Freedom from violence – the child rights issue of our time
Role of the National Children’s Commissioner

As National Children’s Commissioner, my work is guided by the United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

The four central principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are:

- Non-discrimination (article 1)
- Best interests of the child (article 3)
- Voice and participation (article 12)
- Protection, development and survival (article 6)
Children told me….

All children should have equal access to education
All children should be cared for
I think that everyone should be safe
I am happiest when my family is happy and healthy
Young people should have sexual health clinics
There should be no violence
Life would be better if there was no drugs or bad stuff
Every child should have healthy food
There should be no bullies
Everyone should have a family
There should be housing for everyone
We should all be able to access services like headspace
There should be housing for everyone

"Life better would be better if….The government encourages people who are violent to stop”

Young person, in response to Commissioner's 2013 survey
Self harm and suicidal behaviour

• Kids helpline 2012/13: 11,180 suicide and 18,737 self harm contacts.
  – Co-presenting concerns related to family relationships and conflict were 17.8% and 17.3% of contacts respectively
‘Every child who suicided in the last 12 months came from a domestic violence family’

- Police officer at Queensland roundtable

Two Frameworks

Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business

National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020
Examination into the impact of family and domestic violence on children
Physical and emotional abuse

- In Australia there is no national data on the proportion of child protection notifications that relate to family and domestic violence,
- It is estimated that family and domestic violence is present in 55% of physical abuses and 40% of sexual abuses against children
- During 2013-14, 40,844 children were the subjects of substantiated child protection notifications in Australia.
- Of these, emotional abuse was the most common type of abuse.
Children’s exposure to family and domestic violence

• AIHW 2014 *Specialist Homelessness Services 2013–14*

  – Of the 254,001 clients who were assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2013–14
    • 59% were female
    • more than a quarter (just under 70,000) were children
    • 16% were under ten years of age
    • 24% of these clients reported family and domestic violence as the main reason for seeking assistance
Children as victims – assaults

• Between 2010 and 2014
  – Over 14,000 police recorded child victims of physical assault by a family member (NSW, SA, ACT, NT)
  – Over 12,000 police recorded child victims of sexual assault by a family member (NSW, VIC, QLD, TAS, NT, ACT)

Children as victims – homicide

• In the period 2002 – 2012, there were 229 child filicide cases

• 51% of all filicide cases (homicides where the victim is the child of the offender) involved children aged between 1 to 9 years:
  – 32 % were children under the age of one
  – 11% were children aged 10 to 14 years
  – 2 % were children aged 15 to 17 years

• In all age categories for children under 18, filicide was the most common form of family and domestic violence homicide, except for 15 to 17 year olds (intimate partner homicide)

Tracy Cussen and Willow Bryant, ‘Domestic/family homicide in Australia’ (Research Paper No 38, Research in Practice Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2015)
ABS 2012 Personal Safety Survey - estimates

- 839,400 adult women and 596,400 adult men first experienced physical abuse by a family member between 0 to 14 years

- 515,200 adult women and 97,800 adult men first experienced sexual abuse by a family member between 0 to 14 years
Overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

Estimate of Indigenous child population aged 0 to 17 years compared with proportion of police recorded child victims of physical assault and sexual assault aged 0 to 17 years who were Indigenous, by jurisdiction (2010–2013)
Between January 2012 and December 2014, 999 contacts were directly related to family and domestic violence

- 14% of contacts were made by children from CALD backgrounds
- 42% were 13 years old or under
- 32% were 14-15 years old
- 26% were 16-17 years old

- 40% - largest proportion - in relation to exposure to violence between parents, or between a parent and a partner or ex-partner
- 23% also raised concerns about physical child abuse
- 12% raised concerns about emotional child abuse
- 14% involved violence by siblings
Proportion of child victims who reported the offender was their sibling, by Indigenous status and by jurisdiction (2010–2013)

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Recorded Crime – Victims, Australia
Obligation sits with all of us to understand and prioritise the relationship between early life experiences and cognitive, social, emotional and physical health and the consequences of chronic exposure to violence for the unborn child and in early childhood.

…

We must remain dedicated and advocate for children exposed to family violence, ensuring their experiences are validated and they are acknowledged to be victims of these violent crimes even if they are not at a developmental age to articulate their experiences. Initially I was the only one deemed as a primary victim of the crime. The system failed to view or recognise my daughter and her suffering.

– Kristy McKellar, advocate
Thank you

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