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**Title : Survivors of Intra-Parental Violence: A Retrospective Study of Psychosocial Consequences and Coping Behaviour**

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### (Abstract)

Intimate Partner Conflict is an issue that has caught the attention of many researchers, yet one of the domains that have been limitedly explored in the Indian context is the effect it has on child witnesses. The notion of 'family secrecy', which is accorded a significant value in the Indian cultural context, has not allowed for this issue to come out into the public domain. Notwithstanding the secrecy which shrouds the issue, there is sufficient international evidence to suggest that witnessing intra-parental conflict can leave an indelible impact on children. The consequences are not only to be seen in childhood but also through adulthood. The limited attention in terms of research, policy and intervention, the evidence from other countries which suggests the indelible impact that witnessing intra-parental violence can have on children. Keeping the above in view; the research pursued to understand the psychosocial consequences of exposure on children; the coping strategies adopted by the survivors; services utilized by families to address the issue; and understand the nature of services that should be organized for enabling the children to deal with the consequences of intra-parental violence.

Given the extremely sensitive nature of issue which could result in emotional outbursts as well as the need to explore the issue from varied perspectives in an in-depth manner, the researcher opted for the qualitative approach. In the present study since the aim was to explore the lived experiences of the respondents (adult survivors) who have witnessed intra-parental conflict, phenomenological approach was adopted. 50 adult survivors residing in Delhi/NCR and 14 professionals providing psycho-social support to children and families was sample of the present study.

The research findings indicate that children as young as two-three years of age may sense the violence between parents. The nature of violence that children have been exposed to includes physical violence, verbal violence, emotional and sexual violence.

The immediate feelings of the children on witnessing parental violence were those of guilt, helplessness, disgust, confusion, shame and powerlessness. The domains for perceived consequences majorly explored during childhood were-physical health; mental health; academics/education; and relationships (with parents, grandparents and peers). The adult life consequences of witnessing intra-parental violence during childhood were explored in terms of the perceived effect on physical health; mental and emotional health; career choices; marriage; and relationships (with spouse, offspring, mother and father).

Another dimension of the research was to explore the coping strategies adopted by the children in response to the adverse familial situation that they were experiencing. The findings of the research indicated that the strategies adopted by the survivors during their childhood included diversion; avoidance or escapism; venting; denial; providing an expression to the thought; suppression; isolating self; fantasizing; reaction formation; living in the reality; preparing oneself to deal with the impending challenges; seeking motivation from adversity; spirituality and information seeking.

Amidst the conflicts, the presence of factors that had played the role of a buffer to protect the child witness from the ill effects of the exposure were referred to as the mitigating factors. In the present study, some of the mitigating factors that buffered the consequences of exposure to parental violence were parental care, support from relatives, sibling support, peer support, having an opportunity to share as well as the duration and nature of parental conflict.

Help seeking practices with respect to child witnesses of intra-parental violence were also explored. The data provided by adult survivors and the professionals indicated that seldom do children exposed to intra-parental violence get professional support.

It is concluded that children's exposure to intra-parental violence may have serious consequences on various domains of their lives which may prolong into adulthood. However this often goes unnoticed and unattended not only by the parents but also by the professionals. There is need to introduce interventions at different levels and bring about policy level amendments.