

# **Report on Giving, Receiving and Seeking Help**

## **The Campaign for Action on Family Violence**

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## **Acknowledgments**

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Nadine Metzger and Alex Woodley  
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## Executive summary

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- The aim of this research is to understand help giving and receiving behaviours in the context of family violence.
- In total, 75 qualitative interviews, 27 stakeholder surveys and 150 online 'helper' surveys were completed, totalling over 250 overall responses.
- The ultimate aim of the data collection, and the interviews in particular, was to talk to people about the range of experiences they had with seeking, receiving and/or giving help with family violence.

The following are the key findings from this research.

Effective support increases the victim's and the perpetrator's belief in self and sense of agency:

- victims and perpetrators want to access support from their whānau, family and friends
- whānau, family and friends are very important and play a highly influential role
- social support (friends and family in particular) plays an important part in increasing self-efficacy and supporting change.

Readiness to receive help is important for both victims and perpetrators.

- There is a disjuncture between the 'mental picture' of a perpetrator and the vision that perpetrators have of themselves (or in the case of victims/survivors, the vision they have of their partners).
- Victims and perpetrators do not seek help out of fear, shame, guilt and embarrassment.
- Help seeking is deferred when victims and perpetrators feel that they can sort the situation out 'on their own'.
- In general, fear stops victims seeking help; they fear that talking about it will make the violence worse.
- Perpetrators have a desire for respect (as a Dad and a partner) that stops the men admitting they have a problem with violence.
- Both victims/survivors and perpetrators normalise violence and so are not ready to accept help.

In a crisis, effective help is noticing and acting. Failure to recognise that violence is occurring is one of the primary obstacles to intervention. In general, effective help involves:

- being proactive – taking notice, looking for the signs and asking
- being reactive – if asked for help, providing it
- telling others who are prepared to act.

There is currently a disjuncture between help offered and effective help.

- The help currently offered to victims/survivors does not work well.
- The help is often controlling or disempowering.

- The help currently offered to perpetrators only works well when they are ready to accept help. Before this, offers of help do not register.
- Help is largely asked for, offered and heard at a time of crisis.
- Helpers give or offer help because they believe that they have something to offer; that their help will make a difference; or that they have a moral obligation to intervene.
- Many people are willing to help but help offered is ineffective.

Social supports fail where whānau, family, friends and communities:

- tolerate violence
- withdraw or ignore violence
- blame the victim for the violence.

Positive change happens when someone offers effective support.

- Every person who made changes had someone on their side who believed in them and supported them.
- One person was often enough to make the difference, however, the more points of support the better.
- It appears one person (influencer) 'making a stand' against violence can act as a catalyst for change and attract others to join them.
- Displeasure and challenges from a number of whānau members can influence a positive change in perpetrators' behaviour.

## Introduction and background

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Family violence is a significant social issue in New Zealand. It is estimated that one-in-three women has been the victim of domestic violence (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004). Between 2000 and 2004, 56 women, 26 men and 39 children under the age of 17 were murdered by a family member (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2007). In 2005, the New Zealand Police recorded more than 60,000 offences and non-offence incidents involving family violence, at which over 62,000 children and young people under the age of 17 were present or involved in some capacity (Standards New Zealand, 2006). Despite this, many thousands of cases go unreported; Police estimate they only see only 18 per cent of all violence within homes (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2007). The economic cost is estimated at between \$1.2 and \$5.8 billion each year (Snively, 1995).

The Campaign for Action on Family Violence, the “It’s not OK” Campaign (the Campaign), is a community-based social marketing initiative that seeks to change the way New Zealanders think and act about family violence. The goal of the Campaign is to reduce society’s tolerance of family violence and change people’s damaging behaviour within families.

The Campaign has focused on establishing “It’s not OK” as a social norm, and telling stories of positive change. The findings from research conducted by the Centre for Social Research and Evaluation at the Ministry of Social Development have highlighted that New Zealanders see violence within families as not okay and that they want to act if they see violence. However, a number of New Zealanders feel that although they would want to act, they would actually be unlikely to act, or are unsure of how to act (Attitudes Survey, Ministry of Social Development, 2009).

Understanding the motivations and barriers to giving and/or receiving help has been highlighted as a priority for the Campaign.

This aim of this research is to understand help giving and receiving behaviours in the context of family violence. In particular the research aims to understand the attitudes and behaviours relating to the willingness, confidence and capacity to give and/or receive help. Areas of particular focus include what action people can take to prevent family violence; where along the continuum of family violence can or should people act; what are the signs of family violence; what are the opportunities to take action; where it is hard to take action and why; what might make it easier; what offering help looks like and what interventions make it easier to give and receive help.

A further focus of this research is to identify conditions that encourage help giving and receiving, particularly to understand what motivates someone to take action to prevent or stop family violence; to understand people’s willingness, confidence and capacity to give and/or receive help; to understand what help people want or need to take action to prevent family violence; how and where they could access help; what help do those at risk of, or currently experiencing, family violence want or need; how and where would they access help and what makes someone ready to accept help.

Lastly, this research aims to identify barriers that prevent help giving and receiving, particularly to understand what prevents someone from taking action to prevent or stop family violence and to understand what prevents someone from receiving help.

## Method

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### Data collection

The data collection was undertaken in four parts.

#### 1. Qualitative interviews

Seventy-five qualitative interviewees were sourced via organisations, community groups and non-family violence-related stakeholders. Where possible, a 'clustered' or triangulated interview strategy was used, whereby interviews were conducted in clusters with the victim and/or perpetrator and/or helper being interviewed separately about the same situation.

Interviewees were asked to place themselves into one of the following four groups:

- perpetrators of family violence who have been offered and/or sought help
- victims of family violence who have been offered and/or sought help
- people who have been approached by perpetrators of family violence for help, or have offered help
- people who have been approached by victims of family violence for help, or who have offered help.

In reality, the distinction between victims, survivors, helpers and perpetrators was unclear, with most of the interviewees falling into more than one of these categories, and answering accordingly.

The interview team consisted of six women, of whom three were New Zealand European, two Māori, one Pacific Island, and one man (Māori).<sup>1</sup> Where possible, the gender and ethnicity of the interviewer was matched with that of the interviewees.

Interviewees were asked to rate the violence on a scale of one to 10, where one was 'bullying' and 10 was 'life threatening'.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Stakeholders' survey

Community stakeholders were invited to participate in an online survey using Survey Monkey<sup>3</sup> that asked them about their experiences and observations of what encourages help giving and receiving behaviour. The survey link was sent out to individuals and organisations involved with family violence networks.

Contact was made with national partners of the Campaign, and business and local community stakeholder groups to identify participants to be interviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Pākehā interviewers also identified as a Muslim woman.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the categorisation of violence interviewees perpetrated or experienced was not influenced by the interviewer and was therefore entirely subjective.

<sup>3</sup> 'Survey Monkey' is a web-based survey programme.



The stakeholder surveys have been used to inform and contextualise the survey findings.

### 3. Online survey

An online survey that targeted people who had helped someone experiencing family violence was conducted. The questionnaire was sent to 1,000 people from a panel of New Zealanders compiled by Buzz Channel Ltd, an online research company. A total of 150 people responded.

The survey questions were aligned with the interview schedule, and contained mainly open-ended questions. The survey took respondents around 15 minutes to complete.

### 4. Other information sources

Lastly, a page was set up on Facebook and a search was conducted of the site. This elicited a further 30 stories of positive change. Although these were not included in the analysis, the findings of the interviews and surveys were checked against these stories for 'face validity' to see if the results were consistent with their experiences.

## Sample

In total, 75 qualitative interviews, 27 stakeholder surveys and 150 online 'helper' surveys were completed, totalling over 250 overall responses.

As the research focused on stories of positive change, all those who were interviewed as victims or perpetrators believed they were no longer involved with family violence; they were former victims and former perpetrators. Overall, the interviewees comprised of the following:

- perpetrators
  - overall, 6 per cent were New Zealand European, 13 per cent were Pacific people and 80 per cent were Māori<sup>4</sup>
  - all but one was male
  - three-quarters rated their violence at the 'high' (7–10) end of the family violence scale
  - at the time of the study, the youngest perpetrator interviewed was 22, the eldest was 56
- victims/survivors
  - of the victims/survivors, 42 per cent were New Zealand European, 28 per cent were Pacific peoples and 28 per cent were Māori
  - male victims/survivors accounted for one-fifth (20%) of those interviewed. Of these, just one was the victim of partner violence, the remainder were victimised (as teens) by parents or other immediate family members

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the high proportion of Māori interviewees is most likely due to the methods of recruitment used. The three Māori interviewers recruited interviewees through a Marae, a local Māori community and a Māori service provider. This was a purposive sample and therefore the numbers are not representative of the New Zealand population.

- most of the violence experienced by the victims was moderate (40%) or severe (46%)
- at the time of the study, the youngest victim/survivor interviewed was 22, the eldest was 47
- helpers
  - helpers were New Zealand European (40%), Pacific people (20%), or Māori (40%)
  - most were female (90%). It should be noted, however, that at least one-third of the males who chose to share their experiences as perpetrators were also (latterly) helpers
  - the majority of helpers (58%) rated the violence they helped with at the severe end of the scale (7–10).

## **Data analysis**

The ultimate aim of the data collection, and the interviews in particular, was to talk to people about the range of experiences they had with seeking, receiving and/or giving help with family violence.

In this document, the terms intervention and help giving are used interchangeably and refer to interventions that resulted in a move towards a violence-free life (which is also described in this document as ‘a positive change’) for those involved.

A total of five interview schedules were developed for the following groups:

- perpetrators of violence who had sought or been offered help
- victims of violence who had sought help
- victims of violence who had been offered help
- helpers who had helped perpetrators
- helpers who had helped victims.

Each interview schedule was divided into similar thematic areas and the analysis and presentation of the findings have followed the thematic subdivisions set out in the interview schedules.

A cover sheet for each interview was completed by the interviewer where they could record demographics, summarise the situation and the process of change, identify the ‘tipping point’, summarise the outcome, and record any interview quotes that they felt stood out.

The two online surveys followed the same basic format as the helper interview schedules.

A basic coding scheme was developed based on the thematic areas of the interview schedule and the similarity of responses within each of these areas. The coding was primarily inductive, and was divided into general themes and sub-themes. These coding themes were then used as the basis for the findings in this report.

The findings in this report have been checked back with the some of the interviewees to ensure validity.

## Discussion of the literature

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Help and support for those who have experienced family violence, and those who perpetrate violence against others can be categorised in two main forms, 'formal' help and support, which includes specialist support agencies, and 'informal' help and support, which includes friends and family.<sup>5</sup> The following literature review focuses on the support sought from and offered by those in informal networks.

