

FAMILY VIOLENCE

“Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless.”

Ecclesiastes 4:1 NLT



Many of us like to think of New Zealand as a kind of paradise – a great place to raise children in a safe and happy environment. The headlines tell another side of the story, however. Life is anything but safe and happy for many families for whom trauma, abuse, violence and neglect are a fact of life, and sometimes even death.

What is happening in New Zealand?

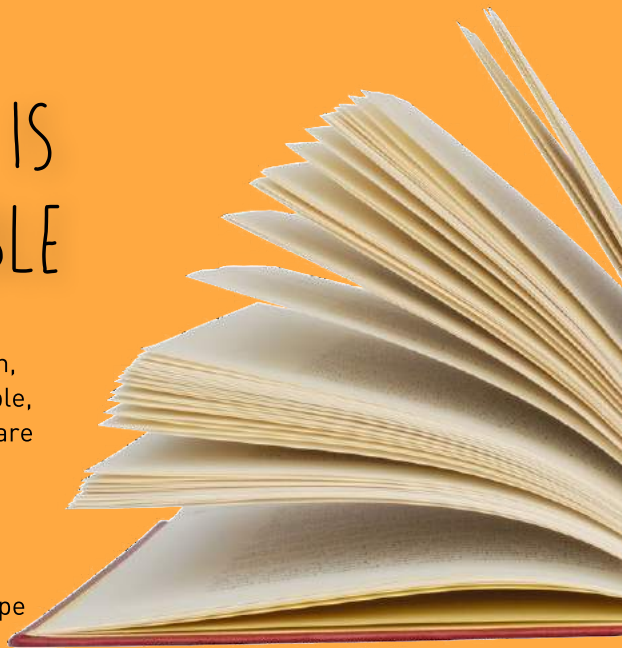
- **Around 35 people die as a result of family violence every year.**²⁸
- Nearly half of all homicides are related to family violence.
- One child is hospitalised every second day due to abuse or neglect. Nearly half are under two years old.²⁹
- On average, one child is killed as a result of family violence every 5 weeks.³⁰
- Every five minutes, police are called to investigate a family violence incident.³¹
- One in three New Zealand women is physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner or ex-partner in their lifetimes.³²
- In 2015/16, almost 13,600 children and young people were abused or neglected.³³

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Police estimate that they only see around 20 percent of violence in homes.³⁴

Family violence has far-reaching consequences, not just for the families involved, but for all of us. The costs to the nation come in many forms, including health expenses, welfare payments and law enforcement, as well as lost productivity.

FAMILY VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE

A key message for all of us, though, is that family violence is preventable, if we do our part. By becoming aware of the issue, learning more about family violence, and acting to do what we can in our own neighbourhoods, we can help free people from violence and bring hope to families and communities.



What is family violence?

It's easy to assume that family violence is only about physical assault or sexual abuse or to think that it's only significant if it involves fists, weapons, cuts, bruises, wounds or worse.

But violence can also be invisible. It can be emotional and psychological, involving fear, intimidation, domination and emotional deprivation or neglect. A child whose basic needs are not being met, or who witnesses other family members being hurt, is also a victim of family violence. A woman whose every move is monitored and controlled by her partner may experience the same level of fear as a woman who gets beaten by her partner every week. Family violence can also include spiritual abuse, which may mean restricting a person's right to practice their religion, or constantly criticising their religious beliefs.



Family violence is nearly always part of a systematic, continuing pattern of controlling behaviour. The different types of abuse are usually connected and all have long-lasting effects.

Family violence is usually about:

- Men assaulting or abusing their intimate partner.
- Parents or caregivers physically assaulting, emotionally abusing or neglecting children.
- Children being exposed to abuse and violence between parents or other family members.

Police calls to investigate family violence:

1 every five minutes
12.6 every hour
302 every 24 hours
2117 every week.³²

Domestic violence can also include other kinds of relationships such as same-sex couples, or extended family members. Under New Zealand law, flatmates are also included. There is growing awareness of the psychological or financial abuse of older people either by members of their own family or other caregivers.³⁷

Myths and facts³⁸

Family violence doesn't happen in my community.

FACT: Family violence happens in every socioeconomic group and ethnic community in New Zealand; it may simply be more visible in some communities than others. Victims and perpetrators from higher socioeconomic groups may have more to lose if others in their community know about the violence, so it is often more hidden in these communities.

What happens in my neighbour's home is none of my business.

