DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS INITIATIVES

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Respectful Relationships Evaluation

Submitted: July 2014

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| **Printed** | 22 July 2014 |
| **Last saved** | 9 February 2015 |
| **File name** | Final Report 3.1  |
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| **Name of project** | Respectful Relationships Evaluation |
| **Name of organisation** | Department of Social Services (DSS) |
| **Project number** | ISSR060127 |

Table of Contents

[**Executive Summary 1**](#_Toc411246883)

[**1 Introduction 5**](#_Toc411246884)

[**2 Summary of projects funded in the different rounds 10**](#_Toc411246885)

[**3 Methodology 12**](#_Toc411246886)

[**4 Results 14**](#_Toc411246887)

[4.1 Underlying conceptual approaches to program design and behavior change 15](#_Toc411246888)

[4.2 Project development and delivery 16](#_Toc411246889)

[4.3 At-risk and vulnerable target groups 17](#_Toc411246890)

[4.4 Inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice 18](#_Toc411246891)

[4.5 Staff and training 18](#_Toc411246892)

[4.6 Evaluation and reporting 18](#_Toc411246893)

[**5 Conclusion and discussion 20**](#_Toc411246894)

[**References 21**](#_Toc411246895)

List of Tables

Table 1 Overview of projects funded under all three Rounds 9

Acronyms

CALD Culturally and linguistically diverse

DSS Department of Social Services

ISSR Institute for Social Science Research

NASASV National Association of Services against Sexual Violence

SAPE Sexual Assault Prevention Education

UQ The University of Queensland

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the evaluation of the Respectful Relationships initiative and provides a summary of the evaluation of projects including key features to be considered in implementing respectful relationships education in schools. Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention initiative that seeks to prevent sexual assault and domestic and family violence through education. The program works with young people to raise their awareness of ethical behaviour, to develop protective behaviours and to develop their skills in conducting respectful relationships.

Under the First Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) the Commonwealth provided more than $9 million over five years to test and evaluate 32 respectful relationships projects across three funding rounds in school and non-school settings. Under the Second Action Plan, governments have committed to incorporating respectful relationships education into the national curriculum, and to strengthen the design and delivery of respectful relationships programs and implement them more broadly.

The Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioned the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) at the University of Queensland to evaluate the Respectful Relationships initiative. The evaluation focussed on the design and process of implementation of projects funded under each round. An outcome evaluation, using a longitudinal methodology with pre- and post-participation data collection, was undertaken for selected projects funded under Round 3. In addition, project content and models were evaluated against the National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV) Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention through education .

The evaluation identified multiple factors that improved the delivery of Respectful Relationships primary intervention initiatives, including:

* Utilising a strengths based approach that focuses on individual and collective (peer based) strengths, cultural competence, and community engagement.
* Utilising a clearly articulated framework which incorporates and stresses the importance of the gendered nature of interpersonal violence and the relevance of Feminist theory.
* Utilising a whole-of-school approach, coupled with community engagement, to increase resilience, reduce risk, build self-respect, and promote the development of interpersonal skills.
* Targeting individual projects towards specific groups or at-risk vulnerable young people.
* Designing and delivering projects to highlight both the gendered nature of violence and integrating feminist philosophy into project design.
* Existing relationships with target populations and organisations, leading to reduced time and resources for initial project implementation.
* Projects backed by organisations with extensive experience in the referral and treatment of both victims and/or perpetrators of interpersonal violence provide multiple intervention pathways.
* Assessment of school and organisation readiness and evaluating their capacity to participate.
* Using a module based structure to provide a flexible base for engaging at-risk students.
* Projects that link in with other public health strategies provide increased support for the Respectful Relationships philosophy.
* Giving special consideration to projects targeting high risk vulnerable young people or those with special needs.
* Working within a community development framework to increase the overall impact of projects.
* Allocating considerable time and resources to ensure that the content and delivery of projects is inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive to the diverse range of students that projects work with.
* Fostering teacher and worker engagement and generating commitment from teachers, school staff and organisation staff during the initial consultation and implementation phase is important.
* Incorporating the needs of the target population in the design of the project. Consideration should be given to age, gender groups, socio-economic resources, the location of project delivery and any other important factors.
* Consideration of program duration. Longer term duration is identified in the NASASV Standards as the preferred model, however, long-term projects are prone to high attrition rates with at-risk populations and young people with complex needs.
* Flexible delivery projectsthat offer a range of entry and exit points to facilitate re-entry and longer term participation are an advantage when working with young people with complex needs.
* The continuance of projects in Indigenous communities is important in facilitating engagement with Indigenous communities.
* Recruiting Indigenous people or working with representatives from the target community as cultural brokers is integral to the success of Indigenous projects.
* Standardised comprehensive training and professional development for all project staff to ensure project fidelity.

