

EDUCATOR INTERVENTIONS WITH STUDENTS WHO WITNESS DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

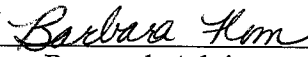
by

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ABSTRACT

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Domestic violence is a social problem plaguing America. Some three million children in America are living in homes where domestic violence is present. Studies have shown that children living in homes where domestic violence occurs commonly suffer from negative social, emotional, behavioral, and psychological effects (Lemmey et. al, 2001; Jaffe, Wofle, & Wilson, 1990; Matthews, 1998; Warshaw & Danley, 1998). Children living in violent homes are at an increased risk to be victims of child abuse and neglect (Straus & Gelles, 1996). Often the stress, chaos, fear, and confusion from living in a violent home impair the child's ability to thrive academically. These children may have few friends and know little about healthy, positive relationships. Tragically, children who witness violence at home are at risk to remain in a cycle of violence their entire life,

either as abuser or the abused. Because the consequences for child witnesses of domestic violence are so grave, it is important that these children receive the help and assistance needed in order to break this horrific cycle.

Educators have an exceptional ability to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. The purpose of this study was to assess the perceived ability of educators to identify and intervene with student witnesses to domestic violence.

Specifically, the study sought to answer these questions: Do educators understand how domestic violence affects their classrooms? Are educators aware of characteristics and signs that domestic violence is present? Are educators adequately trained and supported to intervene with suspected child witnesses of domestic violence?

Educators in a rural school district were surveyed regarding their familiarity with children who witness domestic violence. With all educators in elementary schools being invited to participate, the potential sample size is approximately 88. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from administration. Those willing to participate in the survey completed the survey and returned it to the researcher in a sealed envelope. The data were analyzed using descriptive indicators in order to interpret the results and identify trends. Demographic information was used to provide broad categories for the researcher to identify patterns in educator training and intervention. However, individual survey responses were not identifiable by name, school, or subject taught. Following data analysis, results were available by request. The investigator provided information to participating schools, including statistics on children and domestic violence, characteristics of child witnesses to violence, and intervention approaches.

Findings of this study showed that most educators felt inadequately trained to identify and refer students and/or families to domestic violence intervention services. The majority of participating educators reported not being familiar with the characteristics of child witnesses to domestic violence. Overall, data analysis indicated a need for participants to receive training on domestic violence and the impacts it has on children.

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Most importantly I would like to acknowledge the children I have worked with who have touched my heart. It is because of them that I believe so strongly in combating domestic violence and will continue working the rest of my life to do so.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	4
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	4
<i>Assumptions of the Study</i>	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	5
<i>Limitations of the Study</i>	5
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
<i>Effects of domestic violence on children</i>	6
<i>Interventions for child witnesses of domestic violence</i>	10
<i>Schools, children, and domestic violence</i>	11
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	14
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i>	14
<i>Instrumentation</i>	14
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	14
<i>Data Analysis</i>	15
<i>Limitations</i>	15
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	16
<i>Demographic Information</i>	16
<i>Item Analysis</i>	19
<i>Research Questions</i>	29
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	32
<i>Discussion</i>	32
<i>Conclusions</i>	33
<i>Recommendations for Educators</i>	34
<i>Recommendations for Counselors</i>	34

<i>Recommendation for Administraotors</i>	34
<i>Recommendations for Further Research</i>	34
References.....	38
Appendix A: Educator Survey and Consent to Participate.....	42

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Percentage Response to Item # 2.....	17
Table 2: Percentage Response to Item # 3.....	18
Table 3: Percentage Response to Item # 4.....	18
Table 4: Percentage Response to Item # 5.....	19
Table 5: Percentage Response to Item # 6.....	20
Table 6: Percentage Response to Item # 7.....	21
Table 7: Percentage Response to Item # 8.....	21
Table 8: Percentage Response to Likert Item # 1.....	22
Table 9: Percentage Response to Likert Item # 2.....	23
Table 10: Percentage Response to Likert Item # 3.....	24
Table 11: Percentage Response to Likert Item # 4.....	25
Table 12: Percentage Response to Likert Item # 5.....	26
Table 13: Means Response to Item # 4 & # 6.....	27
Table 14: Crosstabs Response to Item # 4 & # 7.....	28
Table 15: Crosstabs Response to Item # 4 & # 8.....	29

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Many studies (Jaffe, Wolf, Wilson & Zak, 1986; Matthews, 1998; Lemmey et al., 2001; Warsaw & Danley, 1998) have shown that witnessing violence has a negative impact on children. Even if children are not the direct target of violence, they still have many of the same results as if they were the target of violence. According to Jouriles, Kolbo, and Levendosky (as cited in Lemmey et al., 2001), children who grow up in homes where violence is commonplace may suffer from negative social, emotional, behavioral, and psychological effects.

Domestic violence also puts children at higher risk for abuse and/or neglect. Children who live with domestic violence are 1500 times more likely to become victims of child abuse (Matthews, 1998, p. 1). According to Straus and Gelles (1996), about half of the homes where domestic violence is present also contain child abuse and/or neglect. Many times, the abuse begins with the mother being the sole target of violence, but over time, the children become targets of violence as well.

