

Public Health Association of New Zealand

Policy on Family/whanau Violence

The Public Health Association of New Zealand notes that:

All violence is unacceptable. This policy addresses violence in the family/whanau. Family/whanau violence is a significant public health issue with far reaching health implications

Family/whanau violence involves an unequal distribution of power and the use of this power as a means of dominating and controlling.

It includes:

- Partner abuse[#]
- Child abuse/neglect
- Adult abuse/neglect (abuse/neglect of older people, people with disabilities or of parents by their children)
- Sibling abuse.

The Domestic Violence Act 1995, defines family violence as physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse (designed to humiliate, degrade and intimidate). In addition, it is widely recognised to also include social abuse (through isolation, deprivation of liberty etc) and economic abuse (including deprivation of basic necessities, seizure of income or assets etc).

Family/whanau violence:

- occurs in all cultures, backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances
- “the large majority of adult victims of serious domestic violence have been women and their abusers have been men.”ⁱⁱ Abuse of elderly people, people with disabilities and violence by women against men also occurs.
- there is substantial overlap between the occurrence of child abuse and partner abuse. The likelihood of co-occurrence of child abuse increases with increasing frequency of partner abuse.ⁱⁱ The co-occurrence is more pronounced with male perpetrators than with female.ⁱⁱⁱ
- the effects of family/whanau violence on individuals and communities are severe and wide-ranging
 - Pregnancy is a time of high risk for women. Abuse during pregnancy is a significant risk for low birth weight, maternal low weight gain, infections and anaemia.^{iv}
 - Abused women are five times more likely to use psychiatric services than non-abused women.^v

[#] “Partner abuse is physical or sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, or threat of physical or sexual violence which occurs between intimate partners” “Intimate partners include current spouses (including de facto spouses), current non-marital partners (including dating partners, heterosexual or same sex partners) and former marital and former non-marital partners” – Ministry of Health 2001. Core elements for health care provider response to victims of family violence. www.moh.govt.nz

- 15% of women's Refuge residents had a permanent disability as the result of battering.^{vi}
- Child abuse and neglect have detrimental effects on children's physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development.^{vii}
- Family/whanau violence can result in the loss of lives, the creation of unsafe environments, and can contribute to the perpetuation of negative personal behaviours.

The Ministry of Health reports that in New Zealand

- about 400 women are hospitalised annually from assault
- eleven women die from assault each year
- twenty-one percent of New Zealand men say they have physically abused their partners in the previous year.^{viii}

In addition:

- an estimated 15%^{ix} to 35%^x of women are hit or forced to have sex by their partners at least once in their lifetime, while 7% of men report experiencing this type of abuse^{xi}
- 90% of partner homicides in New Zealand were committed by men against their female partners or ex-partners^{xii}
- New Zealand has the fifth highest rate of female murders in a survey of the top 25 industrialised nations conducted by Harvard University^{xiii}
- an estimated 12% of psychological distress and 7% of serious physical illness in New Zealand women is attributable to family violence^{xiv}
- An estimated 18% of children experience sexual abuse. For girls this proportion is 25 to 30%^{xv}

It is estimated that family/whanau violence costs the New Zealand health system over \$141 million each year.^{xvi}

The Public Health Association affirms the following principles in relation to family/whanau violence:

- Everyone has the right to live free from violence or fear of violence
- Family/whanau violence is abuse of power
- Family/whanau violence is a public health issue, as well as a crime. It should not be tolerated in our society
- The unique customary and contemporary structures of whanau, hapu and iwi must be recognised, provided for and fully engaged^{xvii}
- Communities have a responsibility to act to prevent violence in families/whanau
- Public health interventions should aim to protect the most vulnerable in our society

- All agencies have an obligation to respond effectively and appropriately. They should establish a protocol of co-operation between them to ensure the best quality of service and safety to people experiencing family violence
- There should be a strong focus on prevention and early intervention strategies that should be adequately resourced and culturally appropriate
- Victims of family violence should have access to well co-ordinated services, including access to safe housing and adequate income
- All services and interventions should enable the victims of family violence to take control of their lives by providing appropriate opportunities and choices
- The majority of societal efforts to address family violence in New Zealand have been by agencies (such as the criminal justice system and child protection agencies) and non-Governmental organisations (such as Refuge). These agencies and organisations provide critical assistance most often in only the most extreme cases. Health services are well placed to intervene at an early stage

The Public Health Association believes the following steps should be taken:

- Government and society should be encouraged to adopt a policy of zero tolerance towards violence with the clear message that all violence is unacceptable. This should be facilitated by programmes that actively work towards the dismantling of beliefs and behaviours that support family violence, and as a priority, violence against women and children^{xviii}
- The Government should formally adopt relevant national and international policies, for example United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and United Nations Declaration on the elimination of Discrimination against Women
- The Government must repeal S.59 of the Crimes Act 1961 (to remove the defence of reasonable force for the purposes of correcting children)
- The Government should support a community and whole-of-Government approach, including public education, to all forms of violence, and to violence against women and children in particular
- The Government further resource education and support for parents and families as signalled in Goal 3(iii) of Te Rito – NZ Family Violence Prevention Strategy
- The Ministry of Health should take a lead in the development with communities and with other agencies, of population strategies to reduce family violence. In particular these processes should actively involve hapu and iwi in the design and delivery of public health interventions or programmes, according to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi
- The Ministry of Health should lead the implementation of institutional change to enable health and disability service providers to assess and refer cases of violence as recommended in the MoH's DHB Toolkit to reduce interpersonal violence

- Public health agencies should provide public education about family violence
- People who work with women, children and families across sectors should be trained to recognise and deal appropriately with incidents of family violence
- Agencies such as Police and Courts should ensure ongoing training for their people, not only in Family Violence law, but also in the implications of violence on victims' ability to continue a normal life
- The Ministries of Health and Social development should include data on violence against women in the next edition of "The Social Report: Indicators of social well-being in New Zealand."

Adopted by PHA AGM 27 June 2002

References

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- ^{xvi} Snively, S. 1994. The New Zealand economic cost of family violence. Wellington. Family Violence Unit. Department of Social Welfare
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Family/whanau violence

Companion Paper

Actions The Public Health Association could undertake:

- Raise the profile of family violence within the organisation
- Build coalitions and encourage collaboration of agencies / organisations at a national and local level to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the protection of women and children
- Promote the message that communities and individuals have a right and responsibility to be involved in preventing violence in families/whanau
- Participate in the inter-agency working group to support the implementation plan for the Family violence Prevention Action Plan (Te Rito)
- Participate in the development of population strategies to reduce family violence and institutional change to enable health and disability service providers to assess and refer cases of violence as recommended in the MoH's DHB Toolkit to reduce Interpersonal violence.