



Domestic Violence: Children and Young People

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Issues

- How are children involved?
- Impacts (selves and relationships)
- Child contact
- Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention
- Local Initiatives



How are children &
young people
involved?



“My midwife had asked me and I actually admitted to it. A few of the midwives (asked), I’d been to the hospital a few times to be monitored because the baby had stopped moving, but I just kept denying it all the time.” *Lancashire woman*



Abusers may involve children in the abuse in a range of ways -

- Abuse can start or escalate in pregnancy (Mezey and Bewley), is a possible cause of injury or disability before birth (RCOG, 1997) and risk can still be high after birth (Gielen et al)
- Making them watch or encouraging them to be abusive towards their mothers. (Mullender 2000)
- Harsh or inappropriate punishment



Tactics of Abuse

- Making them feel weak or culpable
- Modelling of abusive behaviour
- Unable to protect themselves – labelled as ‘bad’ and ‘naughty’
- Called names and belittled
- Impact on mental health – emotionally unavailable
- Violence or threats, e.g. or abduction



Child protection

- There are strong links between domestic violence and the physical and sexual abuse of children by the perpetrator of the violence: the research suggests that domestic violence is present in 30% - 66% of child abuse cases

(see in particular, Gibbons et al, Epstein and Keep, Abrahams, Hester and Pearson, Farmer and Pollock, Humphreys and Thiara)




How are children & young people involved?

- For half those experiencing domestic violence, there are children aged under 16 in the household. Mirrlees-Black, 1999 (60,000 in Lancashire)
- Every year 23,500 children stay in refuges in England (WAFE)
- The presence of children in the household is associated with nearly double the risk of domestic violence for women (Walby and Allen, 2004).
- In 75-90% of incidents, children were in the same or next room. (NCH 1994)

IF THERE'S VIOLENCE
IN THE HOME, THE KIDS
GET THE PICTURE



Source:
HARV DV
Team

- 
- Children typically know far more of what is going on than their parents think. They may be in the next room listening or lying awake in bed. Or they may pick up on the atmosphere.
 - What children see or hear when their mothers are being abused can not only include physical violence but also emotional abuse and put downs, threats and intimidation, sexual jealousy and abuse.
 - The National Children's Home (NCH) Action for Children study (2002) found that 10% of children living with domestic violence had witnessed their mother being sexually assaulted.




Impacts on children and young people



*"I used to feel I was
bleeding inside." S age 15*

*"I used to wet the bed. I
think this was to do with
their fighting." S age 9*



"My son says that, he wishes he was dead, he wishes he weren't here, he wishes he weren't born. He shouldn't be like that..."

"They (children) turn into adults, don't they? They need to go back to being a child, sometimes they seem to want to protect you but they don't know how to protect you, do they?"

Quotations from Lancashire women



Impacts

- Studies find that children witnessing their mother being assaulted showed effects as if they had been regularly & severely hit. (Waterhouse et al 1993)
- Children frequently said that hearing the violence was worse than seeing the actual assaults, (as they believed that their mother was being killed). (McGee, 2000)
- Research shows that girls, in particular seek to protect younger siblings during violent episodes and offer support or reassurance in the aftermath of violent behaviour (Jaffe *et al*, 1990).



Children and young people may:

- Risk injury by being caught in between parents
- Have their lives disrupted when escaping violence
- Run away from home
- Believe that the violence is their fault
- Feel confused, anxious, angry, afraid, isolated, ashamed, guilty
- Become anxious or depressed
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Have nightmares or flashbacks
- Be easily startled
- Complain of physical symptoms e.g. tummy aches



Children and young people may:

- Start to wet their bed or have temper tantrums
- Behave as though they are much younger
- Have problems with school or overachieve
- Become aggressive or they may internalise their distress and withdraw from other people
- Have a lowered sense of self-worth
- Begin to play truant or start to use alcohol or drugs
- Have an eating disorder
- Begin to self-harm by taking overdoses or cutting themselves



Bird (Young woman aged 12)

If I was a bird I would fly away

As far as I could

Away from the upset

I really would

If I was a 100 foot giant

Which I wish I was

I could step on everyone

From hurting me I really could

But in case you haven't heard

I'm not a giant or a bird so instead

I use a knife and I get hurt! Source: HARV



Are the effects the same for every child?

