

Analysis: Family Violence and Sexual Violence Sectors

Date: March 2022

Purpose

During May and June 2021, the Joint Venture engaged with people across Aotearoa New Zealand to inform [Te Aorerekura – the National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence](#). A key part of this engagement was the conversation with the family violence and sexual violence sectors. This paper reflects the sector’s experience, and the experience of the people, whānau and families they support, with the family violence and sexual violence systems and the opportunities for improving how Aotearoa New Zealand work to prevent, respond, heal and recover from violence. Organisations and individuals were generous in sharing their experiences, and through their insight government agencies have worked to develop a 25-year Strategy designed to achieve the moemoeā, or vision: All people in Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving: their wellbeing is enhanced and sustained because they are safe and supported to live their lives free from family violence and sexual violence.

This paper sets out themes that came out of hui, written submissions and conversations with the sectors and uses, as much as possible, the words and voices of the people who shared their pūrākau (stories) and whakaaro (thoughts). The writing of this paper has been strongly informed by the sectors.

The engagement process with the family violence and sexual violence sectors

In developing our engagement process, Joint Venture agencies identified the importance of hearing from specialist non-government organisations (NGOs) and the workforces that support people, whānau and families (including children and young people) who are impacted by violence, and people who have used violence.

To gather feedback from the family violence and sexual violence sectors, the JV partnered with the following key stakeholders:

- Five national bodies¹ and their member NGOs and Refuges
- Community family violence network coordinators
- Family violence and sexual violence NGOs, groups and community advocates
- Tertiary student coalitions against violence.

¹ Te Kupenga Whakaoti Mahi Patunga-National Network of Family Violence Services (Te Kupenga), Te Ohaakii a Hine-National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together (TOAH-NNEST), National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges (NCIWR), Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) and Male Survivors Aotearoa (MSA).



Between 12 May and 30 June 2021, the JV was involved in 24 hui that captured contributions from 416 managers and practitioners from family violence and sexual violence NGOs. Many NGOs and national bodies also chose to write submissions as well as, or instead of, participating in hui.

What we know about the family violence and sexual violence sectors

The specialist family violence and sexual violence sectors are recognised as experts in the violence intervention and prevention field. They hear the stories and see the impacts of violence on people, families and whānau and are well placed to see what is working, what isn't and what needs to change. The sectors are made up of NGOs, community groups and people from a range of cultures and population groups.

The family violence and sexual violence sectors are made up of specialist NGOs, many of which are members of family violence or sexual violence national bodies. They include:

- 40 Refuges affiliated members of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWRs)
- 49 NGO members of Te Ohaakii a Hine-National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together (TOAH-NNEST)
- 35 NGO members of Te Kupenga Whakaoti Mahi Patunga-National Network of Family Violence Services (Te Kupenga)
- 11 NGO members of Male Survivors Aotearoa (MSA).

The wider sector also includes family violence and sexual violence NGOs which are not members of a national body, some advocacy and political groups which have formed to specifically address violence within their community or population cohort, and regional roles funded by government to support community networking and training.

Specialist family violence and sexual violence NGOs focus solely on family violence and/or sexual violence, or they have a dedicated team that provides these services. As well as providing services and programmes, most are also involved in community initiatives and prevention campaigns and education.

There are also a number of NGOs who offer a range of general support and family services that have a family violence and/or sexual violence service. Many of these NGOs are members of Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA).

Needs and issues identified by the family violence and sexual violence sectors

Family violence and sexual violence remain a big problem in Aotearoa New Zealand. The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey, Cycle 1² found that over the previous 12 months, almost 168,000 sexual assaults occurred in Aotearoa New Zealand. Women made up 80% of the victims, making them almost four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than men. Two

² Ministry of Justice. 2018. New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey. Key findings. Cycle 1. March – September 2018. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/NZCVS-List-of-key-findings-Y1-fin.pdf>

out of three victims of assault (66%) were between 15 and 29 years old and four out of five offences (79%) were perceived as driven by discrimination.³

Over a lifetime, 563,000 people experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV). Women are twice as likely as men to experience IPV and Māori are more likely than any other ethnicity to experience IPV in their lifetime.⁴

The key issues impacting the family violence and sexual violence sectors were:

- The lack of capacity for many NGOs due to burdensome Government contracting and commissioning. Most NGOs have several government contracts with separate compliance and reporting requirements. This becomes repetitive and time-consuming for NGOs often already working to capacity

“Service audits are one aspect of the current services contracting environment that increase the provider administrative burden and are not reflective of a high-trust relationship.”

