

# Why aren't men more active in supporting family violence campaigns?

A project looking at men's awareness of and potential engagement in the prevention of family violence.

A project commissioned by Te Rito: the Nelson Tasman Family Violence Intervention Network, Nelson.

*The missing part of the jigsaw is that New Zealand men don't think that domestic violence is an urgent issue and they don't think that it is up to them to fix it.*

Catriona MacLennan (Barrister and Journalist), TV1. 2016

*Men in New Zealand needed to step forward and take responsibility for change.*

Vic Tamati (It's Not OK champion), RNZ, 2016

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**June 2017.**

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## Acknowledgements.

To the Te Rito Family Violence Network (Nelson) for commissioning the project. This group's preparedness in widening the evidence base in relation to family violence through surfacing the insights of local men in understanding and preventing family violence is both commendable and timely.

To the seventy nine men who gave of their time and opinion in participating in the project especially those who participated in the two focus groups following completion of the survey.

# 1. Introduction

Family violence is a serious and on-going issue in our community. While an extensive range of initiatives aimed at prevention, intervention, support of victims and identification/support/punishment of offenders currently exist, figures from the reporting of family violence continue to rise. For example, according to Police figures, between 1997 and 2007 reported domestic disputes more than doubled (Te Ara, 2013). However, rather than an increase in the incidence of domestic disputes, this increase in reporting is generally understood positively, as reflecting changes in policy and increased public willingness to report incidents. Having said this, it may well be true that underreporting continues to exist (Te Ara, 2013).

As a local community initiative, a panel was organised in 2010 by Nelson's Te Rito Family Violence Prevention Network to further promote awareness of and initiatives to address the issue of family violence. One speaker, the then Principal Family Court Judge Peter Boshier, in observing that New Zealand's rates of child abuse and neglect, levels of domestic violence, deaths of children and women, and the rate of elder abuse are shameful; suggested that communities themselves needed to make good decisions about local family violence responses.

While the Nelson Te Rito Family Violence Prevention Network has undertaken many family violence prevention initiatives at a community level one area where success has been limited is that of the involvement of and support from men. This relative non-involvement is noticeable at the levels of various committees through to the support from men 'on the street'. While the limited number of men involved at committee level is understandable given the limited number of males employed in social services, the lack of involvement of other men is not so easily understood. This is especially important if it is acknowledged that the involvement of males in initiatives is vital in reducing the incidence of family violence.

Unfortunately, this lack of involvement is almost exclusively framed as men 'not stepping up and taking responsibility for their behavior'. As Marshall (2015) states, "For too long efforts to reduce family violence have been led by women alone. It's time for men to step up and take the lead". This message frequently extends to calls for men to "nurture and develop a culture that encourages respect and rejects violence" (White Ribbon, 2016).

What are the reasons for this under-involvement? The following section briefly overviews a selection of the literature on this topic.

## 2. The Literature.

In New Zealand law, family violence is known as domestic violence. In the Domestic Violence Act (1995) domestic violence is defined as, "violence against (a) person by any other person with whom that person is, or has been in a domestic relationship .... In addition, psychological abuse is committed against a child if that child witnesses the abuse of a person with whom the child has a domestic relationship" (New Zealand Government, 2013). The Act defines domestic violence as including sexual or psychological abuse, that is, the violence is not restricted to physical abuse. The Act is inclusive of a wide range of relationships. These include partners (heterosexual/gay/lesbian couples), children and young people, the elderly as well as flatmates or other people who share accommodation (New Zealand Government, 2013).

There is an enormous amount of literature related to family violence. Employing customary search parameters tends to quickly overwhelm the reader. Using the search terms 'men\*', 'views', 'family violence' and/or 'domestic violence' within a very narrow time frame of the past 4 years yielded a number and range of results that are well beyond the scope of this report to analyse. Nevertheless, it was apparent that the first 100 articles followed certain themes. These being:

- The influence of constructions of masculinity on violence towards women (Salter, 2015).
- General articles on men's violence towards women (Devries et al, 2013).
- The effects on children (Buchanan, Wendt, & Moulding, 2015).
- The relationship of family violence to mental ill health in women (Howard et al, 2013).
- Male dominated relationships (Corvo & Johnson, 2013).
- The effectiveness of stopping violence programmes for perpetrators (Akoensi, Koehler, Losel, & Humphreys, 2013).

