

## Announcements, Information & Resources

### Exposure to Domestic Violence Harms Children's Health: Study

Being abused, exposed to domestic violence and having a mother who abuses substances are associated with a high number of health problems for low-income pre-school children. In fact, the mother's poor health and the child's level of trauma are the strongest predictors of poor child health. These are among the findings of a study entitled *Violence Exposure and Traumatic Stress Symptoms as Additional Predictors of Health Problems in High-Risk Children* published in the March 2005 issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Researchers looked at 160 pre-school age children from low-income Michigan families, and found that three in four (78 percent) had been exposed to some form of violence, either in the home or the community. Nearly half (46.7 percent) of the children in the study had been exposed to at least one incident of mild or severe violence in their family.

The children who were exposed to violence suffered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and were at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu. Children experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder had four times the risk of asthma and gastrointestinal problems than their peers.

The study is authored by Dr. Sandra A. Graham-Bermann, PhD and Julie Seng, PhD, CNM. They write: "Although stopping intrafamilial and community violence may be daunting projects beyond the scope of health care providers' direct

practice, clinical interventions to increase the mother's safety and improve her ability to protect her child are of the highest priority. Child traumatic stress symptoms are also treatable, and referring violence-exposed child patients to group or individual therapy specifically aimed at bolstering their power to cope and at reducing post-traumatic stress reactions may be effective in preventing some of the adult [consequences] of these adverse childhood events."

"Advocates are trying to get more money for prevention and intervention services for children exposed to violence in the *Violence Against Women Act* that Congress will consider this year," said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. "If lawmakers really care about improving children's health and prospects, they will allocate these funds."