



IDENTIFYING THE HIDDEN DISASTER CONFERENCE

Post-conference interview findings report

"It was well run. the conference took a different tact than the same subject. That's what grabbed my attention."

"I thought it was very well facilitated and there was good written information – the outlines of the sessions and so forth."

Written by:
Maggie Jakob-Hoff

August 2013

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. THE INTERVIEWS	2
THE TOPIC GUIDE.....	2
RESPONDENTS	2
3. KEY FINDINGS	4
IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF THE CONFERENCE	4
<i>Being better informed</i>	4
<i>Appreciating the speakers</i>	5
<i>The ‘Where to from Here’ session</i>	7
<i>Range of participants</i>	7
<i>Thinking about their own organisation’s response</i>	7
<i>Great Conference</i>	7
<i>Disappointments</i>	7
UPTAKE OF THE MESSAGES GIVEN DURING THE CONFERENCE.....	8
ACTION TAKEN SINCE CONFERENCE	9
FACTORS THAT ENABLED ACTION TO BE TAKEN	10
LIKELIHOOD OF TAKING FURTHER ACTION	11
FACTORS MIGHT HINDER FUTURE ACTION	11
FINAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE CONFERENCE	12
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	13
5. APPENDIX A – THE TOPIC GUIDE USED FOR THE INTERVIEWS	14

TABLES

TABLE 1 FIELD OF WORK OR STUDY OF INTERVIEWEES.....	2
---	---

FIGURES

FIGURE 1 THE CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES	3
FIGURE 2 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FELT MORE INFORMED AFTER THE CONFERENCE ABOUT THE DYNAMICS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AFTER A DISASTER.....	4
FIGURE 3 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FELT INSPIRED AFTER THE CONFERENCE	6
FIGURE 4 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS WERE CONVINCED THAT FAMILY VIOLENCE AFTER DISASTER WAS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE	6
FIGURE 5 AGREEMENT WITH “FAMILY VIOLENCE INCREASES AFTER DISASTERS” STATEMENT.....	8
FIGURE 6 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS WERE CONVINCED OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES IN DISASTER PLANNING, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY	9
FIGURE 7 LIKELIHOOD OF RESPONDENTS TAKING EVEN FURTHER ACTION/MAKING FURTHER CHANGES	11

1. INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the evaluation of the conference entitled “Identifying Hidden Disaster” that was held on 9th March, 2012 in Melbourne, Australia. The first part of the report includes the background to the evaluation, the methods used and the findings from the evaluation activities conducted immediately after the conference (Snook, V. 2012¹).

This part of the report covers the findings from the evaluation interviews conducted by Kate Nicholls and Veronica Snook between six and nine months after the conference.

2. THE INTERVIEWS

The Topic Guide

A Programme Logic exercise was used to plan the conference and is described on the next page of this report. The first page of the Programme Logic diagram, shown in Figure 1, details the five objectives identified during planning as critical to the success of the conference. These objectives were also used to structure the overall evaluation.

Interviews were carried out between September and December 2012 to explore the longer-term outcomes of the conference. The topic guide used was developed from the programme logic and had the following sections:

- Immediate impact of the conference
- Emergent changes
- Helping and hindering factors
- Concluding comments.

A copy of the topic guide can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Respondents