These themes, as well as others, are repeated throughout the databases. Overall the literature consistently positions men as batterers/perpetrators of violence and men as conforming to a socialised role of maintaining power and control over families in general and women in particular. While this analysis of the literature was narrow, there was nothing evident that looked at men's views on family violence. While this perspective may exist, it is not readily apparent. Given that the majority of men are not batterers/perpetrators of violence it seems odd that this group's voice is missing from the discourse around family violence.

What are men's perspectives on family violence? Posing and seeking answers to this question may also give some insight into the reason for men's under-involvement in stopping violence initiatives.

## 3. Research design

### 3.1 Aims

This project was aimed at seeking men's perspectives on a range of issues around family violence including,

- Men's understanding of the nature of family violence.
- Men's commitment to prevention and intervention overall.
- Men's suggestions on effective ways forward in reducing the incidence of family violence.

### 3.2 Methodologies/methods

To achieve the above aims, the study drew on both quantitative and qualitative research approaches through a two-stage process with each stage building upon the previous.

A survey which aimed to:

- Gain data on a range of points including participant characteristics such as age, ethnicity and referral sources.
- Gain data on men's understanding of issues surrounding family violence.

Two focus groups<sup>1</sup> which aimed to:

- Gain men's suggestions on effective ways forward

Secondary aims included:

- Surfacing qualitative information that was authentic, credible and represented the considered perspectives of the participants.
- Providing a process and/or environment where participants could feel included, valued and respected both by the researchers and by other participants.

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<sup>1</sup> *The two focus groups, spaced around 4 weeks apart were of the same participants. This process was undertaken in the belief that group discussion, combined with reflection over time, can produce insights that would not be uncovered through any other research process, especially 'one off' or 'snapshot' approaches to data collection such as in surveys, interviews or single focus groups.*

There were 79 respondents to the survey and 12 focus group participants.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

Accepted processes for protecting participants and ensuring methodological rigor were followed<sup>2</sup>. These included:

- Informed consent obtained from all participants for participation in the focus groups.
- Anonymity was ensured through numerical coding of survey responses.
- Participants making a commitment to respect the privacy of others in the focus groups. (Anonymity is always compromised in focus groups.)
- Protocols were put in place to rest the group if any focus group participant(s) experienced distress with a list of support services was available if required.
- A phone call was made to each focus group participant following completion of data gathering and initial analysis to effect closure and/or referral (if necessary).

Formal ethical approval was not sought as it was considered this project did not reach the expected threshold for approval. Previous projects following similar processes/aims were considered as more of an audit that utilised research methodologies/methods than research where participants could be considered at risk.

### 3.4 Recruitment of participants

The survey was conducted over 3-4 hours outside a café in Nelson's central city. Men were approached and asked if they would be prepared to fill in a survey form and that this would take around 10 minutes. Each was offered a free coffee in respect of their time. Almost all the men approached agreed to complete the form.

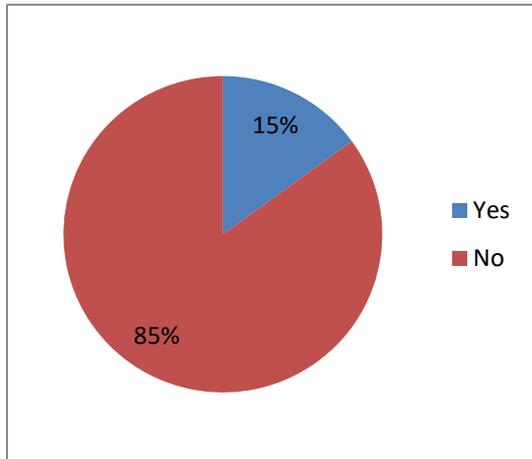
The survey had a detachable section asking if the person would be prepared to participate in two focus groups following an analysis of the survey. Thirty-one men volunteered to take part in the focus groups.