- Contracting and commissioning can also result in siloed and under-resourced services and responses which create gaps. For example, the sexual violence sector identified problems with the ACC sensitive claims process, including accessibility issues, lack of specialist therapists and long waiting lists
- The lack of capacity for many NGOs due to the shortage of skilled workers within the sectors. Recruitment and retention within both sectors, family violence and sexual violence, are affected by lower wages and difficult working conditions (the daily content of this work can be hard, and specialist front-line NGOs are often busy). There is also limited specialist training available. NGOs offer their staff training and support, but often lose staff to higher paying government jobs
- A shortage of kaupapa Māori NGOs, meaning there are limited culturally-appropriate services and support available for tangata whenua
- A lack of diversity within workforces and a lack of services and support for different population groups means support is often limited or non-existent for people from other population groups impacted by violence. Also, upskilling is needed for existing staff to ensure safe and appropriate responses to all adults, children and young people from a range of backgrounds and experiences
- The sectors talked about the lack of an agreed understanding of the root causes and dynamics of family violence and sexual violence, including the impacts of colonisation and patriarchy, and the issue of equity and power. This means there continue to be unhelpful, and sometimes unsafe, responses that perpetuate violence through victim

³ Ministry of Justice. 2018. New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey. Key findings. Cycle 1. March – September 2018. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/NZCVS-SexualViolence.pdf>

⁴ Ministry of Justice. 2018. New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey. Key findings. Cycle 1. March – September 2018. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/NZCVS-Lifetime-SV-IVP.pdf>

blaming, inconsistent messages and not considering the dynamic of how power is used to coerce, control, and groom, and justify and excuse violence

“It’s exhausting having to keep explaining and educating people [other professionals, generalist practitioners, frontline responders] at every point.”

- Concerns were also raised about the current relationship between government and the specialist sectors. While the sectors maintain there are situations where adequate respectful relationships exist, overall, they felt decisions and actions remained government-led and that government continues to hold the power within these relationships. To identify problems and find the right solutions, wisdom is needed from a range of knowledge bases and that should always include specialist practice knowledge.

The key issues identified by the family violence and sexual violence sectors as impacting on people, whānau and families needing support included:

- Problems with government responses in the Justice system (Police, courts and lawyers) and Oranga Tamariki (OT) where processes often put people at further risk, which in turn alienates people impacted by violence, including children and young people. Examples were given of the harm the Family Court causes through decisions about access to children, people needing protection not being believed, and increased risk when people impacted by violence are not taken seriously. The family violence and sexual violence sectors talked about OT’s prioritising of the child-centred approach excluding or minimising the risk to other family members, particularly mothers. When concerns for the safety of children are raised by adult victims, their friends or family, the abusive person will often blame the adult victim, who is placed at greater risk and left with little support. Adult victims often feel blamed for the violence and treated as part of the problem rather than part of the solution

“Victims, survivors and people using violence who are seeking or needing help are often let down by poor responses that do not meet their needs. This is often due to frontline workers not understanding family violence and sexual violence and providing responses that focus on the mandate of their agency rather than the safety and needs of the person in front of them.”

- The system itself is difficult to navigate and as a result, people impacted by violence and people using violence must repeat their story and meet different eligibility criteria at every point. They often receive conflicting messages and advice, resulting in confusion and misinformation
- Concerns were raised about schools and the prevalence of bullying and sexual harassment. They said teachers are often under-resourced and lack the training to respond and provide support as needed. Not enough children are learning about

healthy relationships, consent and what to do if they need help or know someone who needs help

“There are a myriad of situations and circumstances where there has been systematic abuse, the continued re-abuse by the systems and those that work within them: Police, (the) Justice system (Family Court, lawyers, etc.), school systems, ACC, Oranga Tamariki, Work and Income. Engaging with ‘help’ services often leave women feeling more at risk.”

