

**The silence of violence: A review of the lived
experience of people who viewed Kids'
Business.**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Participants in the Solving the Jigsaw online forum.

BACKGROUND

This research report was written for EASE after the release of a fifty-eight minute documentary titled Kids' Business which was aired on television on June 11, 2009 (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2009) (ABC). Kids' Business followed the progress of a class of grade five and six children in Australia who participated in a program called Solving the Jigsaw. It was filmed in a school in Bendigo, Victoria and the Solving the Jigsaw program was facilitated in this particular classroom by Bernadette Wright (ABC, 2009).

Solving the Jigsaw is a school based early intervention program which aims to address violence and bullying at school by changing a culture of violence and creating a culture of well being (EASE, 2008). Solving the Jigsaw utilises a whole of school approach through the implementation of one hour weekly sessions in a twenty or forty week program (EASE, 2008). It is provided by EASE as part of EASE'S commitment to violence prevention programs. Solving the Jigsaw maintains that an effective program to address violence must include an environment where it is possible for children and teachers to speak out against violence and bullying, rather than minimise violence and bullying through keeping silent (EASE, 2008). There is an acknowledgement by the program that a child's self esteem and general well being can improve when they feel safe, connected and valued (Solving the Jigsaw, 2009).

Historically, children in Western societies have not been viewed as having a voice (Lewis, 2009). However, it has been asserted that the period since the 1989 United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, there has been a slow move to address policy and legislation to promote the voice of the child (Lewis, 2009). Through the forum of Solving the Jigsaw, children can be given the opportunity to have a voice and to be assisted in developing the necessary skills to talk about issues which are of concern to them

EASE is a community managed feminist organisation within Bendigo. It services the Loddon Campaspe area in Victoria and which provides support, information and accommodation for women who are experiencing homelessness or who are escaping family violence. EASE also provides men's behaviour change programs (EASE, 2008).

The screening of Kids' Business was followed by an online discussion forum on the ABC website for an hour after the documentary was aired on television. Individuals who viewed Kids'

Business were informed at the end of the documentary that there was an opportunity to participate in an online discussion board about Kids' Business. An online forum is a discussion site which is on the internet. Within this time frame, there were 810 messages posted online on the forum, with 367 people contributing through writing messages on the forum. The response from individuals was significant due to the large amount of messages written and posted on the forum within a short time frame and without the online forum having any prior advertisement before the end of the documentary.

The research was undertaken to inform EASE and Solving the Jigsaw of the content of the messages posted on the online forum and to consider the responses from a broad audience of the general public. This research has considered the lived experience of people who viewed Kids' Business through considering the content within the messages posted online by people. A fourth year social work student on placement, Courtney Lucanto, was recruited to conduct the study over a fourteen week period beginning in September, 2009. The project supervisor, Carla Meurs, was the Coordinator of Solving the Jigsaw and had supported the release of Kids' Business on television.

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in nature and essentially involved a content analysis of the research data. The study's research methods were phenomenological. Phenomenological research seeks to understand how people make sense of their lived experiences (Annells, 1999). Phenomenology makes the assumption that individuals understand their lived experiences according to the personal significance it holds for people (Standing, 2009). Phenomenology was an appropriate research method for this study, as it was the lived experiences which individuals had detailed through messages posted online which formed the research content for this study.

The project methodology consisted of the following elements:

The raw data which informed this project was based on the messages which were posted anonymously by individuals on the Kids' Business online forum on June 11th, 2009. The online forum featured on the ABC website. Initially, the raw data was downloaded and saved onto a computer into documents based on the thread topics as categorised on the forum.

This data was then analysed. For the data analysis, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was used (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Through the use of the IPA method, the lived experiences of participants can be explored deeply (Tomura, 2009). The IPA method consisted of reading the printed copies of the messages on the online forum and detailing comments related to the text. There were a total of 810 messages which formed the data for the study. The researcher utilised the IPA method as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2003). Smith and Osborn (2003) recommend that the researcher articulates comments in the left column of the transcript. These comments include interpreting, summarising or paraphrasing the content of the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This occurred for the whole transcript, which included 810 messages. After this part of the analysis had occurred, in the right hand column of the transcript emerging themes were then detailed. It is through the documentation of emerging themes that preliminary comments are altered to a higher level of conceptualisation (Tomura, 2009).

