



## Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

### YSAS Responses to Questions taken on Notice

**Date:** Monday 5 August 2024

**Witnesses:**

Bianca Johnston, YSAS

Dom Ennis, YSAS

**Question on Notice (Page 36 of transcript):** When it comes to youth perpetrators—how do you see a statewide database having input when it comes to youth as well as adults?

**YSAS Response:**

YSAS recognizes that young people's use and experiences of family and intimate partner violence can involve one or all of the below types of power, control and abuse:

1. Victim survivors of adult instigated family violence
2. Adolescent use of violence in the home (AVITH)
3. Youth Intimate Partner Violence (YIPV)

As noted in our submission, young people's experiences and use of intimate partner and family violence contain characteristics that are distinct from adults. Young people hold 'young people skills' for navigating relationships<sup>1</sup> which are reflective of their age and stage of development, and different to the skills and understandings<sup>2</sup> that adults hold. Consequently, young people's use and experiences of intimate partner violence are distinct due the influence of developing cognitive, relational, accountability, social and behavioural skills associated with this stage of development. Recent Australian research has examined the trajectories of use of IPV and FV in adolescence towards adult use of this issue<sup>3</sup> and the importance of early intervention during youth, particularly those aged 16-17 years old. Research has also identified that many boys and young men who use FV and IPV behaviours also have experiences of adverse childhood experiences, including exposure to trauma during early adolescence<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tagesson & Gallo, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Carlisle, E., Coumarelos, C., Minter, K., Lohmeyer, B., 2022

<sup>3</sup> Boxall, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Daly & Marshall, 2021



The policies, goals and philosophies of responses to family violence and intimate partner violence in youth populations therefore must be different to adults<sup>5</sup>. We believe this to be like the way in which youth justice philosophically seeks to balance community safety with recognition of young people’s capacity for change and needs for rehabilitation and diversion from the criminal justice system<sup>6</sup>.

Adult approaches to intimate partner and family violence hold strong accountability and ‘zero tolerance’ lenses<sup>7</sup> that have worked towards important criminal, legal, mandated intervention and safety responses. Our concern is that the broad brushed application of this lens to a youth population will have implications for young people in ways which will unintentionally criminalize. Rather, we believe it important to recognize and action young people’s need for accountability, rehabilitation, diversion and change through youth-specific interventions that are responsive to their age and developmental stage. There is a large body of research that indicates that criminal and youth justice system contact is harmful, traumatic and entrenching for young people<sup>8</sup> and continual concerns of over-representation in youth justice systems of First Nations Youth<sup>9</sup>. It is our belief at YSAS therefore, that legal and policy responses to the issue of FV and YIPV in youth should adhere to the principles of rehabilitation and diversion away from criminal and youth justice system contact as well as focus on early intervention and crime prevention.

YSAS operates two programs focused on broader youth crime prevention and early intervention that often involve contact with young people who use and/or experience YIPV, AVITH and family violence. These programs are the Youth Support Service (YSS) and the Embedded Youth Outreach Program (EYOP). The Youth Support Service (YSS) provides brief intensive intervention to young people aged 10-18 years old, their families and communities on an outreach basis in the Metropolitan region of Melbourne as well as in the Latrobe Valley area. Although young people may not be directly or explicitly referred to this program for their use of family or intimate partner violence, it is a common concern for cohorts referred into and serviced through this program. During their involvement with YSS, young people and their families receive developmentally sensitive and tailored support for this issue through intervention that is provided holistically to address crime prevention, criminogenic risk factors and wellbeing needs. Operating for more than a decade, our internal YSAS reviews of this program have identified the frequent family violence, IPV and AVITH concerns addressed during intervention work undertaken in this program and the role of it in diverting young people away from the criminal justice system.

The EYOP Program teams youth workers with Victoria Police members to provide “real time” after-hours responses to youth-specific issues, with the strengths and successes of

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<sup>5</sup> Zosky, 2010

<sup>6</sup> Zane & Mears, 2023

<sup>7</sup> Zosky, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Case & Haines, 2021

<sup>9</sup> Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2023

this program's approach highlighted during recent evaluation<sup>10</sup>. This program provides brief intervention and support as well as referral to relevant supports and services. Adolescent's use of violence in the home is a common issue that presents in the work undertaken by this program – which will often provide referral and linkage to the Youth Support Service (YSS) for ongoing intervention and support.