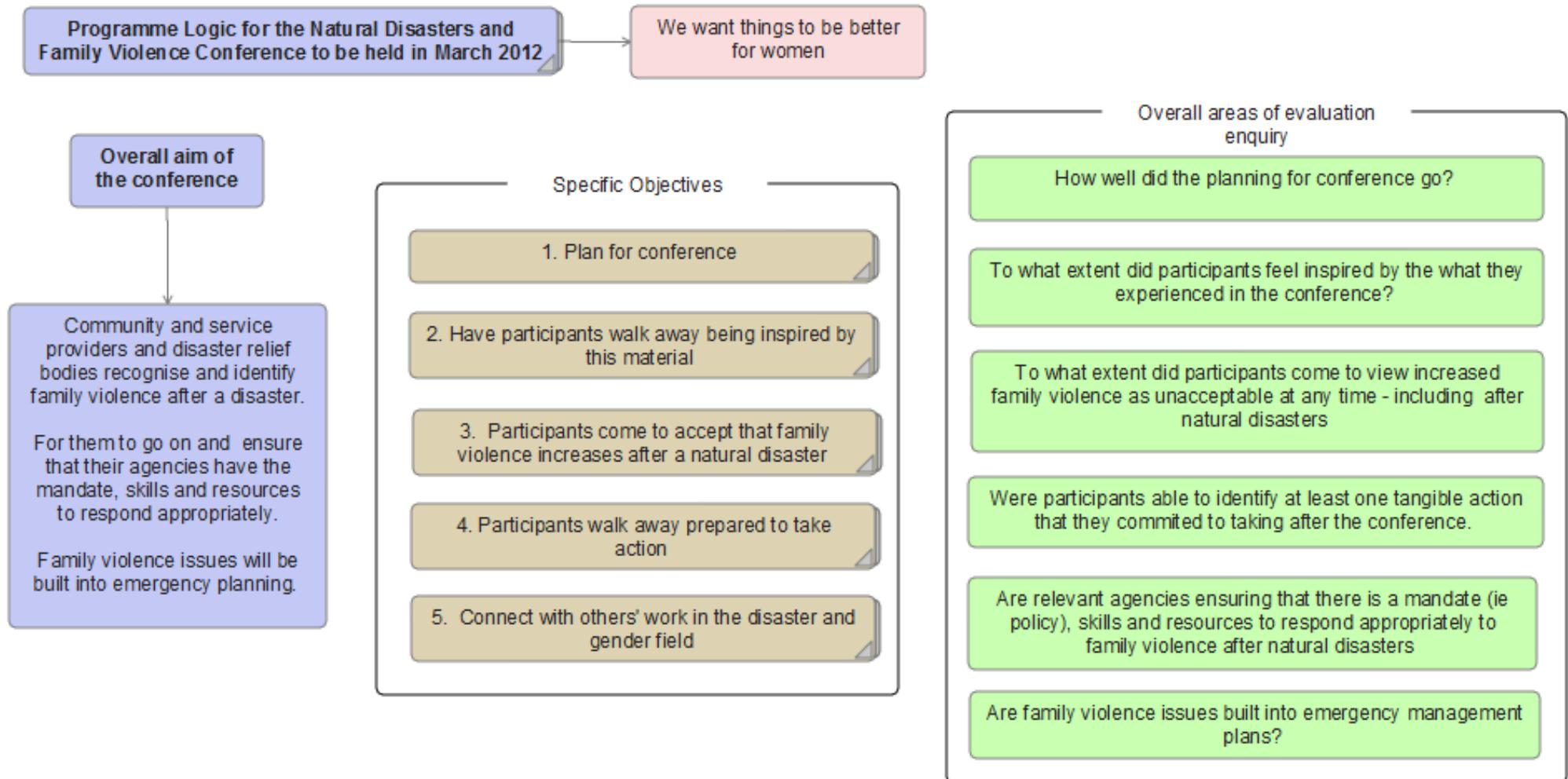
Fifteen conference delegates were interviewed by phone. One third came from the domestic and family violence area, a third came from health and social services and four people came from emergency management. The remaining person came from community recovery (See Table 1)

Table 1 Field of work or study of interviewees

Field of work or study	No.
Domestic and family violence - (including health promotion and strategy development)	5
Health and social services	5
Emergency management - (including state government disaster recovery, professional education, Recovery coordination and research)	4
Community recovery	1
Total	15

¹ Snook, V. Identifying the Hidden Disaster Conference: Conference Evaluation. VEANTO, Melbourne, June 2012

