A common language and shared understanding of family violence?: Corpus-based approaches in support of system responses to family violence

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Family violence is an enduring social problem with devastating impacts. The Victorian Government (Australia) Royal Commission (state inquiry) into Family Violence (RCFV) noted that language is implicated in underreporting and under-recording of violence and emphasised the importance of agencies having 'a common language' and 'shared understanding' of family violence. Our analyses examine written submissions to the RCFV for frequencies and collocations, focussed on the construction and roles of human referents. We utilised corpus assisted discourse analysis to explore if community service and law-based professional bodies do have common vocabularies and if these represent shared ideas, responding directly to agendas set by those involved. Analyses show key differences but also undercover a shared lack of agency given to victims and a loss of focus on the role of those who inflict these forms of violence. We argue for the utility of corpus linguistic methods to empirically show how language is used to construct conceptualisations of family violence across key sectors of the service system. We intend this research as a starting point for discussion between professionals working to improve cross-sector communication, by bringing linguistic insights to this deep-rooted social issue.

Keywords: corpus linguistics, social impact, family violence, inter-profession communication, violence

1. Introduction

Family violence (and related terms/concepts such as *domestic violence*, *domestic abuse*, *intimate partner violence*) refers to a range of violent, coercive and controlling behaviours perpetrated mostly, although not exclusively, by men against women in the context of family or intimate relationships. It is a major human rights, social, legal and public health issue: a complex problem that has proven resistant to efforts to reduce both occurrences and ongoing impacts. Family violence threatens people's wellbeing and lives, has a significant cost in terms of health implications, loss of income and the need for service response, and often profoundly impacts upon those already most vulnerable in a society (see Humphreys, 2007, on the complexities of this). This article uses a corpus constructed from written submissions to a Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) conducted in the state of Victoria, Australia. The corpus was created to examine understandings of and language about family violence across key service sectors such as organisations and systems connected to the application of the law in comparison with organisations concerned providing welfare support. This focus responds to ongoing efforts to improve outcomes for victims of family violence through greater cross-sector cooperation. This paper explores how linguistics can contribute towards supporting professionals who work directly with those experiencing family violence by identifying areas of difference and sources of potential misunderstanding.

Difficulties with the language used to define and talk about family violence have been identified as contributing to failures in recognising of family violence and to ensuring that appropriate responses are in place for both victims and perpetrators. At its most basic level, this is evidenced in victims not having the means to express their experiences in ways that frontline services can recognise as family violence. Language is also implicated in more complex ways, with service providers, especially in different sectors, struggling to communicate effectively (Meyer and Frost, 2019). For example, particularly in contexts without laws addressing coercive control, police and the courts tend to respond to interventions in family violence as if these are a series of isolated incidents rather than a developing or long-standing exertions of power over an intimate partner or family member (Douglas, 2021: 124 and references therein). This construction of family violence tends to reduce responsibility attributed to the perpetrator because it can more readily be excused as a time-specific loss of control rather than a systematic campaign of coercion. How family violence is framed and labelled represents a set of challenges that linguists, with their particular and expert methods and understandings of language, can contribute to addressing

by developing a deeper understanding of the role of language in responses to family violence. As such, the article is an example of implementing corpus linguistics for social impact, using the methods of Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) to bring an empirical approach to linguistic aspects of social issues where language has been explicitly identified as a contributing factor.

This paper begins with a brief outline of the challenges associated with tackling family violence around the globe and in Australia, highlighting the role of language both as a contributor to the problem and as a potential tool for change. The RCFV is introduced as part of this discussion. The use of materials from the RCFV as the source of data for the corpus is explained in Section 2. Section 3 describes the specific uses of this corpus in the current study. The analysis uses simple corpus linguistic methods and CADS to explore the ideas of 'shared understanding' and 'common language' in relation to family violence which have been highlighted as key in the professional response to family violence. Sections 4 and 5 then examine the construction of family violence in the RCFV corpus in terms of language use and representations of understandings. Analyses provide insights into language around and conceptualisations of family violence in the key sectors of community services and legal organisations. The resulting data provide an increasingly detailed picture of the differences and similarities of sectors, who must work closely to combat family violence and support those affected by it. Findings show that there are layers of both convergence and divergence in the language used in these submissions. The way the terminology is used shows that understandings of family violence are in fact divergent and construct the distinctive concerns and activities of professionals in the two service sectors examined while also consistently constructing key roles in family violence in convergent and problematic ways. We conclude in Section 6 with a synthesis of the findings, alongside some discussion of future directions and implications.

1.1 The challenges of addressing family violence

Internationally, prevalence rates of violence against women indicate that one in three women will experience some form of gender-related violence (Schroeder *et al.*, 2017: 1), with the perpetrator most often being known to them. Even in countries where it is illegal, in practice this type of violence may continue to be viewed as a private matter that is outside the scope of criminal law. In societies where family violence is clearly criminalised, underreporting is a

pervasive problem (Schroeder *et al.*, 2017). There are a range of definitional problems that contribute to these issues, including a lack of understanding about how coercion and control are themselves forms of violence, attitudes that blame individuals for the violence enacted against them (e.g. see Yang, 2007 for an example focussed on language), and beliefs that women are somehow undeserving of or unable to persist in engaging the protection of others (Schroeder *et al.*, 2017: 2). These issues expose the gendered nature of family violence.

Within Australia, the problem of violence against women has proven to be both persistent and resistant to programs intended to change beliefs at the level of society (Our Watch, 2013). Mulayim, Jackson and Lai (2017: 174) observe that part of the challenge in dealing more effectively with family violence is a terminological one. A common strategy is 'to lock down the way the problem of D[omestic] V[iolence] is defined. This is achieved by creating a simple sub-problem that has a simple linear solution' (2017: 176). In the context of acknowledging the complexity of family violence, they note that trust and realistic judgements by policy makers and service providers are crucial.

