

Stopping Violence:

Review of Interventions for People Using Violence

Feedback from NCIWR

28 August 2025

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) is a non-governmental organisation that has delivered services to women, children, and whānau affected by family violence in Aotearoa for 50 years. We represent victims of family violence, specifically wāhine and tamariki, who are the primary groups subjected to and impacted by family violence.

Current state - Existing services

What interventions/programmes for people using violence do you deliver, or know about?

Some of our affiliated refuges deliver non-violence programmes and other support for people who want to become/remain non-violent (mostly men).

We know about other non-violence programmes and services for people who use violence, some of whom our member refuges work alongside, sometimes as part of a local multi-agency response to family violence, and sometimes sharing information and coordinate with to support safety and wellbeing for victim-survivors and their whānau.

This also includes Family Violence Restorative Justice providers, funded by MOJ to provide RJ before sentencing in the criminal court, requiring agreement from the victim and offender to participate.

What outcomes do these interventions/programmes seek to achieve? (e.g. reduced rates of reoffending)

The most important outcome they seek to achieve is safety for victim-survivors, both adults and children. Safety includes freedom from fear, coercive control, and ongoing harm, e.g. ability to meet basic needs, have financial independence, etc.

What are the causes/drivers for someone to enter these interventions/programmes, and what is considered 'the end' of the intervention?

Unfortunately 'the end' of the intervention is all too often decided by funding constraints, whereas we believe it should be when the victim-survivor/whānau believe that the person using violence has taken responsibility for their violence, stopped using all forms of violence, and that there is enough of a support network around that person to monitor and intervene to protect victims if that person uses violence again.

Current state - Effectiveness of services

What do you think contributes most to an intervention being effective? Why do you think these things are most effective?

There are many contributing factors for effective interventions; the drivers and barriers to change are different for different people using violence. **Some** of the most important things that contribute to an effective intervention are:

- Providers having a specialist family violence understanding that includes an understanding of the major drivers of gender inequity/patriarchy and colonisation, working with specialist teams/organisations that can provide support for difficult, specialist work and help with holding risk so practitioners aren't isolated as one or two family violence specialists within a non-specialist organisation, or worse as non-specialists within a non-specialist organisation
- Providers having access to information about the person's history of violence from Police/Courts, and from the victim-survivor where safe and possible, to support meaningful engagement (it's difficult to engage with a participant who does not admit their violence and there's no source of information to counter their claims of innocence)
- Having clear and consistent consequences for people using violence, starting with consequences for non-participation in a non-violence programme mandated by courts, probation or OT, but ALSO having criminal justice system and the child protection systems sharing information and having a shared focus on victim safety and preventing people using violence from further harming their victims.
 - Non-violence programmes cannot be relied on to stop the violence, as they rely on participant motivation; participants are often only motivated by facing consequences for their violence.
- Having facilitators with the skills to engage respectfully without collusion, while always prioritising safety for victim-survivors. This means understanding that the story the participant tells during the programme may not be the 'truth', which is why it is so important to seek information from the victim to understand whether change is really happening.

"My abusive partner attended anger management classes weekly. He was even asked to mentor new attending men as he "did so well," [even though] the abuse at home and anger never stopped behind closed doors." (quote from Women's Refuge research participant in 2025 report Safer When? Safer How?)
- Being able to employ skilled and experienced facilitators with cultural backgrounds, genders and gender/sexual identities that enable them to most effectively engage with people using violence, and most effectively use aspects of their culture/identity to support non-violence.
- Having resource and flexibility to engage with whānau, friends and others connected to the person using violence to help them understand family violence, support the person's safe behaviour and have the confidence to respond to prevent further harmful behaviour.
- Having the flexibility and resourcing to support participants to meet basic needs that otherwise may be barriers to behaviour change, e.g. homelessness, transport issues, lack of food, healthcare and other basic needs.
- Having the flexibility to collaborate with other services involved with a participant to help align approaches so that there is a coordinated approach to hold the person accountable and support them with needs and behaviour change

- Having flexibility to engage early with people using violence and to attempt early engagement multiple times, in different ways, as it's often about engaging at a time when they are receptive to the message.

