

# Youth Aggression & Violence

johowardconsulting.org  
johoward@bigpond.com



## Definition

- **Aggression & Violence** involving young adults between the ages of 10 and 18 years (before they are part of the adult justice system).
- Behaviours - verbal & psychological abuse, graffiti, property damage, financial abuse, threats, intimidation, physical and sexual violence, threats & violence by proxy (internet and/or phone) or fighting.

## Manifestations

- Violence against property
- Bullying
- Gangs & fighting
- Assaults against a person/persons
- Homicide
- Intimate partner violence
- Cyber abuse
- Violence against parents/carers/siblings



## Is youth aggression increasing?

- From January 2012 to December 2016 the number of juveniles aged 10 to 17 years proceeded against in some way by NSW Police fell for malicious damage to property.
- It rose for fraud (the only category showing an increase).
- It remained stable for DV related assault & sexual assault.
- No trend test could be performed for two offence categories (murder and robbery with a firearm) as the counts were too small.
- No statistics on non FV/sexual assaults (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research 2017)

## Young Australians' Attitudes to Violence Against Women (2013)

- Domestic violence can be excused if the offender is affected by alcohol, and that a man is less responsible for rape if drunk or affected by drugs (10% agreed)
- Violence can be excused if the violent person is affected by stress (11% agreed) and if they were abused as a child (14%).
- Violence can be excused if it is due to a temporary 'loss of control' (24%).
- Violence can be excused if the violent person is regretful afterward (26%).
- Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex (40%).

## Thinking about youth

- A time of significant brain development – frontal cortex vrs amygdala
- A time of risk taking and experimentation eg substances
- A time of exploring identity
- A time of exploring sexuality
- Peers more important than parents

## Determinants of youth crime

- Individual – high percentage of youth justice clients have been involved with child protection (trauma & attachment, neglect, abuse sexual assault) > behaviour problems, alcohol & drug use, issues with school
- Familial – family violence, child abuse, substance use, mental health, low socio economic status, engaged in crime
- Community – disconnected, isolation, poverty, stigmatization, anti social peers
- Societal – income inequality, low socio economic status, anomie

## Trauma

- Trauma (including family violence) = over engaged amygdala
- Impulsive, reactive, irritable, concentration
- Difficulty resolving conflict – fight or flight
- Narrow range of emotions, difficulty expressing emotions (except anger, boredom)
- Difficulty self soothing (substance use)
- Shame – “I am a bad person”, “lesser person”
- Learning, auditory processing, cognition



## Attitudes & values that support the use of aggression & violence

Violence and aggression is about **power & control**

Attitudes & values:

- Gender:
  - 83% of victims killed are males
  - Females are victims of male violence (WHO)
  - ‘Role modelling of masculine stereotypes that promote the use of power and control in relationships’ (Cottrell & Monk, 2004)
- Race & sexuality & disability – values about ‘others’ & ‘difference’
- Violence is acceptable. Male peer groups – negative attitudes to women, positive attitudes to aggression, power & anti social behaviour
- Female peer groups – power through domination

## Evidence informed strategies

- Direct participation – eg. therapy, casework, family work, medication
- Communications & marketing – whole of population, subgroups eg sexting, gender equality programs in schools
- Community development – events & activities, reduce risk factors ie early childhood development
- Organizational development – eg. sports clubs religious organizations
- Advocacy – social policy eg. inclusion
- Legislative reform – ‘tough on crime’

## Either/or

- ‘Tough on Crime’ or ‘Trauma Informed Practice’
- ‘Accountability’ and ‘Trauma Informed practice’
- Accountability doesn’t necessarily mean a criminal justice approach



## Accountability practice

- ‘The system’ holds offenders, particularly those who have committed violent acts, visible and accountable for their actions
- Is aware of collusion (inadvertently or directly) – denial, blame, minimisation & justification
- Involves restorative practice – making amends for harms done
- May include family group conferencing
- Should ideally include the ‘family system’

## Prevention

- Lessen disparity between those who have and those who haven't (cultural change)
- Support families to parent
- Support strong & safe family environments
- Support strong, safe & respectful communities
- Social inclusion, including education
- Gender equality



## Adolescent Violence in the Home



## Definition

- A **pattern** of behaviours by an adolescent that intimidates and coerces parents/carers in order to gain power and control.
- Siblings are often victims.
- On going – not a one off incident.
- Parents commonly adjust their own behaviour to accommodate threats or anticipation of violence (Patterson et al 2002).

