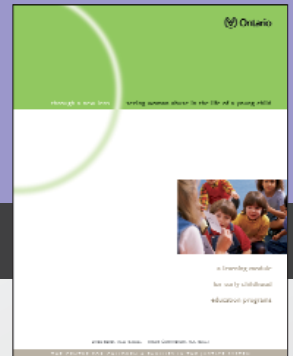


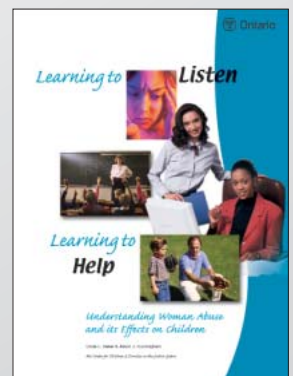
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*Teaching about
Woman Abuse
and its Effects
on Children*

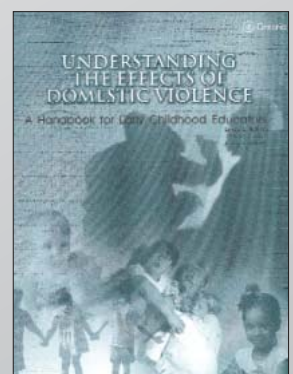
*The Centre for
Children and Families
in the Justice System*



*Through a New Lens /
Seeing Woman Abuse in the
Life of a Young Child
A Learning Module for Early
Childhood Education Programs*



*Learning to Listen,
Learning to Help
Understanding Women Abuse
and its Effects on Children*



*Understanding the Effects of
Domestic Violence
A Handbook for
Early Childhood Educators*

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PROFESSOR'S RESOURCE GUIDE

Teaching About Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children

Students of early childhood education, like students in many other helping professions, will encounter children who are experiencing problems at home. One such group is children who live or have recently lived with violence directed against their mothers by intimate partners. This document is a resource for the Ontario professor who is integrating material on this topic into his or her teaching. Specifically, it provides material to augment that provided in these resources:



Learning to Listen, Learning to Help: Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children (2005)

A 33-page student handbook. Topics include background material on the dynamics of woman abuse, the concept of power and control, how to support women and help them find appropriate resources, how children cope with violence at home, responding to child disclosure of abuse and neglect, standards of professional conduct, taking stock of your own attitudes, and suggestions for how you can make a difference to end violence. In one place, students find relevant and up-to-date information and are directed to easily accessible resources for further study.

Available for download at www.lfcc.on.ca. Can also be ordered in hard copy.



Through a New Lens / Seeing Women Abuse in the Life of a Young Child: A Learning Module for Early Childhood Education Programs (2005)

A complete package for the teacher of ECE to integrate this topic into any course. Students learn how infants, toddlers and young children might be affected by violence against their mothers. The module includes supplementary learning activities, suggested videos, case studies, and sample multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The accompanying PowerPoint slide show can be modified by professors to suit their needs for length and content. Or, use the slides to generate overheads and/or student handouts.

Available in electronic format on CD-ROM: see www.lfcc.on.ca/newlens.html



Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators (2001)

An 18-page handbook where, in one user-friendly source, ECE students learn to identify and assist children who have been exposed to woman abuse. Topics addressed include implications for the childcare setting, safety planning, reporting to the Children's Aid Society, and accessing community support.

Available for download at www.lfcc.on.ca. Can also be ordered in hard copy.

The material in this guide may help while preparing a lecture or lectures on this topic. Material in this guide also prepares you to answer student questions and suggest further readings to the interested student.



Where you see this symbol, further reading on a topic is suggested.



Teaching tips prepare you to answer and address some questions you may hear from students. Ideas for further discussion or class handouts are also presented.



These are important points to emphasize with students.

Teaching methodology

Presentation of this material may be accomplished in lecture format, group discussion, assigned reading, or essay assignment, perhaps augmented with video/DVD materials. Guest speakers might include a representative of the local Children's Aid Society or a children's advocate/counsellor from an abused women's shelter.



To find videos, see the *National Clearinghouse on Family Violence Video Catalogue* (2005) at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/. This catalogue is updated from time to time.



For most students, this is an important and possibly interesting topic of study. For some, it reflects painful aspects of their past and/or current lives.

Have close at hand the contact information for on-campus counselling services and any local women's centres. The Assaulted Women's Help Line is also a good resource:

1-866-863-0511, in the GTA (416) 863-0511 or TTY at 1-866-863-7868

Consider posting or distributing this information before your lecture.

A note on terminology



In discussions with students, select and use your language carefully.

The term “woman abuse” refers to the repetitive use of power and control tactics by a man to intimidate and dominate a female intimate partner. It can involve the ever-present and credible threat of physical violence. Typical features of “woman abuse” include intimidation and threats, minimizing or denying his role in the abuse, socially isolating the woman, controlling family finances, blaming the woman for his bad behaviour, and repetitive use of demeaning comments and insults.



The definition of woman abuse is most commonly drawn from the *Power & Control Wheel* from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Minnesota. This heuristic model is discussed below.

The terms “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” imply that men can be abused and that women can be abusive. It can occur in both same-sex and heterosexual relationships. The term “family violence” usually includes all forms of violence between family members, including child abuse, abuse among siblings, and elder abuse.



Stress to students that the majority of injurious partner abuse is perpetrated by men against women.

The term “victim” refers to individuals, usually women, who are abused by intimate partners. Many advocates prefer the term “survivor” because this reflects how most women cope, with personal strength and resourcefulness. The term “victim” is also seen as dis-empowering.

The term “child maltreatment” or “child abuse” refers to acts and omissions that come under the jurisdiction of child welfare authorities, which in Ontario are the 52 Children’s Aid Societies across the province. Maltreatment can involve, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, physical, emotional or developmental neglect, or denying medical care. Some but not all forms of child maltreatment are also criminal offences (e.g., assault, sexual touching, failing to provide the necessities of life).



N. Trocmé, B. Fallon, B. MacLaurin *et al.* (2005). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings*. Ottawa: Health Canada . [find at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/]

Why learn about woman abuse?

Some of the women whom students will meet in field placements, volunteer jobs, or employed positions will be in or have recently left abusive relationships. Students may not be aware of that fact, because women have many good reasons not to mention it. However, the interaction or intervention contemplated – be that in a health care context, school, child care centre, social service agency, criminal justice sector, etc. – will be enhanced if the student has learned to listen to the cues and clues.

Responding sensitively to abused women is not solely the job of shelters and other agencies in the violence against women sector. Abused women are our neighbours, classmates, and co-workers. They seek housing, health care, legal services, child care, counselling for children or themselves, cultural interpretation, dental care, or welfare. People in the veterinary field now recognize the link between animal abuse and violence in the family. The topic is one that concerns us all.



The Advocacy Wheel illustrates key principles guiding interventions with abused women. It can be found in *Learning to Listen, Learning to Help*, or get a copy at www.pathwaysofcourage.org. If you are teaching in the health sciences, look also at the Medical Power & Control Wheel at that site.

Moreover, many of the women are mothers. In terms of the children we may meet in our professional or volunteer roles, we should understand that:

- woman abuse is one of many adverse experiences that can compromise a child's development and ability to benefit fully from the educational or treatment setting
- woman abuse frequently co-occurs with other adverse experiences (e.g., child maltreatment)
- the effects of woman abuse may be seen in a child's behaviour and/or emotional presentation
- some of these behaviours might be confused with learning disabilities or be linked to other explanations (e.g., oppositional behaviour)

The assumption made here is that knowing when to consider woman abuse as a possible source of observed problems will help target your response, to more effectively address the concerning behaviour and help the woman and her children. For example, a child who lacks concentration and is easily distracted may be considered for an attention deficit diagnosis and a course of Ritalin. Looking for family issues as an alternative hypothesis may lead to quite a different response.



