



NEWS RELEASE

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STUDY SHEDS LIGHT ON CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SAN FRANCISCO

SAN FRANCISCO – A local researcher from ETR Associates, a national health promotion and research organization, has found that children's exposure to domestic violence in San Francisco is more common than previously thought. In cooperation with the SafeStart Initiative, Dr. John Shields has also found that only a small fraction of domestic violence situations result in interventions by law enforcement and criminal justice systems.

"Children are often present during these violent incidents," Shields said, "which can result in serious psychological and developmental consequences." He asserts a broader community response is needed if children are to be protected. "We must acknowledge that children's exposure to domestic violence in San Francisco is a common and damaging phenomenon," he said, "and that existing law enforcement and criminal justice systems are not sufficient responses to the problem."

Dr. Shields' new study, "*I Tried To Stop Them*": *Children's Exposure To Domestic Violence In San Francisco*, estimates that between 11,000 and 16,500 children living in San Francisco are exposed to domestic violence each year. The study is based on the review of over 3,000 felony investigation files and the analysis of several years of administrative data from the San Francisco Police Department's Domestic Violence Response and Crime Analysis units. "The data show that emergency calls to police about domestic violence incidents occur all over San Francisco, but are most frequent in the Ingleside, Bayview, and Mission police districts," Shields said. "These areas," he continued, "are also where the police document some of the highest rates of children's exposure."

Looking at trends, Dr. Shields concludes that (1) the number of domestic violence calls to police, (2) the rate of arrests of alleged batterers, and (3) the proportion of incidents that involve weapons are all increasing. Concurrently, the number of formal police investigations into felony domestic violence incidents and the rate of prosecution by the District Attorney's Office are declining.

The study shows that the police fully investigate approximately 32% of the 400 to 450 felony cases they receive monthly, and that the District Attorney's Office files charges on about 44% of those investigated cases each month. "Given these indicators," Shields said, "it appears that about 14 out of every 100 felony incidents of domestic violence known to police lead to the filing of criminal charges in San Francisco. That's not a good result for a system designed to keep families safe and hold batterers accountable for their criminal behavior."

Report information:

Shields, J. P. (2006). *I tried to stop them: Children's exposure to domestic violence in San Francisco*. ETR Associates (Education, Training, & Research). San Francisco, CA.

For a free copy of the report, please email johns@etr.org.



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About ETR Associates:

ETR Associates is an internationally recognized nonprofit organization providing comprehensive services for the development, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of critical public health initiatives.

About San Francisco SafeStart:

The San Francisco SafeStart Initiative is funded through a cooperative agreement between the United States Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF). The current study was funded by OJJDP through the Association for the Study and Development of Community (ASDC).

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