

Speaking publicly about preventing men's violence against women

Curly questions and language considerations



Working Together to Prevent Violence Against Women in the West



women's health west

Publication and acknowledgements

Women's Health West acknowledges the contribution of the following individuals who supported the content development of this resource:

- * Vanessa Born, Domestic Violence Victoria
- * Elly Taylor, Women's Health West
- * Nicola Harte, Women's Health West
- * Karin Holzknecht, Women's Health West

We acknowledge the input and feedback provided by the Preventing Violence Together Implementation Committee.

Women's Health West acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the people of the Kulin Nation, and we pay our respects to Elders and community members past and present. We express solidarity with the ongoing struggle for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty and the recognition of past injustices. We express our hope for reconciliation and justice.

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Publisher: Women's Health West
Editors: Nathalie Thomas
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Women's Health West acknowledges the support of the state government

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About the resource

Preventing Violence Together (PVT) is Melbourne's western region partnership and action plan to prevent men's violence against women. The vision of *Preventing Violence Together: The Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women* is to create communities, cultures and organisations in Melbourne's west that are non-violent, non-discriminatory, gender equitable, and promote respectful relationships.

In October 2012, the PVT partnership was funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation to implement the three-year 'United' project. United is a collaboratively developed project by partner organisations, and seeks to further implement the PVT action plan by building organisational capacity to embed sustainable, evidence-based strategies to prevent men's violence against women before it occurs.

The objectives of the United project are to:

- * Eliminate, decrease, and redress gender inequity
- * Embed and drive cultural change across all partner organisations to redress the causes and determinants of violence against women
- * Increase awareness and capacity building of partner organisations, and the community, to create safe inclusive environments where women and men can participate equally
- * Increase the awareness and understanding of violence against women across workplace settings and the broader community
- * Document and disseminate the lessons and challenges of primary prevention activities including the development of proxy indicators of success.

The United project includes a suite of primary prevention strategies that partner agencies have committed to implement by late 2015. Included among these strategies is the development of tools and resources to support the gender equity and primary prevention work of partners, as guided by the emerging needs of the project and partnership.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

This resource is designed to build the capacity of members of the PVT Implementation Committee and Executive Governance Group to speak publicly about preventing men's violence against women. This resource aims to build the capacity of partner organisations to respond to curly questions about preventing men's violence against women, and to understand the importance of language when doing so.

The curly questions listed in the resource are questions that the PVT Implementation Committee members have been asked in their prevention of violence against women work. The questions should therefore be read within this context. However, we acknowledge that many of the questions are based on sexist and racist assumptions which need to be challenged.

PART 1:

Language matters

In order to prevent men's violence against women, it is important that we consider the language we use and remember that words, terms and phrases can have various meanings and interpretations. Some have a historical context and others will vary in meaning due to the context in which this language is used. Language frames how we understand a problem and consequently how we work to redress it. Language can also engage or alienate an audience.

GUIDELINES WHEN SPEAKING ABOUT MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

While there is no definitive answer on which terms or phrases should or should not be used in speaking about men's violence against women, it is important to think critically about the language we use: this includes its meaning and impact. Here are some simple guidelines to use when speaking about men's violence against women.

Use the active voice

This means using direct language and making the perpetrator of the violence the subject in the sentence. Using the passive voice provides distance between the speaker and the events and can result in:

- * The victim/survivor being positioned in the forefront of the story, which allows people to place greater emphasis and blame on the victim/survivor for their actions
- * Obscuring and minimising the actions, choices, and responsibility of the perpetrator
- * Minimising the harm caused to the victim/survivor who has experienced the violence.

Passive voice diminishes the actions of the perpetrator and can go as far as to remove him from the equation altogether. For example:

- * **Ryan beat Nancy**
The use of the active voice makes Ryan the subject, with the focus of the sentence being on Ryan and his actions
- * **Nancy was beaten by Ryan**
The use of passive voice makes Nancy the subject; Ryan is less relevant and not grammatically necessary. This is a political shift away from positioning men who use violence as responsible for their behaviour. It is also poor writing
- * **Nancy was battered**
The use of passive voice means that Ryan has disappeared from the sentence, hence the perpetrator and his actions are no longer part of the conversation
- * **Nancy is a battered woman**
The use of passive voice means that what was once an event in Nancy's life is now her identity, and we have long forgotten about Ryan.¹



Do a language check

Ask yourself, does the language my colleagues, my organisation, the media use, or I use:

- * Justify men's violence against women?
- * Suggest that there is a legitimate time, place or situation where men's violence against women is acceptable? (e.g. if a woman has sex with a man other than her partner)
- * Excuse men's violence against women?
- * Suggest that external factor and not the man, are responsible for the violence? (e.g. stress, substance abuse, financial stressors)
- * Trivialise men's violence against women?
- * Suggest that the violence is not serious, or not serious enough, to warrant intervention?
- * Minimise men's violence against women?
- * Deny the seriousness of men's violence or imply a weighting scale to the violence? (e.g. the notion that financial violence is not really a crime or not as serious as physical or sexual violence)
- * Shift the blame for men's violence against women?
- * Put greater emphasis on the woman than the man? (e.g. including details about where she was, who she was with, what she was wearing, if she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol or any other actions she took, rather than focus on the actions of the man who chose to be violent)
- * Characterise the violence as rare, abnormal, monstrous, or otherwise promote myths about the types of men who choose to use violence?

Reflect on the choice of terms and phrases you use and its impact

On the next few pages, there is a list of common terms and phrases used to describe women who have experienced violence, men who have chosen to use violence, the violence itself, and women's safety. The examples are not exhaustive and the analysis and considerations for alternative language provided are not definitive. Rather, this table is intended to support reflection on the language that is commonly used to speak about men's violence against women, why we use it, and its impact. This allows us to make informed choices about the terms and phrases we use when speaking about men's violence against women.

COMMON TERMS AND THEIR IMPACTS

CATEGORY: **Women who have experienced violence**

TERM: **Victim**

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A term used to describe a woman who has experienced violence • A person who is a victim of a crime • Commonly used term by the police and in certain courts of law, such as the magistrate's court, for a woman who has experienced violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain forms of violence against women are recognised as a criminal offence. In these circumstances, the woman is a victim of a crime. • It emphasises that the actions and behaviours that have taken place are not the fault of the woman who has experienced the violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This term can be used to encapsulate a woman's identity, rather than violence as one of many experiences in the woman's life. • Social connotations of the word victim equate being a victim with being powerless, weak, feeble, lacking in agency and requiring the help of others. The term can diminish women's agency and active resistance to men's violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who has experienced violence • Victim/survivor • Watch tense: was a victim of a crime suggests a past event, rather than a present identity • Listen to the woman and use the language she prefers. What tense does she use when describing herself or the crime? Does she refer to herself as a victim or survivor, or victim/survivor, or something else?