Concerning behaviours in children may have other sources besides woman abuse; conversely, some children living with woman abuse will not be observably different from their peers.

Woman abuse

Understanding how children are affected by woman abuse necessitates a basic understanding by students of the concept. The spectrum of abuse ranges from insults through to life-threatening injuries and even murder. The goal is to gain the “upper hand,” to use physical, economic or other power to be in control and to put the woman in a position of powerlessness – with words, violence, or threats. It is a gendered phenomenon, rooted in the social, economic and political inequality of women (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). The factors believed to contribute to and perpetuate violence against women include:

- traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, which compel men to be tough and controlling, and women to be passive and obedient;
- the differential socialization of girls and boys;
- violence in the media; and,
- societal attitudes condoning violence against women (see Baker & Cunningham, 2005: 8-9).

Woman abuse can take one or more of these forms:

! **Emotional abuse**

Demeaning comments and insults (e.g., taunts about being useless, lazy, fat, ugly, or stupid; controlling behaviour such as dictating how she dresses; threats of suicide; threats of taking the children; surveillance; obsessive jealousy; isolating her from family or friends; abusing pets; and/or destroying sentimental and valued possessions).

! **Economic abuse**

Withholding money, taking her money, spending frivolously while the children go without necessities, making all major purchases, denying access to bank accounts, preventing her from taking or keeping a job, not paying child support.

! **Sexual abuse**

Forced sex, distasteful or painful sexual activity, exposure to AIDS or other sexually-transmitted diseases, refusal to use or permit her to use birth control.

! **Spiritual abuse**

Ridicule or punishment for holding a religious or cultural belief, forbidding practise of a woman's religion or forcing adherence to different practices.

! **Physical abuse**

Slapping, punching, kicking, shoving, choking, burning, biting, pushing down stairs, stabbing or slashing with a knife, shooting, hitting with an object. It may or may not result in visible injury.



While all forms of abuse are hurtful, some forms of woman abuse are against the criminal law and others are not.



L. Hart & W. Jamieson (2002). *Woman Abuse: Overview Paper*. Ottawa ON: Health Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. [find at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/]

Power and control

The Power & Control Wheel is probably the most commonly employed heuristic model in this field. It emphasizes control – not overt physical violence – as the defining features of woman abuse. The segments of the wheel illustrate various manifestations of power and control (e.g., economic abuse), highlighting the fact that physical violence can co-exist with tactics of control that may indeed be more common or more deleterious overall. The Wheel was developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Duluth, Minnesota, based on their work treating abusive men. Many women find the wheel helps them to put names to the behaviour of an abusive partner and recognize that their experiences are not unique to themselves.



The Power & Control Wheel helps students see woman abuse as a pattern of behaviour not necessarily involving physical assaults, bruises or visible injuries.



The Power & Control Wheel is a helpful model. However, expect that some students will recognize features of their own families or relationships.

1. Refer to the earlier suggestions about posting contact information for on-campus counselling, etc.
2. Point out that some of these behaviours may be used once in a while in relationships. It is the systematic use of a number of these tactics over time that defines a man (as opposed to a behaviour) as abusive.
3. Another issue that may be raised by students is how some of the listed behaviours are condoned, acceptable or even encouraged by patriarchal cultures. The class may want to engage in a short discussion of cultural norms and gender roles.
4. If a student recognizes some of the power and control tactics as matching the relationship of a friend, refer them to the FAQs at Education Wife Assault (www.womanabuseprevention.com). Also see: www.ontariowomensdirectoriate.gov.on.ca



For more information on the characteristics of abusive men, see L. Bancroft & J. Silverman (2002). *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage. This material is summarized as handouts at www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html.

Equality

Equality is the hallmark of a healthy, equal relationship, as described in the Equality Wheel of Non-violence of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project:

Negotiation and Fairness

- seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict
- accepting change
- being willing to compromise

Non-threatening Behaviour

- talking and acting so she feels safe and comfortable expressing herself and doing things

Respect

- listening to her non-judgmentally
- being emotionally affirming and understanding
- valuing opinions

Trust and Support

- supporting her goals in life
- respecting her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and opinions

Honesty and Accountability

- accepting responsibility for self
- acknowledging past use of violence
- admitting being wrong
- communicating openly and truthfully

Responsible Parenting

- sharing parental responsibilities
- being a positive non-violent role model for the children

Shared Responsibility

- mutually agreeing on a fair distribution of work
- making family decisions together

Economic Partnership

- making money decisions together
- making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements



1. The Power & Control Wheel and the Equality Wheel can be distributed as handouts. Find copies at www.duluth-model.org in the “wheel gallery.” While there, find the Creator Wheel from Mending the Sacred Hoop, designed for Aboriginal communities.
2. Interested students can use the Internet to find the Lesbian/Gay Power & Control Wheel, about violence in same-sex relationships.

Woman Abuse and Marital Conflict: Clarifying Definitions

Research surveys of the general population can use definitions of “violence” that blur the distinction between “woman abuse” and marital conflict. This leads to confusion between the two when results are interpreted, and prevents a clear understanding of how each plays out in the lives of those affected. As one example, the data seem to show that female-to-male violence in relationships is equally as common as male-to-female violence. Without suggesting that women are never abusive and violent to men in relationships – Belknap & Melton (2005) estimate this is true of five percent of cases – the appearance of gender symmetry is most likely an artifact of how the questions are designed and the data organized (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Cunningham & Baker, 2004; Johnson & Leona, 2005).

“Woman abuse,” as defined here, is perpetrated by men against women. It involves on-going and escalating patterns of controlling, coercive and intimidating and often violent behaviour by the abuser. In contrast, marital conflict may occasionally intensify into an incident of inappropriate behaviour such as throwing an object, a push, or a slap. Aggressive behaviour with the context of marital conflict may happen seldom or occasionally and typically is gender symmetrical. It is not about one partner dominating the other. The violence occurring in the context of woman abuse can be severe and even life-threatening for both a woman and her children.

Statistics

How common is woman abuse in Canada? As with most illegal and hidden behaviours, we don’t really know. There are three sources of quantitative data commonly used as proxy measures:

- statistics collected by police about the criminal offences reported to or discovered by them
- anonymous telephone surveys of the general population, such as the General Social Survey
- cases where women were murdered by intimate partners

None of these numbers is accurate as a measure of “woman abuse.” As you consider these data, keep in mind these limitations:

- most victims of inter-personal crimes do not call the police

- definitions used by police (i.e., criminal offences) and definitions used in general population surveys do not match the definition of “woman abuse” used above

Police Data

Police statistics provide a picture of criminal incidents reported to or discovered by law enforcement. Incidents are categorized according to criminal offence categories, such as assault, criminal harassment, sexual assault, and attempted murder. The revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey also asks officers to record the victim/offender relationship, specifically “spouse” (married or common-law) or ex-spouse. Overall, 11% of victims of inter-personal crimes known to the police report being victims of a current spouse (including common law unions) and 5% are victims of an ex-spouse for a total of 17% of incidents known to the police in 2002.

