

Young people's experiences and use of violence in the home – Findings from an Australian national survey



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Our study

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Victim survivor voices

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Adolescent family violence in Australia:

A national study of prevalence, history
of childhood victimisation and impacts



Research Design

- A national survey of 5,021 young Australians aged 16-20 years old.
- Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their sociodemographic characteristics, their current living arrangements, and their experiences of:
 - **'witnessing' violence** between other family members
 - **being subjected to direct forms of abuse** perpetrated by other family members, and
 - their **use of violence** against other family members.
- Survey respondents were also asked to provide detailed information about **impacts of their experiences of DFV, help-seeking and support needs.**

Sample characteristics

- 67% assigned female at birth
- 33% male assigned male at birth
- 4% gender diverse or questioning
- 31% diverse sexual orientation
- 5% First Nations young people
- 10% NESB
- 36% reported at least one disability
- 83% of young people resided in a major city, 15% in a regional area and 2% in a remote area



Young people's *experiences* of violence in the home

28%
experienced
DFV & other
forms of
abuse

23% reported
experiences of
DFV during
childhood (no
other child
abuse)

2% were a
direct target of
abuse/ neglect
(no DFV)

Intergenerational transmission of violence

- 1 in 2 young people with childhood experiences of DFV and/ or other forms of maltreatment reported using adolescent family violence in the home
- **BUT:** 89% of young people reporting frequent use of AFV had experienced DFV and/ or other forms of maltreatment

Priority cohort observation

Priority cohorts were more likely to report use of violence

- LGBTIQ+ young people, young people living with a disability

Priority cohorts were also disproportionately more likely to experience both DFV and other forms of maltreatment

Increased risk of AVITH and related support needs must be understood in the context of childhood victimisation

Study findings: who young people tell

- 1 in 3 young people who had used AFV disclosed this use of violence to a family member (34%, $n=345$)
 - Young people were most likely to tell their mother (22%), a sibling (17%) or their father (15%).
- Beyond family members, young people who use family violence disclosed their experiences to:
 - friends (18%), or a formal service provider (7%).
 - 20 young people in our study (2%) – of the 1,006 young people who self-reported using violence in the home – had been reported to the police for these behaviours.



My mum told me that violence is bad and told me that controlling my anger towards my siblings is important and that kinda helped. (female, 18, heterosexual)

I find my mother more useful as she went through the same as I did when I was a kid. (male, 18, heterosexual)

My mum because she resolved the conflict peacefully. (female, 18, bisexual)

Who was the most helpful person you told?

There were a range of individuals identified as the most helpful person to whom they disclosed their use of violence.

- Large number of young people that identified their mother/mum as the most helpful person they told about their use of DFV
- Young people, particularly girls, cited their mother's understanding, sympathy and action as the reason they were the most helpful
- A number of young people explained that their mother had helped them to address the underlying cause for why they were using violence.
- For a number of young people, the fact that their mother had also experienced violence, and so had shared first-hand knowledge, was cited as the key reason why they were the most helpful person they disclosed to.

Mum would make excuses.
(female, 20, bisexual)

Brother, as he didn't think anything was going on. (male, 18, heterosexual)

Father, as he ignored situation.
(female, 17, bisexual)

Friends, they couldn't do much.
(female, 20, heterosexual)

Who was the least helpful person you told?

The main reason provided for listing someone as “least helpful” related to inaction – individuals who did not believe the young person, failed to take or suggest any action, or ignored the disclosure or excused the situation disclosed.

- Young people’s views underscore the importance of validation and understanding upon disclosing an experience of violence.
- Some young people also reflected that disclosures about their own use of violence had been met with anger or retaliation from a family member,
- A smaller number of young people expressed a sense of guilt or regret for having disclosed their experience.

Study findings: service and support needs

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

Having more and easier contact with other family members. Having a place to go when things got bad. (female, 19, bisexual)

A support system and a safe place/person in case of a serious event. (female, 18, pansexual)

Somewhere to go to escape it (peak violence was during covid lockdowns). (female, 17, queer)

I just wanted someone to give me a hug and tell me everything was going to be okay and that things would eventually get better. (female, 18, heterosexual)

A safe place to go to & someone to

talk to The need for a safe place was the most commonly listed type of support that young people would have found useful.

- This was linked to:
 - the desire to be able to seek respite, and
 - the desire to leave home permanently and find a safe alternative housing or carer arrangement.
- Small number of young people highlighted the importance of being able to remove themselves from the family home during the COVID-19 lockdowns to seek respite and/or avoid escalating conflict.
- **The second most common support need identified by young people was having someone to talk to as a form of emotional support.**
- Beyond having someone to talk to, that person must also actively listen and where possible provide information and validation.
- Young people held clear expectations around accountability of trusted adults. They expressed frustration and hurt when disclosures had been ignored.

More trustworthy and helpful teachers, less trust in the adults that messed me up. (female, 16, aroace [term nominated by participant])

Maybe regular check ins by teachers could have helped. (female, 18, heterosexual)

Kind words, maybe teachers asking how i was individually. (female, 17, bisexual)

Supportive school environments and staff

Schools can be a point to identify young people's experiences and support needs.

A word of caution: The ability to deliver in-person supports to such children was often interrupted during COVID-19 periods of lockdown.

- Some young people believed having a more supportive school environment that took a more proactive approach to enquiring about individual student wellbeing would be useful to improve access to support and pathways to safety for young people using DFV.
- Schools having a trusted onsite counsellor or psychologist available to students was seen as important.
- Some young people articulated a desire for more regular

Policy and practice implications

- Study reveals significant gaps in current responses to this form of DFV
- Critical need to develop a whole-of-system suite of tailored, trauma-informed and DFV-aware interventions.
- Highlights why children must be responded to as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right.
- Supporting the recovery needs of young people who have experienced and used DFV is an essential strategy to:
 - reduce the risk of intergenerational violence,
 - to minimise the impacts of AFV on other family members, and
 - to ensure the trauma experienced by young Australians as a result of DFV is addressed.



Thank you

Project website: <https://www.monash.edu/arts/gender-and-family-violence/research-and-projects/adolescent-family-violence-in-australia-a-national-study-of-prevalence,-use-of-and-exposure-to-violence,-and-support-needs-for-young-people>



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