



Through Our Eyes: Children, Violence, and Trauma

Videos and Resources

Last Updated April 2014 / NCJ #241394

Introduction Transcript

MALE VICTIM: My mother and my brother were murdered in front of me. He put the gun to my head and he had me beg for my life. I was ten—I'd just turned ten.

FEMALE VICTIM: It's hard to come out and say that I was a victim and that I was abused. Especially when you're little 'cause it's like a big secret that's always on your back and that you never know when it's going to come out.

MALE VICTIM: The image of my brother falling on that concrete floor and people stepping and just kicking with shoes on his face, I couldn't get that image out of my head.

JAMES HENRY, PH.D., DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S TRAUMA ASSESSMENT CENTER, KALAMAZOO, MI: Trauma is an overwhelming event. It takes away our safety, it creates a sense of helplessness, and it continues to affect our perception of our reality.

MARLEEN WONG, PH.D., LCSW, CLINICAL PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: Some of the telltale signs of trauma are quite evident. Many of the symptoms, it's not that we don't see them, it's that we don't put together the entire sort of picture of what trauma is—inability to sleep or interrupted sleep, inability to focus on what's going on, really not able to attend to learning. Adults need to be aware of children who are exposed to violence and intervene early and stop it.

FEMALE VICTIM: I don't like the environment that I stay in. People getting killed every day, drug deals, people getting snatched, raped, cut up.

MARLEEN WONG: Whether it is a child who witnesses violence or a child who is the victim, you can't be fearful and be able to live your normal life. You have to be able to think clearly, and when you're traumatized, you can't do that.

JAMES HENRY: Violence continues then to affect the child in their perception of their community, of their family, that danger is right around the corner. And the brain gets wired to expect danger.

FEMALE VICTIM: My dad started, like, actually physically beating me to the point to where I'd go to school covered in bruises. I don't know how many times I've been threatened to be killed by my own dad.

MALE VICTIM: My brother got shot in the head. He didn't make it.

FEMALE VICTIM: It makes you afraid at times. It makes you feel that, oh, my God, you know what—I just lost a friend, I just lost a family member. It just makes you feel that, hey, I could die next, I could be the next one dead.

JAMES HENRY: What trauma does is it triggers what's called the amygdala in the brain, which is our fight/flight/freeze center.

MARLEEN WONG: And it truly is a change in the brain and a change in the stress hormones that are flowing through the body.

JAMES HENRY: All our brains have what we call alarm systems. Because the brain now has been wired for danger and it's triggered into this fight/flight, we don't just get over a traumatic event. It continues to impact us.

FEMALE VICTIM: I started hearing my mom scream in the middle of the night. And it got to the point where he started, like, beating me and my sisters. I let my anger build up, didn't talk to anybody about it.

FEMALE VICTIM: When you hold everything inside, it's like a bomb and you get, it's like, you're ready to explode, and just somebody pushed that last button.

JAMES HENRY: Most kids who've experienced violence oftentimes have experienced multiple types of violence. In the kids we see, the average number of different types of violent trauma is four. And so complex trauma then affects multiple areas of the brain, because it's ongoing.

MARLEEN WONG: Maybe it's gang warfare, maybe it's drug use and abuse in the family, maybe it's domestic violence, maybe it's bullying at school, and if there is a layering effect of cumulative violence, it changes literally the DNA.

FEMALE VICTIM: It all started off with the hugging game. He would take us into his room. We would sit on his lap and he would hug us. And we weren't supposed to tell anyone.

MALE VICTIM: When I was five, I would have to leave kindergartener class and go home and have sex with this man who was in his fifties. I remember the long walk home and crying and falling down and having to get back up and walking on.

ELAINE D. STOLTE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT CENTER, HOUSTON, TX: Child sexual abuse exists in the neighborhood, exists, unfortunately, at our schools, at our churches, at our homes, everywhere. And there are children out there suffering.

MALE VICTIM: My first assault was in high school. I met a guy at a church, and he wanted to be my friend, and I thought it would be great. And instead he assaulted me and I felt very scared.

LAWRENCE THOMPSON, JR., PH.D., DIRECTOR OF THERAPY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, THE CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT CENTER, HOUSTON, TX: When you have a child that doesn't get to work through that abuse in an appropriate manner, that abuse doesn't go away. It lives in that child.

BENJAMIN E. SAUNDERS, PH.D., LICW-CP, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS RESEARCH & TREATMENT CENTER, MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA: Exposure to violence in childhood has been found to be associated with a really unbelievable range of long-term impacts.

JOYCE N. THOMAS, RN, MPH, PRESIDENT, CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT, WASHINGTON, D.C.: Very young children who are exposed to violence many times have difficulty in establishing a trusting relationship; these children have fears.

BENJAMIN SAUNDERS: You're twice as likely to develop depression. You're probably three times as likely to develop some type of anxiety disorder.

JOYCE THOMAS: As they move into school age, they may have very, very serious behavior problems. As we look at adolescents, we see children running away. Sometimes children may be involved in the juvenile justice system, which puts the child at risk for being an adult offender. And so the cost of violence is staggering.

MALE VICTIM: I felt isolated. Nobody knew what I was going through. To go 3 years without talking about it, I imploded.

MALE VICTIM: Finally, after like stressing and stressing and keeping everything bottled up, and everything building up, I just finally broke down one day and attempted suicide.

MICHAEL PINES, PH.D., CO-CHAIR, CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SUICIDE REVIEW TEAM, LOS ANGELOS COUNTY, CA: Suicide is the third leading cause of death of children and adolescents in this country. We always ask in every case, what role might child abuse have played?

FEMALE VICTIM: My mother, she knew that stuff was going on, but it just seemed like she didn't really care. She never stopped that abuse. And to this day, I've never forgotten what... what some of my family members have done to me.

JAMES HENRY: These are traumatized kids, and so how do we then, as adults, professionals, caregivers, put a system around children that really is trauma-informed?

THERAPIST: Happy feeling. Good job! Okay?

JAMES HENRY: What do we do differently to help rewire their brain? And then, ultimately, how do we build capacity in order to really help our kids?

MARLEEN WONG: Everybody come together, whether it's in the community, in the home, in the school, wherever children are, and child by child, think of ways in which we can intervene early and educate people about what children need in order to grow, to thrive, and to continue to be resilient human beings.

[Web Site Links Disclaimer](#) | [Multimedia User Tips](#)



[OVC Home](#) | [OVCRC](#) | [OVC TTAC](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Archive](#) | [Link to Us](#)
[DOJ Home](#) | [OJP Home](#) | [CrimeSolutions.gov](#) | [GMS](#) | [Grants.gov](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Language Access](#)
[Legal Policies and Disclaimers](#) | [FOIA](#) | [USA.gov](#) | [Recovery.gov](#)



Office for Victims of Crime
810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor, Washington, DC 20531
The Office for Victims of Crime is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.