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CHILDREN WITNESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

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Highlights

- According to the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, children heard or saw one parent assaulting the other in an estimated 461,000 households, which represents 37% of all households with spousal violence in the five-year period preceding the survey.
- In cases where children witnessed spousal violence, they were more likely to witness assaults against their mothers (70%) than against their fathers (30%), and assaults involving mothers tended to be more serious. Over half of the female victims in these cases feared for their lives.
- Adult victims of spousal violence were more likely to seek help from the police or from social services when children witnessed the violence than when no children were present.
- During the one-year period ending March 31, 2000, an estimated 57,200 women together with 39,200 children were admitted to 448 shelters across Canada, the majority fleeing violence at home. Three-quarters of these children were under 10 years of age.
- According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, children who were exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home were less likely to have positive or effective interactions with their parents than other children. They were also more likely to be living in households with low family functioning and high parental depression.
- Witnessing family violence is also linked to negative behaviour in children. Children who are exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home were more likely to exhibit physical aggression, indirect aggression, emotional disorders, hyperactivity, and to commit delinquent acts against property.
- Although family violence crosses all socio-demographic groups, there are some circumstances where violence occurs at higher rates. Households with older children, somewhat older parents, parental unemployment, low income, blended, step or single parent families, or a recent change in family structure had higher than average percentages of children exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home.

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, spousal violence has gained widespread public attention. Yet, attention has generally focused on the impact of violence on victims and less so on the effects on children who witness the violence. Until recently, child witnesses have remained the "silent", "forgotten" or "unintended" victims of family violence. Evidence suggests that witnessing violence can have serious negative impacts on the development of children. Legislation in Saskatchewan and the Atlantic provinces consider children exposed to situations of domestic violence to be in need of protective services, which range from support for the family to removal of the child from the home.

The reactions of children who witness violence by one parent against another may include emotional, social, cognitive, physical and behavioural maladjustment problems (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990). These children tend to show lower levels of social competence, higher rates of depression, worry and frustration, and are more likely than other children to develop stress-related disorders and to show lower levels of empathy (Fantuzzo, et al., 1991; Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998; Moore & Pepler, 1998; Edleson, 1999).

Some findings suggest that certain characteristics of children, such as sex and age, affect how children respond when exposed to violence. Boys more commonly express external reactions, such as hostility and aggression, whereas girls tend to show more internalized behaviours such as depression, fear and physical ailments (Carlson, 1991; Kerig, 1999). Younger children are more likely to express complaints of physical ailments, anxiety and aggressive behaviour, and to regress to earlier stages of developmental functioning. Older children are more likely to use aggression as a means of problem solving, accept excuses for violent behaviour, project blame onto others, and display symptoms of anxiety (Alessi & Hern, 1984). Other factors, such as social or economic disadvantage, repeated moves, or parental separation also influence how children respond to spousal violence (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990).

Using data from the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS), the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS), and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), this *Juristat* presents estimates of the number of children

Data sources

The General Social Survey (1999) is a random sample telephone survey of almost 26,000 male and female respondents age 15 years and older. The focus of this survey was criminal victimization, including spousal violence. The prevalence of violence witnessed by children was obtained by asking victims of spousal violence "did any of your children ever see or hear (any of these) this incident(s)".

The Violence Against Women Survey (1993) is a random telephone survey based upon a sample of 12,300 women over the age of 18 years. The VAWS provides detailed national data on all forms of sexual and non-sexual violence perpetrated against women in Canada since age 16. Women who had reported spousal violence were asked "did any of your children ever witness (any of) the incidents".

The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth is a long-term national survey that collects information on the characteristics and life experiences of the same children and youth in Canada as they grow from infancy to adulthood. The survey began in 1994-95 with a sample of approximately 22,000 children aged from infancy to 11. Data are collected from the children, their parents, teachers and school principals.[1] This sample of children and their parents will be interviewed every two years until the oldest respondents reach approximately 25 years of age. A sample of infants is added each year. Data for this *Juristat* was drawn from the third cycle (1998-99) and focuses on children aged 4 to 11 years representing 3,122,000 Canadian children in this age group. The extent of violence witnessed by children in the home was determined by asking the person most knowledgeable about the child (usually the mother) to indicate how often the child sees "adults or teenagers in the home physically fighting, hitting or otherwise trying to hurt others". Because of small sample counts, a distinction cannot be made among children who witness frequent or severe violence and those who witness less frequent or less severe episodes. Of those who reported that their child had seen physical aggression, 31% did not have a teenager living in the home; therefore, a portion of these will reflect incidents where children witnessed assaults on a parent.

