

Issue: Domestic violence and gender inequality submission – 31 March 2016

Submitting organisation: National Council of Women South Australia

Contact Details: NCW SA House, 95 South Terrace, Adelaide 5000. ph 82319154.

Authorising Person: Name: Dr Wendy Abigail Signature_

Designation/Position in the organisation: State Health Advisor

A. The role of gender inequality in all spheres of life contributing to the prevalence of domestic violence
Workplaces play an important role in supporting victims of domestic violence. Statistics show that the majority of victims are women [1]. Workplaces are ideal for being an avenue to provide support, and for promoting social and cultural changes that could assist in ending violence against women by offering training programs and support services that are easily accessible [1]. Although the benefits for the employer include a more stable workforce and increased productivity [1], programs could have government incentives so that business, large and small, are not adversely affected by increased costs to their business. According to the World Health Organisation, 2011, promoting gender equality is the key to violence prevention [2]. Inequality exists between genders where education is required to address the power imbalance that exists from men against women [2]. Education needs to commence at school level where gender norms and attitudes can be addressed early [1,2]. This needs to include a diverse range of content to address the multicultural society that exists in Australia.

Community programs are also required which use peer education strategies (both male and female) supported by well-trained facilitators to improve outcomes [2]. Consideration needs to be given to multicultural diversity in the community so that gendered positions are sensitively discussed, reviewed, acknowledged and addressed in an appropriate way. Use of community role models or high profile leaders who champion the cause can make an impact and assist in addressing deficits.

Media is an important forum which can either cause inequality and/or promote violence or can assist in preventing domestic violence [2]. How television soap operas, popular shows portray domestic violence can have a positive or negative impact on the audience. Stereotyping of victims, and perpetrators can influence vulnerable audiences. Research needs to be ongoing to investigate the impact on this on DV.

Recommendations

1. Workplace incentive programs to address DV and inequality are developed in consultation with key stakeholders
 2. Government adequately funds appropriately trained professionals to deliver relevant education programs
 3. Education curricula includes dispelling stereotypes which lead to inequality
 4. Culturally sensitive programs are developed taking into consideration ethnic origins where patriarchal societies dominate
 5. Media is continue to be monitored for appropriateness of content which includes gender stereotypes, inequality and DV.
- B. The role of gender stereotypes in contributing to cultural conditions which support domestic violence, including, but not limited to, messages conveyed to children and young people in:**
- a. the marketing of toys and other products
 - b. education, and
 - c. entertainment

Education: early childhood education needs to have in place systems that protect the child and also protects the teachers. One member of the National Council of Women SA states:

"... as a director of a kindergarten for many years I have been involved in several cases of domestic violence Before you can do anything you need proof which is difficult, keeping in mind that children have a vivid imagination. Secondly in all family's fights do occur and are sometimes misinterpreted by the children As a female teacher females are easier to approach then males If you do report a case as is compulsory Parents often know precisely where the information comes from This can develop into unfortunate situations added

to this other parents gossip makes it more difficult. Mothers in domestic violence situations know if they talk and found out they can expect to be abused Physical abuse is often visual mental abuse is harder to detect. It is important not to get involved in family disputes and pulled to one of the party's as parents ask the teachers advice."

Recommendations

1. More safe houses
2. More effective counselling to prevent an abuse to one party firstly without involving the other party at a different location and given the opportunity for a 100% safe discussion
3. Protection for the people involved
4. An involved program at the university teachers course to prepare teachers or all people involved working with families how to handle cases of suspected domestic violence, always considering the welfare of the children as well

C. the role of government initiatives at every level in addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence, including the commitments under, or related to, the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

Ongoing government support is required to address the issue of gender equality and DV in the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children [3]. This includes ensuring that all stakeholders in the community are consulted, that existing programs are formally evaluated and changes made to programs that are ineffective, that research is adequately funded over a long period of time to ensure rigorous findings can inform policies.

D. any other related matters.

An Aboriginal woman living in a remote area is 45 times more likely to experience domestic violence than non-Aboriginal peers [4] and 34 times more likely in urban rural and urban areas. Aboriginal Academics are concerned that the age of victims are getting younger and younger, and currently calls to see domestic abuse of Indigenous women a national crisis [5].

The nature of violence involves women, children, families, and communities, and it is multi-layered, complex and incorporates a history of intergenerational loss, grief, trauma and the impact of colonisation [6]. Hence, the causes and risk factors are poverty, unemployment, lack of education, racism, substance abuse, loss of identity, oppression, marginalization and loss of land and traditional culture [4, 7, 8, 9].

According to Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, the ripple effect of this type of violence is huge [10] as children growing up in a violent family believe that when they grow up this is a normal family environment.

In 2008 Aboriginal men gathered to discuss how they could prevent domestic violence and why Aboriginal men were violent. This led to the The Inteyerrkwe Statement against domestic violence [8, 9, 11]. Success in dealing with family violence is forged by community engagement, empowering partnerships and connection with culture and traditions, empowering women and increasing Aboriginal staff [12].

More programs are being developed in response to the domestic violence in Aboriginal families, such as the 20-day training program run by We Al-li for Aboriginal women at the Alice Springs Correction Centre (ASCC) in September 2015. The Educaring program was contracted by the Kunga family violence program to address violence in the context of intergenerational violence with the aim of diverting a return to violence as the norm upon exit from the justice system.

Recommendations

There is a call for action and focus on more longitudinal programs to help Aboriginal families in this dire spiral of family violence.

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