### Help seeking

Reaching out to friends and family is often the first and most common way in which victims of family violence seek help (Chabot et al, 2009; Goodkind et al, 2003; Moe, 2007; West & Wandrei, 2002). Two recent New Zealand studies show that a high proportion of victims of family violence are far more likely to tell parents, siblings, whānau or family members and friends about the violence than go to formal agencies such as Police and Women's Refuge. Data from the New Zealand Violence Against Women study show that 94 per cent (674 of 714) of women who reported experiencing interpersonal violence sought help from informal sources, with 58 per cent ( $n=416$ ) of these seeking help solely from informal sources, and just over five per cent seeking help solely from formal sources (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009). Similarly, research conducted by the Families Commission showed that 69 per cent of victims of interpersonal violence talked to immediate family members, 64 per cent told friends and neighbours, 29 per cent told work colleagues or fellow students and 22 per cent told 'other relatives'.<sup>6</sup> Only six per cent of victims told a specialist support agency (New Zealand Families Commission, 2009).<sup>7</sup>

There are many reasons why those who have experienced family or interpersonal violence choose to tell those around them, rather than utilise the services of a specialist support agency. First, informal supporters are closer to, more trusted by, and frequently available than, formal support (Budde & Schene, 2004). As they know the victim, and most likely the perpetrator, they may be perceived to be in a better position to provide assistance that is tailored to a particular situation or context (Farrow, 1997 *cited in* Budde & Schene 2004). Those who have experienced abuse may also be seeking confirmation that what is occurring is actually abuse; prior to this confirmation they may not believe that formal help is appropriate for their situation (Fugate et al, 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the literature that exists on seeking, giving and receiving help is focussed on those who have been victims of interpersonal violence and, specifically, women victims of violence. Very little literature exists on perpetrator (or 'batterer') help seeking and receiving outside of evidence collected through criminal justice systems. This review, therefore, is concentrated largely on literature that examines victims' (in particular, women's) help seeking and receiving, and those who give help to these victims.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents could nominate more than one category, therefore numbers will add up to more than 100 per cent.

<sup>7</sup> Specialist support agencies include: Victim Support; Rape Crisis/HELP/Women's Refuge; Citizens Advice Bureau; church/church group/Salvation Army; neighbourhood support; iwi or other Māori organisations and Pacific organisations.

For people who have experienced abuse, seeking informal support is often the first step in the realisation and subsequent disclosure that abuse is occurring (Postmus et al, 2009). Towns and Adams (2009) insist that it is not only seeking help that is important, but it is vital that those who have experienced abuse have ongoing, meaningful contact with people who are concerned for their wellbeing. For these people, to have others name the abuse as abuse is important as it provides them with some respite, confirms that what they are experiencing is 'not normal' and offers them an alternative viewpoint with which to evaluate their situation (Robinson & Tregidga, 2007). Family support is also important in helping victims stay out of abusive relationships (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009) and it is believed that disclosing abuse and seeking help has a positive impact on the victim's wellbeing regardless of the amount or severity of the violence (Beeble et al, 2009). Family support also considerably lessens the long-term impact of abuse (Postmus et al, 2009). Further, Sullivan and Bybee (1999) note that the number of supportive people is directly related to the number of protection and safety options for those who have experienced abuse.

Evidence collected both in New Zealand and overseas indicates that women who are victims of family violence are active help seekers. A comprehensive study of American women in 1988 found that women who were victims of family violence sought help an average of six times each (Gondolf, 1988 *cited in* Sullivan & Bybee, 1999), and had employed multiple help-seeking strategies from both formal and informal sources (Kaukinen, 2004).

Active help seeking, however, does not necessarily mean that the victim will receive help. Overall, approximately one-third of the respondents in the New Zealand Violence Against Women study who disclosed violence to an informal source felt that the person they told had not tried to help (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009: 15). Many studies have examined why help is not given when actively sought. Common amongst these is the theme of victim blame, where help is not given because it is believed that the violence is a result of provocation by the victim, indeed, 46 per cent of European Union citizens reported they believed that the provocative behaviour of women was a cause of domestic violence against women (Gracia, 2004). Blame may be considered to be of crucial importance to informal help giving as victims of perceived injustice tend to receive more help than victims blamed for their fate (Batson 1998, *cited in* West and Wandrei, 2002). However a study into potential influences on informal helper intervention found that provocation had little effect on intervention, leading the researchers to speculate that "it is possible that, despite any beliefs that the victim's behaviour was provocative, potential helpers would be willing to imagine helping a friend or family member due to unconditional positive regard for loved ones" (West & Wandrei, 2002: 982).

A failure to recognise violence as a problem is another primary obstacle to intervention. This could be either because the helper fails to recognise the signs of violence (Chabot et al, 2009), or because violence or disrespect is tolerated (either within their own families or the wider community), and is therefore a 'normal' part of life, rather than an emergency that requires intervention. Lastly,

informal helpers are reluctant to intervene if they feel they have a lack of information and skill to deal with the situation effectively (Chabot et al, 2009; Fanslow & Robinson, 2009).

There are wider implications for remaining silent and not helping when asked. In effect, not helping contributes to creating a climate of tolerance that “reduces inhibitions against violence, making it more difficult for women to come forward, and promotes social passivity” (Gracia & Herrero, 2007: 738).

## **Help giving**

Much research has been undertaken into the factors related to willingness to give help to victims and perpetrators of violence. Using this research, it is possible to build a profile of a ‘typical’ helper. Essentially, the typical helper is:

- female. Gender is closely related to the provision of support, with women more likely than men to exhibit helping behaviour (Beeble et al, 2008; George et al, 1998; Kaukinen, 2002). Women are also more comfortable providing emotional support than men (West & Wandrei, 2002)
- a survivor of family violence. Helpers are more likely to have witnessed abuse as a child or experienced violence as an adult (Chabot et al, 2009). Survivors of family violence may be more likely to help because of their shared experience and the likelihood they have knowledge that will be helpful (Beeble et al. 2008)
- someone with high self-esteem (Chabot et al, 2009)
- someone who displays high levels of empathy (Batson et al, 1991, *cited in* Beeble et al, 2008).

Three further factors are related to help giving. First, help givers were far more likely to intervene if the abuser was male (Chabot et al, 2009) and secondly if the abuse was severe (Chabot et al, 2009; Goodkind et al, 2003). Finally, help giving is closely related to community tolerance; Beeble et al, (2008) found that the more community members who perceived family violence as occurring in their communities, the more likely they were to provide help to those who were victims of violence.

Informal helpers respond to requests for help in a variety of ways, some of which are effective. There is a growing body of literature which examines effective interventions from the perspectives of survivors of violence. Overall, this evidence suggests that the most effective interventions are those in which helpers:

- listen in a non-judgemental way and allow survivors to share their stories (Gerbert et al, 2000; Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Because survival often depends on silence, the sharing of stories is vitally important in helping victims/survivors regain their voices and understand that they are not alone (Van Hook, 2000)
- convey understanding or assurance that the survivors were not to blame (Beeble et al, 2009; West & Wandrei, 2002)
- validate that the person is worth caring about (Gerbert et al, 2000)

- help with decision making (Beeble et al, 2009; West & Wandrei, 2002)
- provide information on what resources are available to help them, and how to approach the people who are in control of the resources (Beeble et al, 2008, Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Postmus et al, 2009)
- offer tangible help for their physical and environmental needs, such as child-care, housing and transport (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009; Postmus et al, 2009)
- help them devise a safety plan (Gerbert et al, 2000)
- empower them by giving choice back to the victims whose choice has been taken away by their abusers (McDermott & Garofalo, 2004).

The pre-existing relationships that exist between a victim, or a perpetrator, and their sources of informal support can be both a strength and a liability when dealing with family violence. While there are aspects of informal help, such as those discussed above, that have been shown to be effective, other means of informal help may not be as effective, appropriate or healthy for the victim (Morrison et al, 2006). As already mentioned, the positive support of friends and family is important in helping to name the abuse and initiate and maintain change. A negative reaction, however, can drive the violent behaviour further underground and discourage the victim (or perpetrator) from seeking further help (Fugate et al, 2005).

Overall, disempowerment of the victim is the most unhelpful response, specifically, 'taking over', or presuming to know what is in the victim's best interests. This may be motivated by the belief that victims may not always make appropriate choices with regard to their safety, and therefore taking their choices away will shield them from further violence (McDermott & Garofalo, 2004). Disempowerment can have a devastating effect on victims in that it places them in a subordinate position, similar to the one they occupy with their abusers (Lempert, 1997). As a result, the victims struggle to cope and are more likely to internalise their hurt through depression, self-mutilation, or suicide attempts, blame themselves, or return to the abuser (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009; Moe, 2007).

Other unhelpful responses from informal sources include:

- a judgemental response (Moe, 2007; West & Wandrei, 2002)
- responses that reinforce feelings of self-blame (Beeble et al, 2009)
- excessive advice giving (Beeble et al, 2009; Morrison et al, 2006; West & Wandrei, 2002)
- retaliation, or threatened retaliation against the perpetrator (Beeble et al, 2009; West & Wandrei, 2002)
- trivialising the situation, or saying "I told you so" (West & Wandrei, 2002).

Ineffective help may also be related to not understanding the context and complexity of family violence. Those who have experienced abuse are often viewed as passive, in that they allow themselves to be victimised because they choose not to fight back or leave (Feather, 1996 *cited in* West & Wandrei 2002).

This not only disregards the many obstacles (eg, physical, financial, psychological) that prevent those who have experienced abuse from leaving their situations, but also ignores the fact that many women do leave, only to be beaten more severely or even killed (Busch et al, 1993). As Sullivan and Bybee (1999: 43) point out, the process of becoming violence free is complex and is not as simple as 'just leave if you want to'.

### **Social context**

Research suggests that family violence thrives in silence, and silence will remain the prevalent community response to family violence for as long as victims and those who know about the violence choose to remain silent or passive (Gracia & Herrero, 2007). A climate of tolerance makes it easier for perpetrators to persist in their violent behaviour and makes it more difficult for the victims to disclose the violence (Gracia, 2004). Further, when tolerance levels of violence are high and people do not help, victims may feel as though there is little they can do to stop the violence (Moe, 2007).

Conversely, a social climate of intolerance and an increased sense of social and personal responsibility towards family violence may act as a motivating force for perpetrators to positively change their behaviour, a motivation for helpers to intervene and a reason for victims to disclose that violence is occurring (Gracia & Herrero, 2007).

Studies into community responses to violence show that a social context that is defined by intolerance may be built through the creation of 'community efficacy', which is an emphasis on shared community beliefs and the belief in the capacity of a community to achieve an intended effect (Davis & Henderson, 2003; Klevens et al, 2008; Robinson & Tregidga, 2007; Sabol et al, 2004; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Research shows that when a community has greater community efficacy and a social environment characterised by low tolerance for violence the capacity to prevent violence increases (Gracia & Herrero, 2007).

Sabol et al (2004) note that several factors are important for building community capacity for violence prevention. First, capacity is the volume and quality of social interaction and is not related to tangible community assets. Second, collaboration between community-based organisations for the purposes of sharing resources serves to connect the community into a "broader social fabric" (p 330). Third is the importance of social interactions at the private level and how strong social ties between family and friends can enhance or build community efficacy.

The findings of this study are highly consistent with the literature.



## Findings

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### Help seeking

#### *Help for victims/survivors and perpetrators*

Informal networks were an important source of support for family violence victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence in this study. Most interviewees indicated that they preferred to receive support from those around them, that is those who they turned to when facing other problems in their lives, such as whānau,<sup>8</sup> family and friends.

For those who experienced abuse (hereafter 'victims/survivors'), informal networks remained the primary source of support throughout the help-seeking process, however, most of those who perpetrated violence (hereafter 'perpetrators'<sup>9</sup>) sought support from friends and family in addition to accessing specialist support services.