In the next stage of the project, the themes which were associated were clustered together. Categorical titles were given for each of the themes. Themes which did not integrate with the

structure of the study were eliminated at this point. This elimination is consistent with the IPA method (Tomura, 2009). The remaining themes provided the basis for the report. The three main themes which were interpreted in the study informed the necessary search for literature.

The participants of this study included all of the individuals who had written and posted messages on the online forum for Kids' Business on the ABC website on June 11th, 2009. The participants remained anonymous as they posted messages under pseudonyms, unless otherwise stated by the individual. Individuals who did not remain anonymous included the moderators of the forum. However, the messages and comments posted on the forum by the moderators were eliminated from the research data to be analysed. The comments and messages posted by the moderators were excluded as it was thought that this exclusion would strengthen the study as the data would be more representative of the viewpoints and opinions of individuals who had viewed Kids' Business on television and were not involved in Solving the Jigsaw.

There was an ethical issue to be addressed in the study. This ethical issue was the use of the content from the online forum which represented the data for the study. This content was posted anonymously and without the participants prior knowledge that it would be used for this research project. However, as the messages were posted on the internet, the content of the messages was made public. The individuals who have written the messages were also anonymous. It was considered that any identifiable information that individuals had given in message posts would not be included in the written research report. The use of phenomenology as the research method to inform this study was also crucial in addressing this ethical issue, as phenomenology honours the lived experiences of individuals.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I wish I had it in school

Many participants reflected that they felt that if they had the opportunity to have participated in Solving the Jigsaw as children, then their lives may have been different. A key aspect of the participants' beliefs that their lives may have been different with the inclusion of Solving the Jigsaw included an acknowledgement that having a trusting environment to speak about issues as a child would have been of benefit.

Children who have experienced family violence can be affected by the experience on many levels (Buckley, Holt & Whelan, 2007). The exposure of children to an abusive or violent home environment can have serious negative ramifications on children's developmental progression. (Buckley et al., 2007). Women and children who have experienced family violence have expressed the need for a space to share their pain, to be listened to and to be understood (Yoshihama, 2002).

If the concept of a "trust list" had existed then or if I had been taught that I could "talk about anything", maybe I wouldn't be the damaged person I am today.

My inner child was crying out and wondering where I would be today if I had had such powerful forces in my life... if I had been able to learn how to communicate. Never did and consequently didn't have many resources to cope when I found myself a victim of domestic violence...

Participants also consider that if they had Solving the Jigsaw in their lives as children, they could have expressed their thoughts and emotions through the program.

I wish so much I had a voice when I was a child an advocate... I had no-one to ask how did you feel when you were lying in bed with your heart going through your chest listening to dad hit mum and terrified to do anything I so wish someone had supported me then to have the courage to say what I was feeling or to tell my dad I wanted him to spend time with me I was so scared. It would have made such a difference.

...as a child of abuse I wish I could have talked to someone what the teacher says is so true if it is not talked about it will come out later in anger drug use drinking and so on...

...if there had been this sort of thing around when I was at school, I may be more confident and have stronger beliefs in myself and be better able to resolve conflict much more calmly. And maybe I wouldn't have scared my own daughter with my anger when she was small.

I wonder how different my life may have turned out had I been given the same opportunity when I was a child.

If only some of this had been addressed as a child perhaps I would not have immediately have reverted to a scared child when faced initially with intimidation and verbal bullying from my husband.

I only wished my school had had the resources/information to do the same thing. Perhaps then my life could have been very different...more positive.

How I wish what you do was available to me when I was a child. I related so deeply to what those children expressed.

Maybe if there had been something like this when I was growing up I wouldn't be in the mess I am in now...

What a difference such education as this could have made to my life and everyone else I'm connected with had such a program been available all those years ago.

...how I wish I'd had that sort of support when I was their age. I wish I'd had a supportive teaching group who I could trust to express my fears and confusion.

...if my parents and I had been exposed to a program like Jigsaw maybe I would have spoken out sooner and they would not have blamed me when the family stopped speaking to one another for 3 months.

