

A survey of the literature on domestic violence literature review example

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



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Two individuals who decide to enter into a relationship, and get married or live together often to start a family, both intend to “ live happily ever after.” However, this is not always the case in our present society. Violence in the domicile has become more prevalent, either because there have been an increased number of reports or such cases have increased in frequencies. This paper looks into the existing body of literature to identify the areas which have been extensively studied. The findings of a select number of scholarly materials will be presented in the succeeding sections focusing on the following aspects: (a) definition of domestic violence; (b) effects of domestic violence on the family; (c) coping strategies of victims of domestic violence; and the (d) role of the state in addressing this issue.

Definition of domestic violence

An initial look at a number of books and journal articles shows that there is no single definition for domestic violence. Even authors acknowledge the fact

that there is no single, all encompassing definition. However, for purposes of identifying the issue that this paper talks about, the author selected the definition that is closest to this author's understanding of the issue.

Therefore, in this paper, domestic violence is defined as “ any incident of threatening behavior, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or who have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality” (Home Office, 2006 as cited in Pearson, Hester & Harwin, 2007, p. 18). Dodd (2009) enumerates the variety of behaviors that are referred to by the terms ‘ domestic violence and abuse’. These “ verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, manipulative behavior, physical and sexual assault, rape destructive criticism, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation and harassment” (p. 21).

Figures from the UK show that “ 16% of all violent crime and will affect one in four women and one in six men in their lifetime” (p. 21). Domestic violence cuts across social class, age groups, lifestyles, race, and even sexuality. Dodd (2009) points out, however, that “ the vast majority of such violence, and the most severe and chronic incidents, are perpetrated by men against women and their children” (p. 22).

In the US, statistics show that during the period of 2001 and 2005, 12. 7 percent of the women (for every 1000 residents) whose income was less than \$7, 500 were victims of domestic violence. In comparison, the victimization rate for women living in households that have incomes over \$50, 000 was only 2. 0 percent annually (Hetling & Zhang, 2010). Although, it cannot be discounted that there are female perpetrators of domestic

violence, the information in this paper only include male perpetrators. Wetzel & Ross (1983), in their study of battering and domestic violence, enumerated the characteristics of a “ batterer.” According to the researchers, men who batter would usually possess several of the following traits. These are jealousy, control over partner, drastic personality changes [being very affectionate on one occasion, but then becomes violent at another time], bad temper, would have lots of legal problems, blames others constantly, engages in verbal abuse too, has a history of family violence, becomes increasingly brutal when wife is pregnant or has just given birth, would keep on denying his actions, and engages in the cycle of violence and remorse. Their study also lists down the personalities and traits of women who have been battered. The main purpose of this study was to present the importance of counseling and the different stages through which a woman goes through to break from the bondage of battery.

Effects of domestic violence

Domestic violence is a traumatic experience that affects even the unborn. Levendosky et. al (2011) cited previous studies which suggest that the development of unborn child is affected by the stress experienced when the mother experiences domestic violence. Shore (2003 as cited in Levendosky et al, 2011) that the trauma of domestic violence as well as maternal stress” may affect the brain development and permanently influence the child’s responses to stress after birth” (p. 399). Their study had 150 women participants and their children. The most notable results in their study include (a) “ domestic violence during pregnancy was a risk factor for

insecure attachment at age 1” (p. 408). The researchers highlighted the contribution of their study to policy which “ emphasize the importance of training physicians and other health care professions working with pregnant women to conduct adequate assessments for domestic violence” (p. 407). Domestic violence negatively affects a person’s self worth and sense of security. The 1983 study of Wetzel and Ross enumerated the effects of domestic abuse on the woman. These effects include having an (a) “ unshakable faith that things will improve or feels that there is absolutely nothing she can do about her situation,” (b) “ feels she has no basic right— often not even the right not to be hit,” (c) “ suffers low self-esteem,” and (d) “ doubts her own sanity” (p. 425).

The effect of domestic abuse on mothers is serious. Apart from the physical injuries such as bruised body parts, broken bones and teeth, injuries of internal organs, problems in the reproductive parts, even miscarriages, the abuse leaves a lasting impact on the woman’s psychological health.

According to Dodd (2009), in addition to the above-mentioned injuries, the psychiatric conditions may result from the trauma. Women victims may become depressed, anxious, and highly stressed. In fact, “ suicide attempts are higher amongst those who have been abused compared to those who have not” (p. 22). According to the UK Department of Health in 2000, “ domestic violence is a factor of at least one in four suicide attempts by women” (Dodd, 2009, p. 22).

Women who are battered are not the only ones severely affected or traumatized during incidents of domestic abuse. Due to the psychological stress and physical injuries, the mothers’ capacity to exercise effective

parenting is minimized. Children suffer because they do not receive the necessary support and guidance they need as growing individuals. The nurture that children are supposed to be receiving from their parents is greatly sacrificed. Children who witness domestic abuse may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological effects. Studies have also shown that children in these situations are at a higher risk of being abused themselves. Research conducted by Peeled (1997, as cited in Antle, Barbee, Yankeelov & Bledsoe, 2010, p. 57) showed that “ 50% of fathers and 24% of mothers involved in domestic violence abuse their children (rates 5 times higher than the general population).” When domestic violence becomes a frequent occurrence in the homes which results in children regarding it as the norm, specifically because they have not been exposed to an environment whereby violence is absent.

