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UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE **IN PAKISTAN**

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Domestic Violence and Abuse can be described as a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviors. They take place most commonly by intimate partners, but can also take place by family members and / or a care-giver.

While a majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women (due to an imbalance of power within social structures), it is not exclusive to one gender, social class, caste, race, religion or ethnicity, etc. **Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or class.** The violence and abuse can be focused towards a child, intimate partner or any other household member.

Why is it important to discuss and understand Domestic Violence?

Domestic Violence is an endemic (especially in desi society). It can have far-reaching consequences for individual victims, children affected by domestic violence either directly or by witnessing it in the home, and/or the community(s) as a whole. The lethal nature of domestic violence and abuse can result in physical ailments and - many times - homicidal death.

However, for every homicide victim of domestic violence who did not die are many survivors of the same, struggling with severe health problems and mental health issues, as a consequence of being trapped in abusive relationships without any support or proper treatment from healthcare providers. (*Hamberger, Saunders & Honey, 1992*)

Domestic violence is often underreported due to societal stigma surrounding it, and also because of the lack of accessibility to complaint and reporting mechanisms for victims / survivors. These resources include access to transport, to the police and other security personnel and ease of access to legal remedies. There is a dire need to fill the gap in knowledge regarding one's legal rights within the country; especially regarding domestic violence and abuse.

It is important to remember that Domestic Violence is purposeful and intentional behavior. The abuse meted out to the victim is aimed at achieving compliance and control over him/her. The patter nis not “random” or “out of control” behavior; but, rather, the abuser has made clear choices to hurt and control the victim. The patterns may vary from one abuser to the next; and certain tactics may require a great deal of planning. For example, some abusers may impose certain rules on their victims and monitor their compliance, “punishing” them for all and any “infractions” of the imposed rules. Research shows that perpetrators know exactly what they want from their victims; and they use both subtle and overt forms of abuse in order to attain those goals. (*Ganley, 1995*)

Domestic Violence Statistics:

The limited statistics available through different studies is evidence of the fact that it is so prevalent and accepted within our society, that many people do not even consider it a crime.

According to the **Human Rights Watch (2024 World Report)**, roughly 1000 women are killed for so-called “honor” every year. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) estimates that a staggering 18.9 million girls under the age of 18-years-old, and 4.6 million girls under the age of 15-years-old, are forcibly married. This leaves them open to early (and forced) pregnancies, which are usually too close together. The lack of agency also makes them increasingly vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse in a society where this is considered the “norm” for married life.

As per **Sahil**, a child’s rights NGO based out of Islamabad and working across the country, a child was sexually abused every two hours in Pakistan for the first six months of 2023. According to their report, most of the children were aged between 06 to 15 years of age.

As per the **Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2017-2018)**, more than 41% of women in the country believe that they were beaten by their spouses / intimate partners due to a justified reason - which proves the endemic and widely customary nature of violence within the context of relationships in Pakistani society. Additionally, 97.9% of women do not own any land or property; making it difficult for them to become financially independent and / or escape abuse.

According to available data presented by the DHS, the highest number of cases of physical abuse suffered by women took place in FATA (56%), followed by Balochistan (48%) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (43%). The lowest number of incidents reported were in Sindh (15%), while the report did not contain any figures for Punjab, the most populous province of the country.

As reported by the **National Commission of Human Rights’ (NCHR) Domestic Violence Policy Brief (2023)**, nearly 90% of women in Pakistan have faced domestic violence at some point in their lives. The recent COVID-19 Pandemic, followed by floods across the country and rising inflation all played a role in increasing the rate of domestic violence incidents across homes in Pakistan at an alarming rate.

As per the **Annual Statistics Report (2020)** prepared by the Aurat Foundation, over 11,000 cases of violence against were reported in just that year alone. The most common forms of violence were domestic violence (4,775 cases); rape and gang rape (2,297 cases) and murder / homicide (1,033 cases).

According to the **National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA)**, over 10,000 cases of violence against women were reported in 2020 alone. According to the Ministry of Human Rights, 63,000 cases of gender-based violence were reported in the last three years. Of these, 80% cases were related to domestic violence, with 47% of married women having experienced some sort of sexual violence (rape) within their relationship.

