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The Relationships between Perceived Systemic Family Violence and Children's Problematic Behaviors

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This study examined the effect of systemic family violence (e.g. marital conflict between parents, parent-child conflict, and sibling conflict) on children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. 540 sixth grade students in East Taiwan participated in this study and were invited to fill out questionnaires of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSS-A form, Straus and Gelles, 1979) and the Youth Self-Report (YSR, Achenbach, 1991). 492 questionnaires were valid for analyses. The results indicated that sibling conflict is most frequent, followed by parent-child conflict. Forms of family violence can co-occur, and each type of domestic violence was significantly related to specific internal or external behavior problems. Gender and ethnicity effect were found in children's perception of family conflict and their report of behavioral problems. Girls tended to perceive more sibling conflict and more withdrawal problems than boys. Children whose fathers were aboriginal perceived more marital conflict, father-child conflict, sibling conflict and more somatic complaints and criminal behaviors.

KEY WORDS: Marital Conflict, Parent-Child Conflict, Sibling Conflict, Children's Problematic Behaviors

Over the past few decades the problem of domestic violence has received much attention in the U.S. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the United States, 3.5 million cases of family violence occurred between 1998 and 2003. Domestic violence accounts for more than half of the homicides of women (2005), and more than 3 million American children between the ages of 3 and 17 years witness domestic violence every year (U. S. Department of Justice, 1998, cited from Bureau of Justice Statistic, 2005). Many studies have noted that when children are either victims of violence, or witnesses to spousal violence, they demonstrate a high frequency of externalizing (e.g., aggression, non-compliance, and delinquency) and internalizing problems (e.g. withdrawn, anxious, somatic complaints) (Groves, 1999; Hornor, 2005; Mahoney

& Campbell, 1998). Most of the research investigating how domestic violence affects children focuses on the single dimension of family aggression. However, many different forms of family violence exist and can co-occur (McCloskey & Figueredo, 1995; Appel & Holden, 1998). Neglect of the topic of sibling conflict and interparental conflict in studies on child abuse ignores mechanisms of child maltreatment and limits the understanding of family relationships in the context of the family as a whole. This study investigates the relationships between different forms of aggression within families so as to highlight the reasons for and ultimate effects of family violence.

Although wives are usually the most direct victims of marital violence, children, are also influenced. Witnessing violence between parents is considered to be a highly stressful event for children, and is a high risk factor for psycho-social problems in children (Straus, 1990). Exposure to marital violence can create stress, fear, and feelings of helplessness in a child, resulting in behavioral and emotional disturbances (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Groves, 1999). Arroyo and Eth (1995) indicated that children of battered women usually demonstrate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after witnessing their mothers being beaten. The children showed anxiety, depression, fear, helplessness, low self-esteem and poor social behavior (David, Steele, Forehand & Armistead, 1996). Bennett (1997) reviewed relevant studies and found that children in families with spousal abuse problems display three areas of behavioral problems including internal and emotional problems (e.g., depression, low self-esteem, withdrawal, self-blame, and suicidal intentions), school adjustment problems (e.g., social competence, lack of ability in social problem solving) and external behavioral problems (e.g., committing crimes, displaying aggression, and substance abuse).

Some researchers have suggested that marital violence may be related to child behavior problems due to an association with parent-child aggression (Jouriles, Mehta, McDonald, & Francis, 1997). O'Keefe (1994) and McCloskey and Figueredo (1995) found that in violent homes, more marital violence witnessed by the child was related to higher levels of father-child aggression. McCloskey and Figueredo (1995) further explained that these fathers hurt the children in order to spite the mothers. Mothers in domestic violence relationships are more likely to physically or emotionally abuse their children than are mothers in nonviolent relationships (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Conner, 2004). The abuser is typically the batterer of the mothers, but the mother may also physically abuse the child (Wilden, Williamson, & Wilson, 1991).

Physical child abuse often co-occurs with marital violence, but of course it can also happen as an isolated event. Since parental punishment has been generally used as a way to discipline the child, child abuse is sometimes difficult to distinguish from corporal punishment. Bower and Knutson (1996) indicated that when adults who were abused as children were asked to recollect their early memories of abusive experiences, most denied having had such experiences. However, when asked to freely describe their strongest memories of parent-child interaction, many statements referring to spanking or slapping arose. Although corporal punishment is not the only form of physical abuse, most physical abuse results from corporal punishment (Wauchope & Straus, 1990). Empirical results in the U.S. also indicate that abused children display cognition disorders, social difficulty, emotional disturbances and delinquent behavior. They also have difficulty establishing friendships with peers, use immature defense mechanisms, and demonstrate social withdrawal (Gelles & Cornell, 1998; Hornor, 2005). Physical violence from parents is often related to children's aggressive behaviors. By modeling parents' aggressive behaviors, children learn that punishment is a way to resolve problems, and thus are more likely to display aggression towards others (Gelles & Cornell, 1998; Herrera & McCloskey, 2001; Hornor, 2005).

