Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

Final Report

30 March 2017

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> *Sexual violence and abuse has proved to be among the most difficult and confounding social problems of our time...*
>
> *A unique opportunity now exists to put Australia, and Queensland in particular, at the forefront of international efforts to understand and address these problems.*
>
> *Professor Stephen Smallbone*

Acknowledgements

The task of producing this report was shared by many, most of whom cannot be named individually. I acknowledge the commitment of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee (the Committee) members to understand better, and consider new approaches to a complex and disturbing problem.

All have had to travel to meetings, follow the unfolding research publications and otherwise suffer disruptions to their routines. I also thank the proxy members and the staff supporting them who took on much of the workload.

The Committee was greatly assisted by a number of experts, some of whom have been named in the report and by other workers who provided a pathway to further inquiry. I particularly thank Professor Frank Oberklaid; Professor Kerry Arabena; Doctor Ernest Hunter; Former Manager, Cairns Sexual Assault Service, Mr James Edney; Senior Government Co-ordinator, Aurukun, Mr Brendan McMahon and Senior Sergeant Brad Winks for their informed contributions and support.

The Committee was also assisted by the work of a number of school principals, various advisory bodies, researchers and two consecutive secretariat teams, respectively led so effectively by Ms Ainslie Barron and Mr Aaron Hoffman. I am particularly indebted to Ms Barron who carried the burden of organising the work for the Committee and the literature reviews. I make special mention of Ms Rachel Payne who at short notice has reviewed the material and provided considerable insights and invaluable service in the drafting of this Final Report. I thank all involved for their long hours and hard work on a difficult task.

The Griffith University Team (Ms Sue Rayment-McHugh, Ms Dimity Smith and Ms Marnie Manning) has shown extraordinary sensitivity, patience, thoroughness and dedication to uncovering and understanding a profoundly serious and tragic problem in our society. Its work is the impetus for both First and Final Reports and we are all indebted to the team's rigour, compassion and commitment. I sincerely thank them for the work they have done and continue to do.

The Honourable Mr Stanley Jones AO QC
Chair, Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

Foreword

Happy, healthy children are a national resource. They are the foundation of a cohesive, functioning and productive society. Youth sexual violence and abuse diminishes that resource in a pernicious way, and is therefore a matter of concern for everyone.
It causes serious, often irreparable harm to victims, for whom we must take action.
If we begin by sharing the responsibility, we will achieve a brighter more equitable future, for these victims and our state. Eliminating youth sexual violence and abuse will require implementing strategies that will have an immediate impact and promote long-term generational change.

The evidence set out in this report—*Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse: Final Report* (Final Report)—unlike for the *Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse: First Report* (First Report), is drawn from across Queensland from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. We cannot ignore the fact that our First Nations people are highly overrepresented among our most disadvantaged in Queensland, and the impact of youth sexual violence and abuse is also disproportionately felt by them. However, youth sexual violence and abuse can occur in any community, and steps must be taken to prevent it and to respond appropriately wherever it occurs. Like many other social problems, it is concentrated in the poorest, most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and it is in these areas that support is most required.

This Final Report reveals a greater incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse in communities with high levels of disadvantage. It is well known that early, intergenerational and locational disadvantage constrains choices, limits opportunities and inhibits social mobility. For children in such an environment their educational achievements will almost certainly be reduced. They are more likely to have involvement in youth sexual violence and abuse, the justice system, become teenage parents and are less likely to find employment. Their chance of enjoying stable adult relationships and a healthy, long life are much diminished.

It is in this way that disadvantage and social dysfunction are entrenched across many dimensions and across generations. Intervention early in a child's life is essential if this cycle is to be broken.

The evidence also reveals a greater impact on young women and girls, highlighting a deeply entrenched gender inequality and the imperative for change in the norms and values in our society.

There is an overwhelming body of research which shows that a child's pathway in life is set during his or her formative years, from before birth until the age of five years. Prolonged adverse child experiences during this period alter the architecture of the developing brain with lifelong consequences for intellectual capacity, learning and behaviour. Consequently, early intervention to reduce the harmful effects of a stressful environment is necessary at the personal, societal and government levels.

There is a significant gap between what the experts in the field of childhood development know and what society at large believes are the influences on a child's development. Closing this knowledge gap will require a sustained public campaign to promote awareness of the key influences, and a matching concerted effort on the part of many more professionals and community workers to understand the issues and impart this knowledge more widely.

Investing in reforms targeting the early years of childhood will reduce later expenditure in special education, criminal justice and welfare, and will increase national productivity and strengthen the economy. Preventing harm at this stage is far less expensive, and more effective, than the cost of remedial measures later.

At the same time, there is a need for immediate action —including raising parents' awareness of the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse, so that parents can be more vigilant and equipped to respond. Other immediate actions include: putting into place strategies to prevent youth sexual violence and abuse from occurring, and ensuring those affected—either as a victim, perpetrator, carer or friend—receive the treatment or support they require. The recommendations of this Final Report are intended to meet the needs of parents, children and young people, service providers and the community. They are designed also to enrich the whole community by providing a heightened knowledge and understanding of the issue, creating safe spaces for children and young people, and finding a pathway to a better future. Acceptance of this challenge by the local community is the starting point and this must be accompanied by sensitive and informed support from governments and service providers.

I am deeply grateful to the women and men of the communities affected who are desperate to see change and are courageously influencing where they can to bring about change. And lastly, I especially thank the children and young people who, despite the violations they have endured, could still place their trust in the Griffith University researchers so that their stories could be heard. This Final Report is for them and those who continue to suffer in silence.

I commend this Final Report to the government and people of Queensland, in the spirit of shared responsibility, to ensure the children of Queensland are happy, healthy and safe.

The Honourable Mr Stanley Jones AO QC
Chair, Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

The way forward requires commitment—by families, by communities and by all levels of government—not only to deal with the wellbeing of children but to find an effective way to reduce the broader disadvantage and dysfunction which is the fundamental cause of the problem. It also requires an acknowledgement by government that interventions are required that promote long-term and generational change as well as interventions that tackle youth sexual violence and abuse in the immediate term.

Executive summary

In public policy terms, youth sexual violence and abuse is a 'wicked problem'—that is a complex, difficult and confronting problem, for which there is simply no straightforward solution. Moreover, there is little formal scientific research into the problem and limited evidence of successful approaches to eliminating youth sexual violence and abuse to date

This Final Report proposes to bring about change in two ways:

- **implementing actions that will immediately impact and prevent youth sexual violence and abuse**. These actions will include raising parent, community and Governments' awareness of the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse; addressing the physical risk factors that support its occurrence; and ensuring those affected by it, report it, and receive appropriate treatment and support.

- **actions that will support long term and generational change**, to ensure children are given every opportunity to develop to the fullest of their potential, and youth sexual violence and abuse is prevented.

Youth sexual violence and abuse is an affront to the whole of society because it harms and threatens the fundamental structure within society—the wellbeing of children. The protection of children is paramount and, so too is the provision of an environment in which children will be happy and healthy.

To have happy, healthy and safe children is the shared objective of parents, carers, community leaders and government representatives. It is the responsibility of the whole community to protect and support children, and to develop their potential. It is widely accepted that a happy, healthy and loving childhood lays the critical foundation for future cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development—through adolescence and on to adulthood (Irwin, Siddiqi and Hertzman 2007, 5). It is a tragic fact that in some places in Queensland and around the world, the reality of childhood looks quite different. Far too many young people in Queensland, in particular women and girls, suffer from sexual violence and abuse.

Chapter 01

Chapter one (page 15) provides an overview and background to this Final Report. The Committee has used the definition of youth sexual violence and abuse, as adopted in its First Report, drawing from multiple jurisdictional definitions.

The First Report states that: Youth sexual violence and abuse refers to sexual contact between persons where either the perpetrator or the victim is under 18 years of age and where such contact is non-consensual, violent or illegal. Such contact is non-consensual if any of the following apply:

- either person is under the age of consent or lacks the capacity to consent

- a situation of imbalance of power exists

- there is present a threat or coercion to either person.

The causes of youth sexual violence and abuse are many and complex and must be considered within the context of both the perpetrator's and the victim's family, peers, organisational and community systems and situations. The Queensland Government sought to tackle this issue through the establishment in March 2016, of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee. The Committee had two tasks:

- To identify and address barriers to the effective and efficient implementation and coordination of activities of all tiers of government to address youth sexual violence and abuse in Aurukun and West Cairns; and

- To research the prevalence and impact of youth sexual violence and abuse more broadly across Queensland and take advice from experts in the field to consider and make recommendations about the appropriateness of the current legislative, policy and resourcing of responses to youth sexual violence and abuse, and how all levels of government and the community prevent, respond and reduce youth sexual violence and abuse.

This Final Report complements and builds on the First Report and other work in this area to develop a clearer understanding of youth sexual violence and abuse. Most relevant to this effort is the report titled: *Preventing Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun: Establishing the Scope, Dimension and Dynamics of the Problem* (by Professor Stephen Smallbone, Susan Rayment-McHugh and Dimity Smith of Griffith University).

The First Report submitted by the Committee to the Queensland Government examined youth sexual violence and abuse in two Queensland communities —Aurukun and West Cairns. It was submitted to the Queensland Government in September 2016 and all recommendations were accepted.

This Final Report by the Committee acknowledges that this issue is not only state-wide, but a global problem (WHO 2016). Youth sexual violence and abuse occurs in urban centres, regional towns and remote communities. Those areas worst affected also experience high rates of social dysfunction and economic disadvantage. Given the disproportionate disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, Indigenous children and youth, particularly girls, are unfortunately over-represented in the data related to youth sexual violence and abuse. For this reason where appropriate, the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse as it impacts on Indigenous communities is given specific consideration.

Chapter 02

Chapter two (page 20) provides an analysis of the reported incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. Prevalence is difficult to gauge due to significant levels of under-reporting. According to the 2015–16 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Crime Victimisation Survey, approximately 70 per cent of the most recent incidents of sexual assault were not reported to police. For younger people this proportion is likely to be higher still (ABS 2017).

To consider prevalence, the Committee commissioned the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO) to analyse youth sexual violence and abuse within Queensland, drawing on a range of datasets. It is the first time that a picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland has been compiled.

Overall the data indicates a significant downward trend in the rates of sexual offending against people aged 0–17 from 2008–09 to 2015–16. Disturbingly however, over the same period, the data also reveals a significant upward trend in the number of child pornography related offences, undoubtedly related to the rise of information and communication technologies and sharing of explicit images by mobile phone and on social media.

The data also highlights other concerning trends and issues, namely that:

- young girls and women are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence and abuse than their male counterparts (362 per 100,000 in 2015–16 for females as opposed to 86 per 100,000 in 2015–16 for males)

- perpetrators of youth sexual violence and abuse are far more likely to be males than female

- although an issue occurring across all of Queensland, there is higher reported incidence in some areas of Queensland over others

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are significantly over-represented in the data, and are twice as likely as non-Indigenous youths to be victims (385 per 100,000 persons as opposed to 178 per 100,000)

- most incidences of sexual assault are perpetrated by someone known to the victim, usually a non-family member, and are most likely to be committed in the places where children and young people spend most of their time—with 70 percent of reported offences occurring in residential settings

- there has been an almost four-fold increase in the number of young offenders with reported child pornography related offences in Queensland, from 2011–12 (27.4 per 1000,000) to 2015–16 (101.7 per 1000,000), undoubtedly closely related to advances in technology and the sharing of explicit images via mobile phone and online

- most young people who have sexually offended do not go on to sexually re-offend.

The data presented in this Final Report provides a basis on which to build further data and evidence to better understand youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. The Committee recommends that its collection and analysis be continued and enriched. This data will support parents, teachers, service providers, and young people to understand this issue as it relates to their community. It must be used to inform policy decisions and ensure programs are well targeted.

Chapter 03

Chapter three (page 26) considers the links between youth sexual violence and abuse and disadvantage. As described in the World Health Organization's (WHO) *World report on violence and health (2002)*, children impacted by socioeconomic disadvantage are often exposed to more risk factors than other children. Prolonged exposure to harmful stress associated with extreme poverty, physical or emotional abuse, severe maternal depression, substance abuse and family violence precipitates neurophysiological responses in a child which disrupts developing brain architecture. This can lead to life-long problems in learning, physical and mental health, and particularly in behaviour and create an 'ability gap' that widens as children get older (Oberklaid 2014; Oberklaid and Drever 2011; Oberklaid 1988), as shown below in Figure 1.

The Committee points to the economic returns of prevention. It also makes recommendations aimed at preventing the gap in ability opening up in the first place by promoting early childhood development and an understanding of its importance, and promoting schools as safe places where children can be supported and protected, and feel confident in discussing and disclosing youth sexual violence and abuse. The Committee sees an opportunity for schools to act as hubs of community engagement on a range of important social issues, in particular youth sexual violence and abuse, in recognition that tackling this issue will require whole-of-community awareness and commitment.

Chapter 04

Chapter four (page 33) discusses one of the major obstacles to tackling youth sexual violence and abuse— that is the silence that surrounds it. The reasons behind the silence and unwillingness to discuss, engage on and report this issue are many and complex and include shame, fear of retribution or consequences of reporting, social norms in which forms of youth sexual violence and abuse are perceived as acceptable or tolerated, misunderstanding about what youth sexual violence and abuse is, and a culture of secrecy amongst some young people. Breaking the silence is critical. The Committee stresses the importance of strengthening communities' understanding of youth sexual violence and abuse —both through a state-wide publicity campaign and also through supplementary materials that respond to community specific needs.

The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government continue to support promising early interventions being implemented as part of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in Aurukun and West Cairns, and that the project be expanded into two additional communities (including at least one non-Indigenous community) with high reported incidences of youth sexual violence and abuse to determine its effectiveness in tackling this issue in the broader population. The Committee also recommends that location specific assessments be undertaken in communities with an indicated high incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse to inform targeted responses. A recommendation is made that the Queensland school curriculum related to 'Respectful Relationships' be made compulsory and expanded to include increased consideration of issues related to youth sexual violence and abuse, whilst simultaneously giving schools flexibility to nuance material at a local level to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.

Figure 1: *Early childhood life trajectories*
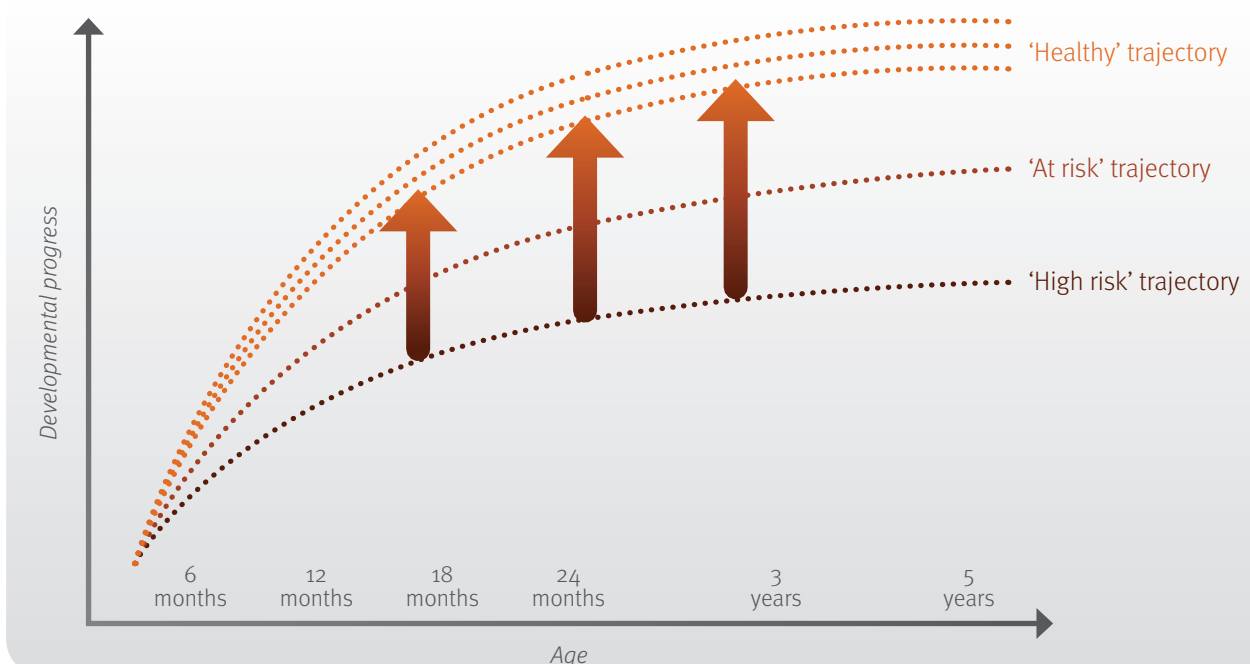
Chapter 05

Chapter five (page 38) discusses the impact of advancements in communication technology on risks and intervention opportunities in relation to youth sexual violence and abuse. Increased access to, and speed of communication technologies has contributed to changing the nature of relationships. A disconnect exists between current child pornography laws that can criminalise youths for consensually sharing or receiving sexually explicit images, and changing social norms in which this behaviour is increasingly becoming part of normal intimate relationships. The Committee recommends that guidelines be developed to support Queensland Police officers in getting the balance right between protecting society from the harm caused by child pornography and recognising changing social norms.

Although most sharing of explicit images is consensual and takes place as part of an intimate relationship, this is not always the case. Over recent years there have been a number of high profile examples of explicit images of young women and girls being shared and even traded, without their consent. Young people need to make judgements about their use of images, videos and other online content of a personal and intimate nature at a time when, developmentally they may not have the cognitive capacity or maturity to process consent and comprehend the repercussions of their actions. Evidence suggests that girls and young women can face significant pressure to engage in sexualised online activity and sexting and potentially face negative consequences for both refusing or taking part in such behaviour (Bluet-Boyd et al. 2013, 24).

The Committee recommends that the opportunities provided by ever improving information and communication capabilities be harnessed as part of a multi-media and interactive community education campaign that emphasises healthy relationships and engages young people as the drivers of change. A stronger awareness of the risks associated with sharing digital images also needs to be fostered through the Queensland 'Respectful Relationships' school curriculum.

Chapter 06

Chapter six (page 42) presents a discussion of structural and systemic changes needed to ensure that no child is left behind. Despite the best efforts and good intentions of government agencies, service providers, community members and families, some children and young people have fallen through the cracks. They have not received the support and intervention they require to either prevent youth sexual violence and abuse or to respond to it appropriately when it occurs. Often, the children and families most in need of support are those most difficult to reach and sustain engagement with. Tackling youth sexual violence and abuse will require a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach that is tailored to the needs of specific communities.

