

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MOTHER

Identifying and Dealing With the Effects of Children's Victimization

A Manual for Parents

Produced by
UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment,
University of Cyprus



Funded by
- The European Commission, Daphne III Programme (action grants 2007-2013)
Project VI.C.T.I.M.S (2009-2011, JLS/2008/DAP3/AG/1157)
- University of Cyprus

Sensitizing and Creating Awareness on the Subject of Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence

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<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/goto/unesco/el-GR/Home.aspx>

<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/victims>

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CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MOTHER

*A parent's manual to sensitize and create awareness
about the effects of children's exposure to domestic violence*

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IDENTITY OF THE PROJECT VI.C.T.I.MS (2009-2011)
FUNDED BY DAPHNE III PROGRAMME

Victimizing Children Through Injuring MotherS

The project VI.C.T.I.MS was designed and conducted in four countries (Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovakia) with funding obtained by the European programme DAPHNE III (action grants 2007-2013), and elaborated on the background of the effects of violence against women-mothers upon their children if exposed, and on how these may be externalized in different contexts such as the school environment.

PROJECT IDENTITY

“An Indirect Harmful Effect of Violence: Victimizing the Child and Re-victimizing the Woman-Mother Through her Child’s Exposure to Violence Against Herself”.

Sensitizing and creating awareness through research-product material, both transnational and differential according to the partner-context.

PROJECT AIM

- a) To examine the indirect harmful effect of violence against women mothers upon their children if exposed to it in the domestic sphere, as well as mothers’ consciousness of that effect;
- b) To sensitize all groups of people who are involved in the child’s development and education by producing awareness raising and research based material.

PROJECT'S MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) Are there any differences between primary-school age children who are exposed to violence against their mother and children who are not exposed, with regard to their behaviour while being exposed to violence and or while witnessing violence? Do they adopt a violent or passive behaviour?
- b) Are there any differences between primary-school age children exposed to violence against their mother, and children not exposed, with regard to their views about their self-image and their school performance?
- c) Are there any differences between primary-school age children exposed to violence against their mother, and children not exposed, with regard to their views about their mother as a role model?

REACHING THE AIM...

- a) By examining the mothers' awareness of the indirect harmful effect of violence inflicted upon the mothers on their children if exposed to it.
 - Analysis of written testimonies given by women and children, victims of violence;
 - Semi-structured interviews with women-mothers victims of violence.

- b) By investigating the possible indirect harmful effect of exposure to violence on children and comparison of their perceptions and self-images with those of children who are not exposed to violence against their mother.
- Child's self-evaluation (administration of the Self Perception Profile Test, Harter, 1985);
 - Child's evaluation by a teacher;
 - Child's perceptions on violence, self-image, school performance and mother as a role model (administration of a questionnaire with 14 scenarios-vignettes becoming filters through which children's perceptions could be examined).



An example of a scenario given to children...

It's break time. Anna sits alone in the school yard eating her snack. Some kids, her classmates, approach her without Anna noticing their presence. They are frightening her with a sudden noise and push her. Anna automatically stands up.

The question...

What would you do if you were in Anna's place?



Answers from children exposed to violence against their mother...

"I would kick them to go away"

"I would be so mad that I would start damaging things"

"I would be so mad that I would beat them badly"



CONSIDERING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

Children exposed to violence...

*Children witnessing violence by seeing, hearing, feeling or being aware of the violence that the one parent – usually the mother – suffers by the other parent – usually the father. “**Children witnessing violence**” or “**children living with violence**” are also used as terms.*

The term of “**children witnessing violence**” may imply a passive role... Instead “**children living with violence**” means/implies that children are “actively” involved, since they can interpret what they see or hear, they can feel the pain experienced by their mothers, they can get anxious about the consequences of violence and can even start blaming themselves for causing the violence...



INTENDED AUDIENCE

This handbook is appropriate for **biological parents** who may either use or suffer violence, **foster parents**, **adoptive parents** and **other kin caregivers** with all levels of experience in caring for children exposed to domestic violence in the present, or who may have a reason to care for these children in the future.

Some of you may have difficulties with the material presented in this handbook because it describes some of your (or your family members') experiences either as a perpetrator or a survivor of domestic violence. Still, it is important for you to **KNOW**.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO KNOW BECAUSE:

- ▶ Witnessing violence is harmful for primary-school age children, even if the children are not hurt by the violence themselves.
- ▶ The signs/effects of a child's exposure to violence may be externalized in different contexts such as the school environment.
- ▶ Primary-school age children witnessing violence against their mothers tend to have increased adjustment problems at several places such as school.
- ▶ Primary-school age children witnessing violence against their mothers tend to have increased behavioral and emotional problems.
- ▶ Parents should protect children from being exposed to violence and adopt appropriate practices dealing with their children's possible challenging behaviours at several places such as school.



CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MOTHER. CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MOTHER. CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM

“I can realize that something isn’t ‘right’ with my child...”

“...Teachers are often complaining about his/her behaviour...”

- ♦ **Alex** participated in a fight with two other children. The odd thing is that Alex is beaten by the other two without making any effort to beat them back or defend himself.
- ♦ **Andrea** is most of the times distracted in class. She is not confident to raise her hand and whenever her classmates make fun of her, she starts shouting and threatening them.
- ♦ Whenever **Dan** walks in the school corridors, the younger pupils hurry to avoid him and hide from him because he always claims their food and money and sometimes even hits them.
- ♦ **Maria** is isolated and avoids being close to other kids during breaks. She prefers being by herself without talking to anyone.

... and the common question of teachers is...

“What is wrong with him/her?”

“...AS A MOTHER, IF I HAD THE COURAGE, I WOULD ANSWER THEM...”

Alex's father and I fight almost every day. Alex sees his dad getting hot-tempered and cries. I try to calm him by saying to him “don't be afraid, mom and dad are just playing”.

Andrea's father and I quarrel a lot. Andrea has to listen to her father threatening me that he will kick me out of the house, if I keep going to work.

“...AS A FATHER, IF I HAD THE COURAGE, I WOULD ANSWER THEM...”

I am Dan's father and I usually get drunk due to the economic problems we face. I cannot control my nerves and I usually beat my wife. Dan witnesses all this.

Maria's mother is taking pills for depression. Maria understands that I neglect her mother and do not show her affection and love; I only care about my job.

Can you appreciate and recognise the emotional or psychological pain these children are going through?

Can you find something common in the above situations?



Exposure to Domestic Violence



DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence...

- ▶ is spread worldwide and can occur in all kind of social groups disregarding age, racial, socioeconomic, religious, educational and occupational differences and factors.
- ▶ is considered to be a human rights violation and a humiliation of human dignity.
- ▶ refers to an abusive relationship between a perpetrator (*abusive partner, batterer*) who causes the violence and a victim (*abused partner*).
- ▶ involves the perpetrator's repetitive behaviour including various forms of abuse – physical (*e.g., slapping*), emotional (*e.g., rejecting*), psychological (*e.g., threatening*), sexual (*e.g., enforcing to sexual actions*), economical (*e.g., economically exploiting*).
- ▶ refers to a violent behaviour that has been usually learned by the adult perpetrator (*e.g., existence of domestic violence in the family of origin*).
- ▶ is a systematic way for the perpetrators to demonstrate power and dominant behaviour over the victims.
- ▶ mostly results in the victim's survivor behaviour focused only on ensuring survival and not on leaving from the abusive relationship.

- ▶ makes the victim's attitude to be mainly determined by the discourses of powerlessness, of tolerance, of denying, of blaming self and of compassion.
- ▶ means either an injury (e.g., *from being hit, punched, slapped or from other trauma*) or stress (e.g., *from threats, humiliations, rejection or from other emotional and/or psychological cause*).
- ▶ has direct (e.g., *physical pain*) or indirect impact (e.g., *depression*) on the victims who can be either directly or indirectly hurt.

A woman's victim words...

"..violence is like they are trying to make you fall apart so as to feel powerless.."

Another's woman victim words...

"..I was trying not to provoke him... I used to believe that if I kept him calm, he wouldn't use violence again. This is the first step for making yourself a victim. Then, he keeps telling you that he is sorry and you unfortunately believe him... you have the need to do so.."



VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Victims...

- ▶ **suffer** the violence caused by the perpetrator.
- ▶ **feel unsafe** and insecure in their living environment.
- ▶ **are afraid** to react in any way (*e.g., talk to someone or testify against the perpetrator*).
- ▶ **adopt** mostly a **survival behaviour** and do not leave the abusive relationship.
- ▶ **suffer** either direct (*e.g., physical pain*) or indirect effects (*e.g., depression*).

Perpetrators...

- ▶ **use violence** and **abuse** to establish control over their partner and power in their families.
- ▶ **want to be** the **head** of the household with their violent behaviour.
- ▶ **use violence** because they want to be the **decision-makers** in the family, and the **disciplinarians**.
- ▶ **use violence** because they believe that they can **get away** with it.
- ▶ **use violence** because **they have learned to do it** from their family or origin.

