



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

# Respectful Relationships Evaluation

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS  
INITIATIVES**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

## ISSR RESEARCH REPORT

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2 Summary of projects funded in the different rounds</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>4 Results</b> .....	<b>14</b>
4.1 Content and underlying conceptual approach .....	15
4.2 Project development and delivery.....	16
4.3 At-risk and vulnerable target groups.....	18
4.4 Inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice .....	18
4.5 Staff and training.....	19
4.6 Evaluation and reporting .....	19
4.7 General process issues .....	21
<b>5 Conclusion and discussion</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>23</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1 Overview of projects funded under all three Rounds.....	9
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## 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 focusses on the Respectful Relationships Evaluation Project and provides a final summary of the evaluation of projects funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS) Respectful Relationships initiative. DSS, in partnership with State and Territory governments, have been responsible for the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention initiative that has sought 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 Australian Government committed funding in three rounds 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 Indigenous Family Safety Program. Funded projects were undertaken in a range of settings including schools, sporting clubs, and community organisations.

In 2008, 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. 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. 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 along with stakeholder telephone interviews. The document review included grant applications and proposals, reports, project documents, information sheets, and evaluation reports. Stakeholder interviews were conducted with key personnel representing each project to identify strengths and challenges of each unique project. Project content and models were evaluated against the NASASV standards of best practice. Participant outcomes were further evaluated for Round 3 projects to assess if projects achieved the desired goals for changes in awareness and attitudes around respectful relationships in the target participant population.

Results from our evaluation showed that the young people who participated in the range of projects offered appeared to be engaged with both the content and the delivery of the respectful relationships programs. Feedback from participants indicated that they enjoyed the sessions and these young women and men conveyed high levels of recall about the content of

each project. The focus groups highlighted that the young people had made positive changes in their lives as a result of participating in the Respectful Relationships projects. Participants also reported that the programs had helped them to examine their own relationships and had made some significant changes since participating in the projects. Furthermore, participants said that they had developed skills to recognise respectful relationships in their own lives and the lives of their friends, and had learnt strategies to obtain help if they felt they were in relationships that were not healthy.

The respectful relationships projects offered a range of different delivery approaches. Whole-of-school approaches worked well however there appears to be a significant role for individual projects targeted towards specific groups or at-risk vulnerable young people. More work needs to be done to highlight both the gendered nature of violence and to help integrate feminist philosophy into project design.

Projects with 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. Building and maintaining these relationships is an ongoing challenge and requires commitment, skill, and collaboration.

There are several factors that improved the delivery of Respectful Relationships primary intervention initiatives:

- Respectful Relationships projects that were backed by organisations with extensive experience in the referral and treatment of both victims and/or perpetrators of interpersonal violence provide multiple intervention pathways.
- One of the key requirements to ensure project success was the assessment of school and organisation readiness and evaluating their capacity to participate.
- A module based structure provided a flexible base to engage at-risk students. Projects can also link in with other public health strategies to provide increased support for Respectful Relationships philosophy. Special consideration also needs to be given when working with projects targeting high risk vulnerable young people or those with special needs.
- Engaging community representatives may help to improve cultural sensitivity when developing and implementing projects.
- Working within a community development framework may also increase the overall impact of these projects.

Staff development and training was an issue across many projects. Standardised training for all project staff would ensure project fidelity despite these staff challenges.

Evaluation of projects presented many challenges and there is significant work to be done by academics, government, and organisations to develop a robust evaluation strategy. A key challenge is the development of sensitive, culturally and developmentally appropriate instruments. Ethical issues related to assessing attitudes, behaviour, and experiences of interpersonal violence largely remain unresolved. 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. Review of project documentation also showed lack of standardised reporting requirements and formats and basic record keeping.

It appears therefore, that Respectful Relationships projects can be delivered to young people in a variety of settings. Funded projects were 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. It is these students who are often those most in need of Respectful Relationships education and support and flexible delivery options means the projects can be delivered where 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. It was interesting to observe that many of 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 more positive and healthy partnerships as they move into adulthood and build young families.

Overall, our findings suggest that there was some 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 differ in content accordingly.

A workshop or conference on preparing Respectful Relationships programs will be beneficial for project organisations, professionals, community representatives, and experts in the field of primary prevention education in providing opportunities to share information and discuss the design and implementation strategies, outcomes, challenges and successes, and experiences 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 assisting states and territories in altering their local curricula and syllabi accordingly.

# 1 Introduction

This report of the Respectful Relationships Evaluation Project has been prepared by the team from the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) at The University of Queensland (UQ) for the Department of Social Services (DSS). The report provides a final summary of the evaluation of projects funded by DSS' Respectful Relationships initiative in three funding rounds.