Few victims/survivors interviewed accessed support from a specialist support service (in addition to friends and family), and even then the involvement was at a reasonably low level (eg, attendance at support groups, the help of a support person through legal processes).

The reactions of whānau, family and friends, both positive and negative, were highly influential in the help-seeking process and outcomes.

My success story comes down to who's supporting you. For that man to have success he has to have brilliant people around him ... (And I know I'm not going to fail, because) everybody has said "hell no, not in our presence". (Perpetrator)

#### When help works

Effective social support received from informal networks plays an important part in supporting victims/survivors and perpetrators to move towards living free of violence.

Those who received effective support were more likely to continue to seek help for the violence and abuse than those who were ignored, told that it was "no big deal", or who were given advice on how to hide the violence.

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<sup>8</sup> Our concept of whānau has been influenced by the Families Commission Blue Skies research report *Whānau is Whānau* (Walker, 2006), in which it is argued that the concept of whānau is deeply contextual and is more than 'extended family'. For the purposes of this report, however, we are using the simple definition of whānau as extended family, while acknowledging its complexity as a concept.

<sup>9</sup> The word perpetrator, rather than 'former perpetrator' is used throughout this document for the purposes of brevity and is not an inference that any of our interviewees continue to perpetrate violence.

The disclosure and subsequent confirmation by whānau, family or friends that abuse was happening was the start of the change process for many of the victims/survivors in this research. Some victims/survivors spoke about how the violence “crept up” on them, leaving them unsure as to what was normal or acceptable. Having another person define or name the abuse as abuse was an important step in the change process.

I told my girlfriend what had happened and she was absolutely gob smacked [She said] “That is not a good thing, that is not what happens in marriages”. (Victim/Survivor)

In situations where the violence was becoming ‘normalised’ or accepted, help givers also reinforced the message that violence is “not okay”.<sup>10</sup>

It wasn’t just physical. He got inside my head. The way he saw things was the way I started to see things. His point of view was becoming my point of view. I was losing my perspective and becoming unsure what was normal anymore. My friends were so important as they gave me another perspective. (Victim/Survivor)

... she told me it wasn’t right. It was this pivotal moment because he always told me it was right and I made him angry and if I [had] just listened to him ... but M told me it wasn’t ok what he was doing and it got worse so I did something about it. (Victim/Survivor)

It was support, not advice, that victims/survivors and perpetrators found useful. For the interviewees that had received effective help, whether victims/survivors or perpetrators, the reinforcement of appropriate and acceptable behaviours, along with the unconditional and ongoing support, appeared to support self-efficacy and their sense of agency.

I was fortunate to come in contact with people who told me something about the talent and potential that exists within me as opposed to “you’re an angry person, you need to go on an anger management programme.” It was a different way of addressing my morals. When you reveal people’s talent and potential it revolutionises their life and they evolve. (Perpetrator)

Informal networks were also able to provide sustained support that extended beyond the period of violence and abuse.

Many of the victims/survivors in this study did not have just one source of help or support. Some sought help on many occasions from multiple sources, including friends, whānau, family, church and workmates. For others, including those

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<sup>10</sup> It is noted that almost every interviewee, unprompted, referenced the messages in the “It’s not OK” Campaign.

isolated by abuse, effective support from just one person was often sufficient to start or support the journey towards living without violence.

#### Motivations behind help seeking

Victims/survivors gave a number of reasons why they sought help. Generally, they were 'done' and could no longer suffer the violent behaviour; they feared serious injury or death or they were concerned for their children. Arriving at this point, for most, was a long and difficult process. For many, the foundations were based on an understanding that what they were experiencing was not acceptable, healthy or 'normal' behaviour.

Many of the victims/survivors spoke about how this understanding came about through their children, either by something the children said, by friends, whānau and family members raising their awareness about the effects of violence on their children or by seeing their children (or their relationship with their children) threatened in some way.

All I know is I was trying to save the kids, you know? I'd look what it [the violence] was doing and I'd think, nah, bugger that.  
(Victim/Survivor)

The motivations for perpetrators were more complex and involved them being at a point where they were ready to ask for, or accept, help. As with the victims/survivors, many perpetrators talked about a growing (or sudden, in some cases) understanding that their behaviour was unacceptable. Again, this understanding was often reached through their children.

... seeing the frightened look on [my children's faces] was enough to think "this can't carry on"... I just looked at my younger ones and thought "nah man, something's got to change". They don't deserve it. (Perpetrator)

I didn't want to be on the rollercoaster ride anymore, I didn't want the ups and downs. I didn't want the violence and my children witnesses [to] it. I recognise that I'm their prime role model in their lives, my children look up to me so it's very important that they see what I do is right. I want to show my children that I can make mistakes but that I'm not going to make the same mistake over and over. I believe it's quite important that I show them by my actions. I suppose what my children think of me is more important to me than anything else in this world. (Perpetrator)

It is noted that helpers too, talked about how they would "find a way in" by talking to the victims/survivors about their children and what they wanted for their children.

## Summary

Effective support appears to increase the victims' and perpetrators' belief in self and sense of agency.

- Victims and perpetrators want to access support from their whānau, family and friends.
- Whānau, family and friends are very important and play a highly influential role (currently positive and negative).

Social support (friends and family in particular) plays an important part, by 'helping people' through supporting them to increase self-efficacy and support the changes they make.

### *Barriers to seeking help*

#### Victims/survivors and barriers to seeking help

Victims/survivors identified a number of barriers to seeking help. Primarily, they were ashamed and embarrassed or felt guilty for 'allowing' themselves to be abused. This was particularly true for those victims/survivors who believed that they "should have known better".

I used to feel ashamed because of the bruises, the beating. I used to just hide away. (Victim/Survivor)

Attitudes of friends and family towards violent behaviour were also a barrier; some victims did not wish to approach their family for help as they felt that it would just be "swept under the carpet".

Mum wouldn't have known what to do - so she would just pretend it wasn't happening. (Victim/Survivor)

For others, asking for help was asking other people to get involved in what they felt was an intensely private matter.

I was embarrassed and ashamed ... And half the time when I wanted help, I had to ask, and I felt like I was grovelling and I would think oh shit I should be able to get out of this myself - I didn't want to bother them with my problems and that. (Victim/Survivor)

Some of the victims/survivors of violence did not seek help as they felt that the person they would ask would not understand or know how to respond.

Although her parents are lovely, she thinks they won't understand why she has remained silent to them about the situation. (Helper)

Fear of repercussion was also a vital concern for many of the victims/survivors when seeking help. Some were scared that seeking or receiving help would

result in the abuser hurting, or even killing, them. Others were fearful their children would be taken away from them, either by their abuser or by the 'authorities', they were fearful of being gossiped about, or of being judged by friends and family.

Some victims did not wish to approach their family for help as they felt that family members (mothers in particular) would 'swoop in' and try to rescue them from a situation that they did not want to be 'rescued' from as they were not ready to leave.

Mostly, they were just scared.

I felt scared. Like, I would try and leave and he wouldn't let me leave and he would chase me up the road in his car and he would punch himself and all that sort of stuff and so I always felt scared that he would hurt me and I could never say the right thing so I had no idea what to say and then when I didn't say anything he would get angry at me for not saying anything as well, so I could just never do anything right. (Victim/Survivor)

Other reasons victims/survivors did not seek help included:

- that they were not 'ready' to receive help
- that they minimised and justified the violence (help was not really needed)
- a belief that they could sort it on their own (many of the victims felt that they could 'help' the perpetrators to change their behaviour)
- a lack of reciprocity which made help hard to take (it would have felt like charity)
- a lack of success when they had asked for help or received help before
- a sense of hopelessness that they had tried to change things, unsuccessfully, in the past
- a loss of the 'dream' that things could have got better
- a commitment to the relationship and a desire to protect the abuser
- a lack of practical support, such as finances or accommodation
- a lack of awareness of help services, that is, unsure about how to access them or what they are called
- a fear of loneliness and loss when the relationship ends.

Perpetrators and barriers to seeking help

The main difference between the barriers for perpetrators and victims/survivors seeking help was the 'normalisation' of violence in the lives of the perpetrators; the majority of perpetrators came from violent backgrounds. For almost all the perpetrators, violence in the home was 'normal', something they had seen happen to their mothers, other whānau or family members, or that they had experienced themselves.

... nobody was willing to come out and help us or ask our parents what's going on ... we thought it was normal... We just looked at it that this wasn't a problem, [because] no one was here telling us otherwise. (Perpetrator)

... you begin to develop this whole psyche that this must be normal, everyone else is doing it. Everyone else gets the same result and it wasn't until I was exposed to a different way of seeing life that I recognised that there was something going on here. (Perpetrator)

For the perpetrators, the principal barriers in seeking help were an extremely high tolerance of violent behaviour and a lack of insight into their need to change their behaviour. For many, their mental picture of a perpetrator of abuse (eg, an irrational, uncontrollable, violent monster) did not match the picture that perpetrators had of themselves (eg, loving parents and partners who occasionally 'lost control', were unreasonably provoked and did things they were ashamed of, but were 'genuinely sorry for'). Admitting that they were all these things *and* a perpetrator of violence was a difficult step for most of the perpetrators interviewed and often came about at a time of crisis.

There were other barriers, however, that were similar to those described by the victims/survivors, such as shame and embarrassment; the fear of loss of mana or respect within the relationship or from others knowing about the abuse and showing displeasure; the feeling that what was happening was a 'private matter', and a fearfulness that an admission would result in having their children taken from them.

The understanding that respect was gained through fear also hindered the help-seeking process for many; they were afraid that they would no longer be 'respected' if they could not enforce respect through violent behaviour. The understanding that respect is separate from fear was an important differentiation for the perpetrators. Most believed, through witnessing the behaviour of their fathers (or uncles, or grandfathers etc), that when people were scared of you, they respected you. At least one-quarter of the perpetrators had belonged to a gang at some stage, where it was also understood that fear equalled respect. For these men, separating fear from respect was a vital influence in their change process.

... how my Dad treated us was to make us fear him. That's how I wanted people to perceive me because I thought that's how my Dad gets respect, was making people fear him. That was the same for me ... (Perpetrator)

For at least two of the perpetrators, understanding that women also deserved their respect was a central influence in their change process.

... I actually took his words in because he was real ... it was bro, "our women are our equals, we're Māori bro ... they [women] are our equals, they carry our seed ...". (Perpetrator)

Women just had to shut up and do as they're told ... that's all I knew at that time and I believed that was just how it goes. (Perpetrator)

Other reasons perpetrators were reluctant to get help included:

- they were not 'ready' to receive help
- they were concentrating on the partner's 'issues' (deferred personal help seeking)
- they minimised and justified the violence (help is not really needed, it is not really that bad, it is not that harmful)
- a belief that they could sort it on their own (feelings of self-sufficiency)
- not wanting others to know their business, and seeing it as a private matter
- a fear of being found out and talked about
- a lack of support around them to make changes
- a lack of awareness of help services, that is, a lack of information about support groups and services, unsure about how to access them or what they are called.

## Summary

Readiness to receive help is important for both victims and perpetrators.

- There is a disjuncture between the 'mental picture' of perpetrators and the vision they have of themselves (or in the case of victims/survivors, the vision they have of their partners).
- Victims/survivors and perpetrators do not seek help out of fear, shame, guilt and embarrassment.
- Help seeking is deferred when victims and perpetrators feel that they can sort the situation out 'on their own'.
- In general, fear stops victims seeking help; they fear that talking about it will make the violence worse.
- Perpetrators have a desire for respect (as a Dad and a partner) that stops the men admitting they have a problem with violence.
- Both victims/survivors and perpetrators normalise violence and so are not ready to accept help.

