

Domestic Violence on Children Impairs their Cognitive, Behavioural and Psychosocial Adjustments: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Domestic violence, a pervasive issue globally, disproportionately affects children, often leading to severe consequences for their well-being. This review paper will investigate the consequences of domestic violence upon children, concentrating on how it affects their psychological, behavioural, and cognitive development. By examining existing research, it aims to investigate the various forms of domestic violence, the underlying factors contributing to its prevalence, and the long-term as well as immediate consequences upon the well-being of the children victimized by physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and also the one's who witness such violence at home. The paper will also provide insights into the strategies implemented by global organizations and governmental bodies to address this issue, as well as policies, interventions, and initiatives to safeguard children from domestic violence. This evaluation aims to provide insights for creating more successful child protection and development programs.

Keywords: Domestic violence, children, abuse, detrimental effects, effective strategies.

Introduction

A person acquires his/her social skills and behavioural patterns from their family. Violence within the family (domestic violence) destroys the harmonious balance within a family. Domestic violence against children has been prevalent for ages in every country around the world. It is still prevalent and has not been addressed widely because it happens within the four walls of a house, thus rarely reported (UNICEF, 2009). The most tragic or heinous cases, like severe health issues or most death cases, come to public notice. The prevalence of domestic violence within a family may be due to rigid sex roles, one man/woman control among the family, indirect ways of communicating and isolating themselves from the community while dealing with familial conflict, and inability to handle responsibility (Elbow, 1982).

Domestic violence is any abuse of infants, children, and adolescents by parents, caregivers, and other authority figures that takes place inside the house, including physical, psychological, sexual or emotional abuse (World Health Organization: WHO, 2022). This kind of maltreatment of children is a seriously growing problem being recognized globally, affecting the health and human rights of

a child (Butchart et al., 2006). Under-developed and developing countries, especially South Asian nations record more cases of domestic violence, especially physical abuse cases on children. This is mainly because corporal punishment is traditionally prevalent and culturally accepted in such countries (Sano et al., 2023)

Domestic violence not only poses immediate, severe, short-term impacts but also hampers their adulthood causing prolonged threats to their overall well-being. It affects children’s cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial development (Pinheiro, 2006; World et al. [WHO], 2002). “Acts of commission by a caregiver that cause actual physical harm or have the potential to cause harm is the definition of physical violence towards children given by the WHO in 2002” (World Health Organization: WHO, 2019). “Non-physical forms of hostile treatment that negatively impact a child’s development and health are classified as psychological or emotional violence towards children” (Deb & Walsh, 2012). The definition of sexual violence against children is any crime involving nonconsensual sexual behaviour. Sexual activities may take place in contact or without contact. Contact acts include things like unwanted touching, masturbation, digital penetration, oral-genital contact, and anal and vaginal rape. Noncontact behaviours encompass voyeurism, exposing oneself, making sexual remarks, and displaying pornography” (Deb & Walsh, 2012). Most children are exposed to more than one form of harassment most of the time, called multi-type maltreatment (Deb & Walsh, 2012c). According to previously recorded data, even witnessing “interparental violence” co-occurs with child maltreatment, and this phenomenon has a worse effect on the child (Appel & Holden, 1998; Casanueva et al., 2009; Edleson, 1999).

Methodology

For the standard review process, a thorough search strategy was created and put into action using the search phrases “Domestic Violence on Children.” Furthermore, the literature search was narrowed down by utilizing specific search phrases such ‘Effects of domestic violence on the cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial development of children.’ Electronic databases (JSTOR, EBSCO, PubMed), Web Searches (Google Scholar), AI-based searches (Scihub et al.), and websites of WHO, UNESCO, and UNICEF were explored to date for all published articles particularly associated with Domestic Violence on Children (2-12 years), types of domestic violence, and long and short term consequences of such violence. A total of 58 articles were critically examined for consideration, and eventually, only 9 out of the 58 met the set inclusion criteria. Expressly, only articles about witnessing or being victimized by domestic violence (violence in home settings, mainly by caregivers) on children (2-12 years), based on qualitative and quantitative methods published in the English language were incorporated. Violence in school, workplace, or any other setting outside the home by any external figure except caregivers/parents and any other age groups above or below 2-12 years. Figure 1 outlines the review selection procedure as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Table 1 also explains the methodologies, samples, and important conclusions of the 12 examined studies on the effects of domestic abuse on children.