FACT: Family violence has far-reaching consequences for society, as well as causing ongoing pain and suffering for individuals. There are costly implications for the health, welfare, business, and criminal justice sectors. Exposure to violence has a long-lasting impact on children, which can affect the next generation in turn. We need to stand up for the victims of abuse, for society's sake as well as theirs.

They were asking for it.

FACT: No-one ever asks to be hurt and harmed. There is no place for violence or any sort of abuse or controlling behaviour in family relationships. Conflict and disagreements can be managed without resorting to physical, verbal or emotional violence, which only adds to the stress of family difficulties.

It's my right and duty to discipline my children.

FACT: Discipline can take many forms and does not have to involve violence or force. Parents are responsible for guiding and protecting their children with compassion. When parents model loving relationships that demonstrate care for others, they foster the same behaviour in their children. Evidence shows that the reverse is also true – children exposed to violence are more likely to become perpetrators as adults.

**They must have
been angry/
drunk/ stoned/
stressed.**

FACT: These things are often used as excuses for family violence, but they do not cause abuse to happen. Perpetrators are responsible for their own attitudes and actions. Anger and stress can be dealt with in more positive ways, and most people who drink or take drugs do not abuse their families.

**If it's so bad,
why doesn't
she just
leave?**

FACT: It takes an incredible amount of courage to leave a violent relationship. Women stay for a variety of reasons, including fear, doubt, family pressure, self-blame, lack of confidence, lack of money, or simply because they have nothing else and nowhere else to go. Often, women in abusive relationships love their partner most of the time; they just want the violence to stop. Leaving is the most dangerous time for women and children, and there is no guarantee of safety; most women who are murdered as a result of family violence are killed around the time of leaving the relationship.

"I was convinced it was all my fault because he was fine with everyone else."

"I had nothing – no family, friends, skills or money. Just him and three dependent kids."

"I always believed him when he said he would change. It took me 20 years to wake up to the fact he wasn't going to."

"He never leaves me alone and controls my every move. He says it's because he loves me so much but I feel like a prisoner in my own home."

VOICES OF WOMEN TRAPPED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE

Why is family violence so widespread?

There is a great deal of research into the reasons why New Zealand's rates of family violence are so high and what can be done about it. One recent report was the Glenn Inquiry.³⁹

The research shows that violence happens in all sorts of families, but the risk of it happening is increased by certain factors. None of these factors is an excuse for violence. Neither does the presence of any one risk factor necessarily mean that violence is present. Many people thought to be “at-risk” through poverty or social isolation will never harm their families.

- Some of these risk factors include an **individual's** inability to cope with stress and conflict in healthy ways, drug and alcohol abuse, poor social and parenting skills, or low income. Those who have experienced family violence as a child may go on to repeat the cycle with their own children.
- **Family** factors can contribute to the risk of domestic violence, such as conflict between partners or marital instability. Financial difficulties can increase the tension, while lack of resources may contribute to child neglect. Children raised by single parents are particularly vulnerable to poverty and violence, as are those who lack extended supportive networks or whānau. Sometimes, violent family relationships can persist for generations.
- **Community** factors play a role too. Patterns of social life have changed; people spend more time at work and connections between neighbours and families are weaker. Lack of adequate housing can create overcrowding (hence more stress on families) or greater mobility (families fail to form supportive networks).
- **Cultural expectations** about how men and women relate to one other and how children should be disciplined influence people's attitudes towards violent behaviour. Exposure to higher levels of violence in the media may also contribute to greater social acceptance in daily life. We may not even be aware of these attitudes, but they can be very powerful. They devalue human beings, in contrast to the Bible which portrays humans as God's image-bearers and therefore of unique worth.

“He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.”

Psalms 72:13-14

Māori and Pacific people

Māori and Pacific people are over-represented in family violence statistics, both as victims and perpetrators, possibly because they are also at greater risk from the factors mentioned previously.⁴¹ Urban drift over the last 50 years has contributed to increased fragmentation and a loss of cultural identity and values for many Māori, who may be more isolated from the protective support of their whānau as a result. Pacific families may struggle to adapt to New Zealand culture, and traditional ideas about disciplining children or gender roles can be called into question, further adding to family stress.

