

Eliminating violence against women and children

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Labour is deeply concerned with the high incidence of family, domestic and sexual violence in New Zealand. It is overwhelmingly women and children who are the victims of domestic and sexual violence, and Labour's policy will recognise the gendered aspect of this violence.

Sexual violence

New Zealand's rate of sexual violence and the lack of support and justice available to most survivors is unacceptable. Sexual violence is preventable, and Labour is committed to eliminating sexual violence in New Zealand.

Family and domestic violence

New Zealand has a serious and worrying problem with family and domestic violence and the consequences of this violence are huge. There are costs to individuals, families and the community.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The level of violence against women and children – sexual and domestic – is unacceptable and out of line with many similar countries. The social and economic costs of this violence are huge – to individuals, to families and to our whole community.

On average 35 New Zealanders are killed in family violence and family violence related homicides every year. One in three New Zealand women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. 20,000 women and children needed the help of Women's Refuge last year alone.

As of 2012 the Police no longer record domestic violence crime statistics meaning the data is poor. However family and sexual violence is clearly an increasing problem. The number of family violence investigations in 2012/13 was 89,952 up from around 84,000 the year before. Levels of sexual assault are rising significantly and are at their highest point since the current system of reporting began in 1996 at 3,739 in 2013 compared to 2,732 in 2008. The figures underplay the significance of the numbers because of the very low level of reporting of crime against women and children.

Children often suffer twice over – as victims of violence against them and witnessing or experiencing the consequences of violence against close family members – often their mother. The harm and the link to intergenerational violence is unacceptable.

The deaths, the harm, the ongoing consequences of violence cannot continue. It is irresponsible when the extent of the problem is known and it is clearly preventable. All people in our country have the right to live free of violence and control.

New Zealand has a moral and international obligation to ensure women and children are safe and free from violence. New Zealand's latest review of our progress in implementing our obligations under CEDAW and our latest UN Periodic review both raised issues with our high and increasing levels of violence against women and with the low levels of reporting and conviction. Concerns about lack of data were also raised.

Action is needed to reduce the high rates of violence. This requires both an immediate response and a long term coordinated plan.

LABOUR'S PLAN

Labour will take decisive action with the aim of being world leading in eliminating violence against women and children. Leadership will be from the Prime Minister to ensure the seriousness of this undertaking and to prioritise action being taken. Responsibility will be with the DPMC to ensure that there is a whole of Government approach.

We will invest \$60 million in additional funding over four years and redirect existing funding to support immediate initiatives for eliminating violence against women and children. In addition we will commit to a long term, collaborative approach involving all relevant Government agencies and non-government agencies to increase resources in the sector in future. We will focus on three key areas: prevention, support services and justice.



Labour will:

Provide leadership to eliminate violence against women and children from the Prime Minister down, with the lead agency being DPMC.

Adopt a collaborative, resourced, long-term New Zealand Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children in consultation with other parties and the sector.

Provide \$60 million over four years for family and sexual violence to support front line services, primary prevention, and education. This includes increased support for transitional housing.

Reform the justice system to provide real justice to survivors while protecting the right to be presumed innocent. This includes providing specialist training.

Review prosecution guidelines to ensure Police appropriately and consistently arrest and charge offenders, and review the operation of Protection Orders.

Preventing Violence Against Women and Children

Tackling awareness

The highly successful "It's Not Okay" campaign has been scaled back to a targeted campaign of just \$500,000 per year. Labour will implement a national awareness programme targeted at reducing sexual and domestic violence, building on the evidence from the "It's Not OK" campaign.

Ensuring adequate and stable funding

Current resources for tackling sexual or domestic violence fail to provide a stable base for sexual violence services. Labour will provide sustainable funding to build a nationwide network of violence prevention services, including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services.

Greater resources are needed at the source to prevent sexual or domestic violence occurring rather than simply dealing with it at the bottom of the cliff. Effort must be put, not just into the victims of offences, but also into their potential offenders. We will increase resources into primary prevention for sexual violence.

