

CREATING A WORLD WITHOUT BULLYING

PREVNet's Third Annual Conference

When, How and Why of Social Aggression in Teens: Normative and Clinical Perspectives

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Adolescence – A Period of Risk & Opportunity

- **Neurological Shifts:** Rapid neurological growth & pruning
- **Cognitive Changes:** Increased capacity for representational thought and multidimensional analysis
- **Affective Changes:** Intensified affective and motivational system
- **Self Representation Elaboration:** Intense preoccupation with the sense of self as perceived by self and others
- **Social-Relationship Expansion:** Development of new attachment relationships; new romantic relationships – need to balance with existing family and parental relationships



Adolescence – Risk & Opportunity



- Increased physical capacity in strength, speed, reaction time...
- Increased risk related behaviours...
 - Smoking, alcohol and substance use
 - Risky sexual behaviour
 - Driving accidents
 - Increased rates of mental health problems, including depression, suicidality, schizophrenia

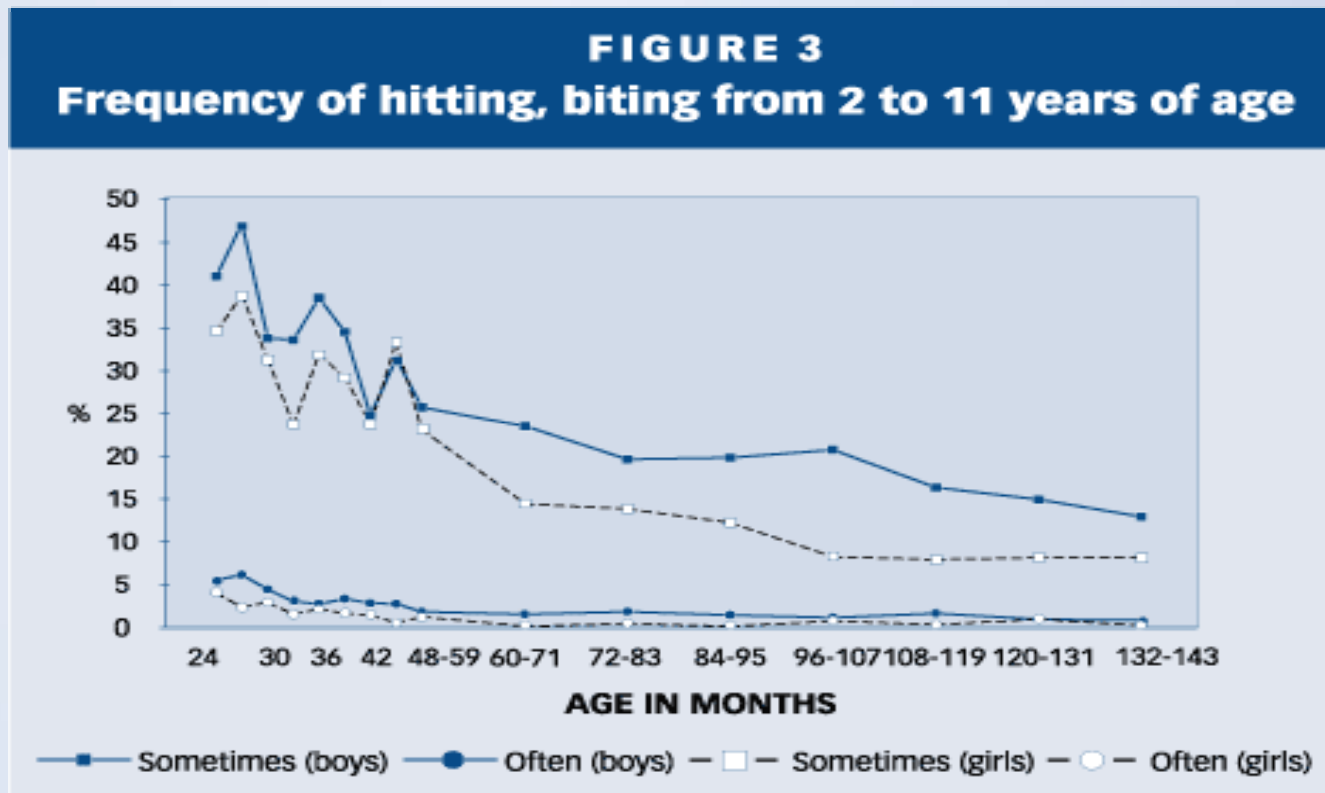
Adolescence – Transition from Childhood to Adulthood

- The foundations of adolescent adjustment are established in childhood → thus we should expect continuity in risk and protective influences
- New challenges specific to adolescence → greater influence of peers; romantic partners; challenges of establishing autonomy
- Framework of continuity and change essential for understanding aggression in teens

Aggression & Development

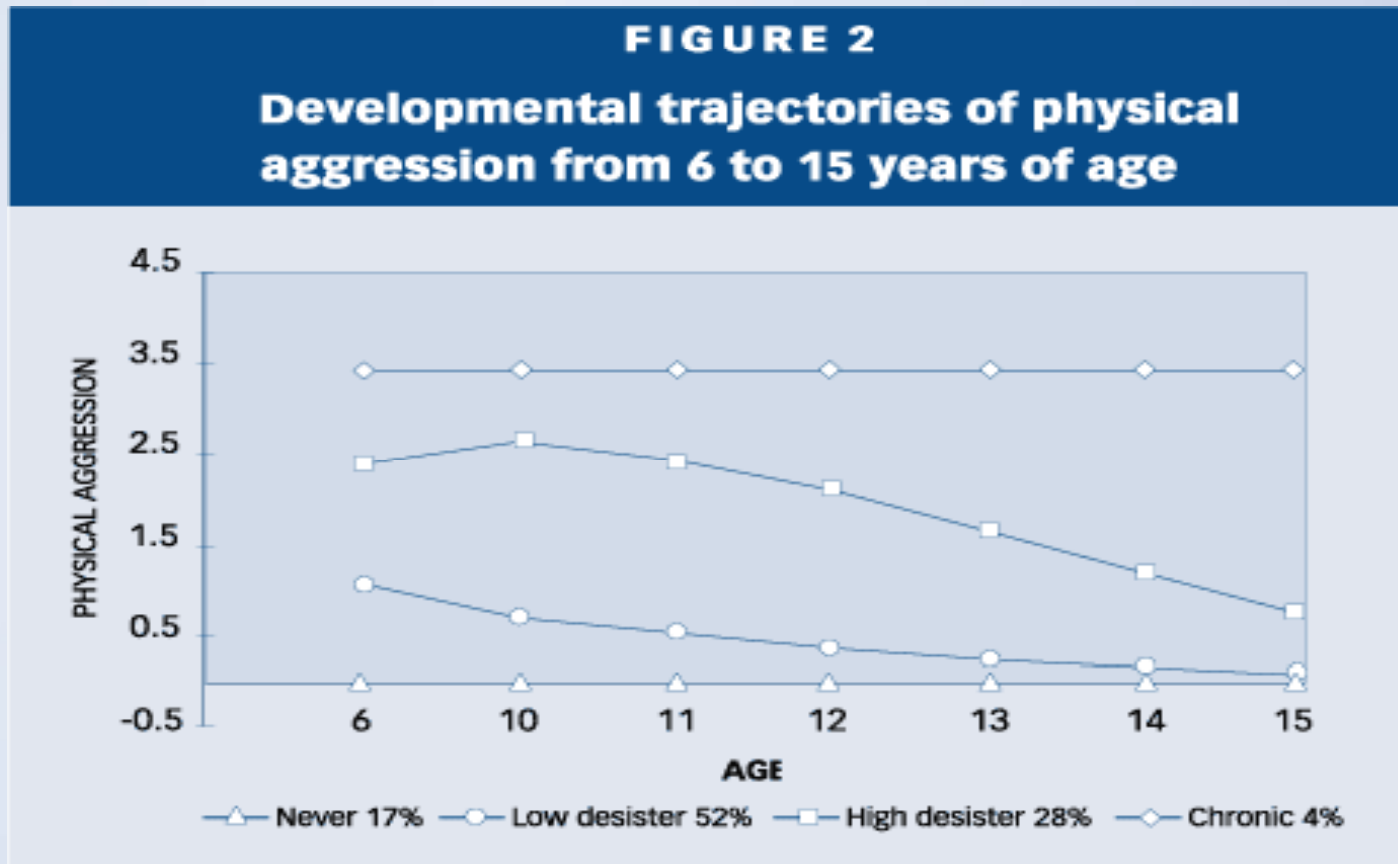


Mean Frequency of Physical Aggression NLSCY: 24-Month Peak and Steadily Decline



Tremblay, R. E., et al. (1996) "Do children in Canada become more aggressive as they approach adolescence?" in Human Resources Development Canada, Statistics Canada (ed.), *Growing up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1996), pp. 127-137.