Unfortunately, the Victorian State Government has recently undertaken cuts to the YSS Program<sup>11</sup> with particularly impacts on services delivered in Melbourne's Western and Northern regions. This is particularly concerning given the effectiveness of the YSS program in providing criminal justice system diversion and its status as one of the few programs providing outreach based developmentally sensitive intervention to young people and their families for violence use amongst other criminogenic risk and wellbeing needs. We are particularly concerned about the implications of this decision in the context of the Western and Northern regions of Melbourne which have high rates of reported family violence<sup>12</sup>.

YSAS remains in support of the family violence information sharing schemes (FVISS) to support the immediate safety of children, young people and adults. We also recognize the importance of the forthcoming Child and Youth MARAM in providing family violence practice guidance specific for children and young people. We believe that rather than a statewide database that identifies youth users of intimate partner and family violence, it would be more beneficial to consider instead gathering broader de-identified information about the prevalence of these issues, age-cohort characteristics, geographically specific concerns and importantly, information about desistance, intervention effectiveness and other processes of change.

**Question on Notice (Page 36 of Transcript):** Could I ask just maybe for some insights on notice just homing in a bit more on your regional Vic lens—the barriers, opportunities and challenges?

**YSAS Response:**

YSAS acknowledges the evidence that there are unique challenges and vulnerabilities that young people, and particularly young women victim-survivors, face due to the intersections of age, gender and rurality<sup>13</sup>. There are androcentric and Anglocentric narratives that can occur more often in rural regions, that can reinforce patriarchal norms, heterosexual masculinity and gender inequality<sup>14</sup>, known drivers of violence.

YSAS acknowledges the evidence base outlining the enhanced family violence risks and challenges that young people, children and adults in rural areas face regarding family and

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<sup>10</sup> Luebbers, Fullam, Pilcher & Ogloff (2020)

<sup>11</sup> Wong, 2024

<sup>12</sup> Crime Statistics Agency, 2024

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

<sup>14</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

intimate partner violence support and safety seeking, justice access and service provision<sup>15</sup>. The issue of geographical isolation can create complexities not only emotionally and psychologically – but have serious implications for victim survivors including lack of access to public transport or vehicle to leave situations, increased access to guns, lack of emergency accommodation, issues resulting from limited employment options creating a barrier to establishing independence and the increased risk of financial abuse because of resources being tied to farms<sup>16</sup>. The localised nature of small communities in rural and regional areas can further create issues of stigma, shame and recognition which can be a barrier to accessing support<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, geographical distance and isolation can create distinct challenges for victim-survivors including the delayed response times and availability of emergency services and lack of access to emergency accommodation<sup>18</sup>. These experiences may be further compounded for migrant and refugee women in rural and remote areas, whose safety and support seeking are further impacted by isolation from community, navigating a new country with different systems, uncertainty surrounding immigration status and risk of issues such as visa abuse<sup>19</sup>. There is limited Australian academic inquiry into how young women in rural and regional areas experience these issues, and we believe it is an important area for further research.

YSAS recognizes the need for youth specific family and intimate partner violence responses that are tailored to and integrated into the distinct needs of rural and remote communities. Research identifies the importance of primary prevention including education and awareness raising campaigns to challenge violence enabling community norms<sup>20</sup> and actions to create increased social capital and community led responses such as bystander intervention training<sup>21</sup>. We also recognize the need for flexible and innovative services and support delivery for youth victim survivors and users of violence in rural and regional areas. This may include flexible delivery of support and behavioural change programs (including online), the use of youth focused outreach in ways that incorporate not only individuals but whole of families and communities and investment in social resources and infrastructure such as emergency support payments, mental health and suicide prevention services, sexual and reproductive health services, emergency accommodation, employment and education pathways, legal services and support groups as options to support young people’s processes of change, safety, diversion and early intervention.

Currently YSAS operates the Youth Support Service (YSS) in the Latrobe Valley region, with this program providing outreach support to young people and their families as well as broader community development. YSAS also delivers AoD (alcohol and other drugs) and some primary health services to young people in the Bendigo region through the YSAS

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<sup>15</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

<sup>16</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024; Owen & Carrington, 2015; Ragusa, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

<sup>19</sup> Murray et. Al., 2019

<sup>20</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024

<sup>21</sup> Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024; Edwards et. Al., 2016



Bendigo office. Both of our regional services identify the complex family and intimate partner violence needs of young people in these regions alongside co-occurring substance use issues. These YSAS services are well established within their communities and have the potential to provide expanded services and unique community development responses (eg. specific programs and groups). An example of such includes the ADF funded program in Bendigo to support Karen (Burmese) young people who experience substance use issues, through engagement in pro-social community activities such as sport.

We would like to highlight the value of increased funding would provide towards these Bendigo and Latrobe Valley services to enable such opportunities for continued and expanded support and innovative flexible programming to young people who reside in these regional areas.

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