

**Slamming the Door:  
Policy and Service Gaps for Young  
People Experiencing Domestic and  
Family Violence**

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## Summary

Young people's experience of domestic and family violence (DFV) is a substantially neglected area in Australia. This neglect is reflected in the literature on DFV and flows through to a poverty of data on both the prevalence and impacts of DFV in young people's lives. What data we do have indicates that the issue is significant and highly damaging. It is therefore highly concerning that a further consequence of this neglect is a substantial gap in policies, programs and services to assist this group of young people. This report details the general neglect of young people experiencing DFV in research, policy, programs and services. However, it also identifies exceptions to the general neglect that act as models for better addressing this critical issue.

In general in the literature on DFV, the language around young people describes them largely as "witnesses" or "secondary" victims of violence perpetrated against their Mothers. This understates the involvement of young people in DFV. It ignores that they can be directly involved either in protecting their parent or in being an additional direct victim of the abuse. It also underrates the vicarious effects of abuse on young people's worldviews and mental health.

Much of the data on young children's experience of DFV comes from the Mother's perspective. For the adolescent and emerging adult age brackets, there is often little data at all. In terms of the data on prevalence:

- We have strong indications that young people are extremely reluctant to share experiences of abuse.
- We have indications that certain groups (gender diverse, culturally and linguistically diverse, and indigenous) are more at risk.
- We know that there is variation in the extent of gendering depending on age; young children of either gender are equally likely to experience DFV, but in older children and emerging adults females are more at risk.
- And we know that more than three quarters of young people think that DFV is very common in Australia.

However, we do not have good data on the prevalence of DFV experiences for young people in general or for at-risk groups. Also, we do not understand many of the dynamics of young people's experience of DFV, such as why gendering varies with age, that would help us address the issue.

In terms of data on impacts, we know that critical developments around skills for independence, coping mechanisms and attitudes to intimate relationships, occur in adolescence and emerging adulthood and that such once such worldviews are established they are hard to change. It seems likely that DFV would demonstrate to a young person that aggression is a functional part of intimate relationships. However, it is not independent from other stressors, such as drugs, poverty, unemployment and disability, and exposure to DFV alone is not a direct cause of perpetration. However, critically we do not have an understanding of the intergenerational aspects of DFV. There is increasing understanding of the long-term effects of trauma and this is leading to better practice, but further research and practice development is required.

New data from a survey of youth homelessness services has added to our knowledge of the issues:

- The majority of services said that more than half of their young people had experienced DFV and nearly half the services reported that 80% or more of their young people had experienced DFV. This is much higher than statistics based on self-reporting and accords with our knowledge of young people's reluctance to report DFV.
- Nearly a third of services were unable to say how many of their young people experienced intergenerational violence, the average proportion of those that could say was 76%.
- The majority of services reported that parents or guardians were the primary source of violence for young people experiencing domestic violence, however a significant minority of services reported intimate partners as the primary source of violence.
- Links between youth homelessness services and DFV services we often fairly weak, with only around a third of youth homelessness services reporting having a formal or informal partnership.

The language in critical policy documents on DFV inadequately recognizes young people and their experience, often referring to children only in the context of witnessing abuse against their Mother and not addressing the need to support young people. There are clear gaps in services to support young people experiencing domestic violence, such as a lack of coordination between child protection and DFV services, and a lack of specialist youth DFV services. However, some effective programs do exist in particular areas, such

as LOVEBiTES, and some new approaches to services are better able to address the issues involved, such as trauma-informed practice and a community of schools and services approach.

### ***Recommendations***

1. Young people must be recognised as a distinct group in the language used to discuss domestic and family violence within academia, media and public discourse. There needs to be community-wide understanding of family and domestic violence related trauma and its impacts on a young person.
2. Improve data collection mechanisms to accurately identify the prevalence of DFV on emerging adults.
3. Greater investments into and application of trauma-informed therapeutic interventions are needed. Trauma informed practice should be standard in all services being accessed by young people.
4. Greater youth specific DFV skills training for SHS staff. Resources are also needed to provide greater support to youth specialist homelessness services staff.
5. Improve access to mental health and trauma specialist services including DV counsellors, family counsellors and psychologists.
6. More integrated service opportunities. Further support at an early intervention level before young people need to leave home.
7. A system wide coordinated response to family violence that focuses on specific needs of children and young people, and makes recommendations aimed at ensuring that their needs are met, is required.
8. We need a public policy system, which recognises young people as a unique and discreet priority population group.
9. There must be a change in the exclusionary language to include young people as a priority group in their own right within all policy and program interventions.
10. Expansion of early intervention programs including Community of Schools (CoSS) approach throughout New South Wales.
11. Programs specifically targeting young males who have experienced DFV.
12. Expansion of LOVEBiTES and related prevention programs to young people in other age cohorts.
13. Increase availability of programs specifically targeting young males who have experienced DFV.

## About Yfoundations

Yfoundations' mission is to create a future without youth homelessness. We represent young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness; and the services who provide direct support to them. Yfoundations provides advocacy and policy responses on issues relevant to young people affected by homelessness, and issues relevant to service providers. Our vision is to ensure that all young people have access to appropriate and permanent housing options that reflects their individual need.

Since its formation in 1979 Yfoundations has called for reform and improvement to broader systemic responses to youth homelessness and young people at risk of homelessness, to promote, protect and build on existing good practice and excellence and to ensure that youth homelessness remains a priority in public policy on homelessness, youth affairs, youth justice, education, child protection, employment, health/wellbeing and housing. In accordance with the United Nations convention on the rights of the child<sup>1</sup> we advocate that every child has the right to appropriate care and protection.

In pursuit of these goals, we have identified five 'foundations' that are essential components to end youth homelessness and assure young people thrive. They include:

- Home and Place
- Safety and Stability
- Health and Wellness
- Connections and Participation
- Education and Employment

These foundations place youth homelessness within a broader context. Recognising that the issue is intimately connected to a broad range of societal determinants, and that ending youth homelessness will require genuine coordination across all service systems that support young people. They provide a framework for reaching out to other service areas to explore collaborative and integrated solutions. We believe it is vital that each young person has the opportunity within each domain to thrive. More information about these foundations is available on the Yfoundations' website.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, (1998), United Nations Convention in the rights of the Child, 17th Report

<sup>2</sup> <https://yfoundations.org.au/>

## Introduction

The drivers of and pathways into young homelessness are varied. Yet the primary driver of youth homelessness is domestic and family violence (DFV).<sup>3</sup> A common view within our community is that young people find themselves homeless as a result of ‘their’ problematic or ‘bad’ behaviour, which warrants being kicked out of the family home. Research into youth homelessness consistently contradicts this view, and the main drivers of youth homelessness continue to be factors outside the control of the young person.

