



Australian Prevention Programmes for Young People *

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This paper provides an overview of programmes, initiatives and resources that have been developed and/or implemented with young people in Australia to prevent violence within relationships. It provides a summary of research undertaken to support the need for prevention programmes as a mechanism of early intervention. It also outlines the different approaches and elements likely to enhance implementation of such programmes.

Why Prevention?

In recent years, increased interest in prevention programmes has arisen from concern about the significant impact of witnessing and experiencing inter-parental violence, and how this shapes young people's attitudes to their own intimate relationships. Current approaches to prevention emphasise early intervention to encourage respectful and equitable relationships and promote non-violent and non-coercive strategies when dealing with difficulties in intimate relationships.

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Adolescence as a unique developmental stage

Early adolescence represents an important opportunity for preventive intervention. Adolescence is a unique developmental stage when young people are defining their individual identity and values, and being exposed to increasing spheres of influence, including the commencement of their own intimate relationships. Cashmore (2000) argues that prevention initiatives targeting early adolescence are crucial, as this is a time when a young person is at increased risk of movement into “harmful pathways” or ways of conducting themselves that may be destructive to themselves and their relationships.

Impact of domestic violence on young people

Two recent studies highlight the incidence and impact of domestic violence on young people in Australia:

- Younger women are more at risk of violence than older women, with 7.3% of women aged 18-24 years experiencing one or more incidents of physical or sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the “Women’s Safety Australia” survey, compared to 3.0% of women aged 25-34 years old (ABS 1996, p. 50).
- 1 in 3 young people have witnessed incidents involving physical violence (including yelling and threats) involving their carers (National Crime Prevention 2000, p. 4).
- 1 in 3 young people (both males and females) reported that they experienced violence within their own relationships (National Crime Prevention 2000, p. 2).
- Young people’s experiences of dating violence increased with age, from 24% of 12-14 year olds to 46% of 19-20 year olds (National Crime Prevention 2000, p. 2).

- 1 in 20 young people considered that: forcing a partner to have sex, throwing things like plates at each other, and regular slapping or punching are part of “normal conflict” rather than domestic violence when given a choice between the two (National Crime Prevention, 2000, p. 1).
- 37% of males and 12% of females agreed with the statement, “men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household”. (National Crime Prevention 2000, p. 1).

Prevention Strategies

Prevention programmes use a range of strategies across a number of levels:

1. **Primary** prevention is targeted at the community as a whole and generally aims to introduce values that promote healthy relationships. This includes programmes with a broad community education component.
2. **Secondary** prevention involves programmes that are targeted to “at risk” individuals such as young people who have experienced violence in their own homes.
3. **Tertiary** prevention involves those who have already experienced domestic violence, either as perpetrators or victims (Laing 2000, p.12). This includes initiatives such as counselling programmes for women and children, statutory interventions and perpetrator groups.

Many of the current examples of prevention programmes promoting healthy relationships for young people in Australia are forms of both primary and secondary approaches.

Universal or targeted approaches?

Prevention programme design considers whether programmes should take a universal (programme encompassing an entire population), or targeted (programme geared to a selected target group) approach. Universal approaches enable programmes to reach a broader spectrum, sometimes including the family

or community as well as the young person. Targeted approaches have been successful in reaching high-risk populations which have been customarily been hard to engage but can also be stigmatising of already marginalised groups.

What do prevention programmes seek to do?

Violence prevention programmes with young people seek to promote “pro social” behaviours demonstrated by equitable and respectful relationships. They aim to influence choices by providing knowledge and skills, and challenge values and attitudes that encourage violence. Strategies include:

Knowledge: information booklets, games, videos, education sessions

Skills: activities such as role-plays and case studies to encourage the acquisition of skills such as assertive communication, problem solving, conflict resolution

Values: Guided peer group discussions promoting critical reflection on power and gender issues. Includes exploration of components that are part of healthy relationships.

