

Effects on Children

Each year an estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence against their mothers or female caretakers by family members. (American Psychological Association, Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996)

Research shows that 80 to 90 percent of children living in homes where there is domestic violence are aware of the violence. (Pagelow, "Effects of Domestic Violence on Children," Mediation Quarterly, 1990)

A child's exposure to the father abusing the mother is the strongest risk factor for transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next. (American Psychological Association, Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996)

Male children who witness the abuse of mothers by fathers are more likely to become men who batter in adulthood than those male children from homes free of violence. (Rosenbaum and O'Leary, "Children: The Unintended Victims of Marital Violence," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1981)

Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and or behavioral problems than those who are not. Some potential effects are:

EMOTIONAL

- Grief for family and personal losses
- Confusion about conflicting feelings toward parents
- Depression and feelings of helplessness
- Fear of abandonment, or injury or expressing emotions
- Shame, guilt & self-blame
- Anger
- Embarrassment

BEHAVIORAL

- Acting out or withdrawing
- Refusing to go to school
- Lying to avoid confrontation
- Excessive attention seeking
- Out of control behavior
- Aggressive or passive
- Care taking; acting as a parent substitute
- Rigid defenses
- Bedwetting and nightmares
- Reduced intellectual competency

SOCIAL

- Isolation from friends and relatives
- Difficulty in trusting, especially adults
- Excessive social involvement to avoid home
- Engaged in exploitative relationships as perpetrator or victim
- Stormy relationships
- Poor anger management and problem solving
- Passivity with peers or bullying

PHYSICAL

- Somatic complaints, headaches and stomachaches
- Nervous, anxious, short attention span
- High risk play
- Poor personal hygiene
- Frequently ill
- Tired and lethargic
- Regression in development
- Self-abuse, self-harm