The evaluation identified some limitations. Specifically, there is more work to be done to develop a robust evaluation strategy. This would include the development of sensitive, culturally and developmentally appropriate research instruments. In addition, research design needs to be adapted for each project and quantitative studies (using questionnaires and tick a box options) are not appropriate for all projects. Findings from the evaluation support that Respectful Relationships projects can be delivered to young people in a variety of settings. This includes projects delivered and adapted for use with disengaged students in flexible learning options, Indigenous students in boarding schools, mainstream disadvantaged schools and other settings where education services support marginalised student groups. Flexible delivery options means the projects can be delivered where and with who they are needed most.

The strong messages of healthy relationships, violence prevention and control, are messages that all young people relate to, regardless of their situation. The young men involved in these projects were engaged in the content and felt empowered to have positive healthy relationships. One of the key benefits of engaging with Respectful Relationships education for these students has been to enable a language to describe and analyse their current relationships. It is hoped that this will inform their future relationships, and in so doing, support them to develop positive, healthy and respectful partnerships as they move into adulthood and build young families.

Overall, the evaluation findings suggest that there was an impact on students across all age groups, albeit based on different measures. This finding is supported by the qualitative process evaluations, in which content for the respective projects was designed to be relevant and meaningful to the age and maturity levels of the student groups. This suggests that there is scope to positively change attitudes and beliefs about gendered violence and respectful relationships, but the programs designed to address these issues need to correspond to the maturity levels of the students and may therefore differ in content accordingly.

To implement the Respectful Relationships program in the National Curriculum, a workshop or conference on Respectful Relationships programs may be beneficial in providing opportunities to share information and discuss the design and implementation strategies, outcomes and challenges in running the Respectful Relationships projects. As recommended in the *Second Action Plan 2013-2016* the workshop should also address the process of implementing Respectful Relationships education into the national curriculum and assist states and territories in altering their local curricula and syllabi accordingly.

# Introduction

**Background**

The Respectful Relationships Program, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) seeks to address harmful attitudes and societal norms concerning women and relationships that underpin abusive behaviour in order to bring about attitudinal and behavioural change. The Respectful Relationships program has an important role in breaking down attitudes that support or perpetuate violence against women through challenging attitudes, and building relationship skills that support gender equality and the status of women.

In the background paper for the World health Organisation expert meeting in 2007 (Harvey, Garcia-Moreno, & Butchart, 2007), school based approaches were seen to be achieving results in shifting norms and attitudes that contribute to violence in intimate relationships. The authors found that programs that were age-appropriate and those that actively engaged participants with the material were optimal for ensuring attitude change. The paper highlighted the importance of multi-session programs that focused on changing attitudes as being more successful than single session programs that just provided information. Other research has also found that the effects of ad hoc educational programs can diminish over time (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Harvey et al. 2007; Flood, Fergus, & Heenan, 2009; Carmody et al., 2009). Therefore, it has been suggested that preventative Respectful Relationships programs need to have the capacity to work with young people over longer timeframes in order to influence lasting attitudinal change.

Government commitment and research evidence indicate that schools have a primary role in bringing about significant societal change. Intensive and lengthy curriculum-based primary prevention approaches have been found to produce lasting changes in attitudes and behaviour (Flood et al., 2009; Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; Harvey et al., 2007). In addition, they provide a number of benefits for schools: creating safe and supportive environments, leading to improved social, academic and behavioural outcomes, and the need for less time to respond to conflicts and disruptive behaviours both in and outside the classroom.

Respectful Relationships education implemented in schools needs to be part of a holistic curriculum-based approach that supports teacher, student, school, and community development. Such an approach is consistent with policy outlined in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), an agreement signed by each State and Territory Education Minister in 2008. The declaration recognised that:

*“Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of all young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.”* (p. 4)

The Australian Government has delivered The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan). The National Plan is a 12-year strategy that aims to make a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children.