Figure 1 The Conference Objectives



3. KEY FINDINGS

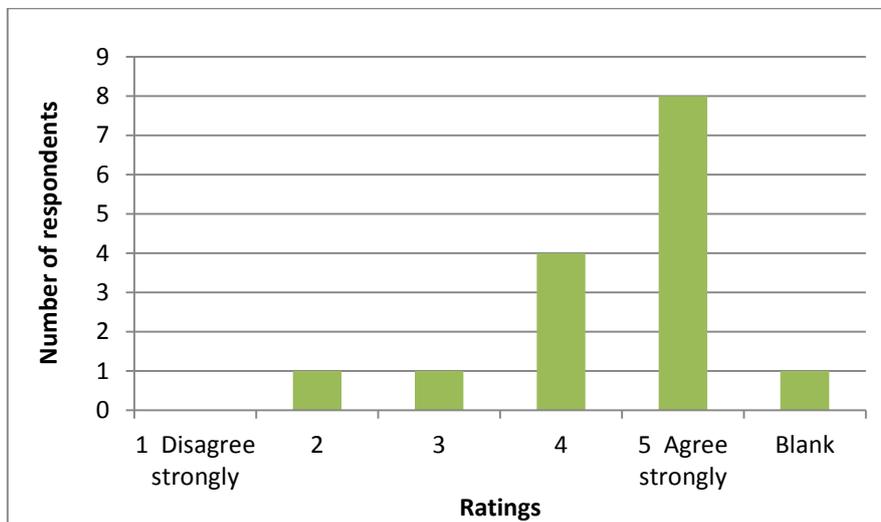
Immediate Impact of the Conference

Being better informed

After the conference, all but three respondents considered themselves better informed about the dynamics of family violence after a disaster. One person was neutral, one indicated they were not better informed and one person did not respond to the question (see Figure 2).

Please note that those who did not consider themselves better informed indicated they were already well informed prior to the conference.

Figure 2 Extent to which respondents felt more informed after the conference about the dynamics of family violence after a disaster



Interviewees came away from the conference with a greater appreciation for the complexity surrounding family violence after disasters. This was attributed to hearing someone’s story first hand.

“..... To me, it highlighted the complexity of the issue and extent to which it’s absent from the discussions on vulnerability, and women’s vulnerability.....”

“I’ve been a worker in child protection, recovery and domestic violence and hadn’t quite simply thought about things like people might be in the middle of a court case and they’re rocking-up to a recovery centre.”

For several respondents the conference was their first exposure to the notion that family violence was linked to disasters. Prior to that, some had been unaware of the link.

“For me, the conference really cemented my awareness of the issues around the heightening of risk of family violence when there’s a disaster and the need for appropriate services. I had a sense of that before, but it cemented it for me. It was really helpful.”

Other people were stunned about the amount of family violence that some areas had experienced.

“.....being really shocked at the amount of family violence that some areas had encountered”

Attending the conference increased some respondents' understanding that the work to resolve family violence issues after disasters needed to start from the top of emergency service organisations in order to be effective.

“It was interesting to hear about their structure and how a lot [of the effort] would need to be top down.....”

Appreciating the speakers

The stories told at the conference by the survivors of family violence were vividly remembered by many respondents. This was what touched the hearts of participants who also appreciated the reality and the practicalities of the situation the women recounted.

“.....the women who talked about their experiences after the fires in terms of their relationships with their partners, the stress on their relationships and how they experienced domestic violence. And the personal stories, there were a couple of those, and particularly that the women hadn't been touched by domestic violence prior to disaster. They were great!”

“I found the two [survivors] particularly powerful – the women who were affected and so they were!”

There was one dissenting opinion – someone to whom the survivor stories did not appeal.