Teacher-Rated Physical Aggression in Boys from Low SES Neighbourhoods



Nagin, D. & Tremblay, R. E. (1999). "Trajectories of boys' physical aggression, opposition, and hyperactivity on the path to physically violent and non violent juvenile delinquency, *Child Development*, 70, 181-1196.

Developmental Trajectories of Bullying Across Adolescence

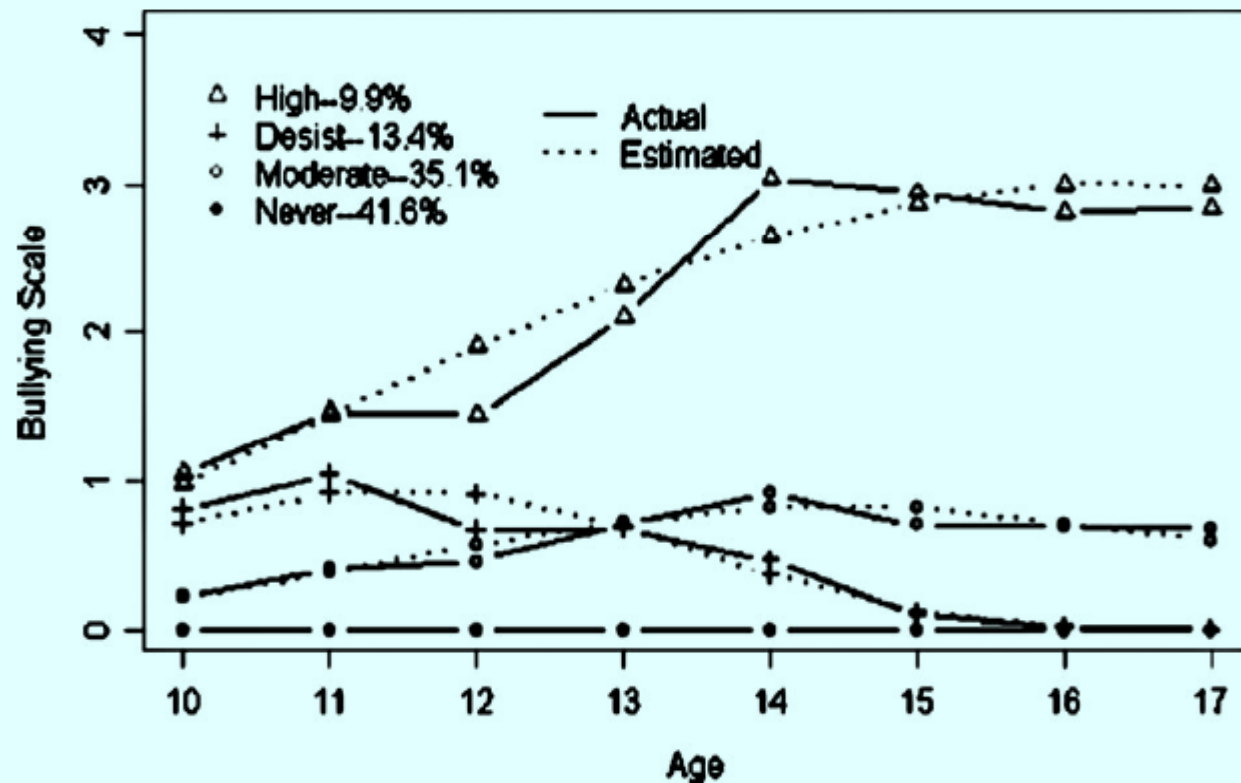


Figure 1. Trajectories of bullying for adolescence: N= 871.

Pepler, D., Jiang, D, Craig, W., & Connolly, J. (2008). Developmental trajectories of bullying and associated factors. *Child Development*, 79, 325 -338.

Risk at Early Adolescence (Late Elementary School) and Bullying Trajectory Across Adolescence

Table 6

Probabilities of Bullying Trajectory Group Conditional on Risk Class at Early Adolescence

Risk class	Bullying trajectory group			
	Low	Desist	Moderate	High
No	52.6	12.0	30.4	5.0
Some	20.7	24.7	37.7	16.9
Moderate	22.6	9.7	48.4	19.3
High	2.7	29.7	35.1	32.5

High Risk Status:

High moral disengagement; physical and relational aggression

Low parental trust, monitoring and high conflict

High peer bullying, conflict with peers and susceptibility to peer influence

Elementary School Problems Related to the High Bullying Trajectory:

Problem relationships with parents → 2 to 4 times increased risk

Problem peer relationships → 3 to 6 times increased risk

Pepler, D., Jiang, D, Craig, W., & Connolly, J. (2008). Developmental trajectories of bullying and associated factors. *Child Development*, 79, 325 -338

Time Limited Adolescent Bullying?

Desistance Trajectory

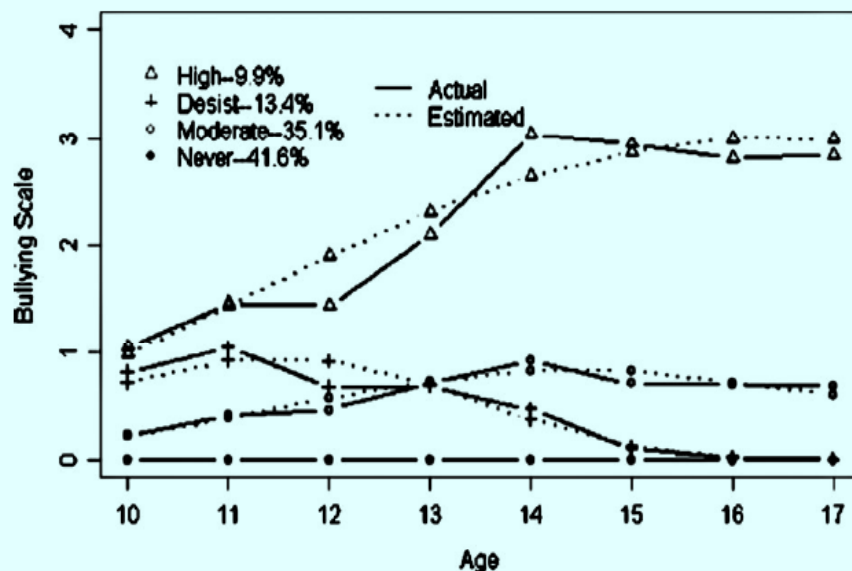


Figure 1. Trajectories of bullying for adolescence: N= 871.

Pepler, D., Jiang, D, Craig, W., & Connolly, J. (2008). Developmental trajectories of bullying and associated factors. *Child Development*, 79, 325-338.

