

**Understanding the Impact of the Family
Violence Interagency Response System
(FVIARS) on Women's Refuge Clients: An
Exploratory Study**

Prepared for
The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, Inc

by

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Contents

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | Approach | 2 |
| 3 | Women’s Refuge staff perceptions and experiences of the FVIARS process | 5 |
| 3.1 | Negative perceptions and experiences | 5 |
| | Compromised ability to empower victims of family violence | 5 |
| | Compromised ability to advocate for women | 6 |
| | Refuges perceived to collude with government agencies | 7 |
| 3.2 | Positive outcomes of the FVIARS process | 8 |
| | Closer working relationships between Refuges and key stakeholders..... | 8 |
| | Improved communication and information sharing between key stakeholders | 9 |
| | Building trust and respect between key stakeholders | 9 |
| 4 | The impact of state intervention on women who make a family violence notification..... | 10 |
| 4.1 | Negative outcomes associated with state intervention | 10 |
| | Lack of control throughout the process..... | 11 |
| | Child, Youth and Family involvement | 11 |
| | Unexpected events after seeking help..... | 12 |
| | Breaches of confidentiality by state agencies | 13 |
| | Multiple agency involvement | 14 |
| 4.2 | Positive outcomes associated with state intervention..... | 15 |
| | Police support..... | 15 |
| | Support from Family Safety Team | 16 |
| | Other considerations | 16 |
| 5 | Critical success factors | 17 |
| | Critical success factor 1: Women Refuge representatives possess a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in reference to FVIARS | 17 |
| | Critical success factor 2: Targeted FVIARS membership | 17 |
| | Critical success factor 3: A collaborative partnership between FVIARS members... .. | 18 |
| | Critical success factor 4: Adequate resourcing | 18 |

1 Introduction

The Family Violence Interagency Response System (FVIARS) is an interagency initiative designed to effectively manage cases of family violence reported to the New Zealand Police. The FVIARS model was introduced nationally in December 2006 and operates throughout New Zealand.

A key objective of FVIARS is to enable collaborative, coordinated interagency responses to family violence. A key element of the model is regular interagency meetings which aim to assess risk level of reported cases of family violence, plan responses and monitor cases. A first tier FVIARS response generally involves the three core agencies, Child, Youth and Family (CYF), the New Zealand Police and local members the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Inc, who meet in order to review family violence incidents (Police Family Violence Investigation Report, Pol FVIR) and address the needs of individual cases and planning responses. The second tier response is broader and involves a wider range of agencies, community and whānau in the process.

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges has expressed concern about the FVIARS process and its potential negative impacts. Specifically, the National Collective has been concerned that:

- FVIARS can discourage women from contacting the Police about a family violence incident; and
- Independent Women's Refuge's advocacy role may be compromised through a perceived close association between Women's Refuge, the Police and CYF.

Arising from these concerns, National Office commissioned Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation to explore how family violence notifications may have impacted on women. To this end, National Office commissioned a series of focus groups and interviews with managers of the participating centres. Further, in an effort to contextualise women's responses, the National Office asked that findings from the current study be compared to focus group interview data obtained from Women's Refuge client focus groups carried out in 2006.

2 Approach

The study employed a combination of focus groups and semi-structured small and group interviews. Focus groups were held with Women's Refuge clients and interviews were carried out with Refuge staff.

Women's Refuge Client Focus Groups

A series of focus groups with Women's Refuge clients were carried out to explore the impact, both negative and positive, of making a family violence notification. Specifically, the current study sought to determine whether clients' experiences of making a family violence notification had improved with the advent of FVIARS.

Focus groups fell into two time periods to allow a comparison of the impact of a family violence notification and the way in which Police and other state agency responses may have changed over time.

The first series of focus groups were held in 2006. Two focus groups were conducted at two independent Women's Refuges in the North Island. The participants of both focus groups were Women's Refuge clients. One focus group comprised of seven women and the second had two participants. No demographic information was collected for the participants from 2006 focus groups. The focus groups were exploratory in nature and allowed the women to tell of their experiences in dealing with state agencies following family violence incident(s). With participants' consent each of the focus groups were video recorded. Both focus groups lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours.

The second series of focus groups were held in November and December 2011. In total two focus groups with Women's Refuge clients were conducted at two independent Women's Refuges in the North Island. One focus group had four participants and the second had six.

The focus groups provided an open group discussion allowing women to detail what happened after they sought help for a family violence situation and whether or not they would notify the police should a family violence incident occur in the future. The focus groups were exploratory in nature and aimed to examine how state intervention impacted on women and how Refuge client's experiences had changed since the implementation of FVIARS in December 2006. With participants consent, each of the focus groups were audio recorded. Focus groups ranged between 1.5 and two hours.

