

Wellington Sexual Abuse Network Education Project Stage One Report

Creating Change in the Prevention of Sexual Violence

Welcome to the Stage One Report (the first six months) of the Wellington Sexual Abuse Network Education Project. The Education Project was commissioned to identify and assess sexual violence prevention initiatives taking place with young people in Aotearoa and internationally, to establish best practice based on these initiatives and to make recommendations for the Wellington Sexual Abuse Network (WSAN) to move forward with education in this area in the future. The project focused on the prevention of sexual violence between peers; it did not include the prevention of sexual abuse of children. This report outlines key findings from the Education Project and provides new ideas regarding moving forward with primary prevention of sexual violence.

Key Findings

The most significant finding of the project is that a radical shift is currently taking place, in the way sexual violence prevention education is being conceptualised and implemented (see Carmody 2005, Lee et al. 2007, Perry 2006, Keel 2005). It has been identified that many current approaches to sexual violence prevention are at the least ineffective and, at worst, reinforcing of cultural norms that contribute to rape and sexual abuse. This shift in thinking regarding prevention involves the inclusion of concepts of “healthy” and “ethical” sexual relating (Carmody 2005, Perry 2006) and an emphasis on negotiating mutual and consensual relationships (Keel 2005) rather than a model of consent based on oppositional gender relating. This shift represents a move away from merely implementing secondary and tertiary prevention approaches to implementing true primary prevention.

Key findings of the Education Project fit into three categories:

1. Understanding “primary prevention”
2. Problems with some current approaches
3. Approaches that may work and what we need to learn more about

Moving Upstream - Understanding Primary Prevention

It is important to begin with clear definitions of prevention and the difference between “primary prevention” and other kinds of prevention. Many initiatives that are referred to as “prevention” are in fact, not “primary prevention”. Prevention can be classified in three ways: primary, secondary and tertiary:

Primary Prevention: Initiatives that take place before sexual violence has occurred. Initiatives for “everyone”, that set cultural norms.

Secondary Prevention: Initiatives aimed at “at risk” populations.

Tertiary Prevention: Initiatives with those affected by sexual violence to deal with consequences and prevent further abuse from occurring.

Information on the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse in our communities, definitions of rape and sexual abuse, effects on survivors, how to support survivors and where to get help, has often formed the basis of prevention education programmes. This is important and valid information and may reduce the impacts of rape and sexual abuse, and indeed may prevent further abuse from occurring (secondary and tertiary prevention), but it is not primary prevention.

The “river story” of “moving upstream” is often used as an analogy for understanding primary prevention.

Suppose you are standing next to a river, and you see someone drowning as she floats downstream. You jump into the river and pull her ashore. As soon as you've done that, you see another person in trouble, again floating downstream, and you rescue him as well. Every time you've saved one person, you see another, and another. After you've dragged another drowning body out of the river, you're thoroughly exhausted and you know you don't have the energy to save one more person, so instead you decide you must go upstream to find out what is causing these people to end up in the river. You want to address this problem at its source. You get upstream, and see a bridge. Upon careful inspection, you find that there is a well-concealed, yet sizeable hole in this bridge that is causing people to fall in. What do you do? You do what makes the most sense - you work to repair the bridge. (Excerpted from Perry 2006).

In this instance, working to repair the bridge requires addressing dominant cultural norms – beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that make rape and sexual abuse possible and increasing protective and resilience factors. Merely focusing on the behaviours we want to eliminate or “prevent” is not enough. We also need to promote and increase the kinds of behaviour and ways of relating that we wish to be present. Instead of focusing on what we want to *prevent*, we need to focus on what we wish to bring into *presence*. Primary prevention makes alternatives possible. We need to ask: “what is it we want to *replace* sexual violence with?”

Problems with some current approaches

Current approaches include (but are not limited to) correcting rape myths and attempting to change attitudes, teaching consent and assertiveness/refusal skills for women, how to keep safe in “high-risk” situations, how to help yourself or a survivor of sexual abuse and definitions and legal aspects of rape. Such approaches have limitations and problems that will be discussed in this report.