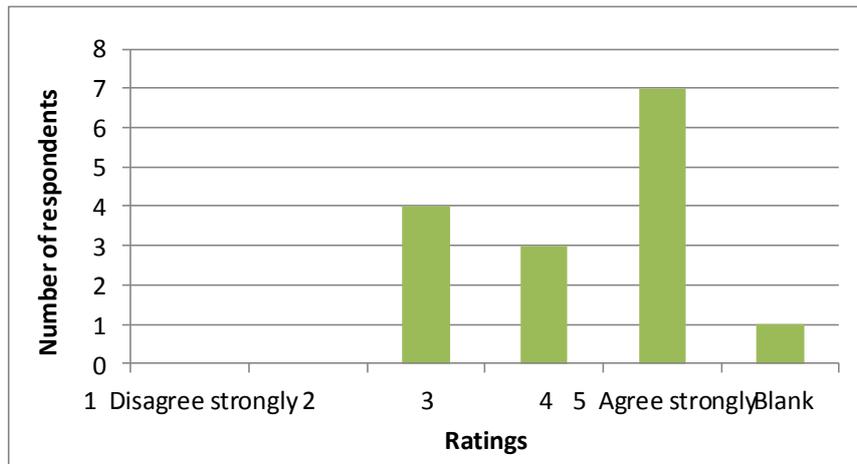
“I'm not a fan of confessional presentations so I found the weakest parts of the conference were the personal stories.”

Other speakers at the conference (particularly Elaine Enarson) were particularly remembered by a number of respondents.

“There were really good speakers. there was lively discussion and good engagement and constructive points coming out of it.”

Two thirds of the interviewees strongly agreed or rated their agreement as a '4' on the five point scale when asked about the extent to which they felt inspired after the conference. All but one of the remaining respondents was neutral on the subject (see Figure 3).

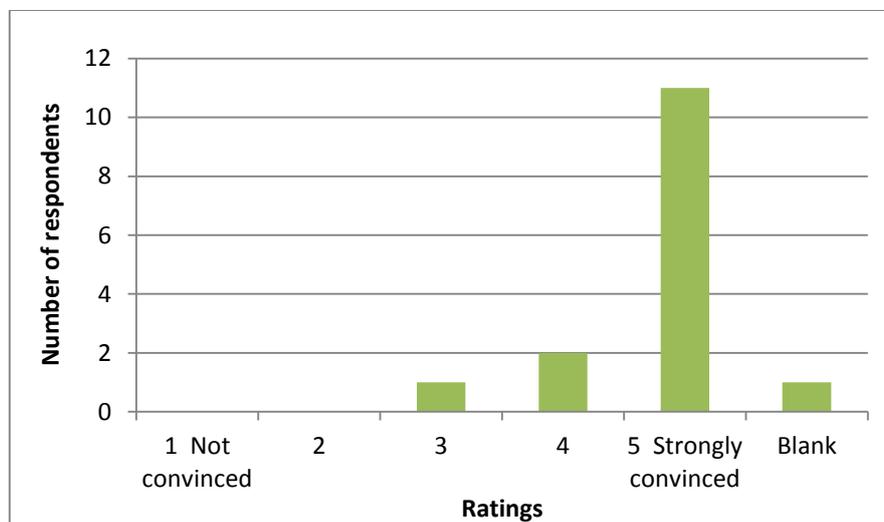
Figure 3 Extent to which respondents felt inspired after the conference



Evidence-based

All but one respondent strongly agreed or gave a rating of ‘4’ on a five point scale indicating that they were convinced that family violence after a disaster was a significant issue. One person was neutral (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Extent to which respondents were convinced that family violence after disaster was a significant issue



One of the reasons that people became convinced was the quality of the research data offered at the conference.

“That it was really good evidence that was presented. I feel like the evidence base we had anecdotally known was strengthened. being able to put academic research to things that we’d hunted for a while, but found difficult – that family violence was something that happened after an emergency.”

“When talking to government, community or partner agencies we found it was quite common - that people saw an increase in family violence [after emergency] but that they haven’t had the evidence to support it.”

The ‘Where to from Here’ session

The final session helped a number of respondents consolidate the information and think about what needed to be done to improve things in future.

“I’ve been heavily involved in natural disaster response in the past, so it was very exciting to see a group of people focused on that and preparatory work in advance of a crisis – so often we just react [to crisis and disaster].”

