

Breaking the Generational Curse

By Sunny Lim

Within domestic violence, there's a term known as intergenerational or transgenerational violence. These terms indicate violence involving and affecting several generations within families.

Intergenerational violence occurs when abuse passes through the family, starting from the older generation—parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents—to the younger generation—children. Abuse tends to be a learned behavior. In the cycle of intergenerational violence, people who have been abused by their relatives or witnessed domestic violence in their household are more likely to continue the abuse they've suffered and observed. Because they might have seen one parent abuse the other parent, it normalizes abusive behavior by showing children this is an acceptable way to act toward your partner in a romantic relationship. Another example of intergenerational violence is when a grandparent physically abused their son, and the son goes on to do the same to his own children. Another consequence of the intergenerational curse is children might enter into relationships with abusive partners because these relationships mimic what these children saw at home.

Because intergenerational violence goes from one generation to another, it is difficult to break the curse. In addition to intergenerational abuse, the transmission of trauma, known as [secondary traumatization](#), is where the effects of trauma trickles down from generation to generation. Although there is debate whether genetics play a role in the transmission of trauma across generations, a [research study](#) at Mount Sinai hospital discovered a possible link.

Rachel Yehuda and her team looked at the genes of 32 Jewish men and women who had been confined in concentration camps, hid, witnessed torture, or suffered violence. They also looked at the genes of their children. Compared to children of Jewish families who didn't live in Europe during the war, the 32 research participants' survivors had a higher chance of developing stress disorders. These research results support the idea of epigenetic inheritance. This idea asserts environmental factors—abuse, stress, nutrition—have the potential to affect the genes of future generations.

There have been research studies done on Native American survivors of boarding schools, abuse survivors, 9/11 survivors, and intergenerational domestic abuse survivors. All showed the same findings — if there is a history of abuse and trauma within a family

or for an entire group historically, the trauma passes through the bloodline. Survivors tend to have higher rates of depression and are more likely to be susceptible to revictimization, suicidal thoughts, and adverse coping skills.

David Prosper is a husband and a father. He is also a survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault. His personal story of intergenerational trauma and surviving has led him to share his experiences to teach people about how to recognize abusive patterns, overcome trauma, and break the stigma of abuse on men.

David grew up in an abusive home, causing him to become desensitized to domestic violence.

“Sadly, I thought it was a way of life—I would see my mother hit, my father retaliate,” he said. “It led me into a lot of emotionally abusive relationships where the women I’d date would position themselves as the only ones who cared about me.”

During his senior year of college, he was sexually assaulted by a young woman, but his friends blew it off as no big deal after he chose to share his story with them. For David, the root cause behind intergenerational trauma was abandonment and rejection.

He recommends these four steps for healing to other survivors of intergenerational trauma and violence:

- **Explore:** Find the root causing your pain,
- **Engage:** Talk with other survivors and share your story with counselors or life coaches,
- **Equip:** Educate yourself with the tools to become healthier,
- **Empower:** Choose to become not just a survivor but a sur-thrivor.

Although intergenerational trauma survivors are more susceptible to repeating behaviors they’ve seen in their childhood and adolescence, whether it’s being abusive in relationships or surviving abusive relationships themselves, you can break the generational curse. Even though the history of abuse and trauma might have started with your parents or your other relatives, you have the power to break free from this curse.

For intergenerational trauma survivors, take the first steps to healing, and examine your own family history to understand where it all started. You’re not alone in your healing.