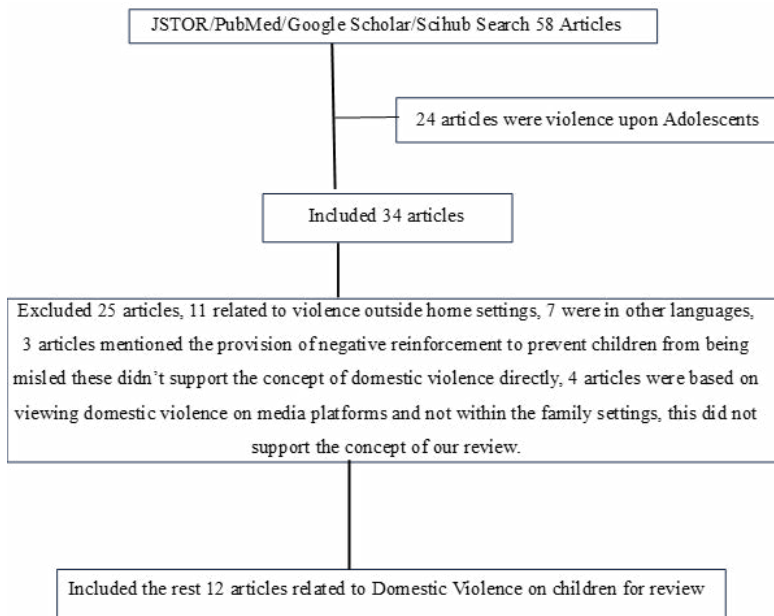


Figure 1 A summary table of the 12 reviewed articles

Table 1 An Overview of Research on the Effects of Domestic Violence on Children’s Cognitive, Behavioural, and Psychosocial Development

Author/ Year/ Country	Types of Research Design	Study Sample	Measures	Main Findings
Klokmanienė et al. (2024b)	Empirical data, Qualitative research	8 women who experienced domestic violence in childhood.	Semi-structured interview. After the conduction of the research, a content analysis was done	According to the research, there are clear aftereffects of violence against children, which include suicide, self-harm, and low self-esteem. Youngsters who witness violence in their immediate surroundings frequently grow up to commit abuse themselves.
Joseph et al. (2021b)	Mixed method	Children enrolled in classes two to five	The children with behavioural issues were identified using the Rutter Children Behavior Questionnaire. The mothers of these children completed a self-administered questionnaire to identify the determinants of behavioural problems. Primary school teachers participated in focus groups to discuss the study’s various findings.	The study involved 750 students, of whom 65 (8.7%) had behavioural issues as determined by their teachers. Multivariable analysis showed that children with behavioural problems were those whose mothers had not eaten a healthy diet during the relevant prenatal period, those whose biological parents were not married, and those whose children had been reported to have frequently been physically abused as a form of discipline, and those who were raised in nuclear families.

