

Brianna Rios and Courtney Ahrens, PhD
Department of Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is very prevalent affecting many children worldwide. In the United States, although data is inconsistent, the approximate number of children living in homes with domestic violence is anywhere from 3.3 million (Carlson, 1984) to 17.8 million (Holden, 1998) yearly.

Given the prevalence of children living in this situation, there needs to be more attention given to it and more effort to assess its effect on children's mental health and development. It is important to understand all of the factors that come into play in this interaction – including attachment to parents, potential risk factors and protective factors. This is vital when creating effective plans to care for these children and to understand its role in how children interact with others and the world.

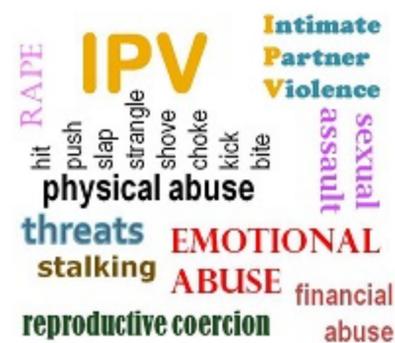


Figure 1. IPV Visual

PURPOSE

The purpose of this review is to assess the existing literature about the effect that witnessing domestic violence in the home has on children. This review will use a holistic framework to organize findings across multiple domains.

METHODS

Using PsychInfo, the articles were gathered using the key terms 'intimate partner violence or domestic violence' followed by 'impact on children.' From this search, 441 article titles were reviewed. After screening titles, 200 abstracts were reviewed. After reviewing the abstracts, 36 articles were selected for inclusion in the final literature review.

RESULTS

Domestic Violence affects the family as a whole. Children can be directly or indirectly affected. They can be directly victimized by the perpetrator or indirectly affected by witnessing or hearing the violent episodes. Either way, children experience adverse affects from witnessing violent episodes and experience it as trauma.

Although research overwhelmingly supports the idea that children do show short-term and possibly long term adversities due to experiencing IPV, the severity and presence of these negative symptoms varies from child to child based on risk and protective factors.

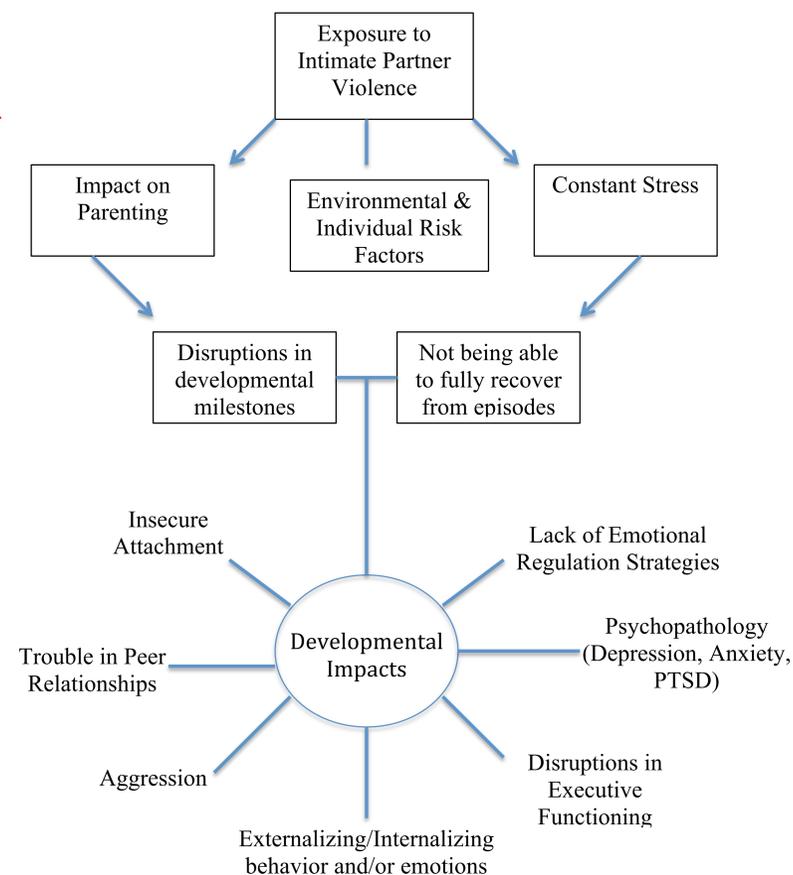
Figure 2. Risk Factors



Figure 3. Protective Factors



Figure 4. Theoretical Model of the Impact Domestic Violence has on Children



CONCLUSION

- A number of risk and protective factors affect the impact of witnessing IPV on children. Understanding the holistic impact that witnessing abuse has on children during this critical period can help inform specialized services and interventions.
- Witnessing intimate partner violence in the home can have detrimental effects on parenting and on how a child learns to regulate their emotions. If these strategies are not learned or taught, this can create distress for the child.
- Witnessing IPV can result in a number of interconnected outcomes such as emotional and behavioral disorders, the development of anxiety, depression or PTSD, disruptions in executive functioning and troubles in peer relationships. These outcomes can be mediated by factors in the environment, family/peer support and the child's individual characteristics.

FUTURE WORK

- Conduct further research on co-occurrence of child maltreatment and witnessing IPV and its combined effects. There are mixed results in the literature.
- Create interventions/services in a child-based, holistic approach. Combination services may be needed. Parent involvement is promising.
- Evaluate and improve screening/assessment in clinical settings to explore if the child has witnessed IPV because this can be the root cause of many clinical issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under Award Numbers; UL1GM118979; TL4GM118980; RL5GM118978. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.