Building collaborations to eliminate family violence: facilitators, barriers and good practice

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Key Messages

- Coordinated and collaborative responses to family violence result in better outcomes for victims and perpetrators, enhanced processes in and between agencies, improved service delivery and provision and reduces violence.

- There needs to be strong *national* mandate and leadership for agencies to work collaboratively. A centralised source to feed information out to and from local networks supports coordinated response and minimises the risk of duplication.

- All members of a collaborative need written agreements on shared aims and objectives based on commonly agreed values-based philosophical framework. Roles, responsibilities and expectations need to be clearly defined and specified. Transparent decision-making, participatory planning and continual monitoring and evaluation are key components of successful collaborations.

- Investment in a dedicated coordinator role ensures momentum is not lost and issues are resolved as they arise. Agencies also need to support staff to invest time and resources into collaborative activities. Funding needs to support the networks to collaborate on primary prevention as well as intervention activities. Investment in communal training assists in building shared understanding and promotes trust and respect.

- Consistent monitoring and measuring of safety and accountability needs to occur in ways that support ongoing learning and which provide opportunities for inclusion of current best-practice of system-wide responses.

Recommended citation

Acknowledgement

Introduction

The New Zealand Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families[1] recognises that to achieve zero tolerance and healthy relationships individuals, agencies and government departments must work cooperatively, with close involvement from whanau, hapu and iwi. A goal of the Taskforce's 2011-12 Programme of Action is to encourage "collaboration and co-operation across government and non-government agencies to amplify their collective impact" (p 4). This is consistent with international thinking that "the system matters" when it comes to eliminating and preventing family violence[2, 3] because the causes of family violence are deeply rooted at every level of the social ecological system.

Research demonstrates the benefits of coordinated, collaborative response: better outcomes for victims and perpetrators, better processes in and between agencies, and benefits for the community generally. Research in the UK shows that in places with coordinated responses, victims engage with a wider range of agencies for much longer periods, gaining more support and information from trained advocates. As a result victims are empowered to make informed choices about whether to engage with the justice system. There is also evidence that when women are aware of a wide range of options they are more likely to seek help.[4, 5]

Evidence also shows that coordinated community responses in fact reduce violence.[6] Male perpetrators who attend stopping violence programmes that are linked to a wider system of services re-offend less frequently than men who attend stand-alone programmes.[7-9]

The causes and dynamics of men's violence against women, and family violence generally, are complex. Collaborative networks open up more options for victims, and can work to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence. Cross-agency processes can bring the following benefits:

- better service provision

- avoiding replication of services

- opportunities for victims and perpetrators to access services previously unavailable

- feedback to clarify issues and hone service delivery

- better processes and procedures are improved

- services can help each other find unique solutions for clients' issues

- more efficient use of resources

- sharing of anxieties and the service load, which reduces stress

- better knowledge of the other agencies

- a louder voice in prevention projects

- less need for clients to repeat information

- better targeting of services to individual need and circumstances

- more opportunities to divert clients away from the court system

- a better referral system for clients

- minimising gaps in services, ideas and approaches[5, 10-16]

When collaborative initiatives work well they expand creative and problem-solving capacity by bringing multiple perspectives to bear. They are then more likely to achieve results, and better results, than the parties are working individually.[17-19] It is increasingly recognised effective collaboration against domestic and family violence requires coordinating the entire community response.[20]

Successful collaboration and coordination is a complex process, and does not happen by accident. This paper seeks to articulate a common language to describe the various types of collaborative initiatives, and distinguish between their aims. We also review the factors that influence the success of collaborative efforts. This review is supplemented and informed by the views of people working in the field in New Zealand. A related document setting out useful tools for collaborative initiatives has also been prepared (Murphy & Fanslow, forthcoming).[*]

Definitions

Internationally, multi-agency responses to family violence are commonly called "Coordinated Community Responses", whilst in New Zealand many are referred to as "family violence networks". New Zealand networks vary in the ways they have been established, their membership, and their activities and strategies to deal with family violence. Some networks meet to share information, some to respond to crises and provide early intervention, whilst others meet to develop family violence prevention strategies. Networks also vary in their structure. Some are informal, while others have formal written protocols, aims and procedures. There is variability in understanding of the aims and objectives of the networks, and in the language used to describe multi-agency working relationships.

These networks can have many diverse aims. Networking, cooperation, coordination and collaboration can be placed on a continuum of developmental stages, from low intensity to high intensity, from simple to comprehensive and complex, from information sharing to early intervention to prevention.

At the simple, low-intensity end of the continuum, networking is often understood in terms of having a cup of tea, developing first-name relationships, and getting to know the functions and specific expertise of other agencies. Many people consider such contacts to be markers of successful multi-agency relationships. Collaborations at the more intensive end of the continuum, however, see communication and relationship-building as steps on a long journey towards societal change to establish a culture of non-violence.[17, 18]

The aim of this paper is to support the development of coordinated multi-agency collaborations to prevent and intervene in family violence. To facilitate the development of a common language, we note here some commonly accepted definitions of networking, cooperation, coordination and collaboration. The terms distinguish types of multi-agency working according to the aims of the interaction, the intensity of interaction, the degree of trust required, and the sharing of risk and responsibility.

Networking

Networking entails a group of people coming together informally to exchange information, experiences and contacts, with the aim of developing common understanding and a support base. Communication is the primary aim; links are loose and flexible, roles are loosely defined, leadership is low key, and decision-making is minimal.[17, 21]

Cooperation

Cooperation also entails people coming together to share information, but with a focus on a particular aim, such as limiting duplication of services or matching agencies to clients' needs. Structurally, this requires a central group as a communication hub and partners engaging in formal communication processes with that group. Otherwise, cooperative groups do not have other clearly defined missions, plans or structures. Relationships are low intensity, semi-formal and tend to be short term. Roles are defined to some degree, but partners retain their own authority, and resources are not shared so there is minimal risk.[17-19]

Coordination

Coordination entails more structured formal relationships. Again the focus is on sharing information; but planning and understanding of missions are also shared, with some role demarcation and a focus on longer-term coordination of projects. For the aims and objectives of projects, there is communication between a central group and subgroups. Coordinated groups aim to improve every agency's response to clients, and they share resources, which increases the risks to all the partners. However, as they retain their own authority, and partners perform their assigned activities within their own agencies, power issues can arise; for example, the power given to statutory agencies can effectively silence community groups.[17-19]

Collaboration

Collaboration operates at the highest level of intensity. Multiple separate organisations join up to create a collaborative structure of well-defined relationships, with comprehensive planning and commitment to common philosophy, aims and objectives, while they continue

to pursue their own agency aims. For effective and consistent practice, collaborations formalise processes using memoranda of understanding, policy and procedure statements (such as information-sharing protocols) and hold themselves accountable through regular monitoring and evaluation.

Intervention and Prevention

For the purposes of this paper, the terms *prevention* and *intervention* are defined as follows:

Primary prevention aims to prevent violence by taking action *before* it occurs.

Intervention approaches are often defined as secondary and tertiary prevention. But to avoid confusion, this paper defines intervention as responses *after* violence occurs. This includes crisis responses and long-term follow-up, care, protection and rehabilitation.

Research

Two kinds of research, a literature search and discussions with key informants, were combined to provide a broad perspective on best-practice principles and challenges relating to coordinated collaborative initiatives generally and as they relate to family violence specifically.

