

As a young adult, and especially as a young woman, understanding about family violence is paramount not only for me but for my community as well. Young people between the ages of 18 and 24, in particular women, are at greatest risk of experiencing domestic and family violence within an intimate relationship. That is why having compulsory education while in high school is so vital to save a life. During high school is where most young people engage in their first intimate relationship, and already many of these have been rifled with abuse.

In Australia, Domestic Violence is a taboo topic that many people are not willing to talk about. It is this culture of 'secrecy', fuelled by the fear and shame that is commonly experienced by victims of violence and abuse, which prevents young people from stepping forward. If we want to change this attitude we first need to change the environment. Through a compulsory education system, we will bring the help to the student, instead of waiting for the student, who themselves are often fearful, to come out.

Education will allow our society to support many young people. It will allow us to correct misunderstandings, equip young people with knowledge, and aid in the healing process. Providing young people with education, while in schools, into domestic violence, will allow them to recognise what is a healthy and an unhealthy relationship, which will enable them to make informed choices and recognise warning signs.

Firstly, there are a lot of misconceptions surrounding family violence - many young people in our community don't even know what it is. The fact that psychological, emotional and economical abuse constitutes as being part of family violence is often not known. The White Ribbon Foundation suggests that only 54% of young people who leave high school actually have an understanding of what domestic violence is. Due to the nature that often surrounds violence in our community, many young people, especially young men have a degree of tolerance of violence against women. It is these young people who have carry on the cycle of abuse, unless it is readdress otherwise through a school based education system.

Secondly, it is ridiculous to expect young people to understand domestic violence, when we as a society refuse to equip these people with the support and resources they need to make informed decisions. Children who suffer from chronic mistreatment in violent, often don't receive the appropriate support, because many of them aren't able to recognise that what is happening to them is abuse. These children who experience or even witness domestic violence, many will grow up, and as adults fall back into the cycle of abuse, either as victims or even perpetrators. If anger, and abuse surrounds a young person's childhood, then they will go up only understanding anger and abuse, because nobody has taught them otherwise. Early intervention, through adequate education within schools will prevent the violence cycle from repeating itself, and destroying other families.

Thirdly, schools are the main environment, other than their homes, where children spend most of their day, and it is where children learn the life lessons of what is right and wrong. These institutions combined with a healthy relationship program, will shape the normative and secretive culture of domestic violence, into a healthier one. Most importantly, education into domestic violence will allow students, who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence, to identify stressors throughout their life, which will as a result improve their development and overall education. Schools are an oasis for children, who live in violent homes, and to make it a better place, we need to make it more supportive and accommodate the young people who are often neglected.

Finally, we need to show students, this is what a healthy relationship looks like, this is where you go to get help, and we need to let them know that they are not alone. The education program should cover things such as:

- The definition of domestic violence, what constitutes as domestic violence and the warning signs.
- Causes of family violence and abuse.
- The differences between a healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Gender stereotypes within intimate relationships.
- How and where to seek help.
- If a victim is being abused, it isn't their fault.

As a society we have failed all those children who never got to say "I love you" one last time to their parent, we have failed all those women who never got to witness their child's success, but we can't fail any longer. We can't let those losses be in vain. We need education and we need it urgently, now more than ever.

In the end of the day, I am no expert. I don't have a degree but what I do have is fear. Fear, that one day, someone I love so dearly will face me and tell me, "it is only a matter of time before he kills me", for many families out there, this is exactly what they are going through right now and it needs to change.

Signed,

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