Impact of Family Violence & Sexual Assault on Children

Professor Emma Hetherington
Dr. Jennifer Elkins
About Us

School of Law
Wilbanks Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation Clinic

School of Social Work
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Agenda

01 Definitions

02 Impact

03 Legal Issues

04 Therapeutic Legal Spaces
1. Who is in the room?
2. Who are your clients or constituents?
3. How long have you been doing this work?
Definition
Domestic Violence applies to any 2 parties in the same household who commit crimes of physical harm, bodily injury, or assault; creating a fear of the physical harm, bodily injury, pushing, shoving, slapping, punching, kicking, or assault will happen soon; sexual assault; or stalking. A relationship where one person maintains power and control over the other person.

Intimate Partner Violence includes any behaviors that one intimate partner (current or former) uses over another to establish power and control. These can include physical or sexual violence, but they do not always; they can be financial, emotional, psychological, cultural, spiritual, reproductive, or other controlling behaviors.

October is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE awareness month

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1.800.799.SAFE (7233)
TTY 1.800.787.3244
Text "START" to 88788
Child Sexual Abuse

"Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviors. Non-touching behaviors can include voyeurism (trying to look at a child’s naked body), exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography. Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds may experience sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse affects [] girls, [] boys, [transgender youth, nonbinary youth, and gender non-conforming youth] in all kinds of neighborhoods and communities.

https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse
Commercial and Sexual Exploitation of Children

A range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person.

Children under 18 cannot consent to being trafficked—do not need to prove force, fraud or coercion. CSEC includes survival sex where there is no particular "trafficker."
Impact
Is witnessing DV or IPV a form of child abuse?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Not Sure
What makes an account of DV, IPV, or sexual assault "credible"?

- Linear account
- Specifies details clearly
- Reported soon after the incident
- None of the above are required
What is a "typical" trauma response?

- Fight, Flight, or Freeze
- No Response At All
- Fear and Isolation
- All of the Above
I know how to identify trauma responses in clients.

Always

Sometimes

Rarely

What's a Trauma Response?
The Impact of Trauma

- Feeling
- Behaving
- Growing
- Thinking
- Relating
- Working
Impact of DV/IPV

- Direct v. Indirect
- Short-Term v. Long-Term
Is Witnessing DV/IPV Child Abuse or Neglect?

- Exposure to DV/IPV is an adverse childhood experience
- Witnessing DV/IPV during childhood can lead to neurobiological changes, adjustment and behavioral problems, as well as increase the risk for mental illness like PTSD
- Exposure to DV may compromise cognitive functioning and emotional regulation
- Forced separation is the most significant independent predictor of risk for emotional and behavioral problems in childhood
- Adults who were in care ages 2-6 had greater odds of psychiatric and neurodevelopmental disorders than those adults who were never removed from their homes as children but experienced similar early life circumstances

Impact of CSA

- What it means to Children
- What it means to Perpetrators
- Key Concerns of survivors
How Children Respond To Trauma:

Traumatogenic Factors Impacting Outcomes

- Age
- Relative vs. Non-Relative
- Victim-Perpetrator Relationship
- Means Used To Silence Victim
- Victim Role (active vs. passive)
- Severity/Duration/Frequency
- Caregiver Response
- Cognitive Appraisal of Abuse (responsibility, blame)
- Community & Societal Response
Non-Offending Parents:

Common Responses To CSA Disclosure

1. A Protective Response
2. A Response Reflecting Role Conflict
3. Overwhelmed, Denying the Abuse or its Significance
4. Rejecting and Unprotective
Non-Offending Parents:

Factors that Influence Lack of Support

1. Cognitive Issues
2. Cycle of Abuse
3. Mental Health Issues
4. Addictions
Non-Offending Parents and Denial

Facts

It couldn’t happen in my family. It’s all a misunderstanding. They would never do that.

Awareness

I never saw anything unusual. The child never told me anything.

Responsibility

I told her not to walk around without a bra. She came on to him.
Non-Offending Parents and Denial

Impact
They'll get over it. They seem to be doing okay

Need for Protection
Now that I know, I'll watch him more carefully

Treatment
My child seems the same as always. It's better to let them forget
How to Respond to Disclosures

- Don't Make Assumptions
- Acknowledge the disclosure
- Have they told anyone before? How did that go?
- Do not try to gather all the details
- Do they relate their current difficulties to their abuse?
- Is it an issue that they need help with?
Common Trauma Reminders

- Perception of Lack of Power
- Unexpected Change
- Feeling Threatened or Attack
- Feeling Shame
- Feelings of Deprivation or Need
- Intimacy and Positive Attention
Assessment Considerations
Creating Environments Conducive to Disclosure

Creating a Safe Environment

Nonjudgmental approach, empathy, warmth, genuineness, compassion, building good rapport, being attentive

Clients expect you to act just like their families did

You have to do the opposite
Be trustworthy, have good boundaries, be transparent; keep your word, own up to mistakes made

Need to be self-aware.

