

DVRCV Quarterly

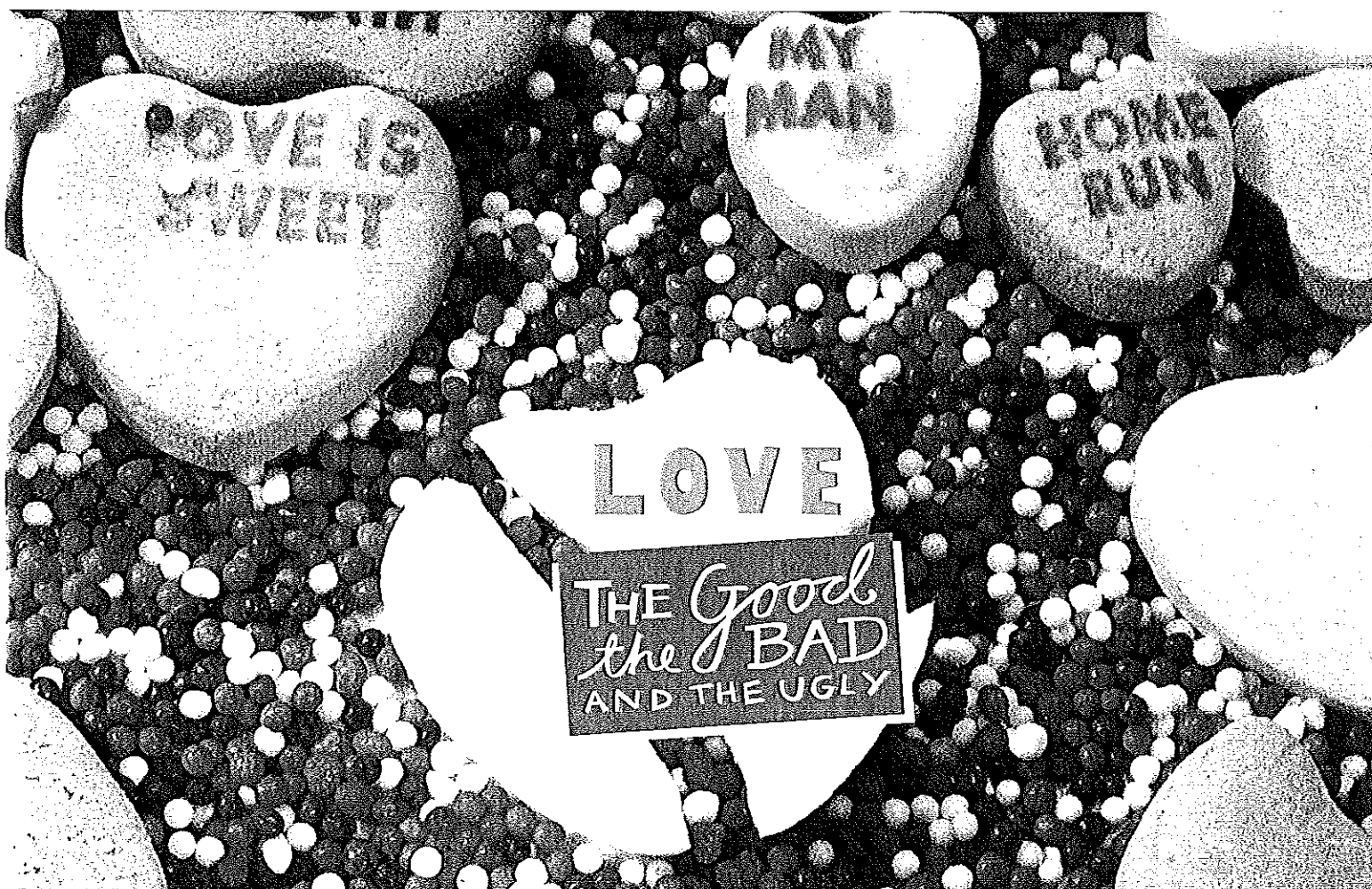
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Eroticising inequality: technology, porn and young people

Preventing family violence: a coordinated response to adolescent violence

Research, rewrite, remix: a website's journey

For better and worse: a forum on young people & violence



editorial

Dear Readers,

This spring edition has a focus on young people and violence.

