ReachOut

A Prevention First Response to Men Perpetrating Family Violence

In North Canterbury, New Zealand
SUMMARY

New Zealand has the highest rate of family violence amongst member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

North Canterbury is situated in the South Island of New Zealand. It is a suburban and rural area with an approximate population of 70,000. Scanning in 2010 by local Police identified a gap in services for men named on Police reports of family violence. While women and children were routinely offered support following Police attendance at an episode, men listed as subjects or offenders were not. At the same time, the number of women entering local safe houses had started to decline and the average length of stay was increasing. This was due to the lack of affordable accommodation for women and children to move into because of the Canterbury earthquakes. Police attendance at family violence episodes had also increased rapidly by 19% following the earthquakes. Prior to the implementation of the response, the local male family violence re-offending rate was 18%.

Police analysis of a high risk sample of local men identified a willingness to receive support. This in turn had the potential to prevent reoffending by improving risk assessment and victim safety planning. A multi-stakeholder community meeting facilitated by Police and the local council found unanimous support for a specialist response for men in North Canterbury. Police and a local specialist family violence agency Aviva (formerly called Christchurch Women's Refuge) convened a multi-stakeholder working group to co-design, implement and pilot a response.

ReachOut was launched in May 2012 to contact all men named as subjects or offenders within 48 hours of Police attending a family violence episode. As a non-mandated service, ReachOut
aims to engage men voluntarily in potentially challenging conversations about personal responsibility and behaviour change. To enhance this engagement, ReachOut also addresses the multiple social, health, legal and other needs of men.

An independent assessment was conducted during ReachOut's first year, with further assessments undertaken in the following two to four years. These assessments identified that:

- In Year 1 no man who became engaged in ReachOut then reoffended.
- In Years 2 and 3 only 1.4% of engaged men re-offended, amounting to a 91% reduction in re-offending.
- Women were more likely to engage because their partners had the choice to receive support.
- ReachOut reduced first time convictions by intervening before the threshold to charge was reached.

**DESCRIPTION**

**SCANNING**

**Introducing New Zealand**

New Zealand has a population of four and a half million people and a land mass similar to that of Great Britain. Māori were the first people to arrive in New Zealand, journeying in canoes from Hawaiki about 700 years ago. On December 13th 1642, Dutchman Abel Tasman was the first European to sight the country. New Zealand’s first European settlers arrived in the latter half of the 1700s. In 1840, New Zealand’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi - was signed by the British Crown and Māori Chiefs on behalf of New Zealand’s indigenous people. Reflecting the principles of Partnership, Participation and
Protection, the Treaty established British law in New Zealand and afforded Māori equal rights with British Citizens. Nonetheless, the enduring effects of early colonisation are recognised by many as contributing to significant health and social inequities experienced by New Zealand Māori today. For example, whilst Māori comprise 15% of the New Zealand population, they are over represented in national crime statistics and make up 50% of the prison population. Women make up only 6% of the total prison population, but Māori women make up 58% of those incarcerated.

Whilst still a member of the British Commonwealth, and maintaining close, friendly relations with the USA, New Zealand has established a strong international identity as an independent trading nation. Since the mid 1980’s, New Zealand has been nuclear free, with its armed forces primarily focused on peacekeeping in the Pacific region. Rugby is the national game. The New Zealand All Blacks are the current World Champions after winning back-to-back World Cups in 2011 and 2015.

