

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

How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children

- ✓ physically or sexually 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

Effects on Children

- ✓ 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

2- 4 years

How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children

- ✓ 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

Effects on Children

- ✓ all of the effects listed for age 0-1 years
- ✓ acting out violently
- ✓ withdrawal
- ✓ problems relating to other children
- ✓ delayed toileting
- ✓ insecurity
- ✓ depression

5-12 years

How Perpetrators Use or Harm Children

- ✓ 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

Effects on Children

- ✓ 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 relationship 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 that 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.)