[1] *At age 10 children begin to respond to some questions on their own.*

in Canada who have witnessed violence in their homes in recent years, and compares the characteristics of these children and their families to children who have not witnessed violence. This analysis also examines links between witnessing violence and negative behaviour among children.

The extent of the problem

Estimates of the extent of family violence witnessed by children in Canada are available through three national surveys conducted by Statistics Canada: the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. The GSS and the VAWS are victimization surveys that ask a random sample of adults (men and women in the case of the GSS and women only in the case of the VAWS) about their experiences of spousal violence and whether their children witnessed the violence. In the NLSCY, a random sample of children are selected and the person most knowledgeable about the child responds to a wide range of questions about the child and the household, including whether the child sees adults or teenagers in the home physically fighting, hitting or otherwise trying to hurt others. (see Boxes: *Data sources* and *Estimates of violence: limitations*)

Estimates of children witnessing violence: limitations

As each of these data sources were designed for purposes other than estimating the number of children who witness violence in their families, and the questions were constructed somewhat differently, results are not directly comparable between sources. In addition, several issues make it likely that the estimates obtained from VAWS, the GSS and the NLSCY underestimate the true extent of violence witnessed by children.

First, responses to the survey questions are provided by parents who may falsely assume that their children are not aware of the violence and may fail to report that their children were witnesses. Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson (1990) found that many parents falsely believed that their children were sleeping or playing during a violent episode and therefore unaware of the event. However, these same children were able to provide detailed accounts of the very events that they supposedly did not witness.

Second, parents may intentionally minimise, deny or discount the extent of violence witnessed by children because of embarrassment or fear of the consequences. O'Brien, John, Margolin and Erel (1994) reported that 10% of the children in a community-based sample reported witnessing inter-parental violence when neither parent had acknowledged that any aggression had occurred.

Third, witnessing family violence refers to the multiple ways in which a child is *exposed* to domestic violence. These may include directly seeing the violence, hearing it, being used as a tool of the perpetrator, and/or experiencing the aftermath of violence (e.g. a mother who is injured and in need of help, police intervention to remove the perpetrator, moving to a shelter). Although the GSS asks whether the child ever saw or heard a violent incident, the NLSCY and VAWS only attempt to measure the amount of violence that a child *sees* directly. All three surveys fail to account for the more covert ways in which children may be exposed to violence.

Fourth, the survey questions only ascertain whether children are witnesses to *physical* assaults and do not measure the extent of children's awareness of emotional abuse (such as verbal insults) which can also be damaging to children's development.

The 1993 Violence Against Women Survey found that 39% of women who had experienced spousal assaults during their lifetime reported that their children had witnessed the violence against them. In many cases the violence these children witnessed was serious. In about half the violent relationships witnessed by children (52%) the women feared their lives were in danger at some point in the relationship and in 61% of the cases the women were physically injured in at least one of the assaults.[2]

More recent findings from the 1999 General Social Survey show that children heard or saw assaults on a parent in an estimated 461,000 households with spousal violence in the five-year period preceding the survey. This represents 37% of all households with spousal violence.[3]

According to the 1999 GSS, in 70% of spousal violence cases with child witnesses the violence was directed at their mothers, and in 30% of cases fathers were the victims (Table 1). In addition, the violence children witnessed against their mothers was more serious. In half of all cases of wife assault witnessed by children the women feared for their lives or were physically injured. In 21% of cases, female victims suffered injuries requiring medical attention and in 14% they were hospitalized. Four-in-ten suffered repercussions serious enough to require them to take time off their daily activities to cope with the violence. The consequences of spousal violence for male victims were less severe though one-in-five male victims were physically injured or took time off daily activities and one-in-eight feared for their lives (Table 2). Figure 1 shows these data for women and men combined.

A third source of information about the exposure of children to violence in the family is the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Parent respondents to the 1998-99 cycle of the NLSCY were asked how often their children, age 4 to 11 years, see adults or teenagers in the home physically fighting, hitting or otherwise trying to hurt others.[4] This is a less precise indicator and could include siblings or parents or other adults (however, in 31% of cases, there were no teenagers in the home). According to this definition, 8% of children in this age group (approximately 247,000) had witnessed violence in their homes. This is similar to the 9% reported in the first cycle and 8% in the second cycle of the NLSCY, but lower than estimates produced by the GSS which asked about violence witnessed over the course of a five-year period for an unspecified age group of children.