## Help giving

For the purposes of this research, informal help givers were defined as any person other than a representative of a formal victim or perpetrator help service who at one time has helped either a victim or perpetrator of family violence. Our

help givers included whānau, family, friends, work colleagues, team mates and strangers.<sup>11</sup>

### *Motivation*

#### Motivation to help victims

For the help givers, the motivations for offering help to victims varied. Many of the help givers, particularly the strangers who became involved, are help givers in other situations. They described themselves as nose-y, a “sticky beak”, and as people who just “cannot help themselves”. Some of the help givers had a history or experience of abuse and had not received help or support, and felt this motivated them to help. Others put themselves in the situation and asked how they would have liked to have been treated.

Many helpers were motivated by their personal values, including a sense of abhorrence towards family violence, a belief that it would be wrong not to help and that it is ‘right’ and ‘natural’ to help others, particularly when no one else is. Other motivating factors for helping victims included anger, their perception that no one else was helping, the severity of situation (eg, crisis), witnessing the violence, their relationship (eg, whānau, family or friend), noticing an increase in the severity of the violence and, in some cases, fear (or extreme fear) for the person they were trying to help.

#### Motivation to help perpetrators

The motivation for helping perpetrators was less clear. Much of the help offered was aligned with helping the victims (including children) to keep safe. As with victims, many of the help givers had previous experience of violence, as either perpetrators or victims.

For some helpers, help was linked with their own self-esteem. People who helped perpetrators acknowledged feeling “flattered”, “helpful” and “useful”.

I felt overwhelmed that he would trust me enough to speak to me.  
(Helper)

Most helpers were not related to the perpetrators, although most had known them for some time in a personal capacity. Many of the helpers worked professionally and voluntarily in community-based roles, although not in the area of family violence.

At least one-third of helpers helped both the perpetrator and the victim. In these cases, the helpers had ties to the perpetrator, which motivated them to advocate

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<sup>11</sup> The motivations and barriers are more useful when considered in the context of the situation. See the ‘profiles’ in Appendix 1 for detail.



more on behalf of the perpetrator, whilst they ensured that others were able to advocate on behalf of the person being victimised.

## Signs

Many help givers were motivated to act after recognising the signs of violence and understanding these signs signalled that something serious was occurring. In addition to physical evidence, these included changes in the emotional state and behaviour of the victim over time.<sup>12</sup>

Other obvious signs of abuse help givers noted were damage to property and possessions; physical signs and evidence, including stories that did not make sense; actually witnessing abuse, including criticism, intimidation, humiliation, put downs, threats, controlling behaviour, throwing things and damaging possessions.

Less obvious signs that alerted help givers to the abuse included changes in the victim's emotional state, such as loss of confidence and withdrawal from friendships (eg, becoming fearful, timid, anxious); changes in relationships (eg, lying, making up stories); changes in behaviour (eg, victims needing 'permission' from partners to do simple things like make a phone call); an increase in substance abuse, or a substance abuse problem that was getting more difficult to control; attempting to get extra support to help with their children or arranging for excessive 'time out' from their children.

Around half of those offering help felt that the abuse was immediately obvious to them. Close friends and family were most likely to say they were very sure, or knew, that something was going on or was "not right". The closer the relationship between the helper and the victim, the more likely they were to know that the abuse was occurring. For some, the violence was evident as they had witnessed a crisis.

We were at this party once. I got a bit lippy, like I sometimes did; because I knew he'd do something [So then people would notice?] Yeah. He knocked me off my chair, and I fell into his mate and knocked him off his chair as well. His mate stands up and yells "don't you do that again!" and I thought he might do something but he was just mad at being knocked off his seat. (Victim/Survivor)

Overall, work colleagues were least likely to be sure if violence was occurring (even though the abuse was rated at the more extreme end). For work colleagues, neighbours and strangers offering help, the signs were most likely to involve strong physical evidence, such as strangulation marks or make-up covering severe bruising, or witnessing a crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that one-third of helpers say they were *asked* for help by the person experiencing abuse.

## *Barriers to giving help*

### Failure to recognise the signs

Although abuse was immediately obvious to some of the help givers in this study, others (including close family and friends) took a few months, or even years, to become aware of the signs. This was in part because the violence was escalating, and partly because the abuse was hidden and the behavioural changes were gradual. Another possibility is that helpers recognised the signs of family violence, yet did not believe the situation was urgent or serious enough to require their action or intervention.

The more extreme the violence, the more likely those offering help were to notice the signs and be sure the abuse was happening. However, around one-in-five 'helpers' who rated the abuse as severe (7–10 on a 10-point scale where 10 is life threatening) were not sure whether something was going on or not.

### A lack of information

For a small number of participants in this study, a lack of information or knowledge about where to source information affected the quality and depth of help they thought they could offer.

Although I talked to her and offered sympathy I was not sure what to do. I really didn't think I had the skills to offer advice as this is not something I know much about. (Helper)

Most helpers, however, did not consider a lack of information to be a barrier because they thought they were giving effective help.

### Other barriers to giving or offering help<sup>13</sup>

Some helpers were worried that they had the wrong impression or had read the situation incorrectly.

Other helpers said that they were scared to get involved, feared becoming over-involved or more involved than they wanted to, or they were anxious that their helping (or 'interfering') would make it worse for the victim. For helpers who worked with, or who did not know, the victim particularly well, there was a fear that they would be overstepping a boundary. Work colleagues, for example, found it hard to cut across professional boundaries and raise such a personal matter in a work context.

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<sup>13</sup> The barriers are more useful when looked at in context of the situation. See the 'profiles' in Appendix 1 for detail.

Some of those who gave help were reluctant to intervene because they did not fully believe the victim. Others identified a lack of backup from bystanders as a barrier to action, or hesitated as they had people with them urging them not to act.

Some who started helping 'dropped off' once the length and complexity of the process became clear.

I just could not be bothered listening to any more of the same old stuff, either do something or get lost. (Helper)

A number of friends felt that they could not risk losing a friend or they were hoping the perpetrator would change and that the situation would change.

[I was] bloody terrified! I didn't want to risk losing my friend but I didn't want to let my friend down by not at least saying something to her about the changes in her that I had noticed. (Helper)

Lastly, helping was hindered for some by a lack of confidence or a lack of knowledge about family violence and questioned whether they were "doing the right thing".

## Summary

In a crisis, effective help is noticing and acting. In general, effective help involves:

- being proactive – taking notice, looking for the signs and asking
- being reactive – if asked for help, providing it
- telling others who are prepared to act. If you don't want to engage then tell someone else, so they can. Ring the Police if you need to.

Failure to recognise that violence is occurring is one of the primary obstacles to intervention, therefore, it is important to understand the signs.

### *Effective help*

There appeared to be a disjuncture between how help givers saw their offer of help and how that help was received. Many of both victims/survivors and perpetrators felt that the 'help' offered was unhelpful, even when the help givers felt they were doing the right thing and that it had gone well.

Generally, for the participants in this study, successful help was responsive, involved clear messages about behaviour but was non-judgemental and supported people to make their own decisions in their own time.

An effective offer of help looks similar for both perpetrators and victims of abuse. It is the focus, emphasis and source of help that appears to differ. While both victims and perpetrators felt that they needed care and support, those victimised

appear to need an approach that was built around encouraging confidence and reducing isolation, and perpetrators appear to need an approach that challenges the acceptability of their behaviour.

In general, effective offers of help for both victims and perpetrators included:

- listening without judging:
  - admitting that they were in an abusive relationship was, for many of those victimised, an admission of failure. Some of the victims seeking help appreciated having a space to talk without feeling they were being judged for “letting the abuse happen”, for continuing to stay despite the abuse, and for not being more proactive in dealing with it

[They switch off] the moment they sense that they're being judged for not leaving, because they're in love and they feel a bit of a dick staying there. (Helper)

- for perpetrators, listening without being judged did not mean colluding or giving advice, but being a ‘fierce friend’, that is, being on the perpetrator’s side but challenging the behaviour
- as part of the listening process, it was also vital for both victims/survivors and perpetrators that their trust and confidentiality was respected. Some of the victims felt that those who helped them breached their confidence by ‘gossiping’ about them, which further isolated them and drove the behaviour underground

My friend thought that I should tell my employer to explain my ‘absence’ from work. I said I didn’t want her to. She is quite bossy and I was in no state to hold my ground and disagree – I was in turmoil. She rang my work. Everything changed from that point. Although they wanted to help I didn’t want their help. I felt embarrassed and humiliated that they knew. I felt they treated me differently, so I left. It ruined something that was actually stable and good in my life. (Victim/Survivor)

- supporting decision-making:
  - the most successful help enabled people to make their own decisions. For example, if a victim needed to flee, then the method of leaving (eg, car, money) was prearranged, but it was left up to the victim to decide when, and how, they would leave. Victims, in particular, felt further undermined and ‘controlled’ when friends and family put conditions on support

It got to the stage where [my friend] said “I can’t help anymore unless you leave him. We have talked around in circles and I am supporting you to stay.” It was awful as we’d been friends for years – I could understand it but we fell out. It didn’t help really. I felt bad. (Victim/Survivor)

- affirming and not assigning blame:
  - many victims/survivors spoke of how their self-worth and self-esteem was eroded by the abuse. In addition, helpers who had successfully helped others felt that victims/survivors were more likely to continue to seek help if the help built and reinforced the good things they knew about themselves
  - for helpers and victims both, an important part of the affirmation was assuring the victim that the violence and abuse was not okay and not their fault. Minimisation, justification and normalisation of family violence amongst victims and perpetrators remain significant problems, and the threshold for unacceptable behaviour amongst some of the victims, perpetrators and helpers is still high
  - for perpetrators, understanding why (eg, personal history, a misunderstanding about what 'respect' entails) they reacted to some situations violently helped them to take responsibility for their actions. This was far more likely to happen if they understood they were men with bad behaviour, not they were 'bad men'
- asking hard questions:
  - successful helpers had the courage to ask hard questions, for example, "is it happening?". Although questions about violence were identified by some victims and perpetrators as "hard to take" and "uncomfortable", on the whole they found it a relief when asked. Similarly, it appears that those offering help found the questions hard to ask. Some help givers said that they needed to ask more than once before they got an honest response
- naming the abuse:
  - many victims/survivors are looking for confirmation that what they are suffering *is* abuse. People who are victimised by low and even moderate levels of abuse are reluctant to bother or inconvenience people for something that they are afraid others might see as trivial. For these people, naming abuse as abuse comes as somewhat of a relief in that they understand they have not been overreacting, and their situation is not 'normal' or healthy

When my sister said she would ring the police [he was smashing down the door] I felt awful and felt like it was an overreaction to the situation. I felt like this because I felt like abuse had to be physical and I guess looking back now I was used to stuff suddenly changing – one minute everything could be fine and the next he was yelling at me and telling me to shut up. (Victim/Survivor)

- naming abuse is also critically important for perpetrators. Most of the perpetrators in this study didn't see their actions as abuse. Some felt like they were the victims; they were not listened to, they were 'disrespected' and their violence was provoked. Others had a mental image of abuse that did not match their experiences
- responding immediately:

- at times, victims/survivors needed help in a crisis situation. On these occasions, helpers acting as soon as they were aware something was happening, and responding immediately when asked for help was the most effective help. It was important, too, that helpers responded immediately when asked in times other than a crisis
- offering tangible support:
  - some victims talked about the practical support that they had received. This was not just help in a crisis, it involved phone calls to check in occasionally; social contact and catch ups; a place to stay; someone to ring when they needed help; someone to plan safety with, being ready to help if needed and someone who could call the Police if necessary
  - many help givers found it useful if they were familiar with support and referral services so they could share the information when asked
- staying close:
  - often, knowing that at least one person was “on their side” made a difference to victims in supporting a positive change. For some victims/survivors, companionship was an opportunity to escape, however briefly, from their violent realities. Sometimes, therefore, support was about social contact, such as doing a night class together, that had nothing to do with violence or the situation

I didn't want to talk about it all the time. I didn't just want 'help' or 'sympathy' I wanted friends. (Victim/Survivor)

- offering support in culturally appropriate ways:
  - both victims and perpetrators spoke of the importance of culturally appropriate support, for example, by taking a wider whānau ora response to family violence. Perpetrators, in particular, said they responded to help that introduced them to, or reaffirmed, positive cultural values

In learning my culture and who I was as a person – that made a lot of difference in my life ... (Perpetrator)

- protective whānau support challenged people to moderate their behaviour or make positive change, particularly when paralleled with counselling or stopping violence programmes.