We searched and compared international and New Zealand literature. The focus of the analysis was the common challenges and barriers to and facilitators of coordinated responses.

We had conversations with several key informants, people with long experience of family violence networks in New Zealand. The aim was to determine what factors have fostered or inhibited collaborative initiatives. Insights from these conversations have been related extensively to themes emerging in the literature. The points ascribed to key informants were generally expressed by all those interviewed, not by isolated individuals.

Facilitators

This section outlines key elements considered essential to support the successful functioning of multi-agency initiatives, whether their aim is intervention or primary prevention.

Policy and perspective

Collaborative partnerships are more prolonged than others, and require commitment and open communication channels at all structural levels. Day-to-day collaboration requires substantial time commitments and financial resources, which are shared. For collaborations to work well ideas and decisions need to be shared, trust needs to be high and any rewards or risks need to be shared.[5, 17-19]

Clear philosophy and shared aims and objectives

The aims and objectives behind working together need to be clear and explicit, and endorsed by all the parties. Effective multi-agency collaborations need best-practice written agreements on shared aims and objectives of the collaborative members. To provide a basis for such agreements, a commonly agreed values-based philosophical framework on intervention practices is desirable.

To engage in effective collaborative work, staff must know what is expected by their own agencies and also what they can expect from other agencies.[19] The collaboration needs a planning process and an organisational structure that create a sense of shared ownership and investment in the process. This is best achieved by working from the bottom up, jointly developing policies, protocols, and principles to benefit both the network and the families they serve. Collaborative establishment of aims, written documents such as Memoranda of Understanding, and explicit guidance such as step-by-step standardised intervention procedures are also recommended.

Mutually agreed plans, strategies and organisational structures strengthen relationships by fostering understanding and trust, and thus develop a more sustainable approach. Who should be consulted in planning will depend on the aims of the collaboration, but it is generally recommended that the views of collaborators with a diverse range of world views and expertise be sought. An inclusive consultation process might include among others

representatives of older people, the disabilities sector, non-heterosexual groups, people who are unemployed, Maori, other ethnic groups and immigrants, and religious groups. Although consultation can be time-consuming, it represents a sound investment, as it is important for building trust, understanding and relationships.[10, 15, 19, 21-25]

The philosophical framework underpinning multi-agency family violence work in New Zealand and elsewhere ideally includes: a commitment to gender equality; objectives focused on victims' safety, wellbeing and empowerment; accountability and rehabilitation for perpetrators; and, in some cases, initiating or supporting social change to prevent family violence.

Ideological clashes between partner agencies can limit the effectiveness of any multi-agency response (see Barriers section, below). The literature suggests that such conflicts can be minimised if participants remain willing to understand the perspectives of other agencies. A mechanism suggested for fostering such understanding is joint training. It can help to ensure that participants share a common understanding of the dynamics of family violence, and also to challenge myths and misconceptions. Commonly reported issues include insufficiently developed patience and understanding and respect for victimised women, and ideological disputes about responsibility for harm to children who witness violence. Frequent tensions in this field include balancing competing needs such as addressing the harm done to children, not blaming the victim, and holding the perpetrator accountable.[12, 15, 18-20, 22, 23, 25-32]

Using gendered analysis and recognising multiple sources of disparity

According to the World Health Organisation, violence against women

> *"is not only a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, it is a mechanism for perpetuating inequality. The violence directed at women and girls, often because they are female, can prevent them from obtaining equal status and full enjoyment of their human rights".*[33]

International literature and key informants strongly recommend using gendered analysis to guide intervention and primary prevention initiatives, to reveal the significant differences between the concerns and experiences of men and women.[34-42] Such analysis unpacks

"the social construction of what it means to be a man or a woman" (p 8).[35] It can illuminate the different degrees of fear, risk and safety that men and women experience.

New Zealand research and policy analysis also confirm the link between violence and gender.[34] Although it is acknowledged that the link is complex,[39, 43, 44] there is a recognition that partner violence affects women disproportionately (p 19),[45] for example in their risk of domestic homicide.[46, 47] Gender socialisation increases the propensity for men to use violence and to control female partners, and decreases women's access to and control over resources. Historically, it has also led bystanders to tolerate violence and remain silent.[48-51] Gender analysis addresses the brutalising socialisation of men and resulting inequalities for women.[52, 53]

Multiple sources of disparity need to be recognised, because gender is not separate from other social positions including class, race, age, religion, disability and sexuality. Discrimination in these areas can also lead to unequal power and control, and increased vulnerability to human rights violations.[31, 36, 54, 55] Recognition of these overlapping forms of discrimination is sometimes called an "intersectional approach", which can be combined with gender analysis.

Utilising the social ecological model

International best practice recommends that multi-agency family violence work combine collaborative responses with the social ecological model at all levels of intervention and prevention, to ensure lasting social change. The premise underlying this model is that multiple historical, cultural, political, community, relational and individual factors influence the perpetration of violence and the victim's response. Eliminating family violence and building healthy relationships ideally requires the commitment of the whole community.[1, 41, 56-60]

Partnership processes

Demarcation of roles and responsibilities

International research consistently reports that a key consideration in high-quality multi-agency work is having the right people around the table. Successful collaborative networks are characterised not only by appropriate and committed participants, but by the presence

of the right skills and appropriate decision-making authority, supported by sufficient resources.

Key informants tell us that part of the coordinator's role is helping people in the networks understand their vital role in family violence prevention. Network partners need to be clear about the collaborative's aims and objectives. Roles are also carried out more efficiently if templates are provided for any reports required for specific purposes. [12, 14, 15, 19, 22, 24-26]

Governance bodies need to develop clear guidelines about network members' roles and responsibilities. This requires clarity as to who does what, with what resources, aimed at which outcomes, using what procedures, and within what timeframes. Clarity on these matters helps hold members to account for their performance.

Key informants also point out that in the current climate of high workloads, attending collaboration meetings is outside most people's job descriptions. Some attendees lack interest or time to engage in activities beyond their day-to-day role. Staff from some agencies attend network meetings on a rotation system in an effort to spread the load, but this can create problems with continuity of understanding.

Creating a climate of trust and respect

In addition to ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly demarcated, healthy collaborations share power and decision-making, and consult experts from diverse fields and cultures. An inclusive climate, combined with open communication, creates conditions of mutual trust and respect.

Conversations with practitioners in the field suggest that trust between agencies encourages people to share relevant information. They suggest that trust is a by-product of consistent efforts to develop relationships between agencies, and requires investment of time and energy. If collaborators are to have confidence that other agencies will carry out their responsibilities and commitments, there needs to be an investment in understanding their protocols and processes. [14, 15, 19, 22, 25, 26, 28, 61]

Key informants from the rural regions tell us that they often know each other personally and have developed strong relationships over time. This contributes to trust between

network partners, which is vital for ensuring agencies work effectively towards larger objectives. It is also important that relationships are nurtured and reviewed.[10]

Putting our own house in order

The different social positions of the wide range of people and organisations involved in coordinated family violence collaboratives can lead to real or perceived power imbalances. They can be based, for example, on gender, race, class, occupational position, language, or professional training. Family violence collaborations are therefore vulnerable to power and control issues within the network itself, and between practitioners and their clients.

