreat) or focus on different explanatory factors (child development vs. neighborhood breakdown). It is generally accepted that these widely varying theories, rather than competing, contribute to an integrated approach to explaining child maltreatment.

Such a multifocused approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) considers how the development of specified characteristics of families and individuals influence and are influenced by broader, macro-level social forces (e.g., neighborhood, community, culture). These ecological influences are often conceptualized in terms of risk and protective factors. This perspective recognizes that some children and adults are at greater risk than others for maltreating, or being maltreated, by virtue of myriad factors at the individual, family, community, and broader environment levels. From this perspective the presence or absence of certain circumstances, traits, and/or behaviors determines the likelihood that an individual will be

maltreated or will instigate maltreatment. The cumulative balance of risk and protective factors represents the predictive equation for maltreatment. For example, an infant that would otherwise be at higher risk of being maltreated by her parent as a function of being born prematurely or having a disability, may be at lower risk because her family has a supportive kinship network and neighborhood.

Individual Level

Personality

To the casual observer, the notion that someone would have to be "crazy" to treat a child in the horrific ways reported regularly in the media seems self-evident. Similarly, early research of child abuse and neglect hypothesized that maltreatment was the result of mental illness or personality deficits (Steele & Pollock, 1968). Despite the intuitive appeal of this proposition to laypersons and researchers alike, the research to date has not established a clear causal link between identified psychotic disorders and maltreatment (Melnick & Hurley, 1969; Polansky, Chalmers, Williams, & Bittenweiser, 1981). Among the personality factors that have been hypothesized to contribute to child maltreatment are low self-esteem, poor impulse control, depressive affect, anxiety, and antisocial behavior. While some support is found for the influence of these factors on child maltreatment, there are other studies that find no effects (for reviews see Baumrind, 1992; Belsky, 1993).

Yet, while psychiatric disorders have not been directly and consistently linked to maltreatment, personality and psychiatric disorders may play a role in the onset, continuance, and outcomes of child maltreatment. One way in which personality factors appear to be related to maltreatment is in the disruption of social relations. Depression, anxiety, and antisocial behavior have been shown to be disruptive to social relations, to increase social isolation, and to contribute to social support inadequacies (Crittenden, 1985; Wolfe, 1985). Maltreating parents are more likely to show signs of depression (Lahey, Conger, Atkeson, & Treiber, 1984; Wolfe, 1985), explosiveness, and irritability than nonmaltreating parents (Caspi & Elder, 1988; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Although research has not identified the specific mechanisms that link par-

ticular psychiatric disorders to maltreatment in various contexts, the association has been observed often enough to merit further research.

Cognitions, Attributions, and Attitudes

The normative expectations of caretakers about child development processes are a factor that has been shown to play a role in child maltreatment (Holden, Willis, & Corcoran, 1992; Zuravin, 1987). Some studies have found that parents with limited understanding of child development are more likely to abuse their child (Disbrow, Doerr, & Caufield, 1977; Spinetta & Rigler, 1972). One recent study employing a longitudinal design looked at the maternal and child factors that place adolescent mothers at risk for abusing their children (Dukewich, Borkowski, & Whitman, 1996). Findings indicate that preparation for parenting (measured as knowledge and attitudes about children's development) was the strongest predictor of abuse potential. This same study found that a mother's psychological predisposition for aggressive coping mediates the effects of knowledge and attitudes about child development on the risks for abuse. However, other studies find no association between knowledge and attitudes about child development and maltreatment (Starr, 1982).

Research exploring the link between attitudes of mothers prior to the birth of their children and subsequent maltreatment indicates that mothers who have negative attitudes about unwanted or unplanned pregnancy are more likely to maltreat their children (Egeland & Brunnuell, 1979; Murphy, Orkow, & Nicola, 1985; Zuravin, 1987). Studies have also shown that maltreating parents sometimes perceive their children as less intelligent, more disobedient, and more aggressive than nonabusing parents, although other research finds no difference between abusing and nonabusing parents on this factor (Mash, Johnston, & Kovitz, 1983; Reid, Kavanaugh, & Baldwin, 1987).

Child Characteristics

The abused child's own characteristics and behavior may be a factor that evokes maltreating responses from parents and other caretakers. For instance, some studies indicate that health problems

early in life may predispose certain children to greater risk for maltreatment. Several studies have found that premature and low-birth weight infants, as well as infants that have a handicap or illness, are more likely to be maltreated (Belsky, 1980; Lynch & Roberts, 1982; McCabe, 1984). In addition, it has been suggested that children who have cognitive or psychological deficiencies may also be at greater risk for sexual abuse (Tharinger, Horton, & Millea, 1990). A recent report by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect indicated that the incidence of sexual abuse among children who have a disability is nearly double the rate of children who have no disabilities (Panel, 1993).

Some studies, however, have found that children with disabilities are no more likely to be maltreated than those with no disabilities. A recent study by Ammerman and Patz (1996) examined the contributions of child and parental factors related to abuse potential in 132 mothers of young children with and without disabilities. These researchers found that children with disabilities were, once other child and parent variables were accounted for, at no greater risk for maltreatment than children without disabilities (Ammerman & Patz, 1996). These findings are consistent with earlier research that failed to find an association between the child's medical, intellectual, or developmental aberrations and child maltreatment (Ammerman, 1990a, 1990b, 1991).

While health-related problems may not directly influence the risk for child maltreatment, there is good reason to believe that illness and disabilities do influence the contexts and conditions that have been shown to be associated with child abuse and neglect. Health problems may impact the family by increasing the financial and emotional stress associated with caretaking responsibilities, disrupting the family, and interfering with parental monitoring and other family management practices. The proposition that health problems exacerbate the more proximate correlates of child maltreatment gains some support in research findings that suggest that mothers with low-birth weight infants were more likely to report higher levels of anxiety and other stress-related phenomena.

The debate about whether child factors are most accurately thought of as antecedents or consequences of child maltreatment continues. Explanations stressing the former have been characterized as victim blaming. Disagreements over this issue will likely continue until further research can disentangle the myriad relation-