Domestic and family violence and parenting: insights from practice and research

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Chief Investigator
Parenting and Abuse and Coercive Tactics Project
ANROWS Inaugural Conference, 25 February, 2016
● Lead organisation: Australian Institute of Family Studies (Dr Rae Kaspiew, Dr Lixia Qu, Ms Ruth Weston PSM, Dr Briony Horsfall)

● Partner Organisations:

● University of Melbourne (Professor Cathy Humphreys and Dr Fiona Buchanan).

● Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University (Professor Jan Nicholson, Professor Angela Taft, Ms Leesa Hooker)
Complex, multi-layered issues

- Parenting capacity
  - Impact DFV on mothers
  - Parenting style of fathers who are perpetrators of DFV

- Children
  - Impact of DFV exposure
  - Impact of exposure to parenting style of perpetrators

Significant challenges for parent/child relationships
Multiple policy and practice frameworks intersect

- Maternal and child health
- Child protection: exposure to DFV grounds for intervention
- Family violence support services
- Post separation responses
  - Family law system: legal and service sector responses
The PACTs project is focused on three main research questions:

1. How does DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
2. How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive this has affected their relationship with their children?
3. To what extent have these mothers had contact with services and agencies in the child protection, family law and DFV systems?
State of Knowledge Report

- Ms Leesa Hooker, Dr Rae Kaspiew, Professor Angela Taft, January 2015

Quantitative evidence (Professor Jan Nicholson, Dr Lixia Qu)

- the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
- AIFS Family Pathways Suite
- the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF)

Qualitative Study (Dr Rae Kaspiew, Professor Cathy Humphreys, Dr Fiona Buchanan)

- Interviews with women who have been involved with services and organisations (child protection, family law, family violence) in relation to family violence and parenting
- Recruiting participants now
The Advisory Group is a critical aspect of the project. It consists of representatives from:

- DV Victoria;
- National Network of Women’s Legal Centres;
- Women’s Legal Service Victoria;
- No To Violence;
- SA Uniting Communities;
- Anglicare WA;
- Department of Health and Human Services Victoria;
- Attorney General’s Department.

Supports nexus between research, practice and policy
Emerging insights from the Family Pathways data sets
• LSSF: National study of approximately 10,000 parents (with child under 18yrs) separated after 2006 reforms, registered with Child Support in 2007
  ◆ Provides longitudinal picture, 5 years post-separation
• SRSP 2012 and 2014: National surveys each about 6,000 parents (with child under 18yrs), samples pre and post 2012 family violence amendments, parents registered with Child Support
• Cross-sectional picture – comparisons between mothers and fathers and care arrangements by violence & abuse
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LSSF W1 (%)</th>
<th>LSSF W2 (%)</th>
<th>LSSF W3 (%)</th>
<th>SRSP 2012 (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fathers</strong></td>
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<td>Majority time (66-100 of nights)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of parents</td>
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<td>4271</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Majority time (66-100 of nights)</td>
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<td>3310</td>
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Note: percentages are based on weighted data. Numbers of parents are unweighted.
• LSSF: Any violence/abuse reported
  ◆ Both before/during & since separation: mothers 50% cf. fathers 40%
  ◆ Before/during separation only: mothers 16% cf. fathers 14%
  ◆ Since separation only: mothers 14% cf. fathers 15%
  ◆ No violence/abuse reported: mothers 20% cf. fathers 31%

• SRSP: Any violence/abuse reported
  ◆ Both before/during & since separation: mothers 57% cf. fathers 49%
  ◆ Before/during separation, not since: mothers 13% cf. fathers 11%
  ◆ Since separation only: mothers 6% cf. fathers 8%
  ◆ No violence/abuse reported: mothers 24% cf. fathers 33%

• Physical hurt before/during and after separation:
  ◆ Mothers reports more frequent than fathers in both studies
Emerging findings from new analyses comparing experiences of parents’ with and without family violence in relation to:

- Parenting stress
- Parents’ satisfaction with relationships with children
- Well-being outcomes for children

Also examining whether there are differences in these areas by different parenting arrangements.
Parenting Stress: LSSF

- Low-moderate parenting stress across care-time arrangements overall but gendered differences

