

Too many children still exposed to family violence in their home

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New University of Auckland research has found uneven progress has been made in reducing the amount of violence teenagers have been exposed to in their homes.

Academics from the University's School of Population Health used data from the Youth 2000 series of cross-sectional surveys carried out on New Zealand high school students aged between 12- and 19 year's old.

They were asked questions about witnessing emotional and [physical violence](#) in three computer based surveys, one in 2001, and again in 2007 and 2012, with about 10,000 students interviewed each time.

For [emotional violence](#), the children were asked two questions; During the past 12 months, how many times have you seen adults in your home yelling or swearing at a child (other than you)? And, During the past 12 months how many times

have you seen adults in your home yelling or swearing at each other?

For physical violence, they were asked: During the past 12 months, how many times have you seen adults in your home hitting or physically hurting a child (other than you)? And, During the past 12 months how many times have you seen adults in your home hitting or physically hurting another adult?

Exploration of trends in young people's exposure to violence over the period 2001-2012 showed some changes, but those changes were not shared by all young people.

Four groups were identified in the study sample; these were characterised by the children's ethnicity, concerns about [family relationships](#), food security and alcohol consumption. For two groups (characterised by food security, positive family relationships and lower exposure to physical violence), there was a reduction in the proportion of respondents who witnessed physical violence (from about 14 percent to about 10 percent) an increase in the proportion who witnessed emotional violence between 2001 and 2012 (from approximately 44 percent to 50 percent, for group two, and 58% to 62% for group one.

For the two groups characterised by poorer food security and higher exposure to physical violence, there were no changes in witnessing physical violence in the home.

Study lead author Dr. Janet Fanslow says that while family violence is a global problem, predominantly comprised of intimate partner violence, child abuse and maltreatment, and elder abuse, New Zealand has among the highest reported rates in the developed world for [intimate partner violence](#) (IPV), the most frequently reported form of [family violence](#) between adults in the home. This is distressing, because international evidence

increasingly shows that violence is a preventable problem.

"The young people who came from families with poorer [food security](#) and higher exposure to physical violence between adults reported no changes in [violence exposure](#) over the decade under review, despite there being some initial national investment in [violence prevention](#) over this time," Dr. Fanslow says.

A review of the impact of childhood and adolescent exposure to IPV highlighted that exposure to IPV in childhood is associated with reduced parental attachment, increased risk of antisocial behaviour in adolescence, and increased risk of personal experience of violence.

"To get long-term changes in young people's exposure to violence, New Zealand needs sustained action and investment in violence prevention," Dr. Fanslow says.

"If we are serious about preventing the adverse effects of violence exposure among [young people](#), we need to invest in prevention long-term, and work to address other social disparities, like financial stress."

The study has recently been published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

More information: Pauline Gulliver et al. Uneven progress in reducing exposure to violence at home for New Zealand adolescents 2001-2012: a nationally representative cross-sectional survey series, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12775](#)

Provided by University of Auckland

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