Chapter 10: Doing it better

'The answers were there before white man come in'

Stories of strength and resilience for responding to violence In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

CHAPTER 10
DOING IT BETTER

Introduction

In this chapter, we build on findings from the previous chapter where we discussed service provision. We report on participants' views of the strengths that already exist in communities. Under the heading 'Keeping culture strong', we outline community-led initiatives. We consider participants' views on the improvements needed across various sectors under the heading 'Improving Service Delivery'. Finally, under the heading 'Enhancing Education', we discuss participants' views on necessary educational activities.

Keeping culture strong

The broader findings of this study are echoed in community participants' view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as a source of identity and strength. Programs and initiatives that reinforce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture were considered central to responding to the issue of family violence. Participants believed that current government-led responses to family violence are not respectful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. One participant said:

> [There need to be] ... more accountability in government in the way that it's delivering the family violence. The law is inconsistent. The law doesn't sit with us. Our traditional customs are not practised within those doors.

Community-led initiatives

The literature supports a focus on culture in initiatives that respond to family violence.(94,96) It assists with ensuring cultural safety, reducing the barriers to access and increasing the relevance and positive outcomes of responses.(39,92,93)

Reflecting on programs or initiatives that worked to reduce violence and increase a sense of community safety, participants reported that change occurred when community was directly involved. Community participants, such as those we quote below, believed that this retaining and reinstating of culture needs to come from within community:

> It's our responsibility from a community perspective … is to put stuff in place or equip our men, equip our younger generations with tools that are going to be resourceful for them out there in society. … we could come up with all them ideas and say this is what worked for him … but I think if we're equipping our men and young men, they will not get to a point where they have to use violence.

> From each of those leaders, if there's any issue there for those families, their leaders to take on that role to talk to the other leaders.

> … if we all sat down at the table, right, and talked about things, these ain't about us anymore, this is about our kids, and our grandkids.

Participants believed that there should be community ownership of services and that local people should develop and provide services:

> We haven't got enough Aboriginal people in schools, police stations, all that sort of stuff, to help our Community, that's the biggest issue.

> We don't need to fund external services. Fund people in community … tell the government we need to be doing things our way …, let's build community, let's build families to deal with their own affairs, and this is what this talk is all about. So, we can listen to the voice for the people …

> Why don't the government sit down in these Men's Sheds, employ people … give that to the community, how they want to run it. Put the funding in them to structure there and educate, get them the qualifications that they want them to have in each individual community.

Elders play a central role in participants' beliefs about better responses to violence and community-led decision-making. Previous studies have found that involving Elders and community members in responses to family violence improves the cultural safety of programs and increases their impact and success.(90,95,97,98) Several participants, including those quoted below and others quoted elsewhere, commented on the wisdom of Elders and the many important roles they play:

… grandmothers and grandfathers … they're there to find the best strategies or what does our culture say about men looking after women … We need to go down that way.

… you need to take time out from your busy life, from whatever you're doing and sit down while them … yarn and listen ... the only way that knowledge can pass down from the Elders for you and me within our families, family group, and then the knowledge is passed throughout Community … to one now.

Overall, community members placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methods of healing at the centre of mental health. Commonly, community members suggested that yarning circles can be helpful in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. These could function to increase social support, which is protective for mental health difficulties:

Yarning circles are very popular in Aboriginal communities, informal chats and gatherings around food … You diminish stress and anxiety in people, you break those mental barriers down, social and emotional wellbeing barriers down, and it opens up the mind to actually access the information to release them to understand and absorb.

I don't call it counselling, I call it yarning. 'Let's go and have a yarn. I can come to your place or we can go down by the river, you know?' … I'll take people down to the river and we'll go wherever they want to go, you know, because four walls for an Aboriginal person is not particularly conducive to yarning, you know?

Participants often spoke about cultural and on-Country services that were having a positive impact on the community, through the sharing of culture and yarning together across generational lines, and in healing from trauma and violence. One example is a program where men, boys and Elders are taken on fishing trips to share knowledge and culture:

But with my program we're trying to utilise it as much as we can because we do annual fishing camps that we go for two days, we take the fathers, the kids, the grandfathers and get them to pass their knowledge on, spear fishing, dragnetting and all that sort of stuff. Plus, we have [an alcohol and other drugs worker]. He comes down and does a workshop on the campsite about the effects of drugs and alcohol and all that sort of stuff. And then we have another Elder fellow. He comes and does a bush tucker program where he shows all the young kids and young adults the bush tucker that's laying around so they can learn all that sort of stuff.

In another example, participants from a remote community focus group spoke of a counselling group for women, where community members had a place to meet and yarn in a safe environment:

We've also got a Women's Group … It's starting off … it's still very early days but, again, we've got a house for them. It's really more of a yarning. Yarning. We want to get a sewing group together, we want to get a craft group together. We just want a space where women can go and feel comfortable, maybe take their children, we'll have a little playroom, and just yarn, you know? Just talk. Because a lot of times women don't get a chance to do that.

They talk to family but sometimes they want to talk to other people, too, so it's a way of keeping that connection together, that Community together so that if somebody comes in and says, 'I'm having a real problem with so and so' and the other women can say, 'Well, you know, why don't you look at this and why don't you try that and why don't you come over to my place and have a cup of tea?' And it's that thing of if somebody's struggling, the other women are aware of it and they can look out for her, especially the young ones that are struggling.

Participants discussed the need for places for men to be able to congregate and yarn, to learn about and pass on knowledge and culture, and where they could also learn about family violence. One person described a Men's Program run by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitator:

… it's [an Indigenous medical service] that does the [Men's Program]. [Facilitator]'s really great, he's got a way of really connecting with the men. I'm not sure how he does it, I mean, he has got that masculine personality but approachable. I think that works really well for some of the blokes in the Community, they can see that he's still a man's man but he's ... got compassion.

Some participants were interested in initiatives where elements of law and order were placed in the control of the community. Community policing is a type of self-policing initiative, which can also be referred to as 'Night Patrols' or 'Community Patrols.' Participants with experience of 'community policing' described it as enabling earlier action and preventative measures:

… take more of a community policing approach that helps because it is more supportive instead of confrontational and just focused on locking people up.

Crowd control, where they can calm the situation down, you know, and say, 'Look' you know, and how to sort it out without any up at the court, in the courthouse, because once you ring the police and they start charging people you're going to end up in the courthouse, because that's how we keep ending up back in the system.