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<sup>2</sup> *It should be noted that professionals can often overstate the case for the need for participants to be protected from the trauma of reliving their experiences. Conversely, individuals may find this process a healing, positive experience (Close & Peel, 2012). It should also be noted that the research design deliberately steered the participants away from their own experiences of family violence, rather to explore common understanding and constructive suggestions for the future.*

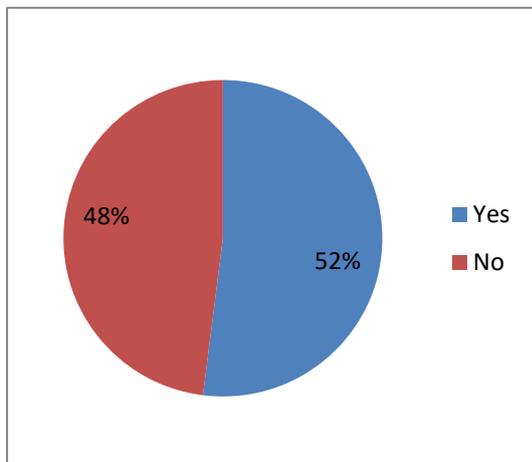
## 4. The survey results.

### 4.1 Are you aware of the 'Te Rito Family Violence Intervention Network'?



The figures here strongly indicate a lack of awareness of the Network. However, this finding doesn't necessarily mean a lack of awareness of the Network's activities.

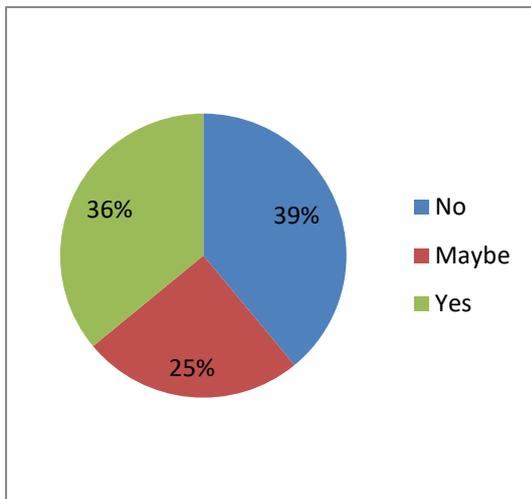
### 4.2 Are you aware of the 'White Ribbon' campaign?



It was quite surprising that, given the significant amount of advertising associated with the White Ribbon Campaign week, that the results of this question indicated that advertising wasn't reaching a significant number of participants. This finding was relatively consistent over all age categories except for younger people (16-25yrs) where of the 16 men surveyed six were aware of the campaign and ten were not.

I may be wrong but I've seen it on TV. It's about violence in the home?

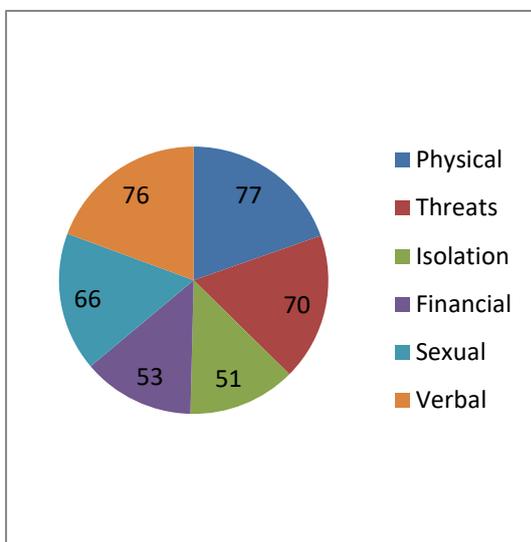
### 4.3 The White Ribbon Campaign is based on the statement that ‘men’s violence underpins all violence’. Do you agree with this statement?



This statement was poorly understood by the participants. However, it is clear from the responses that opinions were evenly spread over all age groups.

Male to female violence is most common but this is not exclusive to men.

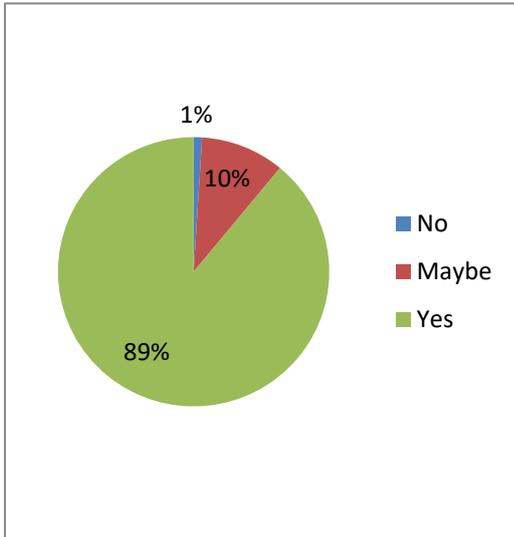
### 4.4 What does family violence mean to you?