- Relatively low on problems of moral disengagement and aggression
- Relatively low conflict with their parents & friends
- Yet they bullied at levels similar to the high bullying trajectory group in late elementary school and decreased through the high school years
- May represent time-limited use of aggression in a social-skilled way to maintain status in peer relationships (e.g., Vaillancourt et al., 2003; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2005)
- May desist once they established status (e.g., Pellegrini, 2004) AND/OR develop greater maturity and understanding of relationships via positive relationships with parents and authority figures.



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Is Aggression Related to Popularity?

It Depends on When and What Type

- Overt and relational aggression tend to co-occur so it is necessary to examine their unique relations with peer relationships ($r \sim .50$)
- Rose, Swenson, Waller (2004) – study of 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th grade students:
 - Overt aggression was not related to popularity in any grade and was related negatively to popularity in grades 5 and 9
 - Relational aggression emerged as significantly related to popularity in 7th grade and continued to be significant among grade 9 students
 - For boys, relational aggression did not predict later increases in popularity but for girls it predicted increases in popularity in grades 7 and 9 and this was a bidirectional relationship

Rose, Swenson, & Waller (2004). Overt and relational aggression and perceived popularity: Developmental differences in concurrent and prospective relations. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 378-387.

Social Aggression: A Girl's Primer for Navigating Social Relationships

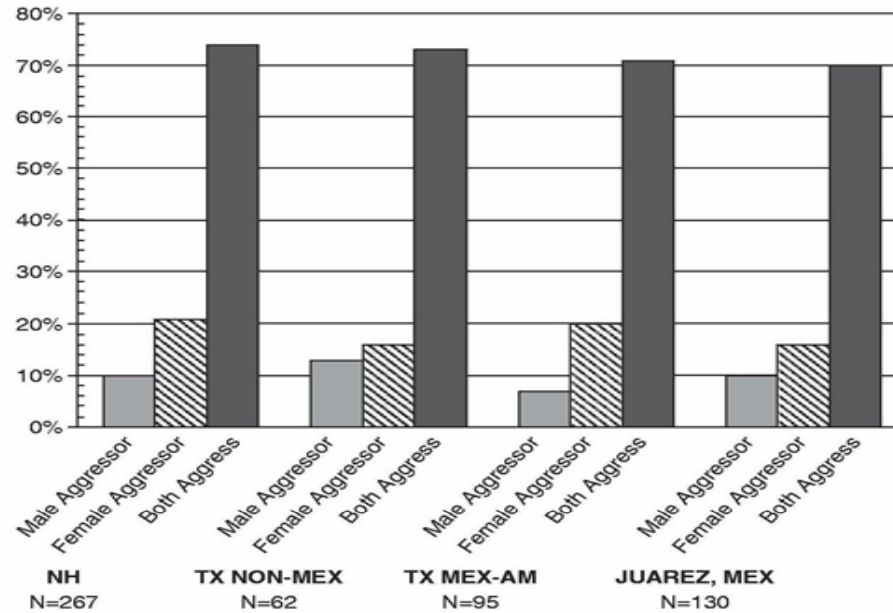


- Girls are sensitive to learning that social aggression is an effective strategy for navigating social relationships
- Bidirectional relationship
- Depends on social skill level
- Depends on social context shifts – the move to less monitored, larger schools may exacerbate expression of social aggression

Adolescent Bullying and Aggression in Romantic Relationships

- Adolescents who bully others are at risk for physical and social aggression toward dating partners (Connolly et al. 2000).

RATES OF AGGRESSION PERPETRATED BY MALE AND FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:



Chi-squared = 2.672, p.849. (N for Male Aggressors = 54 (NH=26, TX Non-Mex=8, TX Mex-Am=7, Juarez=13). N for Female-Only Aggressors = 105 (NH=55, TX Non-Mex=10, TX Mex-Am=19, Juarez=21). N for Both Violent = 395 (NH=186, TX Non-Mex=44, TX Mex-Am=69, Juarez=96)

Fig. 2. Percent of male-only, female-only, and both violent couples in four samples (all assaults).

Straus, M. A., & Ramirez, I. L. (2007). Gender symmetry in prevalence, severity and chronicity of physical aggression against data partners by university students in Mexico and USA. *Aggressive Behavior*, 33, 281-290.

Summary: Adolescence and Aggression

- **Physical Aggression:** Physical aggression decreases particularly by the time children reach and transition through adolescence, but a small percentage continue to be physically aggressive
- **Social Aggression:** Social aggression increases over development, and some girls adapt it as an effective strategy for navigating social relationships
- Family and peer risk factors predict persistence of aggressive behaviour
- What lessons do children learn about aggression and social relationships?
- **What family contexts place youth at greatest risk for aggression?**



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Family Violence: A Known Risk Factor for Aggression

- Kitzmann et al. 2003:
 - Meta-analysis of 118 studies: physical interparental violence (IPV) relates to broad outcomes, including increased aggression
- Virtually no research has examined whether the effects occur similarly when IPV is perpetrated by mothers versus fathers
 - *What might teens learn from their mothers and fathers who engage in aggression and violence toward their partners?*
 - *Are these effects general or sex-specific?*



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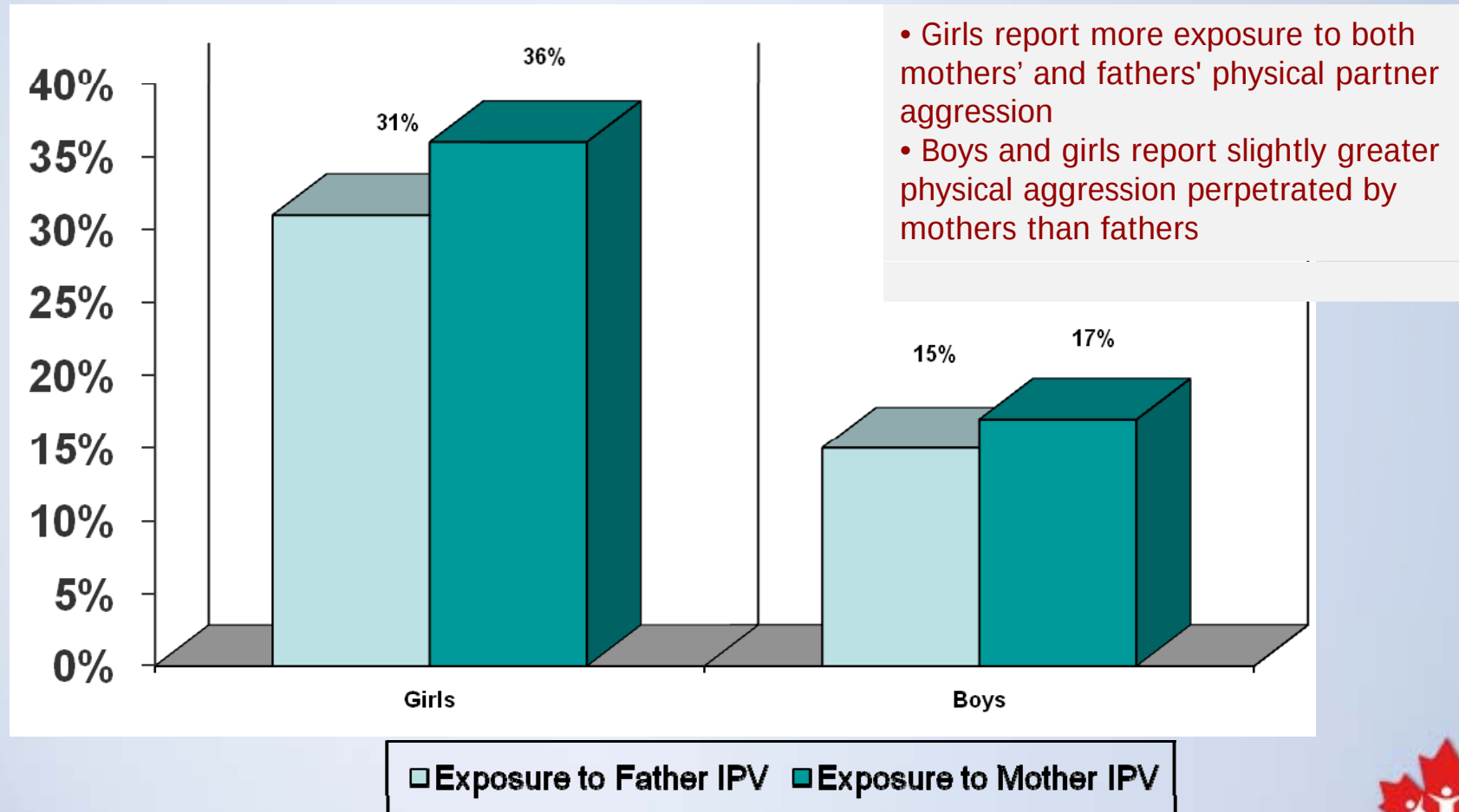


