

Impact of domestic and family violence on children and parenting capacity

Where domestic and family violence occurs in families with **children**, the victim is most likely to be the perpetrator's female intimate partner and the mother of the children. A perpetrator may also directly abuse the children or otherwise **expose them to violence**. These children are also victims of domestic and family violence.

The experience of domestic and family violence may also adversely affect a victim's parenting capacity, and may be compounded by the effects of **mental illness** or **substance misuse** that emerge as a consequence of the violence, placing children at heightened risk of abuse and neglect.

An extensive review [Bromfield et al 2010] by the Australian Institute of Family Studies of Australian and international literature indicates a co-occurrence in this context of multiple and complex parenting problems, often within a broader experience of social isolation and economic disadvantage. For example, **mothers** who are victims of domestic and family violence may remain with their violent partner if they consider it too dangerous to leave; they may prioritise the violent partner's needs over their children's needs in order to reduce the risk of further violence; the debilitating effects of violence may make them unavailable or unable to meet their children's needs; and frequent belittling, undermining, insulting, and physical harm by the violent partner in front of the children may affect the children's respect for their mother's authority or her ability to assert her authority. In relation to the capacity of violent fathers to parent, the research is limited, however children who are exposed to their father's violence may feel a loss of trust, love and respect for their father, or see their father as a source of fear and terror [Bromfield et al 2010].

If **mental illness** or **substance misuse** are also relevant, a parent's cognition, moods, perception, self-awareness and self-esteem may be adversely affected, resulting in possible further impacts on a parent's capacity to perform basic tasks, maintain daily routines, respond to children's physical, material, and emotional needs, and provide consistent and positive parenting [Bromfield et al 2010].