Cross-sector work is also acknowledged as a challenge in Meyer and Frost (2019). They observe, '[w]hile this is in part to do with the content of the information, data, and insights that are communicated and shared, its value is also in terms of the act of sharing and the relational quality of the collaborations among the service community' (2019: 146). Better communication across service-level boundaries is necessary to support more effective responses to the problem of family violence. Furthermore, Meyer and Frost advocate for an approach to addressing these issues that has language at its core:

> It is critical that D[omestic and] F[amily] V[iolence] services, regardless of their designation, play their part in purposeful efforts to construct the bigger picture of the abusive scenario. That is to say, they are engaged in promoting mutual understanding, shared language and definitions, and clear protocols to allow those in possession of information to share it safely where necessary and appropriate. (2019: 146)

We turn now to the materials used in this research which were drawn from the written submissions made by a variety of individuals and organisations to a Royal Commission, conducted by the State of Victoria. A Royal Commision is a major government inquiry into issues of public concern. The RCFV was established as

> an acknowledgement of the seriousness with which the Victorian community has come to regard family violence and its consequences for individuals and families—it

reflects our growing awareness of its scale, a recognition that existing policy responses have been insufficient to reduce the prevalence and severity of the violence, and the priority the community is prepared to accord it in order to address the problem. (State of Victoria, 2016b: 9)

The RCFV (State of Victoria, 2016b: 1) was tasked with identifying effective strategies and practical recommendations to:

i.   prevent family violence

ii.   improve early intervention so as to identify and protect those at risk

iii. support victims—particularly women and children—and address the impacts of violence on them

iv.   make perpetrators accountable

v.   develop and refine systemic responses to family violence—including in the legal system and by police, corrections, child protection, legal and family violence support services

vi.   better coordinate community and government responses to family violence

vii. evaluate and measure the success of strategies, frameworks, policies, programs and services introduced to put a stop family violence.

The findings of the RCFV attended to linguistic issues, paying particular attention to a tool developed to support 'a common language' and 'shared understanding' of family violence among agencies (State of Victoria, 2016a: 102), and noting that language is implicated in underreporting and under-recording of violent behaviours (2016a: 47–48).

1.2 Language as a challenge in addressing family violence

There are many ways in which language can represent a challenge in the context of family violence (e.g. see contributions to Klein, 2013). In this section we use extracts from the submissions to and findings from the RCFV to illustrate the scope of these issues. The RCFV acknowledged that language is used to inform real-world understandings and guide behaviours and practices through its role in constructing discourses. It shared the following excerpt from a woman who described the difficulty of taking action in relation to unspeakable experiences:

> I didn't know how to tell those close to me I needed help. I didn't have a language to describe what was wrong in my relationship. I didn't know who to call or who to see or which hotline to ring. I felt so stupid. It was all in my head. I wish there had been information campaigns on TV or on the radio, that told me what abuse is and what a healthy relationship isn't. I wish I had known that all of the services for women experiencing domestic violence looked after women experiencing all kinds of violence, not just physical violence. *Anonymous, Submission 672* (State of Victoria, 2016b: 8)

At this broad level, language is also of concern in terms of inclusive communications, with the RCFV noting that the language used by service providers needed to reflect the diversity of the community (State of Victoria, 2016b: 33).

Within Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities (i.e. minority groups), restricting access to language learning opportunities was identified as an example of a practice of family violence because it is one means for exerting control over women who do not speak English as part of a wider strategy by perpetrators of isolating victims from the community (State of Victoria, 2016a: 18). This reflects the fact that language is a challenge in terms of accessibility to services, with people who do not speak English, the dominant language in Australia, experiencing much lower access to services:

> … appropriate, responsive services for CALD victims, and the services that are designed specifically for CALD victims are limited. There are also limited opportunities for men from CALD communities to participate in behaviour change programs that are culturally specific or in their own language. (State of Victoria, 2016b: 34)

The RCFV found that mainstream services were not adequately supported by existing interpreting and translating services and that interpreters should be required to meet minimum standards of understanding of the nature of family violence (State of Victoria, 2016b: 34).

In addition, the use of complex language in specific contexts, such as the prevalence of 'legalese' in family violence related police matters and communications in court, are recognised as a barrier for women gaining access to legal protections. For example, the RCFV recommended that the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) take steps to provide materials in multiple formats using plain language to explain the process of applying for family violence intervention orders and to simplify order conditions (State of Victoria,

2016b: 66). The report notes that 'websites and brochures often use language that is meaningful to service providers, government or funders but does not make sense to the person needing help' (State of Victoria, 2016a: 14).

Definitions and terminology can be a barrier; naming is important (Kelly, 1988) and shapes what is understood as family violence (Murray and Powell, 2009). It has been acknowledged for some time that one of the challenges for service providers in delivering appropriate, integrated services to women experiencing family violence has been a lack of shared understanding of family violence, with a specific focus on understanding how to evaluate risk. In 2007, the Victorian Government introduced the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) to address these concerns (a second edition was published in 2012 (State of Victoria, 2012)). It has been used to promote shared action and understanding across different sectors, with a focus on risk assessment and family violence, in support of strengthening system responses, referral pathways, risk management, data collection and information sharing. The RCFV noted that language is a central focus of the first principle within the framework (emphases added):

> **A shared understanding** of risk and family violence among all service providers. An integrated service response to family violence depends on all agencies 'speaking' **a common language** in terms of risk assessment and family violence, and having a common understanding of what underpins family violence—including what constitutes family violence, the ways family violence can affect women and children, and factors affecting the likelihood and severity of family violence. (State of Victoria, 2016a: 102)

By the time the RCFV commenced its work in 2014, the CRAF had been in place for seven years. The focus on shared understandings and a common language were identified in a review as a strength of the CRAF (McCulloch *et al.*, 2016). Given that it has been over ten years since the implementation of the CRAF, with its aim of establishing common language and shared understandings, a strong alignment of language would be expected. As such, our analysis also contributes to an assessment of the success of this policy initiative.

The move towards a common language for reporting and assessing women's risk of family violence has clear practical motivations. However, the potential costs involved in exerting control over language at the service level still need consideration. This is because the use of technical or specialist language is identified as contributing to underreporting of family violence – both the language and the setting in which questions are asked impact on women's

willingness or ability to name their experiences and seek help (State of Victoria, 2016a: 48). Consider the following example:

> I said to her 'Are you experiencing domestic violence?' and she said 'No', '... And I thought, she has rung the DV line, I better ask this question another way.
>
> So I said 'Can I ask you why you phoned?' and she said, 'He's going to kill me.'
> *Sally Ruth, Submission 888* (State of Victoria, 2016a: 14 of Appendix G)

In sum, language and, more specifically, terminology and understandings around family violence have been identified by academics, industry and the government as contributing to the difficulties associated with reducing levels of family violence and improving service responses. As these extracts indicate, language is also a barrier to help-seeking. We focus in this paper on the former problem but note that the risks that Mulayim, Jackson and Lai (2017) identify in trying to solve problems by defining them too narrowly are relevant to both inter-sectorial communications and communications between service providers and potential users of the systems.

1.3 Corpus linguistics for social impact

Tools and methods from corpus linguistics offer potentially powerful resources in understanding social issues because of their ability to uncover patterns and to produce objective measures to describe large amounts of data with the support of statistical analysis. This can then be supported by more qualitative analyses which explore these relationships. One benefit of the simple and concrete empirical procedures selected here is that they can be understood by professionals without a background in linguistics or experience in reading (specific) statistical analyses.

