

Women Are Safe, Inc.

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Caught In The Middle

- **At least 3.3 million children between the ages of 3 and 19 are at risk of exposure to parental violence every year. [1]**
- **Between 50 and 70% of men who abuse their female partners also abuse their children. [2]**
- **Children from homes where domestic violence occurs are physically or sexually abused and or seriously neglected at a rate 15 times the national average.**
- **Children who witness violence are at a high risk of anxiety and depression, and exhibit more aggressive, antisocial, inhibited and fearful behaviors. [3] They also experience delayed development of speech, motor, and cognitive skills, and their school performance may suffer compared with that of their peers. [4]**
- **According to a 1996 report by the American Psychological Association (APA), custody and visitation disputes are more frequent when there is a history of domestic violence. Further, fathers who batter mothers are twice as likely to seek sole custody of their children [5] and they may misuse the legal system as a forum for continuing abuse through harassing and retaliatory legal actions.**
- **Despite the perception that mothers always win custody cases, studies show that fathers who contest custody win sole or joint custody in 40 to 70% of cases. [6]**
- **Batterers use custodial access to the children as a tool to terrorize battered women or to retaliate for separation. According to one study, 5% of abusive fathers threaten during visitation to kill the mother, 34% threaten to kidnap their children, and 25% threaten to hurt their children. [7]**
- **More than 50% of child abductions result from domestic violence, and most abductions are perpetrated by fathers or their agents.**

- **Children’s lives are frequently disrupted by moves to escape domestic violence. They lose considerable school time; flee home without their books, school supplies, changes of clothes, etc.**
- **Since school records are not protected by law, violent fathers use these records to track down the mother or kidnap the children. As a result, many children of battered women are kept out of school for security reasons.**
- **Many children of battered women who move to a new school are unable to enroll in the school if they lack birth certificates, immunization records, and other paperwork that got left behind when they and their mothers had to escape from home. Batterers also frequently destroy these documents as part of their control of the family.**
- **Many parents minimize or deny the presence of children while the mothers are being assaulted. However, interviews with children of battered women reveal that they have seen and heard and can describe detailed accounts of violent behavior that their mother or father never realized they had witnessed.**
- **Events can be witnessed in many ways, not just by sight. Children may hear their mother’s screams and crying; the abuser’s threats; sounds of fist hitting flesh, glass breaking, wood splintering, cursing and degrading language. Children also witness the consequences of abuse – their mother’s bruises and torn clothes, holes in wall, broken furniture, and their mother’s tears.**
- **Many fathers inadvertently injure children while throwing about furniture or other household objects when abusing their female partners.**
- **62% of sons over age 14 were injured when they attempted to protect their mothers.**
- **15 – 25% of pregnant women are battered.**

Endnotes:

[1] Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, *Children of Battered Women*, Sage Publications 19 (1990).

[2] Lee H. Bowker, Michelle Arbitell & Richard McFerron, “On the Relationship Between Wife Beating and Child Abuse,” in Kersti Yillo & Michele Bograd, Eds., *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* 158, 162 (1988); M.A. Strauss and R.J. Gelles, *Physical Violence in American Families* (1990).

[3] Einat Peled, Peter G. Jaffe and Jeffery L. Edelson, *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Battered Women* 4-5 (1995); Mary Kenning, Antia Merchant and Alan Thompkins, “Research of the Effects of Witnessing Parental Battering: Clinical and Legal Policy Responses; 238-9, in Michael Sheimnem, ed. *Woman Battering: Policy Responses* 237 (1991).

[4] Westra and Martin, Children of Battered Women, MCH Project #926, U.S. Govt., Dept. H.W.W., 19.

[5] Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, Violence and the Family 40 (1996).

[6] Ruth Abrams and John Greaney, Report of the Gender Bias Study of the Supreme Judicial Court [of Massachusetts], 62-63 (1989).

[7] Joan Zorza, Protecting the Children in Custody Disputes When One Parent Abuses the Other, 29 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 1113, 119 (1996).