

Intergenerational Mental Health Effects of Traumatic Victimization in Nepal: A 3-D Theory Study

Background. Intergenerational transmission of trauma is a major focus of international research. Epigenetic, complex-trauma, and intergenerational abuse pattern transmission theoretical explanations all have existing empirical support. Three-D theory argues that in addition to trauma victimization severity, victimization invasiveness and exploitativeness have important independent effects. Moreover, 3-D theory claims that a positive 3-way interaction occurs between trauma victimization invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity. This study examines the 3-D hypotheses in the context of intergenerational trauma effects on adolescent depression symptoms and suicidal ideation in generation two. Three-D theory may play a particularly important role in intergenerational trauma effects for female victims in the context of conservative South Asian sex role norms.

Objective. Test for main effects, two-way, and three-way interaction effects of invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity of traumatic victimization on intergenerational transmission to adolescent depression and suicidal ideation in generation two. Pathways from maternal depression and borderline personality symptoms as well as physical and sexual abuse and neglect of the adolescent child were also tested.

Participants and setting. Participants were a nationally representative, random, multi-stage cluster sample of 1,089 Nepali mothers and their 15-17 years old adolescent children.

Methods. Regression models with adjustments for clustering within municipality were used to test the hypotheses.

Results. A three-way interaction effect between maternal trauma invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity was positively associated with adolescent depression symptoms. A two-way interaction effect between exploitativeness and severity of maternal trauma was positively associated with adolescent suicidal ideation. Maternal depression, BPD symptoms, and very severe physical abuse of the adolescent were also associated with adolescent depression symptoms.

Conclusion. Further research is needed to measure and investigate invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity of traumatic victimization as they bear on intergenerational transmission of trauma. Examination of intergenerational transmission of self-concept as a potential vector is recommended.

Keywords: intergenerational transmission of trauma; 3-D theory; invasiveness; exploitativeness; adolescent depression and suicide.