

Abusive kids the result of 'failures by services'

SONIA KOHLBACHER THE AUSTRALIAN APRIL 22, 2015 12:00AM

Children who experience domestic violence are developing their own forms of violent - behaviour towards family members because child protection and support services are failing to provide adequate care, the head of a children's advocacy group says.

Australian Childhood Foundation chief executive Joe Tucci, who was responding to a report which found thousands of children were perpetrators of domestic violence and many of their parents were too ashamed to report the abuse, said positioning young people as abusive was concerning because at least half of those children had themselves been victims of domestic violence.

The report, by Women's Health and Family Services, found a majority of parents who were abused by their children did not report offences because they felt embarrassed and were fearful their capacity as parents would be judged.

In more than 2000 cases reported in Western Australia between 2009 and last year, police charged adolescents with assault and other acts of violence against their siblings, parents and carers.

However, Dr Tucci said in many cases children who displayed violent behaviour towards family members or peers were replicating their own experience and it was often easier for child protection and support services to "define them as the problem when they're really the conclusion of a problem that started before them".

"Those kids who have experienced trauma who then start to manifest that in violent behaviour or in health problems or in relationship problems aren't getting the support they need," Dr Tucci said. "We know that kids need a range of programs that can support them to change when they've experienced a whole range of toxic stress.

"That intervention often isn't strong enough so we're seeing kids who are not only being traumatised by abuse and violence and neglect but the efforts made to protect them are also adding to the complication to the trauma that they have."

Social Services Minister Scott Morrison said addressing domestic violence was a priority and the government would look to put in place reporting arrangements with the states and territories to ensure the effectiveness of service delivery in these critical areas. "The government will continue to work to ensure domestic violence remains a national priority," he said.

The report was handed over to WA Child Protection Minister Helen Morton yesterday. She said the state government's family and domestic violence prevention strategy had a focus on young people including prevention and early intervention.

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