

These children have a low opinion of women: for girls, this extends to a low self-image coupled with the belief that a 'good' wife is one that accepts everything; for boys, it is a view of women as weak, dependent and subordinate. Their perception of the male's position in the family and his role in society is one characterized by the stereo-typical image of the powerful, all-commanding decision-making figure with all the pressures of the world giving him the right to rule the home even if he has to resort to violence to achieve this end. Often this is reinforced by the myth that since he is the only aware and worldly-wise member of the family, he is by default entitled to command — all his actions, no matter how abusive, being motivated by his exclusive knowledge of what is best for all members of the family.

So for girls, this could lead to their accepting and condoning violence in their future relationships, and for boys this capacity for violence is affirmed and supported as a definition of their role. The result is maladjusted adults bruised for life. The boy,

condemned to a life of inadequacy, tries to live up to this impossible role of the ideal, all knowing man, often resorting to violence to resolve situations he cannot control, never having learned healthier ways to deal with problems or to communicate.

For the girl, she could either grow up accepting abuse or develop a low opinion of men, viewing them as all-controlling, her fear of reliving her mother's suffering disallowing her to develop healthy relationships with men.

Adolescent boys soon recognize that there maybe some hope in spending more

time out of the home, an outlet our society denies the girls who grow up feeling trapped and confined, with no relief from the tension of the home. Often the children will go to the extent of running away from home or accepting the first proposal of marriage — anything to escape.

Some adolescents act out their anger in more dramatic ways such as delinquent behaviour patterns, involvement in drugs or other dependencies and looking to negative role models who reaffirm their frustrations and unruly attitudes.

Others may feel they cannot leave home because

they have to protect their mother and devise ways to calm the father's angry outbursts. Taking on this responsibility becomes a heavy burden for the teenager or young adult. The mother can become dependent on the child or children using the children as substitutes for the husband, inverting the parental role by drawing on the child to meet their own adult emotional needs, and as a result disrupting their normal development. The burdensome loyalty to the mother is difficult to disengage from and the children are consumed by guilt feelings — unable to live a normal healthy independent

life, seeing themselves as added abusers, abandoning their victimized mother.

Children of abusive fathers are usually characterized by feelings of depression, guilt, inadequacy, isolation, loneliness, fear and powerlessness. Manifestations of these emotions vary, depending on the temperament of the individual. Even as adults, they usually have a limited tolerance level for frustration, combined with either low impulse control or over-control. They either internalize or inappropriately externalize their anger. Other common denominators are authoritarian attitudes and

inadequate coping skills.

They are more likely to have abusive relationships tending to be more vulnerable because of the dysfunctional patterns they have grown up with that have undermined their self-image and their perception of family dynamics. They have a very shaky definition of themselves in the parenting role and often go on to be abused wives, abusive spouses and or abusive parents.

In their adolescent stage there is a high risk of them acting out by fighting, lying, cheating, etc., or even turning to criminal activities such as stealing drugs and getting

Children and domestic disturbance

Adolescence — more so for boys than for girls in our society, is the time when children first develop intimate relationships outside the family and can practise the sex roles and communication patterns learned at home. The consequences of growing up exposed to the father's aggressive domination and control leads to significant developmental and adjustment problems that can have a far-reaching effect on the self-image of the children even in their adult years, opines **Bazgha Iqbal**.

involved in gangs or street
clashes — it can become their
life pattern. There is a mixture
of hopelessness and
depression and a feeling that
there is no way out leading to
an acceptance of the existing
status quo. This is reinforced
by the society's attitude to
defend the existing power
dynamics in family and society
structure and their own low
self-image, which does not
allow them to believe they can
affect a change.

When we look at the
deterioration of the fabric of
our society and the daily
accounts of violent clashes in
our papers, maybe we need to
look into 80 per cent of the
homes in our country to
resolve the issue of wife
battering with its resultant
child abuse, if we are ever to
develop into a humane and just
society.

The time has come for us to
stop viewing domestic violence
as a 'private' matter and
accept that dysfunctional
homes result in a dysfunctional
society and only by dealing
with the issue in the public
sphere can we bring about any
meaningful long term change
— if not for our own sake, at
least for our children's.