Domestic Violence & Infant Parent Attachment: Moving beyond the Abuse

From Trauma To Triumph

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Aim of session

- To present the ‘human side’ and complex nature of domestic violence
- To acknowledge our attitudes, values, thoughts and experiences
- Parent infant attachment
- Building a relationship
- Acknowledging achievements
Domestic Violence and You
Domestic Violence

- It’s closer than you realise
- 1:4 women experience DV during their life time.
- It is the most common health risk in the world for women
- Domestic Violence is when one person in a present or past intimate relationship uses violence or abuse to cause fear and gain control over the other person.
Pregnancy & Domestic Violence

- Risk of domestic violence is higher for women during pregnancy and following birth (Taft 2002)

- Women with children are three times more likely to be subject to domestic violence than childless women (Humphreys 2007)
Cycle of Violence

- EXPLOSION
- REMORSE
- BUY BACK
- USUAL
- BUILD UP
- STAND OVER
Forms of Domestic Violence

- Physical
- Social
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Sexual
- Financial
- Psychological
Common Myths

- MYTH: A woman can always leave
- MYTH: Women provoke violence
- MYTH: Alcohol causes the violence
- MYTH: Violent men have mental health problems
- MYTH: Some women seek out abusive men
- MYTH: It only happens in some communities
Research informs practice

‘Domestic violence is an attack on the relationship between the infant/children and their mother by disabling her physically and or mentally so that she is not in a good position to parent’

(Humphrey 2007)
Research informs practice

• 76% of women experiencing DV reported that depression affected their parenting (Abrahams 1994)

• Effects of DV on women’s mental health are seen to make mother emotionally unavailable to their infants and children (McGee 2007)
The mental health effects of domestic violence include:

- Loss of self esteem & confidence
- Loss of decision making ability
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Self harm
- PTSD
- Nightmares & sleep disturbances
- Dissociative disorders
The Fear & Guilt Factor

- To experience trauma is frightening
- Women living with DV are living in fear, this fear can be transmitted to their infant resulting in disorganised attachment patterns.
- Infants may perceive their mothers as frightened and therefore frightening
Importance of Early Relationships

- Infants form connections with others before birth.
- Early attachment patterns are crucial for an infant's healthy development.
- A secure attachment contributes to neurological and psychological infant development. Lifelong sense of security and ability to create meaningful relationships.
Principles of Attachment

- Attachment theory is derived from psychoanalysis and is embedded in the field of infant mental health
- “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (John Bowlby, 1969)
- Improving chance of survival
- Earliest attachment patterns impact on relationships formed later in life
DV & Infant development

DV is known to directly compromise infant mental health may present:

- PTSD
- Sleep disturbances
- Separation anxiety
- Aggressiveness, agitation
- Hyperactivity
- Insecure attachment patterns (avoidant, ambivalent, disorganised)
Clinical presentation
Clinical Profile of DV

- Jade House
  Perinatal mood disorder stay unit (Karitane -SSWAHS)

- 62 active clients in Jade House (2009)
- 38 report conflict in relationship
- 31 women disclose history of abuse
- 4 women positive DV screening
- 6-12mths after initial assessment 12disclosures
Implication for clinical practice

- Safe Haven
  free from guilt/free from judgement
- Secure base
- Proximity maintenance
- Separation distress
- Self Care /Clinical supervision
Making a Difference – 3R’s

- Recognise
- Respond - Listen & Believe
- Relationship
Making a Difference – 3C’s

- Consistency
- Connectedness /communication
- Celebrations
Making a difference – 3W’s

- Waiting
- Watching
- Wondering
Resources

• **Working Well with Women: Creating Non-violent Futures.** (NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women, 2002) Liverpool NSW 02 9228 7899

• **It all starts at home: Male adolescent violence to mothers** (Inner South Community Health, Monash University, August 2008) 03 9534 0981 for copies.

• **An assault on our future: the impact of violence on young people and their relationships.** (A white ribbon foundation report 09)

• **Fiona Buchanan: Mother & Infant Attachment Theory and Domestic Violence: Crossing the Divide.** (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearing House - 2008)

• Domestic Violence: You can live without it. DoCS publication.

  About healthy & unhealthy relationships.

• [www.zerotothree.org.au](http://www.zerotothree.org.au)
Thank you

- Acknowledge women and their infants and children who have been brave and trusting enough to shared their story
- Privilege to share their journey of trauma to triumph