

Domestic Violence and Its Impacts on Children: A Concise Review of Past Literature

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Abstract

Studies on domestic violence are largely of the opinion that women or wives are the most affected. As it can often be seen that activities involving women are victims of this incident, but in fact, domestic violence affects all family members, especially children. But they always get help after women, and the impact activities on children are less and less widely discussed. Children are valuable for national development, but domestic violence is detrimental to children; it results in them being in a stressful environment, where they are usually overcome by anxiety, anger and fear. Therefore, children are as vulnerable to domestic violence as their mothers. To gain an overview of the issue, this research aims at concisely reviewing the impact of seeing and falling victim to domestic violence on children. This study focuses on literature relevant to the impact of domestic violence on children, in which children who experience domestic violence do not experience a sense of security, warmth, and love. In fact, domestic violence is also one of the problems that lead children to misbehave such as disobedience, criminality, alcohol addiction, etc. The literature review reveals that domestic violence has consequences on a child's physical, mental, family, and educational relationships.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Domestic abuse, Family violence, Family relationships, Children abuse

Introduction

Domestic violence has been a persistent problem in Thai society and is likely to continue to rise (Suman & Na Chiangmai, 2020). Domestic violence is an act of destructive physical and mental harm and neglect among family members; it may include spouses, children, relatives and any person dependent on the same household. The problem of domestic violence can affect people of all genders, ages, and classes, and has a profound impact on the happiness of family members, especially for children, who are the second most affected by domestic violence after women or wives (Pingley, 2017). Children can recognize and

understand situations based on what they have seen and remember stories that affect their bodies and minds (Øverlien, 2010; Mittal, 2020). Therefore, when a problem affects them, they will remember and be afraid of it. Subsequently, it is undeniable that domestic violence have an impact on them. However, they always come after women for getting helps, and the impact activities on children are less and less widely discussed.

The effects of domestic violence are highly influential on children and can result in emotional problems, such as depression, emotional confusion, nervousness, fear, possible adaptation problems, difficulty and willingness in socializing with colleagues and friends (Mittal, 2020). Continually violent families affect the perceptions and attitudes of children such that those children start assuming violence as a normal and sociable behavior (Thornton, 2014; Lloyd, 2018). As children enter adolescence, they may become more aggressive and violent and fight with friends, where they are more likely to continue violence (Pingley, 2017; Weithornet et al., 1999). For some children, the problem can lead to depression, a state of a person that can lead to serious issues, such as neurosis, psychosis, and suicide (Lloyd, 2018).

Given the serious consequences of domestic violence on children, literature on this issue is sparse and lacks extensive review (Kertesz et al., 2021). To fulfil the knowledge paucity and provide a summarizing review on the issues, the purpose of this research is to concisely explore the effects of domestic violence on children. It is hoped that this research can articulate the impact of domestic violence on children and help reduce ignorance of children from domestic violence.

This academic paper is organized as follows. The first section introduces and defines domestic violence and its consequences. Then, the different aspects of several effects that have been derived from domestic violence are examined. The last section discusses and concludes what has been reviewed throughout the paper.

Theoretical framework

Domestic violence is a global problem among families. Domestic violence can happen to anyone from any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, couples living together, or couples dating. Domestic violence also affects people of all classes and educational levels (English et al., 2003; Kertesz et al., 2021). This violence has many forms which are physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and verbal patterns. It not only hurts the women, but it also affects children. Domestic violence creates insecurity for children because the home is a place where children feel they are safe, but if domestic violence occurs, the home is no longer a safe place for them.

Domestic violence is usually a result of misunderstandings and conflicts between a husband and wife; they often do not realize that their behavior actually affects people living with them, especially their children. It cannot be denied that domestic violence occurs because all family members are the ones most affected by that situation. Kertesz et al. (2021) stated that most domestic violence victims are women or mothers, and when children see their mothers being hurt, they feel pain and anger. The impacts that domestic violence has on children are still being ignored. During domestic violence, some children confront problems they have not

caused, and situations they cannot avoid or find a way out from can make them feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable.

Frequent violence in a family can be caused by a number of related factors such as the family history of the offender who themselves suffered from violence in their childhood, which regulate their current behavior (English et al., 2003; Kertesz et al., 2021). Domestic violence can take the form of physical or verbal abuse within the family. Domestic violence may arise due to conflicts or improper communication between spouses; additionally, the stress of a parent may be a factor leading to the problem of domestic violence for children (Pingley, 2017). Domestic violence is caused by numerous factors and, consequently, affects children and family members a lot. If it is detected and prevented from the beginning, it will reduce the potential of things getting out of hand.