<p>Pandey et al. (2020c)</p>	<p>Quantitative research method</p>	<p>A total of 1382 preschoolers were selected from ten Shanghai, China, kindergarten institutions.</p>	<p>The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire's modules on child maltreatment, conventional crime, and witnessing and indirect victimization were used to conduct interviews with them. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Youth's Inventory-4R, which have been culturally modified for Hindi, were used to evaluate potential mental diagnoses as well as current emotional and behavioural issues.</p>	<p>Eighty-three percent of the sample exhibited symptoms of one or more psychiatric disorders, and eighty-six per cent reported direct or indirect victimization during their childhood (83.36%). 45.5% of the teenagers had hazardous homes, 17.4% had general neglect, and 72.73% had physical abuse (extra-familial 56.25%, intra-familial 42.71%), 47.7% had mental abuse (extra-familial 74.6%, intra-familial 12.9%) and, according to the most common forms of maltreatment. While all of these forms of maltreatment were linked to poor mental health, emotional abuse had the most profound and extensive effect.</p>
<p>Jia et al. (2016b)</p>	<p>Quantitative research method, cluster sampling.</p>	<p>A total of 1382 preschoolers were selected from ten Shanghai, China, kindergarten institutions.</p>	<p>Their parents filled out a demographic questionnaire, the Parent Behavior Inventory, the Family Environment Scale, the Parent Behavior Inventory and the Aggression Subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).</p>	<p>With 44.9% (620) girls and 55.1% (762) boys, the 1382 youngsters had a mean age of 4.97 years (SD =.88). The CBCL found that antagonistic behavior was displayed by preschoolers 12.4% of the time. Multivariate logistic regression analysis showed that family conflicts (OR = 1.231, 95% CI: 1.115–1.360), hostile/coercive parenting (OR = 1.083, 95% CI: 1.051–1.116), inconsistent parenting between parents and grandparents (OR = 1.658, 95% CI: 1.175–2.341), and increased TV watching time (OR = 1.999, 95% CI: 1.568–2.550) were the factors that significantly predicted aggressive behaviour in children.</p>
<p>Ellonen et al. (2013b)</p>	<p>Quantitative research.</p>	<p>The subjects consisted of fifth - sixth graders (aged 10–12 years). The final research sample consisted of 13,459 respondents.</p>	<p>The survey was conducted as a computer-assisted survey. The conflict-related questions were derived from a Finnish adaptation of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz's Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (1981). It's a 14-item scale, initially beginning with assessing aggressive verbalization and moving to severe acts of physical violence. The use of logistic regression was done to analyze the data.</p>	<p>Empirical evidence suggests that children who have experienced and/or witnessed physical violence in their homes are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior and drink alcohol often. Comparing youngsters who have never experienced violence to those who have only watched it, there is a greater chance that the latter would smoke and take drugs on a regular basis. The chance of regularly using drugs and smoking increases when one witnesses parental physical abuse to the same extent as when one experiences it oneself. There was no indication of statistically significant gender-based interactions.</p>

<p>Deb and Walsh (2012b)</p>	<p>Mixed method, Purposive sampling.</p>	<p>Participants in the study were 160 boys and 160 girls in Grades 8 and 9, students who were exposed to domestic violence between the ages of 2 and 8; they were chosen at random from eight English- and Bengali-medium schools in Agartala, Tripura.</p>	<p>A Social Adjustment Inventory and a Semi-structured Questionnaire for Children/Students were two specially designed self-report study instruments.</p>	<p>The results showed that students had witnessed family violence in 29.7% of cases, and they had suffered physical (21.9%), psychological (20.9%), and sexual (18.1%) abuse at home. Sexual violence was seen in girls more than boys, who were more likely to experience physical and psychological abuse. In comparison to schoolchildren who had not encountered violence, schoolchildren who were victims or witnesses of any form of violence had comparatively lower social adjustment</p>
<p>McDonald et al. (2009)</p>	<p>Qualitative research</p>	<p>258 children and their moms who were taken from domestic abuse shelters participated.</p>	<p>Measures of partner-child aggression, mother-child aggression, and women's IPV were completed by mothers and children. Moms reported on their kids' internalizing and externalizing issues, while kids reported on how they felt about the way they were treated when there was parent-child conflict.</p>	<p>Once sociodemographic factors and male IPV were taken into account, three relationships were found between partner-child aggression and internalizing and externalizing problems among children alongside threat assessments. Internalizing challenges and threat assessments did not show gender differences; however, there was a stronger link between externalizing issues and mother-child antagonism in boys compared to girls.</p>
<p>Sternberg et al. (2006)</p>	<p>A longitudinal study, quantitative research method.</p>	<p>110 children from Israel were considered for the study, averaging 10.6 years of age.</p>	<p>Parents, teachers, and the kids themselves provided information regarding the kids' adjustment, which was then gathered using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), Teacher Report Form (TRF), Youth Self-Report (YSR), and Children's Depression Inventory (CDI). Social workers, fathers, mothers, and children provided us with information about the history of family violence.</p>	<p>To assess the consistency of informants' responses within and between time periods, Pearson correlations were created using the CBCL, TRF, YSR, and CDI T scores. Merely a small number of the hypotheses regarding the relationship between early abuse and subsequent adaptation were confirmed. Children were more likely than other informants to suggest maladjustment levels that altered in response to recent or current exposure to family violence. The pattern of reported impacts also showed little stability over time. It has been found that internalizing and externalizing behavioral difficulties are more common in girls than in boys.</p>
<p>Smith et al. (1996)</p>	<p>Empirical study, Quantitative method</p>	<p>54 youngsters, ages three to six.</p>	<p>The children's degree of adjustment was evaluated using the Child Behavior Checklist.</p>	<p>Based on this metric, 42% of the children exhibited behavioral problems that qualified as clinical. The degree of verbal aggression and domestic violence in the household and the children's adjustment were found to be significantly correlated prior to the parents' divorce. The research's implications for social work practice and policy around family violence are also covered.</p>

