Service Responses to the Co-Victimisation of Mother and Child

Missed opportunities in the prevention of domestic violence
Experiences from South Africa

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Background

The trauma of children who live in violent homes, who witness violence and who directly experience violence is significant. Yet, this remains hidden and unaddressed (Pinhiero, 2006)

This study aims:
- To investigate the relationship between the gender and children’s sectors, and how this relationship translates into services
- To explore the challenges to service provision to mother and child victims of domestic violence
Description of Methods

Two-Part Study

- Desk Review
- Primary Research

1. Desk Review

- Explored the three levels of prevention within an *Ecological Framework*

Incorporated review of:

- Published Journal Articles
- Books
- Policy and Legislative Documents
- Reports on incidences (global) and
- Reports on Service Evaluations (local, limited)
Description of Methods (Cont)

2. Primary Qualitative Research

Three study sites:

- **Urban** (8 communities)
- **Peri-urban** (3 communities)
- **Rural** (2 towns)

**Focus Group Sessions**

- 1 with civil society - urban area (6 people)
- 1 with government - urban area (12 people)
- 1 with civil society - peri-urban area (7 people)
- 1 with civil society - rural area (12 people)

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

- **Western Cape**: Government (2) and NGOS (2)
- **Eastern Cape**: Government (7) and CBOs (2)
Desk Review Findings

- Review of Policy and Legislative Frameworks (International, Domestic)
- Examining co-victimisation of the mother and child
  - Prevalence (??)
  - Children witnessing violence as direct victimisation
  - Gendered impacts
  - Impact on ability to form attachments
  - Risks toward later victimisation and perpetration
- Lack of services to address trauma, particularly in respect of children
- Interventions require context sensitivity (Age, Gender)
Primary and secondary interventions are more cost-effective, and could have greater long-term programmatic effect and more sustainable outcomes.

In correctly classifying prevention interventions, it would assist in decisions concerning resource allocation and the strategic development of effective prevention initiatives.

However:

- While there is a growing recognition of the different levels of prevention in the research, there is no consonant reflection in practice.
- Prevention programs are usually aimed at multiple risk factors at the same time in a blunderbuss fashion.
Primary Research Findings

- Barriers to identifying co-victims
  - “Issue overload”
  - Silences and Stigma against women and children
  - Gender bias
- Understanding the realities of patriarchy and gender inequalities and challenges to developing gender sensitive services
  - Urban vs Rural
  - Ideas around the male victim
  - Parenting training
- Lack of understanding of different levels of prevention
Services to Child Victims

- Most participants identified risks toward the intergenerational transmission of violence
  
  “[abuse histories are]...very prevalent. A lot of the women that come here witness their mothers being abused when they were children, or were abused themselves as children” (Civil society, In-depth interview, Urban).

- However, this did not translate into services that address co-victimisation to mitigate this risk.

- With reference to whether children of mothers who seek help from shelters are also assisted, one participant said:

  “...kids, they kind of slip through – it’s so easy for them to slip through...I don’t think we’ve ever done any kind of assessment in terms of how many of them have...problems but I’m sure a lot of those children actually struggle ...” (Civil society, In-depth interview, Urban).
Recommendations

 The need to build bridges between women’s and children’s sectors

 Possible value in collaborative approaches to the capacity building of CBOs and NGOs in relevant contexts
  - intersectoral: women’s, children’s, men’s
  - gender-sensitive training

 Service provider and public knowledge on laws and procedures

 A systematic approach to prevention is required, with an increase in the focus on primary and secondary prevention (early intervention) – challenges?
Conclusion

Lessons:

The importance of research in just about everything we, as practitioners do!

How to conduct research **systematically**, and with increased rigour

Language as a tool for empowerment – bridging the gap between the science and the practice
Taking the Agenda Forward...

The Research Report as an awareness raising and advocacy tool

Strategic fora have been identified for dissemination and discussion:

- Parliamentary Portfolio Committee Hearings: Police and Justice Services; the Parliamentary Review of the Domestic Violence Act (includes dissemination of policy briefs)
- National civil society working groups on gender-based violence
- National Departmental Reference Groups: Civilian Secretariat for Police (An advisory forum for the Minister of Police)
Taking the Agenda Forward

- The Research report as an Advocacy Tool
- Contributing to the momentum around the movement for improved services to victims of domestic violence
- Emphasis on primary prevention and early intervention, and work with child victims
THANK YOU