TERM: **Survivor**

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A term used to describe a woman who has experienced violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This term speaks to strength, agency and life after violence. Some crisis centres identify the ownership of the term survivor by a woman who has experienced violence as a step in the healing process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This term can put pressure on a woman to be and behave 'like a survivor' when that might not reflect her experience or how she feels. • It does not highlight the fact that the woman has been a victim of a crime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who has experienced violence • Victim/survivor • Watch tense: is a survivor = present identity • Listen to the woman and use the language she prefers. Does she refer to herself as a victim or survivor, or victim/survivor, or as something else?



TERM: *Innocent woman/Innocent victim*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A term used to describe a woman who has experienced violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsibility, fault or blame for the violence is not placed on the person who has experienced it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The term 'innocent' is not commonly applied to all women who have experienced violence. For example, it is often used to describe those deemed 'innocent' by society. This excludes groups such as sex workers, drug users, sexually-active women or those in polyamorous relationships. This leads to a subtext of blame on women who are not viewed as 'innocent' by virtue of their behaviour or conduct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No woman is responsible for men's violence perpetrated against them. Be cautious if using 'innocent' as it can imply a value judgement. If using the term 'innocent', use it for all women.

TERM: *Had a few drinks/Left a party on her own/Walked home on her own*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terms that relate and describe the movements of a woman in the lead-up to their assault 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no positive aspects of this terminology; historically, it has been used, and continues to be used, to justify men's violence against women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Places emphasis and focus on the woman's actions, rather than the person who has committed the violence Consciously or unconsciously blames the woman for her actions and choices, and not the man for his behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check your language: Why is this information relevant? Does it lead to victim blaming? What about the movements of the person who has used violence? Are they being reported also? For example, 'she walked home alone from the bar and was assaulted', as opposed to, 'the perpetrator/offender intentionally stalked the woman on her way home when he assaulted her'.

TERM: *Vulnerable*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to describe women Used to describe women undertaking a specific activity or wearing specific clothing Used to describe a woman who has been the victim of an assault 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no positive aspects of this terminology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggests that women are intrinsically vulnerable Can direct the focus on what women are, or are not doing, resulting in the focus shifting away from the men who choose to use violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the focus on the person who chooses to use violence. For example, 'women wearing headphones while walking or running are vulnerable to attacks.' If we focus attention on the perpetrator this sentence would read, 'the assailant targeted women exercising on public bike paths'. Another example includes, 'some women are more vulnerable than others to sexual assault'. However, when refocused reads, 'perpetrators often identify and specifically target women who they believe they can control and dominate.'



CATEGORY: *Men who have used violence*

TERM: *Perpetrator/Offender*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the person who has, or is suspected to have, committed violence against a woman • Commonly used in family violence courts and behavioural change programs. However, these are not legal terms • The Victorian legislative terminology refers to 'the accused' or 'the respondent'. Family violence courts and men's behavioural change programs use the term 'perpetrator' to refer to men who use violence • Courts may use the term 'offending behaviour' in describing the assault or violent act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These terms 'name' the person responsible for the violence and put the focus on them and their behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These terms remove the element of personal choice: men choose to be violent, they are not intrinsically violent. • It can be seen as a label for life, and that these men cannot reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men who choose to use violence

TERM: *Acquitted*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal terminology to describe a person who a jury or judge has found 'not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits outside of the guilty–innocent dichotomy • Provides another word for 'innocent' as a person found 'not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt' is not necessarily innocent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquitted of the charges does not mean the person is innocent. • Despite this, the term is often used interchangeably with 'innocent' through the media such as news and TV programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can be a helpful term, but is in reference specifically to legal judgements.

TERM: *Great father/Devoted dad*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A subjective term used to describe a man who has chosen to use violence and is also a father 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges the monster myth – men who use violence are not abnormal, monsters or freaks. • Men who appear 'good' or 'normal' can choose to use violence against women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a violent partner creates an environment of fear and uncertainty for children and does not role model good behaviour and attitudes. Therefore, a violent partner is not necessarily a good parent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your language: Why is it important to speak to this person's parenting qualities? • Do these phrases minimise or diminish the experiences of the person who has experienced the violence?

TERM: *A good guy/Respected member of the community/Esteemed coach, professional, community leader*

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A subjective term used to describe a man who has chosen to use violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges the monster myth – men who use violence are not abnormal, monsters or freaks • Highlights that men who appear 'good' or 'normal' can choose to use violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These phrases set up excuses for the violence – framing it as an accident, unintentional, a mistake, or related to substance misuse or abuse • Generates sympathy for the person who has chosen to use violence • Suggests that the woman has done something to provoke him 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perpetrator, offender or man who has chosen to use violence • Check your language: Why is it important to speak to this person's apparent traits and qualities? • Do these phrases minimise or diminish the experiences of the person who has experienced the violence? Is this language excusing or minimising the violence?



TERM: *A monster/Criminal/Thug/Brute/Wife-beater/Woman-basher*

Context of use

- A subjective term used to describe a person who has chosen to use violence

Positive aspect of the terminology

- Negative appraisal of the person responsible for the violence

Problematic aspect of the terminology

- These labels present the offender as out of the ordinary, freakish, abnormal, or as a career criminal. The statistics do not support this as one in three Australian women experience violence in their lifetime.
- These labels encapsulate a person's identity and do not frame the violence as a choice.

Considerations and alternative language

- A man who has chosen to use violence
- An offender or perpetrator of violence against women

CATEGORY: *The violence itself*

TERM: *Violent relationship/Abusive relationship*

Context of use

- Commonly used to describe a relationship with a pattern of violence
- Can sometimes be used to describe the relationship a woman has returned to
- Can be used in legal settings by police, lawyers and judges, but is not a legal term

Positive aspect of the terminology

- Draws attention to intimate-partner violence

Problematic aspect of the terminology

- Relationships are neither violent nor abusive – people are.
- This language places the blame on the relationship or relationship dynamics, rather than on the person choosing to use violence.
- This language suggests both people in the relationship are violent or equally at fault. This shifts blame from the person using violence to both people in the relationship.

