

Addressing the effects of child maltreatment through the lens of domestic violence¹

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Exposure to domestic violence is a form of child maltreatment identified in approximately 28% of all cases of substantiated maltreatment in Canada.² Children who witness domestic violence are at risk for a wide range of internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems and are reported to be at greater risk for extending violence into their adult relationships.³

The intervention

The Habitat Program, housed at Wood's Homes in Calgary, Alberta, is an intensive residential treatment program for adolescent males (ages 12–17) with conduct difficulties who have experienced domestic violence and associated maltreatment. This treatment model utilizes interventions developed from treatment components for batterers to address the behavioural issues of the youth, and simultaneously to work with these youth in the context of their families to resolve the trauma of domestic violence and abuse.

The evaluation

This evaluation study used a pre-test/post-test design contrasting an intervention group with a comparison group. Twelve youth were the intervention group and an additional group of eight youth identified as exposed to domestic violence, but not in treatment, were the comparison group. The study was designed to determine:

- if the intervention contributed to a shift in locus of control around violent behaviour for youth,
- if addressing the underlying trauma contributed to a reduction in the youth's violent and impulsive behaviour,

- if there was an increase in adolescent developmental progress,
- if at the end of the intervention other family members developed an awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence, and
- if the intervention contributed to an increase in family and community safety after discharge.

Results

The information gathered and analyzed to date indicates that there is a considerable likelihood that the Habitat Program makes an important and positive difference in the lives of client youth and their families, particularly in the areas of reduction of maladaptive behaviour, increasing school achievement, improving family functioning, and increasing awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence. Shifts in locus of control around violent behaviour and a reduction in the effects of past trauma are less evident. Families' tendency to minimize the effects of violence is strong in both the intervention and the comparison groups. Determining the extent of increased family and community safety will be a part of the remaining aspects of the evaluation.

¹ This report is based on information contained in: Lawson, A., Gardiner, S., MacLaurin, B., & Johansson, B. (2006). *Addressing the effects of child maltreatment through the lens of domestic violence*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work.

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- 2 Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Daciuk, J., Felstiner, C., Black, T. et al. (2005). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- 3 Pepler, D. J., Catallo, R., & Moore, T. E. (2000). Consider the children: Research informing interventions for children exposed to domestic violence. In C. R. A. Geffner, P. G. Jaffe, & M. Sudermann (Eds.), *Children exposed to domestic violence: Current issues in research, intervention, prevention and policy development* (pp. 37–56). New York: Haworth Press.

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