

Impacts of domestic abuse on families



Domestic violence is any abusive behaviour used to control a spouse or partner. Women have been victims of such abuse for many years, and continue to be victimized not only physically, but psychologically (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016). Often times, domestic abuse begins due to the craving of being in control or power of one's spouse. The brutality of domestic violence in most cases often leads to conditions of psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. Battered Women's Syndrome and Stockholm Syndrome are two such psychological conditions which may result from traumatic events like domestic violence (Demarest, 2009). In addition to psychological impacts, domestic violence has its fair share of detrimental effects on families. In many cases, the ruthlessness of one partner has led to the dissolution of marriages. Divorce has become a common outcome of domestic abuse as partners become extremely intolerant of each other and the abusive relationship they share with each other. The lack of mutual respect and understanding in the relationship can become problematic and urge the couple to take this major step. Finally, the harsh atmosphere of domestic violence has a detrimental impact on children within the encompassing environment and their development. In a household where these issues occur, children tend to be the ones most negatively impacted (Child Violent Trauma Centre). The violent atmosphere may have short or long-term impacts on the social and emotional development of these children. This may include changed behavioural aspects or links to depression and/or anxiety (Domestic violence and children, 2019) (Child Violent Trauma Center). They also may be at risk of being abused as well. Therefore, domestic abuse is a widespread issue which can have numerous

profound impacts on families including psychological trauma, divorce and detrimental effects on children and their development.

In many cases, domestic violence leads to conditions of psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. Battered women's syndrome is a major form of PTSD these events can lead to. This syndrome is broken down into two stages. Battered Women Syndrome is a series of characteristics in women who are physically and psychologically abused by an important dominant male in their lives. These women learn helplessness and dependency; these characteristics may sometimes be originated from childhood (Campbell). A woman must experience two cycles before she can be labelled a "battered woman". These cycles are called the "Cycle of Violence" and "The Honeymoon Phase" (FindLaw). Within the first cycle are three phases: the tension building phase, active battering phase and calm loving respite phase (Villines, 2018). During the tension building phase, the victim is subjected to verbal abuse and minor battering incidents, such as slaps, pinches and psychological abuse (FindLaw). The active battering phase begins when the verbal abuse and minor battering evolve into an acute battering incident. The violence during this phase is unpredictable and harsh (Villines, 2018). According to statistics, the risk of the batterer murdering his victim is at its highest peak (FindLaw). The batterer puts his victim in a constant state of fear, and she is unable to control her partner's by utilizing techniques that worked in the tension building phase. The woman, realizing her lack of control, attempts to mitigate the violence by becoming passive (Villines, 2018). Moving on to the second stage, after the active battering phase ends, the cycle of violence enters the calm loving

respite phase or “honeymoon phase.” During this second stage, the abusive partner typically apologizes for his abusive behaviour and tries to convince the female that it will never happen again (FindLaw). The behaviour shown by the batterer in the honeymoon phase closely resembles the behaviour he exhibited when the couple first met and fell in love. The calm loving respite phase is the most psychologically victimizing phase because the abuser tends to trick the victim into believing that he has changed. On the other hand, the victim is thankful that the abusing has ended and believes it will not occur again. However, inevitably, the batterer begins to verbally abuse the victim and the cycle of abuse begins all over again (FindLaw) (Villines, 2018) (Campbell). After closely examining all stages of Battered Women’s Syndrome and each event that takes place within those stages, it is evident that it is a stage of great distress and trauma in a woman’s lifetime. The domestic abuse clearly impacts one’s mental and physical well-being due to the traumatic and brutal experiences they encounter within a toxic and abusive relationship. Battered Women’s Syndrome has various profound impacts on the partner being abused and familial atmosphere in general. Seeing one family member in distress or a state of depression impacts other family members, most importantly children in the household. The negative encompassing atmosphere will eventually impact their emotional well-being as well, which implies that they are also at risk of suffering from depression, anxiety, trauma, etc. Another psychological condition which may result from such harsh circumstances is Stockholm Syndrome. In Stockholm Syndrome, the victim is so petrified of the abuser that she becomes bonded with him in an effort to stop the abuse (Montaldo, 2018) (Demarest, 2009).

