

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

### **Protecting Children from Domestic Violence: Strategies for Community Intervention**

*Edited by Peter G. Jaffe, Linda L. Baker, and Alison J. Cunningham*  
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Reviewed by Mary Bell, MSW, RSW. A private practitioner in Toronto and part-time clinician in the Substance Abuse Program, Division of Adolescent Medicine, Hospital for Sick Children.

This book provides an excellent overview of what we currently know about the effects of domestic violence on children. As the authors point out, the impact on children of this tragic phenomenon is a subject that, even in such a young field as the study of domestic violence, is late to be explored. They show that early misassumptions were made in the field, blinding professionals who help children to the harm caused by domestic violence.

The book is composed of contributions, many of them collaborative, by leading North American researchers and practitioners in the field. It grew out of the 2001 International Conference on Children Exposed to Domestic Violence, held in London, Ontario. The volume is edited by a trio from the host organization, The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System at the London Family Court Clinic.

The contents of the book are divided into four overarching sections. "Part I: Introduction to the Problem" aims a spotlight on the critical issues for professionals in intervening to help children exposed to woman abuse. "Part II: Individual- and Group-Level Responses" offers a summary of current thinking on intervention with adult victims and perpetrators. "Part III: System-Level Responses" explores current responses of the justice system and human services to support children. "Part IV: Conclusions" reviews the research findings described in the previous sections and points the way to promising practices and to topics that urgently need additional study.

In the opening chapter, "Purpose and Overview," the editors outline the work to be presented. They state that the goal of the volume is "to [expand] our understanding and community collaboration in responding to children and their parents in homes where domestic violence takes place" (p. 4). The editors identify three themes: the need to end domestic violence, the need to intervene and provide help both to children and to adult victims and perpetrators in their families, and the search for "promising practices" (in a knowledge base described as still too incomplete to offer "best practices") that may help children.

Veteran researcher on domestic violence, Jeffrey L. Edleson, contributes chapter 2, "Should Childhood Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence Be Defined as Child Maltreatment under the Law?" In his review of the literature—an excellent summary for clinicians, policy-makers, and members of the

justice system—he outlines the harm that we now know is done to children by exposure to domestic violence. He stresses that there is a wide variance in child responses to that exposure, and documents some of what is known about the factors that mitigate damage or encourage resilience in children. Edleson also chronicles two main policy and legislative efforts in some U.S. states and Canadian provinces to support children affected by domestic violence. One approach is to make the perpetration of woman abuse a more serious crime under the law if a child is exposed to it, and the other is to mandate an automatic referral to child protection services. He highlights the dangerous, unintended consequences of each effort. Finally, he describes three tenets on which to base policy and law-making: exposure to domestic violence by children should not automatically be considered maltreatment; children and families should be offered voluntary services (which are still far from readily available); and some (high risk) children do need referral for child protection. Further research is urgently needed to better identify children at higher risk.

Chapter 3, “Young Children Exposed to Adult Domestic Violence: Incidence, Assessment and Intervention,” is written by the late B. B. Robbie Rossman, Jacqueline G. Rea, Sandra A. Graham-Bermann, and Perry M. Butterfield. The authors point out that children exposed to woman abuse in their homes may sometimes be as traumatized as the adult victims of violence. They review findings on incidence that show that between 1.8 and 4 million women a year are victimized in the United States, and possibly 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence. The focus here is on clinical issues especially related to younger children, who are less verbal and require special skills to assess and treat. The authors describe the recommended protocols, and evaluate the effectiveness of several instruments for assessing the level of damage to children from exposure to woman abuse. Then they review common treatment interventions and make recommendations as to their usefulness. Both assessments and interventions are categorized by appropriateness for children ages 0 to 3 and 4 to 6. The authors conclude that exposure to spouse abuse can place children at risk of negative impact on their development. They stress that while more rigorous outcome studies are needed to assess treatment programs, the importance of supporting the mother-child relationship in the wake of the trauma has been clearly demonstrated.

