

Descriptions of NICHD-Supported Research Projects related to Child Abuse, Child Maltreatment, and Child Violence

Project Title: Effects on children of persistent exposure political violence

Principal Investigator: L. Rowell Huesmann

Number: 1 R01 HD047814-01A2

Description:

The overarching goal of this research is to advance our understanding of how persistent and extreme exposure to political conflict and violence combines with cognitive, emotional, and self processes to influence the psychosocial adjustment and mental health of children.

In this project, we will study those processes in two linked samples: in Israeli (Jewish and Arab) and Palestinian children living in the conflicted areas of Israel and Palestine. The investigators will conduct extensive interview assessments on three cohorts of children and their parents drawn from populations of both Palestinian-Arab and Israeli (Jewish and Arab) families, beginning when the children are 8, 11, and 14 years old, and concluding when the children are 11, 14, and 17 years old, respectively. We will implement a cohort-sequential prospective longitudinal design, which will permit the investigators to analyze the ways in which ecological contexts marred by constant ethnic and political conflicts and frequent eruptions of politically motivated violence affect children's psychosocial adjustment from the critical developmental period of middle childhood through middle adolescence. The design also permits researchers to study the contextual and individual predictors and correlates of problematic and healthy developmental pathways under extremely adverse ecological conditions; thus, they can examine the influence of an ongoing politically violent context on the emergence and maintenance of cognitions, emotional styles, and self-identity processes that contribute to the development of enduring patterns of behavioral adjustment and mental health.

Additionally, this research will explore ways in which family and peer relationships serve to moderate and mediate associations between exposure to political violence and child adjustment, and examine transactional relations between the behavior of parents and their children under politically violent conditions.

Our investigation is guided by five principal aims, to:

- Investigate the psychosocial and mental health consequences of exposure to persistent and extreme political violence to the normal development of children, at different ages, by gender, and across different socio-cultural contexts;
- Examine the relations between exposure to persistent political violence and three sets of individual factors that potentially could mediate or moderate those relations: cognitive beliefs (e.g., normative beliefs about general aggression and aggression targeted at outgroup members), emotion regulation styles (e.g., anger control), and self-identity processes (e.g., self worth);
- Investigate whether individual differences in exposure to extreme political violence among children in our sample are associated with exposure to other forms of violence, including non-political violence in the community, domestic violence, and school violence;
- Examine the potential mediating and moderating effects of parent-child relationships on the relation between exposure to political violence and child adjustment; and
- Examine the potential mediating and moderating effects of peer relationships on the association between exposure to political violence and child adjustment.

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Project Title: Violence and Mental Health: Children of First Responders

Principal Investigator: Christina W. Hoven

Number: 1 R01 HD046786-01A2

Description:

After acts of violence, terrorism, and other disasters, children are particularly vulnerable to developing mental health problems due to both their own exposure and to the additional, indirect effect of their parent's exposure. First responders to these events have extremely high levels of work-related exposure to violent acts, which puts their children at elevated risk for mental health problems in general, and at additional increased risk following a major act of terrorism or mass violence. Insufficient attention, however, has focused on the needs of first responders' children, who may routinely experience such indirect exposure to violence through their parents' work-related exposure. The impact on children of indirect exposure to violent events must be understood in order to formulate appropriate public health interventions for all children, especially following acts of terrorism.

A major goal of the proposed study is to assess the impact of parental (first responder) exposure to work-related violent incidents on their children over time, both in Israel and in New York City.

The proposed study design will permit:

- Understanding of the impact of parental exposure to violence and terrorism on children;
- Understanding of why some children of parents who have been found to be particularly resilient to mental health disorders after violent incidents may be at elevated risk for specific types of mental health problems; and
- Identification of risk and protective factors related to children's indirect exposure to violence that can potentially be modified through post-disaster interventions.

In addition to the main objectives, this study will allow us to have in place, through collaboration with the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, an emergency assessment strategy for this important and vulnerable population in the event of a major terrorist attack.

