



Framing Best Practice: National standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault through education.

A summary from the research report

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Background

The National Standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault through education (hereafter, Standards) were developed by a research team led by Associate Professor Moira Carmody from the Social Justice Social Change Research Centre UWS, in a collaborative partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). Funding for the

You know we're actually talking about cultural change. We're talking about changing something that is really engrained ... we need to do that in the context of ... how we construct gender identity. (Interview participant)

work was provided by the Federal Office for the Status of Women to the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV). In supporting this project the Australian Federal government has shown a commitment to reducing sexual assault in the Australian community.

What is 'sexual assault prevention education'?

Sexual assault prevention education programs aim to stop sexual assault from occurring. This is *primary* prevention and is directed at whole population groups (for example, school groups or vocational groups). In Australia, contemporary forms of sexual assault prevention education have evolved from feminist community organisations raising awareness about

The broader kind of movement behind primary prevention is to get cracking, to be seen as something to really try if we're really interested in social change and that's something that would've been incredibly difficult to argue and advocate for three years ago. (Interview Participant)

violence against women. The majority have been delivered in school settings. More recently, programs are being implemented in sporting, tertiary educational and other community settings.

Why have standards for sexual assault prevention education?

In Australia there has been no national policy approach on how prevention programs should be assessed and funded. There has also been limited opportunity for those doing prevention work to learn from, and network with, each other. The Standards provide a tool which can be used to make informed judgements about funding and effective program development. During the course of this project,

Often, sexual assault counsellors or DV outreach workers take a particular interest in prevention and with the support of their manager or whatever, develops a project and gets funding from here or there or wherever they can. (Interview participant)

prevention educators from across Australia, indicated a readiness and willingness to work within national practice standards.

How were the Standards developed?

The research team developed the Standards through conducting a critical review of international and local literature that demonstrated the evidence for best practice in gender violence prevention education. Consultation was undertaken with workers in the prevention field to ensure the standards are relevant and achievable. This included interviews with 32 program providers from across Australia and feedback from delegates during a two day roundtable in December 2008.



Six National Standards for effective sexual assault prevention education

Standard 1: Using coherent conceptual approaches to program design

Rationale

The theoretical or conceptual approach used in a program provides the basis for understanding why sexual violence occurs and the prevention pathway that should be used to reduce sexual violence. There are a range of different conceptual approaches to program design. Whatever approach is taken, a gender analysis of sexual assault is foundational to any program.

Objective

To articulate the theoretical approach upon which the program is based, demonstrating a clear rationale and research evidence relevant to the target population.

Indicators

- A quality program would include a coherent articulation of one or more recognised theoretical concepts relevant to the purposes of sexual assault prevention.
- Theoretical approach will include an understanding of the gendered nature of society and the over representation of men among perpetrators of sexual violence.
- Theoretical approaches should support achievement of positive behaviours in relationships, as well as responsibility for behaviour.

Standard 2: Demonstrating the use of a theory of change

Rationale

Sexual assault prevention programs are to be based on models of attitude change, skills development and behavioural change. Theories of change are widespread in the fields of educational and social psychology, addressing individuals, groups, communities and society. Much has been learned about how to facilitate individual behavioural change through education and it is known that different interventions can lead to different changes in the target population. Programs should demonstrate a conceptual link between the activities being undertaken and the proposed change outcomes of these activities.

Objective

To maximise consistency between program aims and the attitude change, skills development, or behaviour change strategies used in programs.

Indicators

- An understanding of the social, cultural and individual factors that may result in sexual assault occurring.
- Articulation of the program's role in working towards primary prevention.
- Articulation of the behaviour change theory models influencing the program and the logical relationship with

addressing the factors identified with the occurrence of sexual assault.

- Understanding of the differences between attitude change, skill and behaviour change and their impact on achieving primary prevention.

Standard 3: Undertaking inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice

Rationale

All sexual assault prevention education programs portray the nature of the violence problem, and promote notions about the appropriate means to achieve change. The specifics of these notions and means are culturally-based. Culture includes recognising differences based on ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual diversity for example. Program developers need to be aware of the culturally-based elements of programs and strive to make programs inclusive, relevant and sensitive for all participating population groups. Programs which are developed for one population group may not be suitable for other groups without meaningful adjustment.

