

The Link Between Bullying and Domestic Violence

Submitted by Chevon Kothari, Executive Director, Mountain Crisis Services

This article continues our Mariposa County Project Respect Series. Many people have asked me about Mountain Crisis Services's role in Project Respect: how is preventing bullying going to prevent domestic violence?

Bullying and domestic violence are cyclical – those children who witness domestic violence are at a much higher risk of becoming both bullies and victims of bullying. Conversely, those children who bully or are victims of bullying (without any resolution or intervention by adults in their lives) end up learning social norms in relationships that can look a lot like domestic violence. In other words, if a bully learns that there are no consequences for his or her negative treatment of other children, they learn that this behavior is OK in all of their relationships, including relationships with dating partners or spouses later in life. Also, if a child always falls victim to bullying, with no outside help or intervention, this child may grow to feel that this is the best they deserve to be treated in their relationships – hence making them more vulnerable to domestic violence later in life.

A recent study from researchers at the University of Washington (UW) and Indiana University, found that children who were exposed to violence in the home engaged in higher levels of physical bullying than children who were not witnesses to such behavior. The study is one of the first in the United States to specifically examine the association between child exposure to domestic violence and involvement in bullying.

"Children learn from seeing what their primary caregivers do. They are very attuned and very observant about what goes on in a household," said Dr. Nerissa Bauer, lead author of the study and a former UW pediatrician who is now an assistant professor of pediatrics at Indian and Riley Children's Hospital. "Parents are very powerful role models and children will mimic the behavior of parents, wanting to be like them. They may believe violence is OK and they can use it with peers. After all, they may think, 'If Daddy can do this, perhaps I can hit this kid to get my way.' When parents engage in violence, children may assume violence is the right way to do things," she said.

Researchers further stress the importance of early intervention – of doctors, teachers, counselors and other adults in children's lives to not only recognize and intervene in bullying, but to recognize when domestic violence may be occurring and to get victims and children the help they may need. Not all children exposed to violence will respond in the same way, but there are many indirect effects and problems that you can see, such as engaging in bullying, not being able to make friends, not eating or those with extended school absences.

The researchers express that their study illustrates the importance of looking at how family events affect children over time and the power of the intergenerational transmission of violence. Todd Herrenkohl, UW associate professor of social work and

co-author of the study, states, "A key is early identification of this kind of problem, but it is never too late to intervene to break the cycle of violence."

For more information about this study contact, Todd Herrenkohl at the University of Washington at (206) 221-7873 or tih@u.washington.edu. For more information about Mariposa County Project Respect, or how you can get involved in preventing bullying, go to www.mariposarespect.org or contact Cindy Robles or Chevon Kothari at Mountain Crisis Services at 742-5865.