

Media Release

Embargoed 00.01am 24 September 2015

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE READY TO ATTRIBUTE BLAME TO VICTIMS AND THINK TRACKING A PARTNER IS ACCEPTABLE

One in five young Australians believe there are circumstances in which women bear part of the responsibility for sexual assault and nearly half (46%) agree that tracking a partner by electronic means* without consent is acceptable.

A new report released by VicHealth in Melbourne^ today (24 September) reveals worrying attitudes to violence against women among Australia's young people compared to their parents' generation.

VicHealth's *Young Australians' Attitudes to Violence against Women* surveyed 1923 Australians aged between 16 and 24 about their views on violence against women and gender equality as part of the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women survey.

It reveals that young people show a higher level of attitudinal support for violence against women than those aged 35-64 years. They also have a lower level of understanding that violence is more than physical violence and forced sex, and are less likely to support gender equality in relationships.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said she was pleased that most young people recognise that violence is against the law and understand that there are several different types of violence. However, she said VicHealth is particularly concerned by the number of young men and women who believe that women are often partly to blame for rape and those who believe tracking by electronic means is acceptable.

The report reveals that:

- One in five young people believe there are circumstances in which women bear part of the responsibility for sexual assault. For example, 20% of 16-24 year olds believe that women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes' compared to 13% of the 35-64 year age group.
- Two in five (40%) young people believe that 'rape results from men not being able to control their sexual urges', an increase from one in three young people when the survey was last conducted in 2009.
- Although most young people (84%) agree that tracking a partner by electronic means without her consent* is serious, nearly half (46%) believe that it is acceptable to some degree (compared to 35% of those aged 35-64). Young men are more likely to agree with this than young women (52% v 40%).
- One in five (22%) young people agree that men should take control in relationships compared to 16% of 35-64 year olds.

Ms Rechter said attitudes that excuse or justify violence or that shift responsibility to the victim contribute to a culture that tolerates violence. Likewise, the belief that men should be in charge in relationships

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contributes to a culture that tolerates gender inequality, and research has shown that unequal power between women and men is a key driver of violence against women.

“Violence against women is the leading contributor to ill health, disability and death for women aged 15 to 44, and has a profound and devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities. We know that victims of violence against women are most commonly young women and that a large number of men who commit sexual violence against women do so for the first time before the age of 20. This violence has serious consequences for young people because they’re at a critical life stage. On the other hand, it’s a stage when the prospects for preventing violence are particularly strong.

“Violence against women is serious, common and preventable and while there are many factors that contribute to violence against women, attitudes towards gender roles, relationships and identities are among these. If the community accepts violence against women, men who use violence are more likely to feel it’s OK to behave disrespectfully or even violently, and as a community we’re less likely to take action when we see violence and disrespect.”

Ms Rechter said one of the most concerning aspects of the report was that nearly three in five young people (57%) believe that violence is caused by men being unable to control their anger and a quarter are prepared to excuse violence.

“A quarter of young people (26%) agree that partner violence can be excused if the perpetrator regrets it and a further 24% agree that partner violence can be excused if the person is so angry they lose control. The survey also shows that people are willing to excuse violence if alcohol is involved with one in ten young people believing that violence can be excused if the victim or the offender is affected by alcohol. But we know from research that anger and alcohol themselves do not cause violence.

“This report shows how far Australia has to go before we fully understand the nature of violence and reject it. Attitudes are learned and can be unlearned. If we want to change attitudes we need to address the influences that shape them, the way we rear boys and girls, the way relationships between men and women are shown in the media and popular culture, and the position our leaders take on this issue,” she added.

National Community Attitudes Survey project partner Dr Anastasia Powell from RMIT said rape culture needed to be challenged at its source.

“We can start with early education with young people, delivering programs that teach respectful relationships and sexual ethics as the basis for consent. But these findings are not just about young people as individuals. Their attitudes reflect back to us the messages they receive in our culture and society more broadly. As such, efforts to address the underlying causes of violence, namely the attitudes and practices that tolerate violence or produce gender inequality, are likely both to reduce the risk of violence in the short term, and to provide a sound foundation for equal and respectful relationships into adulthood,” Dr Powell added.

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VicHealth was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services in 2012 to undertake the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey. VicHealth led the project in collaboration with the Social Research Centre and the University of Melbourne as research partners. More information about the National Community Attitudes Survey is available at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/ncas

Media please include the following information in all reports: If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800RESPECT.org.au. In an emergency call 000.

***Examples of modern technology used to harass women and control their movements and communications activity without consent include:**

- checking a woman's mobile phone call register, messages and contacts
- installing and using mobile phone and computer tracking software to enable keystroke logging or computer monitoring (e.g. spyware)
- using technologies such as webcams to record, and subsequently digitally transmit, information about a woman's movements and activities
- checking a woman's instant messaging, chat room and browser activity.

^YOUNG AUSTRALIANS' ATTITUDES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Young Australians' Attitudes to Violence against Women will be officially launched by
VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter at **VicHealth**, 15-31 Pelham Street, Carlton
at **10.30am on Thursday, 24 September 2015**

The following will be available for interview:

Jerril Rechter, VicHealth CEO

Dr Anastasia Powell, RMIT University

A survivor advocate with personal experience of family violence and electronic tracking*

Media packs will be distributed on the morning.

**Aged in her late 30s, the survivor advocate endured family violence for ten years from the age of 26*

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