

## **What helps young people create healthy relationships and reject domestic violence?**

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**Overview:** The aims of this study are:

- to generate new knowledge about young people's experiences of growing up with domestic violence,
- increase understandings about factors in the social context that help young people establish healthy relationships in adulthood,
- identify systems and supports that may help young people to form relationships that are free of violence and abuse in adulthood,
- prevent the inter-generational transmission of abuse by contributing to the development of informed preventive policy and practice that supports children and contributes to increased community safety.

A total of 203 young people (18-30), who had grown up in domestic violence, completed an online survey which asked about their experiences, thoughts, and opinions. Fourteen of these young people then participated in face-to-face in-depth individual interviews to further explore what helped them to achieve partnership relationships that are free of violence and abuse.

**Research Findings:** Most of the young people who participated believed that positive connections with others during their childhood were very important in showing them alternatives to abuse. Supports sometimes included close relationships with their non-abusive parent, extended family (often grandparents), friend's parents, individual teachers, school counsellors, neighbours, church members and group leaders. When they felt valued and were encouraged by others as a child, this was seen as beneficial to their development.

Activities were another area where, as children, some participants were able to flourish despite the situation at home. Inclusion in sports, hobby clubs and group activities were valued as time focusing on something other than the problems at home, and as spaces where they could build confidence and feel valued. As children less than half the participants had access to counselling or domestic violence groups, and many who had access to such services wished that counsellors had been knowledgeable about domestic violence and the effects of living with domestic violence on children. Only a small minority of participants had had any formal education about healthy relationships or domestic violence and the majority of participants felt this would have been valuable to them.

Many participants viewed mass media as important in providing information about healthy relationships and showing alternatives to domestic violence. Television, movies and social media were seen as sources of information, Facebook was mentioned as most valuable in terms of participants connecting to people with similar backgrounds. Many also mentioned the role that media and social media needed to play in debunking myths about domestic violence and empowering those who had grown up with it.

Considering their own partnership relationships, most participants were thoughtful and reflective, wanting to ensure that they did not replicate their parents' roles. Through self-education, experience and time, they became clear about the range of behaviours that constitute domestic violence and clear that abuse in any form is harmful.

In the opinion of most participants, knowledge sharing was seen as all important with schools, media, community members and service providers having a role to play in understanding the ramifications of domestic violence and in supporting young people to thrive despite their experiences of abuse at home.

### **Recommendations**

- Children growing up with domestic violence should be informed about the parameters of domestic violence and healthy relationships and encouraged to see themselves as capable and able to achieve healthy relationships.
- The role of media in providing salient information about domestic violence and promoting healthy relationships should be recognised and encouraged.
- Education about domestic violence and healthy relationships should be made available to school children, community members and service providers.
- Safe access to informed counselling and domestic violence groups should be available for children enduring domestic violence at home.

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