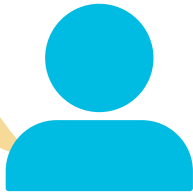


What Should Legal Professionals Know About How Intimate Partner Violence Affects Children?

What is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

- The CDC defines IPV as abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship (current/former spouses or dating partners) and includes any of the following behaviors: physical or sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression (e.g., verbal abuse). IPV can occur once or over multiple years.
- [CDC: Preventing Intimate Partner Violence](#)
- Depending on what state you live in, the types of crimes considered IPV may be different. Use these websites to find the laws in your state:
 - [WomensLaw.org: State Statutes](#)
 - [WomensLaw.org: State vs Federal Law](#)



How does IPV affect children?

- According to Family Systems Theory, the family unit constitutes a complex, interconnected system of individuals and relationships that influence one another. That means violence between parents can affect other relationships in the family, such as the mother-child relationship, for example.⁹
- Children who witness IPV are at higher risk for mental health problems, including higher levels of aggression, anxiety, and social withdrawal.¹⁰
- People exposed to IPV as children are more likely to experience dating violence as adults. This cycle can be broken with increased access to social support, community services, and mental health help.¹¹⁻¹⁶

What do researchers wish legal professionals knew about IPV?

- Research shows that IPV is incredibly common.
 - About 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will experience IPV at some point in their lifetime.¹
 - 15.5 million American children are exposed to IPV in their family home each year.²
- IPV is often underreported.
 - Most IPV is not reported to police. Of those who report to police, around 20% will successfully get a protection order.³
 - Women experiencing psychological or verbal abuse may be less likely to seek help.⁴ Feelings of shame, guilt, or fear associated with sexual IPV may also make victims less likely to report.⁵
- Some groups are at especially high risk for IPV.⁶⁻⁸
 - Black and Indigenous women are at especially high risk for IPV. Indigenous women experiencing IPV may also experience more severe injuries than other groups.
 - Women from low-income backgrounds are at higher risk for IPV, especially when they depend on their partner financially.
 - Immigrant women are also at higher risk for IPV, and face additional challenges with social isolation, economic disparities, language difficulties, and trouble knowing their rights.



Children are exposed to IPV in many ways. Here are some facts to consider:

- The risk of IPV for women with children is up to two times higher compared to women without children. Parents may believe that they can easily hide violence from their children, but children witness 68-87% of IPV incidents in families.¹⁷⁻¹⁹
- There are many ways children can be exposed to IPV and its indirect effects on the family, including:
 - Eye witnessing violent incidents
 - Hearing threats or experiencing tension (“walking on eggshells”)
 - Hearing arguments and fights in household
 - Exposure to IPV in utero while the mother is pregnant
 - Seeing aftereffects of violence (e.g., parental injuries, destruction to home)
 - Using children as a form of control (“kidnapping” or using the child for manipulation)
 - Witnessing police intervention
 - Having to move to a shelter
 - Loss of parent to incarceration, hospitalization, or death
 - Secrecy and restricted contacts with others
 - Financial stressors on family



What can we do?

- Educate legal professionals about the effects of IPV on families and children so that they can be sensitive and trauma-informed with families seeking legal help.
- Educate families on their rights under the law to better inform their decisions. Legal professionals can also help educate the researchers, family counselors, and community agencies that work with these families about their rights.
- Educate families about resources available to them:
 - Free, confidential, 24/7 support for IPV: <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - Programs and resources for children, youth, and teens exposed to IPV from Futures Without Violence: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/children-youth-teens/>
 - SAMHSA Considerations for IPV during Covid-19: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>
- Educate families about evidence-based, parent-child interventions that can support IPV survivors and their children in healing. The TRANSFORM Center has an extensive list of publications related to the impact of IPV on children and the efficacy of parent-child prevention and intervention programs: <https://www.psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/researchers/publications/>



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Citations And Resources

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