

Family violence and children's services: challenges, cultural differences and capacity building

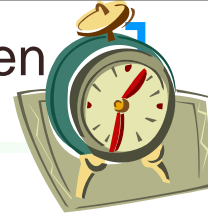


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Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Welfare

Time for Action: National Council Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children, 2009-2021



[*Time for Action: Key children* action points



- Strong support for primary prevention

Priority Action 2.2.1 Implement and evaluation education programs that encourage respectful relationships

- Service development?

Priority Action 3.3.4 Ensure children exposed to violence do not have their safety and well-being compromised

[Overview



- Children and domestic and family violence
- The challenge is intervention and service provision
- Evidence from 'Think Child'
- Some thoughts on assessment
- Thoughts on multi-agency working

Children's emotional well-being

- A consistent research finding is that the emotional well-being of a substantial group of children is undermined by living with family violence
- Meta analysis of 118 studies showed significantly poorer outcomes on 21 psychosocial measures for children 'witnessing' family violence, than those not living with violence (Kitzmann et al, 2003).
- 63% of children 'witnessing' domestic violence doing worse than those who do not witness domestic violence.



Managing a major social problem

- WSS (1996) 23% of women currently or in a previous relationship experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner
- One quarter of 5000 children surveyed reported witnessing violence against a parent (Indermaur, 2001).
- PSS (2006) Increase in reporting (19% to 36% in 10 years)

The challenges for child protection and family services

- **The hidden nature of family violence**
- NSPCC study – 1/3 of child abuse cases known to have FV. 2/3 when screening questions asked (Hester, 2006)
- Health visitors development of safety planning tool which asked about domestic violence led to three times the rate of disclosure of family violence in a two year period (Hester, 2006).
- Child protection social workers – 3 times the rate of family violence in their caseloads once systematic questioning began.
- Currently Victorian IRIS shows **22% of family services** clients living with FV (!!)

A rising challenge

- NSW: 76,000 reports made 07-08 about a risk of harm from domestic violence as the primary reported issue
- 5000 (6.5%) were substantiated. Wood 2008, *Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW*, p699
- Less likely to be investigated, but more likely to be re-notified
- Community pathways with clearer thresholds may prove to be a better route BUT

A continuum of impact on children

- The Child Death Review Team in Victoria has commissioned a group analysis of child deaths where family violence is present – a significant group
- However in any sample, 30% or more children living with fv are doing as well as the general population of children

Some Victorian Data – 2 week snapshot

- Police – 886 fv incidents. Children present at 40% of incidents
- 35% of incidents involving children, police notified DHS
- Family violence specialist services saw 2215 clients. Children present in 70% of cases
- 32% of 165 parent/child incidents involved <18 year old attacking a parent

Referral patterns for FV services

- 3532 children involved in seen by FV specialist service in 2 week period
- 16% current CP; **2%** referred to Child Protection
- 6% currently involved; **1%** active referral to Child FIRST/family services
- 15% current children's counselling; 3% referral BUT 34% of women showing 9 or more risk factors in FV services – indicative of very high risk



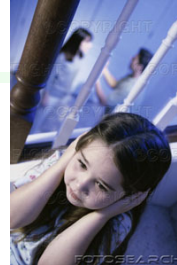
What is the threshold for child protection referral?

- Definitions under the law, but thresholds of harm may be moveable
- Risk assessment and risk management similar and different for women and children living with family violence



9 Areas for Assessment

(Barnados Northern Ireland)

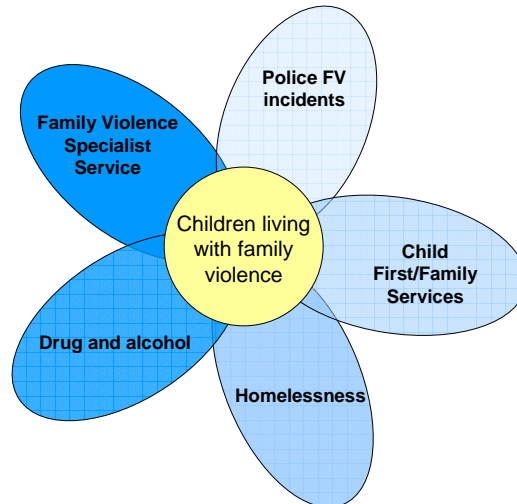


- the nature of abuse;
- the perpetrator risk to the children;
- risks of lethality;
- perpetrators' pattern of coercive behaviours;
- impact of the abuse on the woman;
- impact of abuse on the children;
- impact of abuse on mothering and fathering roles;
- protective factors;
- the outcomes of women's past help-seeking.

Shared risk assessment and management

- Risk assessment tools are inaccurate without information sharing
- KPMG Benchmark data shows 2% of 886 incidents police found 6 or more risk factors present for women.
- Data from women's family violence specialist agencies found 34% of women with 9 or more risk factors
- The most constant refrain in child death enquiries is lack of information sharing

Thinking about multi-agency intake



Greenbook initiatives in US

- Bring together CP, DV services, Courts (Children/Magistrate's Court)
- Major injection of funds into 6 pilot sites
- Evaluation of collaborative working strategies in this area

(Banks et al, 2008 J or Interpersonal Violence)

[Barriers to collaborative work]

- Conflicting organisational cultures (particularly re women living with domestic violence)
- Lack of resources
- Lack of worker time
- Burnout of the participants
- Slow development of the initiative



[Facilitators of multi-agency working]

- Individual relationships among collaborating organisations and staff
- Having the right people at the table
- Strong leadership
- Partner organisations focus on the needs of women and children



Challenges, cultural differences and capacity building

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- Opportunities lie with 2 new national frameworks
- It is 'Time for Action' and for getting our cultures engaged
- Our capacity will lie with our workforce and the relationships built over time



'They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself' (Andy Warhol)