Development of Violent Behavior and Adolescents’ Appraisal and Coping Strategies related to Inter-parental Violence

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Abstract

The present review focuses on understanding the explanatory mechanisms behind the use of violence within intimate relationships, highlighting the consequences of adolescents’ exposure to Inter-parental violence and gauging the role of their (adolescents) appraisal and coping strategies. The theories reviewed stress the significant impact of close figures’ behaviors on the developing child and adolescent through observational and imitational processes, secure and insecure attachment patterns and related internal working models as well as through building own understanding of the world and human interrelations. The review revealed also that adolescents’ exposure to Inter-parental violence constituted an unequivocal risk factor leading to a range of consequences categorized as internalizing and externalizing problems. It however indicates that the outcome behaviors are not a result of a linear process because there is range of mediating factors that explain the association between adolescents’ exposure to Inter-parental violence and outcome behaviors. Finally, appraisal of Inter-parental violence was identified as a central mechanism that impacts both the magnitude of the consequences of exposure and the adolescents’ conception and execution of coping strategies.

Keywords: Inter-parental violence, violent behavior, exposure, appraisal, coping strategies
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Inter-parental violence is one of the most recurrent aspects within domestic violence literature, especially the investigation about its association with children’s and adolescents’ outcome behaviors. The purpose of this review paper is to investigate the premises of some explanatory theories about development of violent behaviors in the perspective of human development and human interrelation. Moreover, it aims to highlights the consequences of adolescents’ exposure to Inter-parental violence and to investigate their appraisal as well as coping strategies as a consequence of such an exposure.

The following review will be divided in the following parts. The first part will be dedicated to review some theoretical explanations underlying the origin of violent behaviors in the perspective of human development and human inter-relation. Indeed, theories are explanatory, consistent and tested tools that help us understand the causes and the nature of phenomenon. They therefore “provide a backcloth and rationale for research” as well as an “explanation of observed regularity” (Bryman, 2008). In the case of this review, regularity in question is the relation between inter-parental violence and adolescents’ violent behaviors.

The second part will be aimed at understanding the consequences of exposure to inter-parental violence with regard to internalizing and externalizing aspects of adolescents’ functioning as well as possible mediator factors of such consequences. The final part will be aimed at reviewing the mechanisms related to adolescents’ appraisal of IPC and their coping strategies associated with positive outcomes. It will also include a section on cultural aspects as other possible explanatory factors of variations of outcome behaviors. For each of the sections making this review, the research scope is relatively limited because we are primarily guided by an interest of learning and understanding more (Torraco, 2005) about the issues related to the research topic. Therefore, the review fits more to Baumeister’s and Leary’s
third type of review which consists in surveying the existing knowledge on the topic without intending to provide new ideas or new interpretations or conclusions (Baumeister & Leary 1997). The theories and empirical evidences presented must be taken as illustrative of phenomenon which is large and complex and whose comprehensive analysis is beyond the present review. It however strives to present a critical perspective about different questions reviewed and raises a number of interrogations that are for research interest.

**Theories on the Development of Violence in Intimate Relationships**

Domestic violence, or family violence, refers to a range of abuses such as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and even economical, that a partner inflict to another within intimate relationships (Shenoy, 2007). Women are found to be the most victims and some approaches, like feminism, equate domestic violence and spouse violence or women betterment (Yllö, 2005). However, men are also victims of domestic violence even if the proportions of their victimization are in many cases lower or under-documented. Indeed, inter-parental violence, intimate partner violence and marital violence are some of the terminologies used to avoid the hard standpoint of feminist approach of domestic violence.

Inter-parental violence, one key forms of domestic violence, is seen as one major threatening and damaging factors for children’s and adolescents’ health and emotional wellbeing (Fantuzo & Wanda, 1999). Indeed, inter-parental violence, namely violence between or from parents who are protectors and key figures in the child’s developmental process was found to impact child functioning in multiple and complexes ways leading to a cross range of multiform outcomes (Rhoades, 2008).

The destructive effects of inter-parental violence work through the central parents’ responsibility vis-à-vis their children, namely parenting. Research evidences point out, among other aspects, that marital violence affects family interrelations, damages emotional climate, disrupts parenting responsibilities etc. (Gerard, Benson & Buehler, 2008). The situation is as preoccupant as research findings indicate that inter-parental violence, even
though its prevalence is not well known, occurs in a large numbers of households (Fantuzo & Wanda, 1999), meaning that a huge number of children are exposed to such an adversity. In face of this reality, one of the pertinent questions for researchers is about ‘’what factors make people become violent in their interrelationships including inter-spouse violence?’’

There are a number of theories that shed light on violent behaviour development and elucidated those developmental mechanisms experienced by a person, which explain why that person in later life become prone to violence in his/her interrelationships in general and in inter-marital relations in particular. Thus, the following section reports recurrent theories on violent behaviour development with regard to human interrelation and inter-marital relations. The theories that were included in the current review are Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory and Implicit Theories.

**Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory is the most influential tool used to explain the mechanisms of behavior development including violent behavior development. It is also the most recurrent referenced perspective in the literature on marital violence (Wofford & Elliott, 1997). It is therefore one of the explanatory tools about developmental factors that frame future behaviors and enlighten why some people resort to violence within intimate relationships including inter-marital relationships.

