

## Mentioning the Family in the Sustainable Development Goals

### 6. Domestic Violence

#### Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

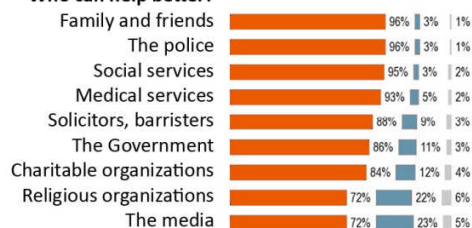
##### Level of proximity to cases of domestic violence

Role of institutions and groups to fight the problem

##### Known victims of domestic violence



##### Who can help better?



Yes No Don't know

SOURCE: Eurostat, 'Domestic Violence Against Women'.

In 2014, the United Nations recognized how domestic violence harms family well-being (Report of the UN Secretary General, 2014, A/70/61–E/2015/3) :

Evidence from multiple countries points to policies for greater gender equality and the prevention of violence being critical for ensuring family well-being. Domestic violence creates an adverse environment for all family members. Violence within the family puts children at risk of behavioural and emotional problems, including aggressive, antisocial, fearful and inhibited behaviours, low self-esteem, lowered social competence and withdrawal symptoms, often leading to underachievement in school.

According to the World Health Organization (2014), 30% of women worldwide have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner. Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. (World Health Organization, 2014).

**How Family Members are Affected by Domestic Violence?** We have learned from new studies in neuroscience how family violence affects children's development. Children's experiences during the first few

years of life shape the architecture of the brain. The developing brain can be compromised by exposure to toxic stress—unrelenting stress from repeated abuse, chronic neglect, severe maternal depression, parental substance abuse, etc.—that occurs with or without the added burden of poverty. Even among children as young as infants, toxic stress can damage the brain's response to stress making it difficult to correctly interpret the world, function at a high level, and avoid problems later in life. The wear and tear of toxic stress can contribute to a lifetime of impairments in physical and mental health, learning, and behavior (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005).

**How Can Domestic Violence Be Eliminated?** Respondents in the European Union identified a number of institutions that can fight domestic violence, two that are discussed here—families and government (Eurostat, Eurobarometer 73.2, 2010). The stress levels of children who are abused or neglected can be buffered and brought back to baseline by caring relationships with parents and the adults who care for them. Children who have been neglected have the capacity to recover with promising interventions that target both the child and their parents/caregivers. Programs that build supportive relationships for children produce biological changes in children's reaction to stress that can have lifetime consequences (Bogenschneider & Little, 2014).

Families also play another important role. Gender equality and gender stereotypes, like many other values and norms are learned in the family. For example, if the division of labor is more equitable at home, this demonstrates to the child the norm of equality (Goksan, 2015).

In the European Union, 86% of respondents saw a role for government for addressing domestic violence. Influencing a baby's brain early in life is easier than reviving it later and less expensive than the subsequent costs of remedial education, clinical treatment, public assistance, incarceration, and so forth.

Also, in many countries, the abuse or neglect of a child is viewed as a criminal justice violation rather than a family relationship crisis. When families are in crises, interventions that work best focus on the cause of the stress. For example, addressing family factors such as addiction, parental depression, medical challenges, and social isolation have a positive effect on child outcomes even though they do not specifically address children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012). When both children and their parents are engaged in interventions, programs have been shown to turn around the lives of children, both those who continue to live with their family or those placed in foster care.

For kids that must be placed out of their home, the most effective approach to helping maltreated and foster kids succeed is promoting the powerful socialization forces of functional family life. The cornerstone is the parent. When parents are trained to be responsive and to use effective behavior management skills, kids show an impressive ability to overcome toxic stress and to catch-up physically, intellectually, and socially. In rigorous studies of exemplary programs, strengthening the parenting skills of birth and foster parents reduced kids' behavior problems at school and home, and taught them to better self-regulate and to be more responsible family members and friends. When kids' behaviors are less problematic and more responsible, the stability of kids' lives improves, reducing the downward spiral that often occurs when foster youth are bounced from placement to placement. One family-centered approach with an independent cost-benefit analysis yielded a resounding return of \$17 for every \$1 invested (Bogenschneider, 2015).

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