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### Domestic Violence: Part 1

By [Allison Musmanno](#)

**VIRTUS Editor's Note:** This is part 1 of a 2-part article series on this topic.



#### Introduction:

Domestic violence (DV), also called intimate partner violence (IPV), is a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by one partner to gain and maintain power and control over another partner.<sup>1</sup> Domestic violence can take many forms, including emotional abuse, physical or sexual abuse, financial abuse, online abuse or stalking. The purpose of this article is to educate about the effects of domestic violence on the abused partner and on any children in the household, and to share what should be done if domestic violence is suspected.

#### Domestic Violence: Prevalence and impact

Domestic violence is experienced to a startling degree by men and women across all ages, races, and income levels. A 2016/2017 CDC survey on intimate partner violence in the United States (U.S.) found that 47% of women and 44% of men had experienced sexual or physical violence, or stalking from a partner, within their lifetimes.<sup>2</sup> Most people who experienced this type of

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#### Allison Musmanno

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violence reported that the abuse significantly impacted their life in at least one way (missing work or needing to seek medical care, for example). People who experience domestic violence are at a greater risk for a range of health problems such as chronic pain, sexually transmitted diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance use disorders, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>3</sup> They are also at risk of physical injuries and homicide. In fact, over half of female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by an intimate partner, and one in five homicide deaths in the U.S. are attributed to domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>

Domestic violence (DV) can have a tremendous impact on children who live in the same residence. There is a bidirectional relationship between child abuse and domestic violence, meaning that if a child experiences one, they have a greater likelihood of experiencing the other. Children exposed to DV within their homes are more likely to be abused themselves. For example, one study found that 30-60% of DV perpetrators also abused children in the household.<sup>5</sup> When compared to children who grew up in safe, non-violent homes, children exposed to domestic violence were 15 times more likely to be physically or sexually assaulted.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, about 40% of child abuse victims also reported domestic violence at home.<sup>7</sup>

Experiencing violence directly is not the only way that children can be negatively affected by DV. Children observing violence are at risk for the same mental and physical problems as children who experience violence *directly*. These downstream effects include mental illness, chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes, as well as decreased opportunities for education and work.<sup>8</sup> Children exposed to DV are also more likely to exhibit unsafe behaviors in adulthood, in addition to unintended pregnancies and alcohol and drug abuse.

Further, children who grow up witnessing violence between parents are often affected in how they understand and later experience their own intimate relationships. While women can (and do) also commit domestic violence against male partners, much of the research on the impact on children has focused on children witnessing their father harm their mother. For example, girls who see their fathers abuse their mothers are six times more likely to be sexually abused in their lifetimes.<sup>9</sup> Boys who see their mothers being abused are ten times more likely to abuse their future female partners. In fact, the single greatest predictor of whether children will grow up to be perpetrators of domestic violence is whether they are witnesses to domestic violence as children.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the effects of domestic violence can continue beyond the present day and can

lead to generational trauma within families for years to come.

## **States laws and reporting children witnessing domestic abuse**

Research on domestic violence and its effects on children has made it clear that there can be short and long-standing consequences to a child's health by growing up in such an environment. In an effort to protect children, 26 states have specifically addressed the issue of children witnessing domestic violence in their code of law.<sup>11</sup> Some states have designated a child's witnessing of domestic violence as actual child abuse. Depending on the state, mandatory reporters may need to report to Child Protective Services (CPS) or law enforcement if they find or suspect a child has witnessed an assault at home, just as they would with other forms of child abuse. Whether or not you are a mandated reporter, all adults serving within a child-serving organization are ethical reporters. Anyone with a reasonable concern about a child's safety can make a report to CPS or law enforcement. Reporters do not need proof, and they do not need all the facts. Rather, they need only to act in good faith on information that would lead a reasonable person to also suspect child abuse.

## **Conclusion**

Domestic violence can have a tremendous impact on children, and it is our role as safe adults to communicate when we have concerns about the wellbeing of children. If you suspect a child has witnessed domestic violence or experienced abuse, contact law enforcement or the local Child Protective Services agency in your state.

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### **1) What impact can witnessing domestic violence have on children?**

- A)  Increased vulnerability for mental health issues.
- B)  Increased likelihood of developing physical illnesses, including chronic diseases.
- C)  Increased chances of engaging in unsafe behaviors in adulthood, including alcohol or drug abuse.
- D)  All of the above.
- E)  A and B only.

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