



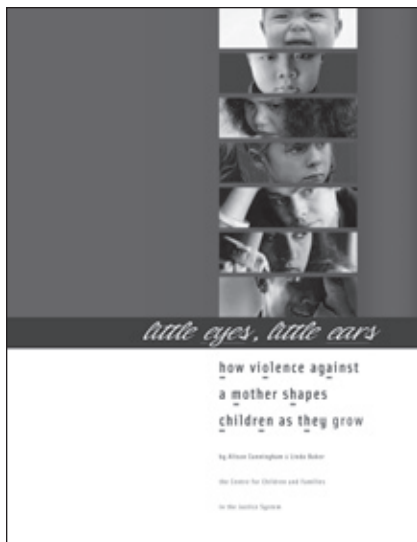
# Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as They Grow

By Sheila Early

One of the advantages of being an educator is that you are able to search out from a variety of sources materials that are extremely useful in clinical practice. Here is a short review of a document from the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System,

Public Health Agency of Canada (2007), written by Alison Cunningham and Linda Baker. The document highlights the consequences when a child is a witness to violence in the family. Copies can be obtained from the National Clearing House on Family Violence or retrieved as a PDF at the site below.

**Little Eyes Little Ears:  
How Violence Against a Mother  
Shapes Children as They Grow**  
[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/fem-2007-LELE\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/fem-2007-LELE_e.pdf)



women and 12 men were killed by current or former partners” (page 5)

- Unhealthy side effects of children witnessing violence against their mothers, such as “victims are to blame for violence” (page 7)
- Descriptions of what children may feel and think when they witness violence. One example given is that children may perceive that “if there is no blood or other signs of injury, Mommy is not hurt” (page 8)
- A very nice table describing what teenagers may think and feel when they witness violence, such as responsibility “I have to protect my younger siblings from this situation” (page 9)
- Discussion on myths and reality about woman abuse and children
- Effects of abuse on children from infants and toddlers to adolescents with its effect on normal development and what features of woman abuse are most distressing for each age group. The section on adolescents is most detailed on how home violence can be manifested in behaviours
- Description of the roles children may assume in the family such as “the perfect child”
- Disclosure and barriers to disclosure are discussed, as well as general reporting of child maltreatment guidelines
- A “how-to-help” section, which also includes references. One reference that is worth looking at is the Adverse Childhood Experiences study available at [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org)

- A very extensive list of resources and references, both Canadian and global.

The document also lists 10 ways a child can be changed by violence in the home (pages 10–11):

1. Children are denied a good father and positive male role model
2. Abuse can harm the mother/child bond
3. Children can develop negative core beliefs about themselves
4. Children can be isolated from helpful sources of support
5. Unhealthy family roles can develop in homes with domestic violence
6. Abuse destroys a child’s view of the world as a safe and predictable place
7. Abuse occurs with other stressors and adversities with negative effects
8. A child’s style of coping and survival may become problematic
9. Children may adopt some of the rationalizations for abuse
10. Children may believe victimization is inevitable or normal

Topics covered by the document include:

- Types of violence against women and children including spiritual abuse, which refers to ridiculing or punishing behaviours because of religious beliefs, not allowing practice of one’s chosen religion or forcing unwanted religious practices on an individual, as well as the more familiar physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- Facts and figures on family violence from the General Social Survey of Canada (2004) and police statistics on violence such as in 2005, of the “658 homicides known to police, 62

I liked this resource because it was clear, concise and had very concrete examples of all discussion points. I would encourage all emergency nurses and those working in forensic nursing fields to read the complete document, develop a short in-service for your units from it, and take one more step towards recognizing that violence is a global issue that often starts in the home. We all need to play a part in violence prevention, both in our professional and personal lives.