

Adolescent family violence in Australia



Background

Adolescent family violence (AFV) is an under-researched form of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia. Our understanding of the issue is currently limited, particularly in terms of hearing the voices of young people with lived experience of AFV. What we *do* know about AFV is that there are limited avenues for accessing effective support or responses for young people using and experiencing this form of violence, and their families.

Led by Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon of Monash University, the research project "Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, use of and exposure to violence, and support needs for young people" drew directly on the voices of 5,021 young people (aged 16 to 20). The research sought to understand the extent to which young people who use violence in the home have experienced different forms of family violence throughout their childhood, and how services and supports could best respond to these experiences.

This resource shares key findings from the two reports produced as part of the project, focusing particularly on under-researched subpopulations of young people:

- young people with disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB)
- gender-diverse young people
- young people with diverse sexual identities.

Note on language

ANROWS acknowledges that children and young people living in homes where domestic and family violence (DFV) is present do not simply "witness" DFV – they experience it. Please note that in the reports this resource draws on, the authors have chosen to use the term "witnessing" violence, and have provided a rationale for this choice in the definition of "Child abuse" in both reports.

Suggested citation

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022). *Adolescent family violence in Australia* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS.

Experiences of child abuse and the use of adolescent family violence: Summary of findings

Prevalence of AFV

1 in 5 (20%) survey respondents reported using any form of adolescent family violence

The most common forms were:



VERBAL ABUSE
(15%)



PHYSICAL VIOLENCE
(10%)



EMOTIONAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE (5%)

Siblings and mothers were most at risk of being subjected to AFV:



Two in three respondents (68%) had used violence against a sibling (including stepsiblings)



Half (51%) had used violence against their mother (included adoptive mothers)

Of those young people who were able to provide the age when they had started to use violence against family members (60%), 42% were 10 years old or younger

Experiences of child abuse and use of AFV

89% of young people who had used AFV reported previous experiences of child abuse.

For the purposes of the research, child abuse was defined in two ways:

1. Witnessing violence between other family members
2. Being directly subjected to abuse.

Young people who had experienced both forms of child abuse were:

- **9.2 times more likely** to use violence in the home than respondents who had not experienced any child abuse
- **2.7 times more likely** to use violence in the home than respondents who had witnessed abuse between other family members (but not been subjected to targeted abuse)
- **2.3 times more likely** to use violence in the home than respondents who had been subjected to targeted abuse perpetrated by family members (but not witnessed violence).

The research team noted that the high level of overlap between experiences of child abuse and use of AFV could be partially attributed to respondents using “retaliatory” violence:

- 93% of young people whose siblings had been violent towards them had in turn used violence against their siblings
- 68% of young people whose mothers had been violent towards them had in turn used violence against their mothers.

Disclosure of use of AFV

One in three (34%) respondents who self-reported ever using AFV had disclosed their use of violence to a family member. These young people most frequently made their disclosures to their mothers (22%), siblings (17%) and fathers (15%).

My own behaviour felt like a mirror of the behaviour i experienced which i hated but I didn't know how to break the cycle because regardless of how i changed my behaviour, i still experienced the same abuse.

(Survey participant, female, 18, unknown sexual identity)

I seem to repeat what was done to me, even though I know it's not okay to do so.

(Survey participant, male, 19, bisexual)



Service and support needs

Young people who had used violence in the home identified a number of related support needs, including:



A safe space or place



Someone to talk to



Professional support



Education for parents and carers on abusive behaviours and their impact



A supportive school environment (including school staff)



A supportive and understanding mother



My life is ruined, and I'm confused ... Nothing makes sense, I don't know what's going, I feel really bad, I hate everything. Sorry ... my life is pointless.

(Survey participant, male, 20, heterosexual)

I hardly went to school because of bruises or because I was too upset and anxious to attend.

(Survey participant, female, 20, bisexual)

Impacts of experiences and use of violence

Experiences of child abuse and the use of AFV had significant impacts on:

- emotional and social wellbeing
- physical wellbeing
- education and school engagement.