According to social learning theory, child’s observation of and interaction with different models within his/her immediate environment teaches him/her how to behave. Bandura who is the pioneer of the theory, states that the core of child’s learning rests on imitation through which both “deviant and conforming behaviors are acquired” (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Thus, the way parents and other key figures handle various inter-relational situations become the appropriate behavior for a child and an adolescent and it is likely to be repeated by them (Wofford & Elliott, 1997).
With regard to violence perpetration, social learning theory remains the key explanatory tool for future violent behaviors. Beva and Higgins (2002) posits that the leading assumption is that exposure to abuse within family context, either as victim or witness, teaches to become violent. They further explain that in that learning process, there are theoretical mechanisms at work, namely identification with the aggressor, vicarious reinforcement, and positive reinforcement of aggression (Beva & Higgins, 2002). As they explain, identification with the aggressor view posits that exposure to family aggression leads to commit aggression against own family members. The vicarious reinforcement or observational view explains that aggressive behaviors are learned through modeling process within family context. Finally, positive reinforcement view holds that children come to learn that violence is sometimes an “effective” and “necessary” means within intimate relationships (Beva & Higgins, 2002).

Ultimately, as pointed out by Marcus, Lindahl and Malik (2001) children exposed to interparental violence develop a ‘repertoire’ of responses to interpersonal problems and consider the use of aggression as a “normative and legitimate response to provocation” (Marcus, Lindahl & Malik (2001).

In sum Social learning theory brings about an understanding about the transmission of violence-related practice and “values” across generation through a socialization by the child’s primary caregivers and important figures which render the mechanism more likely to impact the learner.

Evidences for social learning theory as a mechanism that explains the origin of adolescent’s violence

Several empirical researches on violence transmission use Social learning theory as guiding tool and various findings illustrate its premises. The following section is dedicated to present some of the adolescence-related empirical findings and it is followed by a critical perspective on the approaches related to learning theory.
Browne and Hamilton (1998) examined the relationship between child maltreatment, parents’ conflict tactics and adolescents’ conflict tactics towards parents among young adult students. They found a highly significant association between all conflict tactics used by students and those used by their parents. Their findings indicated also that students who have been abused during their childhood within their families were more likely to employ violence toward their mother or father than those who have not been maltreated. Finally, students who were physically maltreated within their families were found to be significantly more likely to be severely violent than students who were not (Browne & Hamilton 1998).

In another study, Cummings, Goeke-Morey, and Papp (2004) analyzed the correlation between marital conflicts and child aggression among 108 children and their parents. They found, among other findings, that parental destructive conflict tactics were linked to a greater likelihood of child aggression and that destructive conflict tactics induced more aggression in children than constructive conflict tactics (Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp 2004).

Ireland and Smith (2009) conducted a longitudinal study among 1000 adolescents to follow up the relationship between exposure to parental violence and antisocial consequences in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Their findings revealed that exposure to inter-parental violence increased the risk of adolescents externalizing behaviors, self-reported general crime, and self-reported violent crime. They also found that the relationship between severe intimate partner violence (SIPV) and mid-adolescent outcomes were fairly consistent with greater risk for antisocial behaviors among those residing in a SIPV family (Ireland & Smith 2009).

Cui, Durtschi, Donnellan, Lorenz and Conger (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the intergenerational transmission of aggression with one of the guiding hypothesis stating that “inter-parental aggression would predict youth aggression in adult romantic relationships”. Their findings indicated that there was association between aggression in family of origin and “both higher levels of youth aggression toward their
spouse/partner and higher levels of spouse/partner aggression toward the target youth” (Cui et al., 2010). Thus, the authors underscore that these findings are further evidences about the intergenerational transmission of aggression and the “importance of the direct socialization of interpersonal aggression in the family of origin” (Cui et al., 2010).

The preceding illustrative studies inform us about empirical evidences related to child and adolescents’ aggression or violent behavior modeled through learning from exposure to marital violence, one form of domestic violence. However, the social learning perspective faces also a number of critiques from the holders of other explanatory approaches. The key critique relates to the quasi absolute association between childhood exposure to violence and subsequent aggressive or violent behaviors in adolescence and adulthood (Wofford & Elliott, 1997). Thus, social learning theory is accused of ignoring numerous possible mediating factors and intervening variables across generations (Beva & Higgins (2002). Indeed, some empirical findings concluded that there was no association between witnessing IPV and subsequent violent behaviors within interrelationships (Capaldi & Clark, 1998), others revealed that only a small portion of children and adolescents exposed to inter-parental violence became also violent (Wofford & Elliott, 1997) and finally others concluded that the effects of modeling were evident for some forms of violence and not for others (Black, Sussman & Unger, 2010). This suggests that social learning theory cannot alone explain the mechanisms underlying outcome behaviors; rather it has to be confronted with other explanatory theories as to get a unified perspective that takes into account all influencing variables. Thus, the next section presents another theory, attachment theory, whose premise helps to elucidate developmental factors underlying future behaviors including aggressive behaviors within inter-spouse relationships.

**Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is another key approach used by many researchers to understand the importance of the child’s early relations with key figures in his/her immediate environment.
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and their impact on future behaviors. The theory has therefore shed lights to the understanding of relationships formation in infancy and early childhood (Ludolph, 2009) and illustrated how different attachment patterns underlie adults’ behaviors including aggressive behaviors within inter-marital relationships.

Fundamentally, attachment theory highlights the significance of the quality of early relationships and posits that “the affective bond that develops between the child and caregiver has consequences for the child’s emerging self-concept and developing view of the social world” (Levy, 2005). The mother who is the primary caregiver is seen by Bowlby, the pioneer of the attachment theory, as the most important figure while the father is seen as less important (Ludolph, 2009). However, other investigations revealed that both mother and father can be equally important as attachment figures for a child (Ludolph, 2009).

At the heart of the attachment mechanism, researches identified two key patterns, namely secure and insecure attachments with related internal working models. A secure attachment type which is characterized by the child’s enjoyment of the parents’ presence, getting upset because of their departure and the seeking of comfort to the parents when he/she is frightened (Kendra, 2012) is a result of satisfactory relationships between the child and his/her primary caregivers (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997). In contrary, insecure attachment type which comprises ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized patterns (Penny, 2011) is a result of relationships which don’t meet the child’s attachment needs (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997).

Consequently, attachment pattern underlies internal working models which guide individual's perceptions, emotions, thoughts and expectations in later relationships. They also “motivate the individual's relationship behaviors by predicting the availability of the attachment figure to provide care and nurturance” (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997).

Ultimately, internal working models frame the understanding of self and the others as well the interrelationship mechanisms. Davila and Levy (2006) pointed out that internal working
models guide cognition, emotion, and behavior in attachment-relevant circumstances across the lifetime (Davila & Levy 2006). Concerning the future impact of early attachment, Kenneth (2005) stressed the determining role of child’s early relations which can predict the “later capacity to make affectional bonds”, cause “adult dysfunctions” such as “marital problems and “personality disorders” (Kenneth, 2005).

**Empirical evidences about the association between attachment patterns and future aggressive behaviors**

From empirical studies, researchers highlighted the effects of the attachment patterns on future development including aggressive behaviors. Bowlby, the pioneer of the theory, coined the concept of “functional anger” which is a child’s expression of displeasure when attachment needs are not met like in case of separation with primary caregiver (Kesner, Julian & McKenry 1997). Thus when a child continues to face situations of insecure attachment, this functional anger may be transformed in violence in adulthood when for instance a male feels unresponsiveness or insensitivity from his partner (Kesner, Julian & McKenry 1997).

In their study, Kuijpers, Van der Knaap and Winkel (2005) examined the role of attachment, anger and violent Behavior of the victim as risk of revictimization within Intimate Partner Violence. They found that victims’ avoidant attachment was a significant predictor for revictimization of both physical as well as psychological IPV. According to the authors, a “partner’s insecure attachment style may lead to defensive or avoidant responses to conflicts, such as unresponsiveness and inaccessibility, which in turn result in further conflict and dissatisfaction within the couple” (Kuijpers, Van der Knaap & Winkel 2005).

Scott and Babcock (2010) studied attachment as a moderator between Intimate Partner Violence and Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) Symptoms. Their results revealed that attachment dependency and anxiety moderated the relationship between Intimate Partner Violence and PTSD symptoms. They also found a causal relation between high attachment
dependency and anxiety and Intimate Partner Violence and PTSD symptoms and concluded that attachment patterns may be a risk factor for the development of PTSD among abused women (Scott & Babcock 2010). They explained that low dependency and anxiety can protect abused women from developing PTSD while those with high anxiety may develop PTSD because of their predisposition of fear and abandonment (Scott & Babcock 2010).

Kesner and McKenry (1998) analyzed the role of childhood attachment in predicting male violence toward female. They found that “violent males had significantly greater likelihood of reporting a lower secure attachment style endorsement, and a higher endorsement of the fearful attachment style” (Kesner & McKenry, 1998). They also found that males whose partners had a “lower secure style endorsement”, higher “dismissing style” endorsement, and a lower “preoccupied style endorsement” were more likely to exhibit violence toward their partners. Thus, the later finding indicates that women may unconsciously activate their partners’ violent response as far as they are insecurely or fearfully attached (Kesner & McKenry, 1998).

In a close study to the preceding, Kesner, Julian, and McKenry (1997) examined the relationship between the attachment related factors and male violence toward a female intimate (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997). Their findings revealed, among other information, a link between male violence in interpersonal relationships and attachment-related factors, namely perceived relationship support, negative life events stress, self-esteem, sense of autonomy, and perceived quality of early childhood relationship. As the authors clarify, male violence was related to: a perceived deficiency in love and caring from their mother while growing up; lower self-esteem; perception of less relationship support; perceptions of low relationship autonomy; and number of recent life stressors (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997). Among other predictors of male violence, male's perceived relationship
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support from his female intimate was found to be the strongest (Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997).