There are particular experiences of disadvantage that require a new approach in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Committee recommend that this Final Report and the *Empowered Communities* report be referred to the Productivity Commission for consideration in its current review of service provision in Indigenous communities and that the Queensland Government give consideration to the establishment of an independent statutory authority to oversee investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.
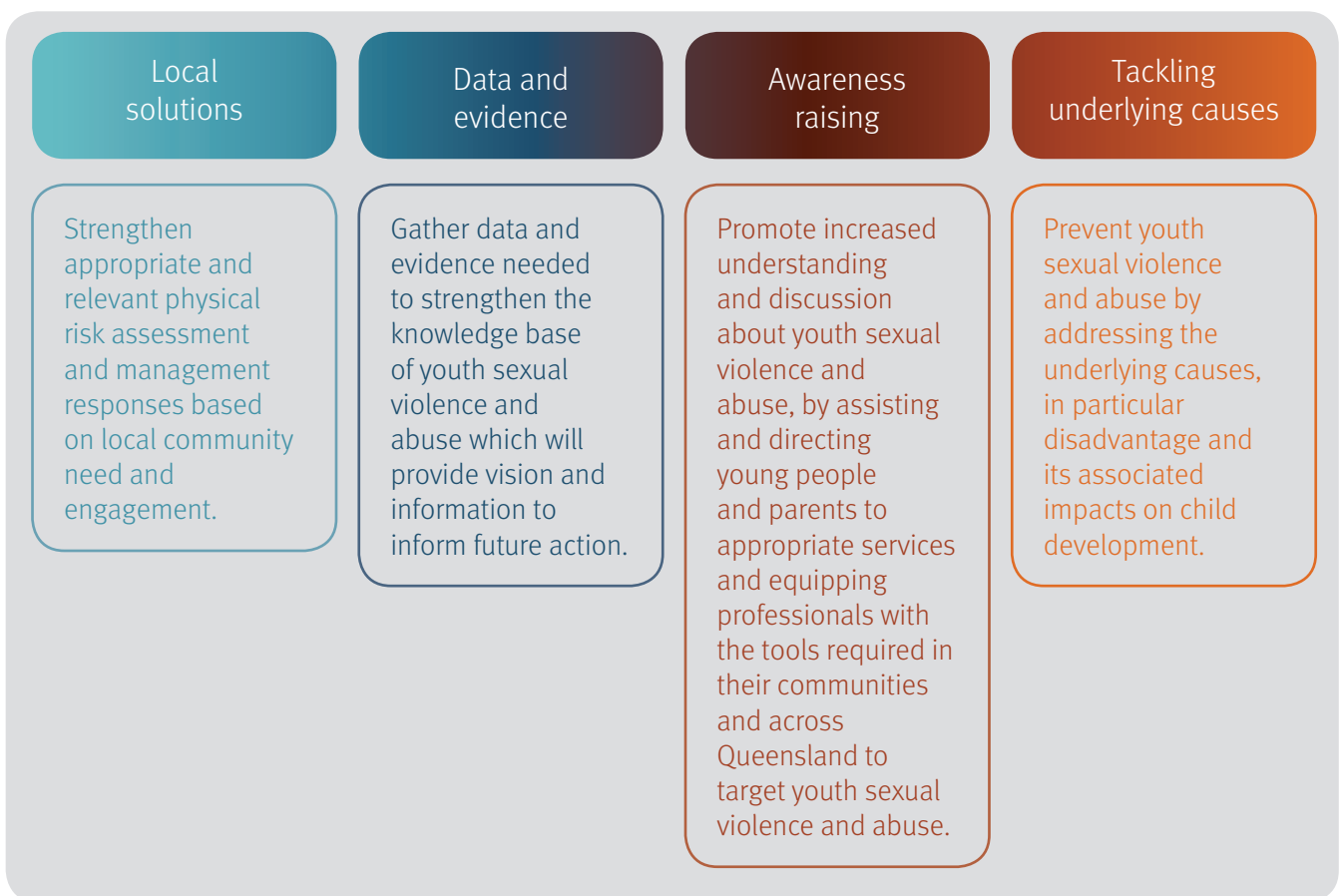
This Final Report concludes with emphasis on the need for a whole-of-community approach and coordinated, local level and outcomes focussed responses to this issue to prevent and respond more effectively to this growing challenge for young people, families and communities.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the report aim to bring about a transformational change to ensure that every child and young person has the safe and secure life they are entitled to. For this change to occur, actions are required that will immediately impact and prevent youth sexual violence and abuse and support long-term and generational change.

The recommendations relate to local level solutions; data and evidence; awareness raising; and tackling the underlying causes of youth sexual violence and abuse. Taken together, the recommendations of the Committee provide a comprehensive and holistic response to youth sexual violence and abuse.

The recommendations are clustered into four key themes:

Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling underlying causes
Strengthen appropriate and relevant physical risk assessment and management responses based on local community need and engagement.	Gather data and evidence needed to strengthen the knowledge base of youth sexual violence and abuse which will provide vision and information to inform future action.	Promote increased understanding and discussion about youth sexual violence and abuse, by assisting and directing young people and parents to appropriate services and equipping professionals with the tools required in their communities and across Queensland to target youth sexual violence and abuse.	Prevent youth sexual violence and abuse by addressing the underlying causes, in particular disadvantage and its associated impacts on child development.

The Committee proposes that every member of society has a role to play in delivering long-term and immediate actions to tackle youth sexual violence and abuse, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Please refer to the following analysis of key issues related to youth sexual violence and abuse and the Committee's recommendations for how best to respond to this challenge (pages 11–14).

Figure 2: *Framework for recommendations*
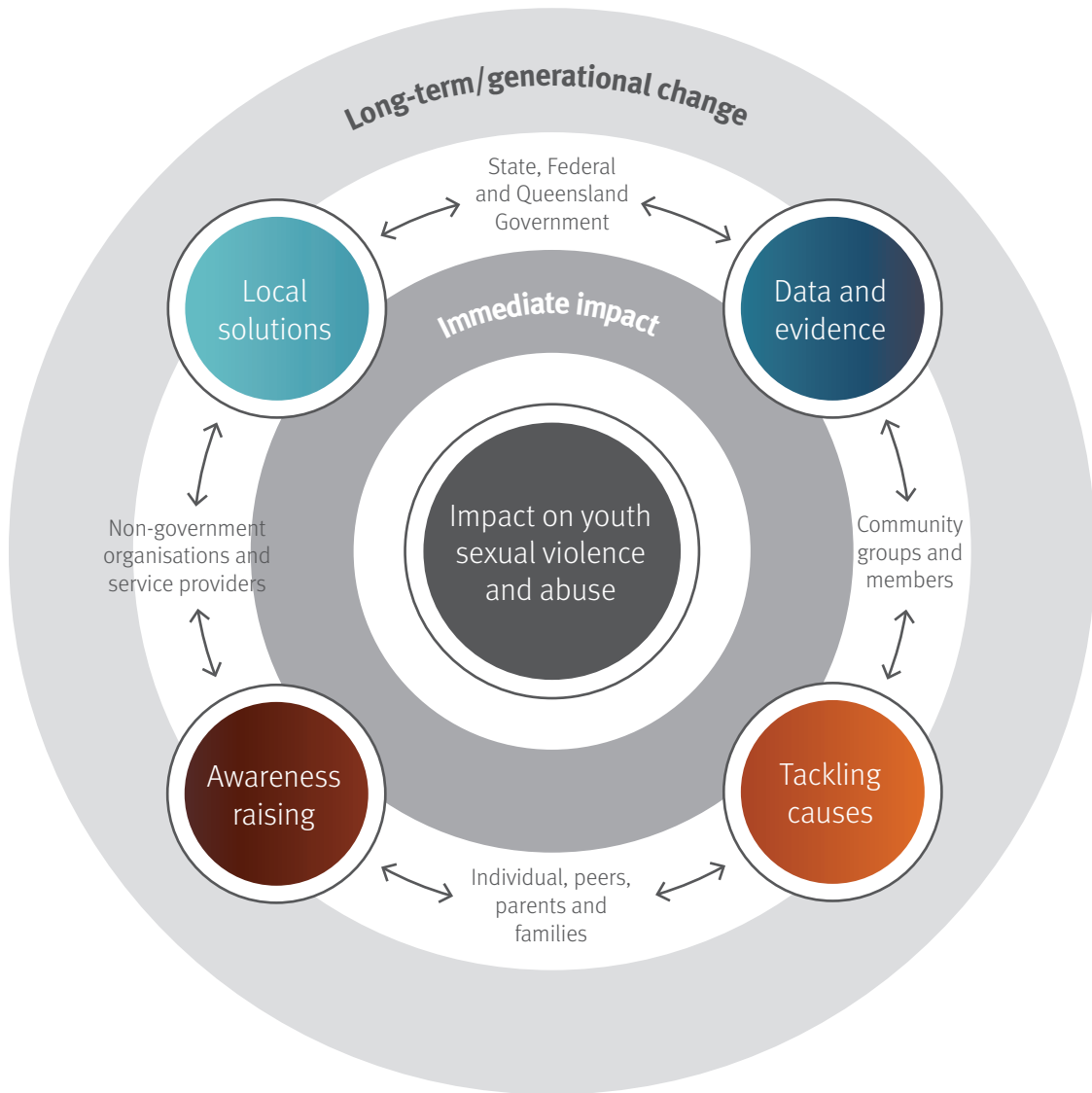
Recommendation actions

Recommendations	Action areas				Immediate impact	Long-term/ generational change
	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes		
Chapter 02: Reported incidences of youth sexual violence and abuse						
1. Given the data demonstrates that youth sexual violence and abuse is a statewide issue, there is a need for a whole of government response to the issue. The Queensland Government should work closely with communities to develop place-based responses.	●				◉	◎
2. That administrative data utilised in the development of this report continue to be collected, tracked and analysed on an annual basis to provide an ongoing picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. To strengthen the evidence base of Queensland Government's policy responses, additional information (qualitative and quantitative) should be collected by agencies to support a more detailed interrogation of specific issues and help overcome the challenge of under-reporting.		●			◉	◎
Chapter 03: Tackling the cause of the cause						
3. That the Queensland Government adopt a whole-of community approach to tackling Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse that builds on the principles of community empowerment and co-design.	●				◉	◎
4. That the Queensland Government work with key stakeholders including the Commonwealth Government to intensify efforts and adopt a long-term approach to supporting local communities to overcome disadvantage, as a fundamental prerequisite for the healthy development and wellbeing of all children and youth.				●		◎
5. That the Queensland Government develop a strategy to promote healthy early-life programs such as the "First 1000 Days" to reduce the effects of disadvantage in early childhood.				●		◎
6. That, in line with its commitment to support kindergarten programs in all settings under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for 2016 and 17, the Queensland Government prioritise communities with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children to ensure enrolment and attendance rates are equally high across all parts of the state, and ensure the quality of education being provided is also equally high in all locations.	●			●	◉	◎
7. All Queensland schools implement the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse to help ensure that they are child safe organisations, and that Queensland's most disadvantaged schools be prioritised and supported to implement the recommendations which: • promote the safety of young people and reduce the risk of youth sexual violence and assault occurring on school premises; • recognise the valuable role that schools can play in supporting community engagement and incorporate spaces that can be used to host community engagement activities, for example community information sessions, computer literacy classes and parenting classes and playgroups; and • promote continual engagement of parents and children from before school stage through to primary school, high school and beyond which reduces the disengagement often associated with transition points.	●		●		◉	◎

Recommendations	Action areas				Immediate impact	Long-term/ generational change
	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes		
8. That the Queensland Government play a leading role in strengthening the knowledge base related to youth sexual violence and abuse, including by commissioning or undertaking research and analysis including on the effectiveness and efficiency of specific interventions. Given the limitations of the data due to under-reporting, the committee recommends that quantitative data analysis be complemented by qualitative data analysis.		●				◎
9. That communities, in particular those with high rates of youth sexual violence and abuse or that are at high risk, be supported to develop or strengthen locally appropriate and relevant programs aimed at empowering and educating young girls and boys, as one part of a localised and comprehensive response.	●		●		◉	◎
10. The Committee recommends the Queensland Government support non-government organisations to work with young women and girls to build confidence and promote knowledge sharing.	●		●	●	◉	◎
Chapter 04: Breaking the silence						
11. The Queensland Government commission the development of a state-wide community awareness and engagement campaign to promote increased understanding and discussion of youth sexual violence and abuse, informed by the voices of children and young people, and developed with expert input. Supplementary material to support the effectiveness of message delivery at the specific community level should be produced by the local community, with Government support.	●		●		◉	◎
12. That the Queensland Government establish a designated hotline service that encourages young people to discuss incidences and concerns in an anonymous setting and be connected with appropriate services and support if required.			●		◉	
13. That the Queensland Government makes 'Respectful Relationships' education programs including sexual ethics a compulsory component of the curriculum across each year of primary and secondary schooling and that the minimum number of contact hours be significantly increased.			●		◉	◎
14. That the 'Respectful Relationships' curriculum be adapted by schools, in conjunction with teachers, parents and young people to ensure it provides a tailored and location-specific response to dealing with the complex issues associated with youth sexual violence and abuse.	●		●		◉	◎
15. That the Queensland Government fund the continuation of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' and its evaluation, leveraging the investment previously made by the Commonwealth Government, for a period of time sufficient to demonstrate effectiveness, including: • Ongoing delivery of those initiatives from the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in Aurukun and West Cairns that have shown promise, to enable further evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions. • Trial the delivery of flagship elements of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in two high prevalence locations (including at least one non-Indigenous location) to gather evidence of the relevance of this approach in tackling youth sexual violence and abuse across Queensland. • Trial the delivery of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' through existing service providers with support from GYFS to enhance sustainability of the delivery model and impact.	●	●	●		◉	◎

Recommendations	Action areas				Immediate impact	Long-term / generational change
	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes		
16. The Committee recommends that a locational assessment to identify 'at risk' locations and times be undertaken in communities with an indicated high incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse to inform an appropriate and targeted response.	●	●			◉	

Chapter 05: Sexting and social media

Recommendations	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes	Immediate impact	Long-term / generational change
17. The Queensland Government commissions the development of a multi-media and interactive community education campaign that emphasises healthy relationships and engages young people as the drivers of change. It should have a particular focus on social media and sexting. The education campaign should draw on examples used in other successful campaigns and aim to strengthen the public's awareness of the law.			●		◉	◎
18. That consideration be given to the establishment of police guidelines aimed at supporting police to appropriately apply the law and ensure that the correct balance is achieved between protecting children and society from the harm caused by child pornography and not criminalising young people for consensually sharing images on digital media.			●		◉	
19. That digital and social media and its role in healthy relationships and youth sexual violence and abuse be included in the 'Respectful Relationships' curriculum, including from a legal perspective.			●		◉	◎

Chapter 06: No child left behind

Recommendations	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes	Immediate impact	Long-term / generational change
20. That the Queensland and Australian Governments work with communities, in particular those with a high prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse, to identify gaps in service provision and co-design tailored interventions that target youth sexual violence through locally appropriate responses.	●	●			◉	◎
21. That systems of professional and cultural mentoring be established across key service delivery agencies (including the Departments of Health, Communities, Education and Police) to ensure that service providers (government and non-government) working on the frontline, including in remote areas, are supported to meet the needs of clients and effectively respond to issues related to youth sexual violence and abuse.	●		●		◉	◎
22. That the Queensland Government develop a package of interventions for communities to consider in developing best-fit local interventions that target youth sexual violence and abuse. The package would include actions that have immediate and long-term impacts and that support awareness raising, prevention and diversion, and treatment and response.	●		●	●	◉	◎
23. That 'downward' accountability mechanisms, whereby communities help determine the performance measures and contribute to evaluating how well the measures are achieved, be built into all new and existing interventions and performance agreements related to youth sexual violence and abuse.	●	●			◉	◎
24. That the Queensland Government pilot and rigorously evaluate the use of financing models that emphasise results and impact interventions that target youth sexual violence and abuse.		●				◎

Recommendations	Action areas				Immediate impact	Long-term / generational change
	Local solutions	Data and evidence	Awareness raising	Tackling causes		
25. That the Queensland Government strengthen the *Program Evaluation Guidelines* to mandate that all programs and interventions of a certain financial value or that deal with complex social challenges (such as youth sexual violence and abuse) or high priority issues are appropriately and independently evaluated.		●				◎
26. The Committee recommends the duration and funding for innovative programs targeting youth sexual violence and abuse be determined based on a realistic assessment of how long it will take to be able to demonstrate likely effectiveness. The Committee recommends the funding for and duration of pilots be determined in consultation with appropriate evaluation experts to ensure adequacy for demonstrating results.		●				◎
27. That the Queensland Government undertake consultations in all discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to relay findings from the Committee's review and foster an open community discussion on this highly sensitive issue. The consultations would lead to the development of community-specific commitments and a framework for fostering happy healthy children free from youth sexual violence and abuse.	●		●		◉	◎
28. That this Final Report and the *Empowered Communities Report* be referred to the Queensland Productivity Commission for consideration in its current review of service delivery in Indigenous communities.		●		●		◎
29. That the Queensand Government give consideration to establishing an independent Statutory Authority to oversee government investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.				●		◎
30. That the Queensland Government prioritise the establishment of local sexual assault networks and encourage and strengthen existing networks particularly in communities with high reported incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse. This would also require the Queensland Government to build the capacity of local non-government organisations to lead the coordination of services and the development of protocols. This may require funding from Queensland Government for dedicated coordinators in some locations as determined by need, and to support the provision of professional mentoring partnerships with from specialist services.	●		●		◉	
31. That existing and new local sexual assault networks be responsive to local needs and priorities and have scope to consider particular issues of concern, for example youth sexual violence and abuse. If warranted, the work of sexual assault networks could also include a focus on prevention as well as response.	●				◉	

Vision

As a community we all want children to be happy, healthy and safe. This is the shared objective of parents, community leaders, service providers and government representatives and is a right for all children. It is an objective that all members of society must ensure is upheld. It is what has driven the Committee in undertaking this review.

The preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, 1) emphasises that:

"the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community…."

"…the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding…."

Article 3 (United Nations 1989, 2) goes on to state that:

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration".

"State parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him and her, and to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures".

It is the responsibility of the whole community to protect and support children, and to develop their potential. It is widely accepted that a happy, healthy and loving childhood lays the critical foundation for future development—through adolescence and on to adulthood (Irwin, Siddiqi and Hertzman 2007, 5).

However some children unfortunately grow up in environments that are not conducive to living happy and healthy lives. These children do not experience the joys of childhood, and instead grow up in environments where violence is considered normal and they are vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

For some children, the downward trajectory starts pre-birth, as indicated by research that demonstrates the links between cognitive development in utero and later life outcomes. This issue is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Society is failing to provide these children with a positive life trajectory.

Later in the child's developmental journey, adolescence can be a complex and challenging time for young people. It is a period of considerable change (physical, cognitive, emotional and sexual). A loving, nurturing and safe childhood is key to helping adolescents navigate this difficult period.

At this stage, young people frequently receive messages through the media, popular culture and their peers about what it is to be a man or a woman. Increasingly these messages focus on sex and sexuality as currency where women are passive objects of sexual desire.