Perpetrators have varying levels of love and connection with their children, and also different capacities regarding their **ABILITY TO STOP BEING VIOLENT**.



Most of the times, victims of domestic violence are:

- ✓ Women
- ✓ Children

Children may be the:

- ✓ direct victims of violence
- ✓ indirect victims of violence



Children are considered to be the indirect victims of violence, if they are exposed to the violence that the one parent figure – usually the mother – suffers by the other parent figure - usually the father.

Being exposed to violence is still harmful for primary-school age children since, even if they are not hurt themselves, they can see, hear, feel or imagine the wrong which is inflicted on their mothers, and this makes them feel unsafe.

A woman's victim words...

“...violence is like you are killing firstly yourself and then the others around you...”



CHILDREN SUFFERING IN SILENCE

A mother's truth...

"...I made my daughter suffer a lot with my tolerant behaviour... But, when you are hurt and you are suffering, you cannot realize that you are hurting the others around you... that your children are suffering too..."

CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MOTHER ...

Children's narrations ...

- ♦ *"... My father didn't come to see us; he only came to cause troubles... My brother went outside the house to call for help... my father closed the door. I don't want to listen to him because of all these he has done to my mother. I am very disappointed... I am also very angry with him ..."*
- ♦ *"... my mother couldn't take off her clothes, she couldn't do anything since she was terribly in pain. I saw him kicking and beating her... I couldn't sleep that night, I was very scared and I didn't want to go at school the next day ..."*
- ♦ *"... he beated her badly... I was in my bed and I could hear them quarrelling. I could hear clearly my mom crying and my dad yelling at her. I was so scared and I was crying. My mom went to the doctor ..."*

Love doesn't have to hurt...

MOTHERS' CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE INDIRECT IMPACT OF VIOLENCE UPON CHILDREN IF EXPOSED

Mothers' narrations ...

- ♦ *"... I could see that my daughter did not smile. She totally withdrew into herself, she didn't want to make friends at school and during breaks she preferred to be alone ..."*
- ♦ *"... children are not in the room where we fight...sometimes they are in their own room. They are just sitting in their room scared but still, they continue their studying ..."*
- ♦ *"... due to this violent situation at home, my daughters came very close to each other. At school, during breaks the younger one is always looking for her sister ..."*
- ♦ *"... my son is very active at school and usually his teachers complain about his violent behavior. His school performance is also low... He doesn't care at all about his lessons ..."*
- ♦ *"... her teacher said to me that she is very often distracted at class. I can understand this because at home also, she cannot study by herself, she cannot concentrate... She needs me to be by her side all the time so as to feel safe and when I leave she keeps asking for me ..."*
- ♦ *"... whereas at home my kids were very active, when I went to their school to ask the teachers about their school performance and behaviour, they kept telling me that my children were too shy to participate in any school activity ..."*

Domestic violence – violence against women victimizes not only the women mothers but also their children, even if children are not themselves the target of violence and women are assaulted instead.

This occurs because most of the time the children are at home during the violence incidents and are in many ways witnesses to the violence.



IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON THE CHILDREN, IF EXPOSED

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON THE CHILDREN, IF EXPOSED

Witnessing violence against their mothers makes children feel afraid and unsafe. Children's exposure to violence against their mothers is tantamount to psychological maltreatment and victimization, and differs according to the children's age, gender and type of exposure.

- ✓ **Children exposed to violence often experience either short- or long-term impact that may also affect also their adjustment at school.**

Children exposed to violence against their mothers may ...

- ◆ choose to react aggressively in an ordinary situation
 - either verbally (e.g., *insulting their classmates while playing*).
 - or physically (e.g., *hitting their classmates while playing*).
- ◆ choose to react aggressively when exposed directly to violence
 - either verbally (e.g., *threatening and insulting while been pushed*).
 - or physically (e.g., *push while being pushed*).
- ◆ choose to react aggressively while witnessing violence (e.g., *interfering in a fight*).



Exposure to violence may desensitize children to aggressiveness. When this happens, aggressive behaviour becomes part of the “norm” and is more likely to be adopted.

