



Waitakere Children and Family Violence Project

Yates, Deborah (2013) *The voices of young adults in Waitakere who were exposed to family violence as children: A report on their experiences and needs at the time* WAVES Trust, Auckland

Executive Summary

The Waitakere Children and Family Violence Project has been researching the response to children exposed to family violence in an effort to define ways this could be enhanced (see our 2012 report on <http://www.waves.org.nz/network-services/projects/waitakere-children-who-witness-fv/>). As a means of hearing from those who have lived the experience, young Waitakere adults who had been exposed to family violence as children have now participated in a short survey.

There were 29 self-selected respondents, two-thirds aged 16 or 17, the others younger or older, and, incidentally, all claiming some Maori or Pacific descent. Thirteen had experienced violence throughout their childhood, while for most others it occurred over a number of years. For 17 the violence they were exposed to was male to female, while for three it was female to male, eight perceived it as 'fighting' between adults and five witnessed multiple perpetrators. Amongst other emotions experienced at the time of the violence, 25 felt frightened, 23 felt sad and 22 worried.

As children, 18 told no one and only 4 turned to an adult for help. Four received services of some sort, a few others felt supported by friends or cousins and two spoke to the perpetrator and found that helpful.

All respondents selected services that they would have appreciated at the time, either to support them to disclose or find safety, such as having a trustworthy adult to confide in, or to help them manage their feelings and relationships, such as counselling or group work. Twenty identified at least three services.

Twenty-three identified ongoing negative effects of the exposure to violence, including recurring upsetting memories, the use of alcohol and drugs to help them cope, experiencing mostly negative feelings, spacing out under stress and poor family relationships. Poignantly, 17 were able to identify that they had learnt and grown in some way as a result of their experiences.

The findings indicate a dearth of support for this group of children and young people, in facilitating their disclosure, helping them feel included and supported and in giving them the opportunity to process the fear, trauma, loss and anxiety generated by their experiences and likely to impact on their adult lives. There is, unfortunately, not a lot of evidence to show this has improved significantly over the past ten years or so.

We are most grateful to these young people for their thoughtful participation in this survey and their wise comments. Their intention was to contribute to improving services for younger children in similar situations. It is now down to us, the responsible adults, to hear their testimony and ensure that this happens.

**“Na to rourou, na taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi”
With your basket and my basket the people will thrive.**

**This well known whakatauki is dedicated with humble thanks to the rangatahi
who have shared their basket of knowledge in order to help others thrive.**