Co-occurrence of Intimate Partner Violence and Child Maltreatment: Service Providers' Perceptions

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Background

Intimate partner violence (IPV) places children at risk for maltreatment and abuse. Physical abuse, harsh psychological punishment, and child neglect have all been found to be strongly related to IPV. In fact, child abuse is estimated to be present in about 40% of IPV cases. Consequently, it is important to determine if child abuse is present when assisting IPV victims, as well as if IPV co-occurs within child abuse cases.

In spite of the knowledge on the overlap of child abuse and IPV, little is known about the attitudes and perceptions of child welfare, IPV or child protection professionals when serving families where both of these violence circumstances may occur. Yet, these may greatly affect the management and assistance provided to the victims and their families.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of professionals in Hillsborough County, Florida from several fields (i.e., child welfare, IPV, law enforcement, and child protection investigations) on the overlap of child maltreatment (CM) and IPV.

This study was designed and implemented by the Harrell Center for the Study of Family Violence at the University of South Florida (USF), supported by the Family Justice Center of Hillsborough County, and the Child Welfare/Domestic Violence (CW/DV) Task Force at Hillsborough County. Its findings will provide guidance in the development of policy, training and organizational collaboration among child serving agencies in this county.

Methods

Design	Cross-sectional
Data collection	Close-ended, Internet-based survey
Instrument	15-item, Likert scale (1-4, 1-5) format • Adaptation of validated measures on health providers' knowledge, actions and beliefs regarding IPV & CM • Additional questions Topic areas: • IPV knowledge • Perceptions related to IPV • IPV & reports of CA • Knowledge & abilities regarding IPV and CA • Workplace policies & training
Sample	Convenience-based sample (N=140) • 81.4% female / 18.6% male • Age: 60% were ≤ 40 years old • Experience in field: • < 1 year: 10% • 5-9 years: 29% • 1-4 years: 32% • 10+ years: 29% Eligibility criteria: • front-line workers who serve in child welfare, IPV, law enforcement, or child protection-related agencies
Recruitment	Indirect recruitment • Via e-mail, sent by *distributors* (members of the DV/CM Task Force at Hillsborough County, FL • Reminder emails sent to *distributors*
Data analyses	PASW Statistics 18 • Descriptive analyses • Cross-tabulations

Table 1. Participants' employment

	N	%
Child protective investigations	43	30.7%
Child welfare services	66	47.1%
IPV service provider	14	10.0%
Law enforcement agency*	4	2.9%
Other	13	9.3%
Total	**140**	**100%**

* Because of the low responses obtained, findings for law enforcement participants are not reported.

Results

Figure 1. Perceptions on why people stay in abusive intimate relationships (N=137)

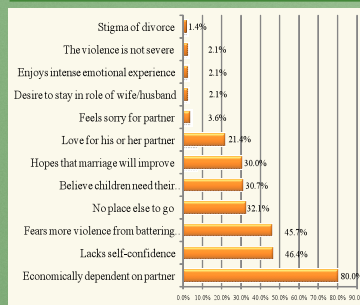|	
Stigma of divorce	1.4%
The violence is not severe	2.1%
Enjoys intense emotional experience	2.1%
Desire to stay in role of wife/husband	2.1%
Feels sorry for partner	3.6%
Love for his or her partner	21.9%
Hopes that marriage will improve	30.0%
Believe children need their...	30.7%
No place else to go	32.1%
Fears more violence from battering...	45.7%
Lacks self-confidence	46.0%
Economically dependent on partner	80.0%

Table 2. Why people stay in abusive intimate relationships, by employment [1] (N=140)

(%)	Child Protective Invest.	Child Welfare Services	IPV/DV Service Provider	Law Enfor.	Other	X^2, p-val.
Fear of greater violence from battering partner	27.9	56.1	57.1	*	38.5	9.38, <.05
Love for his or her partner	11.6	21.2	50.0	*	30.8	11.01, <.05
Enjoys intense emotional experience	2.3	1.5	0	*	0	10.69, <.05

[1] Each participant was able to mention more than one reason why they believe participants stay in abusive IP relationships. This table only shows differences by employment that are statistically significant.
* Not reported

Table 3. Perceived impact of intimate partner violence workers' report of child abuse[1] (N = 140)

