

How Does Witnessing Domestic Violence Affect a Child's Academic and Behavioral Performance at School?

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Education 400





Research Question

- Several researchers have already shown that domestic violence disrupts a child's academic as well as behavioral performance at school. For my research paper, I wanted to find out how this process occurs.
 - *Exactly how does the violence among family members at home translate into a child's school life?*



Significance

- Public awareness is rapidly growing regarding the serious psychological and physical harm that witnessing domestic violence can cause to children.
 - Research suggests that between 3.3 million and 10 million children in the United States are exposed to domestic violence each year (Carlson 1992).
 - Exposure to family violence has significant negative repercussions for children's social, emotional, behavioral, as well as academic functioning
- Personal significance: “The Lifesaver Project” Hartford Hospital, CT
 - All children appeared to be struggling academically



Research (Secondary Sources)

- Behrman, Carter, & Weithorn (1999)
 - Suggested that children exposed to DV may demonstrate poor academic performance and problem-solving skills.
 - Also, children may exhibit behavioral problems such as aggression, phobias, insomnia, low self-esteem, and depression.
 - Concluded that the effects of DV can vary from one child to the next.
- Fauber, Forehand, Tomas, & Wiersen (1990)
 - Suggested that violence between parents may reduce parents' availability and attentiveness to their children's developmental and emotional needs



Main Points of Thesis

1. For most children, exposure to domestic violence interferes with their ability to function in school and thus, leads to a decline in their academic performance.
2. Majority of children who witness domestic violence carry over this exposure to their school life and exhibit a range of disruptive behavioral problems (i.e., increase in aggression, social anxieties, difficulties concentrating ...etc.)
3. For a minority of children, however, extra parental support and parental barriers between home and school prevents domestic violence at home from influencing school life.



Methods

- Observed meetings for about 2 months before recruiting subjects
- Obtained IRB approval
- Obtained informed consent from those individuals willing to participate.
- Conducted phone interviews consisting of 10 questions each.
 - Total: 10 interviews (7 mothers, 3 social workers)
 - Average interview = 10–15 mins. long
- Conducted analyses on data



Analysis

- About 85% of the mothers stated that they noticed a negative change either academically and/or behaviorally w/their child around the time when DV was occurring.
- 5 out of the 7 mothers stated that once the DV stopped, their children's performance improved (i.e., better grades, more time spent on hw...etc.)
- DV creates high risk, stress environment that may make it more difficult for child to concentrate on hw and work both inside/outside of classroom → Child falls behind and difficult to get back on track.



Analysis: Most Common Responses

Mothers Responses

- Increase in aggression
 - Fighting w/peers
 - Talking back to authority
 - Negative attitude
- Emotional distress
 - Lowered self-esteem
 - Withdrawn, shy behavior
 - Anxiety
- Poor grades
- Spent less time on hw

Social Workers Responses

- Increase in aggression
- Emotional distress
 - Psychosocial issues
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
- Separation anxieties
- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulties concentrating
- Poor grades



Analysis cont.

- Two of the mothers stated that their children have always been very consistent, “A,B” students.
 - These mothers have worked very hard to provide a stable, supportive environment for their children.
 - *“I feel blessed that my children's academics seem to be on task. I feel that I work **extra hard** to keep their lives in stable. It has been my goal as a parent to be the very best I can be and when I (can't or don't) I try to seek support or assistance.” Linda**
 - These children had always been very involved in activities after school as well.



Conclusions

- Mothers/victims of DV may become so preoccupied w/the critical issues of safety and survival that they are unable to fully assess the needs of their children.
 - These inconsistencies in parental practices make a child more likely to perform poorly in school.
- DV → Stress → Difficulties concentrating → Poor grades
- Children learn that violence is a way to deal w/anger and conflict and therefore may exhibit behavioral problems at school when interacting w/peers and adults.



Ways to Reduce the Impact of DV

- Extra emotional support from a competent, caring parent
- Keeping personal matters separate from school
- Extracurricular activities
- Parental involvement w/child's school life
- Tutor and/or academic mentor



Bibliography

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- Fauber, R.L., Forehand, R., Thomas, A.M., & Wierson, M. (1990) A mediational model of the impact of marital conflict of adolescent adjustment in intact and divorced families: The role of disrupted parenting. *Child Development*, 61, 1112-1123.



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HAVE A GREAT HOLIDAY EVERYONE!