We begin with an eye-opening examination of the rise of hardcore pornography and its impact on popular culture. Maree Crabbe and David Corlett argue that technologies, such as the internet, have played a major role in making hardcore porn widely accessible. This pornography eroticises the degradation of women, and is influencing young people's views of sexual relationships. The article is an adapted version of a paper presented at *For Better or Worse: Young people, technology and preventing violence*, a forum in August organised as part of DVRCV's Partners in Prevention (PiP) project.

Next we turn to look at young people as perpetrators and victims of violence in the home. Jo Howard argues that a coordinated community and legal response to adolescent violence in the home can help to prevent family violence. Court-based therapeutic interventions have been successful in the United States and Canada. Jo Howard contends that these could be introduced as part of Victoria's integrated family violence service system.

DVRCV launched our new website, *Love: The good, the bad and the ugly*, at the PiP forum. The site is a redevelopment of our earlier site for young people, *When Love Hurts*. The site is based on real stories and feedback from young people. It explores the line between love and control, and looks at how the internet, social media and mobile phones can be used as a way of controlling a partner. The article on page 13 discusses the approach we took in developing the site.

This edition also provides a summary of the other presentations from the PiP forum, including an overview of the *Reach Out* website, the *Be the Hero!* website and training program, and *The Photograph*, a film about sexting.

If you would like to contribute to *DVRCV Quarterly* please contact mmckenzie@dvrcv.org.au

Mandy McKenzie
Editor, DVRCV Quarterly

Domestic Violence Services enter the election campaign

In the lead-up to November's state election, Domestic Violence Victoria (DVVic), the peak body for women and children's family violence services, has worked with its members to develop an election platform. DVRCV is actively supporting this campaign. It is calling for current parliamentarians and state candidates to commit to:

- an investment in children's safety and wellbeing
 - greater investment in children's support and recovery programs based in specialist family violence agencies
 - children's co-case management positions to be provided across the state, to ensure intensive and coordinated responses to children
- a long-term vision for family violence reform
 - a commitment to implement the recommendations from: *A Right to Safety and Justice: Strategic framework to guide continuing family violence reform in Victoria 2010–2020*; *A Right to Respect: Victoria's plan to prevent violence against women 2010–2020*; and *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities – Ten year plan*
- the sustainability of the family violence workforce
 - investment in the family violence workforce to address current and projected skill shortages
 - a commitment to fully fund the outcomes of the ASU's Pay Equity Case, which, if successful, will guarantee fair wages for professionals who support women and children experiencing family violence.

DVVic has sent a survey to the candidates in each of the electorates asking them to commit to these strategies. A document outlining DVVic's position and candidates' responses will be distributed.

Services in six key electorates will seek meetings with local candidates. The media consultants engaged by DVVic will arrange for local media to highlight the situation for children in families experiencing family violence. Facebook and Twitter will also be used.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is on 25 November. We hope candidates will use this as an opportunity to announce commitments before the election. For information contact DVVic on 9921 0828.

Vig Geddes
DVRCV Executive Officer

Jo Howard

preventing family violence

a coordinated response to adolescent violence in the home

In North America, a coordinated legal system and community response play a crucial role in addressing and preventing adolescent violence in the home. Jo Howard contends this approach should be incorporated into Victoria's integrated family violence service system.

This article argues that a coordinated community response to adolescent violence in the home is a key strategy for preventing family violence.¹ It builds on findings from a Winston Churchill Fellowship research trip to Canada and the United States to examine best practice interventions to address and prevent adolescent violence in the home.

Determinants of adolescent violence

Adolescent violence in the home is complex, serious and on the rise in Australia.

