

# FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND

## The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence

Women who are battered often go to extreme and courageous lengths to protect their children from an abusive partner. In fact, research has shown that the non-abusing parent is often the strongest protective factor in the lives of children who witness domestic violence. However, growing up in a violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth, and development. In spite of this, we know that when properly identified and addressed, the effects of domestic violence on children can be mitigated.

- The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country.<sup>1</sup>
- Studies suggest that between 3.3 and 10 million children witness domestic violence annually.<sup>2</sup>
- In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50 percent of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children.<sup>3</sup>
- Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers.<sup>4</sup> They are also more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes.<sup>5</sup>
- Slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in households with children under age 12.<sup>6</sup>
- Men who as children witnessed their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own wives than sons of nonviolent parents.<sup>7</sup>
- One study of 2,245 children and teenagers found that recent exposure to violence in the home was a significant factor in predicting a child's violent behavior.<sup>8</sup>

### Pregnancy and Domestic Violence

- Each year about 324,000 pregnant women in the U.S. are battered by the men in their lives.<sup>9</sup>
- Complications of pregnancy, including low weight gain, anemia, infections, and first and second trimester bleeding are significantly higher for abused women<sup>10,11</sup>, as are maternal rates of depression, suicide attempts, tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States: Fifth Report*, 1995

<sup>2</sup>Carlson, Bonnie E. (1984). Children's observations of interpersonal violence. Pp. 147-167 in A.R. Roberts (Ed.) *Battered women and their families* (pp. 147-167). NY: Springer. Straus, M.A. (1992). Children as witnesses to marital violence: A risk factor for lifelong problems among a nationally representative sample of American men and women. *Report of the Twenty-Third Ross Roundtable*. Columbus, OH: Ross Laboratories.

<sup>3</sup>Strauss, Murray A., Gelles Richard J., and Smith, Christine. 1990. *Physical Violence in American Families; Risk Factors and*

*Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>4</sup>Jaffe, P. and Sudermann, M., "Child Witness of Women Abuse: Research and Community Responses," in Stith, S. and Straus, M., *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalence, Causes, Consequences, and Solutions*. Families in Focus Services, Vol. II. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1995.

<sup>5</sup>Wolfe, D.A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel, D. and Gough, R., "Strategies to Address Violence in the Lives of High Risk Youth." In Peled, E., Jaffe, P.G. and Edleson, J.L. (eds.), *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*. New York: Sage Publications. 1995.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, *Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends*, March 1998

<sup>7</sup>Strauss, Murray A., Gelles Richard J., and Smith, Christine. 1990. *Physical Violence in American Families; Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>8</sup>Singer, M.I., Miller, D.B., Guo, S., Slovak, K & Frieson, T., *The Mental Health Consequences of Children's Exposure to Violence*. Cleveland, OH: Cuyahoga County Community Health Research Institute, Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, 1998

<sup>9</sup>Gazmararian JA, Petersen R, Spitz AM, Goodwin MM, Saltzman LE, Marks JS. *Violence and Reproductive Health: Current Knowledge and Future Research Directions*. *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 2000;4(2):79-84.

<sup>10</sup>Parker, B., McFarlane, J., & Soeken, K. (1994). *Abuse During Pregnancy: Effects on Maternal Complications and Infant Birthweight in Adult and Teen Women*. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 84(1), 323-328.

<sup>11</sup>McFarlane, J. Parker B., & Soeken, K. (1996). *Abuse during Pregnancy: Association with Maternal Health and Infant Birthweight*. *Nursing Research* 45, 32-37.

<sup>12</sup>McFarlane, J., Parker, B., & Soeken, K. (1996). *Physical Abuse, Smoking and Substance Abuse During Pregnancy: Prevalence, Interrelationships and Effects on Birthweight*. *Journal of Obstetrical Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing*, 25, 313-320.

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