Impact of Individual Differences in Child Abuse Potential on the Use of Mitigating Information During Child Transgressions

Lauren M. Irwin

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Background/Context
• Interest in exploring parental risk group differences as predicted by the Social Information Processing Model of child physical abuse
• Thesis: Spontaneous trait inferences made by parents at low- and high-risk for abuse
• Dissertation: Explore mitigation hypothesis proposed by SIP model

Social Information Processing (SIP) Model of Child Physical Abuse
• Offers explanations of child physical abuse (CPA) grounded in both psychological and sociological factors
• Four-part SIP model consisting of 3 cognitive processing stages and a fourth cognitive/behavioral stage of response execution
Social Information Processing Model (SIP) of Child Physical Abuse

- Stage 1: Perceptions of social behavior
- Stage 2: Interpretations, evaluations, and expectations that give meaning to social behavior
- Stage 3: Information integration and response selection
- Stage 4: Response implementation

Stage 3: Information Integration and Response Selection

- Abusive parents (compared to nonabusive):
  - May fail to notice mitigating information
  - May choose to ignore mitigating information
  - May fail to recognize the importance of mitigating information

- Leads to differential use of mitigating information by LR and HR parents (LR use more)
- Ultimately impacts disciplinary decision

Use of Mitigating Information

- Methodology of previous studies:
  - Parents read short (1-2 sentence) vignettes about child behavior (usually negative)
    - "You ask your child to set the table for lunch and he or she refused to help you."
  - Answered questions about vignette (attributions, evaluations, negative affect, disciplinary choice)
  - Then read short vignettes about same kinds of child behavior, except included one additional sentence describing mitigating behavior
    - "You ask your child to set the table for lunch and he or she refused to help you because he or she had a big stomachache."
  - Answered same DVs after each vignette

Results of Mitigating Information Studies

- Foody (1993): No difference between high risk (HR) and low risk (LR) parents when mitigating information present for 6 of 7 DVs
  - Only the global/specific attribution rating was different
- Montes, De Paul, Milner (2001): No difference between HR and LR parents when mitigating information present for 7 of 9 DVs
  - Only differences were for negative affect ratings
- De Paul, Adla, Perez-Albeniz & De Cadiz (2006): No differences between HR and LR parents when mitigating information present for 9 of 10 DVs
  - HR rated only some kinds of behaviors as more wrong
Methodological Limitations

- Same information presented first without, and then with, mitigating information
- Mitigating information was very easy to identify (in 1 of only 1 or 2 sentences in vignettes)
- A greater variety of attribution/response questions could have been asked
- Failed to look at other factors that may influence the use of mitigating information and subsequent parental attributions

Current Studies

- Altered presentation scheme used
- Used a variety of dependent measures on standard response scales
- Manipulated the length of vignettes (Study 1)
- Manipulated whether child behaviors were explicitly disobedient (Study 2)
  - (Bugental et al., 1989; 1999)
  - (Dopke & Milner, 2000)
  - (Caselles & Milner; Chilamkurti & Milner; DePaul et al., 2006, Montes et al., 2001)
- Do these changes result in support for the SIP model predictions?

Child Behavior Pretest

- Identify behaviors that imply traits indicative of certain types of child transgressions (moral, conventional, personal)
- Initial pool of 36 different child behaviors pretested. Chose 32 (4 for each transgression type) that received high mean trait ratings and were correctly categorized into transgression type with a high frequency
- From each behavior, developed 4 vignettes:
  - A short vignette containing no mitigating information
  - A long vignette containing no mitigating information
  - A short vignette similar to previous research containing very obvious mitigating information
  - A long vignette containing mitigating information that is more fully embedded within the scenario

Study 1: Method

- Example of Vignettes: (Conventional Transgression, Impatient)

  1. Your child got to the lunchroom and instead of waiting in line behind everyone else, skipped the line and went right to the front.
  2. Your child got to the lunchroom and instead of waiting in line behind everyone else, skipped the line and went right to the front. S/he had to go to a lesson right after lunch, and would not have had a chance to eat if s/he hadn’t gone to the front right away.
  3. Your child got to the lunchroom and instead of waiting in line behind everyone else, skipped the line and went right to the front. Most of the students from your child's class were waiting in line in the lunchroom. Your child did not bring a packed lunch and therefore had to buy it from the cafeteria. You had given your child money to buy lunch. After lunch, your child was scheduled to have a music lesson.
  4. Your child got to the lunchroom and instead of waiting in line behind everyone else, skipped the line and went right to the front. Most of the students from your child's class were waiting in line in the lunchroom. Your child did not bring a packed lunch and therefore had to buy it from the cafeteria. You had given your child money to buy lunch. S/he had to go to a lesson right after lunch, and would not have had a chance to eat if s/he had not gone to the front right away. After lunch, your child was scheduled to have a music lesson.
Participants filled out a questionnaire packet containing all of the dependent measures, including the child vignettes.

The 12 vignettes for each participant included:
- 4 vignettes depicting each transgression type
- For each transgression type, participants read 2 short and 2 long vignettes, one of each containing mitigating information (each was a different behavior)
- After each vignette, participants answered a series of questions (DV response sheet) based on the vignette

CAP Inventory was scored according to the manual (Milner, 1986) and used to construct low and high CPA risk groups.