DSS provides leadership in Australian Government policy and project management on issues affecting women and gender equality, family and community safety, and the delivery of women's safety initiatives. DSS, in partnership with State and Territory governments, have been responsible for the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention initiative that has sought 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 Australian 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 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 National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV) Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention through Education.

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 Sexual Assault Prevention Education (SAPE) Research Team was led by Associate Professor Moira Carmody and 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.

In 2008, 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 document review included grant applications and proposals, reports, project documents, information sheets, and evaluation reports. Stakeholder interviews were conducted with key personnel representing each project to identify strengths and challenges of each unique project. 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 both the process of implementing respectful relationships primary prevention projects as well as performance outcomes of projects funded during all three rounds of the DSS Respectful Relationships Initiative.

## **2 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
<b>Funded under Round 1 of the Respectful Relationships initiative</b>							
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	✓	
<b>Funded under Round 2 of the Respectful Relationships initiative</b>							
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	✓	

Organisation	Project	State	Age(s)	Gender	Setting	Process Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation
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	✓	

Organisation	Project	State	Age(s)	Gender	Setting	Process Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation
<b>Funded under Round 3 of the Respectful Relationships initiative</b>							
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	✓	✓



### 3 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 National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (Carmody, 2009) Standards which provide best practice guidelines for domestic violence primary prevention projects and their evaluation. The overall evaluation incorporated two types of approaches:

1. A process evaluation which included:
  - a. 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;
  - b. Semi-structured interviews with project service providers from 30 projects;
  - c. Semi-structured interviews with a total of 12 teachers for eight school-based projects (Round 3 only).
  - d. 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:
  - a. A quantitative study of participant responses to questionnaires; and
  - b. 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.

## 4 Results

Results from our 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. Generally whole-of-school approaches worked well however there appears to be a significant role for individual projects targeted towards specific groups or at-risk vulnerable young people. In terms of underlying principles for Respectful Relationships Education initiatives, more work needs to be done by academics, policy makers, and stakeholders to highlight both the gendered nature of violence and to integrate feminist philosophy.

Projects with 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. Building and maintaining these relationships is an ongoing challenge and requires commitment, skill, and attention. The whole-of-school approach is very effective to ensure that Respectful Relationships initiatives build momentum. However, there is also a role for ad-hoc or single project initiatives usually designed for a specific target population with specific needs and challenges such as groups of children with disabilities. These are especially crucial in engaging new schools and organisations.

There are several factors that improve the delivery of Respectful Relationships primary prevention initiatives. Respectful Relationships projects that are backed by organisations with extensive experience in the referral and treatment of both victims and/or perpetrators of interpersonal violence provide multiple intervention pathways. 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 including victims and perpetrators, and can facilitate effective and efficient referral for intervention when needed. They are also characterised by high levels of staff experience and staff training. In addition to high level skills and experience at the delivery organisation level, one of the key requirements to ensure project success is the school and organisation readiness capacity to participate in a primary prevention program. A module based structure provides a flexible base to engage at-risk students. Projects can also link in with other public health strategies to provide increased support for Respectful Relationships philosophy. Special consideration also needs to be given when working with projects targeting high risk vulnerable young people or those with special needs. Engaging community representatives may help to improve cultural sensitivity when developing and implementing projects. Working with a community development framework may also increase the overall impact of these projects.

Staff development and training was an issue across many projects. The selection, training, and retention of multi-skilled experienced staff is difficult, especially for some at-risk groups, remote

communities, and large multi-site projects. Standardised training for all project staff would ensure project fidelity despite these staff challenges.

Evaluation of projects presented many challenges and there is significant work to be done by key stakeholders to develop a robust evaluation strategy. A key challenge is the development of sensitive, culturally and developmentally appropriate instruments. Ethical issues related to assessing attitudes, behaviour, and experiences of interpersonal violence largely remain unresolved. 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. Review of project documentation also showed lack of standardised reporting requirements and formats and basic record keeping.

Feedback from participants indicated that they enjoyed the sessions and were engaged with the content. The young women and men had high levels of recall about the content of each project. The focus groups highlighted that the young people had made positive changes in their lives as a result of participating in the Respectful Relationships projects. Participants also reported that the programs had helped them to examine their own relationships and some reported making significant changes since participating in the prevention program. Participants said that they had developed skills to recognise respectful relationships in their own lives and lives of their friends, and had learnt strategies to obtain help if they felt they were in relationships that were not healthy.