Children and young people have a right to the same degree of safety and protection as other members of our community. Their protection has been formally recognised in various international conventions including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The United Nations Secretary General’s 2006 report outlined Violence Against Children across five settings including their homes and families, schools, care and justice systems, communities and work environments. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence Against Children continues this focus in advocacy to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against children.

Within Australian legislation, the protection of children and young people is enshrined in various conventions. For example, family violence has been recognised as a form of child abuse in state and territory child protection frameworks, the Australian Government’s National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020 (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009b), and the federal *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth).<sup>4</sup> Yet, children and young people continue to experience extraordinary rates of violence and abuse.

Childhood, adolescence and early adulthood are formative stages of the developmental process. It is imperative that all children and young people are protected from harm, and are supported within a nurturing and safe environment during this period of the life cycle. Stability during the early years has a profound affect across various life domains including educational attainment, employment, health and wellness and social inclusion and participation<sup>5</sup>. ‘Stability’ must also extend beyond the physical environment. Young

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/domestic-violence/#age>

<sup>4</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiew, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>4</sup> Powell, A., & Murray, S. (2008). Children and domestic violence: Constructing a policy problem in Australia and New Zealand. *Social and Legal Studies*, 14(4), 453-473

<sup>5</sup> Yfoundations, Safety and Stability Foundation Paper, <http://yfoundations.org.au/explore-and-learn/publications/the-foundations/safety-and-stability/>

people must 'be' and 'feel' socially and emotionally stable within themselves and across their networks.

Most children and young people have their needs met through the family unit, which provides consistent access to universal services like health and education. Some young people however grow up without the support of a kind, loving family, and are forced to ensure significant family and domestic violence. Young people may experience violence and abuse in various settings. These may include the home, their intimate relationships, or broader family networks. This abuse may manifest as verbal, emotional, physical, financial, or sexual abuse. Despite the actual form of abuse, growing up in an abusive environment pervades all areas of a young persons life.

Children and young people are not passive or 'silent' witnesses to domestic and family violence, but experience a range of abuses and neglect within the dynamic of power and control that is central to intimate partner violence. Exposure to family and domestic violence may interrupt the positive development of social, emotional and neurological pathways and the affects may be life long. Instead of growing up in an emotionally and physically safe, secure, nurturing and predictable environment, these children and young people are forced to worry about the future; they are anxious about what might happen next and older children may feel responsible to protect siblings or the parent from being abused. They may also fee guilty for not being able to stop or curb the abuse. Often getting through each day is the main objective so there is little time left for fun, relaxation or planning for the future.

The experiences and emotions that occur during the formative stages of development often persist well beyond the years of abuse and are fundamental to life outcomes throughout adulthood. Trauma survivors view their world through a unique lens, which impacts their relationship with themselves, with those around them and their place in the world.

The transition from early childhood to adulthood is complex. It is a critical developmental phase of life, during which key competencies, attitudes and behaviours are established. Many of which are carried throughout adulthood. When young people are guided and nurtured during the early years, they are more likely to make a healthy transition into adulthood, and follow a positive trajectory towards positive life outcomes. Growing up in an abusive household has been associated with poor educational attainment, poor employment outcomes, higher risk-taking behaviours,



gang involvement, poor emotional intelligence, and higher reliance on welfare and social supports.

This cohort of young people are often engaged with the formal support system, which may include the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) system, Out of Home Care (OOHC) system, or criminal Justice system. Depending on the individual young person, it may be for a transitional period or a longer period of time.

The prevalence and impact of domestic and family violence on young people is largely unknown. The issue of DFV has largely been focused on violence against women perpetrated by men. When children are considered, they are typically children and still reliant on a caregiver. Historically reports of family and domestic violence have largely reflected the experiences of women and have been obtained through interviews with women's refuges or other targeted support services.

The issue of violence against women in Australian is of significant concern. Yfoundations strongly believes that significant change is needed to curb the unacceptable rate in which women and children are victims of violence. We stand alongside the domestic violence in NSW to ensure that more is done to protect and support women accessing services. We also strongly believe that a substantial shift in the societal perceptions regarding acceptable and respectful behaviours is imperative.

Violence and abuse towards women is not acceptable and should not be tolerated within our communities.

There has been unprecedented interested in the scope and consequences of children's exposure to violence in the home over the past three decades. Consequently there is now a relatively sound empirical understanding if the impact of domestic and family violence on young children. <sup>6</sup> Unfortunately however less emphasis has been placed on exploring the prevalence and impacts of domestic violence on young people.

The paucity of data concerning the issue of DFV on children has been acknowledged<sup>7</sup>, yet even less research has been undertaken exploring the impact of DFV on young people. It is understood that most adult victims of domestic violence don't report it to

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<sup>6</sup> Hague, G., & Mullender, A. (2006). Who listens? The voices of domestic violence survivors in service provision in the United Kingdom. *Violence Against Women*, 12(6), 568-587.

<sup>7</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiew, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). *Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

police.<sup>8</sup> Anecdotal evidence has informed us that young people also underreport their experiences of domestic and family violence.

Currently we are aware of only the young people that have reached out to a support service and disclosed their experiences of abuse. Drawing upon data generated from the snapshot survey and anecdotal evidence from service providers, we anticipate the rate of domestic and family violence amongst young people experiencing homelessness to be significantly higher than what is currently being reported.

The lack of data regarding young people has meant that the policy responses to date have largely been targeted towards supporting women and their young children. In more recent years, we have witnessed an interest in programs aimed at challenging societal views regarding appropriate behaviours, for example LOVEBiTES<sup>9</sup> that has been implemented in schools. Programs such as these are encouraging, yet Yfoundations believes that without a thorough understanding of the prevalence, impact and support needs of young males and females experiencing DFV; we as a community are failing to and will continue to fail to support a large proportion of our young people.

The experiences of domestic and family violence are not homogenous. Every young person experiences and is affected by domestic and family violence differently. It is therefore imperative we have a support system that recognises the unique experiences of young people and has the capacity and capability of responding appropriately.

Drawing upon data extracted from the most recent AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) report<sup>10</sup> and a snapshot survey undertaken by Yfoundations in April 2016, the paper presents family and domestic violence as a key driver of youth homelessness.