#### Help specific to victims and perpetrators

Help for victims and perpetrators differed in many respects, both in terms of what the help looked like, and who the help was from. While women were more likely to help victims/survivors, most perpetrators reported that the most effective help came from men (interestingly, however, at least two-thirds of in-depth interviewees who helped perpetrators were women).

## Help specific to victims

In addition to the above points about effective help, there was a clear message from victims/survivors that they preferred:

- help from anyone who notices in a crisis situation
- help from those who they bring the violence to the attention of, whether that help is through asking, 'hints' or tentative attempts to reach out, or through orchestrated opportunities for people to notice
- ongoing support from friends and family.

Most people interviewed indicated that they preferred support from those around them, that is, those who they turned to when facing other problems in their lives, such as whānau, family and friends.

## Help specific to perpetrators

There appeared to be very specific qualities to effective help for perpetrators. For example, for those perpetrators interviewed, it appeared that who offered the help was just as important as what the help entailed.

At least half of the perpetrators had received effective help from respected peers. These included fellow inmates, friends who had experienced or perpetrated violence and had changed their behaviour and people who they met through support or anger management groups. Many of the effective help givers had 'walked the talk' and were able to model respectful behaviour which included behaviour of non-violence.

Effective helpers included those with:

- an understanding of violence
- a willingness to listen, affirm, support and not judge
- empathy
- a perspective on abuse based on their own experiences
- a willingness to make themselves available for informal catch ups
- offering respite lodging at their place
- referring help seekers to appropriate services
- a high awareness of the legal system
- an ability to build confidence through encouragement
- an 'openness' about their own experience of abuse
- a willingness to listen to and engage with those within their networks who may wish to disclose about their abuse.

[You need] people that are real and not going to lie to you. People that are truly there for all the right reasons, not because they're paid to. Not because they have to but because they want to, not because of your past or your reputation or the drugs or money or things you can get for them. Because they truly want to see you succeed.  
(Perpetrator)

Interestingly, for two of the perpetrators interviewed, having a woman present at their anger management course made a significant impact on how they understood their behaviour, they benefited from seeing the 'other side' of the story or the story through 'different eyes', which appeared to increase their empathy towards their victim/s.

## Summary

In general, effective help to victims involves:

- listening
- being non-judgemental
- naming violence
- offering choices
- showing support – validating and showing concern (“are you safe?”). They need someone who shows understanding on their side, to walk alongside them
- giving information and clear messages, “it’s not okay”, challenge behaviour
- getting them to think about what they want and need – this is about increasing self-efficacy by building social support and planning
- giving information about specialist services if needed.

In general, effective help to perpetrators includes:

- challenging their bad behaviour, and the beliefs behind the behaviour, and not attacking the person
- modelling respectful behaviour
- affirming and supporting
- not judging
- giving information about specialist services if needed.

## *Ineffective help*

Much of the help offered or given to victims/survivors and perpetrators was identified as ineffective help.

Although the helpers had a willingness to help, were offering help in good faith and felt that their help was supportive and making a difference, many were offering help in ineffective ways.

For the participants in this study, help that hindered or undermined the change process included:

- help that involved unsolicited advice



- decisions that overrode victims' and perpetrators' choices. An exception to this was during a crisis situation when there was immediate and obvious danger. In these instances, the Police were usually called.<sup>14</sup>
- situations where people took actions that the victims and perpetrators did not support (this did not include calling the Police in a crisis situation).

It was particularly difficult when the timetable for 'help' was controlled by the helper. Indeed, most of the victims of abuse who successfully left the violent relationship made their own decisions about when they left, whereas those who were rescued (eg, they felt that they had little or no control over the leaving) almost always went back.

[My friend would] come and pack my bags and say "stay with me". I broke up with him a lot of times, but I was used to having him around. (Victim/Survivor)

My eldest brother had rung up and said why don't they just come in and get me out but I think I would have gone back. It's something about that readiness ... It's getting to the breaking point. (Victim/Survivor)

Challenging the behaviour and not the person was important for those who were helping perpetrators. Many of the help givers were very angry with the perpetrator and derided not only the behaviour but the perpetrator. Both victims and perpetrators said that this was unhelpful.

#### *When to help (timing)*

The understanding of where on the scale of violence help can best be offered, and the timing of that help, remains limited because of the complexity and variety of family violence situations.

The findings from this study, however, indicate that help can be offered at any time. The giving and receiving of help amongst this group of interviewees appeared to be most effective:

- when the violence or abuse first happened
- when there was an escalation in the abuse, for example, it moved from verbal abuse and intimidation to physical abuse
- during a crisis
- straight after a crisis when the victim was safe and the perpetrator was regretful
- when violence was witnessed by others
- when victims or perpetrators asked for help
- when children were affected
- when it became noticeable to others

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<sup>14</sup> Note, too, that many perpetrators sought help following a 'crisis'. For some, the presence of the Police constituted a crisis.

- when processes, such as court, began and there was potential for loss, such as loss of freedom for perpetrators, loss of access to children and so on.

[You need to help] when the violence has been bad enough to cause wider family members or neighbours to find out about it.  
(Helper)

[Help is best] before she gets more interested in helping him than herself. (Helper)

### *Readiness to receive help (timing)*

Readiness to receive help is similarly complex. There was no particular point that indicated readiness. It took time for people to become ready. For the victims/survivors, the readiness to accept help was influenced by a wide range of different factors. Many of the victims, for example, needed confirmation that what they were experiencing *was* abuse (particularly if the abuse was low level or part of their family history). Further, the readiness of victims/survivors to accept help was often related to levels of self-esteem, that is, victims of abuse needed to feel that they were worth helping, which is why affirmation, support and encouragement were also important.

For some victims/survivors, just one offer of help was enough. For others, however, the offers needed to be sustained and consistent, sometimes over a period of years.

For me it was the loss of a dream. I had the dream of a family, with a mum and dad and two kids, and it took me a long time to let go of that dream. (Victim/Survivor)

For the perpetrators who took part in this study, it was difficult to distinguish whether the help they got was sought, or offered, as it appears that the two events often happened instantaneously, for example, an offer of help was only recognised as such once the perpetrator had acknowledged they had issues with violence that needed dealing with.

Readiness amongst perpetrators was often dictated by a crisis, for example, with the Police being called, and an awareness of the consequences of their violence. Interestingly, for most perpetrators, the effect of their violence on their victims did not constitute a crisis, however, being arrested or “found out” by others, did.

### Summary

There is currently a disjuncture between help offered and effective help.

- The help currently offered to victims/survivors does not work well.
- The help is often controlling or disempowering.

- The help currently offered to perpetrators only works well when they are ready to accept help. Before this, offers of help do not register.
- Help is largely asked for, offered and heard at a time of crisis.
- Helpers give or offer help because they believe they have something to offer; that their help will make a difference; or they have a moral obligation to intervene.
- Many people are willing to help but help offered is ineffective.

#### *When informal networks fail*

Most of the victims/survivors in this study had sought help from those in their informal networks at some point, *but had not received it*.

Many of the victims/survivors were neither silent nor passive.

Nearly all of the victims/survivors interviewed for this study could recall at least one incident where other people clearly witnessed violence, distress or calls for help, and yet did not help.

I remember a neighbour was looking over the fence when I was getting a hiding and didn't do anything. And I'm thinking – are you serious? They said afterwards "I just didn't know what to do". I wanted them to ring the cops, yell and scream. Because then [the cops arriving] wouldn't have been my fault. (Victim/Survivor)

I jumped out of the car, nearly got hit by a car. I grabbed the keys and I was running ... and my husband's a fit guy and I'm running [screaming] "my husband's going to kill me" and I was trying to wave a car down and nobody stopped. Nobody stopped. (Victim/Survivor)

For some, the disclosure of violence was a tentative reach for help, where a less extreme example of violence was raised to gauge the response. In other cases, the request for help was more direct and explicit.

Active help seeking did not necessarily mean victims received the help they solicited or required. In this study, much of the silence related to the *response* to the requests for help.

Many of those who had experienced abuse said that they had told whānau, family members or close friends of the violence, however, those they told did not respond. Some of the whānau, family members or close friends that they told swept it under the table, felt it was the victim's lot and/or did not raise it or mention it again.

All their friends, all the Aunties would say "oh that poor Grace" I'd hear it all the time and they'd get drunk and they'd get in my ear.

Yet they would watch it all unfold and never do anything.  
(Victim/Survivor)

Other victims/survivors felt they were blamed for the violence. Three interviewees were asked, two by the perpetrators' parents and one by a police officer, what they had done to provoke the violence. All these victims/survivors were bewildered and two began to question their 'version of events' and if the abuse was really as bad as they thought it was.

... I'd get phone calls [from his parents] asking why I was doing it ... why I was taking him to court, that [his] behaviour was okay ... that I must have provoked him and just asking me why I was doing it and did I really think it was fair and what am I trying to achieve and all that sort of stuff and just making me feel really bad.  
(Victim/Survivor)

### **Social context**

The wider social context is important and can be positively or negatively influential on the help-seeking behaviour of victims and perpetrators of violence. Social attitudes towards violence played an important role for both victims and perpetrators in determining if help was sought, and, more importantly, if help was given.

There remains widespread tolerance of violence amongst many groups.

#### *Victims/survivors*

Both the literature and findings from this study suggest that victims/survivors who belong to social networks in which violence is still tolerated or 'swept under the carpet' find it more difficult to disclose the violence, are less likely to seek help and, in the event that help is sought, are less likely to be given effective help.

#### *Perpetrators*

Many of the perpetrators in this study also appeared to be heavily influenced by the attitudes of those around them. A climate of tolerance made it easier for them to persist with their violent behaviour. For most, much of the violent behaviour was carried out in social contexts where there was a high tolerance for violence, for example, in families or communities where violence was seen as 'normal', or where there were few or no dissenting voices about their violent behaviour.