Table 1 Client Focus Group Participants (n = 18)

| Characteristics | 2006 Focus Groups (2 focus groups) | Percentage | 2011 Focus Groups (3 focus groups) | Percentage |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | | n | % |
| Female | 9 | 100% | 9 | 100% |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | |
| < 20 | - | - | - | |
| 20 - 29 | - | - | 1 | 9% |
| 30 – 39 | - | - | 5 | 64% |
| 40 -59 | - | - | 3 | 27% |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | | | |
| NZ European | - | - | 5 | 45% |
| NZ Māori | - | - | 5 | 45% |
| Pacific | - | - | 1 | 9% |
| <i>Employment status</i> | | | | |
| Employed | - | - | 1 | 9% |
| Homemaker | - | - | 1 | 9% |
| Beneficiary | - | - | 7 | 64% |
| Student | - | - | 2 | 18% |

Women’s Refuge workshop and interviews

A workshop and a series of interviews with Women’s Refuge managers were carried out to explore their experiences of FVIARS. One representative from five independent Women’s Refuges and two national staff members participated in a half-day FVIARS-focused workshop in July 2011. Next, between November 2011 and March 2012 interviews with Refuge staff were conducted at three independent Women’s Refuges. In total, seven managers were interviewed across three independent Refuges. In comparison to the client focus groups, the workshop and staff interviews explicitly focused on staff perspectives and experiences with the FVIARS process; specifically the processes’ strengths and weaknesses, how the process has impacted on clients and staff suggestions for ways in which FVIARS might be improved. Interviews took approximately one to two and a half hours each.

Analysis

Interview data was analysed to locate patterns and themes relating to the research objectives and wider contextual issues. A process of constant comparative analysis was used throughout the lifespan of the research which meant comparing:

- different individual client and staff perspectives, and
- data from different points in time.

In practice, this means that codes were created within an outcomes framework. Throughout fieldwork, information was defined and categorised through a continual review of interviews, fieldwork notes and regular discussions/fieldwork reviews with the research team. As a result, emerging patterns were continually tested through the interview and observation process as well as the exploration of new questions that arose in the preceding interviews. This process of constant comparative analysis also provided an opportunity to explore, at greater depth, reasons underlying emerging patterns.

Ethical considerations

Participants in the 2011 staff interviews and client focus groups received a koha of \$25 in acknowledgement of their time and contribution. Because the history of trauma, a staff member was present during each of the client focus groups in case additional and timely support was required. Names and identifying characteristics have been changed to ensure participant anonymity.

3 Women's Refuge staff perceptions and experiences of the FVIARS process

Participating independent Women's Refuges often differed considerably in their perceptions and experiences with the FVIARS process and in regards to their relationship with the police and CYF. Differences in perceptions were found to arise out of different interpretations of client empowerment and the role of Women's Refuge. This section reviews the impact of these differing interpretations within an exploration of negative and positive perceptions and experiences with FVIARS.

3.1 Negative perceptions and experiences

Refuges that were less likely to regard FVIARS positively, reported feeling compromised in their ability to advocate on behalf of their clients and to ensure that women are empowered to make their own decisions.

Compromised ability to empower victims of family violence

Refuges that were less likely to positively regard FVIARS described a clash between their Refuge's commitment to empowering women in their own personal journey and the police's desire to protect women by implementing interventions that may inadvertently disempower them. For instance, those committed to the client's empowerment stressed the need for a service model that provides women (clients) with the right to wholly decide the course of action she would like to take, such as deciding to reject or secure a protection order.

It's the Police's job to get a Protection Order. This is not Women's Refuge role. It should always be the wahine's decision. We need to talk to her, to let her know it is her decision. You don't just give one choice (Women's Refuge staff member)

The client knows what is best for her own safety. I will talk with the clients and look at all the options available. She can chose which one best suits her needs (Women's Refuge staff member)

In contrast, some other Refuges described adopting a type of service model that, in an effort to protect the woman and child(ren), limit the client's wishes in order to ensure that the woman is given the greatest protection possible under the law. For example, Women's Refuges working with the police to secure a protection order on the woman's behalf despite the woman either being unsure or being clearly against this course of action.

We would normally agree with the police on that (protection orders). If we see the risk scale he's been given and what she's told us is her reality, then we would have to make her as comfortable as possible. But that said, we would always push a protection order and try and have charges laid if it's in her interests. (Women's Refuge staff member)

Those who reported concern over the second type of service model (limiting the client's wishes) stressed that the FVIARS process had, in some locations, contributed to an erosion of long-standing Women's Refuge principles such as supporting women to decide upon actions that are best for themselves and their children. This erosion of Refuge values was reported to have occurred through pressure placed on Refuge staff by FVIARS member agencies.

I think some pressure may be put on us (by other FVIARS agencies) to get stuff done. Sometimes CYF's believe the children aren't safe with the parents and if they don't do

something about it they will take the children. They ask us to put that across to the family. It seems that because you do have close relationships within the FVIARS environment that they are okay saying these things to NGO's and that we're there to do their work. And if you are not mindful you could be encouraged to some of their work (Women's Refuge staff member)

Finally, some Women's Refuge staff raised concern over FVIARS-related information sharing. In particular, concern was raised that women are disempowered by a process that shares women's information and personal details without their knowledge or consent. Refuge participants who raised this concern strongly suggested that women should be made aware of the process and told which agencies are privy to their information.

