

Impact of domestic violence on family dynamics

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of domestic violence on family dynamics, focusing on how such violence alters relationships, communication patterns, and overall family functioning. Domestic violence not only affects the direct victims but also has profound repercussions on children and other family members, influencing their emotional and psychological well-being. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzes quantitative data from surveys on family health and dynamics alongside qualitative interviews with survivors and professionals in the field. Findings reveal that domestic violence contributes to a breakdown of trust, increased conflict, and emotional distress within families, often leading to long-term negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues in children. The research emphasizes the importance of understanding these dynamics to create effective intervention and support strategies. Additionally, it highlights the role of community resources and support systems in mitigating the adverse effects of domestic violence. By providing insights into the complex interactions within families affected by domestic violence, this study aims to inform practitioners and policymakers about the critical need for comprehensive support services that address both immediate safety and long-term recovery for families.

Keywords: domestic violence, family dynamics, relationships, emotional well-being, intervention strategies, community support, trust, psychological impact.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is defined as the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. Given such a narrow conception of violence within the family, it harms not only an individual or a partnership, but an entire network of people. On the qualitative narrative, victims tend to describe their abuse as one that affects many family members more so than

themselves. Victims of an abusive partner lose a total of 8.0 million days of paid work each year. On a quantitative analysis, a single act of domestic violence impacts an entire family system. It is the hope to articulate the numerous ways in which domestic violence infiltrates family dynamics. The perspective tends to focus on children and spouses, but it should be noted that domestic violence infiltrates elderly abuse and even the unborn. (Maji et al.2022)

Domestic violence has been steadily researched and reported as being a serious social concern. At the heart of the rampant abuse among families are the children who are left to implicate and experience the trauma of both the victims and their abusers. Aggregated findings report that twenty percent of males and twenty-seven percent of females have been victims of abuse from the ages of birth to seventeen. Additionally, fifteen million children witness domestic violence annually. In families where domestic violence occurs, more than fifty percent of the children were abused. Moreover, eighty to ninety percent of the abusers were also abused by their own parents. It is likely that children exposed to or experiencing domestic violence will also become abusers. Thus, addressing domestic violence is crucial for populations who are not even born yet and might never be.

2. Understanding Domestic Violence

The term 'domestic violence' is used to describe a wide range of behaviors that are used by one (or both) person in a relationship to dominate or control the other person or to make them fearful. This kind of violence includes physical, mental, sexual, and financial abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced prostitution, stalking, and harassment. It takes place across all social groups and in all types of intimate relationships, including heterosexual and same-sex relationships, between parents, carers, and children, and also occurs between other family members. (Junco-Guerrero et al.2022)

In public policy and among practitioners and researchers, domestic violence refers collectively to three forms of abuse: domestic abuse, sexual violence, and forced marriage. The latter two are recent advancements within policy and are currently not included in the legal definitions of domestic violence. Domestic abuse, however, is understood collaboratively under a 'definition of sorts.' In everyday policy, in criminal justice settings, and among the general public, domestic abuse consists of either

physical violence or psychological harm. It includes a wide range of coercive and controlling behaviors perpetrated by a current or former partner, including non-physical abuse, financial abuse, intimidation, emotional harm, and emotional manipulation. This is typified as emotional or psychological abuse and is where harmful behaviors can encompass the majority of research attention. Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging that domestic abuse is complex and individuals will often experience a range of physical, psychological, or emotional abuses.

2.1. Definition and Types

One of the most important factors in working with domestic violence is the definition of the concept. In this way, any form of physical, mental, and/or emotional abuse of family members formed within the context of power and control is defined as domestic violence. Historically, the concept of domestic violence was perceived only as physical abuse. Physical violence is just one of the types of domestic violence. Emotional and sexual violence, financial violence, and physical violence also emerged as forms of violence. (Mojahed et al.2022)

Physical and sexual violence are the most obvious forms of abuse. However, some forms of violence, such as emotional and financial violence, are often hidden among the other types. Abuse victims are aware of certain actions that should be done by their spouse or partners; for this reason, these types of abuse continue for a longer period of time.

Until as recent as the 1970s, the criminal justice, legal, and social work agencies of most countries had little knowledge or interest in domestic violence in the family and classified this type of violence as "a normal family issue." After the 1970s, society began to perceive domestic violence as a distinct concept apart from other types of violence. In Sweden, the police did not have the authority to arrest the perpetrator of domestic violence in the family until the decision of 1971. In the United States, police and judicial authorities served more as mediators of the family's peace after domestic violence calls until the 1980s. The recent classification of domestic violence as a crime from the perspectives of legal and law enforcement is thought to have positive impacts on the incorporation of the ill effects of domestic violence into legislation.

