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Emerging issues in domestic/family violence research

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This paper presents an overview of some of the key emerging issues in Australian domestic and family violence (D/FV) research. In particular, the paper considers research in the context of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) communities; among the elderly; those with disabilities and people from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; family violence and Indigenous communities; the relevance of homelessness; the impact of D/FV on children; and issues around perpetrator programs.

In March 2009, the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCRVWC) released *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021*, which identified six key outcome areas:

- communities are safe and free from violence:
- relationships are respectful;
- services meet the needs of women and their children;
- responses are just;
- perpetrators stop their violence; and
- systems work together effectively (NCRVWC 2009).

The strategies for each of these outcome areas include 'build[ing] the evidence base', noting that

> data relating to violence against women and their children in Australia is poor. Data on services sought by, and provided to, victims is not readily available, and the way in which information is reported is generally inconsistent and does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of violence against women (NCRVWC 2009: 47).

Some of the means proposed for improving the evidence base include:

- establishing a minimum dataset disaggregated by sex and segmented by marginalised groups (eg ATSI and CALD communities and women with disabilities) wherever possible. Where this is not possible, this should be complemented by targeted research (Strategy 1.5.2);
- developing a national evaluation approach to assess the effectiveness of service responses to women and children who have experienced violence, including women with disabilities, living in a range of settings (3.4.1);
- research on the specific needs of older women affected by violence, especially sexual violence, to ensure services are responsive to their particular needs (3.4.4);
- reviewing, updating and promulgating standards and good practice guidelines to support programs for women and children who have experienced violence to assure quality service (3.4.5);
- national benchmarking of substantive law, evidence and procedure, including which provisions are best able to provide a just legal response for victims (4.5.1);
- funding and delivering a perpetrator research agenda, including longitudinal research on what changes problem behaviour; what maintains behavioural change; the utility of risk assessment tools and the effectiveness of various recidivism reduction strategies, taking account of different offender characteristics and cultures (5.4.1) and evaluation of programs consistent with Indigenous cultures (5.4.3);
- undertaking research to identify the impacts of daily trauma on the neurological development of children who are victims of sexual assault and D/FV and the intersection of these impacts on their long-term ability to self-regulate and control their behaviour (5.4.2); and
- investigating and establishing the minimum level of services and infrastructure required in different geographical settings to achieve minimum prevention and response outcomes (6.3.4; NCRVWC 2009).

Morgan and Chadwick (2009) recently called for further in-depth research into the nature and extent of domestic violence, particularly in vulnerable communities, while Tually et al. (2008) identified the following as areas for further research in a report prepared for the Office of Women:

- the extent and impact of D/FV on women in remote mining communities and the capacity of regional domestic violence services to meet the needs of women in these areas;
- how to better support women from CALD backgrounds on 457 visas;
- a national study investigating the accessibility of D/FV services for women with disabilities;
- long-term research on the housing and support needs of women affected by family violence in remote Indigenous communities;
- income support measures for women affected by D/FV;
- housing assistance measures for women affected by D/FV;
- what long-term support is needed by, and what works for, women affected by D/FV; and
- an extensive examination (and ongoing examination) of the support and housing models/ programs assisting women affected by D/FV across Australia and overseas.

Gaby Marcus, Director of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC), recently suggested the following key research priority issues, some of which are considered in this paper:

- victims' compensation and access to legal and support services generally (see Barrett Meyering 2010);
- prevention issues, especially in relation to homicide;
- data collection and the need for common datasets;
- consideration of women as perpetrators; and
- the unintended consequences of law reform measures, including pro-arrest policies (G Marcus personal communication 13 Jan 2010).

On 28 January 2010, the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Robert McClelland (2010), released three reports examining the operation of the family law system and how the family law courts deal with cases involving family violence, namely:

- *Evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms* (Kaspiew et al. 2009);
- *Family courts violence review* (Chisholm 2009); and
- *Improving responses to family violence in the family law system: An advice on the intersection of family violence and family law issues* (Family Law Council 2009).

