

# 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)

## Desk Review Findings (Cont)

- 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

A blue spiral-bound notebook is shown from a top-down perspective. The notebook is open, and the cover is a solid, medium-blue color. The spiral binding is visible on the left side, consisting of several dark-colored metal or plastic rings. In the center of the cover, the words "THANK YOU" are printed in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. The background behind the notebook is black.

THANK YOU