Domestic Violence the Impact on Children

MSCB CSF Joint Conference

Behind Closed Doors

1st March 2016
Domestic Violence

1: What proportion of children and young people live with domestic abuse, according to a number of studies?

2: In relationships where there is domestic abuse, children are thought to witness what percentage of violent incidents?

3: When a woman is being physically abused by her partner what percentage of children also experience physical injury?

4: How many children have been killed by fathers in the last 20 years during court ordered contact?

5: In a 2003 study, what percentage of 11-12 year old boys thought that women get hit ‘when they make men angry’?

8: Women experiencing domestic abuse during their pregnancy are at what increased risk of miscarriage and still birth?

9: Women experiencing domestic abuse are how many times more likely to use alcohol than women with no experience?
Domestic Abuse Definition

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional
So How Does it Impact on Children?
The impact on Children

- Witnessing domestic violence towards the parent who does not abuse (usually, but not always the mother).

- Being used in the violence and abuse against the non-abusing parent as part of an attempt to attack the role of self esteem of the abused parent, or

- Getting caught up in the domestic abuse

- Emotional abuse or neglect as a result of harmful parenting.

- Emotional harm as a consequence of domestic violence – moving home, loss of friends, toys and impact on education.

- There is a high overlap between the occurrence of emotional abuse from exposure to domestic violence and direct physical and sexual abuse and neglect of children by domestically violent parent/carers.
Awareness of Children

• In spite of parents views most children ARE aware of domestic abuse
• “He used to always say that he was going to kill my mum, he used to always say he was going to kill all my family and... he really sounded serious like he would do it... You just feel constantly on edge, never free, never safe...You can’t sleep properly – you just sit there waiting for something to happen”. (Mona, in McGee, 2000: 62, 72)
• “I see dad hitting mum all the time. He blames her for anything, like if he can’t find his watch or if the food is a bit cold. Yesterday he kicked her down the stairs and then made her hide in the bedroom when someone came over. I dread to wake up every morning – I don’t know what will happen next.” (Young South Asian person in Izzidien, 2008:7)
Emotional Harm

• Domestically violent parents frequently use similar intimidation and threats as they do towards mothers:

• “I would be getting frustrated with them. They wanted to talk to dad and they were constantly badgering me for attention. There was awful shouting and verbal abuse – aggressive abuse... I was constantly boiling – if they dropped their spoon when they were eating that was enough for me to slam my fist down on the table” (Violent father describing looking after two and four year-old girls, Harne and Radford, 2008).

• This can extend into extreme control of very young children

• Some violent fathers will also deliberately target specific children in families for emotional abuse: “My youngest son started wetting himself when he was about four. His father called him thick and stupid... and when he got glasses he called him four-eyes.” (Mother describing harm to seven-year-old boy when father was looking after him when she was at work (in Harne, 2004: 20).
The Behaviour and Beliefs of an Abusive Parent or Carer that can underpin Domestic Violence
Violent Fathers Attitudes

- A sense of entitlement to have their own needs met by the children.
- A lack of empathy or for children’s feelings and impact of their violence on them.
- Fathers undermine mothers in front of the children and use of the children as weapon against her.
- Disregard of children’s needs, this will often include their basic care needs.
- A sense of ownership of the children, this can lead to a risk of risk of abduction.
- Control of children involving authoritarian parenting and neglect of developmental needs.
- Cruelty towards children.
- The overall risks of neglect, physical or sexual abuse and grooming of children.
What gets in the way of disclosure and safety?
Survivors

Why might an abused parent/mother not want to tell us what is happening

• The degree of control over the mother which stops her from talking about the abuse
• Concern about the reputation of the family in the community.
• Concern about being blamed and lack of confidence in others being able to help
• Shame or feeling embarrassed
• Not seeing the behaviour as domestic violence.
• Poor language skills relate experience
• Worry about deportation or isolation from own community.
• Concern about housing and income if they have to leave the perpetrator.
• Concern the children will be taken into care.
• Anxiety not being taken seriously or given credence
• Fear of the perpetrator actions if he finds out – increase in his violence.
Children may also be reluctant to disclose for similar reasons:

- Fear of perpetrator/father and of further escalating violence towards mother/themselves.
- Fear of not being believed/taken seriously.
- Fear of being taken into care.
- Shame of not having a “proper father”/fear of bullying by other children.
- Lack of trust/confidence in professionals including a lack of trust in keeping information confidential from abusive parent or from peers at school.
- Lacking language to describe experiences.
- Fear of isolation/racism if have to move from own community.
What Can Professionals Do to Help?
Interventions & Support

• Identifying a primary perpetrator/parent rather than assuming that there is just a “volatile” relationship between parents.

• Listening to, believing and not blaming non-abusing mothers

• Asking about domestic violence in interviews, meetings and conferences should always take place away from the perpetrator/parent.

• Safety planning is essential in all interventions, but training is needed

• Asking about domestic violence routinely (routine enquiry)

• While separation from the perpetrator/parent may be the most appropriate option in preventing significant harm (unless he is only at the beginning of his domestic violence career) this can also be the most dangerous time and the violence can escalate. Professionals need to listen to mothers’ assessments of risk, work in a multi-agency way and ensure that no information reaches the perpetrator/parent, which could jeopardise safety.
Interventions & Support

• Recognising that direct contact with a violent/abusive parent can be very harmful to children post-separation
• Not confronting violent parents on their own, as this could jeopardize professionals’ safety.
• Being aware that perpetrator/parents’ accounts are not reliable as they frequently deny/minimize the violence/abuse,
• Community–based perpetrator programmes for violent men can assist
• It should not be assumed that a perpetrator or caring dads programme will necessarily enable a violent parent to change sufficiently to be safe enough to care for children.
• Separate community-based support groups for children and mothers can assist in recovery from the emotional impacts of the violence
Our Local Response
Merton CSF

- Training all staff in Barnardo’s Risk Assessment Model/Approach
- Spot purchasing of perpetrator programmes through e.g. DVIP
- Development of Ontario Model At Bond Road
- Work with IDVAS
- Use of Routine Enquiry at ESTH
- Liaison with Midwifery/Health Visitors
- Engagement with MARAC
- Joint Commissioning with Adult Services
- Caring Dad’s Programme
- Use of Signs of Safety innovation
- Mother’s Group at Bond Road