

# CHILDREN EXPOSED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE BETWEEN ADULTS

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Examining and re-designing our  
response



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# Outline

- The effect on children of exposure to family violence
- The Waitakere Children and FV Research Project
- Proposed solutions
- Conclusion



# Casey (10), Violet (8) and Sam (6) – three siblings living in fear

- From any income or ethnicity.
- Had a night of terror in bed listening to Dad's violence.
- Dad got them up late, saying 'Mum's not well'.
- Haven't seen Mum today.
- Off to school late, poorly dressed, hungry and tired.
- How's their day going to go?



# Their responses vary ...

- Casey is angry, disruptive, bullying towards others.
- Violet throws herself into classwork but anxious by 3pm.
- Sam withdraws, falls asleep, pees his pants.

None of these responses makes them popular with the other children.

# School responses to the children

- Taken at face value, especially when repeated, the school might say:
  - Casey is 'naughty' or 'anti-social' - a 'bully'
  - Violet is 'good' or even 'over-achieving' - a 'goodie-goodie'
  - Sam is 'unmotivated', 'immature' – a 'baby'
- Teachers 'are there to teach'
- But can they teach traumatised children?



# What can the school do?

- Teacher can report concerns to SENCO.
- SENCO might talk to the child but unlikely to disclose without full trust and reassurance. Can this be given?
- SENCO might report to CYF. Is there enough evidence? Will this reach their threshold?
- Social worker in school might work with the child – which?
- What other avenues?
- So what happens to Casey, Violet and Sam?

# What's happening neurologically?

- Fight, flight and fright responses
  - normal threat/alarm reactions.
- Neurologically:
  - Adrenaline fuels fight and flight
  - Numbing endorphins for freeze/fright response
  - Afterwards cortisol calms us
- Extreme/repeated alarms leave chemical reactions on.
- Trauma is a prolonged alarm reaction, impacting on development in children.



# How big is this problem?



- Police attend a FV incident every 6 minutes.
- 100,000+ FV incidents in 2010/11.
- Almost 100,000 children present or living with 'the victim'.
- Around 20% of incidents are reported.
- 50% of CYF's abuse and neglect cases are CEFV.
- 4 of 5 youth suicides in one town were CEFV – typical?
- The economic cost of FV is estimated at \$8 billion p.a.

Sources [www.areyouok.org.nz](http://www.areyouok.org.nz), MSD and media



# Waitakere Children and Family Violence Research Project

- WAVES noted the FV focus on women and men.
- Asked: How can we respond better to CEFV?
- September 2011 Deborah contracted to approach all 85 schools. Most too busy or reluctant.
- 7 did the 2 workshops offered, 40 principals consulted.
- Took it wider to 30+ FV agencies.
- Examined current response systems across sectors.
- First report Oct 2012.
- Literature overview on needs of CEFV and what works.
- Survey of young adults exposed to FV as children.

# Main Findings



- Far too little, far too late
- CEFV not recognised as victims of FV in own right
- Trauma and effects not recognised
- CAMHS not contracted for FV or trauma work
- MoJ's programmes for protected children moribund
- Very little child therapy training available
- Families unaware of effect of violence on children
- Safety is the ultimate C&P goal, rather than recovery



# Young adults corroborate



- 29 West Auckland participants, 14-21, all CEFV - the experts
- At the time, 25 felt frightened, 23 sad and 22 worried
- 18 told no one, 4 told peers, 3 told an adult
- 21 would have liked a safe adult to tell
- 4 received services of some sort
- 100% selected services they would have appreciated at the time; 70% chose more than three
- 80% identified ongoing negative effects ...

# Ongoing negative effects



- Repeated upsetting memories of the violence 10
- Alcohol and/or drugs used for coping 9
- Mostly feelings experienced are negative 8
- Spaces out when stressed 7
- Family relationships are not strong 7
- Fearful and jumpy around anger/sudden movement 6
- Schooling has been badly affected 6
- Violent and/or bullying towards others 6
- Chooses violent and/or bullying partners 4

NB Survey didn't ask about suicidality or criminal activity

# What works (from the literature)

- Early intervention
- Trauma-informed services across sectors
- Screening for FV and trauma
- Helping build resilience
- Work on recovery from trauma and disruption
- Re/attachment and safety post the violence
- Range of treatment types available
- Multi-systemic and multi-agency collaborative responses



# Putting this into practice in Waitakere

WAVES' governance group have agreed, in principle, to setting up a **multi-sector professional network for CEFV**. Over time, this would aim to develop:

- advocacy for CEFV at all levels, including nationally
- trauma-informed professionals and agencies in all sectors
- consistent screening for FV and/or trauma
- review of existing programmes, and analysis of gaps
- a range of programmes and initiatives for all ages and stages to meet their needs – information, resilience, recovery, attachment, prevention – at all levels
- referral processes to ensure suitable matches are made

# The timing



- Children's Action Plan and Vulnerable Children's Bill:
  - ✓ Earlier intervention – Children's Teams
  - ✓ Training children's workforce – all public sectors
  - ✓ Multi-sector responsibility for outcomes for children
  - ✗ Little acknowledgement of children exposed to FV
  - ✗ No recognition of the need for recovery from trauma
- Investing in Service Outcomes – working 'collectively' and 'improving outcomes for children'
- Review of Family Courts and Protected Persons Programmes

# Conclusion

- Are we living in denial?
- Full of challenges but
- Possibly bulk of clients in: health, MH, alcohol and drug treatment, C&P, Justice, Corrections and FV agencies. Think of any high-profile criminal and ask yourself.
- Need to be proactive, professional and compassionate.
- Could save a lot of fear and misery.
- Could save the country a lot of money.
- Could put us all out of work! Yay!



**TAKE CARE OF OUR CHILDREN  
TAKE CARE OF WHAT THEY HEAR  
TAKE CARE OF WHAT THEY SEE  
TAKE CARE OF WHAT THEY FEEL  
FOR HOW THE CHILDREN GROW  
SO WILL BE THE SHAPE OF AOTEAROA**



**Dame Whina Cooper**

For more information, full reports and literature lists related to the Waitakere Children and Family Violence Project

<http://www.waves.org.nz/network-services/projects/waitakere-children-who-witness-fv/>

And for a series of blogs on trauma, CEFV and juvenism (putting children's needs before those of adults)

<http://www.waves.org.nz/news-and-events/the-juvenists/>