All three reports found that 'the family law system has some way to go in effectively responding to issues relating to family violence' (McClelland 2010: np). In light of these reviews, research on legal issues, such as the consequences of law reform measures and courts, will not be explored in detail here, although the importance of such research (eg see David et al. 2009; Douglas 2007) is acknowledged.

Key issues in domestic and family violence research

This section presents a brief overview of some of the principal emerging issues in D/FV research, which have been selected for their topicality and their relevance to the NCRVWC priorities.

Domestic and family violence in rural and remote communities

There is conflicting evidence on the prevalence of D/FV in rural and remote areas, with some research indicating higher rates than in urban areas (see Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics 2006; Cripps et al. 2009; Women's Services Network 2000), while other research suggests the contrary (Henstridge et al. 2007). The prevalence and incidence of D/FV in rural communities has been given limited attention in Australia (see Cheers et al. 2006; La Nauze & Rutherford 2000; Wendt 2009, 2008).

The available research has focused predominantly on factors that keep rural women trapped in violent relationships, such as financial insecurity, dependency, and stress; a perceived lack of confidentiality and anonymity; and stigma attached to the public disclosure of violence. Carrington (2007: 91) has likewise examined the key factors which contribute to a 'cloak of silence' in respect of D/FV which operates to sustain the architecture of rural life'. As Women's Health Victoria (WHV) noted recently, lack of transport options coupled with often poor telecommunications services can make it difficult to escape or seek help for violence and women in isolated areas may have fewer opportunities to be economically independent of their partners (WHV 2009). It should be noted that while most of these issues, especially in respect of service provision, are equally apposite in respect of Indigenous perpetrators and victims, there are also separate issues in such contexts, such as enhanced visibility due to more time spent in public space (Carrington 2007).

There is more limited research available about rural men and D/FV and a dearth of perpetrator programs in such settings (NCRVWC 2009). Jamieson and Wendt (2008) recently examined men's perpetrator programs in small rural communities and found that there was an urgent need for a holistic approach to address D/FV in such settings, as well as for funding for transport to enable rural men to attend perpetrator programs in other locations. Wendt and Campbell (2009) have noted that isolation, beliefs about rural masculinity which encourage stoicism and repressed emotions, and limited access to, and use of, medical and health facilities all indicate that rural men require different assistance to men from urban areas to understand and address their use of violence against their partners and families. They argued that further empirical research is needed to explore the connections between D/FV and rural ideologies and masculinities. As noted above (Tually et al. 2008), research is also required into the extent and impact of D/FV in remote communities and the capacity of regional D/FV services to meet women's needs. Critically, research in this area should be formulated in a way which determines necessary service requirements for prevention and response outcomes in rural and remote settings, in accordance with Strategy 6.3.4 (NCRVWC 2009).

Domestic and family violence in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities

Jeffries and Ball (2008) argued that the Australian criminological and social science research community has largely been silent on the issue of same-sex domestic violence (SSDV). Pitts et al. (2006) conducted an online survey with 5,476 Australians who identified as GLBTI and described D/FV as a

hidden issue in the gay and lesbian community. Indeed, the authors suggested that 'many GLBTI people do not identify family violence when they experience it because of a lack of recognition of its existence in same sex relationships' (Pitt et al. 2006: 51). Notwithstanding this limitation, the report found that 33 percent of respondents had been in a relationship with an abusive partner, although it was not clear whether this was within the context of a same-sex relationship. In a later study of 390 Victorian respondents, 31 percent of GLBT respondents had been in a same sex relationship where they were subject to abuse by their partner, with lesbians more likely than gay men to report such abuse (41% vs 29%; Leonard et al. 2008). A recent study has found that the prevalence, types and contextual triggers of violence in male same-sex relationships parallel abuse in opposite sex relationships (Kay & Jeffries forthcoming).

