

## What is the Impact of Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence on Children in the Home?

In addition to the increased likelihood of themselves being the victim of child abuse, children can be impacted by intimate partner violence in a variety of behavioral, emotional, social or cognitive ways. For some children, this may include symptoms of trauma such as flashbacks, hyperarousal or emotional withdrawal.<sup>14</sup>

### Ways for a Child in the Home to Encounter Intimate Partner Violence

- ➔ Seeing the actual incidents of violence
- ➔ Hearing threats or fighting noises
- ➔ “Feeling” the violence through vibrations in walls or floors
- ➔ Being a part of the violence: Participating by coercion or force, intervening, being assaulted
- ➔ Observing the aftermath: Blood, bruises, tears, torn clothing, broken items
- ➔ Being aware of tension in the home or of victim’s fears

Possible Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Children <sup>15, 16</sup>
<b>Behavioral/Social</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Aggression</li> <li>➔ Antisocial behavior</li> <li>➔ Sleep disturbances – nightmares</li> <li>➔ Flashbacks</li> <li>➔ Poor relationship skills</li> <li>➔ Truancy</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Developmental regression</li> <li>➔ Separation issues</li> <li>➔ Emotional withdrawal</li> <li>➔ Hyperarousal</li> <li>➔ Fears/anxiety</li> <li>➔ Depression</li> <li>➔ Low self-esteem</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive/Attitudinal</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Lower assessment scores – verbal, motor and cognitive skills</li> <li>➔ Pro-violence attitudes</li> <li>➔ Belief in rigid gender stereotypes</li> </ul>
<b>Long-Term</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Males are more likely to engage in domestic violence as adults</li> <li>➔ Females are more likely to be victims of domestic violence</li> <li>➔ Premature death</li> </ul>

The impact of intimate partner violence on children in the home is dependent upon individual protective factors such as age, developmental stage, gender or caregiver and community support, as well as the number of risk factors to which the child is exposed.

## Risk Factors<sup>17</sup>

Risk factors are variables that are associated with an increased likelihood of poor physical, emotional and behavioral outcomes.

- ➡ Longitudinal research has shown that exposure to multiple risk factors can be harmful to a child's development. Additionally, risks of a chronic nature are most likely to have a damaging long-term effect.
- ➡ Risk factors that sometimes co-occur with intimate partner violence include child abuse or neglect, caregiver alcohol and drug abuse, economic insecurity and community violence.
- ➡ Witnessing intimate partner violence can be related to other risk factors, such as school disruptions, separation from extended family or shelter placement.
- ➡ The risk associated with exposure to intimate partner violence also depends upon the severity of the violence, the duration of the exposure, and the child's proximity to the violent event.

## Protective Factors<sup>18</sup>

Protective factors are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or society that, when present, promote well-being and reduce the risk for negative outcomes.

Protective factors that may mitigate exposure to intimate partner violence include:<sup>19</sup>

- ➡ Individual Level Factors:
  - Sense of purpose
  - Sense of optimism
  - Self-regulation skills
  - Intellectual capacity
  - Relational skills
  - Problem-solving skills
  - Child's age
  - Developmental stage
  - Gender
- ➡ Relationship Level Factors:
  - Parenting competencies
  - Parent or caregiver well-being
  - Positive peers
  - Intrapersonal strengths
  - Secure attachments to caregivers
- ➡ Community Level Factors:
  - Positive school environment
  - Types of interventions and supports provided to the child
  - Caring adults
  - Supportive cultural, ethnic or community environment

One key individual protective factor noted is developmental stage. The following graphic shows possible behavioral manifestations specific to the age at which the child was exposed to intimate partner violence.

## Possible Developmental Impact of Childhood Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence<sup>20,21</sup>

### Infant/Toddler Age 0-5

- Poor sleeping habits
- Eating problems
- Higher risk of physical injury
- Trauma may impact development of neural pathways, which are needed for brain and nervous system to communicate
- Poor attachments to appropriate caregivers
- Baby may be hard to soothe or may become withdrawn
- Heightened startle response
- Separation/stranger anxiety
- Regressive behaviors
- Excessive crying
- Fearfulness
- Repetitive/ritualistic play

### School-Aged 6-12

- Somatic complaints - physical symptoms with no discernable cause
- Regressive behaviors (thumb sucking, bed-wetting)
- Depression
- Nightmares
- Difficulties in school
- Low self-esteem
- Loneliness
- Impulsive behavior
- Hyperactivity
- Anxiety
- Distorted thinking

### Adolescent 13-18

- School truancy
- Delinquency
- Substance abuse
- Early sexual activity
- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Identify with aggressor (dating violence) or with victim (risk of dating violence)
- Pregnancy
- Poor self-esteem
- Poor concentration
- Chaotic thoughts
- Lack of empathy or remorse
- Difficulties in school
- Runaway