Chapter 4, “Group Intervention with Abusive Male Adolescents,” by Diane L. Davis of the Domestic Abuse Program in Minneapolis, reviews a comprehensive program for adolescents who have been abusive toward family members or dating partners. The Emerging Young Men’s Program, as it is called, aims to provide a positive group experience to enable youth to stop abusive behaviour, strengthen self-esteem, develop insight and empathy, and take personal responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Davis describes in detail the intake and assessment process, indicators against admission, and group composition and structure. The program accepts both court-ordered members and those referred by community agencies. Members are asked to identify a weekly personal behaviour goal and discuss it in the group. The program offers 14 skills-based psychoeducational components. It also offers two family sessions where families can learn about the strategies that group members are learning to use and give feedback about members’ success in carrying them out. Ongoing evaluation is based on feedback from members and their families. The author points to the need for additional research to enrich our understanding of factors affecting the efficacy of group intervention.

The discussion of individual- and group-level responses in Part II begins with cultural considerations. In "Fostering Resilient Coping in Children Exposed to Violence," Sandra A. Graham-Bermann and Hilda M. Halabu discuss the relationship between the process of immigration and the incidence of domestic violence, and the stress and vulnerability involved. They emphasize the need for cultural competence and culture-specific interventions, and deal with such issues as matching ethnicity of the therapist to the client group, finding culturally appropriate interventions, reinforcing positive associations to culture, and recognizing cultural differences in assumptions, expression, and behaviour. The authors conclude that more research is needed to really understand the needs of children in minority culture families. Much current practice is based on theory describing adults, whose experience may be very different from that of children. Moreover, most studies of children to date are based on shelter populations who may not be representative of their larger communities.

Chapter 6, "Safety Planning for Abused Women and Their Children," by Jennifer L. Hardesty and Jacquelyn C. Campbell, addresses this core component of woman abuse intervention. The authors emphasize the multifaceted nature of safety assessment, which means that a plan must be context and case specific. They show that the safety of children after separation is frequently overlooked. The balancing of children's safety against their need for access to their father is difficult. Decisions about access, made sometimes by the court and sometimes by the parents, can place children at risk of both physical harm and emotional abuse if they become agents of their father's ongoing exercise of power and control over their mother. Although the mother's own assessment of risk remains the most reliable indicator, women sometimes underestimate their partners' potential to inflict serious or lethal harm. The authors discuss the use of the Danger Assessment Tool to compensate for this tendency. They survey the many sources of potential risk to children in post-separation parenting arrangements, and indicate the need for anticipatory guidance to alert women to unforeseen dangers in formulating these plans. They also offer a list of categories of assessments to better evaluate the risk and to advocate in court for parenting plans appropriate to the situational level of safety.

Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman present a comprehensive list of types of risk potentially posed by abusive fathers during and after separation in chapter 7, "Assessing Abusers' Risks to Children." They suggest some criteria for evaluating the danger that an abusive parent will continue to be emotionally abusive to children or will physically harm them or their mother. An additional and useful section offers some criteria for assessing whether there has been a real change in attitude and behaviour following treatment. These authors, like the previous ones, speak to the need for substantially more research in order to produce a refined assessment tool.

In chapter 8, "Fatherhood and Domestic Violence: Exploring the Role of Abusive Men in the Lives of Their Children," authors Oliver J. Williams, Jacquelyn Boggess, and Janet Carter chart the various branches of the "Fatherhood" movement. It is far from a single, cohesive group. They point out the quite different clusters that make up the movement and describe the diverging and sometimes conflicting assumptions, values, and goals of three types of Fatherhood initiatives: responsible fatherhood groups, father involvement advocates, and father's rights groups. They address the potential for dialogue between some of these men's groups and advocacy groups for abused women, and set out some criteria of approach that might make this dialogue constructive.

Part III of the volume explores system-level responses, beginning with chapter 9, “The Ethnic Media Outreach Project.” Melpa Kamateros of the Montreal media education initiative, “Canada is a Country for Women,” outlines how the project provided education and referrals to immigrant and ethnic minorities using focused ethnic media broadcast. Television broadcasts, consisting of a 12- to 15-minute program and a 30-second public service announcement, were reproduced with uniform content but in different formats for 12 ethnocultural communities. Close collaboration with members of the communities to appropriately format the program led serendipitously to the establishment of good community-specific referral links.

