

Access to justice for children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Working paper No.7 – Boys and young men

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Introduction

Context

This working paper forms part of an overall research project exploring the extent to which children and young people are able to access to justice in Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings of the research study are presented in three parts:

Part One contains my analysis of data from key informant interviews with adults with expertise in the justice system and/or working with particular groups of children and young people, as well as from a survey of children and young people aged 14 to 24.

Part Two discusses the meaning of access to justice and other related concepts such as legal empowerment as well as the specific meaning of access to justice for children and child-friendly justice. It then discusses the justice problems experienced by children and young people generally, as well as common barriers to accessing justice. The analysis in this report is based on my review of the research and literature in New Zealand and overseas as well as analysis of information obtained from the government and Crown entities.

This report is supported by a series of ten working papers discussing the justice problems and barriers to accessing justice experienced by particular groups of children and young people and is broken up into a series of reports relating to groups identified as likely to experience differing justice problems or barriers to access. These working papers are:

1. Children and young people in care or with care experience;
2. Disabled and neurodiverse children and young people;
3. Tamariki and rangatahi Māori;
4. Pacific children and young people;
5. Rainbow and takatāpui children and young people;
6. Girls and young women;
7. Boys and young men;
8. Poverty and socio-economic disadvantage;
9. Trauma; and
10. Intersectionality.

Part Three explores possible solutions or ways to close the justice gap for children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. This part of the study is also supported by a series of working papers in relation to possible solutions. At the time of writing these working papers consider the following topics with additional working papers likely to follow:

11. Strategic litigation;
12. Legal service delivery, non-lawyer services, and integrated services;
13. Data, evidence and measuring change;
14. Technology;
15. Training for professionals;
16. Legal education and continuing professional development for lawyers and judges; and
17. Law-related education for children and young people.

These reports and working papers are available at: <https://www.cypaccesstojusticenz.com/>

Executive Summary

This working paper explores the justice problems and barriers to access experienced by boys and young men followed by some of the possible solutions raised in the research and literature from Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. Each of these sections is summarised below.

Justice problems

Education system. Male students experience consistently higher stand-down, suspension, exclusion and expulsion rates than female students with this gender disparity higher in primary school and reducing in secondary school.¹ Boys are also more likely to be involved with the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme which requires them to have been identified as having high or very high ongoing special education needs with this disparity appearing to increase over time.² An Education Review Office survey of school students found that male students were more likely to report experiencing every kind of bullying behaviour than female students.³ Overseas research in relation to the prevalence of bullying also identifies gender-based differences in bullying victimisation with boys being more likely to both experience bullying, particularly physical aggression⁴ and to perpetrate it.⁵

Criminal justice system involvement. Boys outnumber girls in offending rates in all age groups with the offending by children aged 10 to 13 made up of 72% boys and 28% girls, and offending by 14-17 (or 18) year olds 77% boys and 23% girls.⁶ There are also differences in offending by gender with offending by boys being more likely to be serious enough to lead to an FGC or court action and to appear in the Youth Court.⁷

Although girls and young women are more likely to experience sexual violence, boys do make up a sizable minority.⁸ Research in the United Kingdom has also found that male victims of child sexual exploitation differ from females in a number of ways including being younger, being more likely to present with disabilities, and being more likely to have a youth offending record.⁹

Barriers to access

The barriers experienced by boys and young men mirror some of those experienced by girls and young women and rainbow and takatāpui children and young people. For example:

- Gendered assumptions and the negative expectations of maleness (i.e. that they are violent, disruptive, and disrespectful) can operate to disadvantage boys and young men.¹⁰

¹ Ministry of Education. (2022). [Stand-downs, suspensions exclusions and expulsions from school](#) at 10-11.

² Figure NZ. (2022). *Students involved with the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme in New Zealand*. <https://figure.nz/chart/A8Q6XhL90w1d6Ypi>

³ Education Review Office Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga. (2019). [Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools](#) at 14.

⁴ Silva, M.A., Pereira, B., Mendonça, D., Nunes, B., & de Oliveira, W.A. (2013). [The involvement of girls and boys with bullying: an analysis of gender differences](#). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10(12), 6820–6831 at 6820, 6822 & 6827.

⁵ Lunneblad, J. & Johansson, T. (2021). Violence and gender thresholds: A study of the gender coding of violent behaviour in schools, *Gender and Education*, 33(1), 1-16 at 4.

⁶ Ministry of Justice. (2023). [Youth Justice Indicators Summary Report](#) at 9 & 14.

⁷ Ibid at 10-11.

⁸ McNaughton Nicholls, C., Cockbain, E., Brayley, H., Harvey, S., Fox, C., Paskell, C., Ashby, M., Gibson, K. & Jago, N. (2014). [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#). Barnardos at 6.

⁹ Ibid at 6-9.

¹⁰ Gillon, F. (2022). [Thinking about justice](#). Children and Young People's Centre for Justice at 31.

