

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL AND TRAUMATIC REPRECUSIONS OF CHILDHOOD
EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

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Abstract

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TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

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Today, in the United States, children daily are being exposed to violence in their homes, schools, internet, and through media. Most commonly, children are likely to experience domestic violence or abusive behavior in their home by one intimate partner to control and dominate the other in the setting of their own household.

. The clinical implications of the effects of domestic violence and several suggestions for counselors who work with children affected by violence within the family are included.

Key Terms: Domestic Violence, Counseling

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Chapter One: Introduction

Children who are exposed and who live with domestic violence are affected by the experience, though the nature and extent of the effects vary greatly. Some children are severely traumatized, particularly if they are among the many who are also victims of child abuse. Others victims learn to adjust and are able to cope well, and go on to live healthy, productive lives.

Children are not just eye-witnesses to battering and violence. They are actively involved in trying to understand and cope with the abuse, teaching themselves coping techniques, such as predicting when an incident will occur, protecting themselves, their mother or siblings, and worrying about the consequences. These children live in homes where the household is overseen by domestic violence. Fear and confidentiality dominate family relationships and survival to cope becomes the primary goal of the non-abusive family members. Focus on making it through the fear each day may leave little room for fun and relaxation, meeting basic needs, and/or planning for the future. These little victims grow up in a climate of nervousness, awareness, helplessness, and unpredictability rather than one of nurturing, structure, and emotional and physical safety.

Statement of the Problem

What are the physiological and traumatic repressions of childhood exposure to domestic violence? Counselors will be exposed to many youths who come from different walks of life. It is a counselor's duty to learn about the background of domestic violence and the effects

witnessing domestic violence may have on a child. This will aid a counselor in effectively knowing how to address the effects of domestic violence for the most beneficial counseling of an individual.

Definition of Terms (Merriam-Webster, 2012)

Domestic Violence- the inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another; *also*: a repeated or habitual pattern of such behavior

Physiological- a branch of psychology that deals with the effects of normal and pathological Physiological processes on mental life —called also *psychophysiology*.

Emotional- markedly aroused or agitated in feeling or sensibilities.

Traumatic- a disordered psychic or behavior state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.

Exposed- open to view, not shielded or protected.

Repercussion- an action or effect given or exerted in return: a reciprocal action or effect.

The results reflect domestic violence statistics from Western Hemisphere or United States primarily. Results of the study may not generalize to other groups.

Purpose

This purpose of this paper is a library review of the literature. The clinical implications of the effects of domestic violence and several suggestions for counselors who work with children affected by violence within the family are included.

Significance

The literature reviewed is of important to helping professionals, especially counselors working with children affected by domestic violence.

Method of Approach

All relevant articles retrieved for this study were done in a comprehensive search of identified databases, conducted with a 23 year framework (1989-2012). This yielded a variety of literature which was selectively organized and analyzed. From the literature review, data was collected and analyzed. A brief review was done on domestic violence and its effects on children. A review of literature relating to the research of domestic violence, the effects / repercussions of domestic violence on its victims, and domestic violence and children was conducted. Word searches in combinations with 'domestic', 'violence', 'emotional', 'physiological', 'traumatic', exposure ', 'repercussion', 'child'.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

From the time a child is born, that child learns through exposure to their social environment. Children have a sense of emotional and mental innocence; a clean slate. As children are exposed to life and its unexpected events, innocence is lost, especially if these encounters are traumatic events. Children who grow up in a household in which they are exposed to domestic violence or intimate-partner violence absorb negative interactions and behaviors, having a profound effect on them throughout their life span. Traumatic events develop into learned behaviors which play out through interactions with people and circumstances for the entirety of their lives. One of the most troubling issues children face today is exposure to violent imagery due to the continuous presence of such imagery in daily life. It has been suggested by some research that domestic violence is the most toxic violence children can be exposed to in their formative years (McAlister Groves, 2001). Domestic violence is toxic because it does not teach correct behaviors and conduct to children.

Domestic violence has been around for ages, however, society is not in the dark ages anymore; it has evolved to more an open-minded entity than ever before and resources, studies, and statistics are available to teach the population about this problem. In this literature review, some material may seem outdated; the reality is that over the last thirty years, the United States has just started to focus on the ramifications of domestic violence.