Children from homes of violence also are at higher risk for becoming juvenile delinquents. According to the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (n.d.), the most significant difference between delinquent and non-delinquent youth is a history of family violence/abuse. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse (Family Violence Prevention fund, 1998) suggested that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country. The Family Violence Prevention Fund also claimed that domestic violence, child abuse, and youth violence are inextricably connected.

Children who witness violence in their homes are negatively impacted (Johnson et al., 2002; Siegle, Jill, Henderson, Ernst, & Boat et al., 1999). According to Johnson et al. (2002), the victimization felt by child witnesses to violence is a significant predictor of child aggression, depression, anger, and anxiety. A study by Siegle et al. (1999), showed that children exposed to domestic violence experienced a variety of negative effects including behavior disorders, developmental delays, and child abuse. Researchers have found that child witnesses of domestic violence generally exhibit more aggressive and antisocial behaviors and more fearful and inhibitive behaviors (Edleson, 1999). Edleson also stated that child witnesses to violence have lower social competence than other children. Child witnesses to violence are found to have less skill in understanding how others feel and in looking at situations from another person's perspective (Edleson, 1999). According to Rossman and Ho (2000), children exposed to domestic violence may be at a greater risk for post-traumatic stress disorder. According to The Women's Center (1998), the experiences of these children included: danger, chaos, fear and tension, hopelessness, confusion, isolation, and a love/hate relationship with primary caregivers. Children who lived in violent homes shared a variety of the same feelings and experiences.

Policymakers have just begun to recognize these forgotten victims of crime, and have begun taking measures to protect these millions of children. The American Academy of Pediatricians made a recommendation that all patients be screened for signs of domestic violence (Erickson, Hill, & Siegel, 2001). Recent reforms in Wisconsin's W-2 program include screening all clients for domestic violence. Many trainings and courses have popped up around the state in attempts to protect children from domestic

violence. College courses and workshops are available for understanding the impacts of domestic violence on children and how to provide intervention. The University of Wisconsin- Stout is home to the graduate level course *How Domestic Violence Affects Your Classroom*. The Wisconsin Domestic Violence Project hosts two training workshops a year specifically aimed towards intervention in the schools.

School-based intervention for the effects of domestic violence is recommended (Davis & Carlson, 1987). Teachers are in a position to detect and refer children for signs of witnessing domestic violence in the home. According to Dawud-Noursi, Lamb, and Sternberg (1998), violence in the home is related to problems in school with teachers and peers. School personnel are in a prime situation to detect signs of a violent home and to refer the battered parent to a domestic violence shelter.

According to research by Kerker, Horowitz, Leventhal, Plitchta, and Leaf, (2000), domestic violence screening is best done by directly asking parents about violence. If a teacher notices characteristics of witnessing violence, they have an opportunity to ask the parent, "Johnny hit another child on the playground today. Does anyone in your home get hurt or hit?" A study conducted by Erickson et al., (2001) found that in the pediatric setting, when parents were asked similar questions, they disclosed violence in the home 24% of the time. According to Magen, Conroy, and Del-Tufo (2000), women appreciate being asked about past and current abusive relationships and women feel more equipped to protect their children and themselves after disclosing abuse.

A number of studies have shown that screening for child witnesses of domestic violence is important (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Magen et al., 2000; Dubowitz et al., 2001; Erickson et al., 2001; Siegle et al., 1999; Kerker et al., 2000). Because

domestic violence is a difficult but important topic to address with a parent, it is important that all those involved are provided with adequate training in order to feel competent and confident with issues of domestic violence. Pediatricians who were provided with adequate training were 10 times more likely to identify children living with domestic violence (Erickson et al., 2001). A similar study done with psychiatrists found that those with training were able to identify significantly more cases of domestic violence in the home (Currier, Barthauer, Begier, & Bruce, 1996). Magen et al., (2000) found that training enhanced identification of domestic violence.

Statement of the Problem

Because educators are in a unique position to identify and intervene with child witnesses of domestic violence, this study has been conducted to determine whether educators are trained to recognize and respond to signs of child witnesses of domestic violence. A survey was used in Fall 2003 to collect data.

Purpose of the Study

There are three research questions this study will attempt to answer.

1. Do educators recognize the characteristics/impacts of children who witness domestic violence?
2. Do educators feel adequately trained to successfully intervene with child witnesses of domestic violence?
3. Are educators identifying and referring students for domestic violence intervention services?

Assumptions of the Study

One assumption of the study was that educators would be willing to participate in the study and respond at a high enough level for data analysis to occur. It was also assumed that participating educators would honestly answer each item on the survey.

Definition of Terms

Domestic violence (DV): physical, emotional, or sexual abuse that occurs between two or more intimate partners.

