Early Life Stress And The Resulting Effects On Behavior Of Children Under The Age Of Five In A Domestic Violence Shelter

Jordan Singleton

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EARLY LIFE STRESS AND THE RESULTING EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE IN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Jordan Singleton
May 2021
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Approved by:

Dr. Brooklyn Sapozhnikov-Levine, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work
Dr. Armando Barragan, M.S.W. Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

It is an unfortunate reality that domestic violence affects people across the world, men, women, and children. When men or women leave a domestic violence situation, they often take their children with them but are often unaware of the damage that has already been done. Even if the children have not suffered physical abuse, there are many changes going on in the brain just from either witnessing or hearing abuse take place. With domestic violence often going unreported, it can be incredibly difficult to reach the children who are affected. However, when a parent enters a domestic violence shelter with their children they are changing their lives. They are also affording their children the opportunity to heal and grow. The purpose of this research is to explore the most common behavioral deficits of children who are under the age of five and living in a domestic violence shelter, to help these shelters better assess the children’s needs. Interviews will be conducted with staff, volunteers, and interns at an Orange County domestic violence shelter. In addition to interviews at separate shelters, staff, children, and interns will be given a Likert scale for each child under the age of five to assess if the children are meeting common milestones for their age. This research has the potential to expand the services and training offered at domestic violence shelters and increase the awareness of the impacts of domestic violence on young children and infants.

Keywords: socioemotional development, early childhood, early life stress, domestic violence
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have even started this program without the love and support of Mr. Nicholas Edrick, who drove me to drop off my application the day it was due. He has supported and loved me for the duration of this program and I am forever indebted to you. I could not have finished this program without your support and constant re-reads of my papers. Thank you Jellybean, you’re my favorite person.

I want to thank my family who have supported me in every way throughout this journey. Thank you Mom, Dad, Pawpaw, Granny, Gma, Gram, and the Albins. Thank you to everyone who read and critiqued my papers and gave me strength to get through it all.

An ultra special thanks to my best friends Alexis, Stephany, and Viviana, who have kept me in the program, supported me mentally and emotionally, and let me use them as case papers over the years. This would never have been possible without your love, friendship, and insight.
DEDICATION

This project and my education is everything to me and I dedicate it to the Human Options shelter. Without them being my first internship in my undergraduate program, I may have never found myself or my passion for young children and the family unit. I spent years volunteering alongside wonderful people who I will not forget and will always praise for being amazing and dedicated to making the world a better place. Thank you to Human Options for giving me an opportunity to see the changes that can happen in a safe environment and being there for the people who need them most. Last but not least, this is for Young and Maria at the Emergency Shelter, my social work inspirations.
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CHAPTER ONE
IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter one explains the research focus of this study, the socioemotional development and effects of children under the age of five living in a domestic violence shelter. This chapter explains why the researcher chose a pragmatic paradigm when conducting this study, as opposed to other paradigms like post positivism. In addition, this chapter provides a literature review of various infant mental health topics, including developmental milestones for behavior, early life stress and its effects on brain, body, and behavior, and the interventions currently in place to help with behavioral issues. In conclusion, this chapter will explore the potential contributions to the macro and micro practice in the social work field.

Research Focus and/or Question

This research project used a pragmatic paradigm to view the early life stress (ELS) and the resulting socioemotional effects on children under the age of five in domestic violence shelters. Stable development with normal cortisol levels in young children is very important to their socioemotional development (Thompson, 2014). This understanding of socioemotional development is gathered through interviews with the volunteers and employees who work in the
children’s program with children under the age of five. Based on the information gleaned from these workers, a theory about common socioemotional effects has presented itself.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

This study used a pragmatic paradigm during its conduction. A pragmatic paradigm was chosen because the research can then be studied in a way that shows that “worldviews can be individually unique and socially shared” (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This paradigm was deemed a good fit because while similar experiences may have been lived by each subject, not all actions and reactions to the event are the same. Pragmatism was also chosen because of its unique ability to combine and use qualitative and quantitative data as a singular unit (Schoonenboom, 2017). As mixed methods research partly relies on subjective information, which is what will be gathered from the volunteers, interns, and staff members to capture the entire experience of the children.

There is no hypothesis for this proposal, which was conducted qualitatively. Given the way the study was conducted, these approaches were the best choice because the information was gathered from volunteers who work directly with the children and their families. The research gathered had a direct insight into the behaviors of children who are struggling with ELS, as they were working with them one to two times a week, on average. As the data has qualitative aspects, it gave the researcher an opportunity to let the problem
evolve and present itself as data is gathered, in regard to which deficits are most common.