It challenges the widely accepted language and terminology used within academic literature, public policy, media and broader community discourse to define domestic and family violence and argues that the current terminology is exclusionary as it fails to clearly identify young people as a discreet group with unique needs and is therefore necessary to expand the dialogue to include young people.

Furthermore, it challenges the efficacy of the current policy response in supporting young people who have experienced domestic and family violence. It argues that a

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<sup>8</sup> Drabsch, T. (2007) Domestic Violence in NSW, NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, Briefing paper No7/07

<sup>9</sup> Flood, Michael, and Kendrick, Vicki. (2012). LOVEBiTES: An evaluation of the LOVEBiTES and Respectful Relationships programs in a Sydney school. Wollongong: University of Wollongong.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/domestic-violence/#age>

trauma informed approach is imperative when supporting young people who have experienced abuse and suggests that the approach should standard practice across all sectors working to improve the outcomes for young people.

## Definitions

**Young People:** We acknowledge that the definition for 'youth' and 'young people' varies in different societies around the world. For the purpose of this paper, we have defined 'youth' and 'young people' as the age cohort of 10-24 years. This is the definition given by the Australian Medical Association (AMA)<sup>11</sup> and has been used to guide earlier Yfoundations policy work. Although it is necessary to define the cohort we are discussing in this paper, it is also important to consider young people from a developmental perspective and that the transition for young people through these stages may not be linear.

**Homelessness:** For the purpose of this paper, we are using the ABS homelessness definition as, 'a person displaced from their home due to domestic violence becomes homeless if they have a temporary living situation and do not have access to accommodation alternatives that are secure, safe and adequate (and the home in which they were subject to domestic violence is not considered a safe alternative accommodation to their homeless situation).<sup>12</sup>

**Domestic and Family Violence:** Within the literature, there are a multitude of definitions for domestic and family violence. Historically the term 'Domestic violence' has broadly referred to the violent behaviour perpetrated by a current or a previous partner in the home and is the most common form of violence against women.<sup>13</sup> The term includes various forms of violence, yet it has been principally associated with physical violence and has thus been criticized for its narrow focus.<sup>14</sup> There is disagreement within the literature whether domestic violence is a 'gendered' issue<sup>15</sup>, yet the current data suggests women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence. This includes overall prevalence, severity of injuries sustained and emotional impact.<sup>16</sup>

Family violence is a broader term encapsulating violence between family members as well as intimate partners.<sup>17</sup> Family violence is the preferred term in Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> Sawyer et al, (2012), Adolescence: a foundation for future health, *Lancet* 2012; 379: 1630-40.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabn>

<sup>13</sup> Phillips, J., & Vandebroek, P. (2014). Domestic and family violence in Australia: An overview of the issues (Parliamentary Library Research Paper). Canberra: Parliament of Australia. Retrieved from <[www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAustralia](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAustralia)>. World Health Organization. (2010). Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence. Geneva: WHO.

<sup>14</sup> Stark, E., & Flitcraft, A. (1996). *Women at risk. Domestic violence and women's health*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

<sup>15</sup> Holt, S., Buckley, H., Whelan, S. (2008) The Impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: a review of the literature, *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 797-810

<sup>16</sup> Holt, S., Buckley, H., Whelan, S. (2008) The Impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: a review of the literature, *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 797-810

<sup>17</sup> Phillips, J., & Vandebroek, P. (2014). Domestic and family violence in Australia: An overview of the issues (Parliamentary Library Research Paper). Canberra: Parliament of Australia. Retrieved from

populations as it better captures the kinship and extended family relationships in Indigenous communities.<sup>18</sup> Acknowledging all of the dilemmas around definitions and terminology, for the purpose of this paper, we have adopted the Our Watch definition of domestic or family violence as consisting of:

- Physical abuse (slapping, hitting, choking, stabbing)
- Sexual (rape, harassment, being forced to watch pornography)
- Emotional or psychological (isolating from friends, family, culture, threats against children, threat to commit suicide or self harm)
- Economic (withholding money)
- Stalking (repeated following, watching or harassing)
- Sexual violence – may be in intimate partner and family context, in workplaces, in schools and in many other circumstances. It may include: sexual harassment, sexualised bullying, unwanted kissing and sexual touching, sexual touching, sexual pressure and coercion and sexual assault and rape.

## **The research on young people’s experience of DFV**

### **Exclusion in the literature**

Public perceptions of DFV as a private issue between a couple or within a family have often allowed it to remain a relatively hidden issue. Over and above this, the experiences of children, and young people in particular are often invisible in the family violence system.

The language commonly used around this form of violence in the community can also trivialise or minimise the seriousness of the experience. The terminology and language we as a community use to discuss the issues of domestic and family violence will shape future policy responses. When ignored, the, affects of DFV are insidious and have the tendency to reach far beyond an individual family home.

Within much of the literature, prevalence and impact of DFV on ‘young people’ and ‘children’ is discussed synonymously. Yet research pertaining to brain maturation<sup>19</sup> and developmental psychology<sup>20</sup> purports there are significant and distinct physical, social and emotional changes occurring within and between these life stages. Yet young people

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<[www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAustralia](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAustralia)>

<sup>18</sup> Cripps, K. & Davis, M. (2012). Communities working to reduce Indigenous family violence. Canberra: Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse.

<sup>19</sup> Yfoundations, Health and Wellness policy paper 2015

<sup>20</sup> Shaffer, D.R and Kipp, K (2010) *Developmental Psychology, Childhood and Adolescence* , Eighth edition

are not identified, as a distinct cohort with unique support needs within the current system it is therefore unsurprising that their support needs are failing to be met.

Within the majority of academic literature and mainstream media articles, much of the focus is commenting on DFV from the perspective of women. By choosing to discuss the impacts of DFV on women only, we are failing to acknowledge a significant cohort that is being affected, which suggests that the experiences of young people are secondary to that of a parent or adult. This is not acceptable. DFV is widely believed to be a gendered issue<sup>21</sup>, and women are overwhelmingly represented; yet the impacts of DFV extend well beyond the women. This needs to be reflected in the language used to discuss domestic and family violence.

Young people are not 'secondary' or 'silent' witnesses' to DFV violence as was previously believed<sup>22</sup>, they are active participants and may be significantly affected by exposure to violent and abusive behaviours. Some young people are directly involved i.e. providing physical protection to a parent from further harm, or being the direct victim of the abuse, while others are affected vicariously, i.e. feeling guilty for not being able to change the situation. Regardless of the circumstances of their involvement, the short and longer term effects of the violence on young people may be devastating.

