

Families Ready for Children *Violence in Our Homes*

CCCI Leadership Team Briefing

January 19, 2010

Violence in Our Homes

Fresno County

Fresno County suffers from many high risk factors that have created high incidents of violence in our homes

- 26% of population lives below the federal poverty level compared to 16% of all Californian's,
- Cultural diversity (88 ethnic backgrounds, 105 spoken languages)
- High unemployment
- Geographic isolation
- New Economic pressures on families and individuals

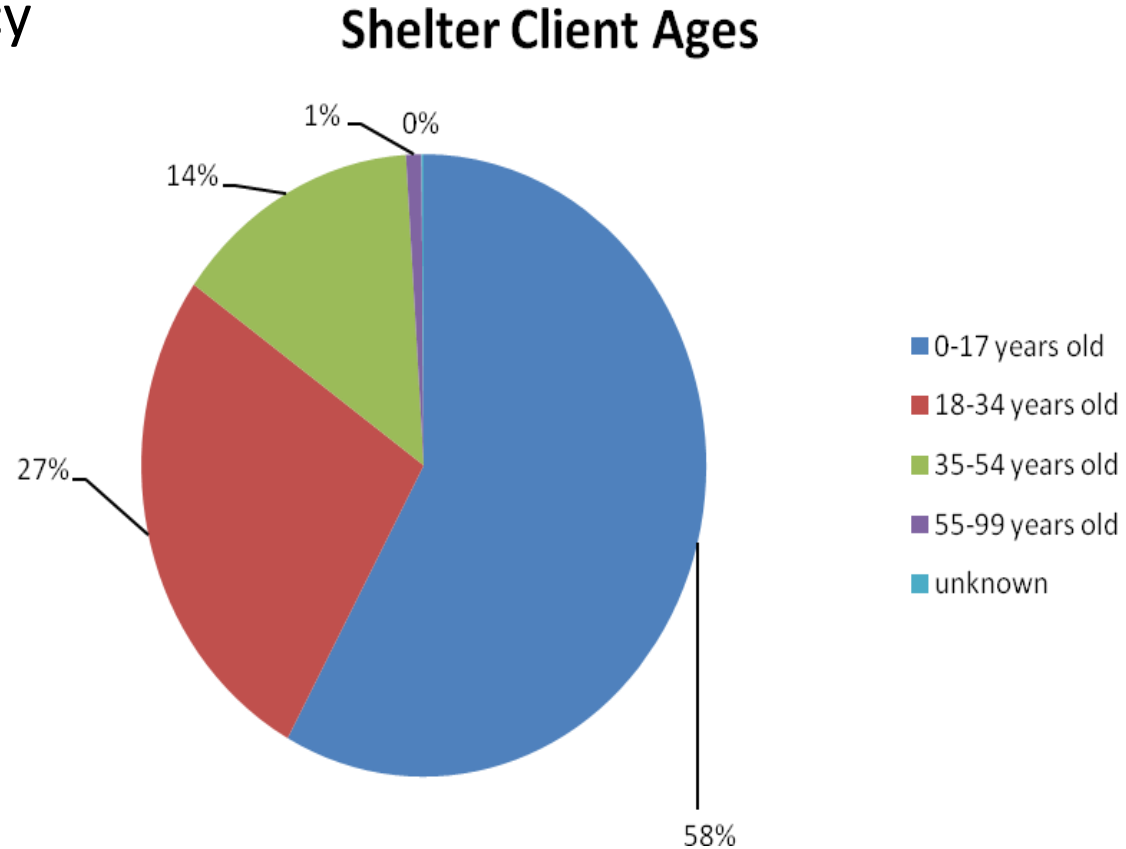
Domestic Violence – Fresno County

- 2007 – over 8,000 calls to law enforcement for assistance
- 2009 – Fresno Police Department Domestic Violence Unit case load increase by 1,000
- DV decreased 25.6% (250,439 to 186,439) statewide from 1994 to 2004
- Over the same time span DV increased 36.3% (5,575 to 7,598) in Fresno County
- Homicide rates – City of Fresno
 - 2006 – 3 DV Homicides
 - 2007 - 4 DV Homicides
 - 2008 – 5 DV Homicides (3 had no prior contact with Law Enforcement or MMC)

Marjaree Mason Center

2009 Statistics

- 4,700 clients served agency wide (11% increase)
- 793 women and children resided in three shelters
- 42,000 nights of shelter
- 82,000 meals served
- Approximately 60% were children under the 0-17 years old
- 433 were children under the ages 0-5
- Increased average length of stay



Key Findings

- Children who live with and are aware of violence in the home face many challenges and risks that can last throughout their lives.
 - There is increased risk of children becoming victims of abuse themselves
 - There is significant risk of ever-increasing harm to the child's physical, emotional and social development
 - There is a strong likelihood that this will become a continuing cycle of violence for the next generation

Children becoming victims of abuse themselves

- Common link between domestic violence and child abuse
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are 15 times more likely to be physically and/or sexually assaulted than the national average

