



CWHS

Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

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 also damages 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 includes 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) showed that many California women have been witnesses or victims of DV. The CWHS further supported 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. Women were asked about any physical violence in the previous 12 months: whether an intimate partner threw something at them; pushed; kicked; or beat them; threatened them with (or used) a knife or gun; or forced them to have 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. All findings from the CWHS were weighted by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population.

The data showed that women and children are exposed to psychological and physical DV. 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 (see Figure 1). 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.

Childhood Exposure to Physical Domestic Violence in California, 2007

California Department of Public Health
Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control Branch
Violence Surveillance Unit
Office of Family Planning Division
Domestic Violence Program

Public Health Message:

The mental and physical health consequences to children who are exposed to incidents can be severe and life-long. Public health has an important role 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.

Childhood Exposure to Physical Domestic Violence in California, 2007

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Figure 1

Domestic Violence (DV) Experienced by California Women and Childhood Exposure to Physical DV in the Previous 12 Months, 2007	Percent⁷	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.

- 1 Osofsky JD. Prevalence of children’s exposure to domestic violence and child maltreatment: implications for prevention and intervention. *Clin Child and Fam Psychol Rev.* 2003;6(3):161-170.
- 2 Graham-Bermann SA, Edleson JL. (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/> Published January 2008. Accessed September 2008.
- 4 Dube SR, Anda RF, Felitti VJ, Edwards VJ, Williamson DF. 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 CL, Anda RF, Dube SR, Felitti VJ. 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 CWHHS 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.

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