



Co-production of programs and policies with victim-survivors

Victim-survivors of family, domestic, and sexual violence have expert insight into their lived experience. The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022- 2032 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022) recognises this expert insight and endorses the inclusion of victim-survivors in the co-production of initiatives designed to meet their needs.

Useful Definitions



Domestic and family violence (DFV)

Is abusive, threatening, or coercive behaviour used by one person to control or dominate another person in a relevant relationship.

Co-production

is often used interchangeably with other terms such as co-design. However, in co-production, victim-survivors are actively involved from the inception of an initiative, rather than just consulted about aspects of an initiative. Such deep involvement requires responsible planning to ensure this engagement is safe and ethical for victim-survivors (Mulvale et al., 2021).



**Co-production should be
underpinned by a
strengths-based approach
to promote and encourage
the agency of members of
vulnerable populations.**

(French & Raman, 2021).



What we know

When co-production occurs, victim-survivors not only benefit from the establishment of more appropriate services, but they can also become empowered by the experience and develop new skills. Co-production, when done in a trauma-informed way, can aid healing for survivors and improve their feelings of safety and control over their lives.

A review of articles on co-producing with members of vulnerable populations found the following factors were associated with creating a supportive organisational environment that promotes teamwork (Amann & Sleigh, 2021, pp. 716- 717):



Power Sharing



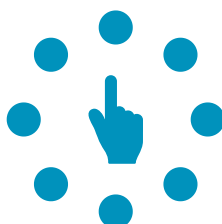
Collaborative Decision-making



All stages in the co-production process are mapped to ensure opportunities for engagement are identified and utilised



Participation is maximised by providing a choice of communication media and flexible meeting times



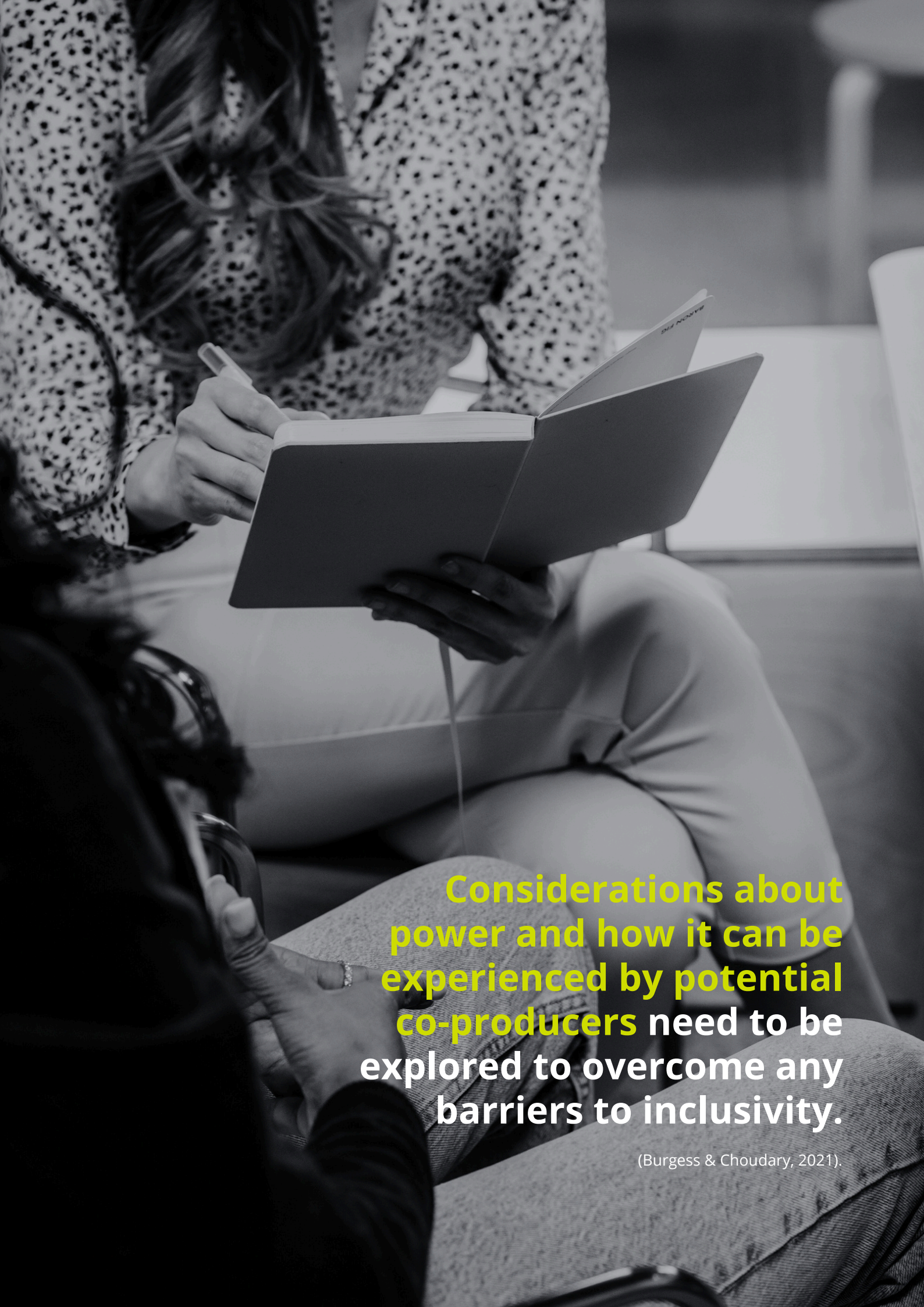
A variety of methods and tools are utilised