***Recommendation:***

- Young people must be recognised as a distinct group in the language used to discuss domestic and family violence within academia, media and public discourse. There needs to be community-wide understanding of family and domestic violence related trauma and its impacts on a young person

**Prevalence – What we know**

In the 2015 Children Rights Report, the National Children's Commissioner purported that the national and disaggregated data about child victims of family violence, including breakdowns on the age of victims and data about offenders was limited.<sup>23</sup> At present, the exact prevalence of young people experiencing or affected by DFV is unknown. We are aware however that the prevalence of young people living in situations of domestic and family violence is high and under enumerated.

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<sup>21</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiw, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>22</sup> Powell, A., & Murray, S. (2008). Children and domestic violence: Constructing a policy problem in Australia and New Zealand. *Social and Legal Studies*, 14(4), 453-473

<sup>23</sup> National Children's Commissioner, 'Children's Rights Report 2015' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 14 October 2015) 120.

The underlying causes of domestic and family violence are complex which has led to significant confusion and misinformation about the prevalence of domestic violence within public discourse, particularly concerning young people.<sup>24</sup>

Community attitudes towards equality, sexuality, domestic violence and sexual assault can strongly influence both the prevalence of domestic and family violence and disclosure/reporting rates. There is general consensus that gender inequality; power imbalances and controlling behaviours within relationships are key determinants for violent behaviours.<sup>25</sup> Further, DFV may destroy the ability for a young person to trust others, particularly adults.<sup>26</sup> The stigma and the shame young people associate with their experiences<sup>27</sup> has contributed to young people underreporting their experiences of DFV to SHS and other agencies collecting data.

From the data that is accessible we are aware that young women are at a higher risk of intimate partner violence than older women<sup>28</sup>, with those aged 18 to 24 twice as likely to experience sexual assault, with some estimates that those aged 15 to 19 are four times as likely.<sup>29</sup> The 2012 Personal Safety Survey (PSS) identified that 13% of young women (aged 18 to 24) experienced at least one incidence of violence in the 12 months prior, a rate higher than for any other age group surveyed.<sup>30</sup>

There is a strong relationship between DFV and young homelessness. DFV is the primary driver of youth homelessness and the main reason a young person accesses support from a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS).<sup>31</sup> Yet it is seldom expressed as the primary reason for reaching out to a service. Young people are often guarded and reticent to share their experiences of violence and abuse with support services, and it may take a considerable amount of time before a young person feels safe enough to

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<sup>24</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiw, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>25</sup> J Phillips, A Dunkley, D Muller & C Lorimer. (2015). Domestic violence: issues and policy challenges, Parliamentary Library Research Paper, Research Paper series 2015-2016

<sup>26</sup> Knight, C. (2015). Trauma-informed social work practice: Practice considerations and challenges. *Clinical Journal of Social Work*, 43, 25-37.

<sup>27</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiw, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>28</sup> Powell, A., & Murray, S. (2008). Children and domestic violence: Constructing a policy problem in Australia and New Zealand. *Social and Legal Studies*, 14(4), 453-473

<sup>29</sup> A Harris, N Honey, K Webster, K Diemer & V Politoff, 'Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16-24 years, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation', Melbourne, 2015, p. 11

<sup>30</sup> Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 'Violence against young women in Australia: Contexts beyond the family home', Face the Facts Briefing, Vol. 1, No. 9, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Personal Safety Survey 2012', cat. no. 4906.0, 2013

<sup>32</sup> Spinney, A. (2013). Safe from the Start? An action research project on early intervention materials for children affected by domestic and family violence. *Children and Society*, 27, 397-405.

open up and share their experiences. This feeling of safety may be achieved through a connection with an individual support worker or feeling safe within a service.

Much of what we currently understand about DFV is largely based on the experiences of women. The majority of data used to inform policy has been collected from specialist women's services, including refuges and other support services. When children are accessing services with a parent, the child's experience is understood from the perspective of the parent (typically the mother).

The experiences of young males experiencing DFV are almost never captured in the current collection systems. Young males are very underrepresented in the DFV data.

Drawing from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) report 2014/15,<sup>32</sup> which is the primary mechanism for collecting the prevalence of DFV and young homelessness, we are aware of the following:

The prevalence for males and female children is similar up to age 10. Yet as children grow, the current statistics tell us that the prevalence of DFV for young females becomes much higher than for young males; the ratio changes to approximately 2:1 for ages 15-17, and over 5:1 for ages 18-24. Does the prevalence of violence *really* cease for young men? Are they more likely to become perpetrators? For those that access a SHS, are they less likely to disclose their experiences to a support worker? And given there are no male youth specific DFV services, are they hidden from the system completely? These are all questions that require further investigation.

Further to the significant lack of empirical data regarding DFV and young people, is the absence of any youth voice. The lived experiences of young people are not evident in the literature yet we know from talking with our services, and from results of the snapshot survey, that DFV is a common theme of amongst this cohort of young people.

According to the most recent AIHW SHS report, (2013-14) 10,157 young people aged under 25 presented at SHS due to domestic and family violence or relationship/family breakdown. This number equates to 45% of all SHS clients aged under 25 years.

From 2011/13 to 2014/15, the AIHW reported a small decline in the number of young people accessing SHS for reasons relating to DFV. While it would be encouraging to see a decline in numbers, the decline must be considered within the context of the Going

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/domestic-violence-and-homelessness/>



Home Staying Home (GSH) Reform. The state-wide reform of the homelessness sector had massive implications for SHS services, particularly across the women's refuge.

We believe the decline in numbers is not an accurate reflection of the experiences of young people, and may be attributable to factors such as services in positions of uncertainty not taking on new clients or poor reporting of client numbers due to unfamiliarity with systems of new staff, or staff in new roles.

There are certain cohorts of young people who are at greater risk of domestic and family violence. These include gender diverse, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), and Aboriginal young people.

Gender diverse young people may experience a negative reception of their sexuality within the family context. This homophobic violence often leads to alienation, loneliness, poverty and homelessness, all of which have significant impacts on health and wellbeing.<sup>33</sup> This is exacerbated in rural/isolated communities.<sup>34</sup>

The effects of DFV on CALD young people can be compounded by cultural and language barriers, experiencing discrimination and racism, isolation from peers, and a history of trauma arising from having witnessed conflict in their homeland or from their journey to Australia.<sup>35</sup>

Anecdotally we know that DFV is often not recognised by young people. One respondent of the survey representing a service working in a rural and predominately Aboriginal community reported 38 of his 41 young people having experiences of DFV yet only 5 of the young people had disclosed DFV to the service.