Service and support needs for young people with disability who use violence

Experiences and use of violence

- 30% of young people with disability reported that they had used violence in the home.
- 70% of young people with disability reported that they had experienced child abuse before the age of 18.
- Three quarters of young people with disability (76%) who said they had used violence in the home also reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to violence in the home.

Disclosure experiences and service and support needs

- 34% of young people with disability who had used AFV disclosed to a family member, and 20% to a friend.
- Young people with disability particularly identified the need for:



Education on abusive behaviours and their impact



A supportive school environment (including school staff)



Someone to talk to



Professional support

Maybe more education to parents about how to manage their anger. I know my parents meant well but I think things would have been easier for them if they knew how to work through their emotions instead of projecting them onto me and apologizing later.

(Survey participant, female, 18, bisexual)



Service and support needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who use violence

Experiences and use of violence

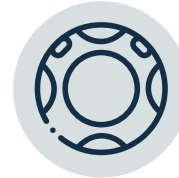
- 23% of First Nations respondents reported that they had used any form of violence in the home.
- Approximately one in two First Nations young people (55%) reported that they had experienced child abuse before the age of 18.
- Two thirds of First Nations young people (67%) who said they had used violence in the home also reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to violence in the home.

Disclosure experiences and service and support needs

- 53% per cent of First Nations young people who had used AFV disclosed to a family member.
- Young First Nations people particularly identified the need for:



A supportive and understanding mother



A safe space or place



Service and support needs for young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) who use violence

Experiences and use of violence

- Approximately one in seven respondents (15%) from NESB reported that they had used any form of violence in the home.
- Approximately two in five young people from NESB (42%) reported that they had experienced child abuse before the age of 18.
- Approximately three quarters of respondents from NESB (73%) who said they had used violence in the home also reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to violence in the home.

Disclosure experiences and service and support needs

- 22% of young people from NESB said they had disclosed their use of violence in the home to a family member, and 13% to a friend.
- Young people from NESB particularly identified the need for:



Education on abusive behaviours and their impact



A supportive school environment (including school staff)