Although power can never truly be equal in a hierarchical society, declaring any sources of power openly is beneficial.[19] In a Norwegian report, *Ending Violence against Women*, the writers argue that "attempts to change the situation of women facing men's violence in our professional lives must be paralleled by the organisation's commitment to getting its own house in order".[62]

Putting our own house in order means promoting respectful, healthy relationships through shared decision-making; regular internal and external accountability and monitoring processes; fostering a safe inclusive climate where all voices are heard equally; valuing the diverse expertise and contributions of partners; and a written equal opportunities policy.[12, 14, 15, 19, 20, 29, 63-65] Other evaluations of successful multi-agency work recommend that collaborations assign clear leadership roles for women's groups such as refuge, with high-profile roles in governance bodies and the network itself. Resourcing is needed to ensure such position-taking does not cause overwork.[31, 66, 67]

Buy-in and commitment

Coordinated networks operate best when individual partners and their parent organisations have strong commitment to, ownership of, and belief in working collaboratively. Even if individuals are committed, research indicates that their ability to progress the aims of the initiative is hampered by any lack of senior management support for their investing time and energy in collaborating.[42] Where funding is limited, there needs to be a willingness to prioritise collaborative work.

Key informants tell us that follow-ups, visits or enquiries by collaborators in response to family violence are undertaken "out of goodwill", without funding. This goodwill reflects a willingness to share the risks and responsibilities and to celebrate the benefits, investing in the partnership over and above personal or organisational needs. Ultimately, the literature suggests strongly that membership of coordinated family violence initiatives should be written into people's job descriptions, and funded adequately.[14, 15, 18, 19, 22, 25, 66, 68]

Open communication and information sharing

Good communication is acknowledged to be an essential to successful family violence collaboration. It means having established mechanisms for frequent, regular, open, transparent information sharing. Best practice calls for carefully considered, formal, written information-sharing protocols with due consideration of privacy and confidentiality. Protocols should include formal consent processes, and clear processes for deciding what constitutes essential information to be shared among collaborators. Case information should be shared on matters such as background, risk, any previous interventions, and everything available on what has or has not worked.[12] One key informant describes case management meetings thus: "The information is read out, but kept very brief and precise to the point of why this family is being discussed, so it's not a gossip session about the whole family or relatives, it's why are we discussing them, what's the risk, and what's the way forward". Such communication processes should be well documented.

To optimise information sharing, clear channels of communication should be agreed upon, and opportunities created to establish and maintain dialogue. To minimise communication difficulties, collaborators need to make time and space to learn about each other's world views and agency protocols. Regular communication and information sharing gives direction to people's practice, and builds the capacity to deliver holistic responses and avoid duplication of service delivery. It also alleviates the burdensome need for victims to repeat their story to multiple providers.[11, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 63]

Attracting diverse partners

The appropriate partners to engage in collaborative work will depend on the overall aims of the network. Early work on coordinated family violence responses focused on accountability for perpetrators of violence, and therefore on working with relatively few

partners, mainly in the justice sector.[28, 69] However, as theoretical work (for example, the social ecological model),[57] has recognised that risk factors for family violence exist at all levels of society, collaborative networks have tended to develop a wide array of linkages with diverse groups. The social ecological model has been combined with the coordinated community response model, which involves engaging non-governmental partners – businesses, the justice, health, education and social service systems, faith communities, the media along with the government.[58] This wider range of partners is appropriate when the aim of the network is to prevent family violence. The international literature also notes the importance of engaging with marginalised sectors of the community.

It is necessary to strike a balance between engaging a broad range of agencies and sectors and using tighter, smaller groups to ensure particular projects get done.[22] One key informant said that practitioners develop "networks within networks trying to make the processes effective without compromising confidentiality and the timeliness, because we can't have our 40 agencies all sitting in the group each week".

Provision and prevention issues

Provision of services

Collaboration works best when up-to-date evidence-based practices underpin the shared provision of services. The literature agrees that the core principles of family violence collaboratives are a) providing appropriate support and protection to victims, and b) supporting offenders, both holding them accountable for their behaviour, and providing options for rehabilitation. Service provision also needs to address the full spectrum of services from crisis, to early intervention, and long-term support for rebuilding lives. This means a commitment to finding gaps in service provision, either general or specific to particular places or groups. Continual monitoring is necessary to avoid fragmentation and duplication in services and to assess their effectiveness.

Extending family violence responses into other sectors

International research strongly endorses government provision of the mandate and policy framework for collaboration. Without this support, critically important agencies and sectors will continue to 'opt out' of responding to the problem.[11, 12, 18] Mandate is particularly

important when collaborations for engaging partners that have not historically been involved with family violence initiatives (such as iwi, and health, education, or social services). Developing linkages with these partners is vital, because organisations that serve these sectors are often not specifically trained in the dynamics of family violence, and may struggle to respond adequately when they encounter it.

The literature also highlights the importance of extending family violence knowledge and services to diverse ethnic, age, sexual and religious groups, and people with disabilities. Members of marginalised groups have specific vulnerabilities to abuse, specific barriers to seeking help, and often have different understandings of male entitlement and women's rights in relationships. Service providers need support to respond sensitively and appropriately to culturally diverse populations.[1, 29, 70-74]

Services for men who use violence

Local informants also point to the need for creativity and flexibility in developing responses to violence, because we do not yet have a definitive suite of options for addressing the problem. In some regions of New Zealand respite housing and emergency accommodation are provided for men, so instead of women and children having to flee to a women's refuge, the man who has caused the issue can be removed temporarily. With the instigation of Police Safety Orders this facility serves an important need.

Services for men who experience violence

Some family violence collaboratives in New Zealand have set up a local process to support men who experience violence. These services are still very new, and providers are still developing response options. Literature in the area suggests that when providing such services it remains important to be guided by gender analysis; and the provision of services to gay, bi- and transsexual men should also be guided by an intersectional analysis to ensure interventions are effective.[35, 75]

Services for women who use violence

In general, research into women's use of violence indicates that women who are primary aggressors are in the minority.[38] The literature in this area suggests that men's violence and women's violence are functionally different: women who use violence against male

intimate partners are generally not engaging in an ongoing campaign to establish power and control. Rather, women's violence is often a result of frustration and disempowerment, a defensive response to being victimised.[76-79] These differences need to be taken into account in providing services. It is unlikely to serve women's needs, and those specifically of lesbian women, if they are made to attend anger management programmes aimed at controlling emotional expression. Emerging practice suggests that women need separate gender-specific programmes that focus on empowerment, improving self-image, assertiveness, independence, and safety and protection.[7, 69, 80]

Prevention initiatives

Family violence networks should extend collaborators' activities beyond putting out small fires at the crisis end of the intervention spectrum, and move towards primary prevention activities. Primary prevention initiatives should address various audiences at different levels of the social ecological model. Their aims should include fostering equal, respectful and healthy relationships in the family, the workplace, schools and elsewhere; promoting non-violent norms; challenging social constructions of masculinity; raising awareness; changing attitudes; and strengthening communities.[81]

Leadership

Leadership is critical in the establishment, maintenance and running of a collaborative network, and vital for the sustainability and success of multi-agency family violence work.[19, 22, 25] Key informants tell us "you need a key group of drivers, a key group of passionate people to lead a network and ones who are in a position to get others involved, or have the passion to get others involved." One writer describes effective leadership as "a combination of strategic drive, tenacity and vision" (p 8);[12] leaders must be organised, efficient, and good at eliciting input from all stakeholders.[12]