Literature Review

This literature review was focused on the definition and importance of early life stress. This literature review discusses the impact of early life stress on infants, toddlers, and young children, but also the effects of intimate partner violence on infants. Next to be discussed in the literature review is early life stress and its effects on not only the brain but the body and behavior later in life as well.

Early Life Stress

Early life stress has no agreed-upon definition but must meet two criteria. For a start, the developmental age must be considered “early life” and second, the event must be determined to be stressful (Heim, 2013). According to Malinovskaya et al. (2018), early life can be considered prenatal, postnatal or adolescent, but for the sake of this thesis, the focus will be on the prenatal and postnatal stages. Postnatal stressful life events can be a number of things such as abuse (physical or sexual), neglect (emotional or physical), or family conflict, including economic violence (Pesonen et al., 2013; Malinovskaya et al., 2018). However, the mother enduring complicated childbirth, engaging in substance abuse or smoking, or being victim to infections or psychological stress during pregnancy is also termed as ELS (Malinovskaya et al., 2018).
Early Life Stress on the Brain and Body

ELS affects a number of brain structures including the auditory and visual cortex, which may be linked to the witnessing of abuse, and the Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis (Mueller & Tronick, 2019). The HPA axis helps regulate stress, which is perfectly normal in any functioning person and can even be helpful in some situations. However, when there is repeated exposure to stress, there is a chance that there will never be “normal functioning” in the brain because of the inability of the brain to have developed in the way that neuroscientists find typical. The prefrontal cortex, corpus callosum, and amygdala may be the most affected, leading to trouble with emotional regulation, among other issues (Malinovskaya et al., 2018).

When the HPA axis is triggered, there are effects on the body, such as immune system suppression and increased blood pressure (Thompson, 2014). Cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and obesity can also be linked to early life stress (Malinovskaya et al., 2018).

Early Life Stress and Behavior

Infants in the womb are not safe from ELS. Chronic depression in the mother can lead to heightened cortisol levels, observed as early as three months after birth (Oberlander et al, 2008, as cited in Thompson, 2014). In addition, high levels of cortisol in the mother can be passed to the infant, which can lead to emotional difficulties (Thompson, 2014).
Thompson (2014) links high-stress levels in infancy to an inability to “concentrate, remember things and control and focus their own thinking”. Since adaptations to constant stress are allocated to vigilance, there is a more difficult time allotting those same mental processes to schoolwork and other learning activities. On the same thread, behaviors that protect the child at home may not be necessary or translate well to behaviors at school and so can keep the child from forming bonds with their schoolmates.

**Intimate Partner Violence and Infants**

While epigenetics is in its infancy, there have been recent leaps in the ability to study gene expression in humans. For example, the glucocorticoid receptor genes in children and teens who were in the womb while their mother was a victim of intimate partner violence (IPV), are different even than children who were born after the mother being involved in IPV (Thompson, 2014). However, since IPV is generally accompanied by other infant stressors, it is difficult to separate what can be attributed specifically to IPV and what is the result of other types of maltreatment post-birth (Mueller & Tronick, 2019). For example, there may be inconsistent caregiving, mental health issues in the mother, and/or other conditions as a result of the IPV, leaving the mother unable to create and maintain a secure attachment.
Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation for this research project was Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theoretical orientation was chosen because it exemplifies how difficult it can be to focus on things like motor skill development and learning when basic needs are not being met. The hierarchy of needs can be thought of as a pyramid, with the lower levels needing to be at least partially fulfilled before new needs can emerge (Maslow, 1943; 1987). The goal of this research topic was to find which developmental delays are most common in children who have been exposed to interpersonal personal violence (IPV), and Maslow was the best fit in explaining how these delays can happen.

The bottommost section of the hierarchy of needs is the physiological needs, which include air, water, food, shelter, and clothing. Above that are the safety needs like stability, security, and freedom from fear. Love and belongingness needs are social and require at least one interpersonal relationship. These needs include trust, affection, intimacy, and of course, love. The next stop on the continuum is esteem needs. Esteem needs can be classified into two categories, a “high evaluation of themselves” and “the esteem of others” (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). These are the desires for adequacy (evaluation of self) and reputation (esteem of others).

The topmost section of the hierarchy of needs is the self-actualization needs, also known as growth needs. These needs do not emerge until the prior levels have been met and vary from person to person (Maslow, 1943). Self-
actualization needs are the desire for self-fulfillment and to “become everything that one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1943, 382).

Maslow (1943) claims reactions to the loss of safety needs are “uninhibited” in infants. While these reactions to stimuli become more inhibited as they age, their understanding of their circumstances grows. When an infant, toddler, or young child observes abuse, those parents are not ensuring that the child’s safety needs are being met. By Maslow’s theory, children in this situation are unable to move to the next level, love, and belongingness.

