

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS CHILD ABUSE

Domestic violence is in every sense of the word child abuse; in fact, it is perhaps one of the most insidious forms of abuse because it is the first violence inflicted on a child. Violence directed against a child's mother is now understood by researchers to be the primary risk factor in determining whether that child will be directly abused by the child's mother or father.

The harm to children takes various forms. The most direct is of a psychological nature. Witnessing violence often induces in children, regardless of their age, a chronic post-traumatic reaction. Interviews with children who witness their father physically and psychologically battering their mothers also reveal a variety of reactions including fear, dissociation and numbing. Male children, particularly older ones, also experience intense anger at their father during and after domestic assaults and typically harbor revenge fantasies for years afterward.

Children who witness their mother's brutalization also typically model

their reaction to the abuse on their mother's reaction. That is to say, when these children are directly struck by the male perpetrator or the mother/victim for that matter, they do not seek assistance from the outside; they blame themselves for the abuse and experience feelings of shame and low self-esteem.

Finally, it is frequently the case that children are directly physically harmed during incidents of domestic violence. This harm occurs in a variety of ways including being accidentally struck by a fist, pushed or hit by a thrown object, or being intentionally struck while attempting to protect their mother.

Help for children suffering from abuse can be accessed through your local law enforcement system, the local office of the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division, or through one of the local Victim's Advocacy offices.

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

MYTH: Children aren't aware of the violence in their home.

FACT: Studies show that most children are aware of the violence directed at their mother. See "Effects of Domestic Violence on Children" for ways you can support children who witness domestic violence.

MYTH: Children are not at risk for being hurt or injured.

FACT: Men who abuse their partners are more likely to abuse the children in the home. Domestic violence is the number one predictor for child abuse. Subjecting children to an environment full of violent actions and hateful words is not being a "good dad."

