

# Six reasons why we cannot be effective with either intimate partner violence or child abuse and neglect unless we address both together

FAMILY VIOLENCE DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE'S POSITION BRIEF: FEBRUARY 2017

## 1 Intergenerational violence requires an intergenerational response

Many children are born into families and whānau experiencing intergenerational violence. The cumulative patterns of harm that affect their wellbeing and development may include:

- historical trauma (the ongoing legacy of colonisation)
- abuse impacting multiple generations of victims – as children and adults
- multiple forms of child abuse and neglect.

Protection for these children requires interrupting intergenerational patterns of violence and the associated transmission of trauma by providing the appropriate support to children and their families and whānau.

## 2 The decision to abuse a child's parent is a harmful, unsafe parenting decision

Abusive behaviour towards a partner who is a parent has a significant impact on family and whānau functioning. The decision to abuse a partner who is a parent is a decision about how to parent and it will affect how the victim will parent. Adult victims are parenting under siege. Abusive behaviour towards a partner/parent is an attack on the relationship between the adult victim and her children<sup>2</sup> and thwarts her ability to provide for her children's basic needs.

The impact of the partner's/parent's abusive behaviour on the overall family and whānau functioning requires assessment of housing security, maternal mental health and substance abuse, child mental health and substance abuse, extended family, whānau and community support, health care, employment and educational stability. Support is needed to rebuild the parenting relationship between adult victims and their children.

## 3 'Failure to protect' approaches fail to respond to both child and adult victims' safety needs

Expecting adult victims to protect their children themselves gives them the responsibility for stopping their partner's violence. This is an impossible task and fails to acknowledge the barriers (coercive control, structural violence and inequities) they face in attempting it. While adult victims generally resist the abuse of their children and themselves, this resistance does not stop their partner's violence.

Focusing on what adult victims are doing to keep their children safe diverts attention away from the partner/parent using violence. This results in a failure to assess and address the level of risk and danger his behaviour poses to both child and adult victims.

Practice influenced by a 'failure to protect' approach can unintentionally increase the likelihood of harm towards both child and adult victims. Children can be harmed by the partner/parent using violence and further harmed by being removed from the care of the adult victim who is not able to protect them.

## 4 Protecting children means acting protectively towards adult victims

To protect children, services must also act protectively and collaboratively towards adult victims. Safety and wellbeing for child and adult victims can only be achieved by practitioners, communities, families and whānau acting as safety allies with child and adult victims. Safety allies work in partnership with adult victims, and take supportive actions to maximise the safety of child and adult victims.

## 5 To prevent family violence, we must work with the people using violence

To prevent family violence reoccurring, we need to work with fathers, men and their communities in ways that respectfully challenge them to take responsibility for their behaviour and to be the parent their family and whānau needs. Without ongoing support to sustain behaviour changes, including trauma responses, or escalating consequences for continued abuse, a partner/parent will take his pattern of abusive behaviour into subsequent relationships. His trajectory of violence towards new partners, children, step-children and other family members may be fatal.

## 6 Victims' safety is a collective responsibility: it cannot be achieved by individuals or individual agencies acting alone

The complexities of the lives of those affected by family violence and violence within whānau requires the development of culturally responsive and multi-layered responses. Victims' safety is dependent on collective action taken to curtail the partner's/parent's abusive behaviour and provide appropriate support. If we wrap support around child and adult victims, their families and whānau, and curtail people's violence, then fewer children are likely to enter state care – resulting in better life outcomes for all.

1 This information is summarised from: Family Violence Death Review Committee. 2016. *Fifth Report: January 2014 to December 2015*. Wellington: Family Violence Death Review Committee. [www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/mrc/fvdrcc/publications-and-resources/publication/2434/](http://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/mrc/fvdrcc/publications-and-resources/publication/2434/).

2 In this position brief adult victims are referred to as women because women are the primary group affected as victims. Similarly, in most cases, the person using violence is male. The Family Violence Death Review Committee recognises men can be victims from their female and male partners, and that intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in heterosexual and LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex) partnerships. While individual men can be victims of IPV, social patterns of harm reflect the fact that structural inequity and community values and beliefs support the perpetuation of male violence against women. Also see: World Health Organization. 2010. *Violence Prevention: The Evidence*. Geneva: World Health Organization. pp 79-94.

Family Violence Death  
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