



The Co-occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse:

When the “helping professions” are part of the problem

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The Ripple Effect**



Domestic Violence: Co-occurrence with Child Abuse

- **Between 30-60% of men who batter their female partners also abuse their children.** (Findlater & Kelly (1999).
- **Perhaps as many as 59% of children of battered women are also physically abused themselves.** (Holden, et. al, 1998)
- **Research projections estimate the prevalence of children's exposure to domestic violence to be between 3.3 - 10 million annually, nationwide.** (Holden, 1988).
- **Conservatively, child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households where domestic violence is present.** (Friend, 1998).

Domestic Violence and Child Abuse

Understanding the Intersection

- In some child assault cases, children are not the primary targets
- child abuse does not usually occur at the same time as wife abuse
- Wife beating is a major precipitant of child abuse
- child abuse typically occurs to spite the wife in DV cases

SOURCE: “On the Relationship Between Wife Beating and Child Abuse,” Bowker, et. al. In *Feminist Perspectives of Wife Abuse*, 1988. (Sage)

Child Abuse & Domestic Violence

Who is the aggressor?

A study of 1,000 battered women found:

- wife beaters abused children in 70% of the cases
- the prevalence of child abuse increased from 51% with one child to 92% with four or more children
- the severity of wife beating is predictive of the severity of child abuse
- husband-dominance was the most significant predictor of abuse
- different mechanisms at work in paternal & maternal child abuse

SOURCE: “On the Relationship Between Wife Beating and Child Abuse,”
Bowker, et. al. In *Feminist Perspectives of Wife Abuse*, 1988. (Sage)



The effects of abuse: Impact on children

- Externalizing Problems
- Internalizing Problems
- PTSD symptoms
- Separation Anxiety, Regression
- Social Behavior/Competence Deficits
- School performance
- Somatic complaints
- Intergenerational transmission of violence

SOURCE: Holden (1988). "The Development of Research into another Consequence of Family Violence." In *Children Exposed to Marital Violence*. (APA)

The effects of abuse: Impact on adults

- Adult victims of domestic violence often experience intense startle reactions, tension, nightmares, chronic fatigue, disturbed sleeping and eating patterns and medical symptoms (Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita & Russo, 1994).
- Psychological abuse often leads to self-doubt, depression, and confusion, and may severely limit a victim's ability to assess options that may aid him or her in leaving the abusive relationship. (Sackett & Saunders, 1999).
- Some survivors remain passive, withdrawn, and continue to display apathy and symptoms of depression (Chapman, 1962; Peterson & Seligman, 1983).
- A survivor's ability to trust and to form emotional attachments is severely impacted by domestic violence (Dehart, 1996).



Domestic Violence: The Cumulative Effect of Abuse

“Battering is the sum of all past acts of violence, and the promise of future violence, that achieves enhanced power for the batterer.”

--Barbara Hart

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence



How the “helping professions” become unwitting accomplices

- Misdiagnosing PTSD or other abuse symptoms
- Court systems used by batterers to “legally” abuse their victims
- Removal of children due to “failure to protect” doctrine
- Unrealistic timeframes and case plans which do not take into account victim’s emotional or economic well-being
- “Batterer accountability” rhetoric

Challenging our assumptions

- the abusing father has a right to see his child
 - trumps safety issues for child/victim
 - transforms abuse to a legally-sanctioned & court-enforced victimization
- that victims have equal access to the courts as batterers
 - economic inequities built into current system
- that the need for support services for victims ends after the acute transitional period of separation from the abuser

Shifting paradigms

- The assumption that the victim must leave
 - cultural competence issues
 - economic realities
 - threat of stalking
- batterer's “treatment” as a jail diversion tactic
- Family preservation
 - definition of family
- protection of the victim and protection of the children are not mutually exclusive goals

Implications for practice

- CPS screening for DV
 - LA model
 - threat of removal of child / foster care placement
- Integration of DV expertise into Mental Health System
 - screening assessment for DV at time of intake
 - Acute Psych, SACS, residential treatment
- Legal representation for victims
- Custody/visitation orders:
 - effect of visitations on both victim and child