This highlights a need to better understand the cultural dimensions of DFV in Aboriginal communities and how it's affecting young people.

The current enumeration methodologies are providing a very limited amount of information about a significant and complex issue. There is a myriad of areas that we believe require rigorous and immediate investigation.

Some of which include:

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<sup>33</sup> Baker, JM 2002, *How Homophobia Hurts Children: Nurturing Diversity at Home, at School, and in the Community*, New York: Harrington Park Press

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, KH, Bansel, P, Denson, N, Ovenden, G & Davies, C 2014, *Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse*, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne

<sup>35</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiw, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). *Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

- How are young people accessing and utilising DFV services. Where are the service gaps? Do they differ in rural and regional parts of Australia?
- What about minority populations including CALD, Aboriginal and gender diverse. What needs to change in the current system for these young people to access relevant and culturally appropriate support?
- Rigorous investigations into the gender balance of young males and females experiencing homelessness. We need to identify why young boys/males not identifying DFV; is it about the messaging, i.e. males are more likely to be the perpetrator therefore reluctant to seek assistance when they are the victim. Is it because there are no services for them to access?
- What about young boys who are excluded from accessing women's refuge services (typically >10)? Where do they go? How many families are not seeking support due to lack of services that accept young males and females?
- We need to know more about the perpetrators. Do adult abusers stop committing violence against young boys at a particular age, if so why?

Lastly, it is important to note that young Australians are very aware that domestic violence is ubiquitous within our community. In 2014, Youth Action and the White Ribbon Foundation surveyed over 3,000 young people across Australia on their attitudes to Domestic, Family and Teen Dating Violence. This included questions on attitudes to gender equity and how common young people felt domestic violence was in Australia society, 76% felt that domestic violence was common in Australia.<sup>36</sup>

### Impacts – Using a developmental perspective

There is a plethora of literature pertaining to the importance of wellbeing during adolescence (10-18)<sup>37</sup> and emerging adulthood (18-25)<sup>38</sup> and the relationship between stability and positive emotional health during the early years on adult life satisfaction.<sup>39</sup>

Bandura's Social Learning Theory <sup>40</sup> purports that young people learn by modelling the attitudes and behaviour of adults and their broader communities. From this, they begin to form a unique belief system comprising a complex pattern of internal and external

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<sup>36</sup> Cale, J. and Breckenridge, J. (2015) Gender, Age and the Perceived Causes, Nature and Extent of Domestic and Dating Violence in Australian Society, Gendered Violence Research Network, UNSW Australia

<sup>37</sup> Blakemore, S.J., (2012) Imaging brain development: The Adolescent Brain *NeuroImage* 61, 397-406

<sup>38</sup> Arnett, J.J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood, A theory of late teens through the twenties, *American Psychologist* Vol 55, No5 469-480

<sup>39</sup> Emerson, L., Fox, S. & Smith, C. 2015, Good Beginnings: Getting it right in the early years The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.; Layard et al (2013). What Predicts A Successful Life? A Life course model of wellbeing, IZA, Discussion Paper No.7682, October 2013

<sup>40</sup> Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Oxford, England: Prentice-Hall.

competencies behaviours and attitudes regarding relationships, intimacy, respect and appropriate behaviour. Once a belief system is firmly established it may be difficult to influence or change. This system is fundamental to the way in which they respect themselves and others and inform decision-making processes throughout adult life.<sup>41</sup> DFV demonstrates to young people that aggression is a functional component of intimate relationships.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to note, that not all young people who have experienced DFV will go on to become victims or perpetrators of violence in their own relationships. The relationship between experiencing DFV in the early stages of life and going on to experiencing violence in adulthood, critical to understanding the intergenerational nature of DFV, is an area that requires further investigation.

Adolescence and emerging adulthood<sup>43</sup> are distinct stages of the life cycle particularly in terms of identity exploring and role experimentation.<sup>44</sup>

The adolescent phase is an intense physical, social and emotional growth period of life. It is a time when behaviours are established, many of which are sustained across the life span. It is a time when young people choose a career path, where they gain and develop necessary skills and competencies and establish an identity and obtain greater responsibility and independence. For young people, who are victims of family and domestic violence, this transition period can be even more challenging than for other young people.

Adolescence is associated with experimentation, which is linked to the development of resilience and coping mechanisms, which are critical attributes to overcome adversity in adulthood. Young victims of domestic and family violence may develop coping mechanisms to manage anxiety and overwhelming distress including suicidality, substance abuse and addictions, eating disorders<sup>45</sup>, self-harming behaviours including cutting and burning and dissociation.<sup>46</sup>In emerging adulthood the focus on identity

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<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Pensak (2015) Must Be 18 or Older: How Current Domestic Violence Policies Dismiss Teen Dating Violence, 21 Wm. & Mary J. Women & L. 499

<sup>42</sup> Holt, S., Buckley, H., Whelan, S. (2008) The Impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: a review of the literature, *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 797-810

<sup>43</sup> Arnett, J.J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood, A theory of late teens through the twenties, *American Psychologist* Vol 55, No5 469-480

<sup>44</sup> Keniston, K. (1971). *Youth and dissent: The rise of a new opposition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>45</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (1993) Practice guidelines for eating disorders, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 150, pp 207-228

<sup>46</sup> Jaffe, P. G., Wolfe, D., & Campbell, M. (2012). *Growing up with domestic violence: Assessment, intervention, and prevention strategies for children and adolescents*. Cambridge: Hogrefe Publishing.

issues can be seen in the areas of love, work and worldviews.<sup>47</sup> Exploration in love becomes more intimate and serious than during adolescence, and a young person is developing important character qualities vital to moving towards being self sufficient, including accepting responsibilities for self and independent decision-making.<sup>48</sup>

Both adolescence and emerging adulthood are associated with heightened risk taking behaviours including unprotected sex, binge drinking and other substance misuse.<sup>49</sup>

When young people experience DFV during these formative developmental stages, the affects may be extremely damaging and wide reaching. There is insufficient knowledge regarding the relationship between experiencing DFV during adolescence and emerging adulthood and future experiences of violence as either victim or perpetrator. Not all young people will go on to experience violence in their adult lives. It is an area that requires further investigation.

A developing field of research that is beginning to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the impacts of DFV is that focussing on trauma.