The picture provided by crime statistics is incomplete, tempered by the reluctance of victims to make an official report. For example, 36% of women victims of “spousal violence” in the General Social Survey (discussed below) said they had called the police. Reasons cited by non-reporting victims of crime in general include a belief that police will not catch the offender, fear of retaliation from the offender, and a sense that the crime is too minor to report. Where woman abuse is concerned, women may fear not being believed or taken seriously, fear being charged themselves, fear being reported to the Children’s Aid Society, fear public discovery of a private family matter, and worry about the consequences of arresting a family breadwinner. On the other hand, most victims who called the police did so for protection, true of 88% of female complainants (Statistics Canada, 2005).



All police departments in Ontario have mandatory charging policies meaning that officers are required to lay charges when finding reasonable and probable grounds to suspect a criminal offence (e.g., assault) occurred, even if they did not witness the event.

Another factor distorting police data is the growing incidence of “dual charging.” Dual charging occurs when police lay charges against both partners after an incident of domestic violence. Statistics Canada (2005) asked victims of “spousal violence” who had called police to describe the police response. The most common response was a warning. While 41% of female victims reported that their partners were charged, 21% of male victims reported that their partners had been charged. Limitations of the survey prevent us from knowing if these were dual charges or sole charges.

Dual charging is an unanticipated and undesirable consequence of the mandatory charging policy, when abused women are charged along with their abusers. To prevent the charging of victims who act in self-defence, police services across Ontario are examining the concept of “dominant aggressor” in incidents of domestic violence.

Two other caveats about police data must be mentioned. First, police data focus on criminal offences rather than woman abuse, and so can incorporate incidents of marital conflict. Conversely, many aspects of woman abuse are not technically against the law (e.g., using male privilege). Second, the accuracy of police data depends upon the extent to which cases are correctly classified as “spousal” rather than generic assaults.

Keeping these factors in mind, the picture that emerges from police statistics is this:

- complainants are much more likely to be female than male
- current spouses are more likely to be injured in spousal violence cases than ex-spouses
- uttering threats and criminal harassment (i.e., stalking) are more common among ex-spouses than current spouses
- young females have the highest rates of spousal violence
- injuries resulting from spousal violence most often involve physical force (as opposed to a weapon, for example)



Crime statistics are reported each year by Statistics Canada. See, for example, the *Juristat* series which is available at most major libraries. See also this annual publication available in electronic format from Statistics Canada [www.statcan.ca] or the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:

Statistics Canada (2005). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2005*. Ottawa ON: Minister of Industry.

General Social Survey

Anonymous victimization surveys of the general population provide another viewpoint. In these studies, a randomly selected group of adults is interviewed on the telephone and promised confidentiality in return for answering questions about any crimes they experienced recently. The General Social Survey (GSS) is one such study, conducted every year on a rotating list of topics. In 2004, the focus was criminal victimization (as it was in 1999). About 24,000 Canadians over the age of 15 answer the GSS questions, contacted through a process called random-digit dialling. Because they were randomly chosen, and because the number of people who refused to participate is relatively small (25%), the responses of these 24,000 people are used to estimate what the findings would have been if all 24 million adults in the ten provinces had been spoken with.



Point for discussion among students: why might people refuse to participate in the GSS when contacted by a surveyor? How might these factors affect population estimates of the phenomenon under study?

Where “spousal violence” is concerned, the GSS focuses on men and women who are married, are living in common-law relationships at the time of the interview, or who have been in such a relationship at any time during the previous five years, an estimated nine million Canadian women. Among this group, 7% of (heterosexual) respondents reported at least one incident of “violence”¹ in the previous five years (Statistics Canada, 2005). Overall, they estimate that 653,000 Canadian women (ages 15 and older) would report at least one incident of spousal violence in the previous five years. The majority had separated from that partner by the time they spoke with the surveyor.



How does Ontario compare with other provinces? It is the same as the national average reported above. Higher rates were reported by women in the provinces to the west of Ontario and lower rates were reported by women to the east of Ontario. This pattern holds true for crime statistics in general in most years.

As with police data, there are several caveats to consider. Residents of the three Territories (where the crime rates are highest) are not included. Some victims contacted by surveyors will choose not to report their experiences. Research has demonstrated a phenomenon called “telescoping,” where respondents report incidents from prior to the study’s time frame, usually because they want to be helpful. Telephone surveys miss people without telephones – probably because they cannot afford one – including the homeless and those imprisoned or otherwise institutionalized. Rates of abuse will be higher among the poor and marginalized members of society. People who speak neither English nor French are also missed.



For a study that surveyed people in several languages commonly spoken among newcomers in the Vancouver area, see: M.J. Kwong, K. Bartholomew, A.J. Henderson & S.J. Trinke (2003). The Intergenerational Transmission of Relationship Violence. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(3): 288-301.

Examination of GSS data in the context of woman abuse should also take into account that the survey does not differentiate woman abuse from marital conflict, a feature it shares with police data and with similar American surveys. Laroche (2005), in reference to the 1999 GSS, suggests that 81% of male-reported violence and 74% of female-reported violence could constitute violence in the context of marital conflict when the perpetrator was reported to be a current spouse. Rates of more entrenched patterns of severe violence are higher when people report the violent behaviour of a former spouse.

¹ Threatened to hit you with a fist or anything else that could have hurt you; thrown anything at you that could have hurt you; pushed, grabbed or shoved you in a way that could have hurt you; slapped you; kicked, bit or hit you with a fist; hit you with something that could have hurt you; beaten you; choked you; used or threatened to use a gun or knife on you; forced you into an unwanted sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way.

In consequence, surveys such as the GSS are not well suited to reflect population incidence of woman abuse. Indeed, because woman abuse may never, rarely or not recently involve overt physical violence, some profoundly abused women may not see their experiences reflected in the numbers at all. Instead, the data appear to show gender symmetry in overall rates of spousal violence. Six percent of men reported spousal violence compared with 7% of women. We must look deeper, at the patterns of behaviour reported by respondents.



M.P. Johnson & J.M. Leone (2005). The Differential Effects of Intimate Terrorism and Situational Couple Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. *Journal of Family Issues*, 26(3): 322-349.

D. Laroche (2005). *Aspects of the Context and Consequences of Domestic Violence – Situational Couple Violence and Intimate Terrorism in Canada in 1999*. Québec QC: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Gouvernement du Québec.

In the 2004 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 2005), we can find information on the characteristics and consequences of spousal violence reported by women, some characteristics of the women themselves, and descriptions of how they sought assistance.

Characteristics of the violence

- the most serious type of violence reported by 40% of women was being pushed, shoved or slapped
- 23% of women reported being beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife or having a gun of knife used against them as the most serious incident
- 43% of women reported one incident while 21% reported 10 or more incidents
- among 49% of women who reported violence in a previous relationship, the violence continued or started after the end of the relationship

Consequences

- 44% of female victims reported an injury, most commonly bruises (96%) or cuts (35%)
- 13% sought medical attention
- 34% of female victims feared for their lives at some point
- 29% took time off from their daily activities because of the violence on at least one occasion
- the most common emotional consequences reported by women were feeling upset, confused or frustrated (37%), angry (37%), fearful (30%), or disappointed (25%)²
- 9% of women felt afraid for their children

² Multiple responses were possible.

