



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

The voice of child welfare in Ontario

www.oacas.org

**SPEAK UP
FOR KIDS**

Children's Aid Can Help

Seven Facts You Should Know About Exposure to Domestic Violence

1. The Ontario *Child and Family Services Act* recognizes exposure to domestic violence as a form of child maltreatment. The legislative amendments on domestic violence were implemented in 2000 and represented a shift in child protection service.¹
2. Exposure to domestic violence occurs when a child is exposed directly or indirectly to physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological harm between intimate partners or spouses who are caring for the child. Exposure can include seeing and hearing violent acts, seeing related injuries, and being told about the violence.²
3. Child welfare agencies across Canada have experienced a dramatic rise in reports of emotional abuse, a large proportion of which involve children exposed to domestic violence.³
4. Cases involving domestic violence are the most frequently substantiated form of child maltreatment in Ontario. In the 2013 Ontario Incidence Study, 48% of substantiated investigations were related to domestic violence.⁴
5. There is growing evidence documenting the serious and persistent negative effects of childhood exposure to domestic violence. Children who have witnessed domestic violence show greater depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, hyperactivity, aggression, lower social competence, lower self-esteem, lower school performance and academic achievement, and more attribution of self-blame and guilt for the violence.⁵
6. One in three (31%) children who have witnessed domestic violence reported being physically abused themselves. Of those children who did not witness domestic violence, only 4.8% reported physical abuse.⁶
7. The presence of a supportive adult or environment provides a powerful buffer to children from the intense stress or anxiety that may occur when they are exposed to domestic violence.⁷

¹ "In Whose Best Interest", A Canadian Case Study of the Impact of Child Welfare Policies in Cases of Domestic Violence, Oxford Journals, 2008 Oxford University Press.

² OACAS "Speak Up for Kids" Brochure, 2015.

³ "In Whose Best Interest", A Canadian Case Study of the Impact of Child Welfare Policies in Cases of Domestic Violence, Oxford Journals, 2008 Oxford University Press.

⁴ Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS-2013).

⁵ "In Whose Best Interest", A Canadian Case Study of the Impact of Child Welfare Policies in Cases of Domestic Violence, Oxford Journals, 2008 Oxford University Press.

⁶ Hamby, S, Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2010). The overlap of witnessing partner violence with child maltreatment and other victimizations in a nationally representative survey of youth. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 34, 734-741.

⁷ Promoting resilience in child welfare (pp. 3-17). Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.