

## **Consequences of Domestic Violence on Children and role of social institutions on the problem**

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### **Introduction**

Domestic violence is the abusive behaviour of one of the intimate partner over the other to control and dominate (Watts, 2006). Domestic violence is defined as the systematic patter of abusive behaviour in a relationship that are used to gain or maintain control and power over another person (Domestic Abuse project, 2016.) this includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. Evidence from various researches show that children having direct or indirect exposure to domestic violence are affected physically, socially, emotionally and mentally (Whelan, 2008). The report of Children's fund 2006 claims that in a year about 275 million children across the world witness domestic violence. According to the study of Hoeffler in 2014 Domestic violence is an aspect of child maltreatment, child abuse and neglect. It is also evident from various studies that domestic violence creates a huge burden on children and affects their development process and cause deregulation (Howell et al., 2016). Deregulation is the disability in performing normative functions. Deregulation in cognitive functions includes problems in organizing, prioritizing, and task completion. Deregulations in emotional functioning include difficulties in maintaining friendships, increased maladaptive peer relationships, and isolation (Howell et al., 2016). The study of Hungerford in the year 2010 says that deregulations also cause violent behaviours, substance abuse and delinquencies.

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### **Domestic violence**

Domestic violence is one of the most visible yet highly overlooked act of violence in families and communities. Violence at home is considered to be the most pervasive challenge to human rights (UNICEF, 2006). From the study of Hague &Malos in the year 2005, it is evident that Men are known to be the primary perpetrator of domestic violence. In the study of Johnson in the year 2011 shows that victimization is more prevalent among women. Domestic violence is experienced between one in three to one in five women (Hague &Malos, 2005).Mullender (1996) in his study says that the abuser could be the intimate partner of the mother, biological or step father of the child.

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationships and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation. Many forms of domestic violence are against the law. For many Indigenous people the term family violence is preferred as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support. (Commonwealth Partnerships Against Domestic Violence program, 1997)

### **The impacts of domestic violence**

The impact of witnessing domestic violence varies for all individual children;this condition can occur from conception and cause developmental impacts throughout childhood and continuous till adulthood (Curran, 2013). The impact of domestic violence on children can start even before the child's birth;which is transferred from the distressed mother (Howell, et al, 2016).

### **Psychological impact**

Children who witness domestic violence are prone to have various psychological effects. It also leads to delays in cognitive and emotional development;

it also leads to mental health issues and behavioural problems like aggressiveness, social withdrawal, anxiety disorder and various internalising and externalising behaviour problems (Antle, Barbee, Yankeelov, & Bledsoe, 2010). Children are dependent on their mothers and caregivers for basic needs, safety and modelling of self regulation. The study of Scheeringa and Zeanah (1995), reports that children who sense or perceive threats to their caregivers had negative behavioural and emotional problems. Domestic violence also interrupts the relationship between children and the affected caregivers because there becomes damage in the relationship due to lack of love, nurture, support and warmth. Studies show that the impact of stressful experiences of violence is similar to the post traumatic disorder in adults (von Eye, 2006).

- Children are affected by health issues (Chamberlain, 2001).
- Cognitive and emotional problems like sleep problems, immaturity, poor concentration, aggressiveness, language development, Fear of being alone, Antisocial behaviours, Irritability, low frustration tolerance, violence behaviours, depression, problems eating, (McGee, 2000; Elderson, 1999; Holt, 2015).
- Anxiety, social withdrawal and fearfulness occur as early as the children are in the pre school age (Hornor, 2005). At the school age children tend to have low self esteem, lack of participation in school activities and tend to get into trouble more frequently (Hassinger.D, 2019).
- A study Meltzer et al., 2009 says that the impact of domestic violence vary with genders. Boys tend to have externalised behavioural problems like disobedience and aggressiveness whereas girls are more likely to have internalised behavioural problems like depression and anxiety. These children may also engage in various risk involved behaviour unprotected sex and drugs. This symptom is likely seen more in boys than girls. Whereas signs of depression are seen more in girls than boys (Hassinger.D, 2019).

### **Behavioural impact**

Domestic violence has two types of effects on the children, the long term

effect and short term effect. Violence in the family has been a major social problem for children who witnessed and physically abused. If these impacts are not identified and treated well, this will lead to long term effects on the children (Lawson, 2001). These effects vary from child to child, some of the children showed disabilities in academical activities and others showed problems of socialising (Chanmugam&Teasley, 2014).

