

Domestic Violence

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Definition

Domestic violence is defined as violence between caregivers or parents. Caller concerned about the effect of violence on the family. If a child is injured the call is logged under physical abuse.

Despite the implementation of many positive structures and policies, and heightened media coverage in the last few years, domestic violence is still well entrenched in Australian society. It has been estimated that at least one-in-three families are affected by family and domestic violence (Health Department of Western Australia, 1998). A 1996 survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 23% of women who have been married or in a de facto relationship have experienced violence by a partner.

Children are often directly involved in the violent situation either through witnessing the violence, being abused themselves, or suffering as a result of parental stress and frustration. Sixty-eight percent of women who had experienced violence in a previous relationship stated that at some time during the relationship they had children in their care (ABS, 1996). Forty-six percent of these women said that these children had witnessed the violence. Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present (Health Department of Western Australia, 1998).

Research examining the effects of domestic violence on young children revealed that, according to mother's reports, half of the children witnessed **at least** 60% of the violence (Smith, 1994). These findings indicate a major social problem which has long term negative effects on children.

These effects include anxiety, depression, aggressive behaviour, decreased self-esteem, disobedience, emotional distress and carrying out abuse in the future (Irwin & Wilkinson, 1997).

Smith (1994) found that after more than 3 months separation from the violent parent, 42% of children surveyed displayed behaviour problems that warranted clinical intervention. The Partnership Against Domestic Violence (1999), a major commitment to the problem of domestic violence by Commonwealth, State and Territory Heads of Government, highlighted the need for more services catering for children who have experienced domestic violence.

A counselling service such as Kids Help Line (KHL) plays an important role in providing both short and long-term intervention into the problem of domestic violence, as experienced by the children and young people who seek help about this issue.

Kids Help Line counsellors provide immediate or crisis intervention through liaison with agencies who will respond in the short term. Counsellors may also embark on a longer term counselling relationship aimed at empowering the child to feel more in control and to develop better coping mechanisms. Such counselling is vital given that one of the 'major problems in relation to children and domestic violence is their powerlessness and vulnerability in the situation' (Partnership Against Domestic Violence, 1999, p. 15).

Every year, KHL counsellors respond to over 500 calls from young people concerning domestic violence, accounting for 0.6% of all calls. Figure 1 shows the proportion of problem calls relating to domestic violence from each state and territory for 1998. It is clear that there are some differences between states in the proportion of calls about domestic violence.

When examining these differences it is important to remember that the figures presented are based on calls made to Kids Help Line and not the prevalence of domestic violence.

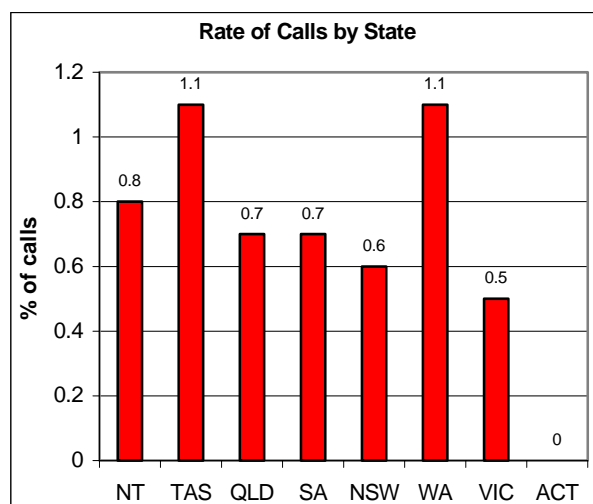


Figure 1 Proportion of Calls by State or Territory

Children aged between 10 and 14 made 55% of calls about domestic violence. Three-quarters of calls about domestic violence were made by females.

