

# Causes of Domestic Violence, and Implications for Primary Prevention

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The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic charitable organisation operating in 149 countries around the world. Our work in Australia covers every state and territory, and is carried out by more than 65,000 members, volunteers, and employees. Our mission is to provide help for those who are marginalised by structures of exclusion and injustice. Our programs assist 2.5 million Australians each year, including people living with mental illness, people who are homeless and insecurely housed, migrants and refugees, and people experiencing poverty. The majority of those assisted are women.

This paper discusses the deep causes of domestic violence, and how these might be addressed in practice.

One place to begin is with the statistics. In 2006, based on self-reporting, the ABS estimated that nearly 100,000 Australians, from all backgrounds and walks of life, experienced domestic violence in some form.<sup>1</sup> This included assault and homicide, and also sexual, psychological, and social abuse from an intimate partner. However, there is good reason to think that the official ABS statistics are underreported: In Victoria alone, police were called out to 65,393 domestic violence incidents in 2013–14 and police estimate they only get called out to 40–50% of cases.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, caseworkers tell us that the definition of violence that we use doesn't always capture some types of trauma-violence from carers, and violence from colleagues, including sexual violence.

## The causes of domestic violence

### Who experiences domestic violence?

In exploring the deep causes of domestic and family violence, a starting point is an examination of just who is experiencing and perpetrating the crime. There are predictors that we know make intimate violence more likely. As the ecological model posits, these include the use of alcohol or drugs, the victim or perpetrator being older, or younger, being from a non-English-speaking background, and in the case of female victims, having a disability,<sup>3</sup> being pregnant, and being on a low income, although research isn't completely clear on this last point.<sup>4</sup>

To tease out one example, for both victims and perpetrators, being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent is a predictor of domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> For example, and in the media this week Indigenous women are 31 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> Data also show that the prevalence and severity of domestic and family violence affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people goes up as geographical remoteness increases. For example, in 2012, the

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Personal Safety Survey' (2006) at [<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4533.0Main+Features502013>].

<sup>2</sup> Jess Hill, 'Home Truths: The cost and causes of domestic violence' *The Monthly* (2015) at [<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2015/march/1425128400/jess-hill/home-truths>].

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Angus, 'Domestic and Family Violence' *NSW Parliamentary Research Service* (2015) at [[http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/domestic\\_and\\_family\\_violence\\_briefing\\_paper\\_0.pdf](http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/domestic_and_family_violence_briefing_paper_0.pdf)].

<sup>4</sup> Women's Legal Service Victoria, 'Submission Domestic Violence in Australia', *Parliament of Australia* (2014) at [<http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=bb3b8833-b5f1-48c9-a929-4d28cc1021ba&subId=298891>].

<sup>5</sup> Angus, above n 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, above n 2; Sara Everingham, 'Domestic violence survivor Lani Brennan tell her story to NT Indigenous Men's Advisory Council' *ABC* (June 11, 2015) at [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-10/indigenous-domestic-violence-survivor-lani-brennan-tells-story/6536658>].

hospitalisation rate for family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was seven times higher in remote areas than it was in major cities.<sup>7</sup>

### The key theme: gender

While the patterns above provide some understanding of domestic violence, it is still clear that the crime cuts across all races, income-levels, religions, and postcodes. Like other chronic issues such as diabetes, homelessness, and unemployment, it is clearly not *caused* by race, income, community connection, or mental health, but can be exacerbated and catalysed by those factors.

What, then, is the cause? If chronic disease is caused by a genetic predisposition that is triggered by environmental factors and lifestyle choices what are the deep underlying predispositions in an individual that set the conditions for domestic violence against some people in some contexts?

The answer, again, lies in the numbers. The most clear and consistent pattern in domestic violence is its gendering. While 15% of women have experienced intimate partner violence, only 4.9% of men have.<sup>8</sup> Of the men whom experience domestic violence it is likely that around half were perpetrated by a male partner.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, when the details of the crimes are broken down by gender, other patterns emerge that further disprove the claim that a quarter of victims is a man at the hands of a women. For example, women are far more likely to have been using violence against men in self-defence: 75% of women who have used violence against intimate male partners say they only ever did so in self-defence, and more than half of their partners agreed with this. This compares to only 8% of males who used violence against their female partners claiming it was in self-defence.<sup>10</sup>

Men are also far more likely to use sexual and economic violence against women than women are against men: research suggests that women are six times more likely to experience sexual violence from an opposite-sex partner than men are, and more than three times more likely to experience economic violence.<sup>11</sup> While it seems that women are more likely to use weapons when they use physical violence against their male intimate partners, men's acts of violence against their female partners are nevertheless more serious or severe, as judged by the perpetrators and survivors themselves, and by others.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 'Not Now Not Ever: Putting an end to domestic violence in Queensland', *The Government of Queensland* (2015) pg. 121 at [<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/documents/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-report-vol-one.pdf>].

<sup>8</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7.

<sup>9</sup> See, Carrie Chan, 'Domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationship' *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House* (2005) at [[http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Gay\\_Lesbian.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Gay_Lesbian.pdf)]; [<https://bullying.humanrights.gov.au/violence-harassment-and-bullying-and-homelessness>]. 'Violence, Harassment, Bullying and Homelessness' *Bullying and Human Rights* at [<https://bullying.humanrights.gov.au/violence-harassment-and-bullying-and-homelessness>]; Jane Mulroney and Carrie Chan, 'Men as Victims of Domestic Violence' *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House* (2005) at [[http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Men\\_as\\_Victims.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Men_as_Victims.pdf)].

<sup>10</sup> Rochelle Braaf and Isobelle Meyering, 'The Gender Debate in Domestic Violence: the Role of Data', *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House, Issues Paper 25* (May 2013) pg. 9 at [[http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper\\_25.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper_25.pdf)].

<sup>11</sup> See, Dal Grande, Hickling, Taylor and Woollacott, 'Domestic violence in South Australia: a population survey of males and females', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2003) 27(5) 543, cited in Braaf and Meyering above n 10.

<sup>12</sup> Dobash and Dobash, 'Women's violence to men in intimate relationships: working on a puzzle', *British Journal of Criminology* (2004) 44(3) 324, cited in Braaf and Meyering, above n 10.

Men are also far more likely to use domestic violence against women repeatedly, over a long period, than women are to use violence repeatedly against male partners.<sup>13</sup>

The trauma of domestic violence also show a gendered pattern: while very few men fear their female partner or feel controlled by their partners after an instance of domestic violence, most women do feel ongoing fear after having violence used against them, and a sense of being controlled.<sup>14</sup> Shockingly, 96% of those who end up homeless as a result of domestic violence are women.<sup>15</sup> Of the remaining 4% of males who become homeless, it is again likely that half were experiencing violence from a male partner as well.<sup>16</sup>

It is not only partners who are affected by men's choices to use domestic violence. Of the families we support through our family and youth homelessness programs (all of which have children) we estimate 75% have had an incidence of family/domestic violence in their life. In every case, the children are in some way impacted or directly involved in that violence. Our view is borne out by the statistics: between 85-90% of incidents of domestic violence occur with children present.<sup>17</sup> This is often also in an environment where there is child abuse and substantiated child protection issues.<sup>18</sup> It is estimated this domestic violence perpetrated by men impacts over one million Australian children a year.<sup>19</sup>

The trauma that this causes is severe. This trauma can take many forms, but has a lifelong detrimental impact on the affected child's life. Examples raised by our case workers and volunteers include increased chance of homelessness as children and as adults; greatly impacted schooling, including relocations, anti-social behaviour, and limited help at home; poor employment outcomes; greatly increased chances of anxiety and depression, both as children and adults; the possibility of physical injury and disability resulting from the violence; and a normalisation of violence, leading to the child being involved in violent relationships themselves in the future. Of course, at the far end, are situations where children are murdered in a domestic violence context. It is estimated that 80% of fathers who kill their children are perpetrators of domestic violence, and 94% of mothers who kill their children are victims of domestic violence at the hands of male partners.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, of all murders committed by an intimate partner, 78% were perpetrated against women.<sup>21</sup> And almost all of those committed by women against men followed a long history of the woman being subjected to domestic violence herself.<sup>22</sup> In NSW in 2010, for example, there were 12 intimate partner homicides recorded: 9 were men with histories of violence killing their female partners, and

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<sup>13</sup> Braaf and Meyering, above n 10, Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3.

<sup>14</sup> Dobash and Dobash, above n 12.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2009-10: Australia* (2004) HOU 246, 253, cited in Braaf and Meyering, above n 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 142.

<sup>18</sup> See, Department of Communities, 'Characteristics of Parents Involved in the Queensland Child Protection System Report 6' *Queensland Government* (2009) at [<https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/about-us/performance/child-protection/report-6-key-findings.pdf>].

<sup>19</sup> Angus, above n 3.

<sup>20</sup> NSW Attorney General and Justice, 'NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team Annual Report 2012-2013' NSW Government (2015) at [[http://www.coroners.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/dvdr\\_t\\_2013\\_annual\\_reportx.pdf](http://www.coroners.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/dvdr_t_2013_annual_reportx.pdf)].

<sup>21</sup> Rosa Campbell, 'General Intimate Partner Violence Statistics', *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House, Fast Facts 1* (May 2011) at [[http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Fast\\_Facts\\_1.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Fast_Facts_1.pdf)].

<sup>22</sup> Hill, above n 2.

the remaining three were women killing their male partners where in every case the male partner had been abusing the female for years.<sup>23</sup> This is indicative of the pattern: over the ten years from 2000, in 238 cases of murder in a domestic violence context in NSW, there was not a single recorded case of a female domestic violence abuser killing a male domestic violence victim.<sup>24</sup>

So, while a victim of domestic violence is **partly** more likely to have low income, be non-white, be living with disability, or housing stress, she is **almost certain** to be a female. This is the key determinant of intimate partner violence.

### What themes make gender central to domestic violence?

Given these broad and pervasive patterns of men's violence against their female intimate partners, it is clear that the causes of domestic violence are more than a "few bad apples", or random individuals with anger management problems. Instead, the clear patterns in use of violence suggest that there are deep and pervasive structural roots, lying in our beliefs and practices about gender and violence. Does the evidence support this?

Broadly, the most recent national survey about community attitudes towards violence against women revealed that significant numbers of Australians believe there are circumstances in which domestic violence isn't serious. More than 1 in 5 people agreed that partner violence can be excused if the person is genuinely regretful afterward (21%) or if they temporarily lost control (22%).<sup>25</sup> Concerningly, these attitudes are prevalent in younger Australians as well: one in four young people (12-24) don't think it's serious if a man who is normally gentle slaps his girlfriend when drunk.<sup>26</sup> What do we know about people who hold attitudes supportive of violence?

First, the National Community Attitudes Survey has shown that men were more likely than women to reinforce myths and stereotypes of violence as well as minimise, trivialise and deny the impact of violence. While simply being a man does not automatically mean that a person will hold violence-supportive attitudes, men with less knowledge about violence against women, less understanding of the dynamics of violence as well as less support for equality between men and women, are also more likely to have violence supporting attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

This is supported by significant evidence that men are more likely to engage in domestic violence against their female partners if they hold negative attitudes towards women generally, if they hold traditional gender role attitudes that legitimise violence as a method of resolving conflict or as a private matter, or if men have low levels of support for gender equality broadly.<sup>28</sup> For example, men

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<sup>23</sup> Angus, above n 3, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Gilmore, 'What the Coroner's Courts reports reveals about domestic violence' *Daily Life* (May 18, 2015) at [<http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/what-the-coroners-court-report-reveals-about-domestic-violence-20150517-gh3qhj.html>].

<sup>25</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 151.

<sup>26</sup> Jayne Margetts, 'The Line domestic violence campaign targets young attitudes towards relationships, sex' *ABC* (8 May, 2015) at [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-08/domestic-violence-campaign-targets-young-people-attitudes-sex/6453718>].

<sup>27</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Flood and Bob Pease, 'The Factors Influencing Community Attitudes In Relation to Violence Against Women: A Critical Review of the Literature', *Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project* (2006) at [[http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/DiscriminationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/CAS\\_Paper3\\_CriticalLiterature.ashx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/DiscriminationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/CAS_Paper3_CriticalLiterature.ashx)]; Australian Institute of Criminology, The Social Research Centre, and VicHealth, 'National Survey on Community Attitudes on Violence Against Women' *Victorian Government* (2009), at [[http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/NCAS\\_CommunityAttitudes\\_report\\_2010.ashx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/NCAS_CommunityAttitudes_report_2010.ashx)].

who support male-dominated decision-making paradigms within heterosexual relationships are more likely to commit violence against their female partners.<sup>29</sup>

Moving from attitudes to environments, these types of negative views to women are also stronger in particularly traditionally “masculine” contexts, such as sporting subcultures and the army,<sup>30</sup> and evidence shows these attitudes are, in some ways, influenced by the media we consume, including pornography, television, music and film.<sup>31</sup> A new study in Australia has suggested that the glamorised violence of much modern heterosexual pornography available readily online is having a significant impact on the violence and submission expected in sex by young teenage boys with female partners.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, domestic violence committed by men against women is also greater in communities with more traditional patriarchal (‘macho’) ideals of masculinity, and strictly defined gender roles around paid work (for men) and unpaid work (for women) -<sup>33</sup> be it for religious, cultural, or other reasons. For example, there is evidence that in regional Australia, more rigid gender roles – combined with increased alcohol consumption – is a cause of increased domestic violence compared with cities.<sup>34</sup> There is also evidence that there is more support for violence among Australians from countries in which the main language spoken is not English.<sup>35</sup>

We also know that domestic violence occurs more in contexts where women have less economic and social capital; that is, where women are more vulnerable generally. For example, language and cultural barriers that marginalise and isolate women from non-English speaking barriers have been one of the factors linked to the increased rate of domestic violence experienced by this group, along with associated health problems caused by inability to navigate Australia’s health system, and on average a lower socio-economic status.<sup>36</sup> As discussed yesterday, gender-based and disability-based discrimination also intersect, and increase the risk of violence for women with disabilities, particularly psychological disability, and particularly from male partners who are also carers.<sup>37</sup> Women also have less economic power – and are more at risk of violence – if their partners use the family’s money for gambling. Women experience a very high level of vulnerability and the least social power – and, again, are resultantly at the greatest risk of violence, at the moment when they try to leave relationships.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Victorian Health, ‘Australia’s attitudes to domestic violence’ *Victorian Government* (17 September, 2014) at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/ncas].

<sup>30</sup> Martin Crotty, ‘The Limits of Manliness’ *Australian Humanities Review* (2001) at [http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-June-2001/crotty.html].

<sup>31</sup> Flood and Pease, above n 28; Margetts, above n 26.

<sup>32</sup> Tracy Bowden, ‘Hardcore internet pornography ‘most prominent sexual educator’ for young people, experts says’ *ABC* (5 June, 2015) at [http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-04/porn-most-prominent-sexual-educator-experts-warn/6522846].

<sup>33</sup> Flood and Pease, above n 28.

<sup>34</sup> Janet Phillips, ‘Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of issues’ *Parliament of Australia* (14 October, 2014) at [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\_Parliament/Parliamentary\_Departments/Parliamentary\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAust#\_Toc401045301].

<sup>35</sup> Angus, above n 3.

<sup>36</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 128.

<sup>37</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 129.

<sup>38</sup> Centre for Innovative Justice, ‘Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bring perpetrators of family violence into view’, *RMIT University* (March 2015) pg. 16 at [http://mams.rmit.edu.au/r3qx75qh2913.pdf].

## The deep themes

From these specific examples of contexts in which men's violence against female partners is more likely, what conclusions can be drawn about the deep causes of this violence?

International evidence seems to support three underpinnings of violence-supportive attitudes, all of which are demonstrated by the contexts discussed in which women are more likely to experience violence. These three underlying factors are: first, unequal distribution of power and resources in society between men and women; secondly, rigid, narrow, and binary gender roles, stereotypes and identities; and, third, a culture that supports violence generally.<sup>39</sup> The broad view that a combination of gender inequality and gender-role rigidity has gained prominence over the last year, through the work of Australian of the Year Rosie Batty, the Queensland Royal Commission into Domestic Violence headed by Dame Quentin Bryce,<sup>40</sup> and a campaign from state and territory police Commissioners last year,<sup>41</sup> to name but a few. These factors also really support and underpin research on the sociological six sites in which patriarchy is enacted in society.<sup>42</sup>

### Why do these broad themes continue?

On the first point about inequality, especially economic inequality there is ample evidence that unequal distributions of resources between men and women worsen as inequality generally increases – modelling by NATSEM, for example, has shown that the last two Australian Federal Budgets, taken against a backdrop of economic insecurity and fiscal austerity, will result in worse economic outcomes for women than for men.<sup>43</sup> Broadly, it could be that the increasingly inequality that the West has seen since the 1980s is reinforcing entrenched economic disparity between women and men, and thus supporting the broader social context that allows domestic violence to flourish.

On the second point on rigid, narrow gender roles, much has been written about the nature of gender, either as constructed and performative or as inherent and biological. These attitudes about gender are still prevalent in 2015, and we don't need to look far at all to see their manifestations in the media, in the workplace, in sport, in politics, in business, and in schools – the topic of gender and patriarchy in these contexts is frequently discussed, and clearly still contested.

On the final point about a culture that supports violence generally, again there have certainly been suggestions that while the visual shock of the Vietnam War might have moderated one generation's interest in violence, the rise of glamorised but highly realistic killing in Hollywood and in first-person shooter games over the last twenty years is increasing our appetite or at least tolerance for violence. The hugely controversial 'R-rating' for graphically violent video games is a part of this. There has also been discussion about the particularities of 'Australian' masculinity and its propensity to violence.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See, eg, M. Ellsberg, S. Bott, A. Morrison, 'Addressing Gender-Based Violence' *World Bank Research Observer* (2007) 22(1); R. Jewkes, 'Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention,' *The Lancet* (2002) 359:9315; The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7, 154; Victorian Health above n 29.

<sup>40</sup> Melissa Davey, 'Quentin Bryce urges focus on gender inequality to tackle domestic violence' *The Guardian* (6 April, 2015) at [<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/06/quentin-bryce-urges-focus-on-gender-inequality-to-tackle-domestic-violence>].

<sup>41</sup> Hill, above n 2.

<sup>42</sup> See, R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity' *Gender Society* (2005) 19:829 at [[http://www.engagemen-me.org/sites/default/files/Hegemonic%20Masculinity-%20Rethinking%20the%20Concept%20\(R.%20W.%20Connell%20and%20James%20W.%20Messerschmidt\).pdf](http://www.engagemen-me.org/sites/default/files/Hegemonic%20Masculinity-%20Rethinking%20the%20Concept%20(R.%20W.%20Connell%20and%20James%20W.%20Messerschmidt).pdf)]

<sup>43</sup> Ben Phillips, 'The Great Australian Dream: Just a Dream?', AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report Issue 29 (July 2011), at [[natsem.canberra.edu.au/storage/AMP\\_NATSEM\\_29.pdf](http://natsem.canberra.edu.au/storage/AMP_NATSEM_29.pdf)].

<sup>44</sup> Peter Douglas, 'Men= Violence A Profeminist Perspective on Dismantling the Masculine Equation' *Australian Institute of Criminology* (1993) at [[http://www.aic.gov.au/media\\_library/conferences/ncv2/douglas.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/ncv2/douglas.pdf)].

## Diathesis-stress model

Of course, a broad culture of inequality, gender roles, and violence, is not the only condition needed for individual acts of violence to occur. If it were, all men would be perpetrators. Instead, these broad, underlying preconditions increase the likelihood of violence in combination with various specific factors, including childhood experiences of domestic violence,<sup>45</sup> individual susceptibility to peer group influences, the use of alcohol and drugs,<sup>46</sup> micro-cultures particular or, mental illness etc. It is the interaction of this general background of inequality and gendering, combined with individual (but predictable and patterned) factors that creates the space for domestic violence. This interaction model posits that, in most cases, just one factor isn't enough: it's not *just* being exposed to society's prejudices, use of alcohol, witnessing violence as a child,<sup>47</sup> or individual predisposition that leads to violence, but an interplay of all of these crystalized by the choice to use violence.<sup>48</sup> But the interaction of these factors is clearly not random: the gendered nature of DV clearly shows that the most important and underlying factor in all of this must be gendered. It is not just about men being more aggressive, having attachment issues, or getting drunk. Instead, it is about the expression of individual frustrations that are borne out of a sense of entitlement that is enculturated into men, and not women, from a young age, catalysed into the choice of violence by situational factors.<sup>49</sup>

## Responding to intimate partner violence against women at every level

### Responsibility

To respond to and stop domestic violence, then, we need to consider whose responsibility it is. If acts of domestic violence are, as argued above, an underlying social meme that is catalysed into action by individual – but patterned – factors, who is responsible for changing these systems? The Age recently published an opinion piece arguing that women are responsible for 50% of the violence against them, by staying, by “permitting” it.<sup>50</sup> As we all know, this is a common enough argument. What this fails to recognise (like so many of the arguments that fall back on individualism, choice, and the illusion of free will) is the constraints women face when confronted with violence. They may very rationally fear escalation (we know that women are far more at risk of violence when they try to leave).<sup>51</sup> Women may well be economically reliant on the abuser – particularly when children are involved, it may seem quite rational to protect them not to try to fight back or leave. And, of course, the argument that women are responsible for allowing violence

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<sup>45</sup> Anna Dunkley and Janet Phillips, 'Domestic Violence in Australia: a quick guide to the issues' *Parliamentary Library* (26 March, 2015) at [[http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3736995/upload\\_binary/3736995.pdf;fileType=application/pdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3736995/upload_binary/3736995.pdf;fileType=application/pdf)].

<sup>46</sup> Phillips, above n 34.

<sup>47</sup> 'FAQs about the issue' *Our Watch* at [<http://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/FAQs-about-the-issue>].

<sup>48</sup> Victorian Health, 'Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary intervention of violence against women in Victoria' *Victorian Government* (2007) pg. 27 at [[http://www.dvic.org.au/attachments/2007\\_vichealth\\_pvaw.framework.pdf](http://www.dvic.org.au/attachments/2007_vichealth_pvaw.framework.pdf)].

<sup>49</sup> 'FAQs about the issue' *Our Watch* at [<http://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/FAQs-about-the-issue>].

<sup>50</sup> Sallee McLaren, 'The part women play in domestic violence' *The Age* (12 May, 2015) at [<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-part-women-play-in-domestic-violence-20150512-ggzeii.html>].

<sup>51</sup> Liesl Mitchell, 'Domestic violence in Australia- an overview of the issues' *The Parliament of Australia* (22 November, 2011) at [[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia)].

against them seems to discount the fact that in the moment of violence the victim is acting on their sympathetic nervous system – fight, flight, or freeze.<sup>52</sup> Biologically, bodies are pumping blood away from the brain, making rational thought impossible. This is even more likely the case when the abuse has been ongoing for a long period – many victims report that the fear (the flight response) becomes constant, and often combines with a depressive or anxious mental illness. In the context of an intimate relationship, there is a growing body of evidence showing that many victims of domestic violence have been placed into a situation of psychological captivity by their partner, including cutting her off from all social supports, and intentionally wearing down her self-esteem.<sup>53</sup> Whatever type of ‘choices’ the victims of domestic violence have are, as such, incredibly limited, both by their circumstances and by human biology and psychology.

On the other hand, the choice to perpetrate violence has no such excuses. Men who commit domestic violence are likely to be economically, socially, and physically more powerful than their female victims. As is borne out by the statistics cited above, very few acts of male-on-female domestic violence occur in self-defence: they are unprovoked attacks, possibly exacerbated by the choice to drink or take drugs. Obviously, there has been a normalising effect of violence against women for many of these men, through a range of both, general and specific factors, but that doesn’t take away from their moral culpability. We hold people legally and morally responsible for unprovoked assault outside the home, even if they think it was okay, and the same must hold inside the home.

The first level of responsibility for male violence against women lies with the men who commit the violence. The second level lies with the people around that man who have some influence over him – his friends, colleagues, parents, sporting community, and social groups. Not with his partner, who by definition does not have influence over him. The third level lies with those responsible for shaping the attitudes of the broader community in which we live: from politicians who pass Budgets that reinforce economic gender inequity, to the media who support strict gendering of presenters, Hollywood’s fetishisation of violence, in blockbusters of which only 2-4% are directed by women, to workplaces that subtly or not-so-subtly don’t reward women the same as men, and all of us individually.

## Practice

In practice, what are the actions we need to take to reduce domestic violence? Many of these ideas are taken from conversations with a senior case worker in DV in St Vincent de Paul.

### Helping women flee/escape

Based on the experience of the St Vincent de Paul Society, it seems that what people need to escape the immediate situation of domestic violence is somewhere to go. This means increasing refuges available to women – we know that one in two is currently turned away – as well as dealing with Australia’s housing crisis, where we know that less than 1% of housing is affordable for people who are on the lowest incomes.<sup>54</sup> It also means increasing other forms of housing than refuges, particularly those that are child-friendly, like Start Safely rent subsidy program here in NSW, and decreasing the stigma around these issues. The movement towards keeping women in their homes and removing perpetrators is positive, but seems limited to cases of physical violence. We know that

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<sup>52</sup> Sonia D. Ferencik and Rachel Ramirez-Hammond, ‘Trauma Informed Care’ *Ohio Domestic Violence Network* (2013) at [[http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ODVN\\_Trauma-InformedCareBestPracticesAndProtocols.pdf](http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ODVN_Trauma-InformedCareBestPracticesAndProtocols.pdf)].

<sup>53</sup> Chris Bullock, ‘A cycle of violence’ *ABC* (3 May 2015) at [<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2015-05-03/6428882>].

<sup>54</sup> Anglicare Australia, ‘Housing Affordability Report’ *Anglicare* (April 2015) at [[http://www.anglicare.asn.au/site/rental\\_affordability\\_snapshot.php](http://www.anglicare.asn.au/site/rental_affordability_snapshot.php)].

Commonwealth Rent Assistance is inadequate,<sup>55</sup> needing to be increased by at least \$25 per week, and there are more than 200,000 people waiting for social housing.<sup>56</sup>

More funding for case-workers to help people move through the welfare system would be helpful, as women who leave may have never rented before, never supported themselves before, and may have had to cut off their existing family and friend supports for their own safety. We also need to work on how services respond to domestic violence: government departments need to be far more responsive, including the police, in what they are able to provide to people experiencing and leaving domestic violence. There are countless examples that we've seen of women that government systems seem unable to help deal with the escape violence, although case workers do help get positive outcomes. We need more training of people delivering services at all levels.

Dealing with the aftermath and outcome of male violence is something that The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children addresses,<sup>57</sup> as does the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme, and all of our responses to violence against women need to be particularly aware of intersectionality; for example, the violence and exclusion for her community that a woman from a non-English speaking background is more likely to fear if she leaves.

#### Counselling men who commit, and who might commit

However, we need far more than helping women after the fact – we need to work with perpetrators to change and accept responsibility for their behaviour.<sup>58</sup> There are many programs, such as 'Love Bites' in NSW, that do great work. The case workers I spoke to also talked about a program in Bankstown, for a cost of around \$1000 per man, which was very intense, but had great outcomes. Of course, however, men need to be actively engaged for these programs to work.

#### Spotting early signs

One step back in male violence prevention is spotting it early, and stopping it as soon as possible: how can we act strategically so a woman doesn't have to go into a refuge?<sup>59</sup> The value of outreach services cannot be overstated, whether through domestic violence-specific programs, or through others such as housing or welfare. We need more training of staff across all government services, and the community, on how to recognise when domestic violence might be happening, and how we can individually act early to stop it. These outreach interventions are good, as we can assist anyone, no matter what their housing situation. St Vincent de Paul runs such a service here in NSW, where we work with women for days or months as they navigate their options in dealing with domestic violence, providing educational programs, social support, and help managing issues for children with disability. Another advantage of outreach is that there is no requirement of physical threat to safety (as there is with refuges), so we can work with women experiencing social isolation, financial abuse, being stopped from attending English classes etc. The 'Ain't No Excuse' program works with the whole family early, including the father, where there is an acknowledged issue, but before there is documented domestic violence.

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<sup>55</sup> St Vincent de Paul Society, 'Submission into Inquiry into Affordable Housing' *St Vincent de Paul* at [[https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms\\_docs/184842\\_Submission\\_to\\_the\\_Inquiry\\_into\\_Affordable\\_Housing.pdf](https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/184842_Submission_to_the_Inquiry_into_Affordable_Housing.pdf)].

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Department of Social Services, 'The National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022' *The Australian Government* at [<http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>].

<sup>58</sup> Alex McKinnon, 'Australia's struggle with domestic violence, and how we can fight it: an interview with Rosie Batty' *Junkee* (6 March, 2015) at [<http://junkee.com/an-interview-with-domestic-violence-campaigner-and-2015-australian-of-the-year-rosie-batty/50920#7225zsRBFrvKwpo3.99>].

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

### Healthy relationship programs for all<sup>60</sup>

While outreach might help prevent an escalation of abuse, at one level up we can teach healthy relationships and gender equality before violence begins. The Report from the Queensland Family Violence Royal Commission recommended gender equality education in schools, and broader education to all Australians about what domestic violence is, its unacceptability, and what respectful relationships looks like.<sup>61</sup> There is clearly a need to teach boys and men about healthy emotion and expression.<sup>62</sup>

### Dealing with the deepest level

We must ask, however, why it is that we have these views about gender and the acceptability of male violence to begin with. Ultimately, to prevent domestic violence, we need to address what have been identified above as the deep causes of domestic violence: rigid gender roles in society; structural power imbalances between men and women; and a culture that celebrates violence.

And these things won't resolve themselves. A large study conducted by Plan International Australia earlier this year showed that women believe sexism is on the rise.<sup>63</sup> This supports research by Roy Morgan in 2013, that found that the percentage of young men who believe a woman's place is in the home had increased since 2008, from 6.5% to 11.6%.<sup>64</sup>

Why is this? There is plenty of evidence and analysis of the way gender and sexuality is taught to us all through the media, politics, the arts, popular music and movies, etc. And of course directly from our parents and teachers: the evidence that babies are gendered from before birth, and children in school are responded to based on their gender; for example, girls being perceived as taking up more time than they do in class when they answer questions.<sup>65</sup> Quentin Bryce has pointed to the huge importance of role-modelling, particularly by boys of their fathers, and breaking down the rigid gender roles we are taught.<sup>66</sup> Of course, this is a hard conversation to have: it's hard for a lot of men to acknowledge the injustice of enormous privilege we have just by being born with our particular chromosomes, and acknowledge the male entitlement that permeates society.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See, 'Australia's campaign to stop violence against women' *White Ribbon* at [<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/programs>]; Shalailah Medhora and Melissa Davey, 'Australian Government put \$30 million into domestic violence awareness campaign' *The Guardian* (4 March, 2015) at [<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/04/australian-governments-put-30m-into-domestic-violence-awareness-campaign>].

<sup>61</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland, above n 7.

<sup>62</sup> See, Timna Jacks, 'Teaching boys what it really means to be a man' *The Age* (30 May, 2015) at [<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/teaching-boys-what-it-really-means-to-be-a-man-20150529-gh7z4p.htm>].

<sup>63</sup> Melissa Davey, 'Sexist attitudes in Australia are on the rise, young women tell gender study' *The Guardian* (1 October, 2014) at [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/01/sexist-attitudes-australia-rise-women-tell-study>].

<sup>64</sup> Angela Priestley, 'The men who believe women belong in the home' *Women's Agenda* (10 June, 2014) at [<http://www.womensagenda.com.au/talking-about/editor-s-agenda/the-men-who-believe-women-belong-in-the-home/201406104144#.VZtYzfmqpBd>].

<sup>65</sup> See, Cindy Faith Miller, Leah E. Lurye, Kristina M. Zosuls and Diane N. Ruble, 'Accessibility of Gender Stereotype Domains: Developmental and Gender Differences in Children' *NCBI* (2009) at [<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2709873/>]; Isabelle D. Cherne, 'The effects of stereotyped toys and gender on play assessment in children aged 19-47 months' *Educational Psychology* (2003) 23:1 at [<http://www.andrews.edu/~rbailey/Chapter%20one/9040385.pdf>].

<sup>66</sup> Blythe Moore and Nance Hoxton, 'Dame Quentin Bryce says breaking down male stereotypes is crucial in addressing domestic violence' *ABC* (6 April, 2015) at [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-03/dame-quentin-bryce-says-breaking-down-male-stereotypes-crucial-/6277048>].

<sup>67</sup> McKinnon, above n 58.

On the next deep cause, power imbalances between the genders in society, there is much analysis and discussion at the moment, particularly in relation to women in work, and in politics. St Vincent de Paul has called on government to commit to a plan on gender equality, for a coherent, national approach to reducing the structural barriers that women face to full economic, social, and political participation.<sup>68</sup> It is crucially important that any analysis of power also includes considerations of the intersectionality of disadvantage, including disability, race, class and indigeneity that compound gendered inequality.<sup>69</sup> The concept of ‘intra-gender equality’ speaks to this,<sup>70</sup> however, gender equality without breaking down gender stereotypes, patriarchy and particularly evidence supportive attitudes is not enough.

On addressing the final deep cause of domestic violence, a cultural tolerance of violence, again much has been written. The speed of the legislative response to “coward punches” in NSW<sup>71</sup> shows that we do not tolerate some types of violence. But this must be juxtaposed with a discussion about the way we celebrate and engage in war, including this year the celebrations of the centenary of ANZAC Day, which have been heavily criticised, current discussions about violent video games and pornography and how to regulate their use by minors, and a documented desensitisation to violence – particularly gendered and sexual violence – through increasingly graphic movies and TV shows, such as *Game of Thrones*. Much has been written, but little government action taken, but of course we are a nation founded on extreme violence – the attempted physical and emotional genocide of the First Australians. We must acknowledge our responsibility for the structural disadvantages faced by the indigenous Australia, and the strong link between disempowerment and domestic violence, if we stand any chance of reconciling with the extreme violence that characterised the invasion of this country more than 200 years ago.

## Conclusion

While we have come a long way, there is clearly still far to go. Two women dying a week because of choice by men in their lives to kill is something we will never accept. But, what I have argued is that domestic violence is really just the tip of the iceberg – with its roots in a cultural celebration of violence, disempowerment of women – particularly those from certain backgrounds – and strict gender stereotyping.

Men’s violence will not stop against their female partners, or against children, their parents, their male partners, or strangers in the street, until we have a cultural shift in our attitudes to gender power, and violence. This struggle is enormous – but it also reveals that those concerned with domestic violence do not stand alone. Our work is thus intimately tied to, and we must stand in solidarity with, those battling for gender equality, including equal pay and representation, people who fight to break down gender stereotypes at all levels, and the movement to confront Australia’s celebration of some varieties of ‘masculine’ violence. It will take a long time for this deep cultural change to flow into the eradication of all male violence against female partners. But, given the progress over the last century on gender equality, the steps over the last 30 years in understanding domestic violence, and political moment we find we suddenly have in 2015, it is truly exciting to be part of the change.

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<sup>68</sup> This sits well within PM&C’s Office for Women, as it must encompass economic empowerment, safety, and leadership. It would also build on the Department of Social Service’s “Gender Equality for Women” program.

<sup>69</sup> See, Natalie J. Sokoloff and Christina Pratt, ‘Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture’ Rutgers University Press (2005).

<sup>70</sup> Liz Wall, ‘Gender equality and violence against women’, *Australian Institute of Family Studies* (June 2014) at [<http://www3.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/researchsummary/ressum7/ressum7.pdf>].

<sup>71</sup> ‘One punch laws: mandatory sentences for drunken violence ‘a recipe for injustice’ say NSW legal experts’ *ABC* (23 January, 2014) at [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-22/one-punch-mandatory-sentences-27a-recipe-for-injustice27/5212462>].