Compared to marital conflict and parent-child conflict, sibling conflict has been found to occur most frequently, although it is seldom recognized (Gelles & Cornell, 1998). Sibling violence occurs in approximately 63% to 73% of American homes. (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Although the existence of sibling conflict has been documented, most parents don't consider it to be a serious issue. Most parents, regardless of culture, consider sibling rivalry to be an inevitable part of growing up and consider it to provide good training for the management of aggressive behavior in the real world. Vandell and Bailey (1992) commented that sibling conflict could be either destructive or constructive, each of which would result in different behavioral consequences. From the constructive perspective, children can learn how to manage and resolve conflicts and enhance development of competence and courage; they also learn skills e.g. the ability to deflect aggression, to use it wisely and at the right moment, to surrender without debasing oneself, and to defeat others without humiliating them (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Wiehe, 1997), that can be used in other relationships. On the other hand, sibling conflict can be destructive and result in certain delinquent behaviors such as smoking and drinking (Huang, 1994), or psychosocial problems such as anxiety and depression, as well as lower levels of self-esteem (Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1992).

Family harmony is a traditional value emphasized in Chinese culture. Family conflicts or violence are a taboo topic which is rarely discussed. However, as society is changing, increasing numbers of incidents of family violence are reported and are found to be associated with behavioral problems among youth. In 2002, there were 36,120 cases of domestic violence resulting in applications for judicial protection. In 2004, this number increased to 53,044 cases, almost 145 cases per day (R.O. C. Ministry of the Interior, 2005). Despite recognition that family violence occurs, only a few studies in Taiwan have investigated the topic of abuse and how children may be affected when facing either marital violence between their parents, or child abuse (Shiah, 1999; Tsang, 1998). This study expands the work of previous studies by investigating the influences of various types of domestic violence including conflict between parents, between parent and child, and between siblings, on children's internal as well external behavioral problems. Subjects who participated in this study were sixth-grade students in the Taitung area. Taitung is located in southeastern Taiwan and has specific ethnic characteristics; that is, the aboriginal population is high compared to the rest of the country. The ratio of non-aboriginal to aboriginal is about 2:1. Though there are no precise statistics which show the occurrence of family violence in the aboriginal community, Yen (2000) indicated that family violence did commonly occur in aboriginal families. The purposes of this study are 1). to describe the occurrence of family violence in Taitung; (2) to examine the relationships among marital conflict witnessed by children, parent-child conflict and sibling conflict; 3). to investigate the relationship between family violence and children's internal vs. external behaviors; and 4). to inspect the potential effect of children's demographic background (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and social economic status) on their perceived family violence occurrence and their internal vs. external behaviors.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Participants in this study were 540 sixth graders (302 boys and 238 girls) from 23 schools in Taitung (including Taitung city, Kuang-Sun, Ti-Ma-Li, Cheng-Kung, Charng-Bing and Lu-Yeh), selected by

randomly stratified cluster sampling. Consent was initially obtained from parents, students, and school principals. Data were collected at the schools from January to March 1999. Of the 540 participants, 48 participants did not complete the questionnaires, and 492 questionnaires (273 boys and 215 girls) were valid in the study. The breakdown of the parents' marital status was as follows: married, 79.5%; divorced, 6.7 %, separated, 4.5%, widowed, 3.9%, remarried, 3.7% and unidentified, 1.6%. Ethnicity status (based on fathers' ethnicity): aboriginal , 28.0%, non-aboriginal, 67.7%, and unidentified, 4.3%.

Social economic status (SES) was indexed by a combination of the father's occupation and both the father's and mother's educational levels. The classification of occupation was based on Huang's study (1998), which classified occupations in Taiwan into five groups: non-skilled worker, farmer or fisherman; skilled workers and machinists; technical personnel and professional assistants; office clerks; and professional executives. In the current study, only the father's occupation was examined as there were too many missing values for the mother's occupation.

Measure

Subjects completed a series of measures at a time, including their personal backgrounds, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (couple version, parent-child version, and sibling version), and the Youth Self-Report (YSR). This study used CTS- Form A as the measure of family conflict. This form was developed in Straus's early study. The CTSs-A form is a self-report measure that consists of three sections, including marital conflict as witnessed by children, parent-child conflict and sibling conflict. This form was used to acquire a consistent measurement of family conflict as it was the only CTS version that included the measure of sibling conflict.

Straus and Gelles (1979) defined violence as "the intended to occur or occurred behavioral assault or psychological aggression among family members" . In the measurement of marital conflict and sibling conflict, types of family violence are classified as reasoning, verbal aggression and physical violence. In the measurement of parent-child conflict, family violence is categorized into 3 groups: nonviolent discipline, psychological aggression and physical assault.

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS)-Couple Version

The amount of marital violence witnessed by the child was measured with the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus & Gelles, 1979). Children indicated the frequency with which they saw their fathers and their mothers perform each of the aggressive acts against each other during the year prior to the assessment. The scale, consisting of 15 items, assesses husband-to-wife violence and wife-to-husband violence. Each item is scored on a scale from 0 (never happened) to 5 (more than 1 time a month). There was no perception of difference between husband-to-wife and wife-to-husband violence for children in pilot study, so in formal study the scale was simplified to measure the children's perceptions of marital violence between parents. Factor analysis with promax rotation extracted only two factors accounting for 56.7% of variance in this study. Factor 1 contained 10 items that described physical or verbal aggression between parents, and was labeled the Physical Assault factor. Examples of these items include "threatened to hit or throw something at each other," "slapped," and "pushed, grabbed or shoved one another." The Cronbach's — coefficient was .89. Factor 2 consisted of 5 items delineating the rational strategies parents use to deal with disagreements

with each other, such as “discussed an issue calmly” or “got information to back up her/his side of things.” The factor was labeled the Reasoning factor and had a Cronbach’s — coefficient of .83.

The Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scale

The Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus & Gelles, 1979) was employed to assess mother-child and father-child conflict. This scale is a self-report questionnaire composed of items similar to those described in the above marital subscale of the Conflict Tactic Scale. Children indicated the frequency with which their fathers and their mothers performed each of the aggressive acts against them during the year prior to the assessment. Scoring is similar to that of the marital version.

Factor analyses with promax rotation in the current study resulted in different factor structures in the mother-child version and the father-child version. In the mother-child version, factor analysis extracted 4 factors accounting for 47.7 % of the variance. Factor 1, consisted of 4 items, such as “outlined explanation,” “time out,” “deprivation of privilege,” and “substitute activity.” It was labeled Nonviolent discipline and had a Cronbach’s — coefficient of .58. Factor 2 included 6 items describing the verbal aggression or mild physical aggression a mother performed against her child. Examples include “pinched me,” and “called me dumb or lazy or some other name like that.” The factor was defined as Mild Physical Assault and the Cronbach’s — coefficient was .72. Factor 3 was composed of 6 items representing a medium degree of physical assault, such as “hit with a fist or kicked hard” and “threw or knocked down.” The factor was labeled Medium Physical Assault. It had a Cronbach’s — coefficient of .65. Factor 4 consisted of 6 items describing severe physical harm, including “threatened me with a weapon” and “burned or scalded on purpose.” The factor was labeled Severe Physical Assault and the Cronbach’s — coefficient was .78.

In the father-child version, factors analysis extracted 3 factors accounting for 45.9% of the variance. Factor 1 consisted of 8 items, depicting ordinary discipline, such as “took away privileges or grounded me.” The factor was defined as Nonviolent Discipline and the Cronbach’s — coefficient was .69. Factor 2 included 8 items, portraying verbal aggression or a medium degree of harm, such as “shouted, yelled or screamed at me” or “slapped on the hand, arm or leg.” The factor, labeled Medium Assault had a Cronbach’s — coefficient of .84. Factor 3 was composed of 7 items depicting severe physical violent behaviors such as “burned or scalded on purpose” and “threatened with a knife or gun.” The factor was labeled Severe Physical Assault and had a Cronbach’s — coefficient of .72.

The Sibling Conflict Tactic Scale

The Sibling Conflict Tactic Scale was employed to measure the conflict resolution between siblings. The scale consists of two forms describing sibling-to-me and me-to-sibling conflicts; the items on the two forms are identical. Factor analyses with promax rotation resulted in three factors identical to the ones in the original scale in both the sibling-to-me version and me-to-sibling version. The factors were Reasoning, describing rational problem resolution between siblings, like “discussed the issue relatively calmly;” Verbal Aggression, characterizing a verbal attack, such as “sulked and/or refused to talk about it” and “yelled and/or insulted;” Physical Assault, portraying physical aggression between siblings, such as “threatened to hit or throw something” and “pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other.” The three factors accounted for 56% of the variance in both versions. The Cronbach’s — coefficient for Reasoning was .65 in the sibling-to-me version and .72 in the me-to-sibling version; Verbal Aggression was .65 in the sibling-to-me version and .65

in the me-to-sibling version; and Physical Assault was .84 in the sibling-to-me version and .83 in the me-to-sibling version.

Youth Self-Report (YSR)

The Youth Self-Report was used to assess the adolescents' emotional and behavioral functioning (Achenbach, 1991). The YSR required 11- to 18- year-olds to report on their competency on 17 items and their problems on 103 items similar to those in the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). In this study, we adopted the two broad-band dimensions of behavior problems (externalizing and internalizing). The subscale contained 61 items and used a weighted scoring with a three-step response (e.g., not true, somewhat or sometimes true, and very often true). The internalizing behavior problems consisted of three factors: Withdrawn, Somatic complaints and Anxious/depressed. The externalizing behavior problems included two factors: Aggressive Behavior and Delinquent Behavior. In this study, factor analyses with promax rotation were performed separately on the items for the two dimensions of behavioral problems. The results of the factor structures were similar to the original scales. For internalizing problems, Withdrawn describes a problematic interpersonal relationship or withdrawn personality, such as "feels that no one loves me" and "feels worthless or inferior." The Cronbach's α coefficient was .59. Somatic complaints described unidentified somatic complaints, such as vomiting or throwing up. The Cronbach's α coefficient was .77. Anxious/depressed portrayed emotional disturbances, for instance, "I think about killing myself" or "my moods or feelings change suddenly." The Cronbach's α coefficient was .86. On the externalizing problems dimension, Criminal Behavior measured antisocial behaviors such as "stealing at home or other places" or "setting fires." The Cronbach's α coefficient was .85. Aggression also delineated maladaptive behaviors, but they were less severe than Criminal Behavior. For instance, "I tease others a lot" or "I have a hot temper." The Cronbach's α coefficient was .83.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 shows the occurrence ratio of family conflicts. The occurrence frequency of each type of family conflict was counted by calculating the average frequency of experiences of those who had experienced the type of conflict at least once. "Never happened" responses were coded as 0, and all others were coded as 1. As indicated, the occurrence ratio of sibling conflict was highest, especially in oral aggression. The occurrence of nonviolence discipline in mother-child conflict and in father-child conflict also indicated high ratios.