As pointed out for social learning theory, attachment theory, though a credible explanatory tool, it has its limitations and raised some criticisms such as focusing only on primary caregivers and ignoring other forms of attachments occurring during adolescence and in adulthood and which have also significant impact on personality development (Lee, 2003). For instance it is established that adolescents strive to be independent from their parents and rely more on peers with whom they establish confident relationships which form their attachment bonds. Similarly adults establish significant relationships with, for instance, their partners on whom they rely for several emotional needs and so be their attachment figures. Thus, attachment theory needs to be put in relation with other theories as to get a comprehensive explanation. The next section presents another perspective, namely implicit theories, which highlight, among other aspects, the cognitive functioning of violence perpetrators.

Implicit Theories

The concept of implicit theory relates to personality development perspective which explains, among other aspects, the origin of aggressive behaviors within inter-partner relationships. This perceptive clarifies that a developing human builds a people and a world related mindset which determines his/her relationships as well as behaviors. According to Polaschek and Gannon a developing person draws from daily experiences an “understanding of their own beliefs, desires, needs, and behaviors, and those of people with whom they interact by developing and using causal theories in a quasi-scientific fashion” (Gilchrist 2009). Thus, implicit theories become guiding informational tools on which a person relies in conducting his/her actions and interaction and expecting others’ behaviors. The own theory about the world and about the others becomes well established to the extent that their “hypothetical and individual nature becomes even less explicit” (Gilchrist 2009). Therefore,
because the implicit theories imply own definition and understanding of self, the others and
the world, they are seen to have an important role in the “development and maintenance of
cognitive distortions” (Day & Dempsey, 2011) or “thinking errors” (Barriga, Hawkins &
Camelia, 2008).

Cognitive distortions which is one of the characteristics of “criminal thinking style” was
defined by Barriga et al.(2001) as “inaccurate or biased ways of attending to or conferring
meaning upon experiences” (Wallinius, Dernevik, Johansson & Lardén, 2011).
One of the aspects of cognitive distortions, namely self-serving cognitive distortions is
associated with externalizing problem behaviors and has four typologies, namely “self-
centered”, “blaming others”, “minimizing/mislabeling”, and “assuming the worst”
(Wallinius, Dernevik, Johansson & Lardén, 2011). As the authors explain, self-centered
cognitive distortions relate to individuals’ attitudes that focus on “own opinions, expectations,
needs, and rights” and ignore or totally rule out those of others. “Blaming others” typology
refers to cognitive distortions that wrongly blame others as the cause of own negative
behaviors. “Minimizing or Mislable” related distortions characterize a person who
considers antisocial behavior as an acceptable and legitimate means to “achieve certain goals
as well as a belittling and dehumanizing way of referring to others”. Assuming the Worst
relates to “cognitive distortions where the individual attributes hostile intentions to others
(…)” (Wallinius, Dernevik, Johansson & Lardén, 2011). Thus, in case of intimate
relationships, as distortions are logical but not rationale (Day & Dempsey, 2011) the
perception of hostile intentions from a partner may cause defensive or counterattack actions
and so justify the use of violence by the one who is victim of distortions.

**Empirical evidences about implicit theories as explaining factors of aggressive
behaviors within Inter-marital relationships**

Empirical studies on implicit theories mainly tried to understand how this set of mind
impact the violence perpetrators. They illustrate how these offenders in their own world and
understanding act as legitimate or in self-defense. In following paragraphs I report few examples of illustrating studies.

Day and Dempsey (2011) conducted an investigation on “core beliefs” of male perpetrator of domestic violence. Their findings highlight three key categories, namely treat, retreat and perfect world with underlying implicit theories for each. The “treat” category relates to perpetrators who felt “threatened by others” and considered their partners as “demanding, hysterical, or manipulative”. They were also characterized by seeing the world as “untrustworthy, women as “unknowable” and by considering themselves as being “always right”. Retreat category was characterized by the feeling of being “misunderstood”, “abused”, or “abandoned” and hold a need to get away from “life stressors” by substance abuse, avoiding intimate relationships or abandonment, or descending into depression and hopelessness”. Perfect World category holds belief that they had the key for a “better world for their partners and children than the one they had experienced themselves in childhood”. They also felt to be “misunderstood” and hindered in their “attempts” to provide the best to their close intimates (Day & Dempsey 2011).

Levitt, Swanger and Butler (2008) examined the perspectives of low income males’ perpetrators of intimate partner violence in relation with their religious beliefs. Their study results revealed that the perpetrators’ religious beliefs that men are family provider and leader could not be fulfilled because of their financial insecurity and thus felt “ashamed and emasculated”. Therefore the perpetrators’ abusive actions were described as means to cope with the “threat of being perceived as emasculated, weak or unmanly” (Levitt, Swanger & Butler 2008).

Eckhardt, et al. (2012) examined cognitive constructs in sample of men with Intimate partner Violence (IPV) history by analyzing their attitudes toward women, violence, and their association between women and violence, in comparison with men without a history of IPV offending (Eckhardt, et al. 2012). The results revealed that men with IPV history were
“slightly more efficient at associating violent words with positive labels” than non-offending group. Further, findings showed that “men in the IPV group were faster than non-offending men at associating aggression-related constructs and female names”. As concluded by the authors, “male offenders showed a pattern of attitudinal activation that favors a positive association for violence-related stimuli and a more strongly developed link between female gender and violent concepts on implicit attitudinal measures” (Eckhardt, et al. 2012).

