

Understanding the cycle of violence

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Researchers have long known that children who grow up in an aggressive or violent household are more likely to become violent or aggressive in future relationships. What has not been so clear is the developmental link between witnessing aggressive behavior as a child and carrying it out as an adult. What changes occur in a child that affect whether he or she will choose to deal with conflict in aggressive or violent ways?

According to researchers from Indiana University's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, children who grow up in aggressive households may learn to process social information differently than their peers who grow up in non-aggressive environments.

"Children with high-conflict parents are more likely to think that aggressive responses would be good ways to handle social conflicts," said John Bates, a professor of psychology in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences and a co-author of the study. "This partly explains why they are more likely as young adults to have conflict in their own romantic relationships."

Unlocking the developmental link between growing up in an aggressive or violent household and becoming the perpetrator of such behavior could prove useful for stopping the cycle of violence. According to IU psychology professor Amy Holtzworth-Munroe, a co-author of the study, this research has implications for treatment and prevention.

"For example, treatments for male batterers may want to address a person's ability to evaluate his responses to certain social situations," said

Holtzworth-Munroe.

Bates cautions that this research is just one piece of the puzzle.

"This is probably not the only factor mediating this association. We want to know how these processes work alongside other factors, such as emotional regulation, social skills or genetic processes," he said.

Source: Indiana University

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