Participants stressed that program should contain culturally appropriate activities. One participant noted that generic programs were often not successful:

The Men's Centre, they run the same programs over and over, they need to change their programs around, so us Indigenous people can understand it.

Improving service delivery

Planning, designing and delivering services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be complicated by a number of issues, including insufficient funding, remoteness and identifying qualified staff. Many participants, especially the service providers, recognised these challenges. However, some communities made positive recommendations for improving service provision. Many of these recommendations echo findings from other research (39-41,92,93,95) and have been discussed earlier in this report. They include:

> working *with* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

> holistic responses that develop relationships with the community and networks with other services

> ensuring that the service, and providers in the service, are culturally competent.

Health care services

The CMS findings showed that one in four participants (26%) who had experienced any physical, emotional or sexual violence reported that they received physical or mental health care. Participants who had experienced physical violence were most likely to have received health care (24%), compared with those who experienced emotional (19%) or sexual violence (18%). Participants in major cities and regional areas were equally likely to get health care (26%), but fewer remote participants (24%) received health care following the violence. Males were slightly more likely to get health care after violence (27%) than females (25%). Those aged 40–49 years were the most likely to get health care (29%), followed by those aged 25–39 years (29%), those aged 50 years or more (23%) and those aged 18–24 years (21%). Participants aged 16–17 years were considerably less likely to get health care following violence (7%) (Table 17; Table 18).

Participants identified barriers to accessing health care services: availability, accessibility and capacity; and racism and lack of cultural safety.

Availability, accessibility, capacity

Service mapping showed that 16 of the 18 communities had an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander health organisation physically present within the community, one had services via outreach; and one had no access. All communities had access to a counselling or mental health services – 17 within the community, and one via outreach (Table 16).

Despite this reported service provision, one participant described limitations:

The other thing that's annoying for me here, is that we do have an AMS [Aboriginal Medical Service], but it hasn't got the appropriate … Management … it's not working with the appropriate programs because they haven't got the people.

Staffing issues within health services were linked to lack of resourcing. Participants expressed concerns about fly-in-fly-out delivery, the high turnover of staff and the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:

Keep the doctors here for more than two years. The amount of times I've had to repeat myself to a doctor.

But there need to be like a structure there where Aboriginal workers are there. Because black fellas not going to go to white fellas if they're not going to help, you know what I mean.

They need to have more funding for Indigenous people that want to be counsellors …, so they can understand where we're coming from, because they've lived it themselves. And to encourage them more. Get a lot more people out in those areas. That might break the cycle a little bit too.

Some called for more services for people who use alcohol and other drugs:

There's not enough rehabs to rehabilitate anybody and most of them, the people that go to gaol and use a lot of drugs they seem to come out even worse than what they already are.

I don't think there's a rehab here, I think there's one up in [major city]. But it'd be good to have a rehab down here, especially with all the people in this town.

Cultural safety

Participants described how a lack of cultural safety within health care services affected accessibility:

I'm coming to another organisation, I'm down on my knees, I'm vulnerable, I'm this fuckin' big, and you had a white face telling me to come back later or go sit down there? You know, that really is really offensive.

I guess the environment we are in. Community health teams have been placed in general hospitals. A lot of Aboriginal people don't like going to hospital, so they are not inclined to just drop in.

Racism

Participants described the racism they experienced in health care services. One said:

White doctors that talk about Indigenous, how we look, you know, how ugly we are.

Another pointed out that there is indirect racism everywhere, including in the hospital system:

… in the hospital system … Like I said, if somebody rocks up to the emergency department, you've got an Elder or local Community member that's sick or whatever, and then there might be a whole mob of family that rocks up, bus load of twenty, and the nurses flip out and don't know what to do, but they don't understand that that's how we operate, that's … our cultural values, you know.

Participants viewed family violence as being inextricably interconnected with other social issues, including education, employment, alcohol and other drug use and trauma. They described a situation of cyclic disadvantage and insecurity in many lives.

The most common response to this issue was community–government collaboration. Some participants used the example of housing stress, suggesting that the Housing Department work with them on solutions:

Housing [Department] is not working, and they don't want to come and sit down and help … That's why we want to get together as our women group, so they can see us.

One of the health care service providers stated that their service had employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to assist with making their service more culturally appropriate:

Aboriginal health practitioners, Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Interpreters attend hospital Monday, Wednesday, Friday, we book if needed outside these hours. Culture and language is a big part in our service.

Housing services

Participants described how emergency housing, such as shelters, refuges and hostels, is needed by victims of violence and their families and also by those who use violence. Thirty-three percent of CMS participants who reported experiencing violence said that they slept 'somewhere' other than their home, after such an experience (Table 17). This could be, for example, at a friend or family member's residence, a safe house, shelter, refuge and/or hostel. Focus group and interview participants identified the need for more places in general, as well as specific places for men, and places for men who use violence.

The service mapping showed that all communities except one (94%) had a safe house or refuge, 83% had a shelter, refuge, or hostel, and 89% had a housing service (Table 16). In the qualitative data, however, community members described a lack of availability of housing services for families, men and young people.

Services for families

Services should focus on the family, not just the individuals involved. Services should work on the principle that family violence does not stem from an individual problem but from wider issues, such as intergenerational trauma, mental health, financial difficulties, gambling, alcohol and other drug use and overcrowding. Examples of these views from participants were:

… you want to work on the perpetrator because they're still a part of the family. They're going to be a part of the family regardless, like, especially if there's kids involved, so you want to work on both the mother and father.

Once the department steps out … [the family needs] ongoing help as long as they want to have it.

Participants highlighted the need for victims – often women and children – to have somewhere they can go for support and safety:

> ... the perpetrator's the type of person that can't be told to leave them alone and stalks and harasses and stuff, so are they better off going into a safe house that's well equipped for her and her family to make it as comfortable as possible so she's protected, and it's sort of, I don't know, monitored by police and video surveillance.

This need was supported by a service provider:

> Housing for families that is safe and secure.

Another believed that there was a need for:

> More services for women and children – safe houses, hostels.

Participants were concerned that service responses focused on splitting up families, rather than helping them to resolve issues. They also saw a need for programs and services to help families heal together:

> If we could get a family violence program that wasn't just entirely run on an individual basis but as a group in community and as a whole family approach to understanding the causes and managing the behaviour.