Child witness(es) to domestic violence: Children who are aware of violence in the home between one of more primary caregivers, usually mother or father, either by seeing or hearing abuse or by being aware of the effects of violence such as bruises on caregiver, destroyed property, or any other aftermath of violence.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study included the possible refusal of some teachers to participate in the study. Because the return rate on surveys was less than 100%, the results may be somewhat biased to reflect those with an interest in the topic. Another limitation to the study was the self-reporting instrument; participants may have answered dishonestly to the items on the survey.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, advocates and policymakers have become aware that domestic violence is more than just a “woman’s issue,” that it has harmful effects on the children who witness the abuse and who must live in families torn apart by violence (Matthews, 1998). Children living in homes where domestic violence is present, or the “forgotten victims,” may suffer from a wide range of problems. This chapter will examine existing literature as it relates to children and domestic violence as well as interventions in healthcare and in schools.

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Current research indicates, according to Jaffe (cited in Warshaw & Danley, 1998), that domestic violence affects children in a variety of ways, and that the effects can be both short or long term. The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (n.d.) reported that children who witness violence toward their mother display as much or more physical and verbal aggression, sleep disturbance, and general anxiety as those who are direct recipients of abuse. Even though the child may not be the direct target of violence, it is still damaging to watch or listen to a parent be the victim of physical or verbal assault.

Often times the abuse will start with abuse of the mother and will eventually progress to emotional abuse and later physical abuse and neglect of the children. According to the United States Department of Justice (1998), more than half of female victims of intimate partner violence live in households with children under age 12. Approximately 50% of homes where domestic violence is present also are affected by child abuse or neglect (Straus & Gelles, 1996). Grusznski, Brink, & Edleson, (1988)

reported that many children living with domestic violence are the victims of abuse themselves. Children are often times blamed for all that is wrong in the family, making them an easy target for abuse. Children may also be hurt by thrown objects or inadvertent hitting, kicking or other forms of physical violence. Boys are more likely to take on a “protector” role and be physically harmed while trying to protect the victimized parent (Fantuzzo, 1991).

According to Jouriles, Kolbo, and Levendosky (as cited in Lemmey et al., 2001), studies indicate that children who grow up observing intimate partner violence are at grave risk for profound emotional, behavioral, physiological, cognitive, and social problems. Several studies revealed that many children who observe violent acts against their mothers have greater behavioral problems than children who live in non-violent homes (Lemmey et al., 2001). Children may become physically injured if they try to intervene during an abusive episode. Males who grow up in violent homes are more likely to become abusers while females are more likely to be sexually abused and to become involved in abusive relationships (Matthews, 1998). Children in homes with domestic violence may learn that violence pays off, that it is an acceptable way to deal with feelings. These children often times become the next generation of abusers and abused. Both sexes may learn through time that violence is an expected and natural component in relationships. Many serious physical, mental, behavioral, and cognitive effects can last throughout the child’s lifetime.

According to the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (n.d.), the following statistics show some of the devastating effects of children witnessing parental abuse.

- Children in homes where domestic violence is present may experience cognitive or language problems, developmental delays, stress-related physical ailments, and hearing and speech problems.
- Children whose mothers are abused are six times more likely to commit suicide and 24 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than are children growing up in non-violent households.
- Children from violent homes have higher risks of alcohol/drug abuse and juvenile delinquency.
- The most significant difference between delinquent and non-delinquent youth is a history of family violence/abuse.
- More than 50% of child abductions result from domestic violence.
- Sixty-three percent of all males ages 11-20 who are serving time for homicide in the United States are incarcerated because they killed their mother's abusers.
- Witnessing ongoing parental violence during childhood has been shown to significantly predict the perpetration of serious crimes in adulthood: assault, attempted rape, attempted murder, kidnapping, and murder.
- Some of the nation's "missing children" are actually being hidden by their mothers to protect them from violent fathers. Abusers sometimes kidnap their children to punish their partners for leaving or to get them to come back. (par. 2)

Of course not every child will be affected by domestic violence in the same way. According to Warshaw and Danley (1998), severity of witnessed violence, length

of witnessed violence, parent-child relationships, gender, age, developmental stage, and social supports all play a role in determining how each child will be affected.

The Women's Center (1998) reported the following experiences as being common to children who grow up in violent homes.

Danger. Children experience danger because of physical violence going on around them. At times, they may be the direct target of abuse, but can also experience danger by accidental pushes, shoves, or by projectile objects. Children will often try to stop the fighting by putting themselves in the middle and may get injured in the process.

Chaos. Because children living with violence never know what to expect from the abuser, they live in a constant state of chaos. Abuser's moods can instantly change from love to rage, leaving children not knowing what to expect.

Fear and Tension. Children living in abusive home feel like they are walking on eggshells, careful not to disrupt the abuser in hopes of preventing a violent episode. Day after day of anger and violence can cause children to be afraid of everything and to trust no one.

Confusion. Confusion is a central component of children from violent homes. At school, children learn that hitting is wrong, but they go home where hitting is used to "solve problems" or to deal with feelings.

Isolation. Commonly abusers will try to keep the family isolated from outside support. Children may not be allowed to visit friends or family and often withdraw from friends and other adults.

Hopelessness. Children witnessing violence in the home will often blame themselves for the abuse, but they feel powerless to stop it. Commonly children will feel

like there is nothing they can do to make the violence end, to get away from it, or to prevent it.

Love-Hate relationship. A child may feel protective of the abused parent, but at the same time feel anger and resentment towards that parent for not stopping the abuse. Children can have close, happy relationships with their abuser, but may also wish that the abuser goes away or even dies.

