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Domestic Violence and Its Effect on Families

Niki Gotelli

Psych 391

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Abstract

In an extension of research focusing on domestic violence, this paper explains the horrible instances of abuse and its life-long effects imposed on an individual. Research in this area indicates that domestic violence is much more existent and prevalent than previously thought. There are many risk factors associated with elements of domestic abuse that researchers have found commonly characterized throughout cases. This paper focuses on spousal abuse, child abuse, as well as elderly abuse. It indicates common signs and symptoms of domestic abuse allowing people to recognize and help victims in need.

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The most life-threatening situation a police officer can enter is a dispute between family members (Cox 447). A family discrepancy is perpetrated with intense emotions and can unfortunately escalate into a serious, violent conflict. The most commonly perpetrated form of abuse against women is domestic violence and it is the majority of interpersonal violence (Gibbons 13). However, domestic abuse is often unreported as well as underrated because it occurs in the privacy of a home and victims are frequently reluctant to speak out due to fear of threats from the perpetrator (Furlow 133). Victims of domestic violence often have the misconception that it was their fault and remain in a permanent state of denial. It is rarely an isolated act, but rather a systematic one in order to gain control over the victim (Furlow 140). It occurs in both heterosexual couples as well as homosexual couples. Domestic Violence includes child abuse, elder abuse, and intimate partner violence. It can include slapping, kicking, hitting, punching, burning, scalding, use of weapons, or destruction of property. It can also involve forcing people to watch or act out porn, denial of contraception, and non-consensual conduct (Gibbons 12). Increasing interest in child abuse has revealed more incidents of sexual abuse as well as incest than was previously thought to exist (Cox 449). Although cultures vary on what is considered “acceptable” and what is deemed “unacceptable” within the home, domestic violence remains widely prevalent. It has many effects on victims as well as individuals who witness the insanity. Many times both victims and witnesses suffer from severe problems long

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after the incident. Domestic violence is a serious, horrifying experience for individuals and has many proceeding negative consequences.

There are many risk factors that may make families more likely to resort to violence. Families that lack effective means of communication may get frustrated and angry, therefore resulting to violent tactics in order to express their feelings. Factors associated with family aggression are cycles of violence, socioeconomic status, stress, social isolation, traditional male-role orientation, low self-esteem, and frequent alcohol and drug use (Cox 450). There are many common factors that perpetrators exhibit. Some are low self-esteem, low income, young age, aggressive behavior as a teen, heavy usage of alcohol and drugs, depression, anger, hostility, personality disorder, history of abusiveness, social isolation, and emotional stability. Relationship risk factors relating to spousal abuse are marital conflict, instability, dominating control of relationships, economic stress and hardships (Furlow 140). Researchers have found all of these factors common among families participating in areas of domestic violence.

While your wedding day is claimed to be the happiest day of one’s life, many brides fail to uncover some unruly characteristics of their future husbands. Many women will not recognize undesirable characteristics in their husbands until after they marry and are then unable to leave the relationship for many reasons. Women who marry abusive husbands advise younger women to leave a relationship if they have feelings of entrapment because later in the relationship they will be unable to escape it. Homicide rates between husbands and wives are high (Cox 450). More females are abused in the United States than males. Most physical

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violence between spouses involves a man hurting his wife or girlfriend. Only 25-35% of arrests for domestic assault are women (Cox 450). Many of these arrests are women whom lash out at their abusive husbands, sometimes even killing them, because they are too afraid of the consequences and threats of simply leaving the relationship. They are unable to find another way to escape the abuse.

Data from Child Protective Services suggest that more than 906,000 United States children are victims of abuse or neglect each year. Girls are four times more likely to be sexually abused than boys (Furlow 141). The female rate for abuse may be higher than the male rate because males may be less likely to admit the abuse. Many victims feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed about the situation. Parents are the perpetrators in 80 percent of these cases and child slayings tend to be perpetrated by parents and relatives (Furlow 141). Many times, the victim of sexual abuse is a daughter and is violated by her own father. A father is role model in a daughter’s life and is someone she can depend on. It is a devastating and life-altering experience when someone she can rely on abuses her in an inappropriate way. Sexual and physical abuse perpetrated by a father can cause many obstacles and hardships for a child later in life. There seems to be an increase in child abuse and this may be in part due to the growing number of children in cohabitating and blended families. It is a disturbing truth that approximately 1,500 children in the United States die from abuse and neglect each year (Furlow 142).

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There is currently a controversial debate on the usage of corporal punishment in order to teach a child a lesson. Spanking children in order to punish them has been an American tradition for many decades. But to what extent should spanking be considered physical abuse?

Recently, Straus and his colleagues conducted studies that showed corporal punishment is detrimental to children and teaches them violent and abusive behavior (Cox 450). Later in life, children who were punished with corporal punishment showed more aggressive tendencies and negative attitudes. Straus suggests other methods of punishment and rearing children rather than relying on physical damage because parents may actually be teaching their child the wrong lesson.

A victim’s overall quality of life as well as their health status is profoundly affected after being domestically abused. The physical and emotional scars that are brought upon them last for their entire life. An abused woman has poorer overall general health. A victim has an increased risk of obtaining sexually transmitted diseases. They are also likely to have impaired brain and immune functioning (Furlow 143). Chronic stress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can continue years after a victim has escaped the abusive relationship. The victim may never learn to trust again, may feel alone, and may live fearing that their perpetrator will once again abuse them. Domestic violence can lead to poorer attachment, negative role modeling, and less support (Paavila 1233).