Coping strategies of victims of domestic violence

The women and children who are within an abusive relationship would tend to endure the abuses especially if there is no clear alternative to the current situation. Children who are of school-age may prefer to stay away from their residences as long as possibly, dreading the hours when they have to be at home and become recipients of abusive acts. Since violence is very contagious, members of the household may likewise exhibit abusive to their peers or siblings. Dodd (2009) conducted a study among a group of mothers and their young children, both of whom are exposed to domestic abuse. Part of this study was to investigate the effects of a therapeutic group work. This intervention was initiated to “ promote positive mother-child relationships

and to enhance the psychological well-being of mothers and their young children who have experienced abuse” (p. 21).

Victims of domestic violence are often in situations where they would find it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to report to the police or seek help. The study of Antle et al (2010) shows that the mandatory reporting law of domestic violence is a legislation welcomed by victims of domestic violence. The study was done in the US State of Kentucky, an area where such a law exists. The women in the study (many of whom are still in an abusive relationship) feel that the mandatory reporting law makes them feel supported and not isolated. They also welcome the intervention. Counseling is one of the most effective way of coping with domestic violence. During counseling the victims go through several stages to process their experience. They then decide whether they remain in the abusive relationship or they opt to leave the perpetrator.

Role of the state in addressing domestic violence

In line with the State’s duty to protect its citizens, policies have been formulated to address the issue of domestic violence. Although in the past, issues in the homes were considered private matters, domestic violence is now considered a crime. In the US, at least three legislations were passed by the Government to address the issue of domestic violence. The first of these was the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) was signed into law in 1984 which aims to “ help prevent domestic violence and provide shelter and related assistance for victims” (GAO, 2007, p. 1).

Ten years later, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was enacted in

1994. In 2006, another law was passed known as the Violence Against Women and DOJ Reauthorization Act of 2005. All these legislations allocated financial resources for the provision of services to victims, interventions to families, and the collection of much needed information about domestic violence. In 2007, the General Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report about the services provided to victims of domestic violence. This report shows that there are three agencies mandated to provide services for those affected by domestic violence. Among the programs being implemented are counseling, legal assistance, transitional housing, and financial assistance. Adelman (2004) looked into how the state has dealt with the domestic abuse issue. She uses a political economy approach to look at the issue. Her study, which focuses on the relationship between the state and the economy, “examines interlocking structural factors, changes over time, and differences across space, [and therefore] will contribute to the wide ranging, multidisciplinary field of domestic violence studies” (p. 61). The first thing she emphasized was that through the VAWA, domestic violence was criminalized. This legislation represented the government’s “commitment to protect the welfare of battered women” (p. 54).

The connection of battery to poverty is the second point that Adelman (2004) made in her paper. She claims that there are several ways by which the issue on domestic violence is interrelated with the issue of poverty. One is that battery perpetuates impoverishment because a woman may be prevented by the perpetrator from gaining an income or maintaining work or because of poverty a person’s economic mobility is limited. Despite domestic violence present in all social classes, there is evidence that “poor women

present higher levels of domestic violence” (p. 56). Another important point that Adelman (2004) makes is that the welfare system promotes “ family values” that identifies a two-parent household as the ideal which encourages “ women to marry in order to reduce their impoverishment” (p. 57). All these observations, made possible through the political economy approach, contribute to a deeper understanding about this social issue.

In order for government agencies to immediately provide the needed intervention, it is important that response units are present in strategic locations. The study of Hetling & Zhang, (2010) investigated whether the agencies tasked to respond to domestic violence incidents are placed in areas where they are needed. The researchers used the State of Connecticut as their unit of study and proceeded to carry out a regression analysis and their variables included reports of domestic violence and location of agency. Their study concluded that there was no relationship between presence of agency and rates of domestic violence. Their research pointed out that the “ established domestic violence agencies are not necessarily located in areas of great need,” however, future studies should also “ question scope, capacity, and location at the town and regional level” (p. 1161).

Conclusions

Domestic violence is a complex issue. There are many different aspects that contribute to its continuing presence in our present society. This paper has presented the different areas which have become the focus of study of scholars from different fields, be it social work, anthropology, education, criminal law, and medicine. The terms domestic violence and abuse refer to

behavior that is threatening or harms adults who have an intimate relationship with each other or are belonging to the same family in the household. Most often perpetrators of such abuse are men as manifested by statistics and incident reports. The abusive relationship have grave effects on women who suffer psychological trauma in addition to physical injuries. Children who witness such violence are also affected psychologically and may even experience post traumatic stress disorder. Children who live within the same households are also most likely to become victims of abuse. The role of the state and the government's interventions are explained in the last sections of the paper. All these different cited materials have shown that there remains a large space for more contributions to the body of literature. The definition is not even all encompassing. Acts considered abusive may vary from society or cultures. Effects may likewise not be entirely the same among different population. However, one thing remains: there is still much to be studied about this issue. Domestic violence is a topic that still offers a wide range of research possibilities for both academic and policy purposes.

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