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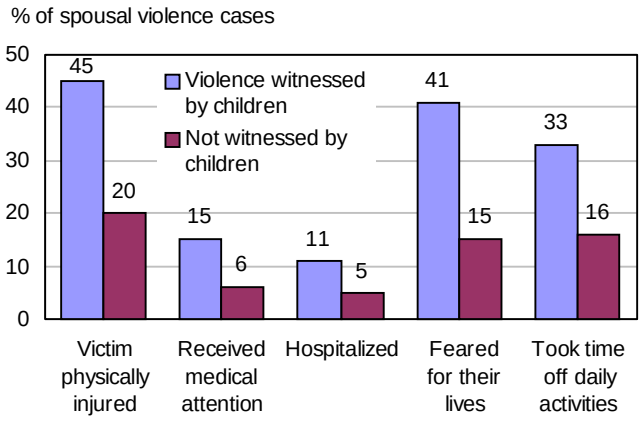
[2] *Children heard or saw at least one violent event in that household which may not have been the event that resulted in injury or caused the woman to fear for her life.*

[3] *Comparisons can be made between the 1993 VAWS and the 1999 GSS in the number of children witnessing assaults on their mothers in the five-year periods preceding each survey. In 1999, 47% of wife assault cases had child witnesses, an increase from 40% in 1993. (This analysis does not take into account a possible change in the number of households that have children.) But since the five-year rate of wife assault declined between 1993 and 1999 (from 12% to 8% of women who were married or in a common-law relationship) the actual number of households where children witnessed violence against their mothers also declined from an estimated 483,000 to 321,000.*

[4] *Usually, only one parent (the person most knowledgeable about the child or the PMK) from each household was surveyed. In 88.8% of all cases the PMK was the biological mother and in another 8.7% of cases the PMK was the biological father.*

Figure 1

Spousal violence cases witnessed by children tend to be more serious



Source: *Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.*

Children victimized during spousal assaults

Victims of spousal violence identified by the GSS were asked whether anyone else was harmed or threatened during the incident and how many were under 15 years of age. In 10% of spousal assaults against women and in 4% against men a child under 15 was harmed or threatened. This numbers 90,000 cases of spousal violence: 70,000 involving women and 20,000 involving men.[5]

A profile of families where children witnessed violence

Family violence crosses all socio-demographic groups. However, there are some circumstances where children witness adults or teenagers physically fighting at higher than average rates (see Table 3). The NLSCY data show that the percentage of children who witnessed physical fighting was slightly higher for older children (8 to 11 years of age) and for those with somewhat older parents (35 to 44 years). Rates of children witnessing violence are linked to socio-economic status of households. Percentages of children who witnessed physical fighting among teenagers or adults were highest when both parents were unemployed (12.8%), or in the case of single parents, when the parent was unemployed (14.2%), as well as in households that fell below the low-income cut-off level (11.4%).[6] Higher percentages of children witnessed violence if they were living in blended, step or single parent homes[7] as compared to biological or adoptive two-parents families, and if their family structure had undergone change over the previous two-year period, either from two parents to one (13.6%), or from one parent to two (14.4%).[8]

According to the 1999 GSS, in cases with child witnesses, perpetrators of spousal violence were also more likely to have been drinking alcohol at the time of the assaults. Male perpetrators were drinking in 52% of incidents of spousal violence that were witnessed by children compared to 30% of incidents with no child witnesses. This might help explain why wife assaults that are witnessed by children are generally more serious in nature as alcohol has been a predictor of more serious and repeated violence (Johnson 1996; Leonard, 1999). However, these results do not pertain to female perpetrators of spousal violence. Female perpetrators had higher rates of alcohol use at the time of the assaults on their husbands, regardless of whether children witnessed the violence or not (women had been drinking in 68% of cases with child witnesses and 78% of cases with no child witnesses), but they were less likely than male perpetrators to cause injury to their victims.

The NLSCY also indicates that problem drinking within the family is associated with children witnessing physical fighting among teenagers or adults (see Box *Links to parental alcohol consumption*).

Links to parental alcohol consumption

Findings from the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey and the 1999 General Social Survey identified alcohol consumption as a risk factor for spousal assault. Both surveys found that women and men who were married to or living with heavy drinkers were more likely to be assaulted by their partners than those who were not married to heavy drinkers (Pottie Bunge & Locke, 2000). NLSCY households with children who witnessed physical fighting among teenagers or adults were approximately twice as likely as other households to report that drinking was a source of tension in the family.