These messages are reinforced through pornography which is increasingly available to children and young people and sends harmful messages about sex, pleasure and consent. As a result, for some young people, early sexual encounters can be violent and distressing and leave life-long impacts. The report *Young Australians' Attitudes to Violence Against Women* found that forty percent of young people agree that 'rape results from men not being able to control their sexual urges'—an increase from the 2009 survey, where 30 percent agreed with this statement. Further, a large proportion of young people believe that women make false claims of partner violence and sexual assault (Harris et al. 2015).

Young people are challenged by the threats posed by an overwhelming increase in the role of communication technologies in their day to day lives and more importantly, their relationships. This unprecedented shift in the way we communicate gives young people responsibility for navigating previously unchartered territory, at a time when they are still developing physically and emotionally (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013). Research suggests that youth who experience dating violence offline are more likely to experience it online as well, highlighting the risk posed by communication technologies in further eroding social norms around respectful relationships.

Consent is an integral aspect of forming intimate relationships of which the complexity cannot be underestimated. Children and young people are expected to make responsible and informed judgements regarding consent, at a time when each individual child is at a different stage of emotional, intellectual and physical development. Some young people may not understand the concept, or one young person's understanding of consent may differ substantially from another. This is a concern not only for establishing sexual consent but in the responsible use of personal images, videos or other online material of an intimate or sexual nature that may be shared between two individuals.

As children mature, greater autonomy, the development of intimate relationships, and age appropriate and consensual sexual behaviour is to be expected. Where, however, there is behaviour that is concerning and/ or problematic, there may be a need for increased supervision, intervention or specialist advice.

The problem of youth sexual violence and abuse reveals a gulf between the vision of happy, healthy and safe children, and the reality. Every child deserves to grow up and be able to say 'I was loved and supported, and felt safe and secure.'

Defining youth sexual violence and abuse

The causes of youth sexual violence and abuse are many and complex. A holistic understanding requires consideration of not only the individual, but their unique social and cultural environment. Sexual violence and abuse is a product of interactions between biological, developmental, sociocultural and situational factors (Carmody 2009, 6). Risk factors operate at multiple levels.

In its First Report on youth sexual violence and abuse which was presented to the Queensland Government in August 2016, the Committee agreed upon a definition for youth sexual violence and abuse. Drawn from multiple jurisdictions, the agreed definition was presented as a recommendation in the First Report. The Committee adopted the following definition:

Youth sexual violence and abuse refers to sexual contact between persons where either the perpetrator or the victim is under 18 years of age and where such contact is non-consensual, violent or illegal.

Such contact is non-consensual if any of the following apply:

- either person is under the age of consent or lacks the capacity to consent
- a situation of imbalance of power exists
- there is present a threat or coercion to either person.

The causes of this violence should not be considered in isolation but also within the context of both the perpetrator's and the victim's family, peer, organisational and community systems and situations.

Risk factors for sexual violence have a cumulative effect, where the more factors present, the greater the risk of sexual violence (World Health Organization (WHO) 2002). Although not unique to disadvantaged communities, children impacted by socioeconomic disadvantage are often exposed to more risk factors than other children. For some children, the downward trajectory starts pre-birth, as indicated by research that demonstrates the links between cognitive development in utero and later life outcomes. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter two (page 20). The more disadvantaged an individual, the greater their risk of experiencing youth sexual violence. Girls are particularly vulnerable to youth sexual violence and abuse, as evidenced by the disproportionate representation in victim statistics.

Risk factors for youth sexual violence and abuse as identified in available literature

Individual-level

Maladaptive psychological and behavioural characteristics and cognitive, emotional and intellectual vulnerability:

- E.g. personal trauma (including previous exposure to abuse), impulsivity, risk-taking behaviour.

Relationship-level

Influence of family and peers:

- E.g. household dynamics and circumstances, parenting, drug and alcohol use, domestic and family violence, inappropriate exposure to sexual behaviours or material.

Community-level

Physical and demographic features of the community:

- E.g. socioeconomic disadvantage, marginalisation, welfare dependency, structural opportunity for crime, lack of enforcement.

Societal-level

Sociocultural norms and values:

- E.g. violence-supportive norms, cultural or gender-based oppression, (Carmody 2009; WHO 2002).

Background

A variety of inquiries and reports have investigated issues broadly relating to youth sexual violence and abuse, including areas such as child abuse and domestic and family violence (Appendix one, page 50). Further, a number of reports are being developed concurrently with this Final Report. This Final Report complements and builds on the First Report by this Committee (described below) and other work in this area to develop a clearer understanding of youth sexual violence and abuse. Most relevant to this effort is the Smallbone Report.

In 2012, the Queensland Government commissioned a report titled: *Preventing Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun: Establishing the Scope, Dimension and Dynamics of the Problem*. The report was prepared by Professor Stephen Smallbone, Susan Rayment-McHugh and Dimity Smith of Griffith University and is widely referred to as the Smallbone Report.

The Smallbone Report was commissioned by the Queensland Government as a result of work undertaken by the Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS), who provide clinical psychological services to court-referred youth sexual offenders and their families across Queensland, and had been doing so for some time in both Aurukun and West Cairns. GYFS was concerned that youth sexual violence and abuse was apparently endemic in these two locations.

The Queensland Government released a redacted version of the Smallbone Report in March 2016, at which time it also established this Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee. Given the trust of local people involved, and the desire for them to continue working to make these places safer, the Smallbone Report itself urged caution about the timing and circumstances of making the report public, and suggested some delay may be warranted to allow ongoing work with the communities involved to respond to the report.

The Smallbone Report outlined some of the key characteristics of endemic youth sexual violence and abuse in the two locations and concluded the two environments posed an extreme risk for future and widespread youth sexual violence and abuse due to:

- individual, family, and peer related factors such as substance misuse, general delinquency and non-sexual offending

- the local physical and social ecology: physical environments that are conducive to youth sexual violence and abuse and social/peer relations that 'normalise' sexual violence and degrading attitudes to women.

The Smallbone Report proposed a way forward to work with the communities involved to put in place prevention and intervention centred strategies developed with community input. With three years of funding support from the Australian Government, interventions have been progressively designed and implemented since 2013, and research conducted into their effectiveness. This prevention and intervention work has occurred under the project name of the Griffith University 'Neighbourhoods Project' and has involved some leading international academics in the project team.

As a consequence new programs have been developed and tested over a short time, and are currently being evaluated. These programs will now be the subject of independent peer review and evaluation. Notwithstanding the limited period of assessment, the programs show sufficient early promise to allow a recommendation that they be continued. The two separate suites of programs are designed for the specific locations in which they operate, but do contain elements which are transportable to other locations. However, use of the programs in other areas would require consultation with the individual community members and specialist adaptation.

The Committee: Terms of Reference and Membership

In March 2016, the Queensland Government established the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee. The Committee had two tasks:

- to identify and address barriers to the effective and efficient implementation and coordination of activities of all tiers of government to address youth sexual violence and abuse in Aurukun and West Cairns; and

- to research the prevalence and impact of youth sexual violence and abuse more broadly across Queensland and take advice from experts in the field to consider and make recommendations about the appropriateness of the current legislative, policy and resourcing of responses to youth sexual violence and abuse, and how all levels of government and the community prevent, respond to and reduce youth sexual violence and abuse.

The Committee was established for up to one year and tasked with producing two reports to government. The Terms of Reference indicate that the Committee's future is to be re-considered following the handover of its Final Report.

The Committee has been led by an independent Chair, the Honourable Stanley Jones AO QC. The membership included local, Australian and Queensland Government representatives and key community and peak body representatives:

Local Government representatives

- **Cr Dereck Walpo**
  Mayor of Aurukun

- **Cr Bob Manning OAM**
  Mayor of Cairns Regional Council

Community and peak organisation participants

- **Mr Noel Pearson**
  Founder and Director of Strategy, Cape York Partnership

- **Ms Natalie Lewis**
  Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd

- **Ms Pattie Lees**
  Injilinji Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Children and Youth Services

- **Mr Bruce Martin**
  Aurukun community member

- **Ms Keri Tamwoy**
  Aurukun community member

- **Ms Rowena Bullio**
  West Cairns community member

Queensland Government representatives

- **Mr Dave Stewart**
  Director-General, Department of Premier and Cabinet

- **Ms Clare O'Connor**
  Director-General, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

- **Mr Michael Walsh**
  Director-General, Queensland Health

- **Mr Michael Hogan**
  Director-General, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

- **Mr Paul Taylor**
  Assistant Commissioner, Queensland Police Service

Australian Government representative

- **Mr Andrew Tongue**
  Associate Secretary of Indigenous Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

The First Report of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

The First Report submitted by the Committee to the Queensland Government examined youth sexual violence and abuse in two Queensland communities. It was submitted to the Queensland Government in September 2016. Recommendations were made in the First Report around three themes:

- improving service effectiveness
- awareness raising
- resourcing.

These recommendations were accepted by the Queensland Government. The First Report can be found on the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships' website (www.datsip.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/preventing-youth-sexual-violence-abuse).

The Final Report of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

This Final Report acknowledges this issue is not only state-wide, but a global problem (WHO 2016). Youth sexual violence and abuse occurs in urban centres, regional towns and remote communities. Those areas worst affected also experience high rates of social dysfunction and economic disadvantage. Given the disproportionate disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, where appropriate, this sub-section of the Queensland population is considered separately.

This Final Report of the Committee is informed by:

- discussions with experts in Queensland and other jurisdictions, as well service providers and others with extensive experience and expertise relevant to the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse
- an analysis of reported data commissioned by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office
- a literature review
- continuing discussions with Griffith University researchers through the 'Neighbourhoods Project', given its status as one of the few detailed, evidence-informed research initiatives explicitly examining youth sexual violence and abuse in Australia.

The insights the Committee has gained from each of these inputs have been included throughout the body of this Final Report.

The Committee also investigated the appropriateness of current legislation, considered similar legislative provisions in other states, and consulted with the Queensland Law Reform Commission. While there are some legislative differences across Australia, both the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Queensland Police Service have existing policies and guidelines which for all practical purposes negate any need for legislative change.

As outlined in the previous chapter, this Final Report makes a number of recommendations aimed at fostering a transformational change and ensuring that every child and young person has the safe and secure life they are entitled to. For this change to occur, interventions are required that will have both an **immediate impact on youth sexual violence and abuse** by raising awareness about the risks, preventing its occurrence, and ensuring that those affected by it receive the treatment and support necessary, as well as **long-term and generational impact**, ensuring that children are given every opportunity to develop to the fullest of their potential, and that the underlying causes of youth sexual violence and abuse are addressed.

Building on from its First Report which was focused on two specific locations (West Cairns and Aurukun), the Committee was tasked with examining broader prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse. It is clear from expert research and advice that there is rising awareness of peer-to-peer sexual offending as a global issue.

There are a myriad of factors that contribute to the risks and prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse including where people live, community norms and values, and experiences of disadvantage.

Prevalence is difficult to gauge due to significant levels of under-reporting. According to the 2015–16 Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Crime Victimisation Survey, approximately 70 per cent of the most recent incidents of sexual assault were not reported to police.

The ABS notes it is a conservative estimate of the proportion of offences which remain unreported. For younger people this proportion is likely to be higher still (ABS 2011). This creates barriers to understanding the true nature and prevalence of this pervasive social issue.

To gauge reported abuse the Committee commissioned the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO) to analyse youth sexual violence and abuse. It is the first time that a picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland has been compiled drawing from a range of administrative datasets.

This analysis reminds us of many things we know, confirms matters we suspect, and raises new issues. It highlights the importance of developing a finer grained view of victimisation and offending within specific locations. It reminds us all of the critical importance of serious and sustained efforts to increase the ability of young people to disclose and then officially report sexual offences, as well as the ability to successfully identify and prosecute offenders whether they are young people or adults.

The commissioned analysis of relevant statistics offers an in-depth view of youth sexual violence and abuse.

Youth sexual violence and abuse: A mosaic of datasets

Administrative data on youth sexual violence and abuse is collected when offenders and victims come into contact with a range of different service providers. In addition to known under-reporting, there are also limitations with available data, and challenges to combining data together to paint an accurate picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland given that each administrative dataset captures information to meet the reporting needs unique to that department.

Queensland Police Records and Information Management Exchange (QPRIME)

QPRIME records offences reported to Queensland Police Service (QPS). Using this data, the number and rates of victims and offenders across different regions in Queensland can be calculated and the relationship between victim and offender explored. Data is also available on victims for whom an offender was not reported. Although statistics on offenders provide a more accurate picture of youth sexual offending than statistics on victims, there are many victims for whom no offender is identified.

Restorative justice conferences

As well as cautioning young offenders, police may refer youth offenders to restorative justice conferences. These conferences bring together the youth who committed the crime and other affected parties to discuss the nature of the crime, its consequences, and the restorative steps to be undertaken. The QPS collects data on referrals, and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) holds data on those referrals where a conference proceeded.

Juvenile defendants

Data on juvenile defendants is available from DJAG and includes the number of cases heard and the outcomes of hearings, as well as the number of juveniles in prisons for sexual offences.

Education and child safety

Suspected youth victims of sexual abuse must be reported by teachers to the QPS. Information on suspected victims and offenders is collected by the Department of Education and Training. The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services collects data on the abuse of children, including the type of harm inflicted. Although a distinction can be made between sexual and other harms, the characteristics of the offender cannot be easily identified.

Notes on data and analysis

Young offenders reported to the QPS are identified as aged 10 to 17 years old. Youth Justice (court) statistics in this report include only those who committed an offence before turning 17 years old. Victims on most occasions are defined as under 18 years of age and, if otherwise, this is noted.

Although the number of reported victims will always exceed the number of reported offenders (as offenders are not always able to be apprehended or identified by the QPS), without an offender, it is impossible to establish whether the offence was perpetrated by another youth, or someone older. It is also important to keep in mind that some offenders have been charged for sexual offences even if sexual relations were perceived to be consensual, such as offences relating to carnal knowledge of a child under the age of 16 years.

The QGSO has supplemented offending and victim statistics with other associated datasets such as data on the proportions of young women who at the time of giving birth were teenagers. Although these datasets are not directly related to sexual abuse they do indicate other possible concerns associated with young people and sexual activity. There is also a wealth of research about the positive impacts for individuals and, therefore, society about delaying the first pregnancy.

Key findings

The Committee acknowledges the limitations of this data in painting a comprehensive picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland, given known high rates of under-reporting. The data indicates a significant downward trend in the rate of sexual violence victims aged 0–17 from 2008–09 to 2015–16 in Queensland. There was no trend for reported young sexual offenders. The available data also suggests a significant upward trend in the number of child pornography related offences and concerning characteristics relating to victims and perpetrators supported by the very limited Australian and international literature in this field.

Research tells us that young girls and women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence and abuse, and young boys and males are more likely to be perpetrators (Boyd and Bromfield 2006, 1). This trend is reflected in the Queensland data and whilst it cannot account for all experiences, it raises an important issue regarding the social and cultural norms which can enable and perpetuate negative and stereotypical attitudes toward girls and women. Gender inequality sets the necessary social context in which women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence (Our Watch 2015). The literature states there is an urgent need to address the fact that abusive behaviours of young people are tacitly and sometimes explicitly, condoned in their social and cultural environments (Boyd and Bromfield 2006, 2).

Research shows most incidences of sexual assault are perpetrated by someone known to the victim, usually a non-family member (Tarczon and Quadara 2012, 9). QPS victim data shows that victims are most commonly perpetrated against in residential settings. Of those offences committed outside of residential settings, schools were the most common setting. This presents very real concerns about what we know to be traditionally safe spaces for young people to develop and learn. Rather than looking to the unknown, we must address what is happening in our homes and schools to identify ways to safeguard young people from harm.

A challenge relates to the role of information and communication technology in perpetrating youth sexual violence and abuse (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013, 1). The significant increase of reported child pornography related offences in Queensland from 2011–12 to 2015–16 is closely intertwined with advances in technology. Technology breaks down numerous barriers to communication which might normally be viewed as advantageous. However, the ability to readily upload photographs or videos of vulnerable young people and to distribute them instantly to a worldwide audience presents enormous obstacles for prevention. The emerging nature of this issue is explored further in Chapter 5 (page 36).

It is important to recognise and address the vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who are significantly over-represented in the data, particularly as victims of sexual violence and abuse. They are twice as likely as non-Indigenous youths to be victimised. Coupled with the fact that women are more likely to be victims, the data also suggests the high risk in particular for Indigenous women and girls. Their increased vulnerability is intimately tied to their exposure to more risk factors and increased levels of disadvantage (Higgins and Davis 2014; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). Responding to youth sexual violence and abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly in discrete locations, must take into account this disadvantage (Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh 2013b, 5).

The analysis of administrative data presented in this Final Report provides a basis on which to build a better understanding of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. This data will support parents, teachers, service providers and young people to understand this issue as it relates to their community, and to inform selective and responsive policy decisions going forward. It will also be important that the analysis undertaken for this report continues to be undertaken on an annual basis, and the data further interrogated to answer complex policy questions, including the incidences that result in charges being laid against a young person for child pornography. To answer these questions, additional information may need to be collected.

Nature of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland

Sexual offence victims and offenders by age and sex

In 2015–16, 16 year old males recorded the highest rate of reported young sexual offenders (241 per 100,000 for males) as shown in Figure 3. The lowest rates were recorded for the 10 year old male and female cohorts. Over the eight years from 2008–09 to 2015–16, there was no significant trend in the overall rate of reported young sexual offenders, and no significant trend in the rates of either non-Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young offenders.

Figure 3: Rates of young offenders by age and sex 2015–16 (per 100,000 persons)[a]
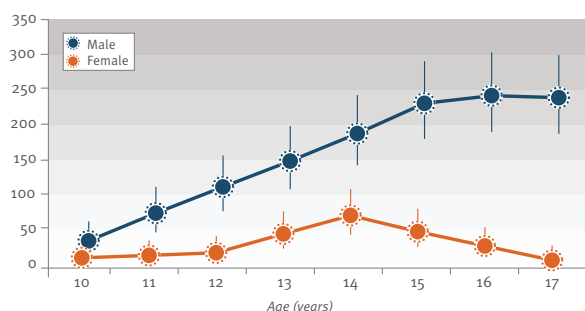
Unique offender count	14	27	39	59	80	86	83	77
Rate per 100,000	14.8	29.3	43.2	64.4	86.1	93.3	90.2	82.7

Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

[a] S. 215 of the Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld) sets the age of consent at 16 years. If this has been breached, in some jurisdictions, not including Queensland, a defence according to similarity of age is possible. This is possible in Victoria, SA, Tasmania and the ACT, provided the age differential is less than two years and the under-age person is at least 12 years old.