WHV noted that one form of violence which is specific to GLBTI relationships is the abusive partner 'outing' or threatening to 'out' their partner to family, friends, colleagues or the general community (WHV 2009); similar issues may arise in terms of disclosing HIV positive status (Chan 2005). Irwin (2008: 208) found that the lesbians she interviewed were unsure about 'what was acceptable, unacceptable or normal behaviour' in such relationships. In addition, SSDV victims may be particularly vulnerable due to isolation from their support networks and may feel that acknowledging the existence of the violence may further feed any homophobia (WHV 2009).

In a study by Pitts et al. (2006), of those participants who had experienced abuse, only one in 10 had reported the abuse to the police; this rose to 18 and 19 percent respectively for those who reported being hit or forced to have sex. Pitt et al. (2006: 52) acknowledged police measures to improve relationships with GLBTI people which 'appear to be having some positive impact and should be developed further'. By way of example, the NSW Attorney-General's Department (2003) Domestic Violence Interagency Guidelines state the importance of police officers contacting gay and lesbian liaison officers in appropriate circumstances. It was also recently reported that NSW Police and the Anti-Violence Campaign would collaborate in 2010 on a campaign to encourage GLBT victims of crime to come forward, with specific reference to D/FV incidents (Potts 2009).

One issue of concern to Pitt et al. (2006) was the lack of referral options for female perpetrators and male victims within mainstream services. Leonard et al. (2008) found that only six percent of GLBT people who reported same-sex partner abuse to police were referred to advice or support services. In 2006, Victoria Police reported that there were no publicly-funded family violence counselling agencies to which they could refer male victims of same sex partner abuse and Leonard et al. (2008: 50) inferred that 'domestic and sexual violence services may not be meeting the needs of victims of same sex partner abuse'.

Zhou (2009) has suggested that although the NCRVWC's Plan of Action explicitly acknowledges domestic violence in lesbian relationships (eg see Zhou 2009: 138), it excludes such violence in gay male relationships and does not recognise the unique aspects of SSDV. Future research in this context should include research on the frequency and prevalence of GLBTI D/FV and the contexts in which it occurs; consideration of the impact of such violence on the individual and community generally; information on help seeking and the provision of safe and relevant services; furthering awareness of the incidence and perceptions of and responses to GLBTI domestic violence; and the development of inclusive policy responses (see Irwin 2008; Jeffries & Ball 2008).

Domestic and family violence and the elderly

In 2005, the *Personal Safety Survey Australia* (ABS 2006) found that the proportion of women aged 45 years and older reporting physical violence against themselves in the past 12 months had increased significantly since 1996 (from 15% to 25%), while the rate for women aged 55 years and over increased even more markedly (4% vs 10%; McFerran 2009a). In addition, 26 percent of women aged 55 years and over had experienced violence from their current partner (ABS 2006). Morgan and Chadwick (2009) noted that older women are much more likely to experience violence and abuse than their male counterparts and the majority of victims are long-term victims. According to WHV (2009), however, there may be a change in perpetrators, with women reporting children, grandchildren, other relatives and carers, as abusers. Kurrle (2004) suggested that up to 90 percent of abusers of older people in Australia are close family. In addition, the nature of the abuse may change, for example, from physical and sexual abuse to more emotional and financial abuse, with the latter the most commonly suspected form of abuse (Bagshaw, Wendt & Zannettino 2009b).

In 2009, the ADFVC released two papers on violence against older people, which identified many of the barriers older people face in reporting abuse and leaving abusive situations, including:

- diminished cognitive functioning and mental or physical disability;
- lack of awareness of what amounts to abuse;
- social alienation;
- being too old to re-enter the workforce;

- having too much invested in families or partners to leave; and
- a perceived or actual lack of access to services (see Bagshaw, Wendt & Zannettino 2009b; McFerran 2009a, 2009b).

A current project funded by the Australian Research Council is seeking to develop, trial and evaluate models of mediation to prevent financial abuse of older people by their families (see Bagshaw, Wendt & Zannettino 2009a). The authors of that project also call for qualitative research to explore older people's experiences of abuse to recognise the social and cultural context and diversity of experiences and develop appropriate responses (Bagshaw, Wendt & Zannettino 2009b). Research on this topic should be referrable to Strategy 3.4.4 (NCRVWC 2009).

