

Best Master Thesis

Long-term effect of childhood abuses on parenting competencies: How the self-efficacy belief of parents who were abused as children is modulated by social, conjugal and family support?

Audrey, Baiverlin sous la direction du Prof. Adélaïde BLAVIER**¹*

Keywords : Maltreatment – Children - Parenting

Theoretical basis.

The self-efficacy belief is the belief that a parent has constructed about his/her competencies to adequately answer to his/her child's needs¹. This belief is divided in two components: efficacy belief (the belief to adequately take care of her/his child) and satisfaction belief (the pleasure to be in relation with her/his child).

Child clinical psychology is very interested in the self-efficacy belief because recent studies showed that working on self-efficacy belief is a very relevant and successful therapeutic method which should be used during therapies². Indeed, when a parent is confident about his/her parental skills, this good perception positively influences his/her actual parental practices in the reality, which has a positive impact on child's behavior and especially decreases the presence of behavioral disorders². The self-efficacy belief is therefore primordial, while we know how much child's behavioral disorders are harmful for the family dynamics, for the other children in the environment and mostly for the child himself who may be rejected by school and later by society. Moreover, the child behavioral disorders lead to an important societal cost at short term because of the set up of a psychological and speech therapy follow up, but also at middle and long term because of the numerous consequences of specialized education. The self-efficacy belief may bring some answers to this society problem by offering to work directly with parents in order to evaluate what is possible to implement in these families as today's children are the society of tomorrow. Parents with a history of abuse may have the first concerned by a problem of self-efficacy belief.

Indeed, previous studies showed that parents who were abused when they were children have a major probability to present a low self-efficacy belief. However, the current scientific literature remains inconsistent about which kind of abuse (physical, psychological, sexual or neglect) may lead a lower self-efficacy belief^{7,8,9,6,10,11}. These contradictory findings may be explained by two limits of current studies. First, their results came from a small sample because of the difficulty for having access to this population of parents who were abused when they were child. Secondly, the studies focused on one kind of abuse (physical, psychological, sexual or neglect) while participants may have experienced many kinds of child abuse. Some studies have even shown that an abused children is seldom victim of only one kind of abuse^{12,13,9}.

* 0498183756 ; Rue Defrance 37/12 – 4000 Liège ; Audrey.Baiverlin@ulg.ac.be

** Centre d'Expertise en Psychotraumatisme et Psychologie Légale, Faculté de Psychologie, Logopédie et Sciences de l'Education, Université de Liège

A recent study realized by Blavier et al. (2013)¹⁵ showed abuse experience during childhood, and particularly child sexual abuse, is not the only element responsible for a lower self-efficacy belief, but instead many other contextual elements considerably influence the self-efficacy belief. According to these first results, the characteristics of social and family context in which the child grew up had a considerable impact on the self-efficacy belief when the child becomes an adult^{14,15,16}. Among these elements, the two major factors were the fact to have been victim of more than one type of abuse and the fact that sexual abuse was intra-family instead of extra-family. Moreover, this research pointed out other factors as not having a feeling of security, not being heard or sustained or the impossibility to report the abuse.

The objective of our master thesis was to analyze which factors may modulate the effect of abuse on self-efficacy belief of parents who were abused when they were child. Previous studies showed that the image that the parent had about himself/herself was highly correlated with some variables as social^{3,4}, conjugal^{5,6} or family⁷ support. In this context, our aim was to analyze how social, conjugal and family supports may influence the effect of child abuse on parental self-efficacy belief.

Methods.

In order to conduct a quantitative study with a hard-to-reach population, we diffused an online survey on various aid groups using the social media "Facebook". Some of these groups were specialized on parenthood or on child abuse. This method allowed interested persons to anonymously participate in the research.

The participants answered to a sociodemographic questionnaire designed for this study, to the "Childhood Trauma Questionnaire" (Bernstein & Fink, 1994), the "Questionnaire d'Auto-Évaluation de la Compétence Parentale" (Terisse & Trudelle, 1988), the "Parental bonding instrument" (Parker, 1979), the "Echelle d'Ajustement du couple" (Spanier, 1976) and the "Echelle des Provisions sociales" (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). These surveys respectively evaluated the abuse during childhood, the self-efficacy belief, the parent's presence during childhood, the conjugal satisfaction and the social support.

Results.

Our online survey was consulted by 14.555 persons and we collected 828 complete protocols, which is a considerable number as much we know this population is hard to reach. More precisely, our sample was composed by 675 women, whose 207 were abused during their childhood and 153 men, whose 42 were abused during their childhood.

Our data showed the self-efficacy belief was lower for parents who were abused during their childhood. Nevertheless, only one of two components of the self-efficacy beliefs (the efficacy belief and the satisfaction belief) was altered by childhood maltreatment: indeed, parents who were abused during their childhood felt as much efficacy to care their children as parents who were not abused during their childhood, while they were less satisfied about their relationship with their child.