“.... bringing all the ideas together and listening to all the other organisations in the circle.... “

Range of participants

Mention was also made about how valuable it was to have the wide range of participants at the conference.

“..... the range of people around the circle, particularly the people from emergency services and their perspective....“

Thinking about their own organisation’s response

A number of respondents talked about how the conference made them think about the response that their own organisations had to family violence after disaster.

“..... and I also felt: why weren’t we and our area told to look for it [following the fires]? Because we honestly sailed about our duties, and I for one, and not many others, thought about it.”

“.... in terms of the service system needed to be able to respond [to the issue] and to prepare beforehand, what type of response would be required.”

Great Conference

A number of people gave very positive comments about the conference as a whole.

“The conference was fabulous... the mix of things...”

“..... the fact that we had the opportunity to do workshops and things. There was a workshop that really related to me.”

“I thought it was an excellent day.”

Disappointments

Very few people expressed disappointment about aspect of the conference. All comments will be mentioned to provide some balance in this report.

One source of disappointment was the response from some panel members and, less specifically, some of the speakers.

“.... When the copper was up there, I was disappointed with their answers. They seemed to be providing a company line which was disappointing.”

For one person, the disappointment was about the inevitable inability for the topics to fully-resonate with such a wide range of participants.

“.....When you’re providing a conference to a range of people you won’t always hit the mark. Some of the topics were heading towards that, but they weren’t really what I was after.”

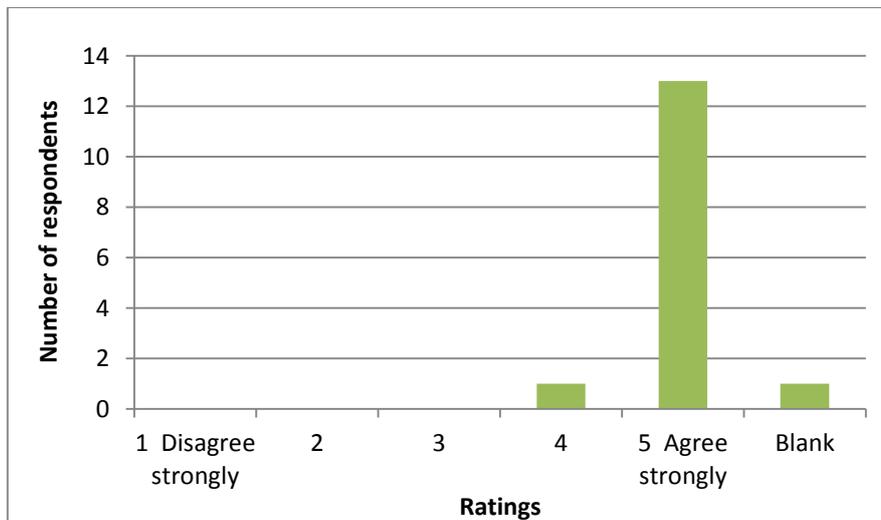
Another respondent had wanted more practical direction from the conference about how their own organisation could implement best practice.

“.....also, [the conference] wasn’t practical about what to do in [disaster] situations. It was more like: “This is the code of practice and this is what we should do”, but we don’t always do that.”

