



INTIMO AWARE

What are the effects of domestic violence?

Wideranging Effects

Domestic violence has wide ranging physical, medical, emotional, social and psychological consequences including

- o anxiety
- o depression and other emotional distress,
- o physical stress symptoms
- o sleep disturbances,
- o suicide attempts,
- o alcohol and drug abuse
- o reduced coping and problem solving skills,
- o loss of self esteem and confidence
- o social isolation,
- o fear of starting new relationships
- o living in fear

The Physical Impact

A recent Victorian study¹ found that intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well know risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.

According to Jo Cavanagh, CEO of Southern Family Life in Melbourne, *"Women in abusive relationships are often on prescription medication for depression or to help them sleep and regularly struggle with heavy use of tobacco and alcohol. Changing these damaging conditions and habits is extremely difficult when the abuse has led them to feel worthless and think so negatively about themselves"*.

The Psychological Impact

A South Australian study² conducted in 1998 found that the psychological, verbal and emotional abuse was far more devastating and long lasting in its effect than physical violence.

"Victims reported that psychological and emotional abuses were built into their relationships, and occurred around the

'little things' of daily life. Most victims reported that the threats of physical violence were as powerful in controlling them as the actual incidences of violence.

This was because the perpetrators had shown that they were capable of carrying out the threats.

Domestic Violence and Children

The Silent Victims

Children are often the "silent victims" of domestic violence. Even though they may not be the victims of physical violence the exposure to this type of behaviour and relationship model has severe consequences. The ABS Women's Safety Survey³ found that of the women who experienced violence by a current partner, 61 per cent reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship, and 38 per cent said that these children had witnessed the violence.

The research report, Family Violence: A Whole Family Approach⁴ found that children living in families experiencing domestic violence are gravely affected even when they are not the targets of the abuse. The impact of witnessing violence can not be differentiated from the impact of experiencing direct violence.

References

- 1/ Department of Human Services Victoria (2004) *The Health Costs of Violence. Measuring the Burden of Disease caused by Intimate Partner Violence.*
- 2/ South Australian Department of Human Services, Adelaide (1998) *South Australian Health Goals and Targets: Violence and Abuse Priority Areas*
- 3/ Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia.*
- 4/ Hewitt & Cavanagh (2000) *Family Violence: A Whole Family Approach*