

**Submission
No 9**

**INQUIRY INTO CAPTURING DATA ON FAMILY VIOLENCE
PERPETRATORS IN VICTORIA**

Organisation: YSAS

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Submission Paper

Inquiry into the mechanisms for capturing data on the profile and volume of perpetrators of family violence in Victoria and barriers to achieving a full understanding of this cohort (Inquiry).

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Youth Support and Advocacy Service (**YSAS**) would like to acknowledge the First Nations people of Victoria for their ongoing connection to Country, custodianship and care for the land and waterways on which we live, work and rely. YSAS acknowledges the inherent cultural strength, wisdom and guidance of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their vast experience in caring for the social, cultural and emotional wellbeing of their Community.

We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self determination.

About YSAS

YSAS is Australia’s largest, youth-specific community service organisation. Operating since 1998 as Victoria’s flagship Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs (**AOD**) service, YSAS now employs over 350 skilled staff across 19 sites in metropolitan and regional Victoria. While the prime focus of YSAS remains on effective Youth AOD Treatment and sector leadership, the organisation also has extensive experience in providing young people, their families and communities with services that support improved mental health and improve meaningful community participation.

YSAS Family Violence Program of Work

In 2018, YSAS began a program of work to develop deeper understanding about the complexities, support needs and challenges experienced by young people with co-occurring substance use and family violence experiences.¹ Funded by Family Safety Victoria (FSV), this initial work involved qualitative interviews with 130+ Youth and Youth AOD Workers across Victoria combined with a literature review and a State and National Policy Analysis to understand complexities of family violence on the lives of young people with co-occurring youth substance use experiences. Findings

¹ YSAS (2019) [Reports — YSAS](#)



from this work identified that a significant number of young people accessing Youth AOD services have past and/or current family and intimate partner violence experiences,² and that these experiences directly impact young people's AOD treatment and support.

YSAS's work towards embedding family violence practice into the "bones" of Youth AOD work at the agency has evolved to also include the agency's participation in a variety of family violence focused State Government projects as well as independent research and local initiatives. Recently this has included the completion of seed funded research in partnership with The University of Melbourne and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) to explore the family violence prevention needs of justice involved young women.³ YSAS has also supported the Stronger Sisters Women's Healing Camp led by Bunjilwarra Koorie Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service, which is provided to young Aboriginal women aged between 16-26 years old who have experiences as victim survivors and/or users of family and intimate partner violence.⁴

The YSAS Family Violence program of work has included mapping the knowledge, skills and resources required by Youth AOD Practitioners and Youth AOD services necessary to provide effective, capable and developmentally sensitive support to young people with co-occurring substance use and family violence experiences. It has led to the development of training curriculum and resources which have been piloted and successfully evaluated and are currently being embedded into the practice approaches used by Youth AOD Workers at YSAS.

YSAS Statement on Gender Equality and Family Violence

YSAS stands alongside and acknowledges the strength, agency, and resilience of victim survivors of family violence. YSAS recognises the gendered nature of family violence and significant impact that this violence has on the lives of victim survivors, including the disproportionate impacts on the lives, safety and wellbeing of women and children. It is recognised by YSAS that addressing the gendered drivers of violence and actively working towards gender equality are key actions necessary for preventing and ending family violence. YSAS acknowledges the decades of advocacy, work and research by academics, advocates, victim survivors and the family violence, sexual assault and other sectors to progress gender equality and end family violence.

YSAS adheres to an intersectional lens in its approach to family violence and acknowledges the unique complexities, strengths and risks experienced by those who hold diverse identities. YSAS recognises that due to structural and systemic issues, marginalisation, and other inequities, family violence impacts some communities disproportionately, and that there may be unique barriers and challenges experienced by members of these communities in seeking safety and justice. YSAS is committed to culturally safe, sensitive, self-determined and Community-led approaches to family violence in First Nations Communities and is committed to safe and sensitive responses to all people and all identities.

YSAS holds a vision of "a community where all young people are valued, included and have every opportunity to thrive". YSAS recognises family violence as a direct form of harm experienced by young people, families and communities which jeopardises this vision.

² YSAS (2019) [Reports — YSAS](#)

³ Willoughby et. Al., 2023

⁴ Bunjilwarra, 2022 [Reports — YSAS](#)



YSAS has publicly committed to undertaking meaningful action across all facets of the agency to enhance gender equality within systems, processes, and leadership. This has included a commitment to completing an Intersectional Gender Pay Audit, a formal response to the current and ongoing national family violence crisis⁵ as well as multi-year programs of work to embed of family violence capability across the organisations practice and systems.

YSAS submission to the Inquiry

A note on terminology

YSAS acknowledges that the Inquiry seeks information about mechanisms for capturing data on perpetrators of family violence in Victoria and barriers to achieving a full understanding of this cohort. YSAS uses the term ‘person using violence’ rather than ‘perpetrators of family violence’.

This language is consistent with that used in the 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. In the context of young people who use violence, this language enables effective intervention by reducing stigma associated with the term ‘perpetrator’, which may in turn result in long-term barriers to engagement. We will further elaborate on this as part of the submission below; for now, we have substituted the words ‘family violence perpetrators’ in the questions posed by the Committee, for the words ‘people who use violence’.

1. What data is collected on the profile and volume of people who use violence* in Victoria?
YSAS collects data on people who use violence. Broadly speaking, data is collected differently in the different services provided by YSAS.

YSAS’ service ‘streams’

YSAS delivers services in three main Service Streams, as outlined below:

YSAS Service Stream	Predominant funding body
Youth Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) services	Victorian Department of Health
Youth crime prevention services	Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
Early intervention mental health services	Federal Department of Health and Aged Care, distributed through Primary Health Networks

Each Service Stream has a different data set, reporting data requirements and client information management system. Below is a summary of data in each Service Stream, relating to people who use violence.

Youth AOD Services

Data is collected and accessed by practitioners in direct service delivery roles. A legacy Client Information Management System is utilised for this. The funder reporting requirements do

⁵ [Policy submissions and position statements — YSAS](#)



not require YSAS to record or report data related to family violence (as a youth service we are exempt).

YSAS has decided to retain a data field from a previous data set where practitioners record client “experience of family violence”. This field allows YSAS to capture whether the client has experienced family violence in the past, has an unknown history, is currently experiencing family violence, or has no experience of family violence. This data allows us to gain a very rudimentary understanding of prevalence of family violence issues for clients in this Service Stream, which can be cross referenced with other demographic characteristics to better understand this cohort. However, it is not specific to people who use family violence.

YSAS is a matter of months away from switching to a new Client Information Management System which will provide far greater capacity to record, and therefore analyse, information about family violence within our cohort, including:

- the prevalence of family violence use;
- management of risks; and
- understanding of the characteristics of this cohort.

This new Client Information Management System will assist in obtaining data to support overarching and individual intervention, support and service needs of young people who use violence as well as capture data into the use of family and intimate partner violence against young people.

Our new system will encourage practitioners to record:

- whether the young person has been screened for the use of family violence
- whether there are indications that FV is being used (disclosed or suspected)
- if the answer to this question is yes
 - the type of FV being used by the young person
 - whether the appropriate MARAM has been completed and a safety plan created and uploaded
 - the risk rating
 - whether FVIO is in place

Our new system will also permit the uploading of completed MARAM tools, will have alerts features and in the future, will have the MARAM Perpetrator tool built in.

As above, this information could be cross referenced with other demographic characteristics collected to better understand the cohort of young people using or at risk of using Family Violence.

Crime prevention services

Similarly to our AOD services, our crime prevention services are not required by our funders to collect or report on family violence issues. Also similarly to our AOD services, YSAS has made a decision to configure the relevant client information management system so that practitioners can record:

- whether a young person has been screened for the use of family violence
- whether there are indications that FV is being used (disclosed or suspected)

- if the answer to this question is yes
 - the type of FV being used by the young person
 - whether the appropriate MARAM has been completed and a safety plan created and uploaded
 - the level of family violence risk
 - whether FVIO is in place

The Client Information Management System permits the uploading of completed MARAM tools and has an alert feature.

