

**Episode 82 - Dr. Jeffrey Edleson: Domestic Violence in the Lives of Children  
(part 2 of 2)**

[00:00:08] Welcome to living proof a podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). We're glad you could join us today. The series Living Proof examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Adjoa Robinson and I'd like to take a moment to address you our regular listeners. We know you have enjoyed the living proof podcast as evidenced by the more than 150000 downloads to date. Thanks to all of you. We'd like to know what value you may have found in the podcast. We'd like to hear from all of you practitioners researchers students but especially our listeners who are social work educators. How are you using the podcast in your classrooms. Just go to our website at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu) forward slash podcast and click on the contact us tab. Again thanks for listening and we look forward to hearing from you. Hi again from Buffalo where we are all trying to understand how a football team that wins games snuck into our team's uniforms. I'm your host Peter Sobota. In the second of a two part podcast Dr. Jeffrey Edleson returns and continues his discussion about domestic violence and the lives of children. Dr. Edleson begins this conversation by reviewing the findings of longitudinal research regarding the impact of early exposure to violence and risk factors that may influence a person's vulnerability to becoming either a perpetrator or a victim of domestic violence.

[00:01:57] He then goes on to discuss what he calls a comprehensive community response to children who are exposed to domestic violence and speaks to the role of protective factors in communities and how this may protect families and children from the impacts of domestic violence. After highlighting the comorbidity between domestic violence and the physical abuse of children Dr. Edleson discusses what's happening in batterer intervention programs and concludes his conversation discussing the differential response and supportive services approach to child welfare services. He contrasts that model with the more traditional and punitive approach delivered in many areas. Jeffrey Edleson Ph.D. is professor and the director of research at the University of Minnesota's School of Social Work. He's also the director of the Minnesota Center Against Violence and abuse and one of the world's leading authorities on children exposed to domestic violence. He published countless articles and 12 books and he possesses many prestigious national appointments and is a sought after expert by media outlets for his knowledge of domestic violence. Margaret Coombes Ph.D. is a regional office project associate at the Office of Child and Family Services in Rochester New York. Dr. Coombes interviewed Dr. Edleson by telephone. What type of relationships as adults. Are they more likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence when they grow up to these longitudinal studies. Actually three of them have spoken to that exact question Tiber Yates who was a doctoral student here at the University of Minnesota used the big longitudinal study of data that we have at the University of Minnesota. It's through the Institute of Child Development to look at families where they've been collecting data. Now I believe almost 35 years they've been collecting data on these families.

[00:03:54] So they have data and they followed parents and infants and now these infants are parents of new children and they did find that among these infants that they've studied that early exposure to violence in the home was highly associated with peer problems social problems developmental problems in adolescence and teen years. In particular I believe one of the findings was in particular boys using aggressive antisocial externalised types of behaviors or a much higher risk as teens and using that kind of behavior. The other studies one of them comes out of the adverse child experience a study from Southern California jointly done between researchers there and the CDC and they add in another study by Aaron Safak and colleagues which was another longitudinal study they found that both of those studies that you were two to three times more likely

to be a victim or a perpetrator of domestic violence fewer exposed to violence as a young child. And that doesn't mean that if you are exposed you're automatically going to become a victim or a perpetrator. I understand the outcome of perpetrator that just puts you at greater risk probably through modeling and social learning of using that same behavior again with victims. The way the researchers have explained it to me is that early victimization and in adverse child experiences study they found an accumulation of adverse experiences led to a certain level of vulnerability among these people as they grew up. And then you can understand the greater likelihood of becoming a victim if you enter young adulthood as a more vulnerable adult than perpetrators of violence may prey on you more than others.

[00:05:56] It makes you vulnerable for negative outcomes in later life and in fact what they find in the adverse child experience the study is there are a host of negative outcomes even health outcomes that impact people as they have more and more adverse child experiences. And what they call ACE's adverse child experience is as you accumulate those. Now you have worse and worse health outcomes in adulthood. And one of those adverse experiences is being exposed to domestic violence as a child I think single Hardy's term poly victimization. Yes. David Finkelhor is and in fact that national survey that he and his colleagues recently completed showed that children aren't only exposed to domestic violence or child abuse but that they have multiple exposures to violence as they grow up and that they are indeed poly victims. As David Finkelhor calls them into horrible term but it's very ality for some children. Yeah I think what we have to realize is that every child probably has multiple exposures to trauma and in particular to violence as they grow up. But they have a variety of protective and risk factors are adverse. You know the people at CDC called adverse child experiences that create varied outcomes for them. So if you have fewer adverse experiences and more protective factors then you do better. A colleague of mine here and Maston who's one of the better known researchers on resilience talks about how she set out to study resilience and she thought she'd be studying exceptional children that ordinary children. But she's decided that it's not extraordinary children that it's ordinary children that every day so many children are exposed to traumas or stressors of various kinds. But so many of them bounce back from those experiences because of protective factors in their environments that buffer them particularly caring adults that she calls ordinary magic.