These reported commonly experienced feelings can reduce a child's ability to function normally. Important relationships and social interactions may not occur due to the experiences that domestic violence has created. These children need intervention in order to ensure their healthy development into loving, caring, secure and functional adults.

Interventions for Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence

One large scale intervention strategy is the routine screening for domestic violence by healthcare providers. Because nearly all children have contact with medical professionals, doctors and nurses are in a unique position to screen for family violence. In the late 1990's The American Pediatric Association recognized and responded to the adverse affects of children exposed to domestic violence by recommending that all pediatricians incorporate domestic violence screening as routine practice (Siegle et al., 1999). Researchers have noted that because the effects of exposure to family violence can be long lasting, pediatricians should screen not only for current abuse, but also past abuse (Dubowitz et al., 2001). There is not a plethora of research on the benefits of pediatric screening for domestic violence, but several studies show positive feedback.

Current research indicates that pediatric DV screening can be helpful to abused parents and their children. Dubowitz et al. (2001) found that routine screening for DV-related symptoms, followed with proper evaluation and intervention, may reduce parental depression, improve parenting, and reduce behavioral problems in children exposed to domestic violence. A study conducted by Siegle et al. (1999) found that 31% of women revealed the occurrence of family violence at some point in their lives when screened during a pediatric visit. Seventeen percent of the mothers reported domestic violence within the previous 2 years. Prior to this screening, only 1 report of domestic violence had been made within the last 4 years. While research is limited in this area, it seems likely that screening for domestic violence can lead to intervention for families exposed to violence.

Schools, Children, and Domestic Violence

Because many school-related problems are the result of domestic violence, it seems as if school personnel are in a unique place to screen, refer and intervene with students exposed to violence in the home. School employees have daily direct contact with most school-aged children in America. Contact with parents of these children generally occurs at least twice a year at parent-teacher conferences and other typical school functions. Knowing the devastating, and sometimes deadly, effects of domestic violence, school administrators need to consider the screening of domestic violence in order to ensure students safety, well-being, and ability to learn, grow and achieve.

Family violence generally occurs at home, but schools have a responsibility to address the issue and help lessen the impact on child witnesses to violence. Weis, Marusza, and Fine (1998) voiced “a concern for the emotional well being of the children

who go to school daily surviving unspeakable horror in the home, a horror which affects their ability to learn academic material, trust social relations, and thrive emotionally” (p. 56). Weis also stated that in and out of school, children have been socialized not to discuss domestic violence and that they internally cope with the impacts of violence alone, throughout the school day. Weis suggested that schools have responsibility to address the issue of domestic violence. Weis’s research showed that exposure to family violence profoundly affects female’s behavior in school. A study by Julia Marusza (as cited in Weis et al., 1998), found that female students did not talk about or seek help from peer, teachers, or other school personnel in coping with the violence at home. Instead, Weis found that a code of silence surrounding domestic violence prevailed. Weis’s study concluded that children currently living with domestic violence and those with a history of domestic violence are certainly affected by the witnessed violence and that the unstable home life created from the abuse interferes with children’s ability to succeed in school.

Several studies have shown that children’s ability to succeed in school may be compromised when living in homes where domestic violence is present. Elking (as cited in Weis et al., 1998), found that family problems are the main reason students are absent from school. A study by Afulayan (1993) stated that children sometimes fake an illness in order to stay home and protect a parent or that they actually do become ill from the intense fear and worry. Children from violent homes showed difficulty concentrating when they did attend school (Jaffe et al., 1990). According to Westra and Martin, (as cited in Weis et al., 1998), compared to the general population, children living with domestic violence tend to have more academic difficulties. According to Wolf (as cited in

al., 1998), these children also showed lowered peer relationships. Research by Fagan, Stewart, and Henson (as cited in Weis et al., 1998) showed that children who witness family violence were more likely to exhibit aggression and conduct disorders. A child's functioning within the school may be affected in a number of different ways, threatening the child's academic and social success.

Millions of children exposed each year to domestic violence experience short and long term implications that affect their success at school (Center for Children and Families in the Justice System, 2002). The Center for Children and Families in the Justice System stated that teachers are in an ideal position to identify when a student is having difficulties at school. The Center also stated that school-based interventions can reduce risks and increase protective behaviors for children exposed to violence.

Research on children and domestic violence is relatively recent, but it has important implications for educators. Effects of domestic violence on children have become clearer over the years and social institutions are beginning to respond. Educators are in a unique position to screen as well as to intervene with school-related effects of witnessing violence in the home. Emotional and behavioral problems, violent behavior, and increased risk for emotional and physical abuse are all effects that may hinder a student's performance at school.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes information on subject selection and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations. Educator information and perceptions were analyzed in order to determine their perceptions about their ability to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence.

Subject Selection and Description

Administrators in a rural Midwestern school district were contacted prior to the study taking place. Permission was granted to distribute surveys at three elementary schools in the district. All educators, including general education, special education, paraprofessionals, specialists, and counselors, from these schools were asked to participate in the study. A copy of the consent form/survey is included in Appendix A. A total of eighty eight surveys were distributed to educators at the elementary schools.

