

CHILD WITNESS TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: UNDERSTANDING AND CONSIDERATIONS

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Overview

- My Background
- Hopes and Limitations
 - ▣ Spark new thoughts
 - ▣ Confirm experiences & impressions
 - ▣ Generate new ideas or motivations
 - ▣ 30 minutes NEVER enough!
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Acknowledgments

- For the research of the Domestic Violence Research Lab to be presented over 400 women currently in or out of violent relationships came forward to share their experiences
- Missoula and surrounding areas agencies contributed support through space, and distribution of materials (YWCA, Denny's Copy Stop, Family Violence Council, Target, Churches, Southgate Mall, etc.)
- Graduate and undergraduate students since 1994

Child Witness Issues

- Protection of children
- Impact on Children
- Complicating Factors
- Best Practices?

Protection of Children

- No simple solution
- Some states applied such laws in a blanket manner; could not serve the number of referrals
- Underestimate the trauma on children associated with removal and placement out of the home
- Fortunately for families, Montana enforces variably and with considerations:
 - ▣ As an example, Missoula CVA office:

Child Witness Policies

- Example: CVA Office:
- DIRECT SERVICES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
Confidentiality: As of 1999, Montana Law states that a child residing in a home where acts of violence occur against another person living in the home is a victim of psychological abuse. While the CVA Program agrees that residing in a home where there is domestic violence is harmful to children, for the purposes of reporting, we will usually not report such cases unless that harm is observable. The reasons for this are that reporting such instances may place the child or the victimized caretaker in greater danger. In addition, the CVA Program would likely have to report nearly all cases seen by the program, and this would be a severe impediment to the effective provision of services by the program.

Protection of Children

- Complex issues requiring weighing the needs of children against the realities of the situations
- How can research and knowledge base support and/or inform decision-making?
- What can we learn from the study of child witness impacts and family violence to assist us in applying policies and law?

Impact on Children

- Children in violent homes 5-7 times more likely to experience significant psychological problems than the general population (Cummings & Davies, 1994)
- Yet most do not experience clinically significant psychopathology at any one time (Hughes Graham-Bermann, & Gruber, 2001)
- Few early studies looked at the variation in families that is likely to contribute to the variations in expression of distress or no distress (protective and risk factors).

Impact on Children

- Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES, Felitti, 1998)
http://vetoviolenace.cdc.gov/apps/phl/resource_center_infographic.html
- 13,494 Kaiser Permanente Primary Care Patients
- 9,508 responded
- 8 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences were studied for impact on Leading causes of Death in Adults
- Witnessing DV is one of the ACEs
- Greater the number of ACE the greater likelihood of adult impacts on adult health and disease
- Multiple risk categories more likely to have multiple risks

ACES

- Multiple studies examining relationships between Adult Health (Heart Disease, Diabetes, Obesity, Depression etc.) and Functioning (Addictions, Smoking, etc.) show increased impact the more childhood dysfunctional environments (1998-present).
- Clear relationship on health and emotional wellbeing
- Also, neurobiological evidence of impact on developing brain (Anda, Felitti, et al, 2006)
 - ▣ Stress response and Neurodevelopmental Cascade

Impact on Children

- Complex-not direct (Davies & Sturge-Apple (2007))
- Interparental Interaction Processes
 - Forms of Violence (mild/severe)-extreme forms (knives guns predict child problems; exposure vs buffering)
 - Parent emotionality (negative intensity of fear, depression, anger)
 - Conflict Tactics (threatening verbal hostility or withdrawal vs. problem-solving and resolution skills)
 - Conflict topics (child-rearing and marital issues most distressing)
 - Growth or steeling effects: growth from adversity: challenging conditions in small or moderate doses allows for effective ways of coping and adapting to adversity

Parenting & family Processes

- Maltreatment of children (abuses, lack of warmth/responsiveness vs protection; 40% median of co-occurrence of CA and DV)
- Parenting difficulties (hostility, laxity, inconsistent discipline; DV compromising parenting?)
- Parent-child relationship (bonding, lack of attachment)
- Family-level processes (communication, boundaries)

Pre-existing Family Attributes

- Gender (parents (male-initiated greater impact) (female-threats to intactness of family-most-destructive); intergenerational violence a risk for dv in adult relationships but more do not go on to perpetrate than do)
- Developmental period (younger children most affected but clearly evident across; toddlers, teens more difficult on parents)
- Family/child characteristics (parent/child psychopathology and temperament, economic/other stressors, family structure, extent of social support)

Child Reactivity to Family Stress

- Hostile Dysregulated behavior
 - Social-Cognitive appraisals
 - Emotional Reactivity
 - Involvement/avoidance
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- *Each of these can interact to increase or decrease family responsiveness*

Child Adjustment Trajectories

- Social Competence
 - Biological/physical functioning
 - Developmental task resolution
 - Psychopathology/symptoms
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- *Child behaviors and adjustment can influence increases in parental conflict, but can also be associated with decreases with marital conflict over time-unclear of how and still under study.*

Women in DV relationships

- Levendosky (2003) women commented on trying to protect their children from the effects of the violence and on being aware of the negative effects of witnessing the violence on their children.
 - ▣ Additional studies found that women expressed wanting to keep their families together (Levendosky et al., 2000; Hendy et al., 2003; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2005).
 - ▣ Some women also stated that they feared losing custody of their children (Scott et al., 2002; Hendy et al., 2003).