Social and educational disparity between the genders means that women account for only 22.63% of the total workforce; whereas men make up 84.79% of the labor force in the country. 82% of women in Pakistan remain unbanked, with limited access to financial institutions. This ensures that women remain financially dependent on the men within their families / tribes.

According to the **DHS**, women with a higher education are much more likely to seek help against domestic violence than women with little to no education. It is important to remember that the statistics quoted represent only the cases of domestic and gender-based violence that have been reported; with a large number of such cases remaining under reported. Only 0.4% of survivors of domestic violence take their cases to court.

As per the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Research's Annual Global Femicide Report**, nearly 89,000 women and girls were killed intentionally (murdered) in just 2022 alone. Around 48,800 women and girls were murdered by their intimate partner(s) or other family members within the same year - which means that 133 women and girls were being murdered every single day. Of all the homicides that take place throughout the year, 66% represent victims of intimate partner violence and homicide.

Defining Domestic Violence and Abuse

There are many different names and phrases that are used to describe domestic violence: wife beating, spousal abuse, marital abuse and intimate partner violence, among others. These phrases may sometimes be used interchangeably, while at others can be used to reflect and highlight specific meanings.

There is a marked **difference between the legal and behavioral definitions** of domestic violence.

The laws of USA, UK and Pakistan can be referred to when trying to understand the legal definition of Domestic Violence.

Under **US Law**, the term “Domestic Violence” includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse or an intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabiting with or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse or

intimate partner, by a person similarly situated as a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction." - (S. 12291(a)(8) of the Violence Against Women Act)

2. Under **UK Law**, the statutory definition of domestic violence and abusive behavior includes behavior that includes physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behavior, controlling or coercive behavior, economic abuse and/or psychological, emotional or other abuse. - (*Domestic Abuse Act, 2021*)

3. Under **Pakistani Law**, the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection Act) 2021 defines domestic violence as all physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and economic abuse that is committed by a respondent against women, children, vulnerable persons, or any other person with whom the respondent is or has been in a domestic relationship with, that causes fear, physical or psychological harm to the aggrieved person.

- (*Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021*)

The **behavioral definition of domestic violence**, however, is slightly different and a little more comprehensive. It is defined by (1) the context of the violence within the relationship, (2) the behaviors of the perpetrator within the relationship, and (3) the function and aim of the perpetrator's behaviors within the relationship.

Domestic violence occurs in relationships where the victim and perpetrator are known to one another. Intimate partners (and spouses) may have children in common; and domestic violence is not dependent on the duration / length of the relationship. Due to the intimate nature of the relationship, people outside of the relationship usually take the violence taking place within the relationship less seriously.

It is important to keep in mind the **context of the relationship** and to remember that abusers / perpetrators have consistent access to the victim(s). They know their vulnerabilities and daily routine; and can continue having access after violent episodes take place. Their knowledge of the victims and unblocked access allows them to perpetually maintain / increase the fear and trauma in the lives of their victims. The victim, therefore, does not only have to deal with the physical and emotional trauma of living with the abuser; but the nature and complexities of the intimate relationship play a role in defining the context, as well.

It is common for perpetrators and abusers to believe that they have a right to control the victim.

They may feel entitled to use coercive tactics with their partners (and others that they abuse within their family / intimate relationships); and may use social structures to give validity and support to their abuse. In Pakistan, the enmeshment of tradition, custom, religion and joint family systems and patriarchal structures means that there are numerous challenges in how systems (both social and legal) can recognize and respond to domestic violence and abuse.

Domestic violence does not occur in isolated incidents but, rather, is a ***pattern of abusive behaviors*** undertaken by the abuser against their chosen victim. It can be a combination of physical and psychosocial acts that are meant to humiliate, demean and disempower the victim.

While one tactic may be used infrequently (such as shoving), other tactics may be used more frequently - sometimes even daily (such as name calling or shouting). Some perpetrators may have a set routine of abusive behaviors, while others may use a variety of tactics with no particular routine at all.

