

Strong family bonds reduce anxiety in young people with lived experience of domestic violence

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Strong relationships with other family members can help raise self-esteem and reduce anxiety for some young people who grow up in homes affected by parental domestic violence.

This is the finding of a study by Doctoral student Catherine Naughton and colleagues from the University of Limerick that will be presented today, Friday 10 July 2015, at the British Psychological Society's Psychology of Women Section's annual conference being held in Windsor.

Catherine Naughton said: "Research has previously shown that strong social bonds can act as a beneficial psychological resource, especially in times of need. In this study we investigated whether family bonds could help the self-esteem and anxiety of [young people](#) who had been exposed to [domestic violence](#) between their parents or caregivers whilst growing up."

Some 465 young people aged between 17 and 25 years (70 per cent female) completed an online survey which asked about their experiences of parental/caregivers' domestic violence, family bonds and psychological wellbeing.

Analysis showed that exposure to parental/caregivers' domestic violence was associated with reduced self-esteem, increased anxiety and weaker

family bonds in young adults when compared to those who grew up in non-affected homes.

However, the presence of [strong family](#) bonds did have a buffering effect in that, despite growing up in a home affected by domestic violence, some young adults who described strong family bonds also showed increased self-esteem and reduced anxiety. This buffering effect of family bonds was seen when the domestic violence between their parents/caregivers was reported as either physical or psychological violence.

Catherine Naughton said: "Although strong family bonds can help raise self-esteem and reduce anxiety for some young people who grow up in homes affected by domestic violence sadly the majority are likely to report weak family bonds. Therefore they are unable to benefit from the psychological benefits strong family bonds provide.'

"The first consideration when dealing with victims of domestic violence (including children) should be their physical and psychological safety. That said, given the secrecy that surrounds domestic violence, it is important that parents, the extended family and service providers understand the protective effects that strong family bonds can have. This way they can encourage young people affected to maintain the inherent sense of belonging within the extended family which, ultimately, can provide positive psychological support."

More information: 'Family Identification: A Protective Factor for Young Adults who Grew Up in Homes Affected by Domestic Violence.' The Psychology of Women Section's annual conference takes place from 8 - 10 July 2015 at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor. T

Provided by British Psychological Society

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