

Fempower

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FOCUS

Children and Domestic Violence

by Barbara Kavemann*

At first sight violence against women and violence against children may appear to be closely related issues. In practice they tend to be dealt with separately. The two major social movements, the child welfare movement and the women's movement, have similar historical roots but took different paths. Both movement exerted a substantial innovative influence on the field of social work. The one movement evolved the principle of "help, don't punish" which has become identified as "modern child welfare" and is now part and parcel of the work of counselling centres and youth welfare offices. The other movement established a network of independent counselling and protection facilities – women's refuges, safe accommodation, helplines, special counselling centres for rape victims and sexually abused girls – which is today an integral part of our social structure. Although child protection services generally work on a family-oriented basis (that is, involving the children's mothers) and the feminist services were aware from the start that most of their clients would bring their children with them, there has been little interdisciplinary exchange between the two. The barriers have been the fact that each movement has focused on the needs of its own target group and that they have differing political approaches to the issue of violence in the family and domestic violence against women. It is only recently that great interest has been taken in the plight of girls and boys whose mothers are battered and threatened by the partner.



Archive: Austrian Women's Shelter Network



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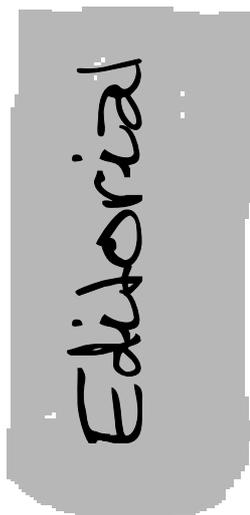
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There are close correlations between violence in relationships and violence against children. Both have their roots in the hierarchical structures of our society, but over and above this, violence in the parents' relationship is a form of violence against their children. In up to 90 per cent of cases in which mothers are subjected to violence at their partners' hands, children are either present or in the next room and either see or hear the violence (Morley / Mullender 1994). Non-violent education is thus possible only if the parents' relationship is itself non-violent. And a non-violent upbringing of children is of course a major factor in the prevention of violence in relationships.

We are very pleased that Barbara Kavemann, who has been conducting research on violence against children for many years now, has provided an article for this issue of Fempower. Lemme Haldre's article deals with the sexual abuse of children and outlines prevention work in her native Estonia. The third article is an interview with Anita Heiliger, whose research focuses on children and young people. She talks mainly about prevention work with boys.

The Editors

Marinela Vecerik

Violence against the mother is a form of violence against the child

Girls and boys whose mother was abused used conventionally to be referred to as "secondary victims". Today it has become apparent that they are directly affected by acts of violence committed against their mother and by a threatening domestic atmosphere and that this can have a detrimental impact on their development. Violence against the mother is a form of violence against the child.

Empirical sociological research has revealed a close correlation between violence against women and violence against children in the domestic context. Women are at a higher risk of falling victim to domestic violence if they have small children, while children's development and health are jeopardised by violence committed against their mothers.

Facts and figures on the links between violence against women and violence against children

- Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft (1988) show in their pioneering article "Women and Children at Risk: A Feminist Perspective on Child Abuse" that the battering of the mother constitutes the most frequent context for the abuse of children.
- Jalna Hanmer (1989) investigated the experiences of children living with their mothers in Women's Aid refuges in Britain and discovered that one third of the children had also been physically or sexually abused by the mother's partner.
- Farmer & Owen (1995) made a study of cases of physical and sexual abuse in which action had been taken to protect the children. In 60 per cent of the cases of the physical abuse of the children and in 40 per cent of cases of sexual abuse, the mothers had also been subjected to violence by the same man.
- Epstein & Keep (1995) interviewed 126 children who had called *Childline*, the children's helpline in Britain, because their mothers were being battered. Nearly 40 per cent of these children said that the mother's partner – in most cases their biological father – also abused them and/or their siblings.
- Mezey & Burley (1997) established that violence in a relationship is likely to escalate during pregnancy and to culminate after the birth.
- Humphreys (1997) studied the records of 32 cases of child protection and discovered that in eleven cases (one third) the mothers had also been injured – some severely – by their partners.
- Hester & Pearson (1998) examined 111 case files at a child welfare agency. One third of the records contained references to violence against the mother, although this information had not led to an intervention. After the agency staff had received further training on domestic violence, the proportion of cases in which domestic violence was identified rose to two thirds.