Results and Discussions

The long-term negative consequences of child abuse often begin early and continue throughout adulthood and old life. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, psychosis, and personality disorders are a few examples of mental health problems (Bendall et al., 2007).

Consequences of Physical Abuse on Children

Physical punishment has been linked to several psychological issues, including sadness, low self-esteem, trouble adjusting psychologically, and others, according to scientific studies. Violence harms people's behaviour (aggression, alcohol, tobacco, use of narcotic substances, self-harm, criminal acts, disobeying rules), cognitive development (language, learning, academic achievements), emotional development (anxiety, depression, low self-esteem), physical health (injuries, scars), and interpersonal relationships (inability to establish contact, communicate warmly and friendly). In a survey, 8.7% of children reported having behavioural issues. Teachers in other Indian studies found that 12.6% of primary school students and 22.7% of students (Gupta et al., 2017) experienced behavioural issues. These had to do with parenting style, and a consistent history of a child suffering physical damage for disobedience served as a predictor of behavioural issues. This was consistent with what earlier research had found (Liu et al., 1999). Children may suffer psychological and emotional trauma when physical punishment is used as a form of discipline. (Joseph and others, 2021). Teenagers who had been physically abused as youngsters were more likely to exhibit abnormally high levels of emotional issues than teens who had not. Emotional challenges, dysthymia, and terror are substantially associated with a history of physical abuse. According to Ferguson and Lynskey (1997), there is a higher likelihood of violent crimes, suicidal thoughts, and alcohol abuse among children who experience physical abuse. Furthermore, associations have been found between a history of physical abuse and subsequent health-risky behaviours, including smoking, drug or alcohol misuse, excessive binge drinking, using lethal weapons, and engaging in risky behaviours connected to HIV. (Bensley et al., 2000).

Impact of Sexual Violence on Victimized Children

Sexual assault victims displayed poor mental and physical health, high levels of substance misuse, dysfunctional familial connections, and low academic achievement. They suffered from bedwetting habits, sexually transmitted illnesses, and soiling (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993).

What Emotional/Psychological Violence does to a Child

According to clinical and research findings, school-aged children who have experienced psychological or emotional abuse may display behaviours in addition to academic underachievements, such as rage, disobedience, strong negativity, poor impulse control, and diminished social competence (Shaffer et al., 2009). Emotional abuse has been associated with increased rates of emotional and behavioural problems, as well as higher incidence or severity of panic attacks, generalized anxiety, melancholy, dysthymia, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, and schizophrenia. Of all the forms of maltreatment, emotional abuse had the greatest impact on mental health; nonetheless, it is a form of abuse that is particularly underrepresented in existing Indian rules. Additionally, it seems that emotional maltreatment is a transdiagnostic risk factor for several mental illnesses (Pandey et al., 2020).

Multiple-Maltreatment and Witnessing Domestic Violence

Maltreatment of children can have a variety of detrimental effects that start early and frequently persist into maturity and old age. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, psychosis, and personality disorders are a few examples of mental health problems (Bendall et al., 2007). When starting their own families, girls who have witnessed violence in their parents' household will not recognize signs of improper or violent behaviour because they have grown up with it as the standard for behaviour and communication. Boys who witnessed violence were reported to have worse social competence as determined by their activities, social achievements, and peer relationships, as well as higher degrees of internalizing and externalizing symptoms. It has been shown that girls from violent homes exhibit greater internalizing signs of anxiety and despair. Additionally, girls from nonviolent homes have higher social competency compared to other females ("Family Violence and Child Adjustment: A Comparative Analysis of Girls' and Boys' Behavioral Symptoms," 1986).

