



# ADOLESCENT VIOLENCE IN THE HOME AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

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We acknowledge the many service providers, organisations, community groups and individuals who engaged with us over the course of this project. They made us think deeply about this issue and questioned our assumptions – it has been a rewarding and challenging exercise

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the individuals who shared their stories with us about themselves, their families and their professional practice

# BACKGROUND

Negative attitudes towards young people with disability and associated stigma shape lives in powerful ways

How do we undertake research that explores young people's use of violence in a way that does not contribute to further stigmatization?

How do we understand and communicate about risk?

- research about AVITH often collapses disability into a binary classification (disabled or not disabled)
- does not always use international best practice for identifying/classifying disability
- positions disability as a 'risk factor' for violence
- does not consider the behaviours *and* the social and interactional context in which those behaviours arise

# WHAT DID WE DO?

Exploratory qualitative project to generate new knowledge about the intersection of AVITH and young people with disability

Data were collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with:

- mothers who had experienced AVITH
- practitioners with direct experience working with young people with disability and AVITH

Perspectives of young people with disability a critical missing piece

# MUMS

eleven mums talked to us about young people with disability who were currently using violence at home

two (2) mothers of adult children talked to us about their past experiences of violence (experiences of violence when their child was young)

- diverse cultural backgrounds
- metro and regional areas of Vic
- single parent household
- most also raising siblings of young person with disability
- 2 in full time employment
- ~ 1/2 identified as having a disability – anxiety, depression, PTSD



# YOUNG PEOPLE

- 8 to 21 years (currently using violence)
- 10 mothers reported that the young person using violence was male
- 8 of the 11 young people currently receiving a NDIS support
- complex needs for support
- co-occurring neurodevelopmental, intellectual and psychosocial disability



# PRACTITIONERS

sixteen (16) practitioners shared their experiences of working with young people with disability, siblings and families

Working across sectors and included:

- disability advocacy
- DFV specialists - policy and advocacy advisors, lawyers and social workers
- ~1/2 from regional Vic
- All but one practitioner was female



# WHAT DID WE FIND?

- complex experiences of violence – overlapping, repeated
- violence had been part of families lives for a long time
- wide-ranging detrimental impacts of violence at home including:
  - direct effects on physical, social and emotional health
  - participation in the paid workforce
  - impact on the young person with disability and on siblings
  - whole of family safety and wellbeing
- mums often spoke about feeling alone, isolated and abandoned





*“There’s probably a lot more behaviour and stuff that goes on that people don’t ever find out about because it’s embarrassing to say, “Look, I’m pretty much controlled by my 16-year-old so he can feel safe, and in the meantime, he yells abuse at me and punches holes in the wall.” I mean, you’re not going to go around telling people stuff like that – it’s a very lonely and isolated place to be in”*

# A BACKDROP OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

## **Violence within and beyond the boundaries of family life**

- past and current experiences of adult-perpetrated violence at home
- mums frequently identified as victim-survivors
- discrimination, marginalization
- significant and complex impacts for young people, families and service providers

# “A PINCUSHION UNDER A SPOTLIGHT OF SERVICES”

**High levels of unmet need in the context of extensive service engagement**

"I don't mind if all of it is coordinated and it actually makes sense, but all of these things operate in silos and none of them talk very well to each other"

- Services and systems struggle to meet the needs of young people with disability
- Lack of disability inclusive practices/literacy in specialist DFV services
- Lack of violence literacy in specialist disability services

# ASKING FOR HELP CAN MAKE THINGS WORSE

## Systems and services can and do contribute to trauma

- There are pockets of good practice, but overall perceptions of service responses to young people with disability using violence was negative

“We were asking, begging for help....and the [service] response was, well, it would have to be a prison cell, because we've got nowhere for him to go. They told us that the only way he could get help would be to have him admitted to hospital and then you refuse to pick him up, or that if he entered the criminal justice system”

# DFV SERVICE RESPONSES

## Responding to violence within the child-parent relationship

- rigid models of service provision that centre on the dynamics of adult perpetrated violence are not helpful
- limited strategies, skills and funding models to support people living with, and who will continue to live with, someone using violence

“Particularly with [some types of] services, if the person who chooses to use violence is still in the home, often services will not take on a parent. So that makes it difficult”

# THE ROLE OF THE NDIS

**An important component of a multisectoral response to AVITH**

- currently not well integrated
- lack of visibility about support for using harmful behaviours at home