Table 1 Frequency Occurrence of Family Conflict

<i>Marital conflict</i>	<i>Mother-to-child conflict</i>	<i>Father-to-child conflict</i>	<i>Sibling-to-me conflict</i>	<i>Me-to-sibling conflict</i>
N= 492	N= 492	N= 492	N= 492	N= 492
Physical assault 57.7%(284)	Non-violent discipline 83.3% (410)	Non-violent discipline 79.4%(440)	Physical assault 74.4%(366)	Physical assault 71.5%(347)
Reasoning 79.7%(392)	Mild assault 67.7% (328)		Reasoning 79.1%(389)	Reasoning 71.2%(355)
	Medium assault 60.8% (299)	Medium assault 49.6%(244)	Oral aggression 81.5%(401)	Oral aggression 76.4%(431)
	Severe physical assault 31.7%(266)	Severe physical assault 41.7%(205)		

Note: There is no Mild Assault in Father-to-Child Conflict

There was apparently a gender effect on the perception of family violence and behavioral problems, as indicated in Table 2. Boys perceived more father-child conflict than girls did, especially in non-violent discipline. However, girls perceived more sibling-to-me or me-to-sibling conflict than boys did, particularly in reasoning and verbal aggression. There was no gender difference in overall mother-child conflict and marital conflict between parents. Moreover, boys apparently had more external behavioral problems than girls did, especially criminal and aggressive behaviors. Girls had more internal behavioral problems than boys, particularly in withdrawal behaviors.

There were ethnicity effects on perceived family violence and behavioral problems. Children whose fathers were aboriginal perceived more physical assault between parents, more father-child physical assault and more sibling physical assault. They also reported to have a higher tendency of somatic complaints and criminal behaviors.

Correlation analysis revealed that types of family violence were positively correlated with each other (as indicated in Table 3). The correlations between marital conflict witnessed by children and parent-child conflict ranged from .097~.359 ($ps < .05$); and correlations between parent-child conflict and sibling conflict ranged from .100~.395 ($ps < .05$); and the correlations between marital conflict witnessed by children and sibling conflict ranged from .169~.364 ($ps < .001$). Reasoning in sibling conflict had no significant correlation with physical assault in marital conflict. Further, almost all types of family violence were positively correlated with internal behavioral problems (rs ranged from .106 ~ .370, $ps < .05$) as well as external behavioral problems (rs ranged from .119 ~ .343, $ps < .05$).

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

	Boys		Girls		t	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal		t
	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD	M	SD	
<i>Marital conflict</i>										
Reasoning	7.98	6.95	6.86	6.58	1.82	7.23	6.45	7.70	7.37	-0.65
Physical assault	5.14	8.95	5.12	8.56	0.03	4.19	7.42	7.52	11.00	-3.32**
<i>Father-to-Child conflict</i>										
Non-violent discipline	6.56	5.40	7.75	7.18	-2.09*	6.97	6.06	7.82	7.15	-1.23
Medium assault	2.59	5.60	3.27	5.61	-1.33	2.39	4.41	4.09	7.35	-2.53*
Severe physical assault	1.30	2.96	1.75	3.81	-1.42	1.19	2.32	2.37	5.09	-2.62*
<i>Mother-to Child conflict</i>										
Non-violent discipline	5.09	4.10	4.61	4.25	1.26	4.86	4.03	4.93	4.41	-0.17
Mild assault	2.61	3.86	3.19	4.26	-1.59	3.71	4.67	4.19	5.50	-0.94
Medium assault	3.52	4.50	4.10	5.30	-1.29	2.87	3.79	3.17	4.74	-0.73
Severe physical assault	0.93	2.87	1.18	3.04	-0.93	0.96	2.72	1.25	3.37	-0.95
<i>Sibling-to-me conflict</i>										
Reasoning	5.91	4.99	5.02	4.94	1.97*	5.25	4.95	5.63	5.15	-0.75
Physical assault	6.99	7.63	6.41	7.66	0.83	6.10	7.23	7.63	8.28	-1.90
Oral aggression	6.60	5.19	5.47	5.45	2.32*	5.97	5.40	5.65	5.16	0.60
<i>Me-to-sibling conflict</i>										
Reasoning	4.69	4.44	3.96	4.22	1.86	4.38	4.42	3.89	4.04	1.13
Physical assault	6.37	7.20	5.62	7.00	1.17	5.41	6.76	7.38	7.76	-2.60*
Oral aggression	8.35	5.71	6.79	6.12	2.87**	7.47	6.07	7.16	5.76	0.52
<i>Internal behavior problem</i>										
Anxiety /Depression	5.98	5.54	5.19	4.80	1.69	5.15	4.78	6.31	5.88	-2.05*
Somatic Complaints	2.90	3.07	2.75	3.01	0.55	2.44	2.73	3.68	3.55	-3.67***
Withdraw	5.64	2.56	4.91	2.72	3.02**	5.12	2.55	5.37	2.87	-0.89
<i>External behavior problem</i>										
Crime	1.51	2.48	2.75	3.90	-4.25***	1.67	2.64	3.32	4.25	-4.24***
Aggression	7.07	5.22	8.10	5.41	-2.12*	7.32	5.12	8.36	5.64	-1.95

