

NATIONAL RESEARCH DAY

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

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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

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