

Recent data from the Department of Child Protection in Western Australia has debunked a common misconception about fathers and violence

Dads not the Demons

Figures from the Department for Child Protection, obtained by *The Sunday Times*, show the number of mothers believed responsible for "substantiated maltreatment" has risen from 312 to 427. In the same period: 05-06 to 07-08 the number of fathers reported for child abuse dropped from 165 to 155. (Nick Taylor, July 18, 2009 06:00pm)

THE FACTS WHICH CHALLENGE THE 'ASSUMPTIONS'

The data shows that natural mothers are far more likely to abuse children than their natural fathers, other than in sexual abuse, where mothers were responsible for only 13% of cases.

The past practice of lumping together de factos, live-in boy-friends and overnight male guests together with fathers as "male carers" has led to skewed beliefs about who abuses children.

In releasing these recent figures that identify natural fathers separately, the DCP has provided a clearer picture of who is likely to abuse children.

The figures - obtained under Freedom of Information provisions - provide a clearer picture of who is likely to abuse children in families. The data show that there were 1505 substantiations of child abuse in WA during 2007-8.

Natural parents were responsible for 37% of total cases. Of these, mothers are identified as the perpetrator of neglect or abuse in 73% of cases, including over 50% of cases of physical abuse.

The graph below shows the breakdown of parents responsible for each form of abuse... these are the facts!

Michael Woods, an academic from the University of Western Sydney, said:

"The data is not surprising – it is in line with international findings regarding perpetrators of child abuse.

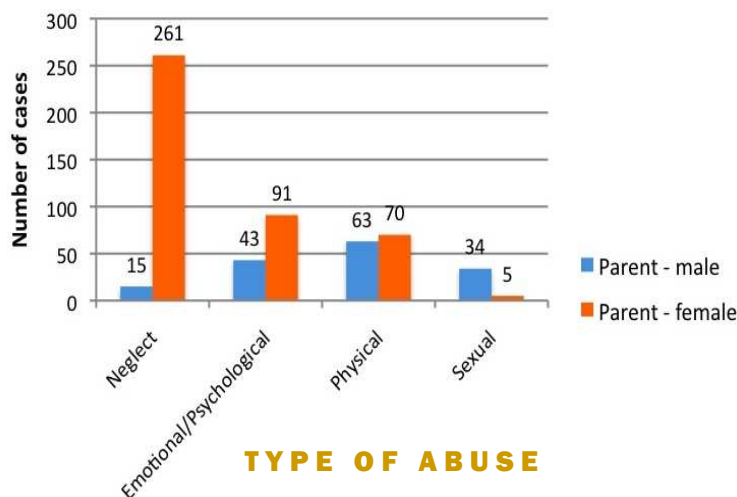
And the figures do undermine the myth that fathers are the major risk for their children's well-being".

The release of this data is timely, and shows the need for solid evidence in developing legislation and policies affecting families.

FACTS NOT CONSIDERED IN:

- Family Courts
- Policy Making
- Shared Care
- Advertising
- Funding
- Tertiary Education
- Service Provision

Substantiated cases of child abuse x responsible parent.



SHARED PARENTING

Recently, some radical groups have attacked the Family Court for its role in encouraging shared parenting after separation, claiming that this placed children at risk from violent fathers. Selected instances where fathers have harmed children were used to suggest that this is a common occurrence, and that shared parenting legislation placed children at increased risk.

However, this newly available information demonstrates that while there are some abusive fathers, there are in fact a larger proportion of violent and abusive mothers. This should not mean that children are automatically placed into the care of fathers to reduce risks of abuse, but rather that unrepresentative anecdotes of violent fathers should not influence legislation and policies designed to protect children.

**It's time we responded
to the facts!**

If we are in the business of helping people we simply must keep trying to shape our attitudes and actions with the best evidence available to us.

People of either gender that are abused, hurt, or treated unjustly deserve no less.

The gender nearly always implicated in public communication around abuse of children is male. If males complain about this they are labelled as being on the side of abusers, or not really caring; and so the lie and the injustice continues.

The difficult task faced by the Family Court in trying to ensure the best interests of children should not be compounded by irrational fear mongering, but rather by a considered examination of the evidence. Do you agree?

Shared parenting may be inconvenient for one parent, or even unwanted, but with changing social roles many more men after separation want to be actively involved in their children's lives. And in the vast majority of cases, their children will be very safe in their care.

Let the facts speak for themselves.

Let's be honest in our responses

This is a community problem we need to face honestly if we aim to protect children.

Appropriate graphic