

Domestic Violence's Effect on Marriage

The focus on marriage by welfare reauthorization has unique demands within the population that it is targeting. For marriage to benefit both the adults and children involved, research indicates that the relationship needs to be nonconflictual. That is it needs to not just be two parents but that these individuals provide a stable low-conflict family unit.

Abuse whether it is physical, sexual, psychological, or sabotage is higher in low-income populations, especially for younger women (Lawrence, 2002). Black couples report the highest rates of abuse, followed by Hispanic couples and lastly white couples (Cunradi, Caetano, Schafer, 2002). Women living in rural areas report higher incidence of abuse from their partners (Logan, Walker, Cole, Ratliff, & Leukefeld, 2003). A strong link between being poor and abuse exists. Living in a low-income context appears to make a greater contribution to the probability of experiencing domestic violence than education or employment status (Cunradi, Caetano, Schafer, 2002). As high as 52 percent of the women receiving welfare support have reported being abused (Lyon, 2002). Adult domestic violence appears to be linked with child abuse with abuser's taking advantage of both the mother and children (Lawrence, 2002).

Domestic violence has a clear impact on the quality and stability of marriage. Abuse also has many impacts upon the decision to marry. Women who have experienced abuse in childhood are less likely to remain in sustained stable relationships (Bloom, 2004). Women who have been abused as an adult are less likely to marry or cohabitate (Bloom, 2004). Once married, abuse, especially physical violence, is a significant deterrent to couples staying together (Fertig, McLanahan, & Garfinkel, 2002). Domestic abuse is a barrier to the formation of healthy marriages among the poor.

Among the poor, domestic violence takes its toll not only on adult individual relationships, but also on children. A parent's ability to provide a stable emotionally supportive context for their children's development is impacted by abuse. Of the women in domestic violence shelters 75 percent reported that their children had experienced one or more forms of maltreatment (English, Marshall, & Stewart, 2003). Child functioning is linked to domestic violence. Children who live in homes where domestic violence is present show loss of self-esteem, increased levels of anxiety, perform worse in school, exhibit aggressive or acting out behaviors, and have impaired problem-solving skills (Litrownik, Newton, Hunter, English, Everson, 2003). Battered mothers are often less emotionally available to their children and children's needs (Lawrence, 2002). The long-term impact is that children who are battered can become batterers as adults.

Domestic violence is an issue that is central to a woman's decision-making in planning for the safety of herself and children. Central to this decision is accessibility to economic resources. Women who experience both recurring violence and poverty are likely to have more complex needs and view marriage from a different paradigm. The safety that a

relationship can offer may not be as appealing when abuse has been an aspect of past relationships.

References

Blum, B. (2004). More research needed to put marriage policies on track. *The Form*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 7, 1-5.

Cunradi, C., Caetano, R., & Schafer, J. (2002). Socioeconomic predictors of intimate partner violence among white, black, and Hispanic couples in the United States. *Journal of Family Violence*, 17, 377-389.

English, D., Marshall, D., & Stewart, A. (2003). Effects of family violence on child behavior and health during early childhood. *Journal of Family Violence*, 18, 43-57.

Fretig, A., McLanahan, S., & Garfinkel, I. (2002). Child support enforcement and domestic violence among non-cohabitating couples. Working paper #02-17-FF. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University. Retrieved November 14, 2003 from <http://crew.princeton.edu/workingpapers-WP02-17-FF-Fertig.pdf>.

Lawrence, S. (2002). Domestic violence and welfare policy. *Research Forum on children, Families, and the New Federalism*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 1-11.

Litrownik, A., Newton, R., Hunter, W., English, D., & Everson, M. (2003). Exposure to family violence in young at-risk children: A longitudinal look at the effects of victimization and witnessed physical and psychological aggression. *Journal of Family Violence*, 18, 59-73.

Logan, T., Walker, R., Cole, J., Ratliff, St., & Leukefeld, C. (2003) Qualitative difference among rural and urban intimate violence victimization experiences and consequences: A pilot study. *Journal of Family Violence*, 18, 83-92.