

Comparing the Gender Role Beliefs of Men Exposed to Male-Perpetrated Domestic Violence

(DV) in Childhood with Non-Exposed Men

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Literature Review

**Abstract**

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### **Introduction**

You can introduce your topic or some necessary definitions here so that the readers can tell what your topic is or can better understand the purpose of your study that you will explain next.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a difference in gender role beliefs between men who were exposed to male-perpetrated domestic violence (DV) as children and those who were not.

### **Justification of the Study**

In one study, Fantuzzo and Fusco (2007) analyzed data collected by a large police department in the American Northeast and found that 44% of DV events took place with children in the home. Of those children, 81% had direct sensory exposure to the violence (i.e. heard or saw the violent acts). Young boys who witness DV are more likely than their non-witnessing peers to become DV perpetrators as adults (Murrell, Christoff, & Henning, 2007). Research also shows that having negative attitudes towards women and more traditional gender role beliefs is correlated with abusing romantic partners (Reitzel-Jaffe & Wolfe, 2001), however little research has been conducted that examines the relationship between witnessing DV and developing those beliefs. Such research could have implications for counseling youth exposed to DV.

### **Literature Review**

#### **DV and Behavioral Problems**

Children who are exposed to DV are at risk for a host of problems. Kernic et al. (2003) reported that children who saw their fathers physically abuse their mothers were 40% more likely than their peers to have a high level of total behavioral problems as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist. Evans, Davies, and DiLillo (2008) found a correlation between DV exposure and exhibiting trauma symptoms and also reported a link between witnessing DV and externalizing problems, with a higher correlation present for boys. In fact, after a review of recent literature, Holt, Buckley, and Whelan (2008) concluded that the effects of DV exposure on children are significant enough that it could be considered a form of child abuse even if the child is never directly involved.

### **DV and Aggression towards Partners**

Witnessing DV is also correlated with increased aggression in both boys and girls towards friends and romantic partners (Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, & Reebye, 2006). Children who are exposed to DV are also more likely to participate in psychological and emotional abuse towards their partner (Gover, Kaukinen, & Fox, 2008). The negative consequences of exposure to DV do not end with adolescence. Men who witness DV as children are more likely to become abusers as adults and there is a positive relationship between the severity of violence witnessed in childhood and the brutality of violence perpetrated in adulthood (Murrell et al., 2007).

### **Gender Role Beliefs and Aggression against Women**

Also associated with aggression against women are hyper masculinity and rigid non-egalitarian gender role beliefs (Reidy, Shirk, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2009). Anderson and Umberson (2001) found that respondents in their study often felt emasculated by their female partners and violence may have been a way in which they sought to reestablish their masculinity. Hostility towards women is positively correlated with aggression specifically against women, even

controlling for general attitudes about violence and general levels of hostility and aggression (Anderson & Anderson, 2008). Even if one does not actually commit violent acts against women, gender role beliefs are still predictive of feelings about domestic violence in general (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004). Berkel et al. (2004) identified an association between having less egalitarian gender role beliefs and being relatively more likely to support the use of violence against women. Further, there is evidence to suggest that there is intergenerational transmission of beliefs about gender. Kulik (2000) found a moderate correlation in the similarity of gender role beliefs and occupational sex-typing between parents and offspring. Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, and Osgood (2007) showed that boys who have parents with traditional beliefs about women's roles tend to maintain that gender role ideology throughout adolescence.

### **DV Exposure and Gender Beliefs**

Despite the research showing a relationship between witnessing and perpetrating DV, having non-egalitarian gender role beliefs and perpetration, and demonstrating familial transmission of gender beliefs, few studies have attempted to investigate any potential link between DV exposure and gender role beliefs. Graham-Bermann and Brescoll (2000) found a significant positive relationship between abuse experienced by the mother and the child's family role stereotyping. Male children scored higher than girls on measures of male power acceptance (Graham-Bermann & Brescoll). Reitzel-Jaffe and Wolfe (2001) reported that childhood exposure to family violence predicted the presence of negative gender role beliefs in young males which then was a predictor of using violence in intimate relationships, suggesting that developing negative gender beliefs could be a mediating variable in becoming abusive partners. Both of these studies have limitations. The former focused on children and it is unknown if those gender

beliefs were maintained after childhood. The latter was a correlational design based on one large sample and did not include a comparison to a control group of non-witnessing men.

### **Research Question, Hypothesis, and Definitions**

**Research question.** After reviewing the literature, the following research question is proposed: Do men who witness male-perpetrated domestic violence as children differ significantly in their gender role beliefs from men who had no exposure as children?

**Hypothesis.** The hypothesis of this study is that witnessing men will show more non-egalitarian gender role beliefs than non-witnessing men.

**Definitions.** Exposure to domestic violence is defined as having seen or heard violence perpetrated against the female caregiver by the male caregiver at least once during childhood.

Gender role belief is measured by score on the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (King & King, 1993).

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