Our paper engages with an emerging thread in research, with authors investigating important social issues via corpus methods. Previous studies have examined, for example, violence metaphors in palliative care (Demmen *et al.*, 2015; Potts and Semino, 2017), metaphors around migration over time (Taylor, 2021), the language of hate on a web forum (Brindle, 2016), dehumanisation in the discussion of people on social benefits on Twitter (Baker and McEnery, 2015), antisemitism in the press (Partington, 2012), negative media discussions of Muslims and Islam (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013), imagined futures

within blogs on climate change (Fløttum *et al.*, 2014), discourse around refugees and asylum seekers (Baker *et al.*, 2008) and the identification of online grooming discourse to assist in detecting child sexual abuse (Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel, 2019; Lorenzo-Dus, Kinzel and Di Cristofaro, 2020). These studies all shed light on the roles language plays in the issue in focus. Much of this work falls under the umbrella of CADS, employing corpus driven methods that allow the examination of large collections of text and through this identifying patterns that are not necessarily apparent in manual examinations. CADS research often entails careful consideration of collocation and concordance, and explores typical and atypical examples Collated texts can be diverse and thus shared properties are uncovered through the corpus analyses, while identifying deeper shared or divergent patterns through language use. Specific texts or the discourse more broadly are optionally a focus of critical analysis (via Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA) (Ancarno, 2020).

While some descriptions of CADS methods propose that initial explorations of data should be open, our approach was to find questions drawn from known challenges identified by professionals in our area of research, rather than derived from the data or linguistic perspectives. A further goal is to present our findings and connect to relevant service providers, trusting that the impact of findings can be developed in discussion with appropriate agencies and their expertise, allowing them to evaluate and apply findings in ways most relevant to their own contexts.

Two examples of textual analysis addressing the language around family violence in the Australian context also inform this research. They illustrate the complexity of navigating prevailing discourses and of grappling with new understandings of the dynamics of family violence. Murray and Powell (2009) explore the discourse of state, territory and federal (national) policy documents, highlighting differing conceptualisations of the issue. These differences were evident in relation to the actual term used, the role of gender in understanding the issue (gendered or degendered), and what counts in discussions and definitions of *domestic* or *family violence* (e.g. whether it is inclusive of child abuse or focussed on intimate partner violence). They conclude that these difference result from ongoing contestation regarding what the 'policy problem' is. This diversity of understandings, and naming practices, is indicative of the complexities of family violence, how it intersects with other social issues and also the diversity of community experiences, even within a country. Robertson's (2019) corpus linguistic and CDA examination of Australian newspaper reporting contrasts comparable murders with and without family

violence. The varied forms of analysis found more graphic descriptions, greater activation of victims via reporting their actions, higher personalisation of the perpetrator including avoiding labelling him as a *killer* and less appraisal from police sources in the coverage of cases that included family violence. Robertson argues that these differences show news media portray these cases as less of public threat with greater sensationalisation and overall reinforce prevailing discourses of victim blaming. Our study provides additional empirical support to other studies of gender-based violence such as that of Coates and Wade (2004, 2007) on personalised and sexualised violence. It adds to this literature by considering differing constructions of family violence among people who work with those directed affected by it, employing a corpus created for this purpose.

2. Creating the corpus

The corpus used in this research is comprised of written submissions received by the RCFV from its commencement in 2014 up until May 2015. Public hearings were conducted between July and October 2015, and the report was made public in March 2016. Close to 1,000 written submissions were made, of which 756 documents were publicly available as PDFs. These were converted into text documents with some automatic and manual tidying needed.[1] From this large number of written texts, subcorpora were constructed by sector with documents organised into seven categories reflecting groups of organisations that respond to different aspects of family violence and may contribute to competing understandings of the problem:

1. **Community services** (social and community service organisations and local councils (who provide an overlapping set of services), and associated State government departments)
2. **Law including the police** (including community legal centres, Victorian courts, the Victorian Bar, Victoria Police, the Victorian Law Institute)
3. **Health system** (mostly community and women's health organisations including services with a mental health focus and a couple of hospitals)

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[1] A small number had to be excluded because the quality of the submission made text capture, even by OCR, impossible. To date elements not part of the data examined here have not been carefully checked for text or OCR issues so a total token count is deliberately not provided.

4   **Work and finance** (including a bank, and advocacy groups with a focus on work or finance)

5   **Other interested parties** (including members of parliament, advocacy organisations that do not clearly align with the other categories and family violence focussed sector-oriented networks and partnerships)

6   **Diversity and community groups** (groups whose names indicated a focus on particular ethnic groups, for example, the Australian Greek Welfare Society, or other specific social categories such as Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria)

7   **Individual responses** (including many anonymous submissions)

The development of the corpus was focussed on the meaningful subdivision of texts and not technical considerations such as the number of submissions or text lengths. The corpus thus provides a range of viewpoints and extended texts on family violence.

3. Methodology

The RCFV written submissions provide considered discussion of family violence with the purpose of displaying a viewpoint and with a fixed/shared audience, allowing an opportunity to evaluate both the use of (a common?) language and the (shared?) understandings of family violence in different service sectors. Using corpus linguistic tools, focussing on a comparison of the community and legal sectors, we ask if an examination of language suggests different or shared terminologies and conceptualisations of family violence between these key sectors. As we note in the introduction, conceptualisations of family violence can be contrasted in terms of a focus on what tend to be characterised as isolated events, especially in the context of law enforcement, while in the community services sector there is greater awareness of the power dynamics that support family violence. To further the depth of the enquiry, *how* they are similar and or different is also explored. These questions were based on the clear issues outlined in previous literature, and, importantly, this included government and industry documents, leading us to believe that this is the focus of the interest in language in the sector.[2]

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[2] Ideally the questions would have come directly from discussions with sector professionals and analyses of their interests. We have started to pursue this in presenting our current findings to relevant audiences and seeking their views, and conducting focus groups with workers. Participants have

3.1 Data

The subcorpora of Community Services (category *1* above) and Law (*2*) were the focus. This choice was based on the ongoing discussion about how family violence is understood in different sectors, and the continuing call for a common language to support cross-sector collaboration and clarity, especially around the risks of family violence. A reference corpus was constructed using three other subcorpora associated with organisational submissions (health, work and finance, and other interested parties i.e. *3, 4* and *5*). This third source of information allows for comparison via an understanding of differences and similarities that are difficult to obtain without this more 'neutral' reference point. The submissions from individuals and diversity and community groups tended to have more narrow and unique areas of focus and for this reason were excluded from the analysis. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the relevant subcorpora by LancsBox (Brezina, Timperley and McEnery, 2018).