Theoretical underpinnings

Despite the fact that a clear articulation of the rationale and concepts sustaining the development of initiatives is critical to success, prevention programmes rarely make explicit the theory base underpinning their approach. A transparent expression of theoretical influences will guide the choice and development of strategies employed to create positive change. For example, social learning theory, cognitive behavioural theory, social cognitive models and constructivist learning have all been applied amongst the prevention programmes currently operating in Australia. Unless programmes provide the opportunity to challenge internalised beliefs supporting the use of violence, then little attitudinal change will take place (Bretherton et al. 1993). This requires the incorporation of a

theory base that addresses gender and power issues within the domestic violence paradigm.

Current Australian Approaches

Indermaur et al. (1998) conducted the most comprehensive review to date of Australian prevention programmes for young people and found that, out of 98 programmes, approximately one third were school-based. The following provides a summary of the diverse range of approaches currently being undertaken. A number of these have been funded under the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative, and these are indicated * in the text.

Whole Of School Approach

Schools may be our most important resource for violence prevention (Gamache & Snapp 1995, p. 230) because of the role they play in the socialisation and moral development of young people. A whole of school approach is based on schools examining:

- Curriculum programmes spanning all year levels and subject areas
- Teaching and learning practices
- School policies
- Resources
- Organisational practices
- School culture

Example: “Solving the Jigsaw”, Emergency Accommodation and Support Enterprise (EASE) (VIC)*

EASE works with primary school students (Years 5 & 6) as well as “at risk” high school students to examine violence within relationships. Further work is

undertaken with parents of “at risk” students through local TAFE resources (Silver 1999).

Key features:

- Seeks to build a culture within the school of well-being not violence
- Places discussions about domestic violence within the broader context of violence, examining issues such as bullying as well;
- Discusses violence within young people’s relationships as well as inter-parental violence;
- Reference committee comprises project worker, school staff, and external domestic violence service providers with ongoing communication and collaboration with the school;
- Integrates programme concepts into the learning environment and teacher practices;
- Provides sessions to teachers to raise their awareness and increase confidence in facilitating sessions;
- Provides support to “at risk” students;
- Involves parents to increase their awareness of the impact of violence on their children;
- Information about the project is made available through newsletters and the school website

Curriculum Development and Integration

In general, discussion about domestic violence is incorporated within the broader curriculum framework (e.g. healthy relationships, bullying etc.) but specific resources may also been developed to encourage teachers to conduct domestic violence sessions within class. Curriculum integration remains an important issue, so that domestic violence prevention programmes are not lost amongst

other programmes and so that anti violence is promoted as a theme consistently across the school community. This integration of material within the curriculum also ensures that young people receive repeated exposure to the programme concepts. These become more sophisticated and attuned to the developmental needs of young people over time. Curriculum integration relies on commitment and cooperation within the school environment to ensure that learning themes are carried throughout curricula. Examples include:

Schools Savvy Kit, Education Queensland (QLD)*

This was designed to increase school staff's knowledge, skills and confidence to support students affected by domestic and family violence and to promote safe, respectful relationships. The kit contains resource material, activities and ideas about how these issues can be dealt with in the school environment (Parker 2000).

Key features

- An information booklet about the kit was distributed to every staff member at Queensland State primary, secondary and special schools during term 4 in 2000.

“Stop it... before it starts” Northern Territory*

A 5 module, prevention programme for 12-15 year olds.

Key features

- Applied intervention research to consult with young people and key professionals to develop a programme which is valid for the client group and for the environment in which it is to be implemented.
- Targeted Indigenous students, students from culturally diverse backgrounds and young people dislocated from formal school system for feedback;

- Each session was rigorously evaluated for its ability to engage young people;
- Engaged educationalists and curriculum advisors in further development (McCallum 2001).

Child Protection Education: Curriculum materials to support teaching and learning in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education, NSW Department of Education and Training

Curriculum materials were developed to support teachers from Kindergarten to Year 10 to deliver sessions within the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) curriculum around sensitive issues such as abuse between peers (e.g. harassment, bullying, dating violence) as well as violence within the family (e.g. domestic violence). The PDHPE syllabus provides a framework in which these issues can be discussed within an appropriate context that also acknowledges multicultural and Indigenous perspectives (NSW Department of School Education 1997).