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Regression Analysis

1. Predicting effect of personal characteristics on family conflict

A series of regression analyses were first conducted to examine the effect of gender, ethnicity and Social Economic Status (SES) on children's perceptions of family conflict. As shown in Table 4, SES has no

Table 3 Correlations Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<i>Internal behavior</i>																				
1. Depres /anxiety	—	.56***	.51***	.53***	.63***	.29***	.39***	.33***	.26***	.36***	.31***	.36***	.34***	.10**	.27***	.29***	.11*	.25***	.31***	.15**
2. Complaint		—	.29***	.51***	.43***	.24***	.33***	.24***	.20***	.34***	.34***	.37***	.30***	0.06	.22***	.31***	0.01	.24***	.33***	.11*
3. Withdraw			—	.21***	.46***	.21***	.23***	.24***	.25***	.25***	.22***	.14**	.25***	.12**	.29***	.19***	.15**	.27***	.15**	.20***
<i>External behavior</i>																				
4. Crime				—	.61***	.23***	.34***	.27***	.13**	.31**	.27***	.36***	.24***	-0.01	.16***	.29***	-0.02	.14**	.39***	0.07
5. Aggression					—	.27**	.34***	.30***	.28***	.37***	.31***	.35***	.32***	0.07	.32***	.34***	0.07	.28***	.30***	.17***
<i>Father-to-child</i>																				
6. Medium assault					—	.55***	.49***	.52***	.57***	.52***	.32***	.18***	.28***	.31***	.20***	.20***	.29***	.28***	.34***	
7. Severe assault						—	.65***	.37***	.44***	.50***	.59***	.28***	.11*	.28***	.22***	.11*	.26***	.34***	.18***	
8. N-violent discip							—	.21***	.43***	.43***	.40***	.26***	0.09	.26***	.22***	.10*	.18***	.28***	.15**	
<i>Mother-to-child</i>																				
9. Mild assault								—	.42***	.49***	.32***	.24***	.25***	.33***	.21***	.25***	.31***	.20***	.32***	
10. Med assault									—	.58***	.55***	.40***	.12**	.38***	.40***	.12**	.33***	.36***	.23***	
11. N-viole discip										—	.49***	.28***	.15**	.24***	.30***	.10*	.21***	.26***	.17***	
12. Severe assault											—	.26***	0.05	.23***	.20***	0.04	.15**	.29***	.10*	
<i>Sibling-to-me</i>																				
13. Phys assault												—	0.04	.55***	.74***	0.07	.45***	.35***	.17***	
14. Reasoning													—	.25***	0.04	.64***	.34***	0.05	.38***	
15. Oral aggress														—	.44***	.23***	.74***	.28***	.34***	
<i>Me-to-sibling</i>																				
16. Phys assault															—	0.02	.48***	.36***	.23***	
17. Reasoning																—	.30***	0.06	.38***	
18. Oral aggress																	—	.28***	.41***	
<i>Marital conflict</i>																				
19. phys assault																		—	.26***	
20. reasoning																			—	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Note: # 2: Somatic complaints; # 8 & 11 Non-violent discipline; #15 & 18: Oral aggression; # 13, 16&19: Physical assault

predicting effect on any types of family conflict. Gender effect was shown in the prediction of reasoning in marital conflict, reasoning in sibling-to-me conflict, and oral aggression in sibling-to-me conflict as well as in me-to-sibling conflict. Ethnicity effect was shown in the prediction of all types of father-child conflict, physical assault in marital conflict, and physical assault in me-to-sibling conflict.

2. Predicting effect of personal characteristics and family conflict on internal vs. external problem behaviors

A series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to understand how types of family violence might affect the children's behavioral problems when the child's gender, ethnicity and social economic status were statistically controlled. For each specific internal problem (anxious/depressed, withdrawn, and somatic complaint) as well as external problem (crime and aggression), the child's gender, ethnicity and SES were entered on the first step, followed by the types of marital conflict witnessed by children, parent-child conflict (e.g. father-child conflict, mother-child conflict) and sibling conflict.

Internal Problem Behaviors

As presented in Table 5 girls displayed more withdrawal behaviors than boys. Children whose fathers are aboriginal reported more somatic complaints. When adding marital conflict into the equation, physical assault between parents was related to more anxiety/ depression and more somatic complaints, and reasoning between parents correlated with more withdrawal. Girls still reported more withdrawal behaviors, but the ethnicity effect on somatic complaints disappeared. Marital conflict explained 13.7% of variances of anxiety/

depression, but explained only 2.2 and 3.6% of variances of withdrawal and somatic complaints. Model 3, with parent-child conflict added, shows that girls generally displayed a higher level of anxiety/depression, somatic complaints and withdrawal. Physical assault between parents significantly and positively predicted anxiety/depression and somatic complaints. Types of mother-child conflict and father-child conflict significantly and positively predicted anxiety/depression and withdrawal, but only mother-child conflict significantly predicted somatic complaints. Parent-child conflict explained the variances of internal behaviors, ranging from 7.1% ~ 15.7%. Finally, when adding sibling conflict, girls still reported more anxiety/aggression, somatic complaints and withdrawal. The predicting effect of marital conflict on anxiety/depression and somatic complaints remained, but the effect on withdrawal disappeared. Types of mother-child conflict significantly and positively predicted anxiety/depression, somatic complaints and withdrawal. Types of