> The amount of families that are broken up, that are like, no, there's domestic violence here, don't look at any of the background of why that is. Nine times out of ten, people that have domestic violence have either got a shit load of trauma in their past, or there's drugs there. And then it just looks at it and goes, this isn't working, they need to be separated …

> I know for a fact that the services provided here for domestic violence is only to separate these couples. It's not to straighten up and get them back together … not to get them strong and get them back to together.

> When there's counselling, I want to see both parties, boy and girl, have that counselling together and not always separate and then, at the end of the day, you don't know where we stand in the relationship, you know?

Service providers similarly described the need for services to support families staying together, reflecting what families want:

> More services providing support to keep the family together without the violence as most families want to stay together or do anyway.

> While our service does meet most of the daily needs of each client and does respect their confidentiality and privacy, because the safety of the client is paramount, there is a lack of ability and time, to liaise effectively with the entire family.

While current responses to family violence tend to separate the offender from the victim, some community members favoured a response that involved addressing the violence as a family issue. One said:

> There isn't enough like, family counselling where you can both sit down and do … it's like, men can do their DV counselling, women do their DV counselling … It's like, you split the family up, he can sort his shit out, she can sort her shit out…

Many recognised the burden of family violence on grandparents, who often provide care, housing and support for victims, perpetrators and children. Family focused programs would ensure that Elders in the family can also access support. Comments included:

> Yeah, I understand with what you mentioned is because we being the grandparents who need some support because … we sit back and go through all the violence with the kids, I've been through it with three of mine, and we've never had any support or somewhere to go. We need somewhere where we can go, just grandparents, so we can go and sit and have a coffee and talk to someone about it.

> You guys [grandparents] don't fall into a category and they always want to tick a box and because you guys [grandparents] don't fall into that category, there's no assistance.

Services for men

Community participants and service providers noted that most services provided support to women, and:

> Men don't seem to have any services provided to help them with accommodation, rehabilitation etc. … Most of the services offered are mainly for women and children.

I would like to see an Aboriginal men's shelter in this Community. I've already said it, and I'm going to say it again and again and again.

… real need for [a] men's refuge, because women seem to be catered for.

… there's nothing here for men, there's no shelter …

… if a woman gets … in trouble … they put her in women's refuge and then no man's allowed to know where they are, and all that. They should have that for blokes too. We need a bloke's shelter.

Many also believed that the cycle of violence, particularly for males, stems from not dealing with trauma. Male-specific services could provide a safe space for men to discuss any issues:

Men shame to talk about it. They need to find the right person to talk about it and, yeah, so that makes it harder for men ... we need a safe house where men can go and talk to another man to help him.

Participants described the lack of services and facilities for men. One participant from a very remote community stated:

They only support the women and strengthen up the woman only, but not the men.

The lack of services for men may explain why it was less common for males (25%) than females (39%) to report sleeping/staying somewhere else after experiencing violence (Table 18).

It was believed that safe houses for men could act as an early intervention in family violence situations:

There's no safe houses. No fully resourced places where men can actually go to as an early intervention, to address their problems or to escape violence or to get away from a relationship because they're being violent and ... particularly for our Indigenous men who find it hard to access services in any case, you've got to have relevant and appropriate, culturally appropriate, services where men can go to otherwise it's going to be very hard to engage.

Among men who had ever felt violent, 51% said that they ever looked for help to stop using violence; 42% said they had never looked for help, and an additional 7% said they had not looked for help but would like help. Of the males who had sought help, 6% said it worked 'a lot', 47% said it worked 'a little bit' or 'a fair bit', and 48% said it did not work at all (Table 22).

Other participants stated that there was a need for men who use violence to be re-housed, so the victim can stay at home and in Community:

… a place where perpetrators should go, are able to go … and victims stayed at home.

And that's the biggest thing, trying to uproot a family overnight to a new community, the kids have got to get rid of all their friends at school and all that type of stuff. Yeah, I think it's just … even though it's probably in the best interests of the family to get as far away as they can, that can be quite hard for them and the kids where they're not exposed to the violence or don't understand it. They're like, 'Why have we got to move overnight and stuff?' and then you've got to go through all that stuff.

Participants also described the need for services for offenders. A participant from a city area referred specifically to the need to provide a service for male and female offenders:

We need to work on the perpetrators … because we've got to remember, men get belted up, too, not just women.

Service providers expressed a similar concern about the lack of services available for men, as victims and users of violence:

There is no male behaviour change program in the region so some clients can only have the choice of returning to violence or leaving completely.

Nothing for men who experience violence at home most time they are discharged to not a safe place. I think men are told to man up [but not from us]. No accommodation sometimes at the crisis centre but not in town, no services for men.

If we had more support or education for men and more services to help and assist perpetrators that would be a start. Often women have to leave home, or receive support, but ultimately want to go back to their man – but when they do he hasn't changed because he's had [no support] to see what he is doing is not right.

Findings from the SPS demonstrate that service providers perceive themselves as better at meeting the needs of those who have experienced violence than those who have used violence (Table 19). Male participants reported a limited number of services directed to men's rehabilitation, wellbeing and safety from family violence. In response to a question about whether there was a safe place for men, a participant from a remote area simply answered:

Gaol.

Another participant from a remote area had a similar answer:

You pretty much don't have anything here for men at all unless they go to the cell for the night.

In relation to offenders being sent to gaol, one participant spoke of continual support after gaol (throughcare) as a form of holistic approach.

So, you know, in a lot of cases, if say male perpetrator, has flogged his missus up, whatever, he goes in gaol, that's it. They get back, it's not as in they've got any follow up, like, anyone, I don't know, like a case worker or something working with them or specialist working with them, or anything. So, it just goes back into that cycle, and that's a big gap. It's all good to send them away to gaol, but are they really learning anything from that?

Services for young people

Young people's exposure to, and involvement in, violence concerned communities greatly. Some participants believed that broader socioeconomic responses, such as employment opportunities, would assist the next generation and give it more self-sufficiency and purpose. Youth-specific services and programs were also important, teaching young people about healthy relationships and alternatives to violence, and in providing them with activities in a safe space:

The other big investment ... more investment needs to be made that I can see is in our young generation, our youths that are coming through. To me, the stats around young people's incarceration and contact with the child protection system and then the suicide rates are screaming out. It's like a call out to Australia and the government, you need to invest more into these Youth Programs that are culturally appropriate, that reconnect the youth to themselves, their identity, their Country and then have therapeutic elements in there as well.

