

Hearing only half of the story by leaving out half of the violence

by

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This presentation is going to talk about:

- The serial discovery and on-going segmentation of the types of child abuse and neglect;
- The recognition of 'domestic violence' as playing an important role in understanding child abuse;
- Findings which suggest that there is likely to be other forms of violence where the child has been severely abused; and
- The importance of taking into account all violence that the child is experiencing, in assessments about the safety and wellbeing of the child.

Child abuse and neglect as multiple fields

Child abuse has been 'discovered' serially. Neglect has an early history. Sexual abuse was discovered twice (and then forgotten/denied). 100 years ago Freud succumbed to pressure to change the diagnosis from sexual abuse to 'hysteria'. While Kinsey in the late 40s said that sexual activity with children was common, it was said to be the intervention, not the sexual activity, that was the problem.

60 years ago	Physical abuse discovered with use of radiology
Just under 40 years ago	Physical assault and neglect as a concept was recognised in Australia
About 30 years ago	Psychological abuse recognised
About 25 years ago	Sexual abuse was recognised
About 10 years ago	Domestic violence recognised as a form of child abuse

One consequence of this is evolving 'discovery' is that child abuse and neglect has developed into a number of fields of interest, rather than one which views family violence as a whole. Since the 1970s physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and psychological (in various forms) have been recognised by the state protection authorities. Domestic violence is in the legislation (since 2000) as a reason for notification, in NSW only. It accounts for a high number of notifications (26%). It may be included in other states by default, under the label of psychological abuse.

Therefore, there has to be a willingness to see the problem for what it is – the problem was always there, but not recognised as such.

Domestic violence and child abuse and neglect

As with other forms of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence has wide ranging definitions. However, it is common for the term, 'domestic violence' to refer to violence between intimate or child-caring partners.

There is some conjecture as to whether the child has to actually witness the domestic violence, or if it is sufficient for the behaviour to be present in the household. Our personal view is that the child is always 'present', even if not physically present, because of secondary impacts such as parental unhappiness, fear, changing households etc.

The presence of domestic violence is often used as an indicator that child abuse may be present. For example, in a study by Goddard and Hiller (1993), domestic violence and sexual assault were present in 40% of a sample of children seen in a hospital for suspected child abuse, and domestic violence and physical abuse was present in 65% of this sample.

Domestic violence is now often thought to be child abusive in itself:

- The child may be caught up in fighting and injured;
- The mother, as a victim of violence, may be less able to protect the child from abuse;
- Due to the adverse impact on the child of witnessing assault; and
- The consequences around the domestic violence such as contact with police, poverty, the need to escape the violence etc.

The Victorian Study

I'm going to provide data from the Victorian Study. One of the aims of this study was to provide information on the types, and extent of violence (and other disturbed behaviour) in the families of a group of children known to child protection services, who had been seriously abused.

The study comprised:

- 50 children who had experienced serious abuse (24 males and 26 females); and
- A random sample of child protection casefiles from Victoria.

To clarify:

- 'Serious abuse' was defined as having occurred where the child was the

subject of some form of legal intervention to facilitate protection;

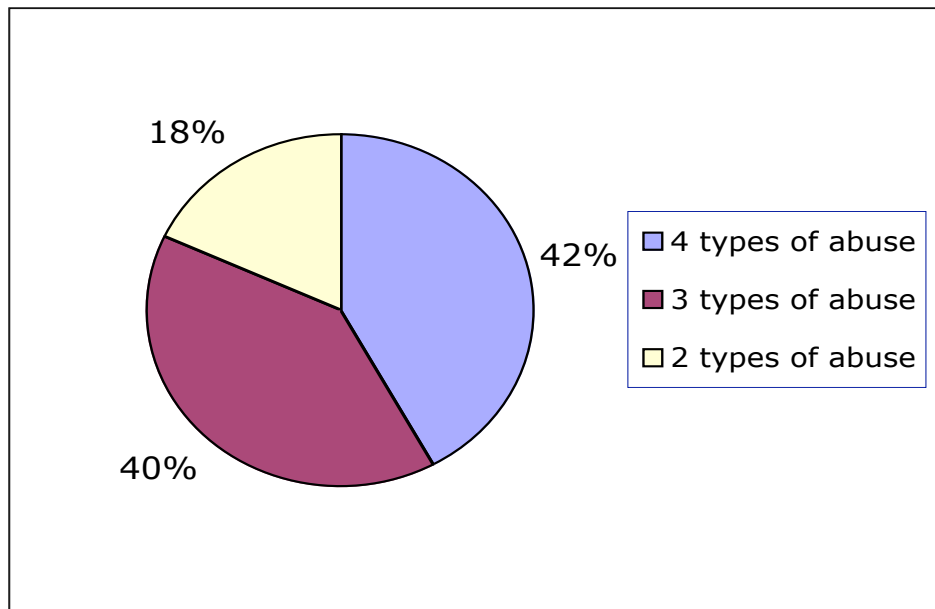
- 'Family' was defined as all adults (and their children) engaged in a significant care-taking role. Three children in the study had almost no information in the file on 'family' as they were living independently; and
- For the purpose of the study events were recorded as present or absent, frequency of occurrence, not being taken into account.