There are many interconnected determinants of adolescent violence in the home. These include individual and relationship factors, as well as societal, cultural and community expectations and attitudes. VicHealth (2007: 13) notes that men's violence against women is influenced by culturally specific norms regarding gender, the acceptance of violence as a means of resolving disputes, and approval of, or weak sanctions against, violence against women. These

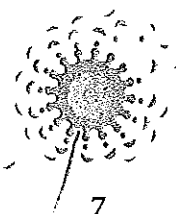
factors also contribute to adolescent violence in the home. For example, male adolescents who use violence against their mothers will often hold negative views about women and mothers, and feel justified to use violence to resolve family conflict (Howard & Rottem 2008).

The two most influential determinants at an individual or relationship level are the experience of abuse and trauma (such as family violence and/or child abuse), and parenting style. These two determinants are interrelated; for example, family violence will have a negative effect on a woman's ability to parent.

Research on the effects of family violence on male children draws attention to the increased propensity for them to be violent to others, including family members and intimate partners (Carr & Vandeusen 2002). A Victorian study of ten women who had experienced abuse from an adolescent son found that all of them had been subjected to some form of abuse from the father of their abusive son (Howard & Rottem 2008).

There is a paucity of long-term research which 'proves' the intergenerational relationship between a male child's

¹ Adolescent violence in the home is commonly referred to as 'youth violence', 'teen abuse', 'teen violence to parents' and 'adolescent violence to parents'. This article uses the term 'adolescent violence in the home' in order to include parents, carers, siblings, other family members and pets who are victims of this form of violence. It is a form of family violence that occurs in an intimate context and in the privacy of the home.



experience of family violence, violence against their mother and violence against an intimate partner in adult life.² Not all children who experience family violence will go on to use violence against parents and women in adulthood. However, the high incidence of childhood experiences of family violence among male adolescents who use violence in the home, and evidence of their use of violence to their own partners, supports an intergenerational relationship.

Service system responses

While there has been considerable investment into preventing and responding to adult family violence, there are no Australian programs that address this form of violence by working with adolescents and parents. Some services are attempting to respond to this issue through therapeutic parent/adolescent counselling or mediation and parent-orientated group work programs. However the difficulty in engaging 'at-risk' adolescents in some form of therapeutic process, particularly where a component of this process requires their taking responsibility for their use of violence, makes concurrent parent/adolescent approaches difficult to implement.

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For adolescents who use violence in the home, there is little support for them to take responsibility for stopping their violence. Adult men who use violence in the home are grown men, and are fully responsible for their violence. Adolescents must also take full responsibility for their use of violence. However their developmental needs and their dependence on adults and family members for nurturing, guidance and safety require divergent approaches from those offered by men's

behavioural change programs. Adolescents have less power than adult men and may be victims as well as perpetrators of violence.

The current service system response to adolescent violence in the home is mainly provided through group programs for parents. Although these are valuable, if we don't engage adolescents in treatment we lose crucial opportunities to address the risk factors and co-occurring issues that contribute to their violence, as well as the opportunity to prevent them from using violence against women in their future relationships. Adolescents tend to fall through the gaps, in part because they may be difficult to engage.

Responding to adolescents and parents facilitates family reparation and the rebuilding of family relationships. This, in turn, acts as a protective factor against other at-risk behaviours.

Best practice

Interventions with adolescents who use violence in the home include exploring attitudes and beliefs that support violence. Intervention requires learning key skills and attributes including empathy and making amends, non-violent conflict resolution, problem solving, respectful communication, recognising early warning signs and constructively dealing with anger. Ultimately, improving family relationships, particularly between mothers and sons, can prevent the later use of violence. Learning new skills also equips adolescents with a range of protective factors to support them to succeed in other areas of life.

In Canada and the United States, current best practice includes diversionary, pre-sentencing and court-mandated interventions that engage and work with parents and adolescents. These interventions are influenced by the concept of therapeutic jurisprudence and recognise the influence of court processes on wellbeing and offender rehabilitation (Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration 2010).

² The term 'experience of family violence' describes situations when children are present in the home and family violence occurs. It is preferable to the expression 'witness to family violence' which implies a passive role and detracts from the significant impact of living in a home where family violence occurs.

preventing family violence

Therapeutic jurisprudence considers how courts can be viewed as natural collaborative partners with community-based organisations rather than as coercive systems set aside from traditional service organisations (Van Horn & Hitchens 2004).

