FAMILY VIOLENCE AND EDUCATION: REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE ON IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS 5

KEY TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS 7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 9

1 INTRODUCTION 12

2 PREVALENCE AND PATTERNS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 18

3 IMPACTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 28

4 ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE: EARLY CHILDCARE SETTINGS 47

OUTCOMES

3.2 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 34

3.2.1 COGNITIVE ABILITIES AND IQ 35

3.2.2 VERBAL SKILLS 36

3.2.3 READING SKILLS 36

3.2.4 MATH SKILLS 37

3.2.5 STANDARDISED TESTS 37

3.2.6 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT 38

3.2.7 SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT 39

3.2.8 POOR CLASSROOM CONDUCT 39

3.2.9 REPEATING GRADES AND REMEDIAL CLASSES 39

3.2.10 ABSENTEEISM AND EXPULSION 40

3.2.11 DROPPING OUT AND FAILURE TO GRADUATE 41

3.2.12 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT 42

3.2.13 SPILL-OVER EFFECTS 42

3.3 PATHWAYS BETWEEN BEHAVIOURAL, MENTAL HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 43

3.4 RESILIENCE: PROTECTIVE FACTORS 44

3.4.1 SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PRIMARY CARE GIVER 45

3.4.2 PARENTAL FUNCTIONING 46

3.4.3 STRONG PEER RELATIONSHIPS 46

3.4.4 SCHOOLS AS A SAFE PLACE 46

3.4.5 SELF-ESTEEM 46

4 ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE: EARLY CHILDCARE SETTINGS 47

4.1 ROLE OF EARLY CHILDCARE SETTINGS 48

4.2 EARLY IDENTIFICATION/Detection: IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE 49

4.3 EARLY INTERVENTION 50

4.3.1 UNIVERSAL SERVICES: PLAYGROUPS 51

4.3.2 TARGETED PROGRAMS 52

4.4 RESPONSE 58

4.4.1 SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES 59

4.4.2 THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS 60

4.5 TRAINING AND CAPABILITY BUILDING FOR EARLY CHILDCARE WORKERS TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE 62

3.1 BEHAVIOURAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES 29

3.1.1 INTERNALISING AND EXTERNALISING PROBLEMS 29

3.1.2 RISKY BEHAVIOURS AND SELF-HARM 30

3.1.3 TRAUMA AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER 31

3.1.4 WITNESSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE 31

3.1.5 CUMULATIVE HARM AND OUTCOMES 32

3.1.6 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL 33
5. ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE: SCHOOLS

5.1 ROLE OF SCHOOLS

5.2 ADOLESCENTS AND DATING VIOLENCE

5.3 EARLY IDENTIFICATION/Detection: IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS OF VIOLENCE

5.4 EARLY INTERVENTION
  5.4.1 GROUP COUNSELLING
  5.4.2 PEER EDUCATION
  5.4.3 PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS PROGRAMS
  5.4.4 INTEGRATED SERVICES

5.5 RESPONSE
  5.5.1 TRAUMA-INFORMED PROGRAMMING
  5.5.2 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR RESPONSE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

5.6 TRAINING AND CAPABILITY BUILDING FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE

6 EVIDENCE ON BEST AND EMERGING PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

6.1 BEST PRACTICE
  6.1.1 INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY
  6.1.2 WHOLE-OF-SCHOOL APPROACH
  6.1.3 CULTURALLY SENSITIVE
  6.1.4 APPLYING A GENDERED LENS

6.2 EMERGING PRACTICE
  6.2.1 CHILD-, YOUTH- AND FAMILY-CENTRED
  6.2.2 TRAUMA-INFORMED

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
  7.1.1 PRIORITISE AND INVEST IN RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
  7.1.2 IMPROVE SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
  7.1.3 PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SECTOR-WIDE TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND CAPABILITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

REFERENCE LIST
KEY TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Adolescent: While the term adolescent is used non-legally to refer to various age groups, the United Nations defines adolescents to refer to individuals from age 10 to 19.¹

Best practice: Best practice refers to approaches to practice for which the evidence base is well-established, and that should inform all work undertaken in this area.

Child: In Victoria, under the Children Youth and Families Act (2005), a child or young person is a person under 18 years of age.

Child abuse: Any act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person’s physical or emotional health or development. This includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect.²

Child maltreatment: Child maltreatment is defined by this study as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment of children, including sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, and commercial or other exploitation of children, as well as exposure or witnessing violence between other family and community members.³

Emerging practice: Emerging practice refers to those approaches for which the evidence on the model’s effectiveness is promising, however further research and uptake is required to become established as best practice in this sector.

Emotional and psychological abuse: Emotional and psychological abuse includes a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or threats of injury or death. Emotional abuse of children can also include ignoring or dismissing a child’s emotional needs, shaming or humiliating a child, or ignoring cries for help. This can be verbal or non-verbal in nature.⁴

Externalising behaviours: Externalising behaviours refers to the outward expression of harmful behaviours such as aggression or antisocial behaviour.

Family violence: Under Victorian law, family violence is defined as (a) a behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour: is physically or sexually abusive; is economically abusive; is threatening; or is coercive or in any other way controls or dominates the family member to feel fear for the safety or welling of that family member or another person; or (b) a behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects or behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).⁵ There are many different manifestations of family violence, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, violence between siblings, elder abuse, and violence against parents.

Internalising behaviours: Internalising behaviours refer to emotional and psychological impacts including anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and problems with temperament.

Intimate partner violence: Any behaviour by an intimate partner or former partner that causes physical, sexual or emotional or psychological harm.

Neglect: Neglect is a form of child maltreatment that can include not providing a child with adequate food, clothing, or shelter to survive as well as not providing a child with adequate health or education.

**Physical abuse**: Physical abuse is direct harm to a person’s body. It might be a single act or repeated acts including strongly shaking an infant, hitting a child, cutting a child’s skin, or burning the skin with a hot implement. 6

**Protective factor**: Protective factors are the reverse of risk factors (see below). Protective factors are the conditions, events, experiences or characteristics of an individual or their society that decrease the likelihood of experiencing violence.

**Resilience**: Resilience is broadly defined as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances. 7

**Risk factor**: Risk factors are those factors that increase the likelihood of someone becoming a victim and/or a perpetrator of violence, which can include global, societal or family conditions as well as experiences or characteristics of an individual.

**Child sexual abuse**: Contacts or interactions between a child and an older or more knowledgeable child or adult where the child is being used as an object of gratification for an older child’s or adult’s sexual needs. Some specific examples of sexual abuse include inducing or coercing a child to engage in any sexual activity, forcing a child to watch pornography, or grooming. 8

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Family violence is a key public health issue in Australia. Approximately one in four Australian women have experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. 9 Family violence can take a multitude of forms including but not limited to physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse and coercive control. 10 Children and young people are also often impacted by family violence, and in recent years there has been a shift in understanding and practice to recognise children and young people as victims in their own right. There is considerable evidence that children and youth are exposed to multiple forms of family violence, and that such violence has lasting impacts on their development. This report examines both children who experience direct victimisation of family violence as well as those who experience family violence through exposure such as witnessing or hearing intimate partner violence in the household.

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**> IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

Several studies have found all forms of experiencing family violence to be associated with negative developmental and educational outcomes, including far-reaching impacts beyond the members of the family, and potential impacts to learning and conduct in the classroom where children who have experienced violence are present. Experiences of family violence can interrupt and disrupt the regular developmental trajectories of children as well as lead to long-term changes in the structural organisation of the brain. Children who are exposed to family violence, such as by witnessing intimate partner violence between parents, experience many of the same negative impacts and health outcomes as those children who experience direct victimisation. Effects of cumulative harm are ambiguous, with some research suggesting that cumulative harm is related to increased negative impacts for children, while other studies find similar outcomes despite the frequency, severity or types of violence experienced. Research on effects of family violence for children of different genders is inconsistent, with some research suggesting girls are more likely to exhibit internalising behaviours while other research finds no significant gender differences for

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10 In Victoria, under the Children Youth and Families Act (2003), a child or young person is a person under 18 years of age.
There is a notable lack of programs within early childcare settings that specifically target family violence through early identification, early intervention, or response. While there is an established evidence base on early childhood intervention for infants, children and families experiencing other forms of hardship or disadvantage, family violence programming in this setting is an emerging field. Further, as most early childcare services are privately owned, the sector is fragmented and competitive, creating barriers to a collaborative approach and to building family violence capacity across the early childcare sector.

While DET has comprehensive guidelines for mandatory reporting and child safety, guidelines and protocols for response and referral mechanisms within early childcare settings are lacking. Staff and practitioner knowledge on identifying and responding to family violence is also variable depending on levels of training and experience. Integration between early childcare services and family violence specialist services is needed. Over one-third of Australian children attend playgroup prior to school, with higher uptake among regional and remote areas compared with urban areas. Given their broad reach, playgroups represent an important opportunity for future programming on family violence, and would be well-suited for prevention and early intervention focused approaches.

Schools are a key setting for early identification and early intervention for children and youth impacted by family violence. When children perceive school as a safe and neutral place where they are not at risk and where they may find support to deal with their experiences, schools can be protective against the impacts of family violence and contribute to building students resilience.

The main role for schools in responding to family violence at present is mandatory reporting. Expanding the role of all schools to have planned response systems, referral pathways and partnerships with appropriate, specialist family violence services would benefit students and educators. There are very few evaluations of programs within school settings targeting children or adolescents who have experienced or been exposed to family violence that establish the effectiveness of such approaches. However, the latest global evidence suggests that the most effective school-based model is a whole-of-school approach that integrates primary prevention, early intervention and response programming and engages the wider school community. It is also important that it takes a gendered approach that acknowledges gender inequality as the primary driver of many forms of family violence. Programming should be culturally-appropriate and tailored to the target community so that it is inclusive and accessible.
Family violence is a growing concern for the Australian community, with approximately one in four Australian women experiencing violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. Family violence can take a multitude of forms including but not limited to physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse and coercive control. Family violence can occur between any members of a family or kinship network, and overlaps with child abuse when a child or young person is directly targeted with violence. Box 1 provides the working definitions of family violence used in this report. Most global research on family violence focuses on intimate partner violence and child abuse, and so where the evidence relates to a specific form of family violence that terminology has been used.

**Box 1. Operational definitions of family violence and child abuse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family violence: Under Victorian law, family violence is defined as (a) a behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour is: physically or sexually abusive; is economically abusive; is threatening; or is coercive or in any other way controls or dominates the family member to feel fear for the safety or welling of that family member or another person; or (b) a behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects or behaviour referred to in paragraph (a). There are many different manifestations of family violence, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, violence between siblings, elder abuse, and violence against parents.</th>
<th>Intimate partner violence: Any behaviour by an intimate partner or former partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. This can include dating violence between adolescents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child maltreatment: Was defined by this study as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment of children, including sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, and commercial or other exploitation of children, as well as exposure or witnessing violence between other family and community members.</td>
<td>Child abuse: Any act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person’s physical or emotional health or development. This includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as neglect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the literature there is variation in the terminology and conceptual models defining the intersections of family violence, child maltreatment and child abuse. In this report,
we define child abuse as a subsection of child maltreatment, where child maltreatment may include other forms of harmful child treatment including neglect or harsh parenting. Child abuse is used to refer to various specific forms of abuse including physical violence, sexual violence and emotional or psychological abuse directed towards a child. Both child maltreatment and child abuse can occur within the family setting and without. This report is limited to reviewing only child maltreatment and child abuse occurring within in the family setting, as it intersects with family violence.

Figure 1. Intersections of family violence, child maltreatment and child abuse

For the purposes of this report, ‘experience of family violence’ includes direct victimisation of violence such as direct experiences of child abuse, as well as exposure to family violence within the home, such as witnessing intimate partner violence between parents or caregivers. This broader definition of experiencing family violence reflects the wide range of ways in which children and young people may both be exposed to, and impacted by, violence within the home. As detailed in Section 3, research has shown that children who are exposed to violence, such as by witnessing intimate partner violence, can show similar negative outcomes as those children who are directly victimised. As such, witnessing, hearing or any other form of exposure to violence are considered ways of experiencing family violence.

There is considerable evidence revealing that children and youth can be exposed to many different forms of family violence, and that such violence has lasting impacts on their development. There is also growing recognition of the widespread prevalence and long-term impacts of child abuse with the home as the primary setting for the majority of child abuse. To date there is substantial evidence documenting the wide ranging negative impacts of experiencing family violence on children and youth’s health, education and long-term outcomes. In order to comprehensively and holistically address and end family violence, a number of complementary approaches are required. In Australia and internationally, work to address family violence and violence against women is predominantly framed by a public health approach. This approach acknowledges that family violence is preventable and should therefore be the focus of sustained government and community effort. The public health conceptualisation of addressing family violence conceives of three main streams for addressing the issue (Figure 2): primary prevention, secondary prevention (or early intervention) and tertiary prevention (or response).

Figure 2. Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to address family violence

1.2 CURRENT APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The Victorian State Government has recognised the severe impact of family violence on Australian communities, including the negative impacts of children and youth affected by family violence. In March 2016, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission) released a detailed report providing an overview of the current state of family violence in Australia and further provided recommendations for addressing this issue, based on comprehensive submissions from across the country.

In August 2015, the Victorian State Government announced the state-wide roll-out of Respectful Relationships curriculum from 2016 onwards. The Respectful Relationships Education curriculum takes a holistic primary prevention approach to stop violence against women before it occurs in the first place. The curriculum, delivered through a whole-of-school approach, tailors age appropriate learning activities for students from Prep to Year 12 and covers key social and emotional learning topics essential for the development of...
respectful relationships and the prevention of family violence. Respectful Relationships Education will form a key pillar of the Victorian State Government’s approach to primary prevention in the coming years. Some aspects of the Respectful Relationships Education pilot and proposed roll-out plan overlap significantly with the findings of this report. The scope of this literature review specifically excludes primary prevention, but aims to review and report early identification, early intervention and response research in a manner that is complementary to the current roll-out of the Respectful Relationships Education program.

1.3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

In the context of the Royal Commission and the introduction of Respectful Relationships Education, the DET is currently reviewing research on interventions and response for children and youth impacted by family violence, and contributing to the evidence base for addressing family violence within the sector. DET has commissioned this literature review to assess and contribute to the evidence base for addressing family violence within the education sector. The purpose of this literature review is to identify, investigate and synthesise evidence on children and youth experiencing or exposed to family violence. It aims to establish the state of knowledge on the impacts of family violence on children and youth, and on proven and promising practices for early intervention in family violence in education settings. The objectives of this literature review are to:

II. Review and create an overview of evaluated early identification, early intervention, and response efforts to address family violence within the education sector.

III. Highlight important successful and unsuccessful interventions in key education settings, as well as those interventions most relevant to cohorts of children and youth.

IV. Provide an overview of best and emerging practice for addressing family violence within the education sector.

V. Highlight key findings from the literature review, identify current gaps in the research base, and offer recommendations for improving the knowledge base and implementing appropriate initiatives within the sector.

