

**INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND
ISSUES IN NSW**

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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

16 September 2011

Dear Director,

Re Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW

The Youth Action and Policy Association NSW (YAPA) welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the *Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW*. YAPA believes that the inquiry provides an important opportunity to hear and include the largely overlooked perspectives and needs of young people in NSW in relation to domestic & family violence and its prevention.

About this submission

This submission refers to the Committee's terms of reference and pays particular attention to early intervention strategies to prevent domestic & family violence in regards to young people in NSW aged 12-25. It also uses the available evidence and research about the prevention and early intervention strategies to make informed recommendations.

About YAPA

YAPA is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW.

YAPA works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. To achieve this, it is the role of YAPA to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
7. Ensure YAPA's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

Domestic & family violence trends in NSW

Domestic & family violence (DFV) is an issue which is not only limited to traditional cases of physical violence within intimate relationships and in a domestic setting, but ranges from psychological, to social and economic abuse and permeates all levels of society.ⁱ

The incidence of domestic & family violence in NSW is often higher in rural areas than in metropolitan areas, and again with higher rates in remote areas.ⁱⁱ The regions of NSW with the highest recorded rates were the Far West (1259.2 per 100,000), North Western (996.8 per 100,000) and Northern (622.0 per 100,000).ⁱⁱⁱ Within the region of Sydney, the areas with the highest rates of recorded domestic & family violence related assaults were Blacktown (645.2 per 100,000), Outer South Western Sydney (610.2 per 100,000) and Inner Sydney (479.0 per 100,000)^{iv}.

Young people and domestic & family violence

Key research about young people and domestic & family violence in Australia found that:

- 1 in 3 youth surveyed reported witnessing physical violence in their own homes. About 16% reported current violence (including yelling) in their homes.^v
- 24% of young people (aged 12-20) surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic & family violence against their mother or stepmother.^{vi}
- Witnessing parental domestic & family violence has emerged as the strongest predictor of perpetration of violence in young people's own intimate relationships.^{vii}

Moreover, within communities with high incidences of domestic & family violence, young people who experienced or witnessed domestic & family violence in their homes were twice as likely to be both victims and perpetrators of violence in their own intimate relationships as those who were not exposed to domestic & family violence^{viii}.

It is also believed that young people's vulnerability to intimate partner violence is increased by sexist and traditional gender role attitudes, peer culture, inexperience and attitudes supportive of violence that can be shaped by the media, pornography and early exposure to aggressive behaviour by parents or role models^{ix}.

Moreover, it is widely considered that physically abusive behaviour is transmitted across generations^x, which suggests that prevention and early intervention strategies targeting domestic & family violence must start with young people.

While there is sufficient literature about domestic & family violence, it is considered that there is widespread under-reporting of incidences of domestic & family violence involving young people and therefore a lack of quality statistical information and analysis explicitly regarding those aged 12-25 years in NSW.

Young people's perception of domestic & family violence

Overall, young people across Australia perceive domestic & family violence as serious^{xi} and that it is learned behaviour. However, a young person's definition and knowledge of domestic & family violence is often limited and there is often confusion between what may be considered "normal conflict" in a relationship and domestic & family violence.^{xii}

Key research about young people's perceptions of domestic & family violence indicate that:

- Young people perceive one of the major causes of domestic & family violence to be what the perpetrator has learnt in their own upbringing (the 'cycle of violence' thesis).^{xiii}
- Indigenous youth, particularly girls and older teens, readily identified with the experience of domestic & family violence.^{xiv}
- Younger boys and boys from multiple disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to express attitudes supportive of violence.^{xv}
- Violence supporting attitudes are also more common among males who exhibit low levels of support for gender equality. Similarly, women with traditional gender role attitudes are less likely to report violence.^{xvi}

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government fund further research about young people's perceptions and definitions of domestic & family violence in order to inform education strategies for prevention and early intervention that challenges unhealthy perceptions of domestic & family violence.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) young people and domestic & family violence in NSW

Domestic & family violence in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex relationships is generally believed to possess different power dynamics and characteristics than domestic & family violence in heterosexual relationships. Same sex domestic & family violence has many unique aspects as opposed to opposite sex domestic & family violence such as:

- lack of understanding of domestic & family violence in the GLBTIQ community,
- fear of 'Outing' of same-sex attracted young people as a method of control,
- confidentiality issues and isolation for people in same sex relationships (particularly in regional and rural areas) and
- underdeveloped services catering to same sex domestic & family violence needs.^{xvii}

Moreover, young people who identify as GLBTIQ are more likely to be victims of domestic & family violence and homophobic abuse in the family home as a result of their sexuality and/or gender identity. According to the report *Writing themselves in 3*, twenty-four per cent of same-sex attracted young people who were abused suffered abuse at home. This was often by their parents, some experiencing verbal

abuse and others physical. This figure is higher than in previous studies (2004 18%; 1998 16%).^{xviii} Fathers were more likely to physically assault their children but, in some cases, mothers did as well.^{xix}

The following young man's parents reacted badly when they suspected he might be gay. He described feeling very unsafe at home.