What clients are saying is that when they ring the police, what they don't understand is that information is going further than the Police. Sometimes when the Police arrive at their house, the Police say that Women's Refuge is going to get a copy of this, but they don't mention anything about the POL [FVIARS] meeting. So they don't understand that other agencies are also going to get that information. . . They certainly don't know within that meeting that Probation, Police, CYF and WINZ get information. . . and if they did they wouldn't want that information to be shared. They feel that they don't have any choices, they are not informed and they don't have any choices. They don't like their information to be talked about and we hear that all the time when we're talking with our clients (Women's Refuge staff member)

Compromised ability to advocate for women

A second area of concern focused on how the FVIARS meeting can compromise Refuge's ability to advocate on behalf of their clients. Specifically, the degree to which Women's Refuge role in advocating on behalf of Refuge clients is negated as an outcome of the meeting process. This was reported as occurring when the government representatives failed to appreciate Women's Refuge role as advocates and met Refuges' alternative viewpoints with hostility. Further, for some Refuges the situation was worsened when Refuge staff members possessed a lack of clarity surrounding Refuges' role in relation to their clients and the FVIARS process. In these situations, staff members reported losing their resolve and complying with government agency representatives' positions.

We all have different purposes and sometimes I see that they are at odds with each other. Sometimes I think that we buy into the purpose of the other organisations around the table and that we are not true to the purpose of our (Women's Refuge) organisation (Women's Refuge staff member)

Examples were provided where government agencies reinforced Refuges secondary role at the FVIARS meetings. Refuges noted that they did not feel that the other government agencies at the table treated them as equals in the FVIARS process due to their community status. This imbalance of power resulted in Refuge staff questioning how much their organisation gains from the FVIARS process and thought that the other agencies around the table probably gained more.

There is an imbalance of power when you're at those FVIARS meetings. I know in the last few months, particularly when you are asked to leave a room because you are community. . . We have always felt like the poor relation, because we aren't a statutory agency. . . Initially it was sold to use as a privilege to be sitting there with two government agencies, but you also feel like the underdog. You

want to feel equal with people and we actually are incredibly aware that you're not equal to a statutory agency in any form (Women's Refuge staff member)

This imbalance of power and lack of respect meant that Refuge representatives had to be strong throughout the meetings to ensure that their position as advocates for women was not comprised.

We're the only NGO that sits at that table. The rest of them are government organisations, you need to be strong, a very strong personality to work well with those agencies. You've always got to pull yourself up. . . it's very difficult (Women's Refuge staff member)

Refuges perceived to collude with government agencies

Refuges who viewed FVIARS less positively also outlined a concern that, because of the growing public perception that Refuge has a close working relationship (ie FVIARS) with the New Zealand Police and CYF, there is a risk that Refuges are regarded as complicit in state actions. As such, Refuge is not always seen as an *independent* body that advocates on behalf of women and children. Rather Refuges are seen as being an extension of the state.

Some clients see us as being Child, Youth and Family or the Police, which is definitely not what we want (Women's Refuge staff member, Māori Refuge)

However this view was not universal. One participating Refuge did not believe this to be the case in their region and commented that rather than a client perception of collusion, client's knowledge of Women's Refuge's relationship with such agencies as CYF meant that women called on Refuges to intervene and assist them when dealing with these other agencies. They were assured that the women in their community did not negatively associate Women's Refuge with CYF.

An outcome of these negative perceptions and experiences is a concern that the FVIARS process may deter a woman from notifying the police about a family violence incident¹. For instance, multiple agency involvement in the FVIARS process has been reported as deterring women from reporting family violence to the police or approaching Women's Refuge for help. One Refuge had dealt with clients who had expressed that they would not report another family violence incident. This was due to the fact that they knew that multiple agencies would be involved next time. Staff members at this Refuge feared that incidents of family violence remain unreported.

They (the clients) are not happy that Child, Youth and Family turn up on their doorstep. They are not really happy that Women's Refuge is involved. If they wanted Women's Refuge they often say that would contact us or they'll know someone who knows how to contact us. But when they have another incident that information goes to the group again (FVIARS), it comes to us and our process is that we will contact them again. So the process we are undertaking, it is definitely not working for some clients because they do not want us to contact them. If they to report the information, it goes to all these groups; if someone else reports it goes to the same groups. So we find that they are going underground. Those that have previous involvements and know how the system is working at this time are going underground (Women's Refuge staff member)

¹ This has been a longstanding concern for the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges.

Other Women's Refuges stated that they did not believe that the FVIARS process resulted in deterrence from reporting violence. Certain clients did not want assistance from Refuges, however, the majority of clients, even though initially surprised when Refuge made contact, accepted their help and did not indicate that they would not seek help in the future due to past experiences.

Some will say, I'll never ring the police again, because it's not worth the hassle - Police, CYF, you guys (Women's Refuge) ringing me. I just wanted to give him a fright and regretted it instantly. Once women actually come here and meet with us they go away happy. If they can actually get to the agency, once they're here they think it's a good move (Women's Refuge staff member)

Clients expressed relief at Refuges' involvement in FVIARS as they felt Refuge would represent their needs at the table.