Domestic and family violence and disability

Women with physical and/or intellectual disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to experience D/FV and such violence is also likely to be more severe and continue for longer (Morgan & Chadwick 2009 citing NCRVWC 2009; Tually et al. 2008; Women with Disabilities Australia 2008). Healey et al. (2008) found that women with disabilities continue to be at risk of being assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of at least twice that of non-disabled women, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or class, while international research has suggested that as many as 90 percent of women with developmental disabilities will experience sexual assault (Milberger et al. 2003). In addition, such women experiencing violence generally have fewer support options for leaving the relationship (Morgan & Chadwick 2009).

The key finding in the research of Healey et al. (2008: 10) was that there 'are major gaps in knowledge, policy and processes that will require significant resourcing in order to improve services to women with disabilities'. In addition, most services do not routinely collect data on disability and D/FV. Little is known about the help-seeking experiences of women with disabilities experiencing violence, although Victorian Public Hospital emergency presentations for family violence (VEMD) now enables analysis of family violence among women with a disability (ADFVC 2009c). Healey et al. (2008: Rec 10.1) called for nationwide research to ascertain the prevalence and extent of violence against women and children with disabilities in the full range of residential settings; and understand the help-seeking experiences of women with disabilities living with violence and the experiences of family violence workers in supporting women with disabilities. Additional data collection will also be consistent with research priorities 1.5.2 and 3.4.1 (NCRVWC 2009).

Domestic and family violence in culturally and linguistically diverse communities

The research on the prevalence of D/FV against women from CALD backgrounds is unclear and drawing conclusions on the nature and extent of D/FV in such communities is therefore difficult (Morgan & Chadwick 2009). The research does indicate, however, that cultural values and immigration status enhance the complexities normally involved in D/FV cases (Pease & Rees 2008) and women from CALD backgrounds are generally less likely than other groups of women to report cases of D/FV (Morgan & Chadwick 2009; Tually et al. 2008). The factors which may influence this include the limited availability of appropriate translator/interpreter services and access to support services; limited support networks and reluctance to confide in others; isolation; lack of awareness about the law; continued abuse from the immediate family; cultural and/or religious shame; and religious beliefs about divorce (Benevolent Society 2009; Morgan & Chadwick 2009; Pease & Rees 2007). Some women may be geographically isolated from extended family and women who do not have permanent residency in Australia may fear deportation if they report the abuse (Office of Women's Policy Victoria 2002). In addition, Taylor and Mouzos (2006) found that definitions of domestic and sexual violence differ with diversity, with females in a selected CALD sample of respondents less likely than those in the main sample to regard forcing one's partner to have sex to be an example of domestic violence.

A recent study involving interviews with three women from CALD communities who had left a D/FV situation found that the interviewees had not shared their experience with anyone outside their immediate family and had very limited social support on which they could draw (Benevolent Society 2009). A significant theme that emerged in the study was the role of religion and the 'rules' imposed on the women by her and her family's religious beliefs. As the report noted, discussion 'focused around the unaccepted and sinful act of divorce, even when it meant women escaping the most unimaginable acts of violence' (Benevolent Society 2009: 46). Pease and Rees' (2007) study with 78 refugees from Iraq, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia should also be noted. Male participants in the study reported that government intervention to address 'family conflict' undermines their authority and family cohesiveness. Male and female participants also felt that women who seek assistance for D/FV usually have a negative experience, while women believed that if they sought assistance within the mainstream community, they would not be believed (Pease & Rees 2007).

Pease and Rees (2008) argued that cultural, social and political contexts are important factors in understanding

the nature and occurrence of D/FV among CALD populations. Future research should examine the incidence of, and factors associated with, D/FV in CALD communities, as well as exploring the role of religion and cultural mores more widely; coping with and managing cultural change; effective strategies to enhance victim safety; and prevention approaches (Pease & Rees 2007; Runner, Yoshihama & Novick 2009). In this context, NCRVWC research priorities 1.5.2 and 5.4.1 should be borne in mind; the latter, which relates to culturally appropriate recidivism reduction strategies, is particularly relevant, given that there are reportedly no language specific men's behavioural change programs available (Morris 2007).

