

STATISTICS

PREVALENCE OF CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE

- The maltreatment of children and violence against women often go hand in hand. As many as half a million children may be encountered by police during domestic violence arrests. There is an overlap of 30 to 60 percent between violence against children and violence against women in the same families. The home can be a dangerous place. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (November 2000). *Safe from the start – taking action on children exposed to violence*. (Publication #NCJ182789) Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.]
- About 4 of 10 (43 percent) female victims of intimate partner violence lived in households with children under age 12. Population estimations suggest that 27 percent of U.S. households have children under the age of 12. This study, however, is not able to determine the extent to which the children witnessed the actual violent event. [Rennison, C. & Welchans, S. (2000). *Intimate Partner Violence*. (Publication #NCJ178247). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, Office of Justice Programs.]
- A 1994 study found that 1 out of every 10 children treated in the Boston City Hospital primary care clinic had witnessed a shooting or stabbing before the age of 6. Almost all (94 percent) of the children had been exposed to multiple forms of violence, and half had been exposed to violence in the past month. Half of the children witnessed this violence in the home and half witnessed it on the streets. Their average age was 2.7 years. [Taylor, L., Zuckerman, B., Harik, V. & Groves, B. (1994). Witnessing violence by young children and their mothers. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 15(2), 120–123.]
- Domestic violence has been shown to occur disproportionately in homes with children under age 5. [Taylor, L., Zuckerman, B., Harik, V. & Groves, B. (1994). Witnessing violence by young children and their mothers. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 15(2), 120–123.]

EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- The harm that individual children experience as a result of exposure to domestic violence varies depending upon many factors, including the level of violence in the family, the child's exposure to it, and both the child's ability to cope as well as protective factors in his or her environment. Problems associated with exposure to domestic violence have also been found to vary by the age and gender of the child, the length of time since last exposed to violence, and the child's connections to the non-abusive parent and other significant individuals and social supports in his or her life. [Groves, B.M. (1999). Mental Health Services for Children Who Witness Domestic Violence. In The David & Lucile Packard Foundation. Domestic violence and children. *The Future of Children*, 9(3). <http://www.futureofchildren.org>]
- Problems associated with exposure to domestic violence have also been found to vary by the age and gender of the child, the length of time since last exposed to violence, and the child's connections to the non-abusive parent and other significant individuals and social supports in his or her life. [Groves, B.M. (1999). Mental health services for children who witness domestic violence. *The Future of Children*, 9(3). <http://www.futureofchildren.org>]
- Participants included 106 maritally violent couples and their eldest child aged 8 to 11 years old. The results showed that inter-parental conflicts are highly salient to all family members and that parents and children perceive them similarly. [Kerig, P. (1998). Gender and appraisals as mediators of adjustment in children exposed to interparental violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 13(4), 345-363.]
- Research also indicates that exposure to domestic violence can affect cognitive functioning. [Rossman, B. B. (1998). Descartes's error and posttraumatic stress disorder: cognition and emotion in children who are exposed to parental violence. In G.W. Holden, R. Geffner & E.N. Jouriles (Eds.). *Children Exposed To Marital Violence*, (pp 223-256). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.]
- The findings of 29 articles reviewed indicated that children who witness domestic violence are at risk for maladaptive responses in one or more of the following areas of functioning: (a) behavioral, (b) emotional, (c) social, (d) cognitive, and (e) physical. [Kolbo, J., Blakely, E. & Engleman, D. (1996). Children who witness domestic violence: A review of empirical literature. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11(2), 281-293.]
- Youth who witness domestic violence are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, commit other delinquent behavior, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes. [Wolfe, D.A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel, D. & Gough, R. (1995). Strategies to address violence in the lives of high risk youth. In Peled, E., Jaffe, P.G., & Edleson, J.L., (Eds.) *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*. New York: Sage Publications.]