Early intervention mental health service

The national reporting data set collected by our headspace centres does not include data relating to family violence or young people using or at risk of using family violence.

Other data collection

Family violence information is also collected, by practitioners, through YSAS' incident reporting and management system. This system is utilised by all Service Streams to report and manage incidents internally and to funders as required.

Currently our incident reporting system only collects data in relation to family violence if it relates to an "incident". Incidents are defined as events that occur during service delivery, which means family violence incident reporting are rare.

We are, however, about to make changes to our incident reporting system to also record family violence disclosures. This will allow staff to record if an individual has used family violence and will collect

- Name
- Date of birth
- gender identity
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- details of the disclosure of violence.

Recording and maintaining information about family violence disclosures will assist our workforce in providing immediate and ongoing responses to support the safety needs of young people.

2. How is the current data on the profile and volume of people who use violence* used in Victoria?

Currently the data collected by YSAS in relation to youth use and/or experiences of family and intimate partner violence is used by the organisation in various capacities. For those who access YSAS as part of our service streams, information about current and/or past family and intimate partner violence use/experiences are used to support the intake, assessment, intervention, and service delivery in response to the young person's needs. Use of this data may extend to undertaking risk assessments, develop Safety Plans and other actions in line with the MARAM framework. YSAS is an Information Sharing Entity (ISE) under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and may request to obtain or share information about family violence risk as per these frameworks.

With current limitations in data collection due to legacy systems and lack of funder reporting requirements, as well as a modest data analysis capacity, YSAS has not yet had the capacity to undertake analysis of family violence prevalence data in order to better understand the cohort of young people using family violence.

Following implementation of new Client Information Management System in AOD services and reconfiguring of the YSAS incident reporting system this will be a worthwhile exercise and YSAS will be in a position to contribute to further understanding the needs and characteristics of young people who use/and or experience family violence.

3. What additional data on the profile and volume of people who use violence should be collected in Victoria?

While the Inquiry is focused on data to be collected on the profile and volume of people who use family violence, YSAS believes that collection of data should be informed by a holistic understanding of this cohort and consideration of enhancing services and supports available. In particular, YSAS recommends that:

- (a) an age and developmental lens in addition to trauma-informed and resilience-based models are adopted to further understand the complexity in youth and adolescent family and intimate partner violence contexts;
- (b) consideration is provided to the terminology used to describe *young people's use of violence* and that consistent terminology is adopted in relation to the issue of *youth intimate partner violence*;
- (c) further inquiry and research occurs into the issue of *substance use coercion*. This includes examination into the experiences, risks and characteristics that occur when drugs and alcohol are used to establish or maintain power and control dynamics in youth intimate partner violence contexts; and
- (d) as outlined in part 2, that a minimum family violence data set be established and implemented by Victorian Government Departments.

Using an age and development lens to understand youth and adolescent family and intimate partner violence

There are many complexities in the use and experience of family and intimate partner violence by young people, which are different to use and experience of family and intimate violence by adults.

Youth and adolescence are important developmental periods in the human life cycle, that occur between the ages of 10 to 25 years old.⁶ This period involves many changes across all dimensions of a young person's life,⁷ and is a time of meaning making, consolidating childhood

⁶ Harms, 2010

⁷ Harms, 2010

experiences, and developing hopes, anticipation and the skills required for adulthood.⁸ Exposure to family and intimate partner violence during this time can create many complexities and disruptions to important youth developmental processes and have both immediate and ongoing impacts on the lives of young people, their wellbeing, their basic human rights, freedom, dignity, safety, and their future trajectories.