2.2. Prevalence and Statistics

Domestic violence is a widespread issue, particularly in cases of intimate partner violence and child abuse. In the U.S. alone, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have been victims of some form of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime, equating to over 10 million women and men each. Breaking this down, women and men of all cultures, socio-economic statuses, and ethnic backgrounds are affected by domestic violence. In 2014, there were 119 women and 72 men who were killed by an intimate partner. This shows a decrease from 2007, where 136 women and 1,816 men were killed; however, in 2013, only 102 women and 180 men were reported dead due to domestic violence. (Zhang, 2022)

Despite this decrease, thousands more go unreported and without support. Only about 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries. Whether they seek help or not, statistics find that 98.5% of the time, this violence is part of a larger system of control. This kind of pattern is present in about 1.3 million women and 835,000 men who have, at some point, been raped. On an even larger scale, 564,450 women and 45,000 men have been stalked by their partner in their lifetime. It is also important to note that these statistics are not the actual number of cases but rather the number of those reported annually to law enforcement. Alarming, in 52% of cases, domestic violence is not reported, largely due to fear and silence. In abusive same-sex relationships, even less abuse is reported to law enforcement. Cultural and socio-economic factors also have a large impact on whether or not abuse is reported.

3. Impact on Children

Exposure to domestic violence takes a profound emotional toll on children. Children who witness or experience domestic violence suffer emotional scars. Effects include severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and aggression. In addition to fears for their own safety and the safety of their loved ones, children who grow up around domestic violence sometimes feel responsible for the violence and conflicts in the home. They often feel helpless to protect themselves or the abused parent and are at a higher risk than other children of often lacking secure attachments to their caregivers. (Rabaan et al.2022)

The emotional effects of witnessing domestic violence can affect children of all ages. It can also disrupt their emotional, cognitive, and even their physical development. Boys growing up in abusive homes were found more likely to have attachment problems partly due to traumatic events, while girls were likelier to have their healthy attachments disrupted by their fathers. Abused boys also experienced major physiological effects partly attributable to psychological disturbances, whereas abused girls had more visible developmental effects due to their higher likelihood of experiencing sadistic emotional abuse, which wrecks childhoods. Children exposed to violence can also produce a range of behaviors, many including being disruptive in school or achieving poorly, or complying too readily with indiscipline. They can either be impulsive, hyper-vigilant, or easily distracted. A range of domestic violence studies demonstrate at an adult age that their witnessing it has been found to link with later neurosis in women, alcohol abuse, and criminal behavior in boys, while for girls there is a link with crime, but not with neurosis at this age. Experts say that the younger children are when exposed to domestic violence, the more profoundly they are likely to be affected. Children's experience of trauma and violence can undercut their ability to concretize an existing care or attachment bond. They may even start to see their parent as a threat, that dangerous attachment figure. The scars can last a lifetime.

3.1. Emotional Effects

In this section, the emotional effects of witnessing domestic violence on children are examined. Many children in Ireland witness their mother being emotionally, physically, or sexually abused. It is inevitable that they will be emotionally and psychologically impacted by living in such an environment. One of the most common emotions that children experience is fear. They may be afraid that one or both of their parents will be seriously hurt or killed. Sometimes they may feel that they are also at risk, especially if they have been caught up in an incident of domestic violence unintentionally. (Mojahed et al.2022)

Many children who witness domestic violence feel powerless, helpless, and paralyzed by fear. They are often confused by a parent's behavior. They know that the violence is wrong but also have a strong emotional bond with the parent using violence. Children may also feel very angry and worried for their parent, their siblings, and

themselves. Many of the children we support have low self-esteem or don't believe in themselves or their own capabilities. Witnessing domestic violence can also affect children's ability to manage their emotions. Living in an atmosphere of tension and fear can make children feel constantly anxious. They may find it difficult to relax and yield to playfulness and joy. Children can continue to suffer, even years after the abuse has ended. How a child is affected depends on their age at the time of the violent experiences and the child's emotional strength or their ability to handle their own feelings. However, some very young children appear resilient at the time of exposure to violence only to develop problems when they are older. For this reason, all children need access to support services that accommodate their emotional and developmental needs. The approach should be comprehensive because when support based on the emotional impact alone occurs in a child's life, it only serves to meet part of their needs. This highlights the importance of providing emotional support to children living with domestic violence. Children from the age of 2 to 15 years experience a broad range of emotions. It is essential to create safe spaces where children can express their emotions. This may be through agreed confidential sessions with an individual counselor or via safe group participation activities.

