Is Domestic Violence Learned?
Exploring the Relationship Between Experience and Behavior

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Social Work

By
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Dedication

First off, I thank God for having a praying mother. Mom, your love, support and especially your prayers are invaluable. You've shown me what faith in His Word will do...To God be the glory! Dad, thanks for the laughter; you got me through some challenging nights of homework struggle. I hope I've made your name proud. To my son Anthony "AJ" Snead II, you've watched me grow, make mistakes and now come out on the better end; you are my heartbeat, I love you Mister. My daughter-in-law Ashlei (CSUN alumni), thanks for encouraging me to go back to school and introducing me to the Matador life. I love you Lady. To my legacy - my granddaughters Aaliyah and Jaeya, you are the reason that I couldn't give up. I want you to always know that it is never too late to live out your dreams, just have the courage to go for it and not quit. Gran Gran loves you to the moon and back. To my Sistah Gurl, Audrey Jackson, you have shown me what true friendship and sisterhood is about. You have literally fed this starving student and have been a part of my self-care from day one of this graduate program. Thanks for being there when others have left; without you, I may have quit after the first quarter. Thank you for pushing and pulling me through. Golden Girls forever. Finally, this study is dedicated to anyone who finds themselves in a relationship that is abusive, I pray that you find the courage to close the door to all that is toxic and begin to love yourself again. It is not where you've been but where you go from here.
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Abstract

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"Domestic violence and child abuse are spawning grounds for the next generation of abusers" (Carter, 2012). Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships of domestic violence to childhood experiences. Question: Is domestic violence a learned behavior?
Method: In a survey design, correlation study, questionnaires were given to a sample of 30 men-ages 20 and above, who were enrolled in a court ordered domestic violence program in Los Angeles County. All of the respondents were enrolled in a single agency. The men were 55% Latino and 45% African American of which 75% live below Federal poverty guidelines.
Measurement: The questionnaires had two sections: one to gather background information including history of domestic violence; and the other was a standardized scale, the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).

For Crosstab data analysis, the Cramer's V was used to measure the strength of the relationship between adverse childhood experience, as measured by the ACE and ethnicity, education, two-parent home, single parent home, and foster care. Additionally, the study measured types of childhood abuse experienced. Results: There is statistical significance in the relationship between childhood adversities and ethnicity. The ACE score of the respondents by ethnicity was: Asian 1; White 2; Hispanic 9; and African American 18. African American respondents in the court ordered domestic violence program were significantly more likely to have experienced childhood
adversities $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 1.247, p = .027)$. Discussion: "There is substantial evidence that child development is the accumulation of risks and protective factors-setting a youth on a developmental trajectory toward adverse social/emotional/behavioral and health outcomes."

Introduction

Domestic Violence.

Domestic violence in communities of color is an unfortunate common trend. Although it is reported among all races/ethnicities and socioeconomic class groupings, "it is most prevalent within the working and lower middle socioeconomic classes" (Jahanfar, 2014, p.9). The statistics of women of color, who were abused, was reported by the Department of Justice showing that almost 50% of Native American females “have been raped, beaten, or stalked by an intimate partner.” (Townes, 2013). The American Bar Association (ABA) reports that Black females experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 22 times the rate of women of other races. (ABA, 2016). Domestic abuse, spousal abuse, relationship abuse, intimate partner abuse, domestic battery, spousal battery, intimate partner violence (IPV), and family violence, are the different terms that refer to domestic violence (DV). According to Attorney Robert Tayac of California Domestic Violence Defense, these terms refer to a single incident or multiple incidents initiated by one or both partners who are presently or formerly have been involved in a special relationship including marriage, cohabitation or dating. The United States Department of Justice defines domestic violence (DV) as "a pattern of abusive behaviors in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. DV can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone"(Justic.gov, 2015).

Domestic violence and who it effects.