- Discriminatory social attitudes and stereotypes including homophobia, stereotypes of masculinity, and stigmatisation as offenders can operate as barriers to disclosing or reporting abuse for boys and young men particularly in cases of sexual violence.¹¹
- There is a lack of available and visible services for male victim survivors.¹² Police and mainstream support services can also fail to respond appropriately to boys and young men when they do report victimisation.¹³
- The focus on girls and young women as victims also operates as a barrier for boys and young men. This includes the invisibility and minimization of male sexual victimization and the assumption of female victimhood.¹⁴

Possible solutions

I discuss several possible ways of addressing the barriers to accessing justice experienced by boys and young men starting with tailored or specialist services for boys and young men particularly in relation to the experience of sexual and family violence. Services and responses also need to consider possible differences in the needs and preferences of boys and young men of different sexual identities. Other possible solutions include general public education to address attitudinal barriers such as gendered assumptions and discriminatory social attitudes. Professionals also need training both to address these attitudes and in relation to how to respond and support boys and young men. I conclude by discussing the need for more research in relation to the needs and experiences of boys and young men who experience victimisation.

This section is not a complete analysis, nor an attempt to identify all possible ways to resolve the access to justice challenges experienced by children and young people in care or with care experience. It should be read together with working papers 11-17 which discuss possible ways of increasing access to justice for children and young people more generally.¹⁵

¹¹ Dixon, L., Treharne, G., Pettie, M., Bowden, C., Patterson, T., Beres, M., Mirfin-Vietch, B., Shaw, R., Eketone-Kelly, A., & Ashdown, J. (2023). [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#). Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington at 4; Carswell, S., Donovan, E. & Kaiwai, H. (2019). [What is known about effective recovery services for men who have been sexually abused? An evidence review](#). Commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development at 4.

¹² Dixon et al., [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 54.

¹³ Ibid at 59; Moore, T. (2021). [Suggestions to improve outcomes for male victims of domestic abuse: a review of the literature](#). *SN Social Sciences* 1, 252 at 6-7.

¹⁴ Hlavka, H. R. (2017). [Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization](#). *Men and Masculinities*, 20(4), 482–505; McNaughton Nicholls et al., [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#) at 13; Weiss, K. G. (2010). [Male Sexual Victimization: Examining Men's Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault](#). *Men and Masculinities*, 12(3), 275–298 at 277.

¹⁵ Working papers 11-17 discuss Strategic litigation; Legal service delivery, non-lawyer services, and integrated services; Data, evidence and measuring change; Technology; Training for professionals; Legal education and continuing professional development for lawyers and judges; and Law-related education for children and young people.

Justice Needs

Education system

Male students experience consistently higher stand-down, suspension, exclusion and expulsion rates than female students with this gender disparity higher in primary school and reducing in secondary school. For example, in 2021 the stand-down, suspension, exclusion, and expulsion rates for male students were lower than female students:¹⁶

- The stand-down rate for male students in 2021 was 37.3 per 1,000 students as compared to a rate of 15.8 per 1,000 students for female students. There was a significantly greater disparity in primary schools and kura [Māori medium education] (42.5 as compared with 10.8) than in secondary schools and kura (33.5 as compared with 19.5);
- The suspension rate for male students in 2021 was 4.1 per 1,000 students as compared to a rate of 2.1 per 1,000 students for female students. This disparity got smaller between 2020 and 2021; and
- Of the suspended male students, the exclusion rate was 1.7 per 1,000 students in primary schools and kura and 1.4 in secondary schools and kura; and the expulsion rate was 1.4 per 1,000 students as compared to an exclusion rate of 0.3 students in primary schools and kura, 0.8 in secondary schools and kura and an expulsion rate of 0.6 per 1,000 students for male students. Gaps between male and female students' exclusion and expulsion rates have also decreased when compared to 2020.

Boys are also more likely to be involved with the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme which requires them to have been identified as having high or very high ongoing special education needs with this disparity appearing to increase over time.¹⁷ As set out in *Working Paper no. 6: Girls and young women*, there has been little research in Aotearoa New Zealand that explores the reasons for gender disparities in education discipline. The most recent study I was able to find on the Education Counts website run by the Ministry of Education was published in 2000,¹⁸ now more than twenty years ago. Alton-Lee and Praat review the literature relating to the gender differences before concluding that the “arguments boil down to the relative influence of nature and nurture”,¹⁹ but that schools can explicitly or implicitly contribute to the production of various forms of masculinity and femininity and their attending behaviours in a range of ways including the use of disciplinary practices based on intimidating/stand over power, channelling students into ‘gender-appropriate’ subjects, supporting school activities such as sports which are associated with aggressive forms of masculinity, and failing to take sexual harassment and bullying seriously.²⁰

An Education Review Office survey of school students found that male students were more likely to report experiencing every kind of bullying behaviour than female students, but the gap was especially wide with respect to being called names, put down or teased (21% as compared with 12%), threats (9% as compared with 4%), and physical forms of bullying (11% as compared

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, [Stand-downs, suspensions exclusions and expulsions from school](#) at 10-11.

¹⁷ Figure NZ, *Students involved with the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme in New Zealand*.