1) Violence

This term refers to extremely violent words or actions that are intended to harm people or are likely to cause damage (Kertesz et al., 2021). Some forms of violence are the result of different thoughts and beliefs, or it can be caused by an abnormal mental state. The World Health Organization (WHO) provides the definition of violence as “intentionally manifested action, coercion, empowerment against oneself and others to cause injury, death, shock or being abandoned (World Health Organization, 2021).” According to Catani et al. (2008), Hornor (2005), Mittal (2020), and Weithorn et al. (1999), and violence can be categorized into three types according to the method used to express it. The three types are as follows.

1.1) Physical violence

Physical violence refers to injury by an offender in the form of flogging, kicking, biting, or other means that cause injury such as fracture, bleeding, bruising, and complete exposure to toxins. Any controversy that takes place has to be classified as a non-accident event for it to be deemed as physical violence (Mittal, 2020).

1.2) Sexual violence

According to Kertesz et al. (2021), sexual violence refers to actions intended to use the act as a tool to meet the offender’s sexual needs, including forcing for sex, intimidating, or seducing.

1.3) Psychological violence

Psychological violence refers to abuse of the mind controlling it, causing a person’s humiliation and resulting in the feelings of a sense of impairment or degradation of humanity (Chemtob, 2004; Thornton, 2014).

2) Definition of domestic violence

Domestic violence is a global problem among families. Domestic violence can happen to anyone from any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender, and it can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, couples living together, or couples

dating. Domestic violence also affects people of all classes and educational levels (English et al., 2003; Kertesz et al., 2021). Domestic violence has many forms which are physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and verbal. It not only hurts the women, but it also affects children. Domestic violence creates insecurity for children because the home is a place where children feel they are safe, but if domestic violence occurs, the home is no longer a safe place for them.

Domestic violence: Consequences on children

Domestic violence affects children via numerous aspects: physical, mental, family relationships, as well as awareness and education (Kertesz et al., 2021; Pingley, 2017). These effects can lead to different and unexpected behavior in children, such as aggressive behavior in society. Regarding the literature review, impacts of domestic violence on children can be grouped into four categories: physical effects, psychological effects, relationship effects, and educational effects.

1) Physical Effects

This effect can occur when children try to help or protect someone, or try to stop their parents from fighting and clearly see if the child is directly affected or assaulted. The direct and immediate physical effects that can happen in domestic violence include injuries such as bruises, fractures, and teeth and hair loss. This is clear evidence that the effects of domestic violence also have a huge effect on mental health and may lead to increased use of alcohol, drugs, and other substances (Katz et al., 2007; Lloyd, 2018; Pingley, 2017; Weithorn et al., 1999). In fact, if the substance or alcohol gets in the body of a child, it has a huge impact; it could affect the brain, which can harm the memory of the children and affect their behavior or systems within the body, such as slowing things down, including deteriorating metabolism in the body (Holt et al., 2008; Katz et al., 2007).

Katz et al. (2007) added that children may get involved with them due to stress or gaining their parents' attention. In addition to physical deterioration, it can lead to loss of personality and lack of consciousness, as well as lead to accidents in extreme cases. Ultimately, these things can harm children (Mahapatro, 2012). Likewise, Mahapatro (2018) stated that one of the most evident physical effects of a child's manifestation is their behaviors. A child's experience of domestic violence can make them display more violent behavior to people around them; they tend to be ignorant of the right ways to deal with people, as they think that domestic violence is the normal behavior, eventually leading to aggressive behavior (Lloyd, 2018; Kertesz et al., 2021).

2) Psychological effects

According to Lloyd and Brustia (2018), this effect is very dangerous for children because the psychological effects are complex and can be silent in some cases. It is undeniable that any form of domestic violence will certainly have an impact on the mental state of the child, and

children affected by this can behave in two different ways: express a feeling or do not express a feeling.

2.1) Express a feeling

Children can express their feelings to friends or someone who makes them feel safe and they can tell stories to (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 1999; Kertesz et al., 2021; Øverlien, 2010). This group may not be as much at risk of harming themselves from domestic violence as the other groups of children. It cannot be denied that there are very few children who express their feelings, as they feel that it is embarrassing and want to hide the issues they face. They can express themselves in various ways such as crying, harsh or rude speech, screaming, and destroying things; children let out their uncomfortable feelings through such behavior.

