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Psychoanalysis of the Transfer of Hatred by Victims of Domestic Violence to Children

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Abstract. Domestic violence is a common social problem at present, which inflicts indelible psychological trauma on victims. More notably, many victims unconsciously displace the pain and resentment they endure onto their children, forming a harmful intergenerational transmission problem. This situation not only inflicts deeper psychological harm on children, but also makes the already broken family relationships more difficult to repair. To understand this complex psychological process, find out the underlying causes, and thus provide useful references for practical intervention work, this study specifically analyzes the psychological mechanism of domestic violence victims transferring hatred to children. The research combines case analysis and theoretical discussion methods, selects several real and representative cases for detailed analysis, and also refers to the research results of related fields such as developmental psychology, trauma theory and family system theory.It is found that victims who have been under high stress and fearful pressure for years could significantly reduce their cognitive performance, emotional control abilities and knowledge of parent-child relationship. Feeling helpless, angry and ashamed due to the traumatic experiences and wrong attributions (such as telling children that children are part of the abuser or claiming children are the source of their own pain) are the major psychological reasons behind hatred transfer. The lack of social support, the trauma of the victims themselves, and the economic pressure will further promote hatred transfer too.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Hatred transfer, Psychological mechanism

1. Introduction

Domestic violence refers to aggressive or controlling behaviors occurring among family members. It mainly takes the forms of physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence. In China, physical violence of couples is 34.8% ,while mental violence 55.6% [1] Domestic violence inflicts profound physical and psychological harm on victims and innocent children, causing children to exhibit aggressive behavior or social disorders [2, 3].

In families that have been riddled with violence for a long time, victims develop complex psychological defense mechanisms. The phenomenon of transferring resentment towards the perpetrator to the child is called "hatred transfer". It will further destabilize the family system, exacerbate the harm of domestic violence to children, and will intensify the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence. As a result, many children may have problems such as aggressive

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behavior and social disorders. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the psychological mechanism of hate transfer to prevent the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence.

This study focuses on the psychological mechanism of victims of domestic violence transferring hatred to their children, using multidimensional analysis methods: The author through a literature review studies the psychological pathways, using a case study method to deeply observe typical cases, a comparative analysis is conducted to evaluate intervention effects. A local psychological model and intervention method is proposed.

2. Theoretical foundation of the hate transfer

2.1. Central principles

Hate transfer is a pathological psychological defense mechanism in which the victim transfers negative emotions such as anger and resentment that should be directed at the perpetrator to vulnerable groups (mainly children). There are several theoretical explanations for this phenomenon.

Spillover Theory posits that negative emotions generated within a violent environment tend to diffuse beyond the immediate conflict, permeating and disrupting the parent-child relationship.The victim has long suppressed their emotions. Once reaching a certain level, they often vent to their children through severe corporal punishment, emotional neglect, abuse, etc.

The cognitive-contextual theory motions that the key factor leading to the transfer of hatred is the victim's incorrect interpretation of the causes of domestic violence. If the victim blames domestic violence as a "problem of the whole family" rather than the perpetrator's personal behavior, children will be considered to be a stand-in for the perpetrator because of victim's hostile attributional bias.

Emotional Safety Theory: Domestic violence seriously destroys the victim's ability to regulate emotions and sense of security. When a child cries out of fear and behaves naughty, the victim may perceive it as a new "threat" and react with stress.This triggers defensive attacks [4].

From the perspective of developmental psychopathology, domestic violence has strong intergenerational transmission characteristics (Cicchetti, 2010). The victim who experienced emotional neglect or domestic violence during childhood have difficulties regulating their emotions. When adults who experienced abuse as kids go through domestic violence themselves, it can stir up those old wounds—and suddenly, the line between "victim" and "perpetrator" gets blurry. That confusion sometimes leads them to unintentionally repeat the same harmful patterns with their own kids.