Uptake of the Messages Given During the Conference

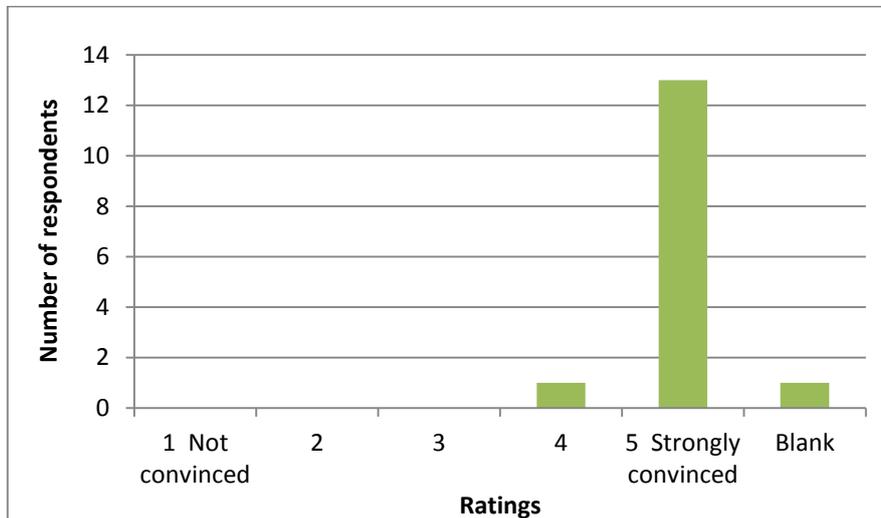
All respondents agreed with the statement that ‘Family violence increases after disasters’. All but one strongly agreed (See Figure 6).

Figure 5 Agreement with “Family violence increases after disasters” statement



All respondents were convinced about the importance of considering family violence issues in disaster planning. All but one was strongly convinced (See Figure 7).

Figure 6 Extent to which respondents were convinced of the importance of considering family violence issues in disaster planning, response and recovery



Action Taken Since Conference

Respondents were asked what actions they had taken since the conference. All had talked to others about what they had learned (“... to anyone that would stand still long enough!”)

“I presented a condensed version of the material from the conference to the peer supervision state-wide team..... I gave them awareness that the organisation does have an emergency management plan – most of them hadn’t really thought of that. And because we do work with men here – with men’s anger – they were interested to hear where men go when they’re grieving and stressed.”

All but one person had taken action on family violence after disasters in their professional or community roles. Some of the specific examples have been included here as they demonstrate the range of actions taken.

“Our regional family violence steering committee just developed a regional prevention strategy. We’ve identified the emergency services sector as one we’ll work with. We’ve just received funding for the strategy.”

“In that session there was someone [I didn’t previously know] from local government from my region and we’ve since met and followed-up about the conference.”

“We were also given postcards on what we planned to do with the information from the conference which was posted back to us three months later. When I read my proposal [on the card], we’d done what we proposed. It was great to receive a prompter in my own hand writing saying this is how we’d utilise the things from the conference. It was really good to bring my mind back to the conference and the reasons why we went and

what we wanted to do. We're looking to use the same model in our conference – it's a great idea."

"At one of the very last sessions, a workshop discussion, I made the comment that there was an emergency management structure that could take some of the work forward. I said that I was a member of a couple of national committees and could raise some of the issues at some of the forums, which I did."

"I used it in my job interview [for the job I'm just about to start]. I'll be working in child services with families that need their capacity to be grown..."

"We now have disaster management leave built into our HR policy. If you're in a disaster there's an additional three days leave in our workers' agreements. Also, if you're a disaster response worker..... then leave's also given"

Eleven of the 15 people interviewed had linked in with other workers to address family violence issues after disasters. Almost half of the respondents had sought more information about issues relating to family violence after disasters.

Respondents were invited to talk about the most significant change that had occurred for them since the conference. Many have already been mentioned in this report.

For a number of respondents, being better informed was the most significant change. They described their use of this knowledge in a number of ways.

"[The most significant change for me has] being able to speak confidently about [family violence after disaster] and having an evidence base behind it."