2.2) Do not express a feeling

Psychologically affected children who choose not to express their feelings are at high risk, as their family or friends will not be able to know exactly what they are feeling and thinking. Children who choose to hide the pain they were subjected to due to domestic violence may fall into depression, causing harm to their psyche. Depression can cause them to injure themselves and block the good things around them, which will leave them stuck in that pain; the worst thing is that they commit suicide to escape the pain (Chemtob, 2004; Kertesz et al., 2021; Rollè et al., 2019).

3) Relationship effects

It is undeniable that every life has a relationship that cannot be avoided. Family and other personal relationships with domestic violence can cause children, who are victims of domestic violence, to avoid having good relationships with other people because family relationships make them anxious about their relationship with other people (Holt et al., 2008; Rollè et al., 2019; Mittal, 2020).

3.1) Family relationship

The family is the starting point for any relationship regarding children. The meaning of the word 'parent' for all children is the person who can protect and comfort them. However, when domestic violence occurs, children lose faith in the relationship. Children may judge things differently than adults. They judge situations according to what they see and, hence, perceive, as their brains are not developed enough to understand the depth of the relationship (Mittal, 2020). There is no denying that when a fight or domestic violence takes place, parents often ask their children to choose between father or mother, which creates confusion and pressure on them, as this problem is not directly related to children; however, it has a direct impact on children, at which point they may think that their parents are not interested in their feelings, and if this happens more and more often, it will have a significant negative effect on family relationships such as the children choose to ignore the domestic violence they experience and do not care about their family relationships (Thornton, 2014).

On the other hand, children who are unable to ignore domestic violence and continue to confuse their minds may start copying violent behavior, in order to solicit attention

from their parents (Thornton, 2014). They think that if their parents can do it, they can too. They think that this action can help their parents turn their attention and try to stop the domestic violence, to make their children stop copying behavior.

3.2) Interpersonal relationship

Domestic violence often takes place in today's society, but it has never been accepted. The worst thing is that children are being bullied and are socially unacceptable simply because of problems they did not cause, and there is no denying that children who are victims of domestic violence are negatively perceived by society; this may cause the children to feel ashamed (Pingley, 2017; Weithorn et al., 1999). These problems prevent children from making friends; hence, they choose to live alone, as domestic violence leads them to poor family relationships, leading them to feel scared in every relationship. According to Thornton (2014), in other cases, children may not be socially acceptable due to their aggressive behavior and inability to have a good relationship with other people. Lloyd (2018) stated that this misbehavior can only be a shield to the fear or trauma of children who have been victims of domestic violence.

4) Education effects

Education is another important aspect for children; it helps them shape their future. Education is now accessible to all children, as everyone has limitless opportunities. Children's education will continue to be beneficial to them with the support of their parents. Basically, all children are interested in getting an education and feel that school is a place where they can meet another form of society: their friends and teachers. If something detrimental occurs in a child's life, such as domestic violence, it could impact their feelings and body, resulting in the decline of their interest in education (Lloyd, 2018; Weithorn et al., 1999). A good family relationship helps a child develop a sound mind, resulting in better education; adverse family relationships that include domestic violence may not directly affect a child's education; however, they might cause effects which, in turn, have an impact on education.

4.1 Physical effects affecting education

Most domestic violence victims are women or mothers (English et al., 2003; Kertesz et al., 2021). Domestic violence may not have much of a direct impact on a child's education, but when a child sees their mother suffer and they are unable to do anything about it, they might harm their own body in order to vent their anger; if a child does harm themselves, they will not be able to go to school, hence affecting their education. The scars or wounds will take time to get better, and until they do get better, their studies will remain discontinued (Hornor, 2005; Lloyd, 2018). In the worst case, their studies have to be stopped completely, and it is unfortunate that a child will have to destroy their future because of domestic violence.

4.2) Emotional effects affecting education

Emotions are both positive and negative, and they can both support and disrupt educational interests. Education in itself is difficult and can cause stress and pressure on students; therefore, managing emotions is very difficult for school-going children who suffer domestic violence. As mentioned above, schooling is already stressful and exhausting for

children, and if they continue to experience the stress of domestic violence, it may result in children being ignorant of their studies and showing adverse behavior (Catani et al., 2008; English et al., 2003). They will not be in the mood to engage in activities and ignore learning (Øverlien, 2010). The apparent emotion of the children in this dire situation is only the boredom of their lives, and the conclusion of their education is withdrawal.