Key features:

- Incorporates tools such as letters to inform parents about the Department's approach to discussing these issues within school programmes.
- Other resources such as videos, overhead transparencies and handouts (translated into many community languages) are provided to assist teachers to conduct awareness raising activities with parents and community groups.
- The material targeted to children and young people uses methods such as case studies and unfinished stories to build skills in seeking help if faced with a situation of potential abuse.
- Students gain awareness that abuse can happen in all kinds of relationships, including those that are closest.

- The paradigm of positive relationships is used to develop an understanding and commitment to developing relationships that are non-coercive and non-violent.

Community Development

Other prevention programmes take a community development approach to prevention with the objective of creating change at the individual, school and community levels. Examples include:

Creating New Choices, Berry Street (VIC)

The project aimed to engage in long-term community development, two or three schools at a time, with each school working intensively with a project worker to identify what they wished to achieve (Sidey & Lynch 2001). To reflect a whole school approach, students, parents, teachers and the broader community were involved. Project strategies included the development of appropriate curriculum, creation of specific policies, provision of professional development opportunities for staff, development of student education and support mechanisms, parent education involving public forums, and creative activities such as festivals.

Key features:

- Required strong collaboration between agencies
- Relied on key agencies or personnel to provide an ongoing commitment and endorsement of the programme.

The Partnerships Against Violence Everywhere (PAVE) (TAS)*

This project was undertaken in 12 communities within Tasmania. Two trained facilitators and a project management team used a community development approach to bring people together, discuss the issues concerning domestic violence and young people and to mobilise collective action. Two workshops were conducted over 6 sessions, one with the young people and the other with local community members including church, youth and welfare workers, retailers,

police, local government and parents. At the conclusion of these workshops, both groups were brought together to develop strategies for future action. Outcomes of this project included a poster competition and development of a website for young people.

Key Features

- Workshop format was used to raise awareness of domestic violence and its impact on young people and to increase knowledge about available support services.
- Young people and community representatives were brought together to hear each other's perspectives and work together to plan for future action.
- Community reference groups were established to support the ongoing work arising from the workshops.

Peer Education

Peer education is a valuable method of delivering messages about anti-violence as it 'is based on a connection...of shared life experience which often makes the message more real' (Evans-Armanasco et al. 1999, p. 4). Some programmes utilised peer educators who had experienced violence in their own lives, using their learning from these experiences to facilitate discussions with other young people. One of the most critical success factors in peer education programmes is the quality and regularity of the debriefing process and the support provided to peer educators. Examples include:

Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself, Victoria

The programme, including a manual (Gulbin 1996), was developed to provide information to young women (Years 7 – 10) about violence and what to do about it.

Key features:

- Involved peer educators in the planning of the programme,
- Developed support within the school community,
- Undertook a comprehensive selection process, screening for appropriate peer educators and informing them about their role and what to expect.
- Involved community agencies to establish links and provide ongoing support to the programme.

Keep Safe and Stay Cool, (SA)

Keep Safe and Stay Cool is an early intervention education programme targeting young people between 13 and 25 years of age, using a peer education model to promote healthy relationships. The programme utilises a framework of human rights to encourage change in young people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours regarding interpersonal relationships. It aims to encourage an understanding of mutual responsibilities with a view to reducing the incidence and tolerance of interpersonal violence (Buchanan 2000).

Key features

- Peer educators were recruited through advertisements in local papers and the distribution of flyers.
- Six young people (three of each gender) were selected to undertake training.
- Each peer educator underwent extensive training in the design and delivery of interactive sessions to high school classes and youth groups.
- Intended that peer educators' ideas and understandings of current youth cultures would assist them to deliver information that is appealing to young people and contributes to a successful transfer of knowledge and ideas.