Final Sample Characteristics:
- 69 valid participants (age M = 33.21, 68.1% female, 52.2% single, 52.2% married, 52.2% African-American, 37.7% Caucasian)
- 39 Low-Risk (CAP M = 78.0)
- 30 High-Risk (CAP M = 271.9)

Materials:
- PANAS
- 48 Child Vignettes
- DV Response Sheet (attributions, evaluations, negative affect, disciplinary responses)
- Parental Modernity Scale
- Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory

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Study 1: Data Analysis

• Created indices to represent the different response categories of interest:
  1. Negativity Index (evaluations of wrongness, traits, blame, and badness)
  2. Internality Index (attributions of internal, stable, global characteristics)
  3. Externality Index (attributions of external and unstable characteristics)
  4. Hostile Intent Index (ratings of intent to annoy and intent to be bad)
  5. Negative Affect Index (ratings of how upset/angry/irritated/ashamed parent would be)
  6. Power Assertion Index (ratings of yelling/shouting/screaming and hitting/slapping/spanking by parents)
  7. Induction Index (ratings of using reasoning and explanation disciplinary techniques by parents)
  8. Repeat Behavior Item (rating of expectation that child would repeat behavior in future)

• Primary Analysis: 2 (CAP Status: low, high) x 2 (Mitigation: absent, present) x 3 (Transgression Type: personal, conventional, moral) x 2 (Vignette Length: short, long) ANOVAs.

• DVs: Ratings on the following indices: Negativity, Internality, Externality, Hostile Intent, Negative Affect, Power Assertion, Induction, Repeat Behavior.

• Also explored the relationship between CAP scores and PANAS, Parental Modernity subscales, demographic information.
Study 1: Results

- CAP Status x Mitigation Interaction?
  - No

- Risk group main effect?
  - Hostile Intent (HR>LR)
  - Power Assertion (HR>LR)
  - Negativity* (HR>LR)
  - Internality* (HR>LR)
  - Negative Affect* (HR>LR)

*when controlling for variables found to be related to CAP status

Study 2: Method

- Same as Study 1, different vignettes (Example: Conventional, Rebellious):
  1. You and your child were in a waiting room for an appointment. Your child refused to put any toys away after s/he had finished playing with them.
  2. You and your child were in a waiting room for an appointment. Your child refused to put any toys away after s/he had finished playing with them. Your child saw that another child was waiting to play with each of the toys with which your child had finished playing.
  3. You told your child that they must pick up and put away every toy when they are finished playing with them. Your child refused to put any toys away after s/he had finished playing with them.
  4. You told your child that they must pick up and put away every toy when they are finished playing with them. Your child refused to put any toys away after s/he had finished playing with them. Your child saw that another child was waiting to play with each of the toys with which your child had finished playing.

- CAP Inventory was again scored according to the manual (Milner, 1986) and used to construct low and high CPA risk groups

- Final Sample Characteristics:
  - 64 valid participants (age M = 34.21, 70.3% female, 42.2% single, 32.8% married, 54.7% Caucasian, 34.4% African-American)
  - 35 Low-Risk (CAP M = 87.9)
  - 29 High-Risk (CAP M = 281.4)

- Materials:
  - PANAS
  - 48 Child Vignettes
  - DV Response Sheet (attributions, evaluations, negative affect, disciplinary responses)
  - Parental Modernity Scale
  - Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory

Study 2: Data Analysis

- Primary Analysis: 2 (CAP Status: low, high) x 2 (Mitigation: absent, present) x 3 (Transgression Type: personal, conventional, moral) x 2 (Power Violation: absent, present) ANOVAs

- DVs: Ratings on the following indices: Negativity, Internality, Externality, Hostile Intent, Negative Affect, Power Assertion, Induction, Repeat Behavior

- Also explored the relationship between CAP scores and PANAS, Parental Modernity subscales, demographic information
Study 2: Results

- CAP Status x Mitigation Interaction?
  - Externality
  - Repeat Behavior

- CAP Status x Mitigation (3-ways)
  - Induction (when power violation present)
  - Negative Affect (for moral transgressions)
  - Power Assertion (for moral transgressions)

- CAP Status Main Effects?
  - Hostile Intent (HR>LR)

Externality Index (CAP x Mitig)

\[ F(1, 61) = 4.73, p < .05 \]

Repeat Behavior (CAP x Mitig)

\[ F(1, 59) = 4.46, p < .05 \]

Induction (CAP x Mitig x PowerVi)

\[ F(1, 61) = 4.12, p < .05 \]
Discussion

- Study 1
- Study 2
- Study 1 vs. Study 2
- Results compared to previous research

Limitations and Future Research

- Intermixing unmitigated and mitigated vignettes
  - Mitigating as between-subjects variable
- Vignette format and administration
  - Use of videos to present child behaviors
  - Use of cognitive load manipulations
- Low statistical power
  - Increase sample size
Conclusions

• Both studies found evidence supportive of some SIP predictions

• Only Study 2 found evidence suggesting that LR parents use mitigating information to a greater extent than HR parents when evaluating child behaviors

• Taken together, results suggest future research should focus on more sensitive methodology (e.g., videos, cognitive load), as well as addressing issues of power

Thank You