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The full report is titled "Physical Abuse of Boys and Possible Associations with Poor Adult Outcomes." It is in the 18 October 2005 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* (volume 143, pages 581-586). The authors are W.C. Holmes and M.D. Sammel.

## Boys Are Victims of Domestic Violence

### What is the problem and what is known about it so far?

Physical abuse in the home is all too common. Although abuse of intimate partners and girls gets much attention, boys also experience physical abuse in the home. Our understanding of abuse of boys is limited. In several surveys, 25% to 50% of men have reported physical abuse as children. Parents are the most frequent abusers of boys. One possible outcome is that boys who experience abuse become adults who inflict abuse on intimate partners and children.

### Why did the researchers do this particular study?

To measure the frequency of abuse of boys in homes located in neighborhoods in which abuse of intimate partners and girls is common and to see whether men who were abused as children have profiles of health and social problems known to occur frequently in men who abuse partners and children.

### Who was studied?

197 men who lived in neighborhoods with a high frequency of HIV infection. Such neighborhoods have a higher-than-average frequency of physical abuse in the home.

### How was the study done?

Interviewers called telephone numbers at random to identify men who were eligible for the study and who were willing to be interviewed. Interviewers asked questions that other researchers have used in their studies of physical abuse in the home. They also asked about symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, sex and drug histories, and legal problems. Participants received a small amount of money after completing the interview.

### What did the researchers find?

One hundred of the 197 men (51%) had experienced physical abuse in the home when they were children, and 57 of them had experienced severe abuse. Physical abuse took the form of being pushed, grabbed, or shoved; having something thrown at them; being kicked, bitten, or punched; being hit with something; being choked, burned, or scalded; or being physically attacked. Mothers and fathers were the most common abusers. Men with less education and men whose parents were neglectful or showed little affection were more likely to experience abuse. Men with a history of physical abuse in the home during their childhood were more likely to have depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, legal problems, and incarceration histories than men who did not experience physical abuse.

### What were the limitations of the study?

The researchers could not ask the participants whether they had physically abused an intimate partner or their own children, so they don't have direct evidence that boys who experience abuse are more likely to become men who abuse intimate partners, children, or both. The researchers surveyed men who live in neighborhoods in which physical abuse in the home is relatively common. The frequency of abuse may be lower in men who live in other types of neighborhoods.

### What are the implications of the study?

Physical abuse of boys is a common occurrence. Abuse during childhood may make men more susceptible to certain kinds of health and social problems. Whether it makes them more likely to abuse intimate partners, children, or both in their home remains unknown.

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