	% of children who did not witness physical fights		% of children who witnessed physical fights	
	No. (000)	%	No. (000)	%
Drinking is a source of tension				
Yes	132	5.0	22	9.0[1]
No	2,482	95.0	220	91.0

**** Chi-square = < .001; df = 1*

1 *Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% to 33.3%).*

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Excludes missing values.

Source: *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Statistics Canada.*

5 *This may be an underestimate of the number of children harmed or threatened during spousal violence incidents for the reasons listed in Box* Estimates of children witnessing violence:limitations.

6 *Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs are derived by considering expenditure-to-income patterns. Families or individuals are classified as "low income" if they spend, on average, at least 20 percentage points more of their pre-tax income than the Canadian average on food, shelter, and clothing. Family size and the size of the urban or rural area where the family resides are also taken into consideration.*

7 *A biological or adoptive two-parent family refers to a family (married or common-law couples) where all children are the natural and/or adopted offspring of both members of the couple. A step family refers to a family (married or common-law couples) in which at least one of the children is in a step relationship with at least one of the parents. A blended family refers to a family (married or common-law couples) with two or more children, one of whom does not share the same natural and/or adoptive parents as the other child(ren).This would indicate that the child has half and/or step siblings living in the household. The blended family is a sub-set of the step family.*

8 *In the case of single parents, violence could involve ex-partners, dating partners of the parent, and/or sibling violence.*

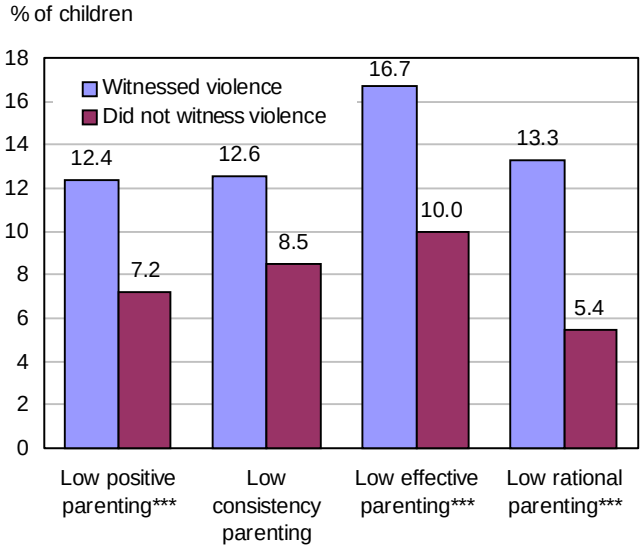
Witnessing Violence and Family Dynamics

Parenting Style

Parenting style is also linked to children's exposure to violence in the home. Although difficult to measure and quantify, the NLSCY attempted to capture the diversity of parent-child interactions using four different scales: positive interactions, consistency, effective parenting, and rational parenting. Parents (usually mothers; see footnote 4) were asked a series of questions pertaining to each type of parenting which were then combined to form global scores on each scale. Figure 2 shows that children who witnessed physical fighting between adults and teenagers in their homes were more likely to have lower levels of positive, effective or rational interactions with their parents than did children from non-violent homes.

Figure 2

Parenting styles in homes where children witnessed and did not witness violence, 1998-99



**** Chi-square = < .001; df = 1*
Those who fell within the bottom 10% of the scales were considered to have "poor" parent-child interactions.
Source: *Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1998-1999.*

Family functioning and parental depression

Whereas the parenting scales assess interactions between parents and their children, the family functioning scale assesses the health of relationships among all family members. The quality of family relationships is particularly important for the long-term healthy development of children (Ross, Scott & Kelly, 1996). Parents were asked how well the family worked together on six activities: problem solving, communication, roles, emotional responsiveness, emotional involvement and behaviour control. Figure 3 shows that children who witnessed physical fighting among adults and teenagers were twice as likely to be living in low family functioning households (defined as those who fall within the bottom 10%).

Parenting scales

The interactions between children and parents were assessed using four parenting scales: the positive parenting scale, the consistency parenting scale, the ineffective parenting scale and the rational parenting scale. Each scale is comprised of individual questions that were answered by the child's parent. Answers were then coded into numerical responses which were added together to form a global score on each scale. Those who fell within the bottom 10% (or closest thereof) were considered to have "poorer" parent-child interactions.

Five questions comprised the *positive parenting* scale including: "how often do you talk or play with your child"; "how often do you praise your child"; and "how often do you and your child laugh together".