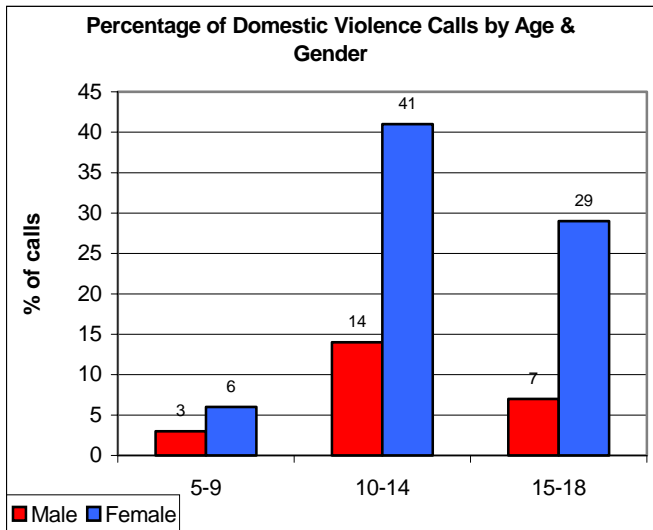


Figure 2 Percentage of Calls by Age and Gender

Males were identified as the perpetrator in 96% of calls. This finding is consistent with research indicating that males were the perpetrators in 95% of domestic violence situations (Health Department of Western Australia, 1998).

An examination of the severity of domestic violence calls reveals some disturbing information.

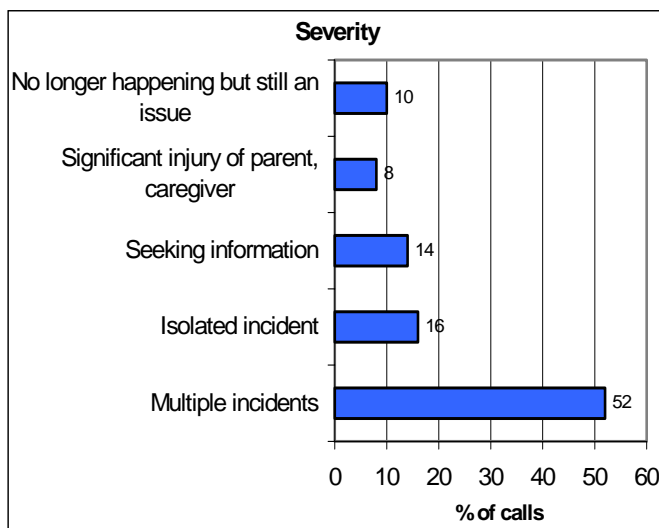


Figure 3 Severity of Calls

* Note: The Kids Help Line statistics presented in this report are based on figures for 1998.

More than half of the young people who phoned KHL about domestic violence had experienced multiple incidents of violence within their homes. A further 8% of callers reported that their parent or caregiver had sustained significant injuries. Ten percent of callers, presented with unresolved issues directly related to the experience of domestic violence although they were no longer exposed to the violence.

During 1998, an outcome was recorded for each call (see Figure 4 below).

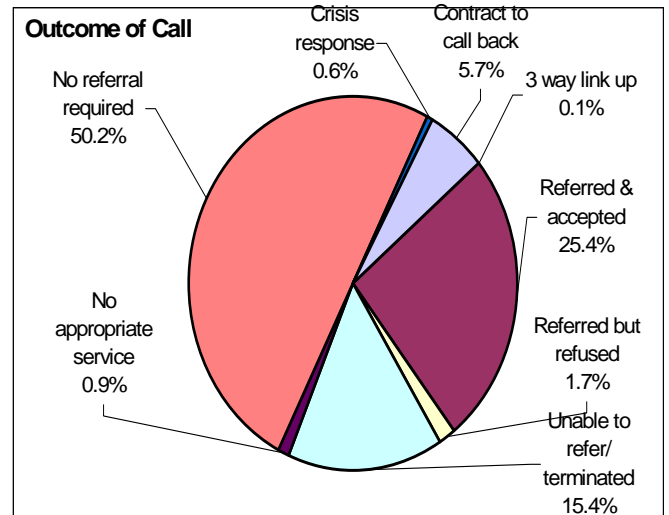


Figure 4 Outcome of Calls

Half of the calls that related to domestic violence required no referral. A referral was offered in 28% of calls although it is unknown how many of these referrals were followed through.

References

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