The women do feel more comfortable knowing that Refuge is at the table. Women don't have any understanding or knowledge of the FVIARS meetings going on and sometimes they freak out when I ring them and talk to them. I say it's a courtesy call and they ask 'how do you know'? So sometimes they don't have the knowledge that Women's Refuge and Child, Youth and Family receive information regarding these incidents and reports. So it is explaining it to them and sometimes I think they are relieved that Refuge is sitting at that table. Because they know they have got a voice (Women's Refuge staff member, Māori Refuge)

3.2 Positive outcomes of the FVIARS process

Refuges that were more likely to perceive the FVIARS process positively explained that FVIARS acted in order to reinforce a relationship with the police which then, because of an existing relationship, resulted in the police responding to crises, such as breaches, appropriately. In this sense, these Refuges appreciated the facilitative nature of FVIARS.

Benefits of the FVIARS process were identified not only by Refuges that viewed FVIARS positively, but also by those Refuges who were more critical of the process. These strengths are listed and discussed below.

Closer working relationships between Refuges and key stakeholders

Women's Refuge staff reported that FVIARS has helped strengthen the relationship between Refuges and local key stakeholder agencies. As a consequence of these successes, stakeholder agencies reported being more available to each other than ever and generally reported good working relationships. This was particularly true of local Refuges' relationships with the New Zealand Police. The weekly face-to-face meetings with representatives at the FVIARS had strengthened the relationship between the agencies in this particular region.

It comes down to personalities. The Family Safety Team, who we deal a lot with, they have some great people there and you can tell them what you think, it's not like going to the head of cops and feeling like you have to be polite and PC (politically correct). We can talk about it (the clients) quite loose. (Women's Refuge staff member)

Improved communication and information sharing between key stakeholders

Those Refuges that considered FVIARS to be a success mentioned improved communication and information sharing between key stakeholders outside of the weekly meetings as well. Staff detailed how the other agencies were more open to sharing client information and referring clients to Women's Refuge. At all the Refuges interviewed, a regular meeting had taken place before the advent of FVIARS, thus historically the communication avenues between the New Zealand Police and Women's Refuge had always been open. Relationships with other agencies had benefited from the FVIARS process, as two of the Refuges noted that they now found it much easier to access information from other agencies such as Probation and Work and Income. The ability to access information benefits Women's Refuge clients and can help ensure their safety.

Sharing information between all the agencies so everyone knows what everyone's doing. What the client's are doing, so that you could protect those clients from any other danger . . . work out who was bringing what to action and who was going to play a lead part (Women's Refuge staff member)

Not just within the FVIARS forum, even outside FVIARS we have this really strong relationship which we actively maintain (Women's Refuge staff member)

We need support for our tane too. We need to strengthen things in our community for all our family, because then things will work better for our wahine and tamariki (Women's Refuge staff member)

Building trust and respect between key stakeholders

The weekly face-to-face FVIARS meeting had not only fostered closer working relationships and improved inter-agency communication, but also has built an environment of trust between those involved. Trust is a vital component of the success of FVIARS and the knowledge that the information discussed in each meeting is not going to go further than the key stakeholders is crucial in ensuring the safety of clients. For those who positively regarded the FVIARS process the trust that the members of FVIARS held for each other meant that those Refuges did not have any concerns about breaches of client privacy.

You get to know each other and know you can trust each other which enables you to have good conversations about the people (clients). . . (You've) got to trust people and know what's said in the room stays in the room, they know it has to stay private for a good reason. (Women's Refuge staff member)

Regardless of whether you are a government agency, a statutory agency or a NGO (non-government organisation), if you have good relationships around common respect - if you agree to disagree. Because it is ok to have different views, to come from different kaupapa. But you strive to improve your relationships around your common goal and that's the alleviation and elimination of violence. To make things better for women and children (Women's Refuge staff member)

4 The impact of state intervention on women following a family violence notification

The current study originally sought to explore Women's Refuge client experiences of the FVIARS process and compare contemporary reports against women's experiences of state intervention in 2006. Unfortunately, it proved exceedingly difficult to gather women's perspectives on FVIARS as the majority of clients interviewed had no knowledge of the FVIARS or interagency information sharing. Rather, 2011 participants knew that the Police have a close working relationship with Women's Refuges and CYF. The current study was not able to ascertain whether or not the experiences of making a family violence notification had improved with the advent of FVIARS. As a consequence, the study's research question was broadened to explore women's experiences of state intervention following a family violence notification. This has permitted a direct comparison between concerns raised by 2006 and 2011 focus group participants.

It should be noted that 2006 and 2011 participants often found it very difficult to discuss concerns surrounding state intervention because of long histories of family violence and frequent contact with state agencies such as the Police and CYF. For many, state intervention, while not desirable, was an expected consequence of their situations. Many were so traumatised by the abuse they had experienced over their lives that were often unaware of how state agencies impacted on them and displayed degrees of learned helplessness in responding to issues that affected them. Their past experiences had left them numb to their situation and therefore unable to control what happens to them in the system.