- ◆ choose to adopt a passive behaviour
 - while exposed directly to violence (*e.g., stay silent while being threatened*).
 - while witnessing violence (*e.g., ignoring a fight*).
- ◆ have a low self-esteem and an inferior self-image.
- ◆ not be happy with the way they lead their life.
- ◆ feel less accepted by their peers and less popular among classmates and/or friends.
- ◆ not be happy with the way they look and feel that they are not so good-looking.
- ◆ reject their mother as a role model.
- ◆ feel more intensely the need to protect their mother.
- ◆ have a low school performance.
- ◆ have problems of concentrating in class and dealing with their school obligations (*e.g., homework*).
- ◆ display traumatic stress reactions (*e.g., sleep disturbances, constant fear of possible danger*).



SIGNS THAT A CHILD IS LIVING WITH VIOLENCE

SIGNS THAT A CHILD IS LIVING WITH VIOLENCE

The signs/effects of a child's exposure to violence are as varied as children's personalities and may be externalized in different ways in the school environment. Some are the following:

Have in mind

- ☛ **Some signs may seem completely unrelated to the child's exposure to violence.**
- ☛ **Still, children displaying these signs *may not* have been necessarily exposed to domestic violence.**

Signs...

- ◆ **Increased aggressive behaviours and feelings of anger.**
(physically or verbally assaulting peers, i.e., hitting, pushing, kicking, insulting, embarrassing, using violent wording, threatening).
- ◆ **Increased passive behaviours and apathy.**
(i.e., not reacting in any way while exposed to violence or witnessing violence, stay silent while being threatened or embarrassed).
- ◆ **Diminished self-esteem and self-confidence.**
(i.e., lack of confidence to raise hand in class, lack of confidence to participate in school activities or festivals).

- ◆ **Withdrawal from peers - classmates, teachers, friends, relatives.**
(i.e., being isolated).
- ◆ **Lack of interest in school activities or any other activities.**
- ◆ **Unreasonable and excessive worry about the safety of loved ones.**
(i.e., asking constantly about mother, needing to be near siblings during the school day).
- ◆ **Difficulty completing an activity or task.**
(i.e., having trouble with schoolwork).
- ◆ **Low school performance.**
(i.e., apparent loss of previously learned skills, trouble concentrating).
- ◆ **Constant worry about possible danger.**





DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL

DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL

Primary-school age children exposed to violence against their mother may display various difficulties and problems in their school adjustment.

TEACHERS' NARRATIONS ABOUT ...

Victims – Primary-school age students identified to have been exposed to violence...

- ♦ *“... The child is usually absent from school and some days he comes late at school. He seems tired and inexplicably scared and sad, I could say ...”*
- ♦ *“... He is very undisciplined and disrespectful to his teachers... He keeps taking pride in the fact that he is hitting his younger sister ...”*
- ♦ *“... Completing a task or homework seems to be boring for her... She cannot concentrate, whatever motives I try to give her... She is always so low –profile and shy ...”*
- ♦ *“... He tries very hard to be a good student... I can sense his need to make his mother feel proud of him... Although he is trying so hard, he feels that whatever he does is wrong or not good enough ...”*

A problem in the domestic sphere, such as domestic violence and children's exposure to it, becomes automatically a social one; this means that it can consequently affect the whole social environment in which the victims socialize and become socialized.

◆ **Behavioral Problems / Difficulties**

- Adoption of aggressive behaviours (e.g., using violent wording, physically hurting self and others).
- Adoption of passive behaviours and demonstrating apathy.
- Expression of negative feelings (e.g., anger, anxiety, testiness).
- Involvement in fights, easily getting into trouble and being undisciplined and rebellious.
- Lack of respect for peers – classmates, teachers.
- Rejecting school and school teachers.

◆ **Emotional Problems / Difficulties**

- Feeling lonely, not accepted and not respected by peers – classmates, friends, teachers.
- Demonstrating an excessive worry about the safety of loved ones.
- Feeling sad and unsafe at school.
- Inability to express feelings of joy and gladness.
- Lack of self-confidence – feeling incapable of doing something right.



RESEARCH RESULTS IN FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The findings and results of the Project VI.C.T.I.MS are the following:

- (a) Children exposed to violence against their mothers tend to engage in more aggressive reactions than what is expected in an ordinary situation, while they are being exposed to violence and while witnessing violence. Boys are those who tend to be more aggressive and externalize in a more intense way their feelings of anger.
- (b) Children exposed to violence against their mothers also tend to adopt a more passive behaviour in an ordinary situation and while witnessing violence. Girls are those who tend to be more passive and who do not externalize their feelings.
- (c) Children exposed to violence against their mothers tend to have lower levels of self-esteem and an inferior self-image. They feel less accepted by peers and less popular among significant others – classmates, friends.
- (d) Children exposed to violence against their mothers tend to be less happy with the way they are leading their lives.
- (e) Children exposed to violence against their mothers tend to believe that they are not so good students. They tend to believe that they have a poor school performance and evaluate themselves as failures.