The scope of the literature review includes early identification, early intervention and response to family violence by the education sector. Primary prevention falls outside the scope of the review, however where relevant, comments on integrating primary, secondary and tertiary approaches within the education sector have been included.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This report was compiled following a comprehensive literature review and analysis of state, national and international research on the various impacts of family violence on children and youth, and on early identification, early intervention and response practices in education settings. The literature for this report was identified through multiple electronic and academic databases and grey literature, backwards referencing through key literature, as well as web searches using Google and Google Scholar, and reviews of clearinghouse databases including Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). The literature review focused on research from Australia and high-income countries with similar contexts such as New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). It included qualitative and quantitative studies, reviews and systematic reviews, and evaluations of violence interventions where available. This was an expansive and iterative process, drawing from a wide and diverse range of literature from various sectors including violence against women and family violence, law and policy, education, health and justice. Over 200 reports and journal articles were analysed for the purposes of this review. The final reference list includes only cited references, and reflects the diversity of literature sourced.
2.1 CAUSES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND CHILDREN’S EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

There is no single cause for children and young peoples’ experiences of family violence. Within the public health approach to family violence, the socio-ecological model is used to conceptualise how the core drivers of violence against women interact with various other factors to increase or decrease the likelihood of person experiencing family violence. A gendered understanding of family violence is central to this model. Gender inequality, traditional gender roles and patriarchal social structures are understood to be at the core of violence against women. Experiencing family violence occurs as a result of these core drivers interacting with a multitude of factors operating at the different levels of society. The socio-ecological model presents four levels at which these factors operate: individual, relationship, community and societal level (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Levels of the socio-ecological model for analysing family violence

Across these levels, risk and protective factors operate to explain when individual children or youth experience family violence. A risk factor is any attribute, characteristic or exposure of an individual that increases the likelihood of them experiencing or perpetrating violence while a protective factor decreases this likelihood. Factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, parental mental ill-health and substance

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abuse, strong gender roles and stereotypes, and violence-supportive attitudes can increase the likelihood of family violence occurring. Protective factors for children and youth who have experienced family violence will be discussed in Section 3.4: Resilience.

### 2.2 Prevalence and Patterns of Children and Young People’s Experiences of Family Violence

Research shows that children and young people can experience many different manifestations of family violence. For example, they may be the direct victims of child abuse by parents, caregivers or other relatives. Global research on child abuse is generally split into three categories: harsh parenting, children witnessing intimate partner violence, and child maltreatment and neglect, which includes physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical and emotional neglect. Children and young people may also experience violence by siblings, or abuse within early or adolescent dating relationships. As outlined in the introduction to this report, children and youth people may also be exposed to different forms of violence within the home. Other than directly witnessing abuse, children may also be exposed by overhearing arguments, observing the aftermath of violent incidents such as broken furniture, and seeing injuries resulting from violence. Children and young people may also be inadvertently or indirectly injured, attempted to intervene, be forced to watch, spy or otherwise inadvertently or indirectly injured, attempted to intervene, be forced to watch, spy or otherwise

There is a lack of systematic and consistent prevalence data for children and young peoples’ experiences of family violence, especially disaggregated by sex and gender. There is a further lack of prevalence data and research on experiences of family violence among children from specific cohorts including Koorie children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with disabilities.

![Figure 4. Prevalence rates of children and young people's experiences of family violence](image)

**KEY FINDINGS**

There is a lack of systematic and consistent prevalence data for children and young peoples’ experiences of family violence, especially disaggregated by sex and gender. There is a further lack of prevalence data and research on experiences of family violence among children from specific cohorts including Koorie children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with disabilities.
2.2.1 BREAKDOWN OF PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE BY AGE AND GENDER

Gender, age and other individual factors influence the type and patterns of abuse experienced by children and youth. Research from across high-, low- and middle-income settings indicates that girls and boys experience different forms of abuse. For instance, studies suggest that boys are more likely to experience harsh physical parenting and corporal punishment. There is some debate around the prevalence and patterns of sexual abuse experienced by girls and boys, with inconsistent findings across the literature from different settings. Age also significantly influences the type of abuse that children and youth experience. In the prenatal period, children are primarily impacted by violence against their mothers. Some studies indicate that infants and younger children are at a higher risk of child abuse due to their dependency on adult caregivers. Research shows that in industrialised countries, infants under the age of 1 are three times more likely to be killed by a parent compared with children aged 1 to 4, and twice as likely compared with children aged 5 to 14. However, children may experience child maltreatment and abuse as well as family violence throughout their entire childhood and youth. In early adolescence (10 to 14 years) and in late adolescence (15 to 19 years), youth may also begin to experience adolescent dating violence in their personal lives, which is expounded upon in Section 5 of the report.

![Figure 5. Type of violence by age group affected](Image)

2.2.2 BREAKDOWN OF PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AMONG SPECIFIC COHORTS

Children and youth’s experiences of family violence vary considerably across contexts. and reflect the complex intersections of societal, community, individual and family-level factors, as outlined in the introduction of this report. When considering the education sector’s current and future role in addressing family violence, it is essential to understand intersectional experiences and develop programming in culturally appropriate and inclusive manners. Intersectionality is a conceptual framework that seeks to uncover the dynamics of different factors that make up an individual’s or group’s identity. Taking an intersectional approach to family violence means identifying how and in what ways these intersections can lead to different or increased risk, severity and/or frequency of experiencing family violence. These intersections can also affect or amplify barriers to reporting or accessing appropriate services. An intersectional analysis of family violence experienced by different communities in Australia is therefore fundamental to ensuring adequate and inclusive responses to violence across the education sector and more broadly.

2.2.2.1 ADOLESCENTS

While the term adolescent is used non-legally to refer to various age groups, the United Nations defines adolescents to refer to individuals from age 10 to 19. In 2012, violence took the lives of around 54,000 adolescent girls between the ages of 10 to 19 years globally. Further, children aged 15 to 17 years were the least likely to be the subjects of a substantiation of abuse and neglect in Australia (3.9 per 1,000 children aged 15 to 17). Adolescence is a time of heightened vulnerability, during which both use and victimisation of some forms of violence often begin or become elevated. There is evidence from the broader Asia-Pacific region that adolescent girls are at greater risk of abuse during early intimate relationships, and of sexual assault and harassment in public places, compared with older women. Research from the region has also demonstrated that perpetration of non-partner sexual violence usually starts in adolescence. As youth begin developing their own intimate relationships during adolescence, these are likely to be influenced by previous experiences of family violence and models of relationships they have been exposed to. Adolescence is a critical time for the development of adulthood skills, coping mechanisms and attitudes towards intimate relationships. Programming with adolescents is crucial to address the heightened risks faced by this age group, including safety in public spaces and increased vulnerability to sexual violence.

2.2.2.2 LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX (LGBTI) YOUTH

Discrimination, shame and abuse can also place LGBTI youth at risk of violence and harmful or exploitative relationships. Members of the LGBTI population can also experience homophobic or transphobic violence from their family members, as well as from outside the family, as a response to their sexual and gender diversity. LGBTI children and youth who are victims of family violence are especially vulnerable to violence and may have greater difficulty accessing specialist services due to their dependence...
on their family. In a national study with same sex attracted and gender questioning people, the majority of respondents between ages 14 and 21 years reported experiencing verbal (61%) and physical abuse (18%).

2.2.2.3 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Research indicates that children with disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing abuse, neglect and other forms of maltreatment, perpetrated by a parent or carer. Sullivan and Knutson’s USA-based study found the prevalence of maltreatment of children with disabilities to be 3.4 times greater than that for children without disabilities (31% as compared to 9%).

2.2.2.4 KOORIE CHILDREN

As with other forms of family violence, the prevalence of child abuse among Koorie communities is considerably higher than in other population groups (or similar). Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost seven times more likely to be the subject of substantiated reports by Child Protection than non-Indigenous children (with rates of 43.6 per 1,000 children compared with 6.4 per 1,000 respectively). The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey in 2014–15 found that 13% of Indigenous people over the age of 15 had experienced physical violence in the previous year and that 96% of the women who had experienced violence in the previous year knew the perpetrator.

For Koorie children and youth, family violence occurs in the context of trauma from colonisation, intergenerational grief, dispossession and loss of traditional culture and language. The intersection between these structural factors, family violence and child abuse is highly complex and poorly researched. Several issues compound the complexity of family violence in this cohort including, but not limited to the breakdown of kinship systems and traditional law, experiences of racism and discrimination, and economic exclusion.

2.2.2.5 CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND OTHER CULTURALLY AND LINGUIS TICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

Children from migrant and other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are likely to face some different challenges from non-migrant and non-CALD children regarding family violence, particularly concerning accessing services. Different cultural backgrounds may influence gender norms and attitudes and will also shape parenting practices across families and community groups. Migrant and CALD children may have witnessed violence in their country of origin, may have lost their family networks, may have challenges learning a new language, or may have trouble adjusting to a new culture or community. Women and children may be reluctant to disclose experiences of family violence due to isolation from family support, fear of deportation, language barriers, or lack of culturally specific services.

2.2.2.6 RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Children from remote and very remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation claim of abuse and neglect (16.2 per 1000 and 23.5 per 1,000 respectively) compared with children in major cities (6.2 per 1,000). Research from South Australia suggests that prevalence of family violence increases with remoteness, with the highest rates of child abuse in the most remote areas. Research suggests that traditional gender norms and constructions of masculinity in rural areas may contribute to the higher rates of family violence in these areas.

2.2.3 CO-OCCURRENCE OF VIOLENCE

There is a focus in the literature on the interconnectedness of family violence and other forms of child maltreatment. That is, children who have experienced family violence have often experienced more than one type of maltreatment. While it is useful to distinguish between the different types of child maltreatment, it can create the misleading impression that there are always strong lines of demarcation between different childhood adversities, or that they usually occur in isolation. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting sub-types of maltreatment do not occur independently and significant proportions of maltreated individuals are likely to be the victim of other forms of abuse or neglect. Findings from the Australian Temperament Project, a longitudinal community study over 2006–2007, reported that 15% of their...
participants had experienced a single type of child maltreatment, 23% had experienced one or more forms of maltreatment, and 8% had experienced two or more forms. A national-level study from the USA found that children exposed to intimate partner violence are more likely to have experienced child maltreatment than those with no history of intimate partner violence exposure. The study found that 34% of youth who had witnessed intimate partner violence were also maltreated in the past year, compared with 9% of non-witnesses. Witnessing intimate partner violence

2.2.4 CUMULATIVE HARM

As children and youth are exposed to a variety of harmful experiences simultaneously, they experience cumulative harm, in which compounded experiences of multiple episodes of abuse work together to negatively impact them. Cumulative harm also occurs through extended exposure to family violence or maltreatment. While

some literature suggests there are strong associations between cumulative harm and more severe developmental outcomes, other research argues that the relationship remains unclear or insignificant. This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3.1.4: Cumulative harm and outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

Several studies have found all forms of experiencing family violence to be associated with negative educational outcomes.

The past three decades have witnessed unprecedented interest in the varied and significant impacts that experiences of and exposure to family violence can have on children and youth. Experiencing family violence has consistently been found to impact regular development of children and youth negatively impact behavioural and mental, educational and long-term outcomes. While poorer educational outcomes have been found consistently for children or youth affected by family violence, it is important to recognise that the pathways through which these lower outcomes occur are varied and complex.

KEY FINDINGS

When children or youth experience multiple forms of maltreatment, it can be difficult to distinguish between the specific impacts of different sub-types of maltreatment. When considering developmental of educational outcomes for those experiencing family violence, the broader picture needs to be taken into account.

As experiences of family violence rarely occur in isolation of other forms of child maltreatment, it is difficult to determine the degree to which developmental and educational outcomes are attributable to one experience over another. While family violence can undoubtedly negatively impact children and youth, research also finds that there are considerable divergences in the outcomes for different children, and resilience in relation to family violence is not well understood.

[3] Ibid.
3 IMPACTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

3.1 BEHAVIOURAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

Research over the past three decades has determined that children exposed to family violence experience a range of poor behavioural and mental health outcomes. As regular child development is expected to occur in a secure and nurturing environment, experiences of family violence can interrupt and disrupt the regular developmental trajectories of children. The developing brain is highly vulnerable to the impacts of traumatic experiences during childhood and youth, and research indicates that extreme trauma and cumulative harm can change the structural organisation of the brain and have long-term impacts.65

3.1.1 INTERNALISING AND EXTERNALISING PROBLEMS

Much of the literature on the impact of family violence on children and youth focuses on ‘internalising problems’ and ‘externalising problems.’ Externalising refers to the outward expression of harmful behaviours such as aggression or antisocial behaviour while internalising refers to emotional and psychological impacts including anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and problems with temperament. There is considerable literature documenting that both experiencing family violence or exposure to family violence can contribute to depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms, aggression, lower social competence, low self-esteem, fear, loneliness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).66

There are several studies consistently finding that children of all ages who have experienced family violence exhibit more externalising and internalising behaviours compared with children who have not experienced such violence. A study from the USA examined children aged 2 to 3 years found that children exposed to family violence were nearly four times more likely than non-exposed children to develop both internalising or externalising problems.67 Another USA-based longitudinal study of children aged 18 months to 6 years examined the impacts of physical and sexual abuse, child neglect, and intimate partner violence under the general constructs of child maltreatment. The study found that child maltreatment independently predicted youth problems of externalising and internalising behaviours.68 Using the same sample of children, Moylan et al. observed that children exposed to child abuse, family violence or both had higher

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65 Domestic Violence and its Impact on Child Development. (2003). Presentation delivered at the Department of Community Services’ Fourth Domestic Violence Forum
levels of both externalising and internalising behaviour problems in adolescence than those exposed to neither form of violence.69 Similarly, a USA-based longitudinal analysis of children ages 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, determined that there was a robust relationship between intimate partner violence within the household and externalising and internalising behaviours, especially for severe intimate partner violence.70 Furthermore, Bourassa’s study of teens aged 16 to 18 in secondary education in Canada found that teens exposed to family violence who had not experienced direct victimisation also experienced a definite impact of internalised and externalised behaviours separately.71

### 3.1.2 RISKY BEHAVIOURS AND SELF-HARM

The effects of child maltreatment on adolescents’ and adults’ risky behaviours has been well documented throughout the literature. Risk behaviours include, but are not limited to, smoking, drinking alcohol, drug use, early and risky sexual activity, gang involvement, and peer violence.72 Several studies have highlighted how maltreatment during childhood and youth can potentiate risk for the development of behaviours such as alcohol use and abuse73, drug use and abuse74, risky sexual behaviour75 as well as aggressive and violent acts.76

The literature further concurs that child maltreatment is associated with increased likelihoods of self-harm behaviours, defined as behaviours performed directly and intentionally to cause physical destruction to oneself, regardless of suicidal intent.77 This could include a range of self-destructive behaviour such as self-mutilation, extreme risk-taking behaviour and suicide attempts.78 Several studies have evinced maltreatment during childhood and adolescence as a key risk factor for adolescent deliberate self-harm behaviour.79 Hu et al.’s 2017 study investigated the longitudinal effects of child maltreatment on adolescent risk of deliberate self-harm for 351,372 children in Western Australia. The study reported a 2% probability of self-harm related hospital admission in adolescent in children with no maltreatment allegations, a 7% probability for children with unsubstantiated allegations, and an 11% probability for children with substantiated allegations.80

### 3.1.3 TRAUMA AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

There is substantial literature documenting family violence leading to outcomes of trauma for children and youth across all age groups. In a meta-analysis of intimate partner violence exposure studies, Evans et al. determined a significant association between intimate partner violence exposure and trauma symptoms.81 In their USA-based study examining infants with an average age of 1.1 years, Bogat et al. noted that nearly half of the participants exhibited at least one trauma symptom following exposure to family violence. Further, infants experiencing severe intimate partner violence and whose mothers exhibit trauma symptoms was predictive of infants exhibiting trauma symptoms.82 Similarly, Levendovsky et al.’s research in the USA found that approximately 50% of children exposed to intimate partner violence between the ages of 1 and 7 years old experienced trauma symptoms, with increased frequency.