Best practice approaches to co-production synthesised from this review include:

1. comprehensive planning and resourcing of a project;
2. active relationship building with potential co-producers;
3. deep understandings (including cultural awareness) about the community co-producers will be drawn from;
4. flexible meeting arrangements;
5. avoiding tokenism by providing meaningful engagement in activities;
6. investing in skill building with co-producers;
7. prioritising the safety and well-being of co-producers, particularly by developing an awareness about factors that could trigger or overwhelm them;
8. valuing co-producers by investing in relationships with them, listening to them, and including them in decision-making; and
9. being reflexive and aware of how power is being used in the co-production context. (Amann & Sleight, 2021, pp. 718-721).




Burgess and Choudary (2021) explored co-production with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in London's mental health sector. Their findings extend Amann and Sleight's (2021) synthesis and stress the development of knowledge about the community co-producers are drawn from, particularly understandings about the 'historical and contemporary challenges' that may prevent members of the community engaging in co-production activities (Burgess & Choudary, 2021). Intersectional cultural, social and economic marginalisation means past attempts at engagement, may have been ineffective, tokenistic and possibly harmful.

A black and white photograph showing a person from the waist down, sitting and writing in a small notebook. They are wearing a patterned top and light-colored pants. Another person's hand is visible in the foreground, holding a pen. The background is blurred, showing a white chair and a table.

**Considerations about
power and how it can be
experienced by potential
co-producers need to be
explored to overcome any
barriers to inclusivity.**

(Burgess & Choudary, 2021).



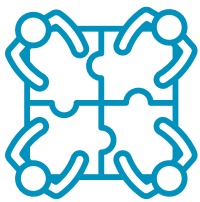
French and Raman (2021) suggest co-production initiatives be underpinned by a strengths-based approach to promote and encourage the agency of members of vulnerable populations. This approach can re-define 'vulnerability' by legitimising the expertise of co-producers' lived experience.

(French & Raman, 2021).

During the co-production process, practitioners are encouraged to be aware of not reinforcing inequality through the misuse of power, as this can erode trust.

(Dudau et al., 2019; Moll et al., 2020)

Survivors' Voices (Chevous et al., 2018), a national survivor-led social enterprise in the United Kingdom, has developed two charters to guide co-production initiatives with victim-survivors. The first charter identifies actions that promote good practice engagement with victim-survivors, while the second charter describes the outcomes of good practice engagement with victim-survivors.



CHARACTER 1

Good practice engagement with victim-survivors

1. Actively involve people with lived experience.
2. Define abuse broadly so that individual experiences are not minimised or denied.
3. Recognise the intertwined nature of transformative power and the pain of breaking the silence of abuse.
4. People are not to be excluded due to fears about their vulnerability – 'negative' coping strategies are often a sign of resilience.
5. Victim-survivors are informed in advance about the purpose of any engagement, how their story may be shared, and how this will occur. They will be informed that their participation is voluntary.
6. Intentional actions are taken to create a safe environment for engagement with victim-survivors and for sharing their experiences – this includes safety in relation to the physical environment and power imbalances.
7. The terms 'story' and 'narrative' are avoided as these terms can imply experiences are made up. The terms to be used when referring to victim-survivors' experiences will be 'experiences', 'accounts', and 'journey'. (Chevous et al., 2018, p. 4).