None of the episodes of domestic violence - be they physical, emotional or economic abuse, etc. - take place in isolation. Each episode of domestic violence is connected to the others. The abuser will usually build on the previous episodes and threaten future consequences, as a way to keep control and maintain influence over the victim. Some tactics may fall under criminal conduct (such as grievous bodily harm and willful negligence) while others may not be illegal (such as shouting and name calling). However, all of these - together - have grave psychological and physical impact(s) upon the victim.

Acts that may be categorized as domestic violence and abuse can include, but are not limited to:

1. Physical Violence: This is when the abuser physically attacks and/or hurts the survivor. This can include spitting, scratching, biting, grabbing, shaking, shoving, pushing, hitting, twisting, restraining, tugging, choking, slapping (with an open or closed hand), punching, burning and / or using weapons against the victim. Sometimes the abuse does not cause the specific injury, but rather, can cause other injuries and other health problems in the long term.

2. Emotional or Psychological Violence: This includes any and all attempts by the abuser to frighten, control or isolate the survivor. There are different types of psychological harm that an abuser can attempt against a victim. These include: (1) *threats of violence and harm* (both against the victim and any children and / or pets the victim may have); (2) *threats of attacks against property or pets and other acts in order to intimidate the victim* (including hurting the pets in front of the

victim, driving recklessly when the victim is in the car or standing before the victim and yelling in their face); (3) emotional abuse, which includes a variety of tactics including humiliation (sometimes in front of family and friends) and abuse. The humiliation is usually aimed at the victim's worth as an individual, or professional or parent, etc. Gaslighting and degrading acts are also included in such abusive behavior. Such tactics ensure that the person's sense of self-worth is destroyed over time, and the abuser's power and control remains intact. For it to be counted as "domestic violence", emotional violence cannot take place in isolation. It is usually paired with the threat of harm (be it physical or social or financial). Emotional violence also includes (4) isolating the victim and (5) using the children to pressurize the victim and preventing them from walking out of the relationship.

3. Coercive Control: This is controlling behavior that is designed to isolate the person from the social support system, by exploiting them and controlling their everyday behavior. It creates a sense of fear and pervades every aspect of the life of the individual being controlled, leaving them unable to make independent choices and decisions.

4. Sexual Violence and Assault: This refers to any behavior of a sexual nature that is unwanted and does not include the consent of one or more participants. It can be physical, psychological, verbal and even online. Some abusers may use sexual violence and coercion against their victims. This may include pressuring the victim into having sexual intercourse when they do not want to have sex; coerced sex by manipulations or threats; physically forcing the victim to partake in sexual activities and / or sexual assault accompanied by violence. Additionally, victims may be forced to perform sexual acts that they are not comfortable performing (such as sex with third parties, physically painful sex, verbal degradation and sexual activities that they may find physically humiliating); or at a time when they do not want it (such as when they are exhausted, when they are ill, in front of the children, or when they are asleep, etc.). Some abusers may torture their victims by hitting their genitalia, while at other times they may deny them contraceptives and risk transferring sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs and STIs). The abuser's message to the victim is the same every time sexual violence and assault takes place: the victim does not have autonomy or agency over their own body. Their "no" counts for nothing. Sometimes the victim may resist attempts by the abuser, which will result in their getting "punished"; whereas other times, the victim may simply give in, hoping the sexual assault will end quickly. Many victims / survivors (especially those in marital relationships) do not even count this as violence and abuse; assuming it to be a part of intimate partner relationships.

5. Economic Abuse: Perpetrators can by controlling access to the family's resources. It does not matter who the primary earner in the household is - the abuser will control the finances of the family. Abusers may actively resist the victim becoming financially self-sufficient, as a way to exert power and control. Conversely, they may refuse to work at all; forcing the victim to provide all the earnings for the family - and still maintaining complete control over all finances. This can include exerting control over income, spending, bank accounts, bills and borrowing. It can also include controlling access to and use of things like transport and technology, which allow us to work and stay connected, as well as property and daily essentials like food and clothing. They may even destroy items and refuse to contribute to household costs. The victim is put in the position of having to ask for "permission" from the abuser for spending on basic family needs. If he/she is successful in leaving the abusive relationship, the abuser will use finances to coerce them either into coming back or to "punish" them until they are no longer financially dependent. Economic / financial abuse is usually seen within coercive control and post-separation abuse (i.e. it can continue long after leaving the toxic relationship).