In efforts to achieve this, the National Plan has adopted a multi-layered approach to prevention efforts, including a social marketing campaign for young people (The Line), education through schools, and engaging civil society via community and sporting based activities.

While each primary prevention initiative targets different audiences and addresses different elements, they are designed to deliver crossover messages and link in to other initiatives.

Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention initiative under the First Action Plan of the National Plan that seeks to reduce sexual assault and domestic and family violence through education. The initiative funded projects which were focused on young people and aimed at raising awareness of ethical behaviour; developing protective behaviours; and developing skills in conducting respectful relationships. The government committed funding over five years from 2008/09 to 2012/13, investing more than $9 million in Respectful Relationships education projects across Australia. In addition, four Indigenous Respectful Relationships projects totalling $556,000 were funded under the former Indigenous Family Safety Program. Funded projects were undertaken in a range of settings including schools, sporting clubs, and community organisations.

Violence prevention education is still in its infancy in Australia and in other parts of the world, and little is known about the efficacy of the various approaches employed. As such, the evaluation of projects provided an opportunity to consider the efficacy of the various approaches employed in the field of violence prevention education and the consistency of these with established standards of best practice as described in the NASASV Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention through Education.

**NASASV Standards**

In 2008, NASASV and the Office for Women, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Australia) commissioned a one-year project to develop and trial a National Sexual Assault Prevention Education Framework. The research aimed to develop primary prevention strategies to promote respectful relationships and decrease sexual and family violence, especially violence against women. Primary prevention strategies are those designed to be theoretically implemented before the problem occurs. Respectful Relationships primary prevention strategies are designed to remove the determinants of sexual violence, to prevent the development of risk factors associated with violence, and/or to enhance the factors protective against violence (Chamberlain, 2008, p.3).

The Sexual Assault Prevention Education (SAPE) Research project was underpinned by the following set of principles:

* That primary prevention work must be underpinned by a clear gender analysis and feminist understanding of why sexual assault occurs.
* That the goal of primary prevention is to achieve behaviour change.
* That primary prevention work must target men and women and include the broader community including strategies to engage parents/caregivers.
* That projects which are based on risk management and stranger danger are not primary prevention.
* That primary prevention programs target a range of delivery locations including schools.
* That primary prevention uses a range of practices to respond to geographical and cultural differences across Australia (Carmody, 2009).

In collaboration with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, the research resulted in the development of standards for sexual assault prevention education in Australia. The report recommended the adoption of six National Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention Education as the framework to increase the capacity of the sector to deliver high quality primary prevention education programs.

The evaluation examined associations between the implementation of NASASV Standards and project outcomes. The NASASV Standards include the following:

1. Using coherent conceptual approaches to project design;
2. Demonstrating the use of a theory of change;
3. Undertaking inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice;
4. Undertaking comprehensive project development and delivery;
5. Using effective evaluation strategies; and
6. Supporting thorough training and professional development of educators.

**Evaluation framework**

In 2011, DSS commissioned the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) at the University of Queensland to evaluate the outcomes for projects funded under the Respectful Relationships initiative. Projects funded in Rounds 1 and 2 were being delivered. A call for submissions for Round 3 funding was yet to be announced. As projects funded under Rounds 1 and 2 were either already completed or underway, the project was designed to evaluate the design and process of implementation of these projects. Results from the evaluation of Rounds 1 and 2 were used to inform the selection of successful grant applications for Round 3 funding. The design of the evaluation of Round 3 projects included an evaluation of the design and process of implementation of projects as well as an outcome evaluation using a longitudinal methodology with pre- and post-participation data collection where appropriate. Where quantitative methodology was not appropriate, qualitative data was collected using focus groups.

The first phase of the evaluation involved an examination of the documentation submitted to DSS by each project funded in Rounds 1 and 2 along with stakeholder telephone interviews.. The evaluation approach for Round 3 projects included both process and outcome evaluation components. Project content and models were evaluated against the NASASV standards of best practice. Participant outcomes were further evaluated to assess if projects achieved the desired goals for changes in awareness and attitudes around respectful relationships in the target participant population.

This report summarises the performance outcomes of projects funded during all three rounds of the DSS Respectful Relationships Initiative.