Across eight years from 2008–09 to 2015–16, there were between 2,300 and 2,600 young sexual offence victims reported each year to QPS. Accounting for under-reporting, these figures are likely to be much higher. Rates of reported sexual violence victims (0 to 17 years) have generally been decreasing since 2009–10, although there was a significant increase in the rate in 2015–16 from the previous year (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rates of sexual offence victims (0–17 years) (per 100,000 persons)
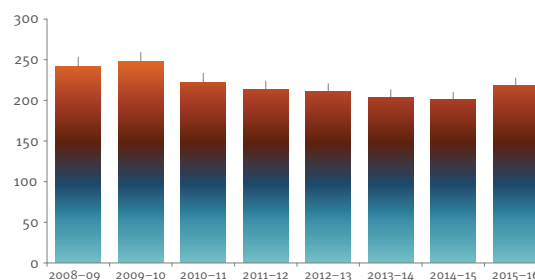
Unique offender count	2,522	2,628	2,395	2,302	2,327	2,284	2,268	2,487	Sig. trend
Rate per 100,000	244.9	250.2	225.5	214.6	213.2	206.4	202.9	220.6	↓

Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

In 2015–16, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (385 per 100,000 persons) were around twice as likely as non-Indigenous young people (178 per 100,000 persons) to be victims of a sexual offence. Victim rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people showed an overall downward trend between 2008–09 and 2015–16 (Table 1).

*Table 1:* Sexual offence victims (0–17 years), by Indigenous status

Unique sexual offence victims[a]	Year								
	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	
Indigenous count	342	329	326	294	287	289	296	338	Sig. trend
Rate per 100,000	429.6	405.4	394.9	351.8	338.8	337.3	341.5	385.1	↓
Non-Indigenous count	1,865	1,945	1,702	1,610	1,588	1,556	1,674	1,855	Sig. trend
Rate per 100,000	196.2	200.7	173.8	162.8	157.8	152.4	162.3	178.4	↓
Rate ratio	**2.2**	**2.0**	**2.3**	**2.2**	**2.1**	**2.2**	**2.1**	**2.2**	

Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

[a] Excluding not-stated Indigenous status – between 320 and 462 victims per year.

Figure 5: *Rates of young victims by age and sex, 2015–16 (per 100,000 persons)[a]*
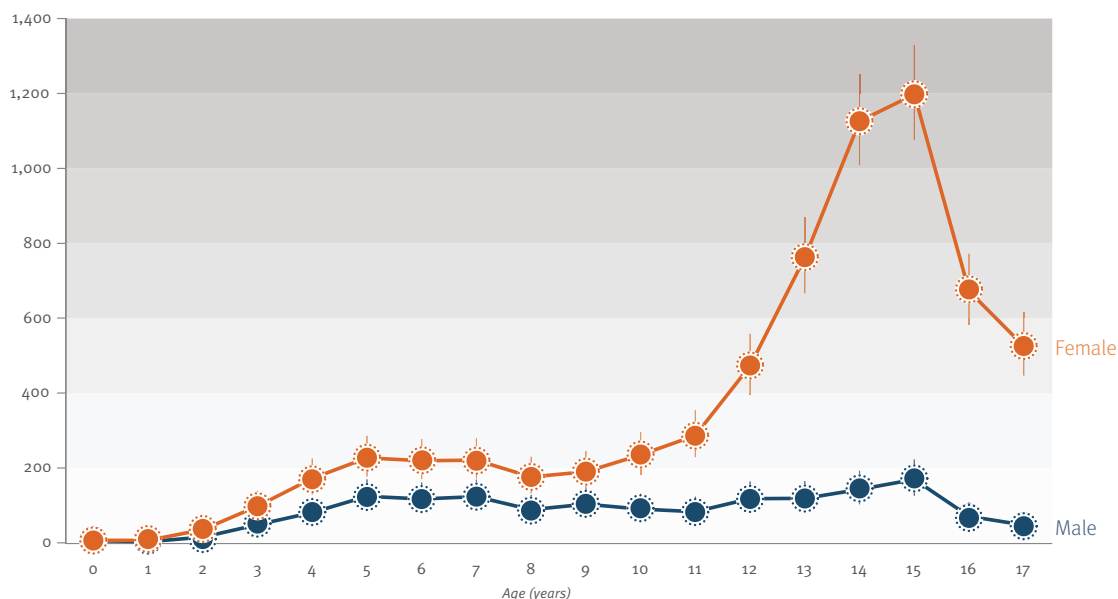
Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

[a] S. 215 of the Criminal Code Act (Qld) sets the age of consent at 16 years.

Females (362 per 100,000 persons in 2015–16) were much more likely to be victims of a sexual offence than males (86 per 100,000 persons in 2015–16). The highest rates of sexual offence victimisation were experienced by females aged 13 to 16 years (Figure 5 above).

Victim-offender relationship

In 2015–16, of the 2,497 incidents reported in this period involving a young victim:

- 16 per cent included a young offender
- 35 per cent included only an adult offender
- 49 per cent had no matching offender, with this proportion decreasing over time.

Over the eight years 2008–09 to 2015–16, the proportion of all young victims of person offences who were victims of sexual offences ranged between 32–40 per cent. By comparison, the equivalent proportions for adult victims were between 7–9 per cent.

In 2015–16, most peer to peer youth sexual offence incidents reported to QPS involved one victim and one offender (86 per cent). Of these, the greatest proportion of sexual offences were committed by a non-family member (56 per cent) of the victim (Table 2), with 36 per cent committed by an acquaintance of the victim. The next most common category was a family member, where, in 29 per cent of incidents, the offender was a relative of the victim 'not elsewhere classified' (i.e. not a romantic partner or spouse).

Table 2: *Sexual offences, relationship to youth victims (0–17 years), 2015–16*

Relationship to youth victim[5]	2015–16	
	Count	%
Non-family	183	56.4
Acquaintance	115	35.5
Family	141	43.6
Relative (not elsewhere classified)	93	28.7
Not stated/unknown	59	n.a.
Total	**383**	**100.0**

Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

There were 574 reports of suspected sexual abuse by Queensland State School staff in 2015. Where the perpetrator was suspected of being aged 17 years or younger, 26 per cent were deemed to be a relative of the victim (compared with 56 per cent where the offender was 18 years or older) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: *Finalised student protection reports*

Suspected sexual abuse[a]	Year		
	2014	2015	2016[a]
17 years and under offenders	332	322	247
Relative of victim (%)	16.0	26.1	15.8
Other (%)[b]	84.0	73.9	84.2
18 years or older offenders	198	252	199
Relative or carer of victim (%)	47.0	56.3	53.3
Other (%)	53.0	43.7	46.7

Source: Queensland Department of Education and Training, unpublished data.

[a] To 6th August 2016.

[b] The 'other' category cannot be disaggregated.

Geography and location

Whilst yearly counts of reported youth sexual offenders in most Police Divisions are typically small, statistics suggest some areas are more problematic than others. From 2008–09 to 2015–16, consistently high rates for youth sexual offenders were recorded for areas in the north of Queensland, as well as in the larger Police Divisions of Cairns, Townsville, and Rockhampton. Over the five years to 2015–16, on average, the highest rate of youth sexual violence and abuse victims was recorded for Cherbourg Police Division, followed by Palm Island and Bamaga Police Divisions. These rates, however, were based on relatively small numbers of victims. Police Divisions with 50 or more victims on average, each year included Cairns, Toowoomba, Kirwan, Caboolture, Logan Central and Bundaberg.

Statistics indicate that between 60–70 per cent of reported youth sexual offences occur within residential settings. Residential setting includes not only dwellings, but also private grounds. The next most likely place of offence was a community setting. Community setting includes not only public and outdoor places, but other settings such as correctional, police, medical, transport and educational locations. Of those offences reported in a community setting, around half occurred in an 'educational' setting. This pattern is the same for child pornography related offences, such as those relating to sexting.

Proven sexual offences

Proven offences are those that have proceeded through the court and excludes charges that have been dismissed or withdrawn (Department of Justice and Attorney-General 2015). In 2014–15, the rate of proven sexual offences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young defendants (78 per 100,000) was about 13 times the rate for non-Indigenous defendants (6 per 100,000) as shown in Figure 6.

Over the period 2008–09 to 2014–15, there was no significant trend in the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants, and a significant downward trend in the rate for non-Indigenous defendants.

In 2015–16, 34 per cent of sexual offences were dealt with by police with a 'caution'. Yearly from 2008–09 to 2015–16, around one-third of all offences were dealt with by police with a 'caution' (ranging from 24–42 per cent).

Approximately one in five sexual offences resulted in an 'arrest' (ranging from 18–27 per cent), and a slightly lower proportion resulted in 'offender bar to prosecution' (ranging from 10–19 per cent).

Figure 6: *Young defendants—proven sexual offences[a][b] (per 100,000 persons)*
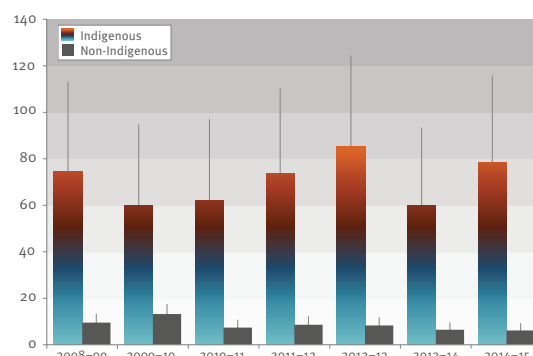
	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	
Indigenous count	22	18	19	23	27	19	25	No sig. trend
Rate per 100,000	74.6	59.9	62.0	73.5	85.4	59.7	78.4	↔
Non-Indigenous count[c]	36	50	28	33	32	25	24	Sig. Trend
Rate per 100,000	9.6	13.2	7.4	8.6	8.3	6.4	6.1	↓
Rate ratio	**7.8**	**4.5**	**8.4**	**8.5**	**10.3**	**9.3**	**12.8**	

Source: Department of Justice and Attorney-General, unpublished data.

[a] Using a base population of 10 to 16 year olds, as Youth Justice data include only those who offended before turning 17 years.

[b] Includes rape, sexual assault, carnal knowledge, indecent treatment of a child, and child pornography offences.

[c] Those with a 'not stated' Indigenous status are not included in these statistics.

Re-offending

Consistent with available literature, our analysis indicates that most young people who have sexually offended do not go on to sexually re-offend. An analysis of offenders in 2013–14, shows that 95 per cent were not charged with further sexual offences in the next two years. Of those who did reoffend, most offended sexually only once in the following two year period.
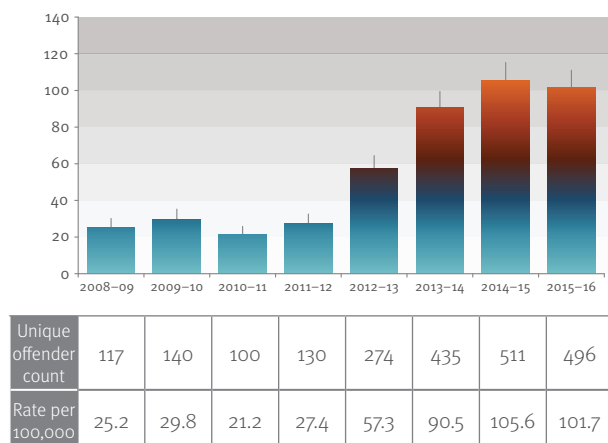
Emerging Issues: technology and youth sexual violence and abuse

Child pornography related offences, among young offenders in Queensland, have increased significantly in recent years, with rates of young offenders rising from 27.4 per 100,000 in 2011–12 to 101.7 per 100,000 in 2015–16. These offences include making, distributing or possessing child exploitation material. Young offenders were mostly charged with making, distribution and possession.

In 2015–16, around two-thirds of all offenders for these offences were aged 10 to 17 years. Of this cohort, 48 per cent of all offenders were aged 13 to 15 years. Almost half (49 per cent) of the 496 young offenders were female. In comparison, only 4 per cent of offenders aged 18 years or older were female.

In the three years to 2015–16, 10 to 17 year olds were mainly cautioned for this offence. Conversely, only one per cent of offences committed by adults received a caution. In Queensland, there has been a significant increase in the number of unique young offenders with a child pornography offence (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Child pornography related offences, young offenders (per 100,000 persons)

	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16
Unique offender count	117	140	100	130	274	435	511	496
Rate per 100,000	25.2	29.8	21.2	27.4	57.3	90.5	105.6	101.7

Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

This increase is related to the 'information technology revolution', wherein devices such as the internet and smart phones make it easier for certain laws to be breached, such as those relating to the distribution of indecent images of children. Tellingly, Australia-wide the number of non-assaultive sexual offences has increased dramatically (from 309 in 2008–09 to 844 in 2014–15), while the number of assaultive sexual offences has remained stable (from 1,187 to 1,155) (ABS 2016a).

There is, however, a connection between these offences and unhealthy sexual relationships amongst young people. This is explored in detail in Chapter 5 (page 36).

Recommendations

1. Given the data demonstrates that youth sexual violence and abuse is a statewide issue, there is a need for a whole-of-government response to the issue. The Queensland Government should work closely with communities to develop place-based responses.

2. That administrative data utilised in the development of this report continue to be collected, tracked and analysed on an annual basis to provide an ongoing picture of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. To strengthen the evidence base of Queensland Government's policy responses, additional information (qualitative and quantitative) should be collected by agencies to support a more detailed interrogation of specific issues and help overcome the challenge of under-reporting.

Reducing disadvantage and emphasising healthy early childhood development are key factors to consider in tackling the underlying causes of youth sexual violence and abuse.

In the 2016 Boyer Lecture, Sir Michael Marmot, President of the World Medical Association, Director of the University College London's Institute of Health Equity, and a leading researcher on health inequality issues for more than four decades, outlined a clear link between disadvantage and healthy childhood development.

'In Australia, the higher the income of parents, and the more education, the better do their children score on measures of early child development…the more economically deprived a neighbourhood is, the lower the proportion of children, at the age of 5, that have a good level of development: cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and behavioural. There is a clear relationship: more deprivation means worse early child development'.

(Marmot 2016, 3).

Sir Michael also made recommendations to the United Kingdom Government to reduce health inequalities in England. He identified six domains in which change was necessary. Three of those domains, the Committee considers, to be particularly relevant to the issues here because they impact directly on the conditions which foster youth sexual violence and abuse. They are:

•   Give every child the best start in life

•   Education and life-long learning to achieve the means of taking control over one's life

•   Prevention of inequality—cause of the cause.

Those communities where youth sexual violence and abuse is a most pressing issue are often communities that demonstrate key characteristics of social and economic disadvantage, including high levels of unemployment; welfare dependency; family, financial or medical stress; and problems with alcohol and drug abuse. It is well known children and young people living in socioeconomically deprived environments have great risk of becoming disengaged from the school system, becoming caught up in anti-social behaviour and crime and engaging in sexual activity at an early age.

This point reiterates findings from a four decade long research project, The Dunedin Longitudinal Study, undertaken by a number of universities. The researchers found:

'…the importance of childhood risks for poor adult outcomes has generally been underestimated. It is not news to service delivery professionals that some individuals use more than their share of services. What is new is that individuals feature in multiple service sectors and they can be identified as children with reasonable accuracy'.

(Caspi et al. 2016).

As poverty and disadvantage impede childhood development, children who grow up in such locations are more vulnerable to youth sexual violence and abuse than their peers from less disadvantaged locations. As described in the World Health Organization's (WHO) *World report on violence and health* (2002), many of the risk factors relate to disadvantage and have a cumulative effect—that is, the more risk factors a person is exposed to, the greater their risk of experiencing sexual violence.

It is important to note that while experiencing sexual violence during childhood can increase the likelihood of violence acceptance, either as a victim or perpetrator in future relationships or high risk situations (WHO 2010), academic literature and data analysis presented in this report suggest that the vast majority of young people who sexually offend do not go on to re-offend later in life.

Early childhood development

To inform its work, this Committee had the benefit of discussion with leading experts in the field of early childhood intervention, Professor Frank Oberklaid and Professor Kerry Arabena.

Professor Oberklaid reminded the Committee that a child's development is the result of complex, ongoing, dynamic transactions between nature and nurture (Oberklaid 1988, 180–1). Optimal development is dependent on good environment. By contrast prolonged exposure to toxic stress associated with extreme poverty, physical or emotional abuse, severe maternal depression, substance abuse, family violence, precipitates neurophysiological responses in a child which disrupts developing brain architecture. This can lead to life-long problems in learning, in physical and mental health and particularly in behaviour (Oberklaid 2014; Oberklaid and Drever 2011; Oberklaid 1988). This damage opens up an ability gap which continues and widens along life's trajectory. Early advantages accumulate, and so do early disadvantages, thus widening the gap.

This 'ability gap' between advantaged and disadvantaged children opens up early, well before schooling begins. This gap impacts upon learning ability and future behaviour and contributes to over representation of disadvantaged youth in the criminal justice system, youth sexual violence and abuse, early teen pregnancy and a host of other social problems. The ability gap which begins even before the child is born, continues to widen and perpetuates disadvantage at all ages. The over-representation of Indigenous people as victims of youth sexual violence and abuse can be attributed in large part to this widening of the ability gap.

Professor Oberklaid and Professor Arabena have experience in the introduction of programs in disadvantaged communities and are well aware of the challenges involved. Professor Oberklaid particularly identified the challenging nature of the task and warned of the need for resolute determination to continue with programs in the face of setbacks from time to time.

It is important to note that no one program or intervention can redress disadvantage. Arguably one of the most important investments that can be made to redress disadvantage, dysfunction and associated social challenges, are those that focus on early childhood interventions. However these interventions will be most effective when part of a holistic approach which includes educating parents, community members and service providers of the need for children to grow up in environments that are free from harmful levels of stress and conducive to raising happy and healthy young people.

The primary task of reducing harmful stress falls on the child's carers. This task will be more effectively undertaken if everyone concerned is aware of the consequences of not doing so.

Harmful stress

- Strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress response in absence of buffering protection of adult support.

- Precipitants included extreme poverty, physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, severe maternal depression, substance abuse, family violence.

- Disrupts developing brain architecture and leads to lower threshold of activation of stress management systems – can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health.

Not only does the stress caused by family violence and dysfunction have an impact on childhood development, but exposure to violence, abuse and disrespect within the family also shapes children's attitudes to violence and informs the strategies they use for resolving conflict —both as children and as adults.

As the National (USA) Association for the Education of Young Children notes:

'Several decades of research clearly demonstrate that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce short and long-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. Specifically, children who experience high-quality, stable child care... demonstrate more secure attachments to adults and other children, and score higher on measures of thinking ability and language development. High-quality child care can predict academic success, adjustment to school, and reduced behavioural problems for children in first grade. Studies demonstrate that children's success or failure during the first years of school often predicts the course of later schooling'.

(National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.)