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Project Title: Children and Political Violence in Northern Ireland

Principal Investigator: Mark E. Cummings

Number: 1 R01 HD046933-01

Description:

There is increasing concern about the effects on children of exposure to political violence and possible links with community and domestic violence. It might be expected that the negative sequelae would be greatest for children when all of these factors converge, as in cultures with long-standing histories of ethnic conflict. However, little systematic study has been accomplished on the impact of political violence and related social ecologies on the adjustment of children, with even less known about the mechanisms underlying relations with child outcomes.

This study investigates an ecological framework for the effects of political violence on children in Northern Ireland. Three programmatically related phases of research are proposed, including: A pilot phase concerned with instrument development and refinement for this culture; based on a survey of parents (n =2000), the next phase tests relations between political, community, and domestic violence and child well-being across a wide age span; and, finally, a more intensive survey of parents and children (n = 400 11-17 year olds) tests an ecological, process-oriented model for the effects of political violence on children.

Multiple dimensions of child and family functioning are assessed, including children's emotional security, social identity and psychological adjustment. Among the hypotheses are that:

- Political, community, and domestic violence will each contribute to prediction of child outcomes;
- Child outcomes will not be uniform but vary by the intensity of ethnic conflict in different regions of Northern Ireland; and
- Family functioning and child regulatory functioning will mediate child outcomes.

The research will contribute to understanding of ecological, psychological and familial processes underlying effects of ethnic conflict on children in Northern Ireland, with possible implications for other regions of the world with histories of political violence.

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Project Title: Parental Wartime Deployment on Adjustment in Children

Principal Investigator: Patricia E. Lester

Number: 1 R03 HD049451-01

Description:

For military families, the current war in Iraq has created an urgent challenge for children and their parents. Living with wartime separation post-war reunion, children with a parent engaged in combat may be affected by extended separation from a primary caretaker, altered family roles during the parent's absence, and potential impact of combat exposure on the military parent post deployment. Limited information is known about the impact of a military parent's wartime deployment on child adjustment.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the UCLA Center for Community Health have established a partnership with the Marine and Family Services Division of Camp Pendleton (CP), where a large number of children have been affected by a parent's deployment to Iraq. We will examine prevalence of social, behavioral, and emotional problems for children affected by a parent's wartime deployment, and potential background and mediating factors of child adjustment.

Recruited families (n=150) with a 6-12 year child (n=180) will be stratified into three strata:

- 50 families with children in which a Marine parent is currently deployed in Iraq;
- 50 families with children in which a Marine parent returned from Iraq to CP within the last six months; and
- 50 families with children in which the Marine parent is on active duty but never deployed in Iraq.

This descriptive study will clarify correlates of adaptive and maladaptive adjustment in children exposed to a parent's war time deployment, as well as post deployment reunion with a parent, providing information about potential protective and risk factors for adjustment in these children. The findings will also form the basis for additional work in developing a family transition preventative intervention to enhance child adjustment when a parent is sent to war.

The project is an urgent and timely opportunity to shed light on the area of children facing separation from a parent due to dangerous occupational duties, an increasingly common circumstance. Thus, these findings may be broadly applicable to other situations in which a child faces a parent's absence and potential traumatic exposure.

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Project Title: Youth Violence Exposure: A National Longitudinal Study

Principal Investigator: Dean Gaines Kilpatrick

Number: 1 R01 HD046830-01

Description:

The overall objective of this project is to obtain a 10-year update and extension of the 1995 National Survey of Adolescents (NSA) by conducting a three-wave longitudinal survey of a new national household probability sample of 12- to 17-year-old adolescents. The original NSA was conducted via telephone with a national household probability sample of 4,023 male and female adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17. The methods used in this project are deliberately modeled after the original NSA; the study involves a baseline survey of a new cohort of 4,000 12 year olds to 17 year olds using identical sample selection and interview procedures as that in the original NSA. The project also includes two additional assessments of adolescent participants to be conducted one and two years after the baseline assessment.

As was the case with the original NSA, a structured interview will be used to measure a broad range of exposure to witnessed and direct violence victimization (e.g., sexual assault, physical assault, and physically abusive punishment) occurring in family, school, and community settings. Several types of mental health problems will be measured, including post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, suicide ideation and attempts, substance use and abuse, and delinquency. The study will also obtain information from parents as well as adolescents regarding academic performance.