Moreover, our results showed self-efficacy belief was also influenced by the kind of abuse undergone during the childhood. First of all, the self-efficacy belief of parents who were sexually abused but who were not victim of another kind of abuse during their childhood was lower, but not significantly different, than the self-efficacy belief of parent who were not abused during their childhood. Moreover, the self-efficacy belief of these parent who were sexually abused during their childhood

but who were not victim of another kind of abuse was significantly higher than the self-efficacy belief of parents who were victim of other kinds of abuse (physical, psychological or neglect).

Our results also showed the mothers who were abused during their childhood became with age as satisfied about their parenting as all the others parents. The self-efficacy belief of fathers who were physically and/or psychologically abused or neglected during their childhood was more influenced by social, conjugal and family support than parents who were not abused during childhood. Therefore, when one of these three supports was high, the fathers who were abused during their childhood had a better self-efficacy belief than all of the others parents (abused and not abused).

At last, the self-efficacy belief of parents who were sexually abused during their childhood (with or without another kind of abuse), in contrast to self-efficacy belief of other parents, was not impacted by social, conjugal and family support.

Discussion.

Conclusions of previous studies were the product of data from a small sample. Thus, results of these studies were inconsistent. This Master thesis evaluated the self-efficacy belief from a large sample of participants (n=828) and it not only showed that parents who were abused in their childhood presented a lower self-efficacy belief than parents who were not abused. Indeed, this master thesis highlighted these parents had more probability to present a low self-efficacy belief if they didn't have social, conjugal and family support. This result allows to emphasize a pluralism risk factors in order to preventively work with these parents, but it also allows to give information to professionals for improving their practice.

More precisely, our results showed a difference in the self-efficacy belief among parents who were not abused during their childhood, parents who were sexually abused and parents who were physically and/or psychologically abused or neglected. Indeed, a history of sexual abuse (without any other kind of abuse) had no significant impact on self-efficacy belief, in contrast to the other kinds of abuse (physical, psychological and neglect) that significantly affected the self-efficacy belief. A main difference between sexual abuse and the other kinds of abuse (physical, psychological and neglect) is the element of family and social context in which children grew up. These elements are generally more positive when child is only sexually abused (and not physically and/or psychologically abused or neglected): indeed, in this case, the abuse is more often extra-family and a sexually abused child can feel safe and in security at home, can be heard and supported, ... while this is more seldom if the child is victim of physical and/or psychological abuse or neglect, which is a more intra-family problem. Thenceforth, social and family support during childhood seems be more determinant to elaborate the future self-efficacy belief of a child than the traumatic experiment itself.

Our results showed the self-efficacy belief was differently influenced by the presence of abuse during childhood, but also by the kind of abuse and by the parent's sex. This result suggests that variables that have to be worked in therapy with parents who were not abused during their childhood are not the same as variables that must be worked with parents who were sexually, physically and/or psychologically abused or neglected.

Thenceforth, this result emphasizes the relevance of current psychotherapy methods because presently, it doesn't exist specific intervention method to improve the self-efficacy belief of parents who were abused during their childhood. This master thesis highlights the necessity to study it,

because this population is particularly in risk to present a low self-efficacy belief. This question is clinically but also socially important because studies have widely shown that when parents can perceive the good side of the relationship with their child, they become more confident, and this has a positive impact on their behavior but also on child behavior, and this in a really short term because only 8 sessions are enough to be effective².

An adaptation of the current psychological support according to the parent's childhood would allow to make them more efficient. Our first results show when we work with a population of parents who were abused during their childhood, it is important to particularly focus on the satisfaction belief, in order to permit to the parents to take more pleasure in the relationship with their child. This dimension of pleasure should be improving by a specific focus on the three perceptions: the social, conjugal and family support.

The main contributions of this master thesis are the fact to have evaluated the effects of the different types of child abuse so far back (adulthood) but also to study them with a less investigated population (as abused father for example). Another novelty mark of our research is that it covered risk factors but also and above all we focused on resilience factors that had to be promoted. Finally, we constructed a statistical model with our data, collected from a large sample of participants (n=828), which allowed to identify the childhood patterns that were more susceptible to conduct to a low self-efficacy belief in adulthood.

References.

1 Duclos (2009). *L'estime de soi des parents*, Montréal. 2 Loop et al. (2015). *Stress et défis de la parentalité*. Bruxelles : De Boeck. 3 DiLillo, et al. (2000). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24. 4 Ruscio (2001). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25(3). 5 DiLillo (2001). *Clinic Psychol Rev*, 21(4). 6 Zuravin & Fontanella (1999). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23, 623-6. 7 Banyard (1997). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 21. 8 Berthelot (2010). *Thèse de doctorat en Psychologie*. Université Laval, Canada. 9 Collin-Vezina (2005). *J Trauma & Dissociation*, 6. 10 Cohen (1995). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19. 11 Fitzgerald, et al. (2005). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(6). 12 Banyard, et al. (2001). *J Trauma & Dissociation*, 14. 13 Brière (1996). *Therapy for adults molested as children*. 14 Baiverlin (2017). *Mémoire de master en Psychologie*. Université de Liège. 15 Blavier, et al. (2013). *CIFAS*. 16 Fivet (2011). *Mémoire de master en Psychologie*. Université de Liège.