

# Impacts of Children Exposed to Domestic Dispute in Mainland China

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**Abstract:** This paper use bio-psych-social approach to explain the impacts children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China. It also use the case to help people better understand this social issue.

**Keywords:** Domestic dispute; Children; Bio-psych-social approach

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## 1. Introduction

Domestic dispute is a global social issue. In the North America and Europe, as well as Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, 11%-71% of women have reported prior physical domestic dispute (Johnson, M. P. , 2008)<sup>[13]</sup>, and sexual and psychological forms often occur (Kishor & Johnson, 2004)<sup>[15]</sup>. The focus on children is important because, relative to general population, families with documented incidents of domestic dispute have a significantly higher number of children in the home (Fantuzzo et al. , 1997)<sup>[11]</sup>. Parents play a very important role in the process of children's development, parents do very small things in their daily life can have a decisive impact on the growth of children. Children also will learn the correct or wrong model of their parents in daily life. Many researches find that children who exposed to domestic dispute will increase the negative implications for children's emotional, mental and future relationship (Erin D. Kenny, 2002)<sup>[9]</sup>(Brandon & Lewis, 1996)<sup>[6]</sup>. It is important to inform the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute to people and improve people's awareness.

This paper mainly talks about impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China. Domestic dispute is not a high degree concerned problem and there are few studies of impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China. It is a good way to tell people more about domestic dispute. Besides, this paper will use bio-psycho-social approach to explain the social issue with a case. Domestic dispute is one of the parts of social work practice and children are also one of the main service objects. The impacts of domestic dispute on children are multifaceted and diverse. Social workers also should know more about the basic impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute.

## 2. The Scope of Problem

To better understand the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China, it is necessary for us to know some definitions and information. Domestic dispute refers to "assaultive and coercive behaviors that adults use against their intimate partners" (Edwards et al. , 2003)<sup>[10]</sup>. Exposure refers to children's awareness of adult's physical aggression toward each other. Children can be aware of parents' physical aggression by seeing or hearing violent interactions, but also by hearing stories about the dispute and by seeing evidence of the abuse (Erin D. Kenny, 2002)<sup>[9]</sup>.

Although there are few statistics of domestic dispute in Mainland China, according to the statistics of the Supreme People's Court of Mainland China in 2014, there are about 24. 7% families have different levels of domestic dispute; nearly 10% of intentional homicide cases involving domestic dispute; about 100 thousand families each year disintegrate because of domestic dispute. The potential risk of children lived in the context of domestic dispute will continue to increase, if the society does not face up to the social issue. Because children are not only influenced by the family, but also feel the pressure and the sight from the people around them and the environment. All these factors will influence the behavioral and psychological problems of children. These potential problems will impact the children in the long term. But children have their opportunities to live

in a safe and secure home environment. Children also need a warm family and appropriate parenting style to help them grow. Children should know domestic dispute is wrong and use dispute is not a good way to solve the problems. Not only the social workers but also people in the society should know the terrible impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute. Social workers should know more professional knowledge of domestic dispute. How to analysis the impacts of children exposure to domestic dispute is important for social workers to carry on the counseling and interventions.

### **3. Theories and Analysis**

This paper will use the bio-psycho-social approach to illustrate the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China with a case. And the bio-psycho-social approach analyzes human behavior in three aspects, including person's biological, psychological and social functioning. This approach focuses on the individual and limits to the immediate social environment (Rogers, 2013)<sup>[20]</sup>.

#### **3.1 The Purpose of Using the Bio-psycho-social Approach**

Why this paper uses the bio-psycho-social approach to analysis the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute? Because the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute are mainly concentrated in biological, psychological and social levels. These three levels is easily for social workers to find out and understand what the observed and potential problems of clients. Besides, the social level focuses on children's relationships with family, engagement with school, workplace and social activities. To a certain extent, it helps the social workers to better focus on the relationship, which is closely linked to the clients. These information will help social workers to get more detail on clients' situation.

#### **3.2 Case and Analysis**

A family of three people lives in a traditional community. In this family, parents are workers and they have an eight years old child. Parents' wages can only just maintain the family's daily living expenses. But the father is an alcoholic, he spends most of wages on alcohol that lead to the family lack of expenses. So the mother and father often quarrel, when the mother is not willing to give money to the father, the father will scold or strike the mother and then take the money away. In this process, their eight years old child often sees these scenes or hears these voices. Gradually, the child will become extreme in the behavior and he also uses dispute to communicate with people in the school. Besides, the child often sees other parents pick their children up when they go to school, the child feels like he is abandoned. So his self-esteem also decreased and he doesn't want to go to school. Moreover, this family live in the traditional community and many neighbors know the situation of the family. Other families look down on the family, because they feel that the father is not quality, they do not want to have more contact with this family. Other families' parents often tell their children do not play with their children, because they are worried that the child will hit their children. Such a line of sight make children suffered a lot of pressure, he becomes more and more reluctant to communicate with others.