**Canterbury**

Canterbury is located in the central-eastern South Island of New Zealand. The region covers 44,508 square kilometres (17,185 sq miles), with a population of 586,500 people. North Canterbury is situated north of Christchurch comprising of two Districts - Waimakariri and Hurunui. North Canterbury has a total population of 69,800. The three biggest towns in North Canterbury are Rangiora, Kaiapoi and Amberley. The region boasts strong agriculture and horticulture sectors based on some 800,000 hectares of productive land. There are over 8,000 businesses, on average, employing fewer than five people. In general the socioeconomic makeup of the region is similar to that of the rest of New Zealand, as are the crime trend statistics.
The Problem

Family violence is a significant problem in New Zealand. ¹

- 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence from a partner in their lifetime
- 78% of partner homicides are men killing their current or ex-female partner
- 85% of sexual violence is committed by someone known to the victim
- About half of all homicides are family violence. On average, 14 women, 7 men and 8 children are killed by a family member every year
- 84% of those arrested for family violence are men, 16% are women
- Although Police attend a family violence episode every 5 minutes, it is estimated that only 20% of episodes are reported
- 58% of all reported violent crime in New Zealand is family violence. In 2010/11 this was:
  - 45% of abductions, kidnappings and threatening behaviour
  - 75% of serious assaults
  - 64% of all assaults
  - 33% of sexual assaults.

Canterbury’s statistics on family violence are very similar to those seen nationally. In particular, Canterbury had seen increasing number of reports in family violence over the past decade from 5,809 to 7,744 reports annually to police, highlighting the need to prioritise and address this as a significant problem.

The 2010-11 Canterbury earthquakes compounded the family violence problem. Two thirds of the population of Kaiapoi was displaced elsewhere in the district. In addition, many

Christchurch residents also became displaced. A large number of them relocated to North Canterbury. This placed significant pressure on remaining housing and contributed to overcrowding.

Furthermore, the international literature on the impact of natural disasters foretold a likely significant increase in family violence in the region.\(^2\) \(^3\) This was reflected in an almost immediate 19% increase in Police attendance at family violence episodes in North Canterbury; calls to Aviva’s crisis line increased by 50%; and the average length of stay in Aviva’s safe house increased by over 40%.

Although all women were routinely offered support by Aviva or another local refuge following a police episode report of family violence, only approximately 25% chose to engage. No men were offered the choice to engage with support. In the two years prior to the response, North Canterbury’s re-conviction rate for male family violence offending was 18% (comparable to the national average for family violence re-offending of 17%).\(^4\)

To address family violence in North Canterbury, the Police Family Violence Officer (Police FVO) represents Police at the Family Violence Round Table (FVRT). This is a local weekly meeting attended by multiple agencies to review police family violence reports. Although member agencies assessed available intelligence to manage the safety of women victims and


their children, the lack of information about men’s motivations, behaviours and movements was a major intelligence blind spot. As a result, the Police FVO initially identified the problem as:

“A lack of engagement with men was hampering effective family violence risk assessment and safety planning for women and children in North Canterbury

ANALYSIS

To test if this intelligence blind spot could be addressed, the local Police FVO, in consultation with the North Canterbury FVRT, selected a pilot sample of 20 high risk male offenders in January-March 2011, to test their willingness to receive support if offered. The initial method of contact was a phone call which in most cases was followed by a face-to-face meeting.

All men were willing to engage once they understood that the local Police FVO was ringing to hear their perspectives and offer support. The potential benefits of this exceeded expectations. It allowed enhanced high risk case management, intelligence-led prioritisation and the ability to understand and address a vulnerable family’s issues as a whole.

During the limited interactions with this sample it became evident that more needed to be done to engage with and support men to address their violent behaviours. As a result, in May 2011 the local Police FVO, together with Waimakariri District Council, convened a community consultation meeting with a wide range of government and non-government stakeholders. Although all agencies recognised and agreed unanimously that the service gap for men should be addressed, none at the time had the specialist capacity to respond.
At the same time a search for other Police responses to men elsewhere in the country revealed that all were operating traditional services like those in Canterbury. None were routinely contacting men listed on Police Family Violence reports at the point of crisis. However there was wide nationwide support to look at an alternative model. International research was also consulted revealing varying theories on how this approach may work but few rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of voluntary men’s services for perpetrators of Family Violence at the point of crisis.  