- Internalising behaviours include fearfulness, social withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints

- Externalising behaviours include aggression, low self-esteem, difficulties in peer relationships, bullying, vandalism, arson, temper tantrums, fight with siblings and schoolmates and becoming more violent after exposure to abuse (Dutton, 2000).

- Short term effects in preschool could be bedwetting, thumb sucking, and increased crying. They show signs of terror, hiding and severe separation anxiety (Hassinger.D, 2019).

- Children exposed to violence are prone to psychosomatic illness, suicidal tendencies, bed wetting, substance abuse, juvenile pregnancies and criminal behaviour (Felitti V.J. et al, 2001)

- Children who witness violence that involves knives, guns or other physical abuse tend to exhibit great risk involved behaviour. Studies say that the higher the level of violence witnessed the higher is the behaviour problem in children (Murrell et al., 2007).

- Various researchers have claimed that there is a link between childhood trauma and suicidal tendencies as adults. Depression, anxiety, attachment disorders, substance abuse and aggressiveness experienced in childhood becomes a later cause for suicides at the later period of life (Everson, 2003).

### **Social impact**

Witnessing and victimising domestic violence can affect the emotional,

physical, psychological and social well being of the child. Studies have proven that these types of children tend to have less socialising skills and maintenance of relationships.

- According to the attachment theory, parents are obliged to provide protection and warmth to the child. In the case of domestic violence one of the parents itself are at the vulnerable state, therefore the parents become unable to provide nurture to the child. This creates a weak parent child relationship, and leads to the inability of the child to grow attachments in relationships. According to Waldman-Levi et al in the year 2013 says that absence of attachment will lead to anger and negative responses from the child.

- According to the social learning theory, where learning takes place through observation and experiences. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are violent to themselves and to others (Temple et al., 2013). From this theory the research also claims that through witnessing violence boys learn to become abusers and girls learn to become victimisations (Payne & Gaaney, 2009).

- Studies have shown that children exposed to domestic violence become abusers or perpetrators as adults; data has shown that husbands who were reported by their

Wives as abusers had witnessed domestic violence in their childhood and their mothers being abused (Kyu, et al, 2005).

- Children who grow up witnessing domestic violence use violence in interpersonal relationship and are mostly dominating others (Baldry, 2003). Skipping schools and rivalry with family is more often seen in the teens who have witnessed violence in their childhood (Hassinger.D, 2019).

- Children as victims of domestic violence lose trust in humans, loses the capacity to love, show empathy and maintain stable relationships (Pineherio, 2006).

- Education: Domestic violence has a severe impact on the educational

abilities of the children (Hornor, 2005). In a study made by Maxwell, et al 2007 says that children who face domestic violence performed 12.2 percentile lower than the children who had not faced domestic violence. Children exposed to violence have poor school functioning, low concentration and reading disabilities (James. M, 1994). Researchers show that poor academic capability of children due to exposure to violence also leads to suicidal tendencies (Hoo-van, et al, 2011).

### **Physical impacts**

- From the study of Antle et al., in the year 2010, it is evident that children who witness domestic violence also suffer from physical abuse. It is inevitable to say that physical abuse also leads to lose body integrity and sense of self (Judith Herman,1997).

- Physiological responses like stress related symptoms can be caused due to chronic stress in young children (Herman-Smith, 2013). Domestic violence to the pregnant mother could lead to premature birth, low weight of the baby, development and attachment problems to a new born child (Howell et al., 2016).

- Children exposed to violence are more likely to show symptoms of headache and stomach ache (Hassinger.D, 2019).

- Physical abuse intended to the child could be harmful to the child's health, development, survival and dignity (Kocur, 2009). Any form of corporal punishments by the parents in order to correct the child's behaviour that causes pain, even without injury is considered to be physical abuse (Kocur, 2009). Physical abuse involves are hitting, kicking, shaking, slapping, punching, throwing, biting and burning.

- According to the study of Herrenkohl in the year 2008 says that a number of risks to health indicators were found in later life of adults who were exposed to violence in their early life.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is the process that enables children to protect themselves in a  
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risk involved context. It is the maintenance of healthy and successful functioning and adaptation of the situation positively. A person's resilience depends on various internal and external protective factors (Unagar, 2005). Internal factors include control over circumstances, self esteem, and temperaments. External protective factors are supportive social relationships, access to resources and social engagements (Unagar, 2005). It is the ability to overcome trauma with psychological and social success (MacMillam, 2011). About 31 – 65 percent of resilience rate is found among school age children (Levendosky, 2009). According to Allen in the year 2003 in his study says that the coping mechanism used by children vary accordingly. Majorly the coping skills are categorised into problem solving and emotion focused. Coping is the process of cognitive and behavioural efforts in order to manage stress and problems (Sarchiapone, 2011).