Several studies have shown that children who witness multiple incidents of family violence or who suffer violence from their parents or other family members are significantly more likely to face a variety of psychiatric, psychological, and academic difficulties. Children are frequently exposed to a variety of family violence situations because physical abuse of children and marital violence frequently coexist. Children who were both victims and witnesses of spouse abuse had the highest rate of externalizing behaviour difficulties, whereas children who were neither had the lowest rate of these issues, according to Hughes (1988). Children who were witnesses but not victims received intermediate grades (Jouriles et al., 1997). When abused children compare to their peers who have not been subjected to abuse or neglect, they usually display more psychological issues and less adaptive performance in various developmental areas. Additionally, studies reveal that kids who witness domestic abuse display more afraid and repressed behaviours (internalizing behaviours) as well as violent and antisocial behaviours (externalizing behaviours) than kids who do not encounter violence in their homes (Edleson, 1999). The risk of regularly using drugs and smoking increases when one witnesses parental physical violence to the same extent as when one experiences parental physical violence (Ellonen et al., 2013).

Seventy per cent of children who witness violence grow up to be violent adults in an attempt to overcome their helplessness and dread. These kids become bad parents when they grow up, continuing the cycle of violence in the family. (Et al., Klokmanienè, 2024). In the worst-case scenario, child death might arise from violence against children (Centre, 2003). In high-income countries, the number of child deaths attributed to maltreatment ranges from 0.1 to 2.4 per 100,000 children, while rates in low- and middle-income countries are estimated to be two to three times higher.

Conclusion

A number of acts and legislation have been prepared in several nations to address the issue of domestic violence. Domestic violence is predisposed by the customs and prejudices that are pervasive in society. The public should thus be made aware of the issue of domestic abuse and its effects on both the victim and contemporary society through the implementation of educational initiatives. Emphasize the necessity of longitudinal studies on the impact of family violence on children's behavioral, emotional, and social issues as well as the need for routine evaluations of development over time (particularly with maltreated children).

Strategies implemented, policies, interventions, and initiatives by global organisations and governmental bodies to safeguard children from domestic violence.

1. Six Strategies were Outlined by UNICEF to Stop and Address Child Abuse

- Assisting families, and caregivers, to implement positive discipline techniques during the early stages of their child's development. As a result, there is less chance of domestic violence.
- Supporting young people in overcoming obstacles and risks. Teaching children and teenagers how to handle stress and threats without turning to violence, as well as how to receive help when they need it, is essential to reducing violence in schools and communities.
- Shifting societal norms and attitudes that support prejudice and domestic violence The most effective strategy to stop violence before it starts is to alter the attitudes and societal conventions that allow it to happen in the first place.
- Encouraging and offering assistance to Children so that they can more effectively deal with and overcome violent situations. They are encouraged to report violent incidents and seek out high-quality professional care.
- Adopting and following laws and policies that protect children makes it very evident to the general population that violence is unacceptable and will not be allowed.
- Researching and collecting data in order to organize and carry out intervention strategies and establish measurable goals in order to track advancement and end violence. It's critical to comprehend the various types of violence, their locations, and the age groups and child populations that are most affected.

2. UNODC (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime)- The goal of this collaborative OSRSG-VAC and UNODC strategy is to eradicate domestic abuse of children, globally. To realize this goal, the UNODC and OSRSG-VAC are collaborating to create a just, inclusive, and peaceful society where children's rights are completely upheld and their role is acknowledged. Protecting children from violence necessitates effort on several fronts, with several players working concurrently on distinct intervention areas and motivated by shared goals. It means giving children who have been exposed to violence, exploited, or traumatized better services in addition to enhancing the capacity of systems to safeguard children. It also entails realizing how children in particular situations require specially designed assistance.

- Objective 1: There is improved protection against domestic abuse for children and their surroundings:

- Strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect children from domestic violence.

- Promoting awareness and education about domestic violence, its causes, and the available support services.

- Enhancing early identification and intervention programs to prevent domestic violence before it occurs.

