

Family Violence Prevention Fund

Factsheet: Children and Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence and Children

* The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country. 1

* Data from a 1995 Gallup Poll of family violence suggest that from 1.5 million to 3.3 million children witness domestic violence each year. 2 Another leading family violence researcher estimates that as many as ten million children are exposed to parental violence each year and that a third of American children have endured violence between their parents.

* In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50 percent of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children. 3

* In 200 substantiated child abuse reports, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services found that in 48 percent of the case records, domestic violence was a barrier to case closing. 4

* Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers. 5 They are also more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes. 6

* Slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in households with children under age 12. 7

* In a 1993 study, the Oregon Department of Human Resources reported that domestic violence was present in 41 percent of families experiencing critical injuries or deaths due to child abuse and neglect. 8

* Children who grow up in violent homes can become violent themselves. Exposure to domestic violence can cause behavioral and emotional problems that last for a lifetime. 9

* Men who as children witnessed their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own wives than sons of nonviolent parents. 10

* One study of 2,245 children and teenagers found that recent exposure to violence in the home was a significant factor in predicting a child's violent behavior. 11

Domestic Violence and Youth

- * Eight percent of high school age girls said "yes" when asked if "a boyfriend or date has ever forced sex against your will." 12
- * Forty percent of teenage girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend. 13
- * During the 1996-1997 school year, there were an estimated 4,000 incidents of rape or other types of sexual assault in public schools across the country. 14

Pregnancy and Domestic Violence

- * Each year, at least six percent of all pregnant women, about 240,000 pregnant women, in this country are battered by the men in their lives. 15
- * Complications of pregnancy, including low weight gain, anemia, infections, and first and second trimester bleeding are significantly higher for abused women 16,17, as are maternal rates of depression, suicide attempts, tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use. 18

1U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States: Fifth Report*, 1995

2Gallup, GH Jr., Moor, DW, and Schussel, R. 1997. *Disciplining Children in America*. Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization.

3Snyder, Howard N. Winter 1996. *The Juvenile Court and Delinquency Cases*. In *The Future of Children: The Juvenile Court*. Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Vol. 6,3

4Hangen, E. 1994. *Department of Social Services Interagency Domestic Violence Team Pilot Project: Program Data Evaluation*. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Social Services.

5Jaffe, P. and Sudermann, M., "Child Witness of Women Abuse: Research and Community Responses," in Stith, S. and Straus, M., *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalence, Causes, Consequences, and Solutions*. Families in Focus Services, Vol. II. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1995.

- 7U.S. Department of Justice, Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends, March 1998
- 8Oregon Children's Services Division. 1993. Task Force Report on Child Fatalities and Critical Injuries Due to Abuse and Neglect. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Human Resources.
- 9Snyder, Howard N. Winter 1996. The Juvenile Court and Delinquency Cases. In The Future of Children: The Juvenile Court. Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Vol. 6,3.
- 10Strauss, Murray A., Gelles Richard J., and Smith, Christine. 1990. Physical Violence in American Families; Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- 11Singer, M.I., Miller, D.B., Guo, S., Slovak, K & Frieson, T., The Mental Health Consequences of Children's Exposure to Violence. Cleveland, OH: Cuyahoga County Community Health Research Institute, Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, 1998
- 12The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls, November 1997
- 13Children Now/Kaiser Permanente poll, December 1995
- 14U.S. Department of Education, Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997
- 15Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 1994.
- 16Parker, B., McFarlane, J., & Soeken, K. (1994). Abuse During Pregnancy: Effects on Maternal Complications and Infant Birthweight in Adult and Teen Women. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 84(1), 323-328.
- 17McFarlane, J. Parker B., & Soeken, K. (1996). Abuse during Pregnancy: Association with Maternal Health and Infant Birthweight. *Nursing Research* 45, 32-37.
- 18McFarlane, J., Parker, B., & Soeken, K. (1996). Physical Abuse, Smoking and Substance Abuse During Pregnancy: Prevalence, Interrelationships and Effects on Birthweight. *Journal of Obstetrical Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing*, 25, 313-320.

General facts about domestic violence

For more information about children and domestic violence, visit these links:

Minnesota Center against Violence and Abuse
The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
London Family Court Clinic