

Policy Brief: Adolescent Health is Affected by Family Disadvantage and Abusive Parenting

Citation: Meinck, F, Cluver, L, Orkin, M, Kuo, C, Sharma, A, Hensels, I & Sherr, L. (2017) 'Pathways from family disadvantage via abusive parenting and caregiver mental health to adolescent health risks in South Africa' Journal of Adolescent Health 60(1):57-64.

The Questions:

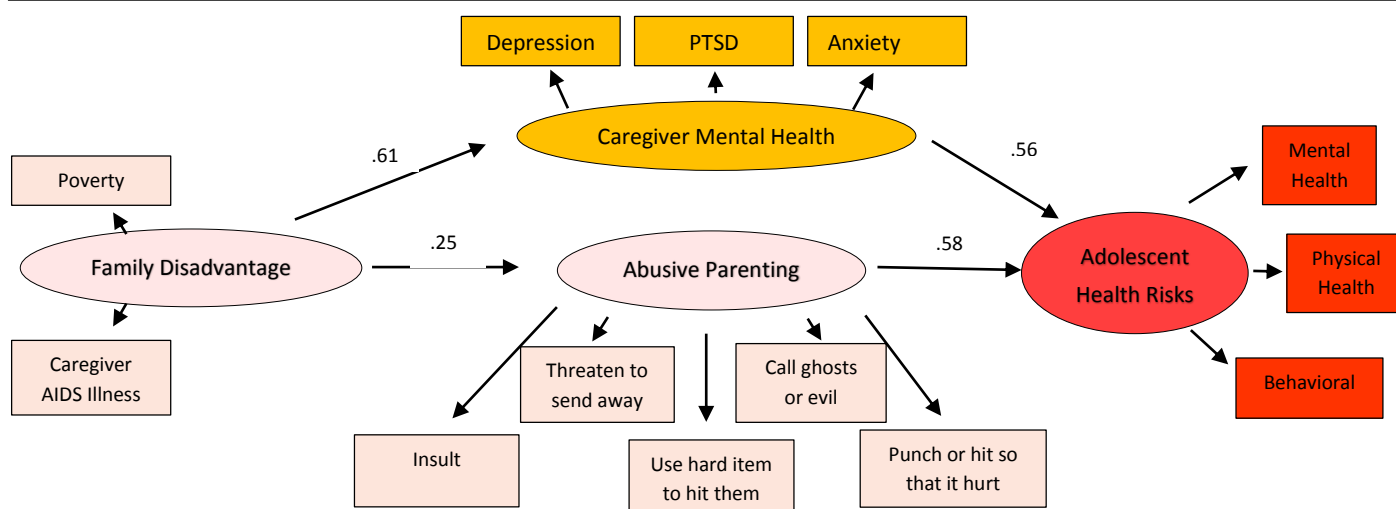
- Evidence shows that adolescents in South Africa have poor mental and physical health. But we need to understand the risk factors for these outcomes
- The study aims to identify these pathways and thus aims to identify important targets for intervention
- 3 key risk factors are examined: family disadvantage, abusive parenting and caregiver mental health.

The Research:

- Cross sectional study of 2477 dyads of adolescents aged 10 to 17 years (< 0.5% refusal) and their primary caregivers, 2009 – 2010.
- Urban and one rural health districts in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
- Validated scales and symptoms checklists were used. Structural equation modelling in AMOS 21 identified pathways of risk.

Key Findings:

- Poverty and caregiver AIDS-illness increase risk for caregiver mental health problems and for abusive parenting
- Abusive parenting and caregiver mental health problems both in turn increase risk for poor adolescent health outcomes
- These pathways work in chain effects – they link with each other to increase risk further
- To prevent poor adolescent health outcomes, it is thus important to not only address adolescent physical and mental health concerns but to also target interventions at the risk pathways



Implications for programming:

- Targeting programmes at risk factors such as poverty, child abuse and poor caregiver mental health can interrupt pathways of risk for vulnerable adolescents in South Africa
- Reducing family disadvantage and abusive parenting is essential in improving adolescent health in South Africa.
- Combination interventions including poverty and violence reduction, access to mental and physical health services for caregivers and adolescents, and positive parenting support are needed to improve adolescent health outcomes

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