2.2. Forms of expression and hazards

It should be noted that hatred transfer does not typically manifest as overt physical punishment. A lot of the time it hides under the radar as emotional neglect: things such as withholding physical affection, engaging in unprovoked verbal denigration, or imposing deliberate emotional withdrawal [3]. Studies show teens who've gone through this emotional neglect are 2.3 times more likely to develop social anxiety than other teens their age. And this kind of psychological damage usually sticks around way longer, and is way harder to fix than straight-up physical violence.

3. Case analysis

To make it easier to see exactly how hatred transfer shows up in a person and how it messes with head, this paper draws upon three representative cases documented in the domestic violence

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intervention archives of the Women's Federation for detailed analysis.

Table 1. Comparison of domestic violence cases involving hatred transfer directed at children

Cases	Victim Characteristics	Expressions of Hate Displacement	Impact on Children	PostIntervention Outcomes	Key Mechanism
Ms. Li	35-year-old; financially dependent, long-term physical and mental abuse by husband.	Often cursed her 8yearold son saying, "You are just like your father"; beat him with a hanger for poor grades; exerted extreme control over the son	Xiao Qiang, age 8; long-term emotional and physical abuse by his mother, becoming the target of displaced aggression	No professional psychological intervention; parentchild relationship continued to deteriorate	Cognitive distortion associating the child with the abuser; regaining a sense of control through violence (power compensation)
Mr. Zhang	42 years old; witnessed his father beating his mother as a child; after losing his job, experienced emotional abuse from his wife, leading to stress reactions	Locked his daughter in a storage room; verbally abused the child, saying "Your mother destroyed this family"; used violent threats	12 years old daughter; developed selfharm behaviors, carved "I'll be good" on her arm; severe psychological issues	No professional intervention; child's selfharm worsened, psychological state remains critical	Childhood violence schema activated; displaced resentment toward wife onto daughter
Ms. Wang	Rural female; endured ten years of cold violence from her husband; Resentful after her husband cheated	Often said to children, "Men are all heartless"; generalized blame toward males	13yearold twin sons; developed social avoidance, refusing to interact with male teachers	Participated in the "Superhero Program" for six months; completed cognitive restructuring	Trauma replication: Resentment toward the ex-husband redirected to the children; resolved by intervention.

As shown in Table 1, the above cases demonstrate that hate transfer is primarily driven by three mechanisms.

3.1. Cognitive dissonance

Abuse victims frequently project negative characteristics of the perpetrator onto their children, effectively perceiving the child as a substitute representation of the abuser. For example, in Case 1, Ms. Li, it associates the husband's physical characteristics with his tendency towards aggressive behavior and his son, forming a cognitive bias towards his son, which in turn leads to hatred towards him. This is consistent with the theory of cognitive background that "incorrect attribution leads to the transfer of aggression";

3.2. Power compensation

When abuse victims are stuck in a weak, powerless position next to their abuser, they try to get that feeling of control and power back by controlling and punishing their kid. In Case 2, Mr. Zhang boosted his sense of male authority exactly by controlling his daughter, which lines up perfectly with the "Spillover theory" [5].

Trauma Replication: if a victim's childhood trauma never got properly dealt with or healed, in response to this sense of disempowerment, victims often seek to reestablish a sense of agency

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through the control or punishment of their children.

This psychological mechanism is consistent with the pressure transfer explanatory framework in the "power dynamic imbalance" theory and spillover theory. In Case 3, Ms. Wang pushed all the resentment she held against her ex-husband onto her son, which lines up with Cicchetti's "pathological intergenerational transmission" theory [6].

The three cases above also illustrate the contradictory responses exhibited by children who are subjected to hatred transfer.: On the one hand, they instinctively protect their parents; on the other hand, they develop self-loathing and a sense of guilt because they are hated and blamed by their parents, forming a pathological psychological defense

4. Analysis of the psychological mechanism of hatred transfer

4.1. Neurophysiological level: abnormal stress response

The three cases above also illustrate the contradictory responses exhibited by children who are subjected to hatred transfer. This whole issue comes from really deep, long-lasting trauma. For people who've been stuck in abuse from their partner for ages, the psychological damage they deal with is not just one simple thing, it is all tangled up.

Physical abuse messes up nervous system works right off the bat, and emotional abuse keeps the victim stuck in constant, ongoing stress all the time.