Characteristics of women reporting violence in previous 12 months³

- an estimated one percent of Canadian women experienced at least one incident of violence perpetrated by a current partner in the previous 12 months
- overall, an estimated 196,000 Canadian women (ages 15 and older) experienced violence in a current or previous relationship in the previous 12 months
- women whose partners were under 25 were more likely to report violence than women with partners who were 25 or older
- women in common-law relationships were three times more likely to report violence than women who were married
- women in relationships of less than three years duration were more likely to report violence (3%) than women in relationships of four to nine years (2%) or 10 years or more (1%)
- there were no significant differences according to where the women lived (urban or rural area), their levels of educational attainment, or family structure (intact or step)
- 44% of women said their partners had been consuming alcohol at the time of the violent incidents
- 24% of Aboriginal women reported violence compared with 7% of non-Aboriginal women

The 2004 GSS also looked at child custody and domestic violence, but the figures reported in Statistics Canada (2005) were not broken down by gender.



It is important to emphasize the problems associated with the ecological fallacy: generalizing information from one level of analysis to another (e.g., groups to individuals). For example, just because Aboriginal women are at greater risk for abuse, you cannot assume that any given Aboriginal woman is being abused.

Seeking assistance

- most women (83%) sought support from friends and family
- 12% of female victims had not told anyone of the incident prior to revealing it to the surveyor
- 22% of women spoke to a lawyer about the incident and 12% consulted a faith leader
- 11% of women went to a shelter or transition home
- 47% of women sought the assistance of a “professional” support service including victim services, women’s centre, shelter, counsellor or crisis line
- half of women felt they did not need the help of a support service

³ Questions pertaining to the characteristics of women focused on women who reported violence in the previous 12 months.

- 5% of women who did not seek help from a social service agency said this decision was related to not knowing such services existed or not having such services available
- 36% of women reported the incident to the police and charges were laid in 41% of those cases
- 38% of women who reported the incident to the police also sought a restraining or protective order



For another document reporting Canadian statistics, see:

Status of Women Canada (2002). *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile*. Ottawa: Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women.

For a discussion of historical trends, see:

Public Health Agency of Canada (2004). *The Family Violence Initiative Performance Report, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

Both these documents are available on-line.



For a discussion of intimate violence reported by men, see:

E. Lupri & E. Grandin (2004). *Intimate Partner Abuse Against Men: Overview Paper*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Belknap, J. & H. Melton (2005). *In Brief: Are Heterosexual Men Also Victims of Intimate Partner Abuse?* Washington DC: Applied Research Forum, National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

Homicide Survey

Another source of quantitative statistical information comes from retrospective review of homicides where the victim and offender were in an intimate relationship. In about two-thirds of such cases, a history of domestic violence was known to authorities. In 2004, 64 women and 14 men were victims of spousal homicide (Statistics Canada, 2005).

- spousal homicides comprise about one fifth of solved homicide cases
- about one third of homicides against women are committed by a spouse compared with 4% of homicides against men
- the most common motive noted for spousal homicide is the escalation of an argument (41%) followed by jealousy (21%), and frustration (19%)

- nearly one third of men who killed a spouse subsequently killed themselves
- rates of spousal homicide have generally been declining in Canada: the rate of 2003 was half of what it was in 1974

The likelihood of being the victim of spousal homicide declines as you get older, with most victims falling into the age 15 to 24 category (Statistics Canada, 2004).



M. Davergne (2004). Homicide in Canada. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*, 23(8). A *Juristat* with a similar name is released each year.

Also, use the Internet to find the latest annual report to the Chief Coroner by Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

Qualitative information

It must be emphasized that *quantitative* data give only one perspective, and one slanted by reporting patterns and variable definitions as noted earlier. Qualitative data such as case studies show the context, dynamics and consequences of woman abuse (e.g., Sev'er, 2002).

Decisions to leave or stay

Perhaps the most common question among students first learning about this topic is this: “why does she stay?” There are many variables statistically associated with women who remain in abusive relationships including youth, limited financial means, and motherhood. However, numbers and percentages obscure the complicated nature of the decision-making process. Leaving an abusive partner is best understood as a process during which women may evolve through phases marked by shifts in thinking. As with other major decisions about leaving (e.g. emigrating from your homeland), cognitive and emotional leaving typically precedes physical leaving. Women may leave and return many times, weighing critical factors and relying on evolving survival strategies.

During the initial period, women may engage in “self talk” to help them rationalize the decision to stay, tolerate the situation, and/or develop a plan to try and make things better:

- denial
 - * my life is pretty good 99% of the time so I really can't complain
 - * I can put up with it, as long as the kids don't know about it
 - * he is so controlling because he loves me so much
 - * people like me do not find themselves in abusive relationships

- self-blame

- * if I hadn't [fill in the blank] he would not have gotten so angry
- * if I weren't so [fill in the blank] he wouldn't be in a bad mood all the time
- * if I did more [fill in the blank] he would be happier at home

- deferred happiness

- * things will get better when he stops drinking / gets counselling / finds a job, etc.
- * things will get better when I lose weight / have a baby / have more time for housework, etc.
- * things will get better when the kids are older / are in school / leave home , etc.
- * my life is destined to be unhappy but I will be rewarded in heaven

- trade-off

- * he's no saint but he is a good provider / good father / handy around the house, etc.
- * I'm lucky to have him
- * the kids need a father
- * I love him
- * he says he would kill himself if I left and the kids would hate me / I'd feel guilty, etc.
- * I must stay because, if I divorce, my sisters back home won't be able to get married / my family will be humiliated / my family will disown me / my daughters won't get married, etc.

- resignation

- * all men are like that so another guy won't be any different
- * marriage is forever so I am stuck with him no matter how bad he is
- * I cannot change my fate because I cannot change God's will for me
- * there is a higher power governing my life / I am an unlucky person / this is karma

- investment

- * we've been together for so long that I can't give up on the relationship
- * I've given him the best years of my life so I can't leave now

Even after she decides to get out of the relationship, other factors may work as barriers.

- logistics

- * I can't afford to leave / have no means of support / would have no place to live, etc.
- * leaving will affect my immigration status

- fear
 - * he'll be so angry he would just track me down / he'll just be angrier / retaliation / murder
 - * fear of being alone / without a man / vulnerable
 - * he'll get custody of the children
 - * he'll call the Children's Aid Society
 - * he'll hurt the kids / I will not be there to protect them during access visits
- embarrassment
 - * I can't believe I'm in this situation
 - * how can I tell my friends and co-workers what is happening?
 - * there are people who will say "I told you so"

After leaving, continued abuse (e.g., stalking, abuse during child exchanges, undermining her parenting) combined with other stresses (e.g., financial pressures), can create substantial burdens for women. This highlights the need for adequate material resources and social supports.



Tina Hotton (2001). Spousal Violence After Marital Separation. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*, 21(7).

Impact of power & control tactics on mothers

Baker & Cunningham (2004: 26-27) describe how the power and control tactics of an abusive man may compromise a woman's parenting, both before and after separation. She may come to believe she is an inadequate parent, lose the respect of some of her children, or believe the distorted excuses of an abuser (e.g., that men should be in charge of the family). Her capacity to be an effective parent may be overwhelmed by contingencies of the abuse (e.g., fatigue, denial of money), she may resort to survival strategies with negative effects (e.g., use drugs), she may get caught up in a competition with her partner for the loyalty and affections of their children, and ultimately her bond with the children might be compromised.