### 3.1.4 WITNESSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Not all forms of experiencing family violence have been researched equally, though there has been a significant focus on the negative impacts of witnessing intimate partner violence. Kitzmann et al.’s notable meta-analysis examined 118 studies of the psychosocial outcomes of children exposed to inter-parental violence, as measured by witnessing intimate partner violence. The study found that 63% of child witnesses fared more poorly than the average child who had not been exposed to inter-parental violence.83 Further, Kitzmann et al. found that witnesses’ outcomes did not significantly differ from those of children exposed to direct physical abuse.84 Meltzer et al.’s UK-based study of children aged 5 to 16 found that while controlling

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76 Fleisher,W. and Sareen, J. (2009). The relationship between child abuse and childhood psychiatric symptoms.82 Similarly, Levendovsky et al.’s USA-based study of 5 to 17 year olds also observed clinically significant levels of several trauma symptoms related to intimate partner violence exposure, mediated through perceived threat and control of the child.85 Olaya et al. assessed 520 children aged between 8 and 17 years in Spain and found that living with intimate partner violence increased the risk of children developing dysthymic disorder and PTSD.86

77 Hu et al. (2013).


80 Fleisher, W. and Sareen, J. (2009). The relationship between child abuse and childhood psychiatric symptoms.82 Similarly, Levendovsky et al.’s USA-based study of 5 to 17 year olds also observed clinically significant levels of several trauma symptoms related to intimate partner violence exposure, mediated through perceived threat and control of the child.85 Olaya et al. assessed 520 children aged between 8 and 17 years in Spain and found that living with intimate partner violence increased the risk of children developing dysthymic disorder and PTSD.86

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for biographic, socio-demographic and socio-economic variables, witnessing family violence remained significantly and independently associated with having a conduct disorder.95

Caroll-Lind’s representative study from New Zealand with children aged 9 to 15 years found that all types of witnessing physical violence (including outside of the family) had more impact on children than their own direct experiences of violence, based on children’s self-reported impacts. Similarly, witnessing emotional violence between adults had more impact on children than direct victimisation.96 This study found that physical and emotional violence had more impact on younger children than older children, whereas the impact of sexual violence did not vary according to age.97

Children who are exposed to family violence, such as by witnessing intimate partner violence between parents, experience many of the same negative impacts and health outcomes as those children who experience direct victimisation.

3.1.5 CUMULATIVE HARM AND OUTCOMES

Research suggests that children who experience multiple forms or several episodes of family violence can exhibit more severe outcomes than those only exposed to a single experience of violence. Moylan et al. reported that children who had both witnessed family violence and had been direct victims of child abuse (i.e. dual exposure) were more consistently at risk for the entire range of internalising and externalising behaviour problems investigated than those who experienced only one form of violence exposure.98

Examining multiple forms of victimisation in a representative sample of 2,030 children, Turner et al.’s study reported children aged 2 to 17 in the USA determined that multiple forms of victimisation in a child’s life created an increased risk for mental health difficulties while each domain of victimisation, including exposure to intimate partner violence, was a significant predictor of mental health.99 Similarly, Renner examined children aged 3 to 18 in the USA and found that children aged 3 to 5 years who experienced one type of family violence victimisation exhibited lower externalising behaviour scores that children who had experienced two or more types. A similar pattern was found for adolescents aged 13 to 18, though it did not hold for children aged 6 to 12.100 Kernic et al.’s 2003 research of 2 to 17 year olds in the USA found significantly elevated rates of both internalising and externalising behaviour for children who experienced both exposure to violence and child maltreatment relative to their peers who experienced one form of adversity.101 Further, results from Bourassa’s study on Canadian teens revealed that co-occurrence of inter-parental violence and child abuse had a significantly greater negative impact on behaviour than did inter-parental violence only.102

Price-Robertson et al.’s study analysed the Australian Temperament Project, a longitudinal community study from 2006-2007, which examined 23 to 24 year olds’ childhood experiences. The study again found that while young people who experienced one form of maltreatment prior to age 18 were at heightened risk of depression and anxiety, the odds of this occurring were lower than for people who had experience multi-type maltreatment.103

On the other hand, some literature suggests that negative behavioural outcomes do not differ significantly based on type of family violence experienced, or cumulative harm. Several studies have reported that children who experience one form of family violence exhibit similar or non-distinguishable behavioural outcomes as children who have experienced cumulative harm. Bayarri et al.’s research on Spanish children aged 4 to 17 specifically explored differences in psychopathology and functional impairment depending on the degree of children’s exposure to family violence. The study found that no matter whether children were exposed to intimate partner violence, suffered direct physical or verbal aggression, participated in the aggression against the mother, or only witnessed the aggression, they were at similar risks of having psychological problems.104 Kitzmann et al.’s meta-analysis found that children exposed to interpersonal violence in addition to physical abuse did not demonstrate significantly poorer outcomes than those exposed only to the violence between their parents.105 Similarly, Lamers-Winkelman et al.’s study of children aged 6 to 12 years old in the Netherlands found no significant differences in negative behavioural outcomes between children who were only witnesses of family violence and children who were both witnesses and victims of other forms of child abuse (individual somatic complaints, on total number of health complaints, and total number of eating, sleep, or pain complaints).106
3.2 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In 2017, Fry et al. conducted the first systematic meta-analysis on the association between violence in childhood and educational outcomes. The study systematically reviewed 67 studies and meta-analysed 43 studies from 21 countries to estimate the relationship between different types of violence in childhood on educational outcomes, including school dropout/graduation, school absence, academic achievement and other educational outcomes such as grade retention, learning outcomes and remedial classes. Specifically, the study reviewed the impacts of physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, neglect, witnessing family violence, bullying, adolescent relationship violence, and community violence. Findings from the study showed that all forms of violence in childhood have a significant impact on educational outcomes. Strong associations have been found between child abuse and neglect with learning difficulties and poor academic achievement. Prospective studies have consistently found that children who have experienced maltreatment have lower educational outcomes than other groups of children.

Table 1 summarises the key findings from the review of literature on experiences of family violence and their impacts on different educational outcomes. Where specific forms of experiencing violence, such as witnessing family violence, have been measured independently, they are noted as such in the table. Where studies have used broader categories such as child maltreatment, child abuse or exposure to family violence, findings are accordingly indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive abilities and IQ</th>
<th>Child abuse</th>
<th>Physical abuse</th>
<th>Sexual abuse</th>
<th>Emotional and psychological abuse</th>
<th>Witnessing family violence</th>
<th>Exposure to family violence</th>
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</table>

3.2.1 COGNITIVE ABILITIES AND IQ

Geoffroy et al.'s prospective study in the UK found childhood neglect to be negatively associated with cognitive abilities (math, reading, and general intellectual ability) at ages 7, 11, and 16 years as well as cognitive abilities at age 50 (immediate/delayed memory, verbal fluency, and processing speed). Further, the study found childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and witnessing abuse were associated with lower cognitive scores across childhood and adolescence, with the exception of psychological abuse impacting cognition at age 7. However, only childhood sexual abuse and witnessing abuse were associated with lower cognitive scores at
age 50. There is also some evidence that children exposed to family violence have lower intelligence quotient (IQ) scores than non-exposed children, which may be moderated by mothers’ attachment security. Busch and Lieberman’s study in the USA of preschool children ages 3 to 5 who had witnessed family violence found that secure maternal attachment was associated with overall higher IQ scores. However, this study found that children displayed significantly stronger verbal and perceptual-organisation abilities when their mothers exhibited more secure attachment. Specifically, mothers’ coherence of mind on the Adult Attachment Interview accounted for 18% of the variance in children’s Verbal IQ and 12% of the variance in children’s Performance IQ.

3.2.2 VERBAL SKILLS

Substantial research has found that learning abilities, and particularly verbal skills, can be affected by experiencing family violence. Abuse and neglect in early childhood can affect the developmental capacities of infants in the areas of speech and language. Kernic et al.’s 2002 study in the USA found intimate partner violence exposure to be associated with speech and language difficulties for children ages 5 to 16, with intimate partner violence-exposed children nearly eight times more likely to have been referred to a school-based speech pathologist than their non-exposed peers. Huth-Bocks et al.’s USA-based study of children ages 3 to 5 similarly reported that when controlling for child abuse and socio-economic status, children who only witnessed family violence in the last year had a mean verbal abilities score 7.35 percentile points lower than non-witnesses. The study further found no significant group differences for visual-spatial abilities, and suggested that family violence primarily impacts pre-schoolers’ verbal abilities. Ybarra et al.’s research from the USA also found that among children ages 2 to 5, those who witnessed family violence scored a mean of 12 points lower on verbal scores than non-witnesses.

3.2.3 READING SKILLS

Maclean et al.’s population-based study of children born in Western Australia who sat the national Year 3 reading achievement test found strong associations between experiencing childhood maltreatment and low reading achievement. The prevalence of low reading achievement in the child maltreatment group was 32.2% compared to 11.4% for their non-maltreated peers. Sexual abuse and neglect were both independently found to be associated with approximately 50% increased odds of low reading achievement, while physical abuse was found to have a slightly lower association at 26% increased odds of low achievement. Similarly, Thompson and Whimper’s longitudinal study in the USA found that 12-year-old children who had witnessed family violence were nearly one and a half times more likely than non-witnesses to have low reading levels. Rouse and Fantuzzo’s population-based study examined second graders in the USA and likewise observed the unique probability of child maltreatment’s association with poor reading to be 0.61. Examining maltreated children ages 6 to 10 in the USA, Co oxy et al. found that children who experienced multiple forms of maltreatment performed the worst on reading tests and worse than children who experienced only physical maltreatment. Fantuzzo et al.’s study of second graders in the USA experiencing neglect specifically in early childhood found that children who experienced neglect prior to kindergarten were 31% more likely to exhibit poor outcomes on a standardised reading assessment, 42% more likely to evidence poor language outcomes, and 35% more likely to evidence poor science outcomes than their non-neglected peers.

3.2.4 MATH SKILLS

There are currently relatively fewer studies observing negative math outcomes compared to other educational outcomes. Co oxy et al.’s USA-based longitudinal study of children ages 6 to 10 found chronic maltreatment to be significantly and negatively associated with math scores. Chronically maltreated children achieved a mean score of 12.68 lower than non-maltreated children. Fantuzzo et al.’s study of second graders in the USA year and likewise found the national sample of children, and that as the number of early risk experiences increased, the odds of not meeting mathematics proficiency standards also increased. Kiesel et al.’s 2016 study in the USA examined children ages 7 to 13 percentile point reduction in standardised test scores, and witnessing parental violence was associated with an 8 percentile point reduction. Lower performance on standardised tests has consistently been found for children of all ages experiencing family violence. Graham-Bermann et al. found that preschool children ages 4 to 6 in the USA exposed to family violence scored significantly lower on verbal ability standardised tests than the national sample of children, and that this relationship was mediated by maternal education level. Kiesel et al.’s 2016 study in the USA examined children ages 7 to 13 timing of child maltreatment and early school success: A population-based investigation. Children and Youth Services Review. 33(8): 1404.

3.2.5 STANDARDISED TESTS

Research has demonstrated that children who have experienced abuse or neglect perform worse on standardised tests and achieve poorer marks at school, even when other background factors such as demographics, socio-economic status and parental education are taken into account. Findings from Fry et al.’s meta-analysis show that all forms of violence in childhood negatively impact standardised test scores. Children who have experienced sexual violence show the largest predicted probability of scoring lower on standardised tests (by 29 percentile points) compared to children who have not experienced violence. Physical violence was associated with a 25
and found that exposure to family violence, either alone or in combination with other maltreatment, performed significantly worse than the matched general population on standardised reading and math tests. The research findings indicated that while children exposed to intimate partner violence fared consistently worst across both reading and math outcomes, all children who experience child maltreatment and/or intimate partner violence exposure struggled to demonstrate proficiency on standardised tests compared to children who did not experience such adversity.124 Interestingly, the research did not find an increased negative effect of the combined experience of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence exposure on academic performance.125 Fry et al.’s rural USA population-based study of school-aged children (6 to 17) similarly found that those exposed to severe physical family violence scored 12.2 percentile points lower than their non-exposed peers on standardised tests. The study reported that the largest score decrease associated with intimate partner violence exposure was 12.5 percentile points for language, while the smallest decrease was 10.4 percentile points for reading.126 While children in both age groups (12 and younger and older than 12) had reduced standardised test score performance, the differences were only statistically significant for children ages 12 and younger.127 The study further found that parent-reported intimate partner violence had a stronger negative effect on the test performance of girls than boys, with girls in violent homes achieving an adjusted core total that was 17.5 percentile points lower than girls without violence.128

### 3.2.6 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Fry et al.’s meta-analysis findings highlighted that all forms of violence in childhood impacted academic achievement fairly equally, with children who have experienced any form of violence being less likely to achieve high grades and test scores.129 Findings indicated that children who experienced violence before the age of 18 have an overall 9% predicted probability of performing poorly in school compared to their peers who did not experience childhood violence. Sexual violence particularly had a significant impact on educational outcomes, and especially on standardised test scores with children who had experienced sexual violence scoring an average of 25 percentile points lower than their non-abused peers.130 Margolin et al.’s prospective, longitudinal study found that children ages 9 and 10 who were exposed to physical marital aggression in the past year were more likely to experience academic failure, as measured by failing grades, suspension, and/or expulsion. The study found that cumulative violence exposure showed anticipated dose-response with each year of exposure associated with an increased risk of 10% to 25% for academic failure.131 Kernic et al.’s 2002 study from the USA also found that abused children from ages 5 to 16 have lower grade point averages than their non-abused peers.132

### 3.2.7 SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Schnurr and Lohman’s USA-based research examined 2 to 4 year olds and increases in family violence exposure over time, and the associated outcomes in middle childhood (aged 8 to 10). The study found a correlation between early exposure to family violence and academic problems including low engagement with school during middle childhood. Specifically, when young children had mothers who reported increases in family violence, the children had lower school engagement 5 to 6 years later, as measured by their feelings about school, feelings about their teachers, being bored at school or wishing they could stay home.133

### 3.2.8 POOR CLASSROOM CONDUCT

The literature review identified one study at present examining the impact of family violence on conduct in the classroom. Using integrated, administrative records for a population of over 10,000 third grade students in the USA, Rouse et al. found child maltreatment to be the factor greatest impacting poor classroom conduct. The analysis reported child maltreatment to be associated with approximately 50% increased odds of poor classroom conduct.134

### 3.2.9 REPEATING GRADES AND REMEDIAL CLASSES

Fry et al.’s meta-analysis found that all forms of violence increased the likelihood of children repeating grades and taking remedial classes, with childhood experiences of physical violence having a slightly higher association. While all forms of violence were associated with these education outcomes for both boys and girls, emotional violence was found to have a larger association for girls, with girls who experienced emotional violence in childhood at a 2.5 times increased risk of experiencing these outcomes.135 Chappelle and Vaske’s research from the USA investigated the effects of different forms of neglect (educational, physical and emotional) on the long-term educational outcomes of children. Findings from the study reported that children who experienced educational and/or physical neglect were more likely to report greater numbers of educational problems, and that overall neglected children had far worse educational outcomes than non-neglected children regardless of educational outcome measured.136 Their analysis revealed that higher levels of educational neglect are significantly related to more behavioural problems in school, taking remedial classes, suspension and grade retention. Higher levels of physical neglect corresponded to a higher likelihood of being placed in remedial classes, and greater emotional neglect is related to a higher prevalence of suspension and grade retention.137

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124 Ibid.
125 Fry et al. (2017).
126 Ibid.
127 Fry et al. (2017).
129 Ibid. (2013).
130 Ibid.
133 Ibid. (2010).
135 Ibid.
3.2.10 ABSENTEEISM AND EXPULSION

Poor educational outcomes are mediated by several factors including absenteeism and expulsion. Fry et al.’s meta-analysis found that physical violence and sexual violence in childhood have the strongest associations with absenteeism for males, with physical violence increasing the likelihood of absenteeism by 2.5 times and sexual violence by 2.3 times. For females, the largest impact on absenteeism is experiencing sexual violence during childhood. Girls who had experienced sexual violence during childhood were found to be three times more likely to be absent from school than girls who did not experience such violence.140