Step Up is unique because it uses a youth justice diversionary approach as leverage to engage adolescents, and mandates both parents and the adolescent to attend.

These interventions are integrated with a coordinated community-based response that includes an extensive parent and adolescent group work program, and 'wrap around' support provided by the community. This addresses adolescent violence in the home and mitigates risk factors for violence against women in adulthood.

This approach offers a key strategy to break intergenerational cycles of violence. It also results in improved health and wellbeing outcomes for adolescents in other areas, including mental health, drug and alcohol use, and engagement in education or training.

The Step Up program

The 'Step Up' program is an example of how police and courts have partnered with community-based organisations to deliver a coordinated response. Developed in Seattle, Washington in 1997, it is an evidence-based 20-week parent/adolescent program. Step Up was a response to the high number of family violence cases—around 950—involving an adolescent as perpetrator that went to juvenile court in 1996.

Step Up understands that adolescent violence in the home is a form of family violence which impacts on all family members. It begins from the standpoint that an

adolescent's sense of entitlement is predictive of abusive behaviour (Buel 2002: 6). Now run in five US locations, the program's priority is the safety of all family members.

Step Up is unique because it uses a youth justice diversionary approach as leverage to engage adolescents, and mandates both parents and the adolescent to attend. The model is influenced by men's behavioural change approaches to family violence prevention, particularly the Minneapolis Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, family systems theory and cognitive behavioural therapy.

Choosing Step Up

Families first encounter Step Up when police are called because of the adolescent's violence in the home. The adolescent is charged and held in juvenile detention until the next available domestic violence court session, which is usually within 24 hours.

When adolescents come before the magistrate, they are given the option of attending the Step Up program or having the domestic violence charge heard before the court. Almost all opt for the Step Up program. An adolescent cannot participate in Step Up without at least one parent's concurrent involvement.

Assessment is undertaken before, during and after program participation and includes:

- the adolescent's use of violence (types, frequency, severity, etc);
- social, mental health, substance abuse and family history;
- parenting and discipline styles;
- current and past adult family violence;
- safety of family members and parental level of fear;
- school (attendance, issues, challenges, support needs);
- community involvement (social and community connection); and
- the need for other services such as drug/alcohol or mental health evaluation.



The mother, father and adolescent are interviewed separately to help them feel safe about disclosing information and to identify family dynamics. Assessment is undertaken by the youth probation officer with representation from other agencies, such as schools or mental health services.

Taking responsibility

The assessment identifies the support needed to help the adolescent stop their use of violence. This may include addressing alcohol and drug use, supporting a parent to develop different parent strategies or addressing violence from one parent against another. Strong links with a range of key agencies, particularly schools and drug/alcohol and mental health services, mean adolescents and family members are supported to make change.

Services participate in care planning, coordination and review where they are relevant to the family's treatment goals. In Seattle, for example, adolescents can be actively referred to eight education and employment programs. The program plays a key advocacy role in ensuring that adolescents who have disengaged from school, training or work are linked back in.

Court staff are highly involved with interventions. Judges preside over fortnightly case reviews where the adolescent and family members speak about changes they have made and probation officers articulate care planning outcomes, referral linkages and treatment for co-occurring issues. If the adolescent has made good progress, the judge may publicly acknowledge them or reward them with a gift voucher or certificate.

Snapshot: Adolescent violence in Australia

Australian data indicates that male adolescents are more likely than females to use violence against parents (Parentline 2008; Department of Justice (DOJ) 2009: 46). In 2003–04 data recorded by Victoria Police, 74 per cent of the young people aged 12–24 years who were involved in incidents against parents or step-parents were male (Victorian Council Against Violence 2006: 19). Similar trends are found in data from the USA (King County Juvenile Court 2005; Sellick-Lane 2007).

In 2006, approximately 3500 police family violence call-outs in Victoria related to adolescent violence in the home. This is approximately one in ten of all police family violence call-outs. There was a 26 per cent increase in police call-outs related to this issue between 2003 and 2006 (Victorian Police 2006).

