



THE REPORT OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FORUM HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

Introduction

The Minister of Finance has expressed an interest in applying evidence-based practice to the issues that are a priority for Government. He also wants to encourage relevant, university-based research on these issues. Earlier this year, he spoke to the Vice-Chancellors of our 8 universities about the possibility of inviting academics to participate in a series of forums with government officials. He asked Superu to arrange these forums.

It was decided that the first forum would trial this process as a means of engaging academics on the Government's priorities. It was decided that the first topic would be family violence, one of the priority issues for the Government, and one which has so far been intractable.

The Forum

The Forum was held on 16 September 2014. It was attended by academics and senior government policy advisers. The Vice-Chancellors had been asked to nominate academics with backgrounds that were relevant to a discussion on family violence, without necessarily being experts on the subject. The participants were selected from among the nominees. Eighteen academics and ten policy advisers attended the Forum. The Forum did not seek consensus, rather participants were asked to discuss issues freely.

The key question which the Forum was asked to address was 'what is missing in New Zealand's response to family violence?' Secondary questions were 'what are the gaps in our knowledge?' and 'what are the research questions that we should address to better inform decision-makers?'

The Forum noted that family violence is a significant problem and that the solutions will be complex and take time to achieve sustainable change. Examples such as prisoners' recidivism rates were provided to show that making *sustainable* change in areas such as these is challenging.



P: 04 917 7040
F: 04 917 7059
W: superu.govt.nz

Level 5, 117 Lambton Quay
PO Box 2839
Wellington 6140

Superu has reflected and built on the discussions at the Forum. This document further considers and refines the Forum's conclusions, while retaining their essence. It is organised under three themes:

- Making better use of evidence to inform family violence policies and practices
- Improve workforce development and training
- Government must provide clearer governance and stronger leadership

The Forum also made some specific suggestions for further investigation which are recorded at the end of this report.

Making better use of evidence to inform family violence policies and practices

All responses to family violence should be evidence-based

Forum participants strongly recommended that all family violence policies and practices be evidence-informed in their design and implementation, and that they be evaluated when implemented. Too often, this approach is ignored, and programmes are initiated and funded without a strong evidence base. Once funded, programmes are often implemented without being evaluated. Furthermore, there is rarely enough post-implementation scrutiny of programmes to determine whether they are faithful to what the programme funders and designers intended.

Three steps are required to rectify this situation immediately.

- The information going to decision-makers must include advice on the extent to which proposed programmes are evidence-based.
- All new initiatives must be based on evidence and must be evaluated post-implementation.
- The entire family violence system of responses and interventions needs to be scrutinised to determine whether there is evidence of effectiveness of existing programmes and interventions. This analysis would require identification of all the programmes in the system, and a determination of whether they are evidence-based, evaluated, and shown to be effective or not. This analysis would allow gaps in existing programmes to be identified, as well as gaps in the evidence-base of the existing programmes. There needs to be a willingness to identify unsuccessful programmes – and a culture developed which supports the shifting of resources to programmes with a greater probability of success.

We should use and build-on our existing evidence base

Where we have no evidence on which to base new initiatives, or where programmes have not been evaluated, new research or evaluations are required. First, better use should be made of our existing evidence base. Some existing evidence has largely been ignored. This evidence could help design effective programmes or indicate whether existing programmes are effective.

Too often the evidence we already have remains largely unknown to decision-makers, policy developers, funders and practitioners. Superu has, as part of its role, a responsibility to collect and disseminate this information. Forums such as this are one vehicle for exchanging information. Superu is responsible for managing the contract for the NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse, which is a repository of family violence knowledge. Superu will explore other means of translating this knowledge.

Programme funding should cover the cost of the evaluation

The Forum made a number of specific recommendations about evaluating programmes. First, when funding a new programme, money should be provided to evaluate it, including where non-government agencies are funded to provide a service for the Government. Second, programmes should not be evaluated until they have matured. A programme might not be fully effective immediately after it has been implemented or in the short to medium term, and it is important to determine the best point at which to assess effectiveness and outcomes. In the initial stages of implementation, programme providers might still be ironing out problems, and improving their delivery. But even during the initial stage of implementation, programmes should be monitored for fidelity. A diverse range of evaluation methods are available to be deployed appropriately and support the development of effective programmes.

Successful pilots should be implemented widely and faithfully

When a pilot programme has been evaluated and shown to be effective and scalable, it should be rolled-out nationally. Care must be taken during national roll-outs that the programme remains true to the original design. Forum participants were concerned that too often pilots seem to languish, even though they have been successful, and, for those that are expanded, too little attention is given to programme fidelity. Once a programme has been implemented nationally, the Government should continue to monitor it, and not rely long-term on the initial pilot evaluation.

