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The Educational
Institute of Scotland

**The Impact on Children
and Young People of
Abuse/Violence in the Home**

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CONTENTS

Child protection	1
Domestic abuse	1
Effects on children and young people of domestic abuse/violence	2
Recognise possible signs	3
The role of schools	4
Practical steps for schools	5
References	6

Child Protection

EIS members working in educational establishments must follow the guidelines of their authorities to protect children who are subject to direct abuse/violence or emotional or sexual abuse. Local authority guidance on Child Protection will be readily available in all establishments.

EIS members may well be the first port of call for a young person in an abusive situation. Teaching staff have faced irate parents, partners, carers and relatives turning up at school to take a child away. They have faced distressed children who have been moved from abusive situations and are acting out their distress in a variety of ways, sometimes passively and sometimes aggressively. Children and young people in such circumstances are very vulnerable and require support.

Children and young people may witness or be subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution and trafficking, dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and 'honour' crimes.

This EIS advice is to supplement, not replace local authority Child Protection Guidelines. Members must follow local authority guidance on Child Protection.

Domestic Abuse/Violence

Domestic abuse/violence is a complex issue. It affects both men and women of every class, age, race, disability, and sexuality. The abuse/violence can begin at any age and at any stage of a relationship and may continue even after the relationship has ended.

It is important to emphasise, that the vast majority of domestic abuse is against women; although men also experience domestic abuse. Moreover, gender stereotyping compounds the effects of domestic abuse.

The abuse/violence may involve:

- physical attacks
- sexual abuse, assault and rape
- emotional and mental abuse.

“There is significant evidence of links between domestic abuse and emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children. In the context of domestic abuse, the safety and wellbeing of children is closely linked to that of the adult victim.”

(Safer Lives: Changed Lives - A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland)

Teachers have a special place in combating attitudes towards gendered abuse/violence

“Schools offer one of the few opportunities for affecting the attitudes of all involved and the experiences that children and young people have in school play an important part in helping them deal with life as they live it in all its complexity and ambiguity. Schools can and do make a difference.” (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2004)

The Scottish Government’s publication and guidance on Domestic Abuse - Primary Prevention through Education (2008) provides useful advice for schools to tackle domestic abuse/violence, not only when disclosed by a young person but also through the curriculum. It states:-

“As universal services, schools can play a crucial role in the early identification and support for children and families affected by domestic abuse. The whole school community, both staff and pupils, is uniquely positioned to break down the silence and stigma surrounding domestic abuse and to help children achieve their potential despite the adversity of their circumstances. It is also uniquely positioned to challenge the attitudes and behaviours that give rise to discrimination or abuse, and to ensure children and young people have positive opportunities, through the curriculum, to develop empathy, resilience and respect for self and others. These two activities are interlinked. Schools which are successfully engaged in challenging and preventing violence or abuse, gives children confidence to talk about their own experiences knowing that they will be respected and supported according to their individual needs and wishes.”

It does recognise that “schools, however, can not work in isolation to improve outcomes for children living with domestic abuse or to prevent domestic abuse from taking place in the future.”

Effects on children and young people of domestic abuse/violence

Violent behaviour, verbal or physical, seen in the home has an impact on a child’s work, confidence and competence. The child may also be the subject of abuse/violence. School may be the only place a child or young person sees as safe, particularly if s/he feels there are no sources of support at home or if s/he is trying to protect the adult victim, or trying to keep the family unit together. They may also feel afraid for their own safety as well as others.

The response to repeated domestic abuse/violence depends on a number of factors, including age, gender, personality and family role. Some of the immediate effects can include:

- blaming themselves for the abuse/violence
- experiencing sleeping difficulties, such as nightmares
- regression to an earlier stage of development, such as thumb sucking and bedwetting
- becoming increasingly anxious or fearful
- displaying aggressive or destructive behaviour
- starting to withdraw from people and events
- becoming a victim or perpetrator of bullying
- starting to show cruelty to animals
- experiencing stress-related illnesses, such as headache or stomach pain
- displaying speech difficulties, such as stuttering
- misusing drugs and alcohol.