Child victims that survived child abuse suffer from many issues. The outcome can result in short-term and long-term problems. Many suffer from physical injuries, bruises, disabilities, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, developmental delays, suicidal behavior, and self-

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harm (Paavila 1232). Family violence tends to follow a “domino pattern” (Cox 448). Abused children tend to abuse each other and become abusive adults. Those who experience spousal violence tend to also abuse their children. Ironically, victims are more likely to become perpetrators as adults. The domino pattern is a vicious cycle that makes it extremely difficult for victims to escape and overcome the hardships of domestic violence.

Approximately 10 million children witness domestic violence in the United States (Goodman 491). Witnessing traumatic, violent experiences within a family also has a direct impact on a child’s life. A child may watch the violent act between their guardians as it is occurring or may indirectly witness the violence by discovering the mother’s injuries, symptoms, or shattered objects. The most important parenting technique is modeling; therefore modeling destructive behavior has serious effects on the children. In an analysis of 118 studies, children exposed to domestic violence had significantly worse outcomes relative to those who had not. Children who witnessed domestic violence were more fearful and inhibited, had more anxiety and depression, showed antisocial behavior, and exhibited trauma symptoms. (Goodman 492). As a result of witnessing verbal violence, many infants experienced sleeping and eating disorders. Many babies were unable to gain weight, resulting in the inability to grow. Children ages twelve months old to preschool years were discovered to have physiological and psychological problems. Girls ages twelve to eighteen showed cases of aggression and delinquency. Boys ages twelve to eighteen showed immense sadness within the topic of violence (Goodman 493). Without even participating in the violence occurring within the home, presence and indirect involvement caused children harmful disorders and problems.

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Every year, thousands of elderly individuals are victims of domestic violence. Many people enjoy taking care of elderly relatives because they find to be an enriching and valuable time in their lives. However, demands of caregiving along with a large amount of elderly needs

can create a stressful environment where domestic violence is more likely to occur. The elderly are abused in their own homes, relatives’ homes, and in facilities that are responsible for their care (Robinson). Elderly suffer from verbal, physical, as well as sexual abuse. The elderly can also be abused with financial exploitation by family members as well as medical-nutritional neglect (Furlow 140). Failure to fulfill a care-taking obligation accounts for more than half of all the reported cases of elder abuse(Robinson)**.** Healthcare fraud is also abuse against the elderly. Charging for healthcare and not providing it and over charging for medical care and services are examples of this. Unfortunately, many relatives and staff employees that the elderly trust are the ones harassing and taking advantage of them.

Due to the fact that many victims of domestic violence are unable to escape their perpetrator, there are important signs to look for in order to detect and help victims of abuse. Some signs nurses use in order to detect domestic violence are strangulation, injuries, patients making light of injuries, extreme panic, fear, apprehension, x-rays showing old, healed fractures, and fractures at various stages of healing (Gibbons 14). An ordinary citizen can detect abuse by noticing an individual with frequent injuries while also wearing clothes intending to cover the bruises. Another implication of domestic abuse is when an individual frequently misses work, school, or social occasions (Smith). Their absence may be a result of their spouse refusing them privileges to see friends and family for fear they may notice the injuries or that

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the victim will confess. Major personality changes, depression, and suicidal thoughts are also characteristics of individuals experiencing domestic violence (Smith).

If any of these signs are noticeable and apparent, it is important to speak up and get help. The most appropriate form of intervention is controversial (Furlow 145). There are currently many hot lines that children and adults in abusive relationships can call for help. Most major cities now have battered women’s shelters where abused women can go to find comfort and a sense of community with other women whom experienced similar issues. There are also programs that are able to intervene in an abusive relationship. Criminal courts can also set restraining orders or jail the partner for a short amount of time (Cox 450). Violence abuse cases are now detected more frequently due to the initiation of a newly developed law. It states that it is “mandatory that persons in contact with students report suspected cases of abuse” (Cox 450). Adults working in schools are required to report any presumptions of abuse they may have in regards to the children in the school. Health care facilitators have an ethical responsibility to intervene in cases of domestic violence. Nurses play an integral role in screening for domestic violence and providing assistance (Paavilainen 1235). They should be easily capable of identifying the signs of domestic violence. Training for nurses is essential so victims can be effectively and easily identified. If there is suspicion of domestic abuse, it is incredibly important to find help. It could save someone’s life.

After researching domestic violence, I discovered that the prevalence and amount of domestic violence currently in the United States far excelled my initial belief. Through reviewing abuse, I realize the harmful and life-threatening effects it places on families. Spousal abuse,

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child abuse, and elderly abuse are all horrifying acts to pursue and witness. It’s extremely difficult to cope and understand these acts of violence that family members commit against one another. Clearly, perpetrators of these crimes are sick individuals with multiple issues. It is a shame that some families are unable to solve issues in a positive manner, thus resulting to violent tendencies. It’s incredibly unfortunate that even after the abuse, victims are unable to recover and suffer life-long illnesses. A family is a unit of support and love. It is devastating that victims feel they can no longer trust and rely on people once this unit is broken. I have also discovered the importance of recognizing and reporting suspected victims of domestic violence. It could ultimately save the victim’s life. Victimized individuals are trapped in a death sentence and are unable to escape. Domestic violence is never acceptable and it is never the fault of the victim.

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