

PACKET OVERVIEW

This packet of information has been developed by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC) as an introduction to the complex and varied issues implicit in children's exposure to intimate partner violence. The packet includes articles, research findings, statistics and resources taken from work done in the time period between 1990 and the present.

Throughout the history of the battered women's movement, discussions about the exposure of children to intimate partner violence, research studies about the experience of those children, and legislative responses have grown in scope and quality. During the 1970's, domestic violence was recognized as a public concern and the needs of the families began to be addressed in local, state and national communities. However, in the initial stages of service provision done by civil/criminal justice systems and social service agencies, children typically received attention only when physically injured or sexually assaulted in the home. The co-occurrence of the children's abuse and the intimate partner violence was not necessarily recognized or addressed. Earliest research studies examined the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse and provided important documentation of the many ways in which children were endangered. Knowledge of the prevalence of co-occurring child sexual abuse was also emerging. As research progressed, the extent of non-physical forms of abuse and neglect became apparent. Information has steadily increased over the past three decades. Current understanding of the effects of domestic violence on children will be explored in this packet.

Within the body of the packet, child victims will be referenced as "children exposed to domestic or intimate partner violence." Fantuzzo & Mohr (1999) clarify the reasons for choosing this term:

Several different terms have been used by researchers and others to refer to children in households with domestic violence. Early researchers spoke of these children as either "witnesses" or "observers" of the violence. In the past five years, these terms have been replaced by "exposure" to the violence, which is more inclusive and does not make assumptions about the specific nature of the children's experiences with the violence. Exposure to domestic violence can include watching or hearing the violent events, direct involvement (for example, trying to intervene or calling the police), or experiencing the aftermath (for example, seeing bruises or observing maternal depression). (p 22)

Increased awareness of the overlap between domestic violence and child abuse brought with it an understanding of the need for collaboration among children's program advocates, child protection workers and law enforcement. Because the missions of the various agencies were often difficult to reconcile in the course of collaboration, agencies struggled to coordinate consistent and appropriate responses to the needs and safety of the families. In recent years many communities have made a stronger commitment to

effective, equitable collaboration in order to provide services that are safe, meaningful and complete in scope. Promising programs and coordinated community response concerning the needs of the children have expanded services and enhanced children's safety nationwide.

In the area of collaboration and service provision, a prevalent consideration for battered women's programs, child protection agencies, law enforcement and the courts has been the examination of parenting practices and adult accountability for children's safety. The search for ways to create safe and stable environments for the children—something adult victims had worked toward both inside and outside of their violent relationships—became a serious concern for child advocates across the disciplines. Because victims were accessible and willing to work toward positive lifestyles for themselves and their children, they became the focus of everything from research projects to criminal investigations into the welfare of their children. Community scrutiny turned to and remained with the victim. This focus carried the risk of re-victimization for both mother and children, which was troubling to those agencies providing direct domestic violence services to victims. Perpetrators of the intimate partner violence were not held to the same standards of accountability for children in the first decades of intervention. Recent studies have pointed to the parenting capabilities and strengths of victims and have called for increased research into the parental accountability of perpetrators.

While the detrimental effects of intimate partner violence on children have been clearly established through research studies and observations of adult survivors and domestic violence programs, the positive results of increased awareness, education, prevention and intervention for children and youth are increasingly recognized and duplicated throughout the nation. Anecdotal accounts of the positive responses of children to support services have validated efforts of domestic violence advocates and other service providers. Longitudinal research studies are beginning to appear that will further the knowledge and encourage development of effective interventions. Within this packet we will provide information on promising strategies that have produced positive results in the lives of children exposed to domestic violence.

Material within the packet has been organized into categories according to content. Following the *Packet Overview*, the *Key Issues* section begins by examining the *Effects of Intimate Partner Violence on Children* and *Co-occurrence of Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse*. Parenting Practices of victims and abusers are discussed, as are *Collaborations between Domestic Violence and Child Protection Agencies*. That section ends with information regarding *Intervention with Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence*. The packet concludes with listings of resources—*Fact Sheet, Statistics, Bibliography, Web site, Video and Direct service tools Resource Lists*—as well as articles and referral information designed to promote increased knowledge on each sub-topic.

Statement Regarding Gender Language and Cultural Diversity

When discussing parents or adults involved in domestic violence incidents, the information in this packet will reference the adult victim as female and the perpetrator as male. The NRC acknowledges that these terms may not be reflective of all intimate relationships. Because the overwhelming majority of domestic violence cases involve male violence against women, we have chosen this gender-specific language for the sake of clarity and continuity. In addition, information from domestic violence programs and studies utilizing clients of those programs do not typically distinguish between heterosexual or same sex relationships. If studies specific to children of same sex relationships become available, they will be added to the contents of this packet.

Cultural diversity is not directly addressed in packet materials. Studies done in the field of child exposure to intimate partner violence have only recently begun to provide information about the ethnicity of participants. In early studies methodological problems made ascertaining cultural implications in child exposure difficult to determine. Then, as now, most studies involved shelter residents and their children, and participants were representative of shelter populations. While cultural and ethnic diversity is present in most shelters, percentages may not accurately reflect the community at large. Recent studies are more methodologically sound with regard to issues of diversity and wherever possible these are the studies to be included in this packet.

Finally, studies addressing issues specific to children with disabilities are only now beginning to be considered. Articles and research studies involving this population of children will be included in this packet as they become available. The Bibliography section in this packet includes *Kid&Teen Safe: An Abuse Prevention Program for Youth with Disabilities*, developed by SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center, Austin, TX

REFERENCES

Fantuzzo, F. & Mohr, W. (1999). Prevalence and effects of child exposure to domestic violence. *The Future of Children, a publication of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation*, 9 (3), 21-31. Los Altos, CA
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