Community Arts

One of the most prominent programmes implemented using a community arts perspective is that conducted by *Big hArt*. *Big hArt** is a non-profit organisation using art based projects to re-engage young people, especially those dislocated from formal supports, with their community. Project goals and mediums to be used (e.g. art, drama and filmmaking) are determined by the young people with project workers guiding the group for a minimum of 20-25 weeks.

Key features

- A significant amount of time is taken to develop trust and rapport with young people and build a sense of ownership of the project.
- An arts mentor and producer work with young people to establish how they wish to promote their ideas.
- An integral element of the project is that the programme works towards leaving a legacy in the community, ensuring that the work continues to grow and evolve.

Other projects such as the *Phoenix Project* and *Kinks and Bends*, both implemented in New South Wales, have incorporated a community arts element to their activities. This has included artwork, the construction of sculptures, dramatic and musical performances. *Non-Violence: What's it all about?* Was developed through the North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service working with young people to write and produce a video conveying messages to young people about non-violence and healthy relationships (Zuchowski 2003).

Key features:

- Young people have the freedom to develop and express their ideas in ways that other young people relate to;
- Young people have some ownership or connection to the outcomes of the projects.

The experiences of such projects are confirmed by evaluation of the *Making Noise** project, which aimed to provide opportunities for young people to express how they think and feel about relationships and relationship violence through art and creativity. The evaluation indicated that:

- In order to communicate effectively with young people, it is important to develop a range of messages delivered across a range of media to communicate with the increasingly diverse and 'tribal' nature of youth;
- -Peer education is successful because young people continue to state they want to hear from other young people about social issues like relationship violence;
- Partnerships with influential individuals, groups and media organisations can be a cost-effective and powerful way to influence the portrayal of relationships, relationship violence and gender in popular culture;
- Interventions like *making noise* provide young people with an opportunity to 'achieve' and to be seen in the mainstream of society, which seems to have been very powerful;
- Telling stories and allowing young people to draw their own conclusions can be more credible, more relevant and therefore more effective than 'telling' them what to think and how to behave (Reamont Pty Ltd 2002).

Computer/Web-based Resources

The use of computer technology is emerging as a means to engage young people on violence and relationships issues. Games and submitting personal stories convey information or connect with young people in a more interactive way. Examples include:

Youth Abuse Website (TAS)*

The website, www.youthabuse.dhhs.tas.gov.au, provides access to information about violence within relationships, especially to young people in remote communities.

Key features:

- Computer access offers anonymous information and advice.
- Focus groups were undertaken with young people to comment on website design and content in initial stages of the project.

When Love Hurts: A guide to love, respect and abuse in relationships, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC) (VIC)

A component within the DVIRC website was created to raise awareness about violence amongst young women and to provide information on the warning signs of abuse and the safety and support options available. The website, www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove, features quizzes, checklists and an opportunity for young people to submit their own stories about their experiences. It is evaluated regularly and this monitoring has influenced the site development, including the development of a section for parents and family and an alteration of some of the language used (McKenzie 1998).

Key features

- Graphics are engaging and follow a theme reproduced on written booklet material which complements the website information.

Recreation-Based Activities/Camps

A small number of programmes conducted recreation based activities or camps as a means to help young people discuss these issues. Examples include:

Kool It, Adelaide Central Mission

Camps were used as part of an overall strategy to connect with young homeless men about issues of personal violence.

Key features:

- Two-hour sessions were delivered over 9 weeks to address issues of violence and inform young men about available support services.
- Follow-up included a three-day live-in “gathering”, undertaken with a small group of 7 young men.
- High worker numbers ensured that workers were available to support the young men in their efforts to engage with others in a non-violent way as well as helping them to deal with the impact of violence and abuse they had experienced in their families.

Positive Choices, Geraldton Sexual Assault Resource Centre, (WA)

This camp programme focuses on healthy relationships within all facets of a young person’s life: family, friends, teachers, police and one’s own intimate relationships. It involves workshops on sex education, abusive versus healthy relationships, harm minimisation with drugs, and several life skills sessions. These are complemented with recreation-based activities such as sandboarding, swimming, Blue Light disco, archery and rope courses.