- Supporting community-based initiatives that provide safe spaces and resources for children affected by domestic violence.

- Objective 2: Support is provided for the healing and reintegration processes of children who have witnessed domestic violence:

- Provide complete psychosocial and mental health support services to kids who have been abused at home.

- Ensuring access to safe, stable housing and basic needs for children and their families.

- Supporting the development of child-friendly justice systems prioritizing the needs of the victims of such violence.

- Facilitating reintegration into their communities and promoting their social and emotional well-being.

- Objective 3: Children who interact with the legal system receive better care, are shielded from harm, and are assisted in their journey to recovery.

Establishing child-sensitive judicial processes that lessen the pain that children who have been subjected to domestic abuse endure.

Ensuring access to legal representation and support services for children involved in domestic violence cases.

Promoting restorative justice approaches that focus on healing and reconciliation.

Educating people in the legal system about the special needs of children who have seen domestic abuse through specialized training.

By focusing on these specific objectives and interventions, UNODC can contribute to a more comprehensive and effective response to the pervasive issue of domestic violence affecting children worldwide.

1. WHO - A few strategies that have been shown to be successful in reducing child abuse are listed in INSPIRE: Seven Tactics to Put an End to Child Abuse. They include response and support services, education and life skills, norms and values, safe surroundings, support for parents and caregivers, income and economic strengthening, and the application and enforcement of the law. The seven tactics are :

- The adoption and enforcement of laws (such as those that restrict access to alcohol and firearms and forbid the use of force in schools);
- The reversal of norms and values (such as the acceptance of male aggressiveness or the sexual abuse of females);
- Protective environments (e.g., identifying “hot spots” for violence among family members and addressing the root causes with problem-oriented police and other interventions);
- Assistance and prevention from other caregivers (e.g., teaching young, new parents);

Providing response services (such as ensuring that children exposed to violence can obtain adequate emergency care and psychosocial support); Providing financial stability and growth (through training in gender justice and microfinance); Providing education and life skills (such as ensuring that kids get to school and teaching them social and life skills).

Limitations of the Systematic Review

An insightful summary of the body of research on domestic violence and its effects on children is given in this systematic review paper.

However, a few limitations might be considered during further research for a more comprehensive and diversified view of this global phenomenon.

- The review has primarily focussed on studies conducted in the English language, which might have limited the diverse perspectives of varied cultural, legal, and social contexts.
- The review highlights more information on the short-term consequences of domestic violence while giving lesser emphasis on the long-term effects. A more comprehensive search or in-depth analysis of adult behaviour can be beneficial in exploring this aspect.
- Very little has been found concerning sexual and emotional violence; lack of awareness and acknowledgement of such violence on children within the family might be the cause of lesser research on these prospects. In-depth interviews followed by longitudinal studies might offer broader knowledge and sensitize society about emotional and sexual abuse and its consequences.

Implications of the Study

The impact of domestic abuse on children’s cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial development is highlighted thoroughly in this systematic review paper. The results of numerous research studies have been compiled here, and their findings emphasize the disastrous effects of this

kind of violence. The study demonstrates the short and long-term mental health problems, hampered social adjustment, and elevated risk of perpetuating the cycle of violence for subsequent generations.

The implications of this research are profound. It calls for immediate action against domestic violence, addressing the issue widely and reaching its roots through early intervention programs, effective prevention measures, and indiscriminate support services for victims. Understanding the diversified consequences of domestic violence would help policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, psychologists, and community leaders to develop more informed and targeted interventions.

The necessity of continuing research to better understand the long-term effects of domestic violence on children's future well-being is another point this review paper makes. This paper can form a base for further longitudinal studies to track the course of these impacts over time and identify the appropriate measures to be taken at different stages of development. Moreover, research that would examine the experiences of children witnessing domestic violence or being victimized can report culturally specific aspects of the occurrence of such phenomenon and thus provide culture-specific preventive measures.

Overall, this paper serves as a practical resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working to protect children from domestic violence on a global scale and school psychologists, lawyers, healthcare professionals, and even extended family members who are keen to extend help to the victimized children, on a personal scale. This systematic review paper's comprehensive literature overview identifies critical areas for future research. It highlights the urgent need for effective interventions to build a healthier society.

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