

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Impact to Individuals

Physical	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injuries related to the violence • Sleep disturbances (more or less than usual) • Eating disturbances (more or less) • Headaches, stomach aches • Chronic pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suicidal ideation • Difficulty concentrating or focussing • Obsessive thinking, rumination • Viewing self as damaged • Dissociation or “blinking out”
Emotional	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness, despair, hopelessness • Volatile mood swings, excessive crying, extreme vulnerability • Anxiety, panic attacks • Guilt, shame, self-hatred • Fearfulness, feeling out of control • Irritability, anger, rage • Emotional numbness, flat affect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse, other addictive or compulsive behaviours • Self-injury • Withdrawal • Risky behaviours • Suicide attempts • Difficulty making decisions, memory lapses • Disordered sleeping and eating
Spiritual	Relational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling disconnected • Loss or questioning of faith • Feeling evil or focussed on evil in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of connection, withdrawal and isolation • Pushing people away, difficulty getting close or letting others close • Loss of trust • Power imbalance and fear

Impact within a Family System

The expectation of love, support, nurture and security within family relationships renders the experience of fear, pain, humiliation and shame, so often linked with violence and abusive behaviours, particularly shocking and destructive to people and relationships. Indeed, there is often a combination of both these positive and negative experiences, which is particularly confusing and damaging.

Impact to the Community

Extended family members, neighbours and concerned community members may have varying levels of awareness of violence occurring. They may struggle with how to respond, often feeling helpless, guilty for not being able to respond or stop it, and angry or blaming toward those involved. The coping strategies individuals use (e.g., substance abuse, withdrawal) also often affect others' and their relationships, causing further breakdown of support.

Impacts of family violence often spill over into the workplace. In fact, domestic violence occurring in the workplace has been identified as the fastest growing type of workplace violence in Canada.

Stages of Impact

When violence and abuse occur over time the impact is not static; rather it starts to *organize* the way people affected relate to themselves and other people.

At different stages the impact may vary, and our role or intervention also will need to be adjusted to match what is appropriate and most important at the time.

Immediate Impact or Acute Stage: *Immediately and for a short time after incident.*

It is normal to feel disoriented, in shock and in disbelief. A person is particularly vulnerable and feeling exposed during this time, may be particularly shut down and at the same time be very sensitive and vulnerable to influence from others. If the abuse is chronic a person may be in this stage for a prolonged period of time. A person is often in "survival mode" and hyper-vigilant to the recurrence of abuse.

Readjustment Stage: *After shock wears off; the actual time may vary.*

During this time, emotions start to surface and it is common for people to experience a "roller coaster" of reactions from denial to self-blame to revengeful rage. People may be struggling to make sense of what happened, or have reconfirmed an expectation of others as dangerous and of one's self as deserving of abuse. Different family members may be at different places, making it difficult to support each other or know how to react, causing rigid interaction patterns to form.

Reorganization or Self-Righting Stage: *Often only after a period without violence.*

People are moving out of "survival mode" to where life feels less chaotic and out of control. Feelings and reactions may diminish in intensity and the person is able to focus on other aspects of life. Hopefulness may return with an ability to look to the future. This may be during calm or positive times in between episodes of violence, or it may only be after abuse has stopped.