Wallinius, Dernevik, Johansson and Lardén (2011) tested the validity and reliability of the How I Think (HIT) questionnaire in a sample of Swedish adult and adolescent offenders and non-offenders. Among other hypothesis, they expected that the questionnaire would discriminate offenders and non-offenders, and that self-serving distortions would be correlated with self-reported antisocial behaviors among adults. The results confirmed their hypothesis because the questionnaire “successfully discriminated between offender and non-offender groups, with the offenders displaying higher levels of self-serving cognitive distortions”. It was also found that self-serving cognitive distortions were associated with self-reported antisocial behaviors among the adults (Wallinius, Dernevik, Johansson & Lardén, 2011).

Although each of the preceding studies has its limitations related to the samples, scope and methods of investigation, they contribute to our understanding of the influence of implicit theories in human functioning and especially in becoming violence perpetrator. However, it is important to notice that implicit theories can’t be the single explanatory perspective of outcome behaviors. Rather it must be taken as a complementary tool that needs to be included in a multidimensional explanatory perspective. In fact, there is no one pathway that explains a particular outcome behavior, instead a developing human undergo the influence of both risk and protective factors and these impact according the surrounding environment and the individual specificity (Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre, & Jaffe, (2003). Thus, the consideration of the three explanatory approaches presented in this review illustrates such endeavor aimed
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to clarify that individual is a product of interactive complex influences. All these theories put emphasis on the interaction with others as examples provider, as confidence and reliance builder or destructor and finally as shaper of own people and world related theory.

**Consequences of exposure to domestic violence**

Within domestic violence study, the focus of many researchers has been on the consequences of children’s, adolescents’, young adults’ and adults’ exposure to that adversity. What is obvious according to many researchers is that children who live side by side with violence in household have greater risks to develop maladjustment than children living in non-violent environments (Fantuzzo & Wanda, 1999).

The concept of “exposure” to domestic violence refers to “watching or hearing the violent events, direct involvement, like trying to intervene or calling the police, or experiencing the aftermath such as seeing bruises or observing maternal depression” (Fantuzzo & Wanda, 1999). Domestic violence is a multifaceted form of violence occurring in intimate relationships such a home and it would be inaccurate to pretend presenting a comprehensive review of its consequences. Thus, this review relates to inter-parental violence (IPV), which refers to the use of violent means, such as aggression or assault in order to harm another in case of disagreement between partners. Exposure to inter-parental violence is as devastating as traumatizing for children because it involves the very providers of their safety and protection (Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2004).

The key feature of the consequences from exposure to IPV that draw attention of several researchers relates to behavior development or behavior outcomes and these were classified in two main categories, namely internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. According to Szanyi, Cali and Guttmannova (2008), externalizing behavior problems refer to “behaviors characterized by an under-control of emotion” and include “difficulties with interpersonal relationships and rule breaking as well as displays of irritability and belligerence”. On the other hand, internalizing behavior problem are defined as an “over-control of emotion” and
include “social withdrawal, demand for attention, feelings of worthlessness or inferiority, and dependency” (Szanyi, Cali & Guttmannova, 2008). Thus, internalized problems are, for instance, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, self-blame, shame, anger, etc. and externalized problems include aggression, isolation and withdrawal, drug abuse, use violence in peer and dating relationships or against parents, low school and academic performances, etc. Further studies explain the consequences of exposure to IPC on interpersonal relations such as peer and dating relationships and finally some studies try to explain the mechanisms through which works the association between exposure to IPC and outcome behaviours. The next section reports illustrative empirical evidences about the consequences of exposure to IPC.

**Empirical Evidences about the Consequences of Exposure to IPV**

Several empirical studies focused on identifying and examining outcomes behaviors to children, adolescents, young adults and adults following their exposure to IPV. This section is dedicated to illustrative studies on diverse consequences of adolescents’ exposure to IPV.

**Exposure to IPC and Externalizing Problems**

Ireland and Smith (2009) investigated the “antisocial consequences of adolescent exposure to inter-parental violence”. They found that exposure to IPV increased the risk for adolescents’ externalizing behaviors, self-reported general crime, and self-reported violent crimes. Further, they found that the relationship between severe intimate partner violence (SIPV) and mid-adolescent outcomes were fairly consistent with greater risk for antisocial behaviors among those residing in a SIPV family (Ireland & Smith, 2009). The limitations for this study include the fact that it did not examine gender differences, uncertainty about the replication of the accurate prevalence of physical violence in the sample and the absence of no “stable partners” in the sample (Ireland & Smith, 2009).

Tschann, et al.(2002) analyzed the relation between inter-parental conflict and health risk behaviors in a sample of 151 Mexican adolescents. Although the study was limited by a
homogenous and small sample (Tschann, et al. 2002), the results indicated that frequent involvement of adolescent in parental conflict were significantly associated with substance use and sexual experience for adolescents (Tschann, et al. 2002).

Marks, Horne, Glass and Glaser (2001) examined the clinical profile of children exposed to IPC in comparison with “normative children and with clinic-referred children”. The study results showed more problems in the group exposed to IPC. Indeed, 38% of children in the sample showed behavioral or emotional problems at the clinical range and almost 30% showed problems in social competence at clinical range (Marks, Horne, Glass & Glaser 2001).