For the last 30 years, rape prevention education has been informed by the idea that “rape isn’t about sex, it is about power and control.” Yet despite three decades of campaigning based on this premise, incidences of rape and sexual abuse have not declined (Carmody 2006, Perry 2006). It is now being argued that it is limiting to focus only on the ways in which rape is about power and control (Carmody 2006, Perry 2006). The power/control analysis is valuable, but this is only part of the picture and can result in unintentionally oversimplifying the complexities of sexual violence.

Nicola Gavey argues in *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* (2005), that the conditions that enable rape and sexual abuse in our culture are the “persistently gendered patterns of heterosexuality – the naturalisation of women’s passivity and men’s aggressive pursuit of sex”. Unfortunately, it has been shown (see Carmody 2006) that sexual violence prevention initiatives can inadvertently reinforce the very patterns of gendered sexual relating that contribute to rape and pressured and coerced sex. Carmody (2003) has argued that rape prevention programmes may be informed by ideas of all men as inherently or potentially violent and of all women as potential victims.

Correcting rape myths and changing attitudes

Correcting rape myths and seeking to change attitudes has long formed the basis of sexual violence prevention education. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that raising awareness and changing attitudes will significantly change behaviour. Breitenbecher’s (2000 in Carmody & Willis 2006) review of 38 American college-based studies of prevention programmes found that although favourable attitude change can occur, the magnitude of such change is often small and often reduces or reverts over time. Similar problems have been found in evaluating Australian anti-violence programmes (Carmody & Willis 2006).

Current usage of consent

Teaching about consent is often an aspect of prevention programmes. Young men are taught that they need to “get consent” and that sex without consent is rape. However “consent” is a concept and term most commonly referred to in academia and by the legal profession, rather than something people consider in everyday experiences. In reality, consent is often negotiated non-verbally and indirectly (Beres 2007, Carmody & Willis 2006). Despite its widespread use in academic literature, there is no consensus on what consent is, how it should be defined or how it is communicated (Beres

2007). According to Beres (2007), understandings of consent are underdeveloped and rely largely on assumed and implied definitions.

The current usage of "consent" is problematic not only because it does not reflect people's lived experience, but also because it reinforces a culture where men are considered active sexual initiators and women are the recipients of male sexuality. The focus is on the ways in which women consent to sex and the ways that men perceive women's consent. Consent is conceptualised as something women "'give'" to men (Archard 1998 in Beres 2007). This sets up an unequal power relationship, and constructs sex as something that one person "gives to", or tries to "get from" another. According to Pateman (1980 in Gavey 2005), an egalitarian sexual relationship cannot fit within our current conceptualisation and use of "consent".

Assertiveness/refusal skills

"No means no" has been a popular slogan of the anti-rape movement. Prevention initiatives that only focus on women's assertiveness and right to say no ignore the complexity of sexual relationships and set up a starting point for negotiating sex based on refusal, which creates a highly gendered dynamic - women as passive, male as pursuer or what has been called the gate-keeper/gate-crasher dynamic (Perry 2006).

Basing prevention on women's refusal denies the possibility of negotiated sexual relating, it places responsibility onto women for managing men's sexual behaviour and reinforces gendered expectations about who initiates sex. It may reinforce some males' expectations that "no really means yes if I can just bring her round" (Carmody 2005).

Keeping safe

Teaching strategies to "keep safe" places responsibility on women to manage risk and can too easily turn to victim blaming if the woman is unsuccessful at "keeping herself safe". This is not only unfair but also ineffective. It ignores the complexity that most rape happens between known people in established relationships.

Raising awareness and how to help survivors

As already outlined, many rape prevention initiatives such as awareness-raising, information on how to help yourself or someone else, and provision of definitions and legal aspects of rape are secondary and tertiary approaches, not primary prevention. There is a place for such interventions, but it needs to be understood that these will always be limiting for the primary prevention of sexual violence. It is ineffective (perhaps even counterproductive) education to provide young people with information about rape and sexual abuse, without offering realistic alternatives and adequate skills to navigate sexual relating. Again, we need to ask the question "what is it we want to replace sexual violence with?"

According to Carmody (2006) we are failing to address the kinds of information and skills needed, especially by young people, to negotiate sexual intimacy in ways that are non-violent, non-coercive and ethical. Most assault occurs between known people and it is the negotiation, or lack of negotiation of consent that poses most problems. The next section of this report outlines approaches that may be effective and that we need to learn more about in order to appropriately and effectively prevent sexual violence.