Note that the responses in this chart are not presented as percentages but as the number of men who indicated each category. That is, the participants could choose more than one category. Having said this, 48 participants indicated ‘all categories’ in their response. These responses give confidence that the participants have a reasonably sound understanding of the broad nature of family violence.

Any form of control that limits the rights of others.

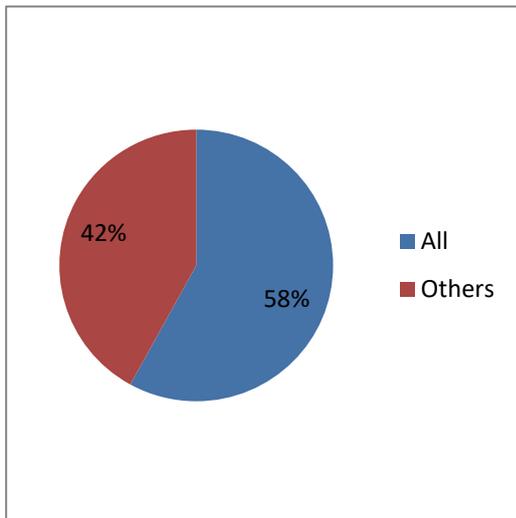
#### 4.5 In relation to Family Violence campaigns do you think anything more needs to be done regarding prevention?



The results here clearly demonstrate a strong belief in a continued commitment to the prevention of family violence.

Better education. For example, at schools, workplaces and sports clubs.

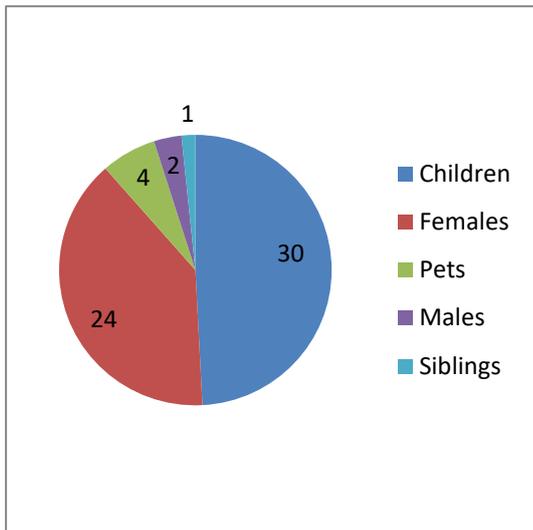
#### 4.6 Who are the main victims of family violence?



Here the participants were asked to indicate whether they believed children, parents, female and male partners, siblings and pets were the victims of family violence. The results again indicate a broad understand of who are the victims of family violence.

Family violence affects everyone.

#### 4.7 Who are the main victims of family violence?

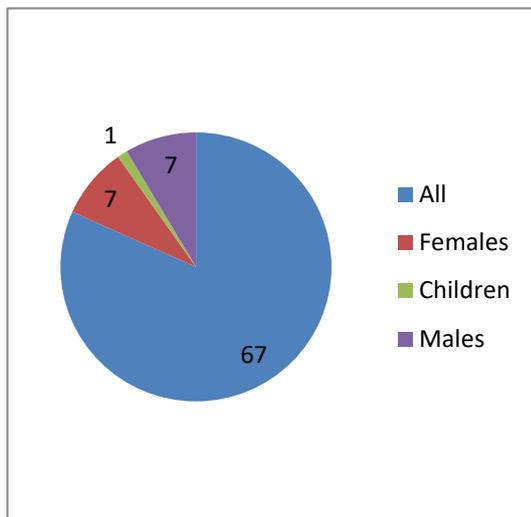


Here the category of 'others' from question 5a is broken down. Again, note that these figures indicate the number of responses not the percentages involved.

It is of interest that children were identified as the main victims of Family Violence.

It is also of interest that males and siblings were identified as being at less risk than family pets.