The Australian Early Development Census revealed similar findings: children who attend early learning facilities gain by promoting social development and protecting against learning vulnerabilities (Australian Early Development Census, n.d). Early childhood education lays the foundations for lifelong learning. It also provides a forum for the identification of sensory and learning difficulties. If undetected, these difficulties including hearing loss associated with chronic or repeated ear infections, language delays and visual impairments can restrict early cognitive, communicative and emotional development, and hinder emotional and social development and future educational engagement and success.

These factors highlight the importance of all children participating in high quality early childhood education programs. However, research undertaken by the Frameworks Institute (a global leader in early childhood development) in Australia in 2013 suggests that the importance of early childhood education is not fully appreciated by the Australian public. This is highlighted by two key findings:

1. While early childhood development experts regard childcare as a site where key development processes take place, the Australian public viewed childcare as primarily being about keeping young children physically safe.

2. Whereas experts recognise stress as a key threat to the healthy development of young children. The Australian public did not recognise stress as an issue for young children, and was not aware of its long term negative consequences for childhood development (Frameworks Institute 2013).

Taken together with the previous discussion in this chapter, it is apparent that more needs to be done to make the general public understand the importance of early childhood development for the future life outcomes of children. Further, this points to the need for a system of continuous engagement and support for children that nurtures them from conception through to their engagement in early childhood education, and their transition onto primary then secondary schooling.

The First 1000 Days approach

The 'First 1000 Days' approach, initially founded in the United States, emphasises the importance of nutrition during the first 1000 days of a child's life (from pregnancy through to the age of 2) for breaking the cycle of poverty. Although originally focused on addressing severe malnutrition, the importance of the first 1000 days for future health, emotional and social outcomes is well recognised (Arabena 2014). Professor Kerry Arabena and her colleagues from the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health have developed a 'First 1000 Days' approach to supporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous infants and their carers (Arabena 2014).

The approach is founded on evidence that:

• Children's early experiences influence brain development

• Adult health, wellbeing and capability are shaped by the early childhood experience

• Prevention programs that target young children are effective in terms of outcomes and cost (Arabena 2014).
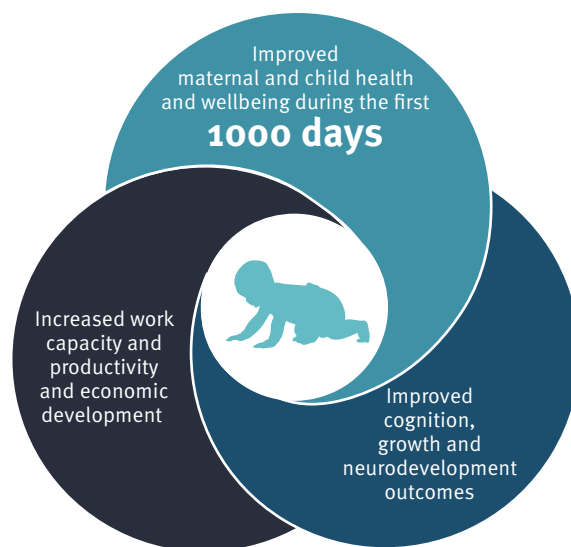
Given the evidence that exposure to harmful stress in early childhood has long term consequences of cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, it is the Committee's view that a focus on the first 1000 days, or even 2000 days, of a child's life is equally relevant for the prevention of youth sexual violence and abuse.

The 'First 1000 Days' approach is globally recognised. The Queensland Government has already taken steps to introduce the program to a number of locations of identified need. The results will be evaluated over time.

Families as first teachers

Another initiative of interest is 'Families as First Teachers'—an initiative being implemented in Queensland and the Northern Territory aimed at improving early childhood learning outcomes by working with both children and parents. The program focuses on families with children younger than school age and aims to promote early childhood development through participation in early learning groups that focus on literacy, numeracy and school readiness. Adult capacity-building is also provided through family support and by linking services within local communities. Although designed as a program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the model is worthy of consideration as part of a package aimed at addressing the underlying causes of youth sexual violence (Australian Institute of Family Studies n.d.).

The importance of schools

A high quality education provides a child with a pathway to achieve their potential through empowerment, employment and positive life outcomes. Conversely, if a child's education is poor, their likelihood of achieving positive life outcomes is limited. The importance of education cannot be overstated. As the previous paragraphs highlight, children from disadvantaged backgrounds start behind and get further and further behind their non-disadvantaged peers as they develop. Schools play a critical role in helping to close this ability gap.

Schools are a place of special significance in all communities, particularly given the very substantial periods of time children spend there. Schools have been identified as one of the places outside the home where youth sexual violence and abuse is most likely to occur. This reflects that schools are not immune to the social problems faced by communities and families. However, the high levels of supervision and adult guardianship available in schools means that with the right approach, including appropriate training and physical design, schools should be amongst the very safest places for children to be—and places where children feel safe in discussing and disclosing youth sexual violence and abuse. If appropriately resourced and managed in a way that advances the interests of children, the school, in conjunction with community members, can create opportunities beyond curriculum to redress local harm and assist families to improve life's chances for their children.

Schools as safe places

Schools can also be places where victims of youth sexual violence and abuse feel safe and confident in disclosing and seeking help. The *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse* (2016, 3–5) has published a report which outlines 10 proposed elements that contribute to organisations being child safe. The Commission's final report which is due for completion in December 2017 will provide further details to support organisations, governments and communities to better protect children by implementing the child safe elements, building the capacity of institutions, and holding institutions to account through independent oversight and monitoring. The Committee recommends the work of the Royal Commission be used to help ensure that Queensland schools (and indeed all organisations that children and young people come into contact with) are safe and meet the requirements specified by the Commission. Implementation of the Commission's recommendations should be prioritised in schools in Queensland's most disadvantaged communities.

The Committee also considers there is an opportunity to promote schools as hubs for community engagement. Doing so would support the continual engagement of families, in particular parents, with the school and reduce the sense of intimidation and unfamiliarity experienced by children and parents as they encounter the education system for the first time. This is particularly important for families where the parents' educational experience has been less than favourable.

The 10 elements of child safe organisations

1. Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved.
4. Equity is promoted and diversity respected.
5. People working with children are suitable and supported.
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.
9. Implementation of child safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse 2016.

Schools as hubs for community engagement

As a hub for community engagement around childhood and parenting, families will be engaged at and with the school throughout the life cycle—from the postnatal period, through to early childhood, the school years and beyond. Many schools already incorporate early learning centres within their premises, and some host parenting classes. There is the opportunity to extend the scope of these services to support families and young children from birth onwards. Where these do not exist, establishing such facilities should be considered.

The engagement between school and parents should be encouraged, including through the establishment or strengthening of Parents & Citizens Associations (P&Cs). P&Cs play an important role in ensuring that schools understand the community they belong to, and are responding the priorities of parents and the community.

Further, P&Cs provide a forum for sharing information with parents and promoting discussion about issues of relevance to child and youth development - including on topics such as what constitutes age-appropriate relationships, sexual violence and abuse, social media and digital literacy.

Schools can provide the physical infrastructure necessary to support community awareness raising, including through the delivery of programs to increase knowledge about youth sexual violence and abuse such as 'Parents Protect' and 'Friends Protect' from the Neighbourhoods Project (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 page 36).

Schools could also facilitate extra-curricular activities aimed at empowering young people and supporting them to improve their life outcomes. The Committee notes that a number of these types of activities are being delivered by various organisations, particularly aimed at empowering Indigenous young people. The Committee also notes that many of these activities—particularly those that use sport as the channel for engaging young people—are targeted at young men and boys, such as those of the Clontarf Foundation.

The Committee sees real value in these programs, noting of course that sport or social clubs alone are not the answer to fostering increased confidence and respect in young people, and that they must be seen as only one part of a comprehensive and locally determined strategy for addressing youth sexual violence and abuse. The Committee also notes a need for more initiatives aimed at empowering girls and young women and providing them with the information and support to make healthy life decisions, such as the Girl Academy in Cape York.

Further, the Committee anticipates the ongoing engagement within the school setting will help foster important relationships between families and the school community, strengthen networks in the community, and help families, including those at risk, to navigate life's challenges.

A long term preventative approach

In his lecture, Sir Michael Marmot (2016, 3) referred to the findings of a national study in England, the Millenium Birth Cohort Study, and said:

"A finding that good childhood development is less common in deprived areas suggests one strategy for improving early childhood development: reduce deprivation and, more generally, inequality. A finding that for a given level of deprivation some areas are doing better than others suggests a complementary strategy: support parents and families. There is evidence of the benefit from both strategies".

A long-term preventative approach must be adopted that acknowledges youth sexual violence and abuse as a symptom of broader disadvantage. It must incorporate responses that simultaneously focus on the child, the family and the broader community.

This will take a long-term commitment and intensified effort from all parties—leadership at all levels, service providers and community members. It will take time also to monitor and evaluate coordinated, comprehensive strategies that tackle disadvantage where it exists. It will also require Queensland Government policies, strategies and programs to emphasise the importance of early childhood and in particular the role of families in fostering healthy and happy children, who in turn will develop into healthy and happy adolescents and adults.

The cycle of disadvantage needs to be broken and a new cycle established, particularly in Queensland's Indigenous communities that experience entrenched disadvantage. Similarly, the gendered nature of youth sexual violence and abuse needs to be addressed. Opportunities could include developing a community-wide culture of safety, promoting safety for young women and preventing and responding to harmful sexual behaviours in boys and young men. This includes encouraging healthy interpersonal and sexual relationships between young people focusing on choice, consent, respect, body image, confidence and self-esteem.

# The economics of addressing the 'cause of the cause'

In the absence of broader approaches aimed at overcoming disadvantage and promoting the early development of all children, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, investments made to directly target youth sexual violence and abuse risks undermining the effectiveness and the likely return on investment.

Rather, Australian and international research points to the enormous potential cost benefits of early interventions which prevent family breakdown and thus, ensure children remain safe in the care of their family. For example, in 2015 the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) completed a comprehensive review of evidence on cost benefits of early intervention, concluding that:

'In addition to being crucial to children's developmental trajectories, it is clear that investments in the early years and in prevention and early intervention more broadly yield significant financial returns. The return on investment for prevention and early intervention is consistently greater than costly remedial responses; preventative investment reduces downstream expenditure on remedial education, school failure, poor health, mental illness, welfare recipiency, substance misuse and criminal justice.'

(ARACY 2014 as cited in Fox et al. 2015)

Figure 8: *Intervention effects and costs of social-emotional health problems over time (Bricker)*
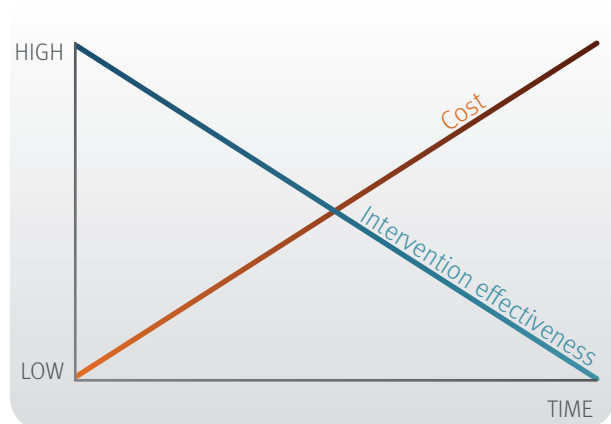
The ARACY study provides several cost/benefit analyses in support of early prevention and intervention, for example, a 7.35 per cent increase in GDP could be achieved over 60 years by reducing child vulnerability; and that Australia incurs a cost of $245,000 per child at 2011 rates for each new substantiation of child maltreatment.

However, whilst an effective universal service system is critical to support vulnerable families, research notes that the most vulnerable families as those least likely to access services. Responding to families with complex needs requires targeted client engagement strategies. Evidence also suggests the greatest economic and social returns on investment come from programs targeting vulnerable populations early in the life cycle. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, service access is compounded by a lack of culturally sensitive programs that are built on a firm understanding of local culture and context. This is reflected in the underutilisation of mainstream services in these communities and emphasises the importance of community involvement in the design and implementation of interventions—co-design.

As Carol Bellamy, Chair of the Board of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and previously CEO of UNICEF states:

"The economic benefits of investing in children have been extensively documented. Investing fully in children today will ensure the well-being and productivity of future generations for decades to come. By contrast, the physical, emotional and intellectual impairment that poverty inflicts on children can mean a lifetime of suffering and want— and a legacy of poverty for the next generation."

(Bellamy 2002)

Recommendations

3. That the Queensland Government adopt a whole-of-community approach to tackling youth sexual violence and abuse that builds on the principles of community empowerment and co-design.

4. That the Queensland Government work with key stakeholders including the Commonwealth Government to intensify efforts and adopt a long-term approach to supporting local communities to overcome disadvantage, as a fundamental prerequisite for the healthy development and wellbeing of all children and youth.

5. That the Queensland Government develop a strategy to promote healthy early-life programs such as the 'First 1000 Days' to reduce the effects of disadvantage in early childhood.

6. That, in line with its commitment to support kindergarten programs in all settings under the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* for 2016 and 17, the Queensland Government prioritises communities with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children to ensure enrolment and attendance rates are equally high across all parts of the state, and ensure the quality of education being provided is also equally high in all locations.

7. All Queensland schools implement the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse to help ensure they are child safe organisations, and that Queensland's most disadvantaged schools be prioritised and supported to implement the recommendations which:

   – promote the safety of young people and reduce the risk of youth sexual violence and assault occurring on school premises;

   – recognise the valuable role that schools can play in supporting community engagement and incorporate spaces that can be used to host community engagement activities, for example community information sessions, computer literacy classes and parenting classes and playgroups; and

   – promote continual engagement of parents and children from before school stage through to primary school, high school and beyond which reduces the disengagement often associated with transition points.

8. That the Queensland Government play a leading role in strengthening the knowledge base related to youth sexual violence and abuse, including by commissioning or undertaking research and analysis including on the effectiveness and efficiency of specific interventions. Given the limitations of the data due to under-reporting, the Committee recommends that quantitative data analysis be complemented by qualitative data analysis.

9. That communities, in particular those with high rates of youth sexual violence and abuse or that are at high risk, be supported to develop or strengthen locally appropriate and relevant programs aimed at empowering and educating young girls and boys, as one part of a localised and comprehensive response.

10. The Committee recommends the Queensland Government support non-government organisations to work with young women and girls to build confidence and promote knowledge sharing.

Overcoming youth sexual violence and abuse necessarily means breaking the silence that surrounds it, so that a community-wide culture of safety is promoted, harmful sexual behaviours—particularly of boys and young men—are prevented, and healthy sexual and interpersonal relationships between young people can be developed. Breaking the silence will also encourage victims to come forward in reporting when it does occur.

In 2007, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) estimated 30 per cent or less of sexual assaults were reported to police. Of those sexual offence cases (including rape) that are reported, less than 20 per cent result in charges being laid and criminal proceedings being instigated (AIC 2007, 1). Sexual violence and abuse within a family situation or with an intimate partner had particularly low levels of reporting.

The reasons behind the silence and unwillingness to discuss and report this issue when it occurs are many and complex. Social norms that condone sexual violence and abuse and age-inappropriate sexual behaviours often mean behaviours that are harmful and problematic are accepted as normal. In some cases parents and adults in the community may also be too accepting of violence and abuse, including of a sexual nature, in some instances having been exposed to it themselves as children. Children and young people may then grow up knowing no better.

Research also confirms the difficulty of talking about this issue, particularly in communities and cultures where sexual relations are deemed to be not for discussion (Taylor and Norma 2013, 114). The existence of cultural and social taboos can influence the ways in which young people from diverse communities respond to sexual violence and abuse, particularly regarding how they seek help from outside their community and their perceptions of police and the criminal justice system (Taylor and Putt 2007, 2). This relates directly to issues of under-reporting and highlights how the data presented in the previous chapter can only provide an indication of the problem.

Failure to report has adverse, sometimes tragic consequences for victims, as we hear from the witnesses giving evidence to various public inquiries. Failure to report results in victims not receiving appropriate treatment and makes them more vulnerable to further assault. Failure to report is damaging to the perpetrator if it results in further offending and a lost opportunity for counselling to change future behaviour.

Shame

Shame is a powerful emotion and a major reason behind the high levels of under-reporting. As noted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Wall 2012, 1):

'Shame is a key aspect of the emotional suffering that results from sexual abuse (Feiring & Taska, 2005; Rahm, Renck, & Ringsberg, 2006; Weiss, 2010). ...shame consistently arises as one of the predominant feelings that victim/survivors describe. Shame has many implications for victim/survivors...including being a major barrier to disclosure and help-seeking (Lievore, 2003). Shame contributes to the risk that intimate partner sexual violence won't be detected and that victim/survivors continue to suffer in isolation.'

The fear of the consequences of discussing sexual violence or abuse is also very real, including the fear and threats of retribution to the victim or people they care about. Other factors that contribute to the silence and under-reporting include:

- Physical and emotional isolation;
- Cultural and linguistic barriers;
- It not being considered serious enough to report or discuss; and
- A fear of engagement with the criminal justice system.

Allimant and Anne 2008; Rees and Pease 2007; Taylor and Putt 2007 as cited in Allimant and Ostapiej-Piatkowski 2011.

It is the Committee's view that establishing a standalone sexual assault hotline would support increased rates of reporting. There is strong evidence to suggest telephone hotlines play an important role in providing immediate support for survivors at a critical point in time. A study undertaken in 2016 in the United States demonstrated that 40.7% of all callers to the studied hotline were victims, and the vast majority of callers were female. Of non-victim callers, 44% identified as having a relationship with a victim, and included professionals, family members and friends. Whilst most calls to the hotline were made within the first 72 hours after the assault, the second most likely category was for assaults that had taken place between 3 and 5 years prior to the call being made (Colvin, 2016).

This highlights the importance of hotline staff being specifically trained and prepared to deal with both the immediate and long term emotional impacts of sexual assault and to have detailed knowledge of resources and services available in different communities and regions.

Consent and secrecy

Children and young people's ability to process consent is an obstacle to breaking the silence around youth sexual violence and abuse. The younger a child is, the less likely they are to possess capacity to understand consent or to identify abnormal sexual experiences or behaviours (Child Family Community Australia 2016). This creates a shroud of secrecy around children who have been victimised and prevents them from reporting incidents to parents or trusted adults. The complexity of navigating consent should not be taken for granted and requires education for young boys and girls alike.

Starting the conversation

High levels of trust must be built in order to have and promote these conversations internally within families and communities, and externally with service providers. Building the levels of trust required takes time and effort and consistency of personnel involved. It also requires the sharing of information to ensure all members of communities understand what youth sexual violence and abuse is.

Further, conversations and information sharing must focus on ensuring all children understand the responsibilities of the adults around them—parents, teachers, community members—to treat them with respect and promote their safety and wellbeing. Children and young people must have confidence they will be listened to, believed and supported. Developing an environment that encourages and supports disclosure is critical.

