



Evaluation of a Domestic Violence Training for Child Protection Workers & Supervisors: Initial Results

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A two day domestic violence training for child protection personnel was evaluated using self-report responses to two case descriptions. One hundred thirty-seven supervisors and 369 workers were trained and 225 personnel participated in the study. Consistent with the goals of the training, there was an increased reported likelihood of providing assessment and brief interventions, holding the abuser responsible, substantiating emotional abuse of a child, and empathizing with victims. Respondents reported less likelihood of holding the victim responsible for stopping the violence, telling the woman she must end the relationship, and making referrals for couples counseling. Despite these positive signs of change, two areas showed room for improvement because they remained relatively high after training: the tendency to refer for couples counseling and the tendency to hold the woman responsible for stopping the violence and for the safety of the children. Future trainings may need to use other methods to convey the problems with couples counseling and the entrapment frequently experienced by battered women.

Awareness of the need for training child protection personnel on the topic of domestic violence is growing nationally. This awareness is fueled by the recent recognition of the overlap between the problems of child abuse and domestic violence and of the need for child protection workers to expand their roles (Carter & Schechter, 1997; Edleson, 1999; McKay, 1994; Mills, 1998; Schechter & Edleson, 1994). Child protection workers have been criticized for holding battered women solely responsible for the safety of the children when they may have little or no influence over a partner who is abusing them and/or their children. A recent focus-group study with child protection workers and battered women's advocates re-

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vealed their differing perspectives (Beeman, Hagemeister, & Edleson, 1999). Child protection workers emphasized the mother's responsibility for the child's safety and advocates for battered women focused on the woman's needs and holding the abuser responsible. Both groups were hopeful that better collaboration would increase safety for mothers and their children. One aspect of these differing viewpoints was discussed by Wilson (1998) and Edleson (1998). Edleson pointed out that the abusive male partners are largely "invisible" in the child protection field and therefore the perpetrator is not held accountable. In some cases, children are removed from the home when mothers are believed to be unable or unwilling to stop physical or emotional abuse in the home (Magen, 1999; Mills, Friend, Conroy, Fleck-Henderson, Krug, Magen & Thomas, 2000).

Studies are emerging on the prevalence of domestic violence in child protection caseloads and the nature of the response by child protection staff. About a third or more of the cases appear to involve domestic violence (Lapham & Johnson, 1995, 39%; Magen, Conroy, Hess, Panciera & Simon, 1995, 28%; Shepard & Raschick, 1999; 32%). However, many of these cases go undetected by workers. In the study by Magen and his associates (Magen et al., 1995) only half of the cases were detected. An even lower detection rate (17%) was found in the study by Magen & Conroy (1997). Shepard and Raschick (1999) found that in 45% of the domestic violence cases, workers asked directly about domestic violence, about the fear of domestic violence, or about specific acts of violence. Their study investigated worker assessment and intervention patterns. The most common assessments focused on the abuser's obsession with the victim, and whether the victim sought outside help, seemed isolated, and was seriously injured. In only about half of the cases did they ask about sexual abuse, abuser threats of suicide, and his violence toward others. The most common intervention was to discuss safety issues, but only half discussed a specific safety plan. It was uncommon for workers to refer children to domestic violence services or to help the women with orders of protection. Out of 14 court cases (for order of protection or out of home placement), the worker raised domestic violence as an issue in only five of the cases.

The differing perspectives and responses of child protection and domestic violence workers can be viewed within the broader framework of differences often found among various professionals in their beliefs about the etiology of domestic violence and the best way to respond to it (Ross & Glisson, 1991). For example, social workers in different settings differ considerably on the extent to which they think couples counseling should

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