Some of these factors may be apparent in the women whom your students might meet in a professional context:

- a mother feels inadequate and lacks confidence in her ability as a parent, perhaps needing far more reassurance than most parents in similar circumstances

- she describes herself as overly permissive or indulgent to compensate for the authoritative parenting style of her partner
- or, she describes having to be overly strict with the children to keep them from annoying her partner
- she seems overwhelmed in her role as mother, appearing fatigued, depressed, jumpy
- she defends, excuses, minimizes, or apologizes for the inappropriate actions and words of her partner
- she seems panicked or strenuously resistant to the suggestion that her partner be involved in parent/teacher meetings, joint therapy sessions, visits to your office, etc.
- you have reason to believe she may be abusing drugs or using alcohol to excess
- you have reason to believe she may be using harsh discipline or perhaps maltreatment
- one or more children displays disrespectful behaviour towards her and/or one of her children seems to take the caretaker role with her

Women in this position may seek support to respond to worrisome behaviours in their children.



These behaviours may also be seen in some women who are not being abused by an intimate partner



L.L. Baker & A.J. Cunningham (2004). *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting*. London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.
[find at www.lfcc.on.ca]

How are children “exposed”?

Edleson (1999) notes that children are “exposed” to woman abuse if they see it, are used by the violent parent, hear the violence, or experience its aftermath such as the arrest or hospitalization of a parent. Specifically, as Baker & Cunningham (2005: 16) list, children are “exposed” to woman abuse by:

- seeing a mother assaulted or demeaned
- hearing loud conflict and violence
- seeing the aftermath (e.g., injuries)
- learning about what happened to a mother
- being used by an abusive parent as part of the abuse
- seeing a father abuse his new partner when they visit him on weekends
- being denied what is owed them for child support

How are children “used” by an abusive parent? Baker *et al.* (2001: 4) describe these ways:

- claiming that the children’s bad behaviour is the reason for the violence
- encouraging the children to abuse the other parent
- threatening violence against the children and/or their pets
- engaging children in negative discussion about their mother
- prolonged court proceedings about custody and access when the abuser has previously shown little interest in the children
- holding the children hostage or abducting them in an effort to punish the victim or gain compliance

In addition, many children who live with woman abuse will also be maltreated directly, especially if the violence is frequent (Ross, 1996).



Figures on the link between woman abuse and child abuse are often reported in terms of an “overlap” typically ranging from 30% to 60%. The variable estimates of overlap are related to different samples (e.g., shelter samples versus general population) and different definitions (woman abuse versus marital conflict, child maltreatment versus “spanking”). A more helpful framework is provided by Ross (1996), who used the National Family Violence Survey to demonstrate that the more frequent is the abuse of a woman in a home, the more likely it is that the children are maltreated. In other words, there is a positive correlation. As the frequency of woman abuse increases, so does the likely presence of child maltreatment. For example, statistically isolating fathers who self-reported over 50 acts of physical violence against a partner over the previous year, virtually all of them acknowledged physical abuse against a child (Ross, 1996).



It is important to emphasize the ecological fallacy here as well, especially for students who will work in fields where they are meeting families one by one. For example, just because there is woman abuse in a home does not mean there is child abuse (or vice versa). Each family must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In generalizing from research samples to individuals, you may make an erroneous decision.

Coping and survival

While often characterized as *witnesses* -- implying a passive role -- children who live with violence are actively engaged in interpreting, predicting, assessing their role in causing the violence, worrying about consequences, problem solving and/or taking measures to protect themselves, physically and emotionally. As they mature, their interpretations and coping mechanisms will change and they may start to play active roles in attempting to prevent or intervene in incidents.

Understanding how children are affected, and how they make sense of and cope with their experiences at different stages of development, enables us to intervene in ways that minimize harm and maximize helpful coping responses (see Baker & Cunningham, 2004). Some children describe trying hard to please or attempting to be invisible. Others actively try to block out the violence by turning up the television or covering their ears. Rescue fantasies help some children cope. Coping strategies evolve and change with age and developmental maturation. For example, escaping through drugs and leaving home are strategies employed by some teenagers.

Children are affected by the context of intimacy in which the violence occurs. The perpetrators of abuse against their mothers are often fathers or father figures. The children have emotional ties to, and dependency on, one or both of the adults involved. Because of a relationship to the non-offending parent, children are often used by the perpetrator to control the adult victim (e.g., engaging children in the abuse of the victim, holding children hostage). While children want the violence to stop, they often experience ambivalent and confusing feelings toward one or both parental figures. Affection often coexists with feelings of resentment and disappointment over their parent's behaviour.

Protective factors

Not all children who live with woman abuse are affected in the same way. Certainly, key features of the abuse itself will be important in explaining this variability, including frequency, severity, duration, predictability, relationship to the abuser, involvement of child in the abusive dynamics, and whether the child and siblings are maltreated directly. Age will also be a factor. Empirical findings are inconsistent at this point but there is reason to suspect that differential impact should be expected between male and female adolescents.

Individual strengths

Each child is unique. A variety of factors sometimes called "resiliency" may come into play, such as temperament and intelligence. Conversely, children who have special needs such as learning disabilities may have a more difficult time understanding and processing their experiences.

Coping beliefs and strategies

Goldblatt (2003: 532-3) defines coping strategies as “those perceptions, interactions, and behaviors that the youths define as modes of dealing or struggling with their exposure and understanding of interparental violence.” Baker & Cunningham (2004), summarizing the types of coping seen among older children and adolescents living with woman abuse, note that some strategies are healthy (seek peers or supportive adults for talking about feelings, focus on sports, journaling, etc.) and some are worrisome. Coping is always helpful if a child can navigate a painful period. But some coping strategies, if solidified and generalized to other circumstances, can be problematic (e.g., addictions) or constitute barriers to normal development. Children who do not internalize blame for the abuse, can appropriately and accurately attribute blame, and who develop helpful coping strategies (e.g., reaching out for help) will probably have the best outcomes. Conversely, unhelpful coping might include emotional numbing, substance use, self-blame, early child bearing, being aggressive with others, or trying to be perfect.



For more information on the coping styles and family roles of children who live with violence, see: *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting* (2004). [find at www.ifcc.on.ca]

Support systems

Children's relationships and support resources can buffer them from some of the effects of adverse experiences and traumas. Having someone on whom to depend, such as a parent, neighbour, relative, counsellor, or Children's Aid worker, can make a big difference in a child's life. They can learn they are valued and not to blame for “problems” in their families. Conversely, children who are isolated from supportive peers and have no trusted adult in their lives will have a more difficult experience.

Research on children

How many children are exposed to domestic violence? We truly have no idea, again because woman abuse is a covert behaviour hidden behind closed doors. In some provinces, it is a reason to notify child welfare authorities, making it even less likely that a woman will report.

In the 2004 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 2005), it was estimated that 394,000 spousal violence victims in Canada (men and women) could report that children saw or heard inter-partner violence in the previous five years, representing one-third (33%) of all victims of spousal violence. There were no children at home at the time of the spousal violence in 31% of households, and 35% of victims reported that children did not see or hear violence. The female victims were more likely to report that children saw or heard this violence (40%) than men who reported being the victims of spousal violence (25%). Refer to the caveats listed earlier about the limits of the GSS.



Ultimately, knowing a precise figure in the population is not important in how we intervene with individual children. Child exposure to woman abuse is more common than some people think, less common than others think, and too common in any event.