Domestic and family violence and Indigenous communities

There is ample evidence to suggest that Indigenous women are over-represented as victims of domestic and family violence (see Morgan & Chadwick 2009), although there may be methodological issues with attempts to develop reliable estimates of the extent of such violence (Mouzos & Makkai 2004; Schmider & Nancarrow 2007). In addition, there is also no clear measure of the extent to which Indigenous family violence is under-reported, but it is expected to be higher than for the general population (Cripps 2008; Cunneen 2009). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (ATSISJC) has noted that 'there are significant deficiencies in the availability of statistics and research on the extent and nature of family violence in communities' (ATSISJC 2006: 6). In an earlier report to the Australian Government about Indigenous violence, it was suggested that 'priority should be placed on implementing anti-violence programs, rather than on further quantitative research' (Memmott et al. 2001: 9). As noted above, however, the NCRVWC has called for the establishment of a minimum data segmented by Indigenous status (NCRVWC 2009: Strategy 1.5.2).

The key risk factors for Indigenous family violence relate to substance use; social stressors; living in a remote community; levels of individual, family and community (dys)functionality; availability of resources; age; removal from family; disability; and financial difficulties (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland & Wallis 2006; Bryant & Willis 2008; cf Cripps et al. 2009).

A research team at Griffith University is currently undertaking a three year national study of intimate partner homicide, funded by the Australian Research Council. The study is considered to be especially important for Indigenous people and communities, given their over-representation among those involved in and incarcerated for violent offending (ADFVC 2009a).

Victoria's 10 year plan, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families,* calls for improving 'the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Indigenous family violence through ongoing research and evaluation' (Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development 2008: 32). More specific requirements for future research in this context include:

- analysing the incidence of, and reasons for, under-reporting of family violence in Indigenous communities (Cripps 2008);
- developing a better understanding of the processes for coordinated and coherent service delivery (ATSISJC 2009);
- improving support services to ensure they are culturally appropriate, sustainable and effective and developing responsive programs in consultation with community (K Cripps personal communication 2 Feb 2010; Cripps 2007);
- examining Indigenous people's engagement with, confidence in and ownership of the legal process (Cunneen 2009);
- considering the appropriateness of applying restorative justice for D/FV cases (NCRVWC 2009; Victorian Law Reform Commission 2006a);
- ensuring support services are provided for children exposed to D/FV (K Cripps personal communication 2 Feb 2010);
- evaluating 'healing' programs (Cripps & McGlade 2008; Nungarrayi Price 2009);
- reviewing the role of Indigenous sentencing courts and circle sentencing (Marchetti 2008); and
- reviewing community-oriented solutions, such as the involvement of community leaders and elders in matters involving minor sex offences, prevention intervention with men and rehabilitative initiatives with offenders (Taylor & Putt 2007).

One noteworthy development is the NPY (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara) Family Violence Program, which arose from the Cross Border Justice Project of the Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments. The project aims to address D/FV in the NPY lands and involves travelling to remote Indigenous communities to conduct month-long perpetrator programs (ADFVC 2009b). Further research is required into the development and operation of such programs.

Domestic and family violence and homelessness

Domestic violence is the most common factor contributing to homelessness among women and their children (AIHW 2008; Morgan & Chadwick 2009). A recent study by the NSW Women's Refuge Movement

Resource Centre and the UWS Urban Research Centre (2009) found that generally housing for women and children experiencing D/FV has deteriorated significantly. The key concerns were the affordability, length of stay, the physical condition of the housing, the neighbourhood, safety and the availability of maintenance.