Unfortunately, in this situation, the victim tends to defend their abuser and

their actions. The risk in having this disorder is that the woman, subsequent to receiving such maltreatment for a drawn-out timeframe and finally leaving the relationship, may willingly return to her abusive partner (Lambert, 2018). Another downfall of this syndrome is that “ It includes sympathy and support for their captor’s plight and may even manifest in negative feelings toward officers who are trying to help the victims. Situations in which the victims have displayed this kind of response have included hostage situations, long-term kidnappings, etc”(Montaldo, 2018). This syndrome is proven to be extremely detrimental to a woman’s psychological well-being as she is not able to think logically for herself. Her ability to think becomes manipulated and impaired as she feels that it is in her best interest and her only option to stay with her abuser. The most concerning issue of one’s having this syndrome is feeling empathy for their abuser and portraying helplessness in the sense that they depend on the support of their abuser to survive (Montaldo, 2018).

The second impact it may make on family members is divorce. Relationships are all about mutual respect and trust. If the sense of understanding and respect is not present between two individuals in a relationship, it can become detrimental towards their relationship. Domestic abuse is an example of such behaviour in a relationship which can and has led to divorce in the past. When a couple chooses to separate/divorce, emotions tend to run rampant and the effects of such decisions on a family are not considered (Greco & Desroches, 2015). Due to these reasons, divorce has become such a controversial/debatable topic since it results in the loss of family structure and foundation. Although domestic abuse is such a delicate topic and should

be considered an acceptable outcome of abusive relationships/marriages, it is still frowned upon in certain societies. The negative impacts of these decisions, however, still affect family structure and relationships (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016). It can become very difficult for one partner, which is typically the woman in these scenarios, to raise their children as a single parent. In certain situations, such as the female partner lacking adequate education, these decisions lead the woman to homelessness and deprivation of daily necessities (Berlin, 2017) (Woolley, 2015). According to studies and surveys performed by Homeless Link and Crisis, divorce is the number one reported cause of lost accommodations. A report from the Parliament of Canada also states that “marital breakdown is a key “risk factor” for homelessness. After divorce, 40% of women are in worse economic circumstances and are three times as likely to live in poverty” (Woolley, 2015). For women, divorces are often traumatic, life-altering circumstances that contribute to “homelessness for many reasons including loss of combined income, legal fees, extra payments, and so on” (Woolley, 2015). Also, women who experience domestic abuse might resort to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism, ultimately becoming addicted to such substances. By examining the links of divorce to poverty and homelessness for women, one can conclude that divorce is also a very traumatic event which brings along with it many downfalls, especially for the female partners within a marital bond. The dissolution of a marriage undoubtedly affects the partners; however, on a larger scale, it also deeply affects the extended family of a married couple (Rosmann, 2018). In some cases, the family members of each spouse may feel like they have to take sides (Andrews, 2016). This may be difficult, confusing and may also adversely affect the

children too. Although their main motive initially might have been to treat both separating partners similarly, the relationships of extended family and friends with the formerly married couple change over time (Rosmann, 2018). Resentment toward one of the separated partners can set in, as well as many other emotional shifts. When the divorce is a result of an abusive relationship, anger is a necessary stage of adjustment for most extended family and friends (Greco & Desroches, 2015) (Rosmann, 2018). There may also be the involvement of emotional trauma from seeing how much their loved one has suffered in their relationship. Divorce affects more than just a couple. Children also involuntarily bear the consequences of divorce, which is why parents often have trouble making such a delicate decision.

Understanding the impact parental separation has on children is essential because it aids in explaining a child's behaviour (Andrews, 2016). A divorce can affect a child psychologically, intellectually, and even behaviorally. Children can suffer physiologically from things like depression, intellectually by having trouble in school and behaviorally by having trouble in social settings (Berlin, 2017). These issues can have a vast impact on a child's daily life, behaviour, and development. Being exposed to such a life-changing event at a younger age may affect how they handle future relationships as well. Many children begin to avoid forming a marital bond in their near/distant future due to the horrific events they may have witnessed as young children. The trauma of watching their mother being abused on a daily basis may follow them for the rest of their lives and these memories could potentially become a source of disbelief in marital bonds for children. They may begin to believe that there is no such thing as a "happily married" couple. On the other hand, a young girl who has witnessed her mother being

abused may also feel terrified to go on and marry another man in the future with the fear that her partner will also abuse her the same way. Another effect domestic abuse can have on children who witness their parent being abused is become an abuser themselves in a future relationship. This relates back to the famous analogy of children behaving like sponges and “absorbing” things from their surrounding environment. This analogy is essentially discussing the idea of children learning from their encompassing environment and caregivers; whichever behaviour and mentality they witness adults around them portraying, they will go on to portray the same behaviour in the future. If they see their parent abusing their partner, their behaviour and actions will be influenced by this and they will continue to do the same in the future to their partner.