Considerations and alternative language

- Name the person using violent behaviour and make them the subject, not the relationship, the situation, or the person who has experienced the violence.

TERM: *But he wasn't physically violent/At least he didn't hit her*

Context of use

- Describes an incident or a pattern of behaviour where physical violence is assumed not to have occurred

Positive aspect of the terminology

- There are no positive aspects of this terminology; it has historically been used, and continues to be used, to justify men's violence against women.

Problematic aspect of the terminology

- Reduces violence against women to only physical violence
- Puts greater importance on physical violence; excuses, minimises, and denies other forms of violence
- Makes assumptions that physical violence didn't occur when it might have. The person might not have recognised the actions of the perpetrator as violence or might be afraid to disclose the physical violence.

Considerations and alternative language

- Check your language: Why is it necessary to comment on the absence of a form of violence? Does this comment minimise the impact of non-physical forms of violence against women?
- Be careful that when you describe an incident of violence that you do not assign a value judgement or hierarchy of one form of violence over another.



TERM: A domestic/Domestic dispute

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to describe an incident of men's violence against women • Generally used by police and the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These terms locate the violence in the family home or context, where women are most at risk of violence. • These terms can also speak to the location police might be attending (i.e. in the home). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frames the incident of violence as a private domestic or family problem and not a crime or human rights violation. • These terms also make the violence that occurs outside the home invisible. Women who are experiencing family violence generally experience violence from their current or former intimate partner in other aspects of their lives. It is not isolated to the home environment. • This language can minimise, trivialise and normalise violence. It does so because it can suggest that if families have conflict, these are private matters and not worth paying attention to or warranting state intervention. • This language relinquishes responsibility of those who commit violence, as well as the individuals who might be aware of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family violence • Intimate-partner violence • Men's violence against women

TERM: Violence came out of the blue/Things got out of hand

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to describe an incident where violence was used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no positive aspects of this terminology; it has historically been used, and continues to be used, to justify men's violence against women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This language perpetuates myths about men's violence against women, as something that occurs 'out of the blue' or 'out of nowhere'. This is untrue, as intimate-partner violence is highly prevalent and involves a pattern of controlling behaviour that provokes fear in the other person. • This language shifts blame and minimises the various forms of violence that have occurred. In reality, there are often many precursors to physical violence including a pattern of controlling behaviours, isolation from friends and family, and intimidation and threats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When describing a violent incident, be careful not to use language that excuses the violence. • Violence that might seem out of character for a person can in fact be an escalation of existing violence or of a pattern of control and intimidation. While the incident could be a one-off incident, this is rare and describing it in such a way minimises the violence and its impact on the woman experiencing it.



TERM: **Stay safe/Don't run with headphones on/Don't go out alone/Don't follow a routine/Let others know where you will be**

Context of use	Positive aspect of the terminology	Problematic aspect of the terminology	Considerations and alternative language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women receive directives or advice on a regular basis, regardless of an actual threat. • When there has been an incident or a series of attacks on women in public spaces, these directives or advice to women often increase. • Police lawyers, judges and the media often use this 'safety' language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These statements provided by a concerned individual or organisational spokesperson are well meaning and are invested in women's public welfare and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These directives or advice can reinforce society's expectation of controlling women's movements. • Notably, these directives or advice are not given to men, despite men being more likely to experience physical violence in public spaces. • Societal gender norms expect men to be able to take care of themselves, but see women as needing protection. • There is no evidence to suggest that these directives, when followed, keep women safe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there have been recent attacks on women in public spaces, alerting the community about these attacks is necessary. • Remind community members to use caution, report suspicious behaviour and attacks. • Importantly, emphasise that women have the right to use public spaces and have freedom of movement. • When speaking about rights, it is also important to speak about responsibilities. Women have the right to be in public spaces and the right to move freely without fear, and men have the responsibility to not violate these rights and to hold other men accountable for their responsibilities.

Responding to curly questions and statements

A significant part of the work of primary prevention practitioners is to talk to others about the problem of men's violence against women and how to prevent it. In doing so, you are likely to receive challenging questions and statements from colleagues and community members about men's violence against women; these can often be difficult to answer.

The topics of men's violence against women, family violence, and gender relations, norms and stereotypes are complex and can prove personally difficult for a lot of people. This can inspire a variety of responses including defensiveness, curiosity, support, concern, disbelief, and sometimes anger. Your safety should always be a priority and it is not encouraged that you continue a conversation if you believe your safety is at risk.

Please note that responding to disclosures of violence against women is not the focus of this resource. However, when talking about preventing men's violence against women, it is not uncommon for prevention practitioners to have individuals disclose their own experience of family and intimate-partner violence. It is important that prevention practitioners are prepared for how to respond to disclosures, and should this arise, are aware of the referral pathways to appropriate specialist services. For information about how to respond to disclosures, and the support services that are available, please see appendices one and two.

STEPS IN RESPONDING TO CURLY QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

To support you to respond to curly questions and statements about men's violence against women, here are some key steps to follow and suggestions for content when you respond.

Step 1: Acknowledge the person's question or statement

- * Given the nature of the topics of men's violence against women and gender, people can feel very strongly about the questions they ask or statements they make
- * Acknowledging that you have heard the person's question or statement can be a helpful way to begin a respectful conversation
- * This is not the same as suggesting that you agree with their question or statement. Rather, it demonstrates to the person that you are listening to them and have understood what they said.
- * You might like to do this by repeating their question or statement to them, to confirm you have heard and understood it correctly. For example:
 - * 'It sounds like you are concerned about violence against men in Australia?'
 - * 'Listening to what you have said, you are asking if alcohol causes men's violence against women?'
 - * 'If I'm hearing you correctly, you think that women-specific initiatives are discriminatory against men?'



Step 2: Clarify their concern

- * There are often many elements to a question and sometimes a person's main concern can be unclear
- * We can also make our own assumptions about what the person is asking, based on past experiences of common questions or statements that we are asked, or presumptions about the person's perceived agenda
- * Seeking clarification is important in order to gain more information about the person's question and to ensure that you are able to answer it correctly or to the best of your ability
- * A way to achieve this is by asking open-ended questions, which not only encourages the speaker to provide more information, but communicates to the person asking the question that their ideas matter to you. For example:
 - * 'Can you tell me a bit more about your concern?'
 - * 'Is your question based on something you have heard or been told?'
 - * 'When you say "violence against men", can you tell me a little bit more about what do you mean by this?'
 - * 'Can I clarify what you mean by women-specific initiatives being discriminatory?'

