

An Assault on Our Future:

The impact of violence on young people and their relationships



A White Ribbon Foundation Report

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Introduction

It is widely recognised that violence against women is a significant problem affecting as many as one in three women in Australia. This widespread violence has impacts more widely on families and communities throughout our society.

This report examines how violence against women specifically affects children and young people. It looks at the nature of violence they experience in their homes and their own relationships, its impacts, and the priorities for action if efforts to prevent violence among, and protect, young people are to be successful.

Why focus on children and young people?

- Young people are already being exposed to, and influenced by, domestic violence.
- Young people are already being subjected to, and perpetrating, violence themselves.
- Violence-supportive attitudes, norms, and relations are already visible among young people.
- Violence prevention among children and young people has been shown to work.

Part One: Living with adult violence

- One in four 12-20 year-old Australians surveyed was aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers.
- Children and young people are also victims of direct violence by adults.
- Exposure to domestic violence is itself a form of abuse.
- Domestic violence has a clear and negative impact on children's and young people's behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning and social development.
- There is a high economic cost to the violence experienced by children and young people.
- Children's and young people's education and later employment prospects are harmed by domestic violence.

- Living with domestic violence can shape young people's attitudes to violence in positive or negative directions.
- Young men who have experienced domestic violence are more likely to perpetrate violence in their own relationships, although the majority do not.

Part Two: Dating and relationship violence among young people

- While physical aggression by both males and females is relatively common in young people's relationships, young women face particularly high risks of violence and are more likely to be physically injured.
- Girls and young women suffer more, they are more afraid, and they experience much more sexual violence than boys and young men.
- Girls and young women face high risks of sexual violence and harassment including high levels of sexual harassment in schools.

The impact of dating and relationship violence on girls, young women and adult women

- Experiencing dating and relationship violence at any age has a profound negative impact on women's health and well-being. This impact is long-term and cumulative.
- When young women experience physical violence in relationships, this violence is often serious and involves injuries.
- Intimate partner violence against young women often includes significant harm to the sexual and reproductive health of women who are pregnant or parenting.
- Domestic violence has negative impacts on every domain of women's lives, including their parenting.
- A man using physical violence against his girlfriend or wife typically also uses a range of other abusive, controlling, and harmful behaviours.
- Violence against women can be fatal.

Part Three: The causes of violence against girls and young women

- Men's violence against girls and women has causes which can be grouped into three clusters. These are:

Gender roles and relations

- Young people's vulnerability to violence in relationships is heightened by strong peer norms, inexperience, age differences in relationships, and lack of access to services.
- Among young people, attitudes towards intimate partner violence are worst among younger males.
- Males are more likely to accept violence against females if they have traditional gender-role attitudes.
- Male-dominated dating relationships and sexist peer cultures are also key risk factors for violence.
- Young people's violence-supportive attitudes and norms are shaped by pornography and other media.
- At the same time, a majority of young men believe that violence against women is unacceptable.

Social Norms and Practices Relating to Violence

- Violence is invisible and 'normal' among young people.
- Violence in the community, exposure to violent relationships among peers and childhood exposure to family violence are all risk factors for intimate partner violence.

Access to resources and systems of support

- Social disadvantage is a risk factor for violence.
- Young women who are socially isolated are more at risk.
- Personality disorders and adolescent delinquency increase males' likelihood of perpetrating violence.
- Alcohol and drugs may be used by some males to avoid responsibility for perpetrating violence or as a strategy to overcome resistance.
- Relationship break-up and separation are particularly risky periods for violence by partners or ex-partners.

Part Four: Prevention among children and young people

Violence prevention education programs among children and young people can work.

- Programs have been shown to produce positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours.
- Prevention strategies can lessen girls' and women's risks of victimisation.
- School-based efforts are complemented by strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation.
- Violence prevention efforts must be sensitive to cultural contexts and the needs of different groups.

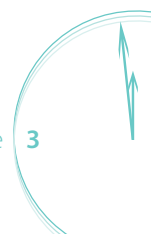
We must address boys and men

- Efforts to engage boys and men must involve not only education but activism.
- Prevention programs should be tailored for males' levels of risk.