The role of the community

Community leaders and community-based organisations must support and engage on this sensitive issue. It is at this local level that leadership must be exercised in order to start this difficult conversation and address the silence that leads to under-reporting and inadequate responses to youth sexual violence and abuse. Where sexual abuse involves children against children, older children against younger children, or victims and offenders connected by family relationships, it can be very hard for people to speak up, and hard for those who are aware of the behaviour to know how to respond.

For these reasons, it is important all community members—women, men, parents, family members, children, leaders and service providers—are engaged in the discussion to build a shared awareness and understanding of youth sexual violence and abuse and a heightened resolve to tackle it in all its forms.

Starting a dialogue about youth sexual violence and abuse is not easy, but a clear entry point exists—that is the desire of all people for children to grow up healthy and happy. We must also draw on the many disciplines which encompass issues of sexual violence —psychology, sociology, criminology and public health (Carmody 2009, 6). Only then can we truly begin to break the silence.

Any approaches to increasing community awareness around youth sexual violence and abuse will need to be adapted to leverage communities' strengths, respond to local priorities and perceptions of the issue, and have traction at a local level. Approaches that might work in one location—for example, the use of children's artwork to raise awareness of the issue—may not work in others. Further, campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of youth sexual violence and abuse must focus on both prevention and response.

The Cure Violence Model

In some of Queensland's most disadvantaged locations, violence has become almost normalised. Concerted effort must be made to work with all members of communities—leaders, service providers, faith leaders, business owners to shift social norms and to promote the establishment of new social norms in which violence and abuse, including of a sexual nature, is not tolerated.

The importance of shifting social norms, has been demonstrated through initiatives such as the Cure Violence Health Model. Developed in the United States and implemented in locations all around the world, the model adopts a public health approach to managing disease outbreaks, detecting and interrupting potential violent conflicts, working with people at high risk of perpetrating violence and connecting them to appropriate social services, and mobilising communities to change social norms. Evaluations of this model have demonstrated its impact on reducing incidences of violence.

Cure Violence 2017.

Prevention through education

Preventing youth sexual violence and abuse through education is a key focus in a number of international frameworks. The increased risk of young girls and women as victims of sexual violence and evidence that young men are commonly perpetrators supports the implementation of school-based peer education in addressing issues of youth sexual violence and abuse (Carmody 2009, 7). Gender and ethics are critical when exploring the role of education as primary prevention.

Young people are at a critical point in their personal and social development and their attitudes and behaviours are more readily influenced than adults. Schools are often viewed as the most suitable setting in which to deliver sexual assault and other violence prevention education (Carmody 2009, 7).

Currently, the Queensland Government school curriculum has provisions for Principals to institute the 'Respectful Relationships' Education program. This program, for children in Prep through to Year 12, constitutes five hours of teaching time per year in each year level. The program challenges attitudes about violence and gender construction associated with trends in sexual violence and abuse and supports students to develop pro-social behaviours that lead to equitable and respectful relationships. In addition to current resources available through Education Queensland, there are other materials developed across a range of agencies, such as Queensland Health, the Queensland Family and Child Commission and Queensland Police Service, that could be utilised by schools. It is the view of the Steering Committee however that a more consistent and concerted effort is required.

Whilst focusing on healthy and respectful relationships is important, alone, it will not result in reduced rates of youth sexual violence and abuse. Change will be needed on many fronts and with leadership from families, peers and community members. Whilst the current arrangements for the 'Respectful Relationships' component of the curriculum represent a good start in breaking the silence and promoting an awareness of youth sexual violence and abuse amongst young people, It is the Committee's view that five hours is inadequate and that the 'Respectful Relationships' curriculum needs to be expanded and made mandatory for it to be an effective tool against youth sexual violence and abuse, particularly in communities where it is more apparent.

The curriculum also needs to include explicit consideration of the gendered nature of interpersonal violence, and to promote ethical decision-making, particularly with regard to consent (Carmody 2009). This should aim to provide children and young people with the skills necessary to reflect on their own behaviour and its impact on others in different circumstances and at different stages of development.

School-based education should prioritise education around consent equally for boys and girls. Age appropriate discussions can empower young people by providing them the skills to ethically negotiate consent in their relationships by emphasising equality and the need to balance power and control.

"Children are 25 percent of the population but 100 percent of the future. If we wish to renew society, we must raise up a generation of children who have strong moral character. And if we wish to do that, we have two responsibilities: first, to model good character in our own lives, and second, to intentionally foster character development in our young."

Thomas Lickona (2004, xxiii), Author, Developmental Psychologist and Professor of Education, State University of New York.

The Neighbourhoods Project

In 2013, in response to the Smallbone Report commissioned by the Queensland Government, the Federal Government contracted the Griffith Youth Forensic Services (GYFS) team to design, implement and evaluate a suite of interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence and impacts of youth sexual violence and abuse in Aurukun and West Cairns.

The 'Neighbourhoods Project' was informed by a six step process for place-based prevention, widely used in problem-oriented policing. A comprehensive prevention program was adopted which organises prevention activities according to three essential targets—offenders (or potential offenders), victims (or potential victims), and settings (potentially unsafe places) across three prevention levels—primary (measures covering whole places populations), secondary (high risk individuals and settings) and tertiary (targeted at known offenders, victims and settings).

The 'Neighbourhoods Project' is based on evidence that demonstrates that many problem sexual behaviours respond well to interventions that identify the problem and establish expectations and norms. The project also acknowledges however that in some cases, a referral to a therapeutic intervention may be needed.

For the project to be effective its program staff must necessarily gain the trust and engagement of the local community in which it is being implemented. Interventions that are implemented without the support and engagement of local community members will likely be ineffective.

The Neighbourhoods Project

Each 'Neighbourhoods Project' is designed to meet the needs of a particular community. It draws on a suite of interventions including:

- **Teachers Protect and Professionals Protect** – designed to equip teachers and other professionals working in the community with the confidence, knowledge and skills to identify and respond to problem sexual behaviours and other related behaviours they identified.

- **Parents and Parents and Guardians Protect** – aims to build parental capacity to identify and respond to indicators of abuse and concerning sexualised behaviours, to identify risks for children and to implement strategies in protect children from sexual violence an abuse in the home.

- **Friends Protect** – a program targeted at 14-16 year old youths aimed at increasing knowledge of laws surrounding sexual behaviour and building awareness of peer's responsibilities for and opportunities to look out for each other in related to sexual behaviour and safety.

- **Communities Protect** – an ambitious program that targets the entire community and aims to address breakdowns in social and behavioural norms and accepted standards of behaviour.

- **Protect Me** – a brief psycho-educational, clinical program aimed at building skills in risk detection and response for victims and those belonging to populations living in conditions that put them at especially high risk (i.e. homelessness).

- **Puggles** – a specialist therapeutic program for children who are displaying harmful and serious sexual behaviour.

- **Targeted police patrols** of high-risk public spaces.

As one of the only bodies of research being undertaken related to youth sexual violence and abuse, the 'Neighbourhoods Project' is making a significant contribution to strengthening the knowledge base on youth sexual violence and abuse.

A recent evaluation of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in Aurukun and West Cairns indicates the project offers promise for tackling youth sexual violence and abuse in these locations and other areas of Queensland. A number of initiatives have been identified as 'flagships' namely Teachers Protect, Professionals Protect, Parents Protect, Friends Protect and Protect Me. It is important to bear in mind the project has been in operation for less than 3 years and only in two communities—both with large Indigenous populations. As such, their findings are indicative only. It is expected that programs will continue to be refined and adapted to meet changing situations and learning.

Identification of hotspots for youth sexual violence and abuse

The Smallbone Report identified physical infrastructure as a factor in enabling high risk behaviours to occur. This finding informed the Police Patrol component of the 'Neighbourhoods Project'. Hotspots in both West Cairns and Aurukun were identified where young people congregated and engaged in high risk activities at certain times of the day, such as the consumption of alcohol, drug use, engaging in physical and verbal violence, and sexual behaviour. The report made recommendations to help turn high risk locations into safe places, including the use of police patrols and community night patrols, and improving lighting and visibility. It is important to note that the issues identified were specific to each of the two communities and that responses were tailored to each community.

The Committee recommends that consideration be given to conducting locational assessments in communities with high rates of reported offences to identify hotspots for high risk behaviour and to support the development of local strategies to create safer spaces.

Recommendations

11. The Queensland Government commission the development of a state-wide community awareness and engagement campaign to promote increased understanding and discussion of youth sexual violence and abuse, informed by the voices of children and young people, and developed with expert input. Supplementary material to support the effectiveness of message delivery at the specific community level should be produced by the local community, with government support.

12. That the Queensland Government establish a designated hotline service that encourages young people to discuss incidences and concerns in an anonymous setting and be connected with appropriate services and support if required.

13. That the Queensland Government makes 'Respectful Relationships' education programs including sexual ethics a compulsory component of the curriculum across each year of primary and secondary schooling and that the minimum number of contact hours be significantly increased.

14. That the 'Respectful Relationships' curriculum be adapted by schools, in conjunction with teachers, parents and young people to ensure it provides a tailored and location-specific response to dealing with the complex issues associated with youth sexual violence and abuse.

15. That the Queensland Government fund the continuation of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' and its evaluation, leveraging the investment previously made by the Commonwealth Government, for a period of time sufficient to demonstrate effectiveness, including:

    – Ongoing delivery of those initiatives from the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in Aurukun and West Cairns that have shown promise, to enable further evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions.

    – Trial the delivery of flagship elements of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' in two high prevalence locations (including at least one non-Indigenous location) to gather evidence of the relevance of this approach in tackling youth sexual violence and abuse across Queensland.

    – Trial the delivery of the 'Neighbourhoods Project' through existing service providers with support from GYFS to enhance sustainability of the delivery model and impact.

16. The Committee recommends that a locational assessment to identify 'at risk' locations and times be undertaken in communities with an indicated high incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse, to inform an appropriate and targeted response.

Technology is developing at an unprecedented pace. In 2000, just over half (53 per cent) of Australian households had access to a computer at home and one third (33 per cent) had home internet access (ABS 2000, 3). Today, Australia is one of the world's largest internet users.

In 2014–15, data indicated that 86 per cent of households had access to the internet (ABS 2016b). This figure rose considerably to 97 per cent when looking explicitly households with children under the age of 15. ABS data also indicates that, on average, households with children under the age of 15 access the internet using seven different devices. For the vast majority of Australians, the internet and mobile devices have become an integral part of life—supporting our learning, work, recreation and socialisation.

Chapter two (page 20) presents Queensland Police Service (QPS) data for child pornography related offences among youths, noting a significant increase in offences from 2011–12 to 2015–16. These offences relate to the distribution, possession and making of child pornography. Young people in Queensland are mostly charged with distribution and possession offences. Whilst the circumstances surrounding these particular incidents cannot be inferred from the data, it is widely acknowledged that the emergence of 'sexting' as a social norm raises complex issues relating to child pornography laws (Legal Aid Queensland 2015; Queensland Police 2014). How can society protect young people from exploitation whilst acknowledging 'sexting' as an increasingly normal and usually consensual behaviour? (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013, 23)

The impact of technological advancements has both positive and negative implications for youth sexual violence and abuse.

The challenge

Digital technology presents one of the major challenges to protecting children against youth sexual violence and abuse. Over recent years, 'sexting'—the sending of provocative and sexual photos, messages and videos by phone or posting of this type of material online—has become a growing concern (Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner n.d). Sharing of intimate images is not a new practice, but advances in technology have resulted in significant increases in the speed and volume of images being distributed, meaning the spread is very difficult to control.

Close attention must be paid to identifying and responding to the challenges posed by communication technologies. As consumers, young people are positioned to make judgements about their use of images, videos and other online content of a personal and intimate nature. This comes at a time when young people are at varying stages of development and therefore, have differing capacity to process consent and comprehend the repercussions of their actions.

Failure to address these challenges risks further eroding respectful social norms and contributing to the normalisation of harmful behaviours and attitudes that undermine equality. There is an opportunity to work with young people to promote prosocial norms relating to communication technology, particularly given the evidence supporting the strong influence peer networks can have on youth behaviour (van Hoorn et al. 2016).

The research

A study undertaken by Lee et al. (2015) for the Australian Institute of Criminology found that digital technologies were changing the nature of people's relationships. The authors conducted a survey of more than 2000 respondents (adults and children), 49 per cent reported they had sent a sexual image or video of themselves to someone else, and 67 per cent of respondents said that they had received a sexually explicit image.

Lee et al. (2015, 6) found sexting is common amongst young people, and is usually consensual. 38 per cent of people aged 13-15 and 50 per cent of people aged 16-18 had sent a sexual image/ video at some point. 62 per cent of 13-15 year olds and 70 per cent of 16-18 year old had received a 'sext'.

Other findings included:

- Most people who had engaged in sexting did so in some kind of ongoing relationship and with only one partner;

- 31 per cent of respondents aged 13–15 and 25 per cent aged 16–18 had sent sexual images of themselves to between two and five people;

- 11 per cent of respondents aged 13–15 and 12 per cent aged 16–18 had sent sexual images of themselves to more than five people; and

- Young males were more likely to circulate images more widely, meaning young girls are at greater risk of being shamed or humiliated 'when consensual sexting goes wrong or when they feel pressured into sending an image' (Lee et al. 2015).

This last point raises complex issues surrounding the gender dynamics of sexting in young people's relationships. Lee et al. (2015, 4) notes that, 'While much media, educational and political discourse has highlighted gendered pressure (see Karaian 2012; Salter et al. 2013), exploitation and coercion, this is not the way respondents in this study expressed their motivations. Both young men and women in this study suggested their primary motivation was to be "fun and flirty".

Research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies explored the role of emerging communication technologies in experiences of sexual violence by holding focus groups with key stakeholders. This included practitioners and researchers in justice, policy, education and the academic sector. When exploring the gender dynamics of sexting some members of the focus groups noted, 'Young women in particular were seen as facing significant pressure to engage in sexualised online activity or via mobile phone technology, and potentially faced negative consequences for both refusing to take part or taking part in such behaviour' (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013, 24).

Evidently, technology is contributing to a significant shift in relationship culture. Whilst in most cases, sexting is consensual and takes place in the context of healthy relationships, non-consensual sharing of images does occur, and images are not always shared between two people. Recent media coverage highlighting the existence of websites where images of young girls and women are traded by young men without their knowledge or consent demonstrate the risks for youth sexual violence and abuse in the digital era.

Studies have shown that viewing violent pornography, which is now increasingly accessible, including to children due to advances in technology, can have negative effects on the thoughts, attitudes and behaviours of people who view it. Consumption of intimate material, including pornography is increasingly common amongst young people due to the accessibility of technology. Research shows there is a relationship between the consumption of sexually violent pornography, sexually violent movies, news headlines that endorse rape myths, sex-stereotyping in video games or exposure to degrading images and attitudes that support violence against women (Webster et al. 2014).

The law

The law in Queensland says a person can consent to most forms of sex and sexting at the age of 16. Australian federal law however says that sexting is a crime when it involves images of people under the age of 18, and can be classified as child pornography. Sexting is also an offence when it involves images harassing people of any age, or when it is shared non-consensually (Lawstuff Australia 2013).

In practice, while it can be a crime to take and share sexual images of people under 18, the police do not usually prosecute when the sexting is consensual and there is no harm to those involved. Charges are likely to be laid in cases where an individual/s have deliberately shared a photo or video of someone without consent, especially if it was intended to embarrass and humiliate (Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner n.d.).

A disconnect between current laws that can criminalise youths for engaging in what is becoming a normal part of healthy sexual relationships has been the topic of much discussion amongst teachers, parents and those working in the criminal justice and youth services fields. This concern has led to the drafting of police guidelines in the UK to help police to determine when it is appropriate and inappropriate to lay charges against young people for offences related to sexting and sharing or receiving sexually explicit images. The intention of the guidelines is to ensure young people are protected, whilst balancing the need to prevent un-necessary criminalisation (Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2013). It is the Committee's view the development of guidelines may equally be of value in the Queensland context.

The opportunity

Improved access and affordability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) also presents certain opportunities to protect children and young people against youth sexual violence and abuse. Digital media is readily accessed by youth which makes providing information and promoting services and tools online a valid option. Providing forums to discuss the topic enable young people to connect with other young people to share stories, discuss experiences and foster youth leadership.

A scan of global literature in this area identifies a range of strategies that have been employed to tackle sexual violence and abuse associated with digital technologies. These include:

- Improving digital literacy so young people understand the risk associated with sexting and sharing images digitally and parents understand the role of ICT as it relates to youth sexual violence and abuse;

- Promoting respectful relationships more broadly. Evidence suggests youth who experience dating violence offline are more likely to experience it online as well;

- Social norms marketing and active bystander interventions that promote healthy and gender-equitable social attitudes and beliefs and encourage people to both proactively and reactively to take a stand against the problem behaviour; and

- Youth driven approaches where young people develop and deliver interventions and messages to their peers.

A number of digital programs/platforms have been developed around the world to promote healthy relationships, reduce sexual violence and abuse, and connect young people to appropriate services. The '#R4Respect' program is an excellent example of a peer-led initiative aimed at tackling violence in young people. Although not explicitly focused on youth sexual violence and abuse, the program is an education and prevention strategy led by young people in Logan and surrounding areas. The prevention strategy aims to prevent anti-social behaviour and violence, using messaging created by young people that promote the values, skills and knowledge needed for respectful relationships. The Committee sees value in the Government partnering with a relevant organisation to develop a similar program tailored to the Queensland context.

An excellent example of an initiative that explicitly addresses sexual violence, respectful relationships and digital abuse can be found in 'That's Not Cool'—a public education campaign developed in the United States (discussed further on page 41).

The Committee notes any interventions aimed at addressing harmful and non-consensual sharing of images online must:

- Recognise sexting is not usually associated with harassment and in most cases is done by consenting partners as part of some form of intimate relationship;

- Support all people, in particular young people to understand the risks associated with sexting, in particular that once posted, images can be further sent without the control or consent of the person they concern. Sexting and social media considerations, including the issue of consent, need to be incorporated into all community awareness campaigns and school based education programs aimed at promoting healthy and ethical relationships;

- Work with young people to think through 'sexual ethics' in order to redress the 'gendered double standard' and instances of non-consensual sharing of intimate images as a form of violence. Opportunities to consider this as part of an expansion of the existing curriculum on healthy relationships or through the introduction of ethics into the curriculum, as done in NSW; and

- Ensure young people are aware of resources and services available and ensure teachers, parents and community members are aware of the issues surrounding digital youth sexual violence and abuse.

Given the rapidity of change and the emergence of new technologies every day, preventive efforts are needed which provide children and young people with a framework and tools to support them to make responsible, ethical and safe mobile and online decisions. School based programs that promote respectful and ethical relationships (as discussed in Chapter four) must give specific consideration to digital and social media as it relates to youth sexual violence and abuse. It must aim to equip people to make good decisions.

