

The Treatment of Family Violence Perpetrators in Victorian Magistrates' Court Bail Support Programs.

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Research Theme: Service Responses and Interventions.

Three Key Words: Perpetrator interventions, research informing practice, innovation

Abstract

Background

In response to the Victorian Government's commitment to address the issue of Family Violence, the Magistrates' Court of Victoria has undertaken to improve its program responses. There has been a rapid increase of family violence perpetrators being referred to Bail Support Programs leading to a need to review the programs practices.

Project Summary:

- Focusing on the two bail support programs, the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) and CREDIT/Bail Support Program and one specialist court, the Assessment and Referral Court (ARC) List, this research looked at the interactions between family violence offenders and court based programs. The research set out to determine international evidence to inform practice in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.

Process

- A literature review was conducted looking at international responses to addressing family violence offenders. Research focused on innovations in Massachusetts, US and Glasgow, Scotland. Both provided some best practice evidence within the justice system for sharing information on family violence perpetrators
- Innovations such as partner contact which is not currently utilised by the court for family violence perpetrators, were also investigated.
- Focus groups were convened with court support staff to discuss service delivery to family violence perpetrators. The risk management and monitoring innovations suggested by the literature were a significant change from the current therapeutic model

Findings and Conclusions

The literature concluded that a greater emphasis on risk management must be incorporated into the current supportive case management model. It was found that this approach will reduce death and injury due to further family violence.

- It further concluded that stronger tools of risk management would reduce the occurrence of family violence.
- Recommendations around the modality of therapeutic programs for perpetrators were made. Men's Behavior Change Programs were found to be scarce and had long waiting lists. The research also found that Men's Behavior Change Programs do not work for all perpetrators including high risk offenders who need on-one-one psychological intervention and CALD perpetrators.
- There were concerns that staff may be reluctant to change their therapeutic approach to case management to an increasingly monitoring role. This concern was unfounded as staff were already operating in this space in their efforts to reduce reoffending but required policy and procedure support for their practice.
- Innovative recommendations for policy and procedure change was made including greater collaboration with other court areas particularly the family violence jurisdiction and external family violence agencies.

References

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Learning Objectives

The Research set out to determine:

1. The difficulties and strengths of working with family violence perpetrators on bail support programs?
2. International best practice for working with family violence perpetrators to address and reduce family violence?
3. Policy and procedure changes that are necessary to reduce family violence in Court Support Programs
4. Theoretical underpinnings for changes to the case management model currently being delivered by Court Support programs
5. How collaboration between Court Support Programs. The Family Violence Unit of the Magistrates' Court and external family violence agencies can reduce the occurrence of family violence.

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Rhiannon is a Project Officer for the Magistrate's Court of Victoria Court Support and Diversion Services. She has also worked as a Case Manager and advanced Case Manager for the CREDIT/Bail, Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) and the Assessment and Referral Court (ARC). Rhiannon completed a Bachelor of Arts majoring in psychology at Monash University and in 2015 completed a Masters of Public Policy at RMIT University. This research formed part of Rhiannon's Capstone for her masters.