It's [information sharing and agency involvement] going to happen if I ring the Police or not. The information is out there. The Police will find out. You just have to deal with it because of the desperate situation (Nadia, 2011 client focus group)

This section outlines negative and positive outcomes associated with state intervention and compares the outcomes of the 2006 and 2011 focus groups. Many of the current study's findings, in relation to negative outcomes of state intervention, have been raised historically by Women's Refuge's National Office with CYF and New Zealand Police.

4.1 Negative outcomes associated with state intervention

Participants in the 2006 and 2011 focus groups identified a number of negative outcomes related to state intervention following a report of family violence. The majority of concerns raised were similar across the two time periods 2006 and 2011 focus groups. However, 2011 participants raised two new areas of concern:

- Breaches of confidentiality by state agencies, and
- The impact of multiple agency involvement.

Table 2: Summary of negative domains associated with state intervention, 2006 and 2011

| Domain | Year | |
|--|------|------|
| | 2006 | 2011 |
| Lack of control throughout process | ✓ | ✓ |
| CYF involvement | ✓ | ✓ |
| Unexpected events following family violence incident | ✓ | ✓ |
| Breaches of confidentiality by state agencies | | ✓ |
| Multiple agency involvement | | ✓ |

Lack of control throughout the process

For some women in both 2006 and 2011, a notification of family violence lead to cascade of events that they felt they had no control over. For some the next steps were taken out of their hands or they were not informed of the actions agencies were taking on their behalf. Even though some admitted that these steps were taken for their own good, they felt they lacked ownership over their own journey.

One day I walked into the police station and asked them what I could do to stop him without charging him, because I was afraid if I charged him it could get worse. And that's just some how snowballed. Very quickly we were living at Refuge and he was in prison. It all just happened really fast and was quite out of my hands (Mia, 2011 client focus group)

One participant described a visit to accident and emergency which resulted in the Police being called without her knowledge. She was not asked by hospital staff if she would like to make it a Police matter and felt she should have been given the choice to decide this. Her partner was in the waiting room with her children and she was terrified of the consequences if her partner had seen them enter her cubicle.

My excuse wasn't covering it and the police were called. They came into see me and asked if I'd like to make a statement. I felt completely judged. My ex-partner was sitting here in the waiting room, waiting for me. I wondered if he had seen the two coppers come through the front door? (Rachel, 2011 client focus group)

Child, Youth and Family involvement

In both 2006 and 2011 those focus group participants who had past contact with CYF all expressed fear of losing their children when the agency became involved. The stress and fear associated with having their children removed and the thought of losing them permanently sees many women hesitate to call the Police or go to the authorities in future.

Anahera even admitted that she would rather suffer the abuse than call the Police, in the knowledge that CYF would eventually become involved.

I don't like them at all (CYF). I shake when I see them. You bring your child into the world, thinking they are yours, but they're the ones saying your child is actually theirs (Mia, 2011 client focus group)

They weren't your children. . . children of the ward, children of the Court. I just looked like I was a really bad mother for trying to keep us safe. So how I feel about ringing the police now is I wouldn't do it, I would just cope with it or take the abuse. . . I would rather go through that than risk losing my children with CYF coming over through the police (Anahera, 2011 client focus group)

So terrified the children were going to be taken away from me, the kids were going through a lot because they weren't allowed to see their Dad. . . I was constantly scared they (CYF) were going to take my children (Rebecca, 2006 client focus group)

When CYF visited Danielle's home, she lied about the family violence. The worry that CYF would take her children from her if she told the truth about the violence resulted in her staying in the relationship another year. She did not seek help until the situation escalated to such a level of seriousness that she had no choice but to call the Police.

I was really scared. . . I lied about the domestic violence. My partner lied. I lied too, because I was frightened, even though I wanted to get out of the relationship. I didn't want CYF taking the kids and that's what I saw them doing. So I lied which meant I ended up staying in relationship another year. . . Damned worried that CYF would take the kids (Danielle, 2006 client focus group)

Fear of CYF and the known connection between the Police and CYF, results in many women not calling the Police at all or weighing up the seriousness of a situation before notifying the Police which places women and their children in danger.

Unexpected events after seeking help

The majority of the women who participated in the 2006 and 2011 focus groups had a history of family violence and as discussed above many were desensitised to state intervention. Those seeking help for the first time were better positioned to recall unexpected events that occurred after seeking help to leave their relationship. Unexpected events included visits from CYF following either a Police call-out or discussing their situation with a lawyer.

I didn't know police were going to be involved at all or CYF were going to be involved. The first thing I knew was, CYF came round, two people came round to talk to me about care and protection issues. . . I was kind of shocked, because I had a good job, never hit my kids or done anything that I thought CYF would be involved with. I didn't know that anyone had talked to them. I didn't get a phone call or anything like that; they just kind of turned up at the door step (Danielle, 2006 client focus group)

One participant of the 2011 focus group had also noted a difference in the way her GP viewed her and her child's visits to the doctor following her partner being treated for a broken hand at accident and emergency at their local hospital. Lucy believed that her GP had been informed of her partner's injury as the doctor asked more questions about why they were sick and asked about violence at home. Lucy never knew for sure that her doctor had obtained this information and she was clueless as to how he would have become privy to it.