Education

Many of those who are subject to sexual or domestic violence at a young age are not aware their situation is unusual until they learn about normal and respectful relationships. We will have an immediate focus on schools, ensuring that all students receive specialist sexuality and relationship education. There will be a minimum standard of sex and sexuality education in the curriculum for all state funded schools - including about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

In addition there is inadequate resourcing to ensure all of our young people have access to quality rape prevention education. Labour will increase and secure funding for rape prevention education with an immediate focus on schools and girls self-defence.

Supporting Front-Line Services

Ensuring adequate and stable funding

We will restore funding to cuts made to Women's Refuge, family violence programmes, rape and sexual violence survivor support services and increase ongoing resources into the sector.

In 2011 Women's Refuge lost \$700,000 in funding for its crisis centres as a result of changes in funding rules and with the establishment of Whanau Ora a further \$11 million was redirected from family violence programmes towards its establishment leaving projects like Te Rito family violence network facing a severe loss of funding. Labour will undo these cuts by investing additional resources into the sexual and family violence sectors to provide an adequate level of funding going forward.

We will also build on successful services under Whanau Ora dealing with family violence, and violence against women and girls, and respond to any problems and unmet needs created by the new funding model by once again establishing an ongoing funding mechanism to ensure security of service provision.

We will work with the sector to create a well-funded and resourced support network for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, beginning with initial support when sexual violence is reported through to meeting long-term needs. Support must be provided not just for those who have directly experienced sexual and domestic violence but also for children who witness and are affected by violence.

Victims of violence often have to rely only on voluntary organisations or limited ACC funded counselling to deal with abuse. We will ensure there are adequate ongoing counselling services for all victims of sexual and domestic violence including children who have witnessed domestic violence.

It is important that measures to tackle violence do not put the entire onus on dealing with the victim rather than the person responsible for the crime. For men who want to access help, but haven't entered our criminal justice system, it is far too difficult to obtain support. We will continue to fund specialist front-line services for offenders.

Work force development

As the Glenn Inquiry has shown while we have some excellent people in the public service who tackle domestic violence some victims have had inconsistent treatment or dealt with staff who did not understand their situation. We will ensure specialist training on violence against women and children, with an emphasis on the power dynamics of violence be provided to members of the judiciary, court staff, police, counsel for the child, counsel, court appointed experts (such as psychologists) and government officials (WINZ, Housing New Zealand).

Housing

There is insufficient emergency housing for women when leaving abusive relationships. Resolving this must be a priority for Housing New Zealand and related agencies. We will fund a Pilot Programme for transitional housing for women and their children leaving domestic violence.

Reforming Criminal Justice

Labour recognises that the response to violence requires action in the criminal justice system as well as in public health and education. This needs to be a considered response and as such we will allow the Law Commission to complete its review on alternative trial mechanisms, including the establishment of a specialist sexual violence court.

Sexual Violence Reforms

Labour will implement reforms to improve the criminal justice system's approach towards sexual violence, in order to provide real justice to survivors whilst protecting the right to be presumed innocent. Labour will consider the following reforms following the Law Commission review on alternative trial mechanisms:

- changes to ensure that victims are not put on trial, including to the "rape shield" and cross-examination rules.
- allowing complainants to adopt alternative trial processes, such as a restorative process, for sexual offence cases.
- the establishment of specialist sexual violence courts. This will include specialist training on the dynamics of violence for all judges and staff involved with the court, including counsel. There will also be specialist support agencies funded to support women through the process.
- amending the definition of consent in instances of sexual violation to ensure it does not impose an unfair burden on victims of violence.

Family Violence

Training to ensure adequate understanding of violence is required not just for sexual violence but also for domestic and family violence. We will ensure all members of the judiciary, court staff, counsel for child, counsel, court appointed experts, and New Zealand police receive specialist training on the dynamics of violence.