Step 3: Correct and communicate your response statement

- * Curly questions are an important opportunity for practitioners to communicate key concepts and messages about preventing men's violence against women, and to dispel myths or victim-blaming statements
- * Upon acknowledging and clarifying the question or statement, it is important to respond with a strong, clear and concise statement. This can be one or two sentences that emphasis the main points you want to communicate, and that you hope the person takes away from the conversation.
- * It is important you assert your key statements respectfully. This is not only of ethical importance, but will also increase the likelihood that the person will engage and be open to receiving the message.
- * Suggestions for responses to common questions are provided in the table on the next few pages.

Step 4: Support your statement

- * Having communicated your response statement, it can be helpful to reference a particular piece of supporting evidence
- * The level of supporting information you provide will depend on many things that include:
 - * How your response statement was received (were they satisfied with this or do they appear unconvinced?)
 - * The tone of the conversation (is this a formal or informal conversation?)
 - * If the interaction is in person or via email or phone call (it will be easier to refer to this resource for supporting information). Evidence can be hard to remember, so it is fine to offer to send the evidence to the person via email at a later date.
- * Organised under common themes, some suggestions for evidence to support your responses are provided in the table on the next few pages.

RESPONSE STATEMENTS AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

THEME: *Violence against men*

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Why is there a focus only on violence against women? What about violence against men?

Response statements

- Violence towards any person is unacceptable and more action is needed to ensure all Australians are safe from violence.
- Women and men are at greater risk of different types of violence, so we need different strategies for each. This doesn't mean one is more important than another.
- There are policy, laws and programs that redress violence against men, such as 'coward punches' and other street-violence initiatives. Prevention of street violence often receives greater funding and attention than violence that affects women.
- Challenging men's violence is working to keep both women and men safe because:
 - » The majority of street and family violence that boys and men experience is also at the hands of men
 - » Men perpetrate the majority of all violence in Australia against women, children and other men.
- Women and men both experience intimate-partner violence. However, the prevalence, severity and impacts are greater for women than for men, so it requires more attention.
- Women are far more likely than men to experience ongoing violence, require medical attention, fear for their lives, and to be murdered.

Supporting evidence

- For 95 per cent of women and 95 per cent of men who have experienced violence since the age of 15, the perpetrator was male.²
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics' latest national personal safety survey revealed that sexual violence was four times more common for women than men.³
- The latest national personal safety survey revealed that women who had experienced violence by a previous partner were more likely than men to have experienced more than one incident.⁴
- In 2012, women comprised 87 per cent of partner assault victim/survivors in Australia.⁵
- An eleven-year trend analysis of Victorian police, court and health system data revealed that women are at least six times more likely than men to experience intimate-partner physical assault.⁶
- Women are more likely than men to: be sexually assaulted; fear for their lives due to enacted violence of the threat of violence; sustain physical injuries; experience psychological harm, including mental health problems; experience post-separation violence from their former partner; require medical attention or hospitalisation; experience repeated violence in intimate relationships; and/or be murdered by their partner of former partner.⁷



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Aren't rates of intimate-partner violence lower for men because they are less likely than women to report it?

Response statements

- Australia has a strong victim-blaming culture that makes it hard for people to report intimate-partner violence and sexual assault.
- Evidence suggests that men face some of the same, as well as different, barriers to reporting family violence, but these barriers are no greater than those faced by women.
- There are many barriers for women and men to report violence and seek support. For example, assumptions about masculinity that depict men who need help as weak, and ideas about femininity that say women should be submissive and not cause trouble, make reporting violence difficult for both women and men.
- Shame and fear of not being believed can prevent both women and men from seeking help. However, research shows that women face the additional barriers of fear of retaliation and escalating violence from their partner or former partner, which is a significantly higher risk for women than men.

Supporting evidence

- An estimated 67 per cent of women who have been physically assaulted by a male partner, have not contacted the police after their most recent incident of physical assault.⁸
- Research shows that violence often escalates and becomes more unpredictable when women leave. Women are at the highest risk of being murdered by a partner or former partner when trying to leave, and in the immediate-to-medium term period after having left a violent partner.⁹

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

There are services for women who have experienced or are experiencing intimate-partner violence and sexual violence. Are there support services for men too? If not, why not?

Response statements

- It is important that there are services for all Australians who have experienced family violence, and there are currently a range of services available for men, women and children who have, or are currently experiencing, intimate-partner violence, including sexual assault and family violence services.
- Given the limited funding (relative to demand) allocated to family violence services across Australia, we need to allocate services on the basis of need. This means greater investment in services primarily for women and children who form the majority of victim/survivors of family violence.
- A significant amount of government funding is dedicated to where men are most at risk of violence, such as public-street violence including alcohol-fuelled violence.

Supporting evidence

- Men's Referral Service is a men's-specific service. It offers support for men who use violent and controlling behaviour, as well as providing support to men who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, family violence. More information: <http://mrs.org.au/>
- The Victims of Crime Helpline is provided by the State Government, and provide a range of services to victims of crime, including men who have experienced family violence. More information: <http://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/home/the+crime/get+help/>
- During the Napthine Government's term, a commitment of \$300 million of funding was allocated to the Protective Services Officers to redress violence on public transport. Victoria Police 2012-2013 crime statistics showed that over the past five years, an average of 1,261 assaults have occurred at public transport locations across the state, which is an increase of 13 per cent over this period. In contrast, police attendances at family violence incidents almost doubled during this time. Despite this, the Napthine Government committed only \$20 million to respond to family violence during its term, which was 10 per cent of the amount provided to fund Protective Services Officers.¹⁰



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Don't alcohol and drugs cause violence against women?

Response statements

- Alcohol and drug use and abuse do not cause violence against women.
 - » Many men who consume alcohol and drugs are not violent towards women and many men who use violence against women do not drink alcohol or take drugs
 - » Alcohol is not necessary, nor sufficient on its own, for violence against women to occur.
- Alcohol consumption and drugs can make existing violence against women worse.
 - » Alcohol can exacerbate existing patterns of violence and control, which stems from entrenched gender inequality.
- Alcohol is not a cause – it is an excuse.
 - » Men who choose to use violence against women often use alcohol as an excuse
 - » Excusing violence when someone is intoxicated justifies the behaviour. Men choose when and who to be violent towards, even when intoxicated.

