



**Welcome by the Chief Commissioner of the Families Commission to the
'Children, child maltreatment and intimate partner violence: Research, policy and practice'
conference**

Wellington, 5 June 2013

Tena kōrua Sam and Marama

Tena koutou katoa

Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou

I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to our keynote speakers:

- Jeff Edleson,
- Sudha Shetty,
- Di Grenell;
- our other speakers,

and to you all, on behalf of the Families Commission, and the New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House.

I'm Belinda Milnes, interim Chief Commissioner of the Families Commission.
Like you, I am passionate about making a difference for New Zealand families and whānau.

We are delighted to be co-hosting today's conference on 'Children, child maltreatment and intimate partner violence: research, policy and practice'.

The diversity of agencies and organisations here today from around New Zealand is testament to what an important, cross-sector issue this is.

I thought I'd tell you a little about the role and focus of the Families Commission.

The Families Commission does a great deal of work in the family violence space.

Currently we:

- fund the work carried out by the Family Violence Clearinghouse,
- we run the annual White Ribbon campaign to raise awareness with men about domestic violence, and
- plus we're an active member of the cross-government Family Violence Taskforce.

You may be aware that the Families Commission will shortly have a new legislative mandate to deliver robust independent monitoring, evaluation and research in the social policy sector, so we know what programmes and interventions actually work.

We are part of the Government's shift to evidence-based policy and funding decisions, based on the best evidence available.

But let me assure you, our longstanding commitment to reducing family violence, will continue.

However, as we transition from a pure advocacy organisation, to an evidence-based focus, the Commission is having a good long look at our entire work programme, including our work in the family violence space.

The Board of the Commission wants to be sure that we are maximising our resources for impact.

- That we are not duplicating our efforts, or doing work other agencies are better placed to do.
- That we are adding value to the work that all of your organisations are doing.
- And that we can measure progress towards reducing family violence.

I believe that with our new evidence-based focus, we can bring really powerful information to the table to inform policies, funding and practice.

One example of particular relevance to everyone here today is the Growing Up in New Zealand study which we are taking over on behalf of the government.

This latest longitudinal study, tracks the lives of nearly 7,000 ethnically diverse children who are about to start school.

It can show us pathways to positive outcomes for children – both now and in the future. It can look at the impact of family violence on children's development and life course. It will provide powerful information on the resilience factors that can ameliorate adverse events.

I hope that one day this powerful dataset could be used to monitor interventions to see what actually works.

So let's briefly look at what we know:

- we know that strong resilient violence-free families are the foundations of healthy communities and a healthy New Zealand.
- we know that New Zealand has an appalling record for family violence, with high rates of domestic murders, and high rates of child maltreatment and death.
- we know one in three New Zealand women have been assaulted by a partner at some stage in their life – that's the equivalent to an intimate partner assault on every woman in the Auckland region;
- Māori women are more likely than Pakeha women to experience violence by their partner.

- Thanks to the work of people like our keynote speakers and Janet Fanslow from the Family Violence Clearinghouse, we are aware of the devastating impact of intimate partner violence on women and children.
- We know the complex impacts on children – such as that witnessing family violence leads to increased criminal offending in young people,
- And we know that all too frequently it creates yet another generation of violent partners, abused children, and damaged families and communities.

And there is some really interesting and positive work underway.

For instance, the Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families is focusing on developing a social sector workforce which understands family violence and is competent to respond.

We know the importance of work with schools and young people in preventing partner abuse and youth violence, so the Taskforce is developing guidelines for schools in providing quality relationship education programmes.

This is an area that the Families Commission's new SuPERU monitoring and evaluation unit is currently looking at as well.

We know that children effected by IPV who are well connected - to their families, schools, and communities - are more resilient. Greater resilience in young people is a key area of focus for the Families Commission.

I am equally interested in what we don't know enough about

- How do we encourage complex, troubled families to address family violence?
- How do we get sports clubs, employers, churches, GPs, and teachers and other community organisations to get involved?
- How do we ensure that high-quality services are available in the right places?
- What are the key characteristics of interventions that effectively prevent reoffending and keep families free from violence?
- How can we use the enormous amount of data becoming available to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge?
- Can we identify those who may be the victims of family violence and intervene before it happens?
- How should we help young women recognise and resist violent relationships?

Certainly, consistent quality data and evidence has a huge part to play in answering these questions.

A common issue, particularly in government circles, is a lack of quality information on family violence in New Zealand.

That's why the Families Commission is leading the next phase of the development of Family Violence indicators for the Taskforce.

We've contracted the Family Violence Clearinghouse to help reach some common definitions, data and indicators of family violence.

The focus is on data sources from Health, Justice, Social Development and the Police.

Consistent information will mean we can move beyond counting incidents, and start assessing trends and seeing what programmes and interventions really work.
And to a large extent that's the role of SuPERU.

To conclude yes, family violence is a large, complex and critical issue. And it requires our collective effort, knowledge and expertise to make a difference.

Today the key question for us all is, 'how can we best work together to eliminate the cycle of family violence and poor outcomes in New Zealand?'

How can we get real traction on reducing family violence, as government, communities and NGO's?

Are we 'doing the right things', at the right time and in the right combination?

How can we push family violence up the priority list.

On behalf of the Families Commission, welcome to this symposium.

Coming together today, and sharing our knowledge and experience, is an important step towards the change we all want for New Zealand families.

Thank you.

Belinda Milnes
Interim Chief Commissioner
Families Commission