The forms of family and intimate partner violence experienced by young people can range from individual to ongoing cumulative harms that involve physical, sexual, psychological, financial, emotional forms of abuse, as well as coercion, stalking and other behaviours that threaten their own and other's feelings of safety. The complexity of these issues is also further compounded by the recognition that young people can simultaneously be experiencing and using multiple forms of family violence, including:

- adolescent violence in the home (**AVITH**) by or towards family or care givers
- youth intimate partner violence (YIPV) in their romantic and dating relationships
- family violence used by adults and caregivers.

Significantly, all these experiences – AVITH, YIPV and adult instigated family violence may be occurring at the same time in the life of the young person.

The co-occurrence of multiple forms of violence, abuse and harm is a form of polyvictimisation.⁹ Polyvictimisation recognises that harm:

- can be simultaneous and cumulative;
- rarely occurs in single isolated incidents; and
- can have interrelated and overlapping consequences.

In addition to the polyvictimisation that can occur in incidents of AVITH, YIPV and family violence – young people may also be experiencing social harms such as neighbourhood violence and/or bullying both online and in settings such as school or social groups.¹⁰

The intersections of age and youth and adolescent development create unique and complex support, care and intervention needs as well as presentations in the ways in which these harms are enacted, expressed, and recovered by young people. In response to the polyvictimisation, trauma and harm caused by family and intimate partner violence, young people may experience a range of potential impacts such as dysregulated emotions, low self-esteem, shame, anger, anxiety, depression, substance use and disconnection from supports such as school and employment¹¹.

In situations of complex trauma and polyvictimisation, young people may also develop presentations such as impulsivity, disassociation, reactive aggression, relational problems, emotional numbing, and insensitivity to others' emotions.¹² Youth experiences of family

⁸ Lombard, 2013

⁹ Price-Robertson et. Al., 2013; Wolfe, 2018;

¹⁰ Price-Robertson et. Al. 2013

¹¹ Hay, 2000; Batchelor, 2005; Heimer & De Coster, 1999; Howard & Qiwang, 2003; Cleveland et al., 2003; Towns & Scott, 2013; Ussher, 2010; Kerrig & Becker, 2016, 2012; YSAS, 2022 Wolfe; 2018

¹² Kerig & Becker, 2016, 2012

violence and polyvictimisation may extend to engaging in behaviours such as running away from home, self-harming and the emergence of youth mental health issues and disordered eating.¹³ Young people may also develop an excessive need for control in relationships¹⁴ and at times may have normalised the use of power, control and abuse they have experienced in their relationships, believing this to be acceptable.

YSAS feel it important to consider young people's behaviours in the context of past and/or current family violence, other forms of polyvictimisation,¹⁵ and the strategies and behaviours that young people have developed as ways of coping and surviving their experiences. We also recognise that young people are at risk of being misidentified as the primary aggressor in situations of family violence. This may occur when young people's dual experiences as current and/or past victim survivors are not identified or considered in their use of violence - such as in protection of other family members during incidents of adult-instigated family violence. YSAS' approach to young people's use of violence centre understandings on the young person's age and developmental stage as well as adopting trauma informed and resilience geared lenses with recognition of young people's ability and capacity to change, learn and be supported in transitioning to lives free from violence.

It is our recommendation that and age and developmental lens in addition to trauma-informed and resilience-based models are adopted to further understand the complexity in youth and adolescent family and intimate partner violence contexts.

Using person-centred language which recognises the nuance and complexity of issues pertaining to young people's use of family and intimate partner violence.

The way in which we define and understand young people and family violence requires a recognition of the nuance and complexity of these issues. Young people are recognised as victim survivors of family and intimate partner violence in their own right.¹⁶

It is recognized by YSAS that there is a lack of standard nomenclature across Australia regarding the terminology used to describe youth specific experiences and/or use of family and intimate partner violence.¹⁷ The lack of the standard operational definitions can be challenging for both young people and service providers, due to lack of commonly accepted language to identify and describe their observations and experiences.¹⁸ This is particularly relevant in relation to the issues of power, control and violence that emerge in young people's intimate partner and romantic relationships,¹⁹ which can be referred to in a variety of ways such as 'youth and intimate partner violence' and 'teen dating violence'.²⁰ At YSAS, our