Despite significant adversity, it is important to acknowledge the resilience demonstrated by many young people experiencing DFV.<sup>50</sup> Exposure to DFV is not a 'homogenous uni-dimensional phenomenon'.<sup>51</sup> Every young person's experience is unique, which requires a targeted and individualised response. The circumstances surrounding the violence, how the young person responds, and the impact of the trauma in the short and longer term differs for every individual. Psychological and behavioural symptoms that may be evident in those suffering trauma, include: an inability to manage internal states/emotions, alterations in attention or consciousness and alterations in self-perception.<sup>52</sup>

Trauma may be the result of a one off experience. It may also be the culmination of multiple, interrelated and coexisting stressors or patterns of harmful events occurring

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<sup>47</sup> Arnett, J.J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood, A theory of late teens through the twenties, *American Psychologist* Vol 55, No5 469-480

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Arnett, J. (1992). Reckless behavior in adolescence: A developmental perspective. *Developmental Review*, 12, 339-373; J. G. & Schulenberg, J. (1993). How part-time work intensity relates to drug use, problem behavior, time use, and satisfaction among high school seniors: Are these consequences or just correlates? *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 220-235.

<sup>50</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiw, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>51</sup> Jouriles, E. N., McDonald, R., Norwood, W. D., ShinnWare, H., Collazos Spiller, L., & Swank, P. R. (1998). Knives, guns and interparent violence: Relations with child behaviour problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 12(2), 178-194.

<sup>52</sup> Bateman, J., Henderson, C., & Kezelman, C. (2013). Trauma informed care and practice: Towards a cultural shift in policy reform across mental health and human services in Australia. A national strategic direction: National Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group. Position paper and recommendations. Lilyfield, NSW: Mental Health Coordinating Council.

over critical developmental periods. Yet neither trauma period is more ‘worthy’<sup>53</sup> than another. The impact of trauma is dependent on a range of factors specific to the individual. The affect of cumulative harm on a young person is not always understood by practitioners working to support young victims of violence.<sup>54</sup>

DFV is seldom an isolated event. It is something that potentially disrupts broader family functioning<sup>55</sup> and may be one part of a broader ‘adversity package’.<sup>56</sup> This may include a multitude of risk factors i.e. child abuse, parental substance abuse, mental health difficulties, unemployment, homelessness, social isolation and involvement in crime.<sup>57</sup> It is important that all components of the adversity package are considered when supporting with young people as “the presence of multiple stresses in a young person’s life may both elevate the risk of negative outcomes and possibly render indistinct the exact relationship between DFV and those negative outcomes“. Emerging adults who lack fundamental cognitive, emotional, familial, societal, and cultural supports are also at risk of suffering adverse effects of trauma exposure.<sup>58</sup>

Failure to acknowledge the reality of trauma and abuse in the lives of young people. And the long term impact this can have in the lives of adults is on the significantly clinical and moral deficit of current mental health approaches.

There is growing momentum around ‘trauma-centred model of care’ the Trauma Informed Care and Practice (TICP) approach is an approach whereby all services are organised around the recognition and acknowledgement of trauma and its prevalence, alongside awareness and sensitivity to its dynamics. “Trauma informed care is a strengths based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bateman, J., Henderson, C., & Kezelman, C. (2013). Trauma informed care and practice: Towards a cultural shift in policy reform across mental health and human services in Australia. A national strategic direction: National Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group. Position paper and recommendations. Lilyfield, NSW: Mental Health Coordinating Council

<sup>54</sup> Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission 894, 3. In Victoria Commission into Family Violence

<sup>55</sup> Holt, S., Buckley, H., Whelan, S. (2008) The Impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: a review of the literature, *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 797-810

<sup>56</sup> Rossman, B. B. R. (2000). Time heals all: How much and for whom? *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2, 31–50.

<sup>57</sup> Golding, J. M. (1999). Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: A meta analysis. *Journal of Family Violence*, 14(2), 99–132.

<sup>58</sup> Becker DF, Daley M, Gadpaille WJ, Green MR, Flahery LT, Harper G, et al. (2004). ‘Trauma and adolescence 2: The nature and scope of trauma’. *Adolescent Psychiatry*. (2004); 27(special issue): 165–193

<sup>59</sup> Hopper EK, Bassuk EL, Oliver J. (2010). Shelter from the storm: Trauma-informed care in homelessness services settings. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*; 3(2): 80-100.

***Recommendations:***

- Improve data collection mechanisms to accurately identify the prevalence of DFV on emerging adults.
- Greater investments into and application of trauma-informed therapeutic interventions
- Trauma informed practice as standard in all services being accessed by young people including schools, training institutions, health care providers

## Results from a survey of youth homelessness services

Collecting data relating to domestic and family violence is difficult and complex. There is often an over-reliance of self-identification of experience of DFV as a primary issue. The current survey attempted to overcome this by asking questions directly of youth homelessness services who in general have a detailed knowledge of the experiences of the young people they assist.

It is important to note that these services are frequently under significant resources pressure and this the time they can devote to such resources is highly limited. This means that the survey could only be a quick glance at a very nuanced issue. However, we believe the data is a valuable contribution to the research regarding the intersection of DFV on youth homelessness. The results highlight the need for further investigation into the prevalence and impacts of DFV on young people.

In NSW, there are around 150 services supporting young people experiencing homelessness. This total number includes crisis refuges, transitional accommodation and family support services. On Tuesday 5 and Wednesday 6 April, Yfoundations called over 70 services around NSW. Thirty-eight services responded to our survey. These services were supporting an approximate total of 1,800 young people on the days of the survey.

The questions we asked were as follows:

1. How many young people are accessing your service at present?
2. How many young people accessing your service (at present) have experienced domestic and family violence? (That you're aware of)
3. What is the average age of young people in your service who have experienced domestic and family violence? (Categories: [12-15] [16-17] [18-24])
4. How many of the young people who have experienced domestic and family violence had family members involved with domestic and family violence in the past?
5. In general who is the main perpetrator of violence in the majority of these young people's lives? (Categories: [Parent/guardian] [Other relative e.g. Sibling] [intimate partner] [non-family member e.g. housemate])
6. What do you need as a service provider to support young people experiencing domestic and family violence?
7. What is your relationship with your local DFV service(s)?  
(Categories: [No service present in my area] [No relationship] [No formal partnership])

but collaborate when required] [Partnership] [Partnership with Memorandum of Understanding])

The key findings from the survey were as follows:

**Prevalence:** Indications are that the prevalence of DFV amongst young people experiencing homelessness is much higher than previously estimated by data relying more on self-reporting of DFV at initial contact. The majority of services said that more than half of their young people had experienced DFV and nearly half the services reported that 80% or more of their young people had experienced DFV.