One person (the child) – multiple forms of abuse

The child abuse and neglect recorded in the child's file was as follows (N=50):

- 50 psychological abuse;
- 42 physical abuse;
- 39 neglect; and
- 31 sexual abuse

Thus, as can be seen below, most children experienced multiple forms of child abuse:



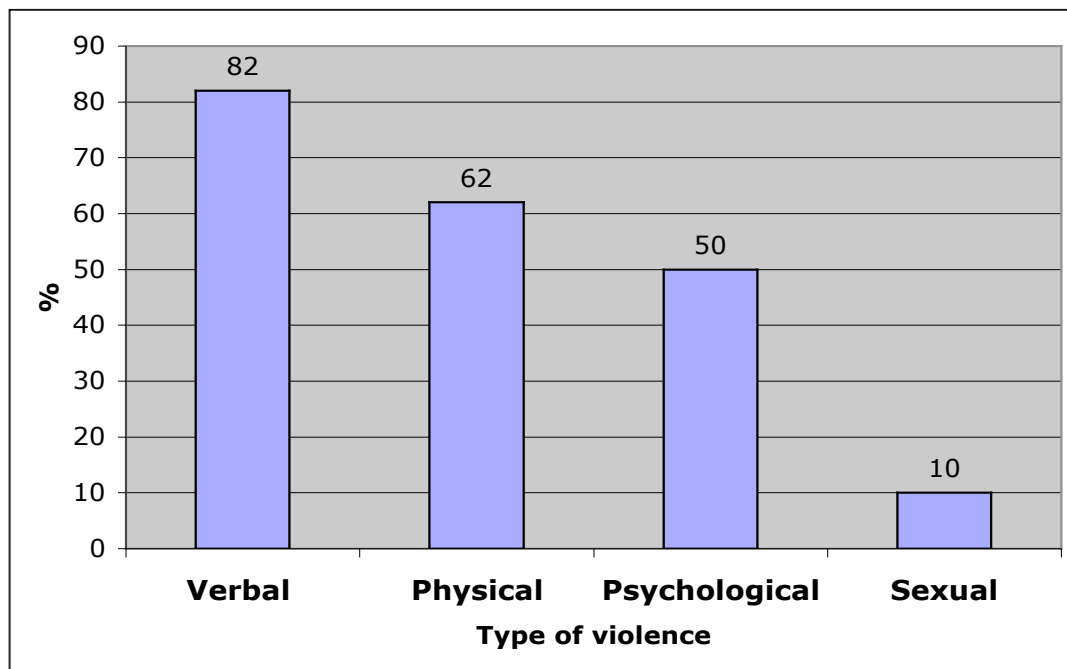
I'm now going to talk about what other violence was reported in the files as occurring around these children. It needs to be remembered that this data is likely to be an under-estimation of the true levels of violence because it relies on the fact that this information was sought out, and recorded, in the casefiles. In addition, some files had missing sections.

Other forms of violence associated with child abuse and neglect:

1. Violence between child-caring partners and its association with child abuse and neglect

Recognition that there may be an association between physical intimate violence and physical child abuse probably goes back to the work of the Family Violence Research Program at the University of New Hampshire, US, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, while their work had a number of drawbacks, they found that a number of forms of violence may be associated or linked. In relation to violence between child-caring partners, they found that the highest rates of physical child abuse occurred in families with the highest rates of violence between child-caring partners.