## Behaviours

- Physical – hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, hair pulling, spitting, property damage
- Psychological/verbal – manipulation, intimidation, sarcasm, criticism, threats to harm self and others
- Financial – property damage, theft, disruption of parent's work, incurring debts and fines
- Social – denigrating family and friends, controlling social contact, undermining attempts to form new friendships/relationships

## Co-occurrence

- School behaviour/drop out, low academic achievement
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Mental health/developmental (ADHD, ODD, CD, autism spectrum)
- Youth homelessness
- Mix of emotional manipulation and real safety concerns eg 'at risk' behaviours

## Co-occurrence with youth aggression

- Very high incidence in YJ clients (DoJ Victoria)
- Past involvement with Child Protection (Melbourne Children's Court)
- Relationship with crime – graffiti, property damage, illicit & licit substance use



- Window of opportunity to prevent adult crime
- Note – some adolescents 'grow out' of the use of violence

## Intergenerational cycle of violence



## Prevalence

- Parental shame, fear and embarrassment prevents disclosure
- 7-8% of all family violence incidents
- LGAs with high family violence incidents have high AVITH incidents
- Two thirds of offenders are male and most victims are mothers (over 80%)
- Largest cohort is sole mothers of adolescent males

## Determinants

- Intergenerational issues
- Parenting:
  - Parent as 'friend'
  - Boundaries & consequences
  - Abusive/harsh parenting
  - Over controlling parenting (helicopter parenting)
- Trauma (parental and child), especially family violence (60% have experienced family violence)
- Societal ie consumerism, changes in family life, lack of resilience, social media etc



## Challenges

- Mix of emotional manipulation and real safety concerns eg 'at risk' behaviours
- Adolescent vulnerability
- Victim has care and responsibility for the (vulnerable) offender

## Impacts of trauma

- Trauma (including family violence) - over engaged amygdala
- Impulsive, reactive, irritable, concentration
- Difficulty resolving conflict – fight or flight
- Memories are disorganised and incoherent - flashbacks
- Narrow range of emotions, difficulty expressing emotions (except anger, boredom)
- Emotionally either 'shut down' and feel nothing at all or see and feel only their trauma
- 'At risk' behaviours
- Difficulty self soothing (substance use, games addiction, pornography)
- Shame – "I am a bad person", "lesser than"

## Impacts of adolescent family violence

- Victim - guilt, shame, embarrassment, isolation, blame, grief and loss, mental health, financial, physical
- The experience of abuse results in 'a new type of parental role, one that includes a loss of power' (Eckstein 2004)
- Ineffective discipline & acceptance of abuse as normal behaviour
- Adolescent – power, guilt, shame, grief and loss, at risk behaviours, mental health issues
- Other family – sibling abuse, extended family, family loyalty/splitting

## Why a specific response is required

- Adolescent development - brain not fully formed (opportunity to influence this)
- Adolescent challenge to separate emotions from behaviours (anger/violence)
- Victim has care and responsibility for the offender/prevention of homelessness & further criminal activity
- Offender may also be a victim or in need of protection (child protection)
- Risk male adolescents may 'graduate' to adult family violence

## Conclusion

- AFV is frequently present with other forms of youth offending and youth aggression
- Many offenders have experienced trauma, especially family violence
- Family involvement is important to stop offending
- A 'tough on crime' approach will not work – adolescents need to learn skills to be non violent
- Trauma informed practice, accountability and restorative practice are important frameworks

Thank you!