Instrumentation

A survey was used as the measure of evaluation. The survey developed for this study had a total of 18 items, including five Likert Scale items and five demographics items. Some of the questions were developed through research into other instruments used to study domestic violence. (Erickson et al., 2001; Currier et al., 1996; Siegle et al., 1999). This survey was developed to measure educator perceptions of their ability to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. The instrument was created specifically for use in this study, thus there are no measures of validity or reliability.

Data Collection Procedures

Following administrative approval, the 18 item survey was administered to a total of 88 educators at three elementary schools. Educators were instructed to return the survey within one week to an envelope located in the staff mailroom. Surveys at all three schools were distributed during late November and early December.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Program for Social Sciences, version 10.0, was used to analyze survey responses. Frequencies were used to obtain frequency counts and percentages on survey items one through five, seven and eight. In addition, frequencies were also used on item number six to obtain frequency counts, percentages, mean, median, and standard deviation. Likert Scale items were analyzed using frequencies to obtain frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Item means were cross tabulated with demographic variables, in order to determine trends.

Limitations

Participants in the study were not chosen randomly, so they may not be representative of the entire educator population at the three elementary schools. Results should not be generalized to the entire population or beyond the staffs of these schools. Participants of this study were primarily female and of European-American descent.

In summary, then, educators at the three elementary schools were surveyed regarding their perceptions about identifying and responding to child witnesses of domestic violence. The 18 item surveys were analyzed using frequencies, means, and percentages to evaluate educator's beliefs and actions of possible student witnesses of violence in the home.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Results of this study will be discussed to determine how well prepared educators are to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. Results were generated through the use of a survey instrument assessing educator perceptions, training, experience and knowledge in regards to children and domestic violence. Demographic information and individual survey items will be provided.

Demographic Information

Eighty eight surveys were distributed to educators at the three elementary schools. A total of 47 surveys were returned, resulting in a return rate of 53.4%. All educators, including general education teachers, specialists, paraeducators, counselors, and special education teachers, were invited to participate in this study.

Item number one of the instrument asked the participant's gender. Of the 47 participants who responded, 6 were male and 39 were female. Actual gender ratios for educators in the three elementary schools are not known.

Item number 2 of the survey stated "Grade Currently Teaching." Due to the inclusion of specialists, special education educators, etc. several participants had a combination of grades currently taught ranging from PreK to 8th (see Table 1). There were a total of 3 missing responses for item number 2.

Table 1

Percentage Response to Item #2: Grade Currently Teaching

Grade Level	Frequency	Percent
Preschool	1	2.3
K-2	19	43.2
3-5	13	29.5
6-8	4	9.1
K-5	6	13.6
K-8	1	2.3
Total	44	100

Item number three of the survey stated “Level of Education.” Choices ranged from H.S. diploma to doctoral degree (see Table 2). Seventy-two percent of participants had a graduate degree. Participants with some graduate work accounted for 17% of respondents.

Table 2

Percentage Response to Item # 3: Level of Education

Training	Frequency	Percent
HS diploma/ GED	1	2.1
College Degree	4	8.5
Some Graduate Coursework	8	17.0
Graduate Degree	34	72.3
Total	47	100

Item number four on the survey stated “Specific Training in Domestic Violence.” Fifty-three percent of respondents had received less than one hour training in domestic violence (see Table 3). Educators with 10 or more hours training in domestic violence accounted for 15.6%.

Table 3

Percentage Response to Item #4: Specific Training in Domestic Violence

Training	Frequency	Percent
< 1 hour	24	53.3
1-3 hours	7	15.6
3-5 hours	4	8.9
5-7 hours	2	4.4
7-10 hours	1	2.2
10 + hours	7	15.6
Total	45	100

Item number five on the educator survey stated “Years of Educational Experience.” Seventy-nine percent of participants have had 10 or more years of experience in education (see Table 4).

Table 4

Percentage Response to Item #5: Years of Educational Experience

Educational Experience	Frequency	Percent
< 1 year	3	6.4
1-3 year	0	0.0
3-5 year	3	6.4
5-7 year	3	6.4
7-10 year	1	2.1
10 + year	37	78.7
Total	47	100

Item Analysis

Item number six on the survey stated “I estimate that _____% of students in my school are living in homes where domestic violence is present.” The mean response for this item was 14.8% (see Table 5). Twenty-four percent of educators believed that the percentage of students living in homes where domestic violence occurs is 5% or less. Sixty-two percent felt that the estimated percent of student s living with DV was 10% of lower.

Table 5

Percentage Response to Item #6: Estimated % of Students Living with DV

Estimated %	Frequency	Percent
1	4	8.9
4	1	2.2
5	6	13.3
8	2	4.4
10	15	33.3
14	1	2.2
15	2	4.4
20	3	6.7
25	5	11.1
28	1	2.2
35	2	4.4
40	1	2.2
45	1	2.2
50	1	2.2
Total	45	100
Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
14.80	10.00	11.938

Item number seven stated “I have identified a student as being a possible witness of domestic violence.” Fifty-three percent responded that they have identified a student as being a possible witness to DV (see Table 6).

