ABSTRACT

IMMIGRANT LATINO FAMILIES: A MEDIATIONAL MODEL OF THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE UPON LATINO MOTHERS AND YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

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BACKGROUND

Latina women often experience violence and oppression derived from the prevalence of male dominance and machismo in their country of origin. As immigrants to the United States, Latina mothers are disproportionately at higher risk for exposure to community violence, as they tend to reside in low-income, high crime communities.

Few studies have examined the prevalence of exposure to community among Latino immigrant families (Aisenberg, 2001; Kataoka, et al., 2003). As a result, the traumatic effects of violence exposure among these families and the relationship between Latina mothers’ distress symptomatology, including PTSD and depression, and their children’s behavioral problems are largely unknown.

OBJECTIVES

Based on a conceptual model that contextualizes the interdependent processes of mother and child coping with community violence this presentation aims to:

1) identify and measure the types of lifetime exposure to community violence of immigrant Latino mothers and their young adolescent children;
2) measure the psychological and behavioral effects of such exposure; and
3) investigate how maternal distress relates to child behavior problems.

METHODS

Using multiple informants, this study gathered data on 47 pairs of Latino children and their mothers who immigrated to the United States from Mexico and Central America. Multiple regression analyses were conducted.

RESULTS

Community violence exposure predicts over 21% of child and mother depression and 16% of their respective PTSD symptomatology. Analysis reveals that maternal distress is a mediator of child behavior problems, reducing the direct effect of community violence on child behavior problems over 50%.

CONCLUSION

Maternal distress may be more important than community violence exposure in contributing to young adolescents’ behavior problems. This finding advocates for a fundamental shift in the delivery of mental health services from primarily focusing on the individual child to empowering immigrant Latina mothers and promoting their resiliency by addressing their social and behavioral health needs.