

Using a national attitudes survey to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect

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Translating Research within Vulnerable Populations Forum

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Child protection statistics

- In 2008-09, 339,454 report to child protection services nationally
- An increase of more than 25% in 5-years
- Of these, 54,621 verified as having occurred
- Emotional abuse (includes witnessing DV) and neglect most commonly verified maltreatment types



Critical events in the evolution of child protection services

- Late 1800 & early 1900s Child rescue movement
- 1940s Start of professionalisation of child welfare
- 1962 “Battered child syndrome” discovered
- 1970s Legislation to protect children in all Australian jurisdictions
- 1970s First mandatory reporting requirements
- 1980s Sexual abuse recognised on world stage
- 1990s Neglect re-discovered
- 1990s Emotional abuse starting to be recognised
- 2000s Witnessing family violence



Community perceptions

- Rising awareness within the community about maltreatment
- Changing social values
- Decrease in threshold for what is abuse or neglect
- Privileging of 'expert' over family and community in preventing and responding to child abuse & neglect
- Child protection primarily responsibility of one government department



Child protection and families 'in need'

- High numbers of reports to child protection
- Only approx 1 in 6 reports are verified
- Total reports comprise relatively small number of children who need a child protection response
- Majority of families reported are 'in need'
- Problems may escalate if no preventive action is taken



The Survey

- Online survey
- Commenced National Child Protection Week, 2009
- Dedicated website
- Promoted through NAPCAN partners



Who responded?

- 22,000 participants
- Majority were women (4:1)
- Majority had some contact with children – at home, through family/friends, at work
- 92% thought child abuse and neglect was a serious problem



Responsibility for protecting children

Table 3: Perception of who is responsible for children's wellbeing and safety

	Mainly %	Partly %	Not at all %	No response %
Parents	98	2	0	0
Other relatives	54	45	1	0
Schools	51	49	0	0
Child Protection Authorities	48	50	1	1
Police	43	54	2	1
Government	35	61	3	1
Health professionals and agencies	33	65	1	1
The media	22	60	17	1
Charities and welfare groups	20	70	9	1
Neighbours	10	78	11	1
Businesses/companies	8	60	31	1



Responses to abuse/neglect scenarios

Table 7: What respondents would 'definitely' do in three hypothetical scenarios

Percentage who definitely would do	Physical abuse	Neglect	Sexual abuse
	%	%	%
Discuss it with a friend or partner	80	76	76
Call the families/child protection department	45	44	49
Phone a helpline for advice	31	27	36
Call the police	28	13	34
Talk to the child	20	28	14
Call a child health nurse/teacher	11	13	15
Talk to the parents	7	6	42



Reasons for not taking action

- Factors that stop people taking action
 - They are worried they may be wrong (48%)
 - They are worried what would happen to them if they talk about it (44%)
 - They don't think it's their business (42%)
 - They don't know what to do (38%)
 - They don't want to cause problems for the child (33%)
 - They don't want to upset the parents (30%)
 - They don't want to admit things like that happen (22%)



National Child Protection Week 2010

- Survey findings released
- Media strategy
- What can you do to prevent child abuse and neglect for
 - Parents and relatives
 - Neighbours & Local communities
 - Policy makers
 - Media
 - Business



Australian Centre for Child Protection

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www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection/



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