

Family Violence Prevention Fund

The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence

On average, more than three women a day are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in the United States¹ and women experience two million injuries from intimate partner violence each year.² Many of these women are mothers who often go to great and courageous lengths to protect their children from abusive partners. In fact, research has shown that the non-abusing parent is often the strongest protective factor in the lives of children who are exposed to domestic violence. However, growing up in a violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth and development. In spite of this, we know that when properly identified and addressed, the effects of domestic violence on children can be mitigated.

- 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year, and seven million children live in families in which severe partner violence occurred.³
- The majority of U.S. nonfatal intimate partner victimizations of women (two-thirds) occur at home.⁴ Children are residents of the households experiencing intimate partner violence in 43 percent of incidents involving female victims.⁵
- In a single day in 2007, 13,485 children were living in a domestic violence shelter or transitional housing facility. Another 5,526 sought services at a non-residential program.⁶
- The UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children conservatively estimates that 275 million children worldwide are exposed to violence in the home.⁷

Domestic Violence Affects Children

- A Michigan study of low-income pre-schoolers finds that children who have been exposed to family violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and are at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu.⁸
- Children of mothers who experience prenatal physical domestic violence are at an increased risk of exhibiting aggressive, anxious, depressed or hyperactive behavior.⁹
- Females who are exposed to their parents' domestic violence as adolescents are significantly more likely to become victims of dating violence than daughters of nonviolent parents.¹⁰
- Children who experience childhood trauma, including witnessing incidents of domestic violence, are at a greater risk of having serious adult health problems including tobacco use, substance abuse, obesity, cancer, heart disease, depression and a higher risk for unintended pregnancy.¹¹
- Physical abuse during childhood increases the risk of future victimization among women and the risk of future perpetration of abuse by men more than two-fold.¹²

What Helps Children Exposed to Violence

- Psychotherapy designed for mothers and children together can increase the quality of parenting and increase positive outcomes for children.¹³

- Many abusive men are concerned about the effect of violence on their children and the children of their partners. Some may be motivated to stop using violence if they understand the devastating effects on their children.¹⁴
- A safe, stable and nurturing relationship with a caring adult can help a child overcome the stress associated with intimate partner violence.¹⁵

Children Trafficked and Exploited

- The World Health Organization reports that 150 million girls experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence in 2002.¹⁶
- Each year, more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade, many of them trapped in prostitution.¹⁷
- According to the International Labour Office, eight million children are trapped in the worst forms of child labor, which include slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, prostitution, pornography and illicit activities.¹⁸

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