



CHILDREN AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Children and Family Violence YWCA of Salt Lake City

Prevalence

In Utah, an act of domestic violence in the presence of a child is child abuse. Last year 31% of the 12,582 substantiated cases of child abuse in Utah were related to domestic violence—higher than any other type of abuse substantiated by the Utah Division of Child and Family Services.ⁱ

Of 49 victims of domestic violence–related homicide in Utah, reviewed over a 3-year period, 63.3% had children, and 24.9% of those children witnessed or were present during the murder of their own parent.ⁱⁱ

Two decades of research have confirmed that adults and children are often victimized in the same family. Research shows that there is an overlap of 30 to 60 percent between violence against children and violence against women in the same family.ⁱⁱⁱ

Last year 54% of the 5,842 individuals sheltered in Utah’s sixteen domestic violence shelters were children.^{iv}

Effects on Children

“[A]ll studies to date suggest that exposure to violence in childhood alters brain development and that the abnormalities are more prominent if the traumatic exposure is early in life, severe and chronic... These children will have impaired capacities to benefit from social, emotional and cognitive experiences.”^v

Children who witness violence often experience the same symptoms and lasting effects as children who are direct victims of violence.^{vi}

A comparison of delinquent and non-delinquent youth found that a history of family violence or abuse was the most significant difference between the two groups.^{vii}

Children who witness family violence are at an increased risk of entering violent relationships as teens and adults.^{viii}

Children exposed to violence must accomplish crucial developmental tasks in a persistent state of fear.^{ix} Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers.^x They are also more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes.^{xi}

Hope

Most battered women care deeply about their children’s safety and work hard to protect them both from physical assaults by a batterer and from the harm of poverty and of isolation that may result from leaving or reporting a batterer.^{xii}

Family violence can be prevented and its effects on children reduced if we: begin prevention efforts earlier; work together; think developmentally; make mothers safe to keep children safe; enforce the law and hold offenders accountable; make adequate resources available; work from a sound knowledge base; and create a culture of nonviolence.^{xiii}



References

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- ⁱ DCFS 2004 Annual Report.
- ⁱⁱ Domestic Violence Fatalities in Utah 2000 – 2002, Utah Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, Department of Health , 2005.
- ⁱⁱⁱ OJJDP, Safe from the Start, 2002.
- ^{iv} Utah DCFS 2005 GI Summary Form.
- ^v Bruce D. Perry, “Violence in Childhood,” from Perry, B. D., “The Neurodevelopment Impact of Violence in Childhood,” in Schetky, D. and Benedek, E., eds., *Textbook of Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychiatry*, Washington, D. C.: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2001, pp. 221-238.
- ^{vi} The Cycle of Violence, research in brief, US Dept of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Natl. Institute of Justice, 1992.
- ^{vii} Miller, 1998.
- ^{viii} Gelles, 1994
- ^{ix} OJJDP, Safe from the Start, 2002.
- ^x Jaffe, P. and Sudermann, M., “Child Witness of Women Abuse: Research and Community Responses,” in Stith, S. and Straus, M., *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalence, Causes, Consequences, and Solutions. Families in Focus Services, Vol. II*, Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1995.
- ^{xi} Wolfe, D.A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel, D. and Gough, R., “Strategies to Address Violence in the Lives of High Risk Youth,” in Peled, E., Jaffe, P.G. and Edleson, J.L. (eds.), *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*, New York: Sage Publications, 1995.
- ^{xii} OJJDP, Safe from the Start, 2002.
- ^{xiii} OJJDP, Safe from the Start, 2002.