Key features:

- Young people are paired with a “mentor”, someone with whom they can remain in contact after the camp.
- Participants receive intensive exposure to the material and develop strong support networks that may be utilised when young people are confronted by risk situations including relationship abuse.

Social Action

Ideas can be drawn from allied fields to mobilise young people into social action activities. Banner competitions have been used effectively within schools to raise awareness about violence and healthy relationships. This has been a vehicle to promote discussion and involve school councils in developing responses.

Prevention Resources

Creative resources have been developed to inform young people about violence and healthy relationships. Some have been directly targeted at young women. These include the *Loves Me Not** diary/calendar produced by Berry Street (2000) and the *Eh La. diary* for Indigenous Young women (Stanford 2001), which incorporate information useful in their daily lives. Other pamphlets and booklets such as: *Relationships* (DVIRC 2000), *Living with Love** (Lee 1999) and *Is this Love* (DVRC 2001), include more comprehensive information. These use methods such as quizzes to facilitate young people's interaction with the information. *The Big Secret* (Dow et al. 1996) and *Enough is Enough* (Robinson 2000) use a comic book format to impart information and challenge ideas in a less confronting way. Games (e.g. rubics cube, board games) provide another way to engage young people with the topic.

Key features:

- The design of resources has incorporated graphics and language that young people can relate to.

What Works?

A review of the literature highlights that very few prevention programmes have undertaken formal evaluations. Questionnaires were the most commonly used method to obtain perceptions about useful components of the programme/project. However, more comprehensive evaluation is necessary to identify the elements of programmes that bring about change and have a long

lasting impact on young people. The prevention programmes for young people funded under the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative were subjected to formal evaluation by an independent consultant team. The evaluation highlighted organisational features that appear to be prerequisites for the success of programmes of this nature (Szirom 2000).

The following points summarise key the themes within the literature about factors likely to enhance outcomes of prevention programmes with young people:

1. Prevention approaches need to be incorporated as part of a broader strategy concerning violence and healthy relationships.
2. Initiatives targeting young people should involve primary, secondary and tertiary prevention strategies.
3. Strategic and comprehensive planning that takes account of local needs and issues should be undertaken in the development of programmes.
4. Parents need to be informed about prevention initiatives and involved in the process.
5. Programmes are more effective if specific risk factors are targeted and appropriate methods are implemented to address those risk factors operating at all levels including individual, family, peer, school, and community.
6. A clear rationale should be articulated about the educational principles and strategies used to encourage change.
7. Specific consideration must be given to the population where the programme will be implemented, especially strategies to engage with Indigenous, immigrant or refugee youth, and disadvantaged young people who are at most risk.
8. Programme content or curriculum development needs to incorporate elements designed to inform young people about violence and options available to them, challenge attitudes about the use of violence and

- gender construction, develop skills and provide opportunities to practise and implement skills.
9. Support mechanisms need to be clearly articulated and schools should be informed about the existence of these.
 10. Follow-up sessions or a commitment to a prevention programme that occurs over a lengthy period of time is instrumental to achieving long lasting behavioural and attitudinal change.
 11. Careful consideration must be given to evaluation measures used to determine the effectiveness of intervention methods. An evaluation strategy should be integrated into the programme from the beginning.

Conclusion

Prevention programmes targeted at young people require careful planning that addresses identified risk factors and includes a clearly articulated evaluation strategy. Programme development needs to incorporate methods of consultation with young people about learning methods and activities that will engage their interest and promote behavioural change. Content must place domestic and dating violence within a context where the constructions of gender can be analysed. Efforts to encourage commitment and collaboration from key stakeholders including young people, family, school and the community are essential to the ongoing success of the programme. Specific strategies that recognise the special needs of Indigenous, immigrant and refugee, and homeless youth are essential. The literature reviewed strongly indicates the need for a holistic approach to programme development that incorporates both primary and secondary prevention strategies implemented over a lengthy period of time.

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