**Exposure to IPV and internalizing problems**

In a longitudinal study, Harold and Shelton (2008) assessed the relationship between IPC and adolescent’s internalizing and externalized problems in a sample of 252 schoolchildren. On internalized symptoms account, the study revealed that IPC had “direct effects on adolescent appraisals of threat, self-blame, and their over-involvement in conflict. In addition, “appraisals of threat were associated with increased avoidance of conflict, while self-blame was associated with increased over-involvement”. Consequently it was found that “over-involvement in and avoidance of conflict were in turn both related to increased internalizing symptoms” (Harold & Shelton 2008).

Tschann, et al. (2002) found, in addition to the results reported earlier, that inter-parental conflict and adolescents’ intervention in parents’ conflict were associated with adolescent emotional distress (Tschann, et al. 2002).

**Exposure to IPC and interpersonal and dating relationships**

Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) examined the effect of inter-parental conflict and adolescent dating relationships in a sample of 391 adolescents. They found that exposure to IPC lead to abusive behavior in adolescent boys’ dating relationships. Indeed, higher levels exposure to aggressive IPV was found to make boys to perceive “aggression as justifiable in a romantic
relationship”, but this was not the case for girls. Exposure to IPC was also found to be associated with adolescents’ higher levels of expression of anger, which lead to abusive aggression in dating relationships (Kinsfogel & Grych 2004). The study was limited by the fact of relying solely on adolescents’ self-reports with the risk of biases and underreport of some aspects of aggression (Kinsfogel & Grych 2004).

In their study reported earlier, Ireland and Smith (2009), found also that exposure to a severe level of partner violence had a lasting impact on living in a violent relationship as an adult (Ireland & Smith 2009).

**Mechanisms that explain the association between exposure IPC and outcome behaviors**

Kim, Jackson, Hunter and Conrad (2009) studied the role of perceived threat and self-blame appraisals as mediating factors of the IPC’s effects on adolescents dating relationships. Despite the study limits, namely the cross-sectional design that could not clarify the directionality of the relation between the studied variables and the sole use of adolescents self-reports as source of information (Kim, Jackson, Hunter & Conrad 2009), the findings indicated that threat appraisal was a significant partial mediator of the relation between IPC and sexual aggression, and IPC and relational aggression (Kim, Jackson, Hunter & Conrad 2009). The results also suggested that adolescents’ self-blame appraisals of IPC were significantly related to adolescent dating behaviors including sexual aggression, relational aggression and threatening behavior (Kim, Jackson, Hunter & Conrad 2009).

Lemola, Schwarz, and Siffert (2012) examined the relation between short and irregular sleep and adolescents’ aggressive behavior and sought to know if they moderated the association between IPC and aggressive behavior. Although study limitations, namely that it relied on adolescents’ self-report for sleep times assessment which might have been affected by memory distortions (Lemola, Schwarz & Siffert 2012), the findings indicated a strong association between IPC and early adolescent’s aggressive behaviors “irrespective of whether mothers reported negative IPC behavior or adolescents reported their appraisal”. The authors
found also an association between mothers’ perception of negative IPC behavior and “aggression among adolescents who slept short on weekdays and among adolescents with a large weekday-to-weekend difference in sleep duration” (Lemola, Schwarz & Siffert 2012).

Buehler, Benson and Gerard (2006) inquired the explanations about the association between Inter-parental violence and early adolescents’ problem behavior by examining a number of parenting aspects, namely harshness, inconsistency, psychological intrusiveness, and lower levels of acceptance and monitoring knowledge. The study was limited by drawing its sample only from “European American” families and by focusing solely on parenting as an explanatory variable. However, the findings revealed that compromised parenting due to inter-parental violence was associated with adolescents’ problem behaviors. More specifically, mother’s harshness, lower levels of acceptance and psychological intrusiveness were found to mediate the association between inter-parental hostility and adolescent internalizing while fathers’ harshness and monitoring knowledge mediated the association between inter-parental hostility and adolescent externalizing (Buehler, Benson & Gerard 2006). Tschann, et al., 2002 whose study was reported in this review, found also that more demanding and dominating mothers’ parenting style during conflict was associated with more sexual experience for adolescents (Tschann, et al., 2002).

Harold’s and Shelton’s study (2008) indicated that “self-blame was a robust predictor of externalizing problems and that over-involvement also influenced externalizing problems. Further, appraisals of threat were associated with increased avoidance, which in turn was associated with increased externalizing problems” (Harold & Shelton 2008).

The preceding illustrative studies, among several others, confirm that the risks from exposure to IPC are matter of facts even if the influential mechanism is not uniform or absolutely of the type “the same cause leads to same effects”. In fact, researchers recognized that the pathways through which IPC influences adolescent’s outcome behaviors are unclear and depend, among other explanations, on theoretical perspectives underlying inquiries (Kim,
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Jackson, Hunter & Conrad, 2009). Therefore, the findings are indicative with regard to study samples, context, design, methods, underlying theories, etc. With regard to design and methods for instance, the studies on the consequences of IPC face the key critique of being mainly retroactive, that’s to say relying on memories which are fallible. More specifically, it appears that those studies are predominantly cross-sectional and therefore cannot describe how studied variables influence each other and cannot determine the impact of extraneous variables. Moreover, most studies have a predictive approach trying to prove the relationship between independent and dependent variables, missing out or ignoring mediating factors that are multiple and complex in nature. That is why most of studies extract their sample from violent contexts (perpetrators and victims) and from people with low socioeconomic status and, thus, little is known about people who become violence perpetrators while they grew up in nonviolent families. Further, the fact is that all outcomes behavior problems are not visible, especially internalized problems, which make it difficult their assessment (Marks, Horne, Glass & Glaser, 2001), which suggests that there are still unknown aspects of the problem.