Primary-school age children learn how to behave in their future relationships from what they have experienced as children in their family. If they were exposed to violence, then the possibility of doing the same - taking either the role of victim or perpetrator - in the future increases.

An example of a scenario given to children...

Chara has a big test tomorrow and tries to study. But her younger brother and sister are playing noisily in the other room. Chara asks them to stop being noisy, but they go on doing it, shouting even louder.

The question...

What would you do if you were in Chara's place?



Answers from children exposed to violence against their mother...

"I would start screaming and threatening to hit them"

"I would yell at them and hit them"

"I would start crying and I don't think I could do something"

Another example of a scenario given to children...

Josef is a boy / Melina is a girl who is exactly your age. While playing with neighborhood children, one child tripped Josef/Melina on purpose. He/she fell down on his/her back. Since he/she did not expect it, he/she was quite hurt. The others, led by that child, began to laugh because he/she fell down in a funny way.

The question...

How would you act if you were in Josef's or Melina's place?



Answers from children exposed to violence against their mother...

"I would trip the child who hurt me so as to break his head"

"I would hit the one that made me fall down"

"I wouldn't do anything"

Answers from children not exposed to violence against their mother...

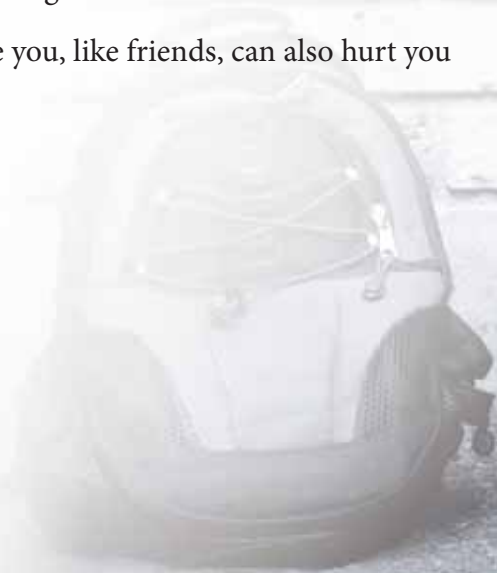
"I would call my mother to come"

"I would rather explain them that it is not right what they did"

"I would tell it to my parents. They always give me good advice"

LESSONS THAT CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE MAY LEARN

- ◆ Violence can be countered by violence
- ◆ Violence is the best way to solve a problem
- ◆ It is better not to react while being exposed to violence in order not to have trouble
- ◆ Violence can be countered by passive behaviour
- ◆ Violence and threats make you feel smarter and more powerful
- ◆ Negative feelings such as anger can lead to violence
- ◆ People you love and love you, like friends, can also hurt you





CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS: ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AND SELF IMAGE

Scenario

Demetris' mother went to school during break to talk with the teacher and saw Demetris participating in a fight with two other children. The weird was that Demetris was beaten by the other two without making any effort to beat them back or defend himself.

The Question

What would you do if Demetris was your younger brother?



Girl - 5th Grade



Boy - 5th Grade



Boy - 5th Grade

Scenario

Some money, which were intended for a school trip got lost from the classroom. Helen is wrongly accused for stealing the money, but she did not do it.

The Question

What would you do if you were in Helen's place?



Boy - 5th Grade



Boy- 5th Grade



Girl - 5th Grade



RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS OF AFFECTED CHILDREN

Parents can help children who have been exposed to domestic violence in many ways.

☛ *An important presupposition though is for parents to be aware of the way children's exposure to domestic violence can affect their behaviour at several contexts such as school.*

SOME MISTAKES...

Parents may

- become bad role models for their children with their aggressive behaviours.
- become bad role models for their children with their tolerant behaviours.
- underestimate children's intelligence to realize the problematic relationship between mother and father.
- do not understand how much they affect children's well being with their behaviour.
- punish them when they try to interfere in the parents' problematic relationship.
- isolate them when they fight having the delusion that they protect their children.
- make hateful or angry comments concerning their children's scholastic competence or behaviour.
- tolerate violence at home having the delusion that this is for the best of their children.

DOING RIGHT..