As a result of this analysis the problem was redefined as:

“Preventable family violence is recurring in North Canterbury because men are not being engaged at the point of crisis”

Scanning and analysis clearly identified the need to move away from the current response model because this maintained the burden of responsibility on victims to take action to become safe. It also identified the limited effectiveness of current multi-agency risk assessment and

\[\text{\footnotesize 5}\text{ The Australian Institute of Family Studies identified three levels of prevention in the context of family violence: “Primary prevention – preventing violence before it occurs (interventions delivered to the whole population or to particular groups at high risk of experiencing or using violence; secondary prevention – early interventions aimed at changing behaviours or increasing skills of individuals or groups (e.g. addressing controlling behaviours before they become established patterns); (and), tertiary prevention – longer term interventions following violence ... (that) would include social support for victims as well as criminal justice and therapeutic interventions for perpetrators” (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014. Reflecting on primary prevention of violence against women. ACSSA Issues, 19.)}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 6}\text{ The basis for such responses largely originates in North America, particularly from the Duluth Programme, and because of the research that demonstrates that many women continue in relationships with their abusive partners because of a lack of economic resources, social support networks and low self-efficacy the paramount focus is on the continued safety of the victims (Chronister, 2007; cited in Argueta (2013). Evaluating the intangible benefits of the partner abuse intervention programs in cook county, Illinois using the sixth level of the phillips return on investment model. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation Research, accessed at http://avancecounseling.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/EVALUATING_THE_INTANGIBLE_BENEFITS_OF_THE_PARTNER_ABUSE_INTERVENTION_PROGRAMS_IN_COOK_COUNTY_ILINOIS_USING_THE_SIXTHLEVEL_OF_THE_PHILLIPS_RETURN_ON_INVESTMENT_MODEL.321113258.pdf]\]
safety planning practice. Because of the significant lack of alternative accommodation resulting from the earthquakes, women and children were increasingly unlikely to leave violent homes.

Informed by the Problem Analysis Triangle (Figure 1), the existing local family violence response model was reviewed and a number of limitations identified: First, as mentioned above, it placed the burden of responsibility on women to take action to become safe rather than offenders to address their violent behaviour. Second, limited intelligence about the movements, motivations and behaviours of male offenders was undermining the ability of the local FVRT to comprehensively assess risk and manage victim safety. Third, by failing to address offender behaviour the potential to prevent future offending against new partners and their children was lost.

Within this context, and with the encouraging evidence provided by the high risk offender sample, the following hypothesis was developed:

“A non-mandated crisis intervention service designed to address the drivers of male family violence offending will reduce family harm including family violence reoffending”
RESPONSE

Local stakeholders agreed that men using or at risk of using violence needed a rapid specialist social work response following police attendance at a family violence episode. However, local Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) did not have the specialist capability and/or capacity to meet this need. As a result, a Police discussion document outlining the problem and proposing the establishment of a new specialist men’s social worker role was circulated widely across local Government agencies and NGOs.

The overall strategy of New Zealand Police is captured on the Our Business poster (Figure 2). This poster explains why police are here, what police do and how they do it. New Zealand Police’s goals are to reduce crime and victimisation, death, serious injuries on our roads and social harm.

Throughout scanning and analysis Aviva was developing its new ‘whole of family’ strategy, including the provision of services for men using violence. As a result Police, in partnership with Aviva, convened a local stakeholder working group to co-plan a response. Aviva obtained funding to develop the additional specialist social work capacity scanning and analysis had identified the need for in February 2012. The working group then reformed into a Partnership Steering Group to co-design and implement the response. This included key stakeholders of Police, Aviva, local refuges, Child Youth and Family, specialist kaupapa Māori agency He Waka Tapu, Relationships Aotearoa, Department of Corrections and Waimakariri District Council.

The Steering Group developed the key operational policies and procedures that informed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Police, Aviva, Victim Support and other local refuges (Figure 3). This marked an important shift from the current Police interagency
MoU which simply stated that ‘perpetrators of family violence are held accountable’ – though there were no services or supports to enable them to become so. Instead, reflecting the conclusions of scanning and analysis, this new MoU expressed key stakeholders’ belief that ‘perpetrators of family violence should receive the services required to enable them to understand and be accountable for their behaviour’.