[00:08:06] It's not extraordinary. It's almost magical because it happens on such a large scale without a lot of formal intervention that there are these naturally protective factors in children's lives that many many children are resilient in the face of trauma and stress. What we really need to do is support those naturally occurring protective factors like caring adults and try to minimize the risk that children face. And by doing that we I think we end up with healthy your children through these traumas and stressors that they are exposed to. I think that's so interesting because you often hear of resilient children never thought of them as being ordinary. But they don't and they just have somebody or something or a community out there somehow that is supporting them and they're bouncing back. So our kids are doing well well that's what and Maston argues is that it's happening in such a large scale that it's not extraordinary that it's ordinary. She calls it ordinary magic. It was really I really like this article she wrote in 2001 in Science magazine. We still want to make sure our children are safe and families are safe. So can you talk a little about how communities can protect families and children who experience domestic violence or you know you're saying that we can't predict but can we how can we intervene. And I come back to what I was saying before that children have varied experiences and varied impacts based on the protective and risk factors in their lives. And therefore this this group of kids we need a variety of responses.

[00:09:50] So my argument would be that a lot of people say well let's just make this a form of child maltreatment and report all of these kids to child protection and child protection will take care of them. And you know look you know you work in child protection. What's the answer to that. It doesn't work with Blauwet to work. And everybody hopes it will work. In an ideal world it would

work. But child welfare has a very restricted set of resources. More and more scarce as time goes on and we expect a lot of child welfare. And in fact many of these children will also be physically abused. So one thing we didn't talk about is the co occurrence of child exposure to adult domestic violence and then child physical or sexual abuse in the same family. And we find around 50 percent Koah occurrence families where there's domestic violence. You find about half that kids are probably also physically abused in some way and vice versa. So the child welfare system will always be involved with battered women and their children just because of that high level of cold currents. And I think the child welfare system needs to think about and there's been some great work nationally over the last decade thinking about how child welfare can behave differently and practice differently with families where domestic violence adult domestic violence is also identified properly that major effort in this area is called The Green Book. And that was the color of the cover of a best practices guide put out by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court judges in nineteen ninety nine.

[00:11:42] Subsequent to that the federal government funded six demonstration sites in five states and a national evaluation of International Technical Assistance around the Green Book. And there is a Web site called Green Book dot info. And there's a lot of information about that national initiative that you were involved in that initiative helped co-author with Susan Shecter the Green Book on behalf of the National Council. And then I acted as a consultant through the green book project specifically on the national evaluation piece. But what that aim to do is say look we have this Koah occurring population and child welfare needs to make changes in how they respond to battered mothers and their children. Domestic violence services need to make changes in terms of how they identified children exposed to domestic violence and who are abused themselves and how they respond to them and connect with the child welfare system and the family courts especially the courts that handle child welfare cases not the family courts but often the dependency courts need to identify how they can better coordinate their work with domestic violence and child welfare systems. So there was a lot around how child welfare does screen how you develop service plans both for adult victims and separately for perpetrators. What you do around adult safety not just child safety but a safety and a whole set of recommendations for child welfare. But there were equally a set of recommendations for domestic violence and for the courts to respond to in the Green Book Project. But that's only one element of a community. What I think would be a comprehensive community response. Another piece is really voluntary services in the community where not everybody is being referred to child protection.