This long-term stress and trauma can mess up how your body regulates the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis. This dysregulation disrupts cortisol secretion, impairs the functioning of the prefrontal cortex responsible for emotional regulation, and causes hyperactivation of the amygdala, which governs fear responses., and makes the amygdala (the part that handles your fear response) go into overdrive [6]. All these changes keep the victim's body stuck in that "fight or flight" mode. When they see their kid, who's related to their abuser, they end up linking that all tensed-up, on-edge feeling they have to the kid being there. That's what causes that instinctive hostility and anxiety out of nowhere.

4.2. Cognitive level: negative schemas and cognitive distortions

If someone has put up with domestic violence for years and years, they usually end up developing these fixed negative thinking patterns. If you go by cognitive-contextual theory, kids who grow up around domestic violence usually blame themselves for what's going on, but adult victims also end up having this really obvious bias when they judge what's going on around them [7]. A representative example is a woman subjected to repeated physical abuse by her husband, who may respond with sudden, intense anger upon noticing a perceived physical resemblance between her son and her husband. She'll start yelling at the kid, saying stuff like "You are just as garbage as your dad" or "You were born bad, just like him."

This cognitive distortion essentially "symbolizes" the child - the child is no longer an independent individual, but an "extension" of the perpetrator. Davies' theory of emotional safety points out that intimate partner violence can completely destabilize family relationships and cause adult victims to lose basic trust in intimate relationships [8]. When the child has some normal naughty and behavioral deviations, the victim will activate the "malicious attribution preference" and interpret the child's ordinary behavior as "deliberately opposing himself" and "deliberately torturing himself".

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4.3. Emotional level: impaired regulation and emotional overflow

Emotions are also a crucial source of division.The theory of developmental psychopathology suggests that adult victims may experience emotional regression due to prolonged exposure to violent and fearful environments, much like children who struggle to control their emotions effectively.In one case from a domestic violence shelter,a 35-year-old woman struck her daughter in response to the child's crying, only to immediately dissolve into tears herself, overwhelmed by self-reproach. This contradictory response shows both dysregulation of the emotions of the victim: On the one hand, she is unable to process the distress triggered by the child's crying and resorts to violence as an outlet; on the other hand, she is incapable of managing the guilt engendered by her own abusive conduct.This contradictory reaction reflects a dual dysfunction in the victim's emotional regulation: on the one hand, she is unable to process the negative emotions triggered by her child's crying and can only vent them through violence; on the other hand, she is unable to cope with the guilt arising from her own violent behavior. The spillover theory effectively explains this mechanism of emotional transmission: negative emotions such as anger and repression resulting from domestic violence spill over into the parent-child relationship, forming a negative emotional transmission chain involving the "abuser-victim-child" [5]. Victims often find themselves trapped in a cycle of emotional isolation. On the one hand, fear of retaliation from the abuser prevents them from venting their anger directly at the abuser; on the other hand, influenced by the traditional notion that "family matters should not be aired in public," they are reluctant to seek support from outside sources [9]. Ultimately, these pent-up negative emotions can only be directed toward children, who hold a lower position of power and lack the ability to resist.

4.4. External factors: lack of protective factors

When protective support like trusted friends, family, or community help are missing, it becomes even harder for someone experiencing domestic violence to break free from the cycle of turning their pain toward their kids. Tajima's long-term research shows that having solid social support really can soften the impact of abuse [10]. But in China, cultural stigma around "family shame" still runs deep—so more than 70% of victims never reach out to the police, the All-China Women's Federation, or even local neighborhood centers. Instead, they suffer in silence.

Domestic violence does not just hurt, it piles on parenting stress. In fact, survivors of domestic violence are over three times more likely to use physical punishment with their children than parents in non-abusive households. And when daily pressure like money worries, exhaustion, or feeling completely overwhelmed—go beyond what they can handle, that stress often spills out as harsh words or even physical harm toward their kids.

