

Long-Term Effects of Domestic Abuse on Women and Children

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Domestic abuse is a pervasive problem, which has been widely discussed in the literature due to its multiple negative effects on victims. The scale of this problem is alarming, according to the statistics. For example, RCDV (2019) claims that from three to ten million children are exposed to adult domestic abuse annually, but the exact number is unknown because not all cases are documented. Carell and Hoekstra (2009) argued that approximately 10-20% of schoolchildren in the United States are exposed to domestic abuse, which means they are either become victims themselves or witness aggressive parental behavior. As for women, the data provided by the National Domestic Violence Hotline (2019) shows that at least three in ten women have suffered from domestic abuse including rape, physical violence, or stalking. Even a greater number of women have experienced psychological aggression by their partners, which one of the manifestations of domestic abuse. This aggressive pattern of behavior may take physical, emotional, economic, psychological, and sexual forms and affect the victims on many levels, resulting in numerous issues that persist for years.

Negative Effects of Abuse on Women

Research shows that domestic abuse adversely affects women's emotional state. It has been found that women abused by their partners suffer from significant cognitive changes and emotional numbing. These women tend to experience sadness, depression, anxiety, pessimism, and social deprivation (Avdibegovic, Brkic, & Sinanovic, 2017). Victims may also demonstrate anger and frustration and become impulsive and quarrelsome. Aggression is also present, and it is common for women to direct it at themselves or others. Researchers have even found the connection between domestic abuse and suicidal and self-harm thoughts in women. Conversely, such traits as openness, cheerfulness, sociability, warmth, trust, and acceptance are less likely to be observed among the female victims of domestic abuse

(Avdibegovic, 2017). Unsurprisingly, emotional changes occurring in abused women reduce their caregiving capacity, thus adversely affecting their children. It is believed that abused women may themselves use physical punishment and have poor emotional attunement with their children, which means they fail to recognize and eliminate stressful and dangerous situations to protect them.

As for the psychological effects of domestic abuse on women, researchers claim that it may have a dramatic effect on the victims' personality. Specifically, female victims of abuse demonstrate maladaptive personality traits, such as hostility, the lack of trust, and emotional dependence (Avdibegovic, 2017). Women facing domestic abuse may also demonstrate symptoms of PTSD complemented with the dissociative disorder, psychotic disorder, and borderline personality disorder. The more aggressive and traumatizing behavior they face, the greater and more prolonged the psychological consequences tend to be.

Domestic abuse also affects women's physical health. Physical abuse often results in bruising, fractures, abdominal pain, and injuries. Sexual and reproductive health may also be affected, especially when women are raped. Unwanted pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections, and miscarriages are only some of the problems suffered by abused women (Chhabra, 2018). In addition, abuse may induce women to start smoking and drinking heavily, which inevitably affects their physical health as well. Finally, women who are often abused may also experience insomnia and various somatic complaints, such as headache, abdominal pain, and others. While some of the mentioned consequences of domestic abuse are short-term and disappear soon after the abuse stops, most of them have long-term effects and undermine women's psychological, emotional, and physical health for years to come.

Long-Term Effects of Abuse on Children

Children are not immune to the harmful consequences of domestic abuse either. In fact, they may suffer even more because they are affected in prime of their emotional,

cognitive, behavioral, and social development. Psychological effects of domestic abuse on children include the feeling of guilt, shame, excessive sadness, harm, abandonment, as well as inability to experience empathy, emotional distancing, habitual lying, low frustration tolerance, and fear about the future. Depression is by far one of the most common psychological effects of domestic abuse, and research shows that children may suffer from depression years after becoming victims or witnesses of domestic abuse (Moynan et al., 2010). Furthermore, children may experience aggression, low self-worth, and decreased confidence, which affect their emotional well-being and social functioning.

Domestic abuse has profound social and behavioral effects on children. Research indicates that children witnessing or experiencing abuse themselves tend to have poor peer, sibling, and social relationships. Their traumatic family experience results in the formation of stereotypes about family and intimate partner relationships and gender roles, which may affect the way they build relationships in the future. Sometimes, children relieve their stress and tension by hurting their peers or animals, bullying, destroying property, and engaging in other delinquent and unethical activities (Edwards, 2019). Self-harming and dangerous activities may also be observed, as young witnesses or victims of domestic abuse are more likely to develop alcohol and drug abuse and engage in risky sexual behavior compared to their peers not facing abuse. In general, domestic abuse results in poor functioning, poor communication, and the lack of harmony with self and the world, which may take years to overcome.

One of the most widely discussed problems is the impact of domestic abuse on children's academic performance. Abuse was found to affect school attendance, grade advancement, test scores, and overall attitude to education (Assaad et al., 2017). While some students may actively engage in the school life to escape the aggressive home environment, others lose interest in studying and lack parental support needed to progress academically.

Attention and concentration difficulties caused by emotional stress and anxiety also make it difficult for children to study. The problem affects other children as well as, according to Carell and Hoekstra (2009), a troubled student can negatively affect academic performance of all students in the classroom.

Finally, negative effects of domestic abuse can be observed when children grow up. Attachment problems developed in childhood hamper an individual's capacity for emotional regulation and the ability to build future relations with significant others (Pernebo & Almqvist, 2016). Negative memories and feelings experienced by children when they face domestic abuse get imprinted onto their brain, so the moments of stress become inextricably linked with certain choices in relationships and behavioral patterns. It means that when they grow old and build their own relationships, they may emulate their parents' behavior in relation to their partners. Girls thus can be subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual exploitation while boys may become perpetrators themselves later in life. In other words, domestic abuse creates the cycle of violence continuing from generation to generation.

Conclusion

To summarize the findings provided above, one may highlight that domestic abuse has cascading, long-term negative effects on both victims and witnesses. This aggressive behavior causes psychological, emotional, behavioral, social, and health effects on women and children, who are the most common victims of abuse. Negative emotions and trauma experienced by these populations do not go away easily but become part of their everyday life, ruining their relationships with people, undermining their self-worth and confidence, and decreasing their quality of life. Women suffering from abuse become less capable of providing the much-needed care to their children, who grow up with this trauma that poisons every aspect of their life, from educational opportunities to personal relationships. Therefore,

the problem of domestic abuse should be addressed holistically to destroy the cycle of violence and help victims and witnesses leave behind their traumatic experience.

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