Mothers are more likely than fathers to experience violence from their adolescent child/stepchild, although fathers are also victims. In Victoria from 2006–07, there were 1160 parents/step-parents who sought intervention orders against an adolescent child. Seventy-three per cent of applicants were mothers and 28 per cent were fathers (DOJ 2009: 46).

A recent report by the Victorian Department of Justice which gathered data about family violence over a nine-year period (1999–2008) showed a consistent 13 per cent of family violence incidents recorded by police involved a parent as the victim (DOJ 2009: 45). In data from Victorian courts, approximately eight per cent of family violence incidents involved an order by a parent or step-parent against a child or stepchild (DOJ 2009: 45).

Adolescent violence in the home is likely to be significantly under-reported. Many parents report intense shame about their own child assaulting them, and are loathe to call police and risk their child's involvement in the criminal justice system or total estrangement from their child.

preventing family violence

Key treatment goals with adolescents include:

- taking responsibility for behaviour and being accountable for the effects of their violence on others;
- demonstrating empathy for those they have abused;
- deciding on and implementing actions to make amends for their use of violence;
- learning skills such as non-violent conflict resolution, 'time out' techniques and assertive communication;
- addressing co-occurring issues; and
- engaging in work, training or school.

Key treatment goals with parents include:

- exploring family history, particularly adult family violence, and its impact on their child and their parenting;
- making amends for abusive, harsh or violent parenting;
- learning new skills such as boundary setting, use of consequences, 'time out', communication and conflict resolution;
- psychoeducation about parenting and child development;
- addressing issues that may negatively impact on parenting; and
- restoration of family relationships, where safe to do so.

Step Up has been independently evaluated three times since its inception and the results are positive. An evaluation in 2005 revealed:

- significant improvements in attitudes, skills and behaviour of adolescents and parents;
- significant decline in the extent to which adolescents used abusive and violent behaviours in family situations; and
- lower recidivism than for adolescents who did not complete the intervention (18 months post treatment).

An evaluation of the Toledo, Ohio Step Up program revealed that out of 48 adolescents who graduated in the first two years (2007–2009), only four have had additional domestic violence charges filed. Letters from parents and adolescents testify to the benefits Step Up has made to individual and family lives. Other outcomes include family reunification, re-engagement in education,

cessation of substance use, and assessment and treatment for mental health problems.

Step Up in Victoria?

Mandating adolescents to participate in a court-coordinated program may appear punitive or harsh; however most adolescents and their parents rate the program extremely positively. According to anecdotal reports, many adolescent participants were 'glad' their parents called the police as this action enabled them to gain support and make significant positive changes.

According to anecdotal reports, many adolescent participants were 'glad' their parents called the police as this action enabled them to gain support and make significant positive changes.

While Step Up includes the charging and incarceration of adolescents, it is arguable that this step, particularly incarceration, could be omitted in a Victorian setting. The program's use of 'the velvet hammer of the law' coupled with a coordinated community response could be delivered through pre-sentencing, youth diversion or court-mandated interventions. In Victoria, family violence courts already mandate violent men to attend behavioural change programs.

Conclusion

A key determinant of adolescent violence in the home is the experience of family violence. Current responses to adolescent violence in the home are a valuable support to parents; however they may sit outside the broader service system, do not engage with adolescents and may not address co-occurring problems. Although some services are working with parents and adolescents in a therapeutic context, maintaining a therapeutic

connection with adolescents remains an ongoing challenge.

A window of opportunity exists to engage with adolescents and to support them and their parents to make changes. When adolescents learn about the effects of their violence on others, develop empathy and make amends for the suffering their violence causes, the risk of them using violence against women in intimate relationships is greatly reduced. Concurrent support to parents to make changes in their parenting and strengthen family relationships supports interventions with adolescents.

With Victoria Police standing orders requiring police intervention in family violence incidents and an increase in the number of call-outs relating to adolescent violence in the home, it is timely to explore how a similar model to Step Up could be piloted in Victoria.

Jo Howard visited Canada and USA in 2009 on a Winston Churchill Fellowship and investigated methods for preventing and responding to adolescent violence towards parents.

Full report: www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellows/reports or contact Jo Howard: johoward@bigpond.com

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