Adolescents’ appraisal of IPC and their coping strategies

Several studies posit that child and adolescent’s appraisal of IPC with all cognitive and affective mechanisms involved, is a determining factor of the subsequent outcomes. Indeed, in face of regular violence, a child is not a passive recipient, instead he/she actively constructs his/her understanding through cognitions and emotions and this construction serves as a key mediator between IPC and youth maladjustment (Beva & Higgins 2002). For instance, Tschann, et al.(2002) clarify that in context of IPC, adolescents make cognitive appraisals, evaluate the threat of the conflict and attribute blame and this can lead to emotional distress, depression, anger and these emotions may push adolescent to risk-taking behaviors (Tschann, et al.2002). Similarly, Grych & Fincham (1990) state that the way children have appraised IPC coupled with how they see their ability to deal with the situation determine “variation in their symptoms of emotional and behavioral distress” (Harold &
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Shelton, 2008). Lemola, Schwarz and Siffert (2012) also stressed the mediating role of conflict appraisal between children’s perception of IPC and their maladjustment, according to cognitive-contextual framework (Schwarz & Siffert, 2012). They clarified that, in first instance, children “evaluate the negativity of the conflict and their subsequent feeling of the threat” and, secondly, gather information about the reasons of the conflict, their possible responsibility and their capability of coping with the situation (Schwarz & Siffert, 2012). Thus, all this information suggests that subjective meaning of the IPC, as internalized by a child or by an adolescent, drives his/her adaptive mechanisms and ultimately underlies his/her psychological functioning in relation with such an adversity.

Concerning coping strategies, a number of studies highlight their role in relation to adolescents’ exposure to IPV. Goldblatt (2003) conducted a qualitative study to understand the meaning of Inter-parental violence for adolescents and their coping strategies. The study findings indicated that adolescents coping strategies included being “physically outside of the home, and emotionally and mentally inside it”, the result being that “they might find themselves nowhere”. They also became “prematurely mature”, felt a sense of responsibility about their lives and got “insights from intense living experience” which empowered them. Moreover, they “defocused” from the past and its “painful memories”, concentrating instead on the present and the future. Finally, they considered violence as an enriching experience from which one can be empowered and, at the same time, recognized its potential risks that can lead to “severe emotional distress” (Goldblatt 2003). It is worth mentioning that the study was limited by its small and purposeful sample, which makes it difficult to generalize its findings (Goldblatt 2003).

In another qualitative study, Benavides (2012) tried to understand the role of spirituality as coping strategy for adolescents exposed to domestic violence. The findings revealed that adolescents’ spirituality played as coping strategy through “learning from experience, self-expression, beliefs, and feelings”. Learning from experience means that adolescents’
spirituality helped them to know that “there was always something to be learned from their experiences” so they can do something and be “prepared for difficulties later in life”. Self-expression like drawing, singing, and journaling, was, according to their spirituality, a tool that helped participants to face difficult times. Moreover, “being oneself and the feeling of individuality” were pointed out as another source of help for some adolescents. Holding some beliefs like “belief in karma”, expecting that “things will get better”, and that “they were not alone”, constituted another form of help throughout their experience. Finally, “confidence, happiness, and forgiveness” are feelings relate to the participants’ spirituality that helped them during their experience (Benavides, 2012). The study was limited by the participants’ diverse conceptualization of spirituality, disparities in exposure to IPC and a small and female dominated sample (Benavides, 2012).

Aymer (2008) explored coping strategies for adolescents exposed to domestic violence. Although the study was limited by a small sample, its findings indicated that adolescents used both “health” and “unhealthy” coping strategies to face the stress caused by domestic violence. Health strategies, which are the focus of this review, included participation in sport activities that helped participants to deal with the stress because they allowed them to “temporary get away from their families and their problems”. Other strategies included “reading and getting professional help”, which helped them to open their mind about different things, to learn about bad and good things, to manage their emotions and to build social contacts and so to be able to continue their activities. Finally, some participants evoked participation in church activities as way cope with the trouble from inter-parental violence (Aymer, 2008).

Appraisal and coping strategies are two interrelated mechanisms that are central to the understanding of adolescents’ functioning when they are exposed to IPV. Because appraisal involves individual subjective perceptions, subsequent coping strategies, which in turn are
also a result of own assessment, are more likely to help getting out of the trouble than any external solution.

