


Impact of COVID-19:
Child Abuse, Exploitation and
Family Violence


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Impact of COVID-19 on Families


- Economic stress – layoffs & furloughs
- Food instabilities
- Disaster-related instability
- Intense and unrelieved contact w/ offenders
- Increased exposure to exploitative relationships
- Negative coping mechanisms
- Reduced options for support



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Impact of COVID-19


- Child abuse reports are down by ~50%
 - In Clark County
 - In Washington State
 - Across the nation
- CA reports made are for more serious physical injuries and sexual victimization



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Impact of COVID-19


- 25-30% of child abuse reports to CPS from school staff
- Approx. 25% of CA reports from mental health or medical providers
- Physical distancing results in lack of “eyes on” children
 - School staff
 - Church, club & sport leaders
 - Friends/peers & their families



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Impact of COVID-19


- Online exploitation increased by more than 100%
- Increased vulnerabilities
 - Children feeling lonely, isolated, depressed
 - Abused children seeking support & understanding
 - More time online and lack of online supervision
 - Phones, computers, tablets, gaming systems, apps
- Offenders exploit youth
 - Manipulate children into sending child sexual abuse imagery



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Impact of COVID-19

- Increases in domestic violence calls
 - City of Vancouver:
 - Aggravated Assault about the same
 - 42% increase in Simple Assault
 - 19% increase in Verbal DV (not a crime)
 - 21% to 35% increase in the US
 - 20-50% increase internationally (c.f., Wuhan, China saw 3x increase)
- Offenders use of containment, fear and threat of contagion as a mechanism of abuse



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Impact of COVID-19

- Decline in child abuse reports is not indicative that child abuse has declined
- High correlation between child abuse and domestic violence



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Co-occurrence of IPV and CA

- One in six children are exposed to IPV
- Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households where intimate partner violence is present
- Between 30-60% of men who batter their female partners also abuse their children
- Perhaps as many as 59% of children of battered women are also physically abused themselves



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Understanding the Intersection

- A study of 1,000 battered women found:
 - Perpetrators of DV 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 DV is predictive of severity of child abuse
- In some child assault cases, children are not the primary targets
- Child abuse does not usually occur at the same time as DV
- DV is a major precipitant of child abuse



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Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence

Is there an impact?



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Types of Exposure

- Hearing a violent event
 - Children's reports of witnessing violence significantly higher than parent's reports
- Direct involvement
 - Eyewitness to a violent event:
 - 23% mothers reported their children physically intervened
 - 21% said their children sought help from someone else
 - Intervention
 - Used as part of violent event (e.g., shield)
- Experiencing aftermath of violent event



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Examples of How Children are Exposed

- Feeling tension building in home prior to assault
- Hearing threats of physical harm
- Being hit/threatened while in victim's arms
- Being denied care because victim is injured or depressed
- Hearing/seeing assault on victim
- Seeing aftermath of violent incident



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Examples of How Children are Exposed

- Being forced to watch or participate in violence against a parent
- Having relationship with non-violent parent undermined
- Being enlisted by violent parent to align against victim
- Being taken hostage to force victim to return home
- Experiencing the loss of a parent due to murder/suicide



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Impact of Exposure to DV

- Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
- Increased risk of:
 - Experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse
 - Developing emotional, behavioral and social problems
 - Depression, anxiety & attachment disorders; Posttraumatic stress disorder & dissociation
 - Aggression, non-compliance, conduct disorders & delinquency
 - Triple the odds of perpetrating violence towards a partner
 - Increased exposure to the presence of other lifelong adversities



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN



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What CJC is Doing to Protect Children

- Dissemination of informational materials
 - Teachers
 - Essential Workers
 - General Public
- Community Education
 - Role of mandated reporters continues
 - Recognize signs & symptoms of abuse
 - How to report suspected maltreatment



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Report Suspected Maltreatment



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Recommendations for Protecting Children

- Engage in conversation with neighbors
- Watch for signs & symptoms of abuse in children
- If interacting w/ children virtually:
 - Maintain appropriate boundaries
 - Listen for red flags in background
- Encourage children to name 5 trusted adults




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5 Trusted Adults




- For each finger of the hand, have your child name a trusted adult – both within and outside of the family/family home.
- These are the people to whom your child can go when feeling scared, upset, angry, confused, hurt – or even happy.
- Go with your child to tell these adults that they are the child's trusted adults.



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Recommendations


- Currently, LE doesn't record children present at DV calls unless injured
- LE patrol/detectives
 - Ask whether children in home/present at DV calls
 - Cross-report cases to CPS
- CPS – screen reports from LE for cross-over reports / high risk children
- CJC work collaboratively with DV unit
- Collaboration with MH providers & YWCA
- Work toward more comprehensive response to children exposed to DV



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Recommendations for Mental Health Professionals



- Work with child through complicated grief
- Normalize feelings (guilt, anger, etc.)
- Stigma – “different” from peers
- Utilize effective trauma treatment techniques
 - Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
 - Progressive Counting (PC)
 - Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)



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It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

~Frederick Douglass



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Questions or Comments?

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