That's Not Cool

'That's Not Cool' (2016) is an award winning public education campaign developed in partnership between the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, the Advertising Council and '*Futures without Violence*'—a non-government organisation that support individuals and organisations working to end violence against women and children through programs, policies and campaigns.

It is based on the premise that young people must lead the way in addressing sexual violence, unhealthy relationships, and digital abuse. The program provides young people with the tools, training, information and support they need to lead prevention efforts in their community, schools and online. The campaign also has an Ambassador Program for teenagers that are motivated to take action against digital dating abuse in their school or community. The Program provides the Ambassadors with an opportunity to raise awareness with their friends, family and community at large.

'That's Not Cool's' interactive website, tools, and resources support young people to recognise, avoid, and prevent dating violence in their lives. The initiative includes a vast array of online resources, and includes social media platforms, innovative apps and games, providing ways for teens to learn more about and what does and doesn't constitute a healthy relationship—on and offline. The program also provides tools, resources, and assistance to parents and people who work with youth on these issues.

Recommendations

17. The Queensland Government commissions the development of a multi-media and interactive community education campaign that emphasises healthy relationships and engages young people as the drivers of change. It should have a particular focus on social media and sexting. The education campaign should draw on examples used in other successful campaigns and aim to strengthen the public's awareness of the law.

18. That consideration be given to the establishment of police guidelines aimed at supporting police to appropriately apply the law and ensure that the correct balance is achieved between protecting children and society from the harm caused by child pornography and not criminalising young people for consensually sharing images on digital media.

19. That digital and social media and its role in healthy relationships and youth sexual violence and abuse be included in the 'Respectful Relationships' curriculum, including from a legal perspective.

Over the last 30 years, Australian Governments have developed various multi-level strategies to try to address the needs of victims, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to educate the community on how to prevent sexual and other forms of intimate violence (Carmody 2009). Historically these strategies have been more broadly directed at preventing violence against women rather than directly addressing the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts and good intentions of government agencies, service providers, community members and families, some children and young people have fallen through the cracks and have not received the support and intervention they require to either prevent youth sexual violence and abuse or to respond to it appropriately when it occurs. Often, the children and families most in need of support and assistance are those most difficult to reach and sustain engagement with.

All over Queensland (indeed Australia and the world), there are reports of children and young people who have not received the support necessary to protect them—too often with devastating consequences. This is highlighted by the number of media articles relating to sexual violence and abuse of young people and the number of children whose stories have sadly become well known for all the wrong reasons.

This is not a criticism of all individual service providers, who the Committee acknowledges for the most part do a tremendous job, working tirelessly to protect and support young children, in often very difficult circumstances. Rather, the following paragraphs aim to highlight the underlying systemic issues that undermine the capacity of these service providers to adequately protect and support vulnerable young people, and the changes needed if youth sexual violence and abuse is to be overcome. Taken together, the recommended changes would constitute a fundamental and disruptive change in the way services are designed, funded and implemented. Only by comprehensively and fundamentally changing the way services are provided can the Government of Queensland ensure that no child is left behind in this regard.

Local solutions for local problems

Queensland has in place the *Queensland Violence Against Women Prevention Plan 2016–22* and it shares commitments under the *Third Action Plan 2016–2019* of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–22*. These and other relevant high level plans and strategies (see Appendix one, page 50) are informed by best practice, evidence and data and set the framework for taking forward related interventions.

Though traditionally a more centralised approach has been employed in the development of programs and policies under such overarching frameworks, current best practice approaches emphasise co-design with key stakeholders and end users at all stages of program development and implementation. This approach aims to ensure programs reach the people they are intended to serve, are culturally and contextually appropriate, and are responsive to local needs. Co-design is particularly important for programs for marginalised and minority populations, in particular Indigenous Queenslanders, who may face additional barriers in accessing mainstream service models.

The idea that local solutions are needed to address locally identified problems has been gaining momentum over recent years. As described by World Bank (2013) in their article *Local Solutions for Local Problems*, "Rather than seeking 'best practice" solutions adopted from elsewhere to problems determined by outsiders, the approach (needs)…. to begin with locally nominated and prioritised problems as the basis for crafting 'best fit' local solutions". This is also relevant to a discussion on youth sexual violence and abuse which, as highlighted by the data presented in Chapter two (page 20) of this report disproportionately affects some communities and more marginalised community members.

To be effective, services need to be enabled to respond appropriately to local needs. Local communities need to be empowered to participate in the identification of priorities as well as gaps and barriers to effective service delivery—preventive, tertiary and acute. Undertaking co-design with local communities requires a long term commitment, consistent effort, and investments in strengthening the partnership. Further, service providers need support to help them effectively respond to the needs of the local community. As the data in Chapter two of this report indicates, some rural and remote areas of Queensland experience high rates of youth sexual violence and abuse. Often specialised services, such as sexual assault and counselling services are not available in these locations, and the local health worker, teacher, or police officer is required to fill the gap in services as best they can.

The challenge is exacerbated where the service provider is new to the location, in their first professional role, does not have established professional networks nor personal supports in the community, and is a sole practitioner or fly-in fly-out fly worker. The challenge may be further intensified in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where service providers operate in a different cultural context.

The combination of these factors and the challenge they present for service providers has been identified as a key reason why services sometimes do not reach those most in need. As the preceding paragraphs have indicated, tacking youth sexual violence and abuse will require a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach tailored to the needs of specific communities and draws from a number of different fields. These fields include neuroscience, early childhood development and pedagogy, psychology and medicine, community engagement and health promotion, community development and empowerment, and information technology. Systems of professional and cultural mentoring, capacity building and support need to be established to ensure service providers (government and non-government) working in challenging, complex and isolated environments are able to serve their communities and clients. Service providers must be informed of the research and use it to design and implement effective programs.

Strengthening downward accountability

Service providers are accountable to the agencies that fund them, but the Committee recognises the importance of enhancing downwards accountability mechanisms to ensure that services respond to the needs of local communities, in particular the needs of vulnerable children and young people.

There are a number of ways improved local accountability can be developed, including through:

- establishment of contractual arrangements that involve local entities, bodies and panels as parties to the contract or in working with government departments to determine performance agreements;
- individual performance assessments of service providers that incorporate feedback from clients and community members (often referred to as 360 degree feedback) and that follow up on clients who fail to attend appointments; and
- developing mechanisms that enable and encourage communities to have input into services and shape future delivery.

Focusing on and measuring results

Government services were more traditionally funded based on the services they provide and the number and types of people they serve—inputs and processes. However over recent years, the world has witnessed a paradigm shift with the introduction and increasing use of funding models that focus on outcomes, impacts and results. In Queensland this has included a range of outcome based funding models and also new and innovative social investment, results based financing and reinvestment initiatives.

Apart from promoting the delivery of results, funding models that emphasise the delivery of results and impact on the ground have been demonstrated to support shifts towards more participatory approaches that emphasise local involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation and also promote a culture of innovation, creativity and problem solving.

For these reasons, they can be useful as a tool for responding to complex social policy issues, such as youth sexual violence and abuse.

Evaluating the impact of such programs is therefore critical in order to understand whether interventions are working or not, to determine which interventions offer the best return on investment, and how best to allocate scarce government resources.

In 2016, an evaluation was undertaken of the Griffith University 'Neighborhoods Project', discussed previously in Chapter three (page 26). This evaluation was the first comprehensive evaluation of a youth sexual violence and abuse program in Australia. The lack of evaluations of programs related to child sexual abuse, and youth sexual violence is very concerning.

In November 2014 the Queensland Treasury published *Program Evaluation Guidelines* to 'provide a framework within which evaluations can be planned and implemented in a manner appropriate to the program being evaluated' (Queensland Treasury 2014, 2). The Guidelines advise where programs are high risk, complex in terms of program design, are piloting or trialing a program, involve multiple delivery bodies or have high potential for behavioural impacts, they should be comprehensively evaluated in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency. The Guidelines also note the evaluation of such programs should be managed externally, be independent, and evaluation experts should be consulted in their design.

Given the social and economic ramifications if investments to address youth sexual violence and abuse are not effective, it is the Committee's view all such interventions are independently and comprehensively evaluated, including, where appropriate, through randomised control trials.

As demonstrated in the case of the 'Neighbourhoods Project', innovative approaches are needed to tackle the complex issue of youth sexual violence and abuse. However pilots of innovative programs often receive funding for short periods of time (between one and three years) and run the risk of having their funding discontinued if they are not able to demonstrate effectiveness. In some cases, extensions may be granted on a piecemeal basis which can undermine the integrity of the original pilot, and the potential value to be reaped from it. The Committee emphasises the importance of innovation and pilot activities being sufficiently funded for a period of time adequate to demonstrate potential impact.

Disruptive change in the way services are provided in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Analysis of service delivery challenges and the need for more locally driven and outcomes focused services is particularly relevant when considering the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

In the Boyer Lecture of 1968, anthropologist Professor WEH Stanner wrote:

"Possibly the most dangerous theory … is that things are now going well, that all we need to do is more of what we are already doing, that is, deepen and widen the welfare programs, and the rest will come at a natural pace in its own good time. The trouble is that things are not going well. The gap between the average living conditions of the Aboriginals and ours shows signs of widening, not narrowing"

(Stanner 1968 as cited in Sutton 2009).

Sadly, this point was reiterated 40 years later by Professor Peter Sutton who noted the "conspicuous failure… to challenge the perpetuation of what obviously doesn't work' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities" (Sutton 2009, 52) and again in 2015 in the *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report* (Wanun Foundation Inc. 2015, 7) which observed, "As we have seen with the succession of Closing the Gap reports since 2008, Stanner could well be talking of today. Without a fundamental reform shift, we fear much the same will be true another 50 years from now".

Highlighted by the quotes above, more than anywhere else, it is in Australia's Indigenous communities that a disruptive change in how programs are funded and delivered is most urgently needed.

As indicated throughout this Final Report, people living in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities represent some of Queensland's most disadvantaged people. As a result of their entrenched disadvantage, children and young people growing up in these communities may be exposed to more risk factors for youth sexual violence and abuse than people growing up in less disadvantaged communities as explored in Chapter one. Raising happy, healthy, children of Australia's first people today is essential if we are to see Indigenous disadvantage overcome in future generations.

The findings of the latest *Closing the Gap Report* (Commonwealth of Australia 2017), and the statistics presented in this report, reinforce the point that traditional, top down, business-as-usual approaches that fail to understand and adequately respond to key community specific challenges are inadequate to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. It is true that some progress towards improved community safety and wellbeing have been noted. However, until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are more proactively empowered and supported to discuss and identify the challenges they face—including those cultural and social norms which may impact negatively on gender relations and the treatment of children—and to lead the way in identifying and implementing 'best fit' solutions to them, the gap in Indigenous disadvantage will remain.

The issues raised in the preceding paragraphs—the need to develop tailored, place-based responses, the need for greater accountability of services to communities and individuals, and the need to sharpen the focus on delivering results on the ground—are equally relevant for a discussion regarding service delivery in Indigenous communities. Short term funding cycles, shifts in policy directions every few years, and poorly coordinated policy responses and service delivery at best stall progress towards closing the gap and at worst contribute to the gap widening. Given the entrenched disadvantage and the need for immediate and focused attention to overcome these challenges, a more concerted Government focus and greater amounts of Government leadership is needed.

To this end, the Committee recommends the establishment of a Statutory Authority charged with oversight of the Queensland Government's investments to address Indigenous disadvantage, particularly for people living in Queensland's rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This body would aim to ensure that investments are prioritised in response to community specific needs and coordinated to maximize impact. The Statutory Authority would ideally be chaired by an Indigenous leader and closely linked with local level leadership.

Importantly, in 2016, the Queensland Treasurer asked the Queensland Productivity Commission to review service delivery in Indigenous communities, considering in particular how available resources can be best used to increase social and economic participation and achieve service outcomes that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The results of this review will be available later in 2017.

The *Empowered Communities Report* (Wanun Foundation Inc. 2015) also considers in detail the types of issues raised in this chapter, as they relate to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. The report aims to change how Indigenous policies and programs are designed and implemented, and the way governments and Indigenous people work together. The Empowered Communities vision, which has received bipartisan support at the National level, is to ensure policies and programs address local priorities and needs, and achieve meaningful and lasting outcomes.

The Committee recommends that this report and the *Empowered Communities Report* be referred to the Queensland Productivity Commission for consideration in its current review of service delivery in Indigenous communities.

Coordinated responses to achieve cross-sectoral objectives

In conclusion, strategies to address youth sexual violence and abuse across all sections of the Queensland community, cannot be developed and implemented in isolation. Responding effectively requires interventions across a range of sectors be designed and implemented with a clear and unified objective. Breaking down silos is critical in order to effectively and comprehensively respond to the challenge of youth sexual violence and abuse.

Alternative frameworks that are being developed locally and internationally argue for more nuanced responses to youth sexual violence and abuse and draw on more sophisticated multi-sectoral, multi-level approaches to prevention (World Health Organization 2016). The World Health Organization's INSPIRE, outlines seven effective strategies for ending violence against children. INSPIRE identifies responses across government departments such as education, health, justice, and social welfare and also identifies the support of the private sector and non-government organisations as critical. In combination, these stakeholders can converge to reduce the negative impact of risk factors associated with violence against children at individual, family, community and society levels.

Localised responses are necessary to ensure youth sexual violence and abuse is responded to appropriately in different places and contexts. It is also at the local level that coordination is most critical and arguably easiest to achieve, provided the right systems are in place to allow flexibility on the ground so that service providers can structure their work to complement and coordinate with that of others.

There are notable examples of where considerable effort has been made to strengthen coordination between agencies. Of particular relevance to this report is the *Queensland Government Interagency Guidelines for Responding to People who have Experienced Sexual Assault*. The Guidelines promote whole-of-government interagency cooperation and service coordination to improve government responses to victims of sexual assault.

To support a coordinated response for victims of sexual abuse at a local level, a number of local networks are being established to develop, draft and implement inter-agency protocols for responding to sexual abuse, informed by the Guidelines.

The Committee sees the establishment of local networks to develop localised protocols as valuable and emphasises the importance of the role of these networks being determined in response to local needs and priorities. In communities where youth sexual violence and abuse is identified as a priority, it may be beneficial for the scope of the Networks to be expanded to include an explicit focus on youth sexual violence and abuse and/or other related issues (for example domestic violence). Further, in some communities, particularly those that are small or in remote locations, it may be beneficial for them to focus on prevention as well as response.

In discussions with Victims Assist Queensland, the Committee learned of the challenges in establishing the local sexual assault networks in some locations where there is no clear lead agency with the necessary capacity to lead the process. The Committee recognises the importance of strengthening the capacity of local organisations to play the role of lead agency, particularly in areas of high reported incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse. The Committee suggests this be done by establishing partnerships between local organisations and key specialist servi ce providers (such as sexual assault services) and ensuring the Networks are resourced adequately including by funding specific positions.

Recommendations

20. That the Queensland and Australian Governments work with communities, in particular those with a high prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse, to identify gaps in service provision and co-design tailored interventions that target youth sexual violence through locally appropriate responses.

21. That systems of professional and cultural mentoring be established across key service delivery agencies (including the Departments of Health, Communities, Education and Police) to ensure that service providers (government and non-government) working on the frontline, including in remote areas, are supported to meet the needs of clients and effectively respond to issues relate to youth sexual violence and abuse.

22. That the Queensland Government develop a package of interventions for communities to consider in developing best-fit local interventions that target youth sexual violence and abuse. The package would include actions that have immediate and long-term impacts and that support awareness raising, prevention and diversion, and treatment and response.

23. That 'downward' accountability mechanisms, whereby communities help determine the performance measures and contribute to evaluating how well the measures are achieved, be built into all new and existing interventions and performance agreements related to youth sexual violence and abuse.

24. That the Queensland Government pilot and rigorously evaluate the use of financing models that emphasise results and impact in interventions that target youth sexual violence and abuse.

25. That the Queensland Government strengthen the *Program Evaluation Guidelines* to mandate that all programs and interventions of a certain financial value or that deal with complex social challenges (such as youth sexual violence and abuse) or high priority issues are appropriately and independently evaluated.

26. The Committee recommends the duration and funding for innovative programs targeting youth sexual violence and abuse be determined based on a realistic assessment of how long it will take to be able to demonstrate likely effectiveness. The Committee recommends the funding for and duration of pilots be determined in consultation with appropriate evaluation experts to ensure adequacy for demonstrating results.

27. That the Queensland Government undertake consultations in all discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to relay findings from the Committee's review and foster an open community discussion on this highly sensitive issue. The consultations would lead to the development of community-specific commitments and a framework for fostering happy healthy children free from youth sexual violence and abuse.

28. That this Final Report and the *Empowered Communities Report* be referred to the Queensland Productivity Commission for consideration in its current review of service delivery in Indigenous communities.

29. That the Queensland Government give consideration to establishing an independent Statutory Authority to oversee government investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.

30. That the Queensland Government prioritise the establishment of local sexual assault networks and encourage and strengthen existing networks particularly in communities with high reported incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse. This would also require the Queensland Government to build the capacity of local non-government organisations to lead the coordination of services and the development of protocols. This may require funding from Queensland Government for dedicated coordinators in some locations as determined by need, and to support the provision of professional mentoring partnerships with from specialist services.

31. That existing and new local sexual assault networks be responsive to local needs and priorities and have scope to consider particular issues of concern, for example youth sexual violence and abuse. If warranted, the work of sexual assault networks could also include a focus on prevention as well as response.

Conclusion

Through this Final Report, the Committee has attempted to put a spotlight on the too commonly hidden issue of youth sexual violence and abuse. As demonstrated by the evidence presented in the report, youth sexual violence and abuse effects children across the width and breadth of Queensland. It is a state-wide issue.

The data suggests children and young people growing up in disadvantaged communities carry the greatest burden of youth sexual violence and abuse and are exposed to more risk factors. Tragically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and children—undoubtedly some of Queensland's most disadvantaged and marginalised citizens—are affected by youth sexual violence and abuse at rates far greater than non-Indigenous young people. For this reason, although this report rightly considers youth sexual violence and abuse as a Queensland-wide issue, it also gives special consideration to tackling this issue as it relates to young Indigenous people.

In this report the Committee has made recommendations that directly relate to youth sexual violence and abuse, in particular the need to break the silence on this sensitive issue—at and across all levels— in order to tackle it effectively. The Committee has also considered the increasingly difficult task of protecting young children from youth sexual violence and abuse in the form of sexting and sharing of online images, in an era where the speed and access to digital media is increasing rapidly.

There are no easy solutions and the discussion and recommendations point to the need for comprehensive and coordinated multi-sectoral approaches. The Committee has provided recommendations to the Queensland Government on how it can best respond to this issue and has given necessary consideration of the broader issues of underlying disadvantage and structural issues that impact on the effectiveness of interventions on the ground. The Committee makes recommendations to support a framework for a government response that will tackle youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland including actions that will immediately impact and prevent youth sexual violence and abuse and actions that will support long term and generational change to ensure that children are given every opportunity to develop to the fullest of their potential.