This isn't just about one generation. If someone grew up watching abuse or being emotionally ignored, their brain's emotion-regulation systems may not have developed fully. Consequently, as adults confronting violence, they may revert to the only coping strategies they were ever exposed to — emotional withdrawal, reactive aggression, or the exercise of control over others. That's how pain gets passed down—not on purpose, but almost automatically from parent to child, and sometimes, from child to their own future children.

5. Strategies

Based on the study of the domestic violence and hatred transfer of children, the studies in Social Adjustment and Intervention for Children in Intimate Partner Violence, this paper proposes a tiered

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intervention approach to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of hatred, from emergency intervention to long-term recovery, incorporating safety measures, psychological rehabilitation and family support. In this article, the paper first establishes a three-tiered safety net for victims and children:

5.1. The first tier: emergency safety protection

This tier focuses on protecting victims from further violence and physical harm, for example, the promotion of Safety Reminder System. This system indicates to offer violence victims cards which prints emergency contact number, sanctuary map and the guidance of how to respond to domestic violence. The cards would guide them to protect themselves from second victimization at straight way. A study shows after the system establishment, the percentage of children get second injury from domestic violence has been reduced 37%.

5.2. The second tier: professional psychological reconstruction

The goal is to rehabilitate mental injury and psychological counseling by correcting cognitive bias and regulating emotions. Inspired by the Child Safety Plan of Kids, this approach guides children to escape from domestic violence by mimicking actual scenes of cartoons and videos. Since the scenario has a relatively simple escape route, it will quickly decide which route to look for and which direction to go if they find themselves in the situation.

5.3. The third tier: family relationship rehabilitate

The main feature is reconstructing parent-child relationship and providing victims with social support, in order to prevent another hate transfer. In this tier, mandatory family assessments would be carried out. For parents who engage in physical punishment, verbal abuse, or coercive behaviors toward their children, judicial protective removal procedures should be initiated in a timely manner. The children will be prevented from the danger and be taken care of by organizations like Civil Affairs Bureau.

6. Conclusion

Based on domestic violence examples, this study shows the psychological cause of hatred transfer:

First, the projection of hatred is brought about by internal psychological factors such as brain, cognitive, or emotional, or external factors such a lack of social support and excessive pressure from parents. Their main psychological drivers include cognitive misalignment, power compensation, and trauma replication;

Second, hate does not always show up as yelling or hitting. Sometimes it is quieter, while just as damaging ignoring a child's feelings, constantly criticizing them, shutting them out emotionally, or micromanaging every part of their life. In fact, this hidden emotional neglect can cut deeper than physical punishment because it is hard to spot, harder to name, and even harder to heal often leading kids to struggle with anger, withdrawal, trouble making friends, or even self-harm. And sadly, without help, those same patterns can show up again in the next generation.

Third, three effective supports are keeping the child feeling, helping the parent heal emotionally and mentally and gradually rebuilding healthier family relationships. This framework operates in a sequential manner: safety provision constitutes the foundational prerequisite, psychological therapy forms the intermediate stage, and family relationship restoration represents the long-term goal of

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sustained recovery. Finally, Intervention adheres to multidimensionality: supporting the victim as well as protecting the child, without blaming either, as trauma-informed treatment, helping parents understand the unfairness, teaching emotional regulation skills, and holding the culprit responsible for the harm. This study introduces, for the first time in local context, a clear psychological path to "exposure to violence → distorted thinking → hatred transferred to the child" — and this study emphasizes "trauma dissociation intervention" to break the chain.

Limitations of the present work: female victims is concentrated while research on male quantity quite are few in the samples; samples are small and no follow-up data has been obtained in a long time; for future studies, studies might be performed on males' characteristics and follow-up studies will be developed; neurobiologists will do experimental research to study neurobiological relationship between abnormal prefrontal cortex activation, HPA axis change, and hate-transfer behavior; or different cultures could compare hate-transfer behaviors.

In summary, the problem of domestic violence victims transferring their hatred towards children is very related to children's physical and mental health, family stability, and social stability. It has to be pursued jointly from academia, practitioners, and all sectors of society. Work should be conducted with a steady increase in research, improve interventions, ensure legitimate rights and interests of victims and children, and break the cycle of domestic violence dynamics.

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