

What Are the Effects of Domestic Violence Against Children?

Capstone Research Report

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Abstract

The comprehensive study will aim to address the detrimental effects of domestic violence against children between the ages of 8-18 years old. Domestic violence can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation and exposure to family violence (Kaukinen, C., Powers, R. A., & Meyer, S., 2016, p. 203). As individuals of society, we must recognize that domestic abuse against children can negatively impact the development of the child and can place an increased risk for physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms. The research question is “What are the effects of domestic violence against children?” The use of secondary data provided the research study with the impacts of domestic violence on children and the negative outcomes associated from domestic violence. The scope of the research study is to examine the role of law enforcement agencies when dealing with children who have been domestically abused. The research study also attempts to discuss the importance and urgency to provide effective intervention strategies to minimize the negative effects from domestic violence. The study is aimed to help law enforcement agencies better prepare themselves when they encounter victimized children and to spread awareness.

Keywords: “domestic violence and children”, “child abuse”, “family violence against children”, “child development”, “neglect and children”, “childhood exposure” and “child maltreatment”.

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Background Problem

Domestic violence against children is a horrific epidemic that creates negative effects among children. There were an estimated 235,842 cases involving child maltreatment across Canada in 2008 (Public Health Canada, 2010, p. 2). The statistic shows there are a significant number of children who are abused throughout Canada, however many cases are still unreported to law enforcement agencies or welfare authorities. Domestic violence against children is a significant issue due to the devastating consequences the child receives, which can have a detrimental impact on society. Children are the future generation, which is why it is important to mitigate the issue of domestic violence. According to De Jong (2016), domestic violence can contribute to an unhealthy adult lifestyle, poor physical health, mental health problems and future criminal behavior (p. 201). The purpose of this study is to further examine the relationship between domestic violence and children and how domestic violence affects the well being of the child. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies must have extensive knowledge on the impact of domestic violence against children in order to better prepare themselves when they deal with victimized children. In addition, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) plays a critical role in rehabilitating and reintegrating youth back into society, however it can have an adverse effect on youth who have been victimized and can contribute to negative outcomes. Approximately 9 million Canadians or 1 out of 3 Canadians have experienced abuse before the age of 15 (Taylor, 2016, p.3). There is urgency for law enforcement agencies to pay greater attention to children who are being abused and reform the methods to combat this issue. Children around the world are

abused everyday, which is why it is significant to identify the impact of domestic violence among children and for the protection of society.

Research Question

The research question addresses the detrimental impacts of domestic violence against children from the ages of 8-18 years old. The research question is “What are the effects of domestic violence against children?” To explore this research question, a critical appraisal method was used to complete the research study. The research study collected secondary data and analyzed the data. The following subset questions will aid in the research study to ensure the secondary data is related to the research question.

Subset Questions:

- How will stakeholders help mitigate the issue of domestic violence against children?
- What are the impacts of domestic violence on children?
- How can law enforcement agencies educate officers on domestic violence against children?
- How can law enforcement professionals improve their intervention process when dealing with domestic abuse among children?

The response from law enforcement agencies when encountering children who have been domestically abused must be consistent and effective. The research study attempts to explain the importance of developing proper intervention strategies and protocols to ensure the child's needs are met. The goal of this research study is to allow the reader, specifically law enforcement professionals, to become more knowledgeable about child abuse cases and to successfully ensure that the child is no longer subjected to

domestic abuse. The choices and actions from law enforcement agencies that are investigating domestic violence cases or saving the child can create positive or negative long-term differences in the child's life.