In order to understand the dynamics of domestic violence, it must first be defined. This review defines what domestic violence is, explains the characteristics and behaviors of domestic violence, and summarizes literature regarding the effects of witnessing family violence on a child's development.

Research suggests when a child witnesses family violence; they are more likely to behave violently later in life (Kashani & Allan, 1998). Much of the research reflects children who witness family violence are affected in the following primary areas: psychological, behavior, emotions, cognitive (Kolko, Blakely, & Engleman, 1996).

There is not one universally accepted definition of family violence, however it can be generally defined as "any act or omission by persons who are cohabiting that result in serious injury [physical or emotional] to other members of the family" (Wallace, 2002). Such acts can include physical abuse (slapping), sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, and neglect (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002) committed by various family members.

As a recent estimate suggests, approximately one fourth of all women have experienced some form of physical assault in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This statistic is low, theoretically due to women choosing not to report domestic violence. In most cases, when women do report violence, they have children or live in households where children witness violence (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

It is important for counselors to understand the scope of the problem of domestic violence, and how to help children who have encountered domestic violence to restore their outlook on life.

The information provided in this review is for those who counsel children who have witnessed and lost their innocence due to being exposed to domestic violence, as well as the implications and complications associated from encountered traumas.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence and abuse have neither one definition, nor does it have one type of victim. Domestic violence does not have a prejudice; anyone can be a victim despite gender, strength, physical appearance, or sexuality. Nonetheless, the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied, especially when the abuse is psychological, in addition to or in lieu of physical abuse. Emotional abuse is often minimized because it is not visual on the surface; however, the occurrence does leave lasting emotional scars to one's self-esteem and confidence level. Domestic violence has several definitions such as partner abuse, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse, and battering.

Studies have shown that family violence typically results from abuse of power or the domination and victimization of a physically less powerful person (Widom, 1989). While most research focuses on women who have been battered by their male partners, it must not be overlooked men are often victims of domestic violence too. From research, the common definition of domestic violence is frequent abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by a partner (battery) to gain or maintain power and control over the other partner. The victim is the person in the relationship with the batterer. This is not always limited to two people who are together in an intimate relationship.

Domestic violence has no boundaries it crosses all social, economic, and cultural lines. However, studies indicate batterers share many common characteristics, which are discussed below.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF BATTERERS

Upon the examination of existing literature, the following themes illustrate the characteristics associated with batterers:

DYNAMICS OF THE FEMALE BATTERER

For years, community agencies concerned with domestic violence did not recognize or address the issue of women who are violent toward their partners, however, focused attention and research involving the female batterer has increased more recently. Each year, more and more women are arrested and convicted of domestic violence related offenses.

Domestic violence predominately involves acts of violence perpetrated by men against women. Women are over looked many times, due to of the under reporting of female led violence, however, is important to recognize women also abuse their partners.

Some studies indicate that women are violent in intimate relationships just as frequently as men. It is important to note these studies have several weaknesses, one being they do not address the motivation behind the violence. The reasons men and women use violence are different. Women use violence as self-defense, in anticipation of violence, or in retaliation for past abuse they have experienced. In a small percentage of cases, they may in fact be true batterers.

DYNAMICS OF THE MALE BATTERER

The common explanation of why men use violence is to maintain or establish power and control over their partners. Throughout research, there have been many different theories presented as explanation for the causes of domestic violence and battering behavior. Some authors offer theories identifying specific typologies of batterers. No single theory can fully explain the causes of domestic violence. A combination of many factors may contribute to the development of these behaviors.

Having low self-esteem: Many batters they have the appearance of being "tough", "strong", and "confident", this is a mechanism hide their low self-esteem. Many feel they fall short in their own perceived opinion of gender stereotypes and develop hyper-masculinity.

Emotionally "needy": Some batters have become dependent on their partner, and the thought

of losing their partner may be threatening. Behaviors of controlling and jealousy follow, as a result.

Rushing into relationships: Many batterers will quickly utter statements like "I knew I loved her right away", or "I've never met anyone like you." Typically they will pressure a potential partner to commit to a relationship before they are ready.