Specific services and initiatives suggested by participants included sports clubs, drop-in programs and bush programs:

I would just sort of like having sports, something to do with sports, because there's a lot of ... There's like, a lot of kids that are doing drugs because they can't get involved with their sports ... Another thing to look to, like, yeah. So, say if you've got sports like basketball one night, and then you got the youth centre to go to and then something to go to, PCYC [Police and Community Youth Club] the next night.

... take them out bush and set up a camp for them and keep them out there for a week, yeah, and give them things to do. They've got youth workers to work with them and that's plenty of time to sit down and talk about things and cultural training and stuff like that.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils were also considered central to building better responses Councils provide communities with advocacy, community development and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation. They are generally well regarded when they are conducted in culturally appropriate ways:

... okay, but what we've said is, we've seen it in other communities, okay, where Aboriginal development managers or officers are put in place and there's better engagement with Community. These are permanent officers. Their job is to be that link between the Aboriginal Community and council.

They're good with our Community ... and all the families within that [group] when they go for help, it's our organisation, our policy we know the people ... And we know the people, we can use the leaders ... to talk to all the families here ...

The justice system

Earlier chapters indicated that most participants did not agree with approaches that would increase families' contact with the legal system. Community members across all remoteness categories supported alternatives to mainstream courts. Participants were interested in alternatives to prison and child removal that involved local systems of law:

> Well, it shouldn't be reporting it, they should be doing a course and that, you know, both of them, because when one go and do a complaint they don't want to talk to the other one, they just lock the other one up.

> Okay, we'll look at maybe two homelands and they can do sentencing maybe two weeks out there and they have to learn this, this, this, this. Why aren't we thinking along those lines?

Alternatives to legal sentencing tend to involve Elders, who hold respect and significance in the community. Elders can be effective in mediating cases and de-escalating situations:

> Have an Elder sitting there and actually talking to you through it before … before it goes onto those extra steps. And just having an Elder talking to you, it could calm the situation down instead of making it evolve even more.

> Bring a lot of culture back when it comes to speaking to the Elders, like you pay them more respect, you concentrate on every word that they say. You don't look down, you keep eye contact, because you know if you look down, then you walk out that room, you're going to get cracked.

Aboriginal Circle Sentencing was another alternative to mainstream sentencing. Participants thought it particularly effective for youth. In Aboriginal Circle Sentencing, members of the Aboriginal community, including Elders, come together, intending to find solutions other than prison:

> You fellas know what that circle sentence is? … What they are is just … like, a group of us getting together, we've got a twelve-year-old kid that comes in, instead of him going to gaol, we sit down and talk about what can we do with him, instead of getting him shafted straight off to gaol. They've got it over there in [an outer regional Community], so the circle sentence. And they've got Elders, plus people who are workers, or say, there's the police, the health, but fellas there to sit around the table and tell you, you know, instead of shoving your kids straight off to gaol. So, how do you try and help them?

Literature about family violence demonstrates support in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for alternative legal responses. Studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sentencing Courts (like the Circle Sentencing, Murri and Koori courts[46]) have consistently found that these courts provide a more culturally appropriate process, are more meaningful to defendants and victims and are endorsed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.(90)

Where an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person goes to court, many participants stressed the importance of having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer attend with them, for their safety and support. A regional service provider said:

> Clients feel better talking to us, also helps with making the client feel like someone understands and can help understand what the lawyers are trying to relay.

Other service providers acknowledged a need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lawyers and more engagement with the community, to improve access to legal services. Despite the overall tensions between the mainstream legal system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, many also saw a role for the mainstream justice system.

Legal services

Findings from the service mapping showed that the majority (72%) of communities had a legal service. These were present in both major city sites, in 78% of regional communities and 57% of remote communities. One regional Community did not have a legal service. Two regional and two remote communities had visiting legal services (Table 16).

Participants spoke about various aspects of legal services, including violence restraining orders (VROs; also known as Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs), accessibility, racism, mandatory reporting processes, programs for violent offenders, gaol, child protection and cultural alternatives to sentencing.

---

46. See Glossary of terms in Appendix 1 for descriptions of Murri Court and Koori Court.

Violence Restraining Orders

Several participants raised issues about VROs, saying that they do not always provide appropriate protection. A service provider described a situation where a woman was unable to use the systems in place to protect her children from her partner:

> … one client I've worked with before that was domestic violence, we've helped her get a place and everything like that, moving away from the partner. The partner's picked the kids up from school. She's gone down to the police station and notified them. There was nothing actioned for ten days. The only time it was actioned was he was trying to run her off the road with the kids in the car outside the police station. She couldn't get a welfare check done on them kids, nothing. We couldn't do nothing and it was … she was coming in every day crying because she didn't think the kids were safe and the police weren't taking it seriously. She had a current DVO on the partner but the kids weren't on the DVO so they couldn't … officially, they couldn't do nothing.

Accessibility

Participants commented on barriers to access to legal services, with views such as:

> You can't contact them … there's none here.

They described their limited access:

> They only over there once a month.

Participants commented on the fact that legal services do not provide information on what legal services are available or applicable, nor about legal rights for those who need it:

> They need to come out to our camps and talk to us and let us know what kind of service they can offer us.

> She doesn't understand the fucking law. The lawyers are not talking to her properly about what law are they using to be in the court today.

> The amount of Aboriginal families that don't know that that is their right … They act very professional so we all think that they have the right to say what they're saying, and they're reading between the lines living in the grey area, getting away with fucking murder, because not enough of us know what our rights are.

Racism

Many participants perceived legal services as racist and discriminatory, believing that the sentencing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, including those of lower socioeconomic status, was generally harsher and more common than for other Australians:

> When I was in a courtroom, I watched one white fella bash his mother, and he was on remand for about three months, and then he got nine months out of all that. If that was any other Murri fella, I reckon he would've got a couple of years instead of nine months.

> But the other thing is low socioeconomic base. So, if you're a very poor person, whether you're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal in this Community, you tend to be worse ill-treated than if you are better off … And that's wrong … it is also putting you in a bracket to say, you're not going to be helped because of the fact that you're in that particular bracket.

This racism is not always overt. Another participant highlighted the concealed nature of the racism they experienced:

> Yeah, to sort of just tear us apart, and I think that's where racism comes in. I think racism ain't obvious no more, I think the most dangerous racism is the subliminal racism where they're pretending they're not racist, but they are racist. And I think that's what my DHS [Department of Human Services] worker, I think she is racist and that's what she wants.