Maslow’s theory was important in this research study because one cannot expect infants, toddlers, and young children to advance through the hierarchy of needs and fulfill their potential if they are constantly in a state of stress and fear. It is difficult to work on one’s self and grow developmentally when the main concern is safety. Therefore, Maslow’s hierarchy was deemed most appropriate to show why some children are not advancing through developmental stages as they should, as they may still be focused on fulfilling basic physiological needs.

Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Process

This study hoped to contribute to micro social work by giving educators, daycare workers, paraprofessionals, and professionals the tools to recognize the effects of IPV on parents and children. This study could also be integrated into the curriculum for domestic violence volunteers and workers, preschool and
kindergarten teachers, daycare workers, doctors, nurses, and social workers.

This type of education should teach that the signs exhibited in infancy can be indicative of larger and more sinister forces at play. For example, if an infant is developing abnormally, there may be an epigenetic cause or it may be because the energy that should be allocated to learning is used for survival instead. Knowing this, a professional or paraprofessional may be able to intervene. This education about ELS may spur a woman to find help for IPV sooner or to recognize the help that will be needed for children of all ages.

In terms of macro practice, it is hoped that this knowledge will be used to add funding to not only child development programs, batterer’s intervention programs, and parenting classes, but to domestic violence shelters and programs that teach domestic violence advocacy. It is hoped that this information could also be used to fund research for reversing or mitigating the effects of ELS, in terms of both mental and bodily health.

Summary

In summation, chapter one covered the research topic and the definition of early life stress. This chapter included a rationale for choosing a pragmatic paradigm with which to conduct research. The literature review explained early life stress and its effects on the brain, body, and behaviors, as well as the specifics of intimate partner violence and its effects on infants. This chapter includes the theoretical orientation of this paper, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs,
and the possible ways this research may contribute to micro and macro social work practice.
CHAPTER TWO
ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

This chapter covered engagement at the research site and how this researcher interacted with gatekeepers and prepared for the study. This chapter will also include how the researcher dealt with problems of diversity, ethics, and politics. Lastly, this chapter covered the use of technology in the engagement process. Engagement with gatekeepers for this study will be accomplished by returning to a previous volunteer site and by attempting to use previous connections to help pass the research. Self-preparation will include acknowledging personal biases and biases and favoritism that happens among the staff.

Research Site

The research sites for this project are at one emergency shelter and two transitional shelters. These sites, run by a non-profit, are for men, women, and their children who are fleeing situations of domestic violence. The programs and services (2019) at the transitional shelters provide clients with bi-weekly meetings that help women develop coping strategies and parenting skills, as well as education and job building activities. This is in addition to counseling and case management. Their mission statement is: “We ignite social change by educating
(name of county) to recognize relationship violence as an issue that threatens everyone, advocating for those affected by abuse, extending a safe place for victims, and empowering survivors on their journey of healing." (Agency document, 2019).

For the children at the transitional shelter, while their parents are in class, there is a children's program. This children's program sets up these clients with tutors as needed and teaches class using the Incredible Years, a program designed for children to help reduce behavioral issues and encourage protective factors (The Incredible Years, 2013). The children’s program at the transitional shelter also includes learning and therapeutic activities. At the emergency shelter, there is also a children’s program, complete with counseling and therapeutic activities (Human Options, 2019).

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers

The researcher first engaged the head of the shelters about the study and what it would entail. The researcher engaged the agency via email and introduced themselves to the Children’s Program director to talk about the study and its purpose. This included what type of research the study would use and who would be involved in the study’s conduction. The researcher informed the agency that by allowing the study to be completed, it would allow them to focus more on specific areas of work for the children, like behavior or interpersonal skills. The agency could then make appropriate activities for addressing
behaviors and if need be, make referrals to outside agencies. The researcher will give the agency full access to their notes and to their finished report so that they can get the most out of the research and apply it to their practices. By learning what behaviors are most common, they could most effectively address the problems that are occurring and manifesting.

It was imperative to get the directors of these programs on board with this research proposal so that volunteers, interns, and staff can participate in this study and so that the research site can benefit from the results. Once approval was obtained, the researcher set up a meeting with volunteers and clinicians and spoke to them about the deficits they had witnessed. The researcher did this on a one-to-one basis via Zoom as there is a pandemic limiting social contact. The researcher proposed going to the shelters to talk to the volunteers, after signing a non-disclosure agreement, or to a close location, but used Zoom to record audio from interviews.

