

Child Development and Domestic Violence

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Children witnessing or experiencing domestic violence is a major concern as it seriously threatens their emotional well-being. Abused children can show a variety of psychological issues including depression and anxiety that can carry into their teenage years.

“Intense focus on child physical abuse has resulted in laws, mandatory reporting, statewide definitions, and local investigation procedures to respond to the needs of direct child victims” (Fantuzzo, et. al., 1997, p. 116). Trauma related to abuse can significantly disrupt the development of children's affect regulation, self-esteem, peer relationships, and school adaptation (Fantuzzo, et. al., 1997, p. 120). There is no follow-up on the development of the children who witnessed the violence to determine the developmental consequences of the exposure.

In a growing body of research children witnessing marital violence with child abuse and developmental psychopathology are at a greater risk for physical abuse. (Fantuzzo, et. al., 1997, p. 120). Children witnessing violence externalize behavioral problems, affecting their age, stage-salient competencies, and vulnerability to co-disruption, and the impact of caregivers and environmental factors on developmental consequences. (Fantuzzo, et. al., 1997, p. 121). To advance research, psychometrically sound measures of age-appropriate competencies for young children must be developed, particularly for low-income, minority children. Empirical validation of constructs derived from white middle-class studies is crucial for culturally diverse low-income families.

Studies have shown that children who did not witness or experience abuse and violence had lower levels of depression and other internal and external behaviors than those who have (Moylan, et al., 2010, pp. 3-4). One study identified different patterns of relationships between violence exposure and internalizing and externalizing behavior outcomes (Moylan, et al., 2010,

p. 10). The study found that children exposed to both domestic violence and child abuse are at higher risk for later adolescent outcomes, which suggests that the relationship between the two exposures and later adolescent outcomes is more complex than previously thought. It emphasizes the need to remove the unique effects of child abuse and domestic violence exposure in children and examine these effects with other risk factors.

References

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