

**Children's perpetration of violence in Early Childhood  
Centres: Practices of children and perceptions of staff.**

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Education**

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## **Abstract**

Violence prevention in Australia is being carried out in schools in order to deal with the sharp rise in the incidence of non-fatal violent assaults in Australia since the 1970s. The overwhelming majority of violent offenders in Australia are men. Theory development has made little attempt to analyse the connection between masculinity as a social construct and the practice of violence. It has also been suggested that adults' tolerance of children's violence may hamper attempts to prevent violence.

This study sought to investigate the hypothesised connection between masculinity and violence by examining the violent practices of the youngest age group of children and how these practices are conceptualised by the adults caring for them.

Four early childhood centres participated in the study. The study drew on critical ethnography and feminist methodology to inform the methods of semi-structured interview and observation.

A sample of 268 children was observed for almost 100 hours to measure the nature and extent of the perpetration of violence. 1,441 incidents of violence were observed. Seventeen staff interviews were carried out following the observation phase to determine their understanding of the phenomenon of children's perpetration of violence.

It was found that the perpetration of violence by the children was a frequent event and both boys and girls were observed perpetrating violence. The statistics gathered show that many more boys than girls were responsible for incidents of violence. Compared to girls, boys were responsible for a greater number of incidents and for a much larger number of serious incidents. There were styles of violence that were unique to boys which were accompanied by symbols common to a dominant form of masculinity. It is argued that many of the boys were actively engaged in constructing a masculinity linked to violence.

Many staff believed that violence was a problem in early childhood. The staff understood violence to be related to a number of factors, but masculinity was rarely discussed. It was found that low levels of staff intervention followed incidents of violence. Several perspectives appeared to inhibit staff from intervening.

**This thesis has demonstrated the need for violence prevention theory to include an analysis of the link between masculinity and violence and for violence prevention strategies for young children to be designed to sever this link. In addition it has argued for adults to be more involved in children's play and to intervene directly in incidents of violence.**

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## **Acronyms**

**DEET**      **Department of Employment, Education and Training**

**NCV**        **National Committee on Violence**

**SACAE**     **South Australian College of Advanced Education**

**AWEC**      **Australian Women in Education Coalition**

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