

More leadership, structure needed in respectful relationships education in Australian schools

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Greater top-down coordination, more teacher training and better evaluation systems are needed to improve respectful relationships education in Australian schools, a Monash University study shows.

The report, released today, analyzed respectful relationships programs delivered nationwide aimed at ending violence against women and children.

The report found great inconsistencies in the way respectful relationships [education](#) (RRE) was delivered and supported in schools, and in student learning outcomes. The researchers performed a national stocktake and gap analysis of existing RRE programs and resources, in conjunction with consulting more than 100 stakeholders across the areas of education, women's health, and domestic, family and sexual violence.

In their 132-page report, the researchers outline a roadmap for improving RRE, through a consistent approach to coordination, delivery, oversight and evaluation.

The report makes seven key recommendations, including that the Federal Government, in partnership with state and territory governments:

- Develop a quality assessment tool to help schools deliver effective RRE.
- Develop a Workforce Development Action Plan to ensure teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to teach RRE.
- Establish an RRE online professional learning resource hub for schools and educators.
- Fund a monitoring and evaluation framework to drive continuous improvement of RRE in schools.
- Establish a national, coordinated approach to facilitating RRE.

Stakeholders consulted in the research said that while there was an increased focus on RRE in the new national curriculum, better pre-service training and ongoing professional development were needed to support teachers to deliver effective RRE.

Project lead Dr. Naomi Pfitzner from the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Center said RRE professional learning and pre-service training, in particular, were underdeveloped in many Australian jurisdictions.

"We need to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to deliver respectful relationships education. Our stocktake reveals that only two universities in Australia currently offer sexuality and relationships education as part of health and physical education pre-service [teacher training](#)," Dr. Pfitzner said.

"We can't assume that teachers have the skills to deliver respectful relationships education and have sometimes confronting and challenging discussions about issues such as violence and gender equality. Federal, state and territory governments need to invest in long-term evaluation of respectful relationships programs to build the evidence required to inform effective whole-of-school initiatives across a range of school settings."

Report co-author Honorary Associate Professor Debbie Oliis said a quality assessment tool was vital to the program's success.

"Teachers and schools want to provide quality, evidence-based respectful relationships education that is suitable for their school context," she said. "A quality assessment tool would enable schools to make informed decisions about the resources and programs they use in classrooms."

Co-author Dr. Rebecca Stewart said the research also revealed parents and caregivers want to play a greater role in RRE.

"Parents and caregivers are a critical part of the school community and most want to continue to have these conversations at home," Dr. Stewart said.

The researcher also found many other groups in the [school](#) community felt unrepresented in the RRE conversation.

"We heard repeated calls from stakeholders for respectful relationships education to move beyond the traditional focus on heterosexual, cisgender interactions between men and women," Dr. Pfitzner said.

"Respectful relationships education resources and programs need to cater for and include the whole range of students in Australian schools."

The Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis Final Report is available online.

More information: [Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis Final Report](#)

Provided by Monash University

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