

Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Infants and toddlers may:

- Be distressed by loud noises or vivid visual images associated with violence.
- Not receive consistent parenting.
- Be inhibited in their exploration and play by fear and instability; imitating in play may be related to aggression witnessed.

Preschoolers may:

- Express anger and aggression in unhealthy ways; and may be confused by conflicting messages.
- Attribute violence to something they have done.
- Learn gender roles associated with violence and victimization (boys externalize, girls internalize).
- Be inhibited in gaining independence by instability; may exhibit regressive behaviors.

School-aged children may:

- Acquire rationalizations heard to justify violence.
- Have a decreased ability to learn.
- Miss positive statements, selectively attend to negatives, or evoke negative feedback.
- Learn gender roles associated with violence and victimization.

Problems that children may face due to domestic violence

- Sleep troubles, nightmares, fear of falling asleep.
- Restless/anxious behavior at naptime.
- Headaches, stomach aches, aches and pains (somatic symptoms), complaints of being overly tired.
- Severe separation anxiety or separation anxiety that lasts an extended period of time.
- Increased aggressive behavior and angry feelings.
- Very high activity levels, constant fidgeting.
- Constant worry about possible danger.
- Loss of skills learned earlier.
- Withdrawing from friends and activities.
- Not showing feelings about anything.
- Worrying a lot about the safety of loved ones.
- Difficulty completing an activity or task.
- Repetitive play about the violence events.
- Using bullying or aggression to control others.

Adapted from Baker, LL, Jaffe, PJ, & Ashbourne, L. (2003)

Stage Specific Effects of Domestic Violence

Adapted from *Domestic Violence: A National Curriculum for Child Protective Services*, Anne Ganley & Susan Schechter, Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1996.

0-1 year	2-4 years	5-12 years
<p>How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ physically abusing the child ✓ waking child with the sound of the violence ✓ exposing child to assaults against mom or property ✓ threats of violence against child ✓ hitting or threatening child while in mother's arms ✓ taking child hostage to get mother to return 	<p>How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ all the ways listed for age 0-1 years ✓ hurting child when he/she intervenes to prevent mom from being injured ✓ using a child as a physical weapon against victim ✓ interrogating child about mother's activities ✓ forcing child to watch assaults against mother or to participate in the abuse 	<p>How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ physically or sexually abusing child ✓ being violent physically and/or sexually towards mother in front of the children ✓ hurting child when he/she intervenes to stop violence against mother ✓ using as spy against mother ✓ forcing child to participate in attack on mother ✓ interrogating child about mother's activities <p>Effects on Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ physical abuse or death ✓ fear ✓ insecurity, low self-esteem ✓ withdrawal ✓ depression ✓ running away ✓ early interest in alcohol or drugs ✓ school problems ✓ becoming an overachiever ✓ bed-wetting or regression to earlier developmental stages ✓ sexual activity ✓ becoming caretaker of adults ✓ becoming violent ✓ developing problems to divert parents from fighting ✓ becoming embarrassed by his/her family
<p>Effects on Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ physical injury or death ✓ fear ✓ traumatization ✓ sleep disturbances ✓ eating disturbances ✓ colicky or sick condition ✓ nervous, jumpy, crying a lot ✓ insecure ✓ unresponsive or not cuddly ✓ premature birth 	<p>Effects on Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ all of the effects listed for age 0-1 years ✓ acting out violently ✓ withdrawal ✓ problems relating to other children ✓ delayed toileting ✓ insecurity ✓ depression 	<p>Effects on Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ physical abuse or death ✓ fear ✓ insecurity, low self-esteem ✓ withdrawal ✓ depression ✓ running away ✓ early interest in alcohol or drugs ✓ school problems ✓ becoming an overachiever ✓ bed-wetting or regression to earlier developmental stages ✓ sexual activity ✓ becoming caretaker of adults ✓ becoming violent ✓ developing problems to divert parents from fighting ✓ becoming embarrassed by his/her family

13-18 years

How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children

- ✓ physically or sexually abusing child
- ✓ coercing child to be abusive to mother
- ✓ being violent physically/sexually towards mother in front of children
- ✓ hurting child when he/she intervenes to stop violence against mother
- ✓ using child as a spy against mother
- ✓ forcing child to participate in an attack on mother