Family Lessons in Attachment and Aggression

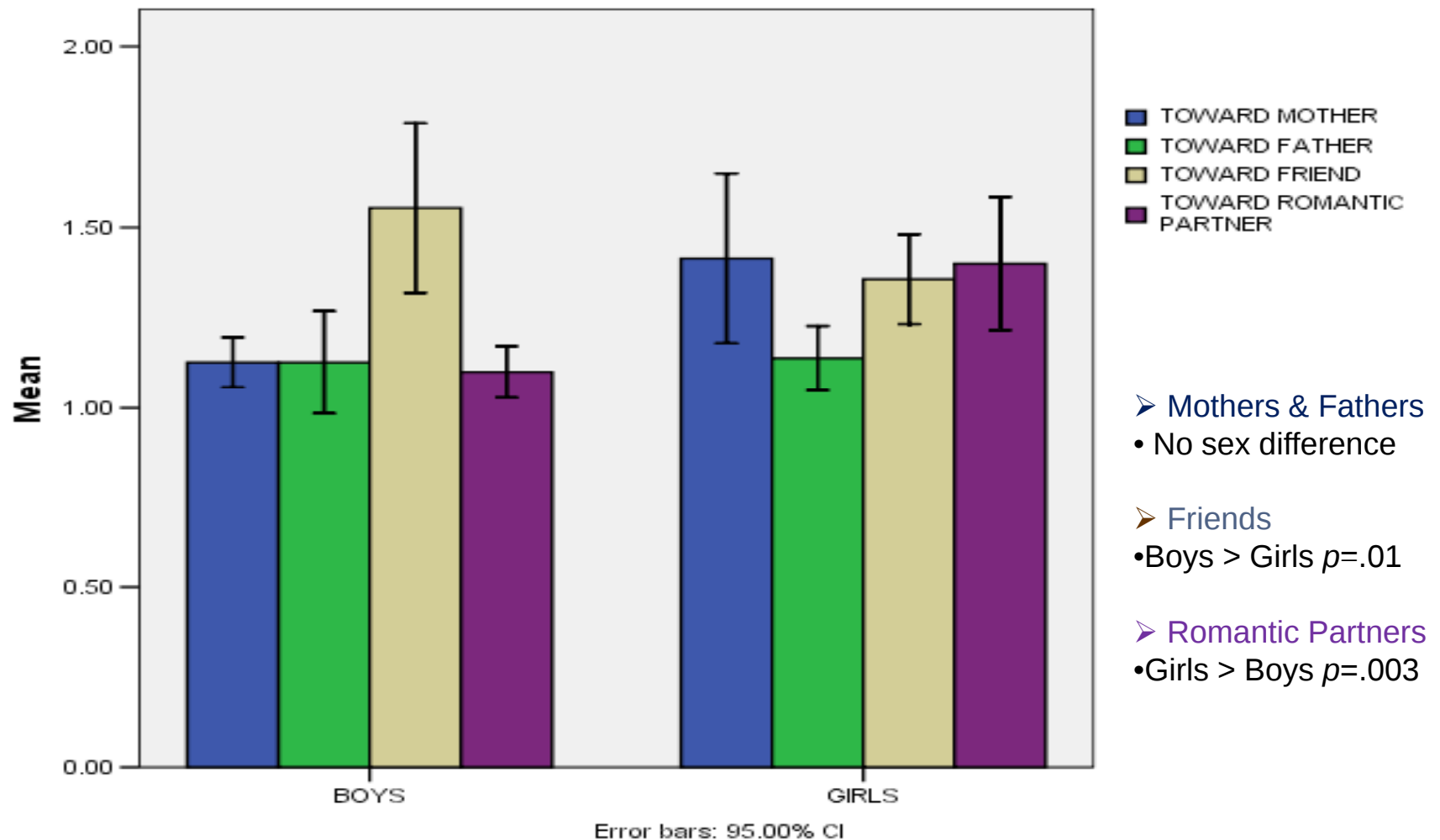
- 112 adolescents (49 boys, 63 girls), mean age 15 years
 - Incarcerated adolescent girls and boys
 - Health facility for youth with serious conduct disorder
- Exposure to maternal vs. paternal partner physical aggression (Family Background Questionnaire, Wolfe et al.)
 - E.g. Beat up... Threw something at... Threatened partner with a weapon... Pushed, grabbed or shoved...
- Adolescent physical aggression across relationships (Conflict Tactics Scale; Pepler modification)
 - E.g., ...pushed, grabbed or shoved..., threw something at..., slapped; kicked bit or hit...

Moretti, M. M., Obsuth, I., Odgers, C. L., Reebye, P. (2006). Exposure to maternal vs. paternal partner violence, PTSD, and aggression in adolescent girls and boys. *Aggressive Behavior*, 32, 385-395.

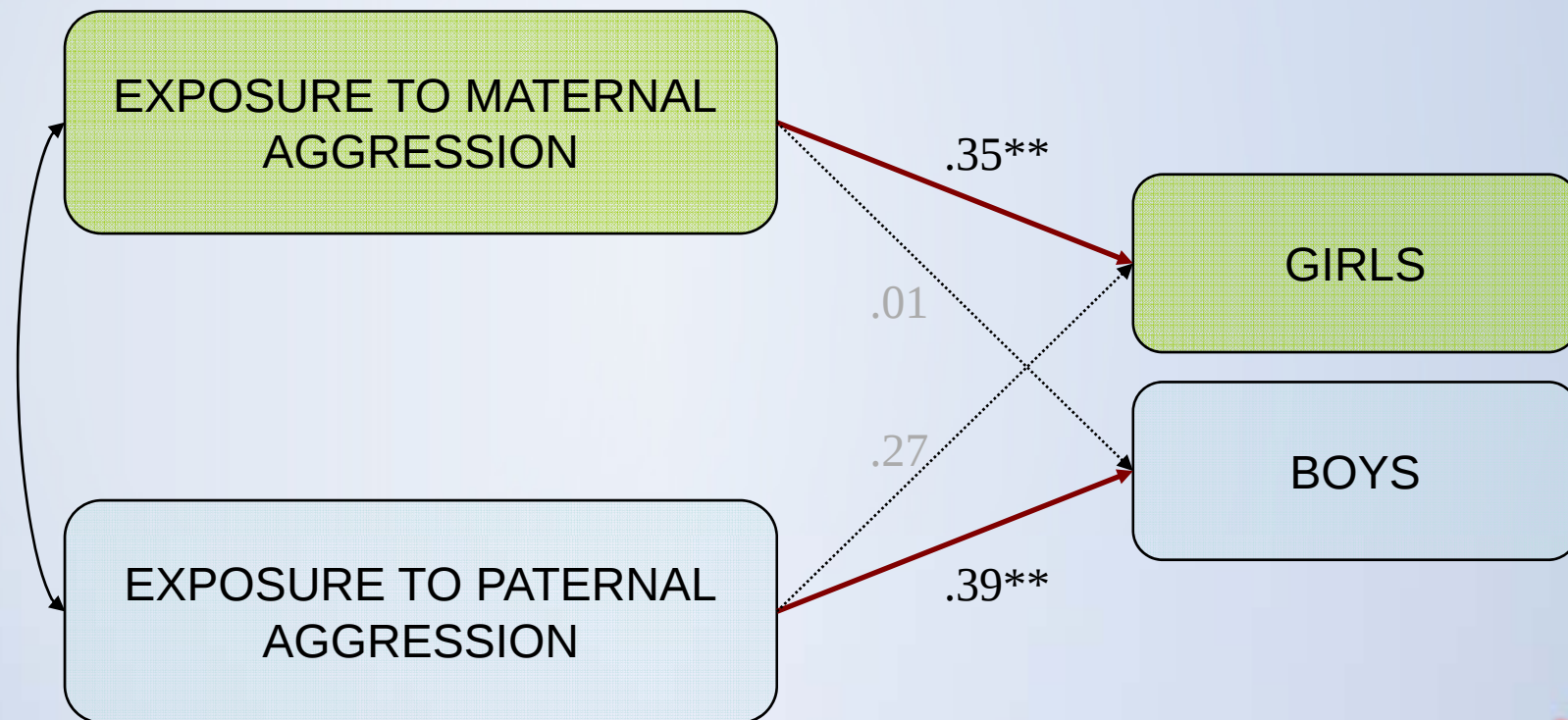
Youth Exposure to Maternal vs. Paternal Physical Aggression Toward Partner