A low social tolerance for violent behaviour, however, was equally as influential. It appears that change happened for many perpetrators when it became clear their behaviour was becoming less and less acceptable to those around them. For many, social ties had an impact on their behavioural change. Displeasure from whānau, family and friends, and non-acceptance of violence was influential for many, especially when there was a consistent voice among friends or close

family members. Further, for many of the perpetrators who took part in this study, the loss of mana brought about by the impact of violence on family and whānau, because of wider family knowing about and being displeased with the abuse, was influential in initiating positive change.

Don't allow your silence to collude with the violence. When you see or hear a perpetrator being violent, intervene. The men I have seen change have been constantly challenged by other whānau to behave with respect around their partners. (Helper)

It's up to whānau members who don't want family violence within their homes to tell their whānau "it's not ok in this whānau anymore ...". (Helper)

We need to be saying to our whānau, "from this day on there will be NO [violence] in this family, or I will report you or sit on your doorstep till it stops". (Helper)

### *Helpers*

One person can make a difference and start the change process. Successful helpers noted that influencers could play a pivotal role in behavioural change, and would often gather support and other influencers around them.

... I noticed just over time, being supported by men who don't abuse makes him feel important or part of something bigger. Just without these guys judging him ... that looks like it works. (Helper)

Overall, the greatest influence for victims/survivors and perpetrators was having at least one person who believed in them and believed they were capable of making a positive change. Typically, the strongest foundation to behavioural change was an effective support person backed by a number of influencers (eg, consistent anti-violence messages from the people around them) and influences (eg, reduced social tolerance for violence).

You just have to believe in them until they can believe in themselves. (Helper)

Influencers were also key in changing perpetrators' attitudes and behaviour. These were people who would not necessarily offer tangible, ongoing help, but who would be in a position to influence perpetrator behaviour and help initiate positive behavioural change.

Influencers who were most likely to influence behavioural change were real, genuine, helpful and non-judgemental, and had an ability to radically challenge previously held beliefs. For perpetrators, the key influencers were other (ex) perpetrators, or people for whom they had some respect (typically an older family or whānau member). Indeed, respect was vitally important for perpetrators,

without it they would not hear messages of help or change. In other words, if they did not respect the source of the message, then they did not respect the message.

He was the only man that I respected ... I've listened to a lot of men over the years and I'll think to myself you're full of shit or you don't know what you are talking about. But I always, if I had a problem, talk to [him] and I found that his sharing of his experiences in life was very helpful to me and I always respected his point of view ... He was forgiving, he could let go ... I found him to be a strong influence in my life. (Perpetrator)

For more than half of the perpetrators, making a positive behavioural change was not only about changing their personal behaviour, but going on to influence the behaviour of those around them, particularly within their families and whānau.

... it's taken eight years of constantly being a positive role model in my family for two of my sisters now who've said "I've had enough." And I say it's been worth it. Because those two will transform the lives in the next generation of six other people who then have their kids, another six more. So that transformation has crossed three generations already and I'll say "hell yeah". (Perpetrator)

We need to change our whole perception, our whole understanding of how teaching our kids how to treat people and whānau, how to teach each other. I tell my kids constantly, you treat somebody the way you want to be treated because if you treat someone naughty they'll treat you naughty back. But if you talk to someone [with] love, they'll love you back. (Perpetrator)

For perpetrators, and to a lesser extent for victims/survivors, once one person started supporting their changes, others would often add their support, in effect 'snowballing' support and collectively creating an overall climate of reduced tolerance to violence.

### *Summary*

Positive change happens when someone offers effective support.

- Every person who made changes had someone on their side who believed in them and supported them.
- One person was often enough to make the difference, however, the more points of support the better.
- It appears one person (influencer) 'making a stand' that violence will no longer be tolerated can act as a catalyst for change and attract others to join them.
- Displeasure and challenges from a number of whānau and family members can influence a positive change in perpetrators' behaviour.

## Ways forward

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Both the literature and these findings suggest possible ways forward.

Victims and perpetrators are far more likely to seek support from their whānau, family and friends than they are from formal agencies; however, this support is often either not given or ineffective when it is. Recognising that whānau, family and friends are likely to be 'frontline' helpers, and up-skilling them in how to provide effective support will play an important part in increasing self-efficacy and agency amongst both victims/survivors and perpetrators, and supporting them towards a life free of violence.

Ensuring that whānau, family and friends can provide supportive and appropriate assistance to both victims and perpetrators when asked could include:

- educating helpers on how to be proactive (being aware of and noticing early signs of family violence and asking) and reactive (how to provide help when asked)
- providing helpers with the knowledge and information they need to provide help and support, for example, specialist services
- encouraging helpers to use techniques that are considered helpful by victims of violence (eg, not judging, supportively listening, giving information and not advice, showing concern) by educating people in the dynamics of family violence (eg, the low probability of a victim changing an abuser's behaviour). (West & Wandrei, 2002)
- encouraging helpers to model respectful behaviour and offer help to perpetrators that fiercely challenges the behaviour and not the person
- further developing messages around appropriate responses, for example, "no one deserves to be hit" and inappropriate responses, for example, "what made him hit you?", "why do you stay?" and "why don't you leave?" (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009).

Addressing family violence is not just the responsibility of whānau, family and friends who are involved. Communities and wider social networks also have a critical role to play. Whilst not every person has the skills, experience or desire to offer tangible help, every person does have the capacity to influence attitudes that result in the reduction of social tolerance for violence. Crucially, these findings indicate that it often took only one person to influence a collective, for example, whānau, social network or sports team and change the collective attitude to violence. This is a phenomena referred to by Westley et al (2007:131) as 'collective effervescence', where patterns of intensity are often at their greatest when people are together and share the same ideas. This study found that other people would often gather around a critical influencer and/or support person through a common idea (eg, "our whānau are not doing this anymore") and sense of purpose, thereby creating collective effervescence. Two cultural concepts in particular appear to 'tap' in to this collective effervescence: whānau

ora for Māori and the Pacific constructs of feagaiga (Samoan) and feangai (Tongan) for Pacific peoples.<sup>15</sup>

The current “It’s not OK” Campaign against family violence rejects the notion that abusers and perpetrators are pathological criminals.<sup>16</sup> It appears that, as a result of this approach, men, in particular, are seeking help for their use of violence (Ministry of Social Development, April 2009). This help-seeking behaviour could be further encouraged by using the concept of ‘community efficacy’ to build ‘whānau efficacy’.

For Pacific peoples, constructs of feagaiga and feangai may provide a framework on which to build efficacy within extended Pasifika families through the promotion of the idea that all women are sisters, and, as such, should be protected by the wider community.

By building on the work that seeks to change the social climate of tolerance and increasing communities’ sense of responsibility and capacity to offer support, the “It’s not OK” Campaign may provide an opportunity to influence both the help-seeking process and outcomes.

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<sup>15</sup> The harmony between a brother and sister operates on the sacred covenant of feagaiga and feangai. Under this covenant, the sister (who has the gift of producing and nurturing life and who, as such, shares divinity with the gods) has the power to bless and to curse. The role of the brother is to ensure the protection of his sister and by doing so is blessed by her. Feagaiga and feangai are characterised by mutual respect, and peace and harmony exist when the nature of all the relationships is respected (Betham, 2008; Laban, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> The updated report from the former Second Māori Taskforce on Whānau Violence notes that whānau violence in New Zealand has existed in a climate of tolerance (Kruger et al, 2004) which has encouraged silence as the prevalent community response. Further, the taskforce believes that the way whānau violence has been previously framed by government, using an analytical process that is “punitive, reductionist and individualised” has helped create Māori individuals/abusers/perpetrators as pathological criminals (p 11).



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## Appendix 1: Help giver profiles

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Help given appears to differ according to the relationship to the victim/survivor or perpetrator and the situation.

The following are profiles of help givers and the barriers they face, their motivations, feelings, thoughts and experiences.

### Offering help to strangers (15 respondents)

#### *Situation*

For strangers who gave help, the situation was immediately obvious to them (12). The event tended to be public (on the street) and the helpers felt that the levels of violence they were witnessing were at the higher end of the scale. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is fairly low level violence (eg, minor and occasional put downs) but 10 is extremely severe (life threatening), most rated the violence between 7 and 10.

Most *offered* assistance, only one was *asked* for help from the victim.

I was walking down a street and heard a fight between a woman and a man in a house. When I got to the house I was going too, I called the Police. I quite often have called the police when neighbours are arguing.

[A] young man was kicking and punching his girlfriend out on the street as I was driving past. I parked my car and went over to intervene, placing myself between them and sheltered the girl.

A woman on the street had been pushed around by her boyfriend, she wanted clearly get away from him but he held her firmly by her arms. I asked him to let her go ... and he did. [He] must have felt I had the support from others.

[I] stopped to stop a man kicking his partner at the roadside. Offered to take her to police, but she chose to go home. She then ID me to her partner as an off duty policeman [I am not, and was confused!] but this calmed him down.

Most were very sure (4) or knew (4) that something was going on because the situations were unfolding in front of them and they felt that the signs were very clear.

He was verbally abusing her about not doing as she was told earlier in the evening then struck her.

One child ran away from the adults and was holding his two hands over his ears, crying. The male and his female partner were standing at the top of a ramp, abusing a woman on her own, holding two children in her arms, who were at the bottom of the short ramp. Their voices were raised and body language aggressive/defensive.

The woman was screaming, the man was violent and angry, the woman was scared and in fear and yelling out in fear and was trying to keep the man out of the house.

Six help givers were on their own when they gave help. Five had someone with them at the time that they acted and consulted them before they acted. Seven said that there were others there but they didn't help. Three said that there were other people watching the situation but did not help.

[There were also] about 30 males all dressed in suits and briefcases.

Some families, children and other supervising adults in the children's activity in the nearby hall were within hearing distance. Two other people inside the nearest building heard the raised voices.

#### *How they felt before offering help*

Most of those who offered help in stranger situations said that they felt scared, worried or fearful.

I felt fearful, worried and scared. I also felt uncomfortable and unsure what to do. When I got to the house I talked about what I had witnessed and was convinced to call the Police.

The first time, I made the decision to act, I was fearful, I did not know what action to take, and I was mindful of the partner's response to my interference.

[I was a little bit] concerned about his reaction, pissed off because there was a security guard not far away ignoring it.

I felt for the woman and how I would feel when handled like her, I don't want that to happen to me.

We felt confident because the woman had worked out exactly what sort of help she required, and her course of action was absolutely the right thing to do – we were there to facilitate, to make it happen – there was no need to discuss “what to do.” There was also a sense of urgency in case her partner decided to come out and look for her.

### *What they were thinking*

Despite their fears, they were able to act because they said that they felt empathy towards the victim, they felt that the situation required action and someone needed to help to stop it.

Two help givers were concerned that they or their family would be hurt, but acted anyway. Another two considered the steps that they should take, such as finding the contact for the Women's Refuge, or calling the Police. Another two could not understand why no one else was taking action.

Why are all the other people within earshot not taking some action to stop the aggressive behaviour/shouting? Are they all deaf or just too scared to intervene?

### *Motivation*

Some of the help givers who offered assistance were motivated by their own life experiences. They had a background of violence and identified with the victims.

I have been assaulted before, and my friends turned into wallpaper. So, I don't hesitate now.

