



Evaluation summary.

Family violence in family services.

Promoting the safety, stability and development of vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Uniting

In recent years family services staff have observed increasing complexity and severity of family violence among the families they support. We undertook an evaluation to better understand how family violence presents in this context, and how the system can more effectively respond.

This summary highlights key findings, strengths in practice, and recommendations to strengthen family violence responses within family services.

Why this evaluation matters.

Family services teams are often a first point of contact for families experiencing complex, and often hidden, forms of family violence. This evaluation aimed to determine:

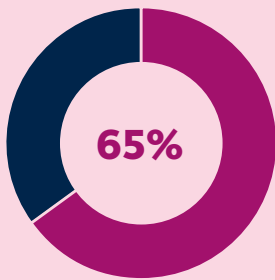
- The current frequency and severity of family violence within Uniting's family services programs
- The most common type of family violence identified
- Which practices and supports are working well, and what needs to improve.

Methodology.

A mixed-method approach was used in this evaluation including a voluntary survey of 72 practitioners and team leaders (representing 32% of our workforce), 2 focus groups, and 3 case studies including one from a consumer perspective.

What we found.

Family violence is prevalent, but family services play a key role in reducing risk



65% of cases involve family violence, often at high-risk levels when services begin

Risk is significantly reduced by case closure, with no cases remaining at the highest level, showing the positive impact of family services.

Supportive leadership makes a difference

Practitioners identified strong team leadership and senior support as critical in navigating complex family violence cases.

“The support I get from my team leader. She is there every step of the way so I am not holding risk on my own.”
– Survey respondent

Practitioners are confident but need more practical training

- All staff felt confident in applying MARAM risk assessments
- However, they identified a need for more practical training, especially around documentation and completing MARAMs with consumers

“You can get all the information online, but sometimes it doesn’t sink in as much as if you talk to people and if you discuss it.”
– Focus group participant

Emotional abuse and coercive control are most common

The most frequently reported forms of family violence are:

- Emotional abuse
- Controlling behaviours
- Coercive control.

“What I’ve been seeing a lot recently is the coercive control and emotional abuse increasing post-separation, and especially around where there’s access with children. And that emotional abuse is very subtle.”
– Focus group participant

System challenges create risk

Practitioners raised concerns about:

- Referral quality from external referring agencies (e.g. missing or incorrect information)
- Inconsistent responses from external systems (e.g. breaches of intervention orders not followed up)
- Differing risk assessments between Family Services and Child Protection.

“When clients present with high family violence concerns the support is very reactive rather than proactive.”
– Survey respondent

“Some of the questions that get asked throughout the referral process really should highlight what’s actually happening for the family, but quite often a lot of that is missed.”
– Focus group participant

Strong foundations in practice

- Staff demonstrated deep knowledge, skill, and innovation in trauma-informed, collaborative practice, often under difficult conditions
- Internal and external collaboration was highlighted as a strength, but also as an area needing further structure and support

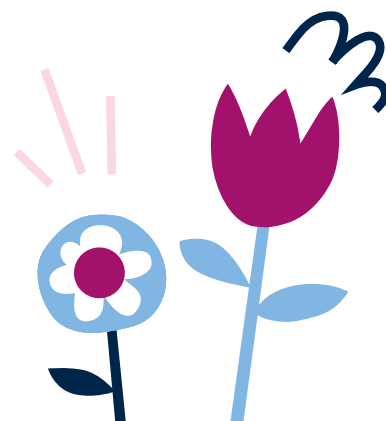
Key themes, challenges and recommendations.

1. System and interagency challenges	Inconsistent referrals from external referring agencies where families are experiencing family violence	• Conduct deeper analysis of referral data • Share findings with external referring agencies and sector leaders
2. Incidence and risk in family violence cases	Inaccurate or incomplete recording of family violence data	• Provide further training in recording family violence data • Improve systems for documenting risk and family violence concerns
3. Workforce capability	Staff need more practical family violence training Collaboration across services needs to strengthen	• Deliver in-person training on MARAM and FVISS • Strengthen internal and external collaboration
4. Explore tailored responses for adolescents using and/or experiencing family violence	Services are not always meeting the needs of adolescents	• Explore tailored responses for adolescent family violence • Actively include young people's voices in planning and assessment

Building on strengths to improve family violence responses.

This evaluation shows that family violence is not only widespread in family services, but that meaningful progress is being made in reducing risk and supporting families. The findings point to areas where training, interagency processes, and child-focused approaches can be strengthened.

By implementing these recommendations, Uniting and our partners can ensure family services continue to evolve into a more coordinated, child-centred, and evidence-informed response system.



Acknowledgements.

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For more information, contact Uniting's Evaluation and Policy Team via polycysupport@vt.uniting.org