A comprehensive review of the literature on the impact of exposure to intimate partner violence for children and youth

Sibylle Artz (University of Victoria), István Géczy (Northern Lights College), Margaret Jackson, Katherine Rossiter, Jennifer Wong, & Alicia Nijdam-Jones (Simon Fraser University)
Domestic Violence in Canada

- Police-reported family violence crimes (including dating violence) constitute 39% of all violent crime in Canada
  - Over 63% of victims are female (Sinha, 2012)
- Childhood exposure to IPV is a serious public health issue.
What is Exposure to IPV?

- ‘Exposure’ includes:
  - Witnessing physical IPV
  - Seeing the effects of IPV (e.g., injuries)
  - Otherwise being made aware of IPV

- IPV exposure is a form of child maltreatment, and often co-occurs with targeted child abuse, producing a ‘double-whammy’ effect.
Literature Review

- Meta-analyses and review articles – reporting on empirical research published between the 1980s and mid-2000s
- Empirical research published since the year 2006 in each outcome domain
Neurobiological Implications

- Recent research has found robust issues of neurodevelopment linked to children’s exposure to IPV
  - Chronic early life stress can alter the activity of the stress-response system
    - Sensitization of neural circuits processing threat information
    - Damage to neurohumoral regulation
    - Issues of psychological and physical health
Neurobiological Implications

- Exposure to IPV is connected to dysregulation in cortisol production
  - Neurodevelopmental consequences
    - Hippocampus (e.g., memory), amygdala (e.g., fear responses), corpus callosum (e.g., interhemispheric balance) & prefrontal cortex (e.g., executive functions)
  - Immunological consequences
    - Weakening the immune system
      - Asthma & autoimmune diseases
Physical Health Outcomes

- IPV exposure is associated with:
  - Underimmunization
  - Increased vulnerability to health problems (e.g., asthma, headaches, eating problems)
  - Risk-taking behaviours (e.g., smoking, substance use, risky sexual behaviours)
  - Increased use of health services and prescription medications
Externalizing Behaviour

- Youth exposed to DV experience:
  - Adjustment problems
  - Attention problems
  - Behaviour/conduct problems
  - Sexual behaviour problems
  - Interpersonal violence victimization
  - Adult interpersonal violence perpetration
Externalizing Behaviour

- Upwards of 62% of children who witness IPV are likely to have more negative outcomes than their peers.
- Youth exposed to DV are at an increased risk of developing conduct disorder and behavioral problems, including anti-social behaviour and relationship violence in early adulthood, perpetuating the cycle of violence.
Violent Victimization

- Youth exposed to DV are at an increased risk of criminal and violent victimization compared to non-exposed youth.
Educational Outcomes

- IPV exposure has been linked to:
  - Low IQ scores
  - Low reading levels
  - Speech and language difficulties
  - Poor school attendance
  - Suspension and expulsion

- School may also be considered by children to be a ‘safe’ place.
Conclusions Regarding the Impact of Exposure to IPV

- The impacts of IPV exposure are dynamic, rather than chain-like.
- Childhood exposure to IPV incurs cost in terms of damage to neurobiological regulation elevating lifelong risk of externalization and internalization symptoms.
Why Focus on the Economic Costs of Child Exposure?

- To increase awareness
- To place in context of other public health concerns
- To justify/advocate costs of treatment, intervention, and prevention
  - e.g., cost-benefit analyses
Estimating the Costs of Exposure

- Most available estimates are for related issues of child maltreatment & domestic violence
- Fang et al., 2012, *Child Abuse & Neg:*
  - Lifetime cost per victim of child maltreatment: $210K
  - Total economic cost of new cases of nonfatal and fatal child maltreatment in 2008: $124 billion
    - Sensitivity analysis: up to $585 billion
Considerations for Cost Measures

- **Tangible vs. intangible costs**
  - tangible = can be valued in marketplace

- **Direct vs. indirect costs**
  - direct = related to producing goods or performing services

- **Short vs. long term costs**
  - e.g., same year, “childhood”, up to age 30, “lifetime”

- **Specific cost considerations:**
  - health care (physical & mental health)
  - criminal justice system
  - social assistance, child welfare
  - special education
  - legal services
  - pain & suffering; lost quality of life
  - lost income, lost productivity and/or opportunities for advancement
Example of Cost Model (Conrad, 2006)

- \[ C = \Sigma (PD + PI + PO) \]
- Where:
  - \( C \) = cost of each case of child exposure to violence
  - \( D \) = direct costs for intervention due to witnessing violence
  - \( I \) = indirect costs resulting from the effects of witnessing violence
  - \( O \) = opportunity costs associated with lost potentials
  - \( P \) = adjusted for probabilities of occurrence
Next Steps: Complexities and Challenges

- Phase 2: Develop a model to estimate costs of child exposure to violence
- Phase 3: Cost-benefit analysis of prevention/intervention programs

**Challenges:**
- Teasing out specific impact of IPV *exposure only*
- Calculating costs associated with each outcome domain (direct & indirect)
- Forecasting costs that reach far into the future
Thank you!

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- Co-investigators:
  - Sibylle Artz – sartz@uvic.ca
  - Margaret Jackson – margarej@sfu.ca
  - Jennifer Wong – jenwong@sfu.ca

- Collaborators:
  - István Géczy, Tracy Porteous, Shabna Ali