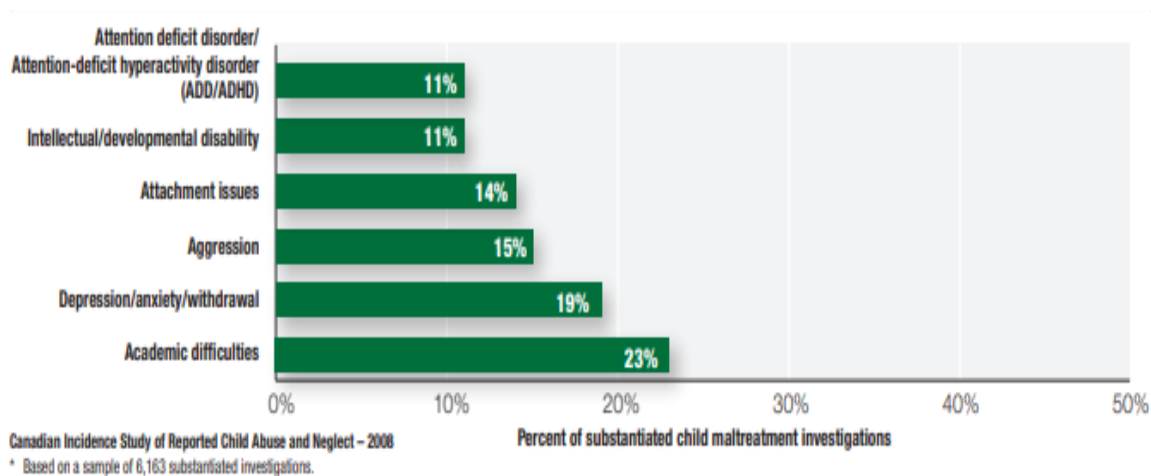
Literature Review

The secondary data obtained throughout the research study presented common themes in the literature review. Research pertaining to domestic violence against children showed that negative symptoms, law enforcement intervention strategies, the criminal justice system and the possibility for future criminality are prominent issues associated with domestic violence against children.

Negative symptoms

Children who are exposed to domestic violence can undergo severe symptoms that can be detrimental to their physical and mental health. Domestic violence can create increased aggression, depression, anxiety, poor academic performance and create a heightened risk for substance abuse (Kaukinen et al., 2016, p. 200). However, one of the most significant issues from domestic violence is the harm to the child's development. The behavioral and neuroendocrine consequences due to domestic violence are detrimental because the symptoms generally include a strain on the social, emotional and developmental growth of the child (Kaukinen et al., 2016, p. 202). The physical and mental consequences have the potential to create negative outcomes that can be displayed during adulthood. For instance, children who have been sexually abused may not be able to have a normal relationship in their adulthood. Children may have difficulty in trying to end the abuse and difficulty in feeling safe and secure. The challenges from domestic violence can create difficulty for adults when they are trying to express their want for a

normal relationship and the need to be loved (McCabe & Murphy, 2017, p. 105). Furthermore, McCoy (2014) suggests that the consequences from domestic violence against children can lead to severe outcomes such as poor attachment, academic problems, impaired socialization, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychiatric disorders (p.114). The literature suggests that the effects from domestic violence on children is strongly associated to a poor development of a child and may lead to an unhealthy lifestyle in adulthood. An investigation conducted in Canada with a sample size of 6,163 children who have been maltreated had reported at least one symptom from being exposed to domestic violence (Public Health Canada, 2010, p. 5). The top six symptoms children reported are displayed in Figure 1. The children reported that they were negatively affected in academic performance, severe depression, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, attachment issues, development disabilities and disorders (Public Health Canada, 2010, p. 5). Children who are victims of domestic violence can experience horrific symptoms and negative impacts, which can affect the child's well being and potentially the rest of their lives.



From Public Health Canada, 2008 (<http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/CIS-2008-rprt-eng.pdf>)

Figure 1: Child functioning issues in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Canada in 2008.