Breaking the silence breaks the cycle

One considerable theme which emerged from the data was that participants believed that in providing children with an opportunity to participate in Solving the Jigsaw, the silence around abuse and violence could be broken. Breaking the silence around violence can break the cycle of violence. Many participants asserted that giving children the opportunity to speak

and voice their emotions and thoughts was a positive aspect of Solving the Jigsaw. The benefits of addressing violence and bullying in a class group framework addresses all individuals involved so that all children have a voice (EASE, 2008).

After watching this program, I sincerely believe that if our society's children are all given the opportunity to understand and articulate their emotions, the future will be filled with mature, humane and wise people - and this would change the world as we know it profoundly.

Abuse and violence has to be brought out into the open and kids need to be able to talk about what happens to them. Well done to such a brilliant programme.

...the more people who speak out and share their own experiences, the easier and less embarrassing it will be for everyone. Once you are in the habit of talking honestly with people about the way you are thinking and feeling, the more often problems are cut off before they get to be big problems and you start to make better decisions for yourself all around.

It has been acknowledged that when the silence surrounding family violence is broken, emotions which have been pent up and hidden are released (Yoshihama, 2002). This was reiterated by the responses from participants who considered that Solving the Jigsaw could be a positive step for children for the future.

...at last we are giving our children a chance to speak up and not feel the guilt, take the blame, or be scared about the consequences. I feel we all have a story and we all carry with us some degree of hurt or shame, this could be a great new beginning in empowering the next generation to have a voice and stand up and be heard!

Upon viewing this amazing program I started to see how transformational this project has been, and how it can be so effective in reshaping our world...not just person by person, community by community, but country by country... These styles of programs offer me and perhaps my older generation hope that we can move into a new future where our children are making more positive and constructive changes to our world than even perhaps we have allowed ourselves... I would love to be involved in this program because I see its wondrous future implications.

The enforcement of silence can be one of the most forceful weapons which perpetrators utilise against victims of family violence (Nelson, 1998). Romito (2008) emphasised that there are mechanisms which are utilised by perpetrators of family violence to silence women and children who have been victims (Romito, 2008).

Nelson (1998) has also acknowledged that one of the first steps towards safety for an individual who is the victim family violence can be to have the silence surrounding the perpetration of violence to be broken. Morrison (2002) has discussed a restorative justice approach to bullying in schools. Morrison (2002) expressed that children need a safe space where they can address their concerns and are also given the opportunity to model effective conflict resolution skills. Solving the Jigsaw creates an opportunity for children to have a safe forum in which their own feelings and reflections are included.

...this show was trying to show what the long term effects "leaving what goes on at home at home" can have on our society, that is leading to a cycle of domestic, sexual and emotional violence. As someone who has experienced some of these things in childhood I can't tell you how much I wished I had met someone as caring and experienced as Bernadette, to give me the skills to know what to do with my fear and anger.

I could identify with these children. There was violence in our home, alcoholism, divorce, adultery and we as children were in the middle. Hold it in, don't talk. The two coping mechanisms and now I have difficulty with conflict and expressing my emotions.

Giving children the tools they need to address the big issues, like domestic violence, instead of keeping it to themselves removes the idea that they are powerless...

...it has really highlighted the need for students to discuss feelings and the importance of having safe open forums within classrooms!

...what you have done with these kids is to conduct a sort of 'intervention' that will help them for the rest of their lives. - it is truly invaluable.

I hope our kids of this generation all have the opportunity to learn how to communicate and to understand each other, and evolve far beyond our capabilities.

There's nothing more moving than listening to kids talking so openly about their problems in an environment that makes them feel so comfortable.

Many participants also stated that early intervention could be beneficial for children. The benefits of early intervention when addressing bullying and violence are considered by James (1994) who found that children in primary school are at a developmental age in which intervention can be successful, as the impact of role modelling of violent behaviour may not have become entrenched in their behavioural and social learning processes. Furthermore, schools have been noted to be an effective institution in reducing antisocial behaviour patterns in children through the promotion of resiliency and social responsibility (Morrison, 2002).

...believer in early intervention and equipping young people with verbal and emotional knowledge to navigate throughout their often turbulent lives.

