

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PSYCHO-PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

**SUFFOLK COUNTY COALITION AGAINST
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.**

**Alice Agostini RN, LMSW, CRM, C.Ht.
Director of Counseling and Education**

UNHEARD CRIES



OBJECTIVES

- Define domestic violence.
- Define multi – abuse trauma
- Understand the short and long term effects of domestic violence.
- Early identification and early intervention.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of violent and or coercive behavior that someone uses against their partner in order to gain power and control.

Trauma

A physical or psychological threat or assault to an individual's physical integrity, sense of self, safety or survival or to the physical safety of another person significant to an individual.

Multi-Abuse Trauma

Multi-abuse trauma is a term used when an individual is impacted by more than one issue that negatively affects her/his safety, health or well-being (Slater, 1994).

Multi-Abuse Trauma

- *Active* forms of abuse include the kinds of harm that one human being does to another, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, emotional abuse, racism, sexism or homophobia.
- *Coping* forms of abuse are the methods that victims of active abuse may use to cope with their situation, such as substance abuse, compulsive eating, binging or purging, etc.

Dimensions of the problem

- In recent years, an intimate partner killed approximately 33% of female murder victims and 4% of male murder victims (Bureau of Justice 1996-2000).
- 60% to 75% of families where a woman is battered, children are also battered (Bowker, 1988).
- Another national survey found that 34% of women were victims of sexual coercion by a husband or intimate partner in their lifetime (Basil, 2002).

Dimensions of the Problem:

- Research demonstrates that exposure to violence can have serious negative effects on children's development (Lawrence 2002).
- According to a UNICEF study, “children who are exposed to violence in the home may have difficulty learning and limited social skills, exhibit violent, risky or delinquent behavior or suffer from depression or severe anxiety.”



Brain Development

- Most of the brain's cells are formed before birth, but most of the connections among cells are made during infancy and early childhood.
- Early experiences have a decisive impact on the actual architecture of the brain.

Sympathetic Nervous System:

- Acceleration of heart rate and lung action.
- Paling or flushing, or alternating between both.
- Dilation of pupils.
- Tunnel vision.
- Acceleration of instantaneous reflexes.

Stress Hormone

- Impaired cognitive performance
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Blood sugar imbalances such as hyperglycemia
- Decreased bone density
- Decrease in muscle tissue

Stress Hormone

- Higher blood pressure
- Lowered immunity and inflammatory responses in the body.
- Increased abdominal fat, which is associated with a greater amount of health problems than fat deposited in other areas of the body.

Psychological Affects

- Mood swings.
- Anger .
- Emotional irritability.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Dissociation.

Behavioral Effects

- Aggression.
- Withdrawal.
- Substance abuse problems.
- Eating disorders.
- Poor adherence to medical recommendations.
- Risky sexual behavior.

Cognitive Effects

- Difficulty with decision making.
- Poor school performance.
- Poor memory.
- Limited problem solving abilities.
- Belief in stereotypical gender roles.

Psycho -physiological effects

- Headaches.
- Stomachache.
- Hyperventilation.
- Increase vulnerability to infection due to immune suppression.
- Cardiac dysrhythmia.

Social Effects

- ISOLATED .
- RELATIONSHIP WITH FRIENDS MAY START INTENSELY AND END ABRUPTLY .
- POOR CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS SKILLS.
- Difficulty with trust.

Unique effects of Children:

- Infants: difficulty with attachment to caregiver or failure to thrive.
- Pre-school: may regress developmentally and/or eating and sleeping difficulties.
- School age : struggle with peer relationships.
- Adolescents: perpetrating or becoming victims of teen dating violence.

Protective factors

- Presence of social support.
- Early intervention.
- Positive beliefs about self.

Early Identification and Early Intervention

- Basic screening as part of medical check-ups, emergency medical care, juvenile corrections intake, mental health agencies and schools...
- Consultation and training to the network of caregivers in the lives of young children in order that they may more effectively identify and respond to children who are exposed to violence.
- Making treatment a priority for children and families by reducing or eliminating gaps in services.
- Provide developmentally appropriate counseling for children and for their families.

Bottom Line

- Children exposed to domestic violence are at risk of trauma.
- Untreated and unresolved trauma contributes to mental health difficulties in individuals – which in turn is related to victimization and perpetration of violence.
- The emotional dysregulation of trauma may alter sensory processing, focusing and regulation of activity, arousal and emotions.

In a Nutshell

We live in a culture of violence. Individuals are exposed to violence every day, they may be struck by a boyfriend, bullied by a classmate, or abused by an parent. They may witness an assault at home or a shooting on the street. Such exposure can cause significant physical, mental and emotional harm with long-term effects that can last the rest of their lives.

There is Always Hope....

