

# Trauma and adolescent family violence: Delivering better homelessness responses

Victorian Homelessness Conference

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**Royal Commission**  
into Family Violence

*It is argued that the links between childhood trauma, housing instability and adult violence is an area that warrants sustained research and policy interest. Yet despite the evidence from Journeys Home and other studies that the lives of the homeless and those experiencing housing instability are marked by extreme and often ongoing traumatic experiences, trauma remains conspicuous by its absence from the policy literature.*

***In recent times there have been calls for greater reflection on the need for Trauma Informed Care approaches...***

(Scutella et al., 2014)

# Trauma and Adolescence

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL TRAUMA**

*Experiences which threaten the individual's psychological or physical wellbeing or physical existence and which overwhelm the individual's coping mechanisms (Mares, Newman & Warren, 2012)*

## **COMPLEX**

*Multiple incidents over an extended period of time*

## **DEVELOPMENTAL**

*Children's development can be slowed down or impaired*

# Childhood Adversity

## Abuse

- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

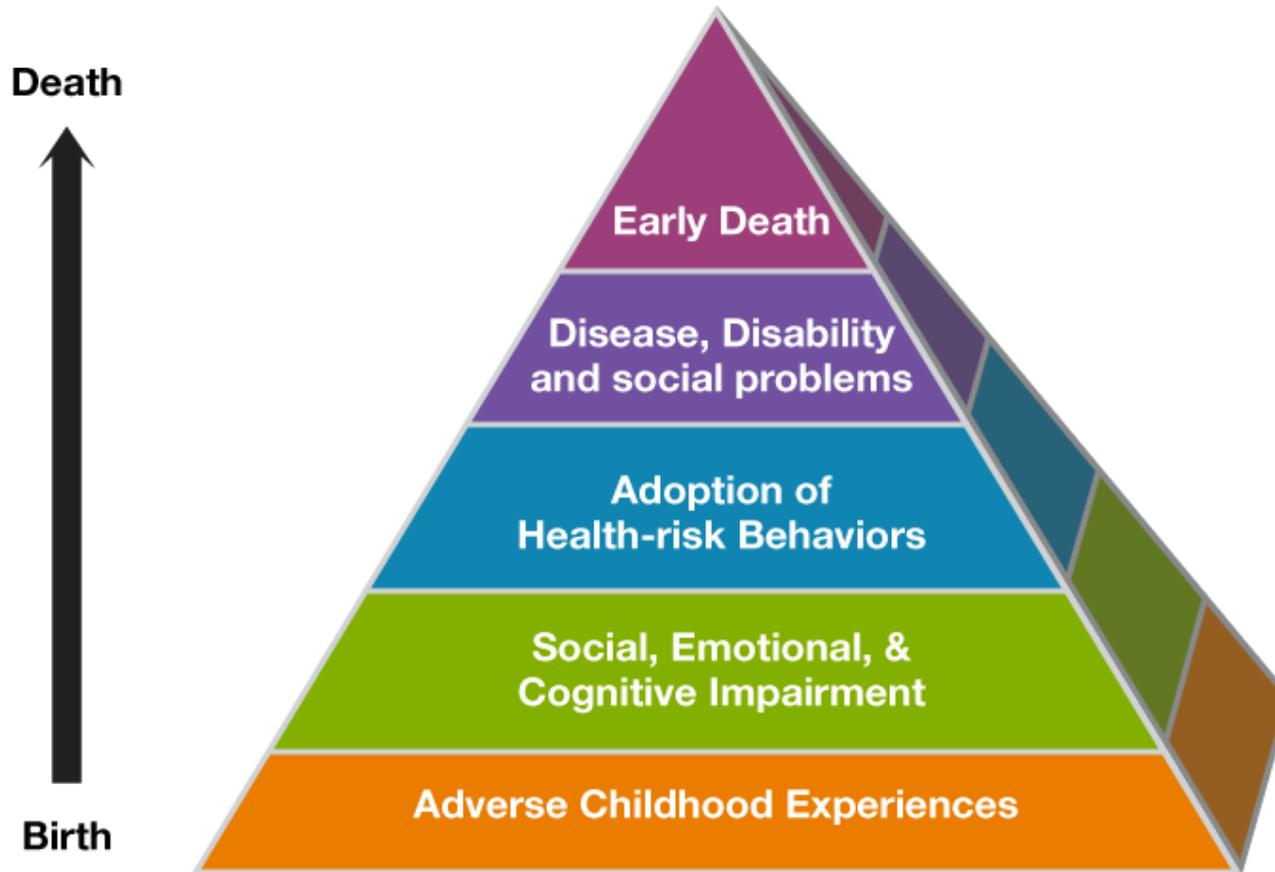
## Neglect

- Physical
- Emotional

## Household Dysfunction

- Family violence
- Parental separation
- Mental health
- Exposure to substance abuse
- Parental incarceration

# Adverse Childhood Experiences



(Felitti & Anda , 2009)

