

## Considering the links between Domestic Abuse & Child Protection

### Setting the Scene...

In the U.K. a woman is murdered every 3 days by a partner or ex-partner.

((Home Office Crime Stats, 2001)

It is estimated that only 2% of violent attacks on women are reported to the police.

(The Hidden Figure Middlesex University 1994)

On average a woman will be assaulted 35 times before calling the police for help.

(Yearnshire,1997).

90% of children will be in the same or next room during attacks on their mothers.

(Hughes, 1992)

Women who experience violence have a 50% higher incidence of miscarriage & stillbirth.

(Mooney 93)

75% of all UK children on child protection registers are affected by domestic violence<sup>1</sup>.

(Women's National Commission, April 2004)

South Ayrshire research with secondary pupils highlighted that almost 1 in 3 young people were living with Domestic Abuse

(Raising the Issue 2002)

Overviews of research indicate that in the context of domestic abuse, 40-60% of children & young people are also physically assaulted by the perpetrator.

(Mullender & Morley 95)

76% of children ordered by courts to have contact with a violent partner were said to have been further abused as a result of contact being set up

(Radford, et al 1999)

The numbers of children reporting abuse is increasing. 6,000 children are referred annually to social work departments in relation to child protection issues.

(For Scotland's Children)

Reports of inquiries into child killings in the UK indicate a context of domestic abuse in a large proportion of cases in which children died as a result of physical abuse. (O'Hara 94)

## Considering the links between Domestic Abuse & Child Protection

Women & children are in most danger when are attempting to leave the abuser.

(Wilson & Daley 92)

Violence against women kills or incapacitates more women aged between 15 - 40 years worldwide than cancer, malaria, accidents & war combined. (Hidden Health Burden 1994)

Attempting to make genuine alliances with non-abusing mothers in a manner which accords them respect is the most effective way, in most cases, to protect children who are at risk in a context of Domestic Violence. (Mullender & Morley)

**Abuse is not a problem the victim can correct.**

**It is a problem that only the abuser can fix...**

**Or that society can work to protect the victim from.**

Fear of a punitive Social Work response may prevent women from seeking help for themselves & their children when they most need it & thus place them at risk. A woman cannot protect her child if she is not protected but if she asks for protection for herself, her child(ren) may be removed. A non women-blaming attitude is undoubtedly one of the most effective tools you can equip yourself with when supporting Children & Young People who have experienced Domestic Abuse.

Mothers may be reluctant to admit the abuse of children has occurred due to;

Fear that her children will automatically be taken into care.

Fear of repercussions from the abuser

Fear of being seen as having failed as a parent

Fear of being unable to retrieve the relationship

**The possible effect of Domestic Abuse On Children & Young People can include;**

**Losses** Pets, Family, Friends, Protection

**Material Effects** Poverty, Homelessness, Social exclusion, Disruption to schooling

**Physical Health** Injury, Exhaustion, Bedwetting, Asthma & eczema

**Mental Health** Anxiety & Withdrawal, Self harm, Depression, Low self esteem

## Considering the links between Domestic Abuse & Child Protection

### Links between domestic abuse and child abuse

Research has identified the link between child abuse and domestic abuse; one is often a predictor of the other.

Studies indicate that a significant number of men who are perpetrators of violence against their partners are also violent towards their children

**(Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force, 1988)**

From *Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Maternal & Child Health Nurse Training*

Where there is child abuse - and most especially physical child abuse - the likelihood is very high that the mother is being physically abused.

The experience of living with domestic abuse is a form of emotional abuse of children.

Where there is domestic abuse, the child abuse is much more likely to be physical (as opposed to non-physical) than where domestic abuse is not occurring.

Where there is domestic abuse, the father is typically also the child's abuser.

Abused mothers of abused children do not usually come from disorganised or violent family origin, casting doubt on the commonly held notion that family history predisposes women to domestic abuse and child abuse.

Mothers experiencing domestic abuse are more punitively treated (i.e. their children are removed) than mothers not experiencing domestic abuse, even when the child is not physically abused.

Hughes et al (1989) found that child abuse and women abuse occurred together in 40% - 60% of cases. 1 In 3 child protection cases show a history of domestic violence to the mother. (Hester and Pearson, 1998)

Adapted from *Children Living With Domestic Violence: Putting Men's Abuse of Women on the Child Care Agenda* Edited by Mullender, A and Morley, R

A woman cannot protect her child if she is not protected but if she asks for protection for herself, her child(ren) may be removed. Mothers may be reluctant to admit the abuse of children has occurred, which may be due to fear:

- that the children will automatically be taken away regardless of who did the abusing
- of further violence if they report the abuser
- of reprisals if she herself has abused the children
- of being seen as having failed as a parent
- of not being able to retrieve the relationship if they report the abuser

Intervention should empower mothers to seek new ways to protect themselves and their children. The focus should be on having a woman regain control of her life in a way that protects her and her children and does not require continued protective intervention for the children, unless they are at risk from the mother.

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