- Exposure to parental domestic violence, while not to be considered automatically a form of child abuse, may be associated with a series of childhood problems, primarily behavioral and related to emotional functioning. Child witnesses of domestic violence on average exhibit more aggressive and antisocial behaviors, fearful and inhibited behaviors, anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, temperament problems, and lowered social competence, than children who do not witness such violence. [Fantuzzo, J.W., DePaula, L.M., Lambert, L., Martino, T., Anderson, G. & Sutton, S. (1991). Effects of interpersonal violence on the psychological adjustment and competencies of young children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59, 258-265. Adamson, L. A. & Thompson, R. A. (1998). Coping with interparental verbal conflict by children exposed to spouse abuse and children from nonviolent homes. *Journal of Family Violence*, 13, 213-232. Hughes, H.M., Parkinson, D. & Vargo, M. (1989). Witnessing spouse abuse and experiencing physical abuse: a "double whammy? *Journal of Family Violence*, 4, 197-209. Maker, A. H., Kemmelmeier, M. & Peterson, C. (1998). Long-term psychological consequences in women of witnessing parental physical conflict and experiencing abuse in childhood. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 13, 574-589. Sternberg, K.J., Lamb, M.E., Greenbaum, C., Cicchetti, D., Dawud, S., Cortes, R.M., Krispin, O. & Lorey, F. (1993). Effects of domestic violence on children's behavior problems and depression. *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 44-52.]
- The impact of exposure to domestic violence and child abuse can continue through adolescence if safety and other interventions are not provided. Many adolescents who have grown up in violent homes are at risk for recreating the abusive relationships they have observed. [Sudermann, M., Jaffe, P.G. & Hastings, E. (1995). Violence Prevention Programs in Secondary (High) Schools. In E. Peled, P. Jaffe & J. Edleson (Eds.) *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage]
- Witnessing violence as a child is also associated with adult reports of depression, trauma-related symptoms and low self-esteem among women, and trauma-related symptoms among men. [Silvern, L., Karyl, J., Waelde, L., Hodges, W.F., Starek, J., Heidt, E. & Min, Kyung. (1995). Retrospective reports of parental partner abuse: Relationships to depression, trauma symptoms and self-esteem among college students. *Journal of Family Violence*, 10, 177-202.]
- Research has found that violent adolescents suffered serious physical abuse by a parent and witnessed the use of weapons in their homes significantly more often than non-violent adolescents. These variables, both independently and in combination, have been significantly associated with adolescents' use of violence. [Spaccarelli, S., Sandler, I.N. & Roosa, M. (1994). History of spouse violence against mother: Correlated risks and unique effects in child mental health. *Journal of Family Violence*, 9, 79-98.]

GENDER SPECIFIC EFFECTS

- Results provided clear evidence that the shelter girls were rated by their mothers as more maladjusted than the boys. The finding that shelter girls received more verbal aggression from their fathers than shelter boys did suggests that exposure to inter-parental violence is likely to be accompanied by high rates of father-daughter conflict. It may be that battering husbands identify their daughters with their wives and anger toward their wives “spills over” onto daughters as well. [Cummings, J., Pepler, D. & Moore, T. (1999). Behavior problems in children exposed to wife abuse: Gender differences. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(2), 133-156.]
- 55 percent of the homeless women reported a past history of wife abuse prior to the time limit set for the study. Homeless girls who had been exposed to interparental violence were significantly more maladjusted than their male counterparts, whereas homeless girls and boys with no history of exposure did not differ. This exposure to interparental violence appears to have more deleterious long-term consequences on the development of girls than on the development of boys. [Cummings, J., Pepler, D. & Moore, T. (1999). Behavior problems in children exposed to wife abuse: Gender differences. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(2), 133-156.]
- Surveys of females in the juvenile justice system and in shelters indicate rates of sexual abuse and assault of over 70 percent. The response of these girls is often to run away from home, which too frequently leads to engaging in prostitution. [Chamberlain, P. & Reid, J. (1994). Differences in risk factors and adjustment for male and female delinquents in treatment and foster care. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 3*(1).]
- A total of 617 women were asked about their memories of witnessing inter-parental violence in the home. One hundred twenty-three women, (20 percent or about one out of five) reported that, before the age of 16, they had witnessed physical conflict(s) between their parents. Results found that women who had witnessed physical conflict between their parents reported more psychological symptoms than a group of women who had never witnessed their parents engage in physical conflict. They also reported currently experiencing greater social maladjustment — less perceived social support, sense of attachment to others and sense of social integration. Results support the hypothesis that witnessing marital violence between one’s parents during childhood has a negative effect on psychological and social adjustment in adulthood. It should be noted, however, that when childhood physical abuse, witnessing nonphysical parental verbal conflict, and low parental caring were controlled for simultaneously, the association between witnessing parental physical conflict during childhood and later adult psychological and social adjustment was no longer evident. [Henning, K., Leitenber, H., Coffey, P., Turner, T. & Bennett, R. (1996). Long-term psychological and social impact of witnessing physical conflict between parents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 11*(1), 35-51.]