Table 4 Regression Analyses of Demographic Background Performed on Family Conflict

Model	<i>Mother-to-Child Conflict</i>				<i>Father-to-Child Conflict</i>		
	Non-Violent	Mild	Medium	Severe physical	Non-violent	Medium	Severe physical
	Discipline	assault	assault	assault	discipline	assault	assault
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Gender	0.09	0.10	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.02	0.05
Ethnicity	-0.09	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.07	0.05	0.08
SES	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.07	0.12*	0.19***	0.22***
R^2	.016	.013	.008	.007	.019	.036	.050

Model	<i>Sibling-to-me conflict</i>			<i>Me-to-Sibling Conflict</i>		
	Reasoning	Oral	Physical	Reasoning	Oral	Physical
		aggression	assault		aggression	assault
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Gender	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.06	0.08	-0.01
Ethnicity	-0.11*	-0.13**	-0.04	-0.09	-0.14**	-0.07
SES	0.01	0.02	0.16**	-0.05	0.00	0.16**
R^2	0.016	0.026	0.026	0.017	0.028	0.030

Model	<i>Marital Conflict</i>	
	Physical	Reasoning
	Assault	
	Beta	Beta
Gender	-0.08	0.02
Ethnicity	-0.02	-0.12*
SES	0.18*	0.06
R^2	0.18	0.47

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

father-child conflict predicted only anxiety/ depression. With regard to sibling conflict, types of sibling-to-me conflict significantly predicted anxiety/depression and somatic complaints, but types of me-to-sibling conflict did not show a predicting effect on internal behaviors. Types of sibling conflict explained 1.9%~3.2% variances of internal behaviors.

External Problem Behaviors

Table 5 indicated that boys exhibited more criminal behaviors than girls. Children whose fathers are aboriginal also exhibited more criminal behaviors. When adding marital conflict into the equation, gender and ethnicity status still showed a significant effect on criminal behavior. Types of marital conflict significantly and positively predicted criminal and aggressive behaviors, and 15.7% and 8.9% of variances were explained. In Model 3, with parent-child conflict added, the effects of gender, ethnicity status and physical assault between parents on criminal behaviors remained significant. Types of mother-child conflict significantly predicted both criminal and aggressive behaviors, but types of father-child conflict had no predicting effect on either external behavior. 8.2 % and 11.6 % of the variances were explained by parent-child conflict. In model 4, with sibling conflict added, the effects of gender, ethnicity status and marital conflict on criminal behaviors were still significant. Types of mother-child conflict significantly predicted criminal and aggressive behaviors. Types of me-to-sibling conflict significantly predicted crime and aggression. Sibling conflict explained 2.7% and 5.3% of variances of external behaviors.

Discussion

This section includes three issues that are generalized from the findings of the studies. They are 1). the occurrence of family violence in eastern Taiwan; 2). the relationship between family violence and children's internal v.s. external behaviors; 3). the effects of gender, ethnicity and social economic status on family violence and internal as well as external behavior.

The Occurrence of Family Violence in Eastern Taiwan

These findings support earlier reports in the U.S. that violence among siblings may be the most common form of family violence, and parent-child violence the second most common (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). The high frequencies of sibling conflict and its negative impact on children's anxiety/depression, somatic complaints, aggression and criminal behaviors found in this study suggest that sibling conflict deserves more attention from parents and the education system. With regard to parent-child conflict, non-violence discipline such as "shouted, yelled or screamed at him/her" and "explained why something was wrong" was the most common strategy used by parents to discipline their children. It is interesting to see that mothers used more mild or medium assault than fathers did, but fathers used more severe physical assault than mothers did. Fisher (1991) suggested that father-child interaction is quite different from mother-child interaction. Compared to fathers, mothers with more traditional values tended to use more negative parenting approaches with their offspring (Fisher, 1991). The reason for the occurrence of mother-child aggression being higher than father-child aggression could be that women are the main caregivers, and that children's expectations of male and female adults might magnify mothers' violent behaviors (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Monson, Meyer, Jeffrey, & Sander, 1998). Alternatively, having spent much time nurturing their children,

Table 5 Regression Analyses of Demographic Background and Family Conflict Performed on Internal/ External Problem Behavior

