



Children in the Crossfire: Assessment and Intervention in Domestic Violence in Conflict Zones

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This article examines the specifics of interdisciplinary assessment and intervention regarding domestic violence against children in conflict zones, highlighting the role of forensic psychological expertise in diagnosis and intervention planning.

Keywords: domestic violence; child; war; forensic psychological expertise; interdisciplinary intervention.

Діти між двома вогнями: оцінювання та реагування на домашнє насильство в умовах збройного конфлікту

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Досліджено специфіку міждисциплінарного оцінювання та реагування на домашнє насильство щодо дітей у зонах збройного конфлікту. Наголошено на провідній ролі психологічної експертизи як у діагностиці, так і в плануванні заходів реагування.

Ключові слова: домашнє насильство; дитина; війна; психологічна експертиза; міждисциплінарне реагування.

Introduction

Domestic violence against children is a widespread phenomenon with severe psychological impacts. Children exposed to physical, emotional, or psychological abuse within the family can suffer from complex traumas and disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Epidemiological studies show that, globally, approximately 30% of children living with both parents experience acts of domestic violence annually. In the context of war, the risk factors for violence against children are exacerbated: armed conflicts introduce additional traumas (external violence, uprooting,

loss of livelihood) and amplify existing problems (severe poverty, increased parental stress). As a result, children in conflict zones are exposed to both the direct risks of war and violence within the family, with often cumulative and long-lasting consequences [1, 2].

The impact of armed conflict on families and children

Armed conflicts generate numerous stressors at the individual and family levels. Statistics show that exposure to traumatic war events and the resulting psychological disorders (PTSD, depression, alcohol abuse) are correlated with



significant increases in family violence. Studies conducted in Uganda, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka – countries with prolonged exposure to armed conflict – have revealed significant levels of family violence against children, in addition to the trauma of war. In this context, an OSCE report highlights that participation in armed conflicts and exposure to war traumas can trigger violent episodes and intensify the scale of domestic violence. In such communities, triggering factors include the loss of income and security, forced migration, and the deterioration of parents' mental health, which promotes the acceptance of violence as a method of discipline and control. Other contributing factors include fear, uncertainty, the breakdown of usual family dynamics, easy access to weapons, and substance use, all of which increase the risk of abuse becoming more severe or frequent. Thus, families in war zones face an accumulation of psychosocial vulnerabilities: heightened poverty, precarious medical services, and the disintegration of community support networks, which all worsen the situation for children. Within this framework, both violence directly related to armed conflicts and amplified domestic violence contribute independently and additively to the onset of psychological disorders in children [3–6].

*The effects of domestic violence
on children and the need
for psychological assessment*

Children exposed to domestic violence show complex psychological and behavioral consequences. First, verbal and physical violence in the family af-

fects mental health development: many children exhibit anxiety, depression, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, low self-esteem, somatization problems, or aggressive behavior. Additionally, the consequences extend to the child's school performance and social relationships. Olaya et al. emphasize that the psychological assessment process should investigate several key areas, including the characteristics of the violence suffered, its effects on the child's mental health and daily functioning, as well as mediating variables at the individual, family, and social levels. In war contexts, the negative effects are cumulative: in addition to the traumas caused by abuse at home, children may also experience their own violent experiences and major social difficulties. Recent data show that protective factors such as parental care and warmth can mitigate the impact of multiple traumas, but domestic violence destroys this protective support and perpetuates the vicious cycle of aggression. Therefore, a rigorous psychological assessment of the child and their family is necessary to identify both the consequences of the abuse and the risk and protective factors present in the environment [3, 7].

*Forensic psychological expertise
in cases of domestic violence
against children*

Forensic psychological expertise is the primary mechanism for translating psychological findings into evidence relevant to the justice system. International guidelines recommend that the interview with the child be conducted by psychologists specialized in child forensic



evaluation, using valid and non-directive protocols (for example, the NICHD protocol). The goal is to obtain a detailed profile of the child and their family – including abilities, anxieties, vulnerabilities, communication styles, and other relevant characteristics – in order to provide objective answers to legal questions (for example, the existence of trauma, the child's credibility, the need for protection, etc.). The result is a scientifically documented forensic report that can guide courts and investigators. The role of psychological expertise in such cases is to highlight „circumstances of legal importance” with objective content, thus supporting the fair and equitable resolution of the case [8–11].

Interdisciplinary interventions for child protection

To mitigate the effects of domestic violence on children in war zones, integrated interventions are recommended, addressing both children and the family. Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy is an effective treatment component, contributing to the reduction of PTSD, anxiety, and depression symptoms in abused children. Studies also show that psycho-educational group programs for children exposed to domestic violence, along with psycho-educational sessions for abusive parents, have significant effects in improving children's mental health and behavior. Effective interventions also include parental training, extended family counseling, and legal support. The practical implementation of these measures requires close collaboration between psychologists, social workers, legal professionals, and child

protection service representatives. This ensures both an adequate psychological approach for the child and survivors, and coherent legal or administrative actions (for example, safe shelters, counseling programs) to prevent the recurrence of violence [12, 10, 13].

Conclusions

- War creates traumas and economic crises that amplify the risk factors for family violence, increasing children's exposure to abuse.
- Children who witness or are victims of domestic violence suffer from complex traumas and psychological disorders, requiring specialized psychological evaluations.
- Interviews with abused children must be conducted by qualified psychologists, following scientific protocols and ensuring a safe and non-directive environment.
- Judicial psychological experts play a crucial role by objectively assessing the impact of the abuse on the child and by advising courts on the necessary measures.
- The treatment of abused children must include validated psychological therapies, group psycho-educational programs, and integrated family support.
- Multidisciplinary teams (psychologists, social workers, lawyers) must collaborate to ensure immediate social and legal support and protection.
- In conflict situations, protection services must be strengthened



and quickly adapted to respond to the increased risk of domes-

tic violence among refugees and survivors.

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