

THE EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Internalizing and Externalizing Problems and Protective Strategies

Scope of the Problem

- More than 15 million children from newborns to age 18 are exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) in their homes.
- Researchers want to know the types of effects exposure to IPV has on children and any protective strategies they use.

Major Concepts

- The definition of children's exposure to domestic violence/IPV includes directly observing violence, hearing the violence from another room, seeing the after affects of violence such as broken objects and injuries and mother's depression.
- Children's exposure to IPV is associated with adjustment problems and internalizing (fear, anxiety, depression) and externalizing (outwardly aggressive) problems.
- Not all children develop adjustment problems.
- The assessment tool called the Child Exposure to Domestic Violence Scale is reliable and shows some validity.

Limitations of the Problem

- Most studies have been cross-sectional and not longitudinal.
- Most research is based on adult/parent reports and not from the children's viewpoints.
- There are not enough studies done to conclude that there is a definite link between exposure to IPV and PTSD.
- More research needs to be done on exposure to IPV on a broader scale when there is also community violence.
- Most studies examine physical abuse alone or combined with emotional and verbal abuse but not emotional and verbal abuse alone.

Significance for Social Work Practice

- Treatment options may include safety planning, encouraging discussion of how they feel about the violence and addressing any fears they have that they are responsible for the violence.
- The literature warns against joint custody when there is a history of abuse and power inequities between parents.
- When child protection agencies define exposure to IPV as maltreatment, the safe parent is threatened with losing custody.
- Practitioners need to understand the children's own agency to protect themselves when exposed to IPV.
- Social workers should consider using the CEDV scale when assessing the impact of IPV on children.
- Create a safe environment for children to speak freely.

Related literature

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