Self Preparation

In a study such as this, the researcher had to be aware of the level of commitment to this study. This would include drafting up a broad questionnaire in case the researcher was unable to meet with the volunteers and staff. It was important for the researcher to do extensive research on what developmental skills are deemed normal for each year, up to age five. For example, children at the age of five should be able to speak clearly, hop or skip and be able to clearly
copy simple shapes (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, & Marcive Inc., 2011, p. 39-42). For younger children, it is expected that children at two years can say sentences of two to four words and stand on tiptoe and that children at the age of nine months may begin to pull on things to help them stand up (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, & Marcive Inc., 2011, p. 15-19; 28-30). It is important to know what milestones are achieved and what is lacking developmentally so that the issues may be addressed.

The researcher had to check personal biases, as they were a previous volunteer at both sites for over two years. As the researcher had seen the efficacy of the children’s program, there was a bias in favor of the program in general. This being said, the researcher had to be aware of how their presence would affect other volunteers and staff, given the qualitative portion of the study. To combat anxiety, the researcher self-disclosed their status as a former volunteer who had been in their position. The self-disclosure helped show that the researcher could be trusted as a researcher and was on their side.

Diversity Issues

It is important to pay attention to the diverse populations that are served by the shelters. Operating in Orange County, the shelters serve both men and women, of all ages, nationalities, religions, races, sexual orientations, and physical/mental health statuses. Part of this diverse population are the children who accompany their parents to the shelter, ranging anywhere from newborn to
eighteen. There are many children of color and many children who are not, and the socioeconomic backgrounds vary. There are no barriers to getting services from the shelter based on sex, race, religion, age, nationality, mental or physical health, or socioeconomic status. To be sensitive to any issues, the researcher practiced cultural competence. The researcher also inquired if there are any concerns from participants regarding being culturally competent in this environment.

Ethical Issues

The ethical issues in this study lay in maintaining the confidentiality of the volunteers, staff, shelter sites, the clients, and their children. As these sites are domestic violence shelters, these sites need to be kept confidential, without any identifying factors that may reveal where they are based. In this study, volunteers need to be able to express their views of the children’s abilities freely and without bias. Volunteers and staff need to be able to express where the children are in a behavioral sense without writing it off as a gender or parenting style issue (i.e. “boys will be boys,” or “Her mother doesn’t punish her behaviors and lets her do whatever she wants”). There was an informed consent form ensuring the volunteers and staff that their participation will be anonymous and as confidential as possible. As there can be a potential breach from other subjects, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
Political Issues

The political issues of this research site depended greatly on how the research will be conducted, though it was anticipated to be through an interview with the volunteers and staff. Because of the nature of the shelters, the gatekeepers have full political power. The goal of this study was to study the effects of ELS on small children and see the most effective ways to care for them and to help them meet developmental milestones they may be missing, whether that be simply removing them from the abusive environment, parent and/or child education, or implementing programs like The Incredible Years or A Window Between Worlds. There is no expected negative impact on the agency’s reputation or ability to serve clients, as the goal is to help prove how much the agency can help.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

Technology was an important aspect of the engagement process when the researcher used the phone and email to establish an initial rapport with gatekeepers. After rapport and support are given, Zoom contact with volunteers and staff will be preferable.

Summary

The engagement of gatekeepers was critical as they lead to the research study being possible. Subsequently, it was important to establish rapport with the
study participants so that a trusting relationship can be built. Personal biases were addressed in this chapter, as well as issues of diversity, ethics, and politics.
CHAPTER THREE
IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter discussed the implementation stage of this research. It discussed the participants for this research and why they were chosen, as well as the phases of data gathering, recording, and analysis. The last part of this chapter is the summary.

Study Participants

This study aimed to include at least eight participants, with a range of volunteers, interns, and program staff. They had been working for the chosen domestic violence shelter in Southern California, either in the emergency shelter or the transitional shelters. All interns, staff, and volunteers will have completed the 40-hour domestic violence advocacy training.

Selection of Participants

The researcher used a local domestic violence agency to recruit participants for this study. After contacting the agency, the researcher spoke with the head of the Children’s Program, who asked their Children’s Program staff, interns, and volunteers about who was willing to participate. Participants for the research study were selected based upon availability and willingness. The number of
volunteers varied based on time of the year, days of the week, and shelter. Some
volunteers only worked Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday, and some only at one of
the transitional shelters, while others only worked at the emergency shelter. The
researcher will only ask for information from those who volunteer in the toddler
and preschool rooms. The situation is similar with employees as only those who
work in the Children's Program with those under the age of five will be
interviewed.

Data Collection

This research project was qualitative. For this thesis, the researcher asked a
variety of questions of the volunteers and staff, individual Zoom interviews.

Prior to being interviewed, participants were asked to review and sign an
informed consent form. The aforementioned informed consent form educated
participants that they may withdraw from the study at any point and that their
participation is voluntary. The consent form also included information about the
study, such as its goals and its commitment to keeping the study sites,
participants, and children confidential.

