

TITLE: Childhood Exposure to Physical Domestic Violence in California, 2007

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A large body of research shows that domestic violence (DV) is a threat to the health and well-being of many women in the United States. Recent research shows that DV is also damaging to the children who are exposed to it.¹⁻⁴ Children exposed to DV in their homes can suffer from a range of harmful emotional, social, physical, cognitive, psychological, and developmental consequences.¹⁻⁵ The impact of violence in the home is especially strong among small children and adolescents¹ and include risk taking, problems in school, and mental health issues.^{1,4} In the longer term, children exposed to DV can have poor health as adults and even become perpetrators or victims of violence themselves.²⁻⁵

The California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) shows that many California women have been witnesses and victims of DV, and further supports the research identifying the connection between exposure to DV as a child and poor health-related outcomes as an adult. On the 2005 CWHS, about 18.6 percent of respondents said they had witnessed their mother being treated violently before the age of 18. Women exposed to violence as children reported an average of 6.4 poor mental health days during the past 30 days, whereas women who were *not* exposed to violence as children reported an average of 4.4 poor mental health days. This difference was statistically significant.⁶

About 4,800 women participating in the 2007 CWHS reported on their own experiences with physical and psychological DV. All findings from the CWHS were weighted to the California adult female population for age and race/ethnicity based on the 2000 Census. Women were asked about any physical violence in the previous 12 months—whether an intimate partner threw something at them, pushed, kicked, beat, or threatened them with (or used) a knife or gun, or forced sex. Psychological abuse was assessed by asking whether the respondent was frightened, controlled, or followed by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. The CWHS also asked respondents who said they had experienced physical DV whether any children were present or overheard any of the DV incidents.

About 6.6 percent of women reported at least one incident of psychological DV, and about 3.8 percent of women reported at least one incident of physical DV during the previous 12 months. Approximately 69.3 percent of the respondents experiencing physical DV had one or more children living in the home. Of the physical DV victims with children living in the home, 26.7 percent reported that children (not only those living in the home, but “any” child) overheard or were present during a DV incident during the past 12 months. The estimated number of women who experienced DV and children exposed to it appear in the following table.

Domestic Violence (DV) Experienced by Women and Childhood Exposure to Physical DV in the Previous 12 Months in California, 2007	Percent ⁷	Estimated number
Women experiencing psychological DV	6.6	742,834
Women experiencing physical DV	3.8	421,667
Women experiencing physical DV with children living in the home	69.3	292,068
Women reporting any children exposed to physical DV incident(s)	26.7	77,826

Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2007. Data were weighted to the California population for age and race/ethnicity based on the 2000 Census.

Public Health Message: The public health implications of these findings from the CWSHS are considerable, as the mental and physical health consequences to children who are exposed to these incidents can be severe and life-long. This further demonstrates the important role of public health in preventing DV from ever occurring in the first place (primary prevention), and the continuing need to offer comprehensive shelter services to victims and their children when DV has already occurred.

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¹ Osofsky, J.D. Prevalence of children's exposure to domestic violence and child maltreatment: Implications for prevention and intervention. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. 2003; 6 (3), 161-170.

² Graham-Bermann, S.A. & Edleson, J.L. (Eds.) *Domestic violence in the lives of children: The future of research, intervention and social policy*. 2001; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta: CDC. Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/index.htm>. Retrieved September 2008.

⁴ Dube, S.R., Anda, R.F., Felitti, V.J., Edwards, V.J., & Williamson, D.F. Exposure to abuse, neglect and household dysfunction among adults who witnessed intimate partner violence as children: Implications for health and social services. *Violence Vict*. 2002; 286 (24): 3089-96.

⁵ Whitfield, C.L., Anda, R.F., Dube, S.R., & Felitti, V.J. Violent childhood experiences and the risk for intimate partner violence in adults: assessment in a large health maintenance organization. *J Interpers Violence*. 2003; 18(2): 166-85.

⁶ p<.0001, chi-square test

⁷ Denominator used to calculate percent of "Women experiencing psychological DV" and "Women experiencing physical DV" is out of all CWSHS respondents. Denominator used to calculate percent of "Women experiencing physical DV with children living in the home" is out of all respondents who reported experiencing physical DV. Denominator used to calculate percent of "Women reporting any children exposed to physical DV incident(s)" is out of all women who reported experiencing physical DV and had children living in the home.