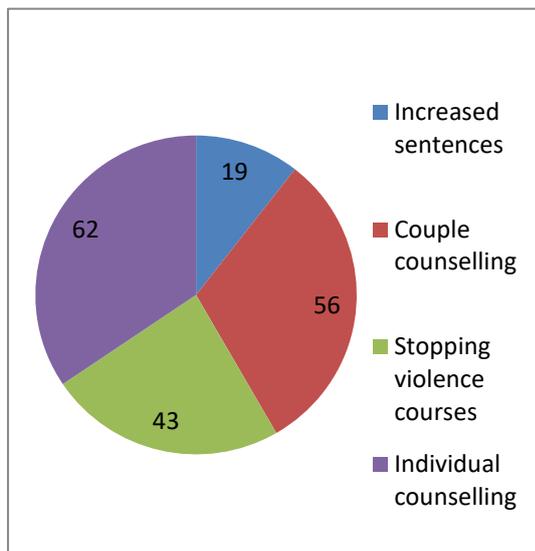
#### 4.8 Who should prevention focus on?



Here 67 (or 85%) of participants thought that prevention should focus on all those involved. Of the other responses (again the men could respond to more than one category) the responses were equally divided between men and women.

Maybe there needs to be a way of reaching blokes like me, I've missed the campaigns

#### 4.9 Should more be done for offenders?

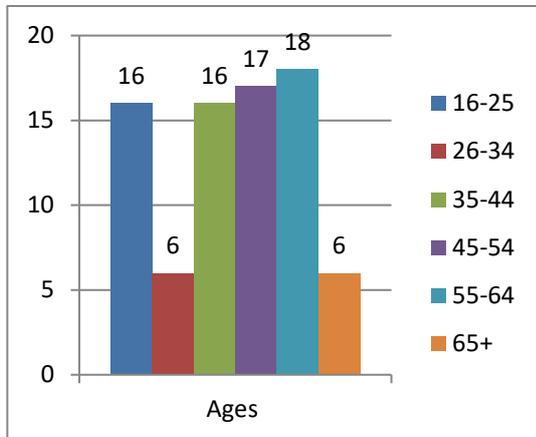


Here the participants were offered four options, one relating to increased sentences with the other three figures are not percentages as the men could choose more than one area.

The numbers from the graph indicate that there was little support for increased punitive sentences but considerable support for increased counselling and stopping violence courses.

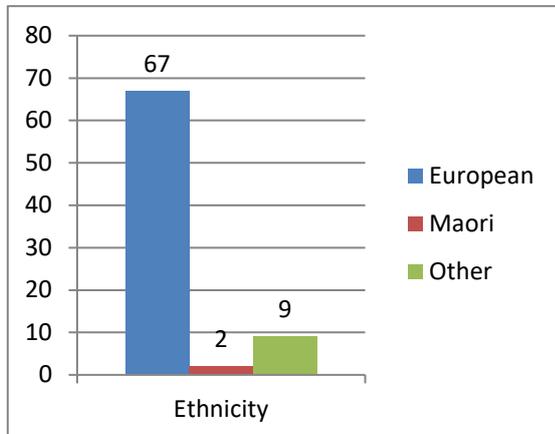
It has to be more positive. Shaming ain't going to work.

#### 4.10 What is your age group?



The ages of the men were well distributed across the spectrum. While 26-34 yr. olds were under-represented it was pleasing that sixteen 16-25 yr. olds elected to complete the survey.

#### 4.11 What is your ethnicity?



While Maori make up approximately 9% of the population of Nelson this number weren't reflected in the overall numbers for the survey.

## 4.12 Conclusions

The main points that arose out of the survey analysis are presented below

- Te Rito: the Nelson Tasman Family Violence Intervention Network, Nelson was largely unknown by the participants. This is disappointing given that the project was, at least in part, driven by the network's desire for greater support from men in the network's activities. However, it should not be assumed that not being aware of the network correlates with men not being aware of the network's activities.
- That 79 men completed the survey over a period of 3 hours belies the common assumptions that men are a hard to reach group and that they are reluctant to become involved in initiatives around family violence. Almost all the men who were asked to complete the survey did so.
- In addition to the above, 31 men agreed to be part of subsequent focus groups. With this project, it is clear that men are willing to spend time and thought in providing ideas that may assist in the prevention of family violence.
- Even though the survey took place during the White Ribbon Campaign Week approximately 50% of the men were unaware of this campaign. This is a surprising result given the media and other coverage detailing the campaign. The result suggests that, to be heard by men, considerably more work needs to be undertaken in how best to market the campaign to this group. Particularly worrying is the poor knowledge younger men had of the campaign. These results suggest that despite significant resourcing, education/advertising is not reaching a number of men.
- The men had a sound understanding of the nature of family violence in how it was perpetrated, from physical violence through to threats. They were also almost completely supportive of the need for a greater focus on prevention.
- Forty-six percent of men felt that all family members were the victims of family violence. Of the others, the majority believed children were the largest number of victims with women below this. 89% of men felt that prevention should focus on all family members.