Excessive jealousy: By nature human beings are jealous creatures; however jealousy really has little or nothing to do with love. Jealousy is more likely viewed as a sign of possessiveness or a lack of trust. In healthy relationships, partners trust one another; with the exception being, one or both has legitimately done something to break the feeling of trust.

Controlling behavior: Batterers exercise control over their partner being concerned for their safety, believing to be looking out for their partner's best interest, or helping him or her make a good decision. Batterers will be upset if their partner is "late" coming from somewhere, which will likely lead to extensive questions about where they went, who you talked to, or who they were with. As a sense of control sets in a victim will likely lose their ability to make personal decisions about the house, choice of clothing, places they would like to go, and who they can see.

Having unrealistic expectations or demands: Batterers expect their partner to meet any and all of their needs: being the perfect partner, lover, and friend. They may expect to have everything taken care of for them; emotionally, physically, and sometimes financially.

Use of isolation to keep partner centered on them: Batterers try to cut off their partner from all other people or resources to be solely dependent on them. They want their partner to distance themselves from their close friends and family. Batterers will accuse family and friends of their partner, who are supportive, of causing trouble, and restrict their contact with them, gradually

isolating the victim.

Use of forceful sex: Typically a batterer wants to act out fantasies where their partner is helpless, fascinated and excited by the idea as rape. They show little or no concern about if their partner actually wants sex. Typically, a batter will use sulking or anger manipulating their partner into participating in sexual activity. They develop unrealistic expectations and demand sex when the victim is ill, tired or asleep, or in the middle of another activity.

Poor communication skills: Batters usually do not know how to properly or effectively express themselves. Batterers have trouble discussing their feelings, typically struggling with their expression of anger and frustration. Batters view feelings, emotions, and sensitivity as weakness.

Placing blame on others to explain their behavior: It is very common for batterers to make excuses for their behavior, blaming the person who made them angry. Batterers will blame their victim for making mistakes or acting in a manner which is upsetting to them. They will view themselves as victims in the relationship, and will not take responsibility or accountability for their actions or behaviors.

Prone to hypersensitivity: Batterers are often easily insulted; simple behaviors can be viewed as a personal attack.

Presence of dualistic personalities: Many batterers are excellent actors and pretend as if nothing is wrong. A batterer develops a façade and appears to be functioning well at work and interacting appropriately with friends and family. Many times, the battered partner is the only person aware of their batterer's true personality and behavior. This façade makes it difficult for a victim to reach out for support, in fear no one will believe her.

Exhibiting cruelty to animals and/or children: A batterer is a person who may punish animals brutally, being insensitive to their pain. A batterer may use threats to prevent his partner from

seeing children they have no biological rights to, or punish children to get even with, punish, or control his partner.

Even though many batterers share common characteristics, the presence or absence of any characteristics should not be used to predict assault. Recent research indicates victims' perceptions and fears that they will be hit substantially increase the ability to predict re-assaults (Gondolf, 2001). The victim's perception needs to be considered in developing ways to prevent violence and intervention.

FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pattern of learned behaviors that include the involvement of physical, verbal, sexual, economic, emotional and/or psychological abuse toward an intimate partner. It affects people of all social, economic, racial, religious and ethnic groups, whether the couple is married, divorced, living together, dating, or in a gay or lesbian relationship. Behavior on the part of the victim neither causes nor excuses the violence. A batterer bears sole responsibility for his actions. Domestic violence encompasses all of the following behaviors.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

While physical abuse is generally the easiest form of domestic violence to recognize, some injuries are not always apparent. Batterers are skilled at causing injuries not readily seen.

Visible signs of strangulation, for example, may not be visible for at least 24 hours.

Physical abuse includes but is not limited to pushing, shoving, slapping, biting, kicking, punching, restraining, strangling, stabbing, shooting and burning. It may also involve throwing objects at the victim, abandoning the victim in dangerous places, locking her out of the house or car, refusing to help her when she is sick, injured, or pregnant, and coercing drug consumption or withholding medication.