Factors that Enabled Action to be Taken

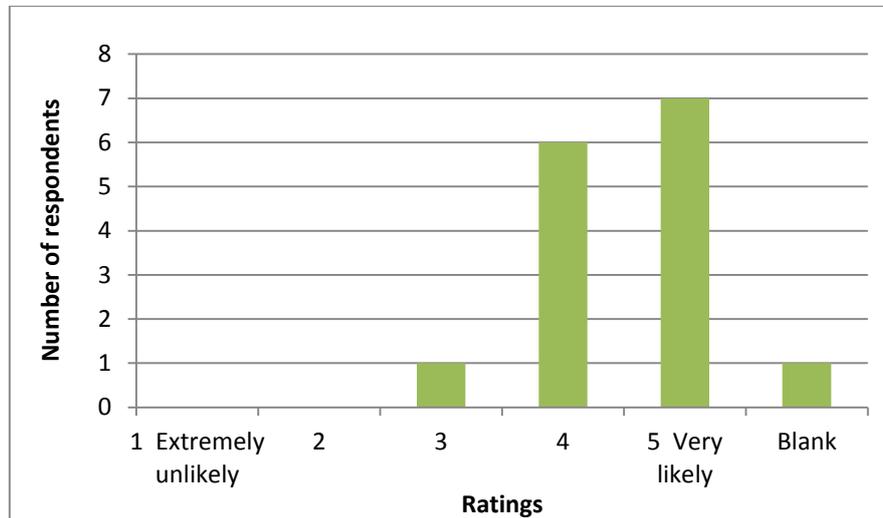
The factors that helped people take action were:

- Being better informed – and hearing the evidence first hand
- Being part of a very supportive team
- The timing of the conference
- Having someone in authority (like the Police Commissioner) showing that this was a serious issue
- Having resources available to do something.

Likelihood of taking further action

All but one (neutral) respondent rated the likelihood of taking further action or making further changes as high with scores of '4' or '5' on a five point scale where 1 = Very unlikely and 5 = Very likely (See Figure 5).

Figure 7 Likelihood of respondents taking even further action/making further changes



Factors Might Hinder Future Action

A number of factors that might possibly hinder future action. They included:

- Lack of time was the barrier mentioned most often by respondents – often to do the necessary work - but also in terms of being in the midst of an emergency situation
“It was highlighted with the Victorian bushfires, the case managers etc – people were employed at a rapid rate and no absolute was given that they’d do some training in family violence.”
- Others’ lack of understanding about recovery and the ramifications of recovery – and the things that flow from that
- Filtering knowledge upwards in an organisational structure – especially when people don’t have the qualifications and understanding of abusive relationships to respond
- Workers only operating within their own ‘silos’ and not giving consideration to the wide context. Having people say “That’s got nothing to do with emergency. That’s something that happens in that town.”
- To carry out the research needed there are difficulties in getting access to the children affected (due the last timeliness of ethics applications)
- Having to hold back from saying things in order to maintain important community-based relationships
- Lack of direction about the practical things to do about the issue.

Final Comments about the Conference

Respondents were invited to make some final observations about the conference overall. Many of the comments made echoed the themes and sentiments already discussed in this report and were covered in the previous evaluation report about the conference.

“The fact that the conference was just a really enjoyable day. And I think the people who organised it did a really great job of keeping a really nice tone to the day. It was done so respectfully and it was really good to see the people who are working on the frontline of these issues – they’re such clever, passionate people. It gives me hope that things will change.”

The calls for more conferences, particularly those addressing training in the practicalities of dealing with family violence, were reiterated by a number of people.

“.....I’d like to see if they’re going to do this again. I’d like a large portion of the conference dedicated to up-skill people there about what works in decreasing family violence and supporting people who have been affected by family violence.”

There were also suggestions that the conference organisers share information – perhaps interactively on their webpage.

“.....it’d be great to have that shared because often we sit alone, but if it happened at the state level, it’d be good to be informed and we could support it at the local level.”

The use of video interviews of the website was also recommended – particularly where the survivors retold their stories.

One person appreciated the opportunity to have a follow up evaluation of the conference.

“..... it’s really great and we need more of it.”

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If we look back at the original planning for the conference, three specific aims were expressed in the Conference Objectives plan:

- Community and service providers and disaster relief bodies recognise and identify family violence after a disaster
- For them to go on and ensure that their agencies have the mandate, skills and resources to respond appropriately
- Family violence issues will be built into emergency planning (see Figure 1).