Law Enforcement Response

Law enforcement agencies play a prominent role in child protection. The literature suggests that law enforcement agencies are not doing enough to mitigate the issue of domestic violence. De Jong (2016) argues that the longer we delay the use of effective intervention strategies, the more difficult it becomes for society to manage the problems the children experiences (p. 213). The use of effective intervention strategies by law enforcement agencies can potentially save the child from developing harmful symptoms. In order to reverse the effects from domestic violence on children, law enforcement professionals must recognize the need for successful intervention methods (De Jong, 2016, p. 212). The literature suggests that one of the primary goals for law enforcement agencies is to investigate crimes and collect evidence for a criminal prosecution (McCoy, 2014). Hendricks, McKean & Hendricks (2010) also states that the law enforcement officers will view domestic violence against children as crimes, however this creates a substantial amount of focus on the preservation and collection of evidence to win the case (p. 210). Children who are exposed to domestic violence must receive a significant amount of attention and effective intervention in order to return to their normal levels of behaviour. Furthermore, domestic violence cases present complex and challenging situations. Law enforcement officers must communicate to the child in a sensitive manner that does not create secondary victimization to the child. However, this can be a difficult challenge due to the lack of specialized training among police officers. McCabe & Murphy (2017) mentions that it is challenging for police departments to acquire specialized training for officers who investigate child abuse cases due to the financial cost (p. 165). Law enforcement officers who do not have specialized training

can expose the child to harsh cross-examination, mature language, intrusive interviews, harsh placement of child and create fear from intimidation, which can lead to secondary victimization. Furthermore, Webb (2016) discusses that police officers are challenged when working with children who have been abused and how the investigation can affect the psychological development of the child (p.185). Law enforcement agencies must ensure they have fast and effective intervention strategies in place when dealing with children who have been domestically abused and create funding towards specialized training to avoid the child experiencing negative repercussions.

Criminal Justice Connection

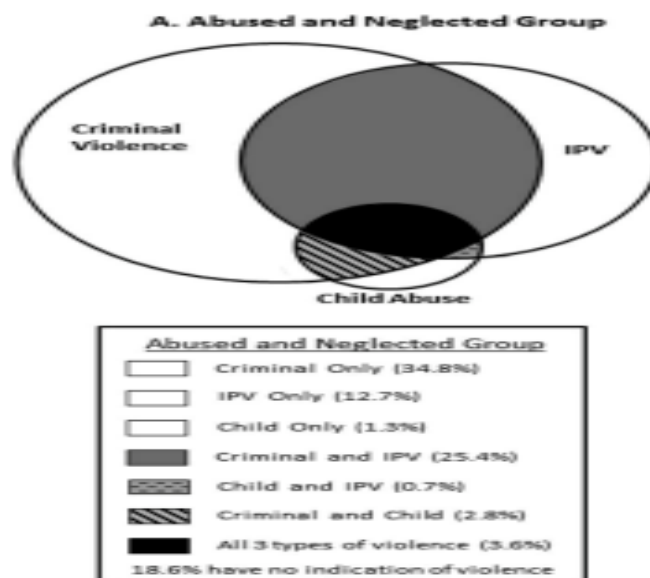
Similar to the law enforcement response to domestic violence against children, the criminal justice system also plays a key role in domestic violence cases. A substantial number of children who have been exposed to domestic violence are often involved in the criminal justice system (Webb, 2016, p. 284). The criminal justice system must recognize that children who have been exposed to domestic violence are survivors and must ensure that the system reduces the negative impacts of secondary victimization (Webb, 2016, p. 284). The justice system is not entirely set up to meet the needs of a child who is a victim of domestic violence. The use of cross-examination in the courtroom can become aggressive in nature, which can become frightening and overwhelming to the child (McCoy, 2014, p. 277). The literature review suggests that the criminal justice system must recognize that there is the potential of negatively affecting the child that is involved in the justice system. The criminal justice system must adjust to meet the best interests for the child who has been victimized. The judge may recommend child protection agencies to ensure that the child is being protected and not harmed throughout the

process. Melchiorre and Vis (2013) suggests that child protection workers are lacking to provide conceptually based intervention strategies that provide help for victims of domestic violence and provide ways to end the violence in their lives (p. 490). There is a significant challenge for child welfare workers to build strong relationships with the mothers who are victims of violence because they do not want to hold their husbands accountable or have the possibility of losing their child. The literature suggests that child welfare workers must provide an effective strategy that will facilitate understanding of the situation and promote positive change to mitigate the issue of domestic violence against the child. The criminal justice system must consider the child's background of being a victim of domestic violence and provide methods to ensure the child has a successful outcome in the criminal justice system.

