

CHILDREN ARE REAL VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Witnessing violence can be intensely traumatic for kids, especially for those who see it happen over and over. **“It can affect a child’s development to have his or her brain in a constant state of heightened stress”**, explained Jack Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. **“They inevitably have trouble learning, are subject to chronic disease, and don’t live as long”**.

Studies show that 3-4 million children between the ages of 3-17 are at risk of exposure to domestic violence each year. United States Government statistics say that 95% of domestic violence cases involve women victims of male partners. The children of those women often witness the violence.

Witnessing can mean **SEEING** and **HEARING** the actual incidents of physical/and or sexual abuse. It can mean experiencing the threats, fighting, and many acts of violence. Children may **OBSERVE** the aftermath of physical abuse such as blood, bruises, tears, torn clothing, and broken items. The children are also aware of their mother’s fearfulness when the abuser leaves and threatens to do more harm when he returns.

Children who are exposed to domestic violence become fearful and anxious themselves. They are many times on guard, watching and waiting for the event to occur. They never know what will trigger the abuse, and therefore, they never feel safe. They are always worried for themselves, their mother, and their siblings. They may feel worthless and powerless.

These same children also carry a heavy burden of guilt and shame, according to Liz Roberts, deputy CEO at Safe Horizon, a nonprofit that works with domestic violence victims in New York City. **“They may believe that they caused the violence, or that they should have been able to stop it. Some kids may even start to mimic the abusive parent’s behavior as they get older, becoming aggressive and bullying their**

peers. Boys are more likely to be violent with their partners when they start to date”, Roberts said, “and girls are at an increased risk of becoming victims of that abuse”.

Therefore, the cycle of Domestic violence is passed from generation to generation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 4 women will be a victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in her lifetime, making it a grave public health issue. The effects on the children who are victimized by these violent acts that are perpetrated upon mostly women are great. But, help is available:

- Thurston- Safeplace a Rape Relief and Womens Shelter Services Crisis (360) 754-6300 or (800) 364-1776, V/TTY 24 Hours safeplace@tss.net
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 24 hours everyday, 800-799-7233 or 800-787-3224 (TTY).
- Teen Dating Violence Hotline, LovesRespect.org – call, chat, or text, 24 hours everyday, 866-331-9474.
- The StrongHearts Native Helpline, 9am-5:30pm M-F, 844-762-8483.
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline Deaf Services, 855-812-1001(videophone) or 800-787-3224 (TTY) anytime. Live Chat every day 7am – 2am.
- Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline, 8am-5pm every day, 800-562-6025.

For the sake of future generations, LET’S STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!