As the Family Violence Death Review Committee found half of intimate partner violence deaths take place during a planned or actual separation. Many victims of family violence deaths already have protection orders against the offender for them or their children at the time of their death. Labour will review the operation of Protection Orders.

Arrest and Prosecution

While there has been improvement over the last two decades far too few domestic and family violence cases are adequately followed through from complaint to prosecution, more work is needed in this area to ensure consistency for all victims of violence.

Labour will review prosecution guidelines to ensure New Zealand Police appropriately and consistently arrest and charge domestic violence offenders.

We will further ensure the Police are adequately resourced and trained and have embedded the changes recommended by the 2007 Bazley report on police conduct, and adopt a focus on prevention and community safety

In addition we will ensure specialist Adult Sexual Assault teams and Child Protection Services are properly resourced.

We will ensure the data on arrests and prosecution for family, domestic, and sexual violence are collected and made public.

Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children

This issue requires leadership, namely political leadership at the highest level. It is a hidden issue in our society and victims suffer stigma and shame. It is a complex issue involving power dynamics and requires a holistic and meaningful approach from Government.

This will require a long term unified commitment by politicians, women's and community organisations, government agencies and New Zealanders. This country ought to be a world leader in seeking to end domestic and sexual violence.

Labour will build a consensus across the specialist sectors and political parties for a long-term adequately resourced plan to eliminate domestic and sexual violence. Our plan will consider the 12 year, multi-million dollar cross party approach announced in Australia National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children and the UK's 10 year "A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy.

National action plans are increasingly common internationally. Other countries with action plans include Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

The concluding observations of the latest United Nations review of New Zealand's progress on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended the development "of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and address all forms of violence against children" and CEDAW recommended further measures to address violence against women.

How it would work

A New Zealand action plan would set out the overarching goals for the country to achieve to eliminate violence against women and children. These could include: preventing violence, providing front line services, ensuring the justice system works for victims, and driving cultural change.

Leading this issue from DPMC rather than MSD will send a powerful message to government and the public that it is being taken seriously.

The precise goals, the initiatives to achieve them, and how progress will be measured would all be set by the plan in collaboration with other parties and the sector. It would see Ministers and their departments working collaboratively and reporting back to Cabinet on its progress.

A New Zealand Action Plan by its nature will create a robust system for reporting and showing progress in reducing levels of violence against women and children. New Zealand has poor reporting of violence towards women and children and improving reporting is already an area Labour is focussed on. In creating this plan we will deal with concerns raised by Women's Refuge and others about data collection and how changed reporting minimises the extent of the problem.

An Action Plan provides opportunity for the Government to work together with other parties and, the sector to identify areas where the Government needs to act, initiatives to resolve the issues in those areas, and how to measure progress could. The plan would also provide a focus on prevention and culture change.

Development of the plan would identify gaps and shortages in funding to resolve family and sexual violence issues which could then be resolved through the plan. For this it could draw on the Taskforce on Sexual Violence and the Taskforce on Family Violence for evidence-based advice.

In developing the plan we will ensure that policies that deal with family and sexual violence recognise gender perspectives and are evidence based. This includes understanding the power and control dynamics of domestic violence.

In addition we will ensure that our policies recognise the needs and issues of all people affected by domestic and sexual violence; for example by providing for the particular needs of disabled women, ethnic/migrant women and Maori women. This includes

ensuring organisations which specialise in assisting these groups, such as Shakti, are adequately resourced.

Other Measures

Labour will build on the existing work and the expertise of the domestic and sexual violence sector. There are a number of areas where we do not need to reinvent the wheel.

We will immediately consider the recommendations of the Sexual Violence Taskforce that have not been implemented and the report of the Social Services Select Committee inquiry into specialist sexual violence services, and implement those recommendations where accepted. We will also prioritise analysing and responding to the recommendations of the Family Violence Death Review Committee.

We will also adopt the current government's Action Plan for Vulnerable Children.

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