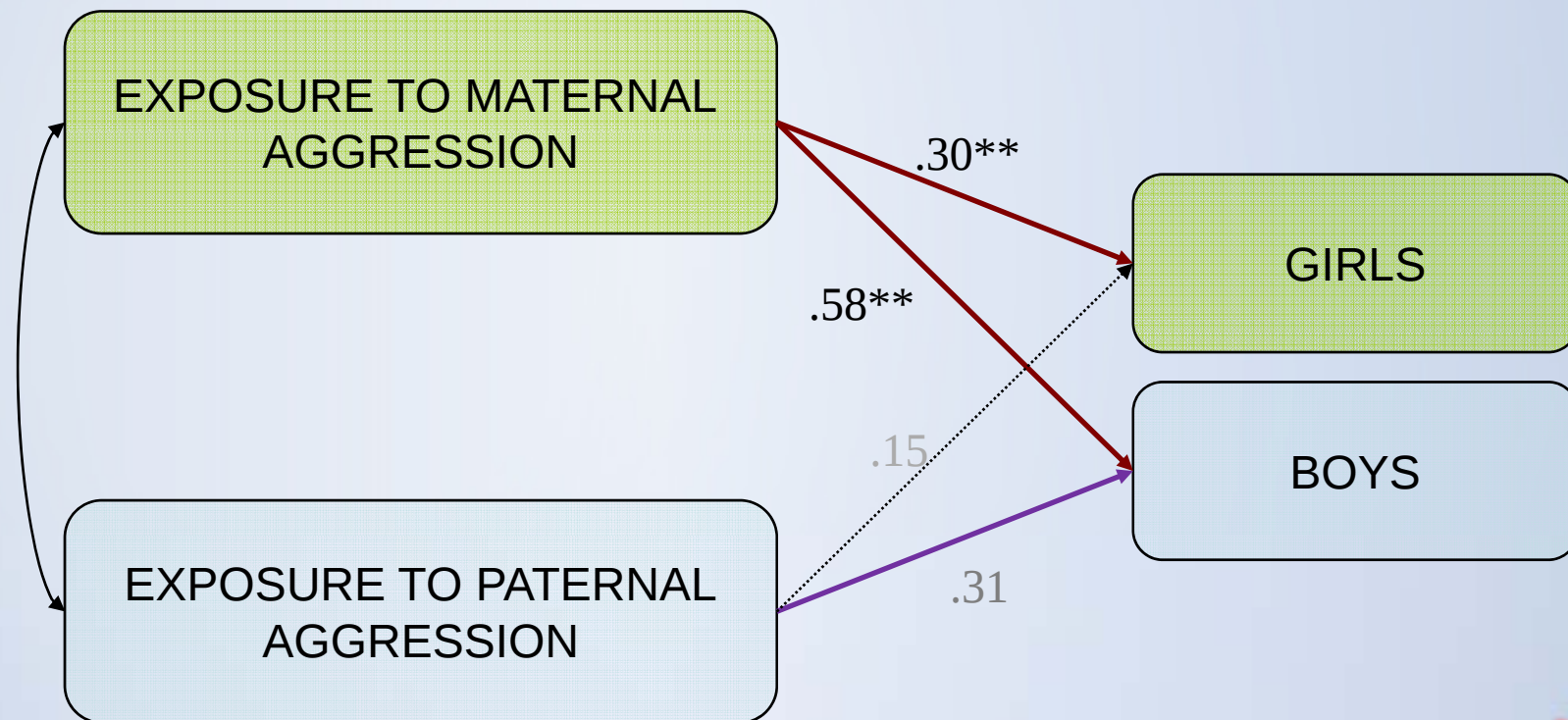
Girls and Boys Physical Aggression Across Relationships (Conflict Tactics Scale)



Exposure to Maternal vs. Paternal Physical Aggression Toward Partner & Youth Physical Aggression in **Peer Relationships** (Controlling for maternal & paternal physical abuse)