In the study I'm reporting here, the frequency of the various types of domestic violence was as seen in the table below. The most common form was verbal domestic violence, in 82% of the families, followed by physical violence, in 62%.



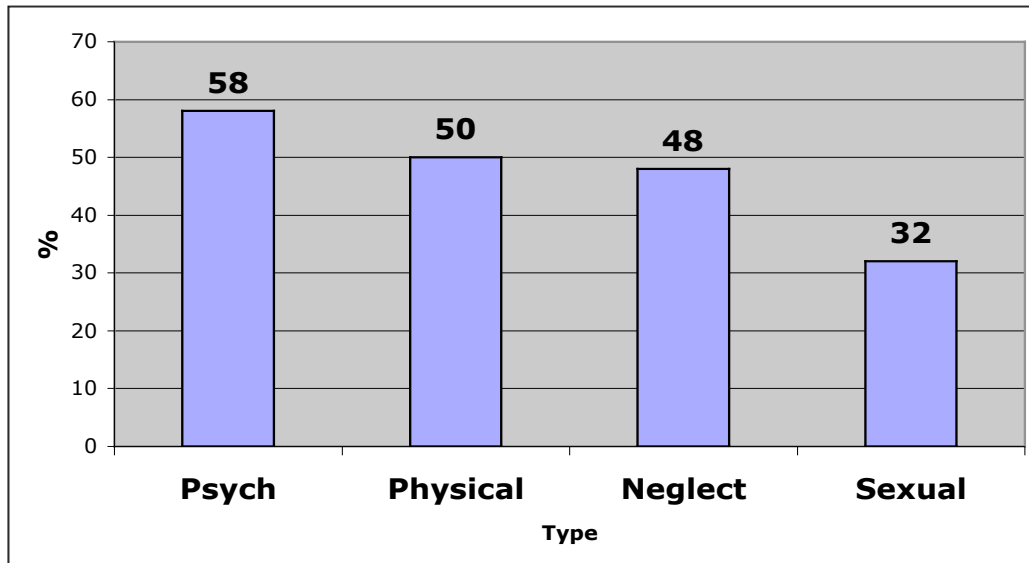
Other forms of violence associated with child abuse and neglect:

2. Abuse by adults to children in the family in addition to the surveyed child

The issue of sibling abuse is rarely considered in the literature. In the study by Goddard and Hiller (1993), a strong association was found between the physical and sexual abuse of one child in the family and abuse of siblings.

This information was available for 80% of the sample in the Victorian Study. For the 10 families where no information was available, three had only one child and seven had no information about siblings.

Sibling abuse was present in 58% of the total number of families or in 72% of families where this information was available. The form of this abuse is outlined in the figure below, the data being represented as a percentage of the total sample:



In 16 of the 25 families with physical abuse of siblings present, the physical abuse was towards more than one sibling. Similarly, two or more siblings were sexually abused in ten of the 16 families where sibling sexual abuse was present.

Violence associated with CA:
3. Violence between siblings

While this issue is not often referred to in the literature, there is a little information on sexual violence between siblings. In the Victorian Study, violence between siblings (of some form) was recorded in 21 families (41%) of the sample total.

Case example: A male, aged 14 years, suffered physical, sexual, psychological abuse, and neglect. He had borderline intelligence and loss of hearing due to medical neglect. He was known to protective services in at least 2 states. He sexually assaulted non-family children and raped his younger sister.

Other forms of violence associated with CA:

4. Violence towards adult carer by a child

There is some mention of this in the literature, but not usually in the context of other abuse or violence. In the Victorian Study at least one form of violence by the child of concern was recorded in 16 casefiles. (This may include an institutional carer of significance to child.) This number of children represents 76% of children aged 13 years and over.

Violence associated with CA:

5. Violence to self

Violence to self is defined as events such as self-harm, suicide and suicide threat or attempt, severe drug abuse and placing self in danger. Increasingly, heavy drug use is being associated in the literature with child abuse and neglect, but little mention is made of other forms of self-harm, in the context of child abuse and neglect. In the Victorian Study 39 families (over 3/4) had at least one member involved in this activity.

Case example: A female, aged seven years, experienced all four types of abuse. She was a 'failure-to-thrive' baby, is developmentally delayed and is partially sighted. A male carer committed suicide and her mother attempted suicide.