¹⁸ Alton-Lee, A. & Praat, A. (2000). [Explaining and addressing gender differences in the New Zealand compulsory school sector](#). Ministry of Education. This extensive literature was followed by a shorter report: Alton-Lee, A. & Praat, A. (2001). [Questioning gender: Snapshots from explaining and addressing gender differences in the New Zealand compulsory school sector](#). Ministry of Education.

¹⁹ Alton-Lee & Praat, [Explaining and addressing gender differences in the New Zealand compulsory school sector](#) at 251.

²⁰ Ibid at 268.

with 4%).²¹ The PISA study cited above also found that boys were more likely to be frequently bullied than girls and that significantly more boys experienced physical violence, being made fun of, verbal threats and theft or destruction of property.²²

Overseas research in relation to the prevalence of bullying also identifies gender-based differences in bullying victimisation with boys being more likely to both experience bullying, particularly physical aggression²³ and to perpetrate it.²⁴ Lunneblad & Johansson suggest that the latter is due to young boys feeling forced to “live up to certain norms and ideals of masculinity” that promote violence.²⁵ Rosen & Nofziger also discuss how notions of hegemonic masculinity play out in the experience of bullying based victimisation whereby “if boys do not exhibit heteronormative behavior and appropriate gender presentation, they are often teased with homophobic slurs”²⁶

Irish research in relation to the impacts of bullying found that “boys who had been bullied at school were more anxious and depressed and had poorer self-esteem than those without a history of bullying victimisation” with the relative risk of lifetime self-harm four times higher for boys who had been bullied than those who had not.²⁷ Boys with a history of victimisation also reported experiencing problems with schoolwork, serious physical abuse, worries about sexual orientation and self-harm thoughts.²⁸

Criminal Justice system involvement

As set out above, boys outnumber girls in offending rates in all age groups with the offending by children aged 10 to 13 made up of 72% boys and 28% girls,²⁹ offending by 14-17(or 18) year olds 74% boys and 25% girls,³⁰ and 80% of 18-19 year olds were male and 20% were female.³¹ There are also differences in offending by gender with offending by boys being more likely to be serious enough to lead to an FGC or court action (31% of boys and 22% of girls)³² and to appear in the Youth Court (26% of boys and 16% of girls).³³ There are also some differences in the characteristics of boys and girls who offend with 94% of boys aged 10-13 and 95% of girls referred for a youth justice FGC having previously been subject to a report of concern to Oranga Tamariki about their care and protection.³⁴ These percentages are 88% and 94% for those aged

²¹ Education Review Office - Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga. (2019). [Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools](#) at 14.

²² Jang-Jones & McGregor, [PISA2018 New Zealand Students' Wellbeing School climate & student mindsets of 15-year-olds](#) at 25.

²³ Silva, M. A., Pereira, B., Mendonça, D., Nunes, B., & de Oliveira, W. A. (2013). [The involvement of girls and boys with bullying: an analysis of gender differences](#). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10(12), 6820–6831 at 6820, 6822 & 6827.

²⁴ Lunneblad, J. & Johansson, T. (2021). Violence and gender thresholds: A study of the gender coding of violent behaviour in schools, *Gender and Education*, 33(1), 1-16, DOI: [10.1080/09540253.2019.1583318](#) at 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rosen, N.L. & Nofziger, S. (2019). [Boys, Bullying, and Gender Roles: How Hegemonic Masculinity Shapes Bullying Behavior](#). *Gender Issues*, 36(4), 295–318 at 19.

²⁷ McMahon, E.M., Reulbach, U., Keeley, H., Perry, I.J., & Arensman, E. (2010). [Bullying victimisation, self harm and associated factors in Irish adolescent boys](#). *Social Science & Medicine*. 71, 1300-1307 at 1306.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ministry of Justice, [Youth Justice Indicators Summary Report](#) at 8.

³⁰ Ibid at 9.

³¹ Ibid at 12.

³² Ibid at 11.

³³ Ibid at 19.

³⁴ Ibid at 17.

14 to 17 (or 18).³⁵ This pattern of over-representation of male youth is consistent across all major English speaking jurisdictions.³⁶

Writing in the United Kingdom, Vaswani raises concerns that although boys and young men are overrepresented in the criminal justice system “much of the narrative around trauma-informed care in prison centres is on women’s experiences of trauma”.³⁷ She argues that the experience of trauma which “often leaves people feeling stigmatised, humiliated and ashamed, and with their view of the world shattered” may be “especially disruptive or burdensome for males who are influenced by traditional notions of masculinity, resulting in an exaggerated performance of masculinity in an attempt to reassert power and control (Ellis et al., 2017, Elder et al., 2017).”³⁸ Vaswani also suggests that masculinity may affect how males respond to trauma:³⁹

[M]ales often present with more PTSD symptoms, have lower usage of therapeutic interventions, and respond less well to trauma treatment than females. Masculinity may pose barriers in relation to being able to identify and articulate emotional, psychological or physical symptoms in the first place, or in wanting or feeling able to seek help for these symptoms. The high level of speech, language and communication problems among young men in the justice system is an additional disadvantage. Even if help is sought, assessment for PTSD and related disorders also relies on the verbal expression of symptoms and treatment interventions often involve talking therapies or require some form of emotional processing. Trauma treatment can be overwhelming and demanding for anyone, but confronting these emotions may cause men to feel additional loss of agency and control. It is likely for these reasons that men have higher drop-out rates from treatment and a lack of success with trauma interventions.