Aggregate characteristics

It is often noted that children who live(d) with “inter-parental violence” (the term most common in the literature) are at increased risk for psychological, behavioural, or social problems. These statements are primarily supported by studies that give psychological tests to groups of children whose mothers report a history of intimate partner victimization. They look at the sample average and compare that to children in the general population. (See Carlson, 2000, for a summary of this literature.) In short, the average score of samples of exposed children is typically higher than the average score of general population children.



Remember that not all children living with woman abuse will experience psychological, behavioural or social problems. Also remember that not all children experiencing these problems live(d) with woman abuse.

The first case study on child exposure to woman abuse was published in 1975. A recent content analysis of research on this topic (Cunningham & Baker, 2004) underscores how aggregate-level investigation is in the early stages, struggling especially with issues of definition and how to measure “exposure.” Among their conclusions is that the evidence now available makes it difficult to isolate the effects of living with woman abuse from the effects of commonly co-occurring adversities such as community violence, marital conflict, child maltreatment, poverty, and parental substance abuse.



Any presentation of research on this topic should begin with a caveat about the field’s infancy and the corresponding limitations of available research. See Cunningham & Baker (2004) for a critique.

Despite the limitations in available research, clinical work with individual children continues to confirm the emotional, cognitive and practical consequences. Research is not needed in order to state unequivocally that living with woman abuse threatens the security and well-being of children.

Individual differences

Some students will enter volunteer or professional roles where they will meet or work with *individual* children. Most research looks at *groups* of children, reporting the average and obscuring any variation. Research looks at a snap shot in time while children grow and their families change. One must resist the temptation to extrapolate from research samples (i.e., groups) to the situation and needs of a particular child.



Emphasize to students that it is unwise to make predictions about an individual child based on research that studies groups.

Each child is unique and how they are affected likely depends on many factors such as age, gender, temperament, role in the family, relationship to the abuser, and key characteristics of the woman abuse such as severity and frequency. Their own experiences of maltreatment are also important. Even siblings in the same family report different memories and perspectives. Cunningham & Baker (2004) present case studies of children to explicate the diversity of responses and also to highlight the differences across ages and developmental stages.

What do we know?

Two points have both strong empirical support and relevance for understanding and intervening with children. The first can be summarised as “adversity package” and the second as “dose response.” Both these observations have implications for assessment and intervention with families. Most importantly, they suggest the need for a wide-ranging review of background information on the family before crafting a plan for intervention.

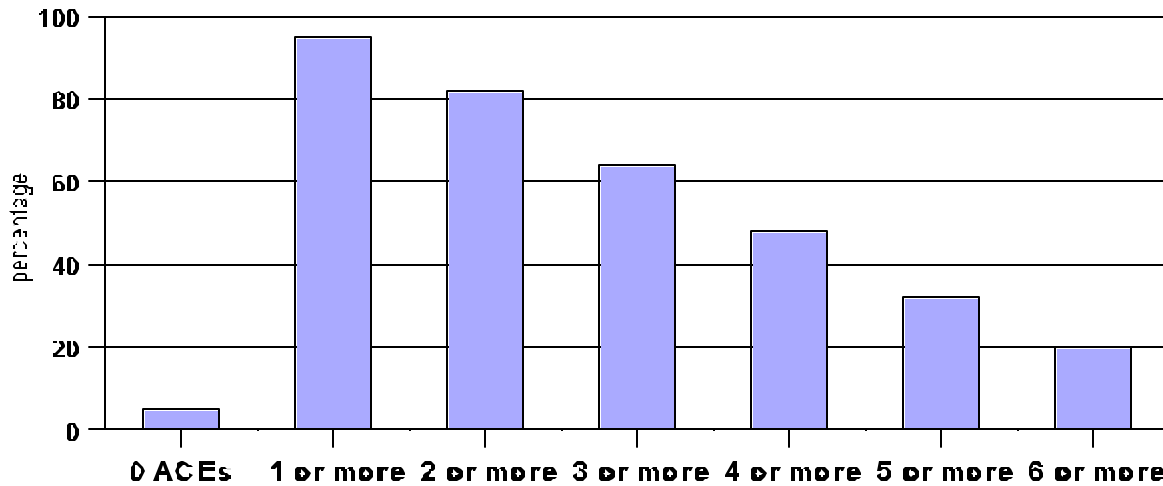
Adversity package

This term has been coined to describe how children who live with woman abuse will rarely experience woman abuse as the only factor compromising their development. For example, in a U.S. study of over 17,000 adults from a middle-class sample, 95% of people who said their mother was “battered” also reported at least one other type of adverse childhood experience⁴ (ACE) such as maltreatment, neglect or parental problems (Dong *et al.*, 2004). Among those who reported having a battered mother while growing up, over 80% reported at least two others ACEs, over 60% reported three or more ACEs, and 48% had four or more ACEs (see Figure 1). Adults who reported having a battered mother had higher levels – two to six times higher – of the other adversities. Looked at another way (Dube *et al.*, 2002), among adult women who reported having a “battered mother” while growing up, 39% also reported emotional neglect, 27% physical neglect, 38% emotional abuse, 59% physical abuse, and 43% sexual abuse. The same figures for men were 32% emotional neglect, 29% physical neglect, 25% emotional abuse, 61% physical abuse and 28% sexual abuse.

⁴ The ten adverse childhood experiences were five types of child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect), household substance abuse, mental illness in household, parental separation or divorce, incarcerated household member, and having a “battered mother.” A variety of outcomes related to health and general functioning was measured at the outset and over time as the sample is tracked prospectively.

Figure 1

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences Among People Acknowledging Violence Against Mother as a Child



Source: Adapted from data in Dong *et al.*, 2004.

As already noted, children living in homes characterized by violence against a woman are virtually certain to have experienced direct maltreatment if the violence against their mothers is frequent (Ross, 1996). In the ACE study, as the frequency of reported abuse of a mother increased, so did the prevalence level of each of the other adversities. In other words, there was a graded relationship between the frequency of reported exposure and increased prevalence of each of the other adversities. For example, as the frequency of the abuse of a mother increased, so did the prevalence level of child abuse (Dube *et al.*, 2002).

A prospective longitudinal study in New Zealand came up with a similar conclusion to the ACE study but added other contextual variables such as economic disadvantage. They concluded that “interparental violence” was frequently embedded in a family context that was characterized by social disadvantage, family dysfunction, and child abuse (Fergusson & Horwood, 2001).

Dose response

In research parlance, the amount of an adverse experience or trauma to which a child is exposed is called “the dose.” In other words, a child who witnesses 100 acts of violence has received a higher “dose” than a child who has seen one. A child who sees a severe assault has had a higher “dose” than a child who sees something thrown across a room. While this is a cold and impersonal way to describe a traumatic experience, measuring the “dose” is important when trying to link exposure to woman abuse with short and long term problematic outcomes in children. That being said, it is unfortunate that most research dichotomizes the variable of exposure as “yes” or “no” rather than using the concept of “dose” (Cunningham & Baker, 2004).

Two important features of the “dose” concept are this:

- the larger the “dose,” the more likely and/or intense is the negative effect
- the effect of “doses” of multiple types of adverse experiences may be additive

In other words, there is reason to believe that the severity of child adjustment problems is related not only to the frequency, intensity, and duration of exposure to adverse events, but also to the number of different adversities. The more adversities and different types of violence in your life, the higher the level of negative outcomes, including compromised health (Dube, Felitti, Dong, Giles & Anda, 2003) and mental health (Edwards, Holden, Felitti & Anda, 2003). The same conclusion was made in the New Zealand study. As the frequency of inter-parental violence goes up, so does the likelihood of both other family adversities and poor outcomes in adulthood (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998).