Cultural considerations are very important when it comes to developing strategies for preventing and reducing family violence within these communities.⁴²

Ethnic and migrant communities

Family violence happens in all communities in New Zealand but its cultural expressions differ. In addition to physical or emotional abuse, women of Asian, African or Middle Eastern origin may also experience forced or underage marriage, dowry abuse, community pressure or the use of immigration status as a means of control.⁴³

Difficulties in adjusting to a new country can add to tensions in migrant families, as can conflict over cultural values, especially between younger and older generations. Traditional cultural beliefs about relationships between men and women can influence attitudes towards violent behaviour.⁴⁴ Language difficulties, a reluctance to expose what is seen as a private matter, and in some cases a fear of police that is influenced by police behaviour in the country of origin, means that domestic violence in these communities is often even more significantly under-reported than in other groups. Accurate data on the situation in New Zealand is scarce and more research needs to be done on the prevalence and impact of family violence in ethnic and migrant communities, as well as appropriate and effective ways to address it.⁴⁵

Pasifika patrol

Newtown Pacific Island Presbyterian Church in Wellington has stepped up to help keep their community free from violence.

Commitment to action

Members joined the first-ever Pasifika Community Patrol Group, formed to reduce crime and keep streets safe.

A creative plan, built on a desire to serve others

The idea began with a police constable who noticed a lot of young Pasifika people out on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights. She was also aware that many Pacific Island victims of crime often don't want to bother police.

Transformation starts with awareness

The church got involved after she shared the idea at a ministers' forum attended by Rev Tauinaola Tofilau.

"It's great to see young adults from our church wanting to be a part of the patrol group and to help the wider Pacific community," says Tauinaola.

Sharing knowledge and resources with others

So far, the patrol has attracted 28 members who form a presence at central city venues and events. Patrollers work in pairs, helping drunk people get home safely, swapping information with police about potential trouble, or simply keeping people company.

Working as part of a team

The group is a joint project between Wellington Police, Wellington City Council, Wellington's Pacific communities and Community Patrol New Zealand. The church now wants to attract even more volunteers and help other communities form their own patrols.

A positive goal

"We're not about stopping people from having a good time, but we want to make sure no one is spoiling anyone else's good time. Our aim is to promote peace and harmony in the community," says church elder Nari Auelua.

Violence, alcohol and poverty

Alcohol consumption is strongly linked to violence between partners; and parental alcohol abuse increases the risk of neglect, abuse or injury to children. The risk of becoming either a perpetrator or a target of violence rises with the amount of alcohol consumed.⁴⁶



However, while alcohol use increases the occurrence and severity of family violence, by itself it does not cause a person to become violent. Other factors, such as low socio-economic status, mental health and beliefs about gender roles also affect the risk of alcohol-related violence.

Various approaches have been suggested to reduce the impact of alcohol on family violence and child abuse, including restricting access, controlling advertising, raising the price, or using targeted interventions.⁴⁷ Research is scarce about the direct impact each of these measures might have, although some overseas examples show that controls on alcohol do reduce the effects of family violence.⁴⁸

Poverty is similarly a contributing factor to family violence, but in itself is not a direct cause. While unemployment, low income and lack of resources may create extra stress and conflict for a family, domestic abuse is not restricted to households below the poverty line.⁴⁹ Equally, not all low-income families live with violence.

25% of the most severe intimate partner aggression incidents in New Zealand involved alcohol.

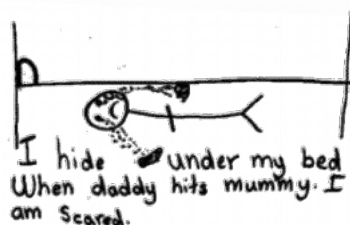
"I am in my room. I go to bed. I put the pillow over my head. I hold the pillow over my head so that I don't have to listen."

"A lot of times I just heard it from the bedroom. My sister and I were just crying our eyes out for our mum, you know, she just sounded so desperate downstairs... crying and screaming."

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WHO WITNESSED FAMILY VIOLENCE

Counting the cost

Family violence has major, far-reaching consequences for women and children as well as for society as a whole.



Children who experience violence and neglect are particularly vulnerable to harm. Trauma of this kind has a devastating effect on their physical and emotional development. These children are more likely to be anxious, depressed, have learning difficulties and act aggressively towards others.⁵⁰ Children from violent homes are more likely to see violence and abuse within families as normal behaviour. They may find it more difficult to form healthy relationships as young adults and continue to use violence when have children of their own. Suicide may seem like the only way out for some; others take the path of crime.⁵¹

Adult victims of domestic violence often say that emotional and psychological abuse is more damaging than physical injuries, and takes longer to recover from. Abuse undermines their self-worth and erodes their confidence. They may blame themselves for their partner's violence or seek relief from emotional pain in alcohol or drugs. It's often difficult for them to convince others of the reality they live with every day, especially if the abuse has been kept secret for many years.