In this case, the child is exposed to the domestic dispute directly and indirectly. Using the bio-psycho-social approach to interpret the impact of children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China. In terms of biological and psychological levels, the child's behavior and psychology are affected by the impact of domestic dispute. In the social level, the family, school and community limit the growth of the child in different degrees. What are the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute? The following paper will explain the impacts of children exposed on domestic dispute in detail.

##### **3.2.1 Biological Level**

In the biological level, Kernic et al. (2003)<sup>[16]</sup> finds that children exposed to domestic dispute have significantly more behavioral problems, including externalized and internalized behaviors. Externalized behaviors mean children show more aggressive and antisocial, internalized behaviors mean children exhibit more fearful and inhibited behaviors. On the basis of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1963)<sup>[3]</sup>, some research findings show that children who have been exposed to domestic dispute are more likely to be abusive as adults (Wallace, 2002)<sup>[21]</sup>. Because children live in the environment of domestic dispute, children will learn what they see the parents' behavior in the family. Children are also more likely to engage in bullying at school (Baldry, 2003)<sup>[2]</sup> and respond to conflict by using aggression (Adanson & Thompson, 1998)<sup>[1]</sup>. More importantly, these cumulative behavior problems may be carried into adulthood and can contribute to the cycle of adversity and dispute (Cunningham & Baker, 2004)<sup>[7]</sup>. Children who grow up with dispute in the home learn early and powerful lessons about the use of dispute in interpersonal relationships to dominate others, and might even be encouraged in doing so (Baldry, 2003)<sup>[2]</sup>. To use the child in the above case, the child not only will learn the behaviors from parents, but also will try to use more aggressive behaviors or dispute to solve problems in daily life. We can know that the degree of impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute in the

biological level is serious and domestic dispute has a great influence on children's behavior. And these behaviors also will bring to adulthood, it will make other children exposed to domestic dispute when the children become parents in the future.

### 3.2.2 Psychological Level

The psychological level pays more attention to children's mental health, cognitive and emotional development. There is a wrong idea that many people think domestic dispute doesn't affect infants and young children, because infants and young children can't remember many things when they are young. Nevertheless, negative consequences have often been found where infant-parent attachments have been classified as insecure. According to the theory, a child's sense of security depends on security of attachment to its earliest caregivers and the quality of this relationship serves as a model of how to relate to people later in life and get what you need from them (NSW Parenting center, 2002)<sup>[23]</sup>. Furthermore, domestic dispute also makes the children feel the absence of the parents. For women, continuing abuse affects their relationship with their children and can impact negatively on the parenting capacity (Mullender et al. , 2002)<sup>[21]</sup>. The children exposed on domestic dispute will feel more insecure and upset, because they can't get the care of their parents. And these psychological problems will affect the children in the long term.

A large number of studies find that children exposed to domestic dispute raise a level of depression, anger, lower self-esteem and anxiety. Family environment plays a key role in children's development process. The children may not develop a sense of trust or security in the family environment of domestic dispute. However, compared with general population, families with domestic dispute are likely to experience high level of stress, containing lower income, more frequent moves, exhibiting higher rates of divorce and single parenting (Fantuzzo et al. , 1997)<sup>[11]</sup>. In these situations, parenting stress has a great effect on children's emotional problems. And children are associated with greater immaturity and inadequacy (Jouriles et al. , 1989)<sup>[14]</sup>. Besides, attitudes of children towards dispute are also impacted. Jaffe, Wilson and Wolfe (1986)<sup>[12]</sup> suggest that children exposed to domestic dispute more accessible to use dispute to solve problems. It means that children towards to approve of dispute. Using the child from the above case, the child will show more low self-esteem and low self-confidence due to the domestic dispute and the absence of parents' caregiving. As we know, the psychological effects of children exposed to domestic dispute will be affected to varying degrees of damage and accompanied by children for a long period of time. These psychological problems are difficult to recover and treat.

### 3.2.3 Social Level

The social level will lay more emphasis on children's relationships with family, engagement with school, workplace and social activities(Rogers, 2013)<sup>[20]</sup>. The empirical evidence clearly states that the quality of parenting and ability of both parents to meet their child's needs are compromised in domestic dispute households (Buchbinder, 2004)<sup>[5]</sup>. The research finds that fathers in the domestically violent family are less accessible to involved with their children and more likely to control and angry with children (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002)<sup>[4]</sup>. Mothers also rarely take care of and educate their children in daily life. Poor parenting capability makes children with low self-esteem and a poor identity in the environment of domestic dispute, parents not only lack of communication and education with the children, but also make the children feel the absence of parents. In fact, children in the process of growth require parents to lead them to learn more knowledge and skills.