# Children and Young People Experiencing Family Violence

According to Victoria's *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, family violence includes behaviour by a person that causes **a child to hear, witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of violence after the violence has occurred.**

The term '**experience the violence**' better describes what living with violence is like for a child. They may not hear or see but they will be affected by the violence. (Laing, 2000; Överlien, 2010)

- **1 in 4 Australian children experiences family violence** (Indemaur, 2001). This figure is consistent with prevalence rates in the UK, US & Canada
- **Aboriginal children experience family violence at higher rates**

# Intersections with family violence and adolescent violence

- **Experiencing family violence as a child increases the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of family violence in intimate partner relationships**
- **However, many will not** and some young people who perpetrate violence toward parents have no history of family violence
- Research suggests that **increased likelihood of perpetration of violence is often found in young people who have experienced a range of adversities in childhood**
- **Boys who grow up in a violent home (as compared with girls) may be more likely to condone and perpetrate violence in adulthood** (Campo, 2015)

# Adolescent Family Violence

A growing body of evidence suggests that adolescent family violence is widespread. However, research evidence of the problem and what interventions exist is limited.

(Routt  
and Anderson, 2011)

For the year ending June 2016, in 63.9% of family violence incidents involving youths (those aged 17 years or younger) as perpetrators, the Victoria Police L17 noted the parent or guardian as the affected family member. The average age of the youths was 14.8 years.

(Crime Statistics Agency, 2017)

# Adolescent Family Violence

***Adolescents who abuse their parents use similar strategies to violent men to gain control and power. They often coerce, threaten and intimidate, destroy property and possessions and physically assault their parents.***

***Most victims are mothers and most offenders are males. However, female adolescents are also offenders and fathers and other family relatives may be victims.***

***Violent adolescents are at a crucial developmental stage, where family relationships and connection make a vital difference to their outcomes.***

(Howard, 2015)

# Intersections with family violence and homelessness

- Of the 298 young people sampled in the 'Cost of Youth Homelessness In Australia Study' 39% had experienced family violence in the home that warranted police attendance with 14% reporting attendance up to 10 times (Flatau et al., 2015)
- Women escaping a violent partner often require refuge for themselves and their children – adolescent males are often unable to be accommodated in family violence refuges
- Of the 20,000 young people seeking assistance from homelessness services in Victoria each year, 63% are young women (State Gov., 2017)

# Intersections with family violence and homelessness

- Experiencing family violence places young people **at greater risk of leaving home early, mental health issues, unemployment and early parenthood**
- Children who become homeless do so as result of family violence, family breakdown, sexual abuse and/or severe financial hardship – a multitude of issues referred to as an ‘adversity package’ (Rossman, 2000)
- Those who experience homelessness as a child are more likely to have been placed in out of home care, and are at greater risk of dropping out of school, being unemployed and experiencing homelessness again in adulthood

# Family Violence Prevention

- Victorian Government investment of \$1.9 billion in 2017/18 into implementation of FVRC recommendations
- Of which \$133.2 million is being invested in housing responses
- Two new youth refuges will be built in the Melbourne CBD and Melton as part of Accommodation for the Homeless – phase 1
- Adolescent family violence Step Up pilot program at agencies in Geelong, Barwon and Frankston with promising uptake

# Youth Homelessness Response

- DHHS spends approximately \$60 million a year on housing and support programs to assist young people 16-25 years old who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness
- A further \$3.3 million from the homelessness assistance budget is spent on programs to assist children who are experiencing homelessness
- Funding initiatives: State-wide access point, youth refuges, transition support, youth foyers, Children's Resource Program, The Detour, Kids Under Cover, Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis

# How can the homelessness sector respond?

- Trauma informed organisations
- Trauma training for staff
- Understand the dynamics of family violence
- Understand the dynamics and context of adolescent violence
- Support the young person as a victim of family violence
- Hold the young person accountable as a perpetrator of violence
- Support staff and other residents to remain safe
- Work with families to achieve reunification where possible
- Create environments that foster children's resilience

# Effective Intervention for Adolescent Family Violence

- *Maintain family relationships*
- *Focus on safety and wellbeing of the adolescent within broader family safety context*
- *Adolescent offender responsibility and accountability for the use of violence*
- *Adolescents may minimise, justify or deny the use of violence and blame their victims*
- *At the same time, workers need to be mindful that adolescents may be victims of abusive, harsh parenting, or family violence*

(Howard, 2015)

# Responses to children experiencing family violence

*Responses to children...should focus on facilitating children to develop skills and knowledge that foster healthy, respectful relationships and enable the learning of non-violent methods of dealing with conflict* (Ellis et al., 2006)

Validate their experience:

- Let them know you believe them
- Let them know you're glad they told you
- Let them know you're sorry it happened
- Let them know it's not their fault
- Let them know you'll help

Fanslow & Kelly, NZ Ministry of Health 2016)

**Thank you**

**Questions?**

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Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.