Well, in some stage of my life I said to me "no one will push me around again".

Others were motivated by their personal values. They expressed abhorrence for violence, felt that it was wrong not to act and is natural to help others, it is the right thing to do and you have a moral duty to help, and particularly if no one else was stepping in.

Because it was the right thing to do and no one else was stepping up to do it!

This was just so black and white. In the past I've pulled a drunken boyfriend off from attacking his girlfriend – and he was much bigger than me. I'm not physically confident, but violence is just simply wrong.

You know what is right and wrong. You act accordingly.

Some were motivated by the extreme level of the violence, and said the situation was urgent so that they had no choice but to act.

This wasn't a discretionary moment where you decide to take part or otherwise: this was an emergency on our own doorstep.

Two were motivated by fear for the safety of the victim if they did not do anything.

## *Action*

Most took action by ringing the Police and either challenging the perpetrator and/or comforting the victim.

I phoned the police – my niece jumped out of the car and challenged the man – then we comforted the child until the police got there.

[I] told the protagonist that police were on way, and I was prepared to act as a witness, so don't add to charges.

I rang the Police, told them I thought there was a bad domestic fight happening at the address I had just passed and that a woman was at risk.

I jumped out of [the] car, walked over to the road. I walked in front of the girl. I asked if she was okay. I asked the guy what on earth was he doing 'why was he spazzing out' and stood not too in his face but stood strong, upright and confident. I told the girl to go sit on the side of road, help on its way. I told the guy to take some deep breaths and let's talk about this – all in a calm but assertive voice. (Female)

I confronted the guy and said. 'Hey what do you think you're doing, you don't hit women or anyone for that matter'. He replied 'it's okay she's my partner'. I said 'I don't give a f\*ck work it out another way or walk away'. I stood my ground offered to be a witness to the woman. (Male)

My wife took the woman inside and comforted her while I phoned women's refuge. My partner was very good – and we just knew that my role was to do the functional contacting while she supplied the emotional support.

Stopped, through open door, yelled at woman to get in, and for the guy to back off or I would have to deal him some damage. Guy was so far drunk, he accepted it.

## *Barriers*

The help givers identified a number of barriers to acting. These included:

- fear that they might get hurt
- fear that they had the wrong impression
- unsure whether the situation was as serious as they thought it was
- fear about getting involved
- not knowing the outcome



- a lack of backup from others
- lack of confidence.

There weren't many and I couldn't be sure who saw the blow but our confrontation wasn't quiet and at the very least the security guard should have walked the 20m or so to find out what the story was. Maybe if he called it in the cops would have turned up sooner.

Two felt that there were no barriers as you just "do what you need to do".

### *In the future*

Most said that they would not have acted differently nor done anything differently. Those who did said that they would call the Police (2) and/or ambulance (1) earlier, or ring Women's Refuge (1).

## **Offering help to whānau and family members (38 respondents)**

### *Situation*

Nearly one-third (12) of the help givers gave help because they were asked for help by the victims. Others gave help because they had witnessed the abuse. For some (5), it was a one-off or crisis situation. Others (15) said it was a situation that had been building gradually over time. Although the violence was immediately obvious (15) for some, for others it took a few months (8) or years (6) to find out.

### *Certainty*

Some were unsure it was going on (6). They just began to notice changes in their daughter's or sister's behaviour over time. Although the severity of violence ranged from mild to life threatening, mostly the signs were unclear and they were unsure whether others were aware of the situation (5).

She was not the same person that she used to be and over two years had become quiet and fearful.

The change in my daughter's relationship with us – it went from being great friends to her lying to us, quite often.

For those who were pretty sure, very sure or knew the abuse was occurring, the signs were clearer. Some had witnessed the violence directly and some noticed changes in behaviour.

The most telling was when she took to calling in to me on her way home from work and as time went on her increasing reluctance to go to her own home and partner.

... she would look to him for approval for everything she did, she couldn't use the phone without his permission for example, unexplained bruises etc.

[My] sister's self esteem and confidence was diminishing before my eyes, she was nervous around him and timid.

Others noticed physical signs and evidence of abuse.

The bruising my daughter continually had.

She made lame excuses about how she got hurt. What made me aware was when she told two different people two different stories about her injuries.

Around half (5 of 12) of those who were asked for help (rather than offered it) said that they had already suspected abuse over a few months or years.

Around half of the respondents were not sure if others were aware of the situation. The remainder said that other family members and friends were aware of the violence happening.

Other family members but they weren't sure and had been ignoring the signs because of their similar religious beliefs.

Around half (19) did not talk to anyone else before taking action. In these cases, one person was able to support the person and make a difference.

Over half said there were others around when they took action and that they helped. Mostly these were other family members, such as partners or siblings.

### *Taking action*

It appears to take time for many whānau and family members to take action, particularly when they are on their own and not witnessing an immediate crisis.

When asked how long they thought about it before taking action, around half (19 of 34) said that they took action immediately, or over a few hours, 11 took days or months to help, and four took a few years.

Some needed to feel certain.

I had to be sure she really needed help.

Those who did not act immediately were unsure what to do.

[I] tossed and turned about what to actually do, rang women's refuge for advice and thought about what would be the best course of action.

It just seems to take a little while to process, emotionally, and to weigh up the options – decide on the best course of action. Maybe it just takes that long to get up the guts.

Some were scared of being excluded from the family or of making things worse.

[I was] afraid that things [would] get more violent.

### *Feelings*

Those who had been unsure of the situation began to feel increasing concern as their suspicions grew. They were more likely to feel unsure of what to do.

I was unsure what to do, I could not stand to see her that way.

Those helping family members living in violence at the higher end of the family violence spectrum predominantly felt fearful and angry.

[I was] fearful he would very easily turn on us children.

[I was] scared and upset, but I had had enough. My father had been hurting my mother for years.

I encouraged her to leave, gave her a place to stay. I was fearful of what he might do to me, but angry about her contact with him while she stayed with me.

Much of the anger family members felt was directed at the victims as well as the perpetrators.

I was angry about what he'd done to her, but I was angry and frustrated that she continued to see him and made excuses for him.

I felt angry, with him for his actions, and with her for not sticking up for herself and leaving. I was worried that if I said anything it would make the situation worse.

### *Thinking*

For family members, in particular mothers, their primary thoughts were how to get their children out of the situation and to stop the situation.

I wanted to help her escape from the situation.

I had to make the victim (my daughter) see sense and leave him.

I just wanted it to stop.

All I thought about was the safety of my son.

Others felt that they had stood by for long enough, and the situation was no longer tolerable anymore.

I couldn't stay silent anymore and with the support of my flatmate and daughter we felt we could tackle the situation together.

Many of the help givers felt frustration and an inability to comprehend why the victim didn't just leave, and how the perpetrator could behave in such a destructive manner.

How can she put up with this all the time? How can he live with himself?

I am shocked at how a modern, well educated middle class woman could put herself into this situation. I really tried to raise her to be a modern confident woman who would not accept this.

### *Motivation*

The motivations for family helping family members were varied. For some, a background of violence motivated family members to act, particularly where the help giver had been in a situation where they had not been helped themselves. In these cases, it often took one person to stand up, draw a line in the sand and say that they would no longer accept this in their whānau or family.

I had been there and knew what was needed.  
[I] no longer wanted to tolerate this behaviour in my life or others I care for.

Those who did not step in immediately waited to see if there would be a change, and were motivated to act when the abuse increased in severity or did not improve.

The fact that my husband didn't dispute what had happened but just trivialised it, the fact that I knew this was one incident too many.

I was older and had seen and heard it happening for so many years  
... I just wanted it to stop.

Some felt that they had no choice but to act because the violence was happening in front of them.

I actually witnessed it with my own eyes there was no denying the fact he hit her.

It was a crisis situation and could no longer put up with it. I feared for my daughter and grandchildren.

Others were motivated by the fact that the violence involved a family member and they felt the need to protect family.

[I] just felt a strong urge to protect my sister.

[It was a] natural instinct to protect my daughter.

[I] didn't want my sister to get hurt by that loser.

Mothers, in particular, were motivated to act by extreme fear, and in one case rage.

I was afraid for her life.

I was worried that eventually the violence would escalate to the point where he would kill her. Probably accidentally, but dead is dead whether it's intentional or not.

My blood boiled and I just went in.

### *Action*

Many of those who acted gave advice, and some were disappointed that their whānau and family members did not take it. Some offered emotional and practical support.

[I] gathered information from sources – relations, friends of sister and abusive partner, sat down and wrote a letter to sister outlining concerns with relationship and evidence to support what I was saying, gave it to her and waited in next room while she read it, talked and cried with her and helped her make plans/decisions about her and the baby's future. Then supported and encouraged over next few weeks to move her out of house and up to our dad's.

I told her my fears for her life, that she was worthy of better, no matter what he had said and that she had a room in our house for as long as she and her daughter needed. I helped her arrange a removal truck and stayed at home that day to help her move in.

Practical support often involved a place to stay, money, and giving information about counselling services.

I offered her a place to stay so that she had somewhere to go.

We evicted the husband, and stayed with the family to ensure safety of sister and children, all of us at different times, informed the police, and spoke with the husband and made it clear this was unacceptable and that we would be there to ensure there was no further abuse.

[I] talked mum into leaving him, moving away for her safety.

I told my daughter to talk to the counsellor and I supported her.

Some family offered 'conditional' support.

When she asked me if I could help with the packing I sat her down and told her although I loved her dearly I could not help her and her partner move again. Come the day that she left him I would be there to help with bells on my feet. Once I had been brave and told her, her father and brother both told her they felt the same way. We all told her again how concerned we were for her well being.

Some were so frightened that they resorted to begging and threats in an attempt to trigger the changes.

I begged her, repeatedly, to leave. I threatened to call the police and CYPs.

### *Barriers*

The main barriers to helping whānau and family members were that they felt they were interfering, that they were not able to confront the issue directly, and fear.

At the time I was accused of sticking my nose in where it wasn't wanted, but later she thanked me. She is now safe and happy.

I have always felt that I didn't really confront the issue, I went around it and let someone else take the responsibility.

### *Supports*

Some found information from support agencies useful.

[What helped was] knowing that other people understood and that they were able to give me practical and emotional support in the background. Having information and people like drug and alcohol counsellors available to give advice.

### *Other comments*

The response of some of the whānau and family members was to swoop in when they became aware of the violence as they were terrified for the safety of their daughters, nieces, sisters and so on. Although in a few cases this resulted in successful outcomes, in other cases it appeared to drive the behaviour underground.

### **Offering help to friends (66 respondents)**

#### *Situation*

For around one-third of friends who offered help, the abuse was immediately obvious. For most, however, it took weeks or months, and in some cases years to become aware of it.

Around 60 per cent of friends said that they were very sure, or knew that something was going on. The closer the friendship, the more likely they were to know.

For those experiencing less extreme abuse, the signs were reasonably clear. Although they were slightly less likely to be sure, many of those interviewed said that they just had a 'feeling' or 'knew' that something was not right. Around one-third said that they were asked for help.

#### *Signs of family violence at the less extreme end of the scale*

The help givers noted that the perpetrators were putting their friends down. In some cases this started as 'jokes' that became increasingly nasty.

He did it in front of anyone who was around. A lot of people just walked away and did not want to get involved. As I said if this person was drinking you could bet he would start on his wife. She could not do a thing right.