The overall consensus is that abuse against women in general is an epidemic no matter the age, color or socio economic statuses. The American Bar Association (ABA) retrieved data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) stating that about one in four women and one in
seven men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime, but "women ages 20-24 years old are at the greatest risk of becoming victims of domestic violence." (ABA, 2015). Unfortunately, Society sends messages that supports and encourages this type of violence especially toward those who are weaker by accepting myths such as "anyone will become violent when pushed to the breaking point" (DeCraene, n.d.) Society portrays men as the stronger species and more aggressive while women are portrayed as the weaker species. For this reason, many men do not report being abused from their partner—especially when it's a female partner, for fear of embarrassment and ridicule—just like women. (Shuler, C., 2010). However, those who are seriously affected by this crime are the children who grow up witnessing this violence. When children are exposed to parental violence, they may begin to believe that violence is an appropriate method of trying to resolve conflicts, within intimate relationships. Research found that there are between 7 million to 15.5 million children and adolescents who are exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) in their home each year (Edleson, Ellerton, Seagren, Kirchberg, and Ambrose, 2007). Exposure to domestic violence—intimate partner violence (IPV) is known to also negatively affect children in a variety of psychosocial domains. (Haselschwerdt, M, 2014). According to Bremner and Narayan (1998), child abuse and neglect are such stressful and threatening experiences that it could cause physiological changes in the area of the brain related to memory storage. The "neurobiological adaptation's that help [children] psychologically survive the traumas associated with domestic violence may increase the likelihood they will grow up to be violent themselves." (Doyne, Bowemaster, Meloy, Dutton, Jaffe, Temko, and Mones, 1999, p. 7-8).

**What makes this study important?**

Despite high prevalence of children exposed to domestic violence, researchers have only recently begun to investigate the effects of this exposure. While the first case study examining the negative impact of childhood exposure to domestic violence was published over forty years ago (Levine, 1975), the first empirical studies did not appear until the early 1980's. It's primary
concern was to document "associations between male-perpetrated violence towards females and various types of childhood symptomatology" (Evans, Davies, and DiLillo, 2008, p. 132).

However, in their summary, it did not give a clear description of the types of violence that the children were exposed to which caused inconsistencies in the data. Also standardized measures were not used identifying age and gender of those exposed to the domestic violence.

**Learning from experience.**

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) argues that people learn from observing, modeling and imitation. This theory predicts that witnessing and experiencing violence in childhood is an important precipitant of later violence (Hotaling, 1986). Singer, Slovak, Frierson, & York, studied 2,245 children and teenagers and found that exposure to violence in the home was a significant factor in predicting a child's violent behavior. This empirical study confirms that behaviors are learned. It has also been proposed that witnessing such violence in childhood is a principal cause of adulthood perpetration and "men who witness intimate partner violence in childhood are more likely to commit such acts in adulthood, compared with men who are otherwise similar with respect to a large range of potential confounders" (Roberts, Gilman, Fitzmaurice, Decker, and Koenen, 2010, para 4).

The main idea of this study is to explore the effects of negative childhood experiences and future behaviors. "Childhood is a delicate and important stage of life, requiring significant emotional investments and social support." (Lourenco, 2013, p. 264). Having protective factors during this stage improves the quality and trajectory of their life and can deter children who witness abuse from becoming abusive as adults. Campbell and Lewandowski (1997) states that the "Characteristics of children who were abused but did not grow up to abuse their own families can be summarized as including more extensive social supports, fewer life stressors, a supportive relationship with one parent or foster parent" (p. 362) Parents involved in intimate partner violence may try to protect their child and believe that their children are not witnessing the violence in the home; but, it has been reported that between 80 - 90 percent of the children living
in these types of environments, are aware of the abuse and can provide detailed accounts of it (DePanfilis, 2006). According to social learning theory, violence can be learned. Sometimes we learn by what we observe on television, at school, on the Internet, in the media and at home. How and why negative behaviors are captured and stored by some, and ignored by others is why a macro look at behaviors needs further researching

**Adverse childhood experiences.**

Childhood experiences, both negative and positive, have a huge impact on future violence, victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ACE have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. (CDC, 2016).