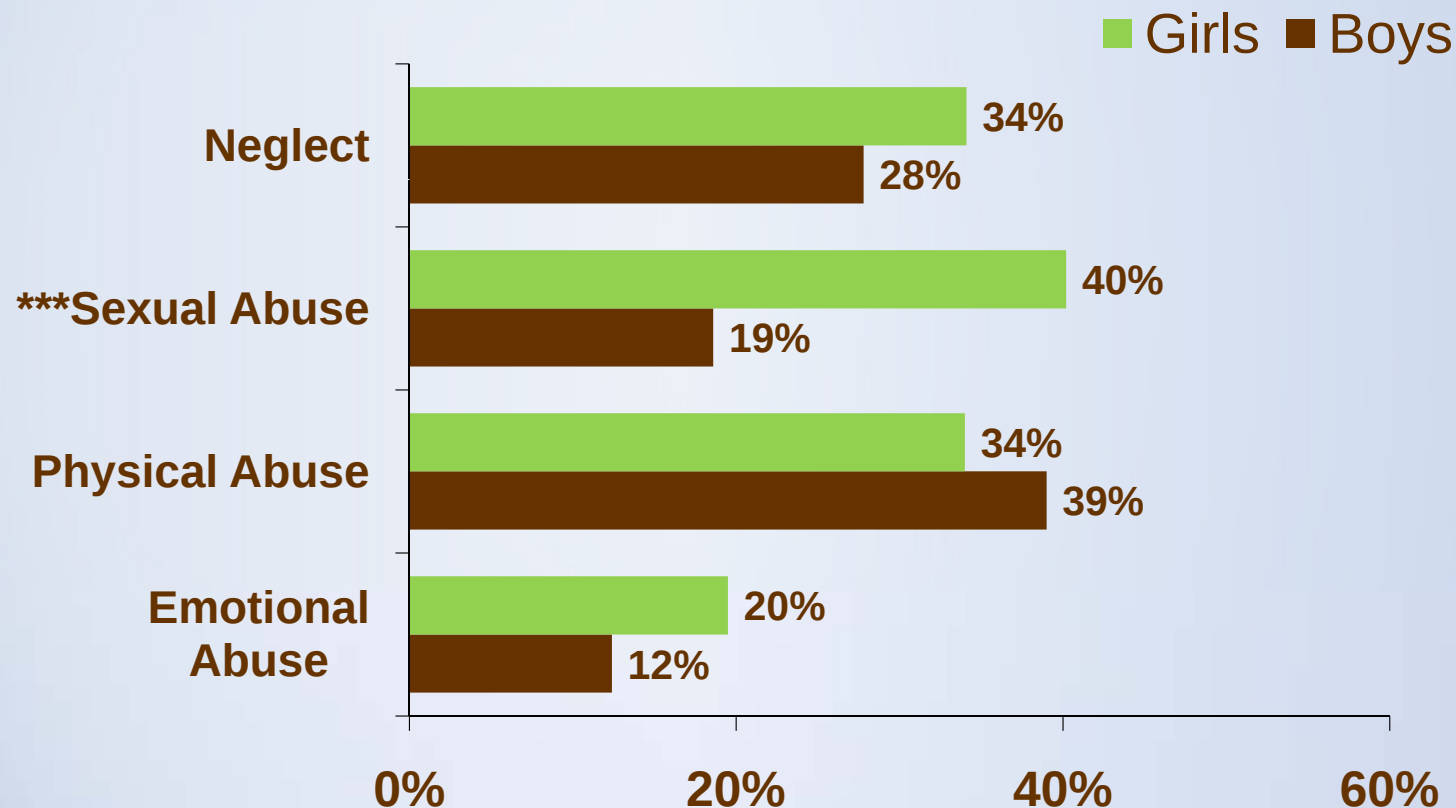


Exposure to Maternal vs. Paternal Physical Aggression Toward Partner & Youth Physical Aggression in **Romantic Relationships** (Controlling for maternal & paternal physical abuse)



Risk Factors: Exposure to Maltreatment

**Documented cases in social history records*



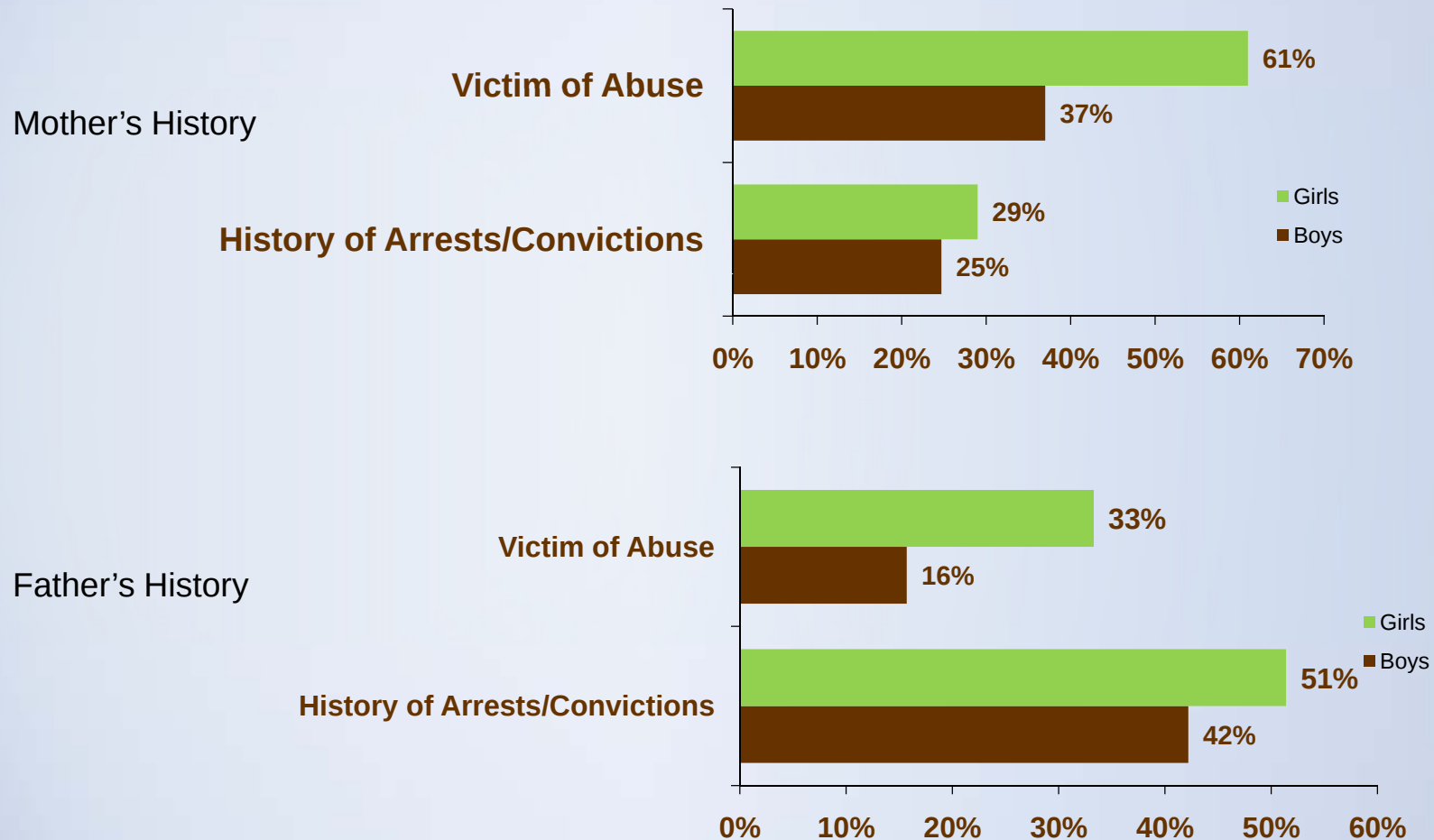
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Family History of Violence and Antisocial behaviour



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Understanding Youth at High Risk: Lessons Learned from Family Violence Contexts

- Implicit and explicit lessons:
 - Children **do not learn** how to inhibit aggression and use other strategies to deal with conflict and frustration – i.e., do not learn healthy emotion regulation
 - Aggression, violence and attachment are *intimately connected*
 - Aggression and violence have a *functional value* in close attachment relationships
- Violence and aggression is a family event... history of violence often runs across generations



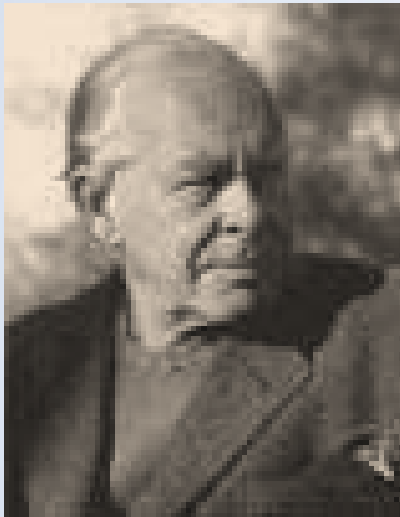
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Lessons Learned in Social Relationships: An Attachment Perspective



John Bowlby

- *“From cradle to grave...”* John Bowlby
- Evolutionarily selected regulatory system to ensure social connectedness, survival and reproduction
- For a child “... to stay in close proximity, or in easy communication ,with someone likely to protect you is the best of all possible insurance policies” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 81)
- Angry behaviour and aggression may have a functional role in securing and retaining relationships

Attachment: The Function of Angry behaviour in Relationships

- Bowlby (1973) → *Anger* is the natural response of the child when the expectation of safety, closeness to the attachment figure, is jeopardized
- In normal development, *angry behaviour can strengthen the bond* between the child and caregiver, serving a *signaling function* closely tied to the child's capacity for autonomous functioning
- Caregivers' sensitive responses to angry behaviour soothe the child, provides a *safe haven* and a *secure base* for exploration of the world ~ and important *opportunity for developing emotion regulation skills*



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Other Instances of Angry behaviour in the Service of Attachment