Accommodation is often a critical factor in women's decisions about whether to leave a violent relationship (Macdonald 2007). The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is the major government response to homelessness and in 2003–04, a third of people accessing such services were women escaping from domestic violence (AIHW 2005). Accordingly, SAAP services need to ensure that the issue of domestic violence 'has a central position in their response to homelessness', including increasing the visibility of D/FV in data collection (Macdonald 2007: 22). Recent research indicated that there were four issues seen as critical to preventing women from entering the homelessness service system, namely:

- police should enforce intervention orders more diligently;
- more options for women seeking refuge, for example, being able to choose whether to go to a communal refuge or stay in their own unit;
- raise awareness of what refuges can offer to clients in terms of support services; and
- better financial support for women leaving D/FV situations (Oberin 2008).

All Australian jurisdictions now have laws which provide for exclusion orders as a condition of a domestic violence orders, which allow the person seeking protection from domestic violence to remain in the family home, while the perpetrator is required to seek alternate accommodation, an approach which appears to enjoy significant popular support (see VicHealth 2006). There is research to suggest, however, that such measures are rarely used, at least in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (see Edwards 2004; Field, Carpenter & Currie 2003; Victorian Law Reform Commission 2006b). Future research in this context should develop the knowledge base in respect of the effectiveness of exclusion orders in preventing family homelessness. Research is also required to examine housing needs and services in urban, rural and remote settings and for particularly vulnerable D/FV victims (eg Indigenous, the elderly, CALD and people with disabilities; Tually et al. 2008).

The impact of domestic and family violence on children

Data analysed by the AIC (2006) has indicated that for 2003–04, children were recorded as being present at 44 percent of D/FV incidents. Notwithstanding the prevalence of children's exposure to such violence, there is currently little research that 'improves our understanding of the long-term impacts of continued exposure to trauma on the psychological, physical and brain development of children, or how this exposure impacts their personality, impulse control and, ultimately, their propensity to perpetrate violence in the future' (NCRVWC 2009: 83) and Strategy 5.4.2 seeks to overcome this knowledge gap.

What the available evidence indicates is that witnessing violence in the home poses a threat to children's physical, emotional, psychological, social, educational and behavioural wellbeing (see McGee 2000; Morgan & Chadwick 2009; Richards forthcoming; Tomison 2000; Tucci et al. 2005; Zerk, Martin & Proeve 2009). Browne and Winkelman (2007) noted that child abuse and neglect have been associated with insecure attachment in both childhood and adulthood, as well as cognitive distortion associated with safety (eg preoccupation with danger), controllability (eg perceptions of hopelessness) and internal attribution (self-blaming). They also acknowledged that 'long after trauma victims regain environmental control over their lives, they continue to suffer from perceptions of powerlessness, helplessness, ineffectualness, and vulnerability to poor psychological adjustment' (Browne & Winkelman 2007: 693).

Zerk, Martin & Proeve (2009) have suggested that enduring stress in the early years may adversely impact on brain development and organisation, arguing that more research is required to determine the effects of stress on the developing nervous system, how these effects are manifested through observable symptoms and what factors in the child's environment may either enhance or modify these effects. They examined 60 pre-school children who lived in households where D/FV was present. They found a modest relationship between the levels of reported violence and the mothers' emotional distress levels but no relationship between violence levels and parenting stress. The authors suggested that future research should examine trauma symptoms in young children and develop more appropriate and standardised means of assessing trauma symptoms. Research should also focus on the extent to which the primary carer's distress and possibly diminished coping abilities as a result of family violence may influence their perceptions of their children (Zerk, Martin & Proeve 2009).

In an English study, McGee (2000) conducted interviews with 54 children and 48 mothers who had experienced domestic violence and listed the following as some of the effects of such violence on children: fear; sadness; anger; adverse effects on identity, health, education; and impacts on relationships with their mother, father, extended family and friends. McGee's study did not include adolescent boys and she therefore considered

it appropriate for future research to examine the impact of family violence on 'young people's socialisation and relationships' (McGee 2000: 94). Such research would clearly also be valuable in the Australian context.