**Summary.**

Bandura argued that people learn from observing, modeling and imitation; and since "the care provided to children by the family, by other social groups and institutions greatly influences their chances of survival and dramatically improves their quality of life." (Lourenco, 2013, p. 264), it is suggested that children exposed to IPV are at high risk for furthering this destructive cycle. Therefore this study, in a correlational study, surveyed 30 men who are in treatment for IPV to assess the relationship between ACE scores, childhood history and current acts of violence against women.
Method

Participant characteristics.

30 men participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 20-62 years old, the ethnic groups represented were African American (60%), Latino (30%), Caucasian (6.7%) and Asian (3.3%). Their educational level is as follows: 20% have G.E.D's., 56.7% have a high school diploma and 23.3% graduated from college. All of these men were arrested for perpetrating a violent act against an intimate partner and was mandated by the Los Angeles County courts to enroll into a domestic violence program. All participants were enrolled at the same agency.

Sampling procedures.

The targeted population were men ages 18 years of age and above who were enrolled at a single agency in the domestic violence program. The demographics of the agency's clients ethnicity/race is 55% Latino and 45% African American. 75% live below Federal poverty guidelines. The Subjects participating in the program were notified about the study and invited to volunteer as a participant in the survey by the domestic violence class instructor. All participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to sign an Informed Consent and provided Research Bill of Rights. The participants were not compensated to participate in this study.

Measures.

The survey was written by this researchers based on the literature. In addition to the 18-items, a standardized scale, the Adverse Childhood Experiences-ACE (CDC, 2016) was used. High scores on the ACE, indicates adverse childhood experiences.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). ACE study is "one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being" (CDC, 2016). ACE questions refer to the respondent's first 18 years of life and are categorized into three groups: (1) Abuse (2) Household (3) Neglect-emotional or physical (CDC, 2016).
Research Design.

This study was a correlation survey design.

Procedure.

The first step in doing this study was providing the necessary documents to IRB for approval. During this time, an agency that held classes for domestic violence (victims and perpetrators) was contacted. An appointment was made with the instructor of the class to discuss this research project and it’s the hypothesis. Background information about the agency was also discussed. The instructor gave background information about this researcher and the study and asked if they were willing to participate. A letter of consent was signed by the agencies DV class instructor prior to data collection and submitted to IRB. Once all documents were approved by IRB, copies of the survey, Informed Consent and Bill of Rights were included with the survey for the instructor to deliver during a class session. To keep anonymity, once completed, participants were asked to place their survey in a large manila envelope provided by the researcher-only the researcher had access to survey results.
Results

Along with the ACE survey (see Appendix A), a 18-item questionnaire with three sections: (1) demographics; (2) family history; and (3) childhood experiences (see Appendix B) was administered to explore the question, if men who were arrested and court ordered to attend DV classes, have a history of childhood adversity. The men’s ages ranged from 20 to 62 with a mean of 33.3 (SD = 10.92). The mean ACE score for the sample was 4.33 (SD = 2.86). There was statistical significance in the relationship between childhood adversities and ethnicity. The ACE score of the respondents by ethnicity was: Asian 1; White 2; Hispanic 9; and African American 18. African American respondents in the court ordered domestic violence program were significantly more likely to have experienced childhood adversities. Using Cramer’s V at a p-value of less than .05, there was a significant relationship between childhood adversities and ethnicity, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 1.247, p = .027$. See Appendix C.