Higher likelihoods of absenteeism, suspension and expulsion has consistently been found for children at all ages experiencing family violence. Kernic et al.’s 2002 study in the USA found that children aged 5 to 16 exposed to family violence were 1.6 times as likely to be absent from school and 1.8 times as likely to be suspended, than their non-exposed peers. Importantly, the likelihood that exposed children would be absent from school rose to 2.2 times compared to non-exposed peers if those children had also experienced child abuse.141 Kiesel et al.’s research from the USA similarly found significant differences in school attendance for children aged 7 to 13 who experienced child maltreatment and children exposed to intimate partner violence. Findings indicated that attendance of intimate partner violence-exposed children was lowest overall, though children who experienced child maltreatment, either alone or in combination with intimate partner violence exposure, also had lower attendance than their peers with no childhood adversity.142 Fantuzzo et al.’s study on second graders in the USA experiencing neglect in early childhood found that children who experienced neglect between kindergarten and the end of second grade were 38% more likely to evidence poor learning behaviours, 57% more likely to have poor attendance, and 88% more likely to be suspended from school relative to their non-neglected peers.143

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3.2.11 DROPPING OUT AND FAILURE TO GRADUATE

Fry et al.’s meta-analysis found a 15% predicted probability of dropping out of high school for children who experienced sexual abuse in childhood. For children who experienced physical or other forms of violence, the predicted probability is that an additional 8% will drop out over their counterparts who have not experienced violence. Emotional violence was also found to increase a child’s risk of dropping out of school twofold, albeit a limited number of studies measuring this type of violence were analysed.144

Looking at early childhood, Tajima et al.’s USA-based study examined children aged 18 months to 6 years and found that the relationship between exposure to family violence and dropping out of high school was moderated by peer communication, peer trust and support.145 Fry et al.’s meta-analysis found a 15% predicted probability of dropping out of high school for children who experienced sexual abuse in childhood. For children who experienced any form of violence in childhood, a 13% probability of not graduating from school compared to those who have not experienced violence, based on eight studies reporting 15 outcomes. In these findings, children who experienced physical violence have a negative predicted probability of 20% and those who have experienced sexual violence have a probability of 14% for not graduating. Emotional violence was also found to increase a child’s risk out dropping out by twofold.146

Several studies across high-income countries have consistently observed the negative impact of family violence on youth’s likelihood of graduating. Allwood and Spatz Widom’s research from the USA of children who experienced abuse under the age of 11 years found that both childhood abuse and neglect predicted decreased likelihood of graduating from high school (48% less likely). That is, individuals with histories of childhood abuse and neglect were significantly less likely to graduate from high school.149

Fry et al.’s research examined youth ages 14 to 26 in Canada, and found that physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect were all positively and independently associated with an incomplete high school education. When all forms of childhood maltreatment were considered together in a multivariable model, emotional abuse was the only form of maltreatment that remained significantly associated with incomplete high school education (odd ratio = 2.08). Further, times: effects of turbulence and violence exposure in adolescence on high school completion, health risk behavior, and mental health in young adulthood. Social Science & Medicine. 90: 73.

Fry et al.’s research examined youth ages 14 to 26 in Canada, and found that physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect were all positively and independently associated with an incomplete high school education. When all forms of childhood maltreatment were considered together in a multivariable model, emotional abuse was the only form of maltreatment that remained significantly associated with incomplete high school education (odd ratio = 2.08). Further, times: effects of turbulence and violence exposure in adolescence on high school completion, health risk behavior, and mental health in young adulthood. Social Science & Medicine. 90: 73.
the research found a moderate dose-dependent trend where the greater the number of different forms of childhood maltreatment, the greater the risk of not completing a high school education.150 Similarly, Boden et al.'s study examined youth and adolescents at ages 18 and 21 in New Zealand and reported that increasing exposure to both child sexual abuse and child physical abuse were significantly associated with failing to achieve secondary school qualifications, gaining a Higher School Certificate, attending university, and gaining a university degree. However, the research found that after controlling for confounding social, parental and individual factors, the associations between both child sexual abuse and child physical abuse and outcomes failed to reach statistical significance.151 Geoffroy et al.'s prospective study of the British birth cohort interestingly found that for childhood abuse there was no associated trend of increasing risk of lower qualifications, but for each type of abuse there was a higher risk of no qualifications. Additionally, the study findings reported that childhood sexual abuse (IRR = 1.78 (1.06-2.99)) and witnessing abuse (RRR = 1.60 (1.23-2.09)) were independently associated with a higher risk on below O-level qualifications.152

3.2.12 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Covey et al.'s study examining adolescents aged 11 to 17 in the USA found that physical abuse is a significant predictor of educational attainment. Being physically abused in adolescence was associated with an average loss of a little over a half year of education, or roughly one less grade completed by adulthood.153 Similarly, Tanka et al.'s 2015 study based in Canada found that children aged 4 to 16 who had experienced child sexual abuse had poorer educational attainment than their non-abused peers. The study also found that participants who reported severe childhood physical abuse were 1.77 times more likely to fail to graduate from high school.154

3.2.13 SPILL-OVER EFFECTS

There is also some evidence that the impact of family violence on school-aged children is not limited to those who are directly affected, but may also have residual effects on their peers. Carrell and Hoeskstra’s USA-based study estimated that adding one more troubled peer in a classroom of 20 students reduces student reading and math test scores by 0.69 percentile points and increases the number of disciplinary infractions committed by 17%.155 Family violence has wide-spread impacts beyond the direct members of the family. When children troubled by family violence are in a classroom, they impact both the academic and behavioural outcomes of their peers.

Tanka et al.’s 2015 study based in Canada found that children aged 4 to 16 who had experienced child sexual abuse had poorer educational attainment than their non-abused peers. The study also found that participants who reported severe childhood physical abuse were 1.77 times more likely to fail to graduate from high school.154

CARRELL AND HOESKTRA’S 2010 STUDY FOUND FAMILY VIOLENCE TO HAVE FAR-REACHING IMPACTS BEYOND THE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY. WHEN CHILDREN EXPERIENCED FAMILY VIOLENCE, THEIR PEERS IN THE CLASSROOM ALSO EXHIBITED LOWER ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIOURAL OUTCOMES.

Educational outcomes can be affected by family violence through several interconnected pathways. Children’s school performance can be affected by mental health, behavioural problems, or problems at home. They may learn coping strategies that protect them in a situation of family violence, but detract from their schooling. For instance, a child may learn to withdraw at home, but this may keep them from engaging at school. Adolescents may turn to leaving home or substance use to cope with their negative feelings and thoughts, which may disturb their educational outcomes.156 Children and youth may also have problems focusing or concentrating, managing homework assignments, getting to school or may be sleep deprived.157 Intimate partner violence exposure can also have an impact on children’s emotional expression, which may interfere with their academic performance, as well as relationships with teachers and peers.158 Family violence may also be a reason requiring children to change schools, which may disrupt their learning and impact their educational outcomes.

3.3 PATHWAYS BETWEEN BEHAVIOURAL, MENTAL HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES CAN BE AFFECTED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE THROUGH SEVERAL INTERCONNECTED PATHWAYS. CHILDREN’S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CAN BE AFFECTED BY MENTAL HEALTH, BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS, OR PROBLEMS AT HOME. THEY MAY LEARN COPING STRATEGIES THAT PROTECT THEM IN A SITUATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE, BUT DISTRACT FROM THEIR SCHOOLLING.

Children and youth may learn coping strategies that protect them in a situation of family violence, but detract from their schooling.

KEY FINDINGS

CARRELL AND HOESKTRA’S 2010 STUDY FOUND FAMILY VIOLENCE TO HAVE FAR-REACHING IMPACTS BEYOND THE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY. WHEN CHILDREN EXPERIENCED FAMILY VIOLENCE, THEIR PEERS IN THE CLASSROOM ALSO EXHIBITED LOWER ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIOURAL OUTCOMES.

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Children and youth may learn coping strategies that protect them in a situation of family violence, but detract from their schooling.
3.4 RESILIENCE: PROTECTIVE FACTORS

It is important to note that family violence impacts children and youth differently, and can have varied negative impacts. Not all people exposed to this violence will end up with long-term negative outcomes: many young people have shown resilience and will recover from such traumatic events. Generally, individuals who do not develop negative outcomes or adapt successfully when exposed to adversities are considered resilient. Research indicates that some young people draw on several coping strategies and show resilience, while others do not exhibit any negative outcomes at all.

KEY FINDINGS

Resilience: broadly defined as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances.”

Source [159]

Most research on resilience and adversity in childhood has been cross-sectional and characterised by widely varying approaches to defining and measuring resilience. A major challenge in understanding how resilience influences outcomes is the numerous conceptualisations of resilience in the literature. The discrepant theories of resilience have hindered global development in this field. Drawing from the literature, the three main conceptions of resilience are: resilience as an outcome, as a trait, and as a process.

3.4.1 SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PRIMARY CARE GIVER

A secure attachment to a non-violent parent or other significant carer has been cited consistently in the literature as an important protective factor in mitigating trauma and distress. Particularly, a child’s social support system is considered crucial in determining the impact of the violence. Osofsky concluded from her review of the literature that the relationship with a parent or another familiar and caring adult serves as a protective factor. Differences and similarities in pairs of siblings exposed to intimate partner violence: A clinical case study. Partner Abuse. 4(2): 274

Happer et al. (2017). Differences and similarities in pairs of siblings exposed to intimate partner violence: A clinical case study. Partner Abuse. 4(2): 274


Happer et al. (2017). Differences and similarities in pairs of siblings exposed to intimate partner violence: A clinical case study. Partner Abuse. 4(2): 274


3.4.2 PARENTAL FUNCTIONING

To date, some research has reported that parental functioning plays an essential role in determining a child’s resilience. Graham-Bermann et al. explored how risk and protective factors, such as violence exposure and the individual characteristics of the mother, child, and family, impact a child’s level of social and emotional adjustment and resilience to the adverse consequences of family violence. Their research found that the parental functioning level greatly impacts a child’s adjustment or resilience. Specifically, resilient children had mothers with better parenting, more family strengths and no past violent partner, while parents of children with continued severe problems lacked these attributes.174

3.4.3 STRONG PEER RELATIONSHIPS

As research reports a child’s social support system as a key factor in determining resilience, strong peer relationships have been identified as a factor mitigating the impacts of family violence.175 In several qualitative studies, children report that strong relationships with peers has been identified as an important coping strategy for children who have experienced family violence.176

3.4.4 SCHOOLS AS A SAFE PLACE

Schools can be seen as protective or resilience factor against the impacts of family violence, when children perceive school as a “safe place” where they are not at risk and where they may support to deal their experiences.177 For example, O’Brien et al.’s qualitative study found that establishment of a safe, supportive place of retreat was a common factor identified by children as important for coping post-experiencing violence in the family.178

3.4.5 SELF-ESTEEM

Some research indicates that individual characteristics such as self-esteem could play a role in explaining resilience amongst some children who experience family violence. Specifically, self-esteem has been found to be a critical element underlying children’s ability to develop successful coping strategies, and as a significant distinguishing factor between resilient and non-resilient children and adolescents.179 Martinez-Torteya et al.’s study explored resilience among children exposed to family violence who maintained positive adaptation through ages 2 to 4. The study found that frequency of family violence exposure did not predict resilience, while a child’s easy temperament was a significant predictor of resilience.180
4.1 ROLE OF EARLY CHILDCARE SETTINGS

KEY FINDINGS

There is a notable lack of programs within early childcare settings that specifically target family violence through early identification, early intervention or response. While there is an established evidence based on early childhood intervention for infants, children and families experiencing other forms of hardship or disadvantage, family violence programming in this setting is an emerging field.

Available evaluations often use limited or weak research tools, and rely on self-reporting by parents rather than directly assessing the impact on the children targeted by the program. There is a lack of longer-term or follow-up research to demonstrate maintained changes as a result of interventions. Published evaluations do not provide great detail on the processes, activities or training and logistics undertaken by specific interventions.

Early childcare settings are a key point of entry for early identification and early intervention for children impacted by family violence. DET currently supports a wide range of early childcare services including long day care, family day care, occasional care, playgroups, early childhood intervention professionals, school nurses, outside school hours care, and kindergarten. Analysis of the 2015 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data highlights that over one-third of Australian children attend playgroup prior to school, with higher uptake among regional and remote areas compared with urban areas. These points illustrate that early childcare settings have a wide reach, including the potential to engage with families that may otherwise be excluded from programming or face structural barriers to services.

Analysis of the 2015 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data highlights that over one-third of Australian children attend playgroup prior to school, with higher uptake among regional and remote areas compared with urban areas.

4.2 EARLY IDENTIFICATION/DETECTION: IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Studies have shown that there is limited knowledge and understanding relating to identifying and responding to family violence among early childcare agencies and staff. For example, Early Childhood Australia conducted interviews with early childcare organisations and found that in this setting there is a limited knowledge of family violence, its impact on children, the specialist family violence sector, and the family violence system generally. They also found that there was an ‘appetite’ to engage with the problem of family violence and to develop partnerships with the specialist family violence sector. Early childcare organisations were primarily interested in clarifying their role and attaining the information, training and support required for staff engagement in family violence. It is important to note that some early childcare workers expressed concern about the level of engagement expected of them and emphasised that they could not be expected to be experts in family violence. Interviewees identified the need for clarification of their role and detailed practice guidelines and referral protocols.

The research shows that it is not only older children and youth that are at risk of experiencing family violence. Infants, toddlers and very young children are also at risk of experiencing or being exposed to family violence, and the earlier this can be identified and mitigated, including in utero, the better for reducing long-term impacts of violence. As such, early childcare settings are ideal for early identification and intervention.

Early childcare workers are well-placed to address family violence by raising awareness among parents and directing parents to specialised services. Further, enrolment in early childcare service may be an optimal opportunity to screen families for developmental and behavioural indicators of family violence. People working in early childcare settings and services also often form trusting relationships with one or both parents, and are in a good position to act as a gateway or make appropriate referrals for families and children experiencing family violence. Early childcare staff may also receive informal disclosures from parents or children, and therefore it is crucial they are adequately trained in making appropriate and timely referrals, and dealing with sensitive and confidential information. However, this literature review confirmed that currently the early childcare sector, both in Australia and in other sites, is relatively silent around family violence, with limited evidence of family violence-specific interventions or of efforts to improve response to family violence within early childcare.

180 Gregory et al. (2017).
181 UNICEF. (2016); Cameron, P. (2016).
Likewise, in a large review of safeguarding practices and approaches in the UK, the research team found there is often insufficient understanding among practitioners across different sectors, including education, of the indicators of violence and the impact of violence on children’s long-term development, leading to delayed identification and action in cases of abuse.\(^{185}\)

In Victoria, early identification of family violence across social, health and justice services sits under the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework, or the common risk assessment framework (CRAF). The CRAF is intended to support different agencies, including early childcare and school settings, in identifying violent or potentially violent situations, and to prevent the repetition and escalation of family violence. An external review of the CRAF found that while there is considerable support from and commitment to the instrument from practitioners, there are several key limitations to be considered in the instrument’s redevelopment.\(^{186}\) As the CRAF is currently being revised as part of multi-agency risk assessment and management (MARAM) framework, it is important to consider and incorporate the unique needs pertinent to the early childcare sector, as highlighted in this review.

### 4.3 EARLY INTERVENTION

Early childhood intervention aims to engage infants, children and their families who have been identified by social services or other familiar agencies as at risk of adverse experiences such as child abuse and neglect, homelessness, or parents with substance abuse.\(^{187}\) There are a range of approaches to early childhood intervention including site-based programs that provide a ‘one-stop shop’, and targeted and structured programs such as parenting programs and supported playgroups. There is an established evidence base on these broader early childhood interventions that aim to mitigate the potential negative developmental, educational and other outcomes that these children may experience, and that overlap with the outcomes discussed in Section 3 of this report. However, there is very limited evidence of early intervention that explicitly incorporates family violence within early childcare settings.

This section discusses the available evidence on different approaches to early childhood intervention, drawing on a broader literature to examine approaches that do not explicitly target family violence, but that could have the potential to impact on relevant outcomes. There is also the potential for family violence programming to be delivered through universal services such as community playgroups and maternal and child health settings, and these approaches have also been included here.

