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Socioeconomic Status as a Factor of Male Domestic Violence: Adaptations Due to Paternity Uncertainty Theory

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Abstract: This article proposes the hypothesis that males of low socioeconomic status (SES) would more likely be a perpetrator of domestic violence due to selection pressures branching from paternity uncertainty. This article would address two points: 1) males are more prone to use violence to control female sexuality to solve the adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty 2) violent mechanisms to control female sexuality and ensure paternity certainty of males of lower SES are more easily triggered due to a more exaggerated fear of losing valuable resources compared to males of higher SES. This study will focus on Chinese society in particular and will base the experiment on the Chinese population using a questionnaire.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Socioeconomic Status, Paternity Uncertainty, Adaptations

1. Introduction

Globally, the WHO (World Health Organization) estimates in 2018 that 640 million women, about 27% of all women aged 15 or older [1], have been subjected to violence by an intimate partner (e.g., husband). These statistics suggest a grave issue, and it is clear that domestic violence affects the lives of many. Domestic violence is a pervasive problem across the globe, mainly with males as the abusers. According to the Chinese government's "Judicial Data Research Institute," 91.43% of cases involving domestic violence in the country are committed by men as perpetrators against women. These statistics prompted the question: why are such a large number of violent domestic abusers male? This study proposes a possible explanation and includes the outline of an experiment designed to test it. For the purpose of this study, domestic violence is defined as any act of physical violence only acted upon women by men.

2. Theory

The goal of all organisms is to survive, and reproduction is what ensures the survival and continuation of their genes. To see this in an evolutionary lens, to reproduce is the ultimate adaptive problem and the ultimate evolutionary pressure. However, reproduction is not a simple, easily solved, one-step problem. It is multi-faceted, with a variety of challenges. Thus, organisms evolved many designs to

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facilitate reproduction. Paternity uncertainty applies to organism reproducing with internal fertilization, where the male counterpart's contribution in reproduction is simply a gamete. This states that the female, who carries the offspring, is always sure that it contains her genetic identity, but the male can never be sure. This was an evolutionary problem imposed on the males, and they developed multiple strategies to overcome this. Looking at patriarchal society, this is an undertone that becomes apparent both on a social and cultural level: marriage vows pledge to be "a faithful wife/husband", religions laws emphasize chastity in its followers [2], and the chastity of a women is often emphasized. The 'undertone', indicates a strong concern for sexual infidelity, which revolves around the concerns of paternity uncertainty. Goetz explains that over time, men have evolved psychological mechanisms dedicated to assess risks of a partner's sexual infidelity, meaning their minds are "hypersensitive to cues of sexual infidelity" [3]. These mechanisms can be generalized as "mate-guarding" adaptions [3, 4]. Mate-guarding is not a mechanism only apparent in humans, similar practices in our closest relatives, primates, helps us observe the adaptive nature of this mechanism. If a female Hamadryas baboon strays afar from her male (which might indicate the inclination to mate with one of the outside "bachelor males"), males threaten the female by aggressive behavior and attacks her with a neck-bite [5]. This act of aggression is an act to control female sexuality and a response to likely infidelity. Domestic violence, therefore, can be understood under a similar context. It can be said that males, with the problem of paternity uncertainty, formed adaptive mechanisms suited to solve this problem that might have given them more inclination to use violence in a sexual relationship.

Ensuring fidelity is not the final step in most human relationships, the father also stays to raise the offspring. Babies require a lot of resources, care, and time to raise, as revealed by the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child". In prehistoric times, team effort was needed to provide the needed food and shelter for the offspring to grow. To put in modern terms, statistics by 2019 estimate that 485,000 yuan is required to raise a child to the age of 18 in China. This is approximately 6.9 times China's per capita GDP at the time [6]. Males have limited resources to raise a child, and in the circumstances of being cuckolded, or in other words, female infidelity, males risk investing in another's child [4]. To people of low-income level (low SES), child-raising uses a large percentage of their resources, an almost un-repairable damage. Examining these established data and theories, This paper hypothesize that males of lower SES level would be more inclined to domestically abuse their spouse (as a result of adaptational "mate-guarding" tactics to ensure paternity uncertainty) due to an exaggerated apprehension of losing valuable resources in raising another's child.

3. Current Investigations

Multiple studies have been done on the relationship between coercive sexuality and paternal uncertainty. Burch and Gallup's research show when males suspect sexual infidelity and were jealous, their mate guarding behaviors doubled, and there is an increase in efforts forcing their partner to have undesired sex. Aggression against their mate also increases when there are "potentially unrelated children" [7]. This study is a direct demonstration of violent tendencies in the case of paternity uncertainty (for more examples, see Goetz 2008 and Thornhill&Thornhill [3, 8]. This article aims to explore domestic violence from a starting point but pin-pointing on a specific group with paternal uncertainty as a more apparent cause. Parish, Pan, Luo, Wang, and Laumann did extensive research in 2004, looking at domestic violence in China and a variety of causes. They questioned the participants about their SES and analyzing the relationship between the two. The data showed that "almost half of women whose partner was of low status had ever been hit" and that the "male partner being of low or middle socio-economic status" was "positively associated" with male-on-female hitting [9]. They argued that the male being of low SES likely "create more stress between spouses", which may lead to domestic violence [9]. This conclusion is well supported; however, in this article, this work proposes a different approach of how low SES would possibly increase domestic abuse.