SEXUAL

Sexual abuse employs both verbal and physical tactics to keep the victim submissive. It can include demeaning remarks, typically about women, criticism about sexual performance, insistence on unwanted or uncomfortable touching, and name-calling. Other tactics may include force of unwanted sexual activity, forced sex after beatings, and sadistic sexual acts.

Sexual abuse is typically the most under-reported form of abuse, as many victims are too ashamed to discuss it. When it is prosecuted, the charge is often reduced to Disorderly Conduct or Battery, not Sexual Assault.

EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL

Emotional abuse can be difficult to identify. The batterer uses words and actions to destroy the self-esteem of his victim, shattering their self-confidence to the point of being afraid to leave the perceived security of the relationship.

A batterer's intent is to alienate the victim from family and friends, leaving the victim socially isolated and solely dependent on the batterer. This gives the batter all the power and control.

Some forms of emotional abuse are name calling, ridiculing the victim's most valued beliefs related to religion, race, or heritage, insulting her in front of family and friends, and withholding approval or affection as punishment for perceived wrongdoing. He or she will attempt to convince the victim they "crazy", humiliate them, or make them feel guilty.

The batter may use the children to maintain control in the relationship by punishing the children when they are angry or threaten to kidnap them if the partner attempts to or hints at leaving.

The batterer may use masculine privilege by treating the victim like a servant, making all decisions or being the one who defines the roles within the relationship.

The batterer may use threats to control his victim. In addition to threatening physical harm, he

may threaten to leave, commit suicide, or to make a report to social service agencies. The batterer may pressure the victim to recant allegations or make the victim commit illegal acts. Batterers may use intimidation by facial expression, actions and gestures intended to cause fear. These may be subtle cues or reminders of past violence for which the victim is well aware, but is not so obvious to an outside observer, who is interacting with the batterer.

ECONOMIC

The batter may use economic denial to foster dependence, refusing to allow the victim to work or control their own money, if they are employed. The batterers may cause difficulties at his partner's place of employment in order to jeopardize the victim's job. The batterer may take control of all of the money, forcing the victim to ask for money or for an allowance. Batterers may deny use of the car, telephone or credit cards. Also, it been illustrated the batter may vandalize their home, car or other personal assets.

DEFINING "WITNESSING" DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are several publications and studies which clarify what is meant by "childhood exposure" to or "witnessing" of domestic violence. Lack of clarification about the type or extent of violence to which a child is exposed to is common. Due to the lack of consistency, there are several terms used to describe children who have witnessed or been exposed to domestic violence. Most of the earlier research described children as being a "witness" of domestic violence; as of the recent writers of the research have begun to use the term "exposure" to domestic violence (Holton, 1998). For this reason, there is a lack of a universal definition or terms used as a standard related to children who have witnessed domestic violence.

Exposure to domestic violence is defined or associated with children who witness domestic violence. Exposure to domestic violence was best described as when children see, hear, and are

directly involved in, or try to intervene (Edleson, 1999).

BEHAVIORAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS of exposure of Domestic Violence

The child's age and mental maturity, will determine the outcome or effect of exposure or the child's idea as to what domestic violence is. The basis for effects of exposure to domestic violence may be visibly different in children exposed at different developmental stages.

No one study has determined specific effects of children witnessing domestic violence; however, many studies have found children exposed to domestic violence experience a variety and range negative outcomes.

Research (Kashani & Allan, 1998) showed a behavioral impact on children exposed to family violence and its effects on internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Women who experienced domestic violence were interviewed about how they thought the violence had changed their children's behaviors (Lemmey, McFarlane, Willson, & Malecha, 2001). Most of the women reported their children exhibited internalizing behaviors which included frequent clinging, crying, body pain, and sleep disturbances, including nightmares and flashbacks. Another study (Higgins & McCabe, 2003) found children exposed to family violence had a higher risk of problematic internalizing and externalizing behaviors and suicide.

Effects including increased internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Fantuzzo, 1997), in turn, have longer-term ramifications. When children who are exposed to domestic violence are more often reported as having more depressive like behavioral symptoms, anxiety, and worry than those who have never been exposed to such violence (Graham-Bermann, 1998).