Veronica Snook's [excellent] Conference Evaluation Report (June 2012) shows that the first objective was met. Conference organisers planned to do this by "capturing the hearts and the minds of delegates". The findings from Veronica's report show that the hearts of delegates were captured by having survivors tell their own stories. The minds were captured by presenting robust research findings and reinforced by including key senior agency leaders as speakers.

This report shows that, over six months later people still felt inspired by what they learned and considered themselves much better informed about family violence after a disaster. They remained convinced that it was a significant issue.

In the overall scheme of things, this is of little consequence if no further action was taken after the conference. The findings in this report show that a number of important actions resulted directly from people's participation in this conference.

This was achieved by holding discussion groups during the conference in which delegates could think about what they could do and make a commitment. These commitments were reinforced by the process of getting people to write them down. The use of postcards sent to delegates three months after the conference served as a further reminder about those commitments.

All of these steps contributed to a number of significant and highly desirable actions taken by delegates. These included talking to others about the issues with authority, including family violence in planning for and training around disasters, and harnessing the energy of other relevant agencies to work collaboratively to address the issues.

All these findings together demonstrate this was a highly successful conference that met its key objectives and in a sensitive and respectful way.

5. APPENDIX A – THE TOPIC GUIDE USED FOR THE INTERVIEWS

Date	
Interviewee code	
Interviewee	

1. Firstly, what field do you work or study in?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Domestic and family violence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Health and social services (community services)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emergency management
<input type="checkbox"/>	Police
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fire and rescue
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____

2. Thinking back to the conference, what are the first things that come to mind?

Immediate impact of the conference

Now, I've got a few questions about the immediate impact of the conference.

3. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, immediately after the conference, did you feel more informed about the dynamics of family violence after a disaster?

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Agree strongly

Comments

4. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, immediately after the conference, did you feel inspired?

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Agree strongly

Comments

5. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not convinced and 5 is strongly convinced, to what extent were you convinced that family violence after disaster was a significant issue?

Not convinced 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly convinced

Comments

6. Immediately after the conference, did you take any action?

Yes

No

Doing anyway

Comments

Emergent changes

Now I'd like to talk about what's happened since the conference.

7. Thinking back over the past eight months, what changes, if any, have resulted from your participation in the conference?

8. Over the past eight months have you made any of the following changes? Can you tell me a bit more about this?

- Talked with others about what you learned at the conference
- Taken action on family violence after disasters in your professional or community role
- Gone on to learn/seek more information about issues related to family violence after disasters
- Linked with other workers to address family violence after disasters

[If no changes, jump to Q15.]

9. Thinking about all the actions/changes that have occurred since the conference, which one would you say has been the most significant?

10. Can you tell me a bit more about the action/change and what happened?

[Probes: What was the situation like before the change? What is like now?]

11. Why is this change the most significant one for you?

Helping and hindering factors

12. Again, thinking about all the actions/changes that we've discussed, what's helped you to make the changes/action?

13. What factors, if any, have made it difficult to make change/take action?

14. How likely is it that you'll continue to take action/make change into the future?

Extremely unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

Comments

For interviewees who haven't made any changes:

15. If you haven't made any changes/taken action to date, why not?

16. What's the likelihood of any changes/action occurring into the future?

Extremely unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

17. Why have you given this particular ranking?

For all interviewees:

18. And finally, thinking about what you know about domestic violence after disaster now, to what extent would you agree with the following statements. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how strongly would you agree with the statement: “Family violence increases after disasters.”

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Comments

19. On a scale where 1 is not convinced and 5 is strongly convinced, how convinced are you by the following statement: “It is important to consider family violence issues in disaster planning, response and recovery.”

Not convinced 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly convinced

Comments

Conclusion

20. Do you have any other comments or suggestions you’d like to make before we finish?

21. Would you be happy to participate in evaluation activities into the future?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

22. If yes, what is the best way to contact you?

Thank you very much for your time and input!

If you have any questions or concerns about the evaluation, you can contact Deb Parkinson at Women’s Health Inner North on 03 9484 1666.