



Sex Role Behavioral Differences in Parental Alienation

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Introduction

Men and women deal with conflicts in different ways and sex differences have been demonstrated in terms of aggressive behaviors; men may be more likely to use direct aggression whereas women may be more likely to indirectly aggress (Archer, 2004; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Lagerspetz, 1994). Direct aggression includes behaviors such as hitting, punching, or even slapping their ex-partners, and indirect aggression involves behaviors such as aligning with friends, families, making up rumors about their ex-partners, etc. Parental alienation has been a common phenomenon which occurs when one parent attempts to destroy the relationship between the other parent and child, often by criticizing the targeted parent in front of the child and eliminating contact between the targeted parent and child (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Parental alienation is problematic not only because of its immediate effects on the parent-child relationship, but adult children who experienced alienation when they were younger have a variety of psychological issues when they are adults (Baker, 2005). The purpose of the current study is to examine if gender differences exist in the context of divorce, particularly when children are involved when parental alienation occurs.

We hypothesized that men are more likely to use direct aggression to prevent a mother from seeing her children while women would employ more indirect aggression to assist with the alienation.

Methods

Sample

Explain the current sample (40 men, 7 women interviewed) N=47

Procedure

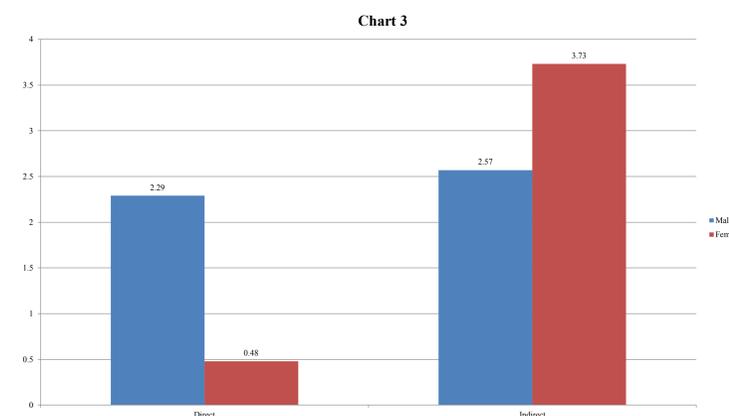
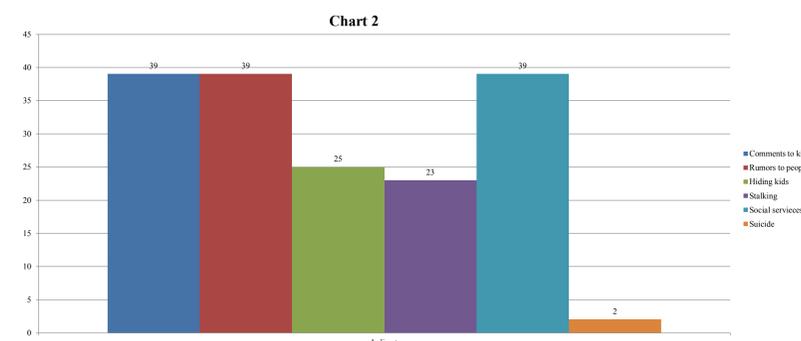
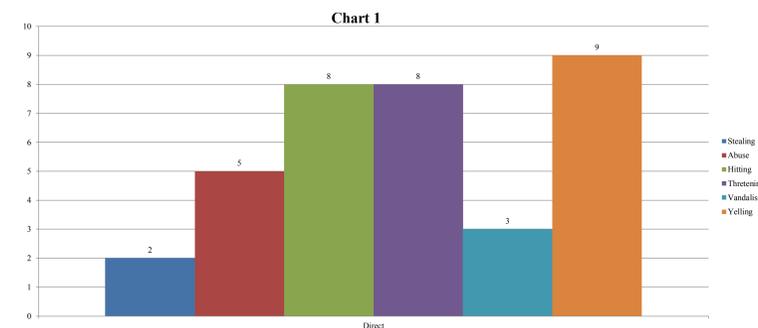
It takes each participant 60-90 minutes to be interviewed by the conductors who are either our research professor or their graduate students. Interview questions involve asking the participants about their basic background or custody situation, their parental alienation experience, etc. Upon completion of transcribing and coding the interviews, the data will be assessed to determine if there are behavioral differences between men and women when parental alienation occurs. So far, forty-eight of them have been transcribed and coded. The process includes research assistants transcribing each interview at least 3 times. And we send the completed transcription to the original interviewee for a final review.

Measure

So far, forty-seven of them have been transcribed and coded. Coding is specified for behavioral clues and we primarily classify the behaviors into two main categories, indirect versus direct, with 6 specific behavioral tactics under each category (Chart 1 & 2). Research assistants read through every completed transcription and mark whether the targeted behaviors occur.

Results

- Both direct and indirect acts of aggression were expressed as tactics for parental alienation (Direct: $M=.74$, $SD=1.15$, Indirect: $M=3.55$, $SD=1.12$). All perps used indirect aggression at least once, whereas 29 of the participants' former partners did not use any direct aggression.
- Men and women were compared to examine the use of direct and indirect aggression in parental alienation. Men were more significantly more likely to utilize direct aggression than women, $t(45) = 4.61$, $p < .001$.
- Women were more likely to utilize indirect aggression towards their male former partners, but this difference was not significant, $t(6.87) = -1.95$, $p = .09$. The Levene statistic was significant indicating that equal variances cannot be assumed. The appropriate corresponding statistics have been presented to account for this.



Conclusion

Implications:

Our hypothesis was partially supported that men directly aggress more, but we can't conclusively determine what tactics women are using most. Based on preliminary data, it appears that indirect aggression is the most common type of aggression when examining parental alienation.

Limitations

Because this is a newer area, it is hard to strictly determine what in this situation falls under each type of aggression (eg. Does hiding kids strictly belong to indirect aggression?) Because it is an ongoing study, there are more samples of female aggressors in the current analysis, the preliminary findings reflect that most of the aggressors tend to use indirect tactics. However, more interviews are to be transcribed as well as coded so there will be a more balanced ratio between male and female aggressors. And inter-rater reliability would increase when we have more research assistants code for the study.

Future Directions:

we will continue coding and reassessing for new findings with final data of about 100 samples with a balanced distribution between men and women. Since it is a new topic in Psychology field, other research studies are also being conducted in relation to Parental Alienation. Our ultimate goal is to call attention to the prevalence and the danger of Parental Alienation and make improvements for divorced families with kids in terms of legal custody.

References

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