

Conspicuous by their absence: Paramedics' role in responding to children exposed to domestic violence

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Train dentists, firefighters and vets to ask about domestic violence, expert says

LAUREN NOVAK POLITICAL REPORTER THE ADVERTISER JUNE 03, 2015 12:50PM

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Dentists, firefighters, medical students and vets should be trained in ways to ask women if they are suffering violence at home, a visiting expert says.

Introduction

- Do paramedics attend to incidences of domestic violence?
 - My research has revealed of the many incidences paramedics attend, domestic violence coexists as part of various clinical presentations

Paramedics

- Healthcare worker/professional
- Breach the threshold of the home
- Skilled at surveillance to determine/support patient history
 - Verbal/non-verbal
 - Scene assessment



Core research question

Do paramedics identify children exposed to domestic violence?



Commonwealth Legislation

- Section 4AB(4)(e) Family Law Act 1975
 - being present when police or ambulance officers attend an incident involving the assault of a member of the child's family by another member of the child's family.

Queensland State Legislation

- Section 10 Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012(Qld)
 - A child is exposed to domestic violence if the child sees or hears domestic violence or otherwise experiences the effects of domestic violence.
 - being present at a domestic violence incident that is attended by police officers

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2012

- 119,600 males who experienced current partner violence, 44.4% had children in their care when the violence occurred
 - 18.2% of male respondents confirmed children had seen or heard the violence

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2012

- 239,400 males who experienced previous partner violence, 49% had children in their care when the violence occurred
 - 33.9% of male respondents confirmed children had seen or heard the violence

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2012

- 237,100 females who experienced current partner violence, 54.2% had children in their care when the violence occurred
 - 31.3% of female respondents confirmed children had seen or heard the violence

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2012

- 1,196,000 females who experienced previous partner violence, 61.4% had children in their care when the violence occurred
 - 47.6% of female respondents confirmed children had seen or heard the violence

Polyvictimisation

- “Children who were exposed to even one type of violence, both within the past year and over their lifetimes, were at far greater risk of experiencing other types of violence.”

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/235504.pdf> - accessed 1 July 2015

Research

- Children
 - "...children ... they're probably the hardest patients to forget..."
 - "even though he is not my primary patient, he's part of my scene"
 - "I think I probably have been to more sick kids due to domestic violence ... But I probably didn't know about it. If that makes sense?"

Research

- Identification
 - “You see it. The hospital’s not going to see it. The school’s not going to see it”
 - “For example, like what are we looking for, what are, you know, what are we looking for, like, what are types of violence and you know, what do we look for, what does that mean, um, and then after that, like who do we talk to about what are their rights, what are the person’s rights or the patient’s rights, etc. What’s our rights and who do we talk to, you know?”

Research

- Referrals

- “I was told: *ah, yes we made a file note but you’re just a paramedic and we don’t act on it*”
- “children services don’t seem to want to hear from paramedics”
- “am I allowed to actually ring, you know, child services here? Is that within my scope?”
- “most paramedics out there do not know what the legal obligation is on an ambo”
- “I was under the impression that only police or, you know, nurses, doctors, are allowed to actually sort of do that, I didn’t realise that, you know, that, that if I had the actual capacity to do it”
- “you want to help the individual but you want to make sure that you’re completely right”

Research

- Future focus
 - “I’m a bit confused about domestic violence versus child abuse”
 - “The tools to be able to go that little step further and to question that little bit more”
 - “What do we look for in domestic violence and who do we call”

Themes

- Engagement & Identification
 - Training
 - Ethnicity
- Abductive reasoning & Heuristics
- Knowledge deficiency
- Role, Responsibilities & Limitations
 - Inculturation
 - Prejudices
- Reporting obstacles
 - Bias & rule of optimism
 - Service support

Discussion

- Child protection is an accepted part of the paramedic role
- Paramedics are rarely mentioned in the literature on child abuse and neglect
 - Let alone children exposed to domestic violence
- Paramedics and a role in prevention?

Do ambulance services need to rethink they way they do business?

- Paramedics and a role in prevention?
 - Multiagency risk cooperation
 - Health
 - Social
 - Legal
- Victim perceptions
- Perpetrator perceptions

The role of paramedic in relation to domestic violence and children exposed to domestic violence?

- “parallel work with women;
- building women’s accounts into evaluation;
- increasing the safety of women and children;
- *challenging and changing men’s attitudes to violence and reducing the risk of reoffending.”*

C Humphreys, et al, 'Domestic violence and child abuse: Developing sensitive policies and guidance' (2001) 10(3) Child Abuse Review 183, 194-195.

Thank you

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