- The area of 'what should be done for offenders' produced an interesting result with the main emphasis on the need for counselling and stopping violence programmes. Also that intervention should focus on both partners. There was significantly low support for increased sentences.

## 5. The focus group results

Of the 31 men who volunteered to take part in the focus groups 12 were able to arrange to participate in the first group with 11 returning for the second group. The discussion was recorded, transcribed with themes and subthemes identified. The analysis from the first group was provided to the participants for critique and reflection prior to their returning for the second group. This initial analysis provided the starting point for discussion in the second group. As expected, discussion in the second group was of considerably more depth. Four themes were identified from the raw data.

6.1 The need for effective male role models.

6.2 There is an urgent need to focus on all aspects of family violence.

6.3 Current provision of services for males needs evaluation and development.

These themes are identified below, supported with a selection of quotations from the focus group discussion

### 5.1 The need for effective male role models.

A recurring point throughout both focus groups was that men struggled to have a clear understanding of what it is to be male, with one participant describing this as a 'crisis of identity'. Considering the multitude of differing perspectives on masculinity, attempting to be more specific on this point would only risk returning to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Nevertheless, this point persisted throughout the groups.

*There's a lack of role models. I listened to the radio on the way here and the Prime Minister complaining about getting kicked out of Parliament. We've got very few guys who we can aspire to, to be proud of.*

*There are good [role models]. Steven Biddulph for example, really good programmes.*

In relation to family violence, there were persistent calls for the need for 'good [male] role models'. This call was more in response to what the participants saw as media

portrayals of sporting heroes and suchlike, portrayals of men who proved difficult for the participants to identify with. One media presence mentioned was Vic Tamati, a spokesperson for the It's Not OK'' and White Ribbon campaigns. Mr Tamati's story is horrific and raw in its telling. It also exemplifies one person's perpetration of extreme violence towards family/whanau members and his subsequent pathway to changing his behaviour. The participants explained that this and similar examples of extreme violence, while important, did not resonate with them. As one participant explained,

*Most of the [male] role models that are used come from backgrounds which don't relate to everybody. They have done horrific things. That's good for some people but it doesn't relate to me because it's not my world, I just wonder that by just focussing on that perspective and nothing else leaves a lot of people feeling that the [message isn't aimed at them].*

The participants believed that the positioning of men role in society, especially in relation to family violence, was extremely negative. Again, this did not resonate with the participants' understandings of themselves and of their families/whanau.

*For me, what I'm seeing, I'm sick and tired of the all men are bastards' message'. Men are too scared to speak up because if they do they know they're going to get hammered. [Speaking up] can come across that you're a misogynist, a woman hater. It's almost as though you're having a go at [women].*

One worrying point was the point above was reflected in education at tertiary level within the health/social sciences. They were clear this negativity persisted and programmes failed to explore the status of men in relation to family violence from a position other than criticism and blame. This particular point should be understood in the context of males being in the minority as well as the power relationships between students and teachers.

*What I [didn't] hear is that males can be vulnerable too but the majority [of course material] is based on the woman, on the children. [Teachers] need to be more aware that males have emotions too they can fold under pressure. They need to*

*teach that as well as everything else. They need to remember that males need help too.*

*There is nothing taught on working or supporting male clients. When you've got some tutors with extreme feminist bias it makes it really, really hard. The next generation of workers is getting this [negative] message from their [teachers], they then carry this out into the wider world and it just enables these attitudes to continue.*

As well as education offered more widely in society

*Education needs to be right through, even to men our age. It's all very well promoting education with boys but it will be years before there will be any social impact. You need to hit all across the board not just in the schools. An awareness campaign for all ages. To start teaching them how to be a responsible adult. That there are services available for us, there are options apart from going out and getting drunk. Hopefully there is somebody to talk to.*

*Education needs to be aimed at both [males and females]. Some specific to males and some to a joint [audience]. Show a bit more equality. They should take the girls aside and talk to them about certain things.*

## **5.2 There is an urgent need to focus on all aspects of family violence.**

The participants viewed family violence as a broad, complex issue and were clear that media portrayals need to move away towards more broad understandings of family violence.