**Cultural context in relation with outcome behaviors variations following exposure to IPC**

Culture is the one of most salient explanatory factors of individual variations as far as behaviour development is concerned. Indeed, each culture holds values and norms which determine the type of behaviours expected to children reared within it (Atzaba-Poria, & Pike, 2005). The developing human undergo the process of socialization through which he/she is encouraged to a kind of behaviors and discouraged to others (Atzaba-Poria, & Pike, 2005). In this perspective, culture influences parenting practices, which in turn exercise a significant impact on children’s self-concept, emotions development and relationship with parents, among other developmental aspects (Nishikawa, Sundbom & Hägglöf, 2010). With regard to the consequences of exposure to family adversities such as parental violence, it is worth pointing out that researches strive to determine, among other interests, the role of culture as mediating factor of outcome behaviors (Ulu & Fişiloglu, 2002). Therefore, cultural background may play a significant role as an explanatory factor of variations among children and adolescents exposed to diverse adversities including Inter-parental violence. For instance, the extent to which adolescents rely on their families varies across cultures and this has an impact on adolescents’ adjustment to family adversity (Formoso, Gonzales & Aiken, 2000). Indeed, it was found that a “deep sense of loyalty” and “strong emotional ties” were some of traditional values stronger in some cultures than in others and act as “incentives” to preserve family relationships from which children are likely to derive protective factors (Formoso, Gonzales & Aiken, 2000).

The following studies report illustrative empirical findings on culture as an explaining factor of the variations of outcome behaviors following exposure to adversities including IPC.
Ulu and Fışıloglu (2002) investigated the relationship between Turkish children's perceptions of marital conflict and their internalizing and externalizing problems. Their findings confirmed an association between children’s perception of conflict properties and internalized problems. The authors concluded that Turkish authoritarian parenting practices which is a cultural pattern might be the cause of internalizing tendency because of the terrorizing environment children were fearful and withdrawn (Ulu & Fışıloglu, 2002).

Roberts and Sobhan (1992) investigated the differences in prevalence of depressive symptoms among adolescents from diverse ethno-cultural groups including Anglo American, African American, Mexican American and Hispanic American (Roberts & Sobhan 1992). Their results indicated that Mexican American adolescents reported more depression than their counterparts, even if the study was unable to determine if the difference was the caused by differential exposure to stress or differential vulnerability (Roberts & Sobhan 1992).

Ulbrich, Warheit and Zimmerman (1989) investigated the psychological reactions of blacks and whites who faced undesirable experiences in their lives such family adversities. Among other findings, the study indicated that Blacks from lower socioeconomic status group ‘‘were more vulnerable than their white counterparts to the impact of undesirable life events, but they were less vulnerable than the whites to the impact of economic problems” (Ulbrich, Warheit & Zimmerman 1989). Thus, the study confirmed racial, and implicitly cultural, differences in reaction to undesirable events, though, as a cross sectional study, it was unable to clarify the process through which the influential mechanisms work (Ulbrich, Warheit & Zimmerman 1989).

Dayna (2009) analyzed the relations between depressive symptom expression and cultural and family contexts among adolescent females from different ethnic groups. She found that there was an association between family stress and authoritarian parenting, which is an expression of cultural beliefs, and depressive symptom expression (Dayna, 2009). Indeed, according to the study results, the participants who reported high levels of depressive
symptoms also reported high levels of family stress and low levels of authoritative parenting (Dayna, 2009).

Culture is one of the factors that enlighten individual perceptions and therefore explain the variations among people in apprehending the reality. Inter-parental violence is a phenomenon which has diverse significance to adolescents according to their cultural background because, among other features, the way they interact with and rely on their parents varies accordingly. Thus, adolescent’s appraisal and coping strategies in relation to IPV can’t be fully understood without taking into account their upbringing cultural norms, values, etc.

**Conclusion and future directions**

This review highlighted the explanatory mechanisms pertaining violence behaviour development in intimate relationships and adolescents’ appraisal and coping strategies in face of IPV. The developing children’s and youths’ relationships with close figures influence them through observation and imitation, attachment patterns and their implications and through shaping own understanding of the world and the others.

Though the reviewed theories shed lights on underlying mechanisms about violent behaviour development, each explanatory tool brings about one perspective whose empirical evidences reveal limitations as the process per se is complex so that a multidimensional approach considering all possible variables is more likely to clarify. Thus, even if IPC constitutes a real risk factor, outcome behaviours cannot be explained as linear process in which every child exposed will also become violent because individual functioning is unique and outcome behaviour derives from a more multifaceted influence. Similarly, early attachment patterns with key figures cannot only explain outcome behaviours because, for instance, future attachments in adolescence and in adulthood are also as significant as determining. It is therefore crucial that researches work on building a unified explanatory
theory which integrates diverse perspectives as to consider all aspects of human development, being internal and external, normal and abnormal.

Adolescent’s appraisal and coping strategies were highlighted as interdependent mechanisms involving individual subjectivity whose outcomes are personally oriented. In this perspective, cultural background illustrates a modelling mechanism through which work individual perception and attribution of significance to phenomenon such as IPV. These mechanisms underscore the importance of considering IPV and its consequence as individual experiences. Therefore, there is a need of more longitudinal studies to specify directions of effects and patterns of causal relations as well as to explain the stability of effects through developmental process or to detect later symptoms which may surface with time. It is also important to conduct comparative studies as to identify specific cultural patterns that might influence children’s adjustment in various cultural settings. Similarly, more qualitative studies are needed because it was established that individual subjective perceptions are crucial and determining for adjustment.
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