

Continuation of the Cycle of Violence

Being exposed to the abuse of their mothers teaches children some very powerful lessons. They learn that they can use violence to control others and, as a consequence, are more likely to have highly aggressive behaviour.¹ A Handbook for Health and Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence notes that children exposed to woman abuse in their homes may be more likely to become involved in bullying and dating violence² and that "[a]gression against peers, teachers, and mothers is increased in children who witness woman abuse, particularly among boys, but also among girls."³

"...[my abusive husband] witnessed spousal abuse and battering at the hands of his older brother to his then wife and it was just accepted. You know you can see it but you don't step in, you don't interfere, it's not something you talk about and that was the way he was raised, you don't get involved. It doesn't matter who is doing what or who is getting hurt, his niece and nephew, he witnessed them being picked up by his brother and flung into their rooms, flying 10 feet in the air, the child is two years old, but he was always told, 'don't interfere, turn a blind eye'..."

Children who are exposed to violence by one parent towards the other become more willing to accept or excuse violence.⁴ As they become teenagers and then adults, they are more likely to be abused as adults and to become abusers. According to the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, men who witnessed their mothers being physically abused by their fathers as children were three times more likely to be violent in their own marital relationships than men who grew up in non-violent homes. Women who witnessed their mothers being abused are more likely to suffer from abuse in their own marital relationships.⁵

"I came from a very abusive home. My father was a violent alcoholic and we lived in poverty. We were evicted from places and there was a lot of physical abuse in our house and I had experienced sexual abuse as a child ... When I look back I can see some of the stuff that took place and anyway I didn't feel very good about myself, very shy and kind of backwards in some ways. ... I was in my twenties [when] ... I met [my abusive husband]... and he seemed to have lots of confidence and everything and that attracted me because I have none."

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"...my daughter is like him, she's twelve, she's a power freak... she wants to control everybody and she's pulled a lot of the stuff that [my ex-husband] did, if I say something, she gives me the look and says "oh mom, that's kind of stupid," but she's got it right down to a science and for a while she would be pushing all my buttons and I was going down just like I used to with [my ex-husband]."

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The quotes in this document are from PEI women interviewed in 1999 during herStory of woman abuse and the PEI justice system, a project of the Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.

"It is important to get the information at a young age. The abuse in schools is awful and there are so many teenagers that are beating their girlfriends and they need to be educated in what's right and the girl needs to know that you don't take this – you don't have to take this...My daughter's 17 and she doesn't really understand what verbal abuse is. Like when their boyfriend tells them who they can hang out with and who they can't – that's abuse."

Parent Abuse

Another form of family violence that may occur is the abuse of parents by their children or adolescents. "Parents are usually the first people blamed for the behaviour of their children, but there are few supports and interventions available to them. There is also little *public awareness of parent abuse*.⁶

How do we help break the cycle of violence?

Not all children who are exposed to violence in their homes will become abusers or victims of abuse. There may be factors that help protect children from the impacts of abuse. Some research has suggested that there are many important influences in a child's development that can aggravate or mitigate the negative effects of witnessing violence. Some of the support factors that minimize risk among children who witness violence include having high self-esteem and intellectual ability,⁷ and living in otherwise stable and socially connected households with high levels of social support within and outside of the family.⁸

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