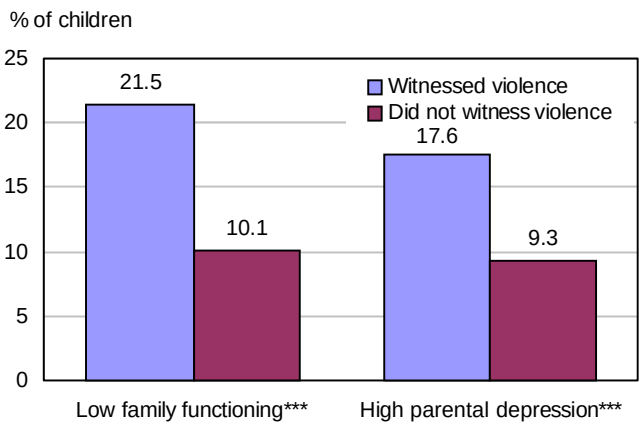
Consistency was measured by asking parents a different set of five questions, such as "if you give your child a command do you make sure he or she follows it"; "when you discipline your child does he or she ignore it"; and "how often do you follow through and punish your child after telling him or her to stop doing something".

When combined, the scores from seven questions composed the *ineffective parenting* scale. Specific questions included: "how often do you get annoyed with your child for saying or doing something he/she is not supposed to"; "of all the times that you talk to your child about his/her behaviour, what proportion is praise"; and "how often do you feel you are having problems managing him/her in general".

Finally, the *rational parenting* scale indicates the extent of punitive interactions between parents and their children. Parents were asked to report the frequency with which they "raise their voice, scold or yell"; "calmly discuss the problem"; "use physical punishment"; and "describe alternative ways of behaving that are acceptable" when their child breaks the rules or does things that he/she is not supposed to do.

Figure 3

Family functioning and parental depression in homes where children witnessed and did not witness violence, 1998-99



**** Chi-square = < .001; df = 1*
Source: *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Statistics Canada.*

Another important component of family dynamics is the mental health status of parents. Depressed parents are usually withdrawn, tired, despondent and pessimistic about the future, behaviours that are likely to have a negative impact on their children (Ross, Scott & Kelly, 1996). To assess the extent of parental depression, parents[9] were asked a series of questions about their state of mind during the week preceding the survey. Answers were combined to arrive at a score on the depression scale. Those falling in the bottom 10% were defined as having higher depressive tendencies.[10] Figure 3 indicates that the parents of children who had witnessed family violence in their homes report significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms.

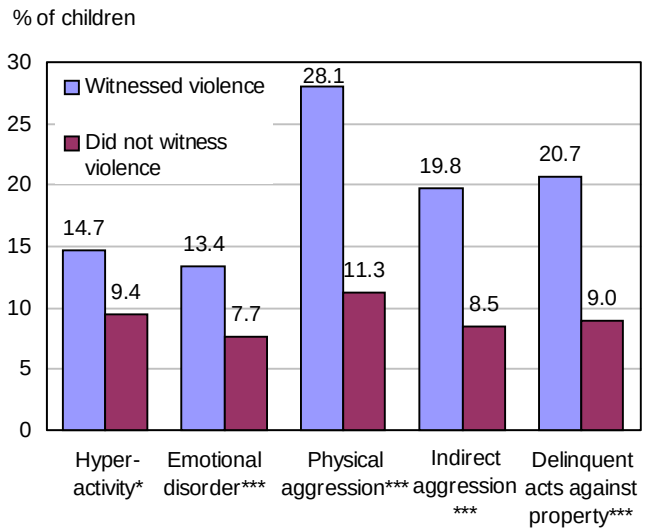
Witnessing Violence and Child Behaviour

A negative relationship was also found between witnessing physical fighting and children's behaviour.[11] Parent respondents to the NLSCY were asked to assess their children on the following five behaviours: hyperactivity (characterised by inattention, impulsivity and motor activity); emotional/anxiety disorders (characterised by feelings of anxiety, fear and/or depression); physical aggression (fighting, bullying or threatening); indirect aggression (non-physical forms of aggression such as rallying friends against someone, spreading gossip, excluding someone from a group, or setting up another child for punishment); and delinquent acts against property (destroying property, vandalising, or stealing). Similar to other NLSCY scales, parents were asked a series of questions pertaining to each scale and responses were combined to form a global score for each type of behaviour. Those who scored within the bottom 10% were considered to have a behavioural problem. Figure 4 shows that children who witnessed violence in their homes were significantly more likely to exhibit difficulties across all five behavioural measures. In particular, they were more than twice as likely to be physically aggressive, to commit delinquent acts against property, and to display indirect aggression.