It is evident from international literature and confirmed by local key informants that strong, competent leadership is required at multiple levels – including the national level, the local governance level, and that of a locally positioned paid coordinator. Strong, effective, proactive leadership does not happen by accident. It is important that partners in a collaboration clarify which organisation or agency will take a lead role, and understand the roles and responsibilities of the other agencies and organisations involved.[13]

National leadership

Whole of government approaches seek to eliminate inconsistent or conflicting policies, make better use of resources, create synergies and offer "seamless service delivery" (p 134).[82] Leadership at the national level should establish a legal mandate for regions to work collaboratively, and support, guide, and encourage integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence.[18, 41, 83-88] National leadership needs to be supported by leadership at the local governance level. The aim is to ensure coordination between federal, state and local government at all levels, bring transparency to policymaking, highlight gaps in coverage, fulfil international obligations, and improve implementation.[89] In an Australian example, national leaders are responsible for setting the strategic direction, whilst a paid coordinator is charged with leading the day-to-day running of the regional family violence network.

Governance and leadership at the local level

Good governance in the context of a collaborative response to family violence is responsive to the aims and objectives of family violence intervention, is participatory, transparent, effective, efficient, and operates by consensus. It is also equitable and inclusive, and should work to include the views of marginalised groups, and ensure women's voices and their advocates are heard in decision-making.[90] This applies equally to local government elected representatives, and iwi and hapu governance bodies. For further reading on governance models see Murphy & Fanslow.[*]

Dedicated coordinator role

National leadership policy and local governance agreements should ideally provide for a dedicated co-ordinator.[13-15, 25, 29] Networks with dedicated coordinators are more assured of maintaining momentum and resolving issues than those without.[10-12, 19, 20]

Key informants tell us that good coordinators know what is going on, know their communities really well, and understand how to get people working together. Time and effort spent developing relationships improves attendance and engagement at network meetings. A coordinator should be a neutral or impartial person who can play the 'honest broker' role[18, 92] without favour. Practitioners tell us that impartial coordination of meetings

is crucial to prevent any group dominating proceedings. Participants can trust an impartial coordinator to resolve conflicts. The coordinator needs to focus on the family or victim in question, looking beyond agency politics and interests to the big picture. In this sense, the coordinator becomes the advocate for, and the upholder of the kaupapa of, the collaboration.

Some of the roles and responsibilities undertaken by coordinators include the following:[18, 25, 93]

- o Acting as a central point of contact for all network partners

- o Being the key family violence resource person for the community

- o Feeding information to the network

- o Coordinating early intervention practices

- o Running the case management process

- o Running primary prevention campaigns

- o Liaison with the media

- o Nurturing and building relationships

- o Keeping the process going

- o Managing a central database

- o Keeping communication channels open

- o Supporting good practice

- o Arranging training

- o Recording meeting minutes

- o Writing submissions

- o Nurturing the network's ongoing development

- o Seeking out and recruiting new partners

- o Coordinating network partners

- o Pulling network processes together

- o Liaison with group or committee chairs

- o Fostering a culture of cooperation, care and respect

- o Looking for opportunities to engage the community

- o Seeking to apply partners' skills, interests, expertise as appropriate

- o Supporting and coordinating service providers' responses

- o Linking people with events in the community

- o Liaison with the governance body

- o Ensuring regular review meetings

Performance monitoring

Governance and accountability

As an area where "best practice" is still being developed, family violence collaboratives must undergo constant change and improvement. Thus governance bodies need to ensure continuous monitoring, measuring and learning, to ensure that interventions and initiatives span the ecological framework, to establish what has proven effective, and to pinpoint what needs improvement. Any lessons learned must be acted upon to continually refine practice.[1, 10, 14, 18, 19, 23, 25, 28, 63, 65, 68, 87, 94-96]

In practical terms, accountability entails transparent decision-making and financial accounting; participatory planning and decision-making involving all affected members of the collaboration; and a responsive grievance process. Accountability, evaluation, and auditing processes should be based on the aims of intervention, and ultimately related to victims' safety and empowerment. Women's and victims' voices must be heard for accountability processes to have credibility.

The system-wide response can be monitored effectively only when appropriate information, tracking and data collection systems have been established and regular meetings take place to "identify, analyse and resolve systemic problems".[24] Accountability processes should be written into formal policy agreements, and should make it clear to whom network partners are accountable.

Distinct pathways of responsibility and accountability are of particular importance in challenging and resolving power and control issues in the governing body or the collaboration as a whole. It is suggested, for example, that accountability structures are needed between partnering agencies, between central and local government, and extending downwards to victims and upwards to governance bodies.[13, 14, 18, 20, 22, 25, 28, 29, 94, 95, 97]

Conflict resolution

Disagreements are inevitable. The greater the diversity of partners in a family violence network the greater the likelihood of disputes. Bringing different perspectives to the table can open up new possibilities and new ways of achieving objectives, but unproductive conflicts do occur. Conflicts in a collaborative may reflect a climate of mistrust, clashing belief systems, stress and frustration at structural blocks to good practice, or poor communication generally. Procedure manuals need to set out clear steps for members seeking conflict resolution, and to name the people ultimately responsible for it. Conflict resolution is usually part of the coordinator's role, and members may also take any disputes to the governance group. Regular meetings are also suggested to resolve issues as they arise. Nevertheless, the precise context may influence the effectiveness of formal conflict resolution strategies.[12, 19, 61] Gregg[15] notes in her research with Family Safety Teams that leadership style, a belief in working together, respecting other members' expertise, shared decision-making, and strong relationships between members and between their parent agencies all help make people feel comfortable about raising concerns.

Resourcing

Funding

Collaborative networks require considerable support in the form of funding, training and staff care. Change takes time, so funding for family violence collaboratives needs to be consistent and sustained. Inadequate resourcing is a major barrier to effective collaboration, and one solution is offering incentives for joining up. It is argued that national policy needs to include a commitment to providing adequate, sustained resourcing for the development and support of coordinated family violence collaboratives and long-term prevention efforts. There is a need for overarching funding of collaborations.[11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 59, 66, 86, 98, 99]

Training and care for staff

Coordinated family violence collaboratives seek to grow and evolve.[1, 94, 96] One typical aim is to use more self-audit and needs analysis to recognise gaps in service provision and find creative ways of filling them. However, any growth creates more work for already overworked people, so requires the commensurate allocation of more staff and time.[15, 18, 23]

Collaboration is time-consuming, so agencies need to support staff, allowing realistically for participation in networks, attendance at regular meetings, planning and project work.[15, 19, 25, 63] Training is imperative at several levels. First, new staff require good induction to embed the collaborative rationale. Second, ongoing training in the principles and processes of effective collaboration is important for sustainability and improvement. Third, all staff need up-to-date training in the theories and concepts of family violence and best-practice intervention and prevention. Cross-agency training is very useful for understanding practices and perspectives bridging sectors; and joint training of collaborators builds communication and conflict resolution skills, understanding of policies and procedures, trust, and staff capacity. It is recommended that training be driven by management, and written into policy statements to ensure participation.[1, 12, 19, 23, 24]

It is inevitable that trained staff will leave eventually. Training, along with policy and procedure manuals, helps maintain organisational understanding of collaborative roles and

processes. Otherwise the sustainability of network functions depends too heavily on a few good people.