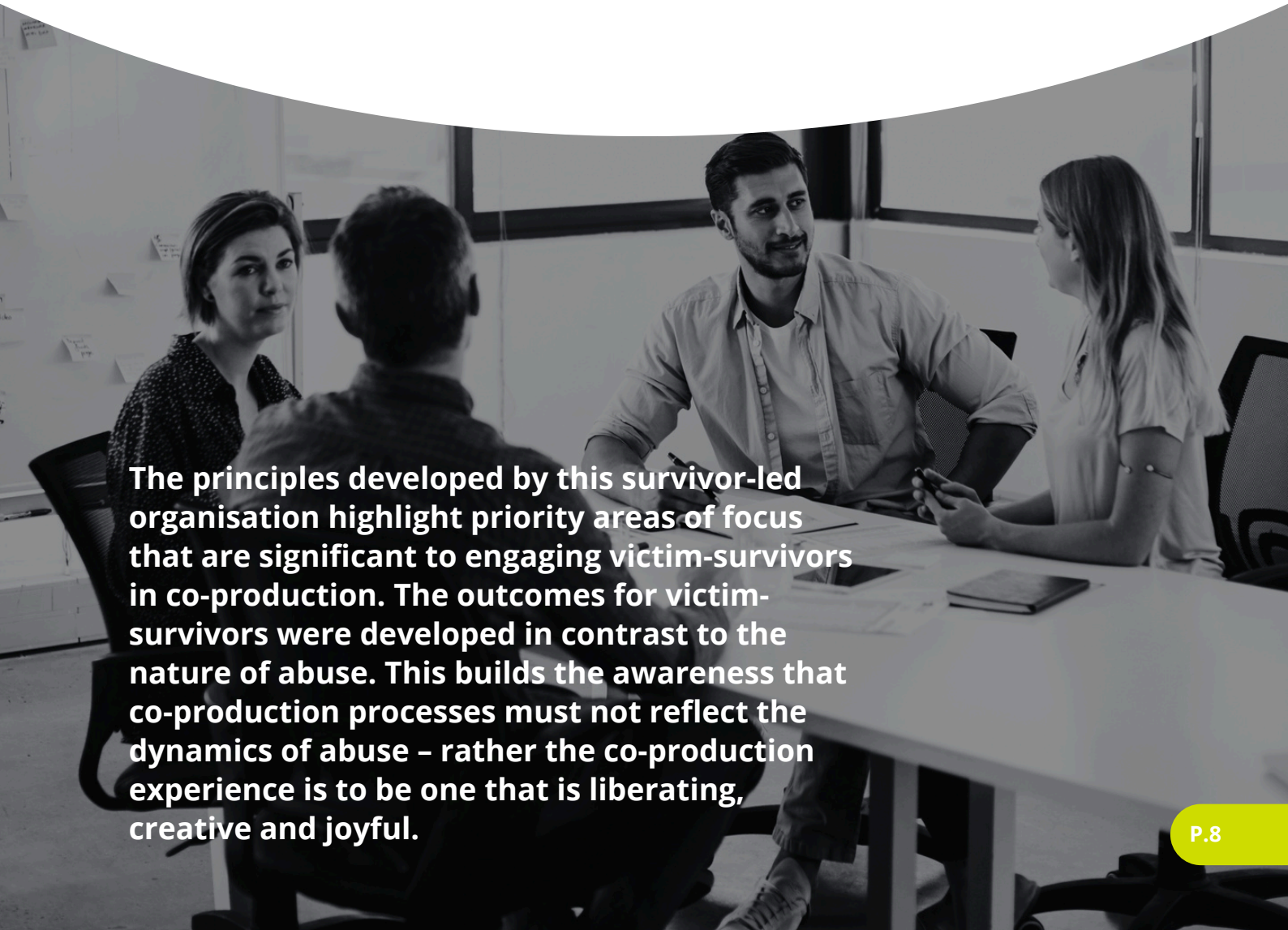




CHARACTER 2

Good practice outcomes for victim-survivors

1. Safety – in comparison, abuse is inherently unsafe.
 2. Empowerment - abuse dominates.
 3. Amplification of their voices - abuse is silencing.
 4. Self-care is prioritised - abuse can destroy self-worth and damage well-being.
 5. Accountable and transparent communication and processes - abuse is hidden, and perpetrators act with impunity.
 6. Liberating - abuse restricts and arrests healthy growth, imprisoning people in physical, mental, and emotional shackles.
 7. Creative and joyful - abuse is corrosive, restrictive, and soul destroying.
- (Chevous et al., 2018, p. 3)



The principles developed by this survivor-led organisation highlight priority areas of focus that are significant to engaging victim-survivors in co-production. The outcomes for victim-survivors were developed in contrast to the nature of abuse. This builds the awareness that co-production processes must not reflect the dynamics of abuse – rather the co-production experience is to be one that is liberating, creative and joyful.

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www.noviolence.org.au



qcdfvonline@cqu.edu.au



07 4940 3320