Could any of your behaviors come across as abusive, offensive, controlling, or make clients feel powerless?
Ensure your interaction makes clients feel valued, powerful, and like they have some control over the process

Need to “listen louder” and “listen deeper”
Legal Issues
What legal issues do you see the most?

- Need for Protective Order
- Divorce/Custody
- Dependency/Foster Care
- Criminal
The most dangerous place for a woman in this country is her own home. She’s most likely to be beaten or killed by a man she knows.

Gloria Steinem
Domestic Violence, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Myth of "Parental Alienation Syndrome"
Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline

"Findings vary, but local and regional studies show alarmingly high rates of abuse among girls in the juvenile justice system."

https://www.ojp.gov/pdfsfiles1/nij/grants/228620.pdf
Creating Empowering & Therapeutic Legal Spaces
Have you ever adjusted how you work with a client in order to address their trauma or behavioral responses to trauma?

- Yes, all the time
- Often, but not always
- Occasionally
- Never
TRAUMA-INFORMED LAWYERING

1. IDENTIFY TRAUMA

2. ADJUST THE ATTORNEY-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

3. ADAPT THE LITIGATION STRATEGY

4. PREVENT SECONDARY TRAUMA

“...We have an obligation to our clients, as well as to ourselves, our colleagues and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do.”
Secondary Trauma & Burnout
How stressful is your work?

- Very stressful
- Often stressful
- Occasionally stressful
- Never stressful
What is your organization's greatest challenge in preventing or combatting burnout or secondary trauma?

- High caseloads
- Low pay
- Lack of resources
- Workplace culture
What strategies has your organization used to prevent burnout or secondary trauma?

- Lowering caseloads
- Mental health support
- Training/Technical Support
- None
The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.

Rachel Remen
Impact of Secondary Trauma

- Cognitive
- Behavioral
- Emotional
- Somatic
- Spiritual
- Personal Relations
- Work Performance
Identifying Burnout & Secondary Trauma

SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT
- Procrastination
- Chronic Fatigue
- Cynicism
- Chronic Lateness
- Pessimism
- Loss of imagination for the future
- Reduced happy moments
- Job dissatisfaction
- Doubting core beliefs

SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Hyper-vigilance
- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Obsessive thinking @ the trauma
- PTSD symptoms

SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMA
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Hyper-vigilance
- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Obsessive thinking @ the trauma
- PTSD symptoms
Repeated exposure to [a survivor’s] traumatic experiences shift the ways in which professionals perceive themselves, others, and the world. Not surprisingly, these shifts in cognitive schemas can have devastating effects on an individual's personal and professional lives.

[T]he cure for burnout is not self-care. Self-care is the fallout shelter you build in your basement because apparently it's your job to protect yourself from nuclear war. The cure instead is simply care. It is all of us caring for each other.

[W]hen you think you need more grit, what you need is more help. When you think you need more discipline, you need more kindness and when you look at others and think they need more grit, what they need is more help. And when you think they need more discipline, what they need is more kindness.

Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Burnout, Stress, & Trauma
Workplace Strategies to Address Burnout, Stress, & Trauma

- Balance and limit caseloads
- Create a safe space for practitioners to talk about trauma
- Encourage and set appropriate boundaries
- Encourage and practice self-care
- Incorporate secondary trauma training
- Counseling
- Celebrate accomplishments
- Clear & transparent organizational supports
- Build in fun
Self Care (or just Care)

Working together requires we take care of ourselves

Working together requires we take care of ourselves

Re-evaluate biases, triggers, and values

Seek support and increase knowledge base
How do you know when you have been taking care of yourself?

**Your Body**
Ways in which my body reacts to stress

**Your Personal Life**
Ways in which my personal life is affected by stress

**Your Professional Life**
Ways in which my professional life is affected by stress
Wellness Planning

**Body**
- biological needs, physical needs

**Mind**
- emotional needs, needs for your thought processes

**Heart**
- motivational needs, spiritual needs, how you stay grounded

**Community**
- needs from social relationships, interpersonal needs, community support
Takeaway Prevention Tips

Be Aware
Be aware of your emotional reactions & distress when confronting clients’ traumatic experiences; Know what traumatic material may trigger you.

Connect
Connect with others by talking about your reactions with trusted colleagues or others who will listen.

Maintain
Maintain a balance between your professional & personal lives; Focus on self-care to prevent - and lessen the effects of - workplace stress.
“Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change [is] trust, and trust and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programs, change people.

Bruce D. Perry
Questions & Discussion
Thank you!

Emma Hetherington
ehether@uga.edu

Jennifer Elkins
jelkins@uga.edu