Domestic violence affects a lot of people in the world. However, children deserve the most attention due to this prevailing issue. This is because violent families are unable to train their children and then they will feel a lack of warmth, care, love, unity, and trust for each other. This type of family will not be able to live a normal life in society.

Based on the research reviews, the issues of domestic violence affecting children are summarized in Figure 1 and Tables 1 and 2.

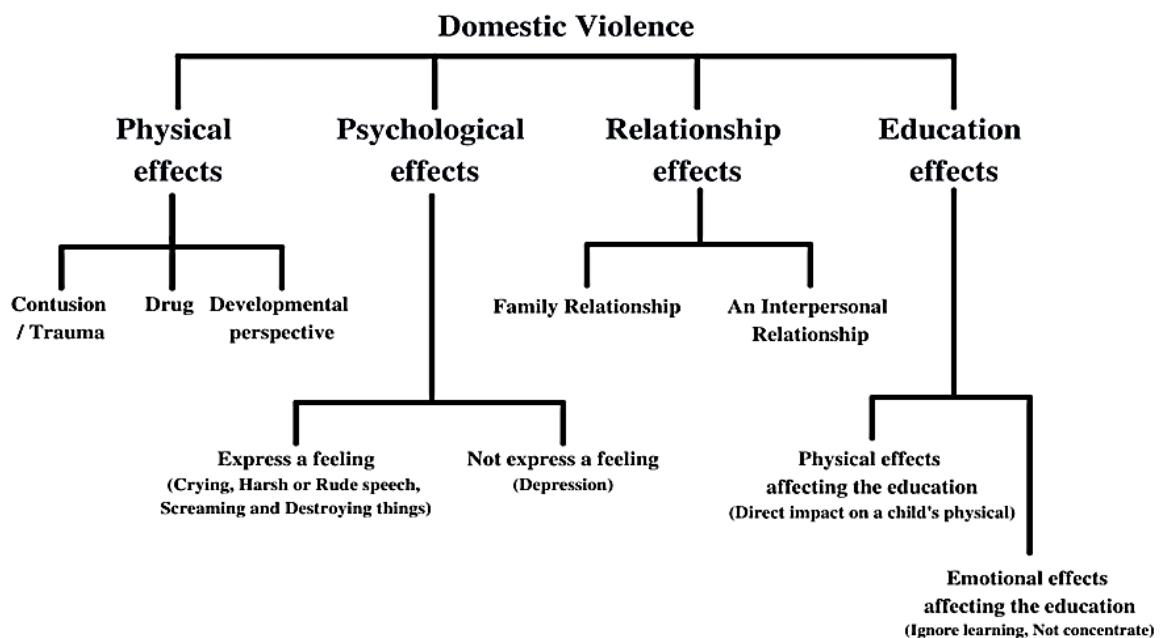


Figure 1 Flow Chart representing impacts of domestic violence on children

Table 1 Impacts of domestic violence on children related to physical effects and psychological effects

Authors	Physical effects			Psychological effects	
	Contusion/ Trauma	Mis behavior (Drug, criminal)	Developmental perspective	Express a feeling (Crying, Harsh or Rude speech, Screaming and Destroying things)	Not express a feeling (Depression)
Graham- Bermann and Hughes (1999)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Weithorn et al. (1999)		✓	✓	✓	✓
English et al. (2003)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chemtob (2004)			✓	✓	✓
Hornor (2005)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Katz et al. (2007)			✓	✓	✓
Catani et al. (2008)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Holt et al. (2008)	✓		✓		✓
Meltzer et al. (2009)			✓		
Øverlien (2010)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Thornton (2014)				✓	✓
Pingley (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lloyd and Brustia (2018)	✓	✓	✓		✓
Rollè et al. (2019)			✓		✓
Mittal (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 Impacts of Domestic Violence on children in the part of relationship effects and education effects

Authors	Relationship effects		Education effects	
	Family Relationship	An Interpersonal Relationship	Physical effects affecting the education (Health problems, contusions, etc.)	Emotional effects affecting the education (Ignore learning, Not concentrate)
Graham-Bermann and Hughes (1999)		✓		✓
Weithorn et al. (1999)		✓	✓	✓
English et al. (2003)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hornor (2005)			✓	
Katz et al. (2007)		✓		
Catani et al. (2008)	✓		✓	✓
Holt et al. (2008)	✓	✓		
Meltzer et al. (2009)	✓		✓	
Øverlien (2010)		✓		
Thornton (2014)	✓			✓
Pingley (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lloyd (2018)	✓	✓	✓	
Rollè et al. (2019)	✓	✓	✓	
Mittal (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓

Discussion and conclusion

Domestic violence is becoming a chronic problem in almost every society, where it results in pain and suffering, both physical and mental, and many other aspects including the impact on children. This research is to concisely investigate the impact of domestic violence on children. Domestic violence can affect individuals, families, and society. However, the focus is on the impact of domestic violence on children because they are affected even though

they have done nothing wrong, but they cannot avoid or solve the problem. The only thing they can do is fall victim to the incomprehensibility of their parents.

According to Table 1 and 2, most of the research being studied has concluded that domestic violence affects children in many ways including effects on physical, psychological, relationships, and education. All of the studies that were conducted were referring to “physical effects”; however, each study discussed a further breakdown of physical effects. Most of the studies show that physical effects in the forms of direct child abuse can cause trauma and pain. Some studies reveal that domestic violence affects the behavioral changes in children, which includes crime and leads their lives towards drugs and alcohol. They do this because they lack a warm relationship from their parents.

Most of the studies regarding Table 1 and 2 also show that domestic violence affects the development of children, for example, lack of food intake leads to inadequate nutrition and insomnia, which may occur due to the stress of children in a violent domestic environment. It's not only the physical effects that are getting attention but also psychological effects, which has been discussed in several studies mentioned in the preceding sections. From the research reviewed, each study puts a lot of emphasis on the minds of children. It is mainly divided into two areas: children who express their feelings and those who do not discuss their feelings. Children may express their feelings emotionally with someone that they feel safe with; however, they may exhibit other emotional and behavioral expressions such as crying, screaming, and destroying things. Most studies mentioned that children in this group are not at greater risk of depression because they are more willing to expose their feelings; however, they are at a greater risk of mimicking misbehavior. Researchers are most interested in children who do not express their feelings. These children are at risk of developing depression; undeniably, depression can lead them to the most serious actions, including self-harm and suicide.

Another effect that is mentioned is the impact of both family relationship and interpersonal relationship. Domestic violence has a direct impact on children's family relationships. The word family for children is a safe space for them, but when families are unable to make children safe with them, children are more likely to avoid talking to their parents and confine themselves to the pain. Due to domestic violence, parents lack the ability and concentration to nurture and raise children, which, in turn, leads children to fear building relationships with others. Most of the research studies mentioned children in a domestic violence environment are not very socially acceptable. These children are constantly being teased about their family, and this has forced them to avoid making relationships with anyone, hence it destroys their childhood joy.

The last factor impacted by domestic violence on children is education. When a child's body and mind are not in a good condition, their learning will definitely be affected. It is undeniable that trauma is the most evident from an unhappy family; it makes children feel embarrassed and afraid of going out and facing the world. Furthermore, it gradually devours their ability to study because the trauma takes time to heal. In some extreme cases, it may even lead to complete withdrawal from education. Researchers are also interested in studying cases of children who are affected by domestic violence in their minds, emotionally; however, it

cannot be denied that emotional and mental damage is as bad as any other effect, and it may also affect education adversely. Several studies conclude that when the mental status of children is impaired, the ability to study is also reduced and some withdraw from education.

The literature review shows that all effects are related; when one effect occurs, inevitably, there will be another. In other words, when domestic violence occurs, family relationships deteriorate automatically. This leaves children with wounds in their minds and, in some cases, wounds on bodies. When their minds and bodies are abused, it affects their behavior and education. In addition, domestic violence affects children and those who have been offended.

Another side of impact that is still less talked about is social impact. It includes the ineffectiveness of the law that does nothing if there is a quarrel within the family, which is viewed as normal by a part of society. Therefore, it makes domestic violence a problem that occurs in all eras. It is therefore imperative for society to understand this issue clearly and not be indifferent; it should be recognized by all parties of the society. The law should be strict and decisive and focus more directly on the children. People in society should be actively involved in informing by helping children when they see problems without hesitation and do not think that this problem is unrelated to them. The problem may be reduced if the authorities are notified of domestic violence, and it is important to be aware of preventive and corrective measures so that these problems do not reoccur in the future.

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