Table 6

Percentage responses for Item #7: Identified a Student as a Witness to DV

Response	Frequency	Percent
yes	25	53.2
no	22	46.8
Total	47	100

Item number eight of the educator survey stated “I have referred a student or family to domestic violence intervention. Forty-five percent responded that they had referred a student or family to domestic violence intervention services (see Table 7).

Table 7

Percentage Response to Item #8: Referred a Student/Family to Intervention Services

Response	Frequency	Percent
yes	21	44.7
no	26	55.3
Total	47	100

The second part of the educator survey consisted of five Likert Scale items.

Participants could choose the response that most closely represented their belief from five options: strongly agree, agree, not sure/neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Item number one of the Likert Scale statements read "Training on domestic violence is extremely important for educators to have in order to identify possible child witnesses of domestic violence." Ninety-six percent of educators agreed or strongly agreed that training is important for educators to identify child witnesses of domestic violence, with 57% agreeing and 34% strongly agreeing.

Table 8

Percentage Response to Likert Item #1: Training on DV is Extremely Important

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2.2
Disagree	1	2.2
Neutral	0	0.0
Agree	27	60.0
Strongly Agree	16	35.6
Total	45	100

Item number two of the Likert Scale statements read "I believe witnessing violence at home vs. being the object of violence at home have different effects on children." Twenty percent disagreed that witnessing and being a direct target of domestic violence has the same kinds of effects. Sixty percent agreed or strongly agreed that the

two produce similar effects. Twenty percent of respondents were neutral or unsure about the similarity between witnessing and being a victim of domestic violence.

Table 9

Percentage Response to Likert Item #2: Witnessing Violence vs. Being the Direct Target

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Disagree	9	20.0
Neutral	9	20.0
Agree	19	42.2
Strongly Agree	8	17.8
Total	45	100

Item number three of the Likert Scale statements read “I am adequately trained to identify students who are living in violent homes.” Eleven percent of respondents strongly disagreed and 51% disagreed that they were adequately trained to identify students witnessing domestic violence. Twenty-two percent were neutral or unsure if they were adequately trained.

Table 10

Percentage Response to Likert Item #3: I am Adequately Trained to Identify Students

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	11.1
Disagree	23	51.1
Neutral	10	22.2
Agree	7	15.6
Strongly Agree	0	0.0
Total	45	100

Item number four of the Likert Scale statements read “I am familiar with the characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence.” Thirty-two percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence, with 29.8% agreeing and 2.1% strongly agreeing.

Table 11

Percentage Response to Likert Item 4: Familiarity with Characteristics of child witnesses

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	4.3
Disagree	17	37.0
Neutral	12	26.1
Agree	14	30.4
Strongly Agree	1	2.2
Total	46	100

Item number five of the Likert Scale statements read “I know what resources are available for victims of domestic violence in my area.” Forty-two percent of respondents agreed that they knew what services are locally available to domestic violence victims and 4.3% strongly agreed.

Table 12

Percentage Response to Likert Item #5: I Know the Available Resources for DV Victims

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	4.3
Disagree	10	21.7
Neutral	12	26.1
Agree	20	43.5
Strongly Agree	2	4.3
Total	46	100

Data analysis between survey item number six, the estimated percent of students living with domestic violence, and survey item number four, specific hours of training in domestic violence, shows high standard deviations, indicating that educators are not consistent in their presumptions of the percentage of students living with domestic violence, regardless of how many hours of training they have received. Seven participants with 10 or more hours training in domestic violence showed a standard deviation of 15.119 when estimating the percentage of students living with domestic violence.

Table 13

Means Responses to Items #6 and #4: Estimated % and DV Training

Hours of Training	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
< 1 hour	11.48	23	8.649
1-3 hours	10.71	7	8.789
3-5 hours	23.00	3	10.817
5-7 hours	30.00	2	28.284
7-10 hours	10.00	1	-
10 + hours	24.29	7	15.119
Total	15.07	43	12.149

Cross tabulation analysis for item number four, specific training in domestic violence, and item number seven, identification of a student as a possible witness of domestic violence, suggests that increased training results in higher frequencies of student identification. Although the difference was not statistically significant, the trend in the data indicates a positive correlation between hours of training and identification of student witnesses to domestic violence. With 3 or more hours of training in domestic violence, 92.5% of participants identified students as possible witnesses to domestic violence. Thirty-eight percent of participants with less than 3 hours of training, identified a student as a possible witness to domestic violence.

Table 14

Crosstabs to Items #4 and #7: Training on DV and Identification of Student Witnesses

Hours of Training	Frequency	% Yes	Frequency	% No
< 1 hour	8	33.3	16	66.7
1-3 hours	3	42.9	4	57.1
3-5 hours	4	100.0	0	0.0
5-7 hours	2	100.0	0	0.0
7-10 hours	1	100.0	0	0.0
10 + hours	5	71.4	2	28.6
Total	23	51.1	22	48.9

Cross tabulation analysis for item number four, specific training in domestic violence, and item number eight, referral of a student or family to domestic violence intervention, shows that increased training results in higher frequencies of student and/or family referral. With 3 or more hours of training in domestic violence, 83.95% of participants referred students or families to DV intervention services. Thirty-nine percent of participants with less than 3 hours of training, referred students or families.

