



Artwork by: Nabahed Alheesa



Artwork by: Ghassan Fatoohi

Fact Sheet 6: The Harms caused by Family Violence

THE HARM CAUSED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE EFFECTS EVERY INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENTLY.

THIS FACT SHEET WILL LOOK TO EXPLORE OVERALL HOW FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN IMPACT AN INDIVIDUAL.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT:

Development Stages

Children and young people living in a home where there is family violence will experience the violence in many different ways. It is very harmful for a child to watch a parent deliberately hurt another parent, whether it is physical hurt, hurting their feelings, or hurting them by controlling their independence. Even when children do not actually see or hear the abuse, living with family violence can lead to fear and stress, threatening their health and wellbeing. They may notice the impacts on the parent who has been abused and may feel unsafe due to the unpredictable environment at home.[1] They deserve a secure and nurturing environment that supports healthy development. Family violence will affect children differently according to their stage of life – in utero, infants, toddlers, primary age, teenagers:

- In Utero: An unborn child may be injured in the womb due to violence aimed at the mother's abdomen or suffer from exposure to drugs or alcohol that a mother may use to cope with stress
- Infants and Toddlers: exposed to violence may have difficulty developing attachments with their caregivers and in extreme cases suffer from failure to thrive, they can be unsettled, easily startled, emotionally withdrawn, aggressive play and delayed developmental milestones
- Primary (School) Age: development may be affected, and they can suffer from eating and sleep disturbances, may struggle with peer relationships, academic performance, and emotional stability difficulties controlling their emotions (e.g. mood swings, aggressive, anxious), poor concentration and not doing well at school, refusing to go to school and returning to behaviours they had when they were younger (e.g. bedwetting, separation anxiety, not wanting to go to sleep)
- Adolescent: may be at higher risk of substance misuse or of either perpetrating or becoming a victim of dating violence, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or attempts, depression or anxiety, skipping school, decreased focus or behavioural changes at school or out-of-school activities, risk-taking behaviours (e.g. using drugs or alcohol, unprotected sex) and increase in symptoms related to chronic health conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

Trauma

Children and young people

Are not bystanders of family violence, they are directly affected, and it is neither their fault nor their choices that are at play. They are victim survivors in their own right. For children living with family violence, their home is not safe or secure and they are likely to become scared about what might happen to them and the people they love.

Children's exposure to family violence can take many forms, including being subjected to deliberate or accidental violence, overhearing violence, or intervening on behalf of a parent or other person. They may also experience the aftermath of violence, such as being cared for by a distressed or withdrawn parent, helping to care for a hurt or distressed parent, seeing injuries and/or property damage, helping clean up mess or damage, going to the doctor or hospital with an injured parent, being present when police or emergency services attend, and/or, critically to their well-being, being asked to not tell anyone about the event. Some children and young people try to protect their parent or siblings, or they might feel angry and blame them. Some children even think it's their fault.

Adults

Every woman's experience of family violence is unique. However, there is certain patterns that a present such as:

- Often starts with an intimate partner's apparent love transforming into family violence through use of controlling and intimidating behaviour
- The abuse increasing over time, rather than being a one-off incident.
- Due to the repeated coercion and control, women may develop trauma responses or to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, emotional detachment, insomnia, avoidance of reminders ('triggers') and extreme distress when exposed to these, irritability, hypervigilance (watching for anger or signs of violence), memory loss, excessive startle response, clinical depression and anxiety, and loss of appetite.
- Are up to six times more likely to use substances. This 'self-medication' can be understood as a way of coping with and managing the impact of trauma.
- Over time, the perpetrator will increasingly isolate the woman from friends and family [2]

CONTACT US

☎ (03) 9380 9536

✉ info@arabicwelfare.org.au

📍 Level 2, 61 Riggall Street, Broadmeadows VIC 3047



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COMMUNITY IMPACT:

Women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

According to the Victorian Multicultural Commission, the following behavioural examples affect women and children from CALD backgrounds more particularly and illustrate the broader impacts of violence on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships:

- Human trafficking, slavery, and slavery-like offences (e.g., forced marriage, servile marriage, use of partner migration as a method of exploitation)
- Female genital mutilation (e.g. a practice that is a gender-based health and human rights violation and is deeply rooted in tradition and culture for non- medical reasons)
- Spiritual or religious abuse (e.g., a person being forced to attend religious activities against their wishes or being stopped from participating in the religious or cultural practice of their choice)[3].

PRACTICAL IMPACT:

Homelessness

SBS article [4] describes domestic and family violence as the most common reason given for homelessness from people seeking help from specialist support services...42% of their clients. The lack of financial dependence is a causing factor of homelessness. "For women and their children escaping domestic and family violence, access to housing that is secure, affordable and immediately available is the most critical factor in their support pathway'.

Financial Struggle

'Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, often financially dependent on their spouses or unable to work due to visa restrictions, are also particularly vulnerable. Social isolation plus language and cultural barriers can restrict women from CALD communities from accessing support and legal services [5].

IMPACTS OF PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOURS
THERE ARE DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS OF PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOUR, BUT THE ULTIMATE DIRECT IMPACT OF PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOUR IS DEATH.

OTHER IMPACTS:

DIRECT IMPACT:

- physical injuries
- disability
- miscarriage or pregnancy
- sexually transmitted diseases
- financial debt
- fear
- anxiety
- low self-esteem
- social isolation
- loss of freedom
- problems with alcohol and drug use
- self-harming behaviour and suicide
- sense of insecurity and attachment in relationships

INDIRECT IMPACT:

- health or mental health-related symptoms headaches
- irritable bowel syndrome
- depression,
- feelings of degradation
- loss of dignity
- pre-existing disabilities and mental illnesses may be exacerbated.
- trouble concentrating at school.
- decreased cognitive and behavioural functioning ability to cope and adapt to different situations and contexts.

References:

- [1] The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: Family Violence – effects on the children's health. https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Family_violence/
- [2] Presentations of family violence in different relationships and communities: How perpetrators use family violence behaviours across the community. <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-foundation-knowledge-guide/presentations-family-violence-different>
- [3] Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2015, p.4
- [4] SBS. A tragic reality: domestic violence is the main cause of homelessness for women. 10 June 2020. <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2017/06/29/tragic-reality-domestic-violence-main-cause-homelessness-women>
- [5] SBS. A tragic reality: domestic violence is the main cause of homelessness for women. 10 June 2020. <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2017/06/29/tragic-reality-domestic-violence-main-cause-homelessness-women>

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