Studies focusing on the psychological effects of witnessing domestic illustrate children who have been exposed to domestic violence are more likely to be diagnosed higher on posttraumatic stress

disorder, or PTSD (Rossman, 2000), and often meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD in the DSM – IV (Kilpatrick & Williams, 1998).

Children who grow in violent households do not become desensitized to violence. It has been shown (Adamson & Thompson, 1998) the children in the study who were exposed to domestic violence reacted with more emotional intensity to conflict than children who did not grow up with domestic violence. It is also shown children who witnessed domestic violence are also at an increased risk for behavioral problems (Onyshiw, 2003).

These children also appear to be more prone to physical aggression, as well as acting out, and having higher incidence of general behavior problems (Sternburg, Lamb, Gutterman, & Abbott, 2006). Children often mimic behaviors they have witnessed at home. Children, who have been exposed to violence, are also more likely to engage in bullying (Baldry, 2003). In a study, (Ballif-Spanvill, Clayton, Hendrix, & Hunsaker, 2004) children who are exposed to domestic violence react more violently to conflict with their peers. A child with recent exposure to violence in their homes poses as a significant predictor in a child's own violent behavior (Singer, 1998). The results of these studies show consistent results that a child who witnesses domestic violence exhibits a host of behavioral and emotional problems.

If you are to use the Albert Bandura social learning theory, it would suggest children who witness violence will also learn to use violence.

COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING AND ATTITUDES EFFECTS of exposure of Domestic Violence

Several studies measured cognitive development problems and witnessing domestic violence. It seems academic abilities were not found to differ between those who witnessed violence and those who have not (Mathias, Mertin & Murray, 1995). There have been a large number of studies supporting the connection of children who witness abuse themselves being at a higher

risk of delayed cognitive development and academic performance than children who do not experience abuse (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). As a child is exposed to violence, the functioning and development of how they deal with people and consequences in life is affected.

One of the most direct effects of witnessing violence may be the attitudes a child develops concerning the use of violence and conflict resolution. A study done (Jaffe, Wilson, & Wolfe, 1990) suggests when a child is exposed to adult domestic violence they may generate attitudes justifying their own use of violence. In turn, this may cause a mental disconnection as to when it's appropriate to use violence (Spaccarelli, Coatsworth, and Bowden, 1995). These findings further support a connection between adolescent boys incarcerated for violent crimes that had been exposed to family violence. In many situations, children believed aggression would enhance their self-image and it significantly predicted violent offending.

When it comes to social skills, children are also affected. Research has found the effects of family hostility can have an effect on children's verbal abilities (Medina, Margolin, & Wilcox, 2000).

Many children exposed to violence, are also aware of verbal abuse occurring between adults in the home. Witnessing verbal abuse can lead to children having poor communication skills.

Huth-Bocks, Levendosky, and Semel, (2001) reported research of those who had been exposed to violence against their mother demonstrated poor verbal skills in comparison to those who had not. In addition, a study (McGee, 2000) found children exposed to family violence affected their educational achievement, from increased aggression in school, and having difficulty concentrating in classes, to bad attendance.

Many of the children experienced difficulties concentrating in classes because they thought about what was happening to their mother. Some of the children did not want to leave the presence of their mother in fear something would happen while they were away; however, research regarding

the cognitive and academic consequences of exposure to family violence primarily assessed the effects on the child directly experiencing child abuse.

LONG TERM REPERCUSSIONS of exposure of Domestic Violence

Children who have been exposed to domestic violence will become adults. Whether or not children are physically abused themselves, they often suffer from cognitive, emotional and psychological trauma living in homes where they are exposed to domestic violence. Children who are exposed to family violence are denied the kind of home life that fosters healthy development. Several studies mentioned long-term problems reported by adults who were exposed to domestic violence as children. One of the studies by (Wallace, 2002) found the most obvious results of children who had been exposed to domestic violence are likely to become abusive as adults. Another study (Lichter & McClosky, 2004) found adults who were exposed to domestic violence as children express views to justify the use of violence as warranted in social interactions where they feel threatened. Children exposed to violence learn different social skills, and revert to this learned behavior and justify the use of intimidation and violence to get their way.

