

Child Protection and Domestic Violence



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Public and Professional Perceptions of the Roles of Men and Women

- Historically, men have been perceived as playing an insignificant role in child care and child development.
- Child welfare has history of focusing on women and mothers.
- Much of the child and family welfare literature is dominated by child development and social work theories, which focus exclusively on mothers and pays scant attention fathers and fathering.

Public and Professional Perceptions of the Roles of Men and Women

- Much of the child protection intervention focus has been on mothers with little attention given to appropriate interventions with fathers (father figures).
- Mothers are often placed in untenable positions to protect children from men whom they may not be able to protect themselves from.
- They are often required by child protection to monitor, or prevent the children's father's access.

Result

- “Women continue to be blamed for the majority of problems in families whereas men remain largely invisible, especially in the field of child welfare” (*Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003: 395*).

Training

- Many child protection workers lack skills knowledge and confidence to engage men who maybe hostile to child protection involvement.

The Child Protection Workforce

- Child protection work is primarily carried out by women.
- Child protection workers may avoid men because of fear of anticipated violence or intimidation. Their fears may be based on actual experience, or on the experience of colleagues.

Complexities of Practice Setting

- Responding simultaneously to the needs of adults experiencing domestic violence and the specific needs of their children.
- Child protection workers receive little guidance on how they might 'engage men'. Furthermore, there are very few resources to work with violent men particularly in rural regions.

Complexities of Practice Setting

- Much of the work going on with men, fathers (father figures) is in specialist, often time limited, centre based projects and encompasses those actively seeking engagement, as well as those less committed.
- The men who may cause most problems for women and children are less likely to be engaged with.
- The issues involved in home visiting are relatively neglected.

Result

- Child Protection workers manage mothers
- Mothers manage fathers
- The father-child protection worker relationship is indirect, invisible or non-existent.
- Failure to hold men accountable/responsible for their behaviour.

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- To focus on safety, development and stability for children exposed to and involved in domestic violence situations.
 - Safety is priority
 - Seek to understand
 - Adopt the child's eye view
 - Use a developmental framework
- To remain conscious of the cumulative impact of living in a home where there is violence .

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- To remember differential responses will be required: there is no “one size fits all”.
- To develop staff awareness, skill and confidence to engage men and hold them accountable.
- To increase men’s awareness of, and responsibility for, abusive and neglectful fathering, including domestic violence.