Objective

To ensure the specific needs of different and significant population groups are central to building primary prevention models and programs.

Indicators

- Explicit discussion and description about the assumptions within a program which are inherent at both surface and deep structure levels.
- Development of an initial profile of the target group.
- Consultation with mentors, community leaders or representatives from the population group leading to a consideration of the specific content needs that are relevant to the population group. This may lead to surface and/or deep structure changes.
- Ensuring the specific needs of population groups are embedded in the theoretical approach, theory of change, content and delivery, evaluation, and the training and development of prevention programs and educators.
- Development of distinct educational programs for 'selective interventions' with at risk groups.
- Ensure evaluation methods specifically support collection of data about the degree to which the specific program design met the needs of the target population group.

Standard 4: Undertaking comprehensive program development and delivery

Rationale

Sexual assault prevention education programs incorporate decisions about **who** the program is targeted at and delivered by; **what** will be the specific activities and structure of the program; **where** the program will be delivered to reach the target group; **when** the program will be run, and over what period. These decisions are sometimes based on organisational purpose, philosophy and resources.

Program design needs to address the indicators below and demonstrate how research literature and practice knowledge have informed program design decisions.

Objective

To develop programs based on best practice research evidence from international and local literature, and practice knowledge.

Indicators

- Education activities are linked to theory of change and key concepts.
- Program activities are sufficiently diverse and engaging to achieve educational outcomes.
- Decisions regarding duration and intensity of programs to be made explicit.
- Decisions regarding target populations of programs are made explicit.
- Rationale provided for decisions regarding settings of programs.
- Mechanisms for addressing the needs of survivors of sexual assault are provided in the program.
- Rationale for decisions regarding gender of participants and facilitators is provided.
- Discussion of how diversity is addressed by the program is provided.
- Rationale for decisions regarding staffing of program is provided.
- Understanding of context and engaging key people in the setting where a program will be conducted, including building partnerships and consultation on local needs, is demonstrated.
- Rationale provided for the context of the program and how this may affect the program's delivery and effectiveness.
- Perceived benefits or impacts of program adaptation are demonstrated.

Standard 5: Using effective evaluation strategies

Rationale

Evaluation is a tool for learning and a process supporting accountability. There is a range of evaluation strategies that can be used depending on the information sought. Program evaluation is a specific skill set and the development of effective evaluation strategies may require consultation with people with specific expertise in this area.

Objective

To collect adequate data that indicates the effectiveness of a program in achieving its stated objectives, leads to recommendations for refinement and/or future rollout, and gauges its impact on participants and contribution to primary prevention.

Indicators

- Articulation of clear and realistic processes and intended program outcomes to be evaluated.
- Demonstration of how evaluation is built into program design.
- Discussion of evaluation approaches to be used and rationale for use is evident.
- Provision of a strategy for long term evaluation follow-up, or which identifies barriers to such a strategy, is documented.
- Consideration of contextual matters that may influence evaluation outcome is documented.
- Identification of methods to be used to disseminate findings beyond reporting to funding bodies is documented.

Standard 6: Supporting thorough training and professional development of educators

Rationale

The success or otherwise of a particular program, and the sustainability of prevention education in a community, is enhanced by the knowledge, skills and stance of educators. These educators need resources and support specific to their prevention role.

Objective

To ensure sexual assault prevention education programs are delivered by well prepared and supported professionals or peer educators.

Indicators

- Programs need to identify how educators will be resourced with knowledge of sexual assault including a gender analysis, knowledge and skills to address survivors of sexual assault and how to access support services, and knowledge of prevention education theories and practices.
- Programs need to demonstrate how educators will access skills based training to prepare educators to deliver prevention programs, where the facilitators do not already have these skills.
- Training provided to educators needs to include both education skills and moral/ethical stance to work.
- Programs using peer educators need to provide a rationale for their use, adequate training and methods for ongoing support.
- Programs need to demonstrate their rationale for choice of facilitator and the facilitator's qualifications and experience relevant to program delivery.
- Programs delivered by teachers need to address their specific needs and articulate methods to work in partnership with community-based violence prevention workers.
- Programs need to demonstrate ongoing supervision of workers and attention to their safety.
- Programs need to encourage networking with other educators doing similar work, or with mentors.