*Violence is about powerlessness, frustration and social circumstances. This is different to the usual story of family violence. Family violence is said to be about men's power and control.*

*The media loves eating up the dramas. They blow everything out of proportion. [Special interest groups] use this to their own ends. There needs to be some protection [from] the media.*

And that family violence affects all family members.

*We should focus on all violence. I don't see why we shouldn't focus on women, men, children, animals. Just to hone in on the male as being the perpetrator of violence is missing a lot.*

That the view of women as perpetrators and men as victims must be acknowledged.

*In the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study, they asked males and females about their experiences of assaultive behaviour. That's defined across the spectrum, hitting, spitting verbal abuse and so on. They found that the incidence was even between genders. The only difference was that guys never reported this to the Police. The reason was that the guys [minimised the effect on them].*

*When they say 'family violence' I automatically think it's a male assaulting a female. It could be a female assaulting a male. It could be where they're both assaulting each other, they do it regularly and it's a pattern. Teenagers assaulting their parents. There's lots of levels of it. We've just had the male assaults female pushed in our face so much. These levels need to be acknowledged not just 'men are all bastards'.*

*Women need to be shown that they commit the crimes as well and it's not alright for them as it's not alright for [men]. This needs to be taken seriously. There's male assaults female, but nothing [the other way]. We all know the amount of psycho women out there; we've probably dated one at some time. We've all got our stories. But its only ever males that are defined as being the problem. It needs to be shown that [women] are the problem too.*

*In a restorative justice session where the female was the perpetrator (of violence), she started crying. Those present comforted her, put their arms around her and the*

*male [the victim] was sitting there by himself. I was thinking i don't mind them giving her some comfort but it would never happen if the man was the perpetrator'. There's no way that would happen. "You poor thing, you've been through a tough time", and she was the perpetrator. It pissed me off. The sympathy and understanding she got ... they would never do that for a guy.*

*Even if the Police know the women's the perpetrator, with Police Safety Orders, he's the one that's got to leave. If they put the woman out on the street and something happened to her there would be trouble. It's a bizarre situation*

### **5.3 Current provision of services for males needs evaluation and development.**

The participants consistently reported that their experience of social services was less than satisfactory. That, while services say they are there for all clients, that is not what the participants experienced. This criticism included experiences from the physical environment they encountered to a lack of empathy in contact with staff.<sup>3</sup>

*At [a particular service] the walls were plastered with services for women, absolutely plastered with them. The only thing for men was a poster saying It's not OK to assault women. So you're sitting in the waiting room looking at all this.*

*I was amazed at the amount of services there were available for mum and the kids. Dad got one paragraph in the pamphlet, pretty much out the door and gone. There was just nothing. Where do these guys go? No wonder things go pear shaped.*

*There's only one place for men to go [for emergency accommodation] and that's the night shelter, so if there were more organisations that fought for men, say for housing and stuff. At present, when men want to get away from the situation, there's nowhere to go so they hang around, it all escalates and gets out of proportion.*

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<sup>3</sup> This point repeats findings in previous projects. However, the authors would point out that this doesn't necessarily reflect the willingness of staff to best support male clients. It may well reflect the lack of availability of a strong evidence base to guide their professional practice.

## 6. Discussion.

The project took place within a distinct local environment therefore any attempt to generalise the findings to a wider population should be made with considerable caution. Having said this, research of this type does have strengths including the credibility and authenticity of the findings as well as the transferability of the process itself. In effect, the process can act as a template for other localised projects. The findings should prove of considerable value to others working with similar groups of men and perhaps to the participants themselves.

The findings from both the survey and focus groups are collated and are presented below.