"...at one point they suspected I was gay (left something open on the computer. Those things will be the death of me!) I was locked into a room (by my parents and brother), much like an interrogation. Physically and mentally abused for a few hours and "released" after I'd kept saying I will kill myself (although, their reply was "Either kill yourself or we will kill you")." Peter, 15 years

Homophobic domestic & family violence is a mostly hidden form of domestic & family violence and is not widely recognised in the community. It also has unique impacts and issues for the young people and can often lead to homelessness. It is therefore essential that the relevant services are available to address this form of domestic & family violence.

Current gaps in services for young people identifying as GLBTIQ regarding domestic & family violence include:

Lack of relevant health promotion

Domestic & family violence health promotion is currently hetero-normative, and adds to the hidden nature of same-sex domestic & family violence. There is also a lack of education for GLBTIQ young people around definitions of domestic & family violence, where to get help and how to help their peers. In addition there needs to be more education about what healthy relationships are that is specific to same-sex relationships.

In this context, it is believed that education is a key component of early intervention. Young people identifying as GLBTIQ need to be made aware of the issues surrounding same sex domestic & family violence, where to get help and how to support their peers as a long term strategy in ending intimate partner violence. In addition, mainstream domestic & family violence campaigns need to include same-sex partnerships by way of awareness raising.

Capacity of services to meet the needs of GLBTIQ young people

In combating same sex domestic & family violence it is also essential to increase the capacity of mainstream services to work with young people suffering same-sex domestic & family violence and homophobic abuse within the family home. For instance, mainstream services report a need for training in cultural competencies for working with young people identifying as GLBTIQ as well as additional resources to meet their particular needs.

Moreover, in the absence of GLBTIQ specific services for domestic & family violence support, mainstream services need to implement access and equity strategies so

that young people identifying as GLBTIQ are aware of, and feel comfortable accessing, mainstream services for support. This includes training workers in GLBTIQ cultural competencies, increasing visibility of GLBTIQ aspects of services, and providing resources specific to GLBTIQ young people.

For more information please also refer to ACON Anti-Violence Project and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby submissions to this inquiry.

In addition, the 3rd Biennial (First National) GLBTIQ Domestic & family violence Conference Sydney 2011 will be held on Friday 16 September and it is recommended that the Committee also refer to any outcomes and recommendations from the conference for consideration.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government invest in health promotion programs specifically targeting young people who identify GLBTIQ and their families in order to prevent domestic & family violence in same sex relationships and in the family home.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government increase funding to increase the capacity of mainstream domestic & family violence support services to meet the service needs of young people identifying as GLBTIQ, including training for workers in GLBTIQ cultural competencies and providing resources specific to young people identifying as GLBTIQ.

Key strategies for early intervention and the prevention of domestic & family violence

Changing attitudes towards violence

The research advocates that the process of 'changing attitudes' must be located within a project of changing familial, organisational, community and societal norms, which support violence. Interventions must address not only those attitudes which are overtly condoning of violence against women, but the wider social norms related to gender and sexuality which normalise and justify this violence. Given the close association between attitudes towards violence against women and beliefs about gender roles, especially males' adherence to sexist, patriarchal, and/or hostile views towards women, traditional gender roles must be targeted in intervention campaigns.^{xx}

Changing attitudes towards violence, both domestic and otherwise thus requires a multilayered and complimentary approach across schools, communities and families. Early intervention and prevention for young people in this context can take a number of forms including education and awareness campaigns in schools, programs run through community services for at risk families and strengthening informal and formal support networks for those at risk.

The role of education

Education about domestic & family violence in the school and community is perceived to be one of the key strategies in engaging with young people aged 12-25 years. Education, both in school and in the community is believed to have the capacity to promote positive social and attitudinal change and to create change in social norms, gender roles, and power relations which underpin partner violence.

For example, early intervention and education programs targeted at young people, including school-based programs that aim to shape appropriate attitudes towards women and violence have been identified as the most important strategies in breaking the cycle of violence.^{xxi}

As suggested by the Family Violence Protection Fund, resources need to be targeted at young people and teens because as young people begin dating, their risk for violence increases, as does their receptivity to messages about relationships. This age group should be targeted with messages that violence and abuse are unacceptable, and give them the information and skills to build healthy relationships.^{xxii}

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government explore opportunities to build on existing education campaigns and develop new ones in schools and in the community in order to educate and create awareness about domestic & family violence with young people.

The role of awareness campaigns

School-based efforts need to be complemented by strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation. Given the evidence that social norms, gender roles, and power relations underpin intimate partner violence, strategies that address these will be critical to successful prevention efforts.^{xxiii} Awareness campaigns that focus on lessening the social acceptance and overall prevalence of family violence and promotion in workplaces, sporting events, and through parents, families, coaches, spiritual or religious leaders and other potential mentors are believed to be ways to spread awareness in the community and to young people. The research also calls on private organisations to promote a culture of change within the community, thus ensuring a greater social responsibility of businesses.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government support awareness campaigns targeting domestic & family violence in the community, particularly campaigns focused on young people.

