



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for
Domestic Violence Services
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice
Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center
Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program
United Services
Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic
Abuse
Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services
Greenwich YWCA
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for
Domestic Violence Services
New Haven, CT

Safe Futures
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program
United Services
Willimantic, CT

Testimony in Support of

SB 303, AAC Children Exposed to Family Violence

**Committee on Children
February 5, 2015**

Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those agencies that serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 50,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We urge your support of SB 303 and the establishment of a task force to evaluate existing policies and procedures used by the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, guardians ad litem, attorneys for minor children and the Judicial Branch for minor exposed to family violence, as well as the creation of a statewide model policy related to this issue.

Domestic violence impacts many children in Connecticut. According to the Connecticut Judicial Branch, in 2012, 26% of cases handled by its Family Services Division involved a child who was present during an arrest; that number was 25% in 2013. The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Crimes Analysis Unit reports that close to 32% of incidents involving family violence in 2012 involved children present. The Department of Children and Families reports the following number of families experiencing intimate partner violence who are receiving support and intervention from the Department – 5,690 in 2012; 3,973 in 2013; and 4,319 in 2014. And in fiscal year 2014, CCADV provided intervention services to 1,334 children whose parent was a victim of intimate partner violence.

Research shows that the majority of children who witness domestic violence are under the age of eight. According to the US Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, the impact of the exposure to domestic violence is traumatic for children and it affects their full development. They may have increased aggression, persistent sleep problems, increased anxiety, difficulty with peer relationships and diminished capacity to concentrate in school. Witnessing domestic violence can destroy a child's core sense of security and trust and create deep feelings of helplessness, guilt and shame when they cannot make the violence stop or protect the non-offending parent.

Children who witness intimate partner homicide - one parent killing the other parent - suffer unique and severe trauma. In Connecticut in 2014, in a matter of 30 days, 5 young children were home when their mothers were shot and killed by their fathers. Following these homicides, CCADV partnered with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to sponsor a Child Witness to Domestic Violence Roundtable last June, bringing essential stakeholders to the table to discuss how the state can better coordinate systems to respond to children and youth exposed to domestic violence. The roundtable resulted in the formation of the "Improving Outcomes for Children Exposed to Family Violence" workgroup, which was led by CCADV and OCA and met through January, producing several findings and recommendations (please see attached report for additional information).

(OVER)

Improving Outcomes for Children & Youth Exposed to Family Violence Workgroup

Findings & Recommendations

January 2015



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

INTRODUCTION

I. Background

In households with domestic violence, 50% are households with children. Most are children under the age of five and most have multiple incidents. In terms of families involved with child protective services, 75% of those families have domestic violence occurring in the home. ⁱ

The “Improving Outcomes for Children and Families Impacted by Family Violence” Workgroup is a product of the June 2014 Children Witness to Domestic Violence Roundtable hosted at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, Connecticut by the Office of the Child Advocate and Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence to discuss a series of 2014 in-state domestic violence homicides where children were present at the scene, with a broader aim to establish stronger policy and practice amongst Connecticut systems and stakeholders who respond to children and youth exposed to domestic violence.

It is the intent of this group to cite findings and offer recommendations which are reflective of evidence based interventions and promising best practice models that are trauma informed, developmentally and culturally relevant and that also serve to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

According to the Attorney General’s National Task Force on **Children Exposed to Violence**, exposure to violence in any forms harms children, and different forms of violence have different negative impacts.ⁱⁱ In that regard, intimate partner violence within families puts children at high risk for severe and potentially lifelong problems with physical health, mental health, and school and peer relationships as well as disruptive behavior. Witnessing or living with domestic or intimate partner violence often burdens children with a sense of loss or profound guilt and shame because of their mistaken assumption that they should have intervened or prevented the violence or, tragically, that they caused the violence. ⁱⁱⁱ

Domestic violence reflects a family culture of violence which includes physical and psychological aggression and control, and where there is domestic violence present, children are often present. ^{iv} Children’s experience and resources during and immediately following the violence can serve as risk and protective factors. In terms of physical aggression, a child may witness daily shoving, hitting, throwing of objects across the room, broken bones, use of a weapon and choking or strangulation. ^v A child may also view psychological abuse to include behaviors such as ridiculing, threatening to harm/kill oneself, humiliation in public, the discouragement of contact with family/friends, threatening to harm the adult partner or partner’s family and controlling activities. ^{vi} Additionally, it does not take physical violence to for there to be cause for concern – forms of psychological aggression and control, often chronic and intense, contribute to the culture of violence in a home and maintains dysfunction. ^{vii}

