The contagion of family violence

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Several inter-related forms of violence across the lifespan

- Child sexual abuse
- Growing up in violent household
- Harsh punishment, abuse, neglect or family problems
- Non-partner sexual or physical violence
- Intimate partner violence
- Suicidality
- HIV infection

Childhood → Adulthood
WHO multi-country study provides opportunity to explore consistency of associations & mechanisms across settings

Prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among ever partnered women 15 - 49

- Bangladesh
- Brazil
- Ethiopia
- Japan
- Maldives
- Namibia
- New Zealand
- Peru
- Samoa
- Serbia & Montenegro
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- Turkey
Early life experiences consistently emerge as strong risk factor for experiencing and perpetrating intimate partner violence

- Childhood history of abuse of women & /or her partner
  - Partner physically abused as child (15/15, all significant)
  - Woman sexually abused as a child (13/15, 10 significant)
  - Some suggestion of a dose response effect - with odds ratio highest when both experienced abuse

- History of domestic violence in woman or her partner’s household when growing up (15/15, 10 significant)

- Some suggestion that risk is higher if man has grown up in a violent household, than when a woman has grown up in a violent household

- Odds ratios highest when both families had a history of domestic violence (10/15 sites)

Abramsky et al BMC Public Health 2011
Multiple reasons why for women, abuse in childhood is associated with increased later risk of partner and non-partner violence

- Other abusive man in girl’s environment
- Abusive partner of mother
- Mother abused by partner
- Other family dysfunctions or adverse events
- Child Sexual Abuse
  - Harsh punishment
  - Physical abuse
- Behavioral & sexual risk taking
- Educational attainment
- Early and/or forced sexual debut
- Alcohol-related problems
- Mental health: adjustment problems
- Sexual assaulted by non-partners
- Experience Partner violence
- Physically assaulted by non-partners

Childhood | Adolescence | Adulthood
3 main developmental pathways likely to explain why men with early exposures to violence are more likely to go on to perpetrate IPV in adulthood

**Family Problems**
- Mother beaten by partner
- Man beaten regularly as a child
- Man sexually abused as a child
- Other adversities

**Social Learning & gender socialisation**
- Modeling – violence to resolve conflict
- Masculine identity formation
- Expectations of female obedience
- Controlling behavior
- Approval of wife beating

**Childhood trauma**
- Educational attainment
- Problematic drinking
- Conflict triggers

**Poor parenting & harsh discipline**
- Conduct Disorder; Poor school performance
- Delinquent Peers
- Anti-social behaviour
- Outside sex partners; Binge drinking
- Fights with other men

**Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence**

**Early childhood**
**Primary school**
**Adolescence**
**Adulthood**
Violence ↔ HIV

- **South Africa** - women in violent relationships have higher HIV incidence - IRR 1.65 (1.13 – 2.40)
- Meta-analyses of large cross sectional surveys with HIV data:
  - exposure to physical partner violence
    1.45 (1.22 – 1.73);
  - exposure to BOTH physical & sexual violence
    1.66 (1.17 – 2.34)
- HIV infection may exacerbate ongoing violence in a relationship
  - may also put her at increased risk of violence from people in extended family & community
Prior exposures to violence are important predictors of suicidality among women

- In WHO study CSA, IPV & non-partner physical violence independently associated with suicidality across multiple sites
  - Associations holds even after controlling for other forms of violence & for common mental disorders
  - Association between IPV & suicidality strongest & most consistent across sites
  - Sexual violence not found to be significant in this study (could be due to under-reporting)

- Evidence from prospective research:
  - IPV significant risk factor for suicide attempts among women (2/3 studies)
  - No significant associations for men (2 prospective studies)
  - CSA risk factor for attempted & completed suicides among both women & men

What if we could prevent violence & its downstream impacts?

Child sexual abuse
Growing up in violent household
Other forms of abuse, neglect or family problems

Non-partner sexual or physical violence
Intimate partner violence

Suicidality
HIV infection

Childhood
Adulthood
A contagion lens provides important insights

• Fundamental value of prevention
  – When prevent violence, will prevent downstream violence perpetration & vulnerability

• Important prevention initiatives for intimate partner violence include:
  – Changing social constructions of masculinity
  – Challenging norms about acceptability of violence
  – Women’s economic & social empowerment

• Support interventions may prevent future violence
  – Survivors of violence & children who have grown up in violent households
  – Parenting interventions, to model new norms in behaviour
  – Support interventions to reduce risk of suicide among survivors of violence

• Potential prevention value of interventions in violence ‘hotspots’
  – Large prevalence of exposure
  – High likelihood of ‘transmission’