Future Criminality

One of the most significant issues stemming from domestic violence against children is the likelihood of developing long-term consequences that may lead to future criminality. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to abuse drugs, alcohol, suffer from depression and engage in criminal behaviour (Roark, Knight, Olson, & DeSandre, 2017, p. 79). Furthermore, Dargis and Koenigs (2017) research suggests that witnessing domestic violence as a child can create psychopathic traits that may lead to future criminal behaviour (p. 178). Dargis and Koenigs (2017) research study had a sample of incarcerated male offenders who were domestically abused as children. There is a strong association between witnessing domestic violence during childhood and showing psychopathy traits in adulthood (Dargis & Koenigs (2017). The literature suggests that there is a consistency between individuals who have been domestically

abused as children and those who engage in violent criminal behaviour in the future (Kruttschnitt, Ward & Shelbe, 2001, p. 513). It can be suggested that children who are exposed to domestic violence experience long lasting consequences that result in criminal behaviour and a cycle of violence (Grella, Stein, & Greenwell, 2005). Milaniak and Widom (2015) literature also supports that children who are domestically abused are at an increased risk to commit criminal violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) (p. 247). Figure 2 displays a venn diagram of negative outcomes linked to being a victim of child abuse. The most common negative symptom stemming from domestic violence was future criminal behaviour. The problematic issue stemming from domestic violence can contribute to the continuum of domestic violence because the individual may begin to abuse his or her child. There is a significant amount of research that has been conducted which suggests that there is an association between domestic violence among children and engaging in criminal activity in the future.



From Public Health Canada, 2008 (<http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/CIS-2008-rprt-eng.pdf>)

Figure 2: Negative effects stemming from child abuse.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the link between domestic violence against children and how it affects the well being of the child. The research design will be based on a critical appraisal method. The critical appraisal method examines the secondary data obtained throughout the literature review and carefully assesses the validity and relevance of the data to the research topic. Furthermore, the critical appraisal method allows the research to establish the association between the variables in the study. The variables of this study are domestic violence on children and the well being of the child. Domestic violence against children is the independent variable, which can possibly cause a change in the dependent variable, which is the well being of the child. The secondary data was grouped into general themes, which allowed the researcher interpret the findings of the data. The critical appraisal method allowed the researcher to collect secondary data and discover inferences or relationships between the secondary literatures.

Data Analysis

The secondary data obtained throughout the research study was critically analyzed and produced common themes that were prevalent throughout the literature review. The common themes that were portrayed throughout the secondary data are associated with domestic violence among children. The common themes discussed were negative symptoms, law enforcement response, criminal justice connection and future criminality. The themes suggest that children who are victims of domestic violence undergo hardships throughout different aspects of their lives. Children undergo internal health problems, issues in the criminal justice system, issues with law enforcement agencies and experience long lasting problems such as future criminality. The themes suggest that

society is lacking to help children who are victims of domestic violence and which can mitigate with proactive strategies from law enforcement agencies. The secondary data obtained throughout the literature review is strongly related to the aim of this study, as it contextualizes the outcomes from children who have been exposed to domestic violence throughout their lives.