Victimisation

As discussed above, the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey shows a number of gender based differences in victimisation rates including that females were more likely to experience sexual assault. Young males are more likely to experience other forms of offending including males (but not females) aged 15–19 being significantly more likely to experience theft and damage offences compared to the New Zealand average.⁴⁰

Although girls are more likely to experience child sexual exploitation (CSE), boys and young men constitute a sizeable minority of CSE cases⁴¹ with international prevalence of sexual abuse rates for males under the age of 16 ranging from one in six to one in 10.⁴² The findings of a UK

³⁵ Ibid at 18.

³⁶ Snow, P. C. (2019). Speech-Language Pathology and the Youth Offender: Epidemiological Overview and Roadmap for Future Speech-Language Pathology Research and Scope of Practice. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, 50(2), 324-339 at 326.

³⁷ Vaswani, N. (2021). [Info Sheet 98: The interaction between young masculinities, trauma and prison](#). Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice at 1. She suggests that this may reflect the perception that prison has been designed for men and the fact that men are often the source of women’s trauma.

³⁸ Ibid at 1-2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice, [Survey findings - Cycle 4 report Descriptive statistics. June 2022. Results drawn from Cycle 4 \(2020/21\) of the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey](#) at 71.

⁴¹ McNaughton Nicholls, C., Cockbain, E., Brayley, H., Harvey, S., Fox, C., Paskell, C., Ashby, M., Gibson, K. & Jago, N. (2014). [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#). Barnardos at 6.

⁴² Carswell, S., Donovan, E. & Kaiwai, H. (2019). [What is known about effective recovery services for men who have been sexually abused? An evidence review](#). Ministry of Social Development at 3.

scoping study by McNaughton et al indicate that male CSE victims differ from female victims in a number of ways:

- Males tend to be slightly younger than females;⁴³
- More males than females presented with disabilities, in particular autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD);⁴⁴
- More males than females had a youth offending record (48% as compared with 28% of females). This in part reflects the over-representation of males in youth justice system involvement however it is of concern that some professionals interviewed suggested that young males involved in criminal offending are more likely to be viewed as a risk than that behaviour being assessed as a potential indicator of victimisation;⁴⁵ and
- There were particular pathways for male victims relating to the gender of the offender and sexuality of both victim and offender.⁴⁶

McNaughton et al also discuss the gendered biases in how the risk of being a victim is perceived and how services respond to victims. Professionals reported that perpetrators could use gender stereotypes to create the opportunity to abuse (e.g. female perpetrators presenting themselves as a caring adult and male perpetrators encouraging young men to view pornography).⁴⁷ Gender biases could also affect the perception of risk when professionals are deciding whether to refer to services. For example, common reasons used to refer females to services including suspicions of exploitation or concerns about a relationship with an older person were far less common for males possibly because they were perceived as less vulnerable than females and their relationships with other people viewed as less inherently risky.⁴⁸

⁴³ McNaughton Nicholls et al., [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#) at 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid at 7. This may in part reflect differing prevalence rates of these conditions.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid at 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid at 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid at 12-13.

Barriers

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudes and views about masculinity can operate as a barrier in a number of ways including gendered expectations placed on boys, boys' own understanding of masculinity / gender norms operating as a barrier to seeking help and getting help. As discussed above and below, these attitudes operate to the disadvantage of children and young people of all genders.

Negative expectations of maleness

The Scottish study exploring children and young people's experiences of justice discussed in the section relating to girls and young women also found that some boys and young men described being subjected to gender based judgements.⁴⁹

The boys in the other older groups (3 and 4) discussed a different side to the gendered justice they experienced. For them, negative expectations of maleness (i.e. violent, disruptive, and disrespectful) created a bias where they were routinely blamed for incidents.

Reluctance to disclose abuse or seek help

A recent New Zealand study in relation to the barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing support services for adult male survivors of sexual violence and abuse found that the average time taken to first report was 18 years, with the majority (22; 68.8%) reporting between 10-50 years after the sexual violence and abuse.⁵⁰ This research found that gendered social norms and myths are a barrier for helpseeking, specifically: "[t]he stereotype that sexual violence does not happen to men is a barrier" and "[s]tereotypes that male survivors are likely to be gay or transgender or go on to perpetrate violence are barriers".⁵¹ An evidence review commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development raised many of the same issues.⁵²

Barriers to men telling others and seeking help are various, including not knowing where to get help and fear of how they will be perceived. Socially constructed ideas of 'masculinity' that promote ideals of toughness, dominance, and invulnerability can influence how men perceive themselves and how abuse impacts them in terms of stigma, shame and mental distress. This can prevent some men from disclosing sexual abuse and seeking help. These negative interpretations of 'masculinity' can influence responses from family, friends and some professionals who may not believe them, nor take their experiences as seriously as they should.