Child Protection Services

Child protection services were regarded as an ineffective resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Participants acknowledged the need to assist some families and provide safety for some children but did not believe that the current child protection system increases safety for families or their children.

Community members also focused on the need for children to be able to retain cultural and community connections. For these reasons, child protection services such as DOCS might be more effective and beneficial to community safety if they worked to keep Aboriginal children with family members.

When discussing child protection or community services, community members said:

There are some good stories. There's a lot of bad.

All but two (89%) of the participating communities had a child protection or community service, such as DOCS or Family and Community Services (FACS) (Table 16). The remaining two communities (11%) were in remote settings and were serviced by outreach.

Knowledge about mandatory reporting

The requirements and categories for mandatory reporting of violence towards children vary considerably across Australia's State and Territory jurisdictions.(99) When asked whether they knew about mandatory reporting, some focus group participants indicated that they were unaware of it and simply responded along the lines of:

No.

Others knew that there was a need to report but were unaware of the term:

No, if you could translate.

Not sure what that is – is it a fancy word for saying you have to report?

Some participants did, however, have a good knowledge of mandatory reporting:

Mandatory reporting, we're basically looking at the definition of it, which I did, is basically a kid's being neglected, abused, or mistreated, in any manner, well as far as I'm concerned that's mandatory reporting.

Mandatory reporting is say, where we health workers, we are mandatory reporters. If we go into a school, say I do here and a little child tells me in school that something's happened to them, it's my duty of care towards that child …

Others spoke of their duty to report:

But I think that both [name] and I, there's a Community expectation, and the Community knows that we have a zero tolerance for that sort of behaviour.

It depends who you work for. See, I'm one too, because I work for health, so we've got to do it, we're … by law, we have to report …

Depending on what it is, we may report it to either [place] Families or the police.

One participant said that no action had been taken after they had reported as mandated:

But, I've been in that position before, I reported a girl that was not properly dressed and no food to eat. I reported it to the authorities, do you know what they said? 'Don't worry about it.'

While this person saw a need for mandatory reporting:

… if there's any signs of sexual abuse or any recent ... child being severely harmed …

another voiced a concern about unnecessary reporting:

... people mandatory report, they were seeing, or not, to choose kids not even having a bath for one night, or going to school with no lunches or sleeping on the lounge floor on a mattress, like I used to do years ago, you know, so things like that. I think the understanding of [it is to report] the big things, not the small things

Participants identified several concerns about child protection services: child removal; fear of retaliation and retribution; harmful service delivery; and lack of cultural safety including racism.

Child removal

Community members and service providers discussed their unwillingness to report to Child Protection Services because of fear of having children removed. Participants recognised this as contemporary and historical fear and distrust (i.e. relating to policies of separation, as described in Chapter 4).

… because they [Community members] still have the theory that the children are going to be removed … so we don't trust them, because that government thing removed our children from going back years and years and years and, you know, generations to generations, so the mistrust.

Many participants had recent experience of children being removed from families and felt the consequences across families and the community:

… a lot of our children have been Stolen.

… do we want to be taking Aboriginal kids out of Aboriginal families, because that's what's been done all too much.

… a lot of our kids is taken away by the white women, and this is the frustration that is coming out of a lot of the family violence.

Participants spoke of the lack of support for families once children are removed and, particularly, about the lack of cultural continuity for children. Participants considered it paramount that children retain cultural and community connections:

… once you're involved in Child Safety even as a parent, or a child, they won't help you, they'll help the child to a certain extent but if the child wants to go back to the parents they won't help the parent.

There needs to be a better way of protecting the culture for these children to making sure that they are returned back to their communities to engage with their culture, the connection and identity is important.

In some cases, mandatory reporting was viewed as contrary to 'helping' a family and could even lead to negative consequences for the parents, including alcohol and other drug use:

And it affects parents when their kids get taken off them, like, most of them lead to drinking.

But yeah, it's gonna tear a mother or father apart, you know? It's just gonna make them fall to alcohol or keep doing drugs.

Fear of child protection services was explicitly linked to disengagement with other services. Participants reported that some families, along with the wider community, conceal issues of child safety through fear of children being removed – even when it is in the best interest of the child:

They're big families in [Community name] and everyone protects each other, so if there's an issue going on sometimes ... they can be hidden from the authorities in different ways but that child is still ... At risk … in a bad situation. The family will come in and hide that … For fear of it being taken away.

This included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers:

Well, black fellas try not to work with DOCS. It's as simple as that.

Highlighting the complexity of the relationship between child protection services and other health and social services, one participant spoke of the effectiveness of child services in removing several children from a violent household and placing them with a relative; but she still expressed her disdain for DOCS:

And her grandmother, luckily, is a registered, like, foster carer, so the kids went straight to their grandmother … Child Safety said to her, 'You can go live with your grandmother and the kids while we do an investigation, but if you go back to him you're not having those kids', and I fucking ... I hate DOCS with a passion but I wholeheartedly agree with that decision.

Fear of retaliation and retribution

Although reports to child protection are anonymous, it is often difficult for service providers, such as teachers, principals and child care workers, to conceal the fact that they have reported. A participant who worked at a preschool spoke about her experience of verbal abuse after a child was reported to DOCS:

… working in a preschool, a report was made about a parent that morning. By the time we took the child home that afternoon, we were being abused by the mother, because DOCS was straight there … we got abused because they knew it obviously came from the preschool.

Community members explained that, if they were to report a family or individual to child services, that family might then retaliate by reporting them, even if the claim was unsubstantiated:

Everyone's still scared of the fact that if we report you … you're going to be reported …

… some people can report false things and they get their kids taken away when there's other kids out there who should be taken from their family … I've seen DOCS take kids that shouldn't have been taken.

You've got to get people out of that when you're saying, 'Okay, these people have reported me, now I'm going to have a set on them and I'm going to keep giving them a hard time.'

Harmful service delivery

Participants across all levels of remoteness spoke of the ineffectiveness of child protection services in helping children and families. Despite the overall distrust of child services, many did also see the need for them, but noted ambivalence on the part of DOCS service provision:

Children Services, too, don't really help much. They brush it aside.

And DOCS you may as well don't ring DOCS in this area.

When you really, honestly, think about it, DOCS are going to say, 'Oh, well, we can't come. We won't get there for another hour and a half' … They go to a house and check and say, 'Oh, everything's going fine' but they don't know what goes on inside that house behind closed doors.