Supporting evidence

- Alcohol and drug use has been found to influence the frequency and severity of intimate-partner violence, but does not cause assaults.¹¹
- Various research studies have shown that where alcohol and drug use and abuse is a concern for a perpetrator, they are most commonly violent when not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.¹²
- Nine per cent of Australians agree that domestic violence can be excused if the offender is heavily affected by alcohol.¹³
- Nine per cent of Australians believe that a man is less responsible for rape if he is drunk or drug-affected at the time of the assault.¹⁴

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Men are violent to women because they grow up in a violent home.

Response statements

- Childhood exposure to violence against women does not cause later perpetration of violence.
 - » Sexism and violence against women are learned attitudes and behaviours, but not all men who grow up in violent homes choose to be violent
 - » Childhood experiences of violence are not necessary, or sufficient factors on their own, for later perpetration of violence to occur
 - » Violence against women is always a choice, not a predetermined behaviour
 - » Some men who have experienced violence as a child go on to become strong advocates for ending men's violence against women, as they have witnessed its pervasive impacts first hand.

Supporting evidence

- This common belief draws on learning or intergenerational transmission theories of violence.
- Research looking at childhood experiences of violence and later perpetration has had mixed results. While some studies have shown an association between childhood exposure to violence and later perpetration, research has shown that most children growing up with violence will become adults who are not perpetrators.¹⁵

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Violence often happens because the man is angry or just loses control.

Response statements

- Anger is an emotion. Violence is a behaviour used to maintain control.
 - » We all get angry, but the majority of us do not respond by choosing to be violent
 - » Intimate-partner violence does not happen because a man loses control. Rather, they use violence to maintain power and control of their partner.
 - » Abusive tactics are often employed by perpetrators regardless of if they are angry or not, and are commonly remediated.
- Violence does not happen because of a loss of control.
 - » Men who use violence against women demonstrate significant control and make choices about their violence. For example, they choose who to be violent towards, they choose when and where to use such behaviour.
 - » Loss of control is an excuse often used by perpetrators when the existing pattern of violence escalates to physical violence.

Supporting evidence

- 64 per cent of Australians think that men being unable to control their anger causes violence against women. Anger is never an excuse for using violence.¹⁶
- 22 per cent of Australians believe that domestic violence is excusable if a person gets so angry they lose control – but violence is a choice.¹⁷
- 43 per cent of Australians agree that rape is the result of men not being able to control their need for sex.¹⁸
- An eleven-year trend analysis of Victorian police, court and health system data revealed that controlling behaviour by the perpetrator was one of the most frequently identified risk indicators for family violence incidents recorded by police. Controlling behaviour by the perpetrator towards the victim/survivor was also identified as a risk indicator for family violence incidents. Controlling behaviour was also a risk for twice as many female victim/survivors as males.¹⁹

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Why doesn't she just leave? Surely women would leave if it was that bad?

Response statements

- Focusing on why a woman doesn't leave, rather than why a man is violent, makes it harder for women.
 - » While it is awful to think of a woman living with a violent partner, it is important to reflect on why our first question is most often, 'why doesn't she leave?' Rather than, 'why is he violent?' or 'why is violence against women still occurring in our society?'
- Women are unable to leave for many reasons:
 - » Women face numerous barriers to leaving a violent partner, including having nowhere to go; a lack of financial resources; being socially isolated; and a fear of losing their children
 - » Women are justified in their fear of leaving violent partners, as this is when threats to kill often escalate and women are at greatest risk of being murdered
 - » Leaving a violent partner is extremely difficult. Women often make several attempts to leave before they are able to do so successfully. This is why it is so vital to invest in specialist women's family violence services that can support women to leave safely.

Supporting evidence

- National research undertaken by VicHealth found that 51 per cent of Australians believe that most women could leave a violent partner if they really wanted to.²⁰
- A VicHealth national study found that 8 out of 10 Australians find it hard to understand why women stay with a violent partner.²¹
- A national report found that 35 per cent of Australian women who had experienced violence from a current partner in the last five years, had left and returned to their partner at least once.²²
- Research has highlighted that many women report not ending a violent relationship because they are financially dependent on their abusive partner and/or are threatened with financial consequences if they try to leave. Some women are also forced to return to their partners because of financial insecurity, particularly if they have dependent children.²³



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Does gender inequality actually cause men's violence against women?

Response statements

- Gender inequality enables men to make the choice to use violence against women.
 - » Gender inequality causes women's lives, experiences, voices, and civic contributions to be of less value to society than those of men
 - » Male dominance and the devaluing of women create an environment in which men can use violence against women to express and maintain power and control.
- Research shows that gender inequality is the most consistent factor that increases the likelihood of violence against women.
 - » Gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of men's violence against women
 - » An unequal distribution of power between women and men, along with rigid assumptions about the roles of women and men, are the most consistent factors present when men choose to use violence against women.
- Preventing violence against women starts with challenging and working to redress gender inequality.
 - » This means changing all the structures, systems, norms and attitudes that support gender inequality.

Supporting evidence

- Research has found that the strongest factors correlating with high levels of violence against women are societal, structural and relationship-level gender inequalities associated with the unequal distribution of power and resources, and attitudes and norms that support rigid gender roles.²⁴
- Evidence shows that men, who hold traditional views about gender roles and relationships, have a strong belief in male dominance. Or that those who have sexually hostile attitudes towards women, are more likely to excuse, tolerate or perpetrate violence, than those men who do not.²⁵
- At the societal and community levels, the risk of violence against women has been found to be higher when resources such as education and income are distributed unequally between women and men, and when women's economic, social and political rights are poorly protected. Men's violence against women is also more prevalent when there are rigid distinctions between the roles of women and men, and between masculine and feminine identities.²⁶
- Violence is more common in families and relationships in which men control decision-making and is less so in relationships in which women have a greater level of independence.²⁷
- At the individual level, among the most consistent predictors of the perpetration of violence against women are traditional views about gender roles and relationships, attitudes that support male dominance in relationships, and attitudes that reflect sexual hostility towards women.²⁸

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Isn't it a narrow point of view to think that gender equality will end men's violence against women? Don't other factors play a role?