After that, if I or my son went to the doctor, there seemed to be more questions, always a lot more. . . questions about why he was sick. Differences in the way the visits were seen. (Lucy, 2011 client focus group)

Breaches of confidentiality by state agencies

Breaches of confidentiality by state agencies were experienced by participants of 2011 focus group. Only one case was specifically related to the FVIARS meeting, the others occurred in various other manners. The sharing of private information without the knowledge of the victim in many cases led to the woman being silenced and a feeling that they had no choice or control of what happened next.

Marama first suspected that information regarding her situation at home had gone further than the Police when she noticed that the principal of her children's school was treating her and her children differently:

School was a prime example. . . they were alright with me then all of sudden they changed. . . they were open, then they closed up a little bit. The Principal deals with Child, Youth and Family, he does a regular report with them. When I found out that he did that, it changed – the mood between me and him. It was like he knew; they were giving him information about what was happening with the family. . . I closed down. I just kept to myself. I worked at the school and I had to come out of that. . . he put pity on my children. . . they were isolated from the rest of the school. . . as if I and the kids were the Principal's pets (Marama, 2011 client focus group)

Marama suspected that the Principal had found out about her situation from CYF, as she had not disclosed her situation to the school. CYF have Care and Protection Resource Panels in every community and the Principal was most probably one of the members on this panel. Though this panel is outside of FVIARS, they hear every notification that goes to CYF. Marama was not aware that the POLFVIR went to anyone but the Police and was even surprised when Women's Refuge called her. Women are told at the time of the incident by Police that the POLFVIR will also go to Refuge, but due to the high level of stress many women experience at that time, they do not remember being given this information.

They are not told that through the FVIARS meeting many other agencies will be advised of their situation and that through this process other agency panels will also obtain this information.

Outside of FVIARS other participants discussed how state agencies informed their children's schools without their knowledge, which created problems with bullying for their children and resulted in the whole school community knowing about their home situation.

CYF turns up at school for an unplanned interview and suddenly all the teachers know, then it is just the usual gossip. It hits every parent and suddenly everyone knows what's going on (Rachel, 2011 client focus group)

On two occasions Anahera experienced agencies sharing her information without her knowledge. She went to Barnardos for assistance with her daughter's behaviour, only to have CYF appear on her doorstep. She also had a similar experience with Work and Income, when she approached them for a food grant, acknowledging that she had also had to go to the Food Bank a couple of times that year. WINZ notified CYF also. Anahera felt she was doing the right thing by her children by going to these agencies for help when she was in need, only to

have them inform another agency without her knowledge. She stated that it make her hesitant to ask agencies for help.

I rang Barnardos for help and they rang CYF. It was like Chinese whispers, so I thought I'm not going to help CYF anymore. But eventually they come knocking and they want to know what is going on (Anahera, 2011 client focus group)

Rachel had her situation at home shared through unofficial channels by a Police Detective who had worked on one of the family violence cases which involved her and her partner. This breach of confidentiality created a more volatile environment at home.

We had a guy that was one of the lead detectives on one of the cases and in his rugby team he played with two of the guys who worked with my ex and they heard all about it from him. The next thing it was all around the building sites and he got black-balled which made it he even worse, so he couldn't work (Rachel, 2011 client focus group)

Multiple agency involvement

Although women in the 2011 focus groups were not aware of FVIARS, there was a sense that a family violence notification resulted in a large number of agencies becoming involved in their case. When the women were informed of FVIARS's function and which agencies participate in the process in their region, they were angered. They felt that too many agencies become aware of their personal circumstances and some women were left feeling paranoid and watched by state agencies.

So many people checking up on so many things. . . (Does this make you feel paranoid?). . . yes, you feel like you're being watched. If your kid turns up with a bruise they got in the playground; you've got to explain how they got it (Rachel, 2011 client focus group)

One participant having supported her friend during a recent family violence incident feared that the involvement of multiple agencies was silencing certain women.

Women are over exposed. There is a sense of too many agencies involved – Child, Youth and Family, Women's Refuge, Police. She (her friend) had no sense of privacy; she wanted to pull back from that. I'm going to shut you out. Women need more of a sense of safety and containment (Raiha, 2011 client focus group)

Though Raiha was concerned about the presence of certain agencies around the FVIARS table, she conceded that information needed to go beyond the Police to help protect children from violence and abuse. She did not wish for information sharing to stop but that information should be shared across relevant agencies only.

Despite a number of negative experiences when dealing with state agencies, when the 2011 focus group participants were asked if they would seek help in future if necessary, not one participant said they would not. A small majority indicated that they would not call the Police, but instead would contact the Family Safety Team or Women's Refuge directly if they needed help.

4.2 Positive outcomes associated with state intervention

Participants in the 2006 and 2011 focus groups identified a number of positive outcomes related to state intervention following a report of family violence. The most common areas were:

- The Family Court and lawyers, and
- Police support and support from the Family Safety Team.

