

Social networks in homes help preschool children who see domestic violence

March 21 2014, by Jared Wadley



Having adult family members in the home can buffer the risk of stress and depression for preschool children who witness domestic violence, a new University of Michigan study found.

Children ages 4-6 exposed to male-to-female [domestic violence](#) can suffer from many psychological problems. The [social support](#) from

stable in-home family members can help [children](#) cope with these stressful, violent matters, said Laura Miller, the study's lead author who conducted the research while in the University of Michigan Clinical Science program.

Miller, now an assistant professor at the University of Notre Dame, said given the high risk of children exposed to domestic violence, social support may be particularly important to the adaptive adjustment of these children.

"Positive adult role model can help children learn healthy ways of coping with emotions," she said.

The findings appear in the current issue of the *Journal of Family Issues*.

The study, whose principal investigator is Sandra Graham-Bermann, U-M professor of psychology and women's studies, included 120 children in southeast Michigan and southern Ontario exposed to domestic violence in the past two years.

Household monthly income was less than \$1,400, and about 53 percent of the women had used emergency shelters for abused women in the past. The research also evaluated mothers for depression and trauma.

Respondents answered questions about how often they were abused (physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological aggression) in the last year. They also were asked about their child's behavior following exposure to domestic violence and any other potentially traumatic events.

Mothers reported an average in-home social network size of three people, not including the preschooler. These individuals had a significant relationship with the child. The results indicate that larger in-home

networks lead to fewer problems for a child coping with witnessing the violence.

Provided by University of Michigan

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