This project will provide invaluable comparisons about changes over the past decade in violence exposure, substance use, and related adjustment issues among American youth. Although modeled after the NSA, the proposed project departs from the original in several important respects. First, the assessment of violence exposure in the proposed study is broader and more specific; specifically, assessment of physically abusive punishment will be expanded, and there will be a more comprehensive focus on episodes of school, domestic, and community violence to permit greater description of adolescents' exposure to violence in each of these important settings. Second, the range of outcomes assessed will be diversified beyond mental health, substance abuse, and delinquency to include academic performance, an important developmental marker of child adjustment, as well as risky sexual behaviors. Third, the proposed survey methodology is longitudinal.

Specific aims of the proposed project are to:

- Obtain prevalence rates and descriptive data regarding adolescents' exposure to violence (both direct and witnessed) across a range of settings (school, home, community), including sexual assault, physical assault, physically abusive punishment, domestic violence, community violence, and school violence;
- Determine whether there have been changes among a nationally representative sample of 12 to 17 year olds over the 1995-2005 period with respect to the prevalence of exposure to violence, mental health problems, and risk or protective factors for a range of adverse social and mental health outcomes given exposure to violence;
- Examine the longitudinal trajectory of exposure to violence, development of mental health and substance use and abuse problems, risky sexual behaviors, delinquency, and changes in academic performance;

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- Test the hypothesis that the relationship between adverse family environment and the outcomes of delinquency and poor academic performance are substantially mediated by exposure to violence and/or violence-related mental health problems; and
- Test the extent to which the relationships described above are moderated by gender, race, and ethnicity.

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Project Title: Violence Exposure Outcomes in Children with Disabilities

Principal Investigator: Patricia Maureen Sullivan

Number: 5 R01 HD046991-03

Description:

This project is designed to fill a gap in the existing knowledge about the consequences of violence exposure in childhood by studying a prospectively derived sample of adults with records of a disability, exposure to domestic violence, and residing in a census tract associated with high rates of community violence in childhood and a comparable non-exposed sample drawn from the same population.

The purpose of the project is to determine whether there are specific and general adverse long-term mental health, posttraumatic stress, and antisocial consequences to childhood violence exposure among adults with an identified childhood disability. Resiliency to violence exposure in childhood will also be studied. Project objectives include determining the moderating role of age at exposure, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and childhood disability status in the occurrence of adverse long-term outcomes. Violence characteristics, community characteristics, family of origin characteristics, and out-of-home placement will be evaluated as outcome mediators.

The researchers have access to an extensive database, dating from the early 1980s, that includes the Nebraska Central Child Abuse Register, the Foster Care Review Board, which includes records of all children placed in foster care due to adverse home environments, as well juvenile and adult law enforcement databases. Cohorts of adults with and without childhood records of diagnosed disabilities, domestic violence in the home, childhood residence in violent neighborhoods, and child maltreatment will be recruited from 40,211 public school records in Douglas County, Nebraska during the 1994-95 school year. Some 79 percent are now 19 years of age or older, 20 percent have a record of domestic violence in the home, and 32 percent resided in a high violence neighborhood during childhood.

A total of 500 subjects comprised of 250 disabled and 250 non-disabled adults will be recruited throughout the five years of the project from eight subject pools obtained from electronic data mergers between the total school population and the violence exposure and disability databases. Subjects will be given a battery of interviews and tests to obtain self-report data on childhood violence exposure, violence victimization, and current adulthood psychopathology, posttraumatic stress, and antisocial status. This research will allow the identification of both risk and protective factors for the violence exposure outcomes in a disabled population and identify targets to guide prevention and intervention efforts.

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Project Title: What Facets of Family Violence Affect Child Functioning?

Principal Investigator: Amy M. Slep

Number: 5 R01 HD046901-03

Description:

Children's exposure to partner maltreatment (herein CE) is a public health concern of substantial magnitude. A recent study of a generalizable sample of parents with children ages 3 to age 7 found the rate of physical CE to be 48 percent and physical/emotional CE to be 63 percent. CE children fare worse on a host of outcomes (e.g., internalizing and externalizing problems, social problems, academic problems, negative affect/distress and negative cognitions) than non-CE children.