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

I. DATA COLLECTION

1. Connecticut lacks one centralized source/place for the collection of data in regard to children and youth exposed to family violence. Here is what we know:
 - a. According to Connecticut Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch: In 2012- 26% of the cases administered by Judicial Branch- Family Services had a child present during an arrest. For 2013, it was 25%.
 - b. According to the CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Crimes Analysis Unit, in 2012 children were involved or present in 6,291 incidents or in 31.7% of circumstances of family violence where there were a total of 19,804.
 - c. Multi-Disciplinary Teams are not capturing data specific to children exposed to family violence.
 - d. In 2012, the CT Department of Children and Families reports that there were 5,690 families receiving support and intervention from the agency with intimate partner violence in the home. In 2013, that number was 3,973 and 4,319 in 2014. These numbers do not reflect ongoing intervention services.
 - e. Connecticut Department of Public Health: Healthy Connecticut 2020. http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/state_health_planning/shipment/hct2020/hct2020_state_hlth_impv_032514.pdf while this report focuses on Injury and Violence Prevention there is no data or initiatives related to DPH's plans to address children/youth exposed to family violence. Objective MHSA-8 does call for an increase by 5% in trauma screening by primary care and behavioral health providers.
 - f. The CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence offered intervention services to include shelter, counseling, group support, advocacy, information and referral to 1,334 children in FY 14 in both shelter and community where one parent is a victim of domestic violence.
2. Opportunities exist in regard to reporting requirements and the establishment of a statewide streamlined process.
 - a. Connecticut should consider mandates regarding collection and reporting of data by law enforcement and CPS (e.g., New Jersey) where children are present or otherwise impacted by incident.
 - b. The state should also work towards the development of a needs assessment with an aim to offer a strategic plan to address needs, with attention to regional disparity.
 - c. There is opportunity to capture better data through the state's Family Violence Offense Report DPS-230-C (offered through the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Division of State Police) which is utilized by law enforcement at the scene of a family violence incident. It is recommended that

- e. Identify already mandated training opportunities to expand and reinforce capacity to help children impacted by family violence. Consider also “in-service” rather than just pre-service training for lawyers, child protection and law enforcement (and others), to make sure that given prevalence rates of family violence, all actors are abreast of best practices and protocols.
2. Mandate training regarding best practices in response to family/domestic violence for the criminal justice system, juvenile justice system and child protection system.
3. Within the healthcare setting there is opportunity to enhance training for clinicians, medical personnel, emergency responders and behavior health providers.
4. Connecticut’s early childhood system is well-positioned to offer training to its providers and could look to incorporate standards into its licensure activities.
5. Explore opportunities for cross-training & response
 - a. Potential to work through MDT’s
6. Expansion of “Handle with Care” protocols
7. Consider mandatory and periodic self-evaluations for effectiveness of agency response re children witnesses/impacted by domestic violence: is anyone better off? Outcomes for children exposed to family violence.

V. STATEWIDE STANDARDS & PROTOCOLS

1. Connecticut’s intervention and prevention work to assist children and youth exposed to family violence would be strongly supported through new statutory provisions which codify a comprehensive response.
2. States, such as Maryland, Oregon and Georgia and Arizona offer stronger punishment in regard domestic violence that is committed in the presence of a child.
 - a. Arizona –
 - i. Section 13-702 defines this as an “aggravating circumstance” allowing for a felony conviction and harsher sentencing.
 - b. Arkansas –
 - i. 5-4-702 Enhanced penalties for offenses committed in presence of a child
 - ii. (a) Any person who commits a felony offense involving assault, battery, domestic battering, or assault on a family member or household member, as provided inmay be subject to enhanced sentence of an additional term of imprisonment of not less than one year and not greater than ten years if the offense is committed in the presence of a child.
 - iii. (b) To seek an enhanced penalty established in this section, a prosecuting attorney shall notify the defendant in writing that the defendant is subject to the enhanced penalty.
 - c. Delaware –
 - i. “Child Protection From Domestic Violence Act”
 - ii. The purpose is to protect children from domestic violence and the harm caused by experiencing domestic violence in their homes.
 - d. Georgia –
 - i. Title 16, Chapter 5, Article 5, Sect. 16-5-70

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱ National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, *Defending Childhood: Final Report & Recommendations*. December 2012. P. 1 & 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Grasso, Damion, *Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence – Reducing Trauma for Children in Family Violence Investigations*, September 2014.

^v Ibid

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Ibid