

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

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Children Learn What they Live

Pay It Forward # 1



Questions

- What Did you See?
- How did the child react in this segment?
- Why?

Pay It Forward #2



Another Video - First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain

Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing Domestic Violence

- There are approximately 31 studies that are methodologically rigorous that look at the impact of witnessing DV on children.
- These studies have documented multiple problems among children that are significantly associated with a child's witnessing assaults of one parent by another in the home.
 - Jeffrey Edleson, Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley

Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing Domestic Violence

- These Problems include:
 - *Psychological and emotional problems* such as aggression, hostility, anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression
 - *Cognitive functioning problems* such as lower verbal and quantitative skills and the development of attitudes supporting the use of violence
 - *Longer-term development problems* such as depression, trauma-related symptoms and low self esteem among women and trauma-related symptoms alone among men.

Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing Domestic Violence

- These problems are magnified or mitigated by a number of *moderating factors* including:
 - Whether or not the child has also been a victim of physical or emotional abuse
 - Child's age and gender (younger and female more impacted)
 - Amount of time that has passed since witnessing violence
 - Where the child is living (with or apart from perp)
 - How child perceives his or her relationship to adults in the home and degree of perceived support for child

Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing Domestic Violence

- There are many well-designed studies, but many with flaws. These flaws include:
 - *Failure to separate abused from non-abused witnesses of violence*, making it difficult to determine source
 - *Samples focusing almost exclusively on children in crisis shelters*. This gives good view of children at point of crisis, but not of children along continuum different arrangements and different points of time.
 - *Failure to collect data from children themselves*. Children often report different effects on themselves than reported by adults.
 - *Use of measures developed for other populations*.

Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing Domestic Violence

- *Finally, significant numbers of children in these studies showed no negative consequences from witnessing domestic violence. One must be careful not to assume that all children who witness domestic violence will show negative results. Careful assessment of each child is extremely important.*

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!

Factors to Consider: Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

- overlap with other forms of child maltreatment
- differential impact on infants, children & adolescents
- risk & protective factors related to likely effects - don't just think in terms of negatives
- potential long-term effects

Effects of Violence on Children ¹

- Hypervigilance
- Low self esteem
- Easily aroused and alerted
- Increased behavioral problems
- Anxiety
- PTSD symptoms
- Anxious attachments; traumatic bonding may lead to enmeshed attachments

¹ www.futureofchildren.org

Effects of Violence on Children

- Problems with social skills
- Increased feelings of vulnerability and withdrawal
- Depression
- “Holes” in their functioning; they may look healthy in some places, but internally there are significant problems

Effects of Violence on Children

- Children in families with separation engendered violence are inhibited and constricted. They typically experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress and are anxious
- These symptoms were typically briefer and with a good prognosis both for the emotional response of the children and the parenting ability for the parents

Effects of Violence on Children

- If violence has stopped, continued threats of such violence is most traumatic for children and families.
- When there is a blend of psychological, physical, economic and other violence that is perpetrated in an intermittent fashion over time, often with little or no apparent cause or warning, the abuse is most devastating and overwhelming (think of the slot machine analogy)

Attachment, Trauma, & Violence

- Even Very Young Children Have Difficulty Coping with Domestic Violence - neurological arousal happens despite age and coping skills are few, if any
- Multiple Emotions Co-Exist
- These Emotions Serve as a Defense Against their Feeling Overwhelmed
- The developing brain has not yet acquired the ability to filter well or to tolerate hyperarousal.
- Therefore, brain development may well be impacted - and this is a lifetime legacy

Infants and Toddlers

Developmental Features

take in information through senses

forming attachment

active explorers and learn through play

learn about social interaction from their families

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

loud noises, vivid visual images associated with violence can be distressing

parents may not be able to consistently respond to children's needs

fear and instability may inhibit exploration and play; imitating in play may be related to aggression witnessed

learn about aggression in interactions observed

Long-term Effects - Infants & Toddlers

- delayed or permanently impacted brain development
- failure to thrive
- listlessness
- disruption in eating & sleeping routines
- developmental delays
- problems with attachment/trust
 - Think insecure attachment and even disorganized attachment
- PTSD symptoms