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This work's approach looks at the subject from an evolutionary psychology perspective. This does not disqualify the stress hypothesis [9], instead it might add some context.

4. Cultural and Societal Context of Domestic violence in China

This paper acknowledges that in the case where this work's hypothesis is supported by the data, it is definitely not the single explanation. Domestic violence is a severe and extremely complicated problem that varies from case to case; therefore, it would be wrong and naive to think it can be explained only with an adaptational view. Cultural and societal environment will support and even escalate domestic violence in some cases, and economic factors are just as likely to come into view [10]. The status of women in contemporary Chinese society has greatly improved, and more women have received education and have independent minds. However, domestic violence against women in the family is still a common as serious social problem [10]. According to data released by the All-China Women's Federation in 2020, a woman in China may bullied by her husband every 7.4 seconds. Domestic violence affects about 30 percent of women in 270 million households, and 60 percent of the 150 thousand women who commit suicide each year are unable to tolerate it. It can be seen that the frequency of domestic violence in China is frequent, and many women suffer as a result.

4.1. Cultural and Social Causes of Domestic Violence for Women

From the perspective of women themselves, due to the Chinese traditional culture, men need to earn money but women only need to take care of their children [11]. Even in modern society now, there are still women who do not participate in social work and take care of family affairs full time, resulting in women not having economic independence, and having to depend their survival on men. This situation has contributed to the idea of "the economic base determines the family status" of the man, that the woman has a life that is self-provided. In a sense, the woman is her own servant, so she thinks that her domestic violence is reasonable, and she would rather endure domestic violence than leave the man because of her spiritual independence.

4.2. Economic level and social class distribution of the group of men as abusers

According to the research, if women have less economic control, they will become more dependent on men, thus reaching a state of male power. The more power men have, the change is likely to occur domestic violence behavior. In the social environment "male superiority" deep brainwashing, men will indeed be affected. It's a social influence.

5. Experiment Design

To test whether the work's hypothesis is wrong or right, the authors designed an experiment. Participants of the experiment would be a large number of males and females (married or in an established relationship) of any social class. SES levels are the independent variable of the experiment, and the answers of different SES levels would be compared [12]. The authors shall employ a correlative questionnaire, and participants will receive rewards as incentives to finish the questionnaire.

Below is the planned content of the questionnaire:

1. Are you male or female?
2. What is your marital or relationship status?
3. Do you have children?
4. For female: What is the SES levels of your spouse?
   For male: What are your SES levels?

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*We will not display all the questions and scales here (for details check)
5. Do you have any case of physically attacking your spouse?
6. The reason is for your action of physically attacking:
A. The victim does not know the position of themselves in household.
B. The victim cheated on me.
C. I have much outside pressure.
D. I suspect the victim is not loyal to me.
E. Other…
7. Do you have any case of being physically attacked by your spouse?
8. How many times do you have experienced?
(1) (1-3) (4-6) (7-9) and more
9. Did it occur before or after giving birth to the child?

Some people might be confused about the eighth question and think it is not necessary. Instead, the eighth question is very important because it can help us learn about whether the males of low SES level have more violent behavior than those of high SES level do that.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary

This research has shown that the violence is a by-product of paternity uncertainty which is an evolutionary problem during reproduction. It's a behavior of men who fear a lack of power in their spousal relationship and a lack of control over their partner's sexuality and reproductive resource [13]. In the experiment of Uri Gneezy, Kenneth L. Leonard, John A. List about a patriarchal society and a matrilineal society, they have proved that men opt to compete more often than women [14]. It will be a motivation for males to take action to control female. The hypothesis is domestic violence is more prevalent among low SES men. They dominate less resource and it's more valuable for them. They more worried about these resources being inherited by people who are not their descendants. Thus, they use violence to keep their heir is their blood related descendant.

Culture and social cause also exist in the domestic violence. In the paternity society, domestic violence will be more often because males dominate most proportion of resource. These females almost unable to live independently without their partner and have low family status due to their low economic status.

In the paper, we design two different questionnaires target to whether the participant is male or female and select the participants randomly to keep accuracy of the experiment. The aim is using this experiment to evaluate the hypothesis.

6.2. Limitation

The limitation of the experiment still exists due to unreliability of partial participants. In Caetano's study, men report less male-on-female hitting than women, possibly because of legal and social disapproval [15]. Thus, some participants will not write down their true thoughts. This research uses the questionnaire as a study method, which means supervise them to make sure they write down their true thoughts is almost impossible. The deviation of collected data is inevitable.

This research only focuses on the physical violence. Mental violence like verbal abuse and emotional abuse is also a part of domestic violence can also cause mental illness and other negative impact. There isn't an explicit standard and definition of injury of mental violence until now. The mental violence has become increasingly common between Chinese cohabiters in recent years. Therefore, the work plan to also focus this research on mental abuse in the future.

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