Childhood trajectories of violence and adult intimate partner violence: A gendered life course approach to violence prevention

**CONTEXT**

Violence against women and children has been studied extensively but the evidence has mostly come from cross-sectional studies. The evidence is clear that there are intersections between multiple forms of violence and that violence is perpetuated across generations. Using longitudinal data, we have previously shown that children in urban South Africa experience high levels of various forms of violence in the home, at school and in communities. Recent findings from the same cohort estimate that almost 50% of 28-year-old South Africans living in urban Soweto experience intimate partner violence (IPV). There are a myriad of factors associated with IPV, including early life environment and sociodemographic factors. However, the causal pathways through which IPV occurs in this context is not yet clear. Understanding these pathways and trajectories of violence using longitudinal studies is pertinent to violence prevention efforts, particularly those aimed at the intergenerational transmission of violence. Using longitudinal data on the childhood physical and social environment, often not collected, provides an opportunity to understand how exposure to violence in childhood can lead to experiences of IPV in adulthood in the South African context.

**PROJECT AIM**

This study proposes a unique mix of longitudinal data on exposure to multiple forms of violence across two generations, and new in-depth qualitative data to reflect and expand on findings from the longitudinal data. Using multiple indicators of violence across childhood, we will develop trajectories of violence that distinguish between individuals who experience low, moderate and high levels of exposure to violence. These differential trajectories of exposure to violence in childhood will be linked to experiences of IPV in adulthood to help build an understanding of which groups are more vulnerable to victimization and perpetration. Using a number of explanatory factors and a composite measure of structural violence, we will attempt to identify how these factors mediate — encourage or discourage — the perpetration or victimization of IPV in adulthood. We will explore in-depth the ways in which exposure to interpersonal and structural violence in childhood shapes vulnerability to experiences of IPV in adulthood.

**STUDY CONTRIBUTION**

This study will contribute to evidence guiding life course approaches to prevent violence against women and children. Findings from the study will inform how we can target those most vulnerable by exploring cumulative exposure to violence and the clustering of risk factors. Identifying causal pathways of exposure to violence in childhood to experiences of IPV in adulthood will guide interventions for violence prevention. The study will also enhance and strengthen capacity for research and practice by training researchers in life course methodology and using quantitative research to support practice through knowledge exchange workshops with partner organisations.