[00:13:44] In fact I have doubts about whether you should define child exposure to domestic violence as a form of maltreatment because it tends to overwhelm child welfare systems with lots of screening that ends up being closed out and the cases end up being closed out quickly and those families don't necessarily get more services as a result of the intrusion of screening and their lives. So I would like to see more voluntary services and really building up of voluntary services that can complement the child welfare system. And I know child welfare wants that to more community resources to draw on. And there are some great models for these around the country usually called child witness to violence projects. They vary in the type of work they do. Betty McAllister Groves at Boston Medical Center who's a social worker Alicia Lieberman and Patricia Van Horn two psychologists at the University of California at San Francisco have both developed early child interventions with young children and their mothers generally their mothers where they work in pairs with the mother child dyad and do some long term trauma work with very young children try to help them heal from the trauma and do sort of typical trauma work where they're talking about the violence talking about safety and being able to talk for that child to express some things about it or do play or work around it with their mother present. So they know it's not a secret and they can exchange talk to their mothers or or hear from their mothers about it. There are groups that many battered women shelters and other domestic violence services offer for children. And both the early childhood that's called child parent psychotherapy done by Alicia Lieberman Patricia Van Horn and

Betty McAlister girls.

[00:15:44] There's some good data to support that it has an impact on children's healing. And then the group work. There are some data on the doing groups with children particularly when mothers are involved. Sandra Graham Berman has done a lot of work on that in what's called the Kids Club which is a group for a little bit older children and then project support down in Dallas Texas. Ernest tireless and Renee MacDonald two psychologists at Southern Methodist University has developed a home visiting program where an advocate and a child worker go out together and after a woman and her children have left a shelter work with them and getting resettled and supporting them through that process of healing. That's called Project Support. And there's good data supporting the effectiveness of that work. So there are some good evidence based practices. What I want to say about that though is there are many many other very great positive emerging programs promising practices what you wherever you want to call them that don't yet have data. But this is an emerging field. So expect more and more of them to come up with data that shows how effective or ineffective they are with children exposed to domestic violence. So I would argue that we really need to develop the spread of community based resources for children exposed to domestic violence in it as complementary to a child welfare response for the more severely abused and directly physically abused children and in support of those children too.

[00:17:19] And a comprehensive response would be one that includes voluntary and child welfare and teachers first responders like teachers medical personnel and others how to identify and make intelligent referrals of these children to this array of services that may be available. I mean I hear that there's a lot of work. What you described and recommendations made in terms of the disconnect between the courts child welfare shelters and services said domestic violence. And there's all these new programs that are emerging. The child witness to violence and psychotherapy groups and kids club and project support what's being done for the men no violent men. Has there been anything that you've seen in your research that's been a factor or promising in terms of interventions because that seems to be the place that we found that it can translate that intervention with men who batter is probably the best researched area of everything we have been talking about today. And there's a great deal of controversy about whether it's effective or not. I tend to follow the advice of Edward Gandalf who's at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh and he has conducted one of the largest studies funded by the CDC batterer intervention programs and generally he does find that over time batterer intervention programs if the men stay in them over time that they do most of the men do and then violence and in some studies we find that they reduce their threat as well through those groups. But those groups alone are not the solution. In addition we have very little. Since we're talking a lot about children today we have very little around these men's parenting roles with their children. So they've been abusive towards their partner but maybe not towards their child. And some of the cases some of them have also been abusive towards their child.

[00:19:22] And the courts often don't know how to respond to that. In fact I've had judges make rulings and tell me well he didn't abuses children so he can be a good father to them even though he was abusing their mother. And to me that ignores this developmental research that we have that shows that beating the child's mother does have a negative impact on the child's development. It ignores that and it sort of ignores the need. What also ignores the occurrence that about 50 percent of these kids are likely to be physically abused as well probably by the same perpetrator but not always. So I think we really need to give some attention in addition to continuing to refine the work of batterer intervention programs to think about fatherhood and domestic violence and what we do with men who are violent towards their partners as fathers and often single fathers when they've been divorced from their partner and how they cope parent or parallel parent or what their relationship is with this mom. You know many battered mothers report that the fathers have undermined their parenting and denigrated them in front of their children and undercut their authority and inconsistent and implementing consequences in the household and stuff. And so to

become a battered mom as a newly single parent to become a single parent is difficult but having been a better mother and now become a single parent is very difficult. But I have to cope parent with your abuser who may still be manipulating the kids and undermining your parent is especially difficult. And I think there's room for creative work around Fathers and domestic violence than there is.