**Limitations**

Limitations to the evaluation were associated with the diversity and implementation of the projects and the lack of existing validated measures for all age and cultural groups participating in the projects. Review of project documentation showed minimal standardised reporting, formats and basic record keeping requirements, and therefore it was difficult to establish a standardised approach to evaluation across all projects in the Respectful Relationships education initiative.

Project evaluations should employ both validated measures and a pre- and post-test design. Follow-up testing and the use of a control or comparison group is considered gold standard evaluation practice, however, these elements were not possible for all projects. Some of the projects had been delivered before pre-program information could be collected. Consequently, despite the allocation of considerable time and effort, evaluation within projects did not necessarily meet rigorous standards of practice.

Significant work is still required to develop a robust evaluation strategy for future projects. Key challenges include:

* Standardised requirements and processes for organisations to deliver the program, in support of regular best-practice evaluation.
* The development and validation of sensitive, culturally and developmentally appropriate measurements instruments.
* Ensuring the validity of the instruments used and congruity with the project content.
* Addressing ethical issues related to assessing attitudes, behaviour, and experiences of interpersonal violence that largely remain unresolved.

# Summary of projects funded in the different rounds

In total, 31 projects were funded under three rounds of the Respectful Relationships initiative. The funded projects targeted diverse participant groups including mainstream primary and secondary school students, and at-risk or vulnerable participant groups including Indigenous; culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background; homeless young people; young people disengaged from schooling; and young people from low socio-economic areas. Participants ranged in age from 8 to 27 years. All projects were evaluated against the NASASV Standards as part of the process evaluation. In addition, nine Round 3 projects participated in the outcome evaluation.

Projects varied in size and scope. Duration ranged from single one and two hour sessions to ongoing programs lasting up to two years. Projects also varied in size, with some targeting several thousand participants across multiple sites, while others targeted smaller groups within single schools or communities. Many of the programs were delivered in school settings, including mainstream secondary schools and primary schools, but also in tertiary courses and alternative or special education settings. Programs were also delivered to participants in other settings such as Indigenous communities, existing support groups (for example, young mothers, migrant and refugee support groups, youth support services) and youth detention.

Most of the organisations funded to deliver Respectful Relationships programs in Round 3 were counselling and support organisations for women and families. Some youth support organisations and migrant and refugee support services also received funding. Table 1 gives an overview of all evaluated projects and their evaluation approach.