Moreover, community members thought that the child protection system, in which children are removed into foster care, does not offer a safer situation for children:

… when they get out of Child Safety, they come back even worse than what they already are. And I guess they're not really doing their job properly if they're trying to look after the kids. Really, they're just there for the pay.

Child Safety don't want to know what goes on in foster care, because I come from foster care, now my kids are in foster care, and you go to Child Safety, mention that your kids are being abused and they turn around and turn a blind eye.

Cultural safety

Participants stressed the need for government services such as DOCS to be more culturally aware and to engage with Elders before passing judgement on Aboriginal families and removing children:

[Staff from DOCS might think] 'Hey look, they don't have any beds. The kids are sleeping on a mattress on the floor, they need to be removed.' Whereas if you looked at that a little bit closer, and a little bit more personal … it's a loving togetherness thing to do. Not because we can't afford bed[s].

Along the same lines, another participant said of DOCS staff:

… their perception, their way of being raised, their white outlook is going to be heavily influenced when they're writing reports and deciding whether or not to take someone's children.

They offered this solution:

Whereas if they've got an Elder saying, 'Hey, no, that might be how you look at it from your family perspective, but in Aboriginal culture, we like to sleep all together, we like to all cuddle each other to sleep, watch a movie together, that's our bonding time, that's our love. That's not something to be looked at negatively.'

A regional participant discussing their state-specific Aboriginal child service emphasised this lack of cultural knowledge:

… they employ white people that probably don't understand culture … lack of training for black organisations to actually deliver service is appalling …

Service providers also discussed their observations of racism, with one regional participant stating:

… I've seen it. There's a difference with the race, because I've worked in the preschool, they wanted to report on this Aboriginal family but not report on this non-Aboriginal family. I'd mentioned to my supervisor, … she made excuses for her because it is was a non-Aboriginal child … but … I still made the report.

Police service

All but one of the participating communities had a police service located within the community. In that remote community, police provided outreach services (Table 16). Findings from the qualitative data showed several key barriers to effective policing related to family violence: trust; responsiveness; racism and cultural safety; and gendered experiences.

As discussed above, participants expressed mixed attitudes towards reporting violence to police. Many comments related to a lack of trust in the police, including fear of being implicated in the event:

If you ring up a policeman … like you was fighting in the argument. But you try and ring up policeman, they would come and sort this fight out or might be two young fellas fighting, and you ring up and the police asking you like, 'You in that fight?' And that's wrong, once you ring up the police and you tell the police, 'Go over there, see over there, that house over there fighting in the back', they should go over there. But you wasn't part of that argument, but the policeman reckon you are. You were involved in that argument. So, a lot of time you don't want to ring up, eh. You don't want to ring up the police, talk to police, police talk to you like you're part of the argument. But you're ringing up to try and stop them, and they put you in there, police say, because you answer the stupid questions … they'll ask you a lot of questions about your name … Like you was there fighting.

Some participants saw police response times as unacceptable:

Could be dead by the time they get out here.

Yeah. … but it takes maybe an hour, two hours, three hours. When something happens. When we ring to the police, we go through the call centre. It takes time to go back this way. We can't ring direct.

Participants living in areas where there is no police presence, or a temporary police presence (particularly in remote areas), viewed police response times as a problem. In some cases, after-hours response times were a concern:

During the day, we can call them but not after hours, straight through to the call centre … if we have an emergency we have to call triple zero … By the time the police come, somebody will be dead.

Participants were dissatisfied with a lack of action by police services in response to reports of family violence. One said:

And women go and do a report on domestic violence, or parents take kids there to complain about sexual abuse, the police don't bother with it, just tells you to go away.

Another participant spoke about an instance where the police responded to a report by driving to the site, but did not get out of the car or take any action:

Anyway, I'm on the phone to the police … and I said, 'Look, get the bloody police up here, there's a mob, they're fighting.' … you know what the police did? Drove in their car, didn't even get out of their car, drove in and then drove straight out. So, you know, I mean, it's about where we live, too, and that's the stereotype, and I rang the police up and I came down to the police station the next day, I said, 'Right, who were the two coppers on last night? Look, they could have killed each other over the other side of the flats there, mate.' So, you know, I mean, when you experience, and you live it, it's totally different.

Participants expressed concern about racism within police services. They saw this as inextricably linked to a lack of responsiveness. Some participants believed that a delayed police response, or non-response, was disproportionate for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people:

It only takes a phone call from a white person and the police is out here, but when a black fella rings, they don't come.

Black fella on black fella, they won't come … And then they don't do nothing, how many times? … Nuh. But when it comes to the black fella and white fella they'll run and protect the white fella.

Some participants believed that the communities or families were stereotyped, which limited the effectiveness of police and legal services in helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

… can make you more unsafe because they will make your partner more wild and they will just come and get you because they don't care about the paper … we know women who have been killed from this happening. Sometimes police don't come straight away if you call for help and there is a VRO in place because they know the family and get a complacent attitude like, 'here we go again.'

Participants spoke of the need for police to be more culturally aware and engaged in the community. Many reported that negative attitudes towards the police force stemmed from their low cultural awareness. There was a feeling that the police were working against the community, rather than with them as a member of that community:

The police need to do something on Aboriginal culture, that's a big must.

The lack of cultural awareness was described as driving police responses that are not appropriate for the context. For example, one participant described an inappropriate police response to an intoxicated person:

But the police don't work properly with the people. When you tell a drunk something, the drunk wants to talk over you and get more bossy with you, you know, especially when you're a family member … But they sort of move their body when policemen come, and policemen think they're reacting to them and then they get really rough with them, you know, and start handcuffing and breaking their arm and everything and they're just drunk, that's all they are, useless drunks, you know? That's why people get frightened of calling the police.

More than one-quarter (28%) of the participating communities had a form of community policing: 43% of remote communities, 22% of regional communities, and 0% of urban communities (Table 16). There is evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across urban, regional and remote settings are implementing different forms of self-policing practices.(100) In some communities, self-policing practices were used historically but have been taken away. Evidence for community policing suggests that it has a positive role to play in reducing family violence, including:

… acting as a nexus to connect people and services such as clinics, courts, police, community government councils, and family. They mediate disputes, remove people from danger, keep the peace at events such as sports carnivals, are consulted by agencies such as courts for input into sentencing, and play a crucial role in the development of community justice groups.(101 p. 2)

While police presence and involvement in family violence was not always perceived as positive, many participants saw an important role for police in communities. Some participants believed that more police officers were needed, to help reduce police response times. This was mentioned by participants from urban and remote settings:

More … police. That's what I reckon you could say, more police. We're always saying community's crying out with domestic violence, not enough police. You need more, too, around especially remote. Sometimes … the policeman's … two hundred kilometres away. By the time they get there, it's all over.