Just listening to the insults. It was all out in the open. I don't think she knew it was abuse. She just accepted it.

He started with insults delivered in an 'amusing' way and over the years didn't bother trying to disguise it as humour, just got nasty.

Others noted that their friends were starting to behave in ways that were out of character.

My best friend had become more and more anxious. Small things that had never bothered her in the past were becoming harder for her to bear. She also was becoming more apt to tears and self-recrimination. She also began to question her self-worth.

She hadn't been her usual happy self for a while and was turning down offers to do activities that might mean she had to spend time with the bully.

*Signs of family violence at the more extreme end of the scale*

For those who experienced more severe abuse, the signs were similar; however, there were also physical signs. Once again, the help givers noted that their friends were behaving in ways that were out of character. Often, these were small changes.

A few times I would go round unexpected and she wouldn't invite me in, making all sorts of excuses. She stopped going to meetings we were both involved in. Suddenly she was becoming very clumsy.

I noticed my friend flinching away from her new partner when he moved suddenly. I noticed the kids keeping 'out of range' of the new partner. They were all being very careful about how they were acting in my home when previously they had been very relaxed.

As the violence escalated or was at the more extreme end of the scale, the physical signs, and signs such as damage to property, began to emerge.

[I saw] bruising, damage to possessions.

She had changed, had bruises on face, made excuses for partner.

For some, their friends told them that their partners were violent. Others witnessed threats, humiliating comments, put downs and physical violence.

My friend told me that he was very controlling and jealous and he would say nasty things especially when drunk. This happened for years before he started being physically violent.

Saw it happening in front of me – nasty criticism, put-downs and humiliation.

The way he spoke to my friend in everyday situations – he was often intentionally mean and made remarks that were degrading.

Just pretty much violent behaviour, eg throwing things around, yelling and swearing etc.



### *Others aware*

Around half of the respondents were not sure if others were aware of the situation. The remainder said that others, mostly close friends, knew about it. Some also mentioned that family knew.

### *Taking action*

When asked how long they thought about taking action, around two-thirds said that they took action immediately, or over a few hours. The remainder took days or months to help, and a couple took a few years.

Those who did not take action immediately said:

- they were too scared to get involved
- it took time to 'get up the guts'
- they were both good friends and they did not want to get involved
- they were worried that they might have got it wrong
- they wanted to be sure
- they were hoping the perpetrator would change
- they thought it was just insults and putdowns, not punches
- by interfering it would make it worse
- they didn't want to step beyond where they should.

### *What help givers were feeling*

Help givers were asked how they felt about giving help. In general, they felt:

- confident
- unsure
- fearful
- disgusted
- angry
- protective and supportive.

As they were both close friends, the decision was easy. I didn't feel fearful.

[I was] a bit unsure, but once I got started, it was ok.

[I was] fearful and unsure what to do.

He scared me, and I could tell my friend was in danger.

I was unsure, mainly because of fear for myself if I got involved, but at the same time I felt that I had to help her and I just hoped that his desire to keep the violence hidden would keep me safe.

The first time, I made the decision to act, I was fearful, I did not know what action to take, and I was mindful of the partner's response to my interference.

I was disgusted in the behaviour and felt very uneasy about what I was seeing initially, when I was witness to them actual hitting the adrenalin kicked in along with uncertainty of safety.

I was very angry with my best friend's husband. I cannot and do not tolerate violence of any type. I was especially angry that he had become verbally and physically abusive to my best friend in front of my daughter.

We felt angry towards him and protective towards her and determined to help, and anxious that we would get there before he hurt her worse than he already had.

### *Motivation*

Help givers were motivated by the following:

- empathy, which was derived from having experience of family violence themselves, or from putting themselves in others' shoes
- personal values; some felt that it was unjust or morally wrong
- friendship; some were motivated out of love for their friend and a belief that they would do the same in return
- anger
- fear for the safety of the victim
- it was not an option not to act
- a crisis.

I had been a victim of domestic violence and so I didn't hesitate in assisting someone else.

It was my friend – I honestly believed she deserved better (as does anyone) and I loved her and her kids – it was not ok to stand back and see it happen.

This was my good friend and I love her kids as if they were mine I didn't want them hurt in anyway and I know she would do the same for me.

This guy was losing the plot, and I had seen how withdrawn my friend was. I didn't want her to end up dead.

I could not see any other solution.

She is 1.6m (I am too), he is 1.9m and a strong man. He punched her in front of me, as I was walking into the lounge, and I ran at him and crash tackled him to the floor. I reacted instinctively. I was scared after I had done it though.

### *Action*

Help givers acted in the following ways.

- Many of the help givers offered emotional support, including reassurances that the victims deserved better.
- Some helped by becoming closer to the victim, staying with them and checking in by phone on a regular basis.
- Some offered practical support, such as helping the victim move house or offering a place to stay.
- In a crisis, practical support involved trying to calm the situation down and ringing the Police.
- A few of the help givers confronted the perpetrators themselves.

[I] assured her that she was a really great mother and person ... much valued by the community.

[We would say] "he is so mean to you. You deserve better. He shouldn't be saying those things to you. Don't take it any more". And later others said things like: "If you leave him, we will still be your friends. We won't leave you ..."

I confronted about the behaviour I had witnessed, that I felt it could mean there was something more going on, and she confirmed that. I asked her what she wanted to do. At that point she didn't feel she could leave – (kids and finances) and didn't want to tell her family. She felt ashamed to admit that it may not have been wise to marry him plus she loved him (at that point) regardless. We decided that I would move in, that way I could help with the money, around the house and with the kids and just be there which would hopefully help to limit his behaviour.

I spent a number of months discussing her relationship with her and making her see that it wasn't a safe relationship, I spoke with her mum, I spoke with other friends, I visited her frequently or encouraged them to come over so we could keep an eye on the situation, and eventually got her to get in touch with Women's Refuge when things got out of control.

I think I said something along the lines of 'this is not okay'. Made it clear to her that I thought he was out of line. Told her she had to get away. Stressed that very strongly. Told her I would help in any way I could, stayed in close contact with her by phone. Just stayed in very

close touch, saw her whenever I could, told her not to be scared when he started acting freakily after she left ... just being a mate basically.

[I] helped her move out of the home. I tried to calm a verbally abusive argument that happened when the husband showed up. What I said I can't remember but we still see and talk to the husband so it couldn't have been too bad.

Just got her and her child out of the house to my sister's house, and then talked to her partner.

I let her stay under my roof for a day or two. I just let her pour her heart out.

I rang my friend after receiving her text and asked what was going on, how and why, offered to pick her up and take her to my place, advised her to have a bag packed and ready in the car for her and her other children so she could leave immediately if it happened again. Advised her to kick the boyfriend out and get a trespass/no contact order against him.

I tried to calm the situation; one person was very aggressive and loud. I just talked calmly to her [the aggressor in this case].

I rang police arranged safe place for all concerned tried to access future support.

We made her house secure and told her to phone us any time day or night if she was worried. We assured her she wasn't at fault and that she didn't deserve to be treated like that.

I spoke to my best friend's husband at my home. I told him very bluntly that violence, verbal and physical was unacceptable. That he had a problem and needed help. I also spoke to him about how his actions were hurting not only his wife but his children. That he had to learn to not resort to violence and that this was not something he could do by himself. I told him that if he was ever violent to anyone in the presence of my children again, I myself would call authorities and press charges.

### *Barriers*

With friends, a key barrier to help was the length of time that it took for things to change and respecting decisions when they felt that they 'knew better' and wanted to rescue their friends. There were also some boundary issues.

It took so long to happen from my perspective.

Other barriers included needing to stop others retaliating on behalf of the victim, and protecting the victim from the partner.

#### *In the future*

Most would not have acted differently except perhaps to intervene or take notice earlier.

#### *Other comments*

Some help givers noted that it was difficult, in some cases extremely difficult, not to take over, give advice or bully their friends into leaving the perpetrator.

Leading up to that it took some convincing – she had to come to the decision herself, my difficulty was not being too pushy while she was unsure because I wanted her to keep talking to me about things that were happening.

### **Offering help to work colleagues (9 respondents)**

#### *Situation*

Abuse at work came to the attention of colleagues because the abuse was severe. Most rated the abuse as at the higher end of the scale (7–8). In most cases, other colleagues had also noticed and knew or suspected the abuse was happening. Around half discussed the situation with other colleagues before acting.

A female colleague arrived at work with bruises around her neck where her ex-partner had partially strangled her when he came across her in a petrol station. He had also previously pushed her against a wall and hit her. She was scared of him and he used repeated threats of physical violence against her.

#### *Feelings*

Almost all the work colleagues were fearful to act but felt that it was the right thing to do. Those interviewed said that they felt they were possibly overstepping a boundary, and were hesitant to act. They were also unsure how to act.

If I am completely honest – I think I felt really shocked that she was in this situation – I would never in a million years seen her as a ‘victim’ of violence. I felt I was doing the right thing helping her – but I felt very unsure what it was that I should do – how I could support her.

### *Thinking*

There was concern about the public–private split between work and their colleagues' personal lives. Most people did not feel that they had the relationship with their colleagues to raise this issue easily. There was considerable reluctance on their part to raise it. They were concerned that the relationship was professional, not personal, were unsure if they were right about the situation and were unsure of how to support the victim.

I hesitated as I do not have a 'personal' relationship with her and I was unsure how to raise such a personal issue with her. I looked around desperately for other people that could help, but realized that no-one else had a personal relationship with her either really.

I thought I could be making such a fool of myself – but there is a bigger picture here – it is better to make a fool of myself and be wrong – than to ignore it and have been right.

Although I talked to her and offered sympathy I was not sure what to do. I really didn't think I had the skills to offer advice as this is not something I know much about. What I could do is find out how I could support her. I didn't want to get too involved either as I didn't think I could be much help.

### *Motivation*

Almost all those interviewed said that they would help in any situation where people needed help – and that a family violence situation was no different. The only thing that stopped them or made them hesitate was that the work relationship is different from a personal relationship.

She was a colleague who needed help. She had kids. What were we going to do – leave her? It just wasn't an option. Once you know you know. You can't ever step away from that.

### *Action*

Most offered support such as listening. One person said that they offered counselling to their employee, which, although it was not taken up, showed that they were behind her.

I rang an agency and asked for advice. It was a good place to ring as it is not like the police – they could give us advice without us having to give details without dumping anyone in it. I talked to her and offered to pay for her to do counselling. She did not take up the offer but she and her friends were all supporting her to stay away from him and leave the relationship. We didn't offer advice – but we

made it pretty clear that we thought his behaviour was unacceptable.

I said that if you do nothing and stay it will happen again, this man presently does not know real love or how to communicate so will be a coward till he gets the message it is not right.

One person said that they offered advice and that was not very effective.

I said that you had to leave for you and your daughter's sake. I gave advice rather than support really – which wasn't great – as she hid the fact that she went back to him. She did leave him though but she had to come to it in her own time. I think our disapproval was both a help and a hindrance – it was clear we thought his behaviour was unacceptable – but she felt unable to confide in us again.

### *Barriers*

The principal barriers to helping were related to concerns that they were crossing work personal boundaries, and a fear of being harmed.

I was really concerned about crossing that personal/work boundary. My concerns have been realised to some extent – she is very needy and dependent. She oversteps the boundaries all the time.