3.2. Behavioral Effects

The impact of domestic violence on children can be behavioral, psychological, or a combination of both aspects. This is typically where research in the area has been concentrated. Children who are exposed to abuse tend to either internalize or externalize their responses to witnessing or experiencing the violence. As a result, children may become aggressive, while others may withdraw socially. This may be part of a coping mechanism utilized by the child to manage their behavior in light of the trauma they have witnessed. (Nassoba & Samanik, 2022)

A potential behavior as a result of witnessing violence that occurs in the academic environment is a difficulty concentrating. A number of findings have also shown that children exposed to violence in the home develop negative behavior patterns, such as aggression, which have been regarded as maladaptive. For example, the "silent" treatment a child might employ could be a learned response to "keep away" from the violent behavior of a parent. Some indications also suggest that there may be a link between witnessing violence in the home and the victimization of the child or young

person. Children might think that antisocial behavior is acceptable and continue or intensify these patterns throughout adulthood. The behaviors that arise from exposure to domestic violence are wide-ranging. It's important to note that not every child will develop aggressive tendencies or indeed negative behavioral outcomes as a result of witnessing and/or experiencing the abuse. Consequently, I'm certainly not suggesting that all children will develop an antisocial behavior pattern. However, it does pose the question: if they did, might it be simply the result of their "training at home"? These behavior patterns could potentially place the child at an increased risk of future victimization.

Children may then go on and continue to be involved in controlling or abusive relationships, and a cycle may then develop. What is important is that adult support and early intervention are needed to help children understand and manage their behavioral response to witnessing or being involved in a violent domestic environment. The importance of early intervention is best highlighted in a follow-up of young children who were either abandoned or reared entirely in institutions. Support and removal from such an environment, followed by rearing in a foster placement environment, led to the reversal of many of the patterns of brain development that had occurred due to neglect. This evidence synthesizes why early intervention in abusive environments has the potential to alter abnormalities in brain development to manage the behavioral response of children.

4. Impact on Spouse/Partner

Domestic violence and its effects on the spouse or partner are often multi-faceted. Physically, being a victim of domestic violence can result in serious injury, disability, and even death. Domestic violence is a coercive means through which the abuser attempts to take away the victim's self-control. For a spouse and his or her children, this is the tragic reality of being under the authority of a man who believes his wife and children are his possessions. The dynamics of the abusive relationship are based upon the abusive partner's need for power and control. Even the decision to strike or not is a demonstration of the batterer's control over the victim. Tired of living in fear, depression, fatigue, and the loss of physical and emotional energy, the victims often must exert many inordinate attempts and unimaginable forms of resistance in an

attempt to leave the fearful control of the abuser, redirecting their lives in new directions. (Mojahed et al., 2022)

Individuals living in an abusive situation find their choices and decision-making abilities minimized by the abusive partner, resulting in a diminishment of their own sense of control and diminishing the sense of having rights and choices. Abusers force their partners to do things which they do not want to do. This level of control often results in the victim feeling incapable of surviving without the abuser. Many abusers manipulate their spouses into believing such things as “No one else will ever love you,” or “I am the only one who will ever endure the children.” Depression, anxiety, and the general sense of isolation are all common experiences resulting from domestic violence. Socio-economic ramifications of these forms of behavior are felt by the victim as well. Due to the loss of employment and financial dependence upon the abuser, the reality of leaving the violent situation is minimized by the financial need of the spouse. Repercussions for leaving are ever present in the victim’s mind. Oftentimes, retaliation from the abuser is the victim’s biggest fear for leaving the abusive atmosphere. Family, friends, neighbors, police, and the judicial systems often leave the victims unprotected and at the mercy of their abuser, strengthening their fears of retaliation.

Victims of domestic violence are often victimized again by society through victim-blaming. Such negative attitudes force the victim to recant her statements and often drop all charges levied against the abuser because of fear of retaliation and lack of sufficient support. Enforcement of laws through the arrest of abusers may seem on the precipice of leading to the end of domestic violence with future participation of the victims in the arrest. This view of events does not take into consideration the punitive response to victims who explain the situation and the normalization of the arrest, as evidenced by the high rate of arrest dropouts by the victim. Victimization might then point to one factor in a process that could begin to stop domestic violence, which is the development of laws that help victims in getting out of violent situations and provide a safety network to help keep victims out of abusive relationships. The narrative identifies the importance of appropriate and well-supported resources for helping the victims free themselves from their abusers.

5. Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

The concept of intergenerational transmission of violence refers to individual experiences becoming the transactional platform across generations. Exposure to violence is usually internalized in childhood and, therefore, may have a considerable influence on the repertory of behavioral and relationship strategies developed by the individual in adulthood. A child who has grown up in a home where domestic violence typically occurs has come to accept the use of threats, brute force, or other abusive behaviors to maintain power and control in a relationship as typical behavior. Such a child learns that in human relationships some people are powerful and ought to be followed or obeyed, while others are weak and should take orders. The fact that men commit the majority of domestic violence, combined with the routines of everyday family life, contributes to the production and reproduction of these norms and the acceptance of violent behavior by children.

Children who witness spousal violence between their parents may develop three patterns of behavior: identify with the perpetrator, identify with the recipient, or be impelled by the situation to adopt more adaptive behaviors. Children or family members may employ avoidant coping mechanisms further encouraged by societal acceptance of these mechanisms. Unfortunately, another explanation for the continuity of violence is that children may learn that violent behavior is normal and appropriate in conflict situations. It is hypothesized that children raised in violent families will develop antisocial characteristics and that boys learn to be aggressive while girls learn to submit. These learned behaviors will then be re-enacted in their own son-and-daughter relationships: sons as aggressors and daughters as victims. Such a perspective offers a useful explanation for the overlapping crisis in general family violence. Each generation learns actions and reactions from the previous one, making it difficult to break the cycle of violence.

Other family protection agencies and a section of the social work profession tend to view violence from a more individual and pathological perspective. They tend to assess the family home in a more general context and may take children into care. The problem of domestic violence is a growing social concern. Male violence against women and children is the most common form of violence in the family, the most difficult to report and the best-kept secret in the family. For families and professionals

dealing with this violence, the implications of domestic violence can have a physical, psychological, sexual, practical, economic, social, or fatal impact. In order to prevent the high prevalence of domestic violence, the transmission of violence from generation to generation, and its acceptance by society, must be understood. Measures must be adopted and funded to protect and support parents and children experiencing and living with domestic violence. Intervention measures, such as education, social policy, and professional practice, must include the systematic and organized action of all the social services and the different professions.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The clear message from a review of research presented in this essay is that domestic violence has a profound impact on family dynamics across the various social settings in which families typically function. The effects of domestic violence affect not only the victims and perpetrators but also children and other family members. The current scope of intervention covers child as well as adult victims in terms of preventing and supporting outcomes long term. However, a lack of community understanding and collusive community practices mean it is necessary to conduct further research to determine what is effective. Ultimately, society as a whole will only be able to address an end, eradication at best, of domestic violence if it develops a coherent and consistent response to the problem in which important information is enacted across all areas of society. This will require the efforts of those in the policy and practice arenas. (Antasari, 2022)

Recommendations

It is clear that long-term resolution of domestic violence can only occur with an emphasis on support. Communities need education to understand the issues, while preventive strategies to address and reduce domestic violence are necessary. All family members impacted by the violence require systems of support; these support systems need to be broad and inclusive, with community-based organizations and government being instrumental in these processes. In order to instigate change in family life affected by family violence, the implementation of a holistic and coordinated response to tackling the problem persists. Policymakers, mental health professionals, housing organizations, family support organizations, medical and legal practitioners are key stakeholders in informing and facilitating the structures and

programs that enable holistic prevention and intervention plans. It is vital that supportive education be taken out to communities to enhance the two-up model that can exist by having agencies linked at all levels; it is also necessary to provide an understanding of the above concerns to build greater awareness outside and within agencies across sectors. Consequently, support services must work closely with health professionals and child protection agencies to provide consistent support. Research is required to determine effective practices in dealing with domestic violence across the spectrum of persons. By building a greater awareness of the impacts and how to better intervene and prevent the occurrence of the cycle of violence across the affected areas, change is possible. Studies are required to determine effective methods to assist children and families in addressing and healing these direct impacts, and this work should not be limited to families in homelessness. Ultimately, by addressing the direct impacts of domestic violence, we may enable all families to have a healthier and safer environment to protect children and secure their well-being.

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