Barriers

This section outlines key barriers to the successful functioning of multi-agency initiatives, whether their aim is intervention or primary prevention.

Policy and perspective

Lack of shared direction

Members of family violence collaboratives may hold different professional values and world views, and are likely to work in services with different codes of practice. This can result in misunderstanding of other agencies, and disagreement or uncertainty about what is expected of members and the nature and aims of a coordinated network. Without clear processes to resolve these tensions, the ability of professionals and their agencies to work cooperatively to meet clients' needs is heavily impaired.[12, 14, 25]

Issues can arise in the development and implementation of plans, policies, protocols and procedures. Shared planning and policy-making among agencies may be lacking entirely, or conflicting agendas may cause competition and hamper agreement on practices. Even where policies and protocols have been developed, they may not always be consistently understood or applied adequately. Inconsistent interpretation of strategies and policies can lead to inconsistent decision-making. Some multi-agency networks in New Zealand also report being constrained by annual planning cycles that hinder the implementation of long-term proposals.[13, 18, 19, 25, 29, 98, 100, 101]

Informants tell us that despite best efforts at collaborating by agencies, discharging regional responsibilities may be impeded by government definitions, parameters and priorities.[98] They mentioned this issue in relation to men's programmes, saying this area is very focused on compliance rather than behavioural change. It was suggested that this reflected government departments contracting the provision of fixed numbers of sessions, irrespective of need or outcomes.

A commonly mentioned barrier is uncompromising ideological positions of women victims' advocates and children's advocates as to who is the primary victim. The international best practice position is that empowering mothers who are abused by the children's father is most likely to ultimately serve the best interests of the children. However, the ideological approach of many children's advocates and statutory agencies such as Child, Youth and Family is to hold the mother responsible for the effect of the perpetrator's behaviours on the children.[29, 61] In her study of the Family Safety Team in Hamilton Gregg[15] gives an example of competing beliefs in action: an individual network member was caught between the team's understanding of her role as a child advocate and her parent agency's understanding of what her role entailed.

Gender-neutral and equalities discourses mask asymmetrical power relations. When collaborators lack a gendered analysis of family violence people may spend a disproportionate amount of time focusing on, for instance, men who experience violence. Whilst networks need to provide services to these men, there needs to be caution about marginalising the needs represented by women's groups.[102] This should be redressed by training in gendered analysis.

Loss of sight of the big picture

Some agencies focus on their own agendas to the detriment of the bigger picture. This may reflect stereotypical thinking, or competing priorities, or different policies, interests and levels of investment in the issues. The upshot can be inconsistent approaches to intervention and primary prevention, and suspicion of other agencies. Such clashes are counterproductive and when unresolved can lead to turf wars.[13, 14, 19, 25, 27, 63, 101, 103]

The legacy of single-factor explanations and solutions to family violence may be one reason that some sectors are not involved in multi-agency family violence work. Although the ecological approach is considered internationally to be "state of the art" (p 807)[104] approach to explaining family violence, the complexities of building collaborative capability across a wide range of sectors can be formidable, especially without guiding policies and procedures.[98] Not all family violence networks in New Zealand are familiar with the social ecological approach to intervention and primary prevention. However, the evidence is clear and mounting that focusing on changing individual male perpetrators, without changing society at all levels, will not accomplish the elimination of family violence.[105]

Partnership processes

Lack of role demarcation

A common barrier to effective working relationships is insufficiently clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Collaborators become confused and frustrated when actions are not clearly allocated to specific people. Lack of clarity can be disempowering, leading to inaction or failure to coordinate actions, and ultimately harm to victims.[106] Another threat to effective outcomes is lack of representation at appropriate levels. For example, the burden of responsibility for forming links with multiple agencies may be imposed on service agencies and individual caseworkers. In some networks, it is not clear at which level of the structure a particular responsibility lies: at the local or national level, at the community or government level, at the individual or agency level.[14, 25, 98]

Lack of trust and mutual respect

Lack of trust and mutual respect are commonly cited in the literature as counter-productive to working relationships. Trust issues can arise between individuals and their agencies and between statutory agencies and community organisations. There are various reasons for this, such as the historical separateness of agencies and a bureaucratic culture of fragmentation.[14, 15, 25] Status issues, power struggles, and professional hierarchies can also lead to individual or organisational interests and agendas being prioritised over collective aims.[25] For example an organisation's internal aims may be prioritised over the family violence network's aims for victims and perpetrators.[29, 63] This highlights the need for conflict resolution processes in governance and leadership structures.

Power imbalances

The tendency for statutory agencies to "take over" (p 15)[19] and be reluctant to relinquish control is a commonly mentioned in the literature. Despite women's groups being at the forefront in raising awareness about domestic violence, they are now prone to being marginalised in multi-agency collaborations. If groups such as women's refuge or women's advocates disagree on the direction of the collaboration, their voices may be ignored, their representation be outnumbered, or the voices of more powerful agencies such as police may dominate network processes and aims.[29, 66, 83] There is history in New Zealand of the

police and Child, Youth and Family agendas and priorities taking precedence over those of community organisations, which can lead the latter to feel undermined.[14, 29] This conflict reflects in part clashes of ideological focus and aims, one organisation serving a woman victim of intimate partner violence and the other serving a child who has witnessed the abuse.[61] Finally, government agencies are well funded, whilst community agencies are under-resourced and rely for much of their funding on government contracts. Although they are so prevalent, issues of inequality within collaboratives are often not approached systematically, if they are dealt with at all.[66]

Lack of buy-in and commitment

It requires an enormous investment of time and energy to participate consistently in a family violence network. There is no government mandate in New Zealand that compels agencies to join up and commit. Some agencies have no culture of collaborative working, and participation in a network is typically outside any individual's job description. Senior management and other professionals may fail to commit to network activities because they lack understanding of the problem or of the value of collaborating to address it. Some individuals and some agencies cannot afford the necessary time and effort, or do not see any benefit for themselves.[12-14, 19, 25, 63, 103]

Communication and information sharing issues

Some networks lack clear communication channels, or the communication itself is not satisfactory. A challenge is how to balance confidentiality against the need to share information. It is clearly necessary to share information amongst agencies to improve outcomes for those who experience family violence; but collaborators may have different rules and protocols about precisely what information can and should be shared and with whom. Some rules may impede information sharing, whilst careless disclosure in multi-agency meetings may lead women to fear imparting certain details for fear it might be misused by particular agencies, especially given the differences in ideological agendas discussed above.[25, 27, 63, 103]

Missing linkages with diverse multi-sector partnerships

Some networks do not know which community leaders and agencies should be asked to participate, and not all those approached may be receptive. Attracting wider participation from people outside the sector, such as Neighbourhood Watch groups, medical practitioners or Age Concern, can be challenging when there is no legal mandate to develop collaboratives. Many cultural and linguistic communities are not adequately linked to family violence networks. [1, 11, 13, 19, 70-73, 80, 87, 94, 107, 108]

Provision and prevention issues

Inadequate provision of services

Leggatt-Cook's study[109] assessing demand for services on Auckland's North Shore highlights several gaps in provision for victims, including a shortage of post-crisis transitional accommodation, poor police and other legal services, and lack of access to food parcels. This highlights the need for coordinated family violence collaboratives to join up with external agencies. Research also shows frequent gaps in provision of services for women victims who become perpetrators. Muftic[7] notes that women arrested for violence are often directed to anger management programmes where they are taught to restrict emotional expression, when the recommended intervention for these women should entail empowerment strategies, improving assertiveness skills, and claiming independence and safety. Also frequently lacking are services for children who witness parental violence, young women abused in dating relationships, and heterosexual male victims.