Table 1. Corpus elements used

	Community Services	**Law**	**Other Submissions (Reference subcorpus)**
Files (submissions)	84	42	84
Tokens	879,602	801,200	618,379
Lemmas	22,539	22,221	21,741

The information in Table 1 highlights a difference in length of submissions, with the texts in the Law subcorpus typically being longer than those from the Community Services or reference subcorpora. The texts are naturally occurring texts, not altered to provide the same number of tokens with such differences considered less problematic than the consequences of substantially altering the texts or excluding submissions. Some pages were not accessible, even with OCR, and so were excluded. These largely consisted of scanned pictures or graphs with small amounts of text to support them. The shortest text was around 450 words. Dispersion was observed in the quantitative and qualitative analyses to compensate for differences in text numbers and check that analyses did not just describe an unusual pattern in a particular text.

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proposed a range of follow up activities across professional development and further research opportunities. Some examples of potential future topics are presented in Section 6.2.

3.2 Analysis overview

In brief, driven by our focus on common language and shared understandings, we conducted frequency analyses in the Community Serves, Law and Other Submissions subcorpora. Concordance lines were manually examined to check if particular phrases or uses of the words were responsible for results and confirm understandings (Section 4). The patterns identified are interrogated in more detail in Section 5, considering the ways in which key participants are typically organised in relation to the propositions being developed within the texts based on collocation typicality. This allowed us to investigate the question of shared understandings, firstly using collocation of the most of frequent human referents in the focus subcorpora and then exploring differences and similarities more qualitatively through the concordance data (Section 5.1). These analyses were token-based, allowing consideration of issues such as singular and plural forms, and tense/aspect marking. Finally, using Sketchengine (Kilgarriff, 2013), rather than LancsBox (Brezina, Timperley and McEnery, 2018) as our earlier analyses had, we examined typical verb combinations with the lemmas WOMEN and MEN in subject and object positions (Section 5.2). Again there was a qualitative engagement with the data during this phase which involved consideration of the types of constructions the noun/verb combinations were contributing to. Further details of each analysis are given in the relevant section.

4. A common language? Frequency of human referents

The analysis presented in this section aims to assess the idea of common language centring on the question of *who* is the focus of discussion in the subcorpora using frequency analysis. This section shows how human referents are made visible in the corpus as a means of exploring similarities and differences in language, using a frequency analysis from LancsBox (Brezina, Timperley and McEnery, 2018) with particular attention to words relating to the family element of family violence (individual or collective). This approach focusses on *who* is identified as key in family violence and how are these people referred to. Table 2 shows the top ten words for humans. Ten words (rather than more) were chosen to meet limitations of space available for discussion here and a focus on human referents that are highly frequent and key in sector level discussions. The word *family* is omitted due to its use in *family violence* and possessive constructions and pronouns were excluded for maximum

comparability, avoiding issues of writing style. *AF* indicates actual frequency and *RF* relative frequency per 10,000 words.

Table 2. Top human-referent nouns

	Community Services	**Law**	**Other Submissions (Reference subcorpus)**
1	*women* (AF 7,147; RF **81.25**)	*women* (AF 3,768; RF **47.03**)	*women* (AF 5,411; RF **87.50**)
2	*children* (AF 5,144; RF **58.48**)	*children* (AF 2,588; RF **32.30**)	*children* (AF 2,136; RF **34.54**)
3	*community* (AF 2,865; RF **32.57**)	*child* (AF 1,979; RF **24.70**)	*community* (AF 2,031; RF **32.84**)
4	*child* (AF 2,375; RF **27.00**)	*community* (AF 1,915; RF **23.09**)	*people* (AF 1,361; RF **22.01**)
5	*people* (AF 1,696; RF **19.28**)	*people* (AF 1,455; RF **18.16**)	*men* (AF 1,020; RF **16.49**)
6	*men* (AF 1552; RF **17.64**)	*victims* (AF 1,341; RF **16.74**)	*partner* (AF 1015; RF **16.41**)
7	*communities* (AF 986; RF **11.62**)	*magistrates* (AF 1025; RF **12.79**)	*child* (AF 982; RF **15.88**)
8	*families* (AF 958; RF **10.89**)	*person* (AF 651; RF **8.13**)	*communities* (AF 932; RF **15.07**)
9	*clients* (AF 825; RF **9.38**)	*perpetrator* (AF 617; RF **7.70**)	*families* (AF 710; RF **11.48**)
10	*partner* (AF 797; RF **9.06**)	*families* (AF 616; RF **7.69**)	*victims* (AF 705; RF **11.40**)

Table 2 shows similar ideas and rankings in relation to who is the focus of discussions of family violence in terms of the five top uses, especially with *women* and *children* first and second across the subcorpora. However, the RFs show an important difference in that the Law subcorpus has fewer human nouns, with *women*, the first response, occurring approximately to 47 times per 10,000 words as opposed to 81 and 88 in the other two subcorpora. *Children* has a higher frequency in Community Services, showing how ranking is useful but the RFs allow direct comparisons. For example, how much women and children are a focus differs in potentially important ways. The Law and Other Submissions are very similar to one another in this respect, having less reference to *children*. Law has individual children, *child*, ranked higher than the others, although lower in RF than Community Services. *Child* ranks above the collective of *community* in the Law subcorpus, showing a

focus on single events (examination of the data confirms that this is not due higher use of phrases such as *child abuse*, *child protection services* or *child protection systems*).

In the lower part of Table 2, greater contrasts are indicated. In terms of the absolute contrasts, while Community Services uses *victims* less than the other two subcorpora, Law does not refer to *man/men* or *partner/s* as often with, in all cases, these items not appearing in the top ten or near the same relative frequency. In terms of uniqueness, *clients* appears only in the Community Services listing and *magistrate* and *perpetrator* only in Law. No words are unique to Other Submissions. This column, representing the reference subcorpus, shows similarities to the other two subcorpora but no specific focus of its own and therefore is a useful baseline for the text type. The cases of *clients*, *victims*, *perpetrators* and *men* open the possibility that some terms are potentially equivalent or overlapping but relate to the specific services and the types of interactions that these involve. For example, while not all violence in family violence is from men, it is likely that they are often referred to using the legal term *perpetuators* in the Law data, resulting in less frequent use of *men*. A similar situation may exist with *clients* in the Community Services discussed as *victims* in Law. Note though that careful consideration is needed given that *victim* is not a strictly legal term (i.e., it does not describe a role in legal proceedings) and *perpetrator* is surprisingly not frequent (less frequent than *men* and *partner* in the other subcorpora).[3] Potential overlap or relabelling shows a limitation of concentrating on language as terminology, which we explore further in analyses below. This idea is key to the emphasis both in CRAF and in this research on both a common language and a shared understanding: it is possible that ideas are shared even if concepts are differently named in keeping with professional discourses and the specific positionings associated with these. Such complexities need to be considered to understand similarities and differences.

