

# The Developmental and Educational Impacts of DV

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# Documented effects of DV

- Meta-analytic studies have shown:
  - Significant associations between exposure to DV and internalising problems e.g. anxiety, depression, social withdrawal
  - Significant associations between exposure to DV and externalising problems e.g. oppositional and defiant behaviour, poor behavioural regulation
  - Very strong associations between exposure to DV and trauma symptoms e.g. hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts and memories, exaggerated startle response
  - No strong evidence for age effects
  - Conflicting evidence for gender effects, some suggest more externalising in boys, others no gender differences

# What does this mean developmentally?

*“The empirical evidence suggests that growing up in an abusive home environment can critically jeopardise the **developmental progress and personal ability** of children...the **cumulative effect** of which may be carried into adulthood and can contribute significantly to the cycle of adversity and violence...Exposure to domestic violence may have a varied impact at different stages...with **early and prolonged exposure potentially creating more severe problems** because it affects the subsequent **chain of development.**” (Holt, Buckley and Whelan, 2008, p.802)*

Many of the key developmental trajectories and consequences of exposure to DV are not captured in the literature because of the cross-sectional nature of the research

- Evidence and experience indicate that, with regards to impact on developmental progression:
  - Duration of exposure to DV matters
  - There may be critical points in the developmental path at which children are more vulnerable to exposure to DV
  - The impacts on development are cumulative and transactional
  - Developmental effects of exposure to DV have longitudinal consequences across many domains of functioning (cognitive, social, emotional, biological)

# Why is a developmental perspective important?

Because the evolutionary purpose of childhood is to ‘become an adult’ in the society/culture in which one is embedded.

To become a productive, effective and healthy adult within any society/culture requires opportunity to develop/grow within an environment that is safe, supportive, nurturing and appropriately challenging.

The *work* of childhood is to develop.

# Why is an educational perspective important?

- In our society, educational settings are key *workplaces of development*
- Schools and ECECs are contexts in which all aspects of development come together and integrate...or collide with one another
- Schools and ECECs are the primary settings for monitoring, tracking, assessing, evaluating and 'predicting' development, cross-sectionally and longitudinally, formally and informally
- Schools and ECECs, and the relationships they facilitate, can provide protection, escape and healing from the effects of DV

# What are the educational considerations?

- Children and adolescents whose optimal 'being', 'doing' and 'becoming' is compromised by exposure to DV are likely to experience additional challenges in the educational workplace (learning, participating, socialising)
- Secondary effects such as move of house, financial disadvantage, court proceedings, custody agreements etc. may all have an impact on a child's access to and attendance at educational settings
- Schools and ECECs may not often have knowledge/awareness/understanding of the burden of DV being carried by a child/student in their care and so other judgements are applied

# Peer relationships

- *It is ok to hit people you love if you are irritated by them for any reason.*
- *Abuse itself can be a sign of love in a relationship.*
- *Violence is an appropriate form of conflict resolution.*
- *Violence is a natural part of family interactions.*
- *Violence has few consequences.*
- *Men control women and should try to control women.*
- *If someone loves you, you can abuse them and they will bear it and forgive you.*

⇒ Relationships are characterised by dominance or fear

Through our same- and opposite-sex peer relationships we learn how to 'be' and 'do' society, community and family. Schools are a primary practice ground for relationship development.

# Early childhood education and care

- Research is showing the critical role that ECEC can play in long term developmental outcomes
- Yet, this 'educational workplace' is often overlooked when we think about access to education
- The early years are important for brain and body development, hence their particular vulnerability to the impacts of DV
- Good quality ECEC is particularly beneficial for children from socio-economically and relationally disadvantaged home contexts
- Yet early childhood care is often the first to fall away for financial, convenience, minimising reasons

# How can we respond?

- Increasing knowledge and awareness among educators and policy makers about the impacts of DV on development and education, including post-separation issues
- Policies and social infrastructure that enable and support children who have been exposed to DV to have continuous and stable access to good quality schooling, including ECEC e.g. keeping child at same school, financial support specifically for education purposes, transport assistance, emotional safety initiatives, single adult point of contact
- More discussion and education about healthy relationships in schools and other educational settings – formal and informal