The majority of positive experiences were raised in both the 2006 and 2011 focus groups and participants reported similar factors as having contributed to positive experiences with agencies they encountered throughout their journey. However, support from the Family Safety Team was a new domain that emerged in 2011 and the participants of both groups spoke highly of them. An exploration of the individual domains follows:

Police support

A number of the participants in both the 2006 and 2011 focus groups reported having received support and understanding from the police officers they encountered. It was common for a participant to speak positively of one individual officer who had explored how they could best assist her. These officers tended to go the extra mile in order to ensure the safety of the victims. Some provided safety alarms that connected directly to the police station, some simply recognised and understood the complexities of the situation, some put women in touch with support networks and provided them with options, which was an empowering experience for the women concerned. Even simple actions such as having a policewoman present when attending family violence call-outs was much appreciated by the women in the focus groups.

The officer set up this program I found it really, really helpful. I had all sorts of people wanting to help me. My husband had always isolated me in my house, I felt like a prisoner. I couldn't go out when I wanted to, do things when I wanted to. So it was weird having all this help at once, people phoning in, and people turning up. I had a lot of help. I was one of the fortunate ones who got the good officers. (Malie, 2006 client focus group)

My interactions with the police were really good. I found them really supportive. They have this system out here where if you are considered to be in quite a dangerous situation they provide you with an alarm you can have in your house which goes direct to the cops. I had that for a while. They don't have many of them, but they were really good about giving that to me. I got good service from the police and I'm really grateful to that woman police officer that works out here. . . She gave me options. It felt like she'd given me some of the power back, and it did too. (Danielle, 2006 client focus group)

The women who had positive experiences with the police expressed how fortunate they felt. They expressed how lucky they were to have made contact with good officers and realised that this was not the experience that many women had.

I was very, very lucky. It I think if I didn't have support from that particular detective that I don't if I would have had the strength to actually get out (Lucy, 2011 client focus group)

Support from Family Safety Team

The participants of the 2011 focus group who had contact with the Family Safety Teams expressed how supportive and helpful they were. Despite the presence of police officers in the Family Safety Team, their lack of uniform, their anonymous base outside of the police station and their expertise in dealing with victims of family violence resulted in participants preferring to dealing directly with them rather than with the regular Police. The Family Safety Team was reported as providing continuity throughout a stressful process and their support and understanding during difficult times was positively received.

I found the Family Safety Team were excellent, similar to everyone else here. . . I can remember going there and being absolutely petrified. He was going to be served the next day with the Protection Order. I was petrified that he would know that I was with the Safety Team. The Family Safety Team were brilliant, they rang the Court to find out when the paper was going to be served, they found out that it was the Police there were going to serve him. . . They rang me when they were standing outside his work. I was rung at least four times on the day he was served to find out if I'd got away, where I was. . . The Safety Team were really, really good. (Lucy, 2011 client focus group)

Other considerations

Participants in the 2006 and 2011 focus groups reported how important the support of Women's Refuge had been throughout their journey. Women's Refuges' willingness to listen to their experiences, provide support and advice, as well as provide a safe place to stay were some of the positives discussed. Many women talked about how Refuge had helped them successfully navigate their way through the process and assist them in dealing with the other agencies. Many were certain that Refuge had helped to prevent CYF removing their children. Many felt they would not have been able to get through their ordeal without the support of the Refuge staff and would return to Refuge for support in the future if necessary.

Very lovely, very gentle, very understanding people. When you're in that kind of abuse, it's really nice to hear someone who spoke softly. I felt really safe there. I felt at home and safe for my children. The Women's Refuge staff member took care of everything for me. Seeing the lawyer about the Protection Order, that was all taken care of. My experience with Women's Refuge was really, really comforting. I had been isolated from everyone. Women's Refuge was like being on holiday. (Sina, 2006 client focus group)

About the middle of last year, I found out about Refuge, big ups to Refuge. They need funding. I thought I'd never ring the Police again, well I didn't, once I'd found out about Refuge. Refuge has helped me out heaps. If it wasn't for them I would have lost my kids. . . they were ready to up lift my kids, but because the Refuge ladies were there telling them I've got this in place, getting me help this way, they said there was no need for them to intervene. (Waimarie, 2006 client focus group)

You're not a number, like with the police. You don't get whoever happens to be on duty that night that you have to explain stuff to all over again. (Lily, 2011 client focus group)

5 Critical success factors

A series of critical success factors arose out of interviews with Women's Refuge staff members. These critical success factors were identified as underpinning Women's Refuges' effective involvement in FVIARS processes and meetings. In this context, critical success factors include principles or beliefs associated with FVIARS membership.² The remainder of this section reviews core principles that, if adhered to, are conducive to the essential and individualised role of Women's Refuge as a FVIARS member.

Critical success factor 1: Women Refuge representatives possess a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in reference to FVIARS

Refuges that reported effectively engaging in FVIARS meetings and processes attributed the success of their involvement to a commitment to Women's Refuge's intrinsic purpose of:

- Empowering Refuge clients, and
- Advocating on behalf of clients.

