

Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence

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Over the past few years, Victorian family violence reforms have instigated a series of supports, improvements in police practice when responding to family violence, information sharing and risk assessment tools, and more. However, gaps still remain for young people who experience family violence.

To address this gap, Melbourne City Mission undertook research through a literature and policy review which informed a series of five workshops with young people with lived experience, youth work practitioners, specialist family violence practitioners, legal services, and the Orange Door practice leadership team.

The review, subsequent workshops, and consultations were all done with the objective of seeking to understand system and service gaps for young people who are experiencing family violence and find a way forward. Findings from this research have recently been released in the report [Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence](#). The purpose of this document is to provide a brief summary of key findings from the report.

Voice and Agency

Young people experiencing violence from a parent are often not seen as victim survivors of family violence due to significant service and knowledge gaps

- Young people's experiences of family violence are often rendered invisible, as family violence is often seen through the lens of violence perpetrated by a male partner or parent against the female parent.
- The resulting trauma from family violence can lead to their own use of violence at home as their identity as victim survivors are ignored which can result in young people not receiving support to help process their experiences and trauma. It was found that structural, legal and policy issues exacerbate the vulnerability of young victim survivors and undermine the ability to recognise young people as victim survivors in their own right.
- When responding to such young people, system responses at the legal and policy level rarely acknowledge the young person's experiences of violence. This can lead to further victimisation and re-traumatisation and cause additional harm.
- The complexities, ambiguities and inconsistencies in Victoria's legal and policy environment have a diminishing impact on the agency of young people.

Safety and Supports

Young people experiencing family violence are not going to ask for family violence support

- Young people were unlikely to ask for help as they were often not aware that what they were experiencing was family violence.
- Young people were less likely to ask for help due to fear of potential consequences from Child Protection.

Young people experience and perceive safety in a range of different ways that is often not acknowledged

- The way one young person perceives safety may differ from how another young person perceives it – however, these different forms of safety were not always reflected in the way services responded or risk was managed.
- As the young people's perception of safety is not reflected in service responses, it diminishes their agency and adds to their sense of shame.
- Services often misinterpret and undermine a young person's attempts to stay safe (running away, disengaging from school, etc.) as they are not seen as protective, but rather, problematic. Consequently, service responses often sent the young person back home or told the parent which in turn undermined their safety.

Services and Systems

There is a distinct lack of services for young victim survivors of family violence between 15-19

- Young people of all genders aged 15-19 are consistently falling through gaps in support options. This is because of the ways that family violence, family services, youth services and child protection systems do not intersect.
- Often young people may only be seen by services for their use of harm, rather than their experience of it. This view from the service system neglects the needs of other young people who respond to violence and trauma in a range of different ways.
- Moreover, most child and family services are not designed or resourced to work with young people over the age of 15, and the services that are available are not designed to manage complex family violence risk.
- A gap was found where there is no specialised family violence case management for young victim survivors which focuses on their identities as victim survivors.

Recommendations

An intersectional lens is critical

- This approach is needed that acknowledges the identities and systemic barriers that influence experiences of family violence and the service system.

More work is needed to understand and respond to sexual violence in the context of family violence against young people

- Sexual violence against young people was an important intersection with family violence. Existing work within sexual assault services could be used to support service responses in understanding sexual violence in the context of family violence.

There is a need for a service and housing response for young people 15-19

- There is a need for a service and housing response within the current family violence system for young people 15-19 that are experiencing family violence that adopts multiple lenses as it was found that there is a gap in the system.

Systems are services need greater clarity about rights of young people to support their agency instead of limiting it

- A response is needed that understands and promotes the agency and rights of young people, where young people's perceptions of safety is understood and respected, but family violence risk assessment is still able to effectively moderate, manage or inform that risk, where young people are seen as victim survivors within their own rights, and that the mental health impacts of family violence and trauma are accounted for.

Young people need access to information and resources specific to their needs that are developed with them and by them

- It was identified that the resources and information provided for young people was not designed by them, but for them. When accessing these resources, young people often they did not know they were experiencing family violence or did not identify with the materials.

Service agencies need to employ a range of ways to equalise the power imbalances young people experience

- The power balance that exists between services and young people should be equalised by having young people engage at different levels through co-design, recruitment processes, and memberships on boards. Young people should be given adequate training and opportunity to engage in these processes in order to meaningfully harness their skills and equalise the power imbalance.

Click [here](#) to access a copy of the full report.