	Anxiety/ Depression		Internal behavior problem Somatic Complaints		Withdraw		External behavior problem Crime		Aggression	
	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2
Model 1		0.02		0.04		0.02		0.10		0.01
Gender	-0.08		-0.06		-0.14**		0.19***		0.05	
Ethnicity	0.10		0.15**		0.03		0.22***		0.06	
SES	-0.04		-0.08		0.04		-0.08		0.01	
Model 2		0.12		0.11		0.04		0.16		0.09
Gender	-0.06		-0.05		-0.12*		0.20***		0.07	
Ethnicity	0.03		0.08		0.01		0.14**		0.01	
SES	-0.01		-0.05		0.04		-0.05		0.03	
Marital conflict										
Physical assault	0.33***		0.32***		0.06		0.40***		0.24***	
Reasoning	0.08		0.04		0.17**		0.04		0.15**	
Model 3		0.16		0.14		0.16		0.08		0.12
Gender	-0.10*		-0.10*		-0.13**		0.16***		0.06	
Ethnicity	0.00		0.07		-0.00		0.13**		0.01	
SES	-0.06		-0.08		0.00		-0.07		-0.02	
Marital conflict										
Physical assault	0.17***		0.20***		-0.02		0.30***		0.11*	
Reasoning	0.01		0.01		0.05		0.03		0.08	
Mother-to Child conflict										
Non-violent discipline	0.07		-0.03		0.22***		-0.06		0.11	
Mild assault	0.06		0.06		0.11		0.02		0.13*	
Medium assault	0.04		0.25***		-0.05		0.07		-0.05	
Severe physical assault	0.21***		0.17**		0.02		0.21***		0.24***	
Father-to-Child conflict										
Non-violent discipline	0.12*		0.00		0.13*		0.09		0.11	
Medium assault	0.04		0.05		-0.03		0.09		-0.04	
Severe physical assault	0.12*		0.00		0.12*		-0.07		0.05	
Model 4		0.05		0.03		0.02		0.03		0.05
Gender	-0.10*		-0.10*		-0.12*		0.17***		0.08	
Ethnicity	-0.02		0.05		-0.00		0.12**		-0.01	
SES	-0.06		-0.09		-0.01		-0.07		-0.02	
Marital conflict										
Physical assault	0.13*		0.15**		-0.05		0.25***		0.05	
Reasoning	-0.01		0.00		0.02		0.03		0.04	
Mother-to Child conflict										
Non-violent discipline	0.06		-0.04		0.20**		-0.07		0.09	
Mild assault	0.02		0.01		0.08		-0.01		0.06	
Medium assault	0.04		0.25***		-0.05		0.06		-0.06	
Severe physical assault	0.19**		0.16**		0.00		0.21***		0.24***	
Father-to-Child conflict										
Non-violent discipline	0.12		0.02		0.17		0.10		0.10	
Medium assault	0.06		0.05		-0.02		0.10		-0.03	
Severe physical assault	0.11*		-0.01		0.11		-0.07		0.04	
Sibling-to-me conflict										
Reasoning	0.03		0.00		-0.01		-0.09		-0.04	
Oral aggression	0.02		-0.07		0.10		0.01		0.11	
Physical assault	0.14*		0.18**		0.04		-0.05		-0.03	
Me-to-sibling conflict										
Reasoning	0.01		0.00		0.04		0.04		-0.01	
Oral aggression	-0.06		0.05		-0.00		0.00		0.07	
Physical assault	-0.09		0.03		0.01		0.19**		0.17*	
Total R ²		0.32		0.32		0.18		0.37		0.26

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

women might have less opportunity for self-achievement. If they also receive less support from the marriage, they might also more easily get depressed and transfer anger to the children (Washburne, 1989).

The findings also confirm that different forms of family violence can co-occur (McCloskey & Figueredo, 1995). Significant relations among marital conflict, parent-child conflict and sibling conflict suggest that family violence is not just a single act, but a series of complex events. Belsky (1980) proposed an ecological perspective of child abuse. He described that the problem of child maltreatment is the consequence of an interaction between three levels of systems: ontogenic (parent); microsystem (child characteristics, family factor); mesosystem (wife abuse). He observed, "Since the parent-child system is nested within the spousal relationship, what happens between husbands and wives-from an ecological point of view-has implications for what happens between parents and their children" (Belsky, 1980, p.326). Similarly, the sibling system is nested within the parent-child relationships. What happens between parents and children also has implications for what happens between siblings.

The Relationship Between Family Violence and Children's Internal vs. External Behaviors

These results also indicate that family violence (the amount of marital violence witnessed by the child, the amount of parent-child conflict, and sibling conflict) significantly predicts internalizing as well as externalizing behaviors, even when controlling for gender, ethnicity and SES. With regard to marital violence as witnessed by the child, the results show that even controlling the other types of family violence, physical assault between parents still significantly predicted children's anxiety/depression, somatic complaints, and criminal behaviors. The results were consistent with the previous findings in that when facing marital conflict between parents, children generally demonstrate depressed, anxious, and withdrawn behaviors. The underlying reasons might be either that they are afraid or that they are not able to help resolve problems for their parents, or that they are stressed when asked to choose a side between parents. Some children choose to isolate themselves from inter-parental conflict. By modeling the aggression demonstrated by parents, they learn to use violence as a means to resolve problems and thus become aggressive and delinquent (Lu, 1993).

Despite the fact that witnessing interparental conflict can have a negative influence on children, O'Keefe (1994) indicated that the effect of interparental conflict on child behavioral problems would decrease when the effect of parent-child aggression was statistically controlled. This study had similar findings. In the hierarchical regression analysis, as the variables of parent-child conflict were entered in Step 2, the beta weight of marital conflict declined. Parent-child conflict explained high percentages of child psychopathology (the highest percentage reached 16.4%). Though the high frequency of parent-child conflict did not conclude that parents in Taitung hold a belief that strict discipline results in children's good behavior, the results did indicate that parent-to-child violent behaviors would result in negative consequences in children's well-being. Moreover, compared to father-child conflict, types of mother-child conflict were more significant predictors of a child's psychopathology, especially in children's withdrawal and aggressive behaviors (for which father-child conflict showed no predicting effect). As O'Keefe (1994) suggested, mothers, who are generally the primary caregivers as well as the main providers of emotional support, are of paramount importance to children's adjustment and well-being.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see that when children are the victims of sibling violence, they tend to be anxious and have more somatic complaints. Also, perpetrators display more aggressive and delinquent

behavior. Previously it was indicated that even if children were the victims of parental violence, they might learn to be aggressive and violent. However, the power structure of sibling relationships seems to result in the solidification of inequitable victim and perpetrator roles. Goodwin and Roscoe (1990) stated that sibling violence is the consequence of modeling. Having witnessed marital violence and experienced physical punishment from parents, children see violence as an effective means of achieving an end. The study revealed that physical assault between siblings is correlated with physical assault in both marital conflict and parent-child conflict, indicating that conflict among siblings is indeed influenced by parent-child aggression and aggression between parents.