Primary prevention of sexual assault through education in Australia: a brief overview

The project identified fewer than 30 sexual assault primary prevention education (SAPE) programs in Australia. Twenty three were mapped. The programs used a range of pedagogical approaches and some were evidence based. Below is an overview of the programs in relation to the Standards.

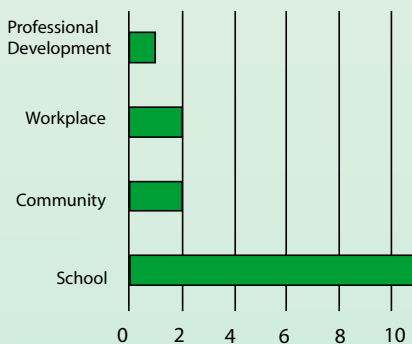
Conceptual approaches: Most SAPE programs have been developed in women's health, youth and sexual assault services. Such programs are usually informed by feminist or pro-feminist frameworks in approaching the problem of sexual violence prevention. A number of other conceptual approaches underpinned programs including values-based programs, social learning and social norms approaches, and human rights.

Theories of change: All SAPE programs in Australia focus on awareness raising and attitude change; for example providing statistics and definitions, and doing activities such as 'debunking rape myths'. Just over half of the programs engage in skills building activities such as teaching negotiation skills and doing bystander training. Fewer programs have a framework which seeks to embed these into behaviour change. There is little evidence that attitude change alone is a reliable mechanism for behaviour change. The challenge of how to bring about behaviour change through such programs is an important issue for debate in the wake of distributing the Standards.

Inclusive and culturally sensitive practice: While it is clear that educators are respectful of diversity during program facilitation and employ flexibility of method to accommodate different needs in the group, there was limited evidence of SAPE programs engaging meaningfully with, and responding appropriately to, cultural diversity. This is an area of many unresolved challenges.

Program development and delivery: SAPE programs in Australia target adolescents through to adults. Most programs are delivered in secondary schools. The duration and intensity of school based SAPE programs is restricted by curriculum and time constraints. A few programs are delivered in other settings such as in tertiary institutions, youth centres and to adults in their workplaces e.g programs in football codes. Programs in these environments present their own restrictions. SAPE programs must strive to be flexible and effective.

Location of Program Delivery



educators received 'training' or mentoring to prepare for the primary prevention education; however this training is often minimal both in terms of duration and pedagogical approach used.

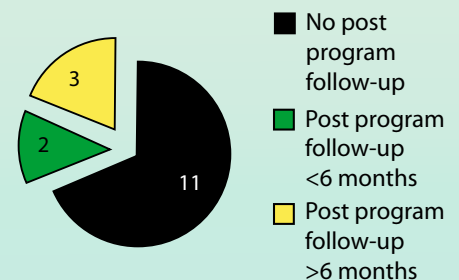
Benefits of the Standards

To date, many SAPE providers have operated in isolation with little structure or policy support to guide their efforts. This research project, with the Standards, comes at a time when the Australian sexual assault prevention education field is ready to progress best and evidence based practice prevention education. The Standards aim to give guidance to program providers and to assist policy makers to making decisions about practice and SAPE funding. Specifically, the Standards will assist educators to know how effective their prevention education is in working towards behavioural and cultural change.

Effective evaluation: Evaluation of the SAPE programs is extremely variable in range and quality. Program coordinators generally recognise the need for rigorous evaluation however this is hampered by resource and knowledge limitations. Some programs built evaluation into program design ensuring significant evaluation as show in the graph below.

Professional development of educators: SAPE programs are most commonly delivered by human services professionals. Many have a background in tertiary violence prevention. Some programs use peer education or school teachers to deliver program elements. Most program

Post Program follow-up



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We were kind of doing it ... on top of our jobs, which is what's been happening with prevention across Australia and everywhere. (Interview participant)