Following the informed consent forms, interviewees were asked open-ended questions regarding various behaviors of the children. The interview
covered common behaviors in the toddler and preschool rooms, internalizing
versus externalizing behaviors, attitudes regarding punishment, abnormal fussing
when separating from their mother or father, the sex of the child, and the birth
order of the child displaying behavioral issues. For example, do any children need one-on-one support for behavioral reasons? What are the most common ways these children act out? I.e. is there hitting? Kicking? Hair pulling? How do the children react when redirected? Are they recalcitrant or do the behaviors continue until they are escorted back to their mother or father?

The researcher asked those questions because the researcher wanted to know how and if children act out. It is unknown if the children are recreating situations they saw at home, as neither the children nor their parents will not be talked to directly. However, it was important to see how they react to being corrected. If they were overly upset and sensitive or if they continually acted out until escorted from the program, those could be indicators of behavioral issues as well. The researcher also asked what the staff and volunteers consider to be problem behavior and how often it happens.

Phases of Data Collection

Data was gathered with Zoom interviews. The researcher reached out to the children’s program coordinator by email and discussed who the best candidates for interviews were and how to reach them. The researcher then met with children program staff and volunteers, where they were reminded that they may opt-out of the interview and data gathering process. No names or identifying information were used, to protect the subjects, interviewees, and domestic
violence sites. The interview will be recorded on a recording device and later transcribed.

The interview began with full disclosure about the project, self-disclosure about the researcher’s history with the shelter, and then proceeded with the prepared questions. Finally, the interview concluded with questions and concerns from the interviewees and a final thank you and show of appreciation for their participation.

The second part of data collection was to listen and transcribe the digital recording of the interview. Following this, the researcher made notes to be used for the coding process. These notes included any questions that would have been helpful to ask in terms of making the interview more thorough or any other clarifying questions.

Finally, the researcher reviewed all the elements of the research practice to ensure confidentiality, clarity, relevance, and replicability.

Data Recording

Interviews were held via Zoom in a quiet, undisclosed location. This interview was fairly unstructured. There were specific questions asked, but some questions did arise that were not previously anticipated. The volunteers and staff had ample opportunity to express themselves, their thoughts, and any of the challenges they faced when working with children who have experienced early
life stress. Important thoughts and insights were noted during the interview with pen and paper.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative section of this research project, the researcher used open coding and axial coding. Open coding identified problem behavior, and axial coding broke down problem behavior by physical characteristics, such as sex, age, and place in the family.

Termination and Follow-Up

After the interview, the staff and volunteers were thanked for their participation and asked about any questions, comments, and concerns they may have had. Participants were thanked for their time. The findings of this research project were then given to the Social Work Research Department of California State University (CSUSB). When the project was completed, it was displayed on the CSUSB ScholarWorks website (“CSUSB ScholarWorks”, n.d.). This allowed participants to view the project’s results online.

Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The final research findings were mailed to the agency, addressed to the head of the Children’s Program, with multiple copies for each of the participants.
Summary

This chapter covered the data collection, data analysis, and the participants selected for the study. Participants for this study were available to staff and volunteers who worked in the toddler and preschool rooms at the children’s program in a domestic violence shelter. The sampling hoped for eight people.

Next, the qualitative research was explained in how the interviews would be treated after they were completed: how they were to be conducted, transcribed, and coded. This includes sample questions and examples of open coding. After this, the quantitative data collection and analysis were discussed. This included how data would be collected using Likert scales and the Center for Disease Control’s developmental milestone checklists for children up to age five.

Lastly, this chapter covered follow-up and termination. Follow-up included allowing participants to ask questions of the researcher following the interviews and emailing a link to each participant that shows them the study they were a part of. The final project will be posted to CSUSB Scholarworks, that being the last step of the project. Participants will be able to make more comments as they deem necessary on CSUSB Scholarworks.
CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and evaluate the data gathered from seven separate interviews with children's program volunteers, interns, and staff. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to show both the outlying and more frequent behaviors and abilities of the youth involved in the children’s program. Based on the information gleaned, there will be recommendations for the domestic violence shelter to put in place to continue working with and mitigating the effects of early life stress on youth engaged in the children’s program. Furthermore, recommendations will be made for continuing research on the impact of early life stress on children in their early education years. Most importantly, this will be a campaign to further educate professionals and paraprofessionals on the effects of interpersonal violence on pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and young children.

