

Violence against women: Levels of prevention

Initiatives to prevent violence against women (PVAW) can be undertaken at three levels of prevention: tertiary, secondary and primary prevention. All of these levels of prevention are vital in our work to redress violence against women. While exact definitions for the three levels of prevention vary across the literature, a summary of the levels of prevention is provided below.

Tertiary prevention

- Often referred to as general ‘intervention’ or ‘tertiary response’
- Involve long-term strategies after violence has occurred to deal with the impact
- Provision of support and treatment to women and their children who are affected by violence, or to men who use violence

Example: Case management and counselling support for a woman who is experiencing intimate partner violence.

Secondary prevention

- Often referred to as ‘early intervention’
- Involves immediate responses after violence has occurred, to deal with the short-term consequences
- Often targeted at individuals and groups who are at greater risk of perpetrating violence or being subjected to further violence

Example: Professionals who may encounter women experiencing violence, using the Family Violence Common Risk Assessment (CRAF) tool to support early intervention processes and support women at risk of further violence.

Primary prevention

- Often referred to as ‘preventing violence before it occurs’
- Activities work to redress the causes of VAW in order to prevent it from happening in the first place
- Strategies can be universal (whole population) or selective/targeted (tailored to specific groups that are at higher risk of experiencing or inflicting violence)
- Seeks to redress the socio-cultural and structural determinants of VAW – i.e. unequal power relations between women and men, and rigid gender roles and stereotypes¹

Example: An organisation working to support gender equity by undertaking gender responsive budgeting processes within their agency.

While classification of a PVAW strategy into solely one of these three levels of prevention is not always possible, in general we can think of primary prevention strategies as those that take place before violence has occurred, and that work to redress the root causes of violence against women. Both *Preventing Violence Together* and the *United* project are primary prevention initiatives and seek to prevent violence against women and their children from occurring in the first place.

¹ VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing violence before it occurs: a framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*, VicHealth, Melbourne.