

Understanding why men's violence against women occurs

An evidence-based background paper
for the primary prevention of violence
against women

PUBLICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The team from Women's Health and VicHealth have led the development of several pieces of work that make up the Preventing Violence Together training package. This work includes:

- Module 1 - Introduction to the prevention of men's violence against women
- Module 2 - Drivers of men's violence against women and taking action
- Understanding the role of gender inequality in men's violence against women: a conceptual model

This resource, *Understanding why men's violence against women occurs: an evidence-based background paper for the primary prevention of violence against women*, was commissioned to build the knowledge base of the sector and increase understanding of the drivers of men's violence against women. This background paper greatly aided development of the training resources listed above.

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INTRODUCTION

This background paper explores how the two drivers of men's violence against women — the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, and rigid gender roles and stereotypes — enable violence against women to occur.

The resource draws on the internationally recognised ecological approach to understanding violence against women, developed by Dr Lori Heise. This approach conceptualises violence against women as a multifaceted interplay among the individual, organisational, and institutional factors in our sociocultural landscape (VicHealth 2007). An ecological approach acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between behaviours and the environments in which people live, work and play.

The background paper explores the drivers of men's violence against women at each level of the ecological approach and their interconnections, through which we can focus our work on the factors that put people at risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence, and in doing so, develop effective and targeted primary prevention strategies.

The background paper is designed to be utilised in conjunction with the Preventing Violence Together training package.

TERMINOLOGY

A **driver** is an element that provides the impulse or motivation that fixes or conditions an outcome (Merriam-Webster 2015). Drivers of violence against women are underlying elements within every level of society that establish the conditions, which lead to the outcome of violence against women. The words describing the drivers in this paper are those predominantly used in current literature: 'unequal distribution of power and resources' and 'rigid gender roles and stereotypes'. The next section explores these terms more fully.

Gender equity describes the process of being fair to men and women. In doing so we recognise diversity and disadvantage, and this requires directing resources and services towards those most in need to ensure equal (but not the same) outcomes for all.

Gender equality describes the concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by strict gender roles, and that different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

Many factors have been identified as contributing to higher levels of violence against women. When a **contributing factor** comes into contact with one or both of the two key drivers that give rise to violence against women, violence is more likely to occur. While the contributing factor can appear to be the cause, extensive research has shown that gender-based violence only occurs when the key drivers are also present. For example, intoxication from alcohol or drugs can contribute to the severity and frequency of intimate partner violence perpetrated by men who hold attitudes and beliefs that condone and support violence, gender inequity or rigid gender roles and stereotypes. Alcohol and drugs will not cause an individual to be violent if they don't already hold violence-supportive attitudes. Hence, such factors can be referred to as 'contributing factors' rather than key drivers, as they contribute to the perpetration of violence against women but do not determine its occurrence on their own.



DRIVERS OF MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND RESOURCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Institutions, systems, communities, organisations and individuals determine how power and resources are allocated, distributed and utilised across all levels of society. The most powerful people, organisations and institutions often use their resources to maintain their power and privilege.

In Australia, men predominantly hold positions of power comparative to women across all three levels of society outlined in this paper, when measured against evidence-based indicators. This power affords men greater access to economic and social resources, decision-making and leadership positions, and other opportunities in the public and private domain.

Men's social privilege and greater access to power and resources sits within a historical context. Men in today's society continue to have greater decision-making power and control within families, organisations, communities, and social institutions and systems comparative to women.

In Australia, men almost exclusively hold the highest paid and most powerful positions and their power and privilege are therefore consistently reinforced. For example, men are more likely to appoint other men into leadership positions within the community, organisations and institutions.

This affords men a collective sense of entitlement and upholds their high level of access to resources that maintain these social structures. This contributes to men's high visibility and power, while reinforcing women's lower status in the public sphere.

In an environment where men's contributions are highly valued, and women's contributions are devalued, the flow-on effect is that men's violence against women is more permissible. In a society where laws, policies, structures, the physical environment and cultural norms are created by men, women subsequently have less access to power and social, political and economic resources.

- Women make up 12 per cent of the boards for Australia's top 200 companies (WGEA 2015)
- Women make up 20.1 per cent of director positions and 15.5 per cent of Australia's top 200 companies have no women on their boards at all (WGEA 2015)
- Women held 12 per cent of government board appointments as of June 2013 (Commonwealth of Australia 2012)
- In the federal parliament of Prime Minister Turnbull, five of the 21 cabinet ministers are women (Commonwealth of Australia 2015)
- There are more than twice as many male federal parliamentarians as female (69 per cent male compared to 31 per cent female) (WHW 2014)
- Women in Australia who work full time earn on average 17.9 per cent less than their male peers, and the gap has remained at this level for close to two decades (WGEA 2015)
- Women are more likely to engage in part-time and casual work in roles characterised by high demands and little control over conditions. In Australia, women account for over half (55.3 per cent) of all casual employees, and women constitute 69 per cent of all part-time employees (WGEA 2015)
- Of people aged 65 and older receiving the aged pension, 55.6 per cent are women (WGEA 2015)
- Average superannuation balances for women are 46.6 per cent less than those of men, and 2.8 million women compared to 1.6 million men aged 15 years and over are not covered by superannuation (WGEA 2015; Australian Human Rights Commission 2010)
- Female graduate salaries are only 90.6 per cent of male graduate salaries (WGEA 2015)

RIGID GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES

In our society, individuals, communities, organisations, institutions and systems create, maintain and reinforce rigid gender roles and stereotypes. Gender roles are learned through the process of socialisation and cultural expectations.

Gender stereotypes reinforce the perception of men as strong, powerful, logical and authoritative, and women as emotional, illogical, weak and powerless. This subsequently constructs social norms that devalue women comparative to men. Rigid gender roles and stereotypes create an environment that limits both women's and men's choices, opportunities and access to power and resources. For example, when we see political leaders as overwhelmingly male, the belief that this is a man's role reinforces men as natural leaders, holders of power and decision makers. In turn, women and girls have sparse access to positive female role models in these positions.

A range of methods are used to maintain and reinforce rigid gender roles and stereotypes across society. For example, women's and men's roles in relation to parenting and other carer responsibilities continue to be rigidly aligned based on their sex.

- Women undertake more unpaid domestic labour: 35 per cent of women do 15 or more hours per week, compared to 12 per cent of men
- More women than men undertake unpaid care for a person with a disability
- Women are more likely than men to undertake unpaid care work for children or relatives who are elderly or who have a disability
- Of Australian single parents, 82 per cent are women (ABS 2011)

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes are also reinforced through media. Studies have consistently shown that women tend to be overlooked as sources of information or content for news stories. Studies of mainstream journalism suggest that this is because journalists gather most of their information from leading political and economic institutions, where women and a range of ethnic and other minorities are less likely to be represented (Romano 2010). There is a distinct lack of positive role models for women and girls in music videos, magazines, adverts and movies (Government of Western Australia 2014). Due to widespread access to media in our society, most people, including children, are constantly being exposed to skewed representations of gender, often reinforcing negative stereotypes of women (Government of Western Australia 2014). These portrayals are repeated thousands of times in the average person's life.

A study of Australian media in November 2009 found that only 24 per cent of people who were heard, read about or seen in news stories were female. In sports stories this figure fell to 1 per cent. Of the 24 per cent of females in news stories, 44 per cent were victims of crimes, accidents, war, health problems or discrimination. Family status (mother, daughter, wife, sister, or other family relationship) was mentioned for 33 per cent of women quoted or discussed in the news stories. Only 13 per cent of men had their family status mentioned. In 75 per cent of news articles women were described as homemakers or parents. Only 32 per cent of the stories were presented or written by female reporters and newsreaders (Government of Western Australia 2014).

Gender stereotyping also exists within institutions and organisations that predominantly value men over women through practices, policies and legislation that disregard gender differences and needs, treating men and women the same and in turn perpetuating gender inequity.

Women, men, boys and girls are rewarded for complying with rigidly prescribed gender roles and penalised at an individual, organisational and societal level if they do not. For example, in 2014 the Australian Human Rights Commission reported that 27 per cent of men who had taken a month or less of parental leave had experienced discrimination upon return from this leave (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). Men were also more likely to experience employer reluctance to approve parental leave (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014).

Gender stereotyping and rigid gender roles are maintained and reinforced at all three levels of society and impact on an individual's sense of self, their interactions with and participation in relationships, organisations, communities and institutional systems and structures. These social norms often go unnoticed or are perceived to represent the inherent differences between women and men.



SUMMARY

The unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men and rigid gender roles and stereotypes interact in a complex way across all three levels of society. This in turn leads to high levels of gender inequity between women and men, creating and maintaining men's entitlement to exert their masculinity, power and control over women, and increasing the prevalence of men's violence against women in societies that adhere most strongly to these beliefs.

Within this environment, men's violence against women is condoned and justified by individuals, communities and society. This is illustrated, for example, by past laws enshrined in the justice system (enacted by courts and police and upheld by the community) that deemed family violence as a private matter between a man and 'his' (implying ownership) wife. Our analysis of the structural biases has become clearer in recent times, resulting in moves to shift these cultural beliefs at all three levels:

- Institutional — More appropriate sentencing and legal sanctions
- Organisational — Education of judiciary around the impact of family violence on women and appropriate sentencing and police protocols regarding response to family violence call outs
- Individual — Community education and promoting women's right to safety and men's responsibility for their own behaviour

Even if individuals (men) and individual communities do not condone violence against women and actively speak out against it, if they are not addressing the underlying inequity then the environment where violence against women can exist remains intact.

The cultural norms and values that are informed by the unequal distribution of power, rigid gender roles and stereotypes are reinforced at each of the three levels. However, the power to influence gender norms and resource allocation varies according to collective and individual people's power and access to resources at each of these three levels.

HOW DO INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS INFLUENCE MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?



HOW DO WE DEFINE INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS?

Complex systems refer to institutions and organisations that individually and collectively exert significant power and influence across all levels of society. These institutions include governments, the public and private sector, large corporations, independent institutions, the judiciary and the media.

WHAT ROLE DO INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS PLAY?

Governments set up, maintain and regulate systems and structures that include health, education, housing, the police force and the military. Governments develop and implement regulations, policies, practices and laws at an institutional and systemic level, with a judiciary to interpret and apply its laws. The media is an institution that provides a means for mass communication and has the capacity to reach and influence millions of people.

These and other institutions and systems have considerable power to create, maintain and influence cultural belief systems and societal norms. Institutions and systems play a powerful role in modelling to communities and individuals what is 'normal' and acceptable in relation to women's and men's access to power and resources, and in relation to gender roles and stereotypes, both of which are causal drivers of men's violence against women.

WHAT IMPACT DO INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS HAVE ON MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Unequal distribution of power and resources

Laws, policies and regulations that ignore the unequal distribution of power between women and men, or that fail to recognise discrimination, reinforce people's attitudes that inequity is not serious. This supports ideas within organisations, communities and among individuals that the unequal power and resource distribution between women and men is fair, just and does not require immediate action.

Institutional support for, or weak sanctions against, gender inequity is a key driver of violence against women. Studies show that rates of violence against women are higher in countries where:

- There is little or no legislative or systemic support for gender equity and non-discrimination
- There are fewer initiatives to redress the unequal distribution of power
- Women and men continue to be treated unequally in law, policies, practices and budget allocations.

Factors such as lower relative levels of women's education, political participation and economic power correlate with higher rates of men's violence against women.

UNIFEM (2010) provides one of the clearest illustrations of how the unequal distribution of power between women and men translates to higher levels of violence against women (see Figure 1). When the leading global indices that measure gender equality are assessed, countries with greater equality between women and men are more likely to have lower levels of violence against women.

These measures examine indicators such as adult literacy; primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolment rates; participation in the formal labour force; estimated earned income; wage equality; and numbers of seats in legislative, ministerial and senior political positions (UNIFEM 2010).



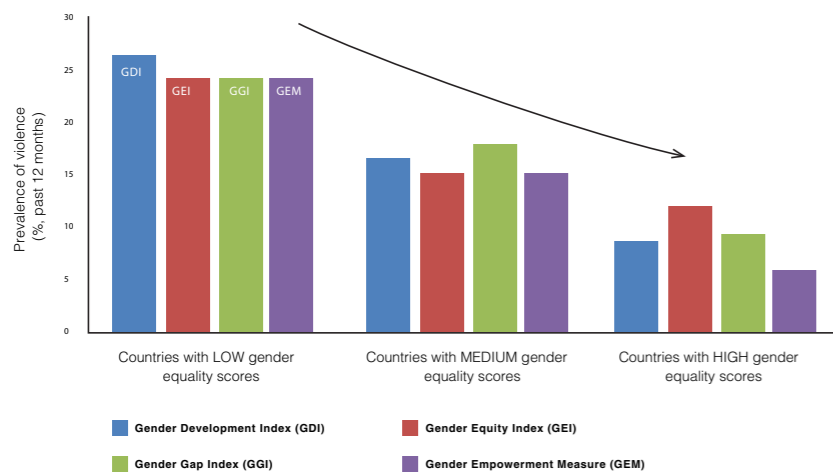


Figure 1. Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence and measures of gender equality in 56 countries. Source: UNIFEM 2010

The high rates of violence against women at a social level reflect individual women’s experiences of violence. Unequal power between women and men at the institutional and structural level increases the likelihood of unequal power in interpersonal relationships. Men are therefore more likely to control the wealth and decision-making capacity within their families and intimate partner relationships, which evidence has shown is directly correlated to a higher incidence of violence against women (WHO 2010).

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes

The media is an example of an institution that constructs and reflects rigid gender roles, which in turn reinforces unequal power between women and men and therefore contributes to rates of violence against women.

Men overwhelmingly hold the majority of government ministerial roles, chief executive officer positions and other highly paid and visible roles in large corporations and the public sector (as per data provided in the previous section). This sends a message to society that women are less capable leaders and that ‘women aren’t meant to do this kind of work’, which subsequently consolidates rigid gender roles and stereotypes. This disparity also results in extreme economic inequities between women and men.

Institutions comprise of individuals, as well as distinct organisations or informal groupings of people. Individuals hold positions of formal and informal power and influence within institutions. These individual’s views and behaviours can carry greater weight and authority, as they are often considered to be speaking on behalf of the group or organisation. This can result in their views being ‘magnified’ by the power of the group, organisation or institution. Consider, for example, the impact of a judge or police officer who holds beliefs that support rigid gender roles and stereotypes. This can lead to them accepting that a woman is ‘partly responsible’ for the violence she has experienced, which can in turn reduce perpetrator accountability. Such attitudes and behaviours, when enshrined in law, reinforce individuals’ beliefs that violence against women is justifiable, excusable, and can continue to occur.

SUMMARY

Men have greater access to institutional power and resources when compared to women. This structural inequity, coupled with powerful individuals in institutions and systems that support rigid gender roles and stereotypes, reinforces unequal socioeconomic and political structures. This further perpetuates gender inequity and creates social systems that condone, justify or encourage men’s violence against women. Institutions and systems, and the powerful individuals within them, can therefore play a critical role in preventing violence against women before it occurs. Indeed, when institutions and systems promote social norms, policies and laws that ensure the equitable distribution of power and resources between women and men and challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes, this over time influences the very fabric of our society through evolving cultural norms and social systems. In the long term, these influences will lead to the prevention of men’s violence against women.

HOW DO ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES INFLUENCE MEN’S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?



HOW DO WE DEFINE ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES?

Organisations and communities are groups of people who come together, either formally or informally. This can include in settings such as workplaces, educational facilities, sports clubs, cultural and religious groups, as well as place-based locations such as neighbourhoods.

Organisations include employers such as corporations, small businesses, not-for-profits and philanthropic groups; they are also providers of education, training, health and housing services. Other organisations and groups provide opportunities for communities to engage in cultural, spiritual and social activities. The local police and fire services are also organisations that provide essential services to local communities.

WHAT ROLE DO ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES PLAY?

The behaviours of groups, workplaces and other organisations set a standard for what is acceptable and what is not. Communities and organisations have significant influence on individual attitudes and community cultures that define what is ‘normal’.

WHAT IMPACT DO ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES HAVE ON MEN’S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Unequal distribution of power and resources

Institutions and systems are powerful influences on society. This influence occurs through the establishment of acceptable norms reinforced through policies, legislation and a social context that maintains the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men at the community and organisational level.

Research shows that, in Australia, there remains a persistent gender wage gap, with women earning less than men for equivalent paid positions. Compared to their male counterparts, women are more likely to work in part-time and casual employment, work in low paid industries, and are under-represented in leadership and senior management positions within organisations and the broader community. Women also make up the majority of unpaid carers, have substantially less superannuation than men upon retirement, and are the majority of single parent households on income support. As an outcome of this inequity, women have less access to power and resources compared to men (WGEA 2012; WGEA 2015).



Rigid gender roles and stereotypes

Organisational and community systems and practices create and reinforce social norms, attitudes and behaviours about what is acceptable and what is not. These are influenced by broader societal institutions and structures, which to varying degrees reinforce community attitudes about gender and women's role in society. This has a profound effect on an individual's attitudes and beliefs, by either reinforcing or challenging the values the individual holds.

For example, in workplaces where men are routinely promoted over women and gender stereotypes are reinforced, individuals are sent a strong message that men are valued more highly than women and that discrimination is acceptable. The Workplace Gender Equity Agency reports that, in general, men continue to dominate the upper echelons of economic power, with only 20.1 per cent of directors in Australia's top 200 companies being women (WGEA 2015). This reinforces individual attitudes that perpetuate sex discrimination, which is associated with a greater likelihood of men's perpetration of violence against women.

Research shows that sexist and discriminatory attitudes are also associated with greater community acceptance and likelihood of both women and men to excuse or justify men's violence against women (VicHealth 2007). Studies have shown a direct link between 'masculine peer and organisational cultures' and higher levels of acceptance and perpetration of violence against women (VicHealth 2007). This is evidenced by an analysis of data from large male-dominated universities, colleges, sporting clubs, military institutions and workplaces (Flood & Pease 2006).

A study in the United States, for example, provided quantitative support for an association between patriarchal male bonding in peer cultures and violence against women. Using survey data from 713 married male soldiers at an army post in Alaska, Rosen et al. (2003) found an association between group disrespect (e.g. the presence of rude and aggressive behaviour, pornography consumption, sexualised discussion) and the perpetration of intimate partner violence at both individual and group levels.

These organisational cultures also impact on the behaviour of individuals who do not condone or support such attitudes. For example, individuals are often reluctant to act or respond to unacceptable behaviour towards women if they feel that they would not be supported by peers, colleagues, or the organisation.

Indeed, individuals are more likely to act if they believe that they will be supported (VicHealth 2012), and especially if they are aware of organisational policies and procedures relating to sexual harassment and gender equity or codes of conduct relating to respectful relationships.

Individuals bring their own attitudes, behaviours, and sense of what is normal and acceptable into their workplaces, sporting clubs, organisations and communities. People therefore participate in creating social norms — that is, what is considered normal and acceptable — by demonstrating acceptance or disapproval in their reaction to attitudes and behaviours. This is otherwise known as bystander behaviour.

Bystander action that undermines rigid gender roles and stereotypes can be effectively supported if the leadership within organisations and communities also works towards the equal distribution of power and resources, and towards redressing rigid gender roles and stereotyping (VicHealth 2012).

At the informal level, communities, neighbours, friends, kinship networks, and extended family are influenced by the norms set out by institutions and systems (as discussed in the previous section). Norms that contribute to or further reinforce an individual's beliefs that women and men have particular gender roles and should behave in a distinct way impacts on how they perceive and react to men's violence against women. These individuals are more likely to blame the victim of violence and find excuses for the perpetrator. This can be expressed via attitudes and myths, such as that women should dress appropriately and not go out drinking with men, or that men can't control their jealousy, anger and need for sex.

This in turn creates a climate of impunity where the perpetration of such violence is excused, or in some instances, it might not be acknowledged that such behaviour constitutes violence against women. Indeed, studies have consistently shown that in communities with discriminatory social norms around gender and sexuality, there are higher rates of violence against women.

SUMMARY

Organisations and communities that ensure the equal distribution of power and resources are essential in the prevention of violence against women, as they challenge rigid gender stereotypes and promote equitable gender norms, practices and policies. For example, strategies designed to support equal numbers of women and men in leadership positions and promote positive non-sexist role modelling of respectful workplace relationships reduce and prevent violence against women.

In summary, the organisational and community-level factors that determine the likelihood of men's violence against women include:

- Unequal distribution of power, influence and resources between men and women within organisations and communities, including unequal pay and dominance of male leadership and management
- Acceptance of traditional rigid gender roles and stereotyping at an organisational and community level, including lack of progression for women into leadership and management positions; lack of organisational policies and procedures that prevent, identify and address sexist and discriminatory practices; peer support for violence against women; and norms of sexual conquest.



HOW DO INDIVIDUALS INFLUENCE MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?



HOW DO WE DEFINE INDIVIDUALS?

Individuals at different life stages have different roles and relationships. Individuals include girls, boys, young women and men, adults, members of families, kinship networks, peers, colleagues, friends and neighbours.

WHAT ROLE DO INDIVIDUALS PLAY?

The social norms and views to which individuals adhere are formed by and in turn help shape all three levels of influence. These include institutions and systems, organisations and communities, and an individual's immediate environment that consists of their friends, family, neighbours and peers.

An individual's power to influence the two broader levels of society varies according to their individual power within institutions, organisations and communities, and their relationships within their immediate social environment.

The individual's power to influence those other levels is limited to other individuals within their family, peer group or neighbourhood, by voting and/or as individual members of those institutions, workplaces, organisations and communities.

Family, kinship networks, peers, neighbours, and community are foundational in shaping attitudes and behaviours for infants, children and young people.

WHAT IMPACT DO INDIVIDUALS HAVE ON MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Unequal distribution of power and resources

When children and young people experience the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men and observe this within their families, kinship networks and peer groups, it directly impacts on their self-efficacy. This inequity also influences their values, beliefs and attitudes, their competence, confidence, sense of entitlement and privilege. It also directly affects children and young people's access to resources, such as education and health.

The unequal distribution of resources between girls and boys begins in childhood. Recent Australian research conducted by Westpac Bank found that boys earn 7 per cent more pocket money than girls, even though they spend 28 per cent less time doing household chores (Wade 2013). Household chores were also more often aligned based on rigid gender roles, with boys doing outdoor chores and girls doing indoor domestic chores (Wade 2013). This inequity is replicated in later life within institutions, organisations and communities.

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes

Individuals enact different attitudes and behaviours informed by their experiences, beliefs, preferences and their exposure to the three different levels of influence. Individuals monitor other people's attitudes and behaviours according to what is considered 'normal', and consciously and unconsciously adjust their own attitudes and behaviours. Individuals do this either by conforming to or by rejecting perceived social norms.

Individuals that encounter institutions, systems, organisations, communities, families and peers that adhere to rigid gender roles and stereotypes are more likely to hold attitudes that excuse or justify men's violence against women.

There is no way to know whether or not an individual will perpetrate or become a victim of violence; however, numerous studies show that certain attitudes and behaviours are often associated with those that support, excuse or justify men's violence against women (VicHealth 2007; WHO 2010). For example, groups of men who believe that women and men have distinct roles and qualities, who have little support for gender equity, and who maintain power and control over their family resources, are more likely to perpetrate violence than those who do not.

This includes men who make all the decisions and control their family's economic resources and relationships, and who see women as sexual objects or as less important or valuable than men. Research shows that these groups of men have higher rates of perpetration of violence against women than the average male population (Rosen et al. 2003).

SUMMARY

In summary, factors at the individual level that determine the likelihood of violence against women include:

- Belief in rigid gender roles, stereotypes and identities and/or weak support for gender equality; for example, men who control a family's economic resources and relationships, and perceive women's roles as being home-based only
- Masculine orientation or sense of entitlement; for example, devaluing feminine traits and valuing masculine traits
- Sexist, sexually hostile or patriarchal attitudes and beliefs; for example, belief that women are sexual objects for men's pleasure

Alternatively, studies have found that individual men are less likely to perpetrate violence if they strongly support gender equality; treat women as equals and with respect; and endorse broader social justice ideas and norms (VicHealth 2012).



LINKS BETWEEN LEVELS OF INFLUENCE



FROM INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL TO COMMUNITY AND ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Ensuring that institutional structures, laws, regulations, policies and practices at the systemic level are gender equitable is a key strategy in the prevention of violence against women. This means that power and resources are equitably distributed and therefore will contribute to reduced levels of men's violence against women and have clearer social sanctions to respond to perpetrator behaviour.

In instances where government funding and budgeting does not benefit women and men equally, unequal access to power and resources is reinforced, which also contributes to higher rates of gender stereotyping.

Laws and policies created at this level influence and affect the way communities and organisations respond or do not respond to the unequal distribution of power and resources and gender stereotyping.

Funding provided by institutions to organisations and communities can influence their attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes and the unequal distribution of power and resources, as well as about violence against women.

The policies and laws created at this level, including childcare, welfare provisions, employment and unemployment provisions, health and medical care, parental leave schemes, and the cost of education, can restrict or enable organisations and communities to contribute to the equal distribution of resources and power.

Laws that fail to recognise and redress discrimination, harassment and intimidation —whether on the basis of sex or other identity characteristics — reinforce individual attitudes and beliefs that such behaviour is not serious and is justifiable.

FROM ORGANISATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL TO INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

At an institutional and systemic level, where there are fewer women in leadership roles and therefore they have less power and control, women's ability to influence and change the organisational and community level of influence is limited.

Within organisations and communities that are male-dominated and where women's voices and their diversity of needs are ignored, women's ability to influence the systemic and institutional level will also be limited. This means women's first-hand experiences of violence and discrimination will not be recognised, and policies and programs will reflect this absence. It also results in women continuing to have unequal access to power and resources, while gender stereotypes continue to be reinforced.



FROM ORGANISATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL TO INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The practices and systems of organisations can have a profound effect on an individual's attitudes and beliefs. Organisational practice can reinforce or challenge an individual's attitudes and beliefs, which in turn can lead to positive attitudinal and behaviour change.

The promotion of organisational and community norms, practices and policies that foster the equal distribution of power and resources and eliminate sex discrimination is therefore a key strategy in the prevention of violence against women.

Men are more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes if these attitudes are held by their peers and to be reluctant to challenge violence-supportive attitudes expressed by peers (VicHealth 2012).

Organisations that directly contribute to women's economic inequity, through such practices as the gender pay gap, also impact on women having less power and resources in their intimate relationships, families and within their communities.

Where it is 'normal' for neighbours, friends, family and other members of the community to believe and act as if men and women have distinct gender roles and should behave in certain ways, how they perceive and react to violence against women will be impacted. Studies show that in communities with discriminatory social norms around gender and sexuality, there are higher levels of violence against women (VicHealth 2007; WHO 2010).





FROM INDIVIDUAL LEVEL TO COMMUNITY LEVEL

Individuals enact their beliefs within their communities, organisations and workplaces, and to a lesser extent within institutions and broader social systems. The more power individuals have relative to others, the more they are able to influence the beliefs and attitudes of others. Men who have more individual and economic power within communities and organisations are more likely to hold attitudes and beliefs associated with gender inequity, which reinforces social norms and gender stereotypes.



FROM INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL TO INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Institutions and systems that have a highly unequal distribution of power and resources and gender stereotyping send a strong message to the other two levels of society that women are less worthy than men. This, at least to some extent, condones violence against women. It also directly impacts on resource allocation at the individual level, which further disadvantages women.

Laws, regulations, policies and practices at the institutional and systemic level determine how societies respond to violence against women, contributing greatly to the social discourse and understanding of this pervasive social problem. For example, where laws fail to recognise and redress violence, discrimination, harassment and intimidation (on the basis of sex), this reinforces individual attitudes and beliefs that such behaviour is not serious, or is justified.

Policies that reinforce economic inequity or fail to promote women's economic independence result in men having greater control than women in more families and intimate partner relationships. This is directly correlated with high rates of men's violence against women. Such situations also make it more difficult for women and their children to leave violent relationships.



FROM INDIVIDUAL LEVEL TO INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

When individuals hold positions of power at the organisational and institutional level, such as in the police force, government, religious organisations or judiciary, their attitudes and beliefs can be magnified because of the power that this group, club, organisation or workplace holds within society.

For example, if a powerful individual holds the view that a woman is partly responsible for sexual assault because of how she is dressed, this in turn reinforces violence-supportive views and practices within institutions and systems.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the cycle of gender inequity is being reinforced between and across individuals, communities and organisations, and within institutions and systems both vertically and horizontally.

In order to prevent men's violence against women, work is needed to ensure a more equitable distribution of power and resources between women and men at all three levels of influence.

Such efforts must also be supported by strategies that challenge gender stereotypes and socialisation, and thus create and maintain cultures that value diverse gender roles at an individual, community, organisational and institutional level.



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