A review of research on early childhood interventions (not specific to family violence) concluded that place-based programs and the service coordination model has not been found to have particularly strong impacts.\(^{188}\) Where this model has shown effectiveness, it has involved a structured program and taken place in an existing space for community engagement such as a school. The review found that some targeted interventions have had stronger impacts, while others have no impacts and some show worsened scores on outcomes of interest. The review recommended that Australian state governments should aim to better evaluate government programs using rigorous methodologies and making findings publically available; should fund experimental research including randomised control trials of high-potential early childhood programs; and create a knowledge hub or clearinghouse to drive information-sharing. These steps would be critical to addressing the significant gaps in the current evidence on early childhood interventions.

#### 4.3.1 UNIVERSAL SERVICES: PLAYGROUPS

There is limited research quantifying the specific impact of attending playgroup on childhood development and wellbeing more generally, and even less relating to family violence.\(^{189}\) While there are evaluations of universal early childcare services such as playgroups, overall these do not refer to family violence, child abuse or associated outcomes, reflecting the relatively recent turn towards programming in this setting.\(^{190}\) In some cases, programs are noted to have the potential to have a positive impact on family violence and child abuse, however these issues have not been an explicit focus of the program or were not assessed during the evaluation.\(^{191}\) In other cases, family violence is described as a barrier to accessing services for some families, and as indicating the need for long-term support for compounding social issues such as violence, homelessness, substance abuse and mental illness.\(^{192}\)

Facilitated playgroups are group- and community-based, led by an early childcare practitioner and aim to build both parenting skills and provide families with the opportunity to develop their own networks of support. Analysis of 2012 and 2015 data from the AEDC found that playgroup is universally beneficial to all children of different backgrounds across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication.\(^{193}\) Playgroups can aid children build positive, supportive relationships with their peers and parents, and mitigate developmental delays that may be driven by a number of different factors including family violence and other

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\(^{187}\) Gregory et al. (2017).


\(^{189}\) Gregory et al. (2017).


\(^{193}\) Gregory et al. (2017).
solutions of disadvantage. There is some evidence from Australia that community-based playgroups are particularly important for diverse populations, including areas with families from migrant and other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Playgroups can also work through partnerships with other institutional and community settings such as libraries, schools, health and community services – this is discussed further in relation to child and family centres below.

These points highlight the importance of universal services such as playgroups for families and communities, and for children’s early development. Given their broad reach, playgroups represent an important opportunity for future programming on family violence, and would be well-suited for prevention and early intervention focused approaches. To integrate family violence programming within community playgroups, there would need to be consideration for constraints around leadership and training support for staff, appropriate content and approaches for Koorie and CALD families, and to addressing the current evidence gap by evaluating all activities and disseminating findings.

KEY FINDINGS

Given their broad reach, playgroups represent an important opportunity for future programming on family violence, and would be well-suited for prevention and early intervention focused approaches.

4.3.2 TARGETED PROGRAMS

Targeted and intensive programs tend to focus on children and families with complex trauma or complicating risk factors, and aim to ameliorate the deeper negative impacts on child development often associated with multiple risk factors or adverse experiences.

4.3.2.1 CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

Child and family centres have developed due to the complexity and fragmentation of the early childcare support system. These centres aim to act as a ‘one stop shop’ where families can access all the support services they require in one location. Ideally, these centres should be connected to other agencies where necessary through a strong integrated approach. System integration is discussed further in Section 6.

An evaluation of Early Years Centres (EYCs) in two sites in Queensland found that the centres were promising in providing both universal and targeted services, including education, to clients within disadvantaged or lower socio-economic areas. The evaluation found that while accessing the centres, families’ knowledge of child development and parenting practices improved significantly, and they were more likely to demonstrate positive parenting behaviours and have access to concrete support outside of the centres. Strengths of the program include effective partnerships between difference services that facilitate strong, integrated service delivery, and engagement of hard to reach families through mobile outreach. The EYCs work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations including by recruiting family support workers at the centres. The evaluation also identified areas for improvement including integrating delivery of parenting programs, reviewing links and referral to family support services, increasing the diversity of partner organisations, articulating a clearer shared vision within each centre, and improving data collection to facilitate ongoing evaluation of the model. While this evaluation shows promising evidence for the model, it is a relatively small study, and family violence and child abuse were not a key focus of the program or the evaluation. However, the partnership model would provide a strong foundation for future family violence specific programming.

4.3.2.2 SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

Supported playgroups are led by trained facilitators, and intended to provide families identified as having particular vulnerabilities or needs, with a focus on the development and wellbeing of both parents and children. Intensive supported
playgroups target socially excluded and marginalised families. Generally, supported play groups are facilitated by at least two staff, usually an early childcare worker and a family support worker who provide extensive support to families by ‘building linkages’ between families and a wide range of other services in the community. However, there is no single model or an established set of guidelines for the delivery of supported playgroups. Rather, playgroups are diverse and can vary in their programming, operations and target audiences.

In Victoria, the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service is provided through partnership between the state government and local government. It is a universally free service provided to families with young children, offering support, education and programs, including supported playgroups. In addition to the range of services offered through the universal MCH service, the Enhance MCH service provides more intensive support for children and families at risk of poor outcomes. Supported playgroups are offered to parents across the board to all families and are specifically targeted at first-time parents. The MCH service offers written information along with facilitated parent discussions at each key stage of child development, and offers first supported playgroups at the ages of 4 months and 18 months.

Research from Australia shows that the role of the facilitator is critical to the success of supported playgroups. Some qualitative studies have documented important features of program delivery, such as the importance of facilitators’ interpersonal skills to ensure positive experiences for families in the playgroups, as well as the important opportunities of the playgroups for reducing social isolation for families.

Research into supported playgroups is limited and evaluation methods vary, however the available evidence suggests that supported playgroups may improve parents’ social supports and increase parents’ ability to care for young children. Supported playgroups may also improve children’s sociability and create new opportunities for them to learn. However, there are varying models in operation, no single set of guidelines or practice principles, making them difficult to research and leading to a lack of cohesion in their implementation. The nature of the research designs employed by evaluations of specific targeted playgroups means that it is not possible to conclude that there is strong evidence of the impact of supported playgroups on child, parent and community outcomes. Further research is also needed to help transition parents out of supported playgroups, with current evidence indicating this is a problematic area for facilitators.

In Victoria, supported playgroups receive funding to deliver the smaltsalk program, which is targeted at families experiencing vulnerable circumstances and addresses aspects of parenting and family functioning known to impact on the development of children’s early learning at home. The program has been evaluated in both maternal and child health (the ‘infant trial’) and in facilitated playgroups (the ‘toddler trial’) using a randomised controlled trial design, with parent-report and observational measures were collected at baseline, 12 and 32 weeks follow up. Program content was delivered at two levels of intensity: the group program alone (smaltsalk group-only) and a hybrid approach combining the group program with individual home visits (smaltsalk plus). Primary outcomes were parent verbal responsibility and home learning activities at 32 weeks. In the infant trial, there were no differences by trial arm for the primary outcomes at 32 weeks. In the toddler trial at 32 weeks, participants in the smaltsalk group-only trial showed improvement compared to the standard program for parent verbal responsibility and home learning activities, but smaltsalk plus did not. The evaluation team concluded that, while there was some evidence for the benefits of combining individual home coaching with the group program (on secondary but not primary outcomes), these do not appear sufficient to justify providing this component to all families. The home visiting component is costly in terms of the staffing required and further research is needed to determine whether some families require home coaching in order to achieve benefits.

In another evaluation of support playgroups in Queensland, an effectiveness study involving interviews with parents over a six-month interval indicated that all children participating in playgroups significantly improved on parent-reported social skills and receptive communication skills. It also found a high commitment by facilitators, with capabilities to respond to diverse needs, and to provide appropriate learning activities and environments for children. However, there was no significant change in attentional and emotional regulation and no change in parent behaviour for parental engagement in home learning activities. The evaluation, which has not been formally published, was conducted through a multi-site case study with eight supported playgroups.

### 4.3.2.3 PARENTING PROGRAMS

Recognising the importance of the infant–parent relationship, some early intervention programs seek to support parents in developing their skills and confidence. Research has shown that the use of violence against children is more likely when parents have a poor understanding of child development, are less nurturing, have an authoritarian parenting style, or were exposed to violence during childhood themselves. Parenting programs therefore aim to foster healthy and safe family relationships by improving skills and knowledge, and teaching positive parenting practices. Parenting programs can be delivered one-on-one through home visitation, or in a group setting through family and health services, and can be important in building young children’s protective factors. They may be provided through more universal services, such as maternal and child health as discussed below, and reflect an overlap or integrated approach to primary prevention and early intervention. The MCH service provides parenting group sessions including, but not limited to, first-time parent groups, which are universally offered to new parents. These programs aim to provide health education, build parenting capacity, offer support to parents and foster community connections.
A global review of parenting programs found that overall, parenting programs show mixed evidence in both preventing and reducing the risk of child maltreatment, with most evidence coming from high-income countries (HICs) and limited evidence from follow-up studies. There is also a strong bias in programming and in the literature towards programs that focus on mothers, with inadequate attention for fathers. The review determined that parenting programs appear to have a positive impact on risk factors associated with child maltreatment such as maternal psychosocial health and parental perceptions about harsh parenting practices, and for rates of unintentional injuries. However, the impact of these programs on actual rates of child maltreatment is unclear, largely due to inconsistent measurement and methodologies. There was limited data on whether parenting programs could prevent maltreatment in homes where intimate partner violence is present, or on children witnessing intimate partner violence. The review concluded that a multi-faceted approach combining different elements such as home visitation, group work, and support from other services would ensure the needs of families at risk are met. This conclusion is supported by other evidence on parenting programs, and on the prevention of family violence more broadly.

One such program is the Triple P Parenting Programme, which originated in the USA and has since been piloted in other settings such as Scotland. Triple P was evaluated over two years using a population trial across 18 counties which were randomly assigned either to implement Triple P or to continue with services as usual. The evaluation found that implementation of Triple P was effective when used alongside universal communication strategies and childcare workforce training. When compared with other approaches, Triple P was found to have a positive impact on three predictors of child maltreatment: the number of out of home placements, the number of substantiated official reports of maltreatment, and the number of identified child injuries caused by maltreatment.

In New Zealand, a nine-year follow up study was conducted on the Early Start program, a home visiting service targeted at families with infants identified by nurses within universal health services as at risk of severe social, economic or emotional challenges. The program involves six key topics: child health, maternal wellbeing, parenting skills (for mothers), family economic functioning, and crisis management. The evaluation used a randomised controlled trial design with follow up at several points over the nine-year period in order to assess what changed, and what changes were sustained over the long-term. Families were assessed using parental interviews, hospital record data and teacher questionnaires. Up to the nine-year follow up, analysis showed that children of enrolled families had the following statistically significant outcomes:

- 33\% lower rates of hospital attendance for childhood accidents compared with control group.
- 50\% lower rates of parental reported physical child abuse compared with control group.
- More positive mean scores on measures of punitive parenting and parenting competence.

Lower mean scores on measures of parental reported child behaviour problems.

The outcomes were found to be similar for Maori and non-Maori families. There was also consistent evidence showing the provision of Early Start did not have any benefit for a wide range of parental and family outcomes of interest (e.g. family economic circumstances, family violence, family stress and adversity). The lack of benefit of Early Start for these parental and family outcomes highlights the importance of developing better links and integration between home visiting services such as Early Start and a wide range of other family related services, such as adult mental health services, educational and career support, family budgeting services, and family relationship services.

The evaluation of Early Start suggests the program has beneficial effects for a series of child related outcomes spanning health, pre-school education, service utilisation, child abuse, parenting, and child behaviour. The evaluation attributes the success of Early Start in addressing child related outcomes to the research base of the program, the use of professionally trained staff, and the development of standards and service manuals for the program.
of family violence within maternal and child health settings is the Baby Makes 3 program. Baby Makes 3 aims to increase the capacity of first-time parents (including fathers) to build equal and respectful family relationships; to increase the capacity of health professionals and agencies to promote equal and respectful family relationships during clients’ transition to parenthood; and to build capacity of maternal and child health staff to identify women at risk of experiencing violence.223 It involves identifying and training facilitators (male and female) to deliver the parenting program component with first-time parents. Workforce development is also provided to maternal and child health staff relating to gender equality, violence against women, and respectful relationships within families. Available to all first-time parents, Baby Makes 3 is a primary prevention approach to family violence within this sector. Evaluation of the program in the Eastern Metropolitan Region has found that a key impact of the Baby Makes 3 program was that participants developed a greater awareness of how traditional attitudes to gender and parenting roles were shaping their new families.224 While the two iterations of Baby Makes 3 have both been found to have a positive impact in generating gender equality among new parents,225 a number of challenges remain including reaching under-represented or marginalised families and potentially being overly negative towards men and fathers.226

4.4 RESPONSE

While early childcare services are not themselves well-positioned to deliver response services for young children and families experiencing family violence, they are an ideal setting for early identification and referring families to appropriate services.

Qualitative research with Victorian service providers also highlighted that the relationship between family violence and child protection services must be a nuanced one.227 The fear of an intervention by Child Protection services prevents many women from disclosing family violence, thereby increasing the risks to herself and her children. Building a better understanding of family violence and access to secondary consultations with specialist family violence services will support early childcare workers to be able to respond effectively to disclosures or when signs of family violence are identified.

4.4.1 SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

To date, early childcare sector training has focused on mandatory reporting for child abuse and neglect. This informs current early childcare services practice, and has led to established professional relationships between early childcare providers and Child Protection. However, this review found that there is a lack of specialist family violence services within the early childcare sector. A review of safeguarding services and systems for children in the UK found that, where established, embedding health visitors and specialist practitioners (beyond family violence) in Sure Start children’s centres contributed to the effectiveness of the centres, however their presence depended heavily on current political will and was therefore inconsistent.228 This point highlights the role of the government in ensuring the availability of specialist services in terms of ongoing and long-term commitment.

The literature suggests that early childcare workers are often unaware about specialist family violence services, and these services are rarely called upon for secondary consultations or response.229 Building better connections between early childcare settings and family violence specialists is important as fear of intervention by Child Protection services has been shown to prevent women from disclosing family violence, thereby increasing risks to herself and her children.230 Further, Child Protection services may be unsuited to provide the specialised services for children who have experienced or have been exposed to family violence. It is thus essential for early childcare settings to develop relationships and connections with specialist family violence services, and be able to assist families by referring them to appropriate services. Currently, there are limited child-focused specialist family violence services for children, relative to other family violence response services. This means there are limited referral pathways for early childcare settings and other universal services to utilise, as recognised by the Royal Commission.231 Building an integrated system and standardised referral pathways are the next steps in developing the early childcare sector’s response to family violence. Moving forward, the Safety and Support Hubs will have a key role to play in referral and specialist services for children exposed to family violence. Once established, early childcare settings should have up-to-date information on referring children and families to the Hubs. More discussion on the Hubs model is provided in Section 6.

KEY FINDINGS

While DET has comprehensive guidelines for mandatory reporting and child safety, guidelines and protocols for response and referral mechanisms within early childcare settings are lacking. There is a need for stronger, and more formalised, integration with specialist family violence services.

225 Keleher and Hutchesson. (2016).
226 Cameron. (2016).
228 Ibid.
229 See Hon. Marcia Neave et al. (2016).
Currently, there are limited child-focused specialist family violence services for children, relative to other family violence response services.

**Box 3. Key learnings from the Eastern Family Violence Partnership**

The Eastern Family Violence Partnership (EFVP) - Children experiencing family violence: Working together to develop a better service response. The research project was commissioned and managed by the Children’s Needs Mapping Working Group, a Working Group of the Eastern Regional Family Violence Executive Committee. Delivered by Urbis, an independent research firm, the report identified a number of key opportunities and priorities for training of practitioners and staff within the region for addressing family violence. These include seeing training as an opportunity to share practice wisdom and collaborate, as increasing accountability between services and their alignment with best practice, as continuing the pursuit of and collaboration with Child Protection services, and as recognising the role for early childcare workers in early identification and intervention. Based on their experience in coordinating a regional response to family violence, the EFVP also recognised the importance of functioning referral networks throughout the system, and the need for consistent principles throughout the system. A key gap in the EFVP system was inadequate child and family violence specific practice, and where services had employed a designated children’s worker, this was seen as invaluable in terms of the profile of impacts of violence on children, in enhancing knowledge of the service system, and in developing partnerships to meet the needs of children and young people.