...There are a number of myths about the sexual abuse of males that need be debunked publicly as they cause distress to survivors and their family and friends. Myths such as 'male abuse survivors go onto abuse'; 'sexual abuse of boys and men is not very common'; 'boys/men abused by men must be gay'. These myths

⁴⁹ Gillon, [Thinking about justice](#) at 31.

⁵⁰ Dixon et al, [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 4.

⁵¹ Ibid at 42.

⁵² Carswell et al., [What is known about effective recovery services for men who have been sexually abused? An evidence review](#) at 4. This study involved a literature review considering both academic and grey literature was reviewed and informed by the authors' consultation with five experts with extensive experience as practitioners and researchers (at 3).

have been discredited through numerous studies but they persist, and can impact the response to boys and men who disclose abuse.

Overseas research has also identified how discriminatory social attitudes and stereotypes including homophobia, stereotypes of masculinity, and stigmatisation as offenders can operate as barriers to disclosing or reporting abuse for boys and young men particularly in cases of sexual violence.⁵³ Hlavka explains:⁵⁴

Rape myths that portray male victimization as either aberrant or harmless (Denov 2003; Scarce 1997) discourage young men from disclosing sexual assault. Victim attributions like self-blame and the fear of negative reactions from others such as doubt, disbelief, or indifference also reduce the likelihood of reporting (Davies 2002). Accounts from survivors indicate that normative expectations about masculinity act as additional barriers to disclosure for fear of being ridiculed as weak, inadequate, or labeled homosexual (Scarce 1997; West 2000). Masculine socialization practices depict boys as invulnerable and powerful and male bodies as impenetrable. Dominant discourses position men as sexual aggressors and women as sexual victims; to envision men as victims or women as perpetrators challenges dominant paradigms of sexual harm and risk, particularly in a heteronormative culture.

Research and literature also identifies several similar reasons that male victims of domestic violence do not seek help “refusal or reluctance to view their experiences as abuse, hesitancy to identify with victimizing language, lack of available supportive services, embarrassment, shame, loss of masculinity, fear of being judged or disbelieved by others, fear of police response, and devotion to their family.”⁵⁵ Fox et al’s research involving 1,203 children aged 13-14 in the United Kingdom found that they girls were more than twice as likely as boys to say that they would seek help from an adult if they were hit by a boyfriend or girlfriend.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most striking evidence of gender difference, however, was with regard to the questions pertaining to seeking help from adults when a young person has themselves been hit by a girlfriend or boyfriend. Boys (33.3%) were much less likely than girls (67.5%) to say they would seek help from an adult. Conversely, when asked if they would seek help from an adult if a parent or carer was experiencing abuse in their home, similar proportions of boys (69.4%) and girls (72.4%) agreed.

Similar issues have also been identified in the context of bullying and abuse in youth justice institutions. For example, Gooch describes how measures to protect a young person from bullying in a youth offenders institution would simply identify the victim as “a faggot” and do damage to the young person’s reputation diminishing his status from a ‘real man’ to a ‘boy’.⁵⁷

⁵³ McNaughton Nicholls et al., [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#) at 13; Weiss, [Male Sexual Victimization: Examining Men’s Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault](#) at 284-285; Widanaralalage, B.K., Hine, B.A. Murphy, A.D. & Murji, K. (2022) [“I Didn’t Feel I Was A Victim”: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Male-on-male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Abuse](#), *Victims & Offenders*, 17(8), 1147-1172 at 1148.

⁵⁴ Hlavka, [Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization](#).

⁵⁵ Moore, T. (2021). [Suggestions to improve outcomes for male victims of domestic abuse: a review of the literature](#). *SN Social Sciences* 1, 252 at 1. See also Shuler, C. (2010) [Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence in the United States: An Examination of the Review of Literature through the Critical Theoretical Perspective](#). *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*. 5(1), 163 – 173 at 164.

⁵⁶ Fox, C.L., Corr, M., Gadd, D. & Butler, I. (2012). [From boys to men: Phase one key findings](#). Economic and Social Research Council at 5-6.

⁵⁷ Gooch, K. (2019). [‘Kidulthood’: Ethnography, juvenile prison violence and the transition from ‘boys’ to ‘men’](#). *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 19(1) 80– 97 at 86.

Other attitudinal barriers to disclosure include not wanting to be seen as a ‘snitch’ with a recent study by Gavey et al. explaining: “[s]nitching, according to the boys’ talk, would risk not only hurting the boy who was being told on (which breaks the code of loyalty), but it also jeopardises the friendship (hence threatening peer group belonging for the boy who reports).”⁵⁸

Services failing to respond to male victimisation

Dixon et al. identified a lack of support both from within victim’s social networks and from services as a barrier to reporting. The authors noted:⁵⁹

Male survivors described how a lack of informal social support from family/whānau and peers, or via more formal channels, reduced their opportunities to tell somebody about the SVA they had experienced. However, the quality of this formal and informal support mattered. Listeners who could make male survivors feel safe and believed and cared for were helpful, as opposed to those who were insensitive or critical.