At the same time, a legal opinion from New Zealand Police on the protocol of information sharing about men recorded on police family violence reports was obtained. As a result, when Police attended a family violence episode they were required to inform male subjects and offenders that a men’s support worker would attempt to contact them within 48 hours. This process assisted with meeting the privacy provisions.

The Steering Group named its response ReachOut. As a core value, ReachOut's process was founded on whanaungatanga – the offering of a mutually respectful relationship bringing both rights and responsibilities to both the ReachOut worker and client. ReachOut was launched in May 2012 with an aim to increase first time reporting of family violence whilst reducing offending and reoffending rates.

ReachOut's risk assessment process starts with Police triaging the Family Violence Reports. These are then sent to Aviva and other local agencies to enable contact with the individuals listed. Men are initially contacted by ReachOut by phone within 48 hours of a family violence episode. This is an important opportunity to plant a seed of change, carry out a brief intervention and encourage a face-to-face meeting. Whenever a man is willing to engage by phone a level of risk assessment and safety planning is undertaken. Referral to other specialised agencies is also offered (Figure 5). When telephone contact cannot be made, a
letter outlining ReachOut’s services and encouraging contact is sent. Evidence indicates that men receiving this letter do later seek help.⁷

These initial conversations aim to engage men at an emotional level by encouraging them to identify with what they most value and want from life. The manner through which this works is based on research which suggests that to increase the likelihood of positive behaviour change, an offender needs to make sense of and attach new meaning to their lives.⁸ By discussing what they value and want from life, this in turn invites questions about what each man can and is willing to do to achieve this. The Steering Group was also aware that ReachOut’s success would depend on its ability to engage men in challenging conversations about personal responsibility and behaviour change. This meant simultaneously addressing all the potential engagement barriers, on a case by case basis, including the many co-existing health, social and legal issues men who are using violence are often experiencing. This includes referring to social agencies and/or to health services as needed. Sessions with the ReachOut worker continue as long as needed and follow-up sessions at a later date are freely available. On a practical level, men are also given tools, strategies and skills to help them manage their anger to defuse volatile situations.

In designing its response, the Steering Group took into consideration the potential risk to women and children whose violent/potentially violent partners were engaged with the service. In the first few months of ReachOut, a ‘green light’ system operated: Contact was not made with men until Aviva or other local refuges had made contact with the women linked to them.

In addition to the referral process, ReachOut’s communication strategy included the publication of a destigmatising leaflet. This was intentionally designed to engage hearts and minds by proposing an alternative to violence that incentivises many men i.e. a positive relationship with their children (Figure 4).

ReachOut is a member of the North Canterbury multi-agency FVRT (Figure 6). Member agencies share information and assess the behaviours and risks associated with the victim and subject or offender. The intelligence provided by ReachOut contributes significantly to the FVRT’s ability to assess risk and plan consequent actions and priorities for all agencies including Child Youth and Family, Department of Corrections, Mental Health services, Police and ReachOut.

Multi-agency supervision, including the Police, occurred during ReachOut’s first year of operations to ensure that best practice and a planned model of service was followed, continuously reviewed and refined as learning accumulated. As a result, the initial ‘green light’ system was changed as evidence from workers involved with family members showed that contacting the men did not increase the risk to women and children. Contact with men therefore took place immediately unless Police triaging signalled a red light. A red light would be signalled if the male had not been spoken to by police and if other risks emerged that could potentially increase risk.
ASSESSMENT

The Steering Group engaged Dr Lesley Campbell to conduct an independent evaluation of ReachOut’s pilot. Her evaluation included interviews with men and women. Her final report in May 2014 concluded that ReachOut successfully engages men using violence, supports positive behaviour change and enhances the effectiveness of risk assessment and safety planning for victims. She also reported an additional positive notable unintended consequence from interviews with women: Now that men had a choice to receive support, women reported that they no longer felt responsible for solving their partner’s problems and were able to ‘let go’ and focus on their own needs and those of their children.