- A total of 617 women were asked about their memories of witnessing inter-parental violence in the home. One hundred twenty-three women (20 percent or about one in five) reported that, before the age of 16, they had witnessed physical conflict(s) between their parents. Of those exposed to any interparental violence, 40 percent witnessed only their fathers use physical force against their mothers, 28 percent witnessed only their mothers use physical force against their fathers, and 32 percent reported witnessing both parents use physical force against the other parent. The types of conflict most frequently observed were one parent slapping the other parent and one parent hitting or trying to hit the other parent with something. In addition, fathers were more frequently observed to slap, beat up, and choke mothers than vice versa. The average age at which the women reported first witnessing either parent use physical force against the other parent was 7.7 years and the average number of times they saw a conflict before the age 16 was six times. [Henning, K., Leitenber, H., Coffey, P., Turner, T. & Bennett, R. (1996). Long-term psychological and social impact of witnessing physical conflict between parents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11(1), 35-51.]

- A total of 617 women were asked about their memories of witnessing Inter-parental violence in the home. One hundred twenty-three women (20 percent or about one out of five) reported that, before the age of 16, they had witnessed physical conflict(s) between their parents. Supporting research that states children who witness physical conflict between their parents are also more likely to be physically abused themselves during childhood, 42.9 percent of the women who witnessed interparental violence reported having been physically abused during childhood compared to only 10.9 percent of the woman who did not report witnessing any interparental violence. [Henning, K., Leitenber, H., Coffey, P., Turner, T., & Bennett, R. (1996). Long-term psychological and social impact of witnessing physical conflict between parents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11(1), 35-51.]

- Research has found that men who as children witnessed their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own wives than sons of non-violent parents. [Strauss, M. & Gelles, R. (1990). *Physical violence in American families – Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.]

TRAUMATIC RESPONSE

- A total of 84 children (48 males and 36 females) and their 67 mothers from eight shelters for battered women and three child protective agencies volunteered to participate in a study on child behavior. The average age of the children was 11 with a range from 9 to 15 years old. Approximately 58 percent of the sample had witnessed an average of 59 assaults, while approximately 42 percent of the sample had witnessed an average of 75 assaults. A large proportion of the children (68 percent) had witnessed their mother being assaulted for longer than 4 years, with the remaining sample witnessing 3-4 years (9.5 percent), 2-3 years (16.7 percent), 1-2 years (3.6 percent), and less than 1 year (1.2 percent). It was determined that all the children met the initial criteria of having experienced an event that was terrifying and outside the range of usual human experience. Moreover, 60 percent (50 children) responded to having at least one re-experiencing symptom, while 68 percent (57 children) responded to having at least three avoidance symptoms. Finally, 66 percent (55 children) responded to having at least two hyper-arousal items. In sum, results of this study indicated that more than half of the children sampled who had witnessed mother assault could be diagnosed as meeting criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This diagnosis was based on their reactions to assault-specific events and reminders. [Lehmann, P. (1997). The Development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a sample of child witnesses to mother assault. *Journal of Family Violence*, 12 (3), 241-257.]

RISK FACTORS FOR THE INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

- It is important to note that exposure to physical or sexual abuse or domestic violence as a child is not the only risk factor for juvenile violence. Living in an impoverished community or with frequent exposure to drugs, guns, and crime; having parents that use harsh or erratic discipline; and being isolated from the community, family, or school are all circumstances that put children at higher risk. [Blumstein, A. (1994). *Youth Violence*. 1994 Task Force Reports. American Society of Criminology to Attorney General Janet Reno.]