Bedi and Goddard (2007) noted that future research also needs to focus on the effects of situational characteristics and called for greater precision in identifying the types and nature of the violence experienced, which may clarify whether certain attributes of the violent home environment are particularly damaging. In particular, they suggested that the examination should include the different violent and neglectful circumstances experienced by children, as well as the impact of time in out-of-home care and contact with social and protective services. The authors also called for 'timely and effective multisystemic interventions' (Bedi & Goddard 2007: 74). This would serve to fulfil the NCRVWC's recommendation that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children meets the needs of children who witness and experience D/FV (NCRVWC 2009: Recommendation 9). It also accords with Wilcox's (2007: 5) assertion that '[o]ur knowledge of the serious impacts of violence on children means little, if their needs in this regard are not addressed as a national priority'.

Perpetrator programs

Day et al. (2009) have observed that there is a broad range of responses to F/DV, ranging from community-based and voluntarily-attended programs through to court-mandated programs (some of which are administered in prison). The programs also vary in their stated purpose, disciplinary emphases and core understanding of domestic violence. Howells et al. (2004) have conducted an overview of Australian perpetrator programs, but not enough is known about such programs and the evidence of their efficacy is unconvincing and incomplete (Day et al. 2009). Indeed, a recent report on prison-based rehabilitation programs found that the literature generally reports no differences in recidivism between the treatment group and the experimental group, but that there does appear to be a positive link between the number of sessions completed and the likelihood of domestic violence recidivism, which 'highlights the importance of treatment retention' (Heseltine, Sarre & Day forthcoming: 63). They reviewed the nature of the programs currently in place around Australia, noting that Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia also have Indigenous-specific programs in place (Heseltine, Sarre & Day forthcoming: 65).

Morgan and Chadwick (2009: 10) argued that 'programs should be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation to determine what is effective and in what circumstances'. The NCRVWC (2009: 133) also stated that:

> We know little about the ways that the many different sectors and professions involved with perpetrators can complement and enhance each other's work, and what sort of social policy will facilitate this endeavour...the best means to undertake specific interventions requires future research.

The NCRVWC proposed the following specific avenues for future research on perpetrator programs:

- the effectiveness of incarceration, deterrence and community restraint in reducing recidivism in cases of violence perpetrated against women and their children;
- research into the characteristics of programs that are proven to be effective in changing men's behaviour;
- developing and evaluating best practice prison-based perpetrator programs; and in particular, evaluations should include:
  - examination of the principles and theory underpinning the program content and the approach it takes to working with women partners and managing issues of safety;
  - a focus on the capacity of the program to respond appropriately to perpetrators from a range of backgrounds and from different geographical locations (eg urban, rural and remote areas); and
  - an assessment of the impact the program is having on reducing violence against women and their children (NCRVWC 2009).

A recent Campbell Collaboration review recommended that research be undertaken in relation to larger representative samples, instead of small samples; that victims be retained longer to determine positive and negative outcomes and that the validity and reliability of official and victim reports be measured (Feder, Wilson & Austin 2008). The ADFVC has also raised a number of good practice issues for evaluations of perpetrator programs, for example, ensuring evaluators have an in-depth understanding of violence within families, its dynamics and impacts (Braaf 2007). Finally, bearing in mind the foregoing discussion on the impacts of D/FV on children's development, the very long-term impacts of perpetrator programs and prevention programs generally should be examined. As Schwartz and DeKeseredy (2008: 182) noted, 'one important area for study in the future is the extent to which ending interpersonal violence against women can be seen as a strategy for reducing adolescent and adult criminal behavior in later years'.

Conclusion

This paper presents the criminological community with a research agenda on some of the key issues in domestic and family violence, including violence in rural, GLTBI, Indigenous and CALD communities and among the elderly and disabled, as well as the impacts on children and perpetrator programs. It follows that the research, policy and practical issues which may arise are compounded where multiple circumstances coincide, for example, in the context of violence committed against elderly migrants in a rural setting. Accordingly, further research is required to better understand not only the prevalence of the issues discussed in this paper and the best responses to them, but the intersection of these issues and contexts.

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All URLs correct at 30 March 2010

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