Methodology

Data Collection

The critical appraisal approach examined the secondary data and evaluated the credibility and validity of the data. The secondary data that was collected measured the impact linked to domestic violence and children. The secondary data also measured the detrimental outcomes that were associated with domestic violence against children. Several keywords were searched through the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) online library's EBSCOhost Discovery Service (EDS) database to obtain sources pertaining to the research topic and the subset questions. The keywords provided extensive literature on this topic. The secondary data included literature from several computerized databases called EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, Google Scholar and ProQuest. The secondary data included a range of sources that were selected to be used such as books, peer reviewed journals and government reports. Inclusion criteria was established such as, secondary data with a publication range from 2010-2018 and research conducted in North America. Exceptions were made for reports and specific articles that were published earlier than 2010 because there were no recent publications and a lack of research in certain topics. Furthermore, the secondary data that was obtained throughout the literature search was reviewed to ensure that the information was credible and valid

and excluded literature that was not credible. The secondary data collected were reviewed by editorial boards, which suggested that the publication standards were met and that there were peer reviewed. Throughout the literature search, 35 articles were selected for an abstract review and 17 articles were selected for a full review because they were strongly related to the research topic and met the inclusion criteria (Refer to Appendix A). The authors of the literature were reviewed for credibility and were assessed due to their knowledge in the field of domestic violence and their previous work of literature. The secondary data collection also excluded studies that did not discuss the variables, outcomes, potential limitations and the sampling error estimations in the data. The secondary data collected throughout this research study provided research on the impacts of domestic violence, symptoms, and types of abuse and measures to prevent domestic violence against children.

Discussion

Domestic violence can be a single incident, however the effects can last a lifetime among the child. Law enforcement agencies that are responsible for intervening in cases of domestic violence against children must recognize the multiple and complex causes of the problem (Hendricks et al., 2010, p. 198). The importance of identifying the impact of domestic violence among children is significant to the child's well being and for the protection of society. Domestic violence can lead to detrimental symptoms that the child can experience such as attempted suicide, abusing drugs and alcohol, engaging in prostitution and committing criminal activity (Webb, 2016, p. 194). It is the duty of law enforcement officers to mitigate the issues of child abuse and to protect a child who is getting harmed. However, the intervention of a police officer can accumulate negative

impacts on the victimized child. Law enforcement officers must have proper intervention strategies to ensure the child is not at a risk for secondary victimization. The intervention strategies must become more effective in reducing the risk for negative symptoms and outcomes that the child can possibly experience. However, domestic abuse cases are challenging for law enforcement agencies because law enforcement officers must be specially trained when helping children who have been victimized. The financial resources to ensure that officers have a specialized training in assisting children who have been domestically abused can become costly for the department to do so (McCabe & Murphy, 2017, p. 197). Furthermore, child protection services and the criminal justice system also face challenges when dealing with children who have been domestically abused. This is a prominent issue because agencies that are aimed to help and support children from domestic abuse cannot fully do so because of the challenges they are faced with. Since the child is not able to receive the most desirable form of help and support from law enforcement agencies, it can lead the child to not being able to overcome the horrific affects from domestic violence. This leads to the issue of the child experiencing long lasting effects and the possibility of engaging in criminal activity (Kaukinen et al., 2016, p. 201). The act of engaging in criminal activity can take the form of IPV or family violence. Due to the ineffective intervention strategies and heightened risk for secondary victimization, the child can commit criminal behavior in their adulthood and begin to abuse their own child, which leads to an ongoing cycle of domestic violence. It is critical to focus on the issue of domestic violence against children because it is a growing epidemic and will not be mitigated without the help and support from law

enforcement agencies. Hence, domestic violence among children can occur at the beginning of one's life and often continue until death (McCabe & Murphy, 2017, p. 28).

Findings

The research study advocates that domestic violence among children is a worldwide public health concern. The issue with domestic violence is that it can jeopardize the child's developmental growth and create irreparable harm if the child does not receive effective help and support from law enforcement agencies. The research study presented common themes that were interpreted from the literature review.