Table 1 Overview of projects funded under all three Rounds

| **Organisation** | **Project** | **State** | **Age(s)** | **Gender** | **Setting** | **Process Evaluation** | **Outcome Evaluation** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Funded under Round 1 of the Respectful Relationships initiative** |
| CASA House (RWH) & Canberra Rape Crisis Centre  | Sexual Assault Prevention Project for Secondary Schools  | ACT | 13-18  | Mixed and male only  | School  | ✓ |  |
| La Trobe University  | Respectful Relationships Project | TAS | Not stated  | Mixed | TAFE; Disability Services Organisations.  | ✓ |  |
| Northern Territory Government, Department of Education  | ‘Keeping Safe‘ Child Protection Curriculum and Supplementary ‘SMART‘ Training Project  | NT | Primary School age  | Mixed | School | ✓ |  |
| University of NSW  | Sex and ethics  | QLD | 17-20  | Male only | NRL club venues  | ✓ |  |
| University of Western Sydney  | Sex and ethics  | NSW | 12-20  | Mixed and segregated  | University; TAFE | ✓ |  |
| **Funded under Round 2 of the Respectful Relationships initiative** |
| Akeyulerre  | Respectful Relationships Project  | NT | 16-27  | Mixed and male only  | Community  | ✓ |  |
| Australian Football League  | Respect & Responsibility  | Australia wide | 16-21  | Male only  | Community sport settings  | ✓ |  |
| Australian Red Cross  | Kwinana Project  | WA | 12-24 | Mixed  | Organisational settings, school holiday project  | ✓ |  |
| Baptist Community Services  | ACT-2: Respectful Relationships Project  | NSW | 12-16  | Mixed  | High schools  | ✓ |  |
| Kurbingui Youth Development Association  | Healthy Relationships  | QLD | 12-24  | Mixed and segregated  | 2 primary schools 1 secondary school Residential camps; at Kurbingui  | ✓ |  |
| Relationships Australia Canberra and Riverina  | LOVE BiTES  | NSW | 15-17  | Mixed  | High schools  | ✓ |  |
| Sexual Assault Resource Centre  | Respectful Relationships Education  | WA | 13-18  | Mixed  | High schools  | ✓ |  |
| Swinburne University of Technology  | Respectful Relationships  | VIC | 15-25  | Male only | High schools/ Certificate training project  | ✓ |  |
| Uniting Care Wesley  | Respectful Relationships Project  | SA | Not stated  | Mixed and segregated  | Disadvantaged high schools and alternative learning streams , Youth in detention, Disadvantaged youth  | ✓ |  |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Incorporated  | Wandiliya Murrung  | NSW | 10-15  | Mixed | Schools, community and government organisations  | ✓ |  |
| Youth & Family Focus  | The Mersey Respectful Relationship Project  | TAS | 12-14 12-19 17-25  | Mixed  | School Grade 7 Alternative Education Community  | ✓ |  |
| Youth & Family Service Logan  | Respectful Relationships  | QLD | 12-24  | Mixed and segregated  | School, TAFE, Other Organisational settings  | ✓ |  |
| **Funded under Round 3 of the Respectful Relationships initiative** |
| Centacare Catholic Family Services | Change- I Am | SA | 8-24 | Female  | Indigenous community-based | ✓ |  |
| Interrelate | Building Resilience (Kids Connexions and My Family) | NSW | 10-13 | Mixed  | Primary schools | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ipswich Women’s Centre Against Domestic Violence | LOVE BiTES | QLD | 14-17 | Mixed  | Secondary schools and alternative education streams | ✓ | ✓ |
| Migrant Resource Centre | Developing and Maintaining Respectful Relationships “X-Pect Respect” | TAS | 12-17 | Mixed and segregated | CALD, migrant and alternative education stream for students | ✓ |  |
| Relationships Australia NT | RESPECT | NT | 14-18 | Segregated | Secondary schools | ✓ | ✓ |
| Uniting Communities | Respectful Relationships | SA | 8-24 | Mixed | Mainstream and flexible learning secondary schools, various other institution and community settings | ✓ | ✓ |
| Vocational Partnerships Group Inc. | Respectful Relationships Initiative | QLD | 13-19 | Segregated | Secondary schools and alternative education stream | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s Council For Domestic and Family Violence | Promoting Respect | WA | 12-17 | Mixed  | Secondary schools | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s Health West | You, Me and Us | VIC | 10-13 18-24 | Mixed  | Primary schools, English courses within Universities and TAFEs | ✓ | ✓ |
| YWCA NSW | Kids, Family and Community | NSW | 8-14 | Mixed | Primary schools and secondary schools | ✓ | ✓ |
| YWCA of Canberra | Respect, Communicate, Choose | ACT | 9-12 | Mixed | Primary schools | ✓ | ✓ |

# Methodology

The evaluation of Respectful Relationship projects funded under Round 1 and 2 consisted of a process evaluation. Projects funded in Round 3 completed the process evaluation and an additional outcome component. The process evaluation of all three rounds focused on the content and implementation of projects to evaluate the efficiency of project and model execution, including challenges and benefits experienced throughout the implementation and facilitation process. The approach to the process evaluation of Respectful Relationship projects was largely informed by, and evaluated against, the NASASV Standards (Carmody, 2009). The overall evaluation incorporated two approaches:

1. A process evaluation which included:
	1. A descriptive review of project documentation including original grant applications, project resources, final reports and related documents from the 31 funded projects made available for this review;
	2. Semi-structured interviews with project service providers from 30 projects;
	3. Semi-structured interviews with a total of 12 teachers for eight school-based projects (Round 3 only).
	4. An appraisal of projects against the NASASV Standards.
2. An outcome evaluation to examine participants’ knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs around respectful dating relationships and to examine change that might be attributed to participation in a Respectful Relationships program. This was conducted for Round 3 projects only. The outcome evaluation consisted of:
	1. A quantitative study of participant responses to questionnaires; and
	2. A qualitative study of focus groups with participants post-project (where questionnaire completion was not appropriate).

The quantitative evaluation involved the completion of questionnaires by project participants before and after participation. Questionnaires were developed to measure attitudes and behaviours relating to gender and respectful relationships both before and following the delivery of a program. Measures were based on validated scales or adaptations of these scales for the Australian context. The analysis of survey data included both a descriptive analysis of demographics, personal characteristics and participant feedback on the projects, and a statistical examination of any differences in individuals’ scores on attitudinal scales pre- and post-program. To examine change in an individual’s scores it was necessary for responses to be collected and recorded at the two time points pre- and post-program.