### **6.1 Family violence prevention/awareness raising campaigns are not connecting with the male participants.**

The participants had a sound and broad understanding of the nature of family violence. That is, how family violence is perpetrated, the range of victims and the effects of violence on victims. However, even though the survey took place during the White Ribbon Week, approximately 50% of the men were unaware of this campaign. This was a surprising result given the media and other coverage detailing the campaign. The result suggests that, to be heard by men, considerably more work needs to be undertaken in how best to market campaigns to this group. These results suggest that despite significant resourcing, education/advertising is not reaching a significant number of men. While some agencies may well have made changes in this area, the perception of the participants was of little change.

Parallel to the above, a recurring theme throughout the project was that of men not being clear about their role, as a male, in today's society. While this is obviously too complex an issue to address in this report, in relation to family violence the participants felt at a loss in how to understand their connection to family violence campaigns. They were aware of persistent calls for 'good [male] role models'. However, this call was more in response to what the participants saw as media portrayals of sporting heroes and suchlike, portrayals of men who proved difficult for the participants to identify with. Another media presence mentioned was Vic Tamati, a spokesperson for the "It's Not OK" and White Ribbon campaigns. Mr Tamati's story is horrific and raw in its telling. It also exemplifies one person's perpetration of extreme violence towards family/whanau members and his subsequent

pathway in changing his behaviour. The participants believed that positioning men in this manner, although representative of one aspect of family violence, was extremely negative completely ignoring a wide variety of other perspectives. While important, this portrayal of an extreme aspect of family violence did not resonate with the participants' understandings of themselves and of their families/whanau. The participants explained that this and similar examples of extreme violence did not represent their world at all.

## **6.2 The need to understand and consider family violence more broadly.**

While it is acknowledged that family violence is complex and broad in its perpetration and effects, intimate partner brutality (sometimes called intimate terrorism) seems to be the area where most emphasis is placed in relation to awareness raising, prevention and intervention. Here the participants were clear that awareness raising in the area of family violence needs to be reconsidered. While the participants accepted the reality of these examples they believed the more commonly experienced relational aspects of intimate partner violence or assaultive behaviour needed to be recognised and that, in most cases of intimate partner violence, there is a need for both partners to be supported to make changes.

It was of interest that majority of participants believed that the main emphasis with intervention should be on the need for counselling and stopping violence programmes. Increasing sentences for offenders was not viewed as a constructive response to preventing family violence. Again, the participants believed these interventions should focus on both partners.

## **6.3 The need to consider the concept of 'male friendly' services**

Several participants believed that while services say they are there for all clients, that is not their experience. These participants reported that their experience of assistance/intervention in relation to family/whanau concerns from social services was less than satisfactory. This criticism included a wide variety of experiences from the physical environment they encountered to a lack of empathy in interpersonal contact with staff. This should be viewed in conjunction with two other observations from the participants. Firstly, that most of the staff in services are female and that education (both undergraduate and in-service) on supporting male clients is either extremely limited or absent. Further the experience of some participants was that what education there was failed to explore the status of men in relation to family violence from a position other than criticism and blame.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Men's engagement with and support of family violence initiatives.**

One point, central to this project, was the willingness and enthusiasm of almost all the 79 men approached to complete the survey. Further, that 32 men volunteered to take part in subsequent focus groups. Their enthusiasm to make a difference was foremost in their endeavours throughout all stages of the project. This strongly suggests that the oft cited belief that men are reluctant to step up and take responsibility for reducing family violence is incorrect. These men demonstrated that when men are approached and listened to they are very willing to share their views, suggestions and insights.

This finding strongly suggests that family violence awareness raising and prevention campaigns, to engage effectively with men, need to be reconsidered. To not do this risks blaming men (if they are a target group) for their non-involvement rather than campaign organisers critiquing and rethinking their strategies. One point cited throughout the focus groups was the need for a more constructive, strengths based approach to be taken.

To not include the insights of men in the area of family violence seems grossly counterproductive. While individual male advocates provide an important perspective, initiatives must also reflect the views of men 'on the street'. This project has demonstrated that this is achievable.

### **7.2 Our understandings must acknowledge all aspects of family violence**

While the participants in this project were reasonably knowledgeable about the nature of family violence, its breadth, its effects and its complexities, they were clear that the focus of current awareness raising and prevention strategies do not resonate with their understandings of their lives and their relationships with family/whanau.

To move forward in the management and prevention of family violence we need to broaden the approaches currently employed. Case study/personal examples need to be complemented by the vast amount of methodologically and ethical robust research evidence available.

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