Gaps in provision for diverse populations

Major gaps exist in services for diverse populations. Victims with serious mental health and addiction issues cannot use mainstream refuges in case they cause a disturbance or risk other occupants' safety.[109, 110] The prevailing domestic violence model in networks is heterosexual, which can lead practitioners to make assumptions as to who the victim and perpetrator might be. Many family violence networks do not have members from gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex agencies. Although these agencies provide supports, they may lack the necessary understanding of the dynamics of family violence.

Services for Asian migrants are under-resourced, and many networks lack coordination with migrant communities including women without residency status.

Lack of focus

Some family violence networks become stuck at the general information-sharing network phase[19, 29], which has been called "little more than 'window dressing'" (p 27),[31] with "talking shops which disguise inaction" (p 188).[64] There are conflicts over whether multi-agency family violence work should focus on crisis intervention, or on primary prevention on all levels of the ecological spectrum. Key informants say that New Zealand networks tend to focus on victims at highest risk according to police risk assessments.[92] This creates inflexibility and limits service provision to victims in the early stages of abuse, with the lack of provision for primary prevention. Even if collaboratives want to coordinate primary prevention strategies, members may have more expertise and experience in intervening after violence has occurred. Messages are also often directed at the mainstream, neglecting diverse cultural communities.[109, 111]

Leadership

Clear leadership is often lacking for coordinated community networks and sometimes there is a lack of senior management support. Confusion also reigns over who is in charge and who is responsible for making decisions.[19, 25] The UK government's Crime Reduction Programme[112] mandates some agencies throughout Britain to coordinate and collaborate, whereas New Zealand lacks any national mandate. However, if central government were to legislate the requirement to collaborate, such a top-down approach might marginalise existing community initiatives.[83] It has been suggested that the lack of mandatory training for some officials in key positions in New Zealand might represent a major obstacle to effective collaboration.[113]

Without a paid coordinator, coordinated community networks tend not to develop beyond the information-sharing phase, and some disband.[19] Leggatt-Cook's[109] research found that the family violence network on Auckland's North Shore was not functioning well because funding for the coordinator had ceased and individual agencies could not take over the coordination role because of workloads.

Performance monitoring

Poor accountability and monitoring

A lack of evaluation and monitoring systems has been an ongoing issue in the family violence field.[64] Varying expectations raise questions as to what accountability processes are appropriate, at what level of collaborative endeavour.[19, 21, 29] For example, should accountability structures for local collaborators differ from those between government and regional organisations?[14] Networks may have difficulty acquiring information from particular agencies, staff on leave may have no appropriately skilled back-up staff.[97] Weak accountability processes can lead to inconsistent or ineffective following-up of intervention outcomes. Many evaluations focus on quantitative measuring of reported violence at the expense of qualitative evaluations of the effects of interventions on victims.[102]

Lack of conflict resolution processes

Many issues may lead to conflict in coordinated networks. Some people have difficulty negotiating and resolving conflict in the absence of formal systematic mechanisms at the coordination or governance level. Even when people raise concerns, key people may not be interested in developing formal conflict resolution processes.[15, 61, 98]

Resourcing

Insufficient overall resourcing is one of the most common barriers to developing and sustaining a coordinated family violence collaborative.

Inadequate funding

Provider members of collaborative multi-agency network have to compete for funding with each other and the network itself. Funding guidelines then require network partners to share resources[114], and any funding received is often time-limited and always inadequate. The networks often have to spend time managing multiple funding sources and circumnavigating inflexible funding processes. These processes undermine coordinated family violence responses because of high compliance costs, provide insufficient funds to fill gaps in services, and can be an excuse for not going beyond day-to-day crisis intervention to developing primary prevention strategies.[12-14, 19, 25, 27, 63, 71, 101]

Time constraints and high workloads

Many people and agencies who join in collaborative multi-agency family violence work underestimate the huge amount of time and energy required to build working relationships and the un-costed time needed. Some networks get frustrated at the time it takes to develop policy and procedure manuals, and to build the network in order to realise change in their communities. These issues make it difficult to sustain regular attendance and wholehearted engagement in network activities, or to expanding representation or violence elimination aims.[4, 12, 14, 19, 25, 27, 94, 103]

Staffing and training issues

There is a lack of mandatory, adequate training in the dynamics of family violence in New Zealand.[113] Professionals have varying degrees of knowledge of family violence, so training is needed for all the agencies involved. But policies mandating training do not equate to assurances that professionals are fully informed. Not all professionals are receptive to training, nor is there always adequate funding for it.[19, 29, 108] Progress in this area may be thwarted by staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting staff.[25, 61] Too often current roles and responsibilities rely on individuals' commitment and passion, so when staff move on, the network ceases to thrive. Informants argued for standardised processes to support new people and guide continuing work when key people leave their jobs.

Current issues facing current collaborative work in New Zealand

Several key issues for people currently working in collaborative family violence prevention networks in New Zealand emerged during conversations with key informants. They included a lack of clear policies, procedures and guidelines, ideological clashes, problematic communication, internal power issues, a lack of national leadership, poor government support for the coordinator role, a narrow focus on crisis and high-risk clients to the detriment of primary prevention, and a lack of sustainable funding.

Policy and perspective

Lack of clear policies, procedures and guidelines

Informants tell us there is no guidance on how to establish a collaborative network or to decide who the members should be. There is also no guidance on resolving common problems encountered by networks, or tasks such as writing an information sharing protocol, conducting processes such as monitoring and evaluation. This leaves each local network wasting time, energy and funding in trying to find its own way. There is also a lack of collective training in and understanding of safety and risk issues. This is compounded by statutory agencies and non-government organisations using different risk assessment tools.

Informants talked about a lack of clear processes for case management. One practitioner mentioned a "scatter-gun approach" to referrals by police based on who had time and capacity, rather than which was the right agency to engage.

Ideological clashes

Key informants tell us that a lack of knowledge and understanding of the complexities of domestic violence can be a barrier, with agency staff expressing unhelpful attitudes: "Why doesn't she just leave, why does she keep going back?". Gender analysis is also often missing from the understanding of men who experience violence.

The gender-neutral perspective is pervasive in New Zealand and there is a general lack of training in a gendered analysis across the board. At the inception of a family violence network, policy statements may have been devised by well trained people, but they move on, leaving many agencies bereft of theoretical expertise in domestic violence and safety and risk factors as they relate to the dynamics of power and control. Informants tells us that groups trying to work often lack common understandings of domestic violence because no one concerned has been specifically trained.

Partnership processes

Problematic communication

Family violence death reviews commonly identify "shortcomings in policy, practice, knowledge, training, collaboration, resources, communication and referral"[115] processes, which compromise victims' safety and perpetrators' accountability. So it is a matter for concern that systemic gaps were highlighted by informants, who tell us that information about risk is often not shared between different levels and parts of the community and the justice system. For example, "the Judge in a District or Family court will never have any idea that there's been any community response going on." Also in many areas agencies are perceived to be working against each other; for example, the police might consider the best way to keep a certain family safe is to arrest the perpetrator, who then goes to the family court and gets custody of the children. Informants point to a lack of connection between the courts and the wider community.