### 4.4.2 THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

Therapeutic interventions may take a range of approaches and are focused on providing counselling and other treatment to mitigate children’s trauma and to repair parent-child relationships, delivered within health and family services. While delivering therapy is beyond early child care centre’s remit, it is critical service for supporting children and families in the aftermath of family violence. As such, it is essential for the early childcare sector to develop and maintain close connections with external organisations providing therapeutic interventions targeted at children. Therapeutic work with children affected by family violence focuses on the relating style of individual children, recognising that early violent relational experiences inform how children understand themselves and their relationships and will continue to do so in the long-term, if not effectively addressed. These often take the form of therapeutic playgroups or other group work with children and/or parents, and may include more intensive case management and referrals to specialist mental health and family services. There are many different community-based group work models, however there is very limited published evidence on them due to lack of funding and resources for evaluation and dissemination. Group work aims to be child-led, with content determined by the needs of individual children rather than a top-down approach. This can be important for work with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or with Indigenous families, as it allows for greater flexibility so that facilitators can provide appropriate content. Some intensive interventions aim to work with the whole family, addressing multiple needs, tailored to meet each family member’s needs, using a range of therapeutic approaches, however there is not yet evidence to show this is consistently more effective than other models.

**KEY FINDINGS**

Therapeutic work with infants and young children who have been exposed to violence and trauma is one of the main approaches to respond in the family violence field. While delivering therapeutic programmes is beyond education settings’ remit, they should be connected with external therapeutic interventions as a part of their response strategy.

In Victoria, therapeutic group work with children who’ve experienced family violence has been the focus of Wendy Bunston and colleagues, primarily delivered through the Royal Children’s Hospital Mental Health Service. Some of these group work programs have been evaluated and exhibited promising results. The Peek a Boo Club ran from 2005 to 2012 and was delivered with infants and their mothers to repair the infant-mother attachment as a consequence of experiencing family violence. The program was evaluated over 2007–2011 with more than 30 groups including families from CALD backgrounds, using pre- and post-surveys and qualitative data. Overall, the program was associated with improved scores on outcome measures assessing infant, mother and infant-mother functioning. Mothers reported that their infants were more socially competent, post-intervention, and that infants displayed less problematic behaviours post-intervention (both findings statistically significant). Clinicians also reported better adaptive functioning for infants post-intervention. While these are positive findings, the evaluation relied on self-reporting by mothers to assess outcomes, and the authors recommended a more comprehensive, longitudinal and quantitative approach.
systematic evaluation be undertaken with a larger sample.

In the parkas (parents accepting responsibility – kids are safe) program, separate children’s and mothers’ groups are delivered to build communication between the two, with the same leadership team facilitating both. The program was run through a partnership between the Melton Community Health Centre and The Royal Children’s Hospital Mental Health Services. The program was evaluated between 1997–2000 using qualitative pre- and post-questionnaires with both children and mothers. With consent, teachers were also contacted by group leaders through an unstructured interview focusing on the child’s academic ability, their behaviour at school and the quality of their peer relationships. The evaluation used standardised clinical measures for children’s behaviours, trauma symptoms and relationships, and while these have shown improvements in participants over time, small sample sizes have been a barrier generating strong results. As with other evaluations of such programs, the evaluation tools also rely on self-reporting of impacts and findings should therefore be interpreted with caution.

The evidence of therapeutic programs with children who have been exposed to family violence highlights several key challenges relating to safe and ethical evaluation and research in this area. A key question that arises is: when does the need for evaluation override the therapeutic duty not to create undue stress through a process that can re-traumatise? This must be weighed against the need to do no harm by ensuring all programming is evidence-based, to ensure interventions do not inadvertently create additional trauma, and most importantly to ensure they are having the desired impact with participants. Other challenges relate to data collection, storage and analysis, as in how to administer tools with young children that have experienced trauma, and ensuring the implementation and research team(s) have the adequate skills and resources to conduct an evaluation with sensitivity and due diligence. As this review has established, these challenges have led to a considerable lack of rigorous evaluations around early childhood interventions in general, with a particular gap in relation to family violence specific programming.

Currently, early childcare workers must comply with mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse and neglect, including experiences of and exposure to family violence. However, there is no requirement that staff be informed about family violence and its impacts on children, and staff training in relation to family violence only occurs in the context of the mandatory child protection online training module. Submissions to the Royal Commission expressed concern over the lack of family violence specific guidelines and other resources for early childcare workers. Early childcare services appear not to have any standardised, specific guidelines or resources for staff in relation to family violence. There were also concerns about the need to expand workers’ capabilities for appropriate responses and the development of referral pathways. Given the sensitivity and complexity of the topic, face-to-face comprehensive training on identifying, responding to and preventing family violence that goes beyond mandatory requirements is recommended.

As most early childcare services are privately owned, the sector is fragmented and competitive, creating barriers to a collaborative approach to building family violence capacity across the early childcare sector.

**KEY FINDINGS**

In the early childcare setting, staff and practitioner knowledge on identifying and responding to family violence is limited. There is a need for more extensive training on family violence including referral systems and available support services.

The resources and capability of services for additional training and skills development are already stretched.

As most early childcare services are privately owned, the sector is fragmented and competitive, creating barriers to a collaborative approach to building family violence capacity across the early childcare sector.

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**4.5 TRAINING AND CAPABILITY BUILDING FOR EARLY CHILDCARE WORKERS TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Training to build the capability of early childcare workers will need to involve the complex nature and dynamics of family violence, the safety risks to both mother and child, and the varied impacts of family violence on young children. It should also include comprehensive information about specialist family violence services, and support connections between these services to facilitate secondary consultations and referrals. However, the current standards and training requirements for early childcare workers under the Australian Government’s National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework mean that the resources and capability of services for additional training and skills development are already stretched. Qualitative research with service providers in Australia has shown that, as most early childcare services are privately owned, the sector is fragmented and competitive, creating barriers to a collaborative approach to building family violence capacity across the early childcare sector.

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244 Bunston and Dileo. (2006).
245 Cameron. (2016).
246 Ibid.
248 The Hon. Marcia Neave et al. (2016).
5.1 ROLE OF SCHOOLS

KEY FINDINGS

Where possible, early intervention and response programming should align with and complement primary prevention programs. This should be a priority in the upcoming rollout of the Respectful Relationships Education program.

Schools are a key setting for early identification and early intervention for children and youth impacted by family violence. Schools enable access to the majority of children and young people, and are the primary settings for development of children and youth outside of the home environment. School can be seen as a protective or resilience factor against the impacts of family violence, when children perceive school as a safe and neutral place where they are not at risk and where they may find support to deal their experiences.

Schools are also an ideal location for external organisations to provide group counselling and play therapy to children who have been exposed to family violence. Quantitative research with young people who were themselves exposed to family violence similarly found that programming for school-aged children and teachers was thought to be beneficial so that teachers would be more understanding, supportive and inclusive of children who were experiencing family violence.

This section presents an overview of the available evidence on evaluated interventions in school-settings. As this is an emerging area of research, the evidence base is limited, however there is some evidence from local and international evaluations that point to the effectiveness of early intervention approaches, response programs and training for school personnel, in addressing children and adolescents who have been exposed to family violence.

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250 Campo et al. (2014).
251 Thompson and Trice-Black. (2012); Mullender et al. (2002).
252 World Health Organization. (2016); Ellis. (2004); Ellis et al. (2006).
253 Buckley et al. (2007).
5.2 ADOLESCENTS AND DATING VIOLENCE

**KEY FINDINGS**

Adolescents are at particular risk of experiencing certain forms of violence, such as sexual violence or dating violence during early intimate relationships. However, this age group is also often overlooked by programs addressing violence.

There are very few evaluations of programs within school settings targeting children or adolescents who have experienced or been exposed to family violence. Family violence programming in this setting is an emerging field, and there is very limited evidence from evaluations or other rigorous research to establish the effectiveness of such approaches.

The impacts of family violence are often more critical at key transition points such as adolescence, which are seen as ideal sites or timing for development interventions. Youth who have experienced family violence are more likely to develop violence-supportive attitudes and use or experience violence in their own relationships, which sometimes translates into dating violence. While research indicates a positive association between childhood experiences of family violence and adolescent dating violence, other factors beyond experiencing family violence must be taken into account when considering the increased risk of dating violence perpetration. That is, multiple forms of disadvantage often intersect to increase the likelihood of an adolescent perpetrating or experiencing dating violence. Abusive patterns initiated in adolescence may well lead to violence on the part of men and victimisation on the part of women in their adult relationships. Adolescent dating violence is associated with several risk factors and negative outcomes for adolescents who experience dating violence, including pregnancy, substance abuse, interpersonal violence, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, and decreased physical and mental health.

While dating violence is common among both girls and boys, girls are more likely to engage in physical force in self-defense and are more likely to be seriously injured in dating violence than boys. They are also far more likely to experience sexual violence in dating relationships than boys. Results from the Global School-based Health Survey, conducted among students aged 13 to 15 years old, show high levels of physical violence within heterosexual dating relationships. The National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health found that in 2013, approximately one quarter of sexually active students reported an experience of unwanted sex.

Younger age is a consistent risk factor for violence as this is a period when young people are experimenting with relationships and learning about boundaries. Young girls in dating relationships with male peers often experience physical violence, accompanied by controlling behaviours, or forced or coerced sex. Young girls are also threatened with violence by male peers to force them into unwanted dating and sexual relationships. In other contexts, girls are coerced into sexual relationships with the provision of gifts from their boyfriends. This situation raises key questions around sexual consent and sexual agency and speaks to the complexity of defining sexual violence within adolescent relationships.

Studies from high-income settings have found that psychological abuse was high among girls against male partners, however boys were most likely to perpetrate physical and/or sexual violence against their female partners. Other studies from the USA have suggested that the perpetration and experience of physical violence among adolescent dating relationships is relatively equal among girls and boys.

The 2016 Personal Safety Survey reported that 12% of women aged 18 to 24 years experienced at least one incident of dating violence in the last 12 months. The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health similarly found that in 2012, 13% of young women aged 18 to 23 years reported that they had been in a violent relationship with a partner. The 2013 Youth Risk Behaviour Survey in the USA found that 21% of female students, and 10% of male students, had experienced any form of dating violence in the past 12 months. Female students were much more likely to report higher rates of all forms of partner violence. Administrative data from Canada in 2008, indicates that police-reported rates of dating violence among adolescents aged 15 to 19, were 10 times higher among girls than boys.

A 2016 study on the impact of information and communications technology on adolescent dating relationships found that girls and boys alike used their phones and social media to monitor their respective partner, however boys were much more extreme in their monitoring of female partners, and were much more likely to try to use this technology to isolate their partner. Identifying early signs of controlling behaviour is important to include in the whole-of-school approach to prevention.
Family violence perpetrated via electronic mediums, such as 'sextortion', revenge porn, or other image-based abuse is an emerging area of research. Currently there is very little being done in the early intervention or response sectors regarding non-consensual distribution of intimate images, though there is some work emerging in primary prevention. In regards to revenge porn, there are no programs addressing this (and certainly no evaluations of programs), however there is growing literature about what revenge porn is and the legislative response to it. A 2015 survey on online harassment and abuse conducted at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology surveyed 3000 Australians between ages 18 and 55 using quota sampling with the national Australian census data. The study reported that 1 in 10 Australians have had a nude or semi-nude image of them distributed online or sent to others without their permission. In the UK, there is a 'Revenge Porn Helpline' that provides free, confidential legal advice and support via telephone and email. There are specific laws in Victoria and South Australia that criminalise the distribution, or threat thereof, of intimate or sexualised images without consent. In 2014, Victoria introduced legislation that makes it an offence to threaten to distribute or to distribute an intimate image without consent. New sections 41DA and 41DB were added to section 41D of the Summary Offences Act 1996, introducing a maximum of two years' imprisonment upon offending. Considering the severe psychological distress image-based abuse or 'sextortion' can cause to victims, it is important that children are educated on the legal implications of image-based abuse and that legal, policy and support responses are integrated into existing school systems.  

**KEY FINDINGS**

Considering the severe psychological distress image-based abuse or 'sextortion' can cause to victims, it is important that children are educated on the legal implications of image-based abuse and that legal, policy and support responses are integrated into existing school systems. There is strong evidence from the USA and Canada that dating violence prevention programs are effective in preventing physical, sexual and emotional violence in adolescent dating relationships, and may further contribute to the prevention of intimate partner violence and sexual violence in adulthood. However there is a need, if any, evaluations of interventions addressing early intervention and response for adolescent dating violence, particularly in the school setting.

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5.3 EARLY IDENTIFICATION/DETECTION: IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

**KEY FINDINGS**

Schools are a key setting for early identification and early intervention for children and youth impacted by family violence.

Identifying the signs of family violence among children and adolescents is critical to ensuring the protection of children and their access to appropriate care and response. Early identification in school settings can occur in several ways including through screening tools and processes, self-identification or disclosure by students, and observation and awareness of signs by teachers and staff. A review of safeguarding systems and agencies in the UK found that there is a lack of evidence on effective ways for schools to undertake identification of neglect and emotional abuse. In Australia, primary school nursing services currently use the School Entraht Health Questionnaire to identify possible exposure to family violence. The questionnaire, which relies on family self-reporting, asks questions relating to abuse of a child or parent and about children or parents ‘witnessing’ violence. Where issues around family violence are identified, the nurse facilitates referrals to school support services and local family agencies where appropriate.  

As discussed in Section 4: Addressing family violence: Early childcare settings, CRAF is the main framework for early identification of family violence intended for social, health and justice services as well as early childcare and school settings. See Section 4 for further information on CRAF. Another approach to early identification and intervention within Australia is the Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support (CAARS). CAARS involves a number of resources that have been designed to support universal practitioners from different sectors, including schools and early childcare settings, to know how to engage children and families in conversations that assist in the early identification of problems including family violence, and to refer to appropriate support. The program is based on capacity and capability building of relevant staff, rather than a direct service delivery model. The pilot study for CAARS was trialled across Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre in Victoria, Interrelate Lismore in New South Wales, Rockingham Kwinana Division of General Practice in Western Australia and Northern Connections in South Australia. The pilot evaluation found that the program encouraged practitioners to identify issues they would not usually identify within their daily practice, leading to more comprehensive referrals, more integrated support, and often the earlier identification of practitioners. Strengths were that the program offers flexible tools for practitioners from different sectors...
KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation of the second stage of the Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support pilot noted that many universal practitioners displayed a reluctance to take on an expanded role in child protection and wellbeing.275 Participants expressed anxiety about their current levels of competence, and concern about what to do if a problem is identified and appropriate services are not available. There was also little evidence that CAARS was used to facilitate information sharing or collaboration across services, or for promoting a common language for child wellbeing amongst universal practitioners. Further, the study identified a need for ongoing training and support to sustain CAARS use beyond the initial assessment.

These findings were supported by a final evaluation of a broader CAARS trial. The delivery of a child and family wellbeing project using the Common Approach – Final report. Canberra Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and the Department for Education and Child Development, South Australian State Government. 276

A key component of the CAARS model was the use of the champion model, where a staff member (usually a manager) was designated as the Common Approach champion for each site. Each site Champion was the point of contact for their site and provided support and guidance for the implementation of the approach for other staff at the site. The Champion model was effective in some sites, however in others it was clear that Champions were not aware of or did not pursue their responsibilities within the program, and some participants were not aware who the Champion was within their organisation. This highlights the barriers to effective leadership, outlined above. One of the key findings of the study was that follow up training and support is needed for the approach to become embedded in the organisation’s practices and policies.276 Following on from this point, the CAARS model would also benefit from a more long-term vision and activities that more explicitly target family violence and associated outcomes. At present child abuse and neglect are highlighted in the theory of change, but these are not adequately addressed in the program’s implementation.