¹³ Hay, 2000; Batchelor, 2005; Heimer & De Coster, 1999; Howard & Qiwang, 2003; Cleveland et al., 2003; Towns & Scott, 2013; Ussher, 2010; Kerrig & Becker, 2016, 2012; YSAS, 2020; Burton et. Al., 2010; Chesney-Lind, Sheldon (2004); Chung (2007) Gervais et. Al., (2013)

¹⁴Gallihier & Bentley, (2010) Gottzen, (2019) Daly et. Al. (2021)

¹⁵ Price-Robertson et. al., 2013

¹⁶ RCFV, 2016

¹⁷ Johnston, Gordon & Flynn, 2024;

¹⁸ Johnston, Flynn & Gordon, 2022; Lombard, 2013;

¹⁹ Johnston, Flynn & Gordon, 2022;

²⁰ Johnston, Flynn & Gordon, 2022

preferred terminology to describe the dynamics of power, control and violence in youth romantic relationships is “youth intimate partner violence”.

YSAS does not support the use the term ‘perpetrator’ to describe young people who use family or intimate partner violence. The preferred term is ‘young person who uses... [family/intimate partner and/or adolescent violence in the home]’.

YSAS’s use of the term ‘young person who uses violence’ is in recognition that youth is a critical intervention point in the trajectories of young people’s lives.²¹ Young people have important capacity and ability to change through intervention, connection to supports and opportunities to learn, practice and enact important developmental skills that they may not have had opportunities to obtain prior due to adverse life experiences, trauma, disadvantage or other disruptions. These skills may be directly connected to their use of violence and include secure attachment to others²², emotional regulation, impulse control, self-confidence, conflict resolution, establishing and maintain boundaries, problem solving, and understanding of gender equality, consent, and healthy masculinities²³. Furthermore, young people may require support in developing the skills to engage in accountability and processing their feelings of shame²⁴ – important components of adult family violence prevention models.

Our approaches at YSAS recognise the impacts of stigma and labelling on the lives of young people and the ways in which such can create internal and external barriers. We recognise the severe and serious impacts of family and intimate partner violence, but also seek to ensure that young people’s capacity for growth and change is acknowledged.

It is our recommendation that consideration is provided to the terminology used to describe young people’s use of violence and that consistent terminology is adopted in relation to the issue of youth intimate partner violence.

Substance use coercion: the use of drugs and alcohol as a tactic of power and control in youth intimate partner violence contexts.

At YSAS, we have undertaken a multi-year body of work to establish and build family violence capacity and capability across our workforce, programs, and youth-focused models of service delivery. It has become apparent through this work that there are unique dynamics of family and intimate partner violence, power and control that relate to the use of drugs and alcohol by young people. Our examination of this issue has highlighted that this is an important area of inquiry that is largely absent from the broader Australian and international family violence discourses, empirical evidence base, practice frameworks and service delivery models.

Young people may use substances such as drugs and alcohol as ways of coping and surviving their experiences of family and intimate partner violence.²⁵ There is an established link between experiences of family and intimate partner violence and youth use of drugs and

²¹ Boxall, Pooley, Lawler (2021)

²² Gao et. Al., 2021

²³ Schuster, 2021; Gottzen, 2019

²⁴ Schuster, 2021; Gottzen, 2019

²⁵ YSAS, 2020 <http://www.ysas.org.au/downloads>

alcohol.²⁶ Conversely, however, drugs and alcohol may be used as ways to establish and maintain power and control dynamics in youth intimate partner violence relationships and other exploitative dynamics – an issue referred to as Substance Use Coercion²⁷.

YSAS’s work in this area has identified multiple ways in which substance use coercion can be used as a mechanism of power and control. As an example,²⁸ users of intimate partner violence introduce youth victim survivors to substances and deliberately rapidly escalate the use to encourage dependence. Other issues identified include blocking victim survivors’ access to harm minimisation strategies (such as safe injecting) creating reliance on the user of violence to administer substances. This creates both immediate and ongoing safety and wellbeing risks such as deliberate overdose (which can be life threatening) and risk of exposure to blood borne viruses such as Hepatitis C.