For school age children, some researches discover that children exposed to domestic dispute are difficult to form healthy intimate relationships with peers due to the models they experience in their family (Levedosky et al. , 2002)<sup>[17]</sup>. Moreover, they also have difficulties to adhere the rules in school. Children exposed to domestic dispute lack help from parents and receive the poor model in the family, they also have a certain degree of influence on their school life.

It is worth mentioning that Mainland China is a traditional society, people will think a domestically violent family is bad and the people from this family also not good. In addition, people in the community will use a different line of sight to talk about these things. These discrimination and oppression are a great pressure for children. In order to avoid these conditions, the child will gradually away from the community and thus lead to more behavior and psychological problems.

It is found that children exposed to domestic dispute show low social adjustment and low social competence (Fantuzzo et al. , 1997)<sup>[11]</sup>. Low social adjustment and low social competence reduce the social ability of children. In the Mainland China, the competition between people is very fierce and the companies also only select the competent people to the company. So it is difficult for children to adapt well to the society.

## 4. Interventions

Cases of domestic dispute are common in social work practice. Interventions are one of the most critical steps for so-

cial workers to help the children exposed to domestic dispute to improve their situations. This paper lays more emphasis on children and the bio-psycho-social approach focuses more on the individual, how social workers should be counseling children exposed to domestic dispute? On the basis of the bio-psycho-social approach, the social workers can find many presenting problems. But the social workers should pay more attention on individual not the presenting problem. The social workers can use the client-centered therapy in this situation. The social workers should help the child to enhance his self-concept and become a fully functioning person. In addition, the social workers also should help the child increase his openness to experience, promote his willingness to grow and build trust with each other. Used the above example, the social worker are suppose to help the child to improve his self-esteem, teach him build trust with friends in school and encourage him to experience more in the school. When social workers are counseling with the child, the social workers should use more congruence, unconditional positive regards and accurate empathic in the meeting. However, social workers also should intervene the whole family, because surrounding environment has a significant impact on clients and social workers should focus on the person in the environment.

## 5. Evaluation

The bio-psycho-social approach use the biological, psychological and social levels to elaborate the impacts of children exposed on domestic dispute. These three levels are not separate but connected with each other. Social workers also should put these three levels together to analysis the clients' situation. Children exposed to domestic dispute show more behavioral problems and emotional problems, such as aggressive behavior, more depression and anger. These problems will make the children not good at dealing with interpersonal relationships in other surrounding environments. Gradually, the children will show more low social adjustment and low social competence than other children.

Although the bio-psycho-social approach focuses on children's present problems and surrounding environment. This approach is too problem oriented and it ignores children's strengths (Rogers, 2013)<sup>[20]</sup>. If you only focus on the shortcomings of the children, it will be increase their psychological pressure. This will not help the problems caused by domestic dispute. It is essential for children to build up their confidence and self-esteem from other aspects, and then gradually solve the problems caused by domestic dispute.

Additionally, this approach is too narrow, it misses a broader social level, such as, economic, political and cultural influences in Mainland China (Rogers, 2013)<sup>[20]</sup>. These large social forces also can affect the society's views on the issue of domestic dispute, so that people can give the victims, especially children, more inclusive. Many families suffered from domestic dispute have different degrees of economic problems. According to their situation, they can apply for social assistance to the political and legal aid to alleviate their lives. The government not only can use social welfare and other channels to give them help, but also can protect the victims of domestic dispute through the law. Reality, Chinese mainland government issued China's anti domestic dispute law in December 27, 2015, and determined to begin implementing it in March 1, 2016. In the law, in order to effectively prevent domestic dispute, the public power will be timely intervention, and government establishes a personal safety protection order. Moreover, the law clearly stipulates that schools, kindergartens and other work agencies in the discovery of suffered or suspected victims of domestic dispute. There is the obligation to report to the public security organs. Government and society are also the important forces to protect and help children exposed to domestic dispute.

## 6. Summary

This paper use bio-psych-social approach to explain the impacts children exposed to domestic dispute in Mainland China. It also use the case to help people better understand this social issue. Children exposed to domestic dispute have significantly more behavioral problems, including externalized and internalized behaviors. Besides, children exposed to domestic dispute also raise a level of depression, anger, lower self-esteem and anxiety. Moreover, family, school, community and society have great influences on children. The stress from China's society and lacking of parents' help make children difficult to adapt social life. When the social workers attempt to help children to change these situations, the social workers should focus on the individual not the presenting problems. The social workers also should focus more on the strengths of children and make the children realize they have a lot of advantages on their own. The bio-psych-social approach is not the best way to explain the impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute. This approach is too problem-oriented and it overlooks the broader social level. The large social forces in Mainland China also can help children from different ways. The impacts of children exposed to domestic dispute are multiplied and there are serious impediments to the growth of the children. To help children exposed to domestic dispute requires all aspects of the effort in the society.

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