

FACTSHEET: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN



DEFINITION

“ Domestic violence is “behaviours that may result in physical, sexual and emotional/psychological attacks, as well as economic or financial coercion or abuse used by one intimate partner against another, parents against their children, or children and adolescents against their parents. The purpose of domestic violence is to establish and exert power and control over another.”⁴³

Violence against the Child Report, United Nations

Although women can be violent toward men in relationships, and violence exists in same-sex partnerships, the largest burden of intimate partner violence/domestic violence is inflicted by men against their female partners.

Many children and young people are exposed to domestic violence – because they experience such attacks directly or because they witness it happening to someone else in their family.

FACTS

- In some countries, up to 70 per cent of women face physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime at the hands of their husbands/partners, according to available country data. Most of this violence takes place in intimate relationships, with many women reporting their intimate partners as the abusers.⁴⁴
- In the UK at least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence.⁴⁵

Violence against women is most commonly in the form of intimate partner/family-related violence.

What are the causes of domestic violence?

There are no simple answers as to why domestic violence happens. Here are some reasons:

- **Gender inequality and discrimination** – Men and boys are less likely to respect women and girls if they do not view them as equals. They may believe that it is acceptable to harm a girl or woman. This can increase women and girls risk to violence and decrease their ability to report and seek support to stop it.
- **Power and control** – Domestic violence is a form of power and control over women and children.
- **Invisible children** – Domestic violence may go unreported and may be inadequately dealt with even in instances where children disclose that they are living with domestic violence. They may not be listened to or believed and and/or may not be provided with appropriate or adequate support if they do speak out.
- **Culture of acceptance** – People can excuse, ignore, justify and encourage domestic violence. For example, it may be socially accepted that husbands should control their wives, and therefore domestic violence becomes normalized and accepted as a part of life.
- **Private matter** – As domestic violence happens behind closed doors it is often not considered a crime but a family or private issue and therefore not an issue of public interest or concern. Communities may choose to ignore it and law enforcement agencies such as the police may be reluctant to get involved even if violence is reported.
- **Weak laws** – Inadequately or insufficiently implemented laws or the lack of appropriate laws to stop domestic violence. This can result in abusers going unpunished for their crimes.
- **Lack of protection** – children and young people at risk may not have access to services and protection.

What are the consequences of domestic violence to children?

- Children can be **physically, sexually and emotionally harmed** by domestic violence.
- Domestic violence can affect children's long-term physical and emotional development. Infants and small children who are exposed to violence in the home experience added emotional stress that can harm the development of their brains and impair cognitive and sensory growth. At an early age, a child's brain is becoming 'hard-wired' for later physical and emotional functioning. Exposure to domestic violence threatens that development.⁴⁶
- Children can have **long-term mental health problems** like eating disorders or depression.
- Domestic violence can lead to children being unable to concentrate at school which can lead to lower grades or **dropping out altogether**.
- Domestic violence in the home can **increase children's risk-taking activity** such as taking drugs and/or engaging in risky sexual behaviour.
- Children and young people may learn that domestic violence is a 'normal' part of a relationship which may lead to them being more likely to be affected by violence as adults – either as victims or abusers.
- Domestic violence can also impact on children's and young people's ability to form respectful relationships with their peers. Children may suffer **isolation**; they may become withdrawn and unable to make friends easily due to social discomfort or confusion over what is acceptable.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gender matters: A manual on addressing gender-based violence affecting young people (2007)

Council of Europe http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/pdf/Gender_matters_EN.pc

It's all one curriculum (2009)

International Planned Parenthood Federation

This is a global activity pack that connects gender-based violence, HIV and sexuality education

http://www.ippfwhr.org/en/allonecurriculum_en

Doorways training manuals On School-Related Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response (2009) USAID

This is a global education pack with information and activities for students and teachers.

http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Doorways_III_Teachers_Manual.pdf

A Young People's Toolkit On Issues Connected To Gender-Based Violence: Raising Awareness on Roles & Responsibilities in Relationships (2010)

This is a Cambodian education resource and is full of information and activities that you could use with your group.

www.giz.de/.../gtz2010-en-toolkit-gbv-kambodscha-introduction.pdf



Activities

Below is a selection of activities that feature in the activity booklets that look at domestic violence and children. You may need to adapt the activities to draw out messages relevant to your context and to make them appropriate to your group. Many of the other activities in the booklets can also be adapted to address domestic violence.

Section	Activity	Description	Age
	Helping hand	The group discusses support networks so children know where to access support if they need to.	EARLY
	Secrets can be shared	Discussion and drama help the group to understand the difference between friendly and scary secrets.	YOUNG
	Survivor Story	The group learns about the story of a survivor and the support services available to women experiencing violence. The survivor's story can be presented as a case study or through an organization working with survivors.	MIDDLE
	Agony Aunt	The group learns how to support people they know are experiencing violence.	MIDDLE
	Child rights	Colour in child rights images to understand that all children have the right to live free from violence and from the fear of violence.	EARLY
	Poster campaign	Participants create a poster against domestic violence.	YOUNG
	Local activists	Invite guests who are actively campaigning to stop domestic violence.	MIDDLE
	It's the law	With the help of a guest speaker, the group develops legal cases and scenarios around incidents of violence.	OLDER
	CEDAW	The group explores the UN's Convention that addresses violence against women and discusses recommendations they can make to their governments.	OLDER
	National Action Plan	During this session groups work on presentations on violence against girls that could be delivered to government representatives.	OLDER
	Develop a community campaign	Develop and run a community campaign to raise awareness to stop domestic violence.	ALL