Focus groups were conducted with participants where the completion of written surveys was not feasible. This included projects with small numbers of participants, marginalised students who were unlikely to complete questionnaires, and some projects with young Indigenous participants. The informal and interactive characteristics of focus groups were considered preferable by both project organisations and evaluation personnel because of the general disengagement of students and overall social dynamics and cultural preferences.

# Results

Results from the evaluation showed that the young people who participated in the range of projects appeared to be engaged with both the content and the delivery. Successful projects used a strengths-based approach or a whole-of-school approach and it was found that:

* The whole-of-school approach is very effective to ensure that Respectful Relationships initiatives build momentum.
* There is a significant role for individual projects targeted towards specific groups, at-risk vulnerable young people, and populations with specific needs and challenges such as groups of children with disabilities.
* Projects benefiting from existing relationships with the target populations and organisations are more likely to succeed and use less time and resources in the initial setting up of projects. However, there is also a role for ad-hoc or single project initiatives usually designed for a specific target
* Projects that are backed by organisations with extensive experience in the referral and treatment of both victims and/or perpetrators of interpersonal violence can provide intervention support. These organisations have strong reputations in service delivery, can provide preventative interventions at both the primary level as well as targeted to high risk groups, and can facilitate effective and efficient referral for intervention when needed. They are also characterised by high levels of staff experience and staff training.

Other strategies to ensure project success are:

* School and organisation readiness/capacity to participate in a primary prevention program.
* A module based structure to provide a flexible base to engage at-risk students.
* Linking in with other public health strategies to provide increased support for the Respectful Relationships philosophy.
* Working with a community development framework and engaging with community representatives.
* The selection, training, and retention of multi-skilled experienced staff, especially for some at-risk groups, remote communities, and large multi-site projects.
* Standardised training for all project staff ensures project fidelity.

**Participant Results**

Participants reported that:

* They had enjoyed the sessions and were engaged with the content of the program.
* They had high levels of recall about the content of the program.
* They had made positive changes in their lives as a result of participating in the Respectful Relationships projects.
* The program had helped them to examine their own relationships.
* They had developed skills to recognise respectful relationships in their own lives and lives of their friends.
* They had learnt strategies to obtain help if they felt they were in relationships that were not healthy.

## Underlying conceptual approaches to program design and behavior change

Theories of sexual violence help to develop an understanding about the development of violence towards women and also help target prevention strategies (Carmody et al., 2009). A range of conceptual approaches have been used to underpin primary prevention initiatives in the promotion of Respectful Relationships. In addition, theories of change are used to articulate the relationship between project design and content. The following approaches are identified as suited to respectful relationships education initiatives.

**A strengths-based framework** focuses on developing new skills and emphasising existing strengths that the participants could use, emphasising positive behaviours and healthy ways of interacting with peers, teachers, parents, siblings and the wider community compared with a focus on the prevention of negative behaviours. Evidence suggests that participants receive information better when it is delivered using a **preventative and collaborative approach** rather than focussing on negative behaviours. Most projects used a strengths-based approach.

**A whole-of-school approach** has been found to be highly effective in facilitating a cultural shift at multiple levels of the school community and in encouraging ownership of the project by the school community itself. **Articulation of feminist principles and how they relate to violence** are necessary in development and design of Respectful Relationship education projects. This is in alignment with the NASASV Standard 1, which suggests that the theoretical or conceptual approach used in a program provides the basis for understanding why sexual violence occurs and the prevention pathway that should be used to reduce sexual violence . Most projects clearly articulated a feminist conceptual approach to their project design however some projects reported that they were reluctant to use the word ‘feminism’ in relation to their project due to a perceived negative impact of feminist ideals. This showed poor understanding of the gendered nature of violence within relationships.

## Project development and delivery

Project development and delivery options are critically important to the success of primary violence prevention programs (Carmody et al., 2009). There are a number of considerations that need to be addressed and evaluated to ensure that the project is appropriate for the target population and that the delivery organisation has capacity to deliver. There are a range of presentation methods that should be incorporated into the project design to ensure that changes in knowledge, skill and behavioural outcomes are achieved at the individual and group level. Duration of projects also need to be considered in the context of the project setting and capacity. The needs of the target population also impact on the design of the project including age, gender groups, socio-economic resources, as well as where the project is being carried out. In addition to gender groups, the decision to undertake segregated presentation or combine groups is also significant in the design and delivery of Respectful Relationships prevention programs. The utilization of peer support and peer education impacts on the training of facilitators and personnel resources. In addition, design and delivery factors may need to be adapted for local conditions and emerging problems and issues.