However, there were also participants who questioned Solving the Jigsaw. Some participants felt that it was inappropriate to discuss the issues on television and that the issues discussed should have been kept within the families of the school children.

I question whether airing this in such a public forum is acceptable given the age of the children...

I thought this was taking school involvement with private family issues too far...Schools should not ever have the power to delve into the private lives of what goes on at home...

These viewpoints reiterate the prevailing attitude of some individuals that family violence is a private and personal matter (Yoshihama, 2002). These viewpoints do not consider family violence in the context of a societal issue or a criminal act (Yoshihama, 2002).

Furthermore, some participants expressed concern over the confidentiality of the children.

These are children...who gave permission for these children's right to privacy and confidentiality to be waived?

However, many of the participants addressed the messages directly to express their support for the program. Many participants acknowledged the benefits of speaking out to implement change in the cycle of violence.

The 'privacy' you mention has caused UNTOLD damage to generations of people. It is only by shining a light on the darkness that anything will ever change; it is why things ARE changing slowly.

What good is hiding these behaviours behind closed doors and keeping innocent children powerless and vulnerable.

Better to be open and empower the child - and maybe the parents - than not and to continue a cycle that may be unhealthy - and dangerous.

We don't need another generation of abused children who become adults with problems.

Abuse and violence has to be brought out into the open and kids need to be able to talk about what happens to them. Well done to such a brilliant programme. Try to ignore those attitudes that believe keeping your head buried in the sand will assist in solving the problems of the world.

More's the pity in our society at the moment that we 'sweep' these tough issues under the carpet and turn a blind eye, expecting our young kids to bottle it all up inside

I'm sure that all issues with regards to "confidentiality" were addressed, and isn't the issue of kids having to keep their problems 'confidential' part of the problem?

...children were simply speaking honestly about how they feel -and the jigsaw program gives them the voice and confidence children (and adults) so often lack.

Let the buck stop here - we need to take responsibility for our stuff ups as adults, parents, grandparents. Children are people - and if we are screwing them up in private, then it needs to be brought out into the open and dealt with. That's what loving our children and young people is about - empowering them to be whole and healthy both physically and mentally. I so wish someone had given me that opportunity...but I'm not going to waste my bloody awful experience....I'm going to use it to make it better for someone else, our kids (kids in our community).

...there is never any shame in trying to make the world a safer place for our young ones. The only shame is in keeping Domestic Violence private and hidden behind closed doors. These inspirational children will be the fore-runners of a new age of decent adults who can communicate effectively without violence and won't sit back and just accept it like a frightened rabbit.

Every time we shy away from these types of issues the more that goes on in silence. Good on these kids and parents for finally having the courage to speak up so that everyone has the chance to feel less alone!

Should be in every school!

The importance of including Solving the Jigsaw in schools was a strong theme for a majority of participants.

I would love to see these programmes provided in schools on a more general scale to many different communities, and help us to all recreate our world with open hearts and minds.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the skills taught in the Jigsaw program could be a part of every child's education?

A programme like this would have been perfect for the students to teach them to deal with their feelings before reaching mid- senior high school.

This lesson should be included at all schools as i think there would be a better outcome for everyone in society. If they learnt these life skills.

I hope many more schools make it a priority to implement such programs.

The need for this level of support for all children is so important and I only wish we could implement it across all schools

An excellent program that I believe should be run through every primary school in the country as an important a subject as maths or English.

I agree that it should be compulsory in all schools. Just imagine how much better our world would be if everyone had this learning experience at school.

Wouldn't it be fantastic to have someone like Bernadette working full-time in each school, focussing solely on the implementation of The Jigsaw Program. Perhaps this is something for the government to consider for the ongoing emotional well-being of our kids.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are two strong recommendations which arose out of this study.

The first recommendation was gathered from the participants who contributed to the study. A main theme which emerged in this study was that Solving the Jigsaw should be implemented in all schools. The presence of Solving the Jigsaw in many more schools in Australia would lead to a stronger and more effective response to addressing family violence within a societal and cultural context.

The second recommendation which arose out of this study was the need to consider what impact Solving the Jigsaw has on breaking the silence surrounding family violence in a home environment through the development of a formal evaluation tool. This is an area in which further research could be conducted.

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