Recognise possible signs

This is not an exhaustive list; the following are possible signs of experiencing domestic abuse/violence:

- changes in behaviour and attainment
- preoccupation/lack of concentration
- increased or unexplained absences
- low self-esteem/self doubt
- fear of conflicts
- apprehension
- isolation from others
- self harming
- not maintaining friendships
- emotional and behavioural problems.

Children and young people experiencing domestic abuse/violence may need:

- ‘time out’
- ‘time off’ for legal reasons, e.g. court appearances
- one to one support/counselling
- specialist help.

The role of schools

Research shows that prevention work in schools should start at or before the age of 11, while attitudes to relationships are still being formed. The reason behind much domestic abuse/violence appears to be the view that women are inferior; men are in control physically, emotionally and financially. (Paradoxically, this gender stereotyping can also lead to problems for men.)

It is important that schools play their role in challenging prejudice, gender stereotyping and discrimination. Such important work also falls under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The EIS believes that schools can and do make a difference. It is possible to discuss these issues with children and young people sensitively and effectively.

Research and pilot studies by the domestic abuse charity Zero Tolerance (2002) demonstrate that schools can help to -

- encourage healthy relationships amongst young people
- promote self-respect, respect for others and for difference
- challenge and reduce tolerance of abuse/violence against women amongst young people
- encourage a sense of social responsibility
- promote positive skills for healthy relationships, based on equality and respect
- support equal rights for young men and women, boys and girls
- present alternatives to models of masculinity and femininity which encourage or condone coercion or abuse
- promote understanding of power relationships that provide the context in which abuse and victimisation occur
- promote the rights and responsibilities of children and young people as citizens
- encourage confidence, self-respect and emotional literacy in children and young people in preparation for adulthood and parenthood
- help children and young people know what help and support is available to them.

Schools can also provide accurate information about abuse/violence and try to challenge prevalent misinformation, stereotypes and attitudes that contribute to the acceptability of abuse/violence through the school ethos and curriculum.

Some practical steps for schools to take:

- display brochures and posters in public places that explain the issue and send the message that there is no excuse for domestic abuse/violence
- make appropriate information (e.g., Childline contact) available in classrooms/pupil common rooms/guidance bases
- enlist the help of parents and carers in challenging stereotypes of gender
- examine school behaviour policies
- examine school ethos for gender bias
- examine school bullying policies to ensure inclusion of sexist, racist, homophobic abuse
- embed equality into the school improvement/development plan
- be aware of the seriousness of domestic abuse/violence
- request suitable CPD on domestic abuse/violence and its impact on learning and teaching.

The EIS believes that this issue should be addressed by ITE institutions as well as it forming part of the CPD requirements for newly qualified teachers and other staff. Sources which may be useful for teachers and young people

- Childline: 0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk - Free national helpline for Children and Young People in danger or distress.
- LGBT Youth:- www.lgbtyouth.org.uk
- Scottish Women's Aid:- www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk
- www.thehideout.org.uk
- www.zerotolerance.org.uk
- www.broken-rainbow.org.uk:- Website for LGBT young people
- www.childreninscotland.org.uk
- www.ncdv.org.uk
- www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk
- www.abusedmeninscotland.org
- www.dartsscotland.org
- www.safehubscotland.org

References:

Getting it right for every child

National Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (2008)

National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan, Children Young People, Implementation Report, 2010

Early Years Framework

Practical Guidance on Consulting, Conducting Research and Working in Participative Ways With Children and Young People Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence against Women in Scotland

A Curriculum for Excellence

Better Behaviour Better Learning

Respect and Responsibility - the Early Years strategy

HMIE Strategy for Equality Impact Assessments

Scottish Women's Aid Bystander Project



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