**Intergenerational DFV:** Even amongst services with a close understanding of the young people they assist there was a lack of knowledge as regards whether the DFV was intergenerational. Records of this were rarely kept and nearly a third of services were unable to give even an estimate of how many of their young people experienced intergenerational violence. Disturbingly the interactions are that it is very common, amongst those services that could give data on this the average proportion was over three-quarters. This highlights both how critical it is to understand intergenerational aspects of DFV, and how far there is to go in doing so.

**Source of violence:** The majority of services reported that parents or guardians were the primary source of violence for young people experiencing domestic violence. However, a significant minority of services reported intimate partners as the primary source of violence. Given that services were asked for only the primary source of violence, the fact that intimate partners was the response of even as a minority indicates that it is likely a close second in terms of its prevalence. This is supported by informal comments by many services to this effect.

**Coordination with DFV services:** Only around one third of services had a (formal or informal) partnership with a local DFV service, most reported that they collaborated when required with their local DFV service. This is an indication that links between youth specialist and DFV specialist services are generally weak. This likely means that, despite the best efforts of the sector, this issue is not being adequately addressed.

**Skill shortage:** Services were also asked to provide any further feedback on the issue. A key point raised in many responses was skill shortage. Many of those working in the SHS sector don't feel they have sufficient skills to support young people, in particular those within teenage years, in overcoming the trauma associated with domestic and family



violence. Members of the SHS sector feel that greater specialist services are needed to support this group. Certain services do currently have access to specialist health professionals including counsellors and psychologists, yet they feel that more contact hours are still needed to meet the needs of their young people within their service. In rural and regional areas, specialist psychological services are either non-existent or extremely expensive.

***Recommendations:***

- Greater youth specific DFV training for SHS staff
- Improve access to mental health and trauma specialist services including DV counsellors, family counsellors and psychologists.
- Specialist services to support young males experiencing DFV
- More integrated service opportunities. Further support at an early intervention level, before young person needs to leave home.

## Current responses

### Policy

In addition to young people not being adequately recognised within the literature, as discussed above, the language used within current policy is trivializing the experiences of young people. Also, despite National and State legislations, there are obvious gaps in the care and protection system in NSW and young people are falling through.

One issue pertains to the structure of the two primary systems responding to domestic and family violence. The child protection system, which is responsible for protecting children against and responding to allegations of child abuse, and a domestic violence system, which is largely responsible for responding to violence and abuse being experienced by women by male perpetrators. Despite the obvious overlap between the two systems, they continue to operate in isolation of the other, and young people are inadequately recognised by either.

In 2013 the World Health Organization (WHO) analysed and collated data from around the world, including Australia. The review found that violence against women is a significant public health problem and a violation of human rights. The review concluded that the prevalence of violence constitutes 'a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action'.<sup>60</sup>

There are a number of statutes in Australia protect the rights of children and young people. Yet it is the State Governments responsibility to administer and operate protection services for children and young people. The principal statute in NSW is the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157.<sup>61</sup>

The Act was implemented in stages from 2000. Six reforms have occurred since implementation phase, all of which have been focused on strengthening outcomes for children within the 0-8-age cohort. Although the Act makes explicit mention of 'young people', not one of the reforms has been aimed at improving outcomes for young people.

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<sup>60</sup>[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAust#\\_ftn1](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAust#_ftn1)

<sup>61</sup> Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157,  
<http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/fullhtml/inforce/act+157+1998+FIRST+0+N#ch.2-pt.1-sec.7>

The objective of this Act are to provide:

*(a) that **children and young persons** receive such care and protection as is necessary for their safety, welfare and well-being, having regard to the capacity of their parents or other persons responsible for them, and*

*(b) Recognition **that the primary means of providing for the safety, welfare and well-being of children and young persons** is by providing them with long-term, safe, nurturing, stable and secure environments through permanent placement in accordance with the permanent placement principles, and*

*(c) That all institutions, services and facilities responsible for the **care and protection of children and young persons** provide an environment for them that is **free of violence** and exploitation and provide services that foster their health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity, and*

*(d) That **appropriate assistance is rendered to parents and other persons responsible for children and young persons** in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities in order to promote a safe and nurturing environment.*

Other relevant acts/legislations include: Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment (Parental Responsibility Contracts) Act 2006(NSW); Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW); Crimes Act 1900 (NSW); Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (NSW); The Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW); Family Law Act 1975 (Cth); Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Bill 2009.<sup>62</sup>

One of the key documents in this area is the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. The title clearly demonstrates our argument that young people are being left behind in the current debate. The framework was developed by the Council of Australian Governments and uses a public health approach to place 'children's' interests at the centre of all policy and legislative development. Where does the protection of young people fit into this national framework?

Another key document is the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. This is Australia's first ever long-term plan to reduce violence against women. The national plan, which targets two major forms of violence: domestic

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<sup>62</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>

and family violence and sexual assault. On page one of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* it reads, "Too many young people in Australia **have witnessed** acts of physical domestic violence **against a parent**".<sup>63</sup> This language is exclusionary and fails to acknowledge the devastating affects DFV has on young people. The Plan fails to mention the significant impacts DFV on young people when the violence is perpetrated against them.

There are some exceptions to this exclusionary language in critical documents. The release of the Victorian Commissions Report into Family Violence was timely. We are encouraged to see that many of the recommendations outlined in the report are strongly aligned to our vision for improving outcomes for young people experiencing domestic and family violence. We agree that children and young people experiencing family violence, as well as domestic violence should be recognised as victims in their own right (p 509)<sup>64</sup> and interventions need to respond accordingly.

Yfoundations agrees that it will take a collective effort from all States and Territories to reduce and eliminate violence in our community. We are concerned however that the issue of domestic and family violence and young people is only mentioned in reference to strengthening respectful relationships. While we agree that preventive programs are essential, it is imperative the system also has the capabilities to provide appropriated and timely support to victims of domestic and family violence so they can begin to heal and move forward with their lives.

***Recommendations:***

- A system wide coordinated response to family violence that focuses on specific needs of children and young people, and makes recommendations aimed at ensuring that their needs are met
- A public policy system, which recognises young people as a unique and discreet priority population group.
- There must be a change in the exclusionary language to include young people as a priority group in their own right within all policy and program interventions.