Child exposure to domestic violence can also cause other harm to social skills. In a study by Henning, (1996) research showed adult women who had been exposed to domestic violence as children had greater distress and lower social adjustment, when compared to those not exposed. Just because these child grow up does not mean the effects do not take a psychological tow. As these children become adults, it wears on their mental health.

Another study by (Silvern, 1995) looked at the undergraduate student population. Silvern found children who were exposed to domestic violence were associated with adult depression,

trauma-related symptoms, and low self-esteem reported by women. The majority of men only reported trauma-related symptoms.

The affects do not end there. There are many other factors which come about from children exposed to violence in their childhood homes. They have higher risks for alcohol/drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, and involvement in crime. Exposure to domestic violence is a great predictor of adult criminality.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Many of these studies and research articles reviewed for the writing of this document provide strong evidence related to children who witness domestic violence at home also exhibit a variety of behavioral, psychological, emotional, cognitive and long-term problems. Each child who experiences adult domestic violence will develop in different ways, varying factors will determine how to address it with the victim. Counselors need to be aware of all the details, aspects, and family dynamics to effectively counsel them. Listed below are some guidelines, resolutions, and warnings.

Empathy and a plan: By no choice or control of their own, children who have been exposed to domestic violence/family violence may be labeled as difficult or problematic children. Many times, children exposed to domestic violence experience a variety of concerns and the counselor must demonstrate empathy and provide an approach that requires an effective assistance to this child.

The fostering of self-esteem: Researchers have found children exposed to domestic violence typically have lower levels of self-esteem (Neighbors, 2003). With these results, prevention programs would be helpful in assisting the child in gaining self-esteem. (Searcy, 2006) believed

one part of self-esteem is getting the children involved with their peers. Having an activity children are involved and participating in will help raise self-esteem.

Simply having children exposed to domestic violence involved in an activity could improve their self-esteem (Searcy, 2006). Therefore, counselors should encourage children to join community organizations, or sport teams, based on their personal interests. Researchers reported child participation in team sports has promoted higher self-esteem among elementary age children. It helps build their self-concept and perceived ability in sports (Slutsky & Simpkins, 2009).

Conflict resolution: In a study done by Fontes (2000) psychological education groups for children exposed to domestic violence, were recommended. In many of these groups, children who exhibited problems with anger and aggression could participate in conflict resolution, and from this they learn to solve problems without the use of violence.

Other studies have suggested referrals to be made to activities which focused on teaching children how to be self-confident. One study (Runyon, Basilio, Van Hasselt & Hansen, 1998) suggests an activity which teaches children how to differentiate between aggressive and submissive. The counselor can also role play with responses to a scenario, also called sharing. The counselor should allow the child to choose the most helpful effective way to share, to be most effective.

Emotional awareness: Many of the children who been exposed to domestic violence are aware interventions are needed to help them recognize and express emotions. This could aid in a child's ability to self-regulate emotions (Vickerman & Margolin, 2007). One activity used is children recognize various emotional states, from pictures of emotions. With this they can be encouraged to share a time when they encountered the emotion pictured (Runyon, Basilio, Van Hasselt & Hansen, 1998). Having emotional awareness is critical to having proper emotional expression.

Through controlled discussions, children can learn to recognize when something is not right, and can start teaching themselves skills to manage or control their emotions.

Parent Participation: Parents involved in domestic violence may need parenting education and consultation. These are additional intervention efforts counselors can undertake. Counselors can offer general programs, resources, discuss beneficial parenting practices, and behavioral strategies (Runyon, Basilio, Van Hasselt & Hansen 1998). Runyon and colleagues (1998) developed a program designed for parents and children who had exposure to domestic violence. This program focused on teaching parents behavior management skills. From this programming, counselors can provide education on skills for parents/guardians to discourage unfavorable behavior, such as yelling at children, and skills parents/guardians can use to encourage favorable behavior, or affirmations. School counselors may also discuss with parents the struggles faced by a child who has witnessed domestic violence in their homes.

A study by (Fontes, 2000) suggests communication with the non-offending parent must, be handled cautiously or it could initially increase the risk of violence.