Current state - Challenges in current state

What are the current gaps or areas for improvement for better responses to prevent people using violence?

In addition to what's written above, Māori should have access to a kaupapa Māori programme no matter where they live. People in Rainbow communities should have access to a programme no matter where they live that is Rainbow safe at a bare minimum, but ideally to a programme delivered by people from their Rainbow community who can best understand and talk to dynamics of family violence specific to that community.

What are the barriers for people who use violence in accessing and completing interventions/programmes and/or changing their behaviour?

A number of well-respected existing non-violence programmes lost their funding for non-mandated referrals, with funding going to providers who are not yet providing services in that community. This is a significant barrier in these communities when there is nowhere for people to go for support to be non-violent for the foreseeable future.

Many people who use violence will only be motivated to change if there are consequences for their violence, i.e. they are held accountable. If they get away with it, there is little reason for them to change. We need many more processes and systems to hold people using violence accountable, not just the criminal justice system. This will create greater motivation for participants to access and complete programmes.

What dangers or barriers do victim-survivors face when a user of violence attends an intervention/programme?

Victim-survivors may not implement, or may postpone implementing, safety strategies when their abuser engages with a programme, because they believe or hope that he will change.

Programme participants may provide misleading information to their partner about the programme content, e.g. to support their accusations that their partner (the victim) is using abusive behaviour, or support their misuse of a 'time-out' strategy as another tactic of abuse and control.

Victims are further harmed when professionals/programmes collude with their abuser, illustrated by this research participant quote from recent 2024 Women's Refuge survey:

"My abusive partner attended anger management classes weekly. He was even asked to mentor new attending men as he "did so well," [even though] the abuse at home and anger never stopped behind closed doors."

Hearing something like will make a victim less trustful of services and professionals, less likely to seek help, and thus more isolated and more vulnerable to her partner's coercive control.

Future state - System level change

What improvements can be made to how government agencies work with the family and sexual violence sectors in delivering these interventions/services?

Evaluations of programmes/interventions for users of violence need to centre the voices of victim-survivors to determine whether they 'work,' if indeed the aim of these services is to increase safety for victims.

Safe and effective non-violence programmes/interventions must be delivered by family violence specialist practitioners working in family violence specialist organisations. It is not safe for a non-specialist organisation to employ one or two people to do this specialist mahi, as they need to work within an organisation with policies, procedures, supervision and management structures that all contribute to safe service provision, which is why the Family Violence Specialist Organisation Standards sits alongside the Entry to Expert Family Violence Capability Framework. There has been a repeated failure of government agencies to support this understanding when commissioning family violence services over the years, leading to staff working in unsafe environments and services that are unsafe or ineffective.

There needs to be a focus on accountability for people who use violence and expansion of all the ways that can and should happen.

What actions could government agencies take to disrupt violence, and provide support for people to change their behaviour?

As stated above, many people who use violence will only be motivated to change if there are consequences for their violence, i.e. they are held accountable. If they get away with it, there is little reason for them to change. We need many more processes and systems to hold people using violence accountable, and motivate behaviour change, including the following:

- **Criminal Courts where there is no Family Violence Court:** According to the 2021 Evaluation of the Family Violence Courts, "...defendants who appear in a FV Court are significantly more likely to be referred to a nonviolence programme (43.2%) than matched controls who do not appear in FV Courts (1.6%)." (Cording et al, 2021). Further, while 54.5% of defendants referred to the SVP via the Family Violence Court complete the programme, only 26.5% of those referred from a non-FV Court complete the programme. the Ministry of Justice funds non-violence programmes all over the country. But there is an enormous missed opportunity, as all criminal courts should be utilising this critical resource to help motivate and support offenders to be non-violent. It's also likely that the higher programme completion rates of defendants referred by Family Violence Courts is because of better case management and follow up with defendants who fail to complete, which is another missed opportunity for other criminal courts to do better.
- **Family Court:** In CoCA and other relevant proceedings, the Family Court does not have:
 - a. a process to routinely assess whether parties are at risk of (further) family violence from another party to automatically trigger bypassing family dispute resolution, which is an unsafe process for adult and child victims of family violence
 - b. a routine process to access family violence information about parties held in the community
 - c. a safe and effective way for children experiencing family violence to participate in the court process and make their views known

Without such measures in place, the Family Court system will fail to recognise family violence, fail to hold accountable people who use violence and cause further harm to victims. With these processes in place, there would be more opportunities for Family Court to refer or mandate people using violence to participate in non-violence programmes.

- **Referrals from Oranga Tamariki:** There is a missed opportunities by Oranga Tamariki to motivate and engage with men who have used violence against partners and harmed their children, and specifically to refer or require people using violence to participate in non-violence programmes, while not relying on this participation to stop the violence.
- **Family Violence Restorative Justice:** There is a missed opportunity to build stronger connections between FV RJ and non-violence programme providers, so that the RJ process can build on and reinforce NVP engagement, and enable involvement of skilled and experienced non-violence programme facilitators in the restorative justice process - similar to the three-legged stool model used by Project Restore (national sexual violence RJ provider), and as was reported to have been very successful in the report “Restorative justice in cases of family violence and harm – Learnings from the Porirua Model”.

The Ministry of Justice began providing limited flexible funding for non-violence and safety programmes in the wake of COVID, and this funding could be expanded to enable providers’ involvement with family violence RJ.

- **Work & Income and more generally government agencies managing personal debt to government, as well as laws and institutions that govern practices in the financial sector:** An integrated government approach to holding people using violence accountable must include accountability for financial abuse, as this is such a common and persistent form of harm for so many victims. Women’s Refuge research showed that 63% of women who had experienced intimate partner violence were left with debt that they would not otherwise had as a result. Implementing the **Debt to Government Framework** to help prevent coerced debt, and ensuring that responses support safety and wellbeing for victims, would be a significant step to stopping violence in and of itself, and enable more victims to have the means to live, and care for children, independently from their abuser. Similarly, the corporate financial sector need mandates around provision of basic services to victims of family violence to enable their autonomy and prevent further financial abuse.

How should the outcomes/success of these intervention/programmes be measured/assessed? This could include measuring outcomes for victims/survivors and whānau.

Evaluations of programmes/interventions for users of violence must centre the voices of victim-survivors to determine whether they ‘work’ in terms of improving victim safety from the victims’ perspective.

Without this, there is the risk that – with the best of intentions – unsafe practice is embedded and there are missed opportunities to improve practice. Providers should not rely on participants (users of violence) to identify victims, as this is another opportunity for users of violence to avoid accountability by failing to identify one or all of their victims.

We have consulted on the Backbone Collective’s current survey of victim-survivors on this topic, and we urge that the results of that survey be incorporated into and centred in this review.

Future state - Service delivery

What changes could be made to the current intervention system (e.g. what and how stopping violence services are delivered, monitored, and commissioned) to improve outcomes for people using violence, their whānau, and victims/survivors?

In addition to changes explained previously, participants also should be able to repeat a programme as many times as they would like, with the understanding that behaviour change requires long-term support and many men have limited support outside of a programme environment.

What would improve collaboration across 'Stopping Violence' interventions/services?

While collaboration across stopping violence services may be important, a more important question may be about what would improve collaboration between stopping violence services and victim services and local multi-agency responses to family violence. There may be a way to support this to happen through the multi-agency response work being led by Te Puna Aonui, and by supporting this to happen through contracts with these services.

For clarification about any of the points in this feedback please contact Research@refuge.org.nz.