It's estimated that the economic cost of family violence could be around \$4 billion or more a year. The trauma of abuse at home can spill over into the workplace, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in lost productivity. There are higher welfare and medical costs associated with family violence, and ongoing impacts on the criminal justice and prison systems.⁵²

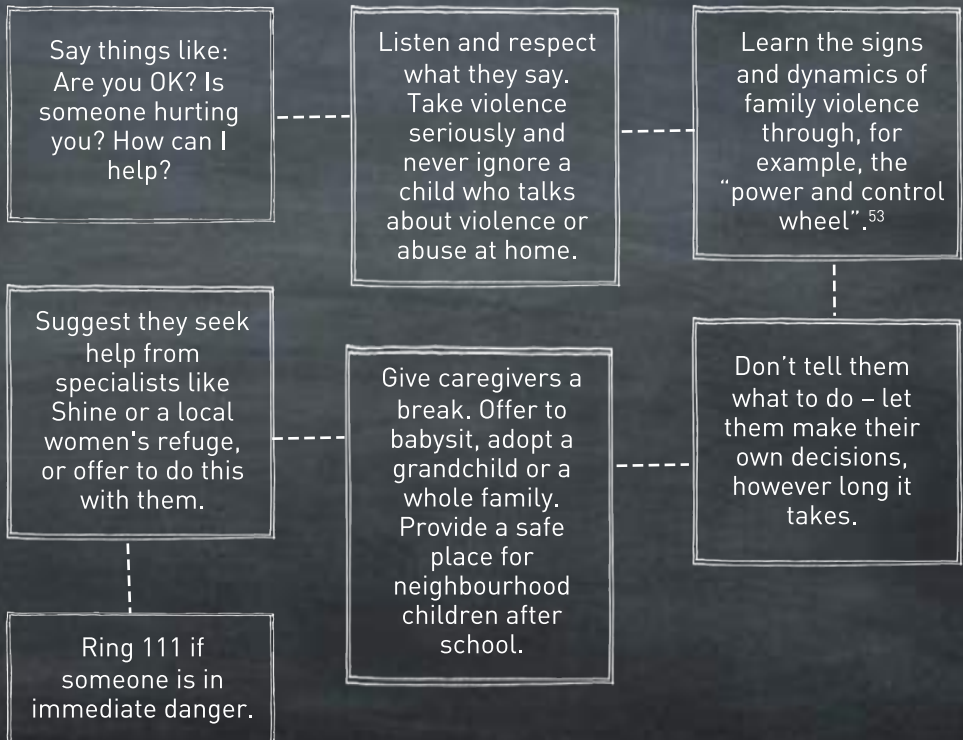
What can we do about family violence?

Like child poverty, family violence has multiple causes and consequences. The best solutions are therefore those that address the issue on multiple levels. Cooperation with others is another key to preventing the devastation caused by family violence in our communities.

What can I do?

It can be very difficult to know what to do when you know – or suspect – that someone is being abused or is abusing a family member. You may be afraid of “interfering” in someone else’s business or putting your own or your family’s safety at risk. It’s about establishing a relationship of trust; by showing that you’re available to help, you could prevent someone from being hurt or even save a life.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:



What can our church do?

A sense of belonging can make a huge difference to an isolated woman or frightened child. A welcoming, hospitable church community can provide a haven for families to get the help they need to become safe.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

- **Break the silence.** Don't be afraid to discuss the tough issues – family violence, child neglect and alcohol abuse
- Organise or **support events** that educate families, nurture children and create strong community support networks
- **Partner** with schools and other community groups that are working to prevent violence
- **Collaborate with specialists** like Shine to offer training in violence prevention for church staff and volunteers, as well as for church members in other workplaces ⁵⁴
- **Welcome families** and make church a comfortable place for them to be
- **Share information** about the social agencies in your area, and the services they provide. For example, Shine's helpline 0508 744 633 is answered 7 days a week, 9am to 11pm. Family Works provides counselling and practical support
- **Advocate** for the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves, especially where children are involved
- **Do not judge** – this will only drive the violence behind closed doors
- **Be consistent** with support but also be prepared for your commitment to be tested. Know your limits and when it's best to refer a family to others
- **Pray for the families** in your neighbourhood
- **Provide workshops** on respectful relationships, anger management and positive parenting skills
- **Support White Ribbon** and other campaigns that promote positive, anti-violence messages ⁵⁵