5.4 EARLY INTERVENTION

The literature indicates that school settings can be an important site for implementing effective early intervention programs to address the impacts of family violence on children and youth. As in the early childcare sector, there are few family violence specific interventions delivered through schools. Even fewer early interventions in schools have been evaluated, yet some have suggested promising results so far.

For children who have already experienced family violence, a social learning theory model of prevention and early intervention that focuses on developing skills and knowledge, can assist children in learning alternative ways of dealing with conflict, and in ‘unlearning’ problematic behaviours.277 While primary prevention programs, such as Respectful Relationships, address the harmful gender norms and violence-condoning attitudes children are exposed to daily, early intervention programs have the potential to support reinforce the positive messaging delivered through such programs, whilst simultaneously supporting at risk children, or children who have already experienced family violence.278

Research on family violence interventions with children highlights the benefit of treatment early on. Although limited, findings from research on the effectiveness of family violence group interventions with children indicate that children benefit from early interventions.279 Family violence group interventions is an umbrella term used to describe structured and non-structured intervention and response programs delivered in group settings. These interventions aim to aid children and families develop the skills and coping mechanisms needed to heal after experiences of family violence in a safe environment.280

These intervention types include: structured interventions; bibliotherapy; play therapy, and group objectives (that are mapped out through play therapy and structured interventions).281 These interventions can be delivered by external family violence specialists or trained school mental health professionals.

5.4.1 GROUP COUNSELLING

Group counselling is one of the most efficient ways to promote growth and development of children exposed to family violence. Group counselling refers to the delivery of therapeutic interventions promoting the growth and development of individuals in a small group setting rather than in one-on-one settings.

275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.277
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
281 As in the early childcare sector, there are few family violence specific interventions delivered through schools. Even fewer early interventions in schools have been evaluated, yet some have suggested promising results so far.

282 Ellis et al. (2006).
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
Group counselling for children and youth necessarily involves enhancing the relatedness between and among children within a supportive social system that allows mutual aid. group counselling interventions are effective at reducing internalising and externalising behaviour problems, increasing self-esteem, diminishing feelings of self-blame, and increasing safety knowledge. primary school interventions for children exposed to family violence, such as small group counselling, can provide support, assist with emotional and problem-solving skills, and help prevent problems later in life.

5.4.2 Peer Education

There is also some evidence to suggest that peer education programs on family and dating violence are effective early intervention approaches. Peer education is a strategy by which individuals from a particular group provide information, training or other resources to their peers. In Australia, peer education approaches are successfully being used with youth to raise awareness around alcohol and drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health and more recently domestic and dating violence.

Some research clearly supports the efficacy of the peer education model for youth over adult-delivered education programming. Cuipers’ 2002 meta-analysis of 12 research projects comparing peer led and adult led school based drug prevention programs found that overall the peer led programs were more effective. Similarly Mellanby et al.’s 2001 study comparing adult versus peer delivered sex education found that peer educators were more effective in establishing positive norms and attitudes relating to sexual behaviour.

A program in Western Australia conducted with teachers and students in two secondary schools in metro and regional areas aimed to:

- Implement an education program to raise awareness about family and dating violence;
- Make available resources and support for students and teachers who have experienced these forms of violence;
- Improve student’s attitudes towards and understandings of health family and intimate partner relationships;
- Train a small group of students from each school as Peer Educators, who implement school-based activities around awareness raising and knowledge building;
- Develop partnerships between schools and local service providers.

The program resulted in several concrete achievements including a series of awareness-raising presentations, links between schools and the Regional Coordinated Response to Family and Domestic Violence Groups, and increased student knowledge about family and dating violence.

CASA house (Centre Against Sexual Assault) initiated the Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools model, a whole-school, long term model for embedding respectful relationships education, policies and practices across school communities in 2004. From 2007 to 2009, CASA House further developed a peer educator pilot to build the capacity of senior secondary students aged 16 to 18 years to take on leadership roles around addressing sexual assault. The peer educator pilot was implemented in four schools over three years, involving 64 young people as peer educators and seven school and agency staff as trainers and supporters. The results of process and impact evaluations found that the pilot met its main objective of building the capacity of young leaders; it equipped young people with the communications skills and confidence to convey their knowledge and understanding of sexual assault to their younger peers in the school community.

5.4.3 Protective Behaviours Programs

There is also some evidence supporting early intervention programs that are not specifically targeted at family violence. The All Children Being Safe program (NAPCAN) in Tamworth, New South Wales, is a culturally appropriate primary school protective behaviours program that uses animal stories, craft, dance and other activities to help children aged 5 to 8 identify safe and unsafe feelings, places and people. The pilot program was delivered to eight primary schools in Tamworth in 2012, and the evaluation found the program to be associated with increased children’s knowledge of protective behaviours and safety. Further, both children and teachers reported finding the program valuable and effective. NAPCAN does not specifically address family violence, and did not include components challenging gendered stereotypes. However, the program aimed to raise children’s awareness of potential harms and build their protective behaviours, which can directly affect the impacts of family violence.

5.4.4 Integrated Services

The Geelong Project (TGP) is a ‘community of schools and services’ response to young people at risk of homelessness. It uses a location-based, integrated coalition of schools and youth agencies that engage in a range of early intervention activities for at-risk children. TGP is a unique partnership model between schools and community organisations that is committed to address the dual issue of school disengagement and homelessness in Geelong. Key features of TGP include:

- School-level screening processes for at risk students and surveys across all

Development and Education. In A. A. Drews, L. J. Carey, & C. E. Schaefer (Eds.), School-based play therapy (pp. 194–215). New York: Wiley; Sullivan et al. (2007). Group counseling for children and youth necessarily involves enhancing the relatedness between and among children within a supportive social system that allows mutual aid. Group counseling interventions are effective at reducing internalising and externalising behaviour problems, increasing self-esteem, diminishing feelings of self-blame, and increasing safety knowledge. Primary school interventions for children exposed to family violence, such as small group counseling, can provide support, assist with emotional and problem-solving skills, and help prevent problems later in life.

Key Findings

Group counseling interventions are one of the most efficient ways to promote growth and development of children exposed to family violence.
schools feeding into baseline data;
- Collaborative approach connecting schools with integrated key service providers; and
- Standardised system of referral and case management for schools and services in the area.

TGP does not specifically target youth who have experienced family violence, though

5.4 EARLY INTERVENTION

KEY FINDINGS

The main role for schools in responding to family violence at present is mandatory reporting, and expanding their role to include developing effective response systems, referral pathways and partnerships with appropriate, specialist family violence service deliverers would benefit students and educators.

While primary schools and high schools are not themselves positioned to deliver response services to children and youth impacted by family violence, they are well positioned to create links with universal services and specialist family violence services. The main role for schools in responding to family violence at present is mandatory reporting, and expanding their role to include developing effective response systems, referral pathways and partnerships with appropriate, specialist family violence service deliverers would benefit students and educators. This should be a focus of upcoming integration through the Support and Safety Hubs.

DET currently provides resources and guidelines for school staff setting out their responsibilities in responding to risks of harm, including child abuse and family violence. At present, teachers are mandatory reporters to Child Protection in cases of knowledge or reasonable belief that a child has or is at risk of experiencing family violence and child abuse. While current response practice focuses on Child Protection, the response system could be expanded to include links to the wide range of specialist family violence services that are often needed after violence, including ongoing support and recovery. Schools can provide referral for children and their family members, especially mothers, and be part of the entire integrated system. The Royal Commission heard that at present, referral pathways are under-developed and schools need to augment their capability to effectively respond to family violence.

Findings from the CAARS evaluation highlighted support from leadership, unfamiliarity with external services, and lack of staff knowledge were major issues hindering staff’s referral of families within a response model. It is essential that

schools manage disclosures appropriately by establishing close links with external support services and ensuring that schools have the skill and capability to adequately respond to children’s potential disclosures. Given the sensitivity and complexity of the topic, expertise within the school in these areas is required, and training as well as resources are needed to develop and maintain this. Qualitative research with parents who are survivors and whose children have been exposed to violence, and with service providers, highlighted some of the priorities to support families.

5.5.1 TRAUMA-INFORMED PROGRAMMING

Some research indicates that trauma informed programming can be an effective form of response in school settings. While initial evaluations of trauma-informed programming show positive results, more research and evaluation is required in this emerging field. Children who have been exposed to family violence are at a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder which may further exaggerate developmental problems related to family violence. The Cognitive Behavioural Intervention for Trauma in Schools program (CTBIS) is a school-based, group and individual early trauma intervention developed in the USA. It is designed to reduce symptoms of PTSD, depression and behavioural problems, and to improve functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support and coping skills. It is a classroom based intervention, that is delivered by school-based mental health workers. The program uses a skills-based approach to help children process traumatic memories, express their grief, learn relaxation skills, challenge upsetting thoughts and improve social problem solving. Evaluative research has found that students who participate in the program have significantly fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression and psychosocial dysfunction, and improved mental health and academic outcomes.

The Wilmah and Campsie Women’s Refuges in New South Wales run the Speak Out For Kids program for children aged 5 to 7 years, and the Kids Can program for children aged 8 to 12 years. Both programs are trauma-informed and child-centred, and delivered through creative arts therapy, educational activities and counselling. The program is based on the latest neuro-development research and seeks to build positive neuro-pathways for children who have experienced family violence. While the Speak Out For Kids program focuses on creative arts through breathing exercises and expressive play, the Kids Can program is a cross between education and therapeutic group work. The program specifically involves addressing the impact of family violence, and uses arts and crafts as a medium for children to tell their stories through play. The refuge also runs
5.5.2 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR RESPONSE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Websites can be a non-threatening first stop for those who have experienced or been exposed to family violence, especially for youth. The anonymous and accessible nature of these services can help overcome barriers to service delivery that occur due to fear and concerns about confidentiality. By their nature websites are integrated as they act as a referral and information source and are also relatively cost-effective and easy to incorporate into a school’s set of resources. They can also be important for rural, regional and remote communities where other resources and services may be limited.

Rigorous evaluations of online resources for response are limited. The Kindertelefoon is an anonymous Dutch helpline for children under 18 to discuss a range of concerns, but most commonly sex, relationships, bullying at school and their home life. Children can also chat to a trained volunteer online through the website, with conversations lasting up to 30 minutes. A comparative study of the effect of contacting the organisation by phone or the confidential one-on-one online chat service found that children who contacted Kindertelefoon by both methods experienced a higher sense of well-being and a reduced severity of their problems. The follow-up survey found that the effect of contacting Kindertelefoon lasts for at least one month after the contact, although the effect decreases slightly after that. Australia similarly offers the Kids Helpline, an anonymous online and telephone resource for children ages 5 to 12 and teens and young adults ages 13 to 25. Kids Helpline is a free 24 hour counselling service available for children and youth to discuss a wide range of issues including but not limited to relationships, home life, body image, school, cyberbullying and mental health. While there is no external evaluation reporting on the efficacy of the Kids Helpline, the organisation publishes annual reports on its delivered services as well as key issues affecting young people who contact the service.

5.5.3 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR RESPONSE IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

Websites can be an important resource for rural, regional and remote communities where other resources and services may be limited.

5.6 TRAINING AND CAPABILITY BUILDING FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE

While it is not the role of teachers to be experts or specialists in family violence, it is important that they are appropriately knowledgeable to identify and respond to cases of children experiencing family violence. Educators cannot be expected to take on the full responsibility of tackling family violence on their own, but must be supported by school management and the integrated service system. While evaluations of existing training programs for teachers and school staff around family violence are limited, existing evidence suggests that taking an integrated whole-of-school approach is key for building workforce capacity.

The ‘What’s Ok at Home’ website was developed by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) to offer information and support for children and youth aged 10 to 17 who are living with family violence. The site was re-developed in 2017 from the DVRCV’s award-winning Bursting the Bubble website. The 2005 evaluation of Bursting the Bubble indicated that the site had successfully motivated teenagers to seek help, helped young people identify family violence, and conveyed information about coping strategies. Adults, counsellors and teachers also reported finding the website helpful.

Capacity and capability building of teachers and educational staff is crucial for responding to family violence in the school setting. One study found that where teachers and educational psychologists are offered specific training in child protection, together with online support, guidance and consultation, identification improves and appropriate referrals increase. Training in this area may be particularly effective if it addresses professional’s fears and doubts about what would be best for the child, and their lack of confidence and knowledge about their role in identification, intervention and response.
Capacity and capability building of teachers and educational staff is crucial to addressing family violence in school settings. The available evidence indicates that with proper training, teachers can have an increased capacity to confidently and safely identify and respond to incidences of family violence.

Key Findings

The evaluation of the Children at Risk program in a USA school district found significant change in the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teachers and other professionals who completed the training. In-depth educator training was provided to counsellors, teachers, school nurses, administrators, and school-based law enforcement personnel, who then trained their own staff. The training package included topics such as: bullying, gang violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, family violence, dating violence, living with addicted parents, neglect and abuse. Teachers and educational staff were trained to recognise the warning signs of exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, and safe and effective ways to respond. Directly following the launch of the program, there was an immediate and yearly increase in the number of inquiries and referrals regarding child abuse and family violence within the district.

The Helping Child Victims of Domestic Violence: Implications for School Personnel training program was delivered in 18 different locations in four counties in rural Western New York. The training was developed and designed to be presented to variety of individuals that work in schools, including administrators, teachers, teacher aides, bus drivers and cafeteria staff. The training included an overview of what family violence is, the cycle of abuse, and perpetrator patterns of behaviour. The training also explained the common emotional, behavioural and physical reactions of children who have experienced family violence, and how they could manifest in a school setting, as well as the developmental impact of family violence on children. Teachers and educational staff were trained how best to respond to disclosures of family violence, develop safety plans for victims, follow processes when a family is in a shelter, and handle orders of protection. An evaluation of this program found that it is an effective tool for use in applied school settings. Overall, teachers and educational staff were provided with the necessary skills for identifying signs of family violence, understanding the dynamics of family violence, and strategies for addressing disclosure and cases of family violence. The evaluation further highlighted the need for schools to examine their family violence safety policies procedures.

Outside of the family violence sector, a five-year study in Spain aimed at improving detection of child maltreatment provided school professionals from all the schools in the territory with training on early identification and response measures. Teachers and education staff were provided with training and online support to increase their knowledge around child maltreatment and their capacity to respond to cases of abuse. The specific intervention addressed their concerns about how to respond appropriately and responsibly to reports or suspicions of maltreatment, and increased their knowledge and confidence in detection and response. The results of this training determined an increase in the number of detected cases by teachers and educational staff in schools. Furthermore, the number of cases reported to child protection services also increased.

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This section provides an overview of the existing evidence on best and emerging practices for addressing family violence within the education sector. Best practice includes those approaches for which the evidence base is well-established, and that should inform all work undertaken in this area. Emerging practice includes those approaches for which the evidence on the model’s effectiveness is promising, however further research and uptake is required to become established as best practice across the family violence sector.

6.1 BEST PRACTICE

6.1.1 INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

Broadly, an integrated service delivery approach refers to the collaborative and coordinated efforts of multi-disciplinary service providers working together to provide timely and comprehensive supports for vulnerable children and families. This is the basis of the new Safety and Support Hubs currently under development in Victoria. While there are still questions about the most effective way to implement such an approach, there are several elements that are consistently recognised as important to effective implementation. Governance structures are often raised as being integral for the implementation and sustainability of an integrated system, however a study on integrated service provision found that the professional and managerial culture, and staff time and resources that could be dedicated to fostering effective working relationships between agencies, outweighed the need for structure. The research concluded that formal reporting and information sharing protocol, informal meetings, multi-disciplinary teams, co-location of services, joint training and interagency strategic bodies complement these features in creating an effective integrated system.