Dixon et al. also reported that male survivors participating in their research study described how their search for support “was hindered by a lack of available and visible services to support them with their specific experience of victimisation as diverse groups of men”.⁶⁰ This included insufficient and unaffordable specialist service provision particularly for men who are transgender, gay, or bisexual as well as a lack of diversity in service providers,⁶¹ and poor service visibility with survivors reporting it was difficult to find information that was relevant to them as male survivors or the right sources of support.⁶²

Male survivors also reported a range of negative experiences when they did report including experiencing:⁶³

[A] lack of confidentiality when reporting, lengthy drawn-out reporting processes with religious organisations, lack of action after reporting, or hostile court processes... Male survivors also described how a lack of victim support, advocacy and counselling throughout the reporting process left them feeling unsupported and unable to cope and retraumatised

Moore identifies unique concerns that may prevent men from reaching out to police to report domestic violence including police officers behaving “in more dismissive or hostile ways than formal services like counsellors, laughing at male victims’ claims or even outright insulting male victims”, “police may simply refuse to assist in the situation or claim that there is nothing that they would be able to do”, and of even greater concern, men “not only being treated as the abuser but being arrested (Lysova et al. 2020a; McCarrick et al. 2016).”⁶⁴ Widanaralalage et al.’s research in relation to the experiences of male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse found that survivors “described feeling re-traumatized after reporting, with officers’ investigative decisions/actions seen as attacks to their credibility as rape victims” suggesting that reporting

⁵⁸ Gavey, N., Calder-Dawe, O., Taylor, K., Le Grice, J., Thorburn, B., Manuela, S., Dudley, M., Panditharatne, S., Ross, R., & Carr, A. (2021). [Shifting the Line: Boys talk on gender, sexism and online ethics](#). Te Kura Mātai Hinengaro - School of Psychology, Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau - The University of Auckland at 79.

⁵⁹ Dixon et al., [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid at 54.

⁶¹ Ibid at 54-56.

⁶² Ibid at 56.

⁶³ Ibid at 59.

⁶⁴ Moore, [Suggestions to improve outcomes for male victims of domestic abuse: a review of the literature](#) at 6-7.

could be a form of secondary victimization for male rape victims.⁶⁵ Widanaralalage et al note that “victim withdrawal emerged in this study as a safeguarding decision to avoid further psychological damage from officers’ stigmatizing approaches.”⁶⁶

Focus on females as victims

Much as the criminal justice system focusses on males as offenders, research & literature raises the focus on females as victims of sexual and domestic violence operating as a barrier for male survivors of abuse. For example, Hlavka points to:⁶⁷

The invisibility and minimization of male sexual victimization, the use of outdated definitions that fail to include female and same-sex perpetrators (Black et al. 2011; Weiss 2010b), and the lack of money available to study male sexual assault culminate in a paucity of research and public information (Graham 2006; Stemple and Meyer 2014).

With few exceptions, boys’ constructions of sexual violence have received little attention from victimization scholars and those interested in the gendered power dynamics of adolescent sexual development.

McNaughton Nicholls et al. also raise the focus on female victims in sex and consent education as a possible reason why males do not disclose.⁶⁸ Similarly, Hlavka notes that popular discussions tend to frame consent as a female’s decision leaving young males in a position where they are unable to “understand their experiences of coercion and assault, perhaps especially with women perpetrators.”⁶⁹

Weiss blames this non-recognition of men as victims on social ideals about gender:⁷⁰

For instance, while social constructs of femininity—as physically weak and sexually vulnerable—fit overall perceptions of sexual victims, social expectations of what it is to be a man in our society—as strong, tough, selfsufficient, and impenetrable (Kimmel 1996, 2003; Messner 1992, 2003; Pollack 2003; Sabo 2003a, 2003b)—counter images of victimization in general and sexual victimization in particular.

Moore explains that these dismissive attitudes towards male victimisation can mean that men are “less inclined to view all but the most serious and violent acts from their partner as abuse”⁷¹ and can be left feeling “that they are alone and no one else understands their experiences” leaving them “too embarrassed or ashamed to tell anyone about their victimization”.⁷² The focus on male violence against females can also mean that males do not recognise their experiences as abuse because male survivors may experience different forms of abuse than female survivors, in particular, they may be more likely to experience abuse that does not constitute physical violence.⁷³

⁶⁵ Widanaralalage et al., [“I Didn’t Feel I Was A Victim”: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Male-on-male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Abuse](#) at 1164.

⁶⁶ Ibid at 1164.

⁶⁷ Hlavka, [Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization](#).

⁶⁸ McNaughton Nicholls et al., [Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men: A UK scoping study Summary of findings](#) at 13.

⁶⁹ Hlavka, [Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization](#).

⁷⁰ Weiss, [Male Sexual Victimization: Examining Men’s Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault](#) at 277.

⁷¹ Moore, [Suggestions to improve outcomes for male victims of domestic abuse: a review of the literature](#) at 4.

⁷² Ibid at 5.

⁷³ Ibid at 4.

Huntaway Strategy's literature review for Te Rōpū Tautoko, Male Survivors Aotearoa also raises the lack of research on the experiences of male survivors:⁷⁴

There is a strong sense across the literature both in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere that research and services focused on the experiences, needs and recovery of male survivors of abuse are seriously under-represented and under-provided. The focus of academic and professional attention has been and continues to be primarily on female victims of abuse. Some studies include a short section merely acknowledging that males are also often abused, but offer little specific information or guidance for their support.

