

CHILDREN IN VIOLENT HOMES

Children are often the unintended victims of battering. Children in violent homes face dual threats: the threat of witnessing traumatic events, and the threat of physical assault. Children of abused women may:

- ◆ Be injured during an incident of parental violence;
- ◆ Be traumatized by fear for their mother and their own helplessness in protecting her;
- ◆ Blame themselves for not preventing the violence or for causing it;
- ◆ Be abused or neglected themselves.¹

CHILD ABUSE IN VIOLENT HOMES

The risk of child abuse is significantly higher when partner assault is also reported.²

- ◆ Nearly half of men who abuse their female partners also abuse their children.³
- ◆ Nationally, 75% of battered women say that their children are also battered.⁴ Another study found that one-third of the families reporting a violent incident between the parents also reported the presence of child abuse.⁵
- ◆ Women being battered are less able to care for their children.⁶ Eight times as many women report using physical discipline on their children while with their batterer than when living alone or in a nonbattering relationship.⁷

WITNESSING PARENTAL VIOLENCE

- ◆ Over 3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year.⁸
- ◆ Children from violent families can provide clinicians with detailed accounts of abusive incidents their parents never realized they had witnessed.⁹

THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The damage inflicted by living in a home with severe parent-to-parent violence is often overlooked. The immediate impact of this exposure can be traumatic--fear for self, fear for their mother's safety, and self-blame.

- ◆ The range of problems among children who witness parental violence includes psychosomatic disorders, such as stuttering, anxiety, fear, sleep disruption, and school problems.¹⁰
- ◆ Children older than five or six have a tendency to identify with the aggressor and lose respect for the victim.¹¹

Over a longer period of time, the child's exposure to violence may lead to later violence on the part of the child--as well as to other serious emotional and behavioral problems.¹²

- ◆ Violence witnessed at home is often repeated later in life.¹³ Violent parental conflict has been found in twenty to forty percent of the families of chronically violent adolescents.¹⁴ Seventy-five percent of boys who witness parental abuse have demonstrable behavioral problems.¹⁵
- ◆ A comparison of delinquent and nondelinquent youth found that a history of family violence or abuse was the most significant difference between the two groups.¹⁶
- ◆ Child and adult victims of abuse are more likely to commit violent acts outside the family than those not abused.¹⁷ Abused children are arrested by the police four times more often than non-abused children.¹⁸

Courts should consider the effects of parental violence in custody and visitation cases. Counseling should be available to help children from violent homes avoid the serious consequences of abuse.

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