These two-dimensional views of the relationship between witnessing family violence and subsequent behaviour fail to take into account the possible influence of other factors. A child's behaviour is influenced not only by whether or not he/she is exposed to violence in the home, but other child, parent and familial characteristics such as age, gender, parental educational attainment, family structure and/or household income also come into play. Table 4 shows the results of multivariate analysis where the effects of other influences are controlled (see Box *Multivariate analysis: Logistic regression models).* Children who witnessed physical fighting had heightened odds of displaying behaviours associated with hyperactivity, emotional disorder, physical aggression, indirect aggression and delinquent acts against property, even when the effects of these other factors were controlled. The complexity of the relationship between behavioural outcomes, witnessing violence and other factors is illustrated by the fact that most other factors, and in particular, parenting style, remain important predictors.

Figure 4

Child behavioural outcomes in homes where children witnessed and did not witness violence 1998-99



* Chi-square = < .05; df = 1
*** Chi-square = < .001; df = 1
Those who fell within the bottom 10% of the scales were considered to have behavioural problems.

Source: *Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1998-1999.*

Multivariate analysis: Logistic regression models

A logistic regression model was used to isolate the effect of witnessing violence by adults or teenagers on five child behavioural outcomes. Each of the factors, or independent variables, were fitted into a logistic regression model to determine the unique effects of each variable, after the effects of the others were held constant.

A partial odds ratio is a statistic generated by logistic regression that can be used to assess whether, other things being equal, children or families with specific characteristics (say children witnessing adults or teenagers fighting in the home) are more or less likely than other children (the reference category) to exhibit certain behaviours. An odds ratio near 1.0 implies there is no difference between the two groups; a result of less than 1.0 means that children who witness violence are less likely to exhibit these behaviours; a result of greater than 1.0 implies that this group of children is more likely to exhibit these behaviours.

[9] *Survey methodology permitted only one parent (the PMK) to be asked the questions assessing depression. Consequently, in the case of two-parent families, whether the other parent had depressive symptoms that could equally affect the child is unknown.*

[10] *It is important to note that the parental depression scale measures only symptoms of depression and is not necessarily an indication of clinical depression.*

[11] *The NLSCY does not differentiate between those children who witnessed family violence but were not directly victimized and those who were witnesses* and *victims of violence in the family. Many child witnesses were also victims which may account, at least in part, for their negative behaviour. Failing to separate abused from non-abused witnesses makes it difficult to determine what exactly is associated with children's subsequent behaviour (Hughes, Parkinson & Vargo, 1989). However, questions concerning violence directed at children were not included on the NLSCY and so cannot be explored in this analysis. Witnessing other forms of violence can also lead to certain autcomes but this was not addressed in this study.*

The generational cycle of violence

According to social learning theory, children learn to be aggressive by observing and imitating the behaviour of influential people in their lives (Bandura, 1977; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997). Violence may become the way in which problems are solved if there is a lack of negative consequences, the results are seen as positive, and there are few opportunities for learning other means of conflict resolution. When parents use violence to deal with problems or resolve conflicts, children may learn to use aggression as an appropriate tool for interpersonal relations.

There is evidence to support the belief that children who witness family violence are more likely to perpetrate assaults towards their partners in adulthood. In a study conducted by Blanchette, et al. (1998) of a sample of federal inmates enrolled in a family violence program who had a history of family violence, more than half (56%) reported that they had witnessed some form of violence as children. The 1993 VAWS found that men who witnessed their mothers being physically abused by their fathers were three times as likely to be violent toward their own wives than men who grew up in non-violent homes. They were also significantly more likely to inflict more serious and repeated assaults on their wives. Women who observed assaults against their mothers also suffered higher rates of violent victimization by their own husbands in adulthood suggesting that they also may have acquired certain beliefs about the appropriateness of spousal violence to resolve conflicts.

Despite the link between witnessing spousal violence in childhood and using violent tactics later in life, there was not a simple cause and effect relationship between early exposure to violence and replication of the same behaviour. While the rate of wife abuse was higher for men who witnessed violence by their own fathers, the majority of violent men were not exposed to violence in childhood. And, over half the men who were exposed to violence were not violent toward their own wives. Situations and experiences other than a violent home life can and do intervene to encourage or discourage the use of violence in marital relationships.