While these results support the idea that there is agreement as to a focus on women and children in discussing the aims of the RCFV and what it should be aiming to achieve, there is less agreement and visibility given to those inflicting violence at the level of the word. While men can also be the abused person in situations of family violence, in the majority of cases they are the abusers (e.g. in Victoria this is the situation in. on average, 83% of family violence intervention orders (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2013)). The absence of

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[3] Analysis of the concordance lines revealed that *partner* was used in expressions such as *partner agency* or *partner organisation*, as well as having a human referent (e.g. *her ex-partner* or *intimate partner*). The organisational uses of *partner* accounted for around 8% of the Community Service examples but were nearly twice as common in the Law texts. Therefore, the organisational uses are not the cause of the higher ranking of *partner* in the Community Services subcorpus.

a focus on men and perpetrators is significant in light of recent discussions that engaging with men is the way to prevent family violence (e.g. Hill, 2019).

5. A shared understanding?

Section 4 showed a considerable divergence between the language used in the Community services and Law subcorpora based on the most frequent human referents, in spite of a general shared focus on *women* and *child/ren*. In this section, collocations for select human referent nouns (Section 5.1) and grammatical analysis of the roles of some of these nouns (Section 5.2) are used to explore the extent to which human referents in the subcorpora are constructed in similar ways. This provides an opportunity to further explore understandings of family violence and consider whether the roles of various categories of person are understood in a shared way across different sectors.

5.1 Collocation

Baker (2011) has shown that the same frequency of a word does not necessarily indicate the same usage/concept. In his examination of lockwords, those that are unchanging over time, he found *children* to appear steady in British English; however, examination of the uses of *children* within the Brown corpus texts suggested different conceptualisations. Keeping in mind the possibility that the same word could be differently understood, we further examined three of most common shared human referents identified in Section 4 (*women*, *children* and *people*). Collocation analyses make it possible to explore whether the words are being used in a similar way, without introducing strongly interpretive procedures into the analysis.

The analyses below, presented in Tables 3–5, use the statistic Minimum Sensitivity via LancsBox's (Brezina, Timperley and McEnery, 2018) GraphColl (Brezina, McEnery and Wattam, 2015). They explores words four places to the left and right of *women*, *children* and *people* to understand how those directly impacted by family violence are constructed in the Community Services and Law subcopora.[4] Here we show the ten highest results excluding

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[4] Collocation parameters notation: 12 - MinSens (0.002)/ L4-R4/ C: 5.0-NC: 5.0, following Brezina's recommended format for transparency in analysis (e.g. Brezina, V. 2018. *Statistics in corpus linguistics: A practical guide.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.). Some scholars problematise MinSens and other statistics are more commonly used. We chose MinSens because it worked best for finding collocations across texts while avoiding the level of exclusivity of some other statisitics. This was important given that our subcorpora have a high word counts but low number of texts.

function words, with these omissions clear in the *index* column which preserves the absolute ranking. *Pos*(ition) indicates if the word occurred to the *L*(eft) or *R*(ight) of the searched term, which is not accounted for in the statistic but is important for understanding (Gries, 2013). The third column in each table displays the collocate and this is followed by its frequency as a collocation (e.g. **women**+*violence* [L4-R4]) which can then be compared to *Total freq* which lists overall frequency of the collolate (e.g. *violence*). Displays and discussions are again limited to the top ten as the high occurance of these items makes complete discussions impracticable.

5.1.1 *Women*

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis described above for *women*, showing ten of the 489 collocates within the Community Services and 510 from Law subcorpora.

Table 3. Collocates for *women**

		Community Services					Law		
Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll)	Total freq	Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll)	Total freq
1	R	*children*	1,808	5,144	**1**	R	*children*	711	2,588
3	L	*violence*	2,239	16,809	**6**	L	*violence*	903	12,759
14	L	*men*	398	1,552	**8**	R	*disabilities*	244	303
15	L	*support*	360	3.471	**24**	L	*support*	124	2,270
18	R	*family*	616	13,249	**27**	R	*experiencing*	122	410
24	L	*services*	278	4,934	**30**	R	*experienced*	117	426
26	L	*prevention*	269	1,427	**31**	L	*safety*	115	1,321
27	R	*experiencing*	265	704	**34**	R	*Victoria*	98	2,285
30	L	*prevent*	209	451	**35**	R	*research*	97	1,092
34	L	*preventing*	198	424	**37**	R	*family*	271	11,083

*Shading marks items unique within the table (applies to all).

The largest and clearest difference here is the strong connection to 'prevention' in Community Services not found in Law, which does not contain *prevention*, *prevent* or *preventing* among the most frequent collocates with *women*. Furthermore, there are no collocations here with *intervention* or *orders* which might have been possible alternatives as the primary means of prevention for those engaged in the legal prevention of family violence. In the Community Services texts the following sorts of uses were typical:

(1)   Monash City Council recognises the complexities involved in delivering primary **prevention** of violence against **women** initiatives to a diverse population of women.

(2)   Since 2006, Maribyrnong City Council has taken a leadership role in contributing to evidence based practice to **prevent** violence against **women** and their children before it occurs through a range of strategies.

Very few uses of *prevention/prevent/preventing* mentioned *men's violence against women*, rather than just *violence against women* as in (1) and (2).

While *men* is the fourteenth most common collocate in Community Services, it does not appear in the top 37 for Law. *Experienced* (R) rather than *experiencing* did occur at a similar rate in the Community Services data (N =136) but was indexed at 48. These results demonstrate some important differences in the understandings of women within the issue of family violence. Also of note is that half of these collocations are the same, suggesting shared ground (see also findings in Section 5.2). Relative rankings of these shared collocations are also similar with the exception of *family* being less strongly associated with *women* in the Law subcorpus.

The differentiation regarding prevention words attached to *women* is against expectation and signals a legal profession focus on events after family violence has occurred that contrasts with an active and explicit community service engagement with prevention. This is unexpected because the role of the law in prevention is key and many community services may not be in contact or involved in the welfare of families until violence has manifested within them.

5.1.2 *Children*

Table 4 displays the results of the collocation analysis for *children*.