Furthermore, the prevalent themes suggest that domestic violence against children creates harmful impacts on the child and continues to take a substantial toll on their life after the incident. The literature suggests that victimized children are at a heightened risk for poor social, emotional and developmental growth (De Jong, 2016, p. 202). The most consistent finding in the literature is that the parents who abuse the children often report of having been physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected as children (Hendricks et al., 2010, p. 199). Domestic violence stems from a cycle of violence and must be addressed in order to mitigate the issue. Children can often feel helpless when they are domestically abused and may rely on law enforcement agencies to help mitigate the issue. However, the findings from the literature suggest that children may have a negative interaction with law enforcement agencies and may develop further symptoms that affect the child's well being. The research study found that the children who are victimized are often involved in the criminal justice system, however the criminal justice system is not set up to meet the best interests of children who have been victimized (Webb, 2016, p.184). The criminal justice system must treat victimized children as survivors of trauma,

rather than witnesses. If children are getting treated in an intrusive and insensitive manner, the child will likely experience secondary traumatization.

Furthermore, the research study found that law enforcement agencies have overlooked and under-researched the majority of child abuse cases that are processed by child welfare agencies (Roark et al., 2017, p. 79). Although, cases that are provided from the child welfare agencies may not be detailed and contain all the facts of the situation because they are faced with many challenges and complex situations. The child welfare workers have a difficulty in creating a strong relationship with the parent who is protecting the child against the other parent's actions of abuse (Melchiorre & Vis, 2013, p. 494). The parent often hides the issue of domestic violence occurring in the household because they have a perception of fear created from their partner. Therefore, the child welfare worker is not aware of all the details and issues that are occurring in the household and are not able to provide strong details to law enforcement agencies, which leads to the lack of cases that are processed. The research study reveals that law enforcement agencies and child welfare agencies have a key role in reducing the negative effects of domestic violence among children. However, law enforcement agencies must pay greater attention to the best interests of the victimized child by undergoing specialized training, creating proactive intervention strategies and meeting the best interests of the victimized child.

Conclusion

The research study concludes that domestic violence against children from the ages of 8-18 years old are at a heightened risk to experience negative symptoms that is associated with domestic violence. The critical appraisal method proved that the

independent variable (domestic violence among children) impacts the dependent variable (the well-being of the child). The prevalence of domestic violence is strongly associated with negative symptoms. Children who were exposed to domestic violence suffered from short or long term consequences, such as behavioural symptoms and social problems. The research study obtained secondary data to gain background information, which allowed the research study to make interpretations of the data. The research study suggested that there are four common themes associated to domestic violence against child. The themes identified were negative symptoms, the law enforcement response, the criminal justice connection and the likelihood of future criminality. Law enforcement agencies have the ability to mitigate the issue of domestic violence among child and help children create a better future. However, the research study has interpreted that law enforcement agencies are not doing enough to combat this issue. Law enforcement officers must have extensive knowledge of domestic violence among children in order to help provide a positive outcome. Although, the research study suggested that departments are faced with challenges when dealing with victimized children. Law enforcement agencies must ensure that their employees are equipped with knowledge about domestic violence and create effective intervention strategies to help the child. There was a gap in the literature that discussed intervention strategies that are currently used when dealing with domestic violence cases and proper protocols that are being used. Due to the gap in literature discussing police involvement in domestic violence cases among children, it can be interpreted that law enforcement agencies have neglected and have not paid serious attention to this issue. The research study affirms that domestic violence can be destructive to a child's development and their well being. In conclusion, the effects

stemming from domestic violence among children can be significantly mitigated with proper intervention methods that are carried out by law enforcement agencies.

Recommendations for further research

The following recommendations can be made to law enforcement agencies to help mitigate the issue of domestic violence among children and to better prepare law enforcement officers when dealing with children who are victimized from domestic violence.

- Establishment of specialized training for officers about intervention methods to use when dealing with domestically abused children.
- Establishment of seminars on mitigating the issue of domestic violence among children. Individuals who have extensive knowledge about the impact of domestic violence on children, such as social workers or psychologists should teach the seminars.
- Establishment of seminars conducted from law enforcement agencies to educate parents about domestic violence and how to create a safe environment for their children.
- Continuing research to create practices and programs to mitigate domestic violence among children.

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Appendix AGraphic Chart