Getting help

The presence of children in the household during incidents of spousal violence complicates the situation for victims who must consider both their own safety and the safety and wellbeing of their children. According to the 1999 GSS, the presence of child witnesses to the violence elevated the tendency for spousal violence victims to seek help from criminal justice and social service agencies. Overall, spousal violence cases witnessed by children were more than twice as likely as others to be reported to the police (45% compared to 18%), a situation that may be linked to the relatively more serious nature of these events. This was the case whether the violence was reported by victims themselves or by someone else; in both cases the presence of child witnesses was linked to higher reporting rates (Table 5). This was true for female victims of spousal violence, whereas a definitive statement cannot be made for male victims due to low sample counts.

The presence of children in the household who witnessed the violence was also linked to a greater likelihood that social services would be contacted for help. In about half (53%) of cases where children witnessed spousal violence, the victims contacted social services.[12] In cases without child witnesses, roughly one-quarter had involvement with social services. This pattern holds true for both male and female victims of spousal violence, although women were more likely to call on both the police and social services for assistance. The results of the NLSCY also show that children who witnessed adults or teenagers fighting in the home were more likely to have had contact with mental health specialists (see Box *Contact with mental health specialists*).

Contact with mental health specialists

Research suggests that symptoms associated with behavioural, physical, emotional and cognitive problems tend to be more prevalent among children exposed to family violence. Parents in the NLSCY were asked to indicate the number of times they had seen or talked on the telephone with a mental health specialist[a] about their child's physical, emotional or mental health. The proportion of children whose parents had contacted a mental health specialist was significantly higher among children who witnessed violence in their homes.

	% of children who did not witness physical fights		% of children who witnessed physical fights	
	No. (000)	%	No. (000)	%
Contact with mental health specialists				
None	2,363	88.5	199	80.4
At least one	31	11.5	48	19.6

**** Chi-square = < .001; df = 1*

[a] *A mental health specialist refers to a psychiatrist, psychologist, child welfare or children's aid worker, or other professional trained to provide treatment or counsel (such as social worker or speech therapist).*

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Excludes missing values.

Source: *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Statistics Canada.*

Children in Shelters

Emergency shelters are widely available across Canada to provide housing and support services to victims of spousal violence, primarily abused women and their children. In April, 2000, there were 508 shelters providing residential services to abused women in Canada. During the one-year period ending March 31, 2000, a total of 57,182 women together with 39,177 children were admitted to 448 shelters (Locke & Code, 2001).[13] On a one-day snapshot of shelter residents on April 17, 2000, there were 2,281 women and 2,310 children fleeing abuse. The majority of children accompanying their mothers to shelters were very young: 41% were under 5 years of age and 32% were 5-9 years of age.

[12] *Social services include crisis centres and crisis lines, counsellors and psychologists, family centres, shelters, men's and women's support groups, and police-based or court-based victim service units.*

[13] *Of the 508 shelters surveyed, 464 responded to the survey. However, not all shelters were able to reply to all questions.*

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Table 1

Estimated number of spousal violence cases and the proportion witnessed by children

	Total		Violence against women		Violence against men	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence by a spouse	**1,239**	**100**	**690**	**56**	**549**	**44**
Children witnessed violence	461	37	321	70	140	30
Children did not witness violence/no children at the time	738	60	354	48	384	52
Not stated/Don't know	40	3†	14	35†	26	65†

† *Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).*
Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.
Source: *Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.*

Table 2

Severity of spousal violence cases where children witnessed the violence

	Total		Violence against women		Violence against men	
	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]
	No. (000s)					
Total	**461**	**738**	**321**	**354**	**140**	**384**
	Percent					
Adult victim was physically injured						
Yes	45	20	53	30	24†	--
No	55	80	46	70	75	90
Adult victim received medical attention for injuries						
Yes	15	6	21†	11	--	-
No	85	94	79	89	96	98
Adult victim was hospitalized for injuries						
Yes	11†	5	14†	8	--	--
No	89	95	86	92	97	98
Adult victim feared for their lives						
Yes	41	15	53	25	12†	--
No	59	85	46	75	88	94
Adult victim took time off daily activities due to violence						
Yes	33	16	39	27	20†	--
No	66	83	60	73	80	93

-- *amount too small to be expressed*
† *Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).*
Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.
[1] *Combines "children did not witness violence" and "no children at the time".*
Source: *Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.*

Table 3

Percentage of children 4 to 11 years who witnessed physical fighting among teenagers or adults in their homes by selected socio-demographic characteristics, 1998-1999

