

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHARLOTTESVILLE / ALBEMARLE YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of informational briefs from the Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families compiling recent local data, supplemented with national research, about a pressing issue facing children and families in Charlottesville/Albemarle. This brief examines the impact of exposure to domestic violence on local children. CCF's data indicates a relatively low rate of domestic assaults reported to police; yet a review of cases of juvenile offenders and a subset of children needing extensive Comprehensive Service Act (CSA) services revealed that one-third to over half of these local high-risk youth experienced domestic violence in their lives.

SIGNIFICANCE

The negative impact on children who witness domestic violence is well documented. Jeffrey Edelson of the University of Minnesota reviewed 31 rigorous research studies and identified a series of childhood problems statistically associated with a child's witnessing domestic violence.¹ These problems can be categorized in three areas:

1. Behavioral and Emotional Problems for witnessing children:

- Increased aggressive and antisocial behaviors
- Lower social competence than peers

- More anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and temperament problems
- For boys, poor peer relationships, self-control, and overall competence
- Increased violent behavior by the child



2. Problems with Cognitive Functioning and Attitudes for witnessing children:

- Lower cognitive functioning
- Positive attitudes towards the use of violence to resolve conflicts

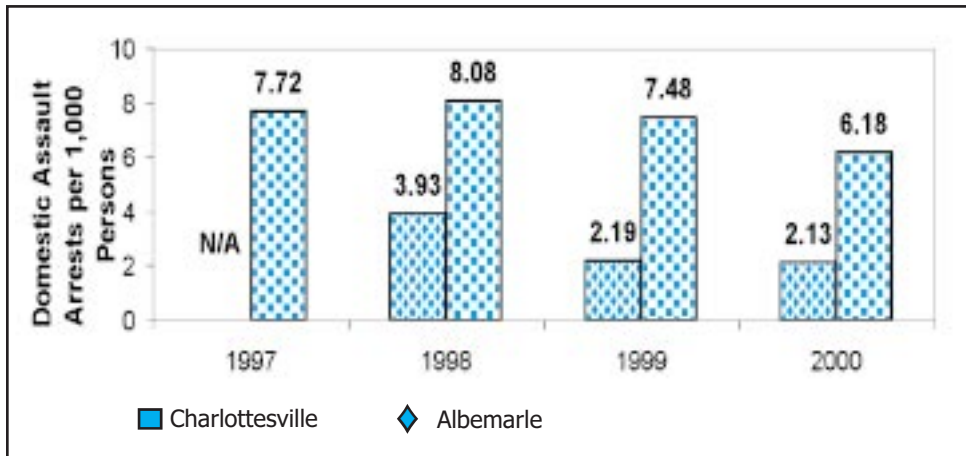
3. Longer-term Problems for witnessing children:

- Adult depression, trauma-related symptoms, and low-self esteem
- Increased substance abuse
- Involvement in the criminal justice system
- Violence in adult relationships



LOCAL FINDINGS

Stepping Stones data indicates that the local arrest rates for domestic assault in 2000 ranged from 2.13 per 1,000 residents in Albemarle to 6.18 per 1,000 residents in Charlottesville.²



According to Brandi Painter, of the Shelter for Help in Emergency, 65 families and 42 children were housed at their emergency shelter during FY01, with approximately 25 additional families turned away due to lack of space.

Two recent studies by the Commission on Children and Families reveal that many local high-risk children have been exposed to domestic violence, which is a likely contributing factor to their emotional, behavioral and social difficulties. CCF's Profile of Juvenile Offenders reports that 39% of 263 juveniles placed on probation locally in 1997 and 1998 were exposed to adult domestic violence.³

A review of 36 cases studied by CCF's Children Needing Extensive Services Work Group indicated that 61% were exposed to domestic violence. This group of youth represents local children who have very serious emotional and behavioral problems requiring intensive and expensive out of community treatment. These services are funded through the State Comprehensive Services Act and local tax revenues to meet the needs of children in foster care or who need intervention to prevent foster care, students whose special education needs cannot be met in traditional schools, and delinquent

youth.⁴

The Winter, 2001, Virginia Child Protection Newsletter notes that "it is rare for domestic violence to be the only stressor" for child witnesses. Other issues may include dislocation, economic disadvantages, and interactions with the courts and police.⁵ Painter noted battered mothers might be so overwhelmed by their abuse that they have not attended to the needs of their children. She noted that many of the children entering the shelter are one to two years behind developmentally and demonstrate behavioral and social problems.

¹ Edelson, Jeffrey L., "Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing of Domestic Violence", U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Online Resources, 1999.

² *Stepping Stones*. Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families, August, 2001.

³ Ellis, Gretchen, *Profile of Juvenile Offenders*, Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families, January, 2001

⁴ "Children Needing Extensive Services Report", Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families, 2000.

⁵ "Children Living with Domestic Violence", Virginia Child Protection Newsletter, Winter, 2001.

⁶ Assessing the Justice System Response to Violence Against Women, STOP Violence Against Women Grants, <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/Promise>, July, 1998

⁷ Family Violence Prevention Fund. Website: <http://endabuse.org/contact>. 2001

⁸ "Children Living with Domestic Violence", Virginia Child Protection Newsletter, Winter, 2001.

IMPLICATIONS

Because exposure to domestic violence has a negative impact on local children, there is a need for enhanced efforts to prevent domestic violence and to intervene effectively with children exposed to domestic violence.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, effective prevention strategies can include programs that create a coordinated community response.⁶ Promising approaches include Community Intervention Projects (coordinated advocacy organizations), and Coordinating Councils (state and local forums for interagency communication and collaboration). The Family Violence Prevention Fund has created Neighbor to Neighbor and Worker to Worker domestic violence prevention programs which are available to communities.⁷



Artwork courtesy of DAP's Children's Program

Intervention strategies for children who witness domestic violence include safety assessment, planning, and shelter programs. Promising models for treatment and mitigation of the impact of domestic violence include trauma-specific and traditional mental health counseling, intensive coordinated in-home services, and specialized group therapy in which children and parents participate in separate and combined groups.⁸

For more information and data, call CCF at 970-3550.