Table 4. Collocates for *children*

| | Community Services | | | | | Law | | | |
Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll)	Total freq	Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll)	Total freq
1	L	*women*	1,808	7,147	**1**	L	*women*	711	3,768
7	R	*young*	423	940	**4**	R	*domestic*	170	1,619
9	R	*people*	375	1,696	**7**	R	*young*	137	352
15	R	*experiencing*	256	704	**11**	R	*people*	117	1,455
17	R	*violence*	829	16,809	**12**	R	*families*	113	616
21	R	*family*	597	13,249	**15**	R	*affected*	98	307
22	L	*support*	216	3,471	**16**	L	*services*	106	2,878
27	R	*families*	189	958	**19**	R	*violence*	425	12,759
29	R	*risk*	183	2,087	**20**	L	*safety*	83	1,321
30	L	*services*	178	4,934	**21**	L	*protection*	82	1,342

The unhighlighted portions of Table 4 display six shared lexical items. Examining the highlighted differences, suggests alternative conceptualisations of children, with a more active role given in the Community Services data. For example, compare *risk* and *support* in the Community Services data, which are centred in children's experiences and service providers responses to them with the more static concepts of *safety* and *protection* in the Law data. The contrast in *experiencing* (Community Services) as compared to *affected* (Law) works similarly. The progressive aspect associated with *experiencing* points to the potential for ongoing harm being made visible in the Community Services data. In contrast, the construction of bounded events in the past associated with *affected* highlights legal professionals' treatment family violence as more discrete, completed events. *Experiencing* also distinguishes victims from perpetrators in a way that being *affected* does not. The following examples from the data show how these words can operate in context:

(3)   The project established a multi-disciplinary integrated response to identify and respond to women and **children** at high **risk** of extreme violence. (Community Services)

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(4)   In response to the significant growth in the number of family violence related matters coming before the Court, MCV has been pivotal in developing integrated, specialist family violence court reforms, which aim to enhance the **safety** of women and **children**, improve access to and the quality of services for women, and strengthen the accountability of perpetrators of family violence. (Law)

(5)   The program provides intensive case management to women and therapeutic case management for **children experiencing** family violence, as well as men's case management for men using violence. (Community Services)

(6)   Women and **children affected** by family violence are a defining feature of all jurisdictions within the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) and the Children's Court of Victoria (CCV). (Law)

This difference in understanding the status of children in the context of family violence perhaps supports claims that police and others need to reconceptualise this, with current understandings of children as passive and unaffected *witnesses* not recognising the profound impact children's experiences have on their mental and physical health which make them victims themselves rather than merely being *exposed* to family violence (Callaghan *et al.*, 2018: 1555; Elliffe and Holt, 2019).

5.1.3   *People*

Table 5 displays the analysis for the word *people*.

Table 5. Collocates for *people*

Community Services					Law				
Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll)	Total freq	Index	Pos	Collocate	Freq (coll.)	Total freq
1	L	*young*	653	940	1	L	*young*	214	352
3	L	*children*	375	5,144	3	L	*older*	125	318
4	R	*experiencing*	118	704	4	R	*experiencing*	82	410
5	R	*affected*	95	370	5	L	*children*	117	2,588
7	L	*older*	75	168	7	R	*disabilities*	61	303
10	R	*disability*	51	288	9	R	*disability*	48	420
11	R	*families*	50	958	11	L	*abuse*	49	1,625
12	L	*support*	102	3,471	13	L	*support*	62	2,270
19	R	*backgrounds*	42	155	14	R	*experienced*	37	426
20	L	*Aboriginal*	40	356	15	R	*use*	37	724

Here the Law subcorpus does have a collocation with *experiencing* alongside *experienced* and the Community Services data includes *affected* alongside *experiencing*. This supports the idea the children are a different case from people in general. Note here that referents may have been *young* or *older* people, with both important collocations across the subcorpora.

The collocates in Table 5 show a different use of *people* in the most frequent occurrences. Both subcorpora have a focus on people with *disability/ies* (these were used in very similar ways across the data). However, a recognition of those from a wider range of minority backgrounds facing inequities in experiencing family violence is shown in the Community Services subcorpus. This is clear in the collocations with *Aboriginal* (referring to the Indigenous people Australia, excluding those from the Torres Strait Islands) and *backgrounds*. *Aboriginal* had an index of 52 in the Law data and *background(s)* was not identified as a meaningful collocation. In the Community Services data, seventeen of the uses of *backgrounds* were part of the phrase *CALD backgrounds*, in which *CALD* is an acronym for *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse*, usually used to indicate English is not the first or home language. A further six occurrences had a comparable meaning, and two denoted the opposite of this through *all* and the converse, *non-CALD*. *People* also collocates with *family* with this relationship absent amongst the high frequency occurrences in Law (index = 65).

The differences in focus are important but perhaps understandable considering the professional differences: the police and the law represent systems aspiring to have set

processes which treat people the same, while community services may work to support particularly disadvantaged people. While people of all genders, ethnicities, migration/citizen statuses, social classes, abilities and regions may experience family violence, in fact some groups are much more at risk (Humphreys, 2007). This difference though is still meaningful to highlight, as the difference in conceptualisation of *people* in relation to family violence means that when professionals representing different sectors are discussing the issue, they could essentially have different referents in mind.

5.1.4 *Summary*

In summary, these brief collocation analyses suggests that in many cases, the people (*women*, *children* and *people*) most directly affected by family violence are being written about in similar ways. However, an examination of the top collocations also indicates clear differences which appear to suggest divergent understandings. It should be noted that, as in Section 4, it is later in the list that greater differences emerge so limiting the analysis to the top ten collocations probably over-emphasises similarities.

5.2 Collocating verbs and grammatical role

In this section, the exploration of collocates is expanded to include consideration of their grammatical patterns to support a more nuanced understanding of the data (Mautner, 2007; Pearce, 2008). In relation to the corpus explored here, this is a means of considering whether there are different understandings about the role of referents (*men* and *women*) within the subcorpora that may be obscured by shared terminology. If the words in focus here are equivalent in how they are used, there is evidence for a shared understanding. The analysis focusses on the use of *men* and *women* as grammatical subjects and objects by indicating the verbs they are associated with in each grammatical role. Unlike the previous analyses, this analysis was completed in SketchEngine (Kilgarriff, 2013), which works with lemmas rather than particular word forms and automatically compares different types of grammatical relations.

Tables 6–9 display WordSketch function analyses of the five most typical collocates for the lemma MAN and then WOMAN (overwhelmingly as *men* and *women*) as the grammatical subject and followed by object. Displays and discussion are limited to five most typical verbs, as scored within SketchEngine, for reasons of space and to present multiple

types of analysis.[5] Tables directly compare Community Service and Law results. Columns show the collocate, its frequency and the logDice score given by SketchEngine (Kilgarriff, 2013). The first row presents the number of times the lemma appears in the grammatical role with the *freq* column showing the ratio of total corpus uses this figure represents (Pearce, 2008). Note that the subjects of passive clauses are analysed as objects in this software (e.g. see Example 9).

