Parents too ashamed to tell of domestic violence by kids

SONIA KOHLBACHER  THE AUSTRALIAN  APRIL 21, 2015 12:00AM

Thousands of children are the perpetrators of domestic violence and many of their parents are too ashamed to report the abuse.

Australia’s strategy to curb domestic violence calls for action in families where children are the victims but overlooks thousands of cases highlighted in a report to be released today.

In more than 2000 cases reported across Western Australia between 2009 and last year police charged adolescents with assault and other acts of violence against their siblings, parents and carers.

The report, by Women’s Health and Family Services, finds parents who are being abused by their children are suffering from a particularly secret form of domestic violence. A majority do not report offences to police because they feel embarrassed and fear their capacity as parents will be judged.

The report finds the issue is not clearly addressed in public health plans in Western Australia or federally.

“The Australian Government National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children (2011) focuses on the need to take action on domestic and family violence where children are the victims,”
the report finds.

“Notably, this report neglects the fact that adolescents can also be the perpetrators of domestic and family violence.”

In the five years from 2009, West Australian police received 2013 reports of violence committed by children, aged between 10 years to 17 years, against a family member in their own home.

More than 60 per cent of the reports were from homes located within the metropolitan area.

“Out of 2013 offences, 1416 were reported as assault, 181 as sexual assault, 19 as deprivation of liberty, 389 as threatening behaviour and six as robberies,” the report says.

“Out of these 2013 offences, 1538 perpetrators were male, 461 female and 14 were unknown.”

The report includes comparative data from Victoria indicating youth violence in the home is a significant problem there too.

Victorian police received 3252 reports of domestic violence by youths during 2010-11. The report, titled The Making of Good Men and Women, found “most families do not report their child to the police due to embarrassment, guilt, a sense of needing to manage their own children, and/or a fear of judgment about their own parental capacities”.

In NSW last year, police found that 1371 juveniles had committed assaults linked to domestic violence.

A separate study in western Sydney found 51 per cent of sole mothers had experienced violent or abusive behaviour from their teenage children.

That study, from 2006, found male adolescent violence against mothers was the most common.

Women’s Health and Family Services project officer Sarah Broadhead said there were a “huge” number of incidents of youth violence in the home and “the only way that we’re going to break the cycle for the next generation and prevent the cycle of domestic violence in future is actually to focus on children and young people”.

“Research shows that 50 per cent of those children that are perpetrating violence against their parents were probably subject to family domestic violence when they were growing up,” Ms Broadhead said.

“These young people are going to be the next generation of perpetrators, unfortunately.”

×

Share this story

Facebook  
Twitter  
LinkedIn  