IPV worker's reporting of child abuse would…(%)	Never	Rarely	Half of the time	Often	Always	N/R[2]
Damage relationship worker-battered parent	1.4	12.9	48.6	27.1	5.7	4.3
Disempower the battered parent	4.3	30.7	32.9	23.6	4.3	4.3
Prevent the battered parent from seeking further help	2.9	24.3	43.6	25.0	0	4.3
Further traumatize the child	5.0	36.4	34.3	15.0	5.0	4.3
Protect the child	0.7	2.1	21.4	41.4	30.0	4.3
Cause more disruption to the family ($X^2= 34.38, p<.05$)	2.1	10.0	48.6	28.6	6.4	4.3
Child Protective Investigations (n=43)	0	2.3	32.6	34.9	27.9	2.3
Child Welfare Services (n=66)	0	0	12.1	47.0	33.3	7.6
IPV/DV Service Providers (n=14)	0	0	35.7	42.9	21.4	0
Law Enforcement (n=4)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other (n=13)	7.7	15.4	15.4	30.8	30.8	0

[1]No statistically significant differences in responses by participants' employment, unless noted. [2]N/R = No response
* Not reported

Table 4. Knowledge and ability in dealing with IPV and CA cases, by employment area [1] (N=133)

Do you feel that you… (%)	Total	Employment Area – Mean (sd)					X^2 p-val
		Child Protective Investigations	Child Welfare Services	IPV Service Providers	Law Enforcement	Other	
Know the dynamics of…							
IPV-parents	3.7 (.944)	3.8 (.821)	3.5 (.833)	4.8 (.579)	*	3.2 (1.235)	58.62, <.001
CA	4.3 (.774)	4.4 (.63)	4.3 (.701)	4.5 (.76)	*	4.0 (1.291)	26.64, <.05
Can identify victims of…							
IPV-parents	3.5 (.910)	3.7 (.734)	3.2 (.948)	4.2 (.699)	*	3.2 (.899)	34.02, <.05
CA	4.2 (.787)	4.4 (.63)	4.1 (.766)	4 (.784)	*	3.85 (1.144)	N.S.
Can effectively intervene in cases of…							
IPV-parents	3.3 (.938)	3.4 (.887)	3.0 (.792)	4.1 (.997)	*	2.9 (1.068)	46.99, <.0001
CA	4.1 (.868)	4.4 (.618)	4.2 (.81)	3.7 (.994)	*	3.5 (1.198)	34.07, <.001
Can advocate on behalf of victims of…							
IPV-parents	3.8 (.983)	3.6 (.882)	3.9 (.860)	4.6 (.633)	*	3.3 (1.494)	39.57, <.001
CA	4.4 (.791)	4.4 (.672)	4.6 (.698)	4.1 (.77)	*	4.2 (1.144)	23.28, <.05
Feel comfortable working with victims of…							
IPV-parents	3.9 (.925)	3.8 (.871)	3.9 (.885)	4.6 (.633)	*	3.9 (1.214)	28.9, <.05
CA	4.5 (.812)	4.6 (.577)	4.6 (.61)	3.9 (.949)	*	4.1 (1.320)	37.60, <.0001

* Not reported.

Table 5. Training and beliefs regarding children within IPV situations (N = 140)

	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed
IPV victims stay with partner fearing removal of children	81.4%	36%	10.7%
Battered parents are not capable of protecting children	38.6%	18.6%	38.6%
IPV victims should decide on immediate actions for…			
• themselves:	77.1%	3%	13.6%
• children:	65.7%	5%	22.9%

	Yes	No
Received training on the co-occurrence of IPV & CA	70%	22.9%

Discussion

Participants felt they had more knowledge and were more comfortable dealing with child abuse than IPV cases. As expected, participants felt most confident in effectively identifying victims, intervening with or advocating for the population they are primarily trained to work with.

Child welfare service providers and child protection investigators felt more capable of dealing with child abuse. Although they felt most capable in dealing with IPV victims, IPV workers reported greater knowledge on child abuse dynamics than participants of other employment areas.

While economic dependence on the partner was the most frequently reported reason for staying in abusive relationships (80%), a similar proportion of respondents (81%) believed battered parents stay because they fear their children's removal by authorities. Even so, views on the most important reasons why people stay in abusive relationships varied by employment.

Implications

Findings demonstrate the inequitable knowledge, training and perceived ability to deal with the overlap of IPV and child abuse among professionals from different employment areas. Those discrepancies serve as opportunities for different agencies to collaborate in reducing any knowledge gaps and increasing respondent's perceived capacity to effectively identify and intervene with of both IPV and child abuse victims. The CW/DV Task Force of Hillsborough County, as an established entity with representation of law enforcement, child protection investigators, IPV/DW and child welfare service providers, has a unique opportunity to lead in the development of local policies to best serve and protect victims of family violence.

Limitations

This report presents the findings from a convenience-based sample, and should not be generalized to all IPV or child maltreatment first responders/ service providers in Hillsborough County, the State of Florida, or the United States. Furthermore, given the low participation from law enforcement (n=4), results are not representative of this employment area and are not reported. It is also important to consider that nearly a tenth of all participants (n=13) identified themselves as being from other, unlisted professions.

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