Research shows a number of factors of resilience certain of them are self-control, positive self-image, improved self-esteem, strong determination to be different from abusive parents, higher cognitive abilities, commitment to school activities, strong and positive attachments to mother (Herrenkohl et al., 2008).

## **Remedial measures**

### **Children**

Children need to have awareness that there are adults who will help them overcome their problems. Adults, who will believe them, listen to them and protect them (Hassinger.D, 2019). Children also need to know that violence at home is not their fault. Children need support services to meet their needs, they need to learn that domestic violence is an offense and resolve conflicts in non violent methods. They need adults to speak up and break the silence (Hassinger.D, 2019).

### **School**

Schools play a major role in protecting and supporting the children of abuses. As children would not disclose easily about the violence at home, it is crucial for the school to work closely with them. Schools are a major source

of emotional support to these children (Paton, 2005). Schools does not only have the responsibility to provide support but also safeguard and protect these children from further abuses and witnessing . Educational personnel are also obliged to intervene and correct the problematic behaviour of these children. These children continue to suffer when there are not identified and intervened by the teachers, therefore the educational personnel has to establish close contact with the children and identify their behavioural changes (Paton, 2005).

### **Government**

The government has a primary duty of ensuring child safety and protection and take necessary steps in achieving them (Hassinger.D, 2019). Raise awareness on the dynamic impact of domestic violence on women and children. Public information campaigns could help in creating awareness on the same (Hassinger.D, 2019). Legislations and policies should emphasise that domestic violence is a punishable offense. The specific impact of domestic violence on children should be taken into account by all the government agencies (Hassinger.D, 2019). Allocation of resources specific to children affected by domestic violence should be mandated by the government in order to prevent abuse and support victims. Interventions provided to the child victims should focus more on minimising the long term impacts of domestic violence (Hassinger.D, 2019).

### **Non-governmental organisations**

The non-governmental organisations could Provide financial aids and support initiatives that aim to prevent domestic violence (Hassinger.D, 2019). Active engagement of corporate in developing awareness, campaigns and fund raising initiatives through CSR activities through innovative employee education and training programmes in communities (Hassinger.D, 2019).

### **Counseling**

Counselling serves the best in cases for providing emotional support to the child victims of domestic violence, counselling helps in identifying and im-



proving the strengths of the child and improve options for healing. Behaviour problems and emotional support could be addressed and rectified through counselling.

### **Limitations**

- Teacher work closely with children they have higher opportunity to identify the changes in a child. Lack of awareness and knowledge about child abuse, maltreatments and reporting procedures lead to the failure in recognising the problem (Alvarez et al., 2004).

- Teachers are not given proper training to identify and intervene with children facing violence. According to Walsh and Farrell in 2008 says that teachers have showed great difficulty in associating between domestic violence, mental health concerns, social and economic concerns to the prevalence of child abuse, maltreatment and conditions as risk factors.

- In terms of limited knowledge teachers are more conserved to visible symptoms of physical abuse, but lack in understanding or identifying mental abuse and emotional neglect (Dillenburger, 2009).

- Cultural barriers also play a major role in limiting the protecting of the child. Informing the child protection services is considered as injustice and harm to the child (Walsh et al, 2006)

- Family disruption and further more abuse to the child could be the negative consequences of reporting (Alvarez et al., 2004).

### **Conclusion**

Domestic violence is a continuous problem in most of the families. From the study it is clear that witnessing or victimising domestic violence creates a major negative impact on the child. It affects the developmental process of the child including cognitive and emotional development. Unfortunately domestic violence has the potential to create long term impact on the children that will affect their adulthood and wellbeing. Breaking the cycle of violence will

require the family and society support. Society plays a major role in helping the children overcome the abuse and its effects. It is clear from the study that proper intervention is required to help children overcome the problem. By providing physical, moral and social support the children gain strength and develop coping skills. Ultimately the breaking the silence is domestic violence and helping children feel secure and supported should be the aim of any intervention. Families, educational personals, peers, community, policy makers and the private sectors should play major role in spreading the awareness and prevent the victimisation of children. This study helps us to understand the dynamic problems faced by children either short or long term through direct or indirect impact of domestic violence. If this issue is not addressed and intervened many children in the society will continue to suffer in silence. It is essential to say that witnessing and victimising domestic violence by children will become a social problem, when these children grow up to be adults.

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