Data Analysis

The intention of this study is to focus on common effects of early life stress, particularly domestic violence, on children under the age of five. Many children under the age of five are affected by early life stress, which often leads to problems within several different domains, including socioemotional
development. The interviews were conducted with children’s program volunteers, interns, and staff to gather qualitative data about the youth they were in contact with over their tenure. The interviews were coded to identify the most common behaviors of children in the toddler and preschool rooms; the two rooms are designated for children under the age of three and under the age of five, respectively. Table 1 presents the themes, subthemes, and descriptions of those themes that were identified through the coding and analysis.
Table 1. Items Related to the Behavioral Responses of Children in a Domestic Violence Shelter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Behaviors in the Toddler Room</td>
<td>A compilation of common behaviors seen in children’s program’s clients who are under three years of age and placed in the toddler room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Behaviors in the Preschool Room</td>
<td>A compilation of common behaviors seen in children’s program’s clients who are over three years and under five years of age and placed in the preschool room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing Behaviors in Reaction to:</td>
<td>A compilation of internalizing behaviors e.g., scratching their own palms with their fingernails, exhibited by children’s program’s clients in reaction to one of the following three scenarios: being dropped off, being redirected, or being escorted back to their parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing Behaviors in Reaction to:</td>
<td>A compilation of externalizing behaviors e.g., hitting another client, exhibited by children’s program’s clients in reaction to one of the following three scenarios: being dropped off, being redirected, or being escorted back to their parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being Dropped Off</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redirection</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Returning to Parent</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Characteristics of Child:</th>
<th>Sex of children commonly engaging in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in Internalizing Behaviors</td>
<td>internalizing behaviors, actions inflicted on self,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in Externalizing Behaviors</td>
<td>or in externalizing behavior or, actions inflicted on others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common Behavioral Reactions in the Toddler Room

Within the toddler room, with children between 6 months and 3 years, there were several common behaviors mentioned. These common behaviors could have been in response to several different situations, such as being dropped off. Children’s program volunteers, interns, and staff reported that children had a variety of behaviors over the course of the children’s program, which runs for about two hours, namely a lot of separation anxiety. Reactionary behaviors ran the gamut from crying and tantrums to more hyperactive and/or aggressive behaviors. According to Participant 3, it was noted that the children “...were hitting, biting, throwing things...they would throw like temper tantrums or they would just, like, cry sometimes for long periods of time.” Following up with Participant 2, toddler room tantrums could last anywhere from “five minutes up to an hour” with “hitting, slapping, throwing, smashing” listed as other typical behaviors. Participant 7 did note that there were differences between some children who were able “...just go in and start playing versus others than need us to kind of sit there with them a little bit more and hold them and just kind of reassure their safety”. This shows that separation anxiety is very common, but that there were also examples of insecure attachments.

Common Behavioral Reactions in the Preschool Room

When working in the preschool room, there were also tantrums and aggressive behaviors, with, as Participant 3 noted, added hyperactive behaviors e.g. children running around and climbing on the furniture. Participant 7 stated
that there was “a lot of action” in the class, with the need for support within the classroom because of the “negative behaviors”, which included “roughhousing”, “wrestling”, and more climbing. Participant 6 brought up the attention-span as well, noting that some youth struggled with transitions from playing to structured activities or that some of the children “wanted to go from one activity to the next within like five minutes”. In addition, Participant 6 spoke on impulse control, or lack thereof, with “a hard time following directions, just remaining seated”. That being said, it seems that many of these children in the preschool room are struggling with what could be an excess of cortisol, leading to some of the observed inattentive behaviors, as Thompson (2014) noted a connection between ELS and an inability to “concentrate, remember things, and control and focus their thinking”.

**Internalizing Behavior**

Internalizing behavior, described by the researcher as reactions to stress turned inward, could include the children’s programs client’s putting themselves in time-out, hitting themselves, or engaging in negative self-talk. The need for a toddler or preschool-aged child to interact with themselves in such a way could be a response to being dropped-off, being redirected, or being returned to their parent for safety or behavioral reasons. Participant 6 added that negative self-talk and self-blame was a common behavior “sayiing like, oh, like I did something bad, I’m a bad girl, a bad boy…” or “I’m so stupid”, as added by Participant 7.
Participant 3 introduced the prevalence of self-injurious behavior in both toddlers and preschoolers, commenting:

“they would also scratch themselves, like the one child even had like a mark on the palm of her hand. That was like the place that they would go to, to scratch themselves when they felt anxious for any sort of feeling. And so even with babies, I would notice that they often scratch themselves because they don’t really get that attention from the caregivers. So they cry excessively. And so they often resort to just scratching themselves to get that attention.”

In addition, Participants 1, 5, 6, and 7 noted incidents of children’s program clients hitting themselves, specifically in the head. Participant 1 shared that one particular client from the preschool room came in with her father and “put herself in timeout a couple of times” engaged in negative self-talk when she was distressed.