We must continue to address girls and women

- Historically, girls and women have been the focus, and this can be victim-blaming.
- Programs and strategies for males and females should collaborate and complement each other.

We must address children and young people already living with violence



Conclusion

Vastly increased efforts need to be made, and resources mobilised, at national, state, and local levels, in the area of primary prevention of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on children and young people. A multi-faceted prevention strategy, which engages boys and young men, is essential to maximising positive outcomes for all children and young people.

It should be recognised from the outset that there are no 'quick fixes' for the long-term social change towards which prevention efforts are directed. However, there is a sound and growing evidence base for the effectiveness of primary prevention work. Recent research by the World Health Organisation, culminating in the World Report on Violence and Health, stated unequivocally that violence

can be prevented and its impact reduced [...] The factors that contribute to violent responses – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed (World Health Organisation 2002: 3).

The engagement of men and boys is essential for prevention efforts to come to fruition. In all areas, particular attention should be paid to addressing the varying needs of Indigenous and CALD young people, young people living in rural areas, same-sex attracted young people and young people with a disability.

We now have frameworks for action within which change can be envisaged and instigated in policy and practice terms (such as those by VicHealth (2007) and Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis (2008)). The evidence shows that violence can be prevented, and its harm reduced. We know that if we take the primary prevention of violence against women seriously, if we plan accordingly, if we ensure the resources, skills and time necessary, then we can reach the stage where children and young people grow up in an Australia free of violence against women.

Recommendations

Substantial work has been undertaken in recent years to develop frameworks for action, policy-making and research in the area of primary prevention of violence against women. For example, in Australia, VicHealth's *Preventing Violence Before It Occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* (2007) provides a blueprint for conceptualising the problem and directing efforts across sectors, over the short, mid and long-terms. Internationally, a Scottish literature review titled *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Abuse – Directions for Good Practice* (Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis 2008) focuses specifically on work with and for children and young people. Both reports offer extensive advice and recommendations regarding the systems and structures which must be put into place to ensure the long-term potential to effect change, and they are complemented by a series of further frameworks for action.¹³

While recognising the breadth and detail of such work and the directions for action they advocate, here we focus on key, practical steps that can be taken to reach young people in our efforts to end violence against women. We have also included further steps which reflect the White Ribbon campaign's focus on the positive roles men and boys can play ending violence against women. The recommendations have been organised into national, state, and local or community levels, although some span more than one level of action.

¹³ See for example Davis *et al.* (2006), Oregon Department of Human Services (2006), and World Health Organization (2002).

At the National level:

Within the context of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children, the Federal Government should develop a specific strategy on the primary prevention of violence against women. In relation to children and young people, the focus of the Government's prevention efforts at the national level should be on providing leadership, building capacity, and driving change through public awareness raising. Key strategies include:

- The development of multi-media awareness-raising campaigns for children and young people, including websites and television campaigns, addressing the attitudes and norms which feed into violence against girls and women (as well as providing information on recognising violence and where to find support or help).
 - Such campaigns should include content specifically addressing sexist and violence-supportive constructions of masculinity and sexuality.
- The provision of resources and programs on respectful relationships in every higher education campus throughout the country, with existing student groups working in partnership with academic departments, university and community organisations.
- Partnerships with statutory organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop advocacy and resources on the prevention of violence against women and girls, and for children and young people living with violence.

In addition, the Federal Government should:

- Enhance boys' and men's positive roles as agents of change at every level and in every domain of its violence prevention activity, both as allies for and targets of prevention work, including by:
 - Developing or reviewing national policies in relation to the role of men and boys in ending violence against girls and women;
 - Reinforcing the involvement of boys and men in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- Support non-government efforts to engage boys and men in ending violence against women, by:
 - Supporting networking of non-governmental organisations that work with boys and men to end violence against women;
 - Encouraging partnerships between women's and men's organizations working to end violence.
 - Supporting collaborative learning and the development of best practice by supporting dialogues and conferences focused on engaging boys and men in ending violence against women;
 - Promoting partnerships between civil society and the corporate sector to fund and implement initiatives aimed at increasing boys' and men's involvement in promoting gender equality and non-violence.
- Address men's roles as gatekeepers of policy and practice in relation to violence prevention, for example through training in issues of gender and violence for key Government officials including members of the police, judiciary, legal profession and others.