- Parents' angry behaviour toward a child for engaging in dangerous behaviour...
- Anger toward a romantic partner who appears disinterested, or anger displaced on to a person perceived as a threat to the relationship...
- ***Bowlby (1988) concluded....“... at the right time, and to the right degree, anger is not only appropriate but may be indispensable. It serves to deter from dangerous behaviour, to drive off a rival, or to coerce a partner. In each case, the aim of the angry behaviour is the same – to protect a relationship which is of very special value to the angry person” (p. 89).***



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Attachment & Aggression: From Function to Dysfunction

1. When developmentally appropriate strategies for negotiating relationships are not acquired – and anger and aggression are non-normative for an individual's age and context – it can lead to negative social outcomes
2. When anger escalates to aggression and violence it undermines healthy relationships
3. When individuals fail to learn alternate strategies for securing relationships and resolving conflict – and intimacy becomes patterned around aggression – it can lead to stronger but unhealthy bonds, for example, in abusive romantic relationships



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Attachment & Aggression among Youth at High Risk: Research Findings

- Moretti et al. (2007):
 - Most are insecurely attached with parent/caregivers
 - Insecure attachment is related to higher aggression and higher psychopathy in adolescent girls and boys
 - Attachment anxiety in girls and attachment avoidance in boys is related to higher aggression
- Allen et al. (2002): anxious-preoccupied attachment at age 16 predicted increasing delinquent behaviour between the ages of 16 to 18 years
- Orcutt, Garcia, and Pickett (2005): females high in attachment anxiety and low in attachment avoidance reported higher rates of perpetrating violence toward their partners



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Integrating Research from Studies of Aggression in Normative and Clinical Populations

Common Themes ~

1. Anger and aggression are commonly expressed in young children – but through sensitive and supportive socialization most children learn to navigate social relationships using less aggressive and more pro-social strategies. Some children learn more quickly than others, depending on their capacity for inhibition etc.
2. Understanding that aggression can be functional in social relationships helps us to grasp the meaning of this behaviour across the lifespan and in different relational contexts.
3. Girls' development may be particularly contextualized in social relationships, and these relationships become centrally important in adolescence. Social aggression may be functional in these contexts to achieving connectedness and acceptance.
4. Through understanding the functional role of aggression, we are better positioned to support children in the development of healthy relationship skills to achieve important social goals.



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Integrating Research from Studies of Aggression in Normative and Clinical Populations

Unique Considerations ~

1. Understanding youth at high-risk for aggression requires that we recognize the common processes that influence the expression of aggression in children, and the unique and complex effects of exposure to multiple risk factors.
2. Chronic exposure to adverse environments influence both the expression of social needs for connectedness and attachment, and other regulatory processes such as cognitive processes and affect regulation. Other impacts, such as trauma and mental health problems, must be recognized in intervention programs.
3. While it is important to understand and modify contextual factors that promote aggression in all children, it is particularly important to recognize the profound effect of chronic and often continuing adverse environments on youth at high-risk.



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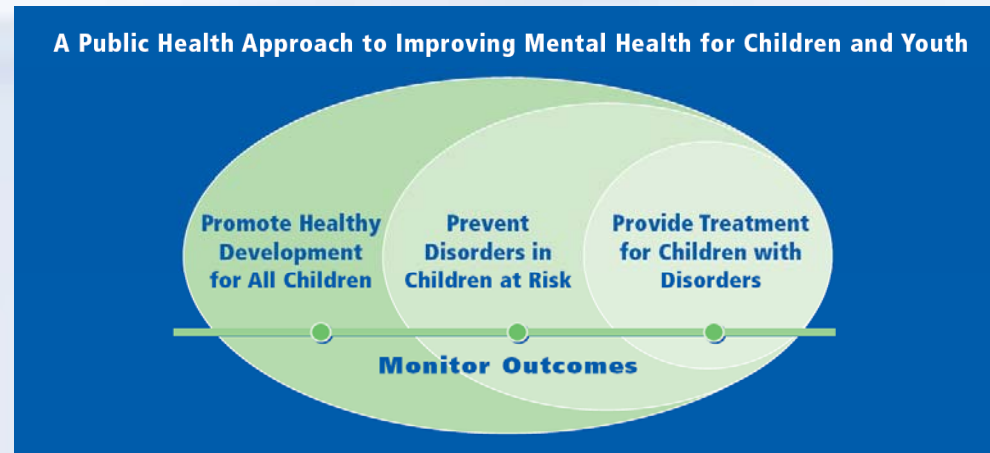
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Implications for Prevention & Intervention



- Programs must be tailored to the unique needs of children and youth, whether they be population based or targeted ~ they must be developmentally tailored
- Programs need to be evidence based and grounded in research and theory on child and youth development
- Prevention is always advantageous, but not always available and not always fully effective

**Greater
Complexity
Deeper Severity
Longer Chronicity**

**Multiple Risk
Reduction
Components in
Integrated
Tailored Package**



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See: C. Waddell, CHILDREN'S HEALTH POLICY CENTRE, <http://www.childhealthpolicy.sfu.ca/publications/RR-4-04>

Prevention Programs

Examples of School Based Approaches:

- Elementary Grades
 - WITS “Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out, and Seek Help” (Grades K to 3) and WITS LEADS (Grades 4-5) – Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater, University of Victoria
<http://www.youth.society.uvic.ca/>
- Grades 9/10
 - Fourth R <http://www.thefourthr.ca/index.html>
 - Youth Safe Schools Committee (YSSC) is a key component of the Fourth R program and focuses on preventing violence and promoting healthy relationships both in the classroom and in the school and community



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Targeted Programs for High-Risk Teens

Program	Sample	Description	Main Findings
<i>Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (US)</i> ⁹⁰	• <i>Focus:</i> Youth with a history of serious + chronic delinquency • <i>Age:</i> 12-17 years • <i>Sex:</i> 100% male • <i>Ethnic majority:</i> 85% Caucasian	• One-year intervention focused on the foster family environment + links with other systems (school + community) • Taught foster parents to create structured environment for youth • Used individual + family therapy	• Reduced days spent in detention • Improvements in self-report measures of delinquency + criminal activity at 1-year follow-up
<i>Multi-Systemic Therapy (US)</i> ⁶²	• <i>Focus:</i> Youth with a history of violent + chronic delinquency • <i>Age:</i> 11-17 years • <i>Sex:</i> 82% male • <i>Ethnic majority:</i> 81% African American	• One-6-month, family-driven intervention that developed links between multiple systems (school, community, peers + family) • Used variety of therapies to address difficulties in diverse areas of youth's life • Avg treatment spanned 4 months	• Improvements in psychiatric symptoms • Reduction in days incarcerated at 1-year follow-up



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Attachment: A Relational Model to Reduce Risk in High-Risk Teens

Evidence of Effectiveness in Younger Populations:

- Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003: 70 studies representing 88 intervention effects on parental sensitivity and/or children's attachment security; interventions that specifically focused on promoting sensitive parental behaviour proved to be effective in changing insensitive parenting as well as infant attachment insecurity
- Marvin: "Circle of Security"
- Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn: Videofeedback Intervention to promote Positive Parenting

Common Focus: Enhance parental sensitivity; awareness of attachment/relational issues; as prerequisite for change



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CONNECT[©]

Moretti, Holland, Braber, Cross & Obsuth, 2006

- Manualized -10 Sessions
- Group Format
- Role Plays, Reflection Exercises; Instruction & Discussion
- For parents or alternate caregivers
- Evidence based & integrated program evaluation
- Directed at reducing aggression and violence, and promoting healthy relationships.



See: Moretti, M. M., & Obsuth, I. (in press). Attachment and aggression: From paradox to principles of intervention to reduce risk of violence in teens. In M. Kerr & H. Stattin (Eds.), *Understanding Girls' Problem Behaviour*.

Obsuth, I., Moretti, M. M., Holland, R., Braber, C., & Cross, S. (2006). Conduct Disorder: New directions in promoting effective parenting and strengthening parent -adolescent relationships. *Canadian Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Review*, 15(1), 6-15.