[00:21:11] There are some people like Lindsay being crossed up and Massachusetts is written about and then some great training and speaking on batterers as parents. And there are some wonderful programs that have developed around the country and in North America in particular one called Caring dads that's developed by Katrina Scott and Claire Crookes up in Canada. They have a manual that they've developed and they have some evaluation data around the program and there's a whole website called Caring dads. Or I think it is we're seeing for Canada I'm not sure but there's some great work around fathers who have been abusive to the moms and thinking about not only how does the father become a non-violent parent but how does he work with his former victim when they're both still parenting these children. It's great to hear you talk about this because I think it's in New York State. We have a whole initiative of locating and engaging fathers and we've been pushing to have fathers be a part of a child's life. But many of these families come into the system and they're reporting domestic violence. Glad you're saying we can't ignore the abuse and these children are impacted by it but we've got to find a way to do it. And we work with them in terms of. But we can't ignore the violence. Right. My experience is that very few judges will ever say to a father you can never have impact with never have contact with that child again. And even when judges do say that often the children will have contact with that father regardless of what the courts. So I think we have to acknowledge that.

[00:22:52] I do think that there are some violent men who are not safe to have access to their children and that may be for a period of time or that may be permanently. I think we have to make a decision. So who and when can have access to their children and when they do have access to their children how can we help them be both nurturing and supportive. Current non-violent parent but also how can they be a supportive nurturing non abusive parent or partner to a former victim. And what does that mean. In Minnesota we have what's called parenting coordinators. So sometimes parents won't have any contact with each other. The parenting coordinator will arrange the custody exchange as acceptor without any direct contact between parent and in some cases I think that's going to be necessary for the safety of the adult victim and the safety of the children. Just like I think supervised visitation is an important innovation supervised exchange around domestic violence cases and that those that we think about those very differently than child abuse cases. What are the safety issues. What are the precautions we need to take. There is a project called safe havens through to the violence against women act that has funded supervised visitation centers to think about domestic violence more carefully and develop protocols around cases involving domestic violence as opposed to child abuse. So I think there's a lot of innovation out there that has yet really evaluated where we can't say it's evidence based practice. But I think there are some very promising practices developing in a number of these areas. So ongoing assessment supervised her coach visits. Those are still key. Absolutely.

[00:24:44] And I think that if there is access and we decide that this man should have access to supervise this patient center then I don't think it should just be time based like the judge will say well three months of supervised visitation then you can go to unsupervised. It really needs to be behavior based where you come back to the court in three months and we'll decide whether we extend the supervised visitation or whether we make it less restrictive but we'll do it based on a clear assessment of progress made towards being nonviolent not only towards this child but towards the other adult coping. So does he have the capacity to change right. Does he have a capacity has he taken the steps and do we have evidence of that before we allow greater access and unrestricted access of unsupervised exchanges which may endanger not only the children but the other adult

family. Just a couple more quick questions. I just want to tap to the fact that New York state just passed legislation supporting the child protective services Family Assessment Response known as the fire here but also known in other states York State as differential response which is less adversarial. CPS is more partnering with families. When you talk about how this approach being used with families where there's domestic violence occurring does it keep the children safe. I can't answer your last question but I can certainly talk about what we call alternative response in Minnesota there is often called differential response.

[00:26:14] And essentially that's to take lower risk cases and they divert I guess I wouldn't say divert them but create a second channel within child welfare where there are more family supportive assessments and services offered primarily on a voluntary basis compared to more of a forensic investigation where you end up with a finding of child maltreatment or substantiation and then mandatory services. So this voluntary track the alternative for differential response I think is a great innovation within child welfare. It frees up child welfare to get back to the welfare piece and be less of the sort of punitive piece and trying to support families especially those that are at lower risk. That in Minnesota the first county was Olmsted County which is where Rochester Minnesota is and that's where it was developed Rob Sawyer who at the time was the Director of Children and Family Services in that county very small county of about 100000 people I believe. But he went to his county board and he got funding for I think it was four or five new positions. That was in a county of only 100000 people so that was a big commitment. County board to fund a special domestic violence unit that would respond so that every case was screened for domestic violence and whether it was in the traditional child welfare or in the differential response. They would come through this special domestic violence unit. And Rob Sawyer and his colleague Susan Lora back have written an article I think in the Protecting Children journal American Humane Association Journal. They wrote a nice piece that outlines Olmsted County's response to domestic violence via this differential response mechanism.