These results can be summarised as follows:

- If the mother is exposed to domestic violence, there is a high probability that the children will also be physically or sexually abused or neglected (Mullender & Moreley 1994).
- If children are abused by their father, there is a high probability that he will also abuse the mother (Mullender & Moreley 1994).
- Violence against the mother always damages the children, regardless of whether they are themselves directly subjected to violence (Peled 1995).
- If women receive no support and help, the children are left to cope with this detrimental situation alone (Kelly 1994).
- Domestic violence against the mother must be treated as a key issue in all child protection strategies (Hester 1998).

Impact of violence against the mother on daughters and sons

In the vast majority of cases of domestic violence, the daughters and sons witness the mother being abused, humiliated and intimidated by the father. This affects their image of their mother and father and their relationship with both. Witnessing violence against the mother has a varied and wide-ranging impact on the daughters and sons, but it never fails to have an impact:

- Children – even small children – feel helpless and exposed in the face of the father's violence and the mother's impotence. But they may also feel responsible for what is happening. Many believe the violence is their fault.
- Many children try to intervene and restrain the father on the mother's behalf. If they do intervene, they may be battered themselves. Some children are too scared to act and then feel guilty for their inaction. Others realise the mother's plight and assume responsibility for looking after and protecting their sisters and brothers.
- In many cases the abuse of the mother results in the inversion of the roles of parents and children: they children take over some of the parents' responsibilities. This role inversion is familiar from other contexts such as cases of parents with alcohol and substance abuse problems.
- Most children are extremely relieved to escape from a violent home. Above all they feel a load has been taken off them when the mother finally receives help, and they return to seeing their mothers as once more capable of acting and themselves as children. A safe environment like a refuge also affords girls and boys the opportunity to talk about the violence they themselves have suffered.
- However, for many children escape also means losing their familiar environment, their school friends and other people important to them. Many children also miss their fathers – even if they were afraid of him, separation from the father can be extremely painful. Girls and boys need help to enable them to grieve for that which they have lost. The mother cannot assume this role.
- If daughters and sons were witnesses of violence against their mother over an extended period of time, they may lose all their respect for both parents. Their mother will have forfeited her parental authority, while the father will have controlled the children by means of intimidation or manipulation. The mother needs support in re-establishing her maternal standing after escaping from a violent relationship. In cases of domestic violence, the family relationships are moulded by hierarchical structures founded on violence. Escape or separation terminates these structures, leaving a vacuum that can cause severe problems between mother and children. It is important to provide continuous support and help to re-establish relationships based on respect.

Witnessing violence invariably inflicts damage on children. The effects may not always entail traumatisation, but all children who have been through this experience need qualified, independent help.

Above all in the numerous cases in which children have been exposed to chronic violence by the father against the mother over an extended period, they are likely to be traumatised.

In many cases unspecific effects have been observed, such as:

- Sleep disorders
- Problems at school
- Developmental impediments
- Aggression
- Fearfulness

This range of symptomatic conditions closely resembles those that children and young people undergo in other difficult situations such as when they are themselves physically or sexually abused, when their family splits up or when they have to cope with other painful separations.

The unspecific nature of the symptoms clearly illustrates the point that girls and boys must be asked to talk about their problem if they are to receive the support they need.

Some studies have analysed the impact on a gender basis and noted that girls tend to identify more closely with their mothers (Wolfe et al., 1995). The idea of a mechanistic cycle of violence is not, however, born out by research results, although evidence has been found to establish a close correlation between childhood experiences and violent behaviour (cf. Bussmann 2000, Pfeiffer/Wetzels 1999, Wetzels 1997). It is important to provide gender-specific support because the experience of male violence against the mother, the mother's reaction and above all the response of third parties and agencies can

convey to girls and boys specific concepts about gender relationships which may have a disastrous impact on the way they plan their own lives. In this sense, then, support is also a key factor in the prevention of violence.

* Text of a lecture, abbreviated by the editors, with permission from the author.

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My approach is Perpetrator Prevention

Male violence begins in kindergarten

By Birgit Appelt

Dr. Anita Heilliger, born in Berlin in 1942. Studied sociology at Freie Universität Berlin. Since 1973 sociologist in the department of gender research and women's policy at the Deutsches Jugendinstitut in Munich.

Main areas of work to date: single mothers, girl labour and girls' policy, women's policy, women's and lesbian movement, custody and visiting rights, violence against girls and women, sexual violence and sexual abuse, female and male socialisation, prevention of violence, and perpetrator prevention. Currently engaged on a research project on changing images of masculinity as a key factor in preventing violence.

