Emotional Injuries by Parents & Forgiveness in Families

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Introduction / Background

Emotional Injuries
- In some families, the actions and/or inactions of family members can contribute to the negative emotional experiences of other family members (hurt and anger).
  - These hurtful experiences have been called emotional injuries (Diamond, Siqueland, & Diamond, 2003)
- Emotional injuries inflicted by parents may be particularly important for children’s psychosocial adjustment.

Forgiveness and Rumination
- Children’s inability to forgive their parents for emotional injuries may have implications for the development of key skills and competencies.
  - Forgiveness is defined as a change in a victim’s response tendencies that are the result of being wrongfully harmed (McCullough, Sandage, Brown, Nuchal, Worthington, Hight, 1998)
- One such developmental skill that may be influenced by unforgiveness of parents is emotion regulation.
  - Rumination is one component of emotion regulation and is the tendency to continuously think about aspects of a situation that are upsetting (Peled & Mocetti, 2007)

Purpose of Present Study
- To examine the association between unforgiveness of parents and rumination

Method

Participants
- 194 undergraduate students recruited from a Southern region of U.S.
  - Between 18- and 19-years-old

Procedure
- Secondary analysis of self-report questionnaires

Measures
- Forgiveness was assessed using the 18-item Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) and a 4-item scale created for the present study that assessed continued hurt. Items were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.
- Rumination was assessed using the Sadness (11-items) and Anger (11-items) Rumination Inventory (SARI). Items were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Results
- Strongest positive correlations were found between continued hurt and rumination of sadness (r = .29) and rumination of anger (r = .24)
- Weak correlations between other aspects of forgiveness and rumination of sadness and anger (except revenge)

Examples of Questionnaire Items

TRIM Items
- Based upon the event/circumstance you indicated was the most hurtful or most difficult with your parent/caregiver, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:
  - I withdraw from my parent/caregiver (avoidance)
  - I’ll make my parent/caregiver pay (revenge)
  - Despite what my parent/caregiver did, I want us to have a positive relationship again (benevolence)
  - I still am hurt by the event/circumstance (continued hurt)

SARI Items
- Indicate how often you do the following things when you are SAD or ANGRY by selecting the corresponding bubble.
  - Whenever I am sad, I keep thinking about it for a while (rumination of sadness)
  - I think about certain events form the past and they still make me angry (rumination of anger)

Results (Correlations of Forgiveness & Rumination)

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Coefficient Alpha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Avoidance</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.00 – 5.00</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Revenge Seeking</td>
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<td>0.60</td>
<td>1.00 – 4.40</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td>3. Benevolence</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00 – 5.00</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<td>4. Continued Hurt</td>
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<td>1.00 – 5.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>0.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rumination</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>5. Sadness</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.00 – 5.00</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Anger</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.00 – 5.00</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ns range from 190 to 194. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Results (Correlations)

Forgiveness Correlations

Rumination Correlations

Discussion and Future Directions

- Findings suggest that individuals who continue to feel hurt by their parents’ actions and/or inactions tend to have difficulties letting go of sad and angry feelings
- Mental health professionals who are working with individuals who tend to perseverate on negative emotional experiences may assess whether they are also harboring pain caused by their parents
  - If so, designing interventions that directly address these hurt feelings could help address rumination difficulties

Acknowledgements

- Gilbert R. Parra, Ph.D. UNL Faculty Mentor
- UNL McNair Scholars Program