Several informants raised confidentiality as an issue. If confidentiality is breached in a small community, for example, it is detrimental to healthy collaboration. Fears of breaching confidentiality mean that some groups such as women's refuge will not attend the collaborative weekly meetings, but will come to the small group meetings, to limit the amount of information "out there".

Internal power and control issues

Key informants spoke of issues with "parallel process" and personal politics obscuring the philosophy, aims and objectives of collaborative efforts. This was described as "extremely damaging for networks." Several informants told us that in some regions, for example,

women's refuge will never work with police. There are suggestions that historical bad blood, sexism and racism come into play in collaborations. Sometimes single people or small groups of people can prevent or hamper promising collaboration and progress.

Adequacy of provision and prevention

A challenge for service provision in rural areas is that victims of family violence may hesitate to disclose to an agency such as Work and Income because it might be the only service in town. Throughout the country there is a narrow intervention focus on high-risk physical violence. An international review of New Zealand's response to family violence notes that government support for self-referrals is poor.[113] At the moment a coordinated community response tends to be invoked only for cases of violence that are reported to the police. Although informants say some clients self-refer, directly or through community channels or family members, in general it is rare for agencies in networks to take referrals from other members. In most networks there is a narrow focus on dealing with crisis and high-risk clients. However, the original purpose of the funding for local coordinators provided by Family and Community Service division of the Ministry of Social Development was "to provide effective, quality, and collaborative family violence prevention work" (p 3).[116] Achieving this aim is difficult because the workforce is not generally trained in devising primary prevention initiatives, so it has taken networks a long time to orient their work in this direction.

Leadership issues

Lack of national leadership

There is no national policy or legislation that mandates government or non-government agencies to work collaboratively. Informants tell us this is a huge issue. Because family violence collaborative networks have mostly developed from grassroots there has never been consistent joint training or protocols, nor any national oversight or support role. This is still the position. It is still left to local communities to develop their own models. One informant described it this way: new networks "start having meetings, then look around and they wonder, 'what we can do?' But they do not realise that just down the road there is a network that has been going for many years." Every new network has to reinvent the wheel by devising their own Memorandum of Understanding, strategic plan, structure, job

description for a coordinator, and so forth. At the moment there is no formal way of sharing this work.

There is no centralised source to feed information to networks. It is left to individual coordinators to gather research about issues, intervention and prevention. Informants say this means many coordinators around the country are all individually expending energy finding out about the Green Paper for vulnerable children, for example. Although there is a list of contact details of the networks on the Family and Community Services website[117] there are few formal processes linking networks. The Te Rito newsletter[93] gives some information about individual networks' successful projects, but there are no templates and no formal processes to share what others have learnt.

Informants say that without better support at the national level, "agencies don't have what it takes" in terms of time or capacity. As one practitioner said, people come to the network table voluntarily, saying, "this is on top of my real work".

Finally, there is a lack of leadership at the national level to oversee coordination. Even though coordinators are linked with many people in their local networks, the role is very isolating. Failure to encourage and nurture coordinators represents a lack of good management and governance at all levels.

Poor government support for the coordinator role

Key informants told us that "the first barrier" is finding funding for a coordinator. Recently, in New Zealand family violence collaboratives had to compete with other member organisations for funding for their network coordinator. Government funding was not renewed for some coordinator positions, leading to a loss of expertise, and other funding was not able to be sourced. This puts local collaborations in jeopardy, as the coordinator role is recognised as pivotal to successful collaboration.

Informants said the coordinator's role was difficult. It can be "a dumping ground for all these good ideas that people have and nobody's got any time to do". Consequently, coordinators work at great personal cost, and many burn out. If they leave, this is a huge loss, as it takes six months to build trust and secure engagement.

All the coordinators encounter similar problems in their work and few get supervision. The role is unique, so mentors are hard to come by.

There are also challenges associated with the hosting agencies in which coordinators are located. Effective coordinators are impartial. If the coordinator is hosted by the police, for example, some men and women hesitate to seek help for fear of legal consequences. Some coordinators are hosted by organisations with which ideological clashes can occur, organisations which have a specialised knowledge of family violence.

Resourcing issues

An international review of New Zealand's response to family violence finds that government funding is too short-term and unstable.[113] Local network practitioners say that lack of sustainable funding is one of the biggest issues they face. To date, communities have drawn on a single pot of money, for which agencies have had to compete. But funding collaboration adequately will not help if insufficient services are available to meet the need.

When funding has to be reapplied for and topped up annually, it makes it difficult to plan ahead or to employ staff to do the primary prevention work. This is particularly difficult when networks have to do prevention work on top of service provision. Ideally these functions should be provided separately, and should not have to compete for resources. Sustained funding is important because prevention is a new way of thinking, and it takes time to engage and inform new partners about it. Under pressure people tend to revert to old ways of thinking, so focus on crises rather than investing in prevention. Consistent implementation of prevention efforts is important at the population level, and it does not happen quickly.

Resourcing challenges in rural areas

Because towns are so small in New Zealand rural areas, they tend to have small generalist agencies. Many social services are part time, and lack the time and resources to be involved in networks. Distance can make attending meetings in remote places impractical, so electronic communications become important, but some services lack the equipment and knowledge to make the best use of the technology now available.

Current needs and opportunities

Some networks have been functioning now for three decades, so many lessons have been learned. Coordinated family violence collaboratives cannot sit still, but need to be constantly reflecting, changing and experimenting. Some networks work hard and purposefully at improving, whilst others stagnate and are unsure of their direction.

On the basis of what we know already, work is needed in four main areas to progress family violence networks: expansion of provision and prevention initiatives; national leadership of collaborative efforts and support for a local paid coordinator; stronger safety and accountability processes; and better resourcing.

Expansion of provision and prevention initiatives

Wider community commitment to stopping violence

Informants tell us there remains a need to develop a wider community commitment to stopping violence. First, collaborative family violence networks need to adopt a "no wrong door" approach, to ensure that no approach for help goes without adequate response. Second, networks need funding and capacity building to engage in primary prevention as well as intervention. Third, there is a call to join the international call to action to engage men in order to end violence against women.[52, 118-123] The social ecological model is an appropriate tool to guide these developments so that men and women are not just seen as individuals, but as members of a society-wide community.[56, 57, 124, 125]

"No wrong door" approach

The referral pathway by which most clients come to the notice of family violence collaboratives is via police risk assessments of victims who have reported violence to the police. Some networks deal with clients who are referred from other agencies, but this is the exception rather than a matter of policy. Therefore most victims of intimate partner psychological abuse or low-level physical or sexual violence are missing out on services that could help empower them and prevent escalation of abuse. Moreover, failure to provide services at this level reduces the opportunity to call perpetrators to account in the early stages of abuse.