Table 15

Crosstabs to Items #4 and #8: Specific Training on DV and Student Referral

Hours of Training	Frequency	% Yes	Frequency	% No
< 1 hour	5	20.8	19	79.2
1-3 hours	4	57.1	3	42.9
3-5 hours	4	100.0	0	0.0
5-7 hours	1	50.0	1	50.0
7-10 hours	1	100.0	0	0.0
10 + hours	6	85.7	1	14.3
Total	21	46.7	24	53.3

Research Questions

Research Question #1: Do educators recognize the characteristics/impacts of children who witness domestic violence?

Likert scale items number 2 and number 4 related to this question. When asked about participant's knowledge about characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence, responses were distributed somewhat evenly between knowing the characteristics, not knowing the characteristics, and being unsure or neutral of their knowledge on the characteristics of witnessing domestic violence. Over half of all participants were not sure if they knew the characteristics or stated that they did not know the characteristics. When asked about the similarity between being a target of violence and witnessing domestic violence, most participants agreed that the two produced similar effects. However, about 40% participants were not sure or disagreed. The results of this

survey indicate that participants overall do not have a strong understanding of the characteristics and effects of child witnesses to domestic violence.

Research Question #2: Are educators adequately trained and supported to successfully intervene with issues of domestic violence?

Survey items four and six, as well as Likert scale items one, three, and five related to this question. Most participants in this study reported having less than 1 hour of training in domestic violence. Less than a quarter of participants estimated that 10% or less of students at their school were living in homes where domestic violence is present. Range of answers from 1% to 50% along with a high standard deviation show ambiguity among staff when estimating how many students are faced with domestic violence in the home.

Nearly all participants agreed that training is important in order to recognize child witnesses to domestic violence. Results showed that while most participants felt that training on domestic violence is important, most feel inadequately trained to identify student witnesses. Half of the participants reported knowing what resources are available for victims of domestic violence. The other half reported not knowing what resources are available or not being sure if they know what resources are available.

Research Question #3: Are educators identifying and referring students for domestic violence intervention services?

Items number seven and eight of the survey show mixed results when identifying students witnessing domestic violence and referring students and/or families to domestic violence services. About half of the participants have identified a student as a possible

witness of domestic violence and about half of participants have referred a student/family to domestic violence intervention services.

Data analysis of the completed surveys provide understanding of the identified research objectives. Results indicate a need for further training and education regarding child witnesses of domestic violence. This training would increase educator knowledge on the effects of witnesses of domestic violence, increase identification and referrals, and educators in feeling adequately prepared to intervene with cases of domestic violence.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

A discussion and final conclusion will be included in this chapter.

Recommendations for educators, administrators and school counselors, as well as recommendations for further research will be made.

Discussion

The effects of witnessing domestic violence on children are well documented. Impacts of witnessing violence in the home touch all aspects of children's lives including physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being. The medical community has taken steps to combat the effects by recommending routine screening. Existing literature shows success for this intervention in the pediatric setting. Other literature suggests that given prime position, educators need to address the issue of child witnesses of domestic violence.

The purpose of this study was to determine if educators in a rural Midwestern school district are trained to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. Specifically, the study was aimed at evaluating whether or not educators believe they understand the effects and characteristics associated with witnessing domestic violence, whether educators feel adequately trained to intervene, and whether educators are identifying and referring students and/or families for domestic violence intervention services.

Forty seven elementary educators in a rural Midwestern school district participated in this study. The survey instrument, consisting of 18 items, was used to evaluate educators' perceptions on their ability to effectively recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. The first 13 items, consisting of demographic

information, were evaluated for comparative analysis of means responses. The remaining five items regarded educator perceptions of their ability to recognize and respond to child witnesses of domestic violence. A 5- point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral/ not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to analyze educator perceptions.

Data analysis as outlined in Chapter 4, indicated an overall need for domestic violence training. Overall, educators stated feeling inadequately trained to successfully manage issues relating to child witnesses of domestic violence. Participants indicated a need for training on domestic violence. Results also suggested that 3 or more hours of training on domestic violence leads to higher rates of identification and referral of students and/or families impacted by domestic violence.

Conclusions

Findings of this study conclude that educators in this school district believe they need additional training in order to effectively identify and intervene with child witnesses to domestic violence. Most staff felt that training is important in order to successfully deal with the issues of child witnesses to violence, but few felt that they were adequately trained to handle such issues.

Overall, educators surveyed indicated a need for domestic violence training. The majority of participants reported not being familiar with the characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence. Almost half of surveyed educators were unaware that witnessing domestic violence produces similar effects as being the direct target of violence. Results indicate a need for training on the effects and characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence.

Identification and referral of student witnesses to domestic violence was related to the amount of domestic violence training educators had received. Educators with three or more hours training in domestic violence were far more likely to identify and refer student witnesses than those with less training.