The fact that youth sexual violence and abuse disproportionately affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds indicates the problem will not be fixed quickly, by any one intervention, nor by interventions that only target unhealthy and problematic sexual behaviours—although the importance of these interventions cannot be understated.

For these reasons the Committee has given consideration to the links between disadvantage and dysfunction in the early years of life and their impact on social, emotional and cognitive development as well as later life outcomes. Recommendations are aimed at ensuring all children—irrespective of where they grow up—get the best start in life.

The Committee emphasises the importance of ensuring that investments made to tackle youth sexual violence and abuse have the greatest positive impact possible. A number of recommendations are aimed at immediately improving the impact of services on the ground, while others will have a longer term impact, creating generational change. These include:

- encouraging discussions within local communities to determine and develop 'best fit' solutions to local priorities;

- providing, if appropriate, independent non-government expert facilitation for such discussions;

- acknowledging the importance of heeding local priorities and of partnering with communities and service providers in determining and developing those priorities;

- ensuring service providers are accountable to the communities, families and young people they are intended to serve;

- strengthening coordination across agencies and service providers, in recognition that youth sexual violence and abuse cannot be addressed by interventions in any one sector; and

- building a knowledge base related to this issue through continued research, innovation and rigorous evaluation of interventions.

There is an urgent need for the issue of youth sexual violence and abuse to be addressed in Queensland. Providing a heightened knowledge and understanding of this issue across all elements of society—young people, parents, families, communities, service providers, educators and policy makers—is a critical step to creating longer term, generational change.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Existing strategies and reports

Taking action through an integrated response

Taking action to prevent and respond to youth sexual violence and abuse is everyone's business. All levels of government and non-government agencies need to work together to create lasting change that will lead to the elimination of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. Appendix one details a number of current and emerging State and Federal Government initiatives that are responding, either directly or indirectly to youth sexual violence and abuse. Some of the initiatives target domestic and family violence which research has shown to have a strong link with youth sexual violence and abuse. The following initiatives present ideas and responses needed to meet the challenge of addressing youth sexual violence and abuse.

Working across Australia

National Plan to reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022

In May 2008, the Federal Government appointed a National Council to develop an evidence base for reducing violence towards women and their children. The work led to an agreement that all governments commit to a long-term plan to action.

www.dss.gov.au

Royal Commission into Institutionalised Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

A *Royal Commission into Institutionalised Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* was announced on 11 January 2013. The purpose of the Commission was to investigate the management of allegations and incidents within institutions.

www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Respectful Relationships education in schools

A Victorian Government initiative aimed at addressing family violence through education in schools and early childhood education settings.

www.education.vic.gov.au

Fourth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood-Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2014–2017

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged under 30) are a priority population for the *Fourth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood-Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2014–2017*.

This Strategy is one of a suite of five strategies which provide a framework for the coordinated effort by the commonwealth, state and territory governments and communities, clinicians and researchers to address already high or rising rates of HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and STI in priority populations within Australia.

www.health.gov.au

Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report

The *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report*, released in 2015 is the joint effort of a group of Indigenous leaders from Australia with support from the Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships. It proposes staged implementation of an Indigenous empowerment agenda.

The Australian Government responded to the report in December 2015, strongly supporting the place-based, whole-of-government approach outlined in the report. The Australian Government is progressing with the regional response for Empowered Communities before considering the institutional governance or legislative reforms also recommended in the report.

www.dpmc.gov.au

Not Now, Not Ever: putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland

The Queensland Government convened a special taskforce in 2014 on domestic and family violence in Queensland. The Special Taskforce's role has been to define the domestic and family violence landscape in Queensland, and make recommendations to inform the development of a long term vision and strategy for Government and the community to address domestic and family violence. The report was released by the Premier in 2015 and made 140 recommendations to ensure those affected by domestic and family violence have access to support and safety.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026

The *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026* encourages partnership between government, community and business. The strategy has released a *First Action Plan 2015–2016* and is currently implementing the *Second Action Plan 2016–2019*. Both Plans focus on the implementation of recommendations of the *Not Now, Not Ever* report. The future work of the Strategy will be rolled out through a series of action plans commencing 2019–2020.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

The Queensland Government Interagency Guidelines for Responding to People who have Experienced Sexual Assault

The guidelines outline key principles and a practice framework to assist government agencies in responding to people who have experienced sexual assault, including children and young people who have been abused.

https://publications.qld.gov.au

Review of Queensland Health responses to adult victims of sexual assault (KPMG 2009)

An external review undertaken to identify gaps in service provision, examine cooperation and integration of Sexual Assault Services with key agencies and provide options for a service system model that is evidenced based and appropriately and effectively meets the needs of adult victims of sexual assault.

www.health.qld.gov.au

Respectful Relationships education program

A direct response to the *Not Now, Not Ever* report. The Respectful Relationships education program is a primary prevention program focused on influencing behaviour change to prevent undesirable social consequences such as domestic and family violence. The content and approaches of the program are based on domestic and family violence research and best-practice educational approaches. The program was developed in consultation with teachers, school communities, domestic and family violence organisations and external experts.

www.education.qld.gov.au

My Health, Queensland's future: Advancing health 2026

Developed to guide Queensland Governments' investment into health, the report details the guiding principles of sustainability, compassion, inclusion, excellence and empowerment.

www.health.qld.gov.au

Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021

The Strategy was developed in collaboration and consultation with stakeholders including health consumers, other government departments and community organisations. The Strategy aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health of all Queenslanders by addressing a broad range of sexual and reproductive health issues including health promotion, prevention, clinical service provision and community education. The Strategy provides an overarching framework for several Action Plans including the *North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016–2021.*

www.health.qld.gov.au

North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016–2021

Released in May 2016, the Action Plan targets regional services and communities in North Queensland. The goals aim to eliminate, control and progressively reduce sexually transmissible infections in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in North Queensland.

www.health.qld.gov.au

Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection

The Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry final report found that the child protection system was under stress with increased child protection intake rates and over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Commission has made 121 recommendations and provided a detailed roadmap of how to implement the reform process.

www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au

Supporting Families Changing Futures: Advancing Queensland's child protection and family support reforms

In response to *Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection* the Queensland Government is progressing a wide-ranging 10 year reform program for the child protection and family support system.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Queensland Women's Strategy 2016–21

The strategy provides a framework for the wider Queensland community to take significant action to achieve gender equality in Queensland. A range of actions have been identified under the four key priorities of participation and leadership; economic security; safety; health and wellbeing.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

The Queensland Violence Against Women Prevention Plan 2016–22

The Plan was developed based on widespread community consultation and has been designed to operate over a six year period with action to be implemented in a phased approach. The key priorities are respect; safety and justice.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

# Appendix 2: Regional offender and victim statistics

Appendix two explores additional statistics produced by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office using primarily Queensland Police Service (QPS) data. It is important that the data be interpreted cautiously as research demonstrates that underreporting significantly skews the rates of reported sexual offences. Thus, administrative datasets cannot capture the full extent of youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland. However, they provide a base from which to explore the issue and suggest priority areas for responses to youth sexual violence and abuse.

Offender hotspots

Police Division boundaries have been used to highlight hotspots for youth sexual offending. These boundaries are an obvious choice when presenting QPS data, and, given the small counts overall, they are of an adequate size to enable statistical analyses, without being so large that scope is lost. For more fine-grained analysis, the Statistical Areas Level 2 (SA2) geography is used, and for broader trend analyses, Local Government Areas (LGAs) are used.

Police divisions

Yearly counts of reported sexual offenders across Police Divisions are generally small. However, consistently high rates for unique offenders were recorded for several areas in the north of Queensland, including the more populated Police Divisions of Cairns, Townsville, and Rockhampton. Figure 9 (page 51) shows that several areas with high rates are collocated e.g. Kirwan, Townsville and Mundingburra.
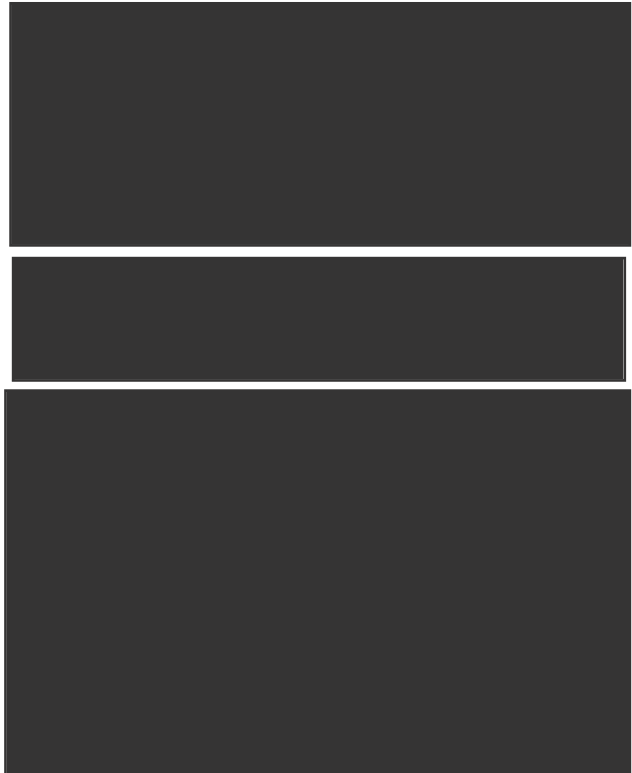
Table 4: Average annual youth sexual offender (unique) rate and count, 2011–12 to 2015–16, selected Police Divisions[a] in Queensland

Rank[b]	Police Division	Average rate	Average count
1	Cairns	316.4	26
2	Kirwan	207.6	16
3	Toowoomba	124.7	15
4	Bundaberg	162.9	11
5	Caboolture	150.2	10
6	Townsville	340.5	10
7	Edmonton	220.8	10
8	Logan Central	151.0	10
9	Thursday Island	836.9	8
10	Hervey Bay	126.7	8
11	Gladstone	174.7	7
12	Coomera	61.1	7
13	Redcliffe	134.6	7
14	Maryborough	195.4	7
15	Beenleigh	134.8	7
16	Inala	103.4	7
17	Deeragun	212.7	7
18	North Rockhampton	125.3	7
19	Rockhampton	223.5	6
20	Jimboomba	89.2	6
21	Goodna	99.9	6
22	Maroochydore	80.3	6
23	Bamaga	1,473.6	5
24	Mount Isa	222.0	5
25	Burpengary	87.9	5
26	Capalaba	68.4	5
27	Petrie	59.2	5
28	Ipswich	179.6	5
29	Mundingburra	159.5	5
30	Southport	62.3	5

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury using Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

[a] *Excludes police divisions (305) with average annual counts of unique youth sexual offenders of less than five, five years to 2015–16.*

[b] *Ranked by average annual count, largest to smallest (unrounded values). Ranking is indicative only as Police Division counts have been tested for significant differences.*
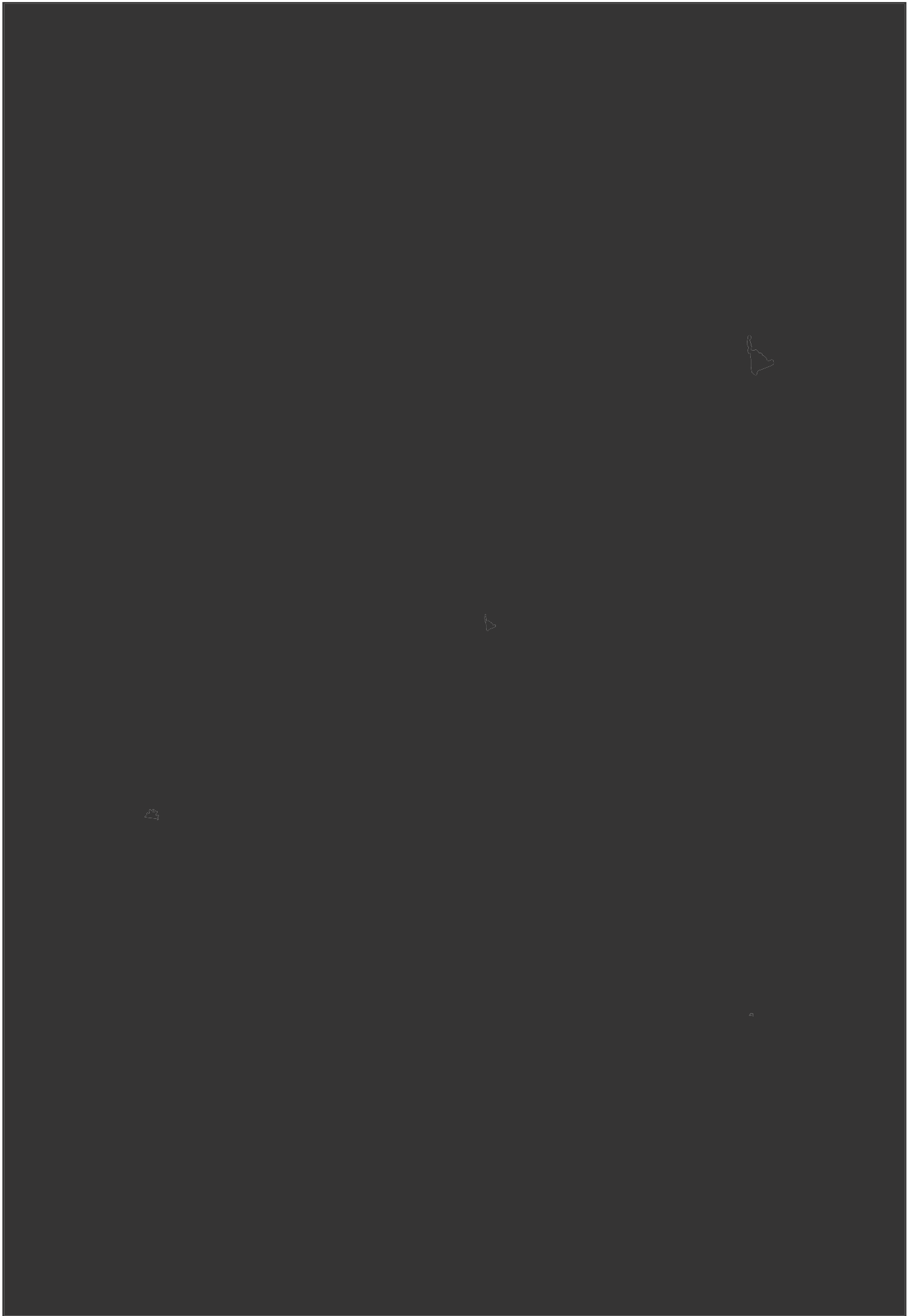
Table 6: *Average annual youth sexual victim (unique) rate and count, 2011–12 to 2015–16, selected Police Divisions[a] in Queensland*

Rank[b]	Police Division	Average rate	Average count
1	Cairns	448.4	86
2	Toowoomba	273.9	73
3	Kirwan	409.8	71
4	Caboolture	371.6	63
5	Logan Central	362.8	56
6	Bundaberg	356.5	50
7	Townsville	659.8	46
8	Hervey Bay	315.1	40
9	Coomera	137.0	40
10	Redcliffe	313.5	38
11	Goodna	272.7	38
12	Beenleigh	289.2	37
13	North Rockhampton	303.8	36
14	Petrie	175.2	34
15	Maryborough	439.7	33
16	Gladstone	319.7	33
17	Edmonton	311.6	33
18	Ipswich	538.1	32
19	Rockhampton	600.3	30
20	Inala	191.6	30
21	Crestmead	267.0	30
22	Southport	172.2	29
23	Mackay	240.5	27
24	Burpengary	193.9	26
25	Maroochydore	175.3	26
26	Browns Plains	228.9	25
27	Mundingburra	371.7	23
28	Springfield	222.4	23
29	Deception Bay	326.8	23
30	Jimboomba	169.5	23
31	Mount Isa	362.9	22
32	Laidley	442.6	22
33	Deeragun	272.5	22
34	Gympie	260.5	22
35	Nerang	130.8	22
36	Wynnum	123.5	21
37	Upper Mount Gravatt	132.8	21
38	Capalaba	124.5	20

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury using Queensland Police Service, unpublished data.

[a] *Excludes police divisions (305) with average annual counts of unique youth sexual offenders of less than five years to 2015–16.*

[b] *Ranked by average annual count, largest to smallest (unrounded values). Ranking is indicative only as Police Division counts have been tested for significant differences.*

Definitions used for QGSO statistical analyses

Cleared offences: The QPS (2016, 183) states an offence is deemed to be cleared under, but not restricted to, the following circumstances:

- At least one offender has been arrested or summonsed or issued with a notice to appear, or information has been laid to compel an offender's appearance before a court

- Action has been taken against at least one offender under the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 (e.g. administration of an official caution, summons or reference to a community conference)

- At least one offender has been dealt with in accordance with Queensland Police Service policy (e.g. informal counselling of children and elderly persons)

- The offender has admitted the offence but there is an obstacle to proceedings (e.g. diplomatic immunity)

- The offender is known and sufficient evidence has been obtained, but the complainant refuses to prosecute

- The offender is in another jurisdiction and extradition is not desired or not available

- The offender is serving a sentence and no useful purpose would be served by prosecution

- The offender has died before proceedings can be commenced

- The offender has been admitted to a mental institution before charges are laid and release is unlikely

- The offender is being offered drug diversion for a minor drug offence

- There is some other bar to prosecution

- The offender is dealt with by ex-officio indictment

- The offender is being dealt with by another agency apart from QPS

- The complainant or essential witness has died and proceedings would be abortive

- Following a complaint the complainant has requested that police take no further action.

Incident: Defined as an activity which involves the same offender(s), the same victim(s), at one location, and during one period of time.

Reported offences: A single criminal incident may result in a number of offences being recorded. Statistics are reported in Queensland on a victim based counting system. A count of one offence is recorded for each major offence.

Sexual offender or victim: Unless otherwise stated (such as counts reported by incident) we have provided counts of unique offenders and victims. Each victim/offender is counted once only in the reference period, regardless of how many times they have been reported as a victim/offender. Note that the age of the victim is recorded as the age when the offence was reported, not necessarily when it occurred.

Police Division: There are 335 Police Divisions, within five Police Regions in Queensland.

SA2: SA2s have an average population of about 10,000 persons. SA2s in remote and regional areas generally have smaller populations than those in urban areas (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1270.0.55.001).

Local Government Area (LGA): LGAs are an Australian Bureau of Statistics approximation of officially gazetted LGAs as defined by each State and Territory Local Government Department (see Australian Bureaus of Statistics, 1270.0.55.003).

Offender hot spots: Identified as a geographic location with (1) a rate significantly higher than the Queensland rate, (2) an average yearly count greater than two for offenders, and greater than five for victims, and (3) a rate which was greater than twice the Queensland rate in five or more of eight years.

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