In addition to psychological trauma and divorce, domestic violence can also have a high degree of detrimental effects on children. In fact, research makes it evident that children are impacted the most in a household where domestic violence occurs (Child Violent Trauma Centre). Such violence could have short term and long-term consequences and could affect the social and emotional adjustment/development of the children (Domestic violence and children, 2019) (Child Violent Trauma Center). Children exposed to domestic violence at early ages begin to feel a sense of neglect. This most likely will impact their early psychological and social development skills as they tend to become overwhelmed by the situation (Domestic violence and children, 2019). Witnessing domestic abuse as a young child can be a very traumatic experience which can be engrained into one’s memory forever. This disturbance will follow these children around for the rest of their lives and

become overwhelming to them at various points in their lifetime. At some point in their lifetime, most likely at a younger age, those short-term and long-term consequences will begin to affect their mental health. Children exposed to violence exhibit many more problems than children who do not witness violence at home, including anxiety; aggression; depression and temperament problems; less empathy and self-esteem; and lower verbal, cognitive, and motor abilities (Domestic violence and children, 2019) (Child Violent Trauma Center). Many researchers have also noticed that children whose mental health is dramatically impacted by domestic abuse tend to avoid speaking to others about this issue as well. In a few cases, counselling sessions had become difficult as the children were afraid of speaking against their abusive parent in fear of being abused themselves (Issue 3: Children Exposed to Domestic Violence, 2016). Furthermore, it can cause psychological trauma to the child which impacts behaviour and social/emotional development (The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children). Studies prove that young children who were exposed to domestic violence were more likely than the children who were not exposed to domestic violence to show symptoms of internalizing and externalizing problems (Issue 3: Children Exposed to Domestic Violence, 2016). On the contrary, some children with such exposure also tend to build resilience amongst themselves (Government of Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2017). To conclude, being in a toxic environment like this, children are also at risk of being abused (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016). This is where child protection agencies play a role (The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children). Child protection agencies examine domestic violence and also help in lessening the effects of a child's exposure to domestic

violence (Government of Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2017). In certain cases, they could provide an opinion for or against the removal of children from homes exposed to domestic violence (Government of Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2017). Therefore, it is evident that domestic abuse may have profound impacts on children and become detrimental towards their psychological, social, and emotional development. There are many negative impacts such experiences may make on a child, especially ones younger in age. Having difficulty speaking to an elder who wants to help them about what they are going through may also become one of the leading causes of their deteriorating mental health.

It is evident that domestic violence has made its fair share of profound impacts on families and members of the families. The desire of being in power and control of one's spouse and victimize them not only physically, but psychologically, has proven to be a very traumatic experience within many relationships. To begin with, domestic violence has led to many cases of psychological conditions and trauma. Battered Women's Syndrome and Stockholm Syndrome are two such possibilities of psychological PTSD conditions which can result from these toxic relationships. In these conditions, women suffer from trauma and are constantly put into a state of fear, anxiety, depression and denial by their partners. Furthermore, it has made numerous profound impacts on families in terms of a divorce. In modern society, divorce has become a very controversial topic, but at the same time, it is also more normalized in comparison to previous generations. Divorce can result in many struggles and hardships for both partners, in particular for women. There can be many financial struggles associated with

this as well, which can result in poverty. Divorce not only impacts immediate family but also extended families as they may feel that they are required to pick sides, which causes more tension in the issue. Lastly, children tend to be the most affected by such situations. The negative encompassing atmosphere may impact their social/emotional development and cause psychological trauma. This may follow with links to depression, anxiety and changed behavioural aspects. In addition to the trauma it may cause, the children are also at risk of being abused themselves. Therefore, it is evident that domestic violence is an issue which can have various profound impacts on families in terms of psychological trauma, divorce, and effects on children and their development.

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