Domestic Violence and Child Abuse:
Understanding the intersection between the two

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The Ripple Effect
Domestic Violence: Co-occurrence with Child Abuse

- Between 30-60% of men who batter their female partners also abuse their children. (Findlater & Kelly (1999).

- Perhaps as many as 59% of children of battered women are also physically abused themselves. (Holden, et. al, 1998)

- Research projections estimate the prevalence of children’s exposure to domestic violence to be between 3.3 - 10 million annually, nationwide. (Holden, 1988).

- Conservatively, child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households where domestic violence is present. (Friend, 1998).
Domestic Violence and Child Abuse
Understanding the Intersection

- In some child assault cases, children are not the primary targets
- child abuse does not usually occur at the same time as wife abuse
- Wife beating is a major precipitant of child abuse
- child abuse typically occurs to spite the wife in DV cases

Child Abuse & Domestic Violence

Who is the aggressor?

A study of 1,000 battered women found:

- wife beaters abused children in 70% of the cases
- the prevalence of child abuse increased from 51% with one child to 92% with four or more children
- the severity of wife beating is predictive of the severity of child abuse
- husband-dominance was the most significant predictor of abuse
- different mechanisms at work in paternal & maternal child abuse

The effects of abuse: Impact on children

- Externalizing Problems
- Internalizing Problems
- PTSD symptoms
- Separation Anxiety, Regression
- Social Behavior/Competence Deficits
- School performance
- Somatic complaints
- Intergenerational transmission of violence

The effects of abuse: Impact on adults

- Adult victims of domestic violence often experience intense startle reactions, tension, nightmares, chronic fatigue, disturbed sleeping and eating patterns and medical symptoms (Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita & Russo, 1994).

- Psychological abuse often leads to self-doubt, depression, and confusion, and may severely limit a victim’s ability to assess options that may aid him or her in leaving the abusive relationship (Sackett & Saunders, 1999).
The effects of abuse:
Impact on adults, cont.

• Some survivors remain passive, withdrawn, and continue to display apathy and symptoms of depression  (Chapman, 1962; Peterson & Seligman, 1983).

• A survivor’s ability to trust and to form emotional attachments is severely impacted by domestic violence (Dehart, 1996).
Domestic Violence: Common Misperceptions

• the belief that domestic violence is caused by:
  – anger
  – stress
  – alcohol/drugs
  – mental illness
  – unemployment
  – lack of impulse control

• the belief that domestic violence is more prevalent
  – among certain races/cultures/ethnic groups
  – in families of lower socio-economic status
Challenging our assumptions

- the abusing father has a right to see his child
  - trumps safety issues for child/victim
  - transforms abuse to a legally-sanctioned & court-enforced victimization

- that victims have equal access to the courts as batterers
  - economic inequities built into current system

- that the need for support services for victims ends after the acute transitional period of separation from the abuser
Shifting paradigms

• The assumption that the victim must leave
  – cultural competence issues
  – economic realities
  – threat of stalking

• batterer’s “treatment” as a jail diversion tactic

• Family preservation
  – definition of family

• protection of the victim and protection of the children are not mutually exclusive goals