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Media Relations

One In Four Children Exposed To Some Form Of Family Violence, According To New National Study From UNH

October 17, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. — More than 1 in 4 children have been exposed to physical violence between their parents at some time, 1 in 9 of them during the past year, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire Crimes against Children Research Center.

The research was reported in a new bulletin released by the U.S. Department of Justice. The bulletin was part of The National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence.

Although children get exposed to violence between parents in a variety of ways, such as hearing it, getting told about, or seeing the consequences, the vast majority of exposed children—90 percent—were direct eyewitnesses to at least one incident, according to the researchers.

“Not surprisingly, given this high rate of eyewitness exposure, children had strong reactions to the exposure. Almost half yelled at their parents to stop, more than 2 in 5 tried to get away from the fight, and nearly 1 in 4 called for help,” said UNH Crimes against Children Research Center research associate Sherry Hamby, lead author of the study and research associate professor at Sewanee, the University of the South.

Male parents and caregivers were identified as the perpetrator 69 percent of the time, female parent figures were identified 23 percent of the time, and both male and female perpetrators were identified by 9 percent of youth. Noncohabiting boyfriends of mothers, for example, were 11 percent of identified perpetrators.

“We want people to recognize that children’s exposure to violence in the family is not limited to fights between parents. They also see parents physically assault siblings and teens or adults physically assault other relatives,” Hamby said.

Taking these other forms of family violence into account, the study suggests there are approximately 18.8 million children who have been exposed to some form of family violence in their lifetime.

“We want to encourage people who have contact with children in a variety of settings—including teachers, pediatricians, nurses, child protection workers, and domestic violence advocates—to consider more comprehensive, collaborative assessments of the safety issues and needs of all family members,” Hamby said.

To facilitate more comprehensive assessments, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center is debuting a new website that provides free access to the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire and provides information on how to use it in a variety of settings. The link is http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/jvq/index_new.html.

The study was conducted in 2008 and involved interviews with caregivers and youth about the experiences of a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children ages 0-17. In addition to Hamby, the authors include David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes against Children Research Center and professor of sociology; Heather Turner, professor of sociology at UNH; and Richard Ormrod, research professor of geography at UNH.

The UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Visit the

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center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

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-30-

Editors and Reporters: The study, "Children's Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence and Other Family Violence," is available online.

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