⁷⁴ Huntaway Strategy. (2022). [Literature review. Te Rōpū Tautoko, Male Survivors Aotearoa](#). Male Survivors Aotearoa at 1.

Possible solutions

Introduction

In this section I discuss some possible solutions or ways of addressing some of the barriers to access raised in the research and literature from Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. It is not a complete analysis, nor an attempt to identify ways to resolve all the access to justice challenges experienced by boys and young men and should be read together with working papers 11-17 which discuss possible ways of increasing access to justice for children and young people more generally.⁷⁵

Much less attention is given to the access to justice needs of boys and young men, or males of all ages perhaps due to males being seen as dominant or the default for whom measures are developed. However, as discussed above, the fact that males are a minority of victims of family and sexual violence means that services and systems have been designed to meet the needs of females rather than males and there is a need for services tailored to the needs of boys and young men.

Tailored or specialist services

Moore argues that just as it is important to understand how female victims experience domestic violence, it is equally important to understand men's experiences and the barriers they face to seeking help in order to improve their outcomes.⁷⁶ For example, the psychological barriers to disclosure differ for men meaning that screening tools targeted to men may increase disclosure.⁷⁷ Moore also suggests that the regard with which men generally hold their personal agency means that it may help them to feel better if they can regain or maintain a sense of control over how they deal with their situation.⁷⁸ Widanaralalage et al. make a similar point in relation to male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual violence arguing that the role of masculinity in male survivors' experiences means that treatment should be focussed on giving men the tools to be in control over what happens.⁷⁹

Another consideration is whether the fact that many domestic and sexual violence services are tailored towards women including in many cases being 'women only' spaces means that there also needs to be services tailored to men. Another issue to consider is the extent to which LGBTQI+ males and straight, cis-gender males who experience victimisation have different barriers and therefore need different, or at least tailored, solutions. For example, an LGBTQI+ male may prefer to have access to a rainbow specific service. However, a straight, cis-gender male may not feel comfortable accessing a service for men if that service is also tailored to the needs of the LGBTQI+ community.

⁷⁵ Working papers 11-17 discuss Strategic litigation; Legal service delivery, non-lawyer services, and integrated services; Data, evidence and measuring change; Technology; Training for professionals; Legal education and continuing professional development for lawyers and judges; and Law-related education for children and young people.

⁷⁶ Moore, [Suggestions to improve outcomes for male victims of domestic abuse: a review of the literature](#) at 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid at 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Widanaralalage et al., ["I Didn't Feel I Was A Victim": A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Male-on-male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Abuse](#) at 19.

Dixon et al. also identified the need for service provision, visibility and design to be tailored to male survivors in order to facilitate access:⁸⁰

The findings showed that the male survivors and service workers wanted access to a choice of service workers demonstrating a range of demographic backgrounds, treatment modalities, and to have accessible services. Considering the intersectionality evident in the male survivors' demographics it would seem that choice is essential to enable the men's empowerment and autonomy. Based on the findings we recommend that accessible services for male survivors can be achieved via:

- *Explicit legislation, policy, practices, and procedures relevant to male survivors.*
- *Targeted funding for support services for male survivors, and, as raised at the sensemaking workshop, including funding for the administration of those services.*
- *Providing free services for male survivors including transgender survivors.*
- *Increasing access to services in different locations, especially for male survivors living in small and remote communities where anonymity is difficult.*
- *Providing men with choice of support services. For example, all-gender SVA services; generic trauma services; specialist services that can work with male survivors and minority groups of survivors in a bespoke way. We draw no conclusions about whether universal services open to all genders, or bespoke services for a specific gender are preferred, but rather that providing survivors with a choice of options is optimum.*
- *Providing wrap-around services and bridging support. As noted at the sense-making workshop, bridging support should not be a holding space for male survivors but also an opportunity to provide support.*
- *Ensuring the visibility of services through advertising, clearly available staff profiles, male-friendly language, and clear messaging about service objectives and provision, and staff characteristics.*
- *Promoting quick and easy initial access (e.g., communication via texts) to help men assess their suitability for services quickly.*
- *Providing male survivors with access to attentive expert support including 'advocates' and 'navigators' throughout the reporting and court process, including keeping in touch post-process completion.*

Dixon et al. also reported that the male survivors described ideal service design as incorporating a trauma-informed approach “that ensures aspects such as privacy, confidentiality, trust, peer support, collaborative decision making, choice, relaxation and cultural needs are met”.⁸¹

General public education

The biggest barriers are attitudinal so the most effective solutions will be those that change attitudes. Dixon et al. discussed this issue in their report and made recommendations for gender-inclusive societal education in relation to sexual violence and abuse.⁸²

⁸⁰ Dixon et al., [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 88-89.

⁸¹ Ibid at 92.

⁸² Ibid at 90-91.

