

Family violence¹—primary prevention: a community involvement approach

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Abstract

This paper is an outline of a family violence primary prevention project in a small agricultural community in Victoria. The lead agency is the Yarra Valley Country Women's Association. The project commenced in January 2014, it is continuing to make 'real' changes in the community, particularly for individuals and families. Some of the outcomes are documented in this paper. The community in which people live is an important place to have a conversation about prevention of family violence.

Introduction

Family violence is a major issue of concern for many communities around the world and is recognised as constituting a violation of human rights.

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace. (Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, 8 March 1999)²

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes the levels of violence experienced by the world's women as a "global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action".³

Family violence

Family violence can have devastating consequences on individuals, families, and the communities in which they live. It is now recognised as a significant social problem within Australian society. In 2005 the national Personal Safety Survey found that nearly half a million women had experienced violence in the preceding twelve month period and that around half of all households in which there is violence contain children.⁴ Research indicates that children who are exposed to family violence are affected emotionally and developmentally.⁵

Statistics indicate that in 2014 one woman died every week from domestic violence in Australia. In NSW, 24 women were killed last year in domestic-related incidents. Of all homicides in NSW, 42 per cent are domestic. One woman is hospitalised every three hours across the country.⁶

Victorian Government

In 2002 the Victorian government developed an integrated model of response and prevention of family violence, which includes a justice and a community involvement response, a 'whole government' approach with an emphasis on primary prevention intervention, to 'prevent violence before it occurs', using the following rationale:

- the human rights imperative
- impact on women and families' health
- impact on children and young people
- impact on the economy⁷

Project

The Yarra Valley Country Women's Association Inc. (YV CWA)⁸ was established in the 1920's, there are approximately 100 members. The YV CWA and the Monbulk community are working together on family violence.

Community

Monbulk is a small town in the Yarra Valley, 55km east of Melbourne, with a population of approximately 3500. It is mainly an agricultural, fruit and wine producing area.^{9,10}

Carmel and I are descendants of settlers in the 1800's; we and our families continue to be Monbulk community members. Carmel has been an active community member and leader all her life.

Consult—involve—sustain

In consultation with the YV CWA, Yarra Ranges Council, local service providers and local community leaders, a committee was formed. From consultations and feedback, suggestions were detailed.¹¹ Community members and organisations continue to be involved in training, information sharing, meetings and discussions.

Outcomes

All the outcomes¹² are detailed in RMIT research paper, some additional ones are:

- YouTube video
- family violence awareness training for 15 community members
- Police included in protective behaviours in local schools “protect respect”
- future two day training for 25 people in responding to disclosures of family violence
- brochures in local businesses and library
- community consultations requested in two other towns in the Yarra Valley
- talks to local mental health networks; churches; doctors.

Advantages of this approach at a community level

The advantages are:

- value and support norms that are non-violent and build respectful and equitable gender relations
- build connections between women and their families and sources of formal and informal support
- take action to support individuals and groups affected by violence
- promote collective activity between community; women, children and families¹³

Plus:

- local community ownership and involvement
- no additional monetary cost
- build on existing CWA involvement in communities.

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Presenters

Nerrida Mitchell is an active community member and social worker in the sexual assault and family violence field. Currently working at the Victorian South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault and Family Violence (SECASA) as a senior counsellor, team leader and sometimes Acting Manager. Has worked in the family violence and child abuse field in the United Kingdom; Vietnam and Australia in training/development and direct service work.

Carmel Mitchell is an active, passionate community member, she has been involved in community and charity work since she was 7 years old when she joined Junior Red Cross in Monbulk. She works in voluntary and paid positions in disability, medical and community sectors. Carmel currently holds the following positions: State Vice President, Country Women's Association; Personal Support Officer and Single Incident Officer, Red Cross; Chairperson and CWA spokesperson on Travellers Aid Victoria.