In this sense empowerment was defined as providing victims of family violence with the

. . . time and space to make decisions for themselves and their children. These women have had their choices and power to make decisions taken away from them. Our role is to awhi them so they can make their own choices. (Women's Refuge staff member)

Central to this focus on empowerment is a commitment to support female victims of family violence in planning and deciding their own courses of action within timeframes that suit them. The antithesis of this approach, decisions made on behalf of female victims, was viewed as risking re-victimising the woman. Women's Refuge's focus is on clients' empowerment. As such their role is to advocate for women in order to ensure that they are provided with the space, time and opportunity they need to make decisions.

Critical success factor 2: Targeted FVIARS membership

Refuges, with a history of effective FVIARS membership, drew attention to the need for minimal tier one membership. Limiting membership prevented breaches of confidentiality and allowed meetings to efficiently review family violence cases. Such limitations were discussed in reference to one or more of the following agencies having attended at least one local FVIARS:

- Work and Income
- Housing New Zealand
- District Health Boards

² Those factors identified as critical to the success of Women's Refuge involvement in the FVIARS arose out of a workshop and interviews with staff. A number of Refuges that participated in the study had developed clear understandings about the importance of victim empowerment and Refuge's essential role in advocating for women by reviewing their own involvement in the FVIARS process or by observing sister Refuge's struggles as a member of a FVIARS team.

- Probation
- Rape Crisis
- Barnardos.

Participating Refuges stressed the need to limit FVIARS members because of reports that FVIARS comprising of more than Police, CYF and Women's Refuge had lead to inappropriate information sharing across multiple agencies. Information was shared without women's consent and outside of relevant family violence-related matters.

Critical success factor 3: A collaborative partnership between FVIARS members

A third critical success factor underpinning the success of FVIARS meetings was based on members having a commitment to collaborative FVIARS partnerships that stressed the importance of:

- Clear roles and responsibilities – FVIARS members have clear roles and responsibilities (including the lead agency having a clearly defined role). Further, there is a clear understanding that Refuge's role is to advocate on behalf of the woman and that such a position may counter what the police and CYF consider as best practice
- Consistent FVIARS attendance – the same individuals from each agency are required to attend weekly meetings. This continuity helps to foster stronger working relationships and efficient processes. For instance, the efficiency of the FVIARS meetings in question were attributed to the same agency representatives consistently attending FVIARS meetings. This differed from other locations where different CYF and police representatives rotated meeting attendance. Such membership rotation was found to extend meeting times as agency representatives were not aware of the process or cases and was often regarded as poor process as some attendees possessed low levels of family violence-related knowledge
- Open and constructive communication channels – FVIARS meetings implement processes to open and constructive communication. In addition, some Refuges also attributed the success of their FVIARS processes to an arrangement where the local Refuge staff met with the NZ Police Area Commander to discuss any concerns the Refuge might have about police responses or communications surrounding family violence. As a result any problems are escalated and dealt by senior police staff.
- FVIARS members are treated as equal partners. Refuges stressed the importance of being treated as an integral member of the FVIARS team as it was common for local Refuges to report an imbalance of power at FVIARS meetings which resulted in a perception of government agencies viewing Women's Refuge as inferior due to its status as a non-governmental organisation.

Critical success factor 4: Adequate resourcing

Refuges reported that being appropriately funded was an important critical success factor. In an effort for Refuges to appropriately attribute resources to the FVIARS meetings and follow-up work meant that funds had to be redirected from other parts of the service. Participants unanimously reported having exceeded annual contractual requirements and commonly meet annual requirements within one calendar month. As a consequence, Refuges were concerned about the lack of resources available to them to appropriately respond to PoFVIR. For

example, one Refuge was funded to deal with 46 PolFVIR in a year, but actually handled approximately 1500 annually. Extra funding would ensure that a staff member could be devoted to FVIARS, allowing other staff members to deal with the other important work that the Refuge does.

It always comes down to the funding. If we had the money to employ someone to cover the whole thing it could go for half a day if they wanted and it wouldn't be an issue. We are paid to process 46 (POL's) a year and we're doing 1500. If we did take 46 we'd pick one a week literally. \$12,000 a year to do all that is not enough, even \$20,000 a year, not a huge jump, but that could employ someone to do the whole thing. . . The POL's run this agency (Women's Refuge staff member)

Recommendations:

1. That Women's Refuges review, as part of staff training and development, their staff's understanding of client empowerment and identify best practice models that will safe guard against a client's re-victimisation.
2. That FVIARS membership be reviewed to ensure its membership consists of appropriate Tier 1 agencies. Any review of membership will require the development of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria.
3. That FVIARS members ensure that processes are developed to aid free and frank discussion and the intermittent review of member satisfaction surrounding FVIARS meetings and processes.
4. Where possible same agency representatives should attend each FVIARS meeting. This ensures consistency of knowledge and practice surrounding cases and in regards to family violence in general.
5. FVIARS attendees need to possess an approved level of knowledge about family violence and appropriate options for referral and intervention.
6. Appropriately fund Women's Refuge to attend FVIARS meetings and follow-up on family violence cases.