A workshop or conference on preparing Respectful Relationships projects will be beneficial for project organisations, professionals, community representatives, and experts in the field of primary prevention education in providing opportunities to share information and discuss the design, outcomes, challenges and successes, and experiences in running the Respectful Relationships projects. It is important that experts and stakeholders agree on appropriate strategies for the implementation of Respectful Relationships programs. Therefore, the outcome of this workshop could be the further development of detailed good practice guidelines on how to strengthen, design, deliver and implement Respectful Relationship programs. In accordance with the National Priority 1 of the *Second Action Plan 2013-2016* of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, this would be beneficial to the process of implementing Respectful Relationships education into the national curriculum.

#### **4.1 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. Few projects were able to articulate the underlying behavioural change theory used in their design and to show how this related to project processes and activities.

**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. While most projects tried to engage with the whole school, often projects were directed at one specific year level or groups of students. Despite this, engagement from teachers, commitment from school leaders, engagement from parents, and awareness of the Respectful Relationships messages, ensured that project content had a wider impact on the school community.

Further work by policy makers and academics needs to be undertaken to **identify appropriate theories of change** and to show how these models can be used in the design and evaluation of Respectful Relationships education projects. **Improved understanding of feminist principles and how they relate to violence** will help in the development and design of Respectful Relationship education projects.

## 4.2 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. These organisations reported that these additional challenges impacted on their capacity to meet their project goals.

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. Funding these projects facilitates an initial engagement with these populations to begin a dialogue within the community relating to respectful relationships.

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.

### **4.3 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 may be 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.

### **4.4 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 also 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.

## 4.5 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. This continued to be a problem with projects that were funded as a one-off project or were not part of a consistent multi-focussed program of service delivery.

## 4.6 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, however, more work is urgently 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.

The need for age-appropriate violence prevention projects was supported by the survey-based outcome evaluation findings. Greater improvement in attitudes and beliefs towards *dating violence* was observed for older (i.e. secondary school) students as this kind of education seems to be more suitable for this age group than their primary school counterparts. Attitudes and beliefs about *conflict resolution* and *anger* did not change significantly for the older age group while some change was observed for primary school students. This suggests that **certain aspects of respectful relationships (including friendships and dating relationships) may need to be addressed at a developmentally appropriate age using age-appropriate curriculum content.**

Age-appropriateness was further identified as a relevant factor in relation to evaluating these projects. Tools for assessing the impact of project content on attitudinal and behavioural change of project participants also need to be age-appropriate. For the purpose of this evaluation, instruments were adjusted for two different age groups corresponding to primary and secondary/ post-secondary school participants. While independent evaluations are the preferred method of assessing project outcomes, it is acknowledged that this is not always feasible. Where internal evaluations are the only way of assessing project performance it is recommended that projects use age-appropriate and consistent instruments with standardised measures that are sensitive enough to assess even small changes over time. This level of



consideration for the enhancement of evaluation tools has previously been given to cultural appropriateness, with outcome evaluation methods having been adjusted from the use of surveys to focus group designs.

Despite being of little use to assess change in attitudes or behaviour, the use of **regular within-project evaluation**, addressing questions relating to relevance, participation, and how informative the sessions are, ensured that the projects maintained a focus on the goals set out in their grant application and served to keep projects on track. Despite the allocation of considerable time and effort, evaluation within projects did not necessarily meet rigorous standards of practice when undertaking evaluation work. The validity of the instruments used and the congruity with the project content needs greater consideration. At a minimum, project evaluations need to employ both validated measures and a pre- and post-test design. In addition, follow-up testing and the use of a control or comparison group is considered gold standard evaluation practice however, these elements may not be within the scope of most project funding.

It is evident that there are **a number of research methodology issues** in evaluating these primary prevention initiatives. 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.

In reviewing project documentation, it was observed that reporting varied considerably. It is recommended that **documentation and reporting be standardised** to ensure that projects meet required reporting criteria. Final reports should cover the entire project period, and should be a stand-alone document describing the project and detailing the project's outcomes.

Projects often suffered from a lack of good practice in record keeping. 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 may assist with evaluation of projects.

#### **4.7 General process issues**

A number of project representatives who were interviewed commented that project funding, invaluable in concept, **would benefit from ongoing funding, or funding over a longer duration**. In addition, opportunities to **broaden the scope of the program** to include people outside of the initial project participants would provide increased benefit to those most in need.

## 5 Conclusion and discussion

In summary, this large evaluation exercise 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, although more work is needed to communicate the importance of the gendered nature of interpersonal violence and the relevance of Feminist theory. Projects generally followed a whole-of-school approach, including consideration of the school's curriculum content and delivery along with school staff engagement and capacity. 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 further highlighted the need for projects with an ongoing duration rather than one-off sessions however we also recognised the 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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