Response statements

- Primary prevention works to redress gender inequity, as we need to take action where we can make the greatest impact for change. This means tackling the root cause of men's violence against women – which is gender inequality.
 - » We work to achieve gender equality because it is the most significant factor that increases the likelihood of violence against women occurring
 - » Achieving gender equality won't end all violence in society, but it will end all gender-based violence against women
 - » If we achieve gender equality, it is likely that family and intimate-partner violence will not be disproportionately perpetrated by men against women, and will not arise out of gender socialisation and gender-based inequalities.
- Other factors, such as childhood exposure to violence, or alcohol and drug abuse, can contribute to violence against women by making existing violence worse.
 - » Gender inequality is always present in the perpetration of men's violence against women, while contributing factors such as alcohol abuse is not always present
 - » Redressing contributing factors alone will never end men's violence against women. We need to tackle the underlying attitudes, norms and structures that support gender inequality, if we want to end men's violence against women in Australia.

Supporting evidence

- The strongest factors that correlate with higher levels of violence against women are structural and individual gender inequalities, and attitudes and norms supporting a gender hierarchy and rigid gender roles.²⁹
- Factors such as low education and childhood exposure to violence, alcohol and drug abuse are associated with an increased statistical likelihood of violence against women occurring. However, the research has shown that these factors contribute to violence but do not cause violence against women on their own. That is why we call these 'contributing factors'.³⁰
- Contributing factors are not enough on their own to lead to violence. They only play a role when they occur in conjunction with gender-based power inequalities and rigid gender roles.³¹
- Research has found that alcohol abuse only increases the likelihood of a man perpetrating violence, if he already holds attitudes and beliefs that condoned/supported violence, gender inequality or rigid gender roles.³²



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Violence against women is a huge problem, surely it's too big to prevent?

Response statements

- Violence against women is not inevitable – it is preventable.
 - » Countries that have greater equality between women and men tend to have lower levels of violence against women
 - » Research has identified specific factors that are linked to the perpetration of violence against women. Many of these factors can be changed or eliminated, which suggests that violence against women can be prevented.
 - » Attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that support violence against women are learned and transferred across generations – and can therefore be changed

Supporting evidence

- The United Nations' Development Fund for Women measured data from four of the largest international gender equity indices, against data from 56 countries on physical and sexual violence. The results revealed that countries with the lowest rates of gender equality also had the highest rates of men's violence against women.³³
- There are substantial variations in the prevalence of violence against women between countries and regions, which suggests that some of the key factors that influence violence are likely to lie at population-level social and economic conditions.³⁴
- The prevention of violence against women is an emerging area of practice. However, there is broad international consensus that the prospects for primary prevention are sound.³⁵

THEME: **Family violence**

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Aren't the rates of family violence over-exaggerated? Don't women often make up false claims of violence or sexual assault?

Response statements

- The rates of family violence are not over-exaggerated. In fact, the opposite is true – family violence is extremely under-reported.
 - » For many women, fear, stigma, perceived shame, and having nowhere to go means that they do not report their experiences of intimate-partner violence
 - » Australian research has revealed that the majority of women who experience intimate-partner violence do not report their experience of violence to the police.
- Research demonstrates that false claims of men's violence against women are rare.
 - » International research demonstrates that false reports of domestic violence by women in order to gain child custody are very rare, despite more than half of Australians believing this to be true³⁶
 - » Research and police data confirm that the majority of accusations of intimate-partner violence and sexual assault that women make are sincere.

Supporting evidence

- A state-wide Victoria Police research report found only 2.1 per cent of rape reports were designated by police as false.³⁷
- The Australian National Safety Survey (2012) revealed that an estimated 67 per cent of women had not been in contact with the police after their most recent incident of physical assault by a male partner.³⁸
- The Australian National Safety Survey (2012) revealed that 26 per cent of women who had experienced violence from their current partner had never told anyone about it.³⁹
- VicHealth research revealed that nearly 2 in 5 (38 per cent) Australians believe that, 'a lot of times, women who say they are raped had led the man on and then had regrets'.⁴⁰
- VicHealth research highlights that 53 per cent of Australians believe that women often make false claims of domestic violence to improve their prospects in cases concerning care arrangements for children following separation.⁴¹



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Most people argue or fight. When does it become intimate-partner violence? Isn't it just arguing? I mean everyone gets angry and fed up. Aren't you allowed to yell anymore?

Response statements

- Intimate-partner violence is about ongoing patterns of power and control.
 - » Arguments happen, but when they are connected to acts where one partner is dominant and controls the other, it is not just an isolated argument or fight
 - » Intimate-partner violence and family violence involves a systematic pattern of power and control where the perpetrator uses a range of physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion against their partner
 - » Intimate-partner violence is abusive or intimidating behaviour by a partner, or former partner, designed to control, dominate, humiliate or instil fear in the other person
 - » Intimate-partner violence can include isolated incidents, but what might appear as an isolated incident is commonly part of a pattern of abuse.

Supporting evidence

- Intimate-partner violence and family violence is the repeated use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member or someone with whom they have, or had, an intimate relationship.⁴²
- When it comes to men's violence against female partners or ex-partners, rather than talking about isolated aggressive acts, most often we are talking about a pattern of behaviour, designed to exert power and control.
- Men's physical violence towards women in relationships and families is frequently accompanied by other forms of abusive, controlling and harmful behaviour.
- Historically, violence prevention advocates have used the term 'domestic violence' to refer to a systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one person (most often a man) against another (most often a woman), involving a variety of physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion in the context of a current or former intimate relationship.⁴³

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Are some women more at risk of intimate-partner violence than others? Why?

Response statements

- All women are at risk of violence, but women who are marginalised and disadvantaged are at greater risk of violence and its impacts.
 - » Women who face multiple levels of discrimination are more likely to be targeted by men, and will have less economic and social options for leaving violent situations
 - » Men who use violence often target women who they perceive as less powerful or isolated – such as women who are unable to communicate to others what has happened to them; those restricted in their physical movement; women with limited economic options; women who are culturally isolated; or women who are geographically or socially isolated
 - » Isolation can also make it harder to get help or leave a situation. Some perpetrators use social isolation as a form of controlling behaviour.
 - » Women who are marginalised, have less access to power and resources, and face prejudice are at greater risk of violence.

Supporting evidence

- Women with a disability are twice as likely to experience violence as other women, but less likely to receive an adequate service response.⁴⁴
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be a victim/survivor of violence. Around 22 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women over the age of 18 years have reported that they had been a victim of physical violence or threatened with violence in the past 12 months.⁴⁵

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

The rates of family violence in the west are high and increasing. Why is this?

Response statements

- Rates of reported family violence in the west are increasing because violence against women continues to be perpetrated, and now women are more likely to seek help.
 - » Increasing awareness leads to increases in the rates of reported family violence, as more women and children disclose and seek help
 - » The west has undertaken significant work over recent years to create an integrated family violence service system; improve police response; and raise awareness of family violence in the community.
- Increasing reporting rates do not reflect the true prevalence of violence against women as it continues to be an under-reported crime.
 - » The high rates of a mostly under-reported crime demonstrate that family violence is a major problem for the western region and Victoria.