What may work and what we need to learn more about

There are eight areas outlined here as important for expanding our understanding of what may contribute to preventing sexual violence. They are: "sexual ethics"; "a discourse of erotics"; "healthy" sexuality; pleasure, desire and embodied sexual experience; complexities of consent; new ways of constructing gender; working with men in the field; and community/ecological approaches.

"Sexual ethics"

The Sydney based study "Developing ethical sexual lives" led by Moira Carmody, is a three-year, three stage study that aims to move beyond the limitations of existing sexual assault prevention. It represents a shift from traditional models of consent, based on oppositional gender dynamics, to a process of ethical and mutual negotiation - "a process of mutual exploration and agreement where both parties needs are considered and agreed upon" (Carmody & Willis 2006).

Based on the idea that we need to learn from "ethical sexual subjects" to help young people gain skills for non-exploitative and mutual sexual negotiation, the study explores how young women and men aged 16-25 negotiate sexual intimacy and assesses their educational needs in relation to anti-violence education. Preliminary research showed that people of diverse sexualities possess multiple ways to explore sexual pleasure that is ethical, non-exploitative and where danger is reduced. The study also arose out of the recognition that young people's experience of sex is a gap in current research - "teenage sex" has been studied, but not young people's *experience* of sex (Carmody & Willis 2006).

Stage One of the study involved interviews with fifty-six young women and men aged 16-25 years asking them to reflect on their own sexual experiences, including:

- ? how they work out what they will or won't do in any sexual encounter
- ? how their partner would know this
- ? how they work out what the other person wants

- ? exploring differences in first time, casual or ongoing relationships and whether this impacted on their ability to negotiate for their own needs
- ? what form the negotiation took
- ? how they deal with being uncomfortable, fearful or bored
- ? the impact of safe sex education on their sexual practices and how they negotiate this
- ? exposure to rape prevention education strategies - what they think are the strengths and weaknesses of programmes
- ? what they think should be included in sexuality and sexual assault prevention programmes with young people; what messages they think are important to convey to young people; what issues should be covered; how they should be delivered

Experiences of participants reinforced the need for both sexuality education and violence prevention education to be re-conceptualised in order to address the complexity of pleasure *and* danger. The findings of the study suggest that young people would welcome greater opportunities to address the complexity of sexual intimacy and develop increased skills in ethical non-violent relationships.

Results of the interviews in Stage One informed the design of a 6 week education programme, which was piloted in 2007 as Stage Two of the study. The approach of the programme was education about obtaining free agreement based on mutual negotiation. Stage Three is a 6-month follow-up and evaluation with participants. The results of the education programme and the programme itself are to be published in September 2008 as a book about the study.

“Developing ethical sexual lives” represents a major shift in sexual violence prevention. It has a large body of theory and research behind its design which can be accessed from: <http://www.sexualethics.org.au/about.htm>

“A discourse of erotics”

Consistent with some of the rationale and findings of “Developing ethical sexual lives”, New Zealand researcher Louisa Allen argues in “Sexual Subjects: Young people, Sexuality and Education” for the need for a “discourse of erotics” to inform sexuality education. Her research with youth suggests that in order for warnings on the negative consequences of sexual activity to be heeded, they need to be included along side the positive, enjoyable and pleasurable aspects of sexuality. If the only messages received from schools etc are that sex is dangerous, risky and guilt-worthy, and from elsewhere that sex is fun, pleasurable and gives access to power, then there is a risk that the potential authority and power of sex education may be undermined by a boring, un-engaging and partial message. This is particularly so when sex education messages deviate from what young people already know about sex and sexuality.

In the absence of a discourse of erotics, pornography is often used by youth as a place to learn about sex and sexuality. Three quarters of young men in Allen's study had consulted pornography magazines and rated information "very useful". This has major implications for sexual violence prevention. Learning about sexual relationships from pornography contributes to the unhealthy and unrealistic expectations, and the objectification and degradation of women by men.

