



Overview of Family Violence Fact Sheet

What is family violence?

The *Domestic Violence Act* (1995) section 3 defines **domestic violence** as “violence against [a] person by any other person with whom that person is, or has been, in a domestic relationship.”

The Act also defines **violence** as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse including, but not limited to, intimidation, harassment, damage to property, threats, and causing or allowing a child to see or hear physical, sexual or psychological abuse.

Te Rito: New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy defines **family violence** as “a broad range of controlling behaviours commonly of a physical, sexual and/or psychological nature which typically involve fear, intimidation, and emotional deprivation. It occurs within close interpersonal relationships.”¹

Family violence is sometimes referred to as **battering**, a term that highlights the “systematic, continuing pattern of assaults, threatened assaults, intimidation and abuse which produces a dynamic of fear”.²

The terms ‘family violence’ and ‘domestic violence’ are often used interchangeably. **Whanau violence** is also sometimes used to mean the same as family violence, but whanau has a wider meaning than family.³ **Abuse** and violence are also often used to mean the same thing.

The New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (NZFVC) uses the same understanding of family violence as *Te Rito*, where ‘family violence’ includes:

- Partner or spouse abuse (abuse or violence by one partner against the other, in same sex and different sex relationships, including dating relationships)
- Child abuse or neglect
- Elder abuse or neglect (NZFVC extends this to cover abuse in long-term care)
- Parental abuse (abuse or violence by a child or young person against a parent)
- Sibling abuse (abuse or violence by a child or young person against a sister or brother)

How common is family violence?

Aotearoa New Zealand evidence:

- Half of all murders in Aotearoa New Zealand are family violence related (28 of 53 murders in 2000; 29 of 61 murders in 2005). Around eight children die each year from maltreatment.⁴
- Child, Youth and Family received 66,210 care and protection notifications in the year 2005/6. From these notifications, 49,063 required further action, and 5,077 children were placed in care.⁵
- A survey of women aged 18-64, who had ever had a partner, found that 33-39% of women had experienced at least one act of physical or sexual assault from a partner during their lifetime. Severe physical violence was experienced by 19-23% of women during their lifetime.⁶
- Women’s Refuge provided services and programmes to 17,773 women and 12,161 children in the year 2005/06.⁷
- In a study asking men about their use of violence, 35% of men reported being physically violent to their partner in their lifetime, while 20% of men reported physically assaulting their female partner during the last year, and 50% reported using psychological abuse during that time.⁸
- A national survey of women and men found that 26.4% of women and 18.2% of men, who had ever had partners, had experienced physical violence from their partner.⁹
- In the same survey, 14.3% of young women and 2.9% of young men (aged 17-25) said they had been sexually abused before the age of 17.¹⁰
- Police recorded 56,380 family violence occurrences in 2005, at which around 65,000 children were present.¹¹



- There were a total of 32,108 family violence-related offences recorded by Police in 2005/06, including 8,437 male assaults female offences, and 4,402 offences of breaching a protection order.¹²
- Age Concern worked with 975 older clients who had experienced abuse or neglect between 2002 and 2004.¹³
- There were a total of 8,255 applications to the Family Court under the *Domestic Violence Act* (1995) in 2004, including 4,659 applications for protection orders.¹⁴

International evidence:

- A US survey of 16,000 women and men found that 25% of women and 8% of men had experienced physical assault or rape by an intimate partner. Eight percent of women and 2% of men reported being stalked.¹⁵
- A UK Crime Survey found that 21% of women and 10% of men had been subject to threats or force (physical abuse) within a domestic situation since they were 16. Twenty-four percent of women and 5% of men reported being sexually victimised at least once in their lifetime.¹⁶
- Child death from maltreatment occurs in every OECD nation, but the death rates vary dramatically from 0.1 to 3.7 deaths for every 100,000 children (New Zealand has 1.2 deaths for every 100,000 children).¹⁷

What is known about the impact of family violence?

- Family violence is physically, emotionally, mentally and socially damaging.^{18 19}
- Being a victim of family violence is associated with increased physical and mental health problems, and increased use of health care services.^{20 21}
- Children are harmed by seeing, hearing, or living with violence in the home.²²
- The physical punishment of children is associated with long term negative effects for children.²³
- Of the families where partner abuse is happening, 30-75% will also have child abuse occurring.²⁴
- Men are more likely to be the perpetrators of partner violence, and women are more severely affected by partner abuse than men.^{25 26 27 28 29}
- Women are more likely to be the perpetrators of physical punishment of children, but men are more likely to perpetrate physical violence that leads to serious or fatal injury of children.³⁰
- Family violence occurs irrespective of age, social status, or ethnic group, and affects a significant number of people in the community.^{31 32}
- The consequences of abuse can be especially serious for older people as they are physically weaker and more vulnerable than younger adults.^{33 34}
- In 1994, family violence was estimated to cost New Zealand society up to \$5.3 billion each year.³⁵
- Family violence impacts on, and increases costs for the business and corporate sector through absenteeism, loss of productivity, and staff turnover.³⁶

What works to prevent family violence?

Interventions aimed at preventing family violence can work at several different levels:

- Primary prevention – working with general population groups to prevent violence from ever happening, such as: parenting programmes; education programmes for young people about healthy relationships; social marketing or awareness campaigns to encourage intolerance to violence; promotion of human rights for the young, older persons, women, indigenous peoples and diverse ethnic groups; and addressing economic, housing and employment inequalities.
- Secondary prevention – working with those already identified as being at ‘high risk’ of perpetrating, or being a victim of violence, to prevent violence occurring, such as: screening for family violence; and some ‘anger change’ or preventing violence education programmes, including those for children who have witnessed violence.
- Tertiary prevention – initiatives aimed at providing support, reducing harm, and preventing more violence after violence has occurred, such as: safe houses for victims; protection orders; prosecutions for assault; stopping violence programmes for violent perpetrators; education programmes for adult and child victims; and counselling.

Some initiatives (such as some education programmes and legislation reform) can work at different levels to reduce further violence once it has occurred and also prevent violence in future generations by changing behaviour and attitudes.

Many interventions have not been formally researched or evaluated, although some are validated through the fact that they are developed from the collective knowledge and experience of victims, advocates or those with particular cultural expertise.³⁷

There is no one answer. Preventing violence requires many integrated initiatives at the national and local levels, in different sectors of society and working with different population groups. One intervention, like a stopping violence programme, will not on its own succeed in preventing family violence.

The prevention of family violence requires:^{38 39 40 41}

- A focus on preventing violence with safety and empowerment for all victims being central
- Perpetrator accountability and support for perpetrators to change
- Community collaboration and cooperation across government and non-government agencies and across sectors (such as social services, health, education, justice, and corporate sectors)
- Multi-agency coordination at the case level, with a consistent and comprehensive response to services for individuals and families/whanau
- A long-term view
- Gender specific and culturally-relevant policies and practices
- Different approaches to different forms of family violence, and a recognition of the distinctions and connections between child abuse, partner abuse and elder abuse
- Interventions at all levels – individual, family, community, and whole-of-society or whanau, hapu and iwi
- Ongoing training for all those working with family violence
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of systems and services addressing family violence.

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If you wish to receive more information on family violence or request other New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse fact sheets, newsletters, etc., please contact us.



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