

Dear Commissioner, Please see below some input from WEAVE Inc. <http://weaveinc.org.au> in relation to the submission regarding children and domestic violence.

1. What are the definitional issues in relation to family and domestic violence affecting children?

Family and domestic violence typically focuses on adult behaviours which affect children. When children use violence against family members, the common context of historical or current adult violence is often ignored.

2. What do we know about the prevalence and incidence of family and domestic violence affecting children, including who is involved in family and domestic violence events?

Research by ABS states that around half the women experiencing violence had children in their care and in half of these cases the children were direct witnesses of the violence. Children typically accompany mothers who separate to try to stop violence and they experience the homelessness of their primary carer. Mothers with supportive parents often get help from them, but they also become exposed to the violence. The friends and supporters of the perpetrator often enable and endorse him and blame the victim for the violence against her. In small communities this can be especially powerful and isolating for victims.

3. What are the impacts on children of family and domestic violence?

Trauma researchers note the developmental impacts of growing up exposed to violence wherein a child's brain architecture is geared to living with violence. Developmental post-traumatic disorder affects children's cognition and learning, their social and emotional well-being and their ability to adapt to new experiences of events. See attached summary and article.

4. What are the outcomes for children engaging with services, programs and support?

Children who are able to achieve safety and therapeutic care are able to recover from exposure to violence. Children who continue to be exposed to their perpetrator remain in a crisis state.

5. What are the outcomes for children of public policy approaches and educational campaigns targeting family and domestic violence?

Children suffer because a policy outcome of a domestic violence relationship being reported can mean they are removed from their primary carer and placed in the care of the perpetrator who is seen as 'better' than mum. When mothers do leave the Family Law system will normally require the children to spend time alone in the 'care' of the perpetrator. This leave them exposed to more harm. When children living with domestic violence are killed, mothers are held equally culpable as the killer, even though the perpetrator has controlled her using violence. Children and mothers need to be able to recover together from the violence.

6. What are the surveillance and data gaps/needs in relation to children affected by family and domestic violence?

Due to family law privacy provisions we do not know 1. The proportion of family law children's matters involving violence/abuse allegations 2. The proportion of such cases where the children are supported to not spend time with the offender 3. The proportion of cases where children are removed from the mother/primary carer and placed with the offender. We know very little about the experiences of children ordered by the family law system to be in the care of the offender.

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