

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Research on children exposed to family violence to form part of new training package

The impact on children who are exposed to family violence will form part of a new training package aimed at educating men who use violence in family situations.

Recent research has shown that men who use violence in the family are willing to seek treatment when they learn about how their behaviour affects their children and the relationship they have with them.

A research team from the University of Tasmania's schools of Health Sciences and Social Sciences, led by Professor Kenneth Walsh, is collaborating with The Salvation Army (Tasmania) to undertake a new research project aimed at reducing the harmful effects on children resulting from exposure to family violence.

"Childhood exposure to family violence is associated with a range of long-term harms and there is evidence that exposing children to family violence could, in itself, be considered a form of child abuse," Dr Peter Lucas, spokesperson for the research team, said.

A key strategy in family violence prevention efforts has been to work with perpetrators, primarily males, although evidence of the efficacy of those interventions remains contentious. Further, evidence shows men are often unwilling to seek help to change violent behaviours, in part because of social and cultural factors around masculinity and family violence.

However, recent research has shown that learning about the impact their abusive behaviour has on their children, as well as how their abusive behaviour negatively impacts on their children's perceptions of them as fathers, is a strong motivating factor for encouraging men to seek treatment and engage with behaviour change programs.

The research will adopt a strengths based approach that minimises stigmatisation and blame and strives to find positive solutions. The approach emphasises that seeking help to change abusive behaviours is a sign of strength rather than weakness, thereby challenging traditional constructs of masculinity.

"Programs in the United Kingdom that have adopted this approach have shown promising results," Dr Lucas said.

As part of the project, researchers are aiming to engage with a variety of men on the issue as well as bring together a diverse range of experts from across the state at a series of collaborative workshops.

The workshops, will explore the most effective means to educate men about the harmful effects of family violence on children. These workshops are being held on July 9 in Launceston, July 10 in Ulverstone and July 15 in Hobart

Results from the state-wide workshops will help inform the development of the training package.

Further to the evidence-based training package, the project aims to specifically address national outcome 6 (Perpetrators Stop their Violence and are Held to Account) in the Federal Government's National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women 2015-2020.

The \$70,000 project is funded by the Tasmanian Community Fund. The project builds on research conducted by the late Associate Professor Erica Bell, which led to the development of the nationally recognised Safe from the Start project.

Safe from the Start is an evidence based project facilitated by The Salvation Army which offers training and innovative resources to assist with engaging and listening to the voices of small children exposed to domestic violence.

For more information about the collaborative workshops or the project contact Dr Peter Lucas at p.v.lucas@utas.edu.au

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