Projects that built on **existing service relationships between organisation and the target community** appeared to be more successful during the development and implementation phase compared to other projects. Organisations that were funded to initiate new projects in communities where they did not have an existing collaboration reported that a significant amount of their time and resources were directed towards developing these relationships.

Some of the most successful projects were delivered within an overall program of service delivery. Despite this, there also appeared to be a place for individual one off projects usually designed for a specific target population with specific needs and challenges.

Some projects provided **multiple intervention pathways** by offering primary prevention via the project delivery and also tertiary support, counselling and referral services to participants, individuals and their families. This approach has the capacity to respond to disclosures and participant distress as well as facilitate referral and access to ongoing therapeutic services.

**Determining school and organisation readiness** during initial consultations, with a focus on timelines, content and the feasibility of delivery, is a crucial factor in ensuring that schools and organisations have the capacity to participate in project deliveries. **Fostering teacher and worker engagement** and generating commitment from teachers and school staff and organisation staff during the initial consultation and implementation phase is important. This ensures that the Respectful Relationships content and philosophy is adopted throughout the school community and incorporated into the curriculum in the longer term. Successful projects delivered across multiple settings depend on a supportive school environment, the engagement of teachers to model respectful relationship behaviour and to assist with behaviour management within classes, sufficient time to deliver the sessions, and an appropriate venue. Clear guidelines around the commitment required from teachers and schools and other organisations to ensure the best possible outcomes for participants is essential.

The use of a **flexible, module based structure**, with core and optional modules, is an effective mechanism for adaptable and flexible delivery. Additional modules added at each session can be used to provide information, address new and changing needs, and be adapted for the amount of available time.

**Integrating Respectful Relationships education with other public health initiatives** aimed at reducing violence and promoting positive relationships such as National Nonviolence Week, Say No to Bullying, or White Ribbon Day, can be used to harness the Respectful Relationships philosophy and is strategic in having the dual effect of raising the profile of the project within the community and also increasing the perceived relevance of violence interventions among participants.

## At-risk and vulnerable target groups

At-risk participants may become more engaged when projects use **novel ways to engage** them. Meal and transport vouchers, child care, and other strategies were seen as useful in reducing sporadic attendance and the rate of project attrition among at-risk participant groups. Allocation of project funds to these measures was recommended to minimise the risk of unintentional participant exclusion due to their social and financial disadvantages.

**Program duration** was a crucial factor in relation to participant attrition. Longer term duration was identified in the NASASV Standards as the preferred model. However, the review of funded programs found that long-term projects were prone to high attrition rates with at-risk populations. High rates of attrition are also typical of projects delivered to young people with complex needs. **Flexible delivery projects** that offer a range of entry and exit points to facilitate re-entry and longer term participation was identified as an advantage when working with young people with complex needs.

## Inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice

**The continuance of projects in Indigenous communities** emerged as particularly important in facilitating engagement with the community. This was in part, due to the mechanisms of participant recruitment operant in Indigenous communities (largely via word of mouth and extended family networks) and the trajectory of participant engagement (uptake of Indigenous participation was reported to be typically slow initially and increased exponentially via word of mouth recruitment).

**The role of a cultural broker** connected with the community and working with the project can negotiate cultural issues and convey these to the project facilitators. Recruiting Indigenous people or working with representatives from the target community as cultural brokers is integral to the success of projects. Engagement with Elders and community support and consultation fosters inclusion and increases the cultural relevance of the project among Indigenous and CALD participants and the community at large.

**A community development framework** is relevant for culturally-specific projects. As with projects targeting the wider community, projects which target the Indigenous community benefit from demonstrating a community development framework that empowers local communities and utilises, acknowledges, and respects the knowledge and skills that already exist within that community.

## Staff and training

**The use of standardised training modules for project facilitators and staff** is critical to avoid inconsistency in knowledge and skill bases between project facilitators and other staff. Project fidelity and delivery mechanisms benefit from the use of standardised training prior to the commencement of the project and throughout the project. One of the main challenges for projects was to find staff and facilitators with the appropriate expertise and experience for their target groups.

