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Custody Rulings Often Ignore History of Domestic Violence

THURSDAY, Aug. 11 (HealthDay News) – Even though most U.S. states require courts to consider any history of domestic violence when deliberating child custody cases, this type of abuse is often unknown to courts making these important custody decisions, a new study finds.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center in Seattle. They believe evidence of domestic violence is important in making custody decisions because children who have been exposed to their mothers' abuse by an intimate partner are also more likely to be victims of abuse themselves. These children are also more likely to suffer psychological problems, the researchers added.

Reporting in the August issue of the journal *Violence Against Women*, the Seattle team analyzed documentation on more than 800 local couples with young children who filed for divorce in 1998 and 1999. These included 324 cases with a history of domestic violence and 532 cases without such a history.

Mothers in general were more likely than fathers to be awarded custody of children, but mothers who were victims of domestic abuse were no more likely than other mothers to receive custody, the study found.

In addition, fathers with a history of committing domestic violence were no more likely than other fathers to be required by the court to have a third party supervise child visitations, the researchers report.

Just 17 percent of fathers with a known history of domestic violence were denied child visitation. In 47.6 percent of divorce cases in which husbands displayed a history of partner abuse, no mention of this abuse was found in the divorce case files.

The researchers estimate that at least 11.4 percent of Seattle divorce cases involving couples with dependent children involve a substantiated history of male-perpetrated domestic violence.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about domestic violence.

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