5.2.1 *MAN*

Table 6 shows that within both the Community Services and Law subcorpora, MAN is the subject of many verbs indexing agency.

Table 6. Verbs associated with MAN as subject

Community Services			Law		
Collocate	Freq	Score	Collocate	Freq	Score
746	*35.44*		*260*	*32.1*	
USE	145	12.03	USE	60	11.9
PERPETRATE	54	10.98	PERPETRATE	8	9.69
KILL	57	10.73	ENTER	7	9.60
HAVE	69	8.90	COMMIT	7	9.46
REPORT	15	8.76	BATTER	5	9.27

USE and PERPETRATE, the highest scoring, are shared and similarly scored. The verb USE is part of the relative clause *men who use (family) violence*, a very frequent construction that reflects terminological challenges (see Example 7) within the discourse about family violence that is actively being negotiated within the corpus:

(7)   The term 'men who **use** violence' is used rather than perpetrator in this document, consistent with the definition provided in the No to Violence Standards. This is in recognition that men's use of violence is a choice rather than the term 'perpetrator' which can seem to refer to a type of person. (Community Service)

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[5] Calculations of typicality in SketchEngine take account of the level of variation in the subcorpus for each of the collocates (Kilgarriff, 2013). The key difference between figures for frequency and typicality score in our data relate to the verb BE. This verb has high frequency scores but lower typicality scores and so appears less often than a ranking by frequency would support.

(8)   Perpetrator accountability initiatives include services to help men who **use** violence towards family members to develop non-abusive behaviours and new relationship and parenting skills. (Law)

This construction accounts for 80% of the occurrences of MAN+USE in the Community Service subcorpus and over 90% of the occurrences in the Law subcorpus. Related constructions which are grammatical variations on *men who perpetrate family/domestic violence*, accounts for one quarter of the occurrences in the Community Service and half of the uses of PERPETRATE in the Law subcorpus.

Many of the remaining words (KILL for the Community Services and ENTER, COMMIT, and BATTER for the Law subcorpus) are even more agentive. The Community Services subcorpus also includes the more relational verbs HAVE and REPORT, consistent with the broader concerns of the sector identified above.

Table 7 shows that in the role of grammatical object, in both subcorpora, verbs index the exertion of control (HOLD, REFER, MANDATE for Community services and REFER, MANDATE, HOLD, EXCLUDE for Law) with clear acknowledgement of agency (ENGAGE for both).

Table 7. Verbs associated with MAN as object

Community Services			Law		
Collocate	Freq	Score	Collocate	Freq	Score
306	*14.54*		*150*	*18.52*	
HOLD	31	10.92	ENGAGE	15	11.01
REFER	13	9.93	REFER	12	10.35
ENGAGE	11	9.66	MANDATE	5	9.63
KILL	18	9.57	HOLD	8	9.61
MANDATE	7	9.31	EXCLUDE	5	9.58

The term MANDATE is noteworthy for the prevalence of the use of the passive voice in both corpora:

(9)   There are times that the **man** is **mandated** to attend a course; however he is unable to access this due to language barrier. (Community Service)

(10)   This is no longer the case, as nearly 50% of **men** now entering MBCPs are **mandated** by Courts. (Law) [MBCP = Men's Behaviour Change Program]

In each supcorpus there was only a single example of the verb MANDATE being used in a sentence in the active voice with the courts or magistrates present in the subejct role.

The same pattern is evident for the verb EXCLUDE in the Law subcorpus. In this case, the term also functions as a means of narrowing the reference typically to men who have been excluded from the family home:

(11)   Conversely, the lack of housing options for **men excluded** from their homes causes a myriad of problems, potentially escalating anger and aggression and /or resulting in a victim failing to report family violence or a breach of FVIO, for fear her partner will become homeless (Law). [FVIO = Family Violence Intervention Order]

The frequency of KILL with MAN as the object and WOMAN as subject (see also Table 8) reflects extensive discussion in one submission within the Community Services subcorpus of the ways in which the legal system treats women who kill their abusers.

While MAN is accorded verbs of agency in all analyses, there is greater similarity between subcorpora in object rather than subject position.

5.2.2   *WOMAN*

In contrast to the primary concern with agency and control in the verbs associated with MAN, WOMAN is most often the subject of existential and experiential verbs in both subcorpora, as shown in Table 8. This seems particularly surprising in relation to the Law subcorpus given the focus on specific events as described in Section 4.

Table 8. Verbs associated with WOMAN as subject

Community Services			Law		
Collocate	Freq	Score	Collocate	Freq	Score
2221	*28.5*		*1642*	*40.95*	
EXPERIENCE	289	11.50	EXPERIENCE	190	11.45
KILL	145	10.84	HAVE	243	10.62
HAVE	266	10.45	BE	378	9.92
BE	591	10.31	REPORT	56	9.92
DO	42	8.94	FEEL	47	9.76

The presence of BE is these tables reflects the fact that the verb is both frequent and typical as a collocation with the noun WOMAN. In contrast, for MAN the scores indicate BE was frequent but not typical as a collocation (Community Services Frequency: 162, Score: 8.59; Law Frequency: 68, Score: 7.61). Examples (12) and (13) exemplify typical uses with BE.

(12) For **women** who **are** highly traumatised, or who have complex needs, their ability to recognise risk - including the danger to their children - can be compromised. (Community Services)

(13) The language barriers further isolates [*sic*] **women** who **are** totally dependent on their husbands not only financially but also on what the services are available in the area. (Law)

Examples of WOMAN as the subject of the verb FEEL are interesting as they typically convey reports of women's assessments of their treatment or situation. The verb FEEL reduces the legitimacy of their assessments when other more cognitively oriented verbs expressing evaluation are available:

(14) The **women felt** a huge sense of injustice as a result of their experience of family violence and attempts to seek the protection of the law. (Law)

Table 9 shows the results for WOMAN as grammatical object.

Table 9. Verbs associated with WOMAN as object

Community Services			Law		
Collocate	Freq	Score	Collocate	Freq	Score
1266	*16.25*		*741*	*18.48*	
SUPPORT	143	10.98	SUPPORT	58	10.38
ASSIST	78	10.68	ASSIST	38	10.16
KEEP	45	10.02	INCARCERATE	15	9.31
ENABLE	39	9.73	KEEP	15	9.20
AFFECT	32	9.37	IMPRISON	12	9.01

Where WOMAN is the object, the verb involved is mainly focussed on helping in the Community Services subcorpus (SUPPORT, ASSIST, ENABLE) but also suggest the exertion of influence and control by others (KEEP, AFFECT), and about helping (SUPPORT, ASSIST) or controlling (INCARCERATE, IMPRISON, KEEP) in the Law subcorpus.