- The family violence and sexual violence sectors raised concerns about children and young people. They identified problems and provided a range of suggested solutions. The themes and actions raised are outlined in the Children and Young People’s Analysis paper
- They talked about the lack of early, wraparound and ongoing holistic services for people who use violence. Even when sought, often help is only received after acts of violence, and the help they then receive is limited and short-term

“We need more eyes on men who use violence. They need to be engaged early, monitored and supported long-term.”

- The need for more effort and funding to go into prevention was raised. Government expenditure focuses on responding to crisis situations (the proverbial ambulance at the bottom of the cliff) and too little attention is paid to violence prevention, particularly primary prevention and early intervention. There is a lack of primary prevention education in schools for children and young people and a lack of support for young families and new parents, especially during the first 1,000 days of a child’s life.

Emerging themes from engagement with the family violence and sexual violence sectors

Government changes and improvements

The theme that the family violence and sexual violence sectors raised most often was the problems their clients faced with the government system and responses. Most importantly, they said the system should hold the rights and needs of the people impacted by violence, children and young people, at the centre of its processes and procedures.

In particular, they talked about the need for Justice reform, including of Police, courts, lawyers, the judiciary and legislation. They want a Justice system that provides safety and accountability, where people impacted by violence are believed and unhealthy myths, minimising, denying and blaming are recognised and responded to appropriately.

The family violence and sexual violence sectors said change is needed within schools. They talked about “a whole school approach” that aims to improve the culture within schools,

addressing the needs of school communities, and creating schools that are safe and supportive environments for all students.

They recommended strengthening and expanding education on healthy relationships and consent, and upskilling teachers to recognise signs and deal with disclosures safely and effectively.

To achieve change and improve government systems and responses, the sectors recommended building and maintaining respectful working relationships with the specialist sectors to decide, plan and implement change together.

They also recommended moving to streamlined, high trust, sustainable contracts based on the needs of people, whānau and families, rather than being service-driven. Contracts should be better resourced to allow NGOs to offer a greater range of holistic services and programmes to meet the needs of the people, families and whānau they support.

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The sectors recognised the need for Tauwiwi to have partnerships with tangata whenua at all levels. Supporting ‘by Māori, for Māori’ (or ‘for all’) was a common theme and understanding the obligations and responsibilities of Tauwiwi (government agencies and NGOs) as Tiriti partners need to be acknowledged and adhered to.

Embracing a gendered analysis

This was raised by many in the family violence and sexual violence sectors as the most significant change we can make. While violence occurs across genders, it is heavily shaped by gender inequities introduced through colonisation. The statistics confirm that most victims and survivors are women, and those using violence are predominately men, but our current system, society and responses do not acknowledge this inequity. This leads to unsafe responses, the silencing of those impacted, as well as placing barriers in the way of those needing to stop their violence and make sustainable change.

“Changing our understanding of violence as a nation will ensure messages and responses to people using violence are consistent and safe.”

There are a small group of family violence and sexual violence NGOs who disagree with any focus on gender-based violence, maintaining it is unhelpful and discriminatory.

‘Keeping eyes on’ people who use violence

Accountability, services and responses for people who use violence were seen as critical to reducing violence. This includes providing early support and wraparound services that allow multiple ‘eyes on’ the person using violence, as well as specialists to monitor and assess risk and progress. Providers should ensure basic and therapeutic needs are being met alongside effective and safe behaviour change programmes. The family violence and sexual violence sectors recommended services and programmes be available long term and always have victims, survivors at the centre.

“If we don’t turn off the tap, we will always have people and children being abused.”

The sectors also emphasised that services and support for people using violence should not be at the expense of support and services for those impacted by violence, children and young people.

