

ABSTRACT

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Title: A BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG CHILDREN

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Domestic violence is a coercive and life-threatening crime that is much more prevalent in communities than society is aware of. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on understanding children witnesses to domestic violence, often referred to as “invisible victims.” Varying in definition across state statutes, the term child witness includes biological or non-biological children who are exposed to domestic violence in their homes. The witnessing of domestic violence can include visual, auditory, or inferred exposure in cases where the child witnesses the aftermath of a dispute, such as bruises or damaged property. Using the biopsychosocial model, this thesis seeks to understand the multidimensional impact domestic violence has on early childhood development. This systematic literature review examines and synthesizes the existing literature to determine the impact on development. This study found a significant increase of biological, psychological, and social-cultural delays after children were exposed to various types of domestic violence. The research identifies potential gaps in the literature, directions for further research, and elucidates implications for the social work practice.