6. Digital and Online Violence: Such abuse can take place over long periods and usually escalates with time. It can include behaviors such as monitoring of social media profiles or emails, abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter, sharing intimate photos or videos without your consent, using GPS locators or spyware.

7. Reproductive Coercion: This refers to any and all behaviors that interfere with behavior intended to maintain power and control in a relationship related to reproductive health by someone who is, was, or wishes to be involved in an intimate or dating relationship with an adult or adolescent. It can include interfering with the use of contraception(s) and pregnancy. The most common form of this is sabotaging contraceptive methods, pregnancy coercion and pregnancy pressure.

8. Legal and Post-Separation Abuse: This is the abuse that the survivor endures after walking out of the relationship. After the relationship ends, the perpetrator sets their sights on the child(ren) to exert control and, to terrorize the healthy parent. This has long-lasting affects on both the parent (usually the mother) and the children. The perpetrator may use the children both during and after the relationship ends. They may sexual assault the children; threaten to physically hurt them or kidnap them; and may even use the children to spy on the other parent. Sometimes, the perpetrator's visitations are used as opportunities to monitor and control the victim. These visits may even become nightmares for the children, who may then be interrogated about the victim's daily life. If there are no children involved, the abuser will usually resort to economic abuse or harassment, among other tactics, in an effort to exert control over the survivor.

9. Social Abuse: This is abuse that is directed towards cutting off the individual from the social support system. It can also involve attempts by the abuser to hurt the survivor's relationships and ruin their (social and professional) reputation. Abusers may cut off the victim by claiming to "love them so much and wanting them entirely to themselves". Such words, including love bombing tactics, can get the victim to start spending increasing amounts of time with the abuser - and, as a result, less and less time with their friends. These subtle means of isolation by the abuser may then be turned into overt tactics, such as complaining about "interfering family members" or "ill-mannered / low class friends", etc. Some of these complaints may also be accompanied by threats or acts of physical violence and abuse. This could include locking the victim out of the house; preventing the victim access to transport by taking his/her keys or wallet, etc.; and (in many cases) even forcing the victim to quit their job. The perpetrator will steadily isolate the victim from their support system by acting jealous and/or possessive, and masking it as love. They may even start to accuse their victim of committing various infidelities and acts that they "disapprove of", only to maintain control.

10. Homicide: The final stage of abuse that the victim may face is murder / homicide. Gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as femicide) are usually a result of male entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity and the need to assert male control and power; enforce gender roles; and discourage, prevent or punish what is considered to be "unacceptable" female behavior. Homicide usually is the last stage, following a combination of other types of domestic violence and abuse.

Factors Affecting Domestic Violence and Abuse

In Pakistan, Domestic Violence is deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms that are deeply entrenched within both social and state structures. A complex interplay of social and psychological factors, along with society's blatant disregard for women's rights and the normalization of the imbalance of power between men and women results in such an endemic.

Domestic violence can adversely affect the family environment, and also affect the self-esteem of children who experience or witness abuse within the family home. They could also grow to be abusive towards their intimate partners in the future. Additionally, their financial wellbeing may suffer as a victim may be unable to go leave the home after facing an episode of violence at the hands of their abuser; and the number of lost days at work would therefore increase, affecting their overall productivity and opportunities.

Most survivors of domestic violence do not seek help from external sources, either due to lack of autonomy, induced fear and/or lack of awareness regarding the availability of resources.

Prolonged domestic violence can have an adverse effect on the health of the victim.

The following are the most common factors of domestic violence in Pakistan:

1. **Patriarchal Culture:** This is a male-dominated sociocultural structure where men have power over women, both through organized society and within individual relationships. In such societies, men will typically hold more positions of power, have greater access to resources and enjoy more privilege. The term comes from *pater* or father-figure. Fathers or father-figures hold great authority within patriarchal societies. Such societies are usually patrilineal - where title and land are inherited through male bloodlines.
2. **Economic Dependence:** Women and girls in Pakistan are financially dependent on the male members of their family. This dependence makes it difficult for them to leave abusive relationships, as they usually have no other source of support. Women only represent 20% of the labor force within Pakistan. Inequality in opportunities for work and limited ability for movement plays a strong role against their financial and economic empowerment. For those able to step into the workforce, additional barriers include a lack of gendered infrastructure at workplaces, limited mobility, gender pay gaps, scarcity of women-friendly public places, a dearth of public toilets, lack of job security, denial / discrimination of job opportunities among other factors.