Supporting evidence

- In 2006, the Victorian State Government began reforming the family violence service system across the state. Since July 2006, women and children affected by family violence in the western metropolitan region have been supported by a consortium of local agencies including Women's Health West, cohealth, Elizabeth Hoffman House, and McAuley Community Services for Women. More information is available from the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee website: <http://www.wifvc.org.au/about-wifvc/integrated-service-system/>



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

If people are happy with their traditional gender roles, what is so bad about that?

Response statements

- » If traditional genders roles forced upon family members are rigid or disadvantage individuals, they perpetuate gender inequality and increase women's vulnerability to violence. Especially when women challenge these rigid gender stereotypes and how they interpret their role.
- » Many traditional gender roles promote male dominance and power over women, and support inequality between women and men. It is important we challenge roles in society that support inequality and dominance of one group over another.
- » Families will decide what works best for them and divide up roles and responsibilities accordingly. However, it is important that we all reflect on the impact of these choices in regards to access to power and resources.

Supporting evidence

- Rigid gender roles and inequality between women and men are two prominent factors that feature in the evidence-base around the causes of violence against women.⁴⁶
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that, 'a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women'.⁴⁷
- At an individual level, among the most consistent predictors of the perpetration of violence against women are traditional views about gender roles and relationships; attitudes that support male dominance in relationships; and attitudes that reflect sexual hostility towards women.⁴⁸

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Violence is more common in Islamic culture and religion.

Response statements

- The realisation of gender equality is an ongoing process for the majority of religions and cultures around the world.
- Religious dress practices are common among many religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam.
 - » It is important to distinguish between a form of religious dress, and an ideology that promotes gender inequality
 - » It is common that people following a specific religion adopt a style of dress or ornament that represents their faith
 - » The hijab is a form of religious dress. It is not a harmful practice in and of itself, and does not suppress women who choose to wear it.

Supporting evidence

- For more information about religious dress and gender equality, please view the following online articles:
 - » <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/09/living/five-things-veils/>
 - » <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11120588/Muslim-women-reveal-why-they-wear-the-veil-burqa-school-debate.html>
 - » <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2015/jun/24/hijab-not-oppression-feminist-statement-video>

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Isn't violence against women more of a problem for some cultures than others? Why don't we just focus on violence against women in migrant and refugee communities?

Response statements

- Violence against women is a problem in all cultures, including Anglo-Australian culture.
 - » It is more likely that we make excuses or minimise the violence that appears in Australian culture because it is normalised. This can give a distorted perception. We often recognise and condemn the violence we see in other communities, but are blind to the violence that exists within our own.
 - » We need to challenge practices in all cultures that are based on prejudice, and that lead to human rights violations and harmful outcomes for women and men.
- Violence against women happens in all cultures – but that doesn't make it okay.
 - » All women have the right to live free from violence regardless of their culture, nationality or religious background
 - » Traditional cultural practices and beliefs exist in all communities; most are beneficial to all members, but some are harmful to specific groups, particularly women and girls.

Supporting evidence

- Traditional and cultural practices that position men as dominant and having greater power and control over women and girls, are evident across the world. Examples include: men have a right to assert power over women and are considered socially superior; men have a right to physically discipline women for 'incorrect' behaviour; physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict in a relationship; intimate-partner violence is a 'taboo' subject; divorce is shameful; sex is men's right; sexual activity (including rape) is a marker of masculinity; and that women are responsible for controlling men's sexual urges.⁴⁹
- There is a long history of patriarchal practices in Australia. For example:
 - » Prior to the Jury Act of 1964, women were not deemed qualified to act as jurors and were disqualified from exercising any public function⁵⁰
 - » Only men and unmarried women could hold property titles until 1882⁵¹
 - » Prior to the 1980s a man could not be accused of raping his wife, and had immunity to all sexual assault committed in marriage⁵²
 - » Prior to 1961, men could divorce women on the grounds of adultery, but women couldn't divorce their husband if he was unfaithful.⁵³
- Harmful practices include: female genital mutilation/cutting; child marriage; dowry price; and practices that prevent women and girls' reproductive rights such as access to fertility control, medical and surgical abortion, and son preference and female infanticide.



QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

Aren't men just better leaders? But what if women don't want to be leaders?

Response statements

- The belief that men are better leaders or more suited to leadership positions than women is a sexist idea informed by gender stereotypes.
 - » There is no evidence that demonstrates that men are biologically more suited to leadership positions than women
 - » The qualities of good leaders are taught, and consciously and unconsciously boys are taught these qualities and traits more often than girls.
- Leadership opportunities must be based on individual interest, skills and knowledge, not on gender role expectations and constraints.
 - » Some women and men will not want to be leaders based on their personality and individual preference
 - » It is important to recognise that society teaches women that they should step back and be led, rather than lead
 - » Encouragement, mentorship and structural opportunities for leadership are vital for women to counteract gender role socialisation that expects women to be led, rather than lead.

Supporting evidence

- Yale University research has shown that unconscious gender bias in hiring leads to certain job criteria being deemed more important depending on the gender of the candidate. Researchers conclude that while the employers felt that they had chosen 'the right man for the job', in fact the way they interpreted the criteria and candidate, they had actually chosen the 'right job criteria for the man'.⁵⁴

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

If gender is about everyone, why are so many gender equity initiatives for women? Aren't women-specific initiatives discriminatory against men?

Response statements

- Australian men as a group have greater access to power and resources. Gender equity initiatives therefore often focus on women in order to achieve equal outcomes for all.
 - » Treating women and men the same will often exacerbate existing inequalities, as women and men are not on a level playing field to begin with in many areas of life.
- Women-specific initiatives are equity measures that recognise the specific barriers faced by women that do not exist for men. The intent of such initiatives is to be fair, so that equality can be achieved.
 - » Initiatives that do not target a specific group or are labelled 'gender neutral' tend to favour the dominant group by default
 - » There are more women's gender equity initiatives, as while women make up 50 per cent of the Australian population, as a group they do not have 50 per cent of the power and/or resources
 - » Male-focused gender equity initiatives also exist. For example, White Ribbon Day targets men and masculinity in the struggle to end men's violence against women.