"Healthy" sexuality

Historically, sexuality education has avoided abuse issues and violence prevention education has avoided sexuality and negotiating sexual intimacy, focusing more on risk (Carmody & Willis 2006). In Australia, with some programmes, this is beginning to change (see Keel 2005). Perry (2006) considers that the role of sexuality is perhaps the least explored of contributing factors to sexual violence. The examination of sexuality in sexual violence prevention education allows the possibility of envisioning a positive alternative: healthy sexuality.

Healthy sexuality (adapted from Planned Parenthood, World Health Organisation, and World Association of Sexologists in Perry 2006) includes (but not exclusively) these working definitions:

1. Healthy sexuality means sexuality is experienced in a state of wellbeing at all levels: physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially and culturally.
2. Healthy sexuality is demonstrated by voluntary and responsible sexual expressions that enrich individuals and their social lives.
3. Healthy sexuality includes, but is not solely, freedom from coercion, dysfunction, disease or infirmity.
4. Healthy sexuality means having the capacity to enjoy and control one's own sexual and reproductive behaviour in accordance with personal and social ethics. Freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs, and other psychological factors that inhibit sexual response and impair sexual relationships.

Healthy or positive sexuality would by definition mean sexuality free of coercion, exploitation, abuse and deception.

Individuals engaging in healthy sexual interactions would:

- View sexual interactions as something adults share with one another rather than do to one another
- Value honest, proactive communication about each other's likes, dislikes expectations, etc
- Value each other's sexual enjoyment
- Value positive sexual expression in any form (including respecting sexual diversity)
- Promote physical sexual health by proactively taking the necessary precautions

There is potential in applying a “healthy sexuality” framework in thinking about sexual violence prevention. It may be helpful to expand our concept of “sexual health” to mean not only protection from Sexually Transmitted Infections and unwanted pregnancy but also protection from sexual violence. It is reasonable to assume that people are less likely to behave in sexually violent/abusive/manipulative ways if “healthy” sexual characteristics are present.

Pleasure, desire and embodied sexual experience

According to Carmody (2006) sexual intimacy has been dominated by discourses of fear and danger, making women’s pleasure invisible. Pleasurable sexual intimacy for women is almost always constructed as risky and positions women as lacking in sexual agency and choice.

Lack of acknowledgement of women’s desire is a risk factor for unwanted, pressured and coerced sex, including rape. Tolman’s (2002) study found that for many teenage girls sex “just happens”. She argues this denial reflects a “consistent refusal to offer girls any guidance for acknowledging, negotiating and integrating their own sexual desire” (Tolman 2002:2-3). It also leaves them ill-equipped to make sense of their own feelings and vulnerable to exploitation.

Carmody and Willis (2006) infer that women’s desire needs to be present in education and general culture as a protective factor for preventing rape.

Gavey (2005) advocates promoting women’s desire as a prerequisite to sex – rather than simply their right to say ‘no’.

In Louisa Allen’s research on young people’s physical experience of sex and sexuality, many young women describe sensual detachment from their bodies, or “disembodiment”. This may mean they are less aware of what they are doing in sexual contexts – this state could affect their ability to assent to sexual activity. This has huge impacts for their ability to clearly choose yes or no to sexual activity and may contribute to “miscommunication” about sexual consent.

Promoting “embodied sexuality”, could empower young women to naturally and clearly set their own boundaries of “yes” and “no” for different kinds of sexual expression and activity, this would be more powerful and affective than simply teaching about saying “no”.

Teaching about personal boundaries has been part of sexual violence prevention, but from the perspective of refusal skills – teaching how to say “no”. True boundary setting is about being able to say “yes” and “no”. If young women are taught only to say “no” it is partial and ineffective education. Teaching about “yes” doesn’t have to mean encouraging young women to have sex, but about encouraging young women to have embodied

physical experience, to be aware of their feelings - physical and emotional, and to be able to make and communicate clear choices.

Complexities of consent

Sexuality education that explores the meaning of sexual consent in a way that is relevant to young people's lived experiences of sexual encounters is crucial in the prevention of pressured and coerced sex. We must encourage and support the capacity of both young women and particularly young men, to be reflective about their role and actions in sexual encounters, and to negotiate them on principles of mutuality and consent. (Powell 2007)

Melanie Beres, a Canadian researcher working in New Zealand, has conducted research on how young people negotiate sex in casual relationships and is currently working on research on how heterosexual couples in long-term relationships negotiate consent. Beres asks: is it always assumed that one person asks for consent, while another person gives it? Is there possibility for mutually consented to activities?