At the state and territory level:

State and territory governments similarly should factor the primary prevention of violence against women into their whole-of-government work, engaging ministers and policy makers across portfolios. Their focus should be on schools and TAFE based work, as well as on supporting local government and community-based initiatives. State and territory governments should:

- Prioritise violence prevention as a human rights issue across government, engaging the support of ministers and departmental commitment in the portfolios of, at a minimum, education, health, community services, women's policy, youth, children, local government, justice and police.
- Integrate educational programs on respectful relationships into the curriculum and culture of every school, involving the expansion and implementation of existing schools-based respectful relationships programs, as well as training and support for teachers and other school staff. Make this a strategic priority with implementation targets and allocated budget.
- Establish a violence prevention position in each

region, to coordinate primary prevention with young people, with a particular focus on engaging boys and young men. These positions should be situated within a key agency such as a domestic violence or sexual assault service, local health service, community or social services organisation, or local government.

- Ensure training for staff in all services and agencies that work with children and young people on the impact of domestic violence and violence in dating relationships.

At the local/community level:

- Local governments should take a coordinating role in violence prevention, drawing on best practice in local and community policy and programs throughout the country.
- Local governments should build the capacity of services and agencies in the education, youth, community and violence against women sectors to develop community-based approaches to violence prevention.
 - Including approaches focused on encouraging boys' and men's positive roles in ending violence against women.
- Local governments should develop resources and campaigns through which adult men (and women) – including sports coaches, teachers, parents, family members, and other potential mentors – can teach boys and young men that there is no place for violence in intimate relationships and families.
- Universities should make systematic efforts to prevent violence among their young adult populations by:
 - Including violence prevention education as a routine element in their induction programs for new and returning students;
 - Funding salaried positions for campus violence prevention educators;
 - Providing and supporting other campus-based strategies including social marketing and social norms campaigns and peer education.
- Schools should integrate the prevention of violence against girls and women throughout their curricula and culture, through the implementation of respectful relationships curricula, training and support for teachers and other school staff, and other elements of a whole-of-school approach.
- Youth services should integrate the prevention of violence into their policy and practice, through both through intensive service responses to children and young people at risk of either victimisation or perpetration and general violence prevention efforts. The latter could include:
 - Discussion groups for young men and young women on sex, relationships and violence;
 - Other strategies aimed at encouraging peer cultures of gender equality and non-violence.
- Workplaces, businesses, sporting clubs and trade unions, including those with significant participation by young people or men in particular, should encourage cultures of gender equality and non-violence, by:
 - Adopting organisational policies and procedures to ensure a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for women;
 - Providing workforce training on issues of gender and violence;
 - Running violence prevention education campaigns addressing their members and the wider communities with which they are associated.
- Violence prevention and social justice advocates and organisations should initiate and nurture groups, networks, and campaigns which mobilise boys and men as advocates for the elimination of violence against women.
- Local area health services should include prevention of violence against women in their health promotion plans, and ensure the training of health professionals, not only on the identification of possible victimisation, but also on the health impacts of domestic violence on women, children and young people.
- Parenting, family, and fathering services should work to prevent violence and abuse by men who are fathers, encouraging respectful and non-violent relationships in their training, materials, and service provision.
- Organisations and initiatives addressing the education and wellbeing of boys should include materials and strategies addressing violence, both the violence to which boys are subjected and the violence they may perpetrate or condone themselves.

- Community leaders and institutions, including spiritual and religious leaders and churches, mosques and other places of worship, should promote norms of gender equality and non-violence in their public statements and their everyday practice.
- Researchers and scholars should contribute to violence prevention efforts among children and young people by:
 - Contributing to the implementation and evaluation of school-based and other strategies of prevention;
 - Conducting research on the dynamics and trajectories of both violence and non-violence among boys and young men, drawing on critical scholarship on men and masculinities and feminist and other scholarship on interpersonal violence.

Violence against women is one of our most significant social problems, with deep, long lasting impacts on young people. Action must not be left to others: both as individuals and working together, we can make a difference.