This project first presents a heuristic roadmap to guide CE definitional research by sketching the moderational and mediational relations linking CE and negative child outcomes. Investigators then outline a five step process for resolving the paradox, namely: (1) Have a conceptual model; (2) Use it to specify key CE facets; (3) Improve measurement of the facets; (4) Test facet-outcome associations (controlling for non-CE variables [such as couple conflict, inept parenting, and child victimization] to ensure parsimony); and (5) Winnow CE and child victimization facets.

We will examine CE facet/ outcome relations in a generalizable sample of 400 families with children ages 4 to 8 recruited through random digit dialing and assessed at two lab visits six months apart. The specific aims of the project are as follows:

- Determine the prevalence of CE in a generalizable community sample of families with 4- to 8-year-old children. Establish the effect size of relations between:
 - Exposure status and facets and
 - Child externalizing problems, internalizing problems, social adjustment, school adjustment, vagal tone and reactivity, and cognitive functioning for boys and girls in this sample.
- By applying a moderational framework to identify what makes exposure to some instances of inter-parental violence (IPV) impact children and others not, determine which facets of children's exposure to IPV relate to concurrent and future aspects of child functioning. Determine if threshold effects are present. If so, determine the thresholds.
- By applying a moderational framework to identify what makes some instances of victimization impact children and others not, determine which facets of children's victimization by parents relate to concurrent and future aspects of child functioning. Determine if threshold effects are present. If so, determine the thresholds.
- Determine the extent to which meaningful facets of exposure and victimization are mediated by non-abusive marital conflict, inept parenting, or both.
- Build a multifaceted model of how IPV exposure and victimization directly and indirectly relate to classes of child outcomes, accomplished through seven specified steps.

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Project Title: Randomized, Controlled Trial to Prevent Child Violence

Principal Investigator: Shari Barkin

Number: 5 R01 HD042260-04

Description:

Child and adolescent violence remains one of our most pressing public health problems today. Health care providers often serve critical roles when treating the results of violence. As with other injuries, pediatric providers serve as one of the necessary agents for prevention. Consequently, major health organizations have issued guidelines for incorporating violence prevention into routine primary care for children and adolescents. Currently, only limited tools are available to help pediatric clinicians address violence prevention-related issues in a consistent manner during the routine office visit. Moreover, no empirical evidence exists for the effectiveness of such approaches on parents or children's behaviors.

Wake Forest University School of Medicine (WFUSM) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center for Child Health Research (CCHR) are collaborating to evaluate the effectiveness of a pediatric clinician's intervention that has been extensively pilot tested. Pediatric Research in Office Settings (PROS), a program of the CCHR, is a national network comprised of practice-based clinicians experienced in research participation. Their membership consists of more than 500 practices and 1,500 clinicians across the country. PROS practices will be randomly assigned to either the intervention arm (Safety Check) or the control arm with an attention placebo.

Safety Check will address four areas of behavior: media use; parental use of physical disciplining techniques; gun ownership and storage; and family/peer physical fights. Each arm of the study will have 68 practices, 136 providers, and 3,536 patients. The study will aim to gather data on sufficient numbers of Latino and African American patients to evaluate if the intervention has different effects on differing cultures/ethnicities.

The intervention consists of four components:

- Community violence prevention worksheet (to guide practices in identifying community specific violence prevention resources);
- Household behavior survey for patient families with children ages 2 to 11 years to complete in the waiting room for identifying problem areas;
- Recommendation guide that the provider directly utilizes to educate and engage the patient family on these issues; and
- "Tangible tools" to help the family adhere to provider recommendations.

The two primary outcomes evaluated will be the pediatric provider's anticipatory guidance behaviors and the patient family's behaviors, e.g., media use, discipline, gun storage, and family/peer fights. Data will be collected at the baseline visit with patient family follow-up one and six months later via telephone interviews. Efforts to reduce the social morbidity of youth violence are essential.

This study breaks new ground, serving as the first national randomized controlled trial focused on testing the effectiveness of a comprehensive violence prevention program for pediatric providers. As yet, there are no data driving the guidelines issued by major medical organizations; this study will provide scientifically sound data to do so.