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CHILDREN WITNESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

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Highlights

- According to the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, children heard or saw one parent assaulting the other in an estimated 461,000 households, which represents 37% of all households with spousal violence in the five-year period preceding the survey.
- In cases where children witnessed spousal violence, they were more likely to witness assaults against their mothers (70%) than against their fathers (30%), and assaults involving mothers tended to be more serious. Over half of the female victims in these cases feared for their lives.
- Adult victims of spousal violence were more likely to seek help from the police or from social services when children witnessed the violence than when no children were present.
- During the one-year period ending March 31, 2000, an estimated 57,200 women together with 39,200 children were admitted to 448 shelters across Canada, the majority fleeing violence at home. Three-quarters of these children were under 10 years of age.
- According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, children who were exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home were less likely to have positive or effective interactions with their parents than other children. They were also more likely to be living in households with low family functioning and high parental depression.
- Witnessing family violence is also linked to negative behaviour in children. Children who are exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home were more likely to exhibit physical aggression, indirect aggression, emotional disorders, hyperactivity, and to commit delinquent acts against property.
- Although family violence crosses all socio-demographic groups, there are some circumstances where violence occurs at higher rates. Households with older children, somewhat older parents, parental unemployment, low income, blended, step or single parent families, or a recent change in family structure had higher than average percentages of children exposed to adults or teenagers physically fighting in the home.

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