Below are some key points from her article, 'Spontaneous' Sexual Consent: An Analysis of Sexual Consent Literature" in *Feminism & Psychology Vol. 17(1): 93-108*

- ? In determining consent attention is often placed on whether or not, and to what degree, a woman resisted, or demonstrated her lack of consent
- ? Focusing on how consent is demonstrated opens space to interrogate ways that women and men communicate willingness to participate in sexual relations, rather than assuming that communication does not take place and that we have to legislate for it
- ? We need to understand 'consensual' experiences in order to examine what 'is absent' in non-consensual experiences
- ? We need to understand normative communication patterns during sexual activity
- ? We need to focus not only on the ways that women and men refuse sex, but also how they 'say yes' to sexual relations
- ? Researchers need to begin interrogating the concepts of consent and willingness to participate in sexual activity
- ? Work on consent lacks understanding of how dominant heterosexual discourses impact on the understanding and communication of consent
- ? Through examination of 'consensual' sex, we will be able to further our understanding of sexual violence and its prevention

New ways of constructing gender

Stage One of "Developing ethical sexual lives" (outlined above) found that gender continues to be a major influence on how both young women and men conceptualise and experience sexual intimacy.

Participants in Allen's (2005) study did not understand their sexual selves in any simple way as traditionally masculine or feminine. Ideas of young women as sexually passive and young men as sexually predatory were seen as "old fashioned". Even though traditional gender relations were in fact largely operational, at the level of perception young people see these kinds of identities as outdated. Allen considers that targeting the perceptual sense of identity will be vital for reaching young people and promoting the kinds of behaviours we wish to see. Allen notes a discrepancy between young women's perception and descriptions of negotiation, and descriptions of practice and contingent power relations. She points to the "complexity with which heterosexual power operates" and advocates taking care in not dismissing the exercise of power by young women around sexual negotiation. Young people's narratives often drew on both dominant and resistant discourses (of heterosexuality) indicating the complexity of both accommodation and resistance of conventional ideals about masculinity and femininity. This has important implications for sexuality education and prevention education. Allen refers to "perpetually evolving meanings of masculine and feminine" as having major implications for both effective sexuality education and sexual violence prevention initiatives.

Both Allen and Gavey advocate for overriding and disrupting traditional gender expectations of sexual relating. Gavey (2005) highlights the "overriding need to de-naturalise a rigid gendered boundary of men as sexual actors and women as passive (a)sexual subjects - 'the sexual double standard'." This is consistent with Allen's (2005) suggestion of the need for sexuality education which disrupts traditional gender expectations of sexual relationships.

What we need is a new cultural terrain in which it would be completely implausible to read women's silent, still, and sullen passivity as sexual consent. (Gavey 2005)

Gavey (2005) writes:

- ? Representations of women as passive and vulnerable and men as sexually aggressive render women's bodies more rapeable and men's bodies more rape-able
- ? It will be impossible to end rape "without challenging the traditional stereotypical representations (and constructions) of men and women".
- ? We need to de-stabilise and rework discourses of sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, sexuality and heterosexuality, in ways that make possible radically different forms of male and female sexual embodiment. In particular, we need to work toward de-gendering both sexuality and violence.
- ? Attempting to teach children more fluid ways of being girls and boys may be a good place to start

- ? It is important that forms of sexuality education deliberately erode compulsory heterosexuality and the sexual double standard (women as passive men as sexual initiators and/or aggressors)

Working professionally with men

Successfully engaging young men in prevention initiatives is a real challenge. Young men can easily “switch off” through feeling shamed, blamed or simply thinking “this is has nothing to do with me”. Researchers have found that focusing educational strategy aimed at reducing domineering masculine behaviour can result in a rebound affect where stereotypes are unintentionally reinforced (Carmody 2006). When it comes to creating new cultures of masculinity (essential for sexual violence prevention) there are some things that it is most appropriate and most effective for men to say, and some things that only men can role model. Men and women need to be allies in preventing sexual violence.