Description of violence found in study families:

I've talked about the categories of violence. This next table shows the types of violent events. These are actual figures (N=50).

Physical (hitting etc)	39
Loud verbal	36
Offensive drugged/ drunken behaviour	22
Threats of suicide	19
Suicide attempts	17
Sexual violence	17
Threatening with dangerous object	13
Violent threats/ terror tactics (w/ out weapon)	11
Destruction of living space	11
Violence against self (not associate with suicide)	11
Threats to kill	9
Aggression (type not specified)	9
Intimidation	8
DV (type not specified)	5
Manipulation	4
Attempt to kill	4
Successful suicide	4
Psychological violence (type not specified)	3
Kidnap	1

So it can be seen that there was a lot of fairly severe violence happening in these families. It needs to be remembered this table does not show how often this occurred in each family.

Summary of violence within study families

The types of violence (as distinct from the categories of violence) within the families, other than abuse and/or neglect of the studied child, is shown below.

Physical (hitting etc)	39
Loud verbal	36
Offensive drugged/ drunken behaviour	22
Threats of suicide	19
Suicide attempts	17
Sexual violence	17
Threatening with dangerous object	13
Violent threats/ terror tactics (w/ out weapon)	11
Destruction of living space	11
Violence against self (not associate with suicide)	11
Threats to kill	9
Aggression (type not specified)	9
Intimidation	8
DV (type not specified)	5
Manipulation	4
Attempt to kill	4
Successful suicide	4
Psychological violence (type not specified)	3
Kidnap	1
Arson	1

Including child maltreatment (as one category), the 50 families recorded an average of six forms of family violence (defined as at least one incidence of each form by at least one family member). Only one family had no other family violence other than child maltreatment recorded in the child's casefile.

Now, to this picture can be added criminal (not necessarily violent) behaviour towards a non-family member.

Violence associated with CA:

6. Criminal and/or violent interaction with the community

Physical child abuse was associated with criminal activity outside the home early in the recent history of child abuse and neglect. For example, Skinner and Castle (1965) found that 45% of fathers who abused a child had a criminal record.

Following this early recognition of a possible association, the issue has been largely overlooked or said to not exist (Corby 2000).

The Victorian Study found that 42 (84%) families were recorded as having at least one family member involved in a criminal activity outside the family and other than child abuse and neglect. The average number of people involved in this activity in each family was 2.5 in the 50 cases, or 2.9 of those with a criminal activity recorded in the casefile.

The following information gives the number of families with at least one member involved in each of the following criminal activities which took place outside the family:

Theft	24
Assault (not sexual)	20
Delinquency	18
Sexual assault	18
Intimidation	12
Drug possession	11
Drug trafficking	10
Serious driving offence	10
Personal crime with weapon (not included above)	10
Possession of weapon (not included above)	10
Drug offence (type unknown)	9
Petty crime (not elsewhere eg. shoplifting)	7
Non-assaultive sex-related crime (eg. exposure)	7
Threats to use a weapon	5
Violence associated with drunken behaviour	5
Prostitution	5
Handling stolen goods	4
Fraud or perjury	4
Threats of bodily harm	4
Death threats	4
Arson	3
Jail term (offence not recorded)	15

So again, it would appear that some fairly serious offences were taking place.

Events not included

The following types of violence were not included in this information:

- Animal/pet abuse. Research is now suggesting this may be associated with child abuse and neglect;
- Violence towards professionals working with the family, such as child protection workers, teachers, child welfare professionals;
- Living in a violent community eg. witnessing street crime (disadvantaged neighbourhoods, such as can be found in some Australian Indigenous

communities).

The impact of domestic violence on the child

Long-term studies on the impact of domestic violence on the child have not been done. Any impact will depend on a range of factors such as the type, extent and severity of domestic violence, and the age of the child.

Short-term impact could be in the form of:

- Control over the child;
 - “Children having witnessed the beating of their mothers need no further reminder of the possible consequences of their resistance to the wishes of their fathers” (Goddard and Hiller 1993),
 - Children learn that avoiding abuse is out of their control,
- An adverse impact on the parent/ child attachment (Dutton 2000). Secure attachment is a necessary buffer against trauma (Bowlby) and for the development of core neurobiological functions in the brain (Van der Kolk 1987);
- The experience of trauma (eg. poor sleeping, hypervigilance, repetition of trauma, leading to poor school performance , withdrawal etc); and
- The impact of the associated social problems, such as the carer’s response to the violence (denial, confusion).

