



INVISIBLE CHILDREN



WITNESSED VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH



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BPW International Health and Wellbeing Taskforce



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Distretto Nord Ovest

Witnessed violence within the family

With “witnessed violence within the family “ we mean the child’s experience of any form of mistreatment through physical, verbal, psychological, sexual and economic violence on reference persons, or on affectively significant others, whether adults or underage





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Types and consequences of witnessed violence

Among witnessed violence, we differentiate between instances where the child makes direct contact with the violence (when forced to witness), or indirect, where he/she is made aware or perceives its adverse effects: from petty daily verbal violence such as a quarrel between parents, up to the most serious and recurring events, that may cause significant effects on the child





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Childhood lived in a persistent state of alarm

Typically these children tend to be very silent among the family, especially in the presence of the mistreating caregiver: they try to avoid taking any stance that could spark a dispute. Lacking the necessary physical strength or the ability to make themselves heard, they often prefer to remain silent, thinking that this might be the best solution to avoid starting another crisis





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Childhood lived in a persistent state of alarm

The coercive silence experienced by the child in the family is opposed to a multitude of aggressive behaviors in the school environment. Aggressive social behavior as a way of releasing restrained anger is almost always acted out by the child outside home and might be considered the response to the restricted behavior he/she may feel compelled to take upon him/herselves in the family





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“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”

Witnessed violence is still a poorly recognized phenomenon, therefore the activation of awareness programs for the population and specific training programs for educational, social and health workers should be mandatory.

It may be extremely important to focus on less severe forms of witnessed violence as a way to institutionally protect those children who, while not already showing irrefutable signs of distress, can anyway show significant elements of discomfort (such as social isolation, uncontrolled anger bursts, early adultization) about which it's important to take action involving the family.

Awareness programs

Should address those issues:

- Underestimation of violent acts in the family environment and the escalation potential with comes with them
- Underestimation of the impairment to parental skills, thus on the child-parent relationship
- Lack of knowledge about the phenomenon
- Denial, minimization, rationalization and, above all, stigma on witness violence victim



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Education programs

Should address specifically:

- Recognize witnessed violence as a kind of mistreatment with its specific markers
- Early activation of compensatory intervention
- Recognizing pathogenic effects that might come from uncoordinated and incorrect interventions (such as those lacking any family involvement)

Strategies

- **Advocate** for and raise awareness, spread knowledge and share information for the prevention and control of any form of violence against children.
- **Develop** a web-based platform that builds and spreads information about the necessary evidence base to inform and sensitize Schools, Health Institutions, Hospitals, policy-makers about the relationship between the children who witnessed violence and the psycho-physical problems of the victims in their future life.
- **Raise awareness** of Organizations and Institutions in setting up the taking of responsibility for children victims who witnessed violence within the family.
- **Establish** a series of meetings/webinars to support and spread information about the children witnessed violence.
- **Spread** a participating **leadership** favouring individual's worth and organizational well-being.



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CHILDREN WITNESSING VIOLENCE ARE VIOLENCE VICTIMS THEMSELVES



.....Thanks