- Children can be affected in many different ways by living with domestic violence.
- There is no set pattern of signs or symptoms.
- Some children come through relatively unscathed, for example if they have good ways of coping, or people to turn to for support, or if they are less aware of what is going on.
- Others recover well once they feel safe. However, children are likely to be affected by the fear, disruption and distress in their lives. Children show distress in their own ways, depending on their age and developmental stage. (Wolfe *et al.*, 1986; Mullender *et al.*, 2002)



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- 1980: category for specific group of symptoms developed for people exposed to incidents of trauma (e.g. rape victims or soldiers returning from war)
- Can persist with frightening and destructive effects for years (Murphy 1997)
- PTSD may be acute or chronic or delayed (e.g. 6 months later)
- The definition was initially both defined by the both the stressful event, “an extreme (life threatening) event” and a cluster of symptoms in 3 categories - re-experiencing trauma, avoidance or numbing of responses, hyper-vigilance.




Leaving...

- Sometimes children have to leave home, leaving everything behind (clothes, toys, pets, family and friends), without understanding why. This may be to go to a refuge that is totally unlike anywhere they have ever lived before (Mullender et al)
- Minority ethnic children may be forced by the violence to leave a supportive community and may face discriminatory attitudes from relevant agencies (Mullender, 2000).




Leaving...

- Because so many refuges are full, it may include spells in temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast or a hostel where there are no special security arrangements.
- The process of leaving may take many months , or even years, and it may involve leaving and returning several times.
- Leaving home is not enough to guarantee safety; women and children may be assaulted by their partner/ex partner, (Walby and Allen, 2004) after moving away.



"I was pleased for my mum to get away from him. She was upset because of him. But I was upset because I had to leave everything. Leave all my stuff. We just had the clothes we stood up in and we didn't come home for fifteen months. I was really upset because I had to leave Thumper behind.. we had to leave him in a shed in the garden, I cried and cried... because they don't have pets in the refuge..." N age 12



“he still tries to do the control thing, even though he's outside the relationship, because he has two children”

“when I got the Council flat he actually spotted us in Asda and tried strangling me & tried to snatch my son off me”

Quotations from Lancashire women




Mothers and children

- Abuser undermines authority and respect
- Not have their own needs fully met by a parent who is struggling to cope with being abused
- Communication gap
- Conspiracy of silence
- They may have ambivalent feelings towards the abuser and the non-abusing parent.



Mothers and children

- Children are an integral factor in the mother's management of their abusive relationships. For more than half the participants in a research study, something the children said or did catalysed the woman into seeking help (Zink *et al.*, 2003)
- *'Legacies of secrecy and of protecting one another from painful knowledge may be hard patterns to break' (Mullender et al., 2002)*



"I went on the streets for five weeks. Left my children. I thought...he'd convinced me the children would be better off without me as well."

"My kids stick up for him. If you have an argument then they say "You got my dad under arrest." "My dad wouldn't be under arrest if it wasn't for you." "My daddy's gone to prison cos of you." They think it's all my fault as well because of what he's told them"

Quotations from Lancashire women




Cycle of Abuse?

- No study shows conclusive link between children who live with DV repeating the violent behaviour in adult years or being targeted.
- Childhood experience is no excuse for adult behaviour
- Depends how children make sense of experiences (some pacifists but are unlikely to be “studied” and are therefore less visible).
- Some evidence to suggest that the key factor is **RESPONSE** to the violence, **NOT** only the violence itself.



Legacies


- A recent NSPCC study, of over 1400 children who had experienced/witnessed domestic violence, showed that, in every case where there had been police involvement, the children recalled (in detail) **EXACTLY** what police response had been.
- Legal consequences not enforced at all till 1970s then consistently in 1990s. I.e. only in 1990s boys will have seen consequences for fathers actions.



"We have been through a lot. We can feel for others and are better human beings." S, 14



Child Contact



"it was supervised (contact) at first and it goes on for a period until you feel comfortable with him having unsupervised contact but I kind of felt in the court room that I was bullied into it anyway so I kind of gave up."

"With the police and the courts solicitors I've got everything that I wanted. The judge even asked me what I would like, would I like him to have some contact. I said no and she granted it. He's got no contact"

Quotations from Lancashire women



Child Contact

- 29 homicides – dangerous time
- In 2003, only 601 out of 67,184 contact applications (less than 1%) were refused. (Lord Chancellor's Department, 2003)
- When they have contact with fathers after separation, children may take on even greater responsibility to protect their mothers or siblings from violence or neglect (Hester and Radford, 1996).