Indeed, the impact of domestic violence on the child appears to be similar to that of tradition forms of child abuse.

The impact of other forms of violence and CA on the child

Work by Perry has shown that early exposure to chronic violence may significantly alter the child’s neurological development.

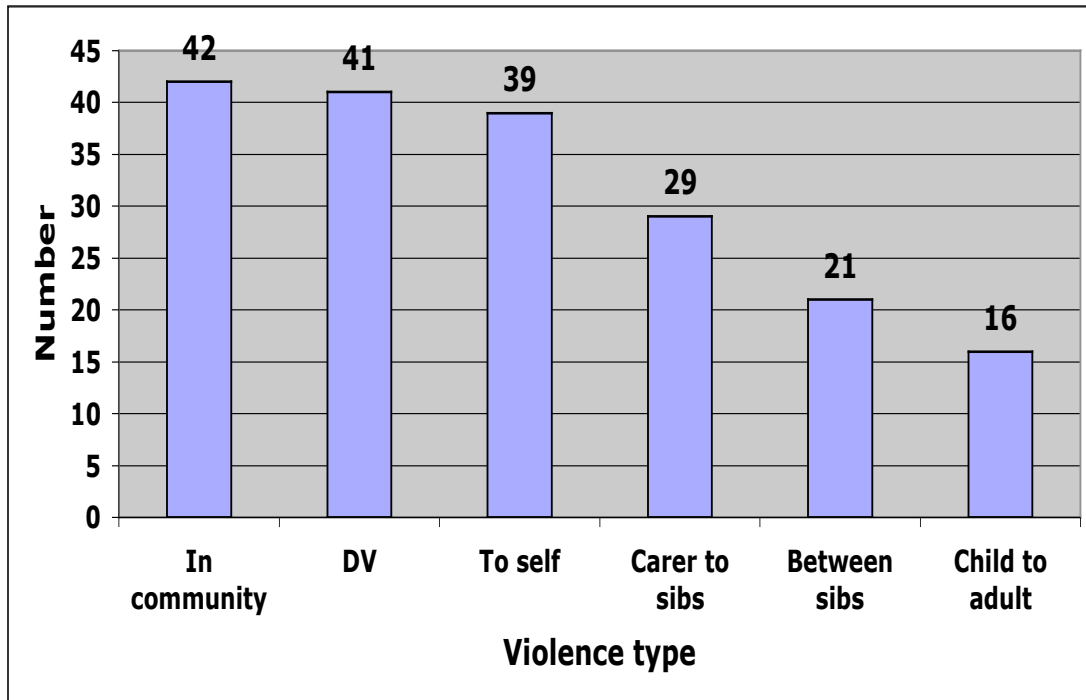
Mudaly and Tucci (2002) talk of the impact in terms of:

- Loss of safety
- Loss of childhood
- Loss of sense of self
- Loss of trust
- Loss of significant relationships
- Loss of a sense of a future

There is a predisposition towards intergenerational transmission of violence (Kaufman and Zigler (1987) produced a ‘best estimate’ transmission rate of 30%) and being involved in a later violent relationship.

The cumulative impact of multiple forms of violence on a child (?)

If we put all the violence together from the Victorian study, we can understand the levels of violence/criminal activity that appears to be present in families where a child has been seriously abused. The following actual levels were found:



The most common form of violence and/or criminal activity was criminal activity towards the community, present in 42 of the 50 families.

We don't know how these factors are combined, for example, whether the cumulative impact on the child is linear, or whether there is a threshold point, above which the child has serious adverse reactions, and where this point is likely to be.

By leaving out half the violence:

we are:

- Possibly under-estimating the danger to the child;
- Not using new knowledge about broader concepts of what is child abusive (eg. the adverse impact of witnessing violence); and
- Possibly under-estimating the ability of the carers to change their behaviour. For example, it could be asked, what is the effectiveness of a parenting course in a multi-violence household?

We are proposing that the best 'predictor' of future violence is past violence.

We should look to the past experience of the child in an attempt to understand what his or her future experience is likely to be, rather than attempting to 'predict' future risk based on a range of (and differing) variables which are not empirically validated, nor their various combinations, understood.

By leaving out half the violence, we are only hearing half of the story.