The "no wrong door" approach is a concept promoted in Australia[126], the UK[127], and the USA.[128] "No wrong door" means that when a client seeks support from any social service agency, staff are trained to be alert to any needs clients might have beyond the services provided by that particular agency. Agencies that have adopted the concept can offer an open door into a broader system of community-wide support. This means anyone experiencing or using violence can access services via what might seem unlikely sources.[126, 127]

This kind of cooperation and collaboration is occurring informally in rural areas of New Zealand. For example, informants tell us that rural clients present for various issues to generalist agencies such as Work and Income, gradually developing relationships of trust that lead to their disclosing family violence. A formalised "no wrong door" approach is valuable in urban settings to encourage community cohesiveness and improve access to services.

Broader partnerships for prevention

Much multi-agency family violence work focuses on early intervention at the individual and relationship levels of the social ecology. However, the collaborations that hold the most promise for long-term social change are those who work at the primary prevention end on the community and societal levels. New Zealand family violence prevention networks have begun to attract people from outside the family violence sector, engaging with, for example city councils, business leaders, the SPCA, Grey Power, service clubs, church groups and sports leaders. Community leaders and groups from outside the family violence sector are more likely to see the bigger picture and be able to assist with primary prevention efforts.[1] To ensure coverage of the prevention-intervention spectrum new partners are needed for community action. Informants tell us that top-down leadership from, say, Mayors and other elected representatives is invaluable.

However, national leadership is also required to resource family violence collaborations sufficiently to pursue such linkages and develop a wide range of primary prevention efforts over the long-term. But, according to the World Health Organisation[33] document on good practice for preventing interpersonal violence, government officials may themselves have little understanding of primary prevention principles. Therefore, although national leadership is necessary to drive coordinated family violence collaboratives forward, caution

is needed to ensure such leadership is itself comprehensively informed about the dynamics of family violence.

Engaging men in ending violence against women

Getting men involved in stopping violence against women is agreed to be an important step. However, informants suggest that it should not be assumed that men understand clearly that family and domestic violence "happens in a gendered society", and that men's and women's options and choices are affected by their understanding as gendered persons. Although these are essentially conceptual problems, national and international leaders in the field strongly endorse engaging boys and men in efforts to prevent violence against women.[52, 118-123]

National leadership

National leadership to formalise cooperative and collaborative processes

Key informants tell us that New Zealand family violence networks have tended to emerge at the grassroots level in local communities, and have grown through trial and error. However, whilst informal relationships between individual members are important, some networks have collapsed because of lack of support to overcome barriers. International literature[22, 26, 128, 129] suggests that networks are more effective when formal arrangements between agencies are established. Key network stakeholders need representatives with decision-making power, who can consistently attend meetings, and who are able and willing to engage in network strategies, supported by adequate resourcing.

For coordinated family violence collaboratives to grow, succeed and sustain themselves, key informants believe a national mandate is needed, from either legislation or a national policy. It should provide a clear recognition of collaboration as an important element in preventing family violence, and require people to collaborate. These views are supported by international literature.[19, 26, 41, 84, 85, 87, 130]

Informants recommend a centralised system to standardise network processes. In particular there is a need for a collective risk assessment tool. It is also vital that standardised documents and templates be disseminated from a central source to help

establish new networks and to streamline those already in existence. Manuals should include policies, procedures, conflict resolution strategies, safety and accountability auditing processes, and so forth. Training would be needed to help networks develop and use accountability and evaluation tools to ensure their efforts are effective.

A central source is needed of up-to-date research not only on family violence, but also on collaborative processes. At the moment any help for new collaborations or new coordinators is often left to passionate individuals who exceed their job descriptions to extend a hand. For further reading on the development of the necessary tools see Murphy & Fanslow.[*]

National support for the local coordinator role

The pivotal role of the coordinator needs to be valued. Some networks have operated without a coordinator for a decade or more before funding was secured to employ one, when they found their effectiveness greatly enhanced. Key informants tell us someone is needed at the national level to coordinate, inspire, encourage and nurture the isolated coordinators. A formal channel for networks to share information is also desired. Professional contacts such as hui, supervision, and resources such as the Clearinghouse website and the It's Not OK Campaign and Facebook page are valued, but a formal, consistent national-level process is seen as a priority for ensuring effective coordination.

Safety and accountability processes

Include women's and survivors' voices

Women's and survivors' voices are often excluded from communication pathways. International good practice emphasises the importance of including victims' voices in multi-agency collaborative.[40, 67, 131, 132] and in safety and accountability processes[129], yet in most New Zealand family violence collaboratives, victims' voices are missing from risk assessments. Ever-changing government policies and funding structures have eroded women's advocacy, despite its vital role as "one of the core elements in response to violence against women, enabling women to access their rights across multiple systems" (p 27).[31]

Advocacy for women dealing with government institutions

Effective advocacy remains very important for protecting, supporting and empowering victims.[31, 67, 131] Advocates know institutional systems and know how to deal with them to help women receive the services they are entitled to. Informants suggest that advocacy needs to be independent of government agencies to be effective when issues arise with statutory bodies such as police, courts, Work and Income or Child, Youth and Family. An advocate should ideally be owned by the community and located in a non-government organisation to avoid being constrained or influenced.

Advocacy for men

To improve women's safety and men's accountability, informants suggest that it would be helpful to have "a good male advocate to work alongside men." There is also a need for a better flow of information through the justice system, for example between the family court and the criminal court, and for men attending court. Men need help to understand what is required of them when they have a protection order taken out against them. Practitioners tell us that sometimes the first notice a man gets is when someone turns up to serve him with the order; and the men get very little information about what the order means. "So most of the time the guys don't understand and the first thing they want to do is find out from their partner what's going on – and then they've instantly breached their order."

Resourcing

Consistent non-competitive funding

Informants suggest that the ideal would be ongoing funding to help networks build their practice. Those working in rural areas tell us that funding for electronic communication equipment and the training to use it would be especially valuable.

Paid staff

After recent funding cuts, many network members expressed concern that they would result in serious loss of important staff capacity for the network. With sufficient paid staff, achievement rises exponentially, and the network is more stable and has more capacity to progress towards eliminating family violence.[20]

Communal training

Collaboratives throughout New Zealand need communal training of two kinds. First there is a need for deep and broad training in the gendered analysis of domestic and family violence. To this end, the training of a specialist high-risk advocate is vital, because many people in the field, including advocates and refuge services, lack pertinent training. Secondly, there is also a need for training in how to establish, sustain and grow a collaborative network.

The types of family violence training that collaborators value at present include media training to resource network members with succinct key messages. Such training is provided by staff from the Campaign For Action on Family Violence.[60, 111] Informants tell us that network members value hearing real stories from a perpetrator's perspective and from a victim's perspective; these stories deepened their understanding of which interventions work. Apart from these valued learning experiences, training is ad hoc and funding is limited so training tends to be piecemeal or opportunistic. This is not consistent with ensuring long-term best practice.

Conclusion

This review documents the importance of coordinated collaborative responses to family violence after it occurs, and in developing comprehensive primary prevention strategies. It also highlights important aspects of the process of working together, which need ongoing support to flourish.

The Taskforce Programme of Action for Violence Within Families[1] describes the potential as follows:

> *"New Zealand is in a unique position – we are a small country with a solid legislative framework and well developed range of government and non-government service providers. We are ideally placed to become a world leader in identifying and implementing continuous improvements and innovations to create sustainable change in addressing family violence."*

To achieve this potential, we need continued investment in the people and resources required to support true collaborative responses, across the whole intervention spectrum.

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(All internet links are correct as at 18th January 2012)

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