Connect: A Principle Based Approach to Working with Parent-Child Relationships

What Skills Do Parents Learn?

- Identify underlying attachment/interpersonal needs and reframe parent-teen conflict
- Reflect on the psychological experience of their youth and themselves with empathy
- Maintain emotional availability and modulate emotional arousal in the face of conflict
- Strategic use of basic parenting skills to set limits and support their relationship with their adolescent



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CONNECT: Group Structure

- Each week focuses on a key attachment principle as it relates to adolescent development and parenting, followed by role-plays, exercises
- Integrate techniques from CBT, mindfulness training, emotional regulation, distress tolerance.
- One hour sessions only! Ten sessions only!



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CONNECT – Illustrative Session Principles

	Title	Principle	Illustrative Goals & Skill Development Focus
#2	Attachment over the Lifespan	Attachment is for life.	Enhance recognition that attachment needs continue throughout life but are expressed differently as children develop.
#3	Conflict: An Opportunity for Understanding and Connection	Conflict is part of attachment.	- Enhance recognition and acceptance of conflict as a normative part of relationships. - Develop skills in regulating affect, maintaining connection and negotiating in the face of conflict.
#6	Empathy – The Heartbeat of Attachment	Understanding, growth & change begins with empathy.	- Enhance understanding of the role of empathy as essential to secure attachment. - Develop skills in empathic listening in conflict situations. - Emphasize that empathy is not condoning problem behaviour - Strengthen skills in setting limits while maintaining empathy



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CONNECT – Waitlist Control Study Effectiveness

Client Group:

- 13 boys and 7 girls (mean age 14.5) and 20 caregivers
- Severe behaviour problems – e.g., within six months prior to admission:
 - 21% of youth had dropped out of school
 - 59% placed outside their biological parents' home for period of time
 - 49% had threatened to kill or seriously harm themselves
 - 61% had threatened to kill or seriously harm someone else



Waitlist-Control Study: Summary of Findings

- Good attendance; high treatment acceptance
- Significant reductions during treatment phase in:
 - Aggressive behaviour
 - Rule breaking
 - Social problems
 - Depression/anxiety
- Treatment gains maintained at follow-up 12-18 months



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CONNECT – Phase II: Community Generalizability

Clients

- 78 adolescents (Mean Age - 13.5) and 78 caregivers
- 35 girls; 53 boys
- Severe behaviour problems – e.g., within six months prior to admission:
 - 83.3% threatened to harm someone a few times
 - 21.6% arrested (16.7% more than 3 arrests)
 - 20.8% incarcerated
- Drop out rate – 14%
- Attendance at all sessions: 86%



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Connect Generalizability Study: Summary of Results

- Significant pre-post treatment reductions in:
 - Teen physical and verbal aggression toward caregivers
 - Caregiver physical and verbal aggression toward teens
- Reduced caregiver burn out as reflected by:
 - Lower caregiver reports of:
 - objective strain (e.g., missing work; disruption in daily return)
 - internalized strain (e.g., feeling sad, unhappy, worried)
 - externalized strain (e.g., feeling embarrassed, resentful)
- Significant increases in:
 - Consistent discipline
 - Parenting satisfaction
 - Perceived parenting efficacy

Assessing Parenting Representations: Interview Excerpts

- I. **Now I would like to ask you some questions related to the Connect Parent Group, okay? How do you think the Connect Parent Group influenced you?**
 - **Father:** Quite a bit, actually. It gave me a different insight into how to deal with Sandy, how to react with him and how to see what was actually in his mind, you know, like try to see it through his eyes, and I think that helps a lot. It's uh, you know, it gives me food for thought whenever I see him doing something or seeing him getting upset, I try and figure out why or what's he doing, what's he thinking sort of thing. Instead of just going in and saying, don't be angry, don't be upset. That doesn't work that well, so it's helped a lot.
 - **Mother:** Well, I did do parenting classes before where I felt like I was talked at and told what to do in certain situations, which for Sarah, she's not an average kid.. What I never really thought about before was there is a need behind the behaviour. I knew there would be a reason for the behaviour, but not so much there's a need that's not being met. That's why when she was younger, she would say be turning everything upside down or....it's not that she just wants to be a little hellion, there's a reason for it. And that's what I try and keep in my mind most now when things are going on ... it helps a lot in just sort of fitting, like little puzzle pieces ... in our life, it seemed like everything was upside down and now it's starting to right itself.



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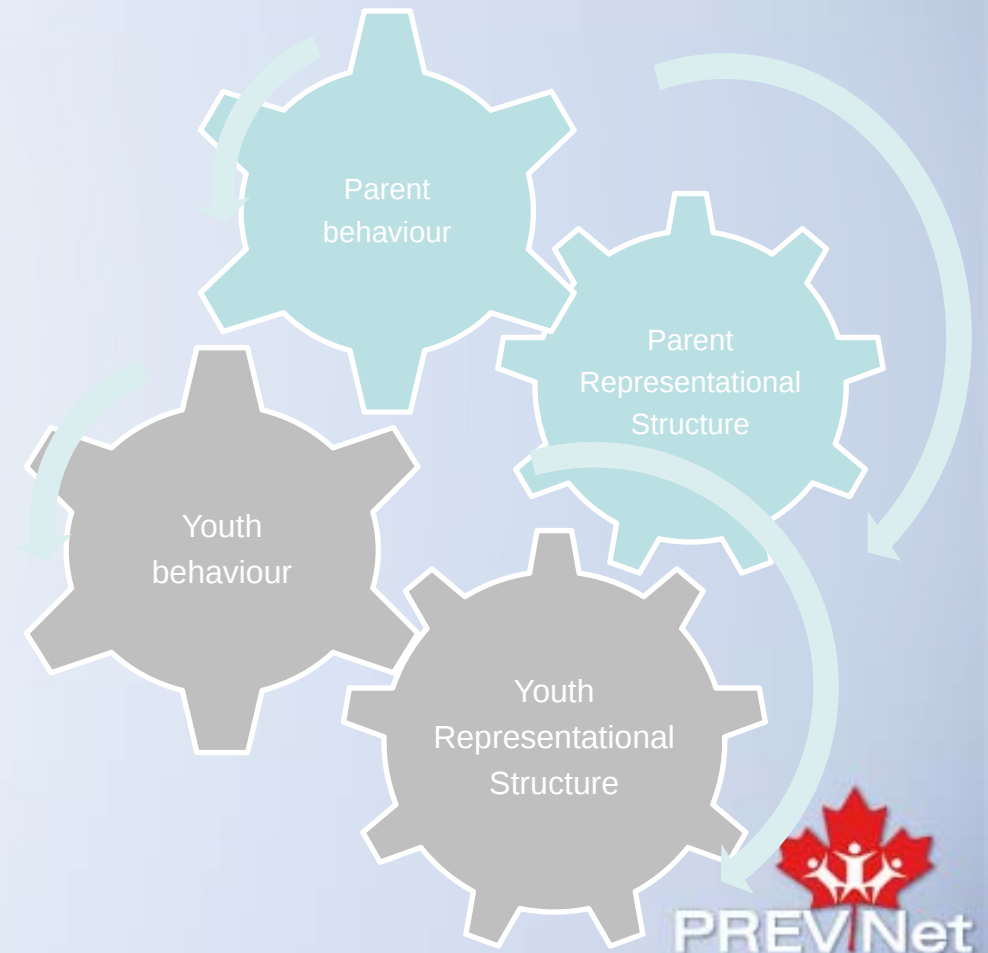
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Dyadic Patterns of Change

- Change is transactional
- Changes in parental beliefs and behaviours trigger change in youth beliefs and behaviours and vice versa
- Understanding the function of aggressive behaviour is key to change



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Thanks to...



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Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre

Youth Justice

Research Trainees:

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