While “dose” is a critical concept in understanding impact, dose itself interacts with child characteristics (e.g., temperament, intelligence), qualitative features of the abuse (e.g., emotional closeness with abuser), and moderators such as the presence of a supportive adult. Moreover, we do not fully understand the differential impact of, say, on-going emotional abuse and episodic physical abuse. It is ultimately the interaction of all these factors – difficult if not impossible to measure in a research study – that determines the nature and extent of problematic outcomes in children. See Figure 2 below, reproduced from Cunningham & Baker (2004).



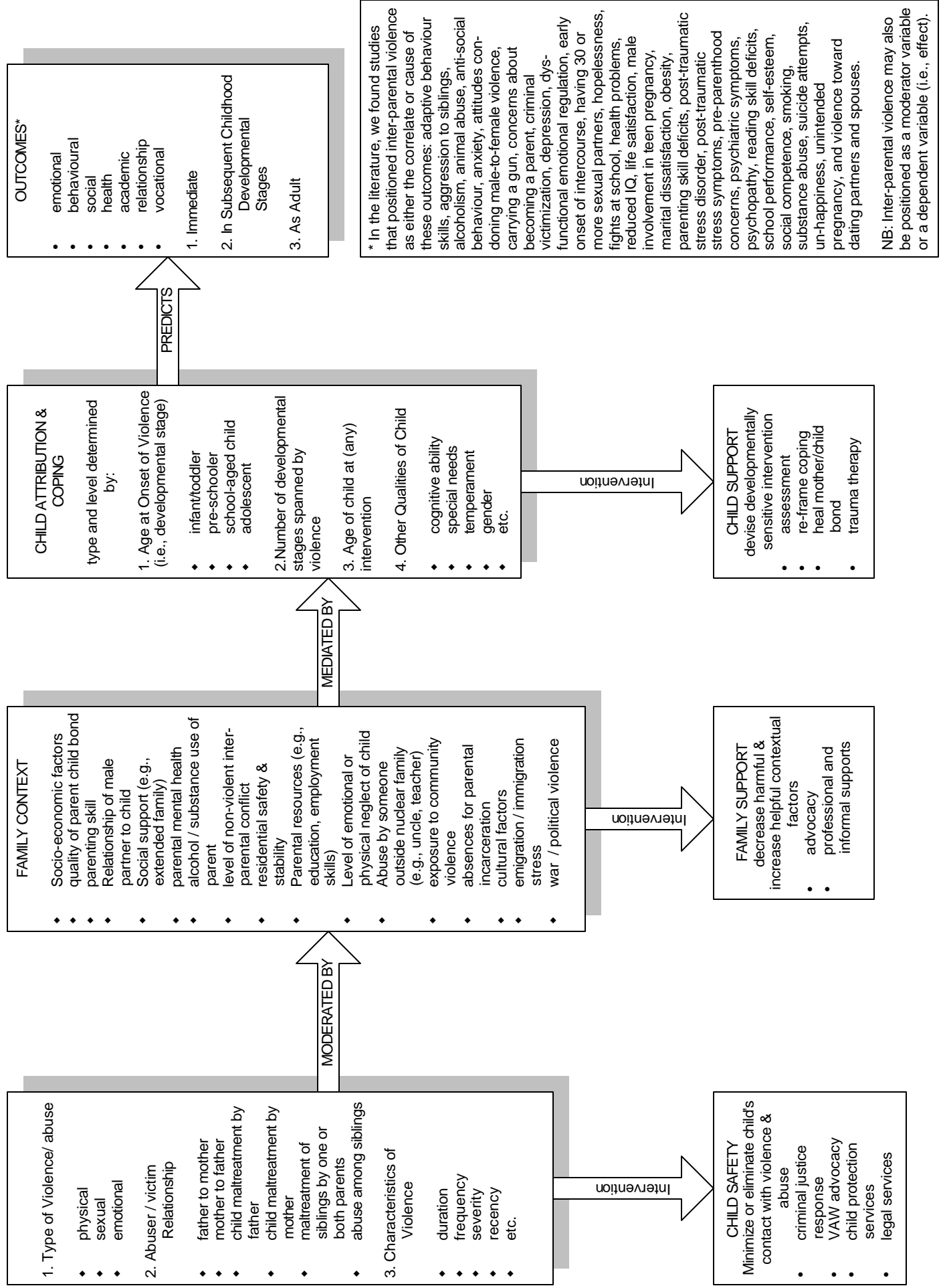
D.M. Fergusson & L.J. Horwood (1998). Exposure to Interparental Violence in Childhood and Psychosocial Adjustment in Young Adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22(5): 339-357.

Correlation vs. cause

A caveat: virtually all research on this topic is correlational. Correlational studies essentially *describe* key characteristics of families where woman abuse occurs. However, the mechanism or mechanisms that *causally* link adverse childhood experiences such as violence with compromised outcomes – in the short or long term – are not well understood yet. For example, excessive alcohol consumption is widely cited as a common characteristics of abusive men and commonly present when abuse occurs. Few, however, would suggest that alcohol alone causes violence or that a man’s blood alcohol content damages children. What mechanism (if any) links these variables to child outcome? What other factors mediate or moderate that relationship? Some are mentioned in Figure 2.

In terms of children who live with woman abuse, Baker & Cunningham (2004) suggest that factors such as coping strategies and cognitive distortions may play a role in shaping child outcomes. Others have suggested that early interruptions in optimum neurological development will manifest later in emotional and behavioural problems (e.g., Perry, 2005). The key to designing interventions for children is to isolate and address the causal mechanisms.

Figure 2: Variables Hypothetically Associated with Impact of Family Violence





Use a concrete example to explain the difference between correlation and a cause and effect relationship, like smoking/lung cancer or race/crime.

Point out that a correlation can be spurious, meaning it is explained by another factor: e.g., shoe size and criminal behaviour may be correlated but the relationship is better explained by a variable correlated with both: sex. Men (who are statistically more likely to engage in crime) have larger feet than women.

Spurious correlations can lead to ineffective interventions. It was once thought that schizophrenia ran in families because it was caused by a certain harsh style of parenting that was passed down between generations. It was eventually determined that schizophrenia runs in families because of a genetic link. Drugs are now the treatment of choice rather than family therapy.

Impact on Children

When woman abuse or loud marital conflict are on-going, children develop strategies to cope and survive emotionally. These strategies change as the child gets older (Baker & Cunningham, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2004).

What children may feel and think

Babies and toddlers are too young to understand what is happening between adults but they hear noise and feel the tension. They may be distressed or scared; be upset because they are not getting their needs met promptly; be too scared to explore and play; or, sense the stress and distress of their mothers. Consistent with their stage of development, infants cannot develop helpful coping strategies and so are completely dependent on adults to keep them safe.