[00:28:06] I think Rob has told me that about 80 percent of the children exposed to domestic violence end up in this differential response track compared to the traditional but some who are both physically abused and exposed to domestic violence end up in the traditional both get access to the specialized unit that works on both safety for the abused parent and the abused child or exposed child and works with the perpetrator as well. And I think they'll also give subcontracts for services around perpetrator intervention as well as support for the mothers to the community based agencies. So it's a fairly comprehensive response in a child protection system that has differential response in place but they have a specialized Domestic Violence Unit sort of with within it's almost a third tract but it overlaps with the other two and really works for safety of the abused adult and child and intervention with the perpetrator. And I think that it's a very nice model and so differential response I think opens up the opportunity to do things like this but it doesn't automatically respond to domestic violence because there is specialized expertise. I'm thinking in the responses that I think we need to do that differential response allows but isn't necessarily automatically going to be in place unless somebody thinks it through carefully. And I think Rob Sawyer and Susan Lohr about that very carefully in Olmsted County. Susan Lord that has just moved to the American Humane Association. And I and Rob retired and he's a consultant also to the American Humane Association. But again you're talking about a very specialized level of knowledge of how they intervene. It really takes a lot of expertise and some places like Massachusetts have hired in to the child welfare system what they called domestic violence specialists and placed them at regional offices that they place them to help with domestic violence cases to train caseworkers around domestic violence consult on the cases.

[00:30:18] I believe they have even engaged Fernando Madeiros around the issue of batterer intervention. And he's a consultant statewide to help them think how the interviewing with these men who have been identified as domestic violence perpetrators as well. So there are some really as

a result of the Green Book Project been thinking around the differential response and domestic violence. There are some really creative things that have been done around the country in child welfare systems in thinking about is there an alternative track or way of thinking and responding to cases where not only is the child physically abused or exposed to domestic violence but where the mother is a victim as well. And how do we work with them. My feeling has always been that if you achieve safety for mother you're going to achieve safety for their children much more quickly. You can't ignore mother safety and hope to achieve safety for a child because that mother is going to be the primary provider of safety for that child. And so when we start to think of a system that responds to the whole family and not just on child safety but family safety then I think we move to systems like differential response and specialized individuals or units that focus on domestic violence. We're all looking for safety stability and well-being. Whether you're a battered woman's advocate you're a judge in family or juvenile dependency court or a child welfare worker. The language of child welfare applies equally to all those settings of safety stability and well-being. And it's not just of children but it's of adults.

[00:31:56] And when the adults in the child's life are not safe that child is not likely to stay safe. So the more we can do to encourage the safety for the primary adult caregiver who is often a battered mom in the cases we've been talking about more likely we are to provide safety for that child as well. And in fact some of the research and the glam Berman in particular at the University of Michigan finds that when mothers are engaged in children's healing and the interventions are more effective than when you just work with children and I think child welfare has always known that that's way they focus on moms primarily. Unfortunately when you focus on the mom and give her a service plan but don't do much with the perpetrator you end up leaving the burden of the impact of the violence on the mom unless we adopt sort of this approach of being supportive like differential response the DOPS of being supportive of providing resources and really acting as a team with the mom to provide for her safety and her child safety and making not just the best interest of the child but the best interest of all victims in the family make that our goal to make any comments about any other major state or federal agency made of changes that have occurs and how effective they've been. I think there are a couple of things. The violence against women act has been reauthorized three times. And it's up for reauthorization I believe the coming year. So it has over time expanded to include there's an entire title within it an initiative that comes through through that title on children exposed to domestic violence. There's another one unengaging men not only in violence prevention but also around fatherhood issues.

[00:33:47] So I think there are some really good movement and addressing of Children's Issues in the violence against women act and hopefully that'll get reauthorized and continue to be funded at the level it has been. And then the Attorney General Eric Holder the U.S. attorney general has a new initiative called the Defending Childhood initiative and Eric Holder even when he was in the Clinton administration as Janet Reno's second in command he was very interested in child exposure to violence in general not just domestic violence but five children exposure and its impact. And he made this a major initiative as his attorney general ship. That's what you call it is his time in this role and the Defending Childhood initiative as sort of the outgrowth of that. Part of that is the result of this national survey that Dave Finkelhor has done and they've just funded eight communities across the country to develop new initiatives on children's exposure to violence prevention. So it's still a major concern. Still a major concern and I'm happy to say that there's growing attention to it at the federal level. Well thank you very very much. This has been informative. It's been helpful. I really appreciate your time today and thank you Dr. Edleson. Thank you very much for having me and I look forward to hearing the podcast. You've been listening to Dr. Jeffrey Edleson discuss domestic violence in the lives of children living in Peru. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast.

[00:35:29] For more information about who we are our history our programs and what we do we

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