Other issues we have identified include deliberate sedation of youth victim survivors (limiting their ability to seek support), drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault, withholding prescription medication, and withholding substances to prompt drug withdrawal (which can be painful and has health implications)²⁹. In our work at YSAS we have also identified situations where youth victim survivors’ access to services have been restricted by users of violence, attempts to stalk whilst in treatment and the deliberate sabotage of treatment and recovery³⁰.

The issue of substance use coercion, particularly from a youth context, appears to be under-researched in Australia and more widely internationally. This issue has important implications for youth understandings of family violence, as well as broader implications for harm minimisation. At YSAS we have been continuing to build our understanding of the issue of substance use coercion, gather evidence of its dynamics, and establish identification and responses in our YSAS family violence capability building body of work. Further investment into researching this issue may directly contribute to not only the evidence base regarding youth victim survivor support needs, but also the characteristics, dynamics and tactics used by those who use substance use coercion as a form of family and intimate partner violence.

It is our recommendation that investment occurs to undertake further inquiry and research into the issue of substance use coercion, particularly from a youth perspective.

Minimum family violence dataset

YSAS notes that there is currently no funder requirement to report on family violence issues. YSAS believes that it is a missed opportunity where mandatory funder driven reporting requirements do not include critical information such as that discussed in this paper.

Given there are already multiple agencies and entities across multiple sectors and Government departments with obligations and responsibilities under the MARAM framework, it is recommended that a minimum family violence data set also be established

²⁶ Humphreys et. Al. 2022; Strauss et. Al. 2018

²⁷ Gadd et. Al., (2019); Phillips et. Al. (2020) Strauss et. Al., (2018)

²⁸ YSAS, 2020

²⁹ YSAS 2020

³⁰ YSAS 2020

and implemented by Victorian Government Departments. Requiring Victorian Government funded health and community services to collect and report on the same information related to family violence and users of family violence will drive a better understanding of this cohort.

Conclusion

Family violence and violence against women is a public health crisis, and should be treated as such, with investment in evidence-informed interventions, supports and services. YSAS recognises the importance of clear, consistent information about use of violence to support this, and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this conversation.

As a specialist youth-focused community services organisation, YSAS' submission has focused on young people's experiences in both the use and experience of family and intimate partner violence. Data recording, reporting and analysis provide an important opportunity to gain further understanding into the use and/or experiences of violence by young people, and in particular young men. Like other agencies, we have used this information at an organisational level to help identify and address client needs. At a sector level, this information can shape policies and programs, and provide opportunities for change, healing and intervention. It is a missed opportunity that this information is not currently collected through funder reporting processes, other than in the context of managing an incident.

YSAS reiterates the call for a data collection approach which is sensitive to the unique needs of young people.

- Young people's experiences of family and intimate partner violence are complex, unique and clearly distinct to that of a child or an adult. Adopting an age and developmental lens ensures that data collection contributes to a holistic understanding of use and/or experience of violence within this cohort, and in turn informs **interventions, supports and services that are age and developmentally appropriate**.
- Adolescence is a critical intervention point in a person's life. Effective and appropriate intervention at this time can provide opportunities to establish and maintain lifelong trajectories that are free from violence and abuse. Young people deserve clear, consistent terminology which describes their experiences without causing stigma and shame, and focuses on their capability to change and grow.

Use and/or experience of family and intimate partner violence within this cohort may intersect with other issues. In particular, YSAS identifies substance use coercion as a serious issue resulting from the intersections of youth substance use with family and intimate partner violence. We recommend investment in research to gain a deeper understanding of this issue including examination of the tactics and dynamics of power and control used in substance use coercion contexts, and the recovery, safety, and support needs of youth victim survivors. Youth-focused inquiry into substance use coercion also holds the potential to uncover further information about the characteristics of those who use this form of abuse and violence.

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