Services and support

There was agreement that a greater range of services and supports are needed for people impacted by violence, children, young people, whānau and families, as well as for people who use violence. The family violence and sexual violence sectors talked about needing accessible, early, holistic wrap-around services that meet the needs of the people that require them, including trauma and violence informed therapy and long-term support to aid recovery and wellbeing, and sustainable behaviour change for people who have used violence.

“There is a need for a holistic response that recognises and supports multiple recovery pathways for survivors and preferences the survivors right to make their own recovery decisions.”

Workforce capability

The family violence and sexual violence sectors identified the need to upskill frontline workers across government and generalist NGOs to better understand their roles and responsibilities within the system and respond safely and effectively first time, every time.

Frontline workers who spend a significant part of their job dealing with adults, children or young people impacted by, or using violence (for example, Police, courts, teachers, Work and Income staff, counsellors etc.) should be trained in:

- Understanding the different types of abuse and impact of violence on adults, children and young people
- Understanding the dynamics of violence and the myths that allow it to continue
- Learning how to recognise signs of violence, and deal with disclosures safely for all people
- Gaining knowledge of risk factors and how to manage them
- Learning who the local specialist NGOs are and how to make an effective, warm and appropriate referral.

“We need training for the first responders, eg, Police, Citizens Advice Bureau, doctors. We need them to understand their role and not try to be the experts, but (to) provide the right care and response and link to the specialist support.”

They identified a need to strengthen and upskill specialist workforces across both family violence and sexual violence areas, and specialists who support people and whānau from population groups impacted by violence. Sharing knowledge is required to close the gaps for population groups currently receiving limited, inadequate, inappropriate or, in some cases, no support at all when they experience violence.

To achieve these and other training goals, they recommended a one-stop centre for workforce capability that provides training for a range of workforces that includes:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi – entry to expert courses that outline the responsibilities of Tauwiwi as Tiriti partners and what that means for government, NGOs and communities
- The dynamics of family violence and sexual violence, including power and equity analysis, the impacts of colonisation and addressing unhelpful myths, attitudes and beliefs people hold
- Providing courses to upskill on cultural safety regarding a range of cultures and population groups
- A series of entry to expert family violence and sexual violence trainings from recognising signs, responding and referring through to specialist responses, intervention and long-term recovery
- Courses on prevention and primary prevention.

“We wanted to help other [university] students but didn’t know where to go for training and information.”

Prevention

The sectors strongly recommend developing a comprehensive prevention plan that looks at prevention through multiple lenses. The plan should think about timing and stages of what is needed, in what order and for how long. It should address prevention from the perspective of a range of communities and intersectionality, and it should have a mechanism to monitor progress, evaluate outcomes and use knowledge gained to improve further work. The sectors do not want a scatter-gun approach, but rather, evidence-based, well thought through projects, education programmes and initiatives.

The sexual violence sector organises and runs a range of sexual violence prevention programmes and initiatives. The sector is keen to see these strengthened and expanded. However, there are less family violence prevention programmes and initiatives. Some thought bringing together relevant prevention programmes and initiatives across family violence and sexual violence would be a good step forward.

Working with existing prevention experts in communities is strongly recommended.

The emergent themes from engagement with the family violence and sexual violence sectors included:

- Government changes and improvements
- Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Embracing a gendered analysis
- ‘Keeping eyes on’ people who use violence
- Services and support
- Workforce capability
- Prevention.

Bottom lines for the sectors

The changes that the family violence and sexual violence sectors felt would support the most significant improvements were:

- Making changes to the Justice system to ensure people impacted by violence, children and young people are protected and that those using violence are held accountable
- Improving contracting and commissioning so that contracts are streamlined, high trust, sustainable and focused on needs
- Embracing a power and equity analysis that identifies a range of power imbalances, including gender and the impacts of colonisation
- Building respectful, working relationships between government and the family violence and sexual violence sectors to plan and work on issues and projects together
- Improving workforce capability particularly for frontline generalist workforces (both government and NGOs) and across specialist sectors to reduce gaps and improve responses for people from a range of cultures and groups
- Increasing the range of accessible, safe services and support that is available so that people impacted by violence, children, young people and people who use violence can easily access what they need, when they need it, for as long as is needed.