Accounting for differences in philosophical and organisational responses to the issue is also important and arguably underpins effective working relationships between service providers. Importantly, services included across the integrated system need to address the key developmental domains of children and the socio-cultural environment. Services include (but are not limited to) maternal and child health practitioners, child welfare and protective services, child care and education, mental health services, drug and alcohol and employment services.

Finally, while there are debates regarding the most effective focus of intervention (i.e. either the family or on the rights of the child), the study found that interventions that target the family as a whole were important; not least because this introduced a wider-range of services into the system. They found shortages of services that

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309 Ross et al. (2011).
311 The study involved child welfare and child protection practitioners from across 12 countries (including Australia) to respond to vignettes on a child welfare case. Practitioners were asked how they think the case would be dealt with in their system. The responses from practitioners were complemented by available government documents regarding response processes and structures, published data on child welfare and protection issues and interviews with key stakeholders.
315 KPMG. (2014).
316 Kat and Hetherington. (2006).
meant they were insufficient to meet the needs of children and families where the likelihood of maltreatment is high, including services for parental substance misuse; work on parenting; services to address young people’s offending behaviour and their drug and alcohol problems; psychotherapeutic support for children and young people; and help with children’s educational problems.

A large-scale review of safeguarding programs and practices, the Safeguarding Children Research Initiative (SCRI) found that, overall, while inter-agency working in the UK is relatively strong in the provision of services, this does not mean they are always sufficient or meet all the families’ needs, or that families take up the services offered. There is also some evidence that referrals do not result in consistent care due to poor communication and gaps in referral pathways, limiting the effectiveness of inter-agency support. The study recommended that staff working in relevant agencies should be required to demonstrate that their practice in inter-agency working is current by completing appropriate, specialised training courses, to better facilitate the integrated service delivery. Further training beyond child protection is required, including working with disabled children, supporting identifying and responding to family violence.

There is currently little to no discussion in the literature around the roles of early childcare settings and schools for delivering family violence-related interventions and emphasizing the importance of integrating education settings with the wider system. Recently with the introduction of RRE, Victoria has begun to solidify the role of schools around early identification and primary prevention of family violence. This gap in the literature highlights the further need to clarify education settings’ roles and responsibilities in an integrated system responding to family violence.

6.1.2 WHOLE-OF-SCHOOL APPROACH

School-based programs have been shown to be effective in improving children’s knowledge and protective behaviours regarding different forms of abuse and violence. While much of the evidence-based regarding the effectiveness of these programs is drawn from research in North America, there is international evidence that highlights the benefits of a whole-of-school approach. Based on an ecological model — whereby what is learnt in the classroom is then reinforced in other aspects of children’s lives — whole-of-school approaches are holistic in that they engage students, parents, teachers and other staff, as well as the wider community, to reinforce change across multiple levels and platforms. While independent evaluations on family violence focused whole-of-school approaches are largely not available, a randomised controlled trial of an anti-bullying program delivered to all students by teachers found that the program moderated peer-reported victimisation, self-reported aggression and aggressive bystanding behaviours compared to control groups.

There are also promising findings from broader violence prevention programs in low-middle income countries, that draw attention to the importance of training and awareness raising about the root causes of family violence, such a gender-based violence. Recently, some successful programs in Australia have moved towards taking whole-of-school approaches in their delivery including RRE, LoveBites, Promoting Healthy Minds for Learning and Living and Safe Schools. However, integrated programs for at-risk groups or individuals are still required as part of secondary prevention strategies and need to be aligned with Respectful Relationships programs. In Victoria, a whole-of-school approach will require effective alignment of the roll-out of Respectful Relationships Education with other early identification, early intervention and response initiatives.

6.1.3 CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

Culturally sensitive and appropriate approaches recognise that experiences of trauma and the needs of survivors are informed by specific socio-cultural contexts. It is important to recognise the cultural and linguistic diversity of children and families, and of designing interventions to suit the needs of diverse families. This is particularly important when working with Koorie children and families and should be pursued through a culturally-led and strengths-based approach to early intervention and response. The body of evidence around cultural appropriateness and adaptation of family violence programming consistently reiterates the importance of accounting for specific cultural attitudes, behaviours and practices of a population. While evidence supporting effectiveness of culturally adapted family violence programs is limited, there are several promising practices that offer guidance in this space. For example, a promising clinical treatment program based on a cultural adaptation trauma-focused cognitive behaviour therapy to address child physical and sexual abuse integrated a suite of indigenous and traditional healing practices. The Honouring Children, Mending the Circle treatment adopted family preservation approaches using genograms, wrap-arounds, talking circles, kinship care, healing ceremonies and kept adoption practices within Native families. It also engaged and tribal elders through the use of storytelling, sweat-lodges and the use of Native languages.

In light of that, it is important that the cultural adaptation accounts for the sociocultural differences between the original target intervention population, and the new one. This is particularly important in light of trends in transferring or adapting violence prevention programs from one country to another. For example, a study on the implementation of the Coaching Boys into Men program from the USA in India found that that facilitators needed significant additional training to understand the key concepts and issues associated with violence. Similarly, the...
6.1 APPLYING A GENDERED LENS

It is well established that a gendered approach should be taken when analysing and addressing forms of family violence such as violence against women.344 A gendered approach to interventions recognises that women are much more likely than men to be victims of family violence, that power and control drive family violence and that violent behaviours are embedded in a complex web of individual, social, cultural and economic factors.345 Therefore programs that seek to address the role that gender plays in family violence must account for these factors, and the broader gendered power dimensions that underpin family violence.346 School based interventions have been shown to address problematic gender-based norms and attitudes in young people, intervening at a crucial age.347

A review of 58 gender-based violence programs found that men and boys can do change problematic attitudes and behaviours associated with sexualities, interactions and relationships with partners and children, and broader notions of violence against women.348 Examples of programs that have been found effective in shifting attitudes towards problematic gender stereotypes are the Safe Dates program and the Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM). The USA-based Safe Dates Program is for middle and high school students and seeks to address violence-supportive norms, enhance healthy relationship skills, and increase protective behaviours (among other aims). It was found to be effective in delivering intervention because of changes in attitudes to gender and dating violence norms.349 The CBIM program has been delivered with promising outcomes in both the USA350 and India.351 The program engages coaches of sports team as models of positive bystander behaviours, which has been argued to support the shift in negative social norms around violence.352 An evaluation of the CBIM program in India found ‘promising changes in gender attitudes and behaviours’ among young male cricketers.353

With partnerships and children, and broader notions of violence against women,354 approaches to the adaptation that include both surface-structure factors (such as language translation, or facilitators from the same cultural background), and much deeper structural changes to the program that are designed to target underlying values and beliefs.355

6.2 EMERGING PRACTICE

6.2.1 CHILD-, YOUTH- AND FAMILY-CENTRED

While reviews of family-centred violence interventions highlighted inconsistent findings in relation to their effectiveness, the evidence suggested that interventions that include direct experiences for children as opposed to just the parents had better outcomes for children.356 Taking a child- or youth-centred approach means putting the child or young person at the centre of the response or intervention, and allowing their needs for support inform the therapeutic response.357 These approaches stress the importance of the child’s views being heard, and their direct engagement in the process. Child-centred approaches emphasise family-sensitive, child-inclusive, strengths-based, collaborative and culturally appropriate approaches to delivering family and social support services.358

Research that directly evaluates child-centred interventions or programs is limited, not least because there are only a small number programs that target children up to 8 years of age in the context of family violence. While evidence from evaluations is limited, a Delphi study found that there was a broad consensus among professionals that work with abused children that the most important features of any treatment were the child-centred approach and factors relating to the therapist, as opposed to the model of therapy.359 The focus on being child-centred was also evidenced in a review of creative therapies as an alternative to clinical healing and restoration. Creative therapies that include play, dance or music have been used in low- and middle-income countries such as Cambodia and in high-income countries, with meta-analysis showing that there are positive impacts across modalities, settings, age, and gender.360

The importance of developing early intervention programs around the family is well documented in the literature and is based on the understanding that children and youth develop and learn in the context of their families.361 There are several approaches that place the family unit at the centre of the intervention, with strong evidence supporting the effectiveness in preventing child abuse and maltreatment.362 Again, strong evaluations are limited, however the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified home visitation programs, parent training programs that foster positive reinforcement, non-violent disciplinary techniques, problem solving and behaviour management skills, cognitive behaviour skills for children and social development programs as promising in reducing aggressive behaviours that often support a trajectory of violence in their adult lives.363
6.2.2 TRAUMA-INFORMED

Trauma-informed care or practice is an approach that is sensitive to, acknowledges and understands trauma-related issues including impacts and potential paths for recovery. Trauma-informed practice does not necessarily mean that the intervention or program being delivered specifically targets or aims to reduce trauma as a key objective. To be clear, trauma-informed care or practice is separate from interventions targeting trauma, such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy. Rather, this approach ensures that organisational structures and daily practices in delivery are sensitive to the trauma recovery processes and that the possibility of traumatisation is reduced. Trauma-informed approaches vary, but must account for the history of the of past and current abuse experiences and provide therapeutic treatment for the negative impacts of such abuse.

There is also some cautionary research relating to this emerging practice. A review of trauma-informed care in child and family welfare services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that there are a limited number of trauma-specific interventions for family violence that have been evaluated using a rigorous research design and that have been shown to be effective, often working with individuals who have experienced a single traumatic incident rather than complex trauma. The review identified a lack of an overarching framework for trauma-informed care in Australia, resulting in varying models and practices and a failure to implement consistent systems of care across child and family services. Challenges to implementation include a lack of clear and shared definitions and practices for trauma-informed care, translating theory into practice within specific services, coordinating care, a lack of guidance for facilitating system change across services, and a lack of evaluation models for trauma-informed care. The review called for further research to better understand the dynamics of this practice with different population groups, including children and adolescents, and across individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Given trauma is experienced within different socio-cultural frames by different communities, it is vital to ensure trauma-informed care programs adopt culturally sensitive and relevant approaches.

KEY FINDINGS

Currently an overarching framework for trauma-informed care in Australia is lacking.

The Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) is a trauma-informed positive education initiative designed to inform teacher practice and student learning at Berry Street’s three specialist campuses. The pilot was rolled out in 2015 in partnership with two Government schools, one primary and prep through twelfth year. The model aims to expand the current methods of teaching and learning by integrating clinical, education and welfare approaches into their practice. Rather than taking the traditional approach, BSEM seeks to take a healing approach by adopting a ‘strengths perspective’. While the evaluation was of limited scope, involving only two schools with no quantitative data, feedback from school leadership at both school settings affirmed the pilot’s positive impact on student wellbeing, achievement, behaviour and engagement. Qualitative data from teacher, student and school leadership perspectives noted the positive affects the program had on student behaviour, the development of relationships, self-awareness and school engagement.
Schools and early childcare settings are key locations for programming on family violence given their contact with children, young people and their families across the first two decades of children’s lives. However, family violence programming in this setting is an emerging field. To ensure safe and ethical implementation, such programming must be evidence-based. This literature review has confirmed that there are substantial gaps in the evidence base on family violence and the education sector including impacts on educational outcomes and evidence of what works to address family violence. While there is considerable global research on child abuse, there is less systematic data on prevalence of broader forms of family violence, particularly in relation to specific communities within Australia, including Koorie children, children from CALD backgrounds, and children with disabilities. This means that while we do know that family violence among children and young people is a serious and prevalent issue, we do not yet completely understand the magnitude of the issue. Moreover, there is an overwhelming lack of research or evidence on the effectiveness of family violence early identification, early intervention and response programming within the education sector. Where evaluations of programming are available, there is often a lack of rigorous, large scale and long-term research, which further contributes to the limited evidence base.

While it is beyond early childcare settings and schools’ remit to deliver response services to children and youth impacted by family violence, they are well-positioned to create links with universal and specialist family violence services. At present, integration of education settings with the wider system of family violence services is underdeveloped, as are referral pathways for responding to cases of family violence in education settings. While the main role of early childcare services and schools in responding to family violence is currently limited to mandatory reporting, it is important for this role to be expanded to include the development of effective response systems, referral pathways and partnerships with appropriate, specialist family violence services.

Building the capability of educators to identify, understand and appropriately respond to family violence remains a significant barrier in addressing family violence in education settings. Currently, there is limited information on training and capability building programs that have been undertaken for educators around family violence. Where information on programming is available, there are few evaluations. Despite the limited evaluation of training and capability building programs, the available evidence indicates that with proper training, teachers can have an increased capability to confidently and safely identify and respond to incidences of family violence. While educators cannot be expected to be family violence specialists, it is important that their capability is built to ensure an understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence, the varied impacts of family violence on children and youth, and the response and referral systems in place in their education setting.

Based on the findings of the literature review, this section presents three priority areas for the education sector to better address and respond to family violence.
7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

7.1.1 PRIORITISE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Effectively addressing family violence requires a solid evidence base which includes the diversity of experience reflected in the Victorian population. Evidence across the Department’s remit including early years and education is needed to understand the prevalence, dynamics and impacts of different manifestations of family violence for children, young people and adolescents as covered in Victorian legislation. This evidence base will also assist in determining and implementing effective interventions and responses.

Key opportunities include:
- Improve the collection, coherence, analysis and use of administrative, program and project data within DET to better identify family violence prevalence – including data on the use of family violence in the home and in intimate relationships, impact, interventions and responses, and effect of interventions and responses.
- Include behavioural and educational short term outcomes in research and, where possible, longitudinal studies with clear feedback into DET system review and improvement processes.
- Promote and share research data and findings across education and family violence systems.
- Ensure the diversity of young people in Victoria is reflected in research, data collection and analysis through incorporation in generalist activities and through initiatives targeted at underrepresented cohorts and those at higher risk of experiencing family violence or encountering barriers to accessing support.
- Ensure that the Department’s existing and new programs, projects and interventions wherever relevant include family violence data as part of the monitoring and/or evaluation process.
- Work collaboratively with Victorian Government Departments, services, and research organisations including academia to share and analyse data, monitor and evaluate family violence programs and projects for young people, and assess combined impacts of programs and sectoral collaboration.

7.1.2 IMPROVE SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Both preventing, and responding effectively to, family violence require a systemic and joint response. In many instances a multi-agency or service approach will be required, which includes the Department and specialist children’s and family violence services. This should incorporate knowledge sharing and a coherent and sustained approach to supporting the young person or people.

Key opportunities include:
- Improve integrated knowledge sharing, support and professional development across the DET educational and early years’ services and with specialist services for referral and consultation.
- Utilise and promote partnerships between DET educational and early years’ services with specialist family services.

7.1.3 PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SECTOR-WIDE TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND CAPABILITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

A workforce which understands family violence issues and impacts for young people and their families, and is competent and confident in identifying, intervening and responding to it is critical to providing effective interventions. The Department’s workforce needs a common base level of knowledge and skill, and specific roles need to have and share a more comprehensive and specialist understanding. This work needs to incorporate and build upon the existing skills and resources within the Department and be cognisant of the Whole of Victorian Government family violence reform activities.

Key opportunities include:
- Implement system-wide workplace training, development and resources beyond mandatory reporting, to identify, respond to and support children and young people affected by family violence in early years and education.
- Improve the clarity of roles and responsibilities for school educational staff, leadership and specialist/wellbeing support roles and develop and implement targeted and specialist training and development opportunities to build and maintain specialist family violence capability and knowledge at school and system level.
- Training and development initiatives should incorporate sensitivity to victim-survivors, as well as cultural sensitivity and understanding of specific issues relating to risks, barriers to support and issues predominantly experienced by diverse cohorts.
- Training and development initiatives should be fit for purpose, monitored, assessed and incorporate an evaluation and improvement cycle.
- Training and development need to be sustainable and ongoing. For example, they need to support ongoing development and capability building across the system and be available for new staff members and those moving into new positions.
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