Initiatives that educate everyone that SVA happens to a diverse group of male survivors, as well as diverse groups of female survivors, and can be perpetrated by a person of any gender, is required to achieve change and ensure early intervention to reduce the long tail of trauma that builds up for male survivors over time through delayed helpseeking. Gender-inclusive societal education has great potential to reduce some of the barriers and increase some of the facilitators raised in this study, via:

- *Reducing hegemonic masculine norms in society through initiatives that aim to reduce sexism.*
- *Educating the public about SVA: what it is and its outcomes, including that SVA can happen to a range of diverse men.*
- *Normalising helpseeking behaviours for male survivors.*
- *Providing men with the know-how so they can talk to others about their experience of victimisation, report, and access services.*
- *Helping listeners understand the power of disclosure and how to talk, listen and respond to male survivors in ways that facilitate their helpseeking and access to services.*

Dixon et al. also discuss the importance of how whoever someone discloses to responds to their disclosure and suggests that this type of education aimed at both the general population and service workers could increase the change that “listeners receive male survivors’ disclosure well.”⁸³ The report by Male Survivors Aotearoa also recommended initiatives that aim to promote public awareness of sexual abuse of males commenting that this remained a poorly understood area.⁸⁴

Training for professionals

Dixon et al. also advocate for training of both specialist and non-specialist workers to receive training to understand:⁸⁵

- *That male survivors exist.*
- *SVA, its outcomes and how to respond appropriately to male survivors and how to encourage and maintain survivor engagement with support services.*
- *The diverse range of male survivors and their intersectionality and how to support them effectively.*
- *How to ask men sensitively about their SVA experiences to encourage disclosure. We therefore recommend that service workers who may come into contact with male survivors across their helpseeking process are trained to understand and respond appropriately.*

Huntaway Strategy’s literature review for Te Rōpū Tautoko, Male Survivors Aotearoa to identify material focusing on a kaupapa Māori approach to the support of Māori male survivors of abuse also identified the need for training of professionals on the specific needs of both male survivors generally, and Māori male survivors in particular:⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid at 88.

⁸⁴ Male Survivors of Abuse Aotearoa. (2022). [Living or merely existing? The experiences of male survivors of historical sexual abuse in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#) at 55.

⁸⁵ Dixon et al., [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 91.

⁸⁶ Huntaway Strategy, [Literature review. Te Rōpū Tautoko, Male Survivors Aotearoa](#) at 2.

There is a need for greater and clearer visibility of the prevalence and particular needs of male survivors of abuse in general, and Māori male survivors in particular, within the health, psychological and psychiatric and social work professions, and for targeted training to upskill professionals, staff and volunteers in relevant organisations of the specific needs of male and Māori male survivors of abuse.

Although Huntaway Strategy do not refer to the need for training of justice system professionals such as police, lawyers and the judiciary, in my view these professionals have a similar need for training.

More research

Male Survivors Aotearoa recently completed the first stage of a research study exploring the lived experience of male survivors of sexual abuse in Aotearoa/New Zealand which involved an online anonymous questionnaire and interviews of male survivors of sexual abuse recruited through member organisations.⁸⁷ One of its recommendations was the need for further research exploring agencies' ability to respond "positively and supportively" to male survivors:⁸⁸

While some agencies are reported as responding positively, there are worrying reports of 'support personnel' lacking in an appropriate evidence base, understanding and empathy, even to the extent of triggering previously experienced anxieties. The preparedness and ability of agency personnel in the many areas where disclosure is likely to be attempted is suspect. The ability to practice in supporting survivors using a sound evidence base is a vital ingredient here. This evidence base should be guided by work that has been carried out in promoting 'male friendly' environments, and the manner in which the experience of male survivors of sexual abuse differs from that of females as well as the communication strategies that may prove to be more effective with traumatised males. In service training and undergraduate education programmes need to be examined for their attention to this area.

Male Survivors Aotearoa also made a series of recommendations for further research in relation to strategies that facilitate prevention and disclosure as well as in relation to the specific needs of Māori survivors:⁸⁹

Support further research especially that aimed at identifying strategies that facilitate prevention, disclosure/identification of sexual abuse and interventions with children and adolescents... Prioritising research and development of services for male survivors of sexual abuse who identify as Māori. In particular, research and development that is undertaken by Māori for Māori.

Dixon et al. also identified the need for further research stating:⁹⁰

[T]his research project merely marks the beginning of a research journey with this underresearched population. Future research is needed to better understand the nuanced experiences of specific groups of men and to produce findings that are representative of the population to inform best practice and policy.

⁸⁷ Male Survivors of Abuse Aotearoa, [Living or merely existing? The experiences of male survivors of historical sexual abuse in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#) at 11-13.

⁸⁸ Ibid at 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid at 54.

⁹⁰ Dixon et al., [Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse \(SVA\): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services](#) at 95.

Huntaway Strategy also identified the need for further and “focused research specifically addressing the experiences, needs and recovery of Māori male survivors of abuse”.⁹¹

Moreover, just as the studies discussed in this working paper focussed on an under-researched group, they also relate to adult males (although abuse often occurred in childhood) and there is also a need for further research focussed on boys and young men.

⁹¹ Huntaway Strategy, [Literature review. Te Rōpū Tautoko, Male Survivors Aotearoa](#) at 2.

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