

Young Women and Family Violence

Understanding Barriers and Honouring Strength

NIFVS Forum Summary

On 15 November 2018, ninety participants explored young women's experience of intimate partner violence and discussed strategies to improve responses that honour young women's strengths in a forum organised by the partnership between NIFVS and the Youth Support Advocacy Service (YSAS). Guest speakers and a panel of regional specialists emphasised the importance of respecting young women's voices and agency.



Guest Speakers: Bianca Johnston, Sarah Santana & Helena Guina

Why young women?

Young women aged 18-24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence of any age group and yet most services and resources are geared towards adult women.

Upholding Young Women's Voices

Key note speaker Bianca Johnston (YSAS) described the interplay between key developmental tasks during puberty and the impact of gendered power discourses on young women.

She shared theories and frameworks including the concept of 'voice' a "sense of meaning and a tool for meaning making" often expressed through creative means.

Loss of voice is problematic in adolescent development with adverse affects including mental health issues, self harm, eating disorders, anger, and aggression.

Young Women's Participation

Young women Sarah Santana and Helena Guina highlighted ways that workers can assist in empowering young women.

- Include young women in service design and development.
- Use alternative ways for young women to find their voice e.g. through art.
- Provide opportunities for young women to speak up.
- Question why there are no young people involved in conversations about young people.

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Panel members: Abir Melhem (Arabic Welfare), Chad Chan (Berry Street) & Beth King (Darebin CLC)

Panel members emphasised the importance of:

- Building rapport
- Gently asking questions
- Reflecting back concerns
- Unconditional positive regard
- Following the lead of young women
- Valuing young women's voice and agency
- Creating links with other services
- Collaborating with young women as active participants.

“For years, people have assumed that all you have to do to make a program designed for boys work for girls is to paint the walls pink and take out the urinals”

Marian Daniel, Baltimore Female

Barriers for Young Women

Participants discussed common barriers for young women in accessing support.

- ⇒ Young women's relationships being dismissed as not serious.
- ⇒ Lack of knowledge about services and their rights.
- ⇒ Lack of resources e.g. economic dependence.
- ⇒ Services being designed for adult women.
- ⇒ Youth spaces being male dominated.

Improving Our Responses

Participants discussed strategies to enhance responses to young women.

- ⇒ Consider alternative outreach venues e.g. schools, TAFEs, libraries.
- ⇒ Provide more creative opportunities to empower young women's voices.
- ⇒ Involve young women in discussions about practice.
- ⇒ Have young women involved in program and service design.
- ⇒ Adopt a feminist approach.

Further Resources: On the NIFVS website view the [presentation from the forum](#) or visit the DVRCV website [Love; the good, the bad and the ugly](#)