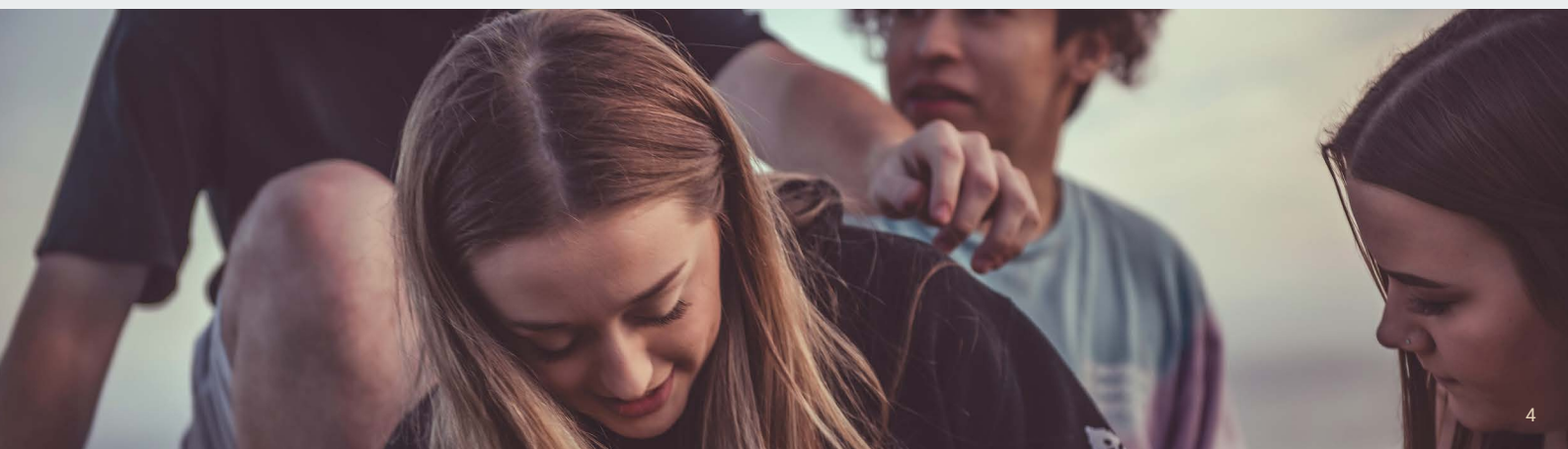
Someone to talk to



Professional support

My parents are not well educated on mental health disorders, and this in turn made it very hard for them to understand that what they were doing was actually hurting me. As adults, it was assumed that they already knew, but my parents are immigrants who were treated the same way by their family. Adults need to be more educated.

(Survey participant, female, 16, pansexual)



Service and support needs for gender-diverse young people who use violence

Experiences and use of violence

- Approximately one in three gender-diverse respondents (31%) reported that they had used any form of violence in the home.
- 79% of gender-diverse young people reported that they had experienced child abuse before the age of 18.
- Four out of five gender-diverse respondents (82%) who said they had used violence in the home also reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to violence in the home.

Disclosure experiences and service and support needs

- 27% of gender-diverse young people said they had disclosed their use of violence in the home to a family member, and 24% to a friend.
- Gender-diverse young people particularly identified the need for:



Education for parents and carers on abusive behaviours and their impact



A supportive school environment (including school staff)



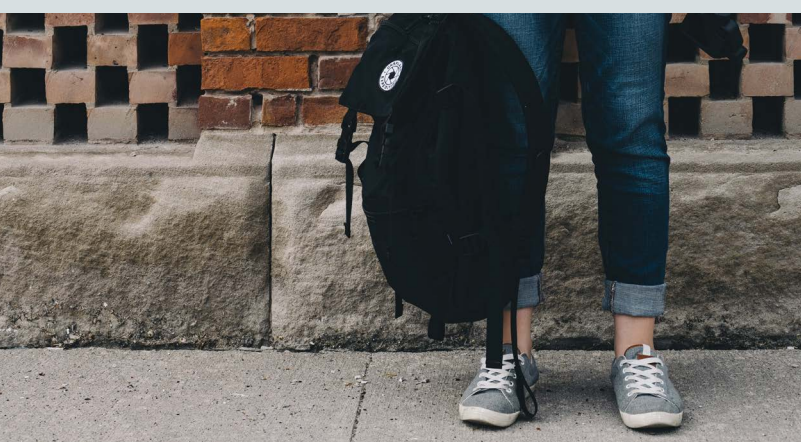
Professional support



Someone to talk to



A safe space or place



Sources

Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Boxall, H., Maher, J., & Roberts, S. (2022). *Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, history of childhood victimisation and impacts* (Research report, 15/2022). ANROWS.

Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Boxall, H., Maher, J., & Roberts, S. (2022). *Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of service and support needs for young people who use family violence* (Research report, 16/2022). ANROWS.



Service and support needs for young people with diverse sexual identities who use violence

Experiences and use of violence

- Approximately a quarter of respondents with diverse sexual identities (26%) reported that they had used any form of violence in the home.
- Two thirds of young people with diverse sexual identities (67%) reported that they had experienced child abuse before the age of 18.
- Three quarters of young people with diverse sexual identities (76%) who said they had used violence in the home also reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to violence in the home.

Disclosure experiences and service and support needs

- 34% of young people with diverse sexualities said they had disclosed their use of violence in the home to a family member, and 23% to a friend.
- Like gender-diverse young people, young people with diverse sexual identities particularly identified the need for:



Education for parents and carers on abusive behaviours and their impact



A supportive school environment (including school staff)



Professional support



Someone to talk to



A safe space or place

Help at school. Classes and talks run at school for young kids who don't understand what's going on.

(Survey participant, female, 20, bisexual)