During ReachOut’s first year, no man who engaged with the service re-offended and there was no evidence of displacement. After four years of the service being in operation there is no evidence that any man has responded adversely towards their partner or children as a result of engagement with ReachOut. Māori represented 17.6% of men engaged in ReachOut— a positive over representation of the local Māori population of just 7.4%.

By 2015 the number of men annually engaged with ReachOut in North Canterbury had increased by 150% (Figure 7). These 185 men make up 37% of those eligible for the service. By contrast, approximately only 25% of women named on police reports of family violence traditionally engage with services when offered following an episode. However, as noted above, women were now more likely to engage with services because their partners also had the opportunity to receive help.
ReachOut has been operating in North Canterbury for four years. To assess its impact, reoffending rates in North Canterbury were compared with those in South Canterbury which has a population of similar size and make-up but has neither ReachOut nor any equivalent service. In North Canterbury the total number of men convicted of a family violence offence has reduced year-on-year since ReachOut started (Figure 8). ReachOut has influenced this in two ways. First, ReachOut provides an intervention opportunity before the threshold to charge is reached. Second, engagement with ReachOut is reducing the number of men subsequently re-convicted. This is in the context of a region that has had significant population growth and contradicts the international research that strongly suggested a probable local increase in family violence following the multiple - and still on-going - Canterbury earthquakes. South Canterbury, by comparison, has experienced flatter population growth and consistent increases in the number of men convicted of one or more family violence offences during 2012-2015. Furthermore, as set out in Figures 9-11, more men in South Canterbury have been convicted for further family violence offending in subsequent years than men in North Canterbury since ReachOut was implemented in 2012.

The evaluation of ReachOut indicated that the initiative had successfully achieved its aim of reducing offending and reoffending rates. Specifically:

- Before ReachOut, the male family violence offender reoffending rate in North Canterbury was 18%
- During ReachOut's first year no family violence offender who engaged with the service reoffended
- For ReachOut's subsequent two years only 1.4% of males engaged with the service reoffended, with no evidence of displacement.
To rule out other likely causes for North Canterbury’s reduction in reoffending, we looked at whether the decrease could be related to any change in practice for dealing with family violence. In New Zealand, Police Safety Orders (PSO) can be issued at the scene of a family violence episode when there is insufficient evidence to arrest but Police have assessed that further violence may occur. In this event, a PSO provides a tool for Police to separate the persons concerned for up to five days, thereby providing a ‘cooling down period’ and a window of opportunity for agencies to engage with those involved in the episode. However, an evaluation of PSOs\(^9\) reported that PSOs have impacted on the charging of some family violence perpetrators by charges not being laid when they should have. As a result, the impact of ReachOut was assessed against the rate of PSOs issued in North Canterbury since its implementation and compared with PSO rates in South Canterbury. As Figure 12 shows, the rate of PSOs in North Canterbury is much lower than in South Canterbury, suggesting that the use of PSOs has not contributed to the reduction in offending and re-offending in North Canterbury since 2012.

We also looked at whether this reduction was occurring nationally, or was specific to North Canterbury. National family violence offending rates were obtained for the same evaluated period (Figures 13-17). While the national trends for convictions did reduce, they did not decrease to the same extent as in North Canterbury. National re-conviction rates were also higher than in North Canterbury.

The ability to measure ReachOut's impact is both defined and constrained by the collective data capability of the agencies involved. However the results are encouraging, not least because they set out a consistent pattern of sustained reductions in offending and re-offending over a four year period in a region where rates were expected to rise following the earthquakes.

Following ReachOut's success in North Canterbury, the service was extended into the Christchurch metro area in October 2014. At the same time, ReachOut's scope expanded to include boys and young men from 13 years of age named on Police reports for using violence in the family home. This has provided a critical step towards breaking the intergenerational cycle of family violence. With parental/carer consent to engage boys and young men, ReachOut now provides a third pathway to prevent family harm, including family violence.