Building familiarity, trust and respectful relationships is key to improving relationships between police and community. This included improving the cultural competency of police officers and enhancing their integration into the community:

… those police came to the launch the other day and were fabulous and they started talking to some of the clients … it was the start of a fabulous process of hearing clients, without being in a system, and none of the … intimidation can occur, because [of] the nature of that.

If the same cop rocked up at every event for the next two years, he would get a hell of a lot more trust than any other bastard … if he just said, 'Hello, how you doing? Hope you have a good day.' He's got his little carry bag, he's happy to be there, that's all we want. Just come and be black for the day.

The police [just need] to show your faces. And not just once a year, you've got to make it often, you know what I mean. Yeah, it's got to be on a regular basis, like monthly, do something every month.

Yeah, I reckon they should have a program for just police officers and Indigenous people, rather than just football, sit down and just actually talk about what we're going through on a day to day basis, and what's affecting our communities and why we act that way, and maybe they might have an understanding …

When police have connections throughout the community, they are perceived to respond more appropriately to family violence, acting to assist a family or person rather than imprison them:

… there's sort of like a network where night patrol … if there's no room at the family's place, or that person's not welcome there, they will try the hospital. The police will actually call night patrol, or the hospital also ring up shelter to get this person a place to stay for the night, you know? Because sometimes, that's what they come across.

Gendered experiences

Participants described differences in the way police responded to males, compared to females, involved in violence. Several asserted that police tended to listen to women and assumed men to be at fault:

… going to treat us [males] different to what they treat females. That's what I believe, they see the man, the man's always in the wrong. But half the time it's probably the woman. And it's not fair on the kids.

They [the police] listen to the woman.

One woman said:

> Well, the way it happened with us was I went in to visit [name] at the hospital after he had his surgery, and the copper said to me, 'We're putting a DVO on him,' and I was like, 'I fucking stabbed him, he nearly died, why are you not charging me?' And they were like, 'No, we understand that you're a little bit smaller than he is, and you're pregnant, you probably stabbed him for a reason.'

Employment of Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers

Community members from around the country indicated that the employment of Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers (known in different jurisdictions as PLOs, ALOs, Aboriginal Community Constables or Community Policing) could assist the relationship between police officers and the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Community and improve responses to family violence:

> Even our last superintendent that was here, he wanted it here, he really wanted an Aboriginal community constable down here for the issues, to go with police officers when they go to Aboriginal people's houses, that person going in and talk to them instead of going in and … yeah, that's what we need. There's another need for that.

> Yeah, they need a Liaison Officer. Not a cop, not a citizen, something in between, you know what I mean?

> Well, I believe that they should have an Aboriginal Liaison Officer twenty-four seven with them.

> Probably. If I seen one of my mob in the police office, I'd be going to the police all the time.

These positions have key roles in providing advice and support to police in the management of Aboriginal issues and supporting the establishment and maintenance of positive rapport between communities and police services. A participant from a remote area who worked with the police said:

> I do work with the police … they'll give me a call, it could be half-past twelve at night and say, 'We've got a young Aboriginal going off … What can we do?' I might talk to them [the young person] on the phone to calm them down … working with the police a lot closer helps things.

It is important for most communities that the Liaison Officer is a local person who knows the community:

> We need a Liaison Officer, a representative of the Aboriginal community, but we need ... a local person who comes from here ... who knows the family, and can contain that, you know, where the police are going, contain that person and talk them down, like, try to settle them down before things escalate where the incarceration statistics go back up.

> From my experience, it has to be a local person from the … Community, that knows the Community, that knows everybody, that can actually get in there and do something for us.

> We should have an Aboriginal LO out to help the ... whatever problem not the white man. We want our own kind to be a policeman in the community and work with us into night and day and any problem, we can solve the problem ourselves with him …

Enhancing education

Participants viewed education as a key response to family violence. They saw a need to increase the recognition of behaviours defined as family violence, facilitate discussion about family and community violence and provide opportunities to learn about healthy, non-violent relationships:

> Education is key, I think. The more people know, the more people that are aware of their rights, their circumstances, their privileges.

Recognising what constitutes family violence

Participants said that educational initiatives should clearly address specific behaviours that constitute family violence; not only physical violence, but also intimidation, financial control, verbal abuse and control:

> … the majority of blokes think, 'Oh, domestic violence is when I hit her. It's not when I financially control her. It's not when I accuse her of playing up. It's not when I do all these other verbal things, or psychological things ... it's when I hit her, and I don't hit my wife, because that would be domestic violence.'

> Financial violence and that social isolation and I actually see that in a lot of the younger ones and because it's not ... they're not being hit, they don't see that as domestic violence.

Often there is misunderstanding about what constitutes FDV [Family Domestic Violence] and so this can also be a factor for under-reporting.

A service provider saw language as an educational starting point, preferring the term 'family violence' rather than the term 'domestic violence':

… what … it has done is make sure that people know that it's not just a partner that can perpetrate violence, that is a holistic family violence situation and it can be that sense of domestic, in the old sense … it can be an uncle committing violence towards a nephew …it can be a grandmother being violently abused by her son or her grandson, or that whole family picture rather than just the traditional male versus female violence …it's definitely opened up a conversation about it and extended the way we think of it.

Information about family violence services

Participants spoke of the need for information about services. Some noted that the barriers to accessing services are especially reflected in the low numbers of people seeking help for family violence other than physical violence:

I'm still seeing a lot of families who are being isolated by partners away from their families and still seeing, yeah, just people who have no idea where to go for help …

Sometimes they need to put actual things at the schools and at the shops like flyers because just putting them in the organisations, not everyone goes there.

Education about services would benefit service providers as well as community members, since there was a lack of knowledge among providers about what other services are available and potential referral pathways.

Participants believed education initiatives should respond to all of community, men and women as well as young and old:

They all say, 'Aunty,' because it goes both ways too, like, for man ... like woman's Country they for thinking the way woman's go. Man's got ample problems, too. Women have to understand man's problems, too.