Socio-demographic characteristics	Children who witnessed physical fighting	
	No. (000s)	%
Total	**247**	**8.5**
Sex		
Males	125	8.3
Females	122	8.6
ns		
Age		
4-7	117	8.1
8-11	130	8.8
p < .001		
Age of parent		
15-24	--	--
25-34	78	7.5
35-44	149	9.3
45+	14	6.2†
p < .001		
Parent's highest level of education		
Less than high school	36	10.5
High school graduate	39	7.5
Some post-secondary	84	10.3
Post-secondary graduate	88	7.2
p < .001		
Parents' employment patterns		
Both parents unemployed or worked less than half the year	13	12.8†
One parent worked full year, the other worked part year or was unemployed	66	8.4
Both parents worked full year or most of the year	116	7.6
Parent employed – no spouse	21	7.7†
Parent unemployed – no spouse	26	14.2†
p < .001		
Level of income adequacy		
Below LICO	59	11.4
Above LICO	173	7.4
p < .001		
Family structure		
Two-parent family	162	7.4
Step or blended family	38	14.7†
Single parent family	47	10.3
p < .001		
Change in family structure		
No change – two parents	168	7.6
No change – one parent	23	8.4
From two parents to one parent	17	13.6
From one parent to two parents	12	14.4†
p < .001		

-- amount too small to be expressed
ns not significant
† *Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).*
Figures may not add to totals due to rounding and due to missing values.
Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs are derived by considering expenditure-to-income patterns. Families or individuals are classified as "low income" if they spend, on average, at least 20 percentage points more of their pre-tax income than the Canadian average on food, shelter, and clothing. Family size and the size of the urban or rural area where the family resides are also taken into consideration.

Source: *Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1998-1999.*

Table 4

Logistic regression analysis of the effects of witnessing violence, child characteristics and parent/ household characteristics on the behaviour of children (4 to 11 years): Partial odds ratios and levels of significance

Variable	Hyperactivity	Emotional disorder	Physical aggression	Indirect aggression	Delinquent acts against property
Witnessing violence					
Children witnessed violence	1.325**	1.241*	2.968***	2.489***	2.334***
Children did not witness violence [a]					
Child characteristics					
Gender of child					
Male	1.898***	1.226*	2.001***	.474***	1.44***
Female [a]					
Age group of child					
4 to 7 years [a]					
8 to 11 years	1.133	1.653***	0.652***	1.948***	.546***
Parent / household characteristics					
Age category of Parent					
15 to 24	1.641	.391*	2.209***	0.912	3.364***
25 to 34	2.274***	1.257	2.365***	2.876***	3.659***
35 to 44	1.557**	1.024	2.141***	2.522***	3.10***
45 and over [a]					
Parent's highest level of education					
Less than high school	1.379***	.764*	1.003	1.401***	1.446***
High school graduate	0.906	.721***	0.881	1.019	1.411***
Some post-secondary	1.189*	0.989	1.183*	1.088	1.384***
Post-secondary graduate [a]					
Parenting style					
Ineffective parenting style	5.887***	4.533***	4.945***	3.906***	5.853***
Effective parenting style [a]					
Family functioning					
Low family functioning	1.729***	1.702***	1.251**	1.126	1.126
High family functioning [a]					
Parental depression					
High parental depression	1.245*	2.571***	1.297**	1.107	1.552***
Low parental depression [a]					
Family structure					
Intact family [a]					
Step or blended family	1.659***	1.516***	0.854	.649***	0.992
Single parent family	1.771***	2.028***	1.379***	1.526***	1.068
Level of income adequacy					
Below LICO	0.939	0.986	0.958	1.355***	1.153*
Above LICO [a]					
-2 log likelihood	7639.36	6777.86	9251.035	7384.525	7803.896
Model chi-square	1125.404***	972.192***	1235.64***	814.659***	1124.877***
Df	15	15	15	15	15

a reference category
** Chi square = < .05*
*** Chi square = <.01*
**** Chi square = < .001*
Source: *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Statistics Canada.*

Table 5

Estimated number of spousal violence cases where children witnessed violence by use of criminal justice and social services

	Total		Violence against women		Violence against men	
	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]	Children witnessed violence	Children did not witness violence[1]
	No. (000s)					
Total	**461**	**738**	**321**	**354**	**140**	**384**
	Percent					
Percentage distribution of spousal violence cases reported to the police						
Violence reported to police	45	18	51	27	30†	10
Reported by victim	32	13	39	21	15†	--
Reported by someone else	13†	5	12†	6	4†	4
Violence not reported to police	55	82	49	73	70	90
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--
Percentage distribution of adult victims who contacted social services						
Yes	53	24	62	38	33	11
No	46	75	38	60	66	88
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--

-- amount too small to be expressed
† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).
Percentage may not total 100% due to rounding.
[1] Combines "children did not witness violence" and "no children at the time".
Source: *Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.*

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

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