

The Kaleidoscope of Family Violence

Child Witnesses and their Parents Perception of Violence in the Home


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Objective



To ascertain congruence of parents (abuser and survivor's) perception of children's witnessing of violence in the home in relation to their children experiences of it



WHO ARE THESE FAMILIES

9 families comprising those who use violence (abuser)
those who experience violence (survivors)
those who witness violence (children)

All clients of a specialized service for family and interpersonal violence

- 6 mandatory clients
- 3 voluntary

Age

Age range of children : 8 -12 years

Average age of survivors : 40 years

Average age of abuser : 45 years

Types of Families

Intact families: 7

Blended Families : 1

Remarried families: 1

What Do Children Do When Violence Erupts?

Children (Witnesses)

- Direct Physical Intervention
- Distracting/Protecting Younger siblings
- Ignoring
- Withdrawing out of fear
- Getting external Help
- Parents direct them to bedroom
- Cries

Survivors

- Direct Intervention
- Ignores
- Hides
- Goes to bedroom
- Comforts mother

Abusers

- Cries
- Watches silently
- Did not notice child's reaction
- Does not think children understand

Emotional Reactions of Children When the Violence Occurs

Children (Witnesses)

- Body Cues:
“Painful Stomach”
- Feelings:
 - Fear
 - Nervousness
 - Sadness
 - Anger
 - Noisy

Survivors

- Feelings:
 - Fear
 - Envy
 - Upset
 - Sadness
 - Envy
- Not quite sure what children are feeling

Abusers

- Feelings:
 - Fear
 - Sadness
- Speculation as not sure not what children are feeling

Locus of Responsibility When Violence Occurs

Children (Witnesses)

- It's my fault – 3
- It's not my fault - 6

Survivors

- They do not think it's their fault – ALL

Abusers

They do not think it's their fault – 2

They think it's their fault
-2

Not sure what they think -
- 5

Do children/siblings get hurt in the process

Children (Witnesses)

- Yes – 6
- No - 3

Survivors

- Yes -1
- No - 8

Abusers)

- No – 8
- Not available - 1

Worst Incident of violence witnessed

Children (Witnesses)

1. 2004 Mo Punched in the eye. Bruised eye
2. 2001. Pushed mo, destroyed property. G/fa hurt in process & bled.
June 2006 Father throw mo clothes out of the flat, damaged property. Police were called
3. December 2005. S/fa slapped, twisted mo hand. They struggled, she fell & hit her head. Ran to toilet to call police

Survivors

1. Not really – child was sent in room.
2. Children should have forgotten incidents . However, in June damaged children's property
3. Feels that child wants attention from fa. Worst: s/fa was stalking mo and child asked mo to take cover at a another block

Abusers

- 1 Victim blaming.
2. Quarrels and throwing things. Happens all the time
3. Arguments, screams

Worst Incident of violence witnessed

Children (Witnesses)

4. Fought twice. Last a month ago. Mum slapped fa on chest, fa kicked and punched mo eyes –bruised eye. Mo called police
5. 1st incident – P3 (9yrs old. Mo was beaten, hit head on mirror and fainted
6. Fa came home and proudly announced that he had slapped mo in public. Mo left home

Survivors

4. March 06 – Fa punched mo in eye. Eyes bruised. Child did not sleep- was scared. Police called
5. 2003. Was hit and fainted. Children work her up, crying.
6. Not sure if kids are aware when fa threatened to ensure that whole family dies.

Abusers

4. Don't know. These things don't happen
5. Don't know what they think. When they fight children are crying and afraid. We seldom fight.
6. Children may not be able to distinguish which was the worst.

Worst Incident of violence witnessed

Children (Witnesses)

7. 2005 – when fa threw fan, hit mo & she bled. After that mo left home for 2 days.

8. March 2006- fighting, pushing, mo threw handphone. Fa punched mo in nose. She was in room, saw bloodied nose. “I run take tissue”. Recently he threw hanger at mum, she threw back

Survivors

7. Child did not see much , heard her cry. Recent incident found child under the bed. Child saw her all covered with blood. Followed her to hospital

8. 2 yrs ago, pulled chair, earring, face was bruised. Son screaming and ran inside his room.

24/7 Fa accused her of infidelity, threw hanger at her, slapped, pulled her hair, strangled her

Abusers

8. Arguments

8 Took phone and broke it

Worst Incident of violence witnessed

Children (Witnesses)

9. Saw from last year. Most scary 2006. They quarreled. Mum kept quiet, fa pulled mo's nose and threatened to hit her if she continued to remain silent. It happened at the traffic light. We were scared we kept quiet.

Mothers (survivors)

9. 3 incidents within 2 weeks. Early July p pinched her nose at the roadside- bruised nose. When they reached home – slapped her

13 July – pulled hair and slapped her at roadside. At home pulled hair and let her go she fell, slapped and hit on hit. Made her kneel on floor and hit her. Asked children to go in room , they peeped but too scared to do anything.

Fathers (abusers)

9. Father not interviewed as he was stalking mother and children who had left home and were in hiding

Themes

1. Witnessing comprises,
 - Direct observation
 - Overhearing
 - Aftermath
2. Not much congruence between child's actual reported experience and parents understanding of their experiences
3. Survivors – slightly more sensitised to children's issues
(Assumption by parents that children know much less than the actually do)
4. Abusers seemed most unaware or tended to minimise their experiences

Themes (contd)

4. Parentified behaviour

5. Extreme emotions experienced by children – no outlet. No communication about impact of violence on children. Adults tend to triangulate children

6. Powerlessness in home manifested in

Cutting behaviour

Bullying behaviour

7. Children intervene and are caught in the crossfires – parents unaware



Implications for practice

1. Holistic intervention with FAMILIES living with violence
2. Focus on congruence of families understanding of the issues

Limitations of the study

1. Pilot
2. Small sample
3. Findings cannot be generalised at this stage