

Recognising and responding to domestic violence: exploring the role of student dentists

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Introduction: The role of student dental practitioners in recognising and responding to domestic violence within a clinical setting has not been investigated previously in Australia. JCU students report feeling ill-prepared for responding appropriately to women who experience domestic violence. An innovative partnership between Dentistry, Social Work and the Regional Domestic Violence Service collaboratively addressed this problem through an educational intervention, which was evaluated by dental student researchers.

Aim: To explore dental students' perceptions of the effectiveness and value of the 'Recognise and Respond to Domestic Violence' educational intervention and to inform dental curriculum design.

Methods: A participatory approach employed mixed with pre and post intervention surveys and focus groups to identify and document undergraduate dental students' understanding, perceptions and preparedness for responding appropriately to domestic violence. The intervention involved 'Recognise and Respond' workshops delivered by expert facilitators for Dental students in Clinical Years 3 – 5. Knowledge of domestic violence before and after the workshops was compared and contrasted. Focus groups then enriched the evaluation data on the value, effectiveness and clinical application of the intervention.

Results: Students' knowledge regarding domestic violence increased significantly. Focus group data confirmed the value of workshops. Students reported feeling enabled to embed awareness of domestic violence into their clinical practice.

Discussion: Although the findings cannot be generalised, they suggest that this socially accountable, educational initiative should not only be embedded into the undergraduate curriculum but would also be valuable for other dental programs. **Conclusion:** Further strengthening of dental students' capacity to respond to domestic violence should be developed across the clinical years through authentic learning experiences that provide opportunities to practice techniques and employ strategies introduced in the workshops.