Supporting evidence

- Initiatives to foster greater equality often involve supporting groups of people who face entrenched discrimination, so that they can have similar access to opportunities as others in the community. These initiatives are sometimes referred to as 'special measures', 'positive discrimination' or 'affirmative action', and are allowed under federal anti-discrimination laws.
- For more information about 'special measures', including gender equality measures, refer to the following information from the Australian Human Rights Commission: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12099>

QUESTION OR STATEMENT:

We have women in leadership roles in our organisation, so gender equity isn't a problem.

Response statements

- Having women in leadership roles does not mean that gender equality exists in an organisation.
 - » Women and men can hold unconscious gender bias and perpetuate barriers to women's leadership in an organisation
 - » Organisations that have some women in leadership can still have a predominantly masculine culture that rewards individuals who exhibit traditionally masculine traits (aggressive, assertive, dominant) and penalise traditionally feminine traits (collaboration, teamwork, nurturing)
 - » Having women in leadership does not mean that feminine and non-traditional styles of leadership are celebrated, acknowledged, valued and rewarded
 - » Even if women are in leadership roles in an organisation, research shows that women are judged more harshly and required to prove their competency more.

Supporting evidence

- The University of Melbourne Business School Gender Equity Project's research into gender bias found individuals still see masculine traits as producing better leaders. Women who have masculine traits are seen as more competent, and women who display more feminine traits are seen as more likeable, but less competent and less likely to succeed in their future careers, as well as being less suitable for recruitment.⁵⁵



Responding to disclosures⁵⁶

Women often first tell someone about their experience of family violence at a point of crisis – few women approach family violence services or police in the first instance.

Women are more likely to approach friends, family, and members of various helping professions including general practitioners, child specialists, maternal and child health nurses, or family support staff. Response to disclosure is often significant in determining the women's subsequent help-seeking behaviour.

Responding to disclosures of violence:

- * Listen empathically. It is okay if you don't know what to do or say at this point, it is enough to simply listen. Later you can find out where to refer her to, and other important things to do to assist and provide support.
- * Believe her and communicate belief. It is often very difficult to disclose experiences of violence, and a reason for this can be that women fear that they will not be believed. For example, one response can be: 'it must have been hard for you to talk about this, a lot of women are often afraid that they won't be believed'.
- * Respond supportively and without judgment. It is important to support a woman in the decisions she makes. You can do this through respecting and trusting her assessment of the situation, and supporting and validating her feelings. Allow her to work through her own issues, affirm and encourage her to make her own decisions. Don't push her to make decisions that you think she should make.
- * Validate what the woman is saying and her decision to disclose. For example: 'it is completely understandable that you're feeling this way'. 'It has taken a lot of courage to tell me about something that is so difficult for you.'
- * Provide reassurance. Emphasise the unacceptability of the violence, and that the violence is not her fault. For example: 'you don't deserve what is happening to you'. 'Responsibility for the violence always sits with the person who chooses to be violent.'
- * Assure the woman that her feelings and reactions are normal survival responses for coping with terrorising and/or life threatening events and circumstances. Let her know that violence is prevalent in our community.
- * Enquire about their safety. For example: 'is it safe for you to go home?' 'Do you have somewhere safe you can stay, such as with a friend or relative?'

Confidentially consult with a colleague or your manager if you are concerned about the woman and her children's safety:

- * Encourage her to talk to someone with specialist family violence expertise in this area and help to find an appropriate person or service
- * Ask how you might be of assistance
- * Help her to work out a plan for how she (and her children if she has them) might stay safe.

It is also important to be conscious of your immediate reactions and respond in ways that provide assurance, support, belief and encouragement, even if your initial reaction is one of shock, panic or disbelief.

Be aware of your own reactions to the disclosure. Sometimes disclosures of violence can tap into previous personal experiences. If this is the case, it is important to debrief confidentially with a trusted colleague or other relevant person following the time with the woman.

Unhelpful responses to disclosures:

- * Talking down – 'well, it's obvious that you're not thinking straight so you just leave it all to me'
- * Ordering – 'I think you should leave him and I'll get you into the refuge'
- * Avoidance – 'maybe we can talk about that later?'
- * Logical argument – 'it's a fact that violence only gets worse over time'
- * Judging – 'you know its harmful to expose the children to this'.



List of tertiary and support services

Police

Emergency response (24 hours)

P: 000

safe steps: Family Violence Response Centre

Provides telephone counselling and referral to safe accommodation.

P: 03) 9373 0123 or free call: 1800 015 188 (24 hours)

In Touch – Multicultural Centre Against family Violence

Provides culturally-sensitive services to meet the needs of women and children affected by family violence who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

P: 03) 8413 6800 or free call: 1800 755 988

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA)

Counselling, legal information and support to victims/survivors of recent and past sexual assault/abuse (including incest). To contact any CASA in Victoria, call the Sexual Assault Crisis and Counselling Line. P: 1800 806 292 (24 hours)

Women's Health West

Provides women and children in the western region with a range of family violence services – such as court support, crisis housing, case management, and women's and children's counselling.

P: (03) 9689 9588 | Weekdays 9–5pm

Kids Help Line

Provides support and information for children

P: 1800 551 800 (24 hours)

Victim's Support Agency

Provides a central resource for victims of crime.

P: 03) 8684 6700

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service

Assists victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault, and works with families and communities affected by violence.

P: 1800 105 303

Elizabeth Hoffman House

A range of services (legal, counselling, information and referral) for Aboriginal women and their children in need of support due to family violence.

P: 1800 796 112 | 24hrs, 7 days

Victims of Crime Helpline

Information, advice and referrals to assist victims to manage and recover from the impacts of crime.

P: 1800 819 817

Victims Assistance and Counselling Program

A network of services operating throughout Victoria that provide access to support, outreach services, court support, referrals, and support groups.

P: 1800 819 817

Men's Referral Service

Provides free, anonymous, and confidential telephone counselling, information, and referrals to men to assist them to take action to stop using violent and controlling behaviour.

P: 03) 9428 2899 or 1800 065 973 | Weekdays 9am – 9pm

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (Vic.)

Provides a free, confidential and anonymous telephone counselling, referral and information service for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) community and its supporters. Counsellors are available Mon/Tue/Thurs 6pm-10pm, Wed 2pm-10pm, Fri–Sun and Public Holidays 6pm–9pm

P: 9663 2939

Community Health Centres

Offer counselling as well as support groups for women and their children affected by family violence. To find your nearest centre, go to:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/commhealth/directory.htm>

References

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