**Externalizing Behavior**

Externalizing behavior is detailed here as reactions to stress that are targeted at another person. These behaviors are generally labeled as aggressive or, according to Participant 7, “extreme”. Participant 7 added that there was at least one situation where the client had “thrown a chair across the classroom” and a lack of staff available to “remove them out of the classroom” to give them space to calm down and so would have to be sent back to their parent. While not all behaviors were so extreme, there were a number of other notable behaviors
like, as Participant 2 added, “crying, tantruming, clinginess”. Participant 3 listed off other habits, such as “they would hit, throw things, they would scratch...”.

When the externalizing behaviors became uncontrollable or a safety concern for the client, other participants or staff, children were escorted back to their parents. In cases where other staff members were available and the child could benefit from it, a child could be assigned a one-to-one mentor. A one-to-one mentor would spend the duration of class shadowing the client during activities, helping them to regulate their impulses and help them mand their needs.

**Sex Characteristics**

Sex characteristics in this paper directly refers to the identified sex of the clients in the children’s program. While boys and girls were not separated by gender, there are behaviors that were observed and attributed to boys over girls and vice versa. For example, while many of the children’s program clients are males, most internalized behaviors, like Participant 3’s palm scratcher, or Participant 1’s client who put themselves in time out were female. That is not to say that the males did not also engage in internalized behaviors, but that the majority of the perpetrators were noted to be female. On the other hand, the client who threw a chair, outlined above, was male. Another client, brought up by Participant 2, was three years of age but placed in the preschool room due to his size, had a one-to-one mentor every time there was a staff member available to shadow him because of his emotional immaturity and aggression with his peers.
Participant 1 stated that “the ones that stand out the most, like safety concerns, were boys.”

Implications of Findings for Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Practice

This research was done to fuel further research into ELS, and the effects of domestic violence in particular, from conception to children up to the age of five. It is hoped that by increasing the knowledge of why children react poorly in what we could consider to be normal situations, like being dropped off with a caretaker, that these children can be better served. While there is a program in place, The Incredible Years, it is important to further educate the volunteers, interns, and staff about why certain behaviors have developed or why some milestones have not been reached on a clinical and biological level. The youth involved in the children’s program are high-risk for a hard life, especially if they are behind in their socioemotional development. By educating volunteers, interns, and staff on the effects of IPV on developing children, it is hoped that these youth will be helped on a micro level that would allow them to flourish in their new environment.

At the request of Participant 3, this research is to be used first and foremost to help on a mezzo level. It is hoped the shelter will engage in additional training and resources for their staff, interns, and volunteers. Though volunteers, interns, and staff already have a curriculum established for working in the children's program, it is hoped that this research about common behaviors, both

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internalized and externalized, can be used to further knowledge and to supplement what is already in place. Not only can volunteers, interns, and staff use this expanded awareness of ELS and small children to interact better with their charges but in addition, they will have greater skills when it comes to observing and tracking developmental delays, particularly in the socioemotional domain. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the agency and show them the need for more training, observation, and testing for children’s program youth, so as to track their progress while in the program and help provide interventions that work with their trauma and help them meet their milestones.

Limitations

Given the limited amount of interviews that came from a single organization, there are limitations to this study. The sample size was smaller than expected and based on convenience, meaning that the data collected has limited generalizability. Data was further limited because the participant pool shrank due to reduced staff on-site and other COVID-19 complications. In addition, because of COVID-19 restrictions, many participants were working from memory and standout cases rather than recent, on-site work. This means that many behaviors are possibly unaccounted for and not included in the study. Additionally, without a curated list of items to refer to during children’s program, specific behaviors, abilities, and weaknesses were unnoticed and the motor skill aspect of the study was put aside. Further research with larger sample sizes and direct observation
of the youth would be recommended to validate what has been found in this study.

Summary

Chapter four analyzed the data collected through interviews with volunteers, interns, and staff. Data was coded to find common behaviors and gather information on reactions to stress, whether real or imagined, turned inwards or out.
CHAPTER FIVE
TERMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the plans for terminating with the research study participants and their respective sites. Furthermore, it discusses how the research findings will be shared with the interviewees and the research agency and the plan for dissemination of information.

Termination of Study

Research participants were notified about termination when interviews were conducted. Participants were formally thanked for their time and participation, with time after for any questions they had. In addition, interviewees were sent a debriefing statement (Appendix C) via email, which included contact information and how to find the project once it is completed.

Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The final research project will be e-mailed to the participants who have indicated their interest and to the research agency sites that have children’s programs, addressed to the program heads.
Ongoing Relationships with Study Participants

Due to the nature of the pre-existing relationship between most interviewees and the researcher, there will continue to be a relationship between them. Future engagement will not be in the same vein and will not be for research purposes.

Dissemination Plan

Final results of the study will be provided to the study site via email and the research will be published and recorded in the CSUSB library.