When putting the words “men against sexual violence” or “men against sexual assault”, into an internet search engine, many organisations come up from overseas, particularly the US and Canada. There are no such results from New Zealand. This is not to say that they aren’t men who support and work for sexual violence prevention in New Zealand, but there is no unified organisation or voice for this.

Michael Flood of Men Against Sexual Assault (Australia) writes:

I believe that to understand why violence happens, and to prevent violence, we have to look at masculinity - at the models of how to be a man that we have. And I believe that violence will only end when men take responsibility for ending it, when men adopt a positive non-violent masculinity. MASA (Men Against Sexual Assault) believes that if we are to create a world free of men’s violence, we will need to create a different masculinity. We need to create roles for men that are healthy, life-loving, and non-oppressive. The sorts of qualities I think are important here include sensitivity, pride nurturance, courage, passion, expressiveness, kindness, strength and humility.

Men Can Stop Rape (MCSR) is an award-winning organisation in the United States offering training, workshops, resources and programmes for young men and people who work with young men, for preventing sexual violence. Their Men of Strength (MOST) campaign uses a socio-ecological model and social marketing approaches. The Men of Strength (MOST) Club is a primary prevention programme in high schools with over a thousand members. MCSR is included in this report as an example of a highly successful prevention initiative led by men. See: www.mencanstoprape.org.

If New Zealand practitioners were to implement a similar campaign or programme, it would require critique that takes into account ideas about reinforcing or interrupting traditional patterns of gendered sexual relating.

Community and ecological models

Greater understanding of primary prevention has created the impetus to move beyond interventions targeted only at the individual level. Public Health models, such as the “socio-ecological” model and “spectrum of prevention model” are useful for targeting interventions at many levels and offering “big picture” strategies. The socio-ecological model targets interventions at four levels:

1. individual
2. relationship
3. community
4. societal

The spectrum of prevention model also frames strategies for change as part of a broader context. There are 6 levels:

1. Strengthening individual knowledge and skills
2. Promoting Community Education
3. Educating providers
4. Fostering coalitions and networks
5. Changing organisational practices
6. Influencing Policy Legislation

(Adapted from Lee et al 2007, Perry 2007)

Research in public health in Australia has called for a more ecological approach to sexual violence prevention where a systems-oriented model is applied which includes an analysis of gender and power (Neame 2003).

Moving Forward with the Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence

This report has brought together the key findings of the Wellington Sexual Abuse Network Education Project. There is still a great deal more to learn. In response to the key findings WSAAN is assessing the philosophical underpinnings that will inform future work and is looking at possible next steps. As part of this, in April 2008, WSAAN will host a forum bringing together key theorists, stakeholders and people working in the field of sexual violence prevention.

Programmes working with young people may, or may not, form part of WSAAN’s future work. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that programmes alone are not enough. Causes of sexual violence are complex and multi-faceted, and therefore prevention approaches need to be equally multi-faceted. Understandings outlined in this report will need to filter through the education system, we will need positive role models and positive relationship models, and we require strong alternative messages for both young men and young women to counter the often negative messages that mainstream media presents about gender, sex and relationships. We need

parents and teachers who are comfortable with their own sexuality and young people's sexuality in order to support and carry out effective rape prevention education.

New ideas, highlighted in this report, including concepts of healthy and ethical sexual relating, erotics, pleasure, desire and embodied sexual experience should add to, not replace, gender and power analyses that have formed the basis of rape prevention initiatives for the last 30 years. Rigid gender roles and inequality, male entitlement and the glorification of disrespect towards women still contribute to sexual violence, and this is only part of the picture. What we are now learning is more about the complexity of gender relating, consent, causes of sexual violence and more about what may actually be effective for change.

Preventing sexual violence requires creating conditions that render it impossible for sexual violence to exist. The creation of such conditions requires knowledge and clarification of what it is we are working towards, what we are for not only what we are against. Cultural change for ending sexual violence will need to take place on many levels. In addition to continuing to increase expertise and understandings on prevention, WSAAN will continue to network with key organisations for collaboration on future initiatives and continue political advocacy in this area.

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