Awareness of reporting: It is very important counselors be mindful not to assume exposure to violence automatically leads to negative outcomes for children. Some of research collected illustrates there is a concern among child protection agencies and they may define a child exposed to violence as a form of child abuse. It is seemingly uncommon; however, some child protection agencies continue to hold battered mothers solely responsible for their children's safety.

Conjoined Therapy: Counselors could face concerns of conjoined couple's therapy for interparental violence. The primary ethical concern for counselors working with children who

have witnessed family violence is in regard to the child's safety and mandated reporting of child abuse, if warranted.

When it comes to the counselor working with couples where domestic violence is present, focusing on the relationship assumes each person contributes to the abusive behavior, when in truth the batterer is responsible for the abusive behavior. Therefore, the victim may feel further violated and not address the real issue which is domestic battery. Focusing on issues other than the abusive behavior allows that behavior to continue.

Another danger with counseling is giving the victim a false sense of security and safety in the couple's session. In couples counseling, if the therapist focuses extensively on the abuse, the batterer may feel ashamed, seen as a scapegoat, and to blame for every problem in the relationship. Couples counseling may discourage the level of disclosure. Couples counseling can keep a victim in the abusive relationship longer than they would otherwise stay with false hope the counseling may make things better. Some forms of couples counseling require couples to make a time commitment of not separating while in counseling, which may prolong an abusive relationship.

Counseling couples where domestic violence is present, and addressing the fact, could result in not seeing the couple ever again. When couples, where violence is present, see a counselor, violence toward the victim may increase due to the counselor's involvement in the relationship. The batterer's goal is to maintain control of the relationship, any interference on the part of the counselor may lead to an increase in his controlling behavior. The therapist may unwittingly elicit information or initiate interventions that escalate abuse.

Countertransference: Counseling children witnessing/exposed to domestic violence can be emotional stressful on anyone, especially if they see it themselves growing up. A counselor can receive emotional, mental, and physical repercussions of counseling these children.

From emotional reactions of almost all participants included lingering visual imagery of severe abuse, difficulty hearing about violence against children or recent violence against a client.

Mentally, counselors lose their confidence in their counseling abilities, feeling overly responsible and worried about clients' safety, and struggling to remain non-judgmental toward perpetrators and in regard to the choices of clients who were domestic violence victims.

Physical reactions that come from working with domestic violence couples are heaviness, nausea, churning stomach and feeling shaken in response to hearing clients' stories of domestic violence. Feelings of being emotionally drained and noticeable physical symptoms such as headaches, tension and illnesses counseling, are reactions to working with this population. So, as a counselor, one should know if they can handle what they will hear from these innocent victims.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

Our society is quick to give labels and definitions to behaviors and actions, and far too often we forget or are short sighted of who these labels effect. Much of the time when it comes to domestic violence issues, we think about the perpetrator and victim, not those who observed this behavior in the household, especially children.

There is plenty of literature, research, studies, and statistics on the effects of children witnessing domestic violence, but more research is needed to understand truly the effects on children where family violence is present. The material examined for the writing of this paper illustrates the effects of witnessing family violence but no other variables were included in the studies, which may limit the generalizations of the results. In addition, to understand the unique and combined effects of children witnessing family violence, continued research is needed in other areas, as well.

It was quickly recognized many writers, on the topic, failed to explain the difference between children who had been abused, from those who had not, but instead witnessed family violence. Some writers did not identify whether the children studied were abused, witnessed abuse or both. This is conflicting because some researchers presented their data as representative of children who only witnessed violence.

Very limited materials are available on varied cultural backgrounds and homosexual parenting, specifically. Various cultural backgrounds and homosexual couples where domestic violence is present, is clearly under researched, and more attention should be focused on these areas.

Developing culturally sensitive counseling strategies could help with prevention and intervention programs for children who have witnessed family violence. Understanding can be

developed as to how witnessing family violence affects individuals from diverse backgrounds. There was not much research on programming available for children. In fact, in many studies there was little if any mention about programs in existence for children who have witnessed violence. In order to deal with the issue, more research is needed to provide the resources to address it. If programming is developed there should be research done to evaluate the outcomes of children who participate in such programs to determine if they are effective. Therefore, more research into such factors may reveal how to improve outcomes for children who have witnessed family violence.

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