Preschoolers

Developmental Features

learn to express and modulate aggression & other emotions

egocentric thinking

ideas about gender roles

increased physical independence

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

learn unhealthy ways of expressing anger and aggression; possibly confused by conflicting messages (e.g., what I see versus what I'm told)

may attribute violence to something they've done

learn gender roles associated with violence & victimization

Family instability may inhibit independence; may see regressive behaviors

Long-term Effects - Preschool Children

- aggressive acts
- clinging
- anxiety
- cruelty to animals
- destruction of property
- PTSD symptoms

Children Ages Five to Twelve

Developmental Features

increased emotional awareness for self and others

emphasis on fairness and understand cause & effect

academic & social success at school has substantial and increasing impact on self-concept

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

more awareness of own reactions to violence at home; more aware of impact on others (e.g., mother's safety, concerned about father being charged, feelings if disapproval)

possibly more susceptible to acquiring rationalizations heard to justify violence (i.e., myths of woman abuse)

accessibility for learning may be decreased because of impact of violence (e.g., distracted); may miss positives, or selectively attend to negatives, or evoke more negative feedback

Children Ages Five to Twelve (cont.d)

Developmental Features

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

increased influence from school, peers, community and media

Possibly more influenced by messages that confirm attitudes and behaviors associated with woman abuse

increased same sex identification

may learn gender roles associated with woman abuse (e.g., males as perpetrators -- females as victims)

competition assumes new importance within peer group

may use hostile aggression to compete; increased risk for bullying and/or being bullied

Long-term Effects - Latency (5-12) Elementary School Ages

- bullying
- general aggression
- depression
- anxiety
- withdrawal
- PTSD symptoms
- oppositional behaviour
- destruction of property
- poor school achievement
- disrespect for females; sex role stereotyped beliefs

Adolescents

Developmental Features

increased autonomy

puberty

increased peer group influence
and desire for acceptance

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

family skills for respectful communication and negotiation may be poorly developed due to violence; transition of adolescence may be more difficult for youth and family and can prompt more violence

may try to physically stop violence; may use increased size to impose will with physical intimidation or aggression – or – identify with the aggression and mimic

possibly more embarrassed by violence at home; may try to escape violence by increasing time away from home; may use maladaptive coping to avoid (e.g., drugs) - or identification with violence and mimic

Adolescents *(cont.d)*

Developmental Features

dating raises issues of sexuality, intimacy, relationship skills

increased influence by media

Potential Impact of Exposure to Violence

- may have difficulty establishing healthy relationships; possibly at greater risk to become involved in dating violence (e.g., boys as abusers & girls as victims)
- possibly more influenced by negative media messages re: violent behavior, gender role stereotypes

Long-term Effects Adolescence (12-18 Years)

- Dating violence
- Bullying
- Poor self-esteem
- Behavioral and conduct disorders
- Suicide ideation
- PTSD symptoms
- Truancy
- Somatic concerns
- Disrespect for females; sex role stereotyped beliefs
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Running away from home
- Sudden decline in school achievement & attendance

Individual Factors that Mitigate Reactions

- Emotional resilience / coping strategies
- Temperamental factors
- Self esteem: sense of self-worth
- Internal locus of control / self-mastery
- Interpersonal skills
- Intellectual or cognitive ability
- Ability to find meaning in one's life

Family Factors that Mitigate Reactions

- Supportive and concerned family members
- Parents who are not punitive and critical
- Family structure that is clearly understood
- Parent in control, consistent, reliable
- Parent who models healthy coping skills
- Parent with good judgment
- Boundaries are intact (no enmeshment)

Environmental Factors that Mitigate Reactions

- Social environment that provides external support
- It provides validation
- Is empathic
- Psychosocial intervention is available to support and protect the child
- When treatment is not indicated it is not provided (*first do no harm*)

Some Situations To Consider

- What are your assumptions about the causes of DV?
- What is the purpose of supervised visitation?
 - When is it indicated?
 - When should it be removed?
 - When is even supervised visitation not a good idea?
- Are the dynamics of DV different for same sex couples?
- Should one consider the impact of parent-child contact on the other parent? Why? Why not? How?
- What do you think (your biases) about victims who do not report?