Effects on Teenagers

- ✓ physical injury or death
- ✓ school problems and truancy
- ✓ social problems
- ✓ shame and embarrassment about his/her family
- ✓ sexual activity
- ✓ tendency to get serious in relationships too early in order to escape home
- ✓ becoming super-achiever at school
- ✓ depression
- ✓ suicide
- ✓ alcohol and/or other drug abuse
- ✓ confusion about gender roles
- ✓ becoming abusive

Specific effects on young women

- ✓ fearing male violence
- ✓ learning that women do not deserve respect
- ✓ accepting violence in their own relationship
- ✓ becoming pregnant

Specific effects on young men

- ✓ fearing that males are violent; identification as the aggressor
- ✓ learning to disrespect women
- ✓ using violence in his own relationships
- ✓ confusion and/or insecurities about being a man
- ✓ attacking mother, father and/or siblings

Mitigating Factors Regarding the Effects of Witnessing Violence

Some children who witness domestic violence suffer significant effects as a result of the exposure, even though they may not be the primary victims of the violence. However, it is important to note that children react in different ways to the violence. Consequently, the effects of the violence vary, depending on a variety of factors such as:

- type and history of the abuse,
- age, gender and developmental level of the child,
- the child's interpretation of the violence,
- how the child has learned to survive and cope with stress,
- the support system available to the child and
- his/her ability to accept support and assistance from adults.

Remember, not all children who witness domestic violence suffer significant negative effects from the experience. Longitudinal studies reveal that 50-75% of children growing up in families with domestic violence, as well as exposure to other risks, defeat the odds and turn a life that appears destined for further hardship into one that illustrates resilience and triumph. ("Tapping Innate Resilience in Children Exposed to Domestic Violence", *Synergy*, Vol.7 No. 2, Summer 2003, by the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges.)

Effects of Witnessing Domestic Violence on Children

AGE	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL	DEVELOPMENTAL
PRE-NATAL	poor nutrition beatings- increased miscarriages	N/A	N/A	increased miscarriages low birth weights
BIRTH-2 YRS.	low weight digestive problems no appetite	irritability sadness anxiety	sleeping problems startles easily cry excessively excessive screaming	failure to thrive
2-6 YEARS	lack of bowel control lack of bladder control stomach aches	fear anxiety guilt (feels responsible for abuse) separation anxiety lacks self-confidence self centered	acts out very aggressive-mimics abusive parent verbally abusive defiant very withdrawn clingy, whining tries not to be noticed problems making or keeping friends regressing to younger behavior	poor verbal skills quiet, doesn't talk poor cognitive skills poor motor skills poor impulse control fears new things, people
7-12 YEARS	bedwetting stomachaches, ulcers headaches insomnia eating disorders	low self esteem ambivalence toward abuser denial & secrecy fear & anger guilt-can't protect	aggressive, bully violent-may hurt peers, siblings, animals lies & steals self-abusive may mimic behavior of	poor grades or failure school phobia poor impulse control learning disabilities poor peer relationships

		<p>mom/loves the abuser</p> <p>self-blame</p> <p>nightmares</p> <p>ashamed & embarrassed</p>	<p>same sex parent.</p> <p>withdrawn or clingy</p> <p>deny violence in home</p> <p>doesn't invite friends home</p>	<p>few or no friends</p>
<p>13-18 YEARS</p>	<p>bedwetting</p> <p>stomachaches, ulcers</p> <p>headaches</p> <p>severe acne</p> <p>eating disorders</p>	<p>low self-esteem</p> <p>loneliness & isolation</p> <p>extreme anger</p> <p>anxious, fearful</p> <p>withdrawn</p> <p>uncommunicative, especially about feelings</p> <p>indifferent, no emotion</p> <p>blames others, especially parents</p>	<p>very violent</p> <p>criminal activities</p> <p>self-destructive-substance abuse, promiscuity, self-mutilation, suicidal ideas, delinquency, risk taking</p> <p>take on parent/caretaker role</p> <p>runaway or stays away from home</p> <p>protective/abusive to mom</p> <p>uses violence to solve problems</p> <p>violence in dating</p> <p>refuses to bring friends home</p>	<p>poor school performance or failure, truancy, drop out</p> <p>immaturity</p> <p>poor impulse control</p> <p>few friends</p>

