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Title

Disrupting the intergenerational flow of childhood adversities: The power of supportive adults

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Population health and epidemiology

Presenters

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Abstract

Background: The level of exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) for parents and their children is correlated. Few studies examine differences in the intergenerational transmission of childhood adversity in relation to fathers or with children through adolescence, and it is unclear if social supports can mitigate risk of transmission.

Objective: We conducted parent-stratified analyses to compare whether intergenerational transmission of adversity between mother/father and their child is modified by the child's connections with supportive adults.

Methods: A large representative sample of households (N=7,501) participated in the 2018 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey. From the 1,296 homes with children <18 years of age, 1,059 provided data on both parent and child adversities. Child adversity was classified as low (<2, median) vs high (≥ 2); child connections with supportive adults were classified as low (<5, median) or high (≥ 5). Using weighted logistic regression models stratified by mother/father, we used parent ACE burden to predict child adversity and identified how the presence of supportive adults for the child modified this relationship. Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are reported. Confounders included: child county, race/ethnicity, age; and parent's marital status and employment.

Results: Children with fewer adult supports had significantly higher odds of adversity when the parent had four or more ACEs, although the magnitude of the association differed for mothers (OR=4.8; 95%CI: 1.4,16.7, p=0.01) and fathers (OR=8.5; 95%CI: 1.4,16.7, p=0.01). For mothers and fathers, children with high adult supports did not have increased odds of adversity, even when parents had high ACE

exposure. Notably, when fathers had only one ACE, children with high social supports had lower odds of adversity (OR=0.10; 95%CI: 0.02, 0.64, p=0.02).

Conclusions: Increasing supportive adult relationships during childhood may protect children by disrupting the intergenerational transmission of childhood adversity from both mothers and fathers. Further, we found a strong protective effect from having increased social supports when fathers had only one ACE.

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