In chapter 10, “Police in the Lives of Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: Collaborative Approaches to Intervention,” authors Miriam Berkman, Robert L. Casey, Steven Berkowitz, and Steven Marans describe an initiative in Connecticut that set up a close alliance between police and children’s mental health services. The Child Development Community Policing Program, a joint project of the Yale University Child Study Center and the New Haven Department of Police Service, was begun in 1991. The authors detail the structure of the program, which involves joint training of police and clinicians, 24-hour consultation to police, intervention by clinicians, and ongoing joint case-review meetings. Initial program evaluation data indicate a high level of satisfaction among those served. The authors point to the importance of early identification of children exposed to violence for referral to mental health services.

Martha Shaffer and Nicholas Bala trace the increasing awareness of wife abuse and children’s issues in Canadian courts in chapter 11, “The Role of Family Courts in Domestic Violence: The Canadian Experience.” To get a snapshot of recent judicial thinking, the authors studied all Canadian rulings involving “wife abuse” or “spouse abuse,” and “custody” or “access,” in the legal database Quicklaw for a 3½-year period from 1997 to 2000. They found that Canadian judges are more aware of the complexity of wife abuse cases than they were a decade ago. Judges are now more likely deny custody to fathers in cases where there has been woman abuse; however, too often they grant unsupervised access in situations that are not safe for women or children. In addition, the authors found ruling statements that indicated a lack of awareness among some judges and, alarmingly, many instances in which even clinicians preparing assessments for court lacked basic knowledge. The authors note that, too often, women are still pressured into accepting orders that they know are unsafe. They call for statutes that specifically address abuse in child-related cases. Need for clarification of the law and more education for all professionals involved are highlighted.

Chapter 12, “The Role of Family Courts in Domestic Violence: The U.S. Experience,” by Billie Lee Dunford-Jackson, reviews the mixed success of American initiatives to provide additional protection to children in cases of domestic violence. Although some statutory changes are bringing children on the radar screen and getting help for them sooner, other changes are retraumatizing children by requiring them to testify against a parent in court. Some changes make mothers vulnerable to being charged for having defended themselves, while other initiatives have overwhelmed the child protection system with referrals—many of them unnecessary. The author commends the clarity of the manual known as “The Greenbook,” which makes recommendations to all three U.S. systems concerned with domestic violence—criminal courts, family courts, and dependency courts. The key, the author says, is to avoid

“one size fits all” policies for dealing with violence, and for all three courts to collaborate in support of families. Two initiatives based on these recommendations, in Alaska and Oregon, show promise.

In chapter 13, “The Fourth R: Developing Healthy Relationships through School-Based Interventions,” Peter G. Jaffe, David Wolfe, Claire Crooks, Ray Hughes, and Linda L. Baker discuss the heightened awareness of the need for violence prevention in schools in the wake of the Columbine tragedy. The authors see universal education on violence prevention as crucial to reducing the incidence of both the overestimated random violence by strangers (“stranger danger”) and the much more common, relationship-based forms of violence like bullying and woman abuse. They present the Stage-Based School Change Model, a modification of the Transtheoretical Model, as a plan for mobilizing communities. It maps and guides a community from a point of apathy to the stage of developing and requiring violence prevention education as part of the core school curriculum.

The editors provide an excellent distillation of the material presented by the contributing authors in chapter 14, “Future Directions in Ending Domestic Violence in the Lives of Children.” They summarize important, current knowledge and recommendations for promising practices. Priorities for future directions include the need for more evaluation of group treatment programs for children, better assessment tools, and the need to engage more men in antiviolence work and to provide treatment specifically tailored to different abuser profiles.

This book provides solid and common ground for professionals of all stripes in the mental health, child protection, and judicial systems who work to help children exposed to domestic violence. It illuminates the many obstacles in these children’s lives and offers constructive guidelines for better interventions on their behalf, both direct and systemic. The book is a treasure house of research references, equally valuable to academics and to practitioners.