Just counselling for the men and for the women to speak up, get out of it while they can. Yeah, counselling's good for men to do and the kids. I know a lot of black young women, they think that violence is love. They need a bit of education on love.

Previous chapters have described the complex difficulties of reporting family violence, with fear and shame named as common barriers. This indicates an opportunity to educate service providers about the context in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience violence; the perceived implications of reporting violence; how this aligns with the action they desire; and, in particular, the fear of child removal in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Working with communities to improve their trust of services is vital, as is considering responses to family violence that keep families together.

Talking about healthy relationships

Participants called for education programs about healthy relationships and dealing with conflict:

It's the lack of education of understanding how to talk to one another, to understand how does that impact on the child if you are arguing.

And it really sort of boils down to respect and we need to, yeah, speak, like have these programs to help our young families and young women.

Like, I'm strong voice for education and especially with young children, and helping young families, and I always say that it starts at home, everything starts at home, so if we target home, target family, because at the end of the day they are the ones, they are the first teachers for them kids before they go up to the school, so they need to be educated.

Healthy relationship education can be strengths based. Participants favoured programs that encourage positive behaviours and relationships and dealing dealt with family conflict in a constructive manner. They also supported programs and services that involved positive role models:

More workshops, positive role models, more education on how to resolve issues.

Young people need strong Aboriginal role models and mentors – this is a better way for them to see what is functional and what isn't.

This included involving Elders as role models. The respect afforded to Elders makes their involvement in education on healthy relationships essential:

> … even having these old, these Elders come and sit with us, sort of give us advice, guide us, just them talk sort of help us, too.

> Basically, what I'm saying is if you're at that shelter, we need older men folk there to come in, sit down, steady the young fella, have a cup of coffee …

Focusing on prevention

With the aim of creating a healthy relationship through education about the right type of behaviour, some participants wanted services and programs to be proactive and preventative rather than punitive:

> ... they wait for you to get into trouble, then to do the course, but if we can do these courses before they get into trouble, it might help.

> We need more education … before people get in trouble, you know, to learn them from the start.

> We had to hit absolute rock bottom before anybody wanted to help us.

Participants acknowledged that family violence services do exist; however, most are delivered as remediation rather than prevention. Many programs are funded for only those community members who have already offended:

> We're actually doing some work now with an Aboriginal Legal Service to try and get a … it's called the Violent DV Offenders program. But, they've had to be charged with DV offences more than three times. And also, they had to be in the court system, and be on parole. Which is ridiculous … But, the thing is, we had a lot of young blokes who said, 'I want to do that program, can I?' 'No, you can't do it, you're not on parole.'

> If you get locked up or something happens, they refer you to … the legal service. And from the [legal service] will refer you to places like [Indigenous medical service] or [men's domestic violence group], [place] Court, that kind of thing. But again, you've got to already be in trouble.

Healthy relationship education programs in schools are another way to help prevent violence in relationships:

> Our schools need to include the impact of violence and how to address it as part of the general Education syllabus/teaching.

> Better talking in the school about violence and respectful relationships is good.

> More talking about what is functional and what is dysfunctional in schools so young people don't think it's normal to have violence in your life.

Smaller communities reported difficulties with violence emerging from teenage relationships and involving members from the wider family:

> Because when they fight from high school, kids, when the kids get involved, the parents get involved. When the parents get involved, the whole family gets involved.

> And a lot of the times the kids may be fighting, but it ends up the adults take over the fight and carry it on … But, yeah, the kids probably made up, still hanging around each other, but it's the adults that keep it going.

The literature review revealed several examples of education programs that were preventative and focused on strengthening healthy relationships, culture and empowerment to address family violence.(37,96,102-104) These programs were regarded positively, but many researchers concluded that more evaluation is important, to build the evidence base.

Collaboration between stakeholders

Participants described how 'organisation cooperation' can support more effective responses to family violence. Services working well together facilitate efficient referral pathways. Links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and mainstream services are particularly important, enabling clients/patients to engage with:

> People from the Community … familiar faces, people you know.

> … someone who really cares. It'd have to be Aboriginal people from the Community taking it in turns as well as being up there helping those professional people. You'd have to have a couple of professional people because it's not only that, it's all the suicide stuff, you know? You need someone there for that. That's a big thing that we've been battling here. So that's the sort of people you do need in that place.

In one example of collaboration between services, a medical service and school in one Community were working together to help inform children and their families about services existing within the Community and to allow medical service staff members to get to know the Community:

I know with the medical centre, they're doing a tour for the schools at the start of the year and take them round to different services so they know from the get-go.

Integrated services were perceived to offer more holistic care, for families and for community as a whole. Many of these examples involved a community program, providing health services as well as specific groups for children, men and women:

… they're very much holistic in that you've got an emotional social wellbeing service ... You've got playgroups, you've got Men's Groups, you've got Women's Groups. There is something then that the members of the family can access.

They used to have a fantastic one down at [Community name] which was a family-based program on both the mother and on both parents and the children and they'd all go and they'd all go through the program, so the children were recognising what was happening for the mum and dad, they had them … the babies could be looked after, mum and dad could work on themselves, work with the children so the whole family; it was a whole family program. But once again it was a good program, it was working and the government couldn't afford it no more.

Participants suggested that current services should create networks within communities and with other services; services that approach family violence as simply an individual or legal issue are not successful. More holistic approaches will produce better outcomes:

Whatever we put in place has to consider us holistically, too. Once we start to try to get on top of that, it's looking after everybody's wellbeing, thinking about trying to find an answer for all of that stuff we just talked about, you know? If we pour our energies and resources into the right way, we take care of a whole heap of those issues.

I guess I'd just keep making them aware of it and … trying to support as many families that need support and … look for the ones that really do need it and be there for them, I think, and working with them, you know, helping them get through all that and rehabilitation and stuff like that, yeah.

Just have to call the police or the Night Patrol and the Public Safety Housing Officer and the [service] … We go to them or they come to us and we talk all together … they help the residents to be strong ... They also offer help and give numbers to other services that is available to use if they needed any help from family violence. They also help and support the … residents … to speak up strong and stand strong against domestic and family violence.

Conclusion

Participants thought that mainstream family violence initiatives and campaigns portray Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative light, exacerbating stigma and shame. They recognised that family violence is an issue across Australia, not specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; any material referencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities should be culturally appropriate and strengths based. Education for non-Indigenous people, about the context of family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is also important. In the following chapter, we discuss these issues, together with implications for action and solutions, in detail.