The Effects of Gender, Ethnicity and Social Economic Status on Family Violence and Problem Behavior

The results of this study reveal that when considering children's gender, ethnicity, and SES together, SES has no predicting effect on children's perceptions of family violence and their problems, but gender and ethnicity do. The non-significant impact of SES on perceived family violence supports previous studies in that poverty or low social economic status is neither the mere reason for the occurrence of family violence (Donenberg and Weisz, 1997; Yu, 1995), nor is the mere reason for children's problem behaviors. With regard to gender effect, girls perceived more sibling conflict than boys did, especially oral aggression. Laursen, Coy and Collins (1998) reported that children during the early puberty period tend to report high conflict frequencies with surrounding others. In this case, girls who were in the sixth grade might happen to experience a biological change and the accompanying stress results in more personal disturbance and more interpersonal conflict, especially with siblings who are in close proximity most of the time. Furthermore, though many studies reported that there should be no gender differences for children who experience family violence to report anxiety, depression and somatic complaints, or to become potential offenders (Merrill, Hevig, & Milner, 1996; O'Keefe, 1994; Herrera & McCloskey, 2001), the results of this study found that girls reported higher levels of withdrawal, somatic complaints and anxiety/ depression, whereas boys reported more criminal and aggressive behaviors. Research in adolescent depression indicates that the severity of depression that adolescent girls report is generally associated with their dissatisfaction with their body image (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994). Whether puberty stress together with family conflict accounts for girls' higher levels of internal problems requires clarification.

With respect to ethnicity effect, children whose fathers are aboriginal tend to report more father-child conflict, physical assault in marital conflict, physical assault in me-to-sibling conflict, and criminal behaviors. Yen (2000) indicated that family violence commonly occurs in aboriginal families. In Huang, Lin and Wu's study (2002), they found that 18 % of aboriginal women in a community located in Taipei city experienced physical abuse at the hands of their husbands. Herbert and McCannell (1997) indicated that drinking, family violence and suicide are common phenomena that can be observed in aboriginal societies all over the world. These problems originally result from the fact that aboriginals have been weak in society with regards to politics and economics. They are less educated so they are deprived of the advantages of employment. Moreover, drinking is prevalent among aboriginal people, yet drinking is usually a catalyst for violent behaviors. This disadvantaged situation puts aboriginal children at a high risk of family violence as well as criminal behaviors.

Conclusion and limitations

This study provides empirical support for the hypothesis that children from violent homes are impacted not only by the trauma of witnessing violence between their parents, but also by harsh punitive discipline from parents, as well as by fighting or aggression from siblings. The fact that the amounts of varying domestic violence significantly predict child behavior problems highlights the harmful effect family violence has on a child's adjustment. The typically small effect sizes for any given form of conflict mapping onto various forms of behavioral problems confirms the need to look at the overall, rather than single dimension, of family conflict or psychopathology.

Several limitations in this study should be addressed in future studies. First, the data relied solely on children's reports of the levels of family violence as well as behavior problems. However, children may report family violence and their own behavior in a biased manner (O'Keefe, 1994). Thus, it is necessary to provide additional perspectives from more objective or independent sources (e.g. parents, teachers, and siblings). Second, though the data provide an objective and general understanding of the phenomena of family violence in East Taiwan, they can not describe the complete details and emotional experiences of all individuals. Future research is needed to assess the mechanism of causal relationships between the types of family violence by using a longitudinal study.

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兒童所知覺的父母婚姻暴力、親對子的暴力 及手足暴力與其內外向行為的關係*

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本研究主要探討家庭暴力，如兒童所知覺的父母婚姻暴力、親對子的暴力及手足暴力對其內向行為（憂鬱／焦慮、身體抱怨、退縮）和外向行為（犯罪、攻擊）的影響。樣本為台東地區540個國小六年級學童，分別填寫了家庭衝突量表（Conflict Tactics Scales, Strau et al., 1979）及青年自我報告（Youth Self-Report, Achenbach, 1991）。結果顯示，手足暴力是家庭暴力中發生最頻繁的暴力行為，其次為親對子的暴力，最後為父母的婚姻暴力。家庭暴力可能會同時發生，不同類型的家庭暴力對兒童的內向行為及外向行為有其特殊的影響。此外，女生比男生知覺更多的手足衝突，和退縮行為。父親為原住民的學童知覺較多父母的衝突、父對子的衝突和手足衝突，並且呈報有較多身體抱怨及犯罪行為。

關鍵詞：婚姻暴力、親子暴力、手足暴力、兒童內向行為及外向行為

* 限於文章的篇幅，無法呈現家庭暴力及內外向行為量表的因素結構。若有興趣瞭解其因素內容，可跟本文第一作者聯繫。E-mail:ylliu@mx.nthu.edu.tw