The role of strengthening informal and formal support systems

Although there has been the implementation of legislation in NSW with regards to minimising children's exposure to domestic & family violence (for example, Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 NSW), there has been little focus on informal supports which are significantly able to cause effective change in domestic & family violence cases. Research suggests that more than four in five women who experience domestic & family violence do not contact a specialised support agency, but are more likely to contact family and friends.^{xxiv} Promoting the role of friends,

neighbours and relatives in preventing domestic & family violence could be an important part of strengthening informal support systems for young people and families.

Formal support systems that are proven strategies for early intervention and prevention include:

- Couples or marital counseling/therapy – this is a frequently promoted approach for addressing domestic & family violence, particularly for less serious or more infrequent forms of domestic & family violence, and can be used to emphasise communication, relationship skills, and conflict resolution.^{xxv}
- Programs focused on relationship skills and family management - these emphasise non-violent methods of conflict resolution and open communication.^{xxvi}

Moreover, programs should target those who have grown up in family situations where domestic & family violence is prevalent, and be designed to be most appropriate for the particular cultural, geographic and other demographic factors of the group. This should also include helping advise young people who may know of incidents of domestic & family violence, but do not know how to approach their friend/relative about the issue.

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government consider ways of promoting informal and formal support systems to those affected by domestic & family violence, particularly young people.

Ensuring that there is adequate long term funding for domestic & family violence services

There are a range of potential barriers that can prevent a victim from seeking help from service providers, including:

- lack of available services;
- cost or limited availability of transport;
- limited awareness of available services;
- a lack of culturally appropriate services;
- perception that services will be unsympathetic or judgmental;
- shame or embarrassment;
- fear that they will not be believed;
- fear of the perpetrator and the potential for retribution; and
- perception that services will not be able to offer assistance.^{xxvii}

Strategies to overcome these barriers are necessary to ensure that victims, particularly those within the most vulnerable groups, are able to access support services to reduce the risk of violence. Most importantly are ensuring that there is adequate long term funding for domestic & family violence services, that services are accessible to victims and their children, and that service systems are sufficiently integrated to address the complex needs of victims.^{xxviii}

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government ensure long term funding for domestic & family violence services in NSW.

Good practice prevention programs in NSW

The following programs have been recognised as outstanding, creative and effective approaches to the prevention of violence against women in NSW by Community Services (Department of Family and Community Services):

- Kids Really Count Interagency, Northern Rivers
- Inner City Domestic Violence Action Group, Sydney
- Carrie's Place Refuge and Maitland City Council, Maitland
- Cumberland Women's Health Service, Western Sydney
- Sutherland Shire Domestic Violence Committee, Sutherland.
- Songs of Anklets – South West Sydney Legal Centre and Songs of Anklets Working Party
- The LOVE BiTES Program – The Women's Health Service Hastings/MacLeay Network North Coast Area Health Service
- National Rugby League Education and Welfare Committee – Education and policy reform
- Domestic and Family Violence Policy – Australia Post.^{xxix}

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Government use existing good practice programs and models to inform future programs targeting domestic & family violence in NSW.

Data collection and research about domestic & family violence in NSW

Researchers and policy analysts have commonly recognised the need for more comprehensive and systematic approaches to the collection of data surrounding the issue of domestic & family violence in NSW, and on a national scale.^{xxx} In particular, programs that focus on the needs of children and young people from situations of domestic & family violence are considered to be under-researched.^{xxxi}

Further research should consider measures across cultural and socioeconomically diverse populations, as well as various factors involving different pathways of domestic & family violence such as the chronologic and character of violence and family variables involved^{xxxi}. Likewise, figures on domestic & family violence for youth in indigenous communities and other major cultural groups require deeper analysis and investigation.

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government work towards the comprehensive and systematic approach to the collection of data about incidences of domestic & family violence in NSW that includes information about young people aged 12-25 (whether they are the victim, perpetrator or witness to an act of domestic & family violence).

Recommendation 10

That the NSW Government fund further research about the causes, consequences and costs of domestic & family violence on the NSW community in order to inform the design of effective prevention strategies.

Summary of recommendations

The Youth Action and Policy Association NSW recommend:

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government fund further research about young people's perceptions and definitions of domestic & family violence in order to inform education strategies for prevention and early intervention that challenges unhealthy perceptions of domestic & family violence.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government invest in health promotion programs specifically targeting young people who identify GLBTIQ and their families in order to prevent domestic & family violence in same sex relationships and in the family home.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government increase funding to increase the capacity of mainstream domestic & family violence support services to meet the service needs of young people identifying as GLBTIQ, including training for workers in GLBTIQ cultural competencies and providing resources specific to young people identifying as GLBTIQ.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government explore opportunities to build on existing education campaigns and develop new ones in schools and in the community in order to educate and create awareness about domestic & family violence with young people.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government support awareness campaigns targeting domestic & family violence in the community, particularly campaigns focused on young people.

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government consider ways of promoting informal and formal support systems to those affected by domestic & family violence, particularly young people.

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Recommendation 10

That the NSW Government fund further research about the causes, consequences and costs of domestic & family violence on the NSW community in order to inform the design of effective prevention strategies.

Conclusion

YAPA thanks the Standing Committee on Social Issues for the opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW*.

For further information please contact:

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