

# *A New Scale for Assessing Child Exposure to Domestic Violence*

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Child exposure to domestic violence is increasingly recognized by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as a risk to healthy development. Several studies reveal the extent of child exposure to domestic violence. For example, Thomson, Saltzman, and Johnson (2003) found in an analysis of two national surveys that 33.2% of battered women in Canada and 40.2% of battered women in the United States reported that their children had been exposed to the violence against them (the women).

The impact of exposure to adult domestic violence has been well documented in

many studies (see Edleson, 2006; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Jouriles, Northwood, McDonald, Vincent, & Mahoney, 1996; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Margolin & Gordis, 2004). The frequency of adult domestic violence in homes correlates highly with children's behavioral problems, including externalizing behavior such as aggression and disobedience, and internalizing behavior such as depression, sadness, and lack of self-confidence (Jouriles, Northwood, McDonald, Vincent, & Mahoney, 1996).

Previous studies have sought reports of child exposure from adult caregivers, not from children themselves. Yet, reports from parents are often different from those of their children (Johnson et al., 2002; O'Brien, John, Margolin, & Erel, 1994; Sternberg, Lamb, Guterman, & Abbott, 2006). This situation points to a need for measures that gather

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child self-reports of exposure to violence. Unfortunately, few child self-report tools have been developed (see Finkelhor, Ormond, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

To fill this gap, we developed a new way to measure child exposure

to domestic violence entitled the Child Exposure to Domestic Violence (CEDV) Scale. This article briefly describes the systematic development and psychometric properties of this 42-item child self-administered scale. (A full description is available in Edleson, Shin, & Armendariz, 2007.)

### Developing the CEDV Scale

This measure was assembled using a number of strategies. First, the research team gathered question items from many surveys and interview guides based on key content areas identified in an earlier review (see Edleson, Shin, & Armendariz, 2007). Next, a panel of nine international expert judges who work with children exposed to domestic violence was invited to review each item online. This development process established both content and face validity of the scale. A revised CEDV Scale based on these steps was then pilot-tested with 10 children. Further changes were made based on this testing. The results are 33 questions divided into the following six sub-scales:

- Level of violence;
- Exposure to violence at home;
- Exposure to violence in the community;
- Involvement with violence;
- Risk factors; and
- Other victimization.

A final section of the CEDV Scale consists of nine additional questions focused on demographic information.

Children were asked to take the CEDV Scale twice, 1 week apart, to establish test-retest reliability of the measure. In addition, children were asked to complete the Things I've Seen and Heard (TISH) Scale (Richters & Martinez, 1990) once, at the time of the first CEDV Scale. The TISH was administered to help establish convergent validity of the CEDV Scale.

Reliability was assessed by measures of internal consistency and a test-retest analysis. More specifically, Cronbach's alpha statistics were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the CEDV Scale. To establish test-retest reliability, children were tested twice at a one-week interval, and then Pearson's correlations and paired t-tests were conducted to establish reliability. The statistical results are available in Edleson, Shin, and Armendariz (2007).

### Making Use of the CEDV Scale

A number of online resources to support the use of the CEDV Scale are freely available at <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/cedv/>.

This website offers a printable version of the CEDV Scale, a lengthy User Manual, and access to several papers by the research team, including a full report on the testing of the CEDV Scale.

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Many professionals who work with children exposed to domestic violence have sought a measure like this for use in assessment. We foresee the CEDV Scale being used to assess exposed children who receive a wide array of services. For example, advocates who work with children in domestic violence programs may use this tool to directly obtain children's reports of exposure to and involvement in violent incidents in their homes. We also see child welfare agencies, especially child protection services, using the CEDV Scale to more deeply assess children on their caseloads. We hope that assessments performed with the help of the scale will also trigger the use of in-house and community-based services for these children and their families (see National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1999). Professionals who work

in child advocacy centers and family justice centers may also use this tool for assessing children with whom they come into contact. Other child protective services professionals, staff, school counselors, and even medical personnel may find this tool useful in assessing children.

The CEDV Scale might also be adapted for use in evaluating changes in children's social environments over time (e.g., determining whether efforts to intervene with violent men in their homes lead to a decrease in children's exposure to violence). To use the CEDV Scale in this way would require adapting the tool by setting a time period in which children would respond.

### Conclusion

The CEDV Scale is only a beginning for better assessing children's exposure to domestic violence. Children in our study had been exposed to relatively serious levels of violence, and many were recently or currently residing in crisis shelters.

The CEDV Scale measures varying degrees and levels of child exposure to domestic violence. This scale should be useful for identifying both low and severe levels of violence, but it requires further testing with community-based samples. Similar measures will likely be produced and the CEDV Scale will likely go through additional revisions. For now, the CEDV Scale offers a reliable and valid response to a large gap in the available measures for assessing children exposed to domestic violence.

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