Women in DV Relationships

- Other studies found that children influenced women's ultimate decisions to leave.
 - ▣ Laughon found that mothers reported children as being “powerful motivators to change (p. 378).” Mothers in this study expressed fear that their children would be physically injured as violence escalated.
 - ▣ Stephens (1999) found that women expressed concern that their children would learn similar behavioral patterns, thus perpetuating a new generation of victims and offenders.

Women in DV

- An additional factor which might influence women's stay-leave decision making is societal views.
 - ▣ In a study conducted by Burke and others (2001) women stated that they were often told to “wait it out” or were asked to try and work things out for their children's well-being.
 - ▣ Women in this study (Burke et al., 2001) also reported that their families were not supportive in the leaving process and therefore had to deal with the situation alone.
 - ▣ Social views of “the perfect family” may influence women to aspire to a certain ideal despite the severity of abuse they are experiencing.

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Domestic Violence Research Lab

- Over 400 women volunteered to participate in an interview and answer questions (10-13 surveys)
- 200 interviews audio-taped and transcribed
- Examination of factors contributing to stay-leave decision-making
- Studies of : Social Support-(friends, family, legal medical, clergy-etc.), Trauma Symptoms, Rurality, Post-traumatic Growth and Resilience,
- Impact of Children on Stay-leave decision-making (WITH Jamie Armstrong, MA)

Our Study

- Women with children (n=182 or 51%) compared to women without children (controlling for age) endured more serious violence and stayed in relationships longer. (total of 359- some missing data)
- However, women with children did not have any difference in severity of trauma symptoms compared to those without children.

Stay-leave Decision-making

- Children as Turning-Points in the Decision Making Process:
- Many women stated that they stayed in the relationship for the children but eventually left when they felt that it would be better for the children. Therefore, children were often the reason to stay but were eventually the turning-point in women's decision making process and ultimately a reason that many women permanently left the relationship.

Children as Turning Point

- “I think before, it was kind of like a reason to stay because I wanted to, you know, make it work out and stuff with their dad, and I didn’t want to split us all up. Then it kind of switched where I want to leave because I don’t want my kids to see this as they started getting older.”
- Another explained, “By the time I left my decision was to leave for the kids, instead of staying for the kids. I think the guilt of them having to go through what they had gone through to that point helped me make that decision.”

Children as turning points

- One woman explained that she left after the birth of her daughter, “I had just had a daughter and mostly wanted to break that cycle with my daughter and now I have a son and I didn’t want him growing up and hurting women.”
- Another stated, “Basically the one morning, like I said, that [it] was just enough. Then my son screamed and he didn’t even touch my son, he just could feel my emotion I think. Babies are pretty in tune with that kind of stuff. But that’s not a good thing. It’s one thing for me, but it’s not good for the kids.”

Children as Reason to Stay

- In our sample 54% of women reported their children as a reason to stay at some point in the relationship. The following are example quotations from women stating that they stayed in the relationship for their children:
 - ▣ One participant explained, “If I was by myself with no children it would be different. But I have children so I can’t just leave and end up in the streets.”

Children as Reason to Stay

- When asked her reason for returning to the relationship, one woman responded, “Because he said that he would change and that we needed to be together for the sake of our child.”
- Another participant stated, “I threatened to leave, and he told me that if I did, he would make sure that I never saw my children again.”
- “Because I was afraid he was going to kill me and take my children. Because he told me he would if I ever tried to leave him.”

- “I was basically, like I said, a prisoner of my own marriage. I stayed until my daughter graduated from high school and got her apartment and moved out. When I knew the kids were safe, they were out on their own and had their own lives going, basically that’s when I decided I didn’t have to deal with this anymore.”
- One woman explained simply, “Because I felt like my baby should have a dad.”
- Another reported, “I was determined to make this marriage work because I wanted this baby to have his father.”

Decision to Leave

- In our sample 60% of women reported their children as a reason to leave at some point in the relationship. The following are example quotations from women stating that they left the relationship for their children:
 - One women stated, “She [the child] is the only reason that I left. If it was up to me and it was just me in the relationship, I probably would not have left.”

Decision to Leave

- I didn't want it around my kids I was like totally no, don't want that environment for my kids," stated one of the participants.
- Another women explained, "I just, I knew he was going to kill me, I just knew that was it. If I didn't get out I'd be dead. He would kill me and the children would not have anyone to take care of them."

Decision to Leave

- One person reported, “I suppose if it had been just for me and there wasn’t a third party [the child] involved, an innocent, completely innocent third party, I don’t think my decision would have been as firm. Since there was this other person that really had no part in it and I had control over how their life went, that made the decision.”
- Another women stated, “I was concerned that my son would grow up to be a batterer and that my daughter would grow up to be battered.”
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□ THANK YOU!