- Violence/abuse: Significantly higher parenting stress
  - Mothers with majority care and violence/abuse
    - Higher parenting stress with violence/abuse before/during separation (wave 1) and in last 12 months after (wave 2)
  - Fathers with majority care and violence/abuse before/during separation (wave 1)
- High ratings of satisfaction with relationship overall
  - Mothers significantly more satisfied
- Violence/abuse and care-time arrangements:
  - Presence of violence/abuse reports associated with significantly lower satisfaction than those without violence/abuse reported
  - Of parents with shared care: violence/abuse was also linked with sustained lower satisfaction compared with parents with shared care and no violence
● Child's wellbeing lower when violence/abuse reported in families than no violence/abuse
● Child’s development worse in one or more areas than other children (LSSF and SRSP)
  ◆ Mothers with majority care and violence/abuse
  ◆ Shared care and violence/abuse (mothers and fathers)
● Child’s social-emotional development significantly lower with persistent violence/abuse over time
  ◆ Violence/abuse reported in three waves of LSSF, all care arrangements, both mothers and fathers
● Behavioural problems (LSSF and SRSP)
Advisory group – insights from practice
Significant amount of knowledge about ongoing tactics of abuse and impact on mothering rests with practitioners;

Practitioners in legal practice and services (including educative and therapeutic services) work with these tactics and women experiencing them everyday.
Identified by practitioners in our Advisory Group

- Diminished value of primary carer in post separation law and practice
- Difficulty in establishing history of family violence and making tactics of abuse visible in legal/court practice
- Practice paradigms – eg typologies – militate against a history of family violence being taken into account in assessing parenting capacity
- Insufficient expertise in family violence in family law system
- Victims of family violence appear irrational, perpetrators seem reasonable
- Little scope to examine children’s lived experiences
Tactics

Identified by practitioners in our Advisory Group

- Undermining mother’s parenting: contradicting rules and standards, encouraging disrespect, modelling abusive behaviour
- Direct interference – preventing mother from providing appropriate care – eg comfort if distressed
- Indirect interference – abuse undermines confidence, ability to focus on needs of child
Abusing systems

Identified by practitioners in our Advisory Group

- Repeated reports to child protection services
- Repeated court action in multiple forums
- Using court action for collateral purposes
  - Maintain abuse and control by necessity for continued engagement through parenting arrangements
  - Court proceedings used to maintain abuse e.g., cross examination by self-represented litigants
State of Knowledge (Hooker et al., 2016)
• Patchy empirical evidence on DFV and parents, including prevalence of DFV and impact on parenting;

• DFV is a diverse phenomenon: limited detailed empirical insight that would provide understanding of the implications of this;

• Issues are multi-directional – impact on mothering capacity, impact of DFV exposure of child + implications of potentially compromised mothering + implications of exposure to abusive parenting style of fathers who perpetrate DFV

Hooker et al., 2016
Evidence on impact of DFV is inconsistent

- Heterogeneity of women, their circumstances, the nature of the abuse they experience
- Different methodological approaches in exploring the issues

Overall, studies suggest DFV adversely affects mothering capacity although there is significant variability in the nature and extent of these effects

Resilient and supportive mothering despite DFV occurs but better evidence about this is required

Hooker et al., 2016
Exposure to DFV (indirect and direct) has a range of adverse effects of children

- Again, diversity of experience makes this a complex area
- Exposure can effect brain development and social, emotional and educational effects are also evident
- Greater risk of behavioural, physical and mental health problems – anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct problems

DFV creates mothering challenges through negative impact on parenting capacity and child development and behaviour
Developing practice

- Development of therapeutic and other responses to address impact of DFV on mother-child relationships are in early stages
- Very little therapeutic work on DFV and father-child relationships

Hooker et al., 2016
Varied approaches in programs to address DFV exposure and mothering

- Prevention and early intervention eg home visiting by health professionals (US)
- Peer support eg MOthers Advocates in the Community (Australia)
- Interventions designed to heal mother-child relationships including those based on trauma and attachment theory

Hooker et al., 2016
Family violence has significant implications for parenting and child well-being

- Impact on child’s behaviour
- Parenting stress
- Some perpetrators deliberately use tactics to undermine mother/child relationship

Empirical evidence is limited

- PACTs project will build the evidence on the basis of quantitative analyses
- Qualitative component: mothers’ experiences will support understanding of tactics and responses that help or hinder recovery
• ANROWS – for funding the research
• The PACTs Advisory Group
• Attorney General’s Department – for funding the SRSP and LSSF Surveys (LSSF Wave 1 co-funded with Families, Housing, Communities and Indigenous Affairs, now Department of Social Services)