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<sup>63</sup> Indermaur, D., 2001, Young Australians and domestic violence, Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 195, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. National Plan to Reduce Violence to Women and Children, Pg 1

<sup>64</sup> Neave, M., Faulkner, P., T., Nicholson. (2016) Royal Commission into Family Violence. Summary and Recommendations

## Programs

There are significant gaps in the service support system for young people at risk of, currently experiencing or victims of domestic and family violence. When services do exist, they are not always appropriate. The circumstances of the violence, and the individual characteristics and competencies of the individual young person influence the experience of domestic and family violence. It is therefore imperative that we have a well-coordinated service system that recognises and respects diversity amongst young people and has the capability to improve outcomes by providing comprehensive and integrated support to young people and families.<sup>65</sup>

Anecdotal evidence suggests that particular attention is needed to identify the prevalence and impact of DFV on young males. We currently do not have a sound understanding of the experiences of DFV for young males as there are no DFV support services available.

In 2015 the NSW Government announced a \$60 million package to target perpetrators and support women, men and children who have experienced DFV.<sup>66</sup> The package includes programs, which will target perpetrators, increase Crisis Accommodation Support, introduce Australia's first Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, and provide a Stronger Response to Sexual Assault. Service gaps have been identified through the DFV blueprint, which was open for consultation in late 2015. The Blueprint has been allocated into four main sections, notably Prevention, Early intervention, Support for victims, and Perpetrator programs.

While we welcome this investment made by the State Government, we are concerned that 'young people' may be further excluded from this package. The funding allocations are yet to be confirmed and we are uncertain of whether the youth SHS sector will be eligible to access funds.

The concept of primary prevention is in its infancy. Yet it's believed that programs targeting children and young people should:

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<sup>65</sup> Campo, M., Kaspiew, R., Tayton, S., & Moore, S. (2014). Children affected by domestic and family violence: A review of domestic and family violence prevention, early intervention and response services. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; Healey, L., & Humphreys, C. (2013). Governance and interagency responses: Improving practice for regional governance. A continuum matrix (Topic Paper No. 21). Sydney: Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse; Zannettino, L., & McLaren, H. (2014). Domestic violence and child protection: Towards a collaborative approach across the two service sectors. *Child & Family Social Work*, 19, 421-431.

<sup>66</sup> More information can be accessed using the following link:  
[https://www.women.nsw.gov.au/violence\\_prevention/new-dfv-package](https://www.women.nsw.gov.au/violence_prevention/new-dfv-package)

- Increase children and young people's knowledge and attitudes toward violence against women
- Promote gender equitable attitudes
- Equip children with critical skills to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and dominant gender stereotypes
- Developing respectful relationship skills.<sup>67</sup>

One notable prevention program is LOVEBiTES<sup>68</sup> and the related program Respectful Relationships. LOVEBiTES is an Australian violence prevention education programs, which aims to promote respectful relationships for young people aged 14-17 years. The LOVEBiTES curriculum addresses both domestic and family violence (including defining the different types of relationship violence, myth deconstruction ethical bystander strategies, skills building activities, and the promotion and modelling of respectful behaviours) and sexual assault (including defining sexual assault, myth deconstruction consent, ethical bystander strategies, and skills building activities). The Respectful Relationships program is a related program for year 7 students.

An evaluation found that The LOVEBiTES and Respectful Relationships programs “had a significant and positive impact on students’ attitudes towards domestic violence, attitudes towards gender relations, and skills in having respectful relationships. Students who participated in the two violence prevention programs showed significant improvements in the attitudes and skills in these areas.”<sup>69</sup> Less positive results were found in a number of other areas. However, the program has demonstrated significant improvements in the attitudes of young people towards DFV. It is encouraging to note that the program will be expanded in the future.

A further program that shows promise is not specifically related to DFV, but is an early intervention approach. Early intervention is inextricably linked with the notion of risk and the concept that it is possible to identify signs of adversity before it happens. The Geelong Project in Victoria, the Northern Beaches Project and the Ryde project in New South Wales is a notable early intervention program improving the outcomes for young people. The project is a place-based, ‘community of schools and services’ (CoSS)

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<sup>67</sup> Flood, M., & Kendrick, V. (2012). Love Bites: An evaluation of LoveBites and Respectful Relationship Programs in a Sydney school. Wollongong: University of Wollongong; Carmody, M., Salter, M., Presterudstuen, G., Ovenden, G., & Hudson, M. (2014). Less to lose and more to gain? Men and Boys Violence Prevention Research Project final report. Sydney: University of Western Sydney; Our Watch. (2015). Working with children and young people (Policy Brief No. 5). Melbourne: Our Watch.

<sup>68</sup> Flood, M., & Kendrick, V. (2012). Love Bites: An evaluation of LoveBites and Respectful Relationship Programs in a Sydney school. Wollongong: University of Wollongong;

<sup>69</sup> Flood, Michael, and Kendrick, Vicki. (2012). LOVEBiTES: An evaluation of the LOVEBiTES and Respectful Relationships programs in a Sydney school. Wollongong: University of Wollongong.

approach to early intervention using population screening, a flexible practice framework and youth-focused, family-centered case management. The model builds in longitudinal follow-up and support to reduce homelessness, and achieve sustainable education and lifetime outcomes.<sup>70</sup> Through the population-screening tool, asks young people to self assess the situation in their family home. This question allows the researchers to identify the possibility that of violence or abuse is happening in the family home. When family violence is identified, the necessary supports are offered to the young person and the broader family, to ensure the young person remains safe and if possible within the family home and engaged with school.

***Recommendations:***

- Expansion of early intervention programs including Community of Schools (CoSS) approach throughout New South Wales
- Expansion of LOVEBiTES and related prevention programs to young people in other years

Increase availability of programs specifically targeting young males who have experienced DFV

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<sup>70</sup> David Mackenzie & Monica Thielking (2013) The Geelong Project: A community of schools and youth services model for early intervention Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University Homelessness Research Collaboration National Homelessness Research Agenda 2009-2013 July 2013

## **Conclusion**

Young people are our future. It is vital that all young people have equal opportunities to grow, learn, play and explore in a safe and stable environment. We often hear from services that parents want to be able to care for their children. There are circumstances however that parents/guardians are unable to provide adequate care for their young family. It is important that we have a social protection system, which detects family breakdown before it reaches crisis, and has the capacity to respond appropriately to the family unit as well as the individuals within the family constellation.

It is important that the particular safety and stability needs of young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are well understood and reflected within social policy. Furthermore adequate human and financial resources are also required to ensure that all young people are provided with the safety and stability necessary to grow and learn and thrive. We need to build a safe and stable system that responds appropriately to the needs and risks of all children and young people.

It is not the responsibility of families alone to ensure young people are supported during the early childhood, adolescent and young adults phases. It is the collective responsibility, of families, Government, social services, broader community and young people to ensure that we create a safe and stable environment for all of our young people.