The verb KEEP is strongly associated with the construction *keep safe* in both datasets (often in the construction *keep women and (their) children safe*) with references so keeping women in housing a variation on this theme as in (15). There are also examples in both subcorpora of the verb KEEP referring to strategies of entrapment used by perpretrators as typified in (16).

(15) Police and EDVOS staff make joint visits to these women to assess their ongoing support needs and to develop safety and response strategies to **keep** the **women** safe. (Community Service)

(16) Economic abuse was a means of control when other methods were no longer at the abuser's disposal and **kept women** tied to their violent partners long after they had separated from them. (Law)

The verb AFFECT with WOMAN as object occurs in two recurring frames. Firstly, in a tidy counterpoint to the phrase *men who use (family/domestic) violence*, we find the expression *women affected by (family/domestic) violence*. Secondly it is found in passages defining the nature and scope of the problem – typically asserting the gendered nature of family violence in the Community Service subcorpus as illustrated in (17) and (18).

(17) Provide training on the needs and experiences of women service users, including the fact that **women affected** by family violence are a diverse group with diverse needs. (Community Service)

(18) As raised in the Royal Commission's Issues Paper, family violence is a gendered issue that disproportionately **affects women**. (Community Service)

5.2.3 Summary

This analysis reveals a shared understanding of the role and status of men and women in family violence that is deeply tied into troubling but real power dynamics between genders. These framings of women as disempowered, emotive and needy are constructed not only in the ways in which their actions are described (when they are subjects of existential and experiencer verbs) but also in the actions imposed on them (they are the objects of verbs that exert support for or control over them). Conversely, men are portrayed as grammatical subjects who are highly agentive, albeit also as grammatical objects in need of containment. This is consistent across the two sectors, with little variation in the semantic range of the verbs used. To some extent this is understandable given (a) the terms of reference of the RCFV and (b) the approach described in the CRAF, which guided service delivery in Victoria in the lead up to the RCFV, and which included a deliberate move towards a common language.

The focus on victims and system responses to them in these analyses demonstrates a tendency to diminish the agency of victims. As Coates and Wade (2004; 2007) have shown very clearly, recognising the agency of victims as they resist is crucial to understanding the extent of violence perpetrated against them. They highlight the great lengths that (mostly) women go to in order to keep themselves and their children safe. The resourcefulness and resilience women display in responding to family violence are not recognisable in the top verbs collocating with WOMAN (especially as compared to the agency of MAN). While it is understandable that in a critically underfunded service environment, organisations might emphasise the depth of need they are trying to provide for, the shared understanding that is revealed in these data is unlikely to be considered an area of policy success.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have explored the construction of participants in family violence with particular attention to identifying commonalities and differences in language and understandings across RCFV subcorpora. In this section we highlight the main findings of the analyses in this paper then consider their implications.

6.1 Findings

Across frequency, collocation and grammatical role/verb analyses, we have found considerable differences in language use (especially in Sections 4 and 5.1) as well as important similarities (especially in Section 5.2), and have shown how quantitative analyses of largely lexical phenomena can uncover understandings of family violence in relevant service organisations, without the need for interpretive categorisation. The strength of the approach presented here is that the patterns become visible and measurable when appropriate corpora are considered.

While all submissions written in response to the guiding aims of the RCFV are concerned with family violence, and this has a consistent surface definition, there are divergences in the two sector-specific subcorpora that were analysed. These relate in part to different professional outlooks, for example with Law submissions focussed on particular events of violence while Community Services are more engaged with different people's experiences over the course of their lives. However, the differences in understandings regarding the role of men as perpetrators, children as victims and family violence as a structural community problem are points on which one would imagine the systems need to be aligned, while these analyses support the idea that they are not. In fact, our analyses suggest the alignment that is present might largely relate to pervasive patterns in language use that persistently construct victims of family violence as passive and weak.

Our purpose has not been to criticise particular texts or sectors, but rather to uncover and show both differences and similarities revealed through the study of language using the tools of corpus linguistics. The need for shared language and common understandings has been under discussion across a range of sectors for some time. Our research suggests that these aims deserve further attention because implicit differences in understanding, which may be obscured by shared language, are potentially more problematic in communication than known differences. Furthermore, while the similarities appear to be desirable, they may in

fact reveal deep and problematic gender biases that could work against effective support for victims of family violence and reduce the perceived need for intervention for perpetrators.

6.2 Implications of findings

The approach taken here explores the language used by service providers in a way that is data driven and objectively related to key public documents developed by each group. We use corpus linguistics procedures to examine similarities and differences with a view to open discussion between professions and services, using empirically established differences and more covert similarities as a starting point. The next stages in this project have involved reporting findings and sharing our expertise with relevant stakeholders, the sorts of people who wrote these submissions, and seeking their expertise on applying the ideas and identifying new questions to ask. Discussions about industry-driven research projects building from these findings are now underway. Early responses have identified a range of potential new directions. Examples include considering the representation of children in family violence in more detail, exploration of the language used in specialist family violence courts as compared to magistrate's courts, and the language used by men's behaviour change specialists. Some of these topics could also be amenable to at least initial research using CADS.

The analyses suggest that *a common language* for family violence is no guarantee of a strategic *shared understanding*: enforced use of terminology can simply hide different or problematic conceptualisations. Furthermore, by diminishing the agency of women and reducing the responsibility of perpetrators, these conceptions can have significant impacts that are counter to the intentions and mandates of the organisations involved. Acknowledgement of these issues across sector boundaries is likely to be a fruitful way to support more strategic communication. Different professions have different foci but need to work together and be able to see other perspectives. This insight is especially important for addressing family violence because of the impact it has on people's lives and the severity of the problem. As a complex and deep-rooted social issue with legal implications and interventions, professionals from a range of fields need to work together to achieve change.

Submissions to the RCFV note that language is also a barrier in encounters between women and service providers. Future work in this area should include research on how (resistance to) violence is framed by women seeking assistance.

We believe that when people are identifying language as key, linguists should try to be involved in the conversation. Corpus linguistics has allowed us to explore sector specific characterisations of family violence. These deeper patterns of similarity and difference we have identified potentially undermine the goal of reducing the pervasiveness, frequency, and severity of family violence in the community. Bringing these discourse patterns to light allows for further work, in cooperation with advocates, policy makers and service providers to continue the important work of addressing this critical social issue

Acknowledgements

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