Summary

Chapter five discussed the termination phase of this research study and how research findings were communicated to the participants and the agency sites they were affiliated with. Continuing, this chapter touched upon the ongoing relationship with participants and the plan for dissemination.
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
July 6, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB-FY2020-219
Status: Approved

Jordan Singleton-Brooklyn Sapochnik
CSE5 - Social Work, Users listed with unmatched Organization affiliation.
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92417

Dear Jordan Singleton-Brooklyn Sapochnik:

Your application to use human participants, titled "Early Life Stress and the Resulting Effects on Behavior and Motor Skills of Children Under the Age of Five in a Domestic Violence Shelter" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

The study is approved from July 6, 2020 through ...

Your IRB application must be renewed annually and you will receive notification from the Cayuse IRB automated notification system when your study is due for renewal. If your study is closed to enrollment, the data has been de-identified, and you’re only analyzing the data – you may close the study by submitting the Closure Application Form through the Cayuse IRB system.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission Webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

• Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up to date and current throughout the study.
• Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
• Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events experienced by subjects during your research.
• Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risks and benefits to the human participants in your IRB application. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or institutional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-1588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgilles@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2020-219 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive regarding your research from participants or others should be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DGWS
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

Developed by researcher, Jordan Singleton

What are the most common behaviors you are seeing from children in the toddler room? Are they boys or girls? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

What are the most common behaviors you are seeing from children in the preschool room? Are they boys or girls? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Do any of the kids have a one-on-one mentor or behavioral coach? Are they boys or girls? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Are any kids repeatedly being sent back to mother or father? If so, why? Are they boys or girls? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Are any kids internalizing behaviors? Are they boys or girls? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Do any kids try to punish themselves? I.e. put themselves in time out? Hit themselves? Do they say they are a bad boy/girl? Are they boys or girls? Are
they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

How do the children act when redirected? Do they fear punishment or being escorted back to their mother or father? Are they a boy or a girl? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Are any children especially upset when their mother or father drops them off at Program? Do they cry, throw tantrums or cling to their mother or father? Are they a boy or a girl? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

How are their language skills? Are they bilingual or monolingual? Can they be understood clearly by their peers? Do they get frustrated by miscommunications? Are they a boy or a girl? Are they the only, oldest, youngest or middle child? Does this issue also happen with their sibling? Did they come in with their mother or their father?

Do any of the children come in not meeting milestones and exit the program having met or been shaping up to meet those milestones?

What did you consider to be “problem behavior”?

Are there any outstanding cases you would like to mention?
Were there any concerns about cultural competency?
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study, in which you are being asked to participate, is designed to investigate the effects of early life stress on children under the age of five living in a domestic violence shelter. This study is being conducted by MSW student researcher Jordan Singleton, under the supervision of Dr. B. Levine-Sapozhnikov, adjunct professor at School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between early life stress and common behavioral and motor skill deficits.

DESCRIPTION: This is a Zoom meeting that will take you between 15 – 30 minutes to complete. The interviewer will ask you several open-ended questions about your work in the domestic violence shelter and your most memorable cases and charges in order to assess common behavioral and motor skill deficits. Access to the Zoom meeting will be sent to you by the researcher and will be recorded.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses are anonymous and no personally identifiable information will be collected. Your responses are confidential because all responses will only be seen by the researcher and reported in group form only.

RISKS: This research is considered minimal risk because there are no foreseeable overt risks. However, some people may experience slight discomfort in answering questions about clients. Respondents may discontinue their participation at any time in the study.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. B. Levine-Sapozhnikov at Brooklyn.Sapozhnikov@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: Results of this study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

I agree to have this interview audio recorded ☐ YES ☐ NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understood the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here ____________________________ Date ____________________________
APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement
Early Life Stress and the Resulting Effects on Behavior and Motor Skills of Children Under the Age of Five in a Domestic Violence Shelter
Jordan Singleton
California State University, San Bernardino
School of Social Work

You recently participated in a research study of common behaviors and motor skill deficits of children under the age of five. You were selected as a possible participant because of your involvement in the Children’s Program.

The purpose of this study is to explain if there are common behaviors and motor skill deficits in children who have suffered early life stress and are living in a domestic violence shelter. This study includes a group interview with interns, volunteers and staff who work in the Children’s Program and Likert scales collected for each child under the age of five, to be completed by the interns, staff, and volunteers who work with them.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Because this is a group interview, the researcher cannot assure that other participants will maintain the subject’s confidentiality and privacy.

Contacts and Questions: The researchers conducting this study is Jordan Singleton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at 006706824@coyote.csusb.edu. Jordan’s research advisor is Dr. B Levine-Sapoznikov, whose information is available upon request.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board Compliance Officer, Michael Gillespie at mgilesp@csusb.edu or to call 909-537-7588.
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