The Forum identified some areas where more research could unlock potential ways of reducing family violence:

1. The participants repeatedly highlighted the clear evidence-based association between alcohol abuse and family violence. They suggested that tackling issues of alcohol availability and access, and treatment of alcohol abuse could lessen the risk of family violence. This is a promising avenue which Superu will explore further.
2. The participants also noted that the presence of child maltreatment in a house often co-occurred alongside intimate partner violence, and that there was a broader suite of common risk factors that should be used as a means of targeting programmes and services towards at-risk populations.
3. Although some research evidence obtained overseas will undoubtedly translate to New Zealand families, new research on family violence is required here:
 - What are the issues and what works for Māori and for Pacific communities?
 - We need to develop a much better understanding of all aspects of family violence in ethnic, migrant and refugee groups. What is the prevalence of family violence among different ethnic groups, including migrant and refugee groups? What do they see as family violence, and how does this affect their behaviour?
 - How do different population groups define masculinity, how do their concepts of masculinity influence their behaviour, and what is its relation to family violence?
 - We need to know more about family violence within the disabled community where rates of violence appear to be very high.

Improve workforce development and training

Forum participants raised a number of issues about workforce development and training. Much of the discussion about skill gaps in New Zealand has focused on issues relevant to the business community (e.g., ICT training, engineering), but the social sector in New Zealand also experiences a shortage of skilled workers. This issue needs to be drawn to

the attention of the relevant Ministers and strategies need to be put in place to address the skill shortages.

More workforce capability and training is needed

The Forum highlighted that New Zealand urgently requires significant capability development and training of the core family violence workforce, and training of other people who come into contact with family violence in the course of their work. The family violence workforce must be sufficiently remunerated to attract and retain competent practitioners. Forum participants suggested that previous reviews of workforce development and training be revisited, as these provide a starting point for what needs to be done.

The workforce must have sufficient capacity to respond to referrals

It is vital the family violence workforce has the capacity to respond promptly and effectively to people referred to it. This is especially true if there is an expansion of risk assessment and referral services. Anything less than this level of service is unethical.

The workforce must faithfully implement evidence-based programmes

The participants were concerned that too often evidence-based initiatives are poorly implemented by both government and non-government agencies, so that the programmes become ineffective, or, at least, effectiveness can no longer be certain. This is partly a workforce capability issue – the workforce needs to have sufficient expertise and resources to faithfully implement the initiative as it was designed. The workforce should be trained to realise how important this is. Mechanisms should be in place to retain quality staff.

Recognise risk and make effective referrals

All people who regularly deal with family members in circumstances where they might encounter people at risk of family violence, e.g. doctors, nurses, and teachers, should be trained to recognise the risk, know how to respond, including making the right referrals. Non-government agencies could help reduce family violence if they have the funding, capability and training to identify risk and make referrals. People at risk of family violence may only ask for help once, and whoever responds first, needs to be effective.

Government must provide clearer governance and stronger leadership

Need for a comprehensive strategy

The participants were unanimous in their view that the Government needs a coherent strategy covering all aspects of family violence, including child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, elder abuse and neglect, and sexual violence. To be successful, the strategy would need high level ministerial and central government agencies' support.

It should include a continuum of responses

The strategy should comprise a well-designed continuum of responses, covering preventing violence from occurring in the first place, supporting victims, holding perpetrators to account, and providing longer term responses to help rebuild lives and prevent recurrence. These responses need to range from universal interventions, to those targeted at particular at-risk groups, and those who have been impacted by violence. Forum participants suggest that additional investment should go towards the prevention end of the continuum.

The strategy should take a long-term investment approach

Expenditure to reduce family violence is likely to pay dividends, by lessening the need for future social, education, and health expenditure on children and adults who have been

damaged physically, socially, or psychologically by family violence. Part of the investment approach would be programmes aimed at reducing the transmission of family violence across generations. We know that children growing up in dysfunctional families and experiencing family violence are more likely than other children to perpetrate family violence when they become adults. An investment aimed at reducing the dysfunction in these families is likely to produce long-term benefits. Examples of prevention investment could be further funding of evidence-based and proven parenting and relationship support. A primary message is that immediate results from any initiative are unlikely, that long-term investment is needed, and that a broader cultural change within society is required to have the greatest population impact.

The strategy needs to link with other sectors

The strategy would need to take account of what other sectors can do towards identifying and mitigating the risk of family violence. Sectors as diverse as child development, education, housing, income support, drug and alcohol dependency, and mental health can all contribute to creating a climate and conditions which could reduce the level of family violence. Government would need to establish and maintain a co-ordinated response and communication among all parts of the family violence sector and the other contributing sectors.

The strategy must be evidence-based

An important part of the strategy would be to ensure that all programmes are evidence-based, and funding is moved from poorly performing programmes to those that are more effective. In the process, any inefficient duplication should be eliminated.

Specific suggestions for further investigation

Forum participants made a number of additional suggestions for further research or investment.

- There should be greater long-term effort to reduce the transmission of family violence across generations, including a focus on the children of at-risk families. A system-based research approach which embraces multiple risk factors will be required.
- More investment is warranted into proven child development and parenting programmes and into incorporating the successful elements of these programmes into existing programmes, in order to reduce child maltreatment. Further, improving family functioning might produce long-term reductions in the intergenerational transmission of family violence.
- More investment in relationship education in schools.
- Fund non-government agencies for more family violence risk assessment and referral.
- There should more emphasis on funding programmes aimed at whole families, rather than only focusing on individuals.