Parents should

- know there is a relation between domestic violence and child maltreatment.
- be aware of the dynamics present in families experiencing domestic violence.
- understand the extent and severity of the problems related to children's exposure to violence against their mother.
- be aware that children are impacted by their exposure to domestic violence differently, depending on a variety of factors such as gender or age.
- recognize and deal with the special needs of children in care who come from domestic violence situations.

LEAVING THE ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP..

A parent helps when he or she ...

✓ In case of the children's behavioral problems/ difficulties

- stops the fights at home.
- discusses with the other parent the consequences of children's exposure to domestic violence.
- discusses the matter with someone else who can help.
- tries to make the children feel safe at home.
- encourages the children to engage in joyful and positive activities (*e.g., sports, dancing*).
- devotes time to talk and discuss with them.
- cares about their school performance and progress.
- asks from the teacher to discuss with the child about what behaviours are considered "right" or "not right" during an activity or during playing.

- rewards each child's assertive behaviour and avoids strict punishment.
- uses non-violent and non-corporal discipline techniques at home to help the child feel safe.
- advises children on how they can respond to violence (*i.e., calling for an adult to come*).
- does not judge them harshly. Listen to their story, to what they have to say about the “bad” behaviour they have exhibited.

✓ *In case of the children's emotional problems/ difficulties*

- does not make hateful or angry comments.
- listens to what the children have to say about an emotional outburst they had.
- helps them express their feelings, negative or positive.
- encourages them to engage in joyful and positive activities.
- gives them motives to participate in school activities such as school festivals.
- establishes simple rules and routines so that children know what to expect.
- asks the teacher to engage the children in different joyful activities and give them responsibilities so as to make them feel useful and important.
- encourages children to make friends and spend time with them.

All the above cannot erase all the emotional and psychological pain a child exposed to violence is going through. Furthermore, despite the fact that children at school learn behaviors and skills, this learning is always filtered through their experiences at home.

Therefore, the intervention of teachers, or parents who have left the abusive relationship, may counterbalance those negative effects of a child's exposure to violence that may be externalized in several environments such as school.



THOSE WHO CAN HELP

Consulting, where possible, is helpful for parents, since sometimes they may not know the right ways of helping their children who have been exposed to domestic violence.

◆ TEACHERS

- Talk to them.
- Have a clear picture in your mind about which of the child's behaviors are a cause of concern before talking to the teachers.
- Make sure that the communication is done in a safe place – preferably the school – and not by phone since this may cause problems especially if parents are still in the abusive relationship.
- Make the teacher feel comfortable with you and assure him/her that you are concerned about your child and that you want his/her help.
- Ask for their advice.
- Do not consider that a family problem like domestic violence is a private matter which does not need to be discussed at school.
- Do not reject everything the teacher will choose to tell you about your child, but stay calm.

- ◆ PSYCHOLOGISTS (collaborating also with teachers at school)
 - ◆ SOCIAL WORKERS (working in GOs and NGOs dealing with the subject of domestic violence)
 - ◆ POLICE OFFICERS (dealing with the subject of domestic violence)
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- Talk to them.
 - Take their advice on how to deal your problem and with some of your children's challenging behaviours.
 - Ask them to be confidential. It is inappropriate to gossip about you and your families.
 - Ask them to inform you about the legislation that may apply in your country and act accordingly.
 - Ask for their help in case you consider it right to fill in an official report or make a testimony (*i.e., against the perpetrator*).



EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

As authors, we could choose to conclude with some main remarks on the effects of children's exposure to violence against their mother. Still, we considered it better to end with some women-mothers' words combined together in what turned out to be a meaningful puzzle, a puzzle which can magically help this handbook reach its aim.

"... he was violent; I mostly think that he was provoking violence, all the fights between us. Maybe I am to blame also since I wasn't reacting... I wanted to be the victim so I was... because I couldn't do anything to stop it ..."

"... children were not in the room in which we were fighting...sometimes they were in their own room. I was trying not to make them feel uncomfortable... They needed their father so I was suffering violence for the sake of my family ..."

"... but violence is like you are killing firstly yourself and then the others around you... I made my children suffer a lot... But, when you are hurt and you are suffering, you cannot realize that you are hurting the others around you... that your children are suffering too ..."

"... I could see that my children weren't acting normal. My daughter was always depressed and my son was very violent at school. Their teachers were always complaining ..."

"... for my children's sanity, I had to react and end all the violence...I had to speak to others near me and near my children to help us. I had to inform the teachers ..."

Awareness always helps.

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