Harm to the child's physical, emotional and social development -Infants

- Infants and small children who are exposed to violence in the home experience so much added emotional stress that it can harm the development of the brain and impair cognitive and sensory growth.
- Behavior changes can include excessive irritability, sleep problems, emotional distress, fear of being alone, immature behavior, and problems with toilet training and language development
- Domestic Violence threatens the hard wiring of the brain and may threaten future physical and emotional development

Harm to the child's physical, emotional and social development – School Age

- Primary school age children tend not to do well in school: trouble with school work, show poor concentration and focus.
- 40% have lower reading abilities
- Personality and behavioral problems increase such as suicidal tendencies, bed wetting, depression and psychosomatic illnesses
- At greater risk of juvenile pregnancy, substance abuse, and criminal behavior
- Social development is damaged – no empathy for others, unable to make friends
- Three more times likely to be involved in fighting, bullying and aggressive behavior

Studies on Child Witnessing DV

- 53% Acted out with parents
- 60% Acted out with siblings
- 30% Acted out with peers
- 33% Acted out with teachers
- 16% Had appeared in juvenile court
- 20% Were labeled truant
- 58% Were at risk of failing school

Continuing cycle of violence for the next generation

- Single best predictor of children becoming either perpetrators or victims later in life is where or not they have grown up in a home where there is domestic violence.
- Rates of abuse are higher in homes where the adult male was abused as a child or saw their mothers being abused.
- Children learn the powerful lessons about the use of violence in interpersonal relationships to dominate others and get their way

Children Know Violence is Wrong!

- There is reason to believe that children know that domestic violence is wrong and want it to stop
 - Many children who are present try to help by trying to prevent the violence, calling the outside for help, or actively try to protect the victim or make the violence stop

Children - Guilt Feelings

- Feelings of responsibility for the violence
- Guilt for not being able to stop or prevent the violence
- For failure to intervene during the violence



Victims of Domestic Violence

- 85% of domestic violence victims are women
- Females who are 20-24 years of age are at greatest risk
- One woman in four has been abused during her pregnancy. The younger the mother the more likely she will be a victim
- Women who live with heavy drinkers are 5 times more likely to be assaulted by their partners
- Witnessing violence between parents or caretakers is the strongest risk factor of transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next
- Boys who witness DV are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults

Welfare and Domestic Violence

- Domestic Violence is the primary cause of homelessness among women and children
- 50 – 60% of women receiving welfare have been victims of domestic violence as adults compared to 22% in general population
- Abused women on welfare are 10 times more likely to have a current or former partner who would not let them go to school or work
- Abused women on welfare who received job training were about 7 times more likely to be working, and those who received job placement were about 4 times more likely to be working than women who did not receive job services – most want to work if they can do so safely
- In California, 37% of welfare recipients applied for aid entirely because of DV

Children at Risk of Continued Exposure to Violence

- Victims with children often have an economic dependence on abuser
- Victims have no money to support herself or children (thus no access to housing, food, transportation, medical insurance, legal representation, etc.)
- In the first year after divorce, a woman's standard of living drops by 73% while a man's drops by an average of 42%
- Women are often left to raise the children on their own and it is difficult to balance work, child care, court appearances, continued threat of abuse for themselves and threats of taking the children keeps them from finding a job or retaining a job

Children from Violent Homes

Custody Battles

- Abusive parents are more likely to seek sole custody than nonviolent ones
- Mothers who are victims of DV are often depressed and suffering from PTSD and as a result can present poorly in court and mediation sessions thereby threatening their ability to gain custody of the children
- Many batterers' motivation to intimidate and control their victims through their children increases after separation, due to the loss of other methods of exerting control

Key Factors Contributing to Resilience

J.D. Osofsky (1999)

- A strong relationship with a competent, caring, positive adult
- Benefits of a community safe haven (schools, churches)
- Characteristics of the child—average or above average intelligence, good attention span, interpersonal skills
- Positive self esteem, access to resources, community activities

Lessons Learned from Experiences at Domestic Violence Shelters

- When a Victim is allowed time to heal in a safe and structured environment, provided opportunities for job skills training or placement, provided advocacy (case management, court and legal), access to child care services and affordable housing they are less likely to return to an abusive relationship thereby helping their children be good students, remain healthy physically and mentally, avoid gangs, drugs and incarceration, and later in life enter into unhealthy relationships.

What Children Need

- A safe and secure home environment
- To know there are adults who will listen, believe, and shelter them
- A sense of routine and normalcy
- Available supportive services
- To learn that DV is wrong and learn non-violent methods of resolving conflict
- Hope for the future!



What policy makers must do...

- Raise awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and society
- Create public policies and laws that protect children
 - Batterers held accountable
 - Insure that shelter programs, law enforcement, legal, courts, and social service systems have resources
- Enhance social services that address the impact of domestic violence on children
 - Early detection programs (health care, schools) to provide appropriate responses and support

Peace on Earth will not exist until
there is Peace in Our Homes