The body of local and international research\textsuperscript{10} 11 12 supporting ReachOut's unique approach to reducing family violence is growing and now informing significant policy and practice developments in New Zealand. For example, a pilot study of a new national family violence Integrated Response System (ISR), in which the non-mandated personalised engagement of men named on Police family violence reports is an integrated component, is currently

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\textsuperscript{11} Murphy and Meis (2008:174) state that “individualised treatment ... (involves) tailoring counselling styles, interventions, and/or, services to specific individual’s needs ... (and) require individual assessment and case formulation along with individual case management and/or individual treatment.” Murphy, C.M. & Meis, L.A. (2008) Individual Treatment of Intimate Partner Violence Perpetrators. Violence and Victims. 23(2):173-186.
\end{flushleft}
underway in Christchurch. Subject to results, this integrated whole of family response model will replace the current national Police Family Violence Inter-Agency Response System (FVIARS) in which only victims are engaged.

ReachOut prevents family violence offending. To inform and support national dissemination of family violence crisis intervention services for men, a ReachOut Service Development and Quality Assurance Framework is currently being developed by Canterbury Police and Aviva.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

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Figure 1. Problem Analysis Triangle
Figure 2. New Zealand Police. "Our Business"
Figure 3. Signing the ReachOut MOU March 2012
Men helping men build a violence-free future

Figure 4
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in the ReachOut Service process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intake</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Receipt of Police reports POL 1310; agency referrals; and/or voluntary self-referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Considering the contents of the POL 1310 Reports and other background information provided by the referral source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 'Cold calling' during the first twenty-four hours following a family violence incident to build understanding about what the ReachOut service offers; what the work with the service might involve and a shared understanding of the experiences, feelings and thoughts that men might have immediately following a family violence incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making connections and building collaborative therapeutic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Men tell their stories to a ReachOut worker in a one-on-one meeting. Further meetings are scheduled as needed on an ongoing basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Surfacing personally meaningful goals for the present and future</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Safety and change plans developed that establish ownership and responsibility through defining goals and the strategies for goal achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sharing and practicing the tools, techniques and strategies for change. E.g. taking self-responsibility. Outlining a safety plan for what to do in a repeat Family Violence situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Case closure</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Consolidating change gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Keeping the door open by offering opportunities for future re-engagement</td>
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**Figure 5**
Figure 6. The North Canterbury Family Violence Round Table members

Figure 7

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>24,380</td>
<td>62,300</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>27,360</td>
<td>68,900</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↑ Increase
Male offenders convicted of offences in family violence occurrences
2011-2015

Figure 8

Male offenders convicted of offences in family violence occurrences that took place in 2012 and their subsequent convictions

Figure 9
Figure 10

Male offenders convicted of offences in family violence occurrences that took place in 2013 and their subsequent convictions

- NC Offenders Convicted
- SC Offenders Convicted
- NC Est. Population Male 15+
- SC Est. Population Male 15+

Figure 11

Male offenders convicted of offences in family violence occurrences that took place in 2014 and their subsequent convictions

- NC Offenders Convicted
- SC Offenders Convicted
- NC Est. Population Male 15+
- SC Est. Population Male 15+
**Figure 12**

Police Safety Orders Issued - Female Persons at Risk 2010-2015

- North Canterbury
- South Canterbury

**Figure 13**

Male offenders convicted of offences in family violence occurrences nationally 2011-2015

- National offenders convicted
- National Est. Population Male 15+
Male offenders who were convicted of offences in FV occurrences that took place in 2011 and their subsequent convictions. New Zealand.

**Figure 14**

Male offenders who were convicted of offences in FV occurrences that took place in 2012 and their subsequent convictions. New Zealand.

**Figure 15**
Male offenders who were convicted of offences in FV occurrences that took place in 2013 and their subsequent convictions. New Zealand.

Figure 16

Male offenders who were convicted of offences in FV occurrences that took place in 2014 and their subsequent convictions. New Zealand.

Figure 17