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### Research Essay

Contrary to popular belief that abuse cannot stem from those closest to us, the underlying evidence represents that abuse, not limited to physical but also verbal, can arise from one's bloodline. This pattern can correlate to many academic fields such as psychology, sociology, and genetics. Psychology explains the reasons why people think and feel the way they do on an emotional level. Sociology is the study of human interaction that describes the ways people interact with one another. Both fields are of significance if trying to understand said patterns of abuse. It is also important to understand that everyone's minds think and react differently. One's genetics can elucidate certain behavioral and emotional patterns from DNA that are responsible for these mental bodily functions. While the prevailing view has described violence as a danger to being cautious from strangers, a close examination reveals both physical and mental abuse commonly stems from people's direct relatives.

When it comes to the discussion of parents arguing in a traditional family dynamic (two parents and a child or children), it is often forgotten that children are frequently present to witness plenty of these arguments. In *Family Violence From a Communication Perspective* by Dudley D. Cahn and Sally A. Lloyd highlight this overlooked truth. They note, "As this incident suggests, children who observe physical aggression between their parents often are the forgotten or unidentified victims of chaotic and violent family systems" (Cahn and Lloyd). Their

observation brings attention to the idea that children are not only affected when parents' direct aggression at them, but also when they are there to witness this aggression between adults in their home. Exposure to this can make an unstable, tension filled environment; conditions where children must navigate on their own before they are prepared to do so. In reality, this is an extremely common affair for many families to encounter. Even when it is rarely discussed openly. A home is meant to be a safe space, and parents or guardians are meant to be someone children can look up to and also consider a safe space. Children without a doubt take this into their adult life and it affects daily life and decisions they make.

Continuing in regards with the mistreatment of minors, an eBook titled, *Preventing Child Abuse*, claims, "With four million reports and more that 675,000 substantiated victims of child maltreatment annually..." (Merrick et al.) This staggering number depicts not only how widespread cases of mistreatment of not all victims, but more specifically the statistic for child victims of domestic violence transpires. By including such a precise and devastating number, Merrick et al. are able to emphasize each affected individual behind this statistic, whose life has been shaped by harmful behavior from caregivers. More danger can come from close relationships for many reasons. For example, becoming close with someone means learning the ins and outs of their responses to certain encounters, emotional triggers, vulnerabilities, and coping mechanisms. This gives significant power to the abuser as they are able to gain emotional control over the victim, thus creating a cycle of control that can shape the child's psychological development.

Many people develop assumptions of the fact that psychological disorders such as anxiety, PTSD, and other long term emotional difficulties caused by abuse stem from one defining event. However, the book *Out of the Darkness* by Glenda Kaufman Kantor and Jana L.

Jasinski contradicts this idea by stating, “Similar to research on stress, different perspectives on defining trauma have developed including a particular event to which a child has been exposed, the child’s appraisal of an event, the child’s reaction to an event, symptoms of psychopathology, or a combination of the aforementioned perspectives” (Kaufman Kantor and Jasinski ). Their main point is that there are a number of causes that can lead to those symptoms rather than just one specific incident; trauma is not a one-dimensional experience. Rather, it is shaped by many overlapping factors that can influence how severely a child is affected. Which is important as it can help when trying to recover victims from these traumatic experiences and lead to more support systems that will rebuild a victim's sense of safety and emotional stability.

Conventional wisdom has it that people form their own relationships with people they love; however, this is not exactly the case. As much as people will deny it, *the article, Intergenerational Cycle of Abuse* acknowledges the underlying fact that, “When there is violence in a home, abusive behavior becomes the standard for relationships” (Woody). Woody is insisting that generational patterns are passed onto future relationships, and the victims are so brainwashed to think the mistreatment they experience is normal; they habitually remain in a dysfunctional relationship. This connects back to the discussion of children witnessing their parents arguing brought up by Dudley and Lloyd. The majority of these cases go on without being recognized. Some people will find these things out by going to therapy, talking about their upbringing, or just looking back on their childhood. However, despite efforts to try and resolve it, they will ignore signs of abuse later on.

From an early period of life, women are taught by peers, the importance of staying away from strangers because you never know what they are capable of. While evidence has proven this to be true, Thalia Ruiz Ramirez brings attention to the proposition that women should always be

on high alert of their surroundings even with those close to us. Her article “Stranger Danger: A Myth That Masks the True Threat to Women.” states, “The myth of “stranger danger” is not only misleading but harmful—it encourages women to lower their guard around familiar faces while heightening their anxiety toward unknown individuals” (Ruiz). In just a few words, this quote unpacks a number of proposals. Ruiz is able to redirect the thought process from thinking that being in a “scary” setting is not the only cause of harm. It can also come from friends, family, girlfriends, boyfriends, husbands, wives, etc. This teaches readers that there are more dangers than the typical threats told by society.

Ultimately, realizing people shouldn’t live in fear, but should always be aware of consequences and possible outcomes that come with living in today’s society allows for larger conversations to be developed about safety. Cases of mental illnesses including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, dissociative identity disorder, etc. are becoming more frequently diagnosed. This contributes to the broader implication of unveiling silence among victims. Victims of abuse from someone with close relations commonly stay quiet about what they had to go through because they feel cornered by fears of shame, ruining family dynamics, pressure, and more. This leads to the question, where can the line be drawn that differentiates abuse from an argument or dispute between members of a family, and how can it be prevented at the root before branching out to the real issue?

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