Child contact issues


- Child contact arrangements being used to track down women escaping violence
- Child contact arrangements being used to continue abuse
- Children's behaviour and emotional well-being adversely affected by domestic violence and ongoing child contact arrangements
- Abuse of system
- A lack of cross over between statutory child care proceedings and private law proceedings
- Problems with lack of evidence and poorly undertaken investigations



How can we respond?



"Mum didn't explain to me where or why we were going. No one told me anything... I didn't ask any questions." A, age 12



"I feel really different. I can sleep without fear. I can really live like any other young person in the community. Now he's not around to terrorise me, I can get on with my studies."

Y age 16.



How can we respond?

- Children learn that the abuse of their mother is something that isn't talked about, either at home or outside, this makes it harder for them to seek explanations about all the confusing things that are happening and much harder to ask for help.
- Children's feelings of powerlessness can increase their trauma (need to talk about violence or have outlet for intense emotions). (McGee, 2000)



How can we respond?

- Children of all ages most often take some form of active or passive support to protect their mothers (eg phoning the police). (Hester & Radford, 1996)
- It is important to recognise children's wish to help and, where possible, to teach them safe ways to do this - such as protecting their younger brothers and sisters or phoning for help where possible. (Loosley *et al.*, 2004).



How can we respond?

- Children should be supported in their own right, because they may need it, i.e. they may be in distress or hurt, and because they have a right to it.
- Children say that being able to talk about the violence and being told what is happening are the most helpful factors in enabling them to deal with it. (McGee, 2000)
- Ideally, children who have lived or are living with domestic violence want to be:
 - * Noticed
 - * Believed
 - * Understood
 - * Supported
 - * Taken seriously
 - * Involved in decisions (Mullender et al, 1999)



Primary prevention

- i.e. working to prevent domestic abuse from happening at all
- e.g. work in schools and youth settings to educate children and young people about domestic violence.



Schools can help by...

- Giving practical help to children affected by domestic violence
- Giving emotional support to children affected by domestic violence
- Do child protection work when necessary
- Provide individual informal support
- Facilitate peer support
- Provide information for survivors of domestic violence or those who want to help
- Carry out preventative work



Youthwork

- Peer support
- Residentials
- Identifying domestic violence
- Prevention groupwork
- Information
- Phonedlines



Secondary prevention

- i.e. stopping domestic violence as soon as any agency learns it is happening and preventing its recurrence
- e.g. intervention by statutory and voluntary agencies in situations of domestic violence in ways that have relevance for children and women.



Interventions

- Child protection (graded response)
- Family support
- Individual services for women and children
- Work on parenting (parents as abusers and survivors)
- Health (routine enquiry)
- Attention to risk and safety



Tertiary prevention

- i.e. reducing the harm to those who have already experienced domestic violence
- e.g. direct work with children and young people, chiefly in groups but also through counselling and other one-to-one work



Interventions

- Children's work in refuges
- Groupwork (mothers, children and both)
- Support groups
- Talking to Mum tools
- Counselling
- A normal life
- Fun



Current Position

Domestic violence services to children are:

- Excellent where they exist, but
- patchy, variable and scarce
- insecurely funded
- largely developed in the voluntary sector
- not linked to mainstream planning



Children in refuges

- Children make up 2/3 of refuge population
- Over 50% of those with child contact had ongoing & serious problems (Routes to Safety, 2002)
- 1990s: Children's Rights Policy; no smacking policy for refuges; anti-racism, disability, class & sexuality work
- School places often a problem
- Funding for workers scarce
- Several in Lancashire



Outreach services

- HARV – one to one sessions, groups, supporting relationship, play work, family residentials, holiday schemes, positive activities, access to counselling, referral and advocacy. (Confidential)
- Awareness and training sessions, case conferences, supporting teachers.



A time to cry
And let things go
A time to chill
But you all must know.....
Without these people
I wouldn't cope
They bring me strength
And give me hope
Were all here for a reason
And we've all been through some trouble
But again without these people
The rubbish in our heads would be double

So thank you HARV
For all you've done
We are really grateful
The help, support and just being there
You've changed our lives when no one cared

young woman Aged 13
Source: HARV



Resources

- WAFE (Hideout)
- One Life (BBC)
- Hitting Home (BBC)
- Safer Lancashire
- LGA Vision
- Research: McGee, Mullender, Humphreys, Thiara, Hague, Kelly, Regan, Malos, Hester, Imam, Saunders, Pearson, Radford.
- U.S. Books: Bancroft.