

A Psychosocial Intervention with Children Affected by Domestic Violence
compiled by V. Arendse, Z. Joseph, H. Wichman

The problem of domestic violence is a pervasive one impacting on all levels of society. The Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture was contracted by the Department of Social Development to provide an intervention which would address the impact of domestic violence on children.

The site for the intervention was the Saartjie Baartman Shelter for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. The Shelter offers various psychosocial activities aimed at the mothers to assist them in dealing with the abuse they experienced but no work is conducted with the children of these women. Interventions conducted are rarely aimed at the parenting of the children. Research indicates that the experience of domestic violence impacts negatively on the children as well as on parenting practices. Two interventions were conducted simultaneously. One focussed on the parenting skills of the mothers the other on building the resilience of the children. Parenting workshops were conducted with the mothers. Group and individual sessions were conducted with the children. The focus of this paper is on the group sessions conducted with the children. A closed group was conducted over a period of twelve weeks with the children. Various themes were covered over the twelve weeks. The results were monitored qualitatively and checks were built into the weekly program to ascertain whether the children were using the skills they acquired. The need for individual counselling was assessed by the facilitators during the twelve weeks. The individual sessions were intended for the children who were struggling significantly. The intervention assisted the children in learning different ways of dealing with conflict situations and feelings of anger. By gaining these skills it is hoped that the children can challenge and eventually break the cycle of violence within which they find themselves as a result of domestic violence.