## Evaluation and reporting

Respondents rated the projects as highly positive, with generally 70 to 100 percent agreement to a range of statements about their satisfaction with their program and its perceived outcomes for them personally. Further work is needed to **develop appropriate instruments to assess both attitudinal and behavioural change in children and young adults** in relation to respectful relationships. These instruments need to be developmentally appropriate and sensitive enough to assess small changes over time.

Projects need to be age-appropriate. **Certain aspects of respectful relationships (including friendships and dating relationships) need to be addressed at a developmentally appropriate age using age-appropriate curriculum content.**

Tools for assessing the impact of project content on attitudinal and behavioural change of project participants also need to be age-appropriate.

There are few reliable and valid instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of Respectful Relationships education outcomes. Our evaluation used adapted instruments to assess the attitudes of young people towards interpersonal violence and relationships. However, ethical considerations around asking young people about their experiences of interpersonal violence prohibited us from examining behaviour and victimisation and how this might change after participation in the Respectful Relationships education initiatives. As interpersonal violence has multiple risk factors, participation in these initiatives has the potential to produce significant short-term change in attitudes. We are yet to develop methodologies that are able to measure long-term behavioural change resulting from these initiatives.

For the measures we did use, the reliability of each scale was found to be high. While statistically significant improvements on attitudinal scales were not widespread, average post-program scores for participants were generally higher across all scales and projects.

Research of this nature is challenged by small sample sizes. Small sample sizes mean that observable changes need to be quite large before statistical significance is detected; it is possible that small, real changes in attitudes were not found to be statistically significant because of the inadequate statistical power of smaller respondent samples. Analysis exploring gender and age differences, and difference in terms of other risk factors, also required larger sample sizes. Participation in research is especially low for at-risk groups and marginalised students, the very groups who would benefit most from these projects.

In addition, quantitative methodologies are not the best approach to evaluate all projects. Different cultural factors and the size and nature of the project impact on the research design that can be used to evaluate each project. For some projects, focus groups were undertaken to assess how the project had impacted on attitudes and behaviour.

Guidelines for a standardised approach to maintaining appropriate records and reporting would be beneficial. Suggestions for reporting of content include consistency in detailing the duration of the project including the frequency and length of the sessions, the number of participants involved, the recruitment method, demographic information and the rate of participant attrition across the duration of the project. In addition, standardised record keeping will assist with evaluation of projects.

# Conclusion and discussion

In summary, this evaluation was conducted in two stages. First, to identify the benefits and challenges of projects funded in Rounds 1 and 2 and second, to undertake a process and outcome evaluation of projects funded in Round 3. Findings suggest that the two-stage evaluation process was valuable. This approach allowed key stakeholders involved in the immediate project design and delivery process, to voice their experiences and perceptions. The research team was then able to identify crucial recommendations for future project selection by the funding body.

The design included a sound evaluation of most recently funded projects involving two components: a process and an outcome evaluation. In addition, the evaluation incorporated standardised survey designs in mainstream settings along with a qualitative focus group approach for hard-to-reach at-risk populations. The use of flexible outcome evaluation methods allowed for a holistic evaluation approach that generated findings applicable to violence prevention programs in both mainstream and vulnerable school and community settings.

Findings highlighted the need for projects to use a clearly articulated framework, including the importance of the gendered nature of interpersonal violence and the relevance of Feminist theory. Projects were designed to ensure cultural inclusiveness and sensibility. They were also designed to develop, maintain and build on relationships between communities, schools and specialised organisations in the area of gender, violence prevention, and early education.

Projects were most successful when designed and implemented in partnerships between communities, community organisations and schools. School-based projects were also most successful if implemented in a supportive school environment where school staff collaboration and commitment was generated. School and organisation readiness to participate needs to be evaluated as part of the initial planning and implementation stage. This ensures that schools have allocated sufficient timeframes for external facilitators to deliver programs and for teachers to support these.

Our research highlighted the need for projects with an ongoing duration rather than one-off sessions however it also recognised there is a need for individual sessions for special groups or with engaging with new settings. Obtaining and engaging project facilitators with relevant and specialised skill-set proved to be particularly difficult for short-term and one-off project sessions and for projects with large geographical spread.

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