Recommendations for Classroom Educators

Based on the results of this study, there is a need for further training on domestic violence. Educators can do a number of things to increase their knowledge and understanding of the issue. There is a plethora of information on domestic violence and its effects on children. Many books based on domestic violence are available. The internet provides a wealth of free information on domestic violence and its effects on children.

Aside from educating themselves on domestic violence, teachers can work to educate students on domestic violence. Education on domestic violence and its effects could be incorporated into the general curriculum or through guidance activities. Educating students on domestic violence would help students to understand that violence in the home is not ok and that school personnel are there to help and support students. Student education would also help to prevent future cases of domestic violence by teaching students the components of healthy relationships.

Recommendations for School Counselors

School counselors should provide a number of direct services to students geared at protecting children from domestic violence. Classroom lesson plans can help students better cope with violence in the home. Counselors need to educate students on violence, teaching them what it is, that it is not their fault, and that it is not ok. Counselors should

work with students to promote safety by teaching them how and when to dial 911, identifying support systems, and creating safety plans. Effective conflict resolution strategies, how to manage anger, healthy relationships, and gender stereotyping are other areas that student witnesses to domestic violence need education and training in. School counselors can address these areas not only through classroom guidance lessons, but also as part of individual and small group counseling.

School counselors need to support and provide resources to educators on domestic violence. School counselor should establish procedures for teachers suspecting student victims of domestic violence. These procedures will help educators to know how to approach each situation as it arises. Guidelines should be established as to when, where, and how to approach the family, when to refer a student/family, and how to effectively support individual students in the classroom.

Recommendations for Administrators

With research clearly showing the impact of witnessing domestic violence on children's ability to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, school administrators need to address the issue and work to deter the negative effect on students.

Administrators could provide presentations and information to staff on domestic violence and children. Presentations could be provided at in-service trainings, staff meetings, or as a professional development opportunity. Faced with budget constraints, schools can obtain these services free of charge through local domestic violence agencies and other social services organizations.

Administrators could also help combat the effects of domestic violence by showing support for the cause and reaching out to those students and families affected.

Information on domestic violence, its effects, and where to find help could be included in the school newsletter, potentially reaching all parents. Information could also be provided at parent teacher conferences or other school meetings. Families touched with violence need to know that schools understand the dynamics of family violence and that they are there to help students.

Recommendations for Further Research

The body of research on the effects of child witnesses of domestic violence is vast and clearly shows a need for concern. There is little research however, on what is effective for working with these students in the schools. More research needs to be done in order to determine successful interventions. What are the impacts of domestic violence education at the individual, small group, and classroom levels? If educators do receive domestic violence training and do intervene, what are the short and long term results? Research of any kind in the area of schools and child witnesses of domestic violence is desperately needed.

Findings of this study indicated a need for educator training on domestic violence and its impacts on the children who witness it. Educator training would improve intervention with students and will help to decrease the effects of domestic violence. School personnel can do a number of things to aid student success and combat domestic violence. Children who witness domestic violence in the home need intervention from educators, just as children who have learning disabilities or physical disabilities need intervention. The effects of domestic violence on children are detrimental to student achievement. Educators have the ability to help these students and provide them and their

families with the information, skills, and resources they need to break free of the violence.

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Appendix A: Educator Survey and Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of this study and agree that any potential risks are minimal. I also understand the potential benefits that will be available from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that only minimal demographic information is necessary and that only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the raw data. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice. I understand that I can see the results of this study by contacting the researcher.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Kate Weisenbeck (715) 232-8957, the researcher, or Barb Flom (715)232-1343, the research advisor. Questions about the rights of research subjects may be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Vocab. Rehab., Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126

Educator Survey

Gender

M F

Grade Currently Teaching

K-2 3-5 6-8

Level of Education

H. S. Diploma/G.E.D. Associate's Degree Some College
College degree Some graduate coursework Graduate degree Doctorate degree

Specific Training in Domestic Violence

<1 hour 1-3 hours 3-5 hours 5-7 hours 7-10 hours 10+ hours

Years of Educational Experience

<1 year 1-3 years 3-5 years 5-7 years 7-10 years 10+ years

I estimate that _____ % of students in my school are living in homes where domestic violence is present.

I have identified a student as being a possible witness of domestic violence.
Yes No

I have referred a student or family to domestic violence intervention. Yes No

Educator Perceptions of Students Who Witness Domestic Violence

Please answer the following statements with the answer that most closely matches your belief.

SD- Strongly Disagree

D- Disagree

N- Not Sure/Neutral

A- Agree

SA- Strongly Agree

Training on domestic violence is extremely important for educators to have in order to identify possible child witnesses of domestic violence.

SD D N A SA

I believe witnessing violence at home vs. being the object of violence at home have different effects on children.

SD D N A SA

I am adequately trained to identify students who are living in violent homes.

SD D N A SA

I am familiar with the characteristics of child witnesses of domestic violence.

SD D N A SA

I know what resources are available for victims of domestic violence in my area.

SD D N A SA

Thank you very much for participating in this study. Results will be used in efforts to help all children living with domestic violence. For further information on domestic violence, please contact the local domestic violence agency for assistance at 235-9074 or 1-800-924-9918.