3. Gender Inequality: According to the Global Gender Parity Index Report of 2023, Pakistan ranks at 142 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity. The country ranked 140 / 146 in terms of labor force participation, 137/146 in terms of estimated earned income, 138/146 in terms of healthcare and survival rates, and 71/146 in terms of wage equality for similar work. Such disparity and unfair treatment reinforces male dominance over women within the society, making them more susceptible to domestic violence and abuse.

4. Lack of Awareness: Due to the pervasive and endemic nature of domestic violence within our society, many people in Pakistan are unaware of what constitutes such violence and abuse. They are not aware of the harmful effects (both psychosocial and medical) of domestic violence; and most do not even recognize it as a problem. Victims are usually unaware of their rights and the legal protections offered to them from abusers. It is common for victims of domestic violence to see themselves at fault and blame themselves for the abuse. Due to the prevalence of it being considered a “private matter” (“aapas ki baath hay”), domestic violence is not talked about openly and the issue remains one that most people are unaware of.

5. Religious Beliefs: Due to the deeply patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, some religious beliefs are interpreted to support the notion that men are superior to women and women are under their divine dominance. This can lead to domestic violence being justified as a divinely given right and a means of enforcing such beliefs.

6. Socio-Cultural Beliefs and Stigma: Due to the social stigma surrounding divorce, many women feel they have no choice but to continue staying in abusive relationships. It also prevents victims from reaching out to others and seeking help or reporting incidents. Additionally, the women’s families are afraid of the “shame” that would befall the family name and honor if they are to be “returned home”. This causes the family members of the victims to push them to stay, regardless of the abuse, “for the sake of the family / honor of the family”. Women who are divorced or who leave such abusive marriages can be ostracized by their own family. Many are even killed for “honor”. These socio-cultural factors are a large cause for the tolerance shown to domestic violence and abuse in many family homes across the country. As a result, perpetrators may use cultural rationalizations for their abusive conduct; with some claiming that this is a “part of their culture” and outsiders / state forces should not interfere in internal family matters.

7. Learned Behavior: Violence (especially in intimate partner relationships) may be behavior learned through observation and reinforcement. It may be learned not only by the family, but due to structures within the society, including courts of law, security personnel and law enforcement institutions. As a result, cycles of domestic violence can be repeated across generations.

Impact of Domestic Violence on the Survivor

Every survivor is different and experiences domestic violence in different ways. The individual and cumulative affect of each domestic violence act and incident depends on various complex facts. The impact of domestic violence is multi-faceted and can have both short-term and long-term consequences for survivors.

According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation, nearly 90% of women in Pakistan face domestic violence at some point in their lives. This includes mostly verbal and physical abuse. Prolonged domestic violence can have an adverse effect on the health of the victim.

Aside from physical (including genital) injuries and trauma, victims of abuse may suffer from mental health problems, anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), eating disorders, diabetes, renal failure, cardiovascular hypertension, hyper- and hypo-glycemia, lack of proper healthcare, little to no reproductive autonomy, low birth weight, premature deliveries and hormonal changes that could affect the victim's immune system.

Perpetrators of abuse may **use the healthcare system** to further control and abuse their victims. Some incidents that healthcare practitioners may witness when domestic abuse victims visit for checkup appointments or are admitted for emergency checkups include:

- Stalking the victim to and from healthcare appointments
- Accompanying the victim to all appointments; and sending them “looks” during appointments. Refusing to let the victim be examined alone.
- Bringing family and/or friends to the medical center in order to intimidate or cajole the victim or healthcare provider.
- Blaming the victim for their failing health through long speeches regarding the victim’s behaviors and “lack of self care”.
- Physician-hopping or therapist-hopping.
- With holding medication. Conversely under- or over-medication the victim.
- Cancelling the victim’s appointments with the healthcare provider.
- Sabotaging the victim’s attempts to reach appointments at the medical center by not providing support, such as child care, transport, finances, etc.
- Trying to create divisiveness between healthcare professionals, or creating distrust of the healthcare provider in the mind of the victim.

Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Children who experience or witness domestic violence within the home may be affected by it in different ways. They may even become victims of such abuse themselves when they grow up. The impact of domestic violence may vary from one child to another, and is usually also affected by other factors such as poverty and marginalization.

Some of the ways domestic violence can impact children are:

1. Emotional Distress: Infants, babies and toddlers who experience domestic violence often cry more than other infants; showing signs of irritability and anxiety. They have feeding and sleeping difficulties, are usually underweight for their age and have delayed mobility. They will often react to loud noises and may be wary of new people. They could either become extremely demanding, or intensely passive.

Children in preschool (aged between 3 - 5 years old) lack the cognitive maturity to understand what it is that they are witnessing and /or experiencing. They may articulate their feelings and exhibit emotional distress through:

- clinginess
- eating and sleeping difficulties
- problems with paying attention and focus
- inability to play constructively
- physical complaints

They may even display symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms usually seen in adults; including re-experiencing events, being fearful, feeling numb, displaying a marked lack of empathy and increased arousal, among others. Additionally, they may display immature behavior and have adjustment problems. For example, they may not be willing to go to school from kindergarten.

As they grow older, children will start to observe the patterns of violent behavior and even have eating disorders. Some may even try to intervene and attempt to protect or defend the parent at the receiving end of the abuse.

Depending on their personalities, those in their pre-adolescent years might begin to either internalize or externalize their emotions.

Externalized Emotions	Internalized Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rebelliousness ● Defiant behavior ● Temper tantrums ● Irritability ● Cruelty to pets ● Physical abuse of others ● Limited tolerance ● Poor impulse control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Repressed anger and confusion ● Conflict avoidance ● Overly compliant behavior ● Loss of interest in social activities ● Social competence and withdrawal ● Avoidance of peer relations

Children's anger at their mothers can also manifest from witnessing family violence. Usually, this anger tends to increase with age. Older children, or adolescents, might see the mother as being complicit in the violence. They may even blame her for "failing" to protect them from the abuse within the family home, or, conversely, for not taking them away from the abusive family home.

While many within our society tend to blame the mother / survivor parent, putting the entire blame of the abuse on the survivor absolves the perpetrator of their crimes. It relieves the perpetrator of all accountability for the impacts of their violence on the children and contributes to the already-pervasive "victim-blaming" / "mother-blaming" mindset within our society. When the sole responsibility of "protecting" the children is placed onto the victim's shoulders, the abuser becomes invisible to the system and to the society at large. This allows them to continue their violence against the women and children with impunity. Thus, civil society and social service providers end up colluding with the abuser when they fail to hold them accountable for their violence on their family members, including the children.

2. Psychological Trauma: Witnessing domestic violence and abuse within the family home can cause long-term psychological harm to children. They may suffer from behavior problems, anxiety, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) or depression and other mental health problems.

3. Physical Harm: Children living in a domestically violent and abusive household may suffer from a variety of physical injuries, illnesses or medical conditions that are directly related to the abuse. Even if the injury is not directly related to the abuse, the

treatment for the injuries may be compromised due to the abusive tactics and controlling behavior of the perpetrator. There are four major ways the abuser can physically hurt the children:

- The abuser may intentionally, physically harm the child(s); especially as a way of threatening or controlling the victim.
- They may unintentionally injure the child when trying to attack the victim; either because the child gets in the way or tries to intervene.
- By creating an environment where children witness the abuse and / or its effects, they cause great emotional distress and psychological harm to the children. Research shows that children who witness domestic violence are affected similar to children who are physically and sexually abused.
- Abusers may control the children, in order to coercively control the other parent. The intent is to continue the abuse of the adult victim / survivor parent; and many times the abuser has little to no regard to the damage this causes the children.

4. Educational Disruption: Children who grow up in households where they might experience / witness domestic violence might perform poorly in academics. They may even be forced to miss school as a result of the violence and abuse at home.

Children are often the forgotten victims of domestic violence and abuse. It falls on the shoulders of civil society, social development sector and legislators to come together in order to create resources and policies that protect children from abuse in order to provide them with a life of emotional and physical safety and stability.

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