



Finding ways to reduce  
the impact of homelessness and  
poverty on the lives of children

INSTITUTE  
FOR CHILDREN  
& POVERTY

## FACT SHEET on **domestic VIOLENCE**

SPRING 2009 Update

### Witnessing Violence in the Home and Child Maltreatment

#### Children and Poverty

- Violence transcends race, class, and gender however; violence disproportionately affects the poor and the young.<sup>1</sup>
- Child maltreatment increases when poverty combines with other risk markers for abuse such as depression, isolation, substance abuse, and domestic violence in the home.<sup>2</sup>

#### Prevalence of Child Exposure to Violence in the United States

- It is estimated that 3.2 million children witness violence in the home each year.<sup>3</sup>
- The United States Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect cautions that domestic violence may be the single most contributing factor to fatalities among child victims of abuse and neglect.<sup>4</sup>

#### Forms of Maltreatment

- Children can be exposed to violence in the home both indirectly and directly; indirect forms of violence include viewing and hearing violent acts as well as being forced to participate in acts of aggression.
- Direct forms of violence are emotional abuse and neglect, physical abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup>

#### Co-occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment

- In homes where domestic violence occurs, children are physically maltreated at a rate 15 times higher than the national average.<sup>6</sup>
- A study of over 17,000 adults revealed that exposure to one type of adverse childhood experience such as witnessing maternal abuse is predictive of subsequent exposure to other adverse childhood experiences such as sexual abuse, recurring physical neglect and abuse, parental incarceration, and parental substance abuse.<sup>7</sup>
- The Family Violence Prevention Fund reports that a national survey of over 6,000 American families found that in 50% of homes where men chronically abused their wives, they also abused their children.<sup>8</sup>
- Seventy-five percent of homeless survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) report that their children are also victims of abuse.<sup>9</sup>
- Children are twice as likely to be abused by a mother who is a victim of IPV when compared with children living in households without violence.<sup>10</sup>

#### Homeless Children Who Witness

- Homeless children who witness violence are twice as likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness when compared with homeless children unscathed by violence.<sup>11</sup>
- Over 25% of homeless New York City children have witnessed domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> 15% have seen their mothers physically assaulted by their fathers.<sup>13</sup> 11% have seen their mothers physically assaulted by other intimate partners.<sup>14</sup>
- According to reports made by homeless parents, 47% of school-aged children and 29% of children less than five years of age witnessed domestic violence prior to being homeless.<sup>15</sup>
- 32% of homeless mothers residing in New York City shelters report witnessing or experiencing family violence as a child.<sup>16</sup>

#### Impact of Exposure on Psychosocial and Cognitive Development

- Frequently, child witnesses must assume adult roles when they serve as caretakers to their parents injured as a result of IPV.<sup>17</sup>
- Children with mothers who have been abused tend to demonstrate less compassion or empathy in their interpersonal relationships when compared with children from non-violent homes.<sup>18</sup>
- Child victims or witnesses of abuse tend to have lower IQ scores, poorer language and memorization skills, impaired visual-motor integration abilities, and difficulty paying attention when compared with children living free of violence.<sup>19</sup>
- Child witnesses tend to develop styles of interaction as a direct result of exposure to violence. Male children tend to exhibit antisocial and aggressive (externalized) behaviors whereas female children tend to exhibit fearful and inhibited (internalized) behaviors when coping with the domestic abuse of a parent.<sup>20</sup>

#### Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

- Men who witness IPV as children are twice as likely to be abusive to their partners and children as adults.<sup>21</sup>
- Being maltreated as a child increases a woman's risk of experiencing IPV by 200 to 300 percent.<sup>22</sup>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph, S., Govender, K., & Bhagwanjee, A. (2006). "I can't see him hit her again, I just want to run away...hide and block my ears": A phenomenological analysis of a sample of children's coping responses to exposure to domestic violence. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 6(4), 23-45.
- <sup>2</sup> English, D.J. (1998). The extent and consequences of child maltreatment [Electronic version]. *The Future of Children* 8 (1), 39-53.
- <sup>3</sup> Stiles, M.M. (2002). Witnessing domestic violence: The effect on children [Electronic version]. *American Family Physician* December 1, 2002. Retrieved on August 20, 2008, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20021201/medicine.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund (2008). *The facts on children and domestic violence*. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from <http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/>
- <sup>5</sup> National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2002). *Children exposed to intimate partner violence*. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from [http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/NRC\\_Children.pdf](http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/NRC_Children.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Osofsky, J. (1999). The impact of violence on children [Electronic version]. *The Future of Children*, 9(3), 33-49.
- <sup>7</sup> Fellitti, V.J. (2002). Belastungen in der kinheit und gesundheit im erwachsenenalter: die verandlung von gold blei. [The relationship of adverse childhood experiences to adult health: Turning gold into lead]. *Zeitschrift fur Psychosomatische Medizin and Psychotherapie*, 48 (4), 359-369.
- <sup>8</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund (2008). The facts on children and domestic violence. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from <http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/>
- <sup>9</sup> Homes for the Homeless and The Institute for Children and Poverty (1999). In the line of fire: Family and community violence. In *Homeless in America: A children's story part one*. New York: Author.
- <sup>10</sup> Sherman, P. (2001). Domestic violence and children: *A children's health fund report*. New York: The Children's Health Fund.
- <sup>11</sup> Homes for the Homeless and The Institute for Children and Poverty (1999). In the line of fire: Family and community violence. In *Homeless in America: A children's story part one*. New York: Author.
- <sup>12</sup> National Center on Family Homelessness (2008). *The characteristics and needs of families experiencing homelessness* (citing Reif, S. and Kushner, L., *Subsidized Housing and Unique Needs of Domestic Violence Victims*, National Center on Law and Poverty (2000).
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Homes for the Homeless and The Institute for Children and Poverty (1999). In the line of fire: Family and community violence. In *Homeless in America: A children's story part one*. New York: Author.
- <sup>16</sup> Institute for Children and Poverty (March 2008). Preliminary findings from Child Welfare Survey.
- <sup>17</sup> Davis, J. and Briggs, E. (n.d.). *Witnessing Violence Fact Sheet*. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center site <http://www.musc.edu/vawprevention/index.html>
- <sup>18</sup> Edleson, J.L. (1997). (Rev. 4/99). *Problems associated with children's witnessing of domestic violence*. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women site: [http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/AR\\_witness.pdf](http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/AR_witness.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> Gourdis, E.B., Margolin, G., & Medina, A. (nd). Children's exposure to violence – community violence, domestic violence - general effects. Retrieved September 12, 2008 from <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2531/Violence-Children-s-Exposure.html>
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph, S., Govender, K., & Bhagwanjee, A. (2006). "I can't see him hit her again, I just want to run away...hide and block my ears": A phenomenological analysis of a sample of children's coping responses to exposure to domestic violence. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 6(4), 23-45.
- <sup>21</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2007). Children and domestic violence fact sheet. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from <http://www.ncadv.org/files/childrenandchildcustody.pdf>
- <sup>22</sup> Renner, L.M. and Slack, K.S. (March 2004). *Intimate partner violence and child maltreatment: Understanding co-occurrence and intergenerational connections*. Retrieved September 4, 2008, from <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/dps/pdfs/dp127804.pdf>

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The Institute for Children and Poverty (ICP) is an independent non-profit research organization based in New York City. ICP studies the impact of poverty on family and child well-being and generates research that will enhance public policies and programs affecting poor or homeless children and their families. Specifically, ICP examines the condition of extreme poverty in the United States and its effect on educational attainment housing, employment, child welfare, domestic violence, and family wellness. Please visit our Web site for more information. [www.icpny.org](http://www.icpny.org)



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