When there is violence in their home, pre-schoolers may see one parent they love hurt the other parent they love. However, they will probably think of it as a “fight” between adults. They are too young to be able to assess motives and concepts such as primary aggressor. However, they can understand when adults are angry or sad. They can use magical thinking (e.g., hoping to be rescued by a television character) or mental disengagement. These strategies help deal with life at home, but may compromise ability to participate fully at pre-school. Indeed, their repertoire of helpful coping strategies is still limited and adults must assist in helping to navigate what can be overwhelming feelings of fear, guilt, confusion, and distress. Pre-schoolers are ego-centric and need to hear that what happened was not their fault, they are still loved, and that important features of daily life will go on. When pre-schoolers see woman abuse or other loud conflict, they may:

- worry about being hurt and may have nightmares about being hurt
- believe they caused the violence by something they did
- intervene without awareness of the potential consequences for themselves (e.g., injury)
- hope that a television character or super hero will come and save them
- be confused if Daddy is gone and worry that Mommy might leave too

Children of this age can be upset by changes to daily routines and separation from cherished items such as blankets, teddies or pets. If they have left home, for example to enter a shelter, encourage the mother to re-establish comforting routines such as meal schedules and bedtime. The present is more important to them than the past.

School-aged children – 6 to 12 years – will still see “fights” between parents, but will start to see how actions have reasons and consequences and that mothers may be upset even after a “fight” ends. They will probably see “fighting” as caused by stress, family finances, alcohol or whatever else their parents argue over. Believing this explanation is easier (emotionally) than seeing themselves as the child of someone who is “bad” and mean on purpose. When they see “fights,” they judge behaviour by its fairness: who started it, who is bigger, and if the consequence (e.g., arrest) was consistent with perceived seriousness. They are learning what it means to be male and female in our society. However, in homes with woman abuse, children are getting distorted messages on gender roles.



To illustrate a child’s point of view, you can find some children’s drawing on the web site of www.shelternet.ca under “just for kids” and “kids speak out.” Or, find child drawings in Cunningham & Baker (2004).

Teenagers may feel embarrassment and have a strong need for privacy and to be seen by peers as “normal.” They may assume responsibility for taking care of younger siblings, be angry at either or both parents, feel concern for the well-being of their mother, feel vengeful toward the abuser, or feel relief if the abuser is gone. As they grow larger, some teens intervene physically in incidents, even risking injury. Teenagers have a wider range of coping strategies than younger children that may include leaving home, using drugs/alcohol, and seeking intimate relationships for escape. Some strategies lead to problems outside the home such as arrest, school drop-out, teen pregnancy, abusive dating relationships, or substance abuse. We still have a lot to learn about how boys and girls are affected differently.

Lessons learned from living with violence

Children and adolescents learn from what they see. When woman abuse occurs, they may learn:

- violence and threats get you what you want
- a person has only two choices – to be the aggressor or be the victim
- victims are to blame for violence

- when men hurt others, they do not get in trouble
- anger causes violence or drinking causes violence
- people who love you also hurt you
- anger should be suppressed because it gets out of control
- unhealthy, unequal relationships are normal or to be expected
- men are in charge and get to control women's lives
- women don't have the right to be treated with respect and equality

Some observers believe these “lessons” may predispose young people to either use or accept violence as normal in their own intimate relationships.

Post-trauma stress

One framework for understanding the impact of woman abuse and maltreatment on children is that of “trauma.” Traumatic stress reactions can be reflected in emotions, thoughts and actions. Features of traumatic stress reactions include:

- re-experiencing aspects of the violence (e.g., nightmares)
- avoidance of reminders of the violence (may avoid conflict, loud voices)
- numbing (e.g., may seem detached from others)
- increased arousal (e.g., may show strong startle-response to noise or startle easily)

Some observers have hypothesized that brain development in infants and young children may be adversely affected by exposure to violence, if it is of sufficient severity to create chronic stress or arousal states.

It is important to note that many stressors besides violence may trigger emotion-driven behaviours and symptoms. During high-conflict divorces, regressive behaviours are commonly observed in preschoolers before and/or after access visits with a non-custodial parent (Johnston & Roseby, 1997), for example. In addition, many features which are corollary to woman abuse may exacerbate delays or regression in development, including leaving the family home, losing contact with a pet, changing schools, separation from siblings, and absence of a parent.

Involving the Children's Aid Society

As citizens of Ontario, we are all required to make a report to the CAS if we have “reasonable grounds” to suspect that a child is, or may be, in need of protection. The *Child & Family Services Act* defines “child in need of protection” in a fair amount of detail and it includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm. These features of the reporting process are important to know:

- the person who receives any disclosure or who has the suspicion must make the call to the CAS personally (i.e., this responsibility cannot be delegated or handed off)
- you do not have to be 100% certain that a child is in need of protection: you need “reasonable grounds” which is what an average person exercising normal and honest judgment would suspect
- if you are unsure about whether you need to make a report, call your local CAS and describe the concern without giving names: they will tell you if a report is required



The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies has a document called “How and When to Report Abuse or Neglect” which can be found on their web site: www.oacas.org

Does living with woman abuse constitute child maltreatment? There is certainly a great deal of debate on that point (Edleson, 2004). For one, a woman may be reluctant to call the police (or call again) if she knows her children may be seen as in need of protection from her because of the actions of her partner. In Ontario, under the *Child & Family Services Act*, exposure to woman abuse is not explicitly stated as one of the reasons a professional is mandated to report. Rather, on a case-by-case basis, a CAS will assess if violence in the home is causing “emotional harm,” as defined in the statute, that is serious and not being addressed by the caretaker.



Each of the 52 CASs has negotiated a conciliation agreement with local Violence Against Women service providers addressing when to report children living with woman abuse. Having a copy of the local conciliation agreement may be helpful when you teach this material.

Allied agencies: “You are Not Alone”

No one has to respond in isolation. Most communities have agencies that assist women and children who are experiencing abuse. Students entering any of the helping professions can and should become familiar with local agencies, to provide referral information about local resources when required. While each community is different and resources are scarce in some areas, women in many areas of the province would have access to:

- Abused women’s shelter
- Aboriginal counselling or family violence agency
- Abused women’s advocacy centre or woman’s centre
- Assaulted Women’s Helpline (province wide)

- Victim/Witness Assistance Program (in each Ontario courthouse)
- Legal Aid Ontario office
- Language Interpreter Services Program
- Children's Aid Society
- Abusive men's treatment program (also called a "PAR Program" in Ontario)
- Family counselling services
- Ontario Works office
- Ontario Early Years Centres



Here's an idea for a class assignment. Have students use community directories and/or the Internet to find the names and contact information of the above-listed resources in your community. These web sites may be helpful:

www.womennet.ca
www.ontariowomensdirectoriate.gov.on.ca
www.thefarmline.ca
www.nacafv.ca
www.settlement.org

Vicarious trauma

People enter the helping professions because they want to help. However, hearing about the experiences of some mothers and children can be upsetting and confusing. We might feel sad, angry, or shocked. This is a normal reaction. Provide students with suggestions for how to deal with these feelings, such as debriefing with colleagues and seeking the input of a supervisor.

Sometimes the emotional reaction is stronger. When we are traumatized by learning of another person's trauma, we call it "vicarious trauma." We may ourselves experience trauma symptoms such as anxiety, a sense of hopelessness, or intrusive thoughts that parallel the experiences of the abuse victim. It is essential that we find ways to deal with the stress felt when supporting others in crisis. In addition to the immediate debriefing, there are also self-care practices that can be promoted as a way to prevent or mitigate the effects of vicarious trauma. These and other ideas are outlined in the following resource.



Jan Richardson (2001). *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-violence Workers*. Ottawa: Health Canada.
 [find at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/]

Additional Resources

Students seeking more information can be directed to the resource called *Learning to Listen, Learning to Help: Understanding Women Abuse and its Effects on Children* (Baker & Cunningham, 2005), which lists books, on-line documents, and web sites. It is available for download at no cost.

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