There were no statistical significances in whether respondents were raised in a two parent home. Similarly there were no significances shown if the respondents were raised in a single parent home or foster care either (see Appendices D- G). The respondents also experienced many types of abuse; as seen in Table 11, 16.7% reported being physically abused and 10% report experiencing multiple types of abuse (see Appendix H).
Discussion

According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences study, the rougher your childhood, the higher your score is likely to be (CDC, 2016). The questions answered by the respondents were used to determine if their behaviors were a result of their experiences. This study found that ethnicity was strongly correlated with childhood adversities—supporting the Bandura’s theory of social learning. "There is substantial evidence that child development is the accumulation of risks and protective factors-setting a youth on a developmental trajectory toward adverse social/emotional/behavioral and health outcomes" (personal conversation, Love, S.M., April 30, 2016). However, other risks outside the family also contribute to social learning of violence—what children observe on television, neighborhood, school, television/movies, and on the Internet. How and why negative behaviors are captured and stored by some, and ignored by others is why a macro look at behaviors needs further researching - especially among men who experienced violence in the home during their childhood. Future researchers might also want to look at the accumulation of stress and exposure to community violence, not just abuse, as the cause of problems in adulthood. Furthermore, prevention studies need to focus on supporting African American young men and their families.

Limitations

The sample size used was minimal, a larger sample size may be necessary to get find significant statistical results between other childhood factors.
Reference


Appendix A

Adverse Childhood Experience scale

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?  or  Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?  or  Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?  or  Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?  or  Your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?  or  Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

7. Was your mother or stepmother:  Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?  or  Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?  or  Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or
threatened with a gun or knife?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

10. Did a household member go to prison?  Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

Now add up your “Yes” answers: ________  This is your ACE Score.
Appendix B

Date:________________________

QUESTAIONAIRE

Instructions: Fill in the blanks or check the box that best describes your response. If choices do not apply to you, check N/A. Please answer All questions to the best of your ability.

1. What is your age? __________

2. Ethnicity? ________________________

3. Educational Level

   [ ] College   [ ] High School   [ ] G.E.D   [ ] Elementary

4. What is your relationship to the person who filed against you

   [ ] Spouse   [ ] Girlfriend   [ ] Former Girlfriend
   [ ] Intimate Partner   [ ] Dating, if yes, how long __________
   [ ] Roommate   [ ] Neighbor   [ ] Other, please specify: ________________

5. Is this your first time taking Domestic Violence Classes [ ] Yes   [ ] No

6. Have you ever been a victim of Domestic Violence [ ] Yes   [ ] No

7. Have you served in the Military? [ ] Yes   [ ] No

8. Have you spent time in jail? [ ] Yes   [ ] No

The following questions are in regards to your family history

1. Are you from a two parent home (Mom and Dad) [ ] Yes   [ ] No

2. If from a single home, who was your guardian? [ ] Mom   [ ] Dad   [ ] Relative
   [ ] N/A

3. Have you lived in Foster Care? [ ] Yes   [ ] No

4. Did your parents/guardian work outside of the home [ ] Yes   [ ] No

5. If so, did they work [ ] Full-time   [ ] Part-time   [ ] Seasonal
The following questions are in regards to possible childhood experiences

1. Did you witness physical abuse within your home [ ] Yes [ ] No

2. If so, who was the victim? _________________________ [ ] N/A

3. Were you spanked as a child? [ ] Yes [ ] No

4. Do you feel you were abused as a child [ ] Yes [ ] No

5. If yes, was it [ ] Physically [ ] Sexually [ ] Mentally [ ] N/A
Appendix C

Table 1: Relationship between ACE score and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Approximate Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal Phi</td>
<td>1.247</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Cramer's V</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### Appendix D

**Table 3:** Relationship between ACE score and education level

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Value</th>
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<td>.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cramer's V</td>
<td>.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Table 5: Relationship between ACE score and two parent home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Approximate Significance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal</td>
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<td>.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cramer's V</td>
<td>.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Table 7: Relationship between ACE score and single parent home

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<tr>
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<th>Value</th>
<th>Approximate Significance</th>
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<td>Cramer's V</td>
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<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
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Appendix G

Table 9: Relationship between ACE score and living in foster care

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<th>Value</th>
<th>Approximate Significance</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.563</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phi</td>
<td>.538</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramer's V</td>
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<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H

### Table 11: Type of Abuse Experienced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple abuse types</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Table 12: ACE Scores (n=30)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE Score of exposure</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.233</td>
<td>2.8610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>33.300</td>
<td>10.92340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>