Numerous publications on the above subjects in books, journals and compilations.

Dear Anita,

In your research work you concentrate exclusively on the prevention of male violence against women and children. You have again and again called for prevention work to begin very early and on a very broad basis. Can you briefly explain your approach?

My approach might be termed "perpetrator prevention". What I'm trying to do is to give boys new kinds of impetus which will shield them from a dominant image of masculinity that is contemptuous of women and contains the seeds of violence. This new impetus would enable them to develop into people who, while establishing a co-operative basis with girls and women and evolving empathy and a sense of social responsibility, will avoid asserting the position of power widely held to be their right and will therefore not feel obliged to develop the related compensation mechanisms which may articulate themselves in, for instance, violence.

I also understand perpetrator prevention as intervening in the behaviour of boys where at an early stage this behaviour can be seen to contain elements of domineering postures towards girls and women and sexually based abuse. It also implies inducing these boys to abandon such behaviour through discussion, communication and reorientation. Police crime statistics show that there is a high risk of 14 to 16-year-old boys committing sexual abuse of children (cf. Jutta Elz *Sexuell deviante Jugendliche und Heranwachsende*. Vol. 41 of the *Schriftenreihe der Kriminologischen Zentralstelle e.V.*, Wiesbaden 2003). This points to the fact that action is urgently called for but is in practice not being implemented (cf. Heilliger: *Täterprävention bei sexuellem Mißbrauch*, unpublished manuscript, 2004).



Large numbers of children have violence inflicted on them by adults and/or witness violence committed against their mothers. How can we help them to escape the spiral of violence?

The traumatic impact of direct and indirect experiences of violence within the family is familiar enough (cf. Strasser 2001, Kindler 2003), but it is taken too little into account by social workers and by judicial professionals and experts giving testimony in court proceedings relating to family law. Children need security, protection and care, but most of them are forced to have dealings with the violent father, with the result that they keep being re-traumatised. What is called for here is an unequivocal political initiative to prevent this kind of thing happening – action gauged to the real interests of the children.

You see male violence against women and girls starting at kindergarten age. What behavioural patterns evolve at that stage?

Some boys in kindergarten start trying out what they've witnessed at home or elsewhere; that means, they attempt to establish power over others when they find themselves in difficult situations. At an early age they try to abuse girls but also boys sexually, testing the reactions of adults and girls when they call them "whore" (cf. Strohhalm e.V., Berlin).

How do boys experience violence? Can they defend themselves better than girls?

It is generally thought that boys tend to have more physical violence inflicted on them by their parents than girls and that the sexual violence they suffer is inflicted by other boys or by male adults they know in their social environment. The role of aggressor, hero and winner which society assigns to boys prevents them from registering inferiority, injury, humiliation and degradation and impels them to translate their awareness of being a victim into domineering and violent behaviour. They helps them not to feel victimised, but it also

get in the way of their accessing their real personal feelings and dealing with the violence that has been inflicted on them.

What part do institutions like schools and after-school care centres play in transmitting traditional gender roles?

Institutions which provide care and education for children and young people do a great deal to transmit the traditional perceptions of gender roles, while at the same time they only sporadically contribute to education in gender equality and the eroding of gender polarity – and then only when individual teachers show especial personal commitment. Training in these areas has not yet systematically adjusted to social requirements. Our hopes now lie with gender mainstreaming as a means of creating a realistic perception of gender roles and of raising awareness of change.

You are currently engaged on a practical research project focusing on the transmission of non-violent images of masculinity. Has the project produced any results you can tell us about?

Having considered a variety of effective pragmatic approaches to reaching boys, I am concentrating my efforts on producing a website ("Nice Guys Engine") specifically for boys. The website is being programmed by the media specialist Tina Perincioli, while I generate and elaborate ideas that are incorporated in the site's content. The idea behind the website is to appeal to boys with a contemporary medium and to interest them in an entertaining manner in topics like masculinity, violence, sexuality, gender relations and so on. The site makes use of games, video sequences, interviews, group discussions, role games, questionnaires and detective skills as incentives for boys to think about masculinity and violence and to change direction and identify with other boys who don't try to construct their masculinity around degrading behaviour towards girls and women.

The website can be used universally because it can be downloaded anywhere and then integrated in any kind of activity. The idea grew out of my perception that many teachers refuse or are reluctant or don't dare to learn and/or apply the basics of violence prevention. The website can be used without any preparation and contains everything needed for the treatment of the issue – including information for teachers.

The content and structures (which will begin to take shape from August 2004 onwards over a period of two years) will be continuously tested in practice, so that it should be possible by next year to say something about how non-violent images of masculinity can be transmitted in a way that boys will accept.

Thank you.

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Sexual Abuse of Children in Estonia

By Lemme Haldre

Sexual Abuse of Children

When Estonia regained its independence in 1991, a new sense of freedom emerged, and people began to feel the need to discuss several issues in daily life that had hitherto been suppressed. The sexual abuse of children was one such concealed topic. For more than ten years now, then, the issue of the sexual abuse of children has been discussed and dealt with. In Estonia, sexual relations between a grown-up and a child are considered deviant, an abuse of authority and a violation of children's rights. Sexual abuse relates to any kind of sexual activity with a child that lies outside communication norms. In Estonia any person who is younger than 18 years ranks as a child.

Various types of abuse have been defined: emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. A child may suffer concurrently from different forms of abuse.

Child Sexual Abuse Study in Estonia

A comprehensive study on child abuse was carried out in Estonia in 2000. The survey involved 874 teenagers from all over Estonia. 495 (56,8%) of all respondents stated that they had been subjected to abuse of one kind or another (Soo, K. & Soo, I., 2002).

The study shows that the most common age for females who were persuaded or coerced to participate in sexual activities was 14 to 17, and for males 15 to 17. The number of sexual abuse cases committed against children under 12 years of age was relatively small (26 cases, i.e. 6%). This percentage significantly increases among teenagers over 12 years of age and peaks at the age of 16 (Soo, K. & Soo, I., 2002).

The data compiled by Tartu Child Support Centre Estonia has two support centres providing help for sexually abused children and their families – in Tartu and in Tallinn.

According to the records of Tartu Child Support Centre, sexual abuse was the primary reason for the first referral in 120 cases. In 2002 there were 381 first referrals, 12% of these being sexual abuse cases. In 2003 the number of first referrals was 379, of which 7% related to sexual abuse.

Tartu Child Support Centre's records show that both girls and boys are potential victims of sexual abuse. However, the number of female victims is larger. According to the Support Centre's data the average age of child victims was over 12 years in 60% of cases and under 12 years in 40% of cases.

Sexual offenders are mostly male adults, usually known to the child. Sexual abuse might occur in the form of incestuous relationships or outside the victim's family. Most often the offender was a family friend, stepfather or merely an acquaintance. In fewer cases the offender was a biological father, grandfather, brother or school mate. Broadly speaking, with younger children the offender is usually a person who is known to the child, with adolescent victims the offender is mostly a stranger. Child sexual abuse may involve various activities: games of a sexual nature played with the child, shooting pornographic images or films of the child, undressing the child, touching the private parts, exposing grown-up's private parts to the child, or having intercourse with the child.



The Consequences of Child Abuse

Child abuse is a trauma. Untreated or ignored childhood trauma may lead to the suppression of emotions, as a result of which trauma will be recurrently experienced through behaviour and various symptoms. Practical experience at the Tartu Child Support Centre shows that different forms of abuse produce several similar signs, yet there are some specific signs that characterise children who have been submitted to sexual abuse.

Abused children show interpersonal, cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems. Trauma may cause a number of cognitive-affective disorders (un-handled feelings and thoughts). Children who have been concurrently subjected to different forms of abuse and are closely related to the offender tend to suffer more serious consequences. In providing help for sexually abused children, Tartu Child Support Centre's therapists have to deal with the following disorders:

- Mood disorders, depression, anxiety;
- Self-destructive behaviour (suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide);
- Difficulties in academic performance (in studies, in behaviour, in communication with peers);
- Drug abuse;
- Decreased self-control, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, delinquent behaviour;
- Post-traumatic stress reactions;
- Deviated self-image and lower self-esteem;
- Feelings of mistrust and betrayal in all relationships.

As the experience of abuse produces mistrust and a sense of betrayal in child victims, this can impede the development of close relationships in later life.

By comparison with the victims of other forms of abuse, children who have suffered from sexual abuse show several specific features like hypersexual behaviour, sexual aggressiveness or the avoidance of sexual stimuli.

Sexualised behaviour might be expressed in the victim's stories, games, drawings or daily activities. There are children who try to solve their personal problems by abusing other children. Young people may display sexual aggressiveness or incline to sexually provocative behaviour or prostitution.

There are others who perceive their environment as sexualised and feel scared, so that they wish to avoid the situation. These abused children are reluctant to take part in physical education lessons and are afraid of medical examinations, as this is associated with the child's body and recalls the trauma. Sexual abuse is also seen as one cause of developing deviated gender identity.

A violent or abusive home impels children onto the streets, where they encounter addictive substances. In order to consume the substance, they need money to buy it, and this in turn can lead to providing sexual services. In Tallinn – the Estonian capital – and in Tartu social workers and psychologists have come across a number of children who have been abused by sex tourists. Tourists come from Finland, Sweden and several other countries. So child sexual abuse is closely related to the sex industry.

Abuse experience makes the child feel that he/she is hateful. This will heighten the child's vulnerability and sense of having lost control. The child will think that she/he has deserved such maltreatment for being bad. A deviated self-image will develop, involving negative self-esteem, which in turn will predispose the child to do wrong, and the result will be disapproval and punishment.

Helping Abused Children and Adolescents

Child psychologists, social workers and paediatricians were the first to talk openly about sexual abuse problems when national independence was re-established in Estonia. In 1995 Tartu Child Support Centre was established on the initiative of child psychologists and paediatricians to provide help for abused children and their families. In 1999 a similar centre was established in Tallinn. Both centres work as NGOs and are project-based.

The staff of Tartu Child Support Centre includes seven specialists who have all been specifically trained to work with abused children and their families. The primary problems treated at Tartu Child Support Centre are child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional), neglect, domestic violence and child trafficking. Multidisciplinary collaboration is the basic principle in providing help. The staff also includes paediatricians, psychologists-psychotherapists and social workers. The Centre also takes on a number of volunteers, mainly students, who are willing to devote their time to working with children. We have a good partnership with a lawyer and with regional child protection specialists.

Short and long term individual and family therapy are available. A network exists between professionals in various fields. During therapy sessions the trauma experiences are worked through and support is provided for the child and the family members.

In our current social situation it is very important that children and their families get help free of charge.

As public awareness of child abuse has grown, the issue of domestic violence and violence against women, which have been taboo topics until now, are also being discussed more openly. Several new NGOs that provide services for women and children

have been established.

The main problem in supporting abuse victims is that help is not available to an equal extent in all regions. In Estonia professional help in abuse cases is available only in bigger cities – in Tartu and Tallinn. In smaller towns and rural districts help is not accessible because of distance, transportation problems and inadequate information. Although the existing two support centres provide free help for children and families, many people lack the financial means to pay even for bus tickets to reach the place.

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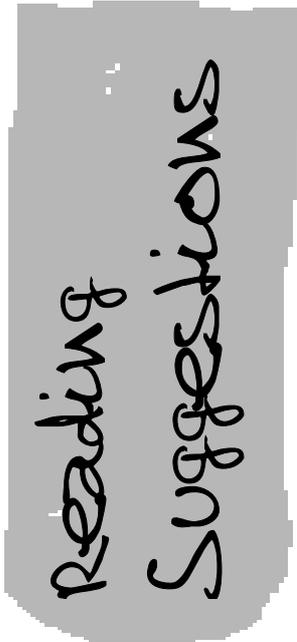
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Helping Hands for Children

Activity Pack for prevention

The activity pack has been designed to introduce children and facilitators to Protective Behaviours, as a strategy for the prevention of the abuse of children. It emphasises the rights children have in relation to safety and support.

The activities have been designed for use with children in schools and community centres. It is important to note that Protective Behaviours Programmes are suitable for all groups of people. The subject matter is about safety, empowerment, self-esteem, assertiveness and valuing yourself.

Helping Hands for Children
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation - NIWAF
(launched on May 30th, 2002)

The Pack can be ordered from:
NIWAF, 129 University St., Belfast BT7 1HP, Northern Ireland
E-mail: info@niwaf.org
Web-site: <http://www.niwaf.org/Publications/helpinghands.htm>

Understanding what children say

Children's experience of domestic violence, parental substance misuse and parental health problems

By Sarah Gorin

This literature review examines what children say about living in families where there is domestic violence, parental substance misuse or parental health problems. It examines research undertaken in the UK from 1990 to 2003, to provide us with a better understanding of the range of children's experience.

The research was carried out by Sarah Gorin at the NSPCC - the UK's Child Protection Resource. Although the children's experiences vary widely, there are many common themes that arise when they talk about their feelings, the difficulties they experience at home, what their coping strategies are and the support they would like to receive.

Sarah Gorin
Understanding what children say

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