

Impact of Exposure to Woman Abuse on Children

"They were doing well in school, but obviously they didn't run and laugh and play and giggle and carry on. They were very quiet children and self-contained children. They suffered more illnesses than most children."

In recent years, children's exposure to the abuse of their mothers has come to be recognized as a form of child abuse. The psychological impact on children of exposed to violence in the home is similar to the impact of direct victimization.

The impact can impair psychological development, including: intelligence, memory, recognition, perception, attention, imagination and moral development. A child's social development may also be impacted, resulting in an impaired ability to perceive, feel, understand and express emotions.^{1.}

Children who are exposed to violence in their homes are between 10 and 27 times more likely to experience serious emotional and behavioural problems than children in non-violent homes^{2.} and are more likely to be aggressive towards peers, teachers and mothers.^{3.}

Some of the effects on children of being exposed to the abuse of their mothers include:^{4.}

- nightmares, flashbacks, fear, anxiety, tension, irritability, outbursts of anger and aggression;
- depression;
- withdrawal;
- low self-esteem;
- problems at school and with peers;
- non-compliance with adults, destructive behaviour and conflict with the law;
- passive or over-compliant behaviour (particularly observed in girls);
- lower academic achievement;
- more absence from school;
- lowered social skills;
- young children and infants may suffer sleeping and weight gain problems (failure to thrive) and may cry excessively;
- preschool-aged children may be anxious, clinging or aggressive/bullying;
- teenagers may run away or drop out of school;
- teenagers may also get involved in violent dating relationships.

~ continued

Woman Abuse
and the
PEI Justice System
Research Team
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Muriel McQueen
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Research

www.isn.net/~tha/womanabuseresearch/

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.

"My child is having a horrible time with school...kicked out of three schools...I remember him getting kicked off the school bus ... in school he doesn't want to learn and has been aggressive as well."

Many underestimate the impact of family violence in the home on children. In domestic violence reports received by police in PEI between 1996 and 1998, children were present in 57% of the cases.⁵ In 1993, 78% of Canadian women who stayed in a transition home indicated that at some point their children had witnessed the violence against them.⁶

"My daughter ... had some dyslexic problems, and a lot of emotional stuff, she's a little behind in socialization cause she's been [through this situation]..."

"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."

"The arguing, the fighting, always tension in the house, the kids were really picking up on it, they knew that it wasn't normal for mom to be sleeping on the couch so much or on the bedroom floor ..."

Children who are exposed to violence in their homes are at risk and in need of protection.

In PEI, everyone is required by law to report children in need of protection. This is mandatory. Children under the age of 18 are considered "in need of protection" when they are exposed to abuse AS WELL AS when they are being abused. If a client or someone you know discloses abuse in her relationship or you suspect abuse and there are children living in the home, you are required by law to report to Child Protection. Child Protection can be reached at 1-800-341-6868 or any of these local numbers:

Charlottetown 368-5330

Summerside 888-8100

Montague 838-0700

Souris 687-7060

O'Leary 859-8811

1. "What is Emotional Abuse?", National Clearinghouse on Family Violence website at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/emotioneng.html>
2. Jaffe, P., Wolfe, D.A., and Wilson, S.K.. 1990. *Children of Battered Women*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
3. Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson. 1990
4. Health Canada. 1996. *Wife Abuse—The Impact on Children*. Fact sheet. Prepared by the London Family Court Clinic (Marlies Sudermann, Peter Jaffe, and Lynn Watson). Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
5. Brown, Rona. December 1998. *Factors Associated with Police Response to Domestic Violence: A Research Project Submitted as Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master of Social Work Degree*, Memorial University of Newfoundland, pg 53
6. Statistics Canada. 1994. *Family Violence in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada