

# National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009

Changing cultures, changing attitudes –  
preventing violence against women

A summary of findings

*Preventing violence against women by increasing participation in respectful relationships*



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of Criminology



THE SOCIAL  
RESEARCH CENTRE



VicHealth

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**On their own, all the laws in the world can't stop violence against women unless there is a genuine change in the way that Australian men think... If we are going to be effective in changing community attitudes we need a better understanding of those attitudes now, and how those attitudes change over time.**

→ The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP,  
Prime Minister of Australia 2008

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**Why did you not bring this information 20 years ago? I have suffered for 46 years and after all I have gone through and had to put up with he left me for another woman. I did not speak about my situation to anyone, could not move around my own home freely, always fearful of [him]. Even after I became a grandmother he hit so hard my eardrum burst. After this incident he never hit again but he was worse with his verbal and other form of abuse. Now I am free from him and his abuse but not from the gossip from the community.**

→ Focus group participant in research by Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service 2006

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## **Disclaimer**

This Project Summary Report is the product of a collaboration between VicHealth, The Social Research Centre and the Australian Institute of Criminology. While it draws on some of the research and findings from the sub-components that comprise this project (including the findings represented in the Project Technical Report), the context, referencing, cited research and interpretation of the findings in this document have been compiled by VicHealth in collaboration with the Project Technical Advisory Group. The opinions and interpretations expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of those who contributed to or participated in the research.

**Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.**

→ UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 8 March 2008

# Executive summary

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) was commissioned by the Commonwealth Government in February 2009 to undertake a National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence against Women. Research partners included the Australian Institute of Criminology and The Social Research Centre.

Understanding community attitudes is important for shaping and influencing future initiatives to prevent violence against women. The survey establishes a benchmark against which changes in attitudes can be more closely monitored over time. The results will guide the development and targeting of interventions that can build cultures of non-violence and value equal and respectful relationships between men and women.

## The Survey

There were three key components to the National Survey:

1. Telephone interviews with over 10,000 people across Australia about their attitudes towards violence against women, with a minimum of 1,000 interviews conducted in each state/territory. The 2009 survey included 16 and 17-year-old respondents (where a parent consented).
2. Telephone interviews with an additional 2,500 first and second-generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities (known as the 'selected culturally and linguistically diverse' or 'SCALD').
3. Face-to-face interviews with 400 Indigenous Australians conducted in nine metropolitan and regional locations across Australia.

The results are compared with an equivalent national survey conducted in 1995 to examine changes in attitudes over time. In addition, some exploratory research was undertaken with new and

emerging refugee communities, which included interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with community members of the Sudanese, Iraqi, Iranian and Assyrian communities.

## Major findings – community attitudes and beliefs and changes since 1995

### Defining and understanding violence against women

Most people in the community have a broad understanding of domestic and sexual violence, and its impacts, and do not condone it.

Community perceptions of what constitutes domestic violence have broadened significantly since 1995. The vast majority of the community agreed that physical and sexual assault, and threats, was domestic violence (between 97 and 98 percent in 2009 compared with between 91 and 97 percent in 1995). In addition:

- people were more likely to understand that domestic violence can take a variety of forms, including physical and sexual assault, threats of harm to family members, and psychological, verbal and economic abuse. Most also consider 'stalking', harassment by phone, and 'harassment by email' to be acts of violence against women.

Overall non-physical behaviours (such as emotional, psychological, verbal and economic abuses) were still less likely to be considered domestic violence than physical types of abuse. For instance:

- 25 percent of respondents in the general community survey did not believe that 'controlling a partner by denying them money' was a form of domestic violence.
- 15 percent did not agree that 'controlling the social life of a partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family' was domestic violence.

## Views about prevalence and seriousness of violence against women

The majority of respondents considered violence against women to be a serious issue. Findings indicated that:

- Overall, since 1995 there has been a positive shift in the proportion of people who rate the spectrum of violent behaviours as 'very serious'.
- Non-physical forms of violence tended to be seen as less serious. For instance, one in five respondents categorised 'yelling abuse at a partner' and 'controlling a partner by denying them money' as either 'not that serious' or 'not serious at all'.
- Stalking was also considered by more than two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) to be 'very serious' violent behaviour.
- There was a decline in the proportion of people who recognise 'slapping or pushing a partner to cause harm or fear' as 'very serious' (53 percent in 2009 compared with 64 percent in 1995).

Comparison with the 1995 survey showed a significant increase in the proportion of the population who believe that domestic violence is a crime (from 93 to 98 percent in 2009). In addition:

- most respondents across all samples believed that domestic violence and forced sex by an intimate partner are unlawful acts; and
- men in the general community were less likely than their female counterparts to view domestic violence as a crime.

Community understanding of violence against women with disabilities was very poor. Few respondents recognised the greater vulnerability to violence against women with disabilities.

## Understanding of who perpetrates and who is affected by violence

Most respondents (76 percent) understood that mainly men perpetrate domestic violence, and the overwhelming majority of victims are women.

However, 22 per cent of respondents believe that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by both men and women.

The shift towards a belief in domestic violence as gender-equal is evident particularly among men.

The vast majority (90 percent) in the general community believe that women are more likely than men to suffer physical harm.

## Belief in explanations diminishing men's responsibility for violence

The vast majority of people surveyed did not believe that any physical force against a current or former wife, partner or girlfriend could be justified under any circumstances. However:

- Four percent of the general community agree that physical force is justifiable when a partner 'admits to having sex with another man.'

There are also sizeable proportions in the general community that were prepared to excuse physical and sexual violence against women, by supporting notions which diminish the responsibility of those who use violence. Substantial proportions agreed that domestic violence can be excused:

- if it results from people 'getting so angry that they temporarily lose control' (18 percent in general community);
- if the violent person 'truly regrets' what they have done (22 percent of the general community);

A similar diminishing of perpetrators' responsibility for sexual violence was evident, in that substantial proportions agreed that:

- rape occurs because of men 'not being able to control their need for sex' (34 percent in the general community).

Since 1995, there has been a decrease in those prepared to apportion blame to a victim of sexual assault. Findings showed:

- Fewer people supported the notion that 'women often say no when they mean yes', (13 percent compared to 18 percent in 1995); and significantly fewer people in the general community (5 percent) believed that 'women who are raped often ask for it' than in 1995 (15 percent).

While there was widespread recognition of rape of women within marriages and intimate relationships there was still a small proportion (5 percent) who do not believe that women can be raped by someone with whom they have been sexually intimate.

## Belief that claims of rape and domestic violence are often falsified

The belief that women falsify or exaggerate claims of rape and domestic violence was widely held. Findings showed that:

- Half of all respondents (49 percent) believed that 'women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case', and only 28 percent disagreed.
- One-quarter (26 percent) disagree that 'women rarely make false claims of being raped'. Such beliefs are at odds with the evidence, which documents that rates of false allegations of sexual and physical assault remain low and compare with rates found for other person-related offences.

## Beliefs about responses to violence against women

The majority of respondents were in support of domestic violence being addressed as a matter of public concern rather than dealt with privately, and were significantly more in favour of formal complaints of sexual harassment being made rather than women having to manage it themselves. Also:

- Two-thirds of the general community considered that there had been an increase in the readiness of victims to talk about domestic violence compared to 14 years ago.
- Increased police powers to remove a violent offender from the home appeared to receive wide endorsement from general community, SCALD and Indigenous respondents, the majority (90 percent) of whom agreed that this was a reasonable response.

However, community understandings of some of the dynamics that characterise domestic violence appear to have worsened. Findings showed:

- The general community in 2009 were significantly less likely to understand why women stay in violent relationships than they were in 1995. Just on half also believed that a woman could leave a violent relationship if she really wanted to. Men in the general community and younger respondents in particular were more likely to hold this view.

## Preparedness to intervene in situation of domestic violence

The majority of respondents agreed that they would intervene in some way in a domestic violence situation, especially where the victim is a family member or close friend (95%).

The general community is largely in step with expert advice on how best to intervene in cases of domestic violence. The two most frequent responses to ways people would intervene were (1) offering support and advice and talking to the victim; and (2) reporting the situation to police/authorities. Findings also indicated that:

- Between 5 and 10 percent of respondents stated that they would intervene in ways that are potentially unhelpful, either confronting the perpetrator or stepping in between the perpetrator and victim. While such intentions may have commendable motivations, they are contrary to advice.

### Factors that help to predict attitudes to violence against women

The strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes were being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality. This was consistently the case for a range of measures across the national survey and held firm even when other demographic factors were statistically controlled.

Age was also predictive for some attitudinal measures. In particular, younger respondents were significantly less likely to rate some physical forms of violence as 'very serious'.

### Reach of media coverage and information about violence against women

Just over half of the general community reported seeing or hearing some form of recent advertising or media reporting about violence against women. Other findings included:

- Younger people were more likely than older people to report seeing some form of advertising.
- One-third of women and just over one-third of men in the general community did not know where to go for outside help to support someone about domestic violence.

- The youngest and oldest groups in the community were the least likely to report that they would know where to go for outside help.

### Changing cultures, changing attitudes – preventing violence against women

The survey findings indicate that community attitudes do change. Since 1995, there have been some significant and positive shifts in the general community's attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women. This overall trend is encouraging and provides the impetus for continuing to improve preventive programs that will contribute to the elimination of violence against women.

The positive attitudinal shifts across several measures tested in the survey were also tempered with patterns of enduring myths about violence against women and beliefs that are shifting in directions counter to the evidence.

The survey results indicate that there is a continued need for comprehensive preventative approaches for achieving changes in community attitudes related to violence against women. Substantial proportions of the Australian population retain violence-supportive views regarding some issues. Universal approaches addressing the attitudes and norms that support or tolerate violence are important at the population level. They must be complemented by more targeted strategies designed to address those groups at higher risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.

The survey findings reaffirm the importance of national leadership for reducing violence against women. High-level and committed leadership is required to:

- co-ordinate the national violence prevention agenda, across States and Territories, and across public and private sectors;

- build coherent policy platforms and frameworks to guide long-term action for the prevention of violence against women;
- ensure that good practice in respectful relationships programs is implemented systematically across States and Territories;
- sustain, over longer periods, planned communication campaigns and education programs to redress prevailing myths and misconceptions about violence against women and promote egalitarian and respectful relations;
- engage workplaces in preventing violence against women;
- support the ongoing development of an evidence base to inform policy and monitor the impact of interventions; and
- address the impacts of violence-supportive representations of women in the media, including the internet, by reviewing and applying appropriate community standards for limiting exposure to such materials, encouraging responsible news reporting, and fostering young people's critical media literacy.

The results from this survey will inform the development and design of the Commonwealth Government's primary prevention social marketing campaign. This is to focus on changing social norms and practices that condone and support violence against women. The campaign was announced as part of the Government's Response to the National Council's Action Plan and is set to target young people in community settings.

# **The biggest risk factor for becoming a victim of sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence is being a woman.**

→ National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009b

# Introduction

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, sometimes deadly and always unacceptable. It is a complex and persistent problem with multiple causes. The overall impact of such violence is incalculable, as it not only directly affects individual victims but also their children, their families and friends, workplaces and communities. In health terms, there is no greater impact than the harm manifested by intimate partner violence on women's lives (WHO 2000, 2002; VicHealth 2004). The elimination of such violence has become an obligation of all governments.

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**As long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace (UN Secretary-General 2006).**

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Significant work by the Commonwealth, States and Territories along with partner non-government organisations, women's groups and networks has been undertaken to tackle men's violence against women. Our understanding of the nature and scope of this violence is increasing and there is better appreciation of its impact on women, children and on our nation. However, progress in how to prevent violence and to create environments where women live free from violence is in its infancy and requires ongoing research attention and policy vigilance.

The Australian Government joins a growing number of governments who have worked toward a national plan to address violence against women. In launching the report, *Time for Action – a plan developed by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children in 2009* – the Australian Government authorised immediate action in response to areas the National Plan identified as urgent.<sup>1</sup>

A key component of the Government's *Immediate Government Actions 2009* is an investment of \$26 million in primary prevention activities including education and social marketing strategies to change community attitudes and behaviours. In addition, with the support of the States and Territories, a National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence Against Women will be established to co-ordinate a national research agenda, with the capacity to centralise and lead knowledge development of the most effective research, policy and practice available to address the issue.

The National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 will both contribute to and strengthen these initiatives. It builds on the design and approach of two previous national surveys of community attitudes to violence against women undertaken by the Office of the Status of Women in 1987 and 1995, and a more recent survey undertaken in Victoria by VicHealth in 2006.

The key objectives of the 2009 National Survey are to examine the factors that influence the formation of community attitudes that support violence against women and to achieve a baseline from which to measure changes in attitudes over time. The results will guide the development and targeting of interventions that can change individual attitudes and behaviours and challenge gendered norms and practices, in ways that nourish cultures of non-violence and value equal and respectful relationships between men and women.

## Violence against women – understanding its prevalence and impact

### Defining violence against women

The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) defines violence against women as: 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.'

The term 'violence against women' is inclusive of the wide range of forms of violence experienced by women. Violence against women includes men's physical and sexual violence against women in intimate relationships and families, but also includes other forms of violence perpetrated in other settings or circumstances.

The National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 focuses on community attitudes towards interpersonal forms of gender-based violence as they affect women, including:

- domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence, family violence or relationship violence;
- sexual harassment;
- sexual assault, including rape; and
- stalking.

**Violence against women cuts across all types of interpersonal violence, and must be addressed as a component of gender inequality and inequity. Violence against women is not only a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, it is a mechanism for perpetuating inequality.**

→ World Health Organization 2004

## Terminology used throughout the report

In examining community attitudes towards violence against women, the National Survey 2009 uses both the term 'violence against women' and a range of other terms including 'domestic violence', 'family violence', 'rape' and 'sexual assault', and 'sexual harassment'. This was done both to examine attitudes towards particular forms of violence against women and to reflect the diversity of terms in use in communities and scholarly circles.

The National Survey 2009 uses the term 'violence-supportive attitudes' to refer to attitudes and beliefs which justify, excuse, minimise, or hide physical or sexual violence against women.

## The prevalence of violence against women

Violence against women cuts across the boundaries of culture, race, class, geography and religion. There is no region of the world, no country and no culture in which women live free from violence. While both women and men can be perpetrators and / or victims of violence and sexual assault, research consistently shows that the overwhelming majority of violence and abuse against women in intimate relationships is perpetrated by men whom women know and often in homes or environments they share (ABS 2006b).<sup>2</sup>

While the true extent of violence against women is difficult to estimate, it is an issue that affects a significant proportion of Australian women across the social spectrum.<sup>3</sup> Reliable estimates drawn from the 2005 *Personal Safety Survey*, the largest and most methodologically sound population-based research in Australia, suggest that one in three women (33 percent) have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and around one in six adult women (16 percent) have experienced actual or threatened physical

or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15. Nearly one in five women have also indicated that they have been exposed to sexual assault since the age of 15 (ABS 2007; ABS 2006b).

While the rates of violence remain uniformly high, research suggests that the risks, vulnerabilities and impacts of violence vary among women. Younger women have been found to be at greater risk of violence than women in older age categories (ABS 2006b). Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, especially where the abuser is also a carer and can exercise control over access to medication, or restrict mobility and access to external supports (Brownridge 2006).

Women from Indigenous backgrounds face a much higher risk of exposure to violence, suffer more severe forms of abuse, including disproportionately high rates of homicide, and face culturally specific barriers to addressing violence once it has started (Al-Yaman et al. 2006; Memmott et al. 2001; Mouzos and Makkai 2004; Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force 2003; Cox et al. 2009). Violence in Indigenous communities is shaped by a complex interplay between colonisation, dispossession, and cultural dislocation on the one hand, and the associated poor health, unemployment, low education, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and welfare dependency that occurs on the other (Cripps 2007).<sup>4</sup>

And while there are questions about the increased vulnerability or heightened risk for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, there is consensus that attitudes and perceptions about the legitimacy of, and about what constitutes, violence against women varies according to class, ethnicity, age, gender, and disadvantage (Rees and Pease 2006). These factors may make women from CALD and refugee backgrounds more vulnerable to ongoing violence and its impacts (Menjivar and Salcido 2002).

## The human and economic costs of violence

Evidence of the damage to women caused by violence is well established. This impact extends across women's physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health (WHO 2002).

For some women, the consequences of violence can be fatal. In Australia intimate partner homicides account for one-fifth of all homicides, and four out of five involve a man killing his female partner (Davies and Mouzos 2007). Women are more likely to be killed by current or former partners than by anyone else (Morgan 2002; Mouzos and Rushforth 2003).

Evidence suggests that the economic costs of domestic violence in Australia are growing. In 2002–03, Access Economics estimated the costs of domestic violence to governments, employers, health care, services and individuals at \$8.1 billion (Access Economics 2004). In 2009, KPMG estimated that violence against women and their children now costs the Australian economy \$13.6 billion, and if appropriate action is not taken to prevent violence, the sum will increase to \$15.6 billion per year by 2021 (National Council 2009a). However, for every woman whose experience of violence can be prevented, the KPMG research found that over \$20,000 in costs can be saved.

New Australian research commissioned by VicHealth examines the economic benefits (as distinct from the costs) of reducing the prevalence of intimate partner violence. The research suggests that even modest reductions in the prevalence rate of intimate partner violence would result in opportunities for costs savings of over \$35 million in health sector costs and over \$300 million in productivity and leisure costs (Cadilhac et al. 2009).

## Understanding violence against women and why community attitudes are important

The causes of violence are complex. Contemporary scholarship on violence against women takes as given that this violence is 'a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and socio-cultural factors' (Heise 1998). However, the pervasiveness of violence against women across boundaries of culture, race, class and religion indicates that above all it has foundations in gender power imbalances and violence-supportive norms [see definitions page 14].

The most consistent themes emerging from international research are links between the perpetration of violence against women and:

- the way gender roles, identities and relationships are constructed and defined within societies, communities and organisations and by individual women and men (CDSH 2008); and
- the distribution of power and material resources between women and men (VicHealth 2007).

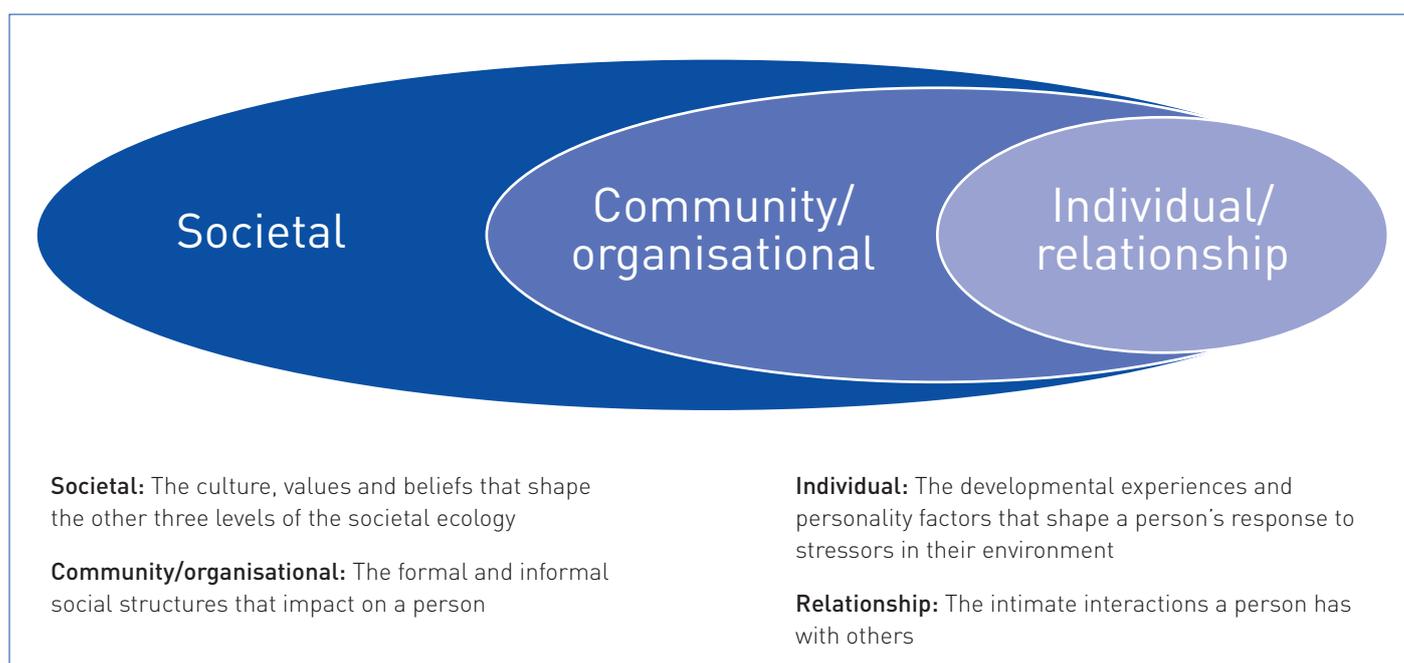
Key international frameworks, such as those developed by the World Health Organization (Krug et al. 2002), and more localised approaches, such as VicHealth's framework for guiding the prevention of violence against women before it occurs (2007), identify key determinants of violence that include the following factors:

- the unequal power relations between men and women;
- social norms and practices related to violence in general; and
- a lack of access to resources and systems of support.

These key determinants are expressed and function differently in specific cultural, geographic and political settings. In addition, these determinants are visible at different levels of society, from the 'micro' level of individuals and relationships to the 'macro' level of social structures and institutions. An 'ecological' model of violence against women, as pioneered by the World Health Organization (WHO), provides a useful illustration of the complex interplay of personal, situational, and socio-cultural factors that combine to cause violence. The model is based on embedded levels of causality, placing factors that increase the risk of violence on interacting and 'nested' levels, including individual and relationship, community and organisational, and societal levels (Figure 1).

At the individual level, the most consistent predictor of the use of violence among men is their agreement with sexist, patriarchal, and/or sexually hostile attitudes (Murnen et al. 2002; Stith et al. 2004). At the level of the immediate

Figure 1: A framework for understanding violence



Adapted from: CHANGE 1999; Heise 1998; WHO 2002

context in which much violence against women takes place – intimate relationships and families – male control over social and economic decision-making is one of the strongest predictors of high levels of violence against women (Heise 1998).

Gendered inequalities of power are also a risk factor for victimisation in girls' and young women's sexual and romantic involvements with men (Vezina and Herbert 2007). At the level of peer groups and organisational cultures, again risk factors for violence against women by men in such contexts include male dominance and gender segregation, higher levels of hostility towards women, peer support for violence, norms of sexual conquest and the denigration of women, as well as other factors (Flood 2007). Finally, at the level of entire cultures or societies, there is evidence that rates of violence against women are higher in societies characterised by rigid and unequal gender roles, where 'manhood' is defined in terms of dominance, toughness or honour (Heise 1998; Nayak et al. 2003), and by women's lower social status (Heise and Garcia-Moreno 2002; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Archer 2006).

International studies have found a clear relationship between women's status in a country and the levels of violence against them. Higher levels of female intimate partner violence victimisation are found in countries with less gender equality (Archer 2006). For example, in an analysis across 27 countries in Europe and North America, the higher the educational and occupational status of women in a country, the lower the rates of sexual violence against women (Yodanis 2004). Gender inequities are maintained by social traditions that govern and constrain behaviours of both women and men, and by the social institutions that produce laws and codes of conduct.

## Definitions

<b>Gender equality</b>
Equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society
<b>Gender equity</b>
Fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. It often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities (WHO 2006)
<b>Violence against women</b>
Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations, 1993)
<b>Violence-supportive attitudes</b>
Attitudes and beliefs which justify, excuse, minimise, or hide physical or sexual violence against women.

In short, at every level of society, gender inequalities have a profound influence on violence against women.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) understands gender equality to be an irreducible condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development (UNDP 2008)

The 2006 Victorian survey found a significant relationship between violence-supportive attitudes and beliefs about gender equality and gender relations. When the effect of other factors was controlled, weak support for gender equality was a strong predictor of violence-supportive attitudes across most of the measures in the survey, for both the general community sample and the sample among selected culturally and linguistically diverse communities (VicHealth 2006, p.67).

## Why address community attitudes towards violence against women?

Violence against women has unmistakable social and cultural foundations. Physical and sexual violence against women in relationships, families, and elsewhere is shaped by social norms, gender roles and relations, inequalities of power, and a host of other factors.

Attitudes and beliefs are central to the contexts in which violence against women occurs. While they are not the only influence on violence against women, their role is critical. As noted in more detail below, attitudes inform the perpetration of this violence shape victims' responses to victimisation, and influence community responses to violence against women.

## Violence-supportive attitudes and beliefs

A wide range of attitudes and beliefs among individuals and in communities has been identified to support violence against women. They work to justify, excuse, minimise, or hide physical or sexual violence against women. Community attitudes may:

- **Justify** the use of violence (for example, when men's use of violence against a female partner is seen as a legitimate expression of their position as head of the household, an extension of rightful male dominance, or as an appropriate response to apparent transgressions by the woman);
- **Excuse** the perpetrator's use of violence (for example, when men are seen as unable to control their violent or sexual 'urges' or desires, violence is understood as perpetrated by 'sick' individuals, it is seen as women's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together, or the violence is attributed to external factors such as the use of alcohol and drugs);
- **Trivialise** the violence and its impact (for example, when domestic violence is understood as 'normal' relationship conflict, physical violence is seen as trivial and its emotional and psychological impacts are neglected, women are seen to 'enjoy' being raped, or it is assumed that 'women can always leave a violent relationship if they really want to');
- **Deny or minimise** the violence (for example, when violence against women is seen as rare, isolated, or exaggerated and when women are seen as routinely making false claims of rape or domestic violence);
- **Blame** the victim (for example, when women are seen to 'provoke' or 'ask' for physical or sexual violence by their behaviour or dress, or responsibility for 'avoiding' rape is seen as women's alone, or women are seen to 'say no but mean yes');

- **Hide** or obscure the violence (for example, when definitions of violence are narrow and focused only on the perpetration of severe physical violence causing injuries, thus hiding other forms of physical and sexual violence and the social and emotional forms of power and control which often accompany them, and when definitions focus only on violence against women by strangers, thus obscuring violence by familiar individuals, in marriages, relationships and other contexts) (Flood and Pease 2006).

## The relationships between attitudes and violence against women

Community attitudes have a crucial relationship to violence against women. While research indicates that the relationship between attitudes and violence is both complex and partial (Flood and Pease 2006), attitudes are significant in shaping violence against women in three key areas:

- men's perpetration of violence against women;
- women's responses to victimisation; and
- community and institutional responses to violence against women (Flood and Pease 2006).

First, according to a review of the international evidence, Flood and Pease (2006) conclude that there is sufficient evidence of a strong association between violence-supportive beliefs and values and the perpetration of violent behaviour, at both individual and community levels. For example, the review showed that men with more traditional and rigid gender-role attitudes are more likely to practise partner violence, while boys and young men who endorse more rape-supportive beliefs are also more likely to have been sexually coercive. At the community level, rates of violence against women are higher in contexts where there is widespread acceptance of violence-supportive norms (Flood and Pease

2006). The relationship between violence-supportive attitudes and the perpetration of violence has been documented in a wide variety of studies, as a recent meta-analysis confirms (Murnen et al. 2002).

Second, women's responses to their own subjection to violence are shaped by their own attitudes and those of others around them. To the extent that individual women agree with violence-supportive understandings of domestic violence or sexual assault, they are more likely to blame themselves for the assault, less likely to report it to the police or other authorities, and more likely to experience long-term negative psychological and emotional effects.

Third, attitudes play a role in the responses to violence against women adopted by individuals other than the perpetrator or victim, including family members and friends, professionals, or bystanders. People with more violence-supportive and violence-condoning attitudes respond with less empathy and support to victims, are more likely to attribute blame to the victim, are less likely to report the incident to the police and are more likely to recommend lenient or no penalties for the offender. Societal attitudes also shape the formal responses of professionals and institutions to the victims and perpetrators of violence against women, including police officers, judges, priests, social workers, doctors, and others (Flood and Pease 2009).

## The formation of attitudes

Given the importance of attitudes with regard to violence against women, what factors influence their formation? In preparation for undertaking the 2006 Victorian Survey, VicHealth commissioned a review by Flood and Pease (2006) that identified a series of factors that are strongly associated with the development of violence-supportive attitudes, summarised in Table 1 (Flood and Pease 2006).

The table itemises key influences on attitudes at multiple levels which include gender roles and relations. There is a strong relationship between attitudes to violence and attitudes towards gender roles and relations; notably:

- Men are more likely than women to hold violence-supportive attitudes.
- Individuals (both men and women) who support traditional gender roles and relationships are more likely to express violence-supportive attitudes.

Gender is a consistent predictor of attitudes that support the use of violence against women. A wide range of studies

find a gender gap in attitudes. In general, men are more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs supportive of violence against women, perceive a narrower range of behaviors as violent, blame and show less empathy for the victim, minimise the harms associated with physical and sexual assault, and see behaviors constituting violence against women as less serious, inappropriate, or damaging (Flood and Pease 2009). However, it is not sex *per se*, but gender orientations that shape such understandings of violence against women.

There is a powerful association between attitudes towards violence against women and attitudes towards gender. Traditional gender-role attitudes are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women. Conversely, the more that people maintain egalitarian gender attitudes, the less acceptance of violence against women. They are more likely to see violence against women as unacceptable, to define a wider variety of acts as violence or abuse, to reject victim-blaming and to support the victim, and to hold accountable the person using violence (Flood and Pease 2006). Attitudes towards violence against women are

**Table 1: Factors associated with violence-supportive attitudes**

Level	Factors	
	Violence-supportive	Factors with the potential to facilitate or inhibit violence-supportive attitudes
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood exposure to violence-supportive cultural norms</li> <li>• Support for traditional gender roles and relationships</li> <li>• Weak support for gender equality</li> <li>• Age and stage of development (boys and young men)</li> <li>• Masculine orientation/sense of entitlement (men)</li> <li>• Lower levels of education (women)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Lower workforce participation (women)<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood exposure to violence (negative impact greater for males)</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masculine contexts such as sporting sub-cultures, college fraternities and the military</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches and faith-based organisations</li> <li>• Criminal justice, social service and health system practices</li> <li>• Workplace cultures</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male peer cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith-based communities</li> <li>• Culturally specific norms regarding gender and sexuality</li> <li>• Neighbourhood culture</li> </ul>
<b>Societal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pornography</li> <li>• Advertising portraying women in highly sexualised ways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Television, music, film and media portrayals of women, violence and gender relations</li> <li>• Campaigns and social movements addressing issues associated with violence and gender relations</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> These factors have been found to positively influence attitudes to gender equality which have in turn been found to positively influence attitudes to violence against women. However, there is as yet no direct evidence demonstrating a relationship between these factors and violence-supportive attitudes.

# **Exposure of children to family violence causes long-term psychological, emotional, physical and behavioural problems.**

→ National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2009b

rooted in wider attitudes towards women, gender and sexuality. For example, beliefs in the legitimacy of men's violence to intimate partners are shaped by agreement with the notions that men should be dominant in households and intimate relationships, men have the right to enforce their dominance through physical aggression, and men have uncontrollable sexual urges, and women are deceptive and malicious (Flood and Pease 2006, pp23-7).

However, while gender norms and relations are highly influential, they are not the only factors shaping attitudes towards violence against women. As Table 1 suggests, attitudes towards violence against women are formed by a wide range of other social processes at multiple levels of society. Further factors documented to shape attitudes towards violence against women at the individual level include experiencing or witnessing violence, age and development. At the organisational level, they include participation in violence-supportive contexts, while at the community level they include participation in informal peer groups and networks. Finally, at the societal level, factors which shape attitudes towards violence against women include sexist and violence-supportive depictions in pornography and other media (Malamuth et al. 2000; Strasburger and Wilson 2002), while education campaigns can have a positive influence (Donovan and Vlasis 2005).

Measured across a population, attitudes are a valuable barometer of overall societal progress in creating a violence-free environment. Community attitudes are central to the social and cultural foundations of violence against women. In addition, they indicate the state of play in society regarding other, crucial determinants of violence against women, including the power relations between men and women and levels of and tolerance for community violence.

## Changing attitudes

Violence-supportive attitudes can be influenced through community awareness and education campaigns that are based on gender equality and that engage both men and women in forging respectful intimate and family relations (Pease 2008; VicHealth 2007). Efforts to prevent violence against women must address not only those attitudes which are overtly condoning of violence against women, but the wider clusters of attitudes related to gender and sexuality which normalise and justify this violence (Flood and Pease 2009).

Prevention efforts must address particular social processes and settings through which violence-supportive attitudes are maintained. Key processes include the intergenerational transmission of violence facilitated by children witnessing or experiencing violence. Key settings include adolescent and particularly boys' peer cultures, the formal and informal settings of male university colleges, sporting clubs, workplaces, military institutions, and religious institutions (Flood and Pease 2009).

Awareness and education campaigns must be complemented by actions that address the structural conditions that perpetuate violence. Hence, collective, multi-level action is likely to be the most effective way of stopping violence against women.

Evidence suggests that the combined efforts of communities, government and other sectors can reduce violence by taking steps to:

- understand, discuss and explicitly condemn violence against women and their children;
- promote women as equal and as active participants in intimate relationships and public life;
- ensure women have equal access to secure employment, salaries and financial independence;
- reject definitions of 'being a man' or notions of masculinity that are associated with violence;
- promote notions of masculinity that are non-violent;
- intervene where violence against women and their children is witnessed or suspected;
- provide information about, and links to, available support services;
- render assistance to victims/survivors when formal services are limited;
- hold perpetrators accountable and challenge their use of violence;
- provide services to perpetrators to help them change their behaviour;
- address factors that contribute to violence in the wider community by encouraging the responsible service and consumption of alcohol; addressing the abuse of drugs; discussing the nature, causes, and impacts of violence against women; and demanding media and internet standards to prevent glamourised images of violence and the negative sexualisation and denigration of women; and
- promote education about respectful relationships (National Council 2009b).

# The Survey: a summary of methods and approach

The design and approach of the *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009* builds on the methodologies used for the last two major Australian surveys that were conducted in 1987 and 1995 by the Office for the Status of Women. It also drew on changes that had been incorporated into the Victorian survey conducted by VicHealth which had introduced new attitudinal measures for testing and review.<sup>5</sup>

## National Survey 2009

There were three key components to the National Survey:

<p><b>1. The general community survey</b></p> <p>Telephone interviews with over 10,000 people across Australia about their attitudes towards violence against women, with a minimum of 1,000 interviews conducted in each state/territory. In contrast to the previous surveys, the 2009 survey included 16 and 17-year-old respondents where a parent or guardian consented.</p>
<p><b>2. The SCALD survey</b></p> <p>Telephone interviews with an additional 2,500 first and second-generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities collectively referred to here as the 'selected culturally and linguistically diverse' or 'SCALD' community sample.</p>
<p><b>3. The Indigenous survey</b></p> <p>Face-to-face interviews with 400 Indigenous Australians conducted in nine metropolitan and regional locations across Australia.</p>

While qualitative research has previously been undertaken with Indigenous communities, as far as is known, this is the first time nationally that Indigenous communities have been surveyed on their attitudes to violence against women. The survey was undertaken with the support of an organisation with specialist expertise in conducting Indigenous research. A process of obtaining approval and consent from community elders and leaders was established, and extensive liaison with community members and briefings with Indigenous interviewers also took place before the survey commenced. In contrast to the other two surveys, a face-to-face methodology was employed.

The results reported from the Indigenous survey sample provide some important insights into the views of Indigenous men and women regarding violence against women, that may help to inform Indigenous communities about where to target strategies aimed at shifting those attitudes and cultural norms that support violence towards women. However the sample size and the different methodological approach used means that any direct comparisons between the general community and Indigenous survey samples should be treated with great caution and as impressionistic only.

The SCALD sample included 500 first and second-generation men and women selected from each of the Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, Greek and Indian communities (2,500 in all). The interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the respondent using a translated version of the survey where required. For the most part, the results for the surveyed communities are presented in a collective form as the SCALD sample.

The results from the SCALD sample cannot be said to represent the views of all Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While the method used to form the sample aimed to maximise representativeness, the findings cannot be said to represent the individual communities from which the samples were drawn. These five groups were selected as they are among the largest of Australia's CALD communities in terms of recent and established migration patterns. They also match the groups that were selected as part of the Victorian Community Attitude Survey in 2006, with the addition in the 2009 survey of a sample from the Indian community.

In terms of administering all three surveys, interviewers were gender matched with interviewees, so that only women interviewed female respondents and men interviewed male respondents.

## Investigating changes over time

An important objective of the National Community Attitudes Survey 2009 is to allow attitudes to be tracked over time, and to establish a new national benchmark against which any changes in attitudes can be more closely monitored and assessed in future. For this reason, a majority of items from the 1995 national survey were retained to enable comparisons to be drawn over time. However, the inclusion of additional items and scales that had been well tested as part of the 2006 Victorian survey and some newly designed measures developed by the Project's Technical Advisory Group were also incorporated into the 2009 survey tool.

## **Qualitative research with new and emerging refugee communities**

Qualitative research with new and emerging refugee communities was also undertaken as part of the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009. The research included:

- A series of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from agencies that have specific knowledge and insight into attitudes to violence against women from a SCALD perspective. Of particular interest to the study were agencies familiar with the Sudanese, Iraqi, Iranian and Assyrian communities.
- A series of in-language gender-based focus group discussions held with community members from the selected communities.
- A small number of 'mini-group' discussions with selected community agents to discuss the key findings of the previous phases and to explore support for potential programs, strategies or interventions that could appropriately and effectively target violence prevention within refugee communities.

The results from this qualitative component of the project are not reported on extensively in this report due to the exploratory nature of its approach. However, where appropriate, some commentary is included to illustrate the various factors that focus group participants identified as relevant for understanding the refugee and settlement experience. In particular, excerpts that capture the complex associations between cultural, religious and social traditions that impact on attitudes towards women and experiences of violence against women in refugee communities have been included.

## **Examining the methodological and technical detail**

A detailed overview of the survey design, sampling frame and methodologies used for all components of the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 is provided in the Project Technical Report published separately.

**You're feeling worthless at that point; you've been told you're worth nothing, so you're not going to think of yourself. At that point, you just think it's your lot in life; you must have done something to upset him and so deserve it. A woman in that situation is not thinking: 'Hey, you know what, I'm better than this, bugger off mate'. You are feeling so worthless, and a failure, and guilty... I remember thinking that I didn't care what he did to me, because I was so worthless.**

→ Victorian Law Reform Commission 2005

# National findings – community attitudes and beliefs and changes since 1995

## How are the findings presented?

The findings from the 2009 National Survey are grouped according to the following eight key themes:

1. Defining and understanding violence against women
2. Views about prevalence and seriousness of violence against women
3. Understanding of who perpetrates and who is affected by violence
4. Belief in explanations diminishing men's responsibility for violence
5. Beliefs about responses to violence against women
6. Preparedness to intervene in situation of domestic violence
7. Factors that help to predict attitudes to violence against women
8. Reach of media coverage and information about violence against women

Each section is prefaced with a 'summary box' of the main findings before an overview of the specific results are presented relevant to each theme. In most cases, the results appear in the following order:

- Brief background information relevant to each theme
- Views of the general community, then by sex
- Views of the SCALD community, then by sex
- Views of the Indigenous sample, then by sex
- Where relevant, the influence of age, and 'gender equity score' (see Appendix, page 66) is examined
- Changes observed in the results for the general community over time, between the 1995 and the 2009 national surveys.

Findings from the qualitative research undertaken with a small number of new and emerging refugee communities are included in some sections where relevant.

Chi-Squared tests of statistical significance were undertaken for comparisons throughout the report. Results were seen to be statistically significant if they reached a level of significance of  $p < .01$ . Throughout the report, contrasts between variables and shifts over time are only reported if they are statistically significant.

The tables presented throughout this section do not include the category of respondents who answered 'don't know', thus there are occasions when the respective findings for survey items do not sum to 100.

## Defining and understanding violence against women

### In summary

#### Progress

In line with legislative changes, community perceptions of what constitutes domestic violence have broadened significantly since 1995. People were more likely to understand that domestic violence can take a variety of forms, including: physical and sexual assault, threats of harm to family members, and psychological, verbal and economic abuse.

While overall non-physical behaviours (such as emotional, psychological, verbal and economic abuses) were still less likely to be considered domestic violence than physical forms of abuse, measures on these behaviours also showed the greatest attitudinal change over the 14-year period.

While questions about 'stalking', 'harassment by phone', and 'harassment by email' were not asked in 1995, most people considered these behaviours to be acts of violence against women when asked about them in 2009.

#### Challenges

The reluctance of some members in the community to view emotional, psychological and economic forms of abuse as domestic violence remains a concern. One in five respondents in the general community survey did not believe that 'controlling a partner by denying them money' was a form of domestic violence and 15 percent did not agree that 'controlling the social life of a partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family' was domestic violence.

A lack of understanding about what constitutes domestic violence has serious implications for how readily women and others affected by these non-physical forms of domestic violence will access support, and how accurately we can estimate the prevalence of domestic violence across the spectrum of unlawful behaviours. Moreover, it limits the extent to which the wider community can participate in building, maintaining and valuing relationships between men and women based on equality and mutual respect.

## Background

The struggle to have domestic violence legally recognised and publicly acknowledged has included advocates insisting that the breadth and depth of women's experiences be more meaningfully captured. Legislative definitions of violence against women in all States and Territories are now uniformly understood to encompass more than physical violence alone. The United Nations' definition (page 10) includes physical, psychological and sexual harm as well as coercive and threatening behaviours. The UN definition is the most widely accepted definition in the world and underpins Australia's most recently endorsed *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women – Immediate Government Actions* (Australian Government 2009).

Acts that constitute domestic or family violence are distinct from the kinds of disagreements that occur in healthy, respectful relationships. The essential aspect of domestic violence is the tactical use of systematic control and abuse of power. It may take the form of control exercised through tightly restricting a partner's access to finances for the purposes of meeting basic household expenses, threatening or being physically violent, isolating a partner from their family or social network, insisting on sex, or deliberately damaging a partner's possessions or harming family pets.

This is in stark contrast to a relationship based on mutual respect. Violence prevention education promotes relationships where personal, social and sexual freedoms are valued and encouraged; where a partner's choices and decisions are respected, where compromises can be negotiated and reached; and where care is taken not to diminish another's confidence and self-worth.

What falls 'within' or 'outside' the scope of community understanding of domestic violence has implications for the ways our police, our courts, our workplaces and our sports clubs will respond to behaviour regarded as violent, controlling or abusive. It also influences how readily victims will be able to identify or 'name' their experiences as abuse, which in turn influences how accurately its prevalence can be estimated.

Against this backdrop, respondents in the 2009 national community attitudes survey were asked, as they had been 14 years prior, what kinds of behaviours should rate as domestic violence.

### The scope has widened for understanding what constitutes violence against women

The bulk of respondents across all three surveys (in the general community, SCALD sample, and Indigenous sample) agreed that domestic violence covers a spectrum of behaviours from physical and sexual violence through to threats, and behaviours that are controlling and abusive. The majority of survey respondents also understood that harassment through stalking, repeated phone calls or emails is also a form of domestic violence (see Table 2, page 26, for list of behaviours). In this sense, there is close alignment between community perceptions and the legislative position on what constitutes domestic violence.

Women in the general community and the SCALD sample were more likely to view the range of behaviours as domestic violence than were men in either sample.

The reverse was the case for the Indigenous sample with Indigenous men more likely than Indigenous women, or men in the general community and SCALD sample, to identify all behaviours listed as forms of domestic violence.

Respondents in the middle age categories were more likely than those in the youngest and older age categories to view the range of behaviours listed as domestic violence.

Across all of the behaviours listed in both the 1995 and the 2009 surveys, there were significant increases in the proportions of the general community who agreed the range of behaviours were domestic violence.

### Physical violence is still most readily identified as domestic violence

Community consensus remains higher for those forms of domestic violence that are physical in nature. On the four measures in the survey that dealt with physical or sexual violence (slapping and pushing a partner or forcing them to have sex) and other physically threatening behaviour (smashing objects to frighten or threaten a partner or threatening to hurt a family member to scare or control a partner), levels of agreement that these behaviours were domestic violence were substantially higher than for non-physical behaviours.

For the general community, there was considerable variation in views about whether non-physical behaviours could be defined as domestic violence. For example:

- one in four (25 percent) did not agree that controlling a partner through denying them access to financial resources was a form of domestic violence;
- one in seven (15 percent) were not convinced that controlling the social life of a partner by preventing them from seeing family and friends is a form of domestic violence; and
- one in seven (14 percent) were not prepared to categorise repeated criticism of a partner to make them feel bad or useless as domestic violence.

Women in both the general community and the SCALD sample were more likely than men in both samples to agree that non-physical forms of violence, including controlling the social life of a partner through isolating them from family and friends, repeated criticism, stalking, and harassment by repeated phone calls, were 'always' forms of domestic violence.

Overall, however, respondents in the SCALD sample were less likely than the general community to agree that the range of behaviours listed by the survey 'always' constituted forms of domestic violence when compared with the general community.

While the pattern of responses was also similar for the small Indigenous sample surveyed, Indigenous respondents were more likely than respondents in the general community sample to agree that yelling abuse, stalking, and controlling and criticising a partner were forms of domestic violence. A majority of Indigenous respondents (85%) also agreed that domestic violence includes 'denying a partner the opportunity to identify with their Indigenous culture or identity'. (This statement was specific to the Indigenous sample only.)

More Indigenous women than men agreed these behaviours were domestic violence (with the exception of repeated criticism to make a partner feel bad or useless, where the rate of agreement that this constituted domestic violence was higher for Indigenous men). Conversely, Indigenous women were less likely than Indigenous men to rate the four items that dealt with physical violence (slapping and pushing a partner, forcing a partner to have sex, throwing and smashing objects, and threatening family members) as domestic violence.

With respect to changes over time, the general community were significantly more likely in 2009 to recognise *non-physical* forms of violence against women as domestic violence than they were in 1995. Ironically, the greatest improvement was found for behaviours for which, overall, there remains the least consensus in the community. For example, recognition of 'criticising a partner to make them feel bad or useless' as violence increased by 14 percentage points, from 71 percent to 85 percent. Similarly, recognition of 'controlling a partner by denying them money' and 'controlling the social life of a partner by preventing them from seeing family and friends' as violence each increased by 10 percentage points over the 14-year period between the surveys.

**Table 2: Comparison of responses to domestic violence behaviours between 1995 and 2009 surveys (percentages)**

Are these behaviours domestic violence?	1995 National (N=2,004)		2009 National (N=10,105)		% point diff between 95 & 09 (Yes)
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Slapping or pushing partner to cause harm or fear	97	2	98**	2	1
Forcing partner to have sex	94	4	98**	1	4
Throwing or smashing objects near the partner to frighten or threaten them	91	8	97**	2	6
Threatening to hurt family members to scare or control partner	na	na	98	1	-
Yelling abuse at partner	77	20	88**	11	11
Controlling the social life of partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family	74	23	84**	15	10
Criticising partner to make them feel bad or useless	71	26	85**	14	14
Controlling partner by denying them money	62	33	72**	25	10
<b>Are these behaviours violence against women?</b>					
Stalking	na	na	91	8	-
Harassment by repeated phone calls	na	na	89	10	-
Harassment by repeated email	na	na	85	12	-

\*\* Proportions responding "yes" differed between 1995 and 2009 samples at  $p < 0.01$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

Interestingly, some women and men in the focus groups with new and emerging refugee communities suggested that non-physical forms of abuse, such as verbal abuse, financial and social control of women, may have become more frequent because they were seen to be less serious than physical violence, and due to a misunderstanding that they were not covered by the law.

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**It is common awareness within Australia that physical violence is against the law, so mental abuse is becoming more common (SCALD female 20-40 year old in SCALD focus group).**

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## Defining violence – still depends on the context

There was considerable variation in community perceptions about whether the behaviours listed were ‘always’, ‘usually’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ domestic violence. In other words, respondents’ attitudes about whether certain behaviours could ‘always’ be considered domestic violence appeared to be conditional.

Overall, non-physical forms of violence were the least likely to ‘always’ be considered domestic violence. For example, forcing a partner to have sex was ‘always’ considered to be a form of domestic violence by 83 percent of men and 86 percent of women in the general community. However, only 42 percent of men and 58 percent of women in the general community were as decisive about recognising ‘repeatedly criticising a partner to make them feel bad or useless’ as ‘always’ domestic violence. The same pattern emerged in the overarching results for the SCALD and Indigenous samples.

With respect to sex of respondents, women in the general community and SCALD samples were significantly more likely than their male counterparts to recognise repeated criticism and controlling behaviours as ‘always’ violence.

These findings were also assessed against people’s views or levels of support for gender equity. To briefly explain, respondents were asked a series of attitudinal statements about women and their role in society. The responses to those statements were summed to give a score out of 100. Those who scored highly (closest to 100) gave answers to the statements that indicated they supported gender equity – that is that women should be afforded the same rights, roles and opportunities in society as men. Those who scored lower on the gender equity scale (closer to zero) expressed views that indicated less support for women receiving equal treatment and equal access to resources. *(A more detailed discussion of Gender Equity Scores and how they were calculated can be found in the Appendix.)*

Overall, general community members who were less likely to be supportive of equal treatment and access to resources for women generally (that is, with a low gender equity score), were significantly less likely to view the behaviours as ‘always’ domestic violence. For example, only 71 percent of those with low gender equity scores believed that forcing a partner to have sex was ‘always’ a form of domestic violence, whereas 94 percent of the community with high gender equity scores believed this was the case.

The corresponding figures for the SCALD sample were even more marked, with 40 percent and 84 percent of those with low and high gender equity scores respectively agreeing that ‘forcing a partner to have sex’ was ‘always’ a form of domestic violence. In statistical terms, the relationship between the gender equity scores and the respective domestic violence measures was extremely high.

While the smaller sample size in the Indigenous survey limits the statistical strength that can be attributed to this finding, gender equity scores similarly distinguished the views of Indigenous respondents. Here again, low gender equity scores corresponded with a reluctance to categorise the behaviours listed as ‘always’ domestic violence.

## Views about prevalence and seriousness of violence against women

### In summary

#### Progress

Overall, since 1995 there has been a positive shift in the proportion of people who rate the spectrum of violent behaviours as 'very serious'. This was especially the case for forcing a partner to have sex (80 percent) and threatening to hurt family members to scare or control a partner (78 percent). Stalking was also considered by more than two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) to be 'very serious' violent behaviour.

The majority of respondents across all three samples considered violence against women to be a serious issue, although SCALD women and women in the general community were more inclined to this view than men.

Perceptions about prevalence varied more widely, with Indigenous respondents and women in the general community most likely to believe that violence against women is common.

Most respondents across all samples believed that domestic violence and forced sex by an intimate partner are unlawful acts. Comparison with the 1995 survey showed a significant increase in the proportion of the population who believed that domestic violence is a crime (from 93 percent to 98 percent in 2009).

#### Challenges

While evidence continues to highlight the cumulative health effects of non-physical and physical forms of violence, the general community were less inclined to rate financial, emotional, and social abuse as 'very serious'. As many as one in five respondents in the general community rated 'yelling abuse' and 'controlling a partner by denying them money' as only 'quite serious'.

It was also the case that not all *physical* forms of violence retained their status as 'very serious' behaviours. There was a significant decline in the rate at which 'slapping or pushing a partner to cause harm or fear' was seen as 'very serious', from 64 percent in 1995 to 53 percent in 2009. Those in the youngest and oldest age categories were more likely to rate this behaviour as only 'quite serious' (Figure 1).

As a whole, women in both the general community and the SCALD samples were significantly more likely to assess the various forms of violence as 'very serious' than were their male counterparts. Both SCALD women and SCALD men were significantly less likely overall to see 'forcing a partner to have sex' and 'stalking' as 'very serious'.

While the majority of women in both the general community and SCALD samples believed that violence against women was common, just under two-thirds of men in the general community, and less than half of the men in the SCALD samples, shared their view.

Men in the SCALD sample and men in the general community were less likely than their female counterparts to view domestic violence as a crime.

Community understanding of the nature and impact of violence against women with disabilities was poor. Few respondents were aware of the far greater vulnerability to violence that women with disabilities face, especially by intimate partners, or of the significant barriers that exist to reporting.

## Background

Earlier this decade, the World Health Organization identified violence against women as a leading public health issue for the international community to address (WHO 2002). Alongside the profound consequences of violence to women’s health, there is now wider recognition of the social and economic costs to families and communities.

For some decades, governments, legislatures and human rights organisations around the world have been reforming the laws and systems that govern the response to violence against women. Some jurisdictions have introduced specialist police units and courts to ensure a more responsive approach is taken to the needs of victims, families and perpetrators (Heath 2005; Stewart 2005).

Most recently, the Australian Government launched the National Council’s evidence-based plan to reduce violence against women and their children. The Prime Minister pledged national leadership

on the Plan’s implementation with a commitment to introduce strategies that can both better protect the safety and wellbeing of women and families affected by violence, and challenge the attitudes, values and practices in the community that continue to sustain violence (Australian Government 2009).

### Awareness of the prevalence of violence against women

While a majority of women in both the general community and SCALD samples believed that violence against women was common, just under two-thirds of men in the general community and less than half of the men in the SCALD samples shared their view.

Research suggests that women’s awareness of their vulnerability to violence, or of the limitations placed on their everyday freedoms for fear of physical or sexual victimisation, is substantially different to men’s (Katz 2006; Morrison et al. 2007). In general terms the survey findings were consistent with this,

with women significantly more likely than men to be concerned about their personal safety in the home and their public safety especially at night and they were also more likely to fear sexual assault.

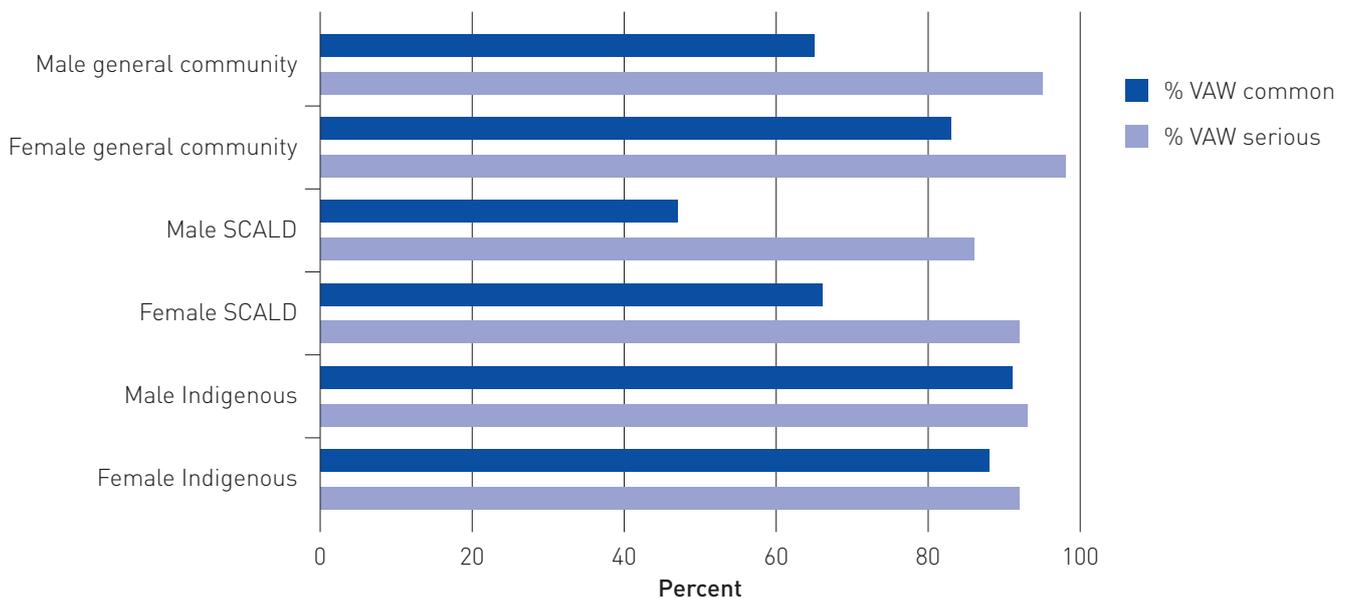
Indigenous men and women had the highest levels of agreement with the statement that violence against women is common. (See Figure 2).

### Understanding the seriousness of violence against women

There was broad consensus across all three samples that violence against women is an issue of serious concern.

Figure 2, below, illustrates that women in both the general community and SCALD sample tended to hold this view more strongly than men; however, SCALD men were less likely to agree overall. Indigenous men and women were most in agreement about the seriousness of the issue.

**Figure 2: Did respondents believe that violence against women (VAW) is common and/or serious? (percentages)**



Note: General community sample n=10,105; SCALD community sample n=2,501; Indigenous community sample n=400. Difference between males in general community and SCALD sample to p<0.01

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data (computer file)

## Perceptions of seriousness of the range of violent behaviours

In addition to exploring how the community defines violence against women, respondents were asked how seriously they rated the behaviours listed in Table 3. The results were surprisingly inconsistent across both physical and non-physical forms of violence.

While respondents in the general community believed most forms of violence were 'very serious', especially when it comes to 'forcing a partner to have sex' (80 percent) or 'threatening to hurt family members to scare or control a partner' (78 percent), non-physical

forms such as yelling abuse or criticising and controlling behaviours were more likely to be considered as only 'quite serious'. Indeed one in five respondents categorised 'yelling abuse at a partner' and 'controlling a partner by denying them money' as either 'not that serious' or 'not serious at all'.

In comparison, 'stalking' and 'harassment by phone' were regarded as 'very serious' by the general community (69 and 52 percent respectively) with very few respondents willing to categorise these behaviours as not very serious.

On the whole, women in both the general community and the SCALD samples

were significantly more likely to rate the various forms of violence as 'very serious' than men. The SCALD sample, however, were less likely overall to consider the behaviours 'very serious'. The greatest differences were found for the behaviours of 'stalking' and 'forcing a partner to have sex', with the Vietnamese and Chinese respondents least likely to agree that that these behaviours were 'very' serious.

By contrast, the Indigenous sample were more likely than the general community and the SCALD sample to recognise a range of both physical and non-physical forms of violence as 'very serious'.

**Table 3: Comparing responses to seriousness of behaviours between 1995 and 2009 (percentages)**

How serious is this behaviour?	1995 National (N=2,004)			2009 National (N=10,105)			% point diff between 95 & 09 (Very)
	Very	Quite	Not <sup>#</sup>	Very	Quite	Not <sup>#</sup>	
Slapping or pushing partner to cause harm or fear	64	29	6	53**	40	6	-11
Forcing partner to have sex	77	18	3	80**	17	2	3
Throwing or smashing objects near the partner to frighten or threaten them	47	40	12	63**	32	5	16
Threatening to hurt family members to scare or control partner	na	na	na	78	20	2	-
Yelling abuse at partner	24	46	28	30**	49	20	6
Controlling the social life of partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family	46	38	14	47	40	12	1
Criticising partner to make them feel bad or useless	29	43	26	40**	45	14	11
Controlling partner by denying them money	35	42	20	33	43	21	2
Stalking	na	na	na	69	27	3	-
Harassment by phone	na	na	na	52	40	7	-
Harassment by email	na	na	na	47	40	11	-

\*\* Proportions responding 'very serious' differed between 1995 and 2009 samples at  $p < 0.01$

# 'Not serious' is a combination of 'not that serious' and 'not at all serious'

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

Broadly speaking, in terms of changes over time, respondents in the general community were more likely in 2009 to view the majority of behaviours, both physical and non-physical forms, as 'very serious' than they were in 1995.

However, there was one important exception to this, with the results showing a decline in the proportion of respondents who were willing to recognise 'slapping and pushing a partner to cause harm or fear' as 'very serious', from 64 percent in 1995 to 53 percent in 2009.

Age is a factor here with more respondents in the youngest and oldest age-categories rating the behaviour as only 'quite serious'. Age was also an influence on some of the ratings for other behaviours listed that relate to financial control and repeatedly criticising a partner, with those in the youngest age categories being least likely to view the behaviours as 'very serious'.

Participants in the SCALD focus groups with new and emerging refugee communities acknowledged the existence of domestic violence and the seriousness with which the issue was increasingly

being treated. Similar to the results in the survey though, behaviours such as yelling abuse or repeatedly criticising a partner to make them feel bad or useless were not considered as serious as physical violence – 'it is humiliation, not violence... it is less serious'.

Key stakeholders interviewed as part of this research also spoke about the challenge of encouraging more open discussion about family violence and sexual assault. They described a spectrum of views that included: 1) denial of the existence of domestic violence as a crime or as an issue; 2) reluctance (mostly by women) to disclose and place themselves or their families at risk of retaliation or community disapproval; 3) defining domestic or family violence in exclusively physical terms; and 4) factoring in the experiences of pre- and post-settlement life on the levels of tolerance that exist in relation to various forms of family violence.

### Awareness that violence against women is a crime

There was near universal consensus amongst the general community that domestic violence constitutes a crime

(98 percent agree). Comparison with the 1995 survey indicates a significant shift in community views on this issue (Table 4). This meets a long-time goal of advocates who have struggled to bridge the public/private divide in establishing the criminal nature of assault regardless of where and between whom it occurs (McGregor and Hopkins 1991). Further, rape remains an offence regardless of whether the victim has had a sexual relationship with the offender (93 percent agree).

A majority of Indigenous men and women also agreed that domestic violence (93 percent) and forced sex by an intimate partner (89 percent) were crimes. Women in the general community were more likely than men to view domestic violence as a crime, as were women more than men in the SCALD sample, although their views on the criminal nature of intimate partner rape were more aligned. Those with high levels of support for gender equity scores were also significantly more likely to view both forms of violence as criminal than those with low gender equity scores. This was true for both the SCALD and general community samples.

**Table 4: Comparing beliefs about domestic and sexual violence between 1995 and 2009 (percentages)**

Agree with the statement?	1995 National		2009 National		% point diff between 95 & 09 (Agree)
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	
Domestic violence is a criminal offence	93	5	98**	2	5
A woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with	na	na	5	93	-

\*\* Proportions differed between 1995 and 2009 samples at  $p < 0.01$

na question was not asked in 1995

## Understanding of violence against women with disabilities

There is little data or research with which to assess the nature and scope of violence against women with disabilities or the adequacy of the systems that respond to it (VLRC 2003, 2004). Nevertheless, it is clear that women with physical and cognitive disabilities experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than those without disabilities, and those with cognitive disabilities are particularly vulnerable (Goodfellow and Camilleri 2003; Armour 2008; Flood 2007). Women with a disability are also far more likely to disclose sexual victimisation as part of their relationship histories, and to report multiple incidents of sexual assault across their lifetimes (Curry et al. 2001).

Perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities cut across a range of relationship categories, including partners and family members who might also function as principal carers; companion residents who occupy the same share-houses, and professional carers in residential and other supported-accommodation services. The undertaking of a national survey on community attitudes to violence against women provided an important opportunity to gauge community perceptions about these issues.

The survey results indicate that the general community was mostly unaware about the greater vulnerability of violence to women with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> The findings<sup>7</sup> showed that:

- Only 9 percent of respondents in the general community sample agreed that 'women with intellectual disabilities are more likely to experience violence than other women', while 69 percent disagreed;
- Sixteen percent agreed that 'women with physical disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence than other women', while 58 percent disagreed; and,

- There was a higher level of awareness regarding community ignorance of rates of sexual violence among women with disabilities, with 76 percent agreeing that 'few people know how often women with disabilities experience rape or sexual assault'.

There were some associations between beliefs regarding violence against women with disabilities and the sex of respondents; however, they appear in relation to different issues. Women seemed to have a better understanding than men about the high rates of sexual violence experienced by women with disabilities, with women more likely to agree that:

- 'Women with disabilities who report rape or sexual assault are less likely to be believed than other women' (42 percent of women agree, compared to 35 percent of men); and
- 'Few people know how often women with disabilities experience rape or sexual assault' (78 percent of women agree, compared to 73 percent of men).

On the other hand, men were more likely to agree that:

- 'Women with intellectual disabilities are more likely to experience violence than other women' (11 percent of men agree, compared to 7 percent of women); and
- 'Women with physical disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence than other women' (20 percent of men agree, compared to 11 percent of women).

However, these sex differences were not evident in either the SCALD or Indigenous samples.

Respondents in the SCALD sample were more likely than those in the general community sample to recognise the relatively high rates of violence experienced by women with physical or intellectual disabilities:

- 18 percent agreed that 'women with intellectual disabilities are more likely to experience violence than other women', compared to 9 percent in the General Community sample;
- 26 percent agreed that 'women with physical disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence than other women', compared to 16 percent in the general community sample.

In addition to gender, age-related difference in beliefs around violence and women with disabilities appeared to emerge. Younger people less often agreed that 'women with disabilities who report rape or sexual assault are less likely to be believed than other women'. The proportion agreeing with this statement rises consistently among older age groups. On the other hand, this same age association is not evident for the statement that, 'few people know how often women with disabilities experience rape or sexual assault.'

In many ways these findings are not unexpected given the current status and deficiencies of research and the concomitant limited emphasis placed on educating the wider community about the social and environmental factors that place women with disabilities at increased risk or exposure to violence in a range of contexts.

Because questions on these issues were not asked in the 1995 survey, it is not possible to gauge shifts over time in relation to these attitudes. However, these measures will provide important benchmarks on which future community attitudes survey tools can extend.

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**Women with disabilities are not only marginalised and ignored but, paradoxically, experience violence within and by the very systems and settings which should be affording them care, sanctuary and protection... All too often women with disabilities are let down by the criminal justice system and are subject to discriminatory, insensitive, aggressive and/or doubting attitudes from those working in it (Women with Disabilities Australia 2007).**

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## Understanding of who perpetrates and who is affected by violence

### In summary

<p><b>Progress</b></p> <p>Domestic violence is perpetrated mainly by men and the overwhelming majority of victims are women. Most respondents (76 percent) understood this to be the case. The vast majority of respondents (90 percent) also believed that women were more likely than men to suffer physical harm.</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>A considerable proportion of respondents (22 percent) believed that domestic violence was perpetrated equally by both men and women. This represents an increase of 13 percent on the proportion who believed this in the 1995 National Survey (9 percent).</p> <p>Sizeable proportions also believed that the levels of fear associated with domestic violence are equal for both men and women, although most believed that physical harms were more likely among women. This suggests that there is a poor understanding that domestic violence is committed mainly by men against women and is frequently characterised by a persistent pattern of controlling and abusive behaviours.</p>

### Background

Both women and men may be subjected to violence in intimate relationships and families, and both men and women may use violence in these contexts. At the same time, there are clear gender contrasts in both victimisation and perpetration. Many of the victims of general public violence are male, and like women, men are at most risk from [other] men. This changes when it comes to violence between intimate partners in particular, where in the majority of cases the victims are female and the perpetrators are male.

Data from the ABS Personal Safety Survey (2006b) give some indication of the gender contrast. They show that for those who experienced physical assault in the previous 12 months:

- Among women, the most frequent category of perpetrator was male current or previous partners (31 percent), then male family members or friends (28 percent), and then male strangers (15 percent).

- Among men, in contrast, the most frequent category of perpetrator was male strangers (65 percent), then male other known persons (19 percent), and then male family members or friends (10 percent). Female current or previous partners accounted for only 4 percent of perpetrators (ABS 2006b).

Thus, while substantial proportions of adult men in Australia are subject to physical assault, only a tiny proportion of this is perpetrated by female partners or ex-partners, and most is perpetrated by other men. For women on the other hand, close to one-third of the physical assaults they experience are perpetrated by male partners or ex-partners.

The Personal Safety Survey, however, has some limits as a basis with which to assess women and men's experiences of domestic violence. Like many large-scale surveys of victimisation, it focuses on physically aggressive acts and gives relatively little information about their context, history, meaning, or impact (Flood 2006). Other richer

investigations document that there are important contrasts in women and men's experiences of violence in heterosexual relationships. These contrasts are as follows:

- Women are far more likely than men to be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence, to sustain injuries, to fear for their lives and safety, and to be sexually assaulted (Bagshaw et al. 2000; Belknap and Melton 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe 2005; Kimmel 2001).
- In addition, men subjected to domestic violence by women rarely experience post-separation violence and have more financial and social independence (Bagshaw et al. 2000).

A small minority of women do initiate violence and act in other ways to control their male partners, and some men do live in fear of their female partners. At the same time, there are gender contrasts in the perpetration of violence in intimate relationships. Women's physical violence towards intimate male partners is more likely than men's violence to take place in the context of violence from their

partners, to be in self-defence and often reactive or self-protective (Morgan 2002). Comparatively, men's physical violence towards intimate female partners is more likely to be instrumental, that is, directed towards particular goals, and to be accompanied by non-physical tactics of coercion and control (Swan and Snow 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004; Cercone et al. 2005).

### Beliefs about who commits violence

The 2009 National Survey finds that most respondents in the general community sample (76 percent) agreed that domestic violence is perpetrated mainly by men. (This combines responses for 'mainly men' and 'both, but mainly men' (see Table 5). However, 22 percent (26 percent of men and 18 percent of women) believed that domestic violence is committed equally by men and women.

A majority of respondents believed that levels of fear are worse for women than men. Perhaps surprisingly, female respondents seem *less* likely than male respondents to believe that levels of fear are worse for women.

The survey findings show that there has been a significant shift away from the idea that domestic violence is committed mainly by men, and towards the belief that domestic violence is committed by both men and women equally. In 1995, 9 percent of the population believed that domestic violence was committed equally by both genders. By 2006, at least in Victoria, this had doubled to 20 percent, and by 2009, 22 percent of the nation's population shared this belief.

The shift towards a belief in domestic violence as gender-equal is evident particularly among men. In 1995, men and women showed similar perceptions of the sex of perpetrators, with only one or two percentage points between them

for each category. However, by 2009, men and women's perceptions had moved apart, with significant sex differences now more evident. At the same time, like men, women have shifted towards a greater belief in domestic violence as gender-equal, from 9 percent in 1995 to 18 percent in 2009.

The sex difference in perceptions of who perpetrates domestic violence is evident too in all but one of the five CALD groups surveyed, with men more likely than women to believe that domestic violence is gender-equal.

In the Indigenous sample, around two-thirds of respondents (62 percent of men and 72 percent of women) believed that 'mainly men' commit domestic violence, with 35 percent of men and 26 percent of women agreeing that 'both men and women equally' are the perpetrators. Sex differences are evident among respondents in the capital cities but not in the regional centres.

**Table 5: Comparison of beliefs about perpetrators of domestic violence between 1995 and 2009 surveys (percentages)**

Who commits acts of domestic violence?	1995 National (N=2,004)			2009 National (N=10,105)			% point change persons 95-09
	Men	Women	All people	Men	Women	All people	
Mainly men	49	51	50	28**	31	30^	-20
Both, but mainly men	35	37	36	42**	49	46^	+10
Both men and women equally	10	9	9	26**	18	22^	+13
Both, but mainly women	3	1	2	1**	1	1^	+1
Mainly women	2	1	2	0	0	0^	-2
Unsure	1	1	1	2	2	2^	+1

\*\*Sex difference within 2009 sample significant to  $p < 0.01$

^Proportions differed between 1995 and 2009 samples at  $p < 0.01$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

Substantial proportions of men (38 percent) and women (46 percent) in the general community sample believed that the levels of fear associated with domestic violence are equal for both men and women. This may reflect the idea that domestic violence involves behaviours and situations which will be experienced in the same way by whomever is being victimised, whether female or male. In other words, whether a person being subjected to physical abuse and control by an intimate partner is female or male, they will feel the same way. While there is a sense in which this is true, it is also the case that women living with physical aggression by male intimate

partners are more likely than men living with aggression by female partners to experience fear.

The overwhelming majority (90 percent) of respondents in the general community believed that women rather than men suffer physical harm, with no differences between female and male respondents. In the SCALD sample, men were less likely than women to report that women suffer the most physical harm and more likely to report that men and women suffer physical harm equally (see Table 6). In the Indigenous sample, while men were less likely than women to agree that women suffer the most physical harm; still, 63 percent of men and 73 percent of women agreed with this.

What has prompted the shift towards inaccurate perceptions of gender symmetry in domestic violence? While there is no data with which to reliably identify key influences, at least four factors are likely to have been influential:

- broadened definitions of domestic violence;
- the influence of anti-feminist men's groups;
- media attention to violence by women and girls and perhaps an actual increase in this violence; and
- de-gendered accounts of domestic violence in public policy.

**Table 6: Perceptions of fear and harm resulting from domestic violence, by sex of survey respondent (percentages)**

Who commits domestic violence?	General Community Sample (N=10,105)		SCALD Sample (N=2,501)	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
<b>Level of fear of victims</b>				
Worse for males	2**	1	3	1
Worse for females	58**	52	62	65
Same for males and females	38**	46	34	32
Don't know	2	1	1	1
<b>Who suffers physical harm?</b>				
Men	2	1	4	2
Women	90	90	83**	90
Both men and women equally	7	8	11**	6
Don't know	1	1	3	2

\*\* Sex difference within sample significant to  $p < 0.01$ .

Note: 'Don't know' categories were not tested.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

As community definitions of what constitutes 'domestic violence' broaden, they also allow for greater emphasis on forms of violence or abuse used by women. Once community members recognise forms of verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse in relationships, they may also be more likely to recognise women's use of these forms of abuse.

The second factor fuelling a growing perception of gender symmetry in domestic violence may be the influence of conservative men's groups. 'Men's rights' and 'fathers' rights' groups in Australia have popularised the belief that domestic violence is gender-equal, in news media, to politicians, and in community forums (Flood 2004, 2009), and their efforts may have had some success in swaying community opinion. Their influence may have been intensified by recent media and popular attention to issues of family law and shared parenting.

A third potential factor is media attention to violence by women and girls. The idea that girls are growing increasingly violent, and as violent as boys, became a media staple in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century (Irwin and Chesney-Lind 2008; Muncer et al. 2001). Much of this media 'hype' centres on violent and criminal behaviour in public spaces by young women. Nevertheless, this attention, as well as media attention to women's domestic violence, may have fuelled acceptance of the idea that women also are catching up to men when it comes to violence in relationships and families.

It is also possible that there has been an actual increase in violence by women and girls. There is some evidence of a narrowing in the gender gap in young people's involvements in violent crime (Carrington 2006). However, there is debate over this. Some commentators suggest that, rather than any significant change in girls' behaviour, there has been an increase in media reporting of and police responses to females' violence (Irwin and Chesney-Lind 2008; Kruttschnitt et al. 2008), and a shift in law and policy which has criminalised a wider range of low-level criminal behaviours and brought more girls and young women into the system (Zahn 2009).

A final factor may be de-gendered accounts of domestic violence in public policy. Some commentators argue that in the 1990s, policy frameworks focused on men's violence against women and emphasising violence as gendered gave way to some degree to more de-gendered, individualistic, and therapeutic understandings of violence (McDonald 2005; Murray and Powell 2009; Phillips 2006). Associated with this, national campaigns on violence in intimate relationships used gender-neutral language that neglected the gendered character of this violence (Phillips 2006). In addition, state policies promoting the arrest of perpetrators have had the unexpected consequence of increasing the number of dual arrests for domestic violence, in which both men and women are arrested. Media attention to this – with headlines like 'Domestic violence: Women abusers on the rise' (ABC Online, 22 June 2009) – may have fuelled attention to women's domestic violence.

## **Belief in explanations diminishing men’s responsibility for violence**

### **In summary**

#### **Progress**

The vast majority of people in all three samples surveyed did not believe that any physical force against a current or former wife, partner or girlfriend could be justified under any circumstances. Nor were most respondents prepared to accept that there were circumstances under which domestic violence could be excused (Table 7).

Importantly, since 1995 there has been a decrease in those prepared to apportion blame to a victim of sexual assault, with fewer people supporting the notion that ‘women often say no when they mean yes’, and significantly fewer people in the general community (5 percent) believing that ‘women who are raped often ask for it’ than in 1995 (15 percent).

#### **Challenges**

While it was encouraging that there was a 2 percent drop over 14 years in the proportion who agreed that physical force can be justified when a partner ‘admits to having sex with another man,’ this circumstance remains a justification for 4 percent of the general community and 14 percent of the SCALD sample. There are also sizeable proportions in the SCALD and general community samples that are prepared to excuse domestic and sexual violence, in particular when the victim is seen somehow to have ‘provoked’ this violence or the perpetrator shows regret. Just under half of the SCALD sample (45 percent) and nearly one in five (18 percent) in the general community believed that domestic violence can be excused if it results from a temporary loss of control. If a perpetrator truly regrets what they have done a significant proportion believed domestic violence was excusable (59 percent of the SCALD sample and 22 percent of the general community). Over a third (34 percent) of the general community agreed that rape occurs because of men ‘not being able to control their need for sex’ (42 percent of the SCALD sample).

The belief that women falsify or exaggerate claims of rape and domestic violence was widely held. Half of all respondents (49 percent) believe that ‘women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case’, and only one-quarter (28 percent) disagree. One-quarter (26 percent) disagree that ‘women rarely make false claims of being raped’.

Such beliefs are at odds with the evidence, which documents that rates of false allegations of sexual and physical assault remain low and compare with rates found for other person-related offences. Most allegations, including those made in the context of family law proceedings, are given in good faith and with evidence for their substance.

While there was widespread recognition of rape of women within marriages and intimate relationships there is still a small proportion that did not believe that women can be raped by someone with whom they have been sexually intimate.

Challenging these more violence-supportive attitudes is essential. Excusing or justifying domestic violence or sexual violence in some circumstances risks not only releasing perpetrators from responsibility and appropriate sanctioning, but also undermines the necessary cultural and normative shifts that need to occur to reduce violence and reduces the extent to which women will identify or ‘name’ the violence perpetrated against them.

## Background

There are at least three ways in which community attitudes may function to diminish the responsibility for their behaviour of those who use violence against women: justifying this violence, excusing the violence, or blaming the victim. Justifications for violence involve the belief that violence against a wife or partner is acceptable, legitimate or appropriate: in order to discipline or punish a disobedient or wayward partner, to enforce compliance with legitimate expectations, or for other reasons. Excuses for violence do not offer such a strong endorsement of violence against women. However, they condone or tolerate its use and diminish perpetrators' responsibility, typically by attributing blame for violence to forces or situations outside the perpetrator's control. Victim-blaming involves holding the victim of violence to be wholly or partly responsible for the violence she has experienced.

## Is domestic and sexual violence against women justified or excusable?

### Justifications for violence

The vast majority of respondents did not believe that any physical force against a current or former wife, partner or girlfriend could be justified under any circumstances. The circumstance in which the highest proportions of respondents believed that it might be acceptable for a man to use physical force against his wife or partner was where he is 'protecting himself' (28 percent of men, 15 percent of women). Lower proportions, ranging from 4 to 7 percent, felt that physical force against a wife or partner might be acceptable in circumstances where the man is 'protecting the children' or 'to stop her harming herself'.

There were some sub-groups in the population who were more likely to assume that violence is justifiable by a man against a wife or partner when protecting himself from perceived harm. Men across all samples, people under 20 years of age and over 70 years, were more likely than women and the middle aged to agree there were circumstances under which physical force against a partner or ex-partner can be justified. For instance, over a quarter of men in the general community reported violence against a woman is justified in order for a man to protect himself; this was also reflected in the SCALD (16 percent) and Indigenous samples (61 percent).

Putting aside situations where a man is acting to protect himself, his partner or their children, very few people agreed that violence could be justified under any circumstances. The behaviour for which the highest levels of people report that physical force can be justified is in circumstances where 'a current wife, partner or girlfriend admits to having sex with another man'. However, this justification also is the one for which the greatest level of decline occurred between the 1995 and 2009 surveys. Six percent of the sample in 1995 believed that physical force could be justified if a partner admitted to having sex with another man, and this fell to 4 percent in 2009.

Only very small proportions of the community agreed that there were circumstances under which a man is justified in using force against a *former* wife or partner (see Table 7). Among men and women, the highest level of agreement for any of the five circumstances given is 4 percent. Four percent of men believed that a man was justified in using physical force against his ex-partner in order to get access to his children, and this is the only category that shows a significant difference between the views of men and women.

Higher proportions of respondents in the SCALD sample agreed that there are some circumstances where physical force against a current or former wife, partner or girlfriend could be justified. As in the general community sample, there was greater agreement that violence can be justified in some circumstances for current rather than former partners. For example, in the circumstances where a current wife, partner or girlfriend:

- 'admits to having sex with another man', 14 percent see physical force as justified (compared to 4 percent in the general community sample);
- 'makes him look stupid or insults him in front of another man', 10 percent see physical force as justified (compared to 3 percent in the general community sample);
- 'is perceived to be flirting with another man', 5 percent of Indigenous respondents see physical force as justified (only the Indigenous sample responded to this statement).

Levels of support for physical force against a partner as justified in some circumstances were higher among respondents in the Indigenous sample than in the general community sample, but lower in general than those among respondents in the SCALD sample.

Those in the general community and SCALD samples who expressed high support for gender equality, spoke English at home and have completed more than 12 years of education were more likely to disagree with justifying physical violence.

**Table 7: Are there any circumstances in which physical force may be justified 2009 (percentages)**

Agree with the statement?	2009 National (N=10,105)	
	Agree	Disagree
<b>Current wife, partner, or girlfriend</b>		
Refuses to have sex with him	2	98
Admits to having sex with another man	4	93
Keeps nagging him	2	97
She does something to make him angry	3	96
Argues with or refuses to obey him	2	98
Doesn't keep up with domestic chores	2	98
<b>Former wife, partner or girlfriend</b>		
In order to get access to his children	3	95
She tries to turn the children against him	3	96
He thinks she is unreasonable about property settlement and financial issues	2	97
She commences a new relationship	1	98

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

Historically, there has been widespread tolerance for, and legal protection of, men's sexual assault of their wives (Martin et al. 2007). It was only in the last 20 or 30 years that rape in marriage was accepted as a criminal offence. The great majority of respondents in the 2009 National Survey also recognised that sexual assault of women can occur in intimate relationships and marriages. Only 5 percent of respondents agreed that 'a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with'. Rates of agreement were very low across age

groups, although a higher proportion of the oldest age group, aged 70 and older, agreed (14 percent). There is a strong relationship between the recognition of rape in marriage and intimate relationships and attitudes towards gender equity: 12 percent of respondents with low scores on gender equity agreed that 'a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with', while only 1 percent of those with high scores on gender equity did so.

There appears to be less recognition of rape in marriage and intimate relationships among the SCALD populations surveyed. In the SCALD sample, 19 percent agreed that 'a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with', and 29 percent of those in this sample with a low gender equity score agreed. On the other hand, Indigenous respondents were very unlikely to agree that 'a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with', with only 2 percent of males and 8 percent of females agreeing.

Stakeholders who participated in the SCALD focus groups with new and emerging refugee communities noted the 'significant shame and stigma' that acted as barriers to women coming forward to discuss/report sexual violence within marriage. Many participants in the focus groups found the topic too sensitive to talk about. A few men and women that did offer comments sought to distinguish between an act of violence (in this case, rape) and sexual 'entitlements' that a man is perceived to have in a relationship: 'but it is the husband...she has to agree to it' (female participants, 40–60 years old). Generally speaking most recognised forcing a wife to have sex against her will as serious, harmful to women and something that should not be condoned.

## Excuses for violence

Excuses for violence may not offer the same explicit endorsement of physical and or sexual violence, but they also release the perpetrator from responsibility for their behaviour. Allowing some acts of domestic violence and sexual violence to be excusable risks not only releasing perpetrators from responsibility and sanctioning, but undermines the necessary cultural and normative shifts that need to occur to reduce violence.

There continue to be sizeable proportions in the SCALD and general community samples that were prepared to excuse domestic and sexual violence. These include:

- if it results from people 'getting so angry that they temporarily lose control' (45 percent in the SCALD sample; 18 percent in the general community);
- if the violent person 'truly regrets' what they have done (59 percent of the SCALD sample and 22 percent of the general community);
- rape occurs because of men 'not being able to control their need for sex' (42 percent of the SCALD sample and a third of the general community).

It is concerning that close to one in five respondents in the general community sample, and close to half the respondents in the SCALD sample, believed that domestic violence can be excused if it results from people 'getting so angry that they temporarily lose control'. The notion that domestic violence is caused, exclusively or primarily, by an inability to control anger or the loss of control over anger is not supported by the evidence (Feldman and Ridley 1995). Recent reviews do note that men who use violence against intimate partners in general have higher levels of anger and hostility than other men (Schumacher et al. 2001; Stith et al. 2004). However, they also note that it is not clear whether anger feeds directly into men's perpetration of violence (Norlander and Eckhardt 2005). Anger is a risk factor for the perpetration of intimate partner violence, but is no more important than the perpetrator's choice to act violently or other societal and peer supports for their behaviour (Norlander and Eckhardt 2005).

Viewing the perpetration of domestic violence in terms of a 'loss of control' misses the fact that domestic violence is chosen behaviour. Studies of relationships in which violence occurs suggest that in order to escape detection and continue their control, many men choose with care how, where and when they will be violent (Pringle 1995). Australian research finds that men who are violent in their intimate relationships are more likely than other men also to be violent outside the home (Mouzos and Makkai 2004, p59). At the same time, most men using violence against intimate partners do not use violence elsewhere, with the research just mentioned finding that only 12 percent of men who had inflicted violence on their intimate partners had also been violent towards anyone outside the family. In other words, those men who use violence against their female partners or ex-partners typically do not also use violence in the workplace or in other non-intimate relationships. Men can and do exercise control over their violent behaviour.

It is concerning too that substantial proportions of the community agreed that violence against an intimate partner can be excused if the violent person 'truly regrets' what they have done. Expressions of regret or remorse are a regular feature of men's patterns of abuse of their female partners. Men using violence may apologise for motives ranging from genuine contrition to manipulation designed to receive forgiveness or win post-abuse favours (Stark 2007, p246). In addition, male partners' apologies for the abuse (as well as promises to change, denials of responsibility, withholding of contact with children, threats of harm, and other actions) make it more likely that women will stay with or return to violent partners (Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997, p197). Community support for this excuse has the potential to compromise women's own resolve to take action as well as the responses of service providers and law enforcement personnel.

Close to one-third of women and over one-third of men agreed that rape results from men 'not being able to control their need for sex'. The notion that male sexuality is an uncontrollable or barely controllable force, with men driven by unstoppable sexual 'drives' or desires, is one of the most persistent violence-supportive myths. This idea has worked to downplay or defend men's sexual violence against women, and to place the burden of responsibility for rape with women. It is up to women not to 'provoke' men, to 'lead them on', as men cannot be held responsible for their actions (Flood 2002-03).

Three bodies of evidence refute the belief that rape results from men 'not being able to control their need for sex'. First, if a biologically based 'need' for sex were the basis of rape, one would expect rates of sexual violence to be similar across cultures. Instead, rates of sexual violence vary markedly between societies and even between communities within societies (Heise et al. 1999). That suggests that this behaviour is social in origin, reflecting the organisation of

**Table 8: Can domestic and sexual violence be excused 2009 (percentages)**

Agree with the statement?	2009 National	
	Male Agree	Female Agree
<b>Domestic violence</b>		
Domestic violence can be excused if it results from people getting so angry that they temporarily lose control	20	17
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	9**	6
Domestic violence can be excused if the offender is heavily affected by alcohol	8**	5
Domestic violence can be excused if, afterwards, the violent person genuinely regrets what they have done	27**	18
<b>Sexual assault</b>		
Rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex	38**	30
A man is less responsible for rape if he is drunk or affected by drugs at the time	7	7
If a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible	16	16

\*\*sex difference within sample significant to  $p < 0.01$

To maximise the number of questions while containing survey length, questions about beliefs and excuses about violence against women were split into two half-blocks with 5,000 respondents randomly allocated to each half block.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

gender roles and other factors within any particular society or community. Second, studies among men convicted of raping women suggest that sexual violence is motivated often by the desire to control, dominate, hurt and humiliate, rather than by sexual desire (Scully 1990). Third, rather than being caused by lack of control, many incidents of sexual assault are premeditated and planned. Certainly, for some men their use of sexual violence against women expresses in part a persistent quest for sexual encounters and a highly sexualised view of women. But these too are social rather than biological in basis, reflecting aspects of masculine socialisation and sexist peer cultures (Carr and Vandeusen 2004).

The effect of these excuses is to shift the source of violence from the perpetrator's control to another force, such as provocation, the effect of alcohol/drugs, or an unmet sexual need. In this way the 'loss of control' can also be projected on to the victim. While alcohol or the effect of drugs on the perpetrator or victim was less supported as an acceptable excuse, there remain substantial proportions in most samples that believed a woman is partially responsible for rape if she is drunk at the time (one-third [34 percent] in the SCALD sample and 16 percent in the general community sample, but only 7 percent in the Indigenous sample). Disconcertingly, community members were more likely to excuse men using

violence when they are alcohol/drug affected than they are women suffering violence who are alcohol/drug affected.

Contemporary practice and evidence indicates that violence against women can only be eliminated when men take responsibility for their use of violence and responsibility for learning non-violent responses (Flood and Pease 2006; VicHealth 2006). Overall community attitudes as shown in this survey are consistent with this notion; however, women were significantly more likely to be less tolerant and supportive of these myths than men (see Table 8).

## Belief in attribution of blame to the victim

There has been a long tradition of victim-blaming with regard to violence against women, at both individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, many community members have located the responsibility and blame for domestic or sexual violence with the victim, believing for example that women somehow 'deserve' or 'provoke' violence against them. Victims of sexual assault have been said to precipitate rape by what they wear, how much they drink, and by what they 'don't say' ('she didn't say no'), while victims of domestic violence would be safer if only they did not 'provoke' their partners, and immediately left them after the first sign of abuse. At the institutional level, victim-blaming has been evident in judicial, legal, and police responses to victims of violence (Stewart and Maddren 1997; Bryant and Spencer 2003).

To the extent that individual women agree with victim-blaming understandings of domestic violence or sexual assault, they are more likely to blame themselves for the assault, less likely to report it to the police or other authorities, and more likely to experience long-term negative psychological and emotional effects (Flood and Pease 2006). Community

members who have victim-blaming attitudes respond with less empathy and support to victims and are less likely to report the incident to the police. To the extent that police, lawyers, and others in the criminal justice system blame victims, they are less likely to work in ways which will provide justice and redress for them.

There have also been longstanding efforts to undermine victim-blaming. Advocates for victims and survivors of violence, as well as others, have argued that notions of 'provocation' and other forms of victim-blaming allow those individuals who use violence to avoid taking responsibility for and being held accountable for their actions. Increasingly, policies and practices addressing violence against women include the principle that those who use violence must take responsibility for their violent behaviour.

Over one in eight respondents in the general community sample (13 percent) believed that a woman often says 'no when she means yes'. Only one in twenty (5 percent) believed that 'women who are raped often ask for it'. However, agreement with both statements has declined since 1995, particularly for the latter statement (see Table 9). Thus, there has been a decrease in the levels

of agreement about victims of sexual violence being in some way responsible for the assault. These shifts, whilst small, are in the right direction and important. They matter not only in the dispelling of a persistent myth but also because female victims are judged more harshly where they are perceived to have 'provoked' the violence. For example, studies have shown that:

- rape victims who violate traditional gender norms are more likely to be blamed than other women (Viki and Abrams 2002); and
- victims perceived to be dressed 'less modestly and more suggestively' are rated as more responsible and deserving of assault than victims who are dressed more soberly (Whatley 2005).

Levels of agreement with these victim-blaming notions were close to twice as high among SCALD respondents as among respondents in the general community sample:

- close to one-quarter (23 percent) agree that women 'often say no when they mean yes';
- over one in ten respondents (11 percent) agreed that 'women who are raped often ask for it'; and

**Table 9: Comparing beliefs about whether blame for sexual violence can be attributed to the victim, 1995 and 2009 (percentages)**

Agree with the statement?	1995 National		2009 National		% change between 95 & 09 [Agree]
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	18	79	13**	80	-5
Women who are raped often ask for it	15	83	5**	93	-10

\*\*Proportions differed between 1995 and 2009 samples at  $p < 0.01$

To maximise the number of questions while containing survey length, questions about beliefs and excuses about violence against women were split into two half-blocks with 5,000 respondents randomly allocated to each half block.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

- over one-third (34 percent) agree that 'if a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible'.

Levels of attribution of blame to the victim among Indigenous respondents were similar to, and at times lower than, those among respondents in the general community sample. For example, while 16 percent of respondents in the general community sample agreed that 'If a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible', only 7 percent of Indigenous respondents did so. An identical proportion to that among the general community sample (5 percent) agreed that 'women who are raped often ask for it'. However, a higher proportion of Indigenous than general community respondents (18 percent and 13 percent respectively) believed that 'women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes''.

In the general community sample, there were no sex differences in levels of agreement with any of the three victim-blaming statements discussed above. Looking at respondents by age however, for all three statements there was a U-shaped pattern of agreement. Levels of agreement with each victim-blaming statement were highest at either end of the age range, and lowest in the middle. For example, 15 percent of 16 and 17-year-olds agreed that 'women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'', as did 16 percent of 61 to 70 year-olds, but only 7 percent of 31 to 40-year-olds did so.

The National Survey's findings suggest that the some of the bluntest forms of victim-blaming, such as the idea that women 'ask' to be raped, are held by only a minority and are in decline. On the other hand, other forms of victim-blaming persist with greater support. With 13 percent of the general community and 23 percent of the SCALD sample believing that women 'often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'', there is substantial room for improvement in community attitudes.

### **Belief that claims of rape and domestic violence are often falsified**

The perception that allegations of rape and domestic violence often are false has been documented both in earlier surveys of community attitudes in Australia (VicHealth 2006) and in research among professionals such as judges, other legal professionals, and police (Rumney 2006). The perception centres on the belief that women make dishonest claims of rape or domestic violence for self-interested, malicious, or vindictive reasons. This notion was aired widely in debates regarding changes in family law in Australia, particularly by 'fathers' rights' groups, and is evident too in the attitudes and responses towards domestic violence of some in the family law and justice systems (Flood 2009). More widely, the image of the falsely accusing woman reflects persistent cultural stereotypes of lying women, cultural habits of victim-blaming, and the judicial system's history of treating women's allegations of sexual violence with suspicion.

However, there is no evidence that false allegations of rape or domestic violence actually are common. Instead, the evidence is that rates of intentionally false and/or malicious accusations of rape are very low. For example, the most recent British study determines that only 3 percent of rapes reported to the police were either 'possible' or 'probable' false allegations (Kelly et al. 2005). Australian studies are similar. For example, in an analysis of 850 rapes reported to Victoria Police over three years, only 2.1 percent of reports were identified by police as false (Heenan and Murray 2006). Three earlier studies in Australia, based on police data from 1986 to 1990, find rates of false reports of sexual assault of 1.4 percent, 4.8 percent, and 7 percent (VLRC 2004).

Some other studies claim that rates of false allegations of sexual assault are much higher. However, as a recent reviews note, there is considerable diversity in definitions of falsity, in how allegations are judged to be false, and in methods for collecting data regarding the extent of false allegations (Rumney 2006; Heenan and Murray 2006). For example, some studies that find apparently high rates of false rape allegations take at face value the judgments made by police officers as to the falsity of an allegation. These may be made on the basis of stereotypical assumptions regarding rape victims and their responses to victimisation (Rumney 2006).

The fact that false allegations of sexual assault are rare is recognised by a majority of the Australian population. Most respondents in the general community (61 percent) agreed that 'women rarely make false claims of being raped'. However, one-quarter of respondents (26 percent) disagreed with this statement, suggesting that they believed that false allegations of sexual assault made by women are frequent or common. Men were more sceptical of women's allegations of sexual assault, with lower proportions of men (58 percent) than women (64 percent) agreeing that 'women rarely make false claims of rape'.

Perceptions of the truthfulness of women's allegations of sexual assault were similar in the SCALD sample. Again, most respondents (59 percent) agreed that 'women rarely make false claims of being raped', while one-quarter (27 percent) disagreed. Among Indigenous respondents, there appears to be slightly less support for the belief that 'women rarely make false claims of being raped', and greater uncertainty. Among Indigenous respondents, 53 percent of males and 51 percent of females agreed with the statement, while 17 percent and 23 percent respectively disagreed.

There appears to have been an increase in community uncertainty regarding the truthfulness of women’s allegations of sexual assault, and an increase in outright distrust of such allegations. The proportions of the general community who agreed that women rarely make false claims did not differ significantly from 1995 to 2009: in 1995, 59 percent agreed, while in 2009, 61 percent agreed. However, there was increased community belief that women often make false allegations of sexual assault. In 1995, 34 percent of respondents in the general community survey disagreed with the statement that, ‘women rarely make false claims of being raped’, whereas by 2009 this had declined to 26 percent. Over this period, some respondents shifted towards ‘not knowing’ whether women rarely make false claims of being raped, rather than disagreeing outright with this, with the proportion of respondents unsure regarding the statement doubling from 7 to 13 percent (see Table 10).

Even larger proportions of the community doubt allegations of domestic violence made by women in the context of family law proceedings:

- Half of all respondents (49 percent) believed that ‘women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case’, and only one-quarter (28 percent) disagreed.
- Men were more willing to believe this than women, with 56 percent of men agreeing compared to 42 percent of women.
- Respondents in the SCALD sample expressed similar beliefs, with 48 percent agreeing.

It is not possible to assess changes over time in agreement with this belief, as it was not included in the 1995 survey.

Existing research finds that most allegations of domestic violence in the context of family law proceedings are made in good faith and with support and

evidence for their claims. Two studies have examined rates of substantiated allegations of domestic violence in the context of family law proceedings, and they find that allegations are substantiated in 63 to 74 percent of cases (Shaffer and Bala 2003; Johnston et al. 2005). The remainder are unsubstantiated – where either there is insufficient information to support substantiation or where there is a determination that the allegation is false.

A Canadian study of family law cases in which written decisions were produced over a three-year period identified 42 recorded cases of spousal abuse alleged against men. Seventy-four percent of these were substantiated. Only two cases of spousal abuse alleged against women were identified, one of which was substantiated (Shaffer and Bala 2003). However, as the authors note, in the cases where the courts found the allegations to be exaggerated or unfounded, in some

**Table 10: Beliefs about whether women falsify claims of domestic and sexual violence – 1995 and 2009 (percentages)**

Agree with the statement?	1995 National			2009 National		
	Agree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<b>Domestic violence</b>						
Women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case	na	na	na	49	28	23
<b>Sexual assault</b>						
Women rarely make false claims of being raped	59	34	7	61	26	13

To maximise the number of questions while containing survey length, questions about beliefs and excuses about violence against women were split into two half-blocks with 5,000 respondents randomly allocated to each half block.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

instances the courts gave no reasons for this conclusion, and in at least some cases, judges failed to recognise the existence or seriousness of actual abuse (Shaffer and Bala 2003).

A US study drew on documentary records describing 120 divorced families referred for child custody evaluations and custody counselling, collected over 1989 to 2002 from family courts within San Francisco Bay Area counties. Multiple allegations of child abuse, neglect, and family violence were raised in the majority of cases. Allegations were assessed on the basis of detailed interviews with family members, information from professionals, and analysis of written documentation. This study found that 63 percent of allegations of abuse by one adult of another (including domestic violence and substance misuse) were substantiated (Johnston et al. 2005). Allegations were more likely to be substantiated against men than against women (67 versus 55 percent). In other words, counter to some popular perceptions, men rather than women were more likely to make allegations of domestic violence (and substance abuse) in family law proceedings which were not substantiated. However, this study cannot determine rates of *false* allegations, as it could not distinguish among 'unsubstantiated' allegations between those which were false and those which could not be determined due to lack of evidence (Johnston et al. 2005).

There is no doubt that false allegations of rape and domestic violence sometimes are made. At the same time, there is nothing to suggest that these are common or that women make them more often than men (Davis 2004). In addition, false allegations of violence and abuse are far less common than false *denials* of their perpetration (Jaffe et al. 2008). The popularity of notions of women's routine use of false allegations reflects the ongoing influence of longstanding gender stereotypes of women as prone to lying and motivated by malice. These stereotypes have been given new life in recent debates over family law (Flood 2009). Their persistence continues to threaten women's (and men's) abilities to protect themselves and their children from violence and abuse.

## Beliefs about responses to violence against women

### In summary

<p><b>Progress</b></p> <p>A majority of respondents across the three surveys were in support of domestic violence being addressed as a matter of public concern rather than dealt with privately, and were significantly more in favour of formal complaints of sexual harassment being made over women having to manage it themselves.</p> <p>Two-thirds of the general community considered that there had been an increase in the readiness of victims to talk about domestic violence compared to a decade ago. They also believed that, as community members themselves, they were more likely to intervene at some level in a domestic violence incident than they were to do nothing at all.</p> <p>Two out of five respondents also believed that police responsiveness to domestic violence calls may have improved, although a similar proportion were not confident to express a view on this matter. Increased police powers to remove a violent offender from the home appeared to receive wide endorsement from general community, SCALD and Indigenous respondents, the majority of whom agreed that this was a reasonable response.</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Conflicting views were found amongst the majority of the general community and Indigenous survey respondents who believed that despite more responsive systems, a greater readiness on behalf of victims to disclose and community members (such as themselves) to intervene, 'most people still turn a blind eye to, or ignore domestic violence' (83 and 87 percent respectively).</p> <p>Community understandings of some of the dynamics that characterise domestic violence appear to have worsened. Eight out of ten people in the general community agreed that it is hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships and more than half believe a woman could leave a violent relationship if she really wanted to.</p> <p>Men in the general community and younger respondents in particular were more likely to hold this view.</p>

### Background

Considerable effort has been directed at reforming police procedures and legal processes that have historically worked to reduce women's confidence in reporting violence to the police. Recent initiatives include the introduction of police codes of practice for improving operational responses; the development of family violence risk assessment tools that can heighten responses from crisis services, police and the courts; increased legislative powers for police to arrest or remove violent perpetrators from shared homes; and better integrated or co-ordinated response systems for victims (Laing 2004; VLRC 2005; Heath 2005; Stewart 2005; Marcus 2009; National Council 2009b, 2009c).

Nationally, there has been a corresponding increase in women's reports of violence to police. Findings from the Personal Safety Survey showed that the proportion of women subjected to physical violence by a male perpetrator in the 12 months prior to the survey who reported this to the police had almost doubled in the past ten years, from 19 percent in 1995 to 34 percent in 2005. A more modest increase was also found in the proportion of victims reporting sexual assaults, from 15 percent to 19 percent (ABS 2006b).

Nonetheless these figures confirm that the vast majority of women's victimisation remains unreported at rates far in excess of other person-related crime (ABS 2006a, 2006b). Research has consistently shown the impact of barriers – individual,

familial, and systemic – that act as strong disincentives to women coming forward. Most commonly cited are the fears that victims share about matters such as offender retribution, feeling ill-equipped or ill-informed about the legal process, fear of having their confidentiality breached or being approached by media, and a general lack of faith in the criminal justice or legal system to address their safety or the impact of what has occurred. In the context of reporting intimate partner violence, women face the risk of escalated violence to themselves or their children, homelessness, and economic hardship (Hegarty and Taft 2001; VLRC 2003, 2005; Lievore 2003, Mouzos and Makkai 2004; Heenan and Murray 2006).

Amongst the most debilitating of these barriers are women's fears that they will not be believed or that their disclosure will result in separation or isolation from the families or communities to which they feel most socially or culturally connected. Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities have identified this as particularly relevant to their preparedness to disclose or report violence (Moore 2002; VLRC 2004, 2005; Keel 2004).

In part this reflects the legacy of a public/private divide in government and social policy where traditionally domestic violence (including rape by husbands or partners) was seen as a private affair, outside the remit of the law and best dealt with in the confines of the family (McGregor and Hopkins 1991; Laing 2000; Heenan 2004). By contrast, three decades on, violence against women has become a nationwide focus of governments, courts and police with strategies that seek to improve the rates at which violence is reported, and the quality and responsiveness of systems available to support them through the process (Nixon 1992; Heath 2005; Marcus 2009).

### **Domestic violence and sexual harassment – no longer private matters**

Less than one in five respondents in both the general community and the Indigenous sample agreed that violence against women should be treated as a private matter best handled within the family. Roughly two-thirds of the SCALD sample also disagreed with domestic/family violence being a matter for the family to privately address.

There were some differences between men and women on this issue, with men in the SCALD and general community samples significantly more likely to agree that it should be kept private than their female counterparts (38 percent of SCALD men and 15 percent of men in the general community sample).

Comparison between the 1995 and 2009 findings for the general community indicated that this change in perception was significant.

The pattern of these results was similar for respondents' views on whether women who are sexually harassed should 'sort it out themselves' rather than report it. There was a significant shift in the general community with fewer than one in ten in 2009 supporting the statement that women should sort sexual harassment out themselves, as compared with one in five who held this view back in 1995. This position was strongly endorsed by the Indigenous men and women surveyed with around 90 percent in favour of women reporting sexual harassment should it occur. Six out of ten respondents in the SCALD sample were also in agreement. Men and women in both the SCALD and general community who shared low gender equity scores were more likely to agree with the statement that women should handle incidents of sexual harassment themselves rather than report it.

These results contrast with how few women feel confident to report sexual harassment, with a recent survey indicating that less than one in five women are prepared to make a formal complaint (Australian Human Rights Commission 2008).

Several people who participated in the SCALD focus groups with new and emerging refugee communities believed that discussions around family violence and sexual harassment issues remained private and would only be disclosed to people well known and trusted. Some stakeholders felt that greater familiarity with relevant support and advocacy services was likely to influence whether women might take formal action, outside of their immediate communities, in relation to violence and harassment.

### **Beliefs about how prepared communities are to talk about and take action on the issue of violence against women**

Respondents were asked whether they perceived any change in how readily people talked about violence and whether they thought the community was more likely to take action or intervene when violence occurred.

Two-thirds of the general community (65 percent) considered that there had been an increase over the past ten years in the preparedness of victims to talk about domestic violence. However, as was the case in 1995 (83 percent), a majority of respondents in 2009 (84 percent) continued to believe that most people still turn a blind eye to or ignore domestic violence. The Indigenous survey respondents (87 percent) also agreed this was the case. By contrast, while two-thirds of the SCALD sample concurred (69 percent), there was still one in four surveyed (26 percent) who believed that the community is now more responsive to domestic violence.

When asked about their own levels of responsiveness, the majority of people surveyed indicated that they were more likely to intervene at some level in a domestic violence incident than to not intervene at all.

However, respondents were a little more circumspect when it came to indicating whether they were likely to intervene in a number of hypothetical situations. Broadly speaking, community members across all three surveys indicated that they would be more likely to intervene where the victim was a family member or close friend than they would if a woman they didn't know well was experiencing domestic violence.

Participants in the SCALD focus groups provided further insights with new and emerging refugee communities who described 'watching out for their neighbours' as something that was culturally accepted if not expected within community life in their countries of origin. However, some participants noted a difference in how Australians tended to value their privacy where it was only acceptable to "intervene when asked".

See the section 'Preparedness to intervene in a situation of domestic violence' on page 48 for further discussion of findings regarding this issue.

### Increased confidence in the police response to violence

It is difficult to say whether the community has greater confidence in police responsiveness to domestic violence calls than they did in the past. While the findings show that just over 40 percent of respondents in each survey agreed that police now provide a more timely response, roughly equal numbers also said they were not sure, or that they genuinely couldn't say given their limited knowledge of the issue.

However, regardless of their specific knowledge of changes to police powers in most States and Territories that allow for the removal of violent offenders from the family home (National Council 2009c), most community members agreed that this was an appropriate response. This was particularly the case for the general community survey respondents with nine out of ten agreeing with the statement that 'where one domestic partner is physically violent towards the other, it is entirely reasonable for the violent person to be made to leave the family home'. Three-quarters of respondents in the Indigenous and SCALD survey respondents also supported this approach (77 and 76 percent respectively). Women in the general community were significantly more likely than men to hold this view.

### Views about how women respond to domestic violence

While the results across a range of measures within the survey suggest that the community takes seriously the issue of violence against women and believe that it should not be hidden or 'privatised' within the confines of family, they remain poorly informed about the barriers that often work to prevent women from leaving violent relationships:

- Half the respondents in the general community believed that most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to. Men were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than women (55 compared with 45 percent). SCALD men and women were even more likely to share this view (65 and 70 percent respectively). The Indigenous sample showed no significant differences between the sexes, and were most aligned with men in the general community on this issue (54 percent agreed with the statement).
- People in the general community were even more likely in 2009 than they were in 1995 to agree with the statement that 'it is hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships' (80 percent in 2009 compared with 77 percent in 1995). A majority of the SCALD sample (70 percent) and Indigenous sample (75 percent) shared this view. There were no significant differences between the sexes on this measure, although it is important to note that of all the groups, Indigenous men were less likely, proportionately, to hold this belief (72 percent).

The age of respondents influenced these findings also, with 16-17 year olds (and young men more than women) more likely to suggest they have difficulty with understanding why women stay (94 percent) and most confident to suggest that 'most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to' (76 percent) (See Table 11).

This may reflect the individualistic emphases on choice and personal responsibility said to be common among the current generation of young people. Young people are likely to downplay social and structural reasons for experiences such as domestic violence and the real constraints on women's ability to leave violent relationships. Many have limited personal experience of intimate relationships. Most live at home, and as dependent members of families, they may overestimate the power of adult women to leave.

As stated earlier, the disincentives for women to leave are many, not least of which is the escalated risk of being exposed to more severe and retaliatory forms of violence, which for some can lead to fatal consequences for both women and their children.

However, the survey results suggested that higher support for gender equity and gender equality influenced whether general community and SCALD respondents understood the difficulties women face with respect to leaving a relationship.

Participants in the SCALD focus groups with new and emerging refugee communities identified many compounding reasons that keep victims of violence in an abusive relationship. Some of these include: isolation and not knowing where to go; lack of financial support; no family to rely on; lack of support from the community; to protect children; and shame. Women seeking support to leave an abusive relationship found it difficult: 'they will say, "stay, hold on to your life and family" maybe hoping it will get better in a short time. But in this situation, you get lonely and isolated and don't know who to listen to' (female participants, 40-60 years old).

**Table 11: Beliefs about responses to violence against women by age - 1995 and 2009 (percentages)**

	2009 National Survey (N=10,105)							
	Age group (years)							
	16-17	18-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+
<b>Domestic violence</b>								
Most people turn a blind eye to, or ignore, domestic violence	76	82	82	84	86	86	85	78
It's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships	94	79	78	79	79	78	81	81
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family**	15	18	16	10	8	8	10	24
Police now respond more quickly to domestic violence calls than they did in the past**	62	55	50	41	42	42	36	40
Most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to**	76	63	52	51	46	48	45	49
In domestic situations where one partner is physically violent towards the other it is entirely reasonable for the violent person to be made to leave the family home	88	95	89	91	91	90	92	86
<b>Sexual violence</b>								
Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it**	3	8	9	9	10	11	16	19

\*\*Age difference within sample significant to  $p < 0.01$ .

To maximise the number of questions while containing survey length, questions about beliefs and excuses about violence against women were split into two half-blocks with 5,000 respondents randomly allocated to each half block.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

## Preparedness to intervene in a situation of domestic violence

### In summary

<p><b>Progress</b></p> <p>The majority of people (81 percent) agreed that they would intervene in some way in a domestic violence situation. The greater the familiarity with the hypothetical victim the higher the proportion that would intervene. For example, 73 percent of SCALD men said they would intervene if a woman they didn't know was being assaulted, compared with 94 percent reporting they would intervene if a close family member or friend was the victim of family violence.</p> <p>The general community is largely in step with expert advice on how best to intervene in cases of domestic violence. The two most frequent responses to ways people would intervene were (1) offering support and advice and talking to the victim; and (2) reporting the situation to police/authorities.</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Between 5 and 10 percent of respondents stated that they would intervene in ways that are potentially unhelpful, either confronting the perpetrator or stepping in between the perpetrator and victim which may increase the risk of violence occurring.</p>

### Background

Attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence influence the way family members, acquaintances and bystanders respond to victims. As most victims will seek the help of family and friends first in preference to other professional services or police, their attitudes and knowledge towards how to help are critical.

Research has shown that people who make negative attributions to victims of violence are also less likely to say that they would report violence to the police and more likely to recommend lenient or no penalties for the offender (Pavlou and Knowles 2001). A US study among college students found that individuals who hold more violence-condoning attitudes were more likely to attribute blame to the victim, and among men, victim blaming was associated with offering less helpful interventions (West and Wandrei 2002). Helpful interventions include nurturance and reassurance that the victim is not to blame, listening, understanding, help with decision making, and encouragement to seek professional help, while unhelpful interventions include being angry and

seeking revenge toward the perpetrator, excessive advice giving, trivialising the situation, seeing the victim as a failure, and telling her 'I told you so' (Westand Wanderi 2002).

### Intentions to intervene

The findings in the survey were consistent with this research, demonstrating that individuals with less violence-supportive attitudes have stronger intentions to intervene and are more likely to intervene in helpful ways. Attitudinal factors were the strongest predictors of whether a person is likely to intervene in any three of the situations associated with levels of familiarity with the victim (see Table 12). Those who strongly disagree that physical force against a partner could be justified, those who strongly agree that violence against women is a serious issue and those with higher levels of support for gender equality and equity were significantly more likely to intervene than those with contrasting views.

The closeness between a person and the hypothetical victim also increased the likelihood of intentions to intervene. In the general community, 83 percent of men and 78 percent of women reported they would

intervene if a woman they didn't know was being assaulted, and these figures climbed to 94 percent of men and 95 percent of women if the victim was a close family member or friend. People aged over 70 were the least likely to intervene in any circumstance. This pattern of response was similar for the SCALD and Indigenous communities surveyed. However, the general community sample were more likely to intervene than the SCALD sample if violence was occurring with someone not well known or a neighbour.

Women in both the general community and SCALD communities were more likely to intervene than men for a neighbour or close friend being physically assaulted. Living outside of a capital city was a strong predictor for intervening with a stranger or neighbour for both the community and SCALD samples. Research in the USA also finds that victims were more likely to be helped by women, but also by younger individuals, those who strongly endorsed criminal justice interventions for perpetrators, those who perceived intimate partner violence as a frequently occurring issue in their communities, and those who had witnessed or experienced violence (Beeble et al. 2008).

## How best to intervene

The two most frequent responses people gave to the way they would intervene if a family member or close friend was a victim of domestic violence were:

- Offering support and advice and talking to them about it (49 percent); and
- Reporting the situation to police/authorities (41 percent).

Close to one in five respondents (19 percent) said that they would offer shelter or refuge to the victim or get her to leave, while close to one in seven (14 percent) said that they would suggest places to go for help, support or counselling. Women were more likely than men to intervene in this manner and were also more likely to offer support and advice and or report the situation to the police than men.

These responses are consistent with advice in community educational materials designed to inform family and friends how best to assist in family violence (IWDVS 2006; DVRCV 2003). Of concern is the frequency of responses indicating that people would step in between the parties

(10 percent) or confront the perpetrator (5 percent). Men were more likely to step between parties and confront perpetrators than women. While such strategies may have commendable motivations, and may be successful in stopping some incidents of violence, individuals must be very cautious in intervening directly when violence is occurring.

One strand of contemporary violence prevention focuses on 'bystander intervention', addressing the roles that people other than the perpetrator or his victim can play in preventing violence against women. The premise of this approach is that the responsibility is shared by giving everyone in the community a specific role in preventing the community's problem of violence (Banyard et al. 2004). The approach is to challenge and change violence-supportive social norms by discouraging victim blaming and encouraging collective responsibility. Bystander intervention education teaches strategies with which to respond to violence-supportive comments, intervene safely when violence occurs, and work to build respectful and non-violent peer cultures.

While over 80 percent of respondents believed that they would intervene in some way in a situation of domestic violence, a similar proportion (84 percent) of respondents agreed to the statement elsewhere in the survey that 'Most people turn a blind eye to, or ignore, domestic violence'. This may mean that community members greatly underestimate the willingness of their peers to intervene in situations of violence. On the other hand, it may be that many community members will intervene only if directly confronted by a situation of domestic violence, but many will ignore it if it is easier to do so. Certainly, this survey found that, as one might expect, individuals were more willing to intervene if the victim is a close family member or friend.

**Table 12: Percentage of sample likely to intervene in a domestic violence incident, by sex (percentages)**

Agree they would intervene	General community sample (N=10,105)		SCALD sample (N=2,501)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Woman they don't know was being physically assaulted	83**	78	73	72
Neighbour they don't know well was being physically assaulted	86	86	77	78
Family member or close friend was a victim of domestic violence	94**	95	94	94

\*\*Sex difference within sample significant to  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

## Reach of media coverage and information about violence against women

### In summary

<p><b>Progress</b></p> <p>Just over half of the general community reported seeing or hearing some form of advertising or media reporting about violence against women. Younger people were more likely than older people to report seeing some form of advertising</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>The recall rate of one in five people reporting having seen the 'Australia Says No' campaign and around one in seven reporting having seen some other form of violence against women campaign suggests there is room for more sustained and planned social marketing campaigns.</p> <p>Combining media advertising with community-based education activities and information dissemination on where people can go for outside help to support someone who is exposed to domestic violence would also be beneficial. One-third of women and just over one-third of men in the general community did not know where to go for outside help to support someone about domestic violence. The youngest and oldest groups in the community were the least likely to report that they would know where to go for outside help.</p>

### Background

Community attitudes may be shaped by the mainstream media coverage of violence against women. There has been little analysis in Australia of the media's direct impact on attitudes towards violence; however, in the USA studies have shown both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, there is evidence that media coverage of and public controversy regarding high-profile incidents of violence can increase community awareness of issues of violence against women. This may be the case in recent Australian controversies of sexual assault of women by rugby league and AFL players. On the other hand, media coverage can have negative effects: for example, when it offers depersonalised depictions of female victims of violent crime leading to decreased empathy towards victims and increased victim blame (Flood and Pease 2006). Media coverage that reinforces violence-supportive attitudes may also counteract the willingness of family, friends and others to intervene.

While one dimension of media content regarding violence against women is news coverage, another is the deliberate attempt to influence community attitudes through education and social marketing campaigns. Past public education campaigns have attempted to encourage recognition that domestic violence is a crime; that communities must 'break the silence' regarding violence against women; that violence has negative impacts on children or on women themselves; that social norms intolerant of violence against women are more widespread than some believe; that family and friends must intervene in violence; and perpetrating violence will have negative consequences (Donovan and Vlasis 2005). There is evidence that particular campaigns have produced positive change in the attitudes (and behaviours) associated with violence against women (Donovan and Vlasis 2005).

In Australia there have been a number of education and social marketing campaigns intended to change community attitudes. However, no past or recent Australian campaigns have challenged traditional gender roles and relations and prejudices, which have been identified as the key cause of violence against women (Amnesty International 2007).

### Awareness of media coverage about violence against women

The most high-profile contemporary example of a social marketing campaign in Australia is 'Violence Against Women: Australia Says No', focused particularly on how to respond to violence. One in five people in the general community survey reported having seen the 'Australia Says No' campaign and around one in seven reported having seen some other form of violence against women media advertising. There was no significant difference in recall between the SCALD community and general survey respondents.

Younger people were more likely than older people to report seeing some form of advertising. Men were more likely than women to report that they had seen an advertising campaign about violence against women recently (59 and 54 percent respectively). For all groups, the greater proportion recalled advertising on television with no recall of news and current affairs programs on radio, TV or in magazines. While the White Ribbon Day campaign is the most widespread community-based public education campaign in Australia, less than one

percent of men and women report having seen media coverage about it recently.

These findings suggest that substantially greater effort is needed. The effectiveness of social marketing and awareness campaigns is contingent upon them being sustained beyond a 'single dose'. Greater efficacy is also achieved if they are integrated with mutually reinforcing strategies that can target the population as well as tailoring messages and initiatives that are effective at the community level (Donovan and Vlasis 2005).

### Knowledge of where to seek outside help

One-third of women and over one-third of men in the general community did not know where to go for outside help to support someone about domestic violence. The youngest and oldest in the community sample were the least likely to

report that they would know where to go for outside help. These findings strongly suggest an ongoing need for broad community education and information provision on where people can go for outside help to support someone about domestic violence.

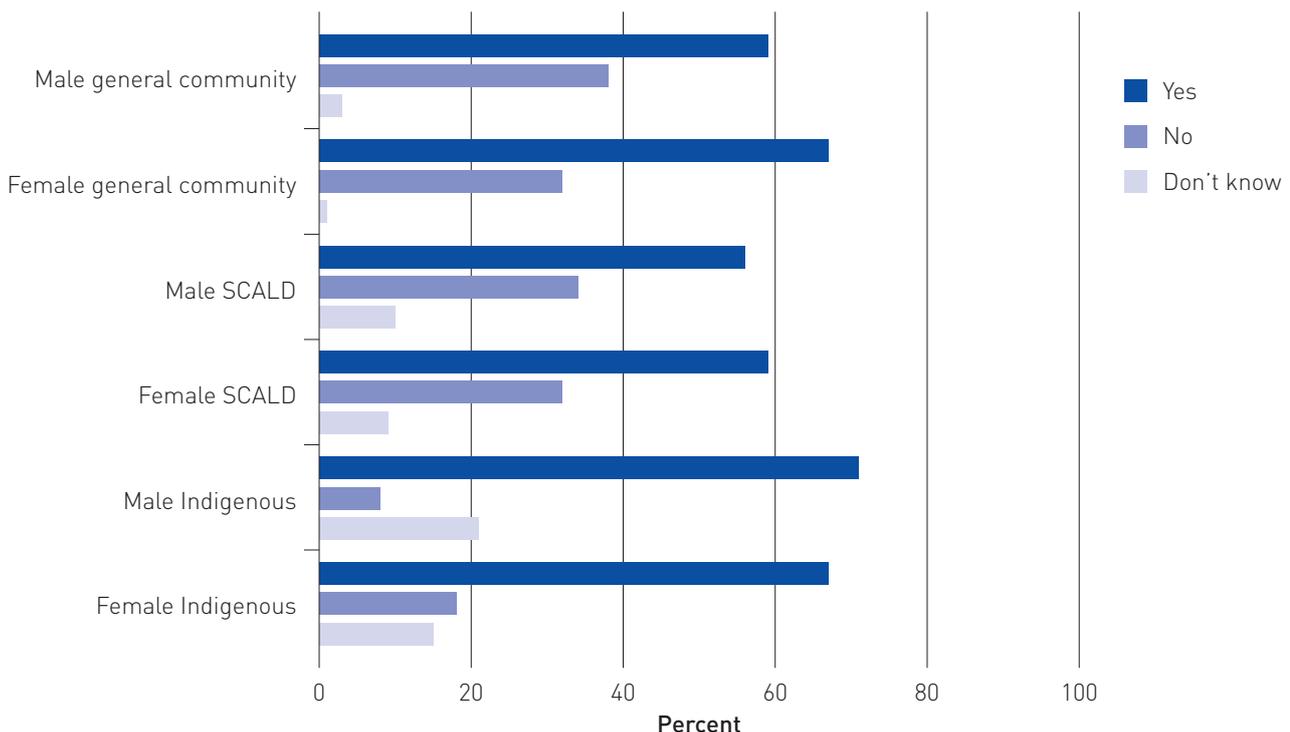
Many participants in the SCALD focus groups stated that they had little idea of which services to contact to support a victim of sexual assault (rape in particular), while some mentioned police, social workers, specialist services, safe houses and doctors. Participants commented that knowing *how* to ask for help was a major barrier for accessing this information.

As there is a very high proportion of respondents in both the SCALD and general community surveys prepared to intervene and lend assistance to victims of domestic violence, it is both an opportunity

for and responsibility of government and community services to ensure they have easy access to information about ways family and friends can best support and assist women affected by domestic violence. Information on appropriate services and legal rights and entitlements should also be part of this communication.

Consideration of the ways that 16-20 year olds can be better informed on where to seek help is also necessary. While they were the least likely to know where to go for outside help regarding domestic violence issues (43 percent would not know where to go), they are the most likely of all age groups to see violence against women as a public issue and they express stronger faith in the reporting systems for harassment and violence than older groups.

**Figure 3: Respondents agree they would know where to go for outside help for someone about a domestic violence issue, by sex (percentages)**



Note: Difference between males in general community and SCALD sample to  $p < 0.01$   
 Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

## Factors that help to predict attitudes to violence against women

### In summary

The strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes were being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality. This was consistently the case for a range of measures across the national survey and held firm even when other demographic factors were being statistically controlled. This provides further evidence of the relationship between the risk of violence against women and attitudes towards gender-based roles, relations and practices.

Age was also predictive for some attitudinal measures. In particular, younger respondents were significantly less likely to rate some physical forms of violence as 'very serious'.

For the SCALD sample, length of time in Australia, whether English was spoken at home and whether respondents were born in Australia influenced whether violence-supportive attitudes were more likely to be held.

These findings indicate priority areas for future prevention strategies to be targeted.

An important objective of the National Community Attitudes Survey is to improve understanding of the kinds of factors that influence or help shape violence-supportive attitudes towards violence against women in order that future violence prevention efforts can more effectively target areas for change.

A number of the results have shown significant differences between the views of men and women in the general community and between men and women in the SCALD sample. There were also differences, some more marked than others, between the general community as a whole and the SCALD sample. However, for other measures the patterns were uneven or suggested other influences, such as age, were more relevant to understanding the shape of the findings.

On a majority of measures, however, sex differences across samples, and differences between the SCALD and general community sample were apparent, with attitudes towards gender equality potentially being a powerful mediating factor. In statistical terms, the relationships between these variables were suggestive of *an association* between sex and attitudes towards gender, as well as factors related to cultural heritage and background.

The findings from the surveys undertaken with Indigenous respondents need to be treated with caution given the different methodological approach and the small number sampled. However, the pattern of results suggested some consistency in that there appeared to be fewer points on which the views of Indigenous men and women diverged. For example, Indigenous women and men were more likely to agree across the sexes that repeatedly criticising a partner to make them feel bad or useless was domestic violence than respondents in the SCALD and general community surveys where significant sex differences were evident.

The results from the Victorian Community Attitude Survey undertaken by VicHealth in 2006 reported a similar pattern of relationships between the attitudinal measures. To investigate the strength of these associations, more rigorous testing was applied<sup>8</sup> to identify whether, when other variables were controlled, the influence of these variables was strong enough to *predict* support or a lack of support for a range of attitudes examined in the survey. This statistical modelling was replicated and applied to the 2009 national survey results.

This modelling could not be undertaken for further investigations of the results of the Indigenous sample due to the sampling frame and size.

### Levels of support for gender equality and gender equity

High support for gender equality and gender equity was *the most powerful predictor* of holding less violence-supportive attitudes across most of the measures included in the survey. This was also a consistent finding of the 2006 Victorian survey results. These results lend considerable support to international research that suggests that the greater the gender equality gap – in terms of social and economic policies and practices and in terms of gender role expectations, beliefs and attitudes – the higher the risk of acts of violence by men against women (WHO 2002, 2009).

**Table 13: Percentage of sample who believed behaviour was 'always' violence, by attitudes toward gender equity, 2009 general community sample**

Are these behaviours 'always' domestic violence/ violence against women?	Support for gender equity					
	Low (N=2,271)		Medium (N=4,542)		High (N=3,291)	
	%	95 CI	%	95 CI	%	95 CI
Slapping or pushing partner to cause harm or fear**	56	53-58	72	70-73	83	81-84
Forcing partner to have sex**	70	68-73	84	83-85	94	93-95
Throwing or smashing objects near the partner to frighten or threaten them**	62	59-65	75	73-76	84	82-85
Threatening to hurt family members to scare or control partner**	75	73-77	85	84-86	91	90-92
Yelling abuse at partner**	28	26-31	38	37-40	49	46-51
Controlling the social life of partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family**	39	37-42	51	49-53	65	63-67
Criticising partner to make them feel bad or useless**	35	32-37	49	47-50	63	61-65
Controlling partner by denying them money**	23	21-25	33	31-34	49	47-51
<b>Are these behaviours violence against women?</b>						
Stalking**	54	51-57	66	64-68	78	76-79
Harassment by phone**	45	43-48	56	54-58	68	66-70
Harassment by email**	41	38-44	51	49-53	63	61-65

Note: 95 CI (95% confidence interval) indicates the probability is 0.95 that the true population figure lies within this range

\*\*Gender equity difference within sample significant to  $p < 0.01$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, VicHealth weighted data [computer file]

For example, respondents who achieved high gender equity scores in both the general community and SCALD surveys, that is who were supportive of statements in favour of women's equal treatment and access to resources, were significantly more likely to:

- Agree that the listed behaviours were 'always' domestic violence and that the behaviours were 'very serious';
- Strongly disagree that physical force against a current or former partner could ever be justified;
- Disagree with statements that suggest that domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is later regretful, disagree that women make up domestic violence claims to advance their custody cases, disagree that domestic violence is better off handled as a private matter, and less likely to believe that women who are raped often ask for it, or that women who are raped while drunk are partially responsible.

## The influence of sex

Significant differences between the attitudes of men and women were found across most measures in the survey, and sex was a consistent predictor of whether more violence-supportive views were held. Women in the general community and women in the SCALD sample were significantly more likely than their male counterparts to:

- Believe that non-physical forms of violence, such as repeated criticism, controlling the degree of social connection with family and friends and controlling finances, were 'always' forms of domestic violence;
- Believe that the various forms of physical and non-physical violence were 'very serious';

- Show lower levels of support for excuses for domestic violence, such as if the violent person is later regretful about violence, or beliefs that suggest 'women who are raped often ask for it' (this last measure applied to women in the general community sample only); and,
- Intervene if a neighbour they didn't know well or close friend or relative was being physically assaulted by her partner.

## The influence of age

Some significant differences between age groups were found across some measures in the survey, with younger respondents (especially those aged between 16 and 20 years of age) holding significantly more violence-supportive views than older respondents on some key attitudinal measures.

Young people had a very strong understanding that domestic and sexual violence is criminal behaviour, and of all the age cohorts, they were most likely to see violence against women as an issue that is acknowledged within the community and better responded to by police today. Unsurprisingly, then, they endorsed the reporting of incidents such as harassment and partner rape and had the greatest faith that women who report assault will be believed. However, they were less clear about what in fact constitutes sexual and domestic violence, if and when it can be excused, and who is most likely to be a victim of it. Young people were also less likely than older respondents to understand complex aspects of violence within relationships: the range and seriousness of violent behaviours, the reasons women may not easily leave violent relationships, and the problems with common excuses for violence. They were also those most inclined to agree with some misconceptions about rape (for example,

that it is a result of male sexual urges, that it is usually perpetrated by strangers, that women are partly responsible if drunk and that women more than rarely make false claims).

Several factors may shape the greater likelihood of violence-supportive attitudes being held by young people. The youngest cohorts, aged 16 and 17, have limited personal experience of intimate relationships, they have had less exposure to the educational and liberalising influences of university education and community debate, and they move in youth and media cultures which often reinforce violence-supportive cultural messages. Particularly for young males, their views may reflect the stereotypically gendered attitudes found to be strongest among males in their early and mid-teens (Flood and Pease 2009).

Young people in Australia are well disposed towards gender equality and take for granted the gains of feminism. At the same time, they also overestimate the extent of gender equality, emphasise choice and personal responsibility, see women as powerful and self-determining, and resist conceptualising women as in any way disadvantaged. While the evidence is that young people are highly concerned about issues of relationships, family cohesion, violence and abuse, many also hold problematic beliefs about violence. These reflect the limited explanatory frameworks – individualistic, gender-stereotyped, and degendered – regarding violence that are most readily available to them.

The results of the more complex statistical modelling suggested that while not as strongly predictive as the previous two variables (sex of respondent and attitudes towards gender equality) younger respondents were less likely to agree that 'forcing a partner to have sex' and 'slapping and pushing a partner to cause harm or fear' were 'very serious' forms of violence against women than respondents in other age categories.<sup>9</sup> Younger respondents were also more likely to excuse domestic violence if the violent person was later regretful, and to agree that 'women who are raped often ask for it' and that 'women who are raped while drunk are at least partially responsible' than respondents in the other age categories.

### The influence of socio-economic background

Other demographic influences such as levels of education and areas of employment (being in white collar versus non-white collar occupations) were investigated for how strongly they might predict attitudinal support or tolerance for violence against women. However, the influence of these factors on the predictability of survey responses was uneven.

For example, respondents who held a white-collar occupation were more likely to recognise 'controlling a partner by denying them money' and stalking as 'always' domestic violence. Nevertheless, attitudes to gender equity and equality, sex, migration factors, and cultural heritage all carried more predictive power than this occupational variable. By comparison, full-time employment, as distinct from occupation type, was strongly predictive of whether respondents viewed 'controlling a partner by denying them money' as a 'very serious' form of violence, but it was respondents not in full-time employment who rated the seriousness more highly than those who were employed full-time.

### The influence of urban and regional location

Whether respondents resided in regional or urban settings influenced how likely they were to intervene in hypothetical situations involving domestic violence where their relationship to 'the victim' ranged from being a complete stranger, to a neighbour, to a close relative or friend. The results indicated that for the general community and SCALD respondents alike, living outside a capital city was a strong predictor for suggesting that someone would be 'very likely' to intervene in situations where 'the victim' was a stranger and being physically assaulted by her partner in public, or was a neighbour that they didn't know well.

### The influences of migration and settlement factors

Factors that appeared to influence the results for the sample among selected culturally and linguistically diverse (SCALD) communities were further explored for their capacity to predict SCALD attitudes on a number of survey measures. There has been earlier discussion in this section of how the sex of respondents and levels of support for gender equity/equality were both strongly predictive of attitudes for both the SCALD and the general community samples. There were nevertheless some additional factors that were also relevant to predicting when SCALD respondents were more likely to hold violence-supportive views. For example:

- Those who arrived in Australia after 1980 were significantly less likely than those who had arrived prior to 1980 to believe that a range of the behaviours listed were 'always' domestic violence.
- Respondents born outside of Australia were significantly less likely to define some of the listed behaviours as forms of domestic violence.

- Respondents with Vietnamese or Chinese heritage were less likely than Greek, Italian and Indian respondents to view a range of the behaviours listed as 'very serious'.
- Respondents who spoke English at home were significantly less likely to agree with selected statements that excused violent behaviour or that apportioned partial blame to rape victims.

These results suggest that attitudes towards violence against women, and levels of resistance or endorsement for gender equality, are best understood by exploring a matrix of factors that is sensitive to how cultural background and origins, migration and settlement experiences, and cultural norms as well as gender norms variously intersect for CALD communities. However, the findings of this survey suggest that length of residence in Australia does impact on reducing tolerance levels for violence-supportive attitudes.

**As a nation, the time has well and truly come to have a national conversation – a public national conversation, not a private one – about how it could still be the case that in 2008 so many Australian women could have experienced violence ... It is my gender – it is our gender – Australian men – that are responsible. And so the question is: what are we going to do about it?**

→ The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP,  
Prime Minister of Australia

# Changing cultures, changing attitudes – preventing violence against women

Community attitudes are a key variable for shaping violence against women. A review of contemporary research shows consistent evidence of an association between violence-supportive beliefs and values, and the perpetration of violent behaviour at both individual and community levels (Flood and Pease 2006). Attitudes and beliefs about violence against women influence the behaviour of individual victims and perpetrators, pervade the relationships and communities within which perpetration and victimisation take place, and sway the support systems designed to respond and prevent such violence. Hence, they are a central factor to account for in any prevention efforts.

The findings from this National Community Attitudes Survey provide both opportunity and challenge for tackling violence against women. There are specific areas of concern where action and the nature of a response is clear. In other areas there will be a need for further enquiry and in-depth analysis to understand what is influencing community attitudes and norms and how best to intervene.

The major areas that arise from the findings that require further consideration include:

## Levels of support for gender equality and gender equity:

- evidence for positing the relationship between the risk of violence against women and attitudes towards gender-based roles, relations and practices
- the importance of framing population-wide communication and social norms campaigns that promote egalitarian and respectful relations.

## Consequences of non-physical forms of violence:

- The reluctance by some members in the community to view emotional, psychological and economic abuse as domestic violence and acknowledge its seriousness, which gives rise to implications for:
  - how readily women and others affected by non-physical forms of domestic violence will seek help and access specialised systems of support; and
  - how accurately we can measure the prevalence of violence against women across the spectrum of unlawful behaviours and across the diversity of women's experiences.

Influence of age on attitudes with regard to:

- the perceived levels of seriousness associated with physical and non-physical forms of domestic violence (among youngest and oldest age groups); and
- young people's (especially young men's) poor understanding and tolerant views towards violence against women.

Limited community understanding of violence against women with disabilities:

- compounding their greater vulnerability to intimate partner violence and their exposure to more prolonged and severe forms of violence; and
- failing to recognise the diversity of relationship contexts and environmental factors that contribute to violence against women with disabilities.

Community's understanding of gendered patterns and dynamics of violence:

- accounting for the sizeable shift in community perceptions (particularly among men) that violence is perpetrated equally by men and women;
- improving communication about the controlling and coercive nature of domestic violence and its impacts;

- beliefs that women make false claims of rape or domestic violence; and
- addressing the low recognition of women's increased risk of being exposed to more severe violence in the course of post-separation, such as homicide (low levels of knowledge particularly among young people).

Prevalence of violence-supportive attitudes that risk absolving perpetrators from responsibility and appropriate sanctioning:

- less recognition of rape in marriage and intimate relationships among some groups;
- rape-supportive attitudes, such as 'women often say no when they mean yes', and 'rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex'.

Information gaps and access to information including:

- information on the most appropriate ways family, friends and neighbours can support women who are experiencing violence; and
- accessible information on sources of advice and support for those experiencing intimate partner violence.

## Attitudes and beliefs toward violence against women are changeable

The survey findings suggest that most people in the community have a broad understanding of physical and sexual violence against women and its impacts, and do not condone it. The findings also indicate that community attitudes do change. Since 1995, there have been some significant and positive shifts in the general community's attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women. This overall trend is encouraging and provides the impetus for continuing to improve preventive programs that will contribute to the elimination of violence against women.

The positive attitudinal shifts across several measures tested in the survey have also been tempered by enduring patterns of agreement with myths about violence against women and beliefs that are shifting in directions counter to the evidence. The mixed results are a likely reflection of the social complexity that surrounds violence against women and draws into sharp relief the need for constant vigilance and reflective practice in policy-making. They also serve to remind us that any focus on changing attitudes must be complemented by a range of preventive strategies that address the socio-cultural, institutional and political forces that also influence the environments in which violence against women occurs (Flood and Pease 2006, WHO 2002, VicHealth 2006).

### **Understanding factors that influence or help shape violence-supportive attitudes**

As stated earlier, a key objective of the National Community Attitudes Survey 2009 was to improve understanding of the kinds of factors that influence or help shape violence-supportive attitudes towards violence against women in order that future violence prevention efforts can more effectively target areas for change.

The survey findings indicate significant differences between the views of men and women in the general community and between men and women in the SCALD sample. There were also differences, some more marked than others, between the general community as a whole and the SCALD sample. Age was sometimes a greater influence on some measures. However, on most measures there was an association between attitudes towards violence against women on the one hand and sex, and attitudes towards gender, and factors related to cultural heritage and background on the other. The results from the Victorian Community Attitude Survey in 2006 reported a similar pattern of relationships between the variables.

An important and consistent finding was that high support for gender equity was *the most powerful predictor* of holding less violence-supportive attitudes across most of the measures included in the survey. The links between violence-supportive attitudes, attitudes towards gender roles and relations, and gender equality remain a fundamental issue for reducing violence against women. As noted earlier in this report, men are more likely to engage in violence against women if they hold negative attitudes toward women and if they identify with traditional masculinity and male social and economic privilege (Flood and Pease 2006).

With only one-third of the general community sample indicating high support for gender equality and equity and fewer doing so in the SCALD sample, there is substantial room for promoting greater respect between and acceptance of women and men as equals.

### **Implications of the survey results and opportunities for change**

The findings from the survey point to the need for a comprehensive approach for achieving changes in community attitudes and behaviours related to violence against women. The key strategies identified below are guided by an evidence-based framework for prevention that identifies three inter-related themes for tackling the underlying causes of violence against women:

- promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women;
- promoting non-violent social norms and reducing the effects of prior exposure to violence; and
- improving access to resources and systems of support (VicHealth 2007).

The survey results indicate that there is a continued need to develop and implement both whole of population (or universal) and targeted (or selective) programs. While the risk factors for violence may be more common among some groups than others, there are still areas where the community more widely retains violence-supportive views. Universal approaches that address attitudes and social norms which support or tolerate violence are therefore important to consolidate at the population level with more targeted strategies designed to address those groups at higher risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence and its impacts at the community level.

The population groups identified in the survey that would most benefit from the development of specific interventions include:

#### **Men and boys**

- Based on the survey findings and an evidence base that shows men and boys are more likely than women to hold violence-supportive attitudes, men and boys are key agents and stakeholders in the social change process required to reshape masculinity and its role in violence; and can positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of other men and boys.

#### **Young people**

- The results from the youngest cohort of survey participants indicate that while a majority of young people do not hold violence-supportive views, their knowledge and understanding of the complex aspects of violence against women is uneven. Young people are concerned about but are also dealing with issues of relationships, family cohesion and conflict, and are more likely to be victimised (young women), to perpetrate violence (young men), and to witness violence in their everyday lives.

### CALD communities and new and emerging refugee communities

- CALD communities and new and emerging refugee communities would also benefit from the development of specific interventions, with an emphasis on targeting CALD men and those communities recently arrived in Australia and a recognition of associations between reductions in violence-supportive views and the length of settlement period. Strategies need to account for the diversity within and between CALD and refugee communities and be sensitive to compounding factors (such as social isolation, economic marginalisation, cultural alienation, and racism) that may make some CALD women and families more vulnerable to violence and its impacts. Early intervention strategies must help to support transition from contexts where gender roles and legal norms may have lent cultural support for violence; however, without diminishing the importance of maintaining the significance of cultural tradition.

### Indigenous communities

- Community-led responses that build on the unique strengths of Indigenous communities and the specific challenges – arising from their history of colonisation, disruption to culture and identity, and poor physical, social and material wellbeing – are required. The survey findings suggest that Indigenous people share high levels of concern about the rate and seriousness of violence against women in their communities. Prevention initiatives endorsed by elders or leaders and driven *by* communities *for* communities are most supported.

### Priorities for consideration

The following priorities are organised around the 'ecological' framework for the primary prevention of violence against women (VicHealth 2007). This identifies three levels of influence for reducing and preventing violence against women: individual/ relationship, community/ organisational, and societal. An optimal approach to preventing violence against women requires multi-level and reinforcing strategies (social marketing, advocacy, policy and legal reform) across a range of environments (such as schools, sport settings, workplaces, faith communities and other contexts).

### Opportunities to act at the individual/relationship level

The gaps in understanding the breadth, nature and seriousness of violence against women across all those surveyed indicate the need for concerted and sustained efforts in raising the community's awareness and appreciation of the extent and nature of domestic violence and sexual violence.

Communication messages that will deepen the community's understanding of the range of behaviours associated with violence should:

- Address the dynamics of both physical and non-physical forms of violence and abuse;
- Ensure that these are understood in the context of wider social and cultural environments where the organisation of gender, power and control also operates; and
- Inspire support for relationships between men and women that are safe, equal and respectful.

Social marketing campaigns can influence individual attitudes and address cultural norms in ways that ultimately reduce tolerance for violence and demonstrate that the community want to see it addressed.

A key objective for communication campaigns and education programs should be to redress a number of prevailing myths and misconceptions, such as:

- the perceived gender symmetry of perpetrators of violence;
- the ambivalence about acknowledging non-physical forms of assault as domestic violence and the tendency to normalise them in the context of 'ups and downs' in all intimate relationships (perhaps suggesting that the 'controlling and coercive' nature and impact of these behaviours is not fully accepted); and
- the perceived lack of seriousness of some physical forms of domestic violence (for example, slapping and pushing to cause harm or fear).

Communication and marketing campaigns have the potential to reach a large number of people and have a wide impact; however they must also be supported by strategies that are customised to meet the culturally-specific and age-specific needs of high-risk groups.

The successful approaches of other public health campaigns designed to change attitudes and behaviours, such as drink driving and smoking, are illustrative of best practice, and should be adopted for preventing violence against women. Too often in violence prevention there has been a tendency to have 'stand alone' and/or short-term campaigns, which do little to effect sustained cultural change in complex behaviours such as domestic and sexual violence.

Communications strategies must also account for how messages are likely to impact on men and boys in particular. The survey results indicated that the strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes were being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality. This pattern was consistent for men in the general, SCALD and (to a lesser extent) Indigenous samples and across most measures. Communication approaches that seek to correct misperceptions of peer or community attitudes will be most effective when developed through an appreciation of how social norms related to gender, relationships, and violence against women are formed and how they can be reshaped.

A shift in broader social norms about gender relations and violence against women will also assist in reinforcing other universal programs and efforts that target particular groups at risk of perpetrating or victimisation. The survey findings suggest that both youth-based and adult learning avenues and opportunities be explored, with particular emphasis on interventions that will engage young people, men, CALD and Indigenous communities.

### **Young people**

Young people, and boys in particular, have long been identified as key agents for change in violence prevention programs. The implementation of evidence-informed violence prevention programs in education-based settings is now occurring across Australia.

Direct participation programs, such as respectful relationships programs, should assist in addressing the uneven knowledge about domestic violence demonstrated amongst young people in the survey. Compared with respondents in other age categories, young people aged 16 to 20 appeared to be less cognisant of the complex aspects of violence within relationships, including: the range and seriousness of violent behaviours, the reasons women may not easily leave

violent relationships, and the problems with common excuses for violence. For example, along with the oldest age group in the survey, the 16-20 year olds were more likely than other age groups to agree that violence can be excused by anger leading to loss of control, if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol, or if the violent partner is remorseful. Alongside universal education strategies among young people, targeted interventions are necessary; for example, among children and young people who have witnessed or experienced violence in their families.

In addition, interventions targeting young people need to acknowledge the effects of strongly gendered influences via media culture, especially that marketed at the young (such as music videos and video games) and sporting cultures that can reproduce gender stereotypes. These effects and others will also be mediated by the stage of development of young people's emotional and moral capacity and the social environment of early adolescence that shapes 'individuals' fundamental values and expectations about the world' (Zucker and Stewart 2007). Hence interventions for influencing attitudes are appropriate with school-aged youth in particular to create an optimal social environment for learning about gender and relationships.

The Commonwealth Government is taking an important leadership role to ensure that good practice in respectful relationships programs is implemented systematically across States and Territories. The introduction of the National Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention Education (2009) supports the introduction of programs based on best practice principles where the program design, teaching approach and content is oriented towards building the capacity of communities, schools and students to recognise, value and maintain relationships based on non-violence, equality and respect.

Many young people at risk of violence are often absent from school, unemployed or are young parents. The Government's response to the National Council's Plan of Action was to propose extending respectful relationships programming to non-school settings.

This is particularly important for Indigenous young people, where the effect of mainstream schools-based prevention strategies may be limited, and unlikely to take account of the levels of intergenerational transmission of violence and the high rate at which Indigenous young people have witnessed or experienced violence or have been removed by child protection services as a result of family violence (Cripps 2007, 2008).

Incorporating ways for utilising cyberspace and other new information technologies to reach young people with anti-violence message is also crucial, particularly as they are now recognised sites for perpetrating violence and bullying. This must be done carefully, however. Research on young people's attitudes towards strategies for improving safety online suggests that many young people find these irrelevant, adult-centric and unable to get at the real issues for youth in navigating the virtual world (Valentine 2004).

The survey findings suggest that the current approach to advertising campaigns is not yet reaching or having a sustained effect among young people. The youngest cohort – 16-17 year olds – was the group most likely to have recently seen or heard advertising campaigns about violence against women (64 percent) and yet they hold some of the most violence-tolerant attitudes and are least likely to know where to go for support. Young people may not be receptive to conventional anti-violence campaigns when they do not recognise themselves as victims or perpetrators. It is timely to evaluate education programs and campaigns, as well as to conduct ongoing research into young people's views over time, in order to identify what works best, in different

places with different young people, to ensure healthy attitudes and experiences regarding gender and relationships. Given young people's own concerns as well as experiences regarding violence and harm, it is the obligation of the government and wider community to give them more effective tools with which to understand and build healthy relationships.

## Community/organisational level

### Community context

Community development and community mobilisation approaches involve creating an enabling environment for communities to lead and support social change in attitudes and behaviour. Such approaches have been found to increase the effectiveness of universal communications campaigns (as mentioned above) by reinforcing messages at the local level (VicHealth 2007).

While there is limited evidence regarding the impact of many community-based approaches on violence against women, there is a substantial practice knowledge and skill base that informs activities. Interventions to mobilise communities are likely to be more effective when there is:

- community ownership;
- repeated exposure to ideas through multiple channels over time;
- multiple components delivered in different community settings (e.g. combining media outreach with group education); and
- follow-up occurs to sustain changes brought about by the program (Harvey et al. 2007).

Community-based interventions with CALD communities are likely to be more effective when community elders and faith leaders and other trusted professionals are engaged in the process.

### Men and boys

The White Ribbon Campaign<sup>10</sup> provides an example of an effective movement for mobilising community action and engaging men in particular as agents in preventing violence against women.

The campaign's reliance on publicly recognisable men to show leadership in addressing violence against women through becoming a White Ribbon Ambassador has successfully raised the profile of the issue and has influenced private corporations, business and governments to sponsor or support White Ribbon events.

Engaging men and boys in playing positive roles in ending violence against women is a crucial element of primary prevention. An annual co-ordination at the State and Territory level of activities that 'speak' directly to men about the roles they can play in their local communities provides an important platform on which alternative models for masculinity and gender-equal relationships can be built. It can also offer a centralised point for ensuring national social marketing campaigns have established State pathways through which violence prevention messages can be appropriately customised and delivered.

Engaging and building the capacity of men to communicate and educate other men and boys can have a two-fold effect: 1) heightening the importance and status of non-violence; and 2) acting as a counterbalance to sexist peer cultures to which men and boys belong. This approach has been adopted by some Indigenous male leaders who organised and delivered a public apology to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women for the violence perpetrated against them.

The local community level is also a key site for working with young men, particularly in recreational and sports settings. Evidence suggests that young men in some sporting contexts (and other male-dominated industries and institutions such as the military) show more rigid adherence to gendered norms and stereotypes, use and tolerate more sexist language and reinforce behaviours that denigrate women, such that the risks associated with men's perpetration of violence, especially sexual assault, are heightened (Schissel 2000, Forbes et al. 2006, Dyson and Flood 2008, Pease 2008).

The development and implementation of organisational change models within sporting clubs can address environments where sexist peer norms and cultures operate and where the structures, policies and administration discourage women's involvement. The AFL's Respect and Responsibility Program provides an example of an industry-wide response to addressing the issue of violence against women, promoting equal and respectful relationships with women through codes of conduct, workshops and materials for clubs and players in the national and state leagues, and marketing campaigns. Interventions with community football and other sporting codes, enlisting the support of club members to help shape and create alternative club cultures that encourage women's equal and safe participation, offer promising approaches to violence prevention.

Among young people and others, violence against women can co-occur with alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption by itself does not cause gendered violence. Among men, other factors such as violence-supportive and negative attitudes towards women and engagement in controlling behaviours are far better predictors of intimate partner violence than their drinking alcohol (Mouzos and Makkai 2004). At the same time, the presence of violence, including controlling behaviour, when combined with alcohol consumption, is likely to increase the incidence and severity of assaults. The co-occurrence of alcohol use and violence against women is shaped by widespread social norms and attitudes that support the use of alcohol as both a social and sexual facilitator and as an excuse for violent behaviour (Miller et al., in press). There is an obvious need for cooperation across the domains of prevention associated with violence and alcohol. Efforts to prevent 'alcohol-fuelled' violence must address alcohol-facilitated sexual assault and other forms of relationship violence where alcohol is a factor, while efforts to prevent violence against women must address alcohol consumption.

**Violence is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part of the human condition. We can do much to address and prevent it.**

→ World Health Organization 2002

### **Culturally and linguistically diverse communities**

Community-led interventions are also an important and appropriate strategy for engaging and working with selected CALD communities. The SCALD stakeholders who participated in the qualitative research emphasise that directly challenging cultural beliefs and values (in a public education campaign, for example) is likely to alienate community and faith leaders within different CALD communities. For instance, the overt messaging about men's violence within the 'Australia Says No' campaign was considered unlikely to resonate with, or prompt attitudinal or behavioural change among men in CALD communities.

The key principle identified for successfully intervening was ensuring a high level of community ownership. This is instructive for considering approaches that will engage selected CALD communities to address gender roles and relations and violence-supportive attitudes. Faith and cultural institutions can be effective avenues for transmitting beliefs and norms and may be an appropriate starting point. Of course, as in other contexts, prevention efforts among CALD communities must have as a fundamental basis the belief that violence against women is unacceptable. The opportunity exists for the results of the 2009 National Survey to guide the development of a program of activity that includes the trialling of culturally-specific prevention initiatives driven by CALD communities. Programs that promote the development of stronger relationship skills and practices, and that raise reflection on the operation of traditional gender norms through a variety of methods, could be explored.

There may also be prospects for examining links between school-based and other education-based respect and relationships programs, on the one hand, and sexual and reproductive health education on the other, to enable

easier engagement for young women with refugee backgrounds or more recently arrived in Australia. The use of settlement services for supporting newly arrived immigrants and refugees could extend to ensuring that information about Australian laws relevant to violence against women is communicated. The exploratory work undertaken with new and emerging refugee communities as part of this project provides rich insights into the sensitivities associated with violence against women and will be a critical guide for helping to inform communities about the development of appropriate interventions.

### **Women with disabilities**

There is also a need to identify appropriate community responses for addressing violence prevention strategies for women with disabilities. There is little community awareness that women with disabilities experience violence at higher rates and are at higher risk of prolonged and frequent episodes of abuse by their intimate partners than other women (WWDA 2007). Improved understanding is needed of the complexities and structural causes of violence against women with disabilities, to better inform the development of prevention strategies that can account for the complex and multiple environments in which women are vulnerable to violence throughout their lives.

### **Working with Indigenous communities**

The Government is engaged with Indigenous communities and is encouraged to continue these processes based on the principles of Indigenous community ownership and the incorporation of holistic approaches to family violence. The National Council's advice on strategies to promote positive male behaviours, through culturally appropriate mediation and conflict resolution training for non-violent men and women in Indigenous communities to strengthen their role and influence in assisting to solve community and family disputes as part of their everyday life, is in keeping with the findings from the survey.

## **Organisational context**

### **Workplaces as a setting**

Workplaces are key settings for prevention programs because of their potential to reach and support large numbers in the population. They are key sites for violence prevention activities on two accounts: 1) as contexts through which social norms are shaped and can be changed; and 2) as settings for violence itself, given that high levels of violence (including sexual harassment and bullying) against women occur in workplaces. While domestic violence and sexual violence rarely occur in a workplace itself, it does have indirect and direct impacts on workplaces.

Supporting workplaces to strengthen their capacity to create safe environments and promote equal and respectful relationships between men and women workers has multiple benefits, both in the workplace and in the home. By integrating violence prevention into their core business, such as ensuring policies, programs and practices are prevention-conscious, workplaces can play a pivotal role in preventing violence against women.

While workplaces in general can work to create respectful cultures, there also is a need to build workforce and institutional capacity in violence prevention in particular. A skilled workforce with content expertise and competencies in program design, development, implementation and education relevant to violence prevention, and primary prevention in particular, is required to implement a prevention agenda. Training and education programs for workers across sectors is a critical adjunct to ensure best practice standards for preventing violence are appropriately resourced, designed and implemented. Cross-sector workforce development with local government, sports, health, community and youth-based services should be prioritised.

### **Access to resources and responsive services**

While there have been increases in reporting incidents of domestic and sexual violence to police, the vast majority of women's victimisation remains unreported. Even with significant legal and procedural reforms there remain significant barriers and risks associated with women coming forward.

A continuing hurdle is the historical legacy of viewing domestic violence (including rape by a husband or partner) as a private affair. This view, while not supported by a majority of participants in the general and SCALD surveys, was nonetheless more likely to be agreed with by men than women in these samples. The operation of this belief among new and emerging communities is thought to impact on women's preparedness to access support and to prioritise individual safety needs over other settlement challenges. These processes are compounded by social isolation, unemployment, and strong adherence to family.

On a broader level access to services is also inhibited when there is an ongoing and limited understanding of the full range of behaviours associated with domestic violence. This is of particular concern in relation to the survey findings on non-physical forms of domestic violence. Limited understandings are likely to affect the way women will seek or not seek help, and how women will access or be reached by specialised systems of support.

Over one-third of the participants in the general sample did not know where to seek help to address violence, with young people featuring disproportionately here. There is a clear need to ensure that any broader public education strategies include factual information about the range of support services available and how to access them. The dissemination of this information through workplaces and community locations also needs to take into account young people's greater use of new technologies in accessing information.

### **Societal level**

The findings from the 2009 National Survey, like those of previous research, document the close relationship between violence against women, violence-supportive attitudes, and gender inequalities. They underline the value of the Australian Government's commitment to the elimination of prejudice through the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2008. This provides legitimacy and urgency to the task of acting to prevent violence against women, as under international law there is an obligation to take:

All appropriate measures [to] modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.<sup>11</sup>

### **Enabling policy environment**

The complexity of violence against women requires governments to unite and build coherent policy platforms and frameworks to guide long-term action in prevention.

The findings from this survey confirm the need for national leadership in co-ordinating the prevention effort. The National Council's Plan sees the development of an evidence-based National Primary Prevention Framework as a key mechanism for achieving this. The Framework would capture the most effective strategies for preventing violence against women and prioritise key settings and population groups in which to co-ordinate primary prevention initiatives and actions.

Ensuring a coherent policy platform between the Commonwealth Government's National Plan to address violence against women and other national policy initiatives in development, such as the National Women's Health

Policy, will ensure a coordinated effort that can act synergistically across the range of health, community, youth-based and service sectors to drive a national violence prevention agenda.

There may be potential for this approach to be amplified in national youth policy that has leadership across government and state jurisdictions, such as the recently developed Youth Employment Policy, and the National Preventive Taskforce Report where prevention strategies for responding to youth-based alcohol-fuelled violence were explored.

### **Changing social norms**

The results from this survey will inform the development and design of the Commonwealth Government's primary prevention social marketing campaign. This is to focus on changing social norms and practices that condone and support violence against women. The campaign was announced as part of the Government's Response to the National Council's Action Plan and is set to target young people in community settings.

There is now an established evidence base that identifies strategies for effective campaign design (Donovan and Vlasis 2005). These include:

- interventions based on comprehensive theoretical models of health promotion and social marketing;
- formative research being undertaken to map the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills relevant to the behavioural and communication objectives of the campaign, including testing with target audiences to guard against unintended negative consequences;
- campaigns that are sustained beyond a single 'dose'. This can be achieved through activities which extend beyond the immediate media coverage (e.g. websites, community development programs), having a phased approach, or by building on existing campaigns;

- mass media advertising and media advocacy strategies that are integrated and mutually reinforced by other activities such as community development, community education or improvements in the way organisations respond to violence;
- a primary message with a specific behavioural objective where the campaign is focused on changing gendered social norms; and
- comprehensive framework for evaluation and monitoring of success against campaign objectives.

There is also an opportunity through more targeted approaches for government to address the impacts of violence-supportive representations of women in the media, including the internet, by reviewing and applying appropriate community standards for limiting exposure to such materials, encouraging responsible news reporting, and fostering young people's critical media literacy.

### **Strengthening the evidence base to guide action**

The results of this survey highlight the need for improved national data collection capacity that can adequately capture the dynamics and patterns of violence against women. Longitudinal studies that can map women's and men's experiences of intimate partner violence and its wider health and social impacts (such as living in fear, and effects of long-term social isolation); and improved measures for determining the prevalence of domestic violence across the spectrum of unlawful behaviours, including the nature and conduct of agency and institutional responses, are good starting points.

Comprehensive research, including evaluation, is needed to strengthen the foundations of violence prevention. It will provide a stronger evidence base with which to develop policies, programs and campaigns that can address gender inequality and violence-supportive attitudes over the longer term. Research into the workings and effectiveness of violence prevention is vital in guiding ongoing programming and in informing legislative change.

A National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women, whose establishment was endorsed by the Commonwealth Government at the launch of the National Council's *Time for Action*, will play a pivotal role in undertaking high-quality research and evaluation to guide effective program design and implementation; and, in operating as a centralised point from which to monitor and report on the efficacy of policy and practice initiatives that target prevention.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the 2009 National Survey inspire renewed optimism for efforts to prevent violence against women. Over the last 14 years, there have been important, positive shifts in the community's attitudes towards violence against women. Unfortunately, there is still much work to do. Despite improvements, attitudes that excuse, trivialise and or justify violence against women persist, and some have even worsened. Alongside hope therefore, these survey findings should inspire determination and commitment. They reaffirm the need for continued investment in programming and policy intended to eliminate violence against women. If we are to build relationships, families and communities based on equality and respect, our prevention efforts must grow in both scale and sophistication.

It is well accepted that the extent of violence against women is too great and the costs too high for inaction. The vast majority across the community do not condone it and the Australian Government has acknowledged this. The necessary steps for promoting safe and equal and respectful relationships between men and women are also known and evidence-informed. The need for examining, 'What to do?' has past. The opportunity is to act. The survey findings demonstrate that people can change what they think and the more people who believe in equal and respectful relationships the greater likelihood we can all share in a non-violent community.

# Appendix

## What is a Gender Equity Score (GES)?

The 2006 Victorian Survey identified that the strongest predictor for holding violence-supportive views about violence against women was an individual's 'gender equity score' (VicHealth 2006; Taylor and Mouzos 2006). This gender equity score or GES was constructed by asking respondents a series of attitudinal statements about women and their role in society.

As with the 2006 Victorian Survey, the 2009 National Survey asked participants to respond to the same series of attitudinal statements relating to gender equity adapted from Inglehart & Norris (2003). Responses to these statements were based on a likert scale where 1 = 'strongly agree' and 5 = 'strongly disagree'. The questions were:

- On the whole, men make better political leaders than women.

- When jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job than women.
- A university education is more important for a boy than a girl
- A woman has to have children to be fulfilled
- It's OK for a woman to have a child as a single parent and not want a stable relationship with a man (reversed scored)

In the 2009 survey an additional three statements were included:

- Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Australia
- Men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household
- Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship

The gender equity scale and associated scores were calculated and summed to give a score out of 100. Those who scored closest to 100 gave answers to the statements which indicated they supported gender equity – women should not only have equal rights and opportunities but be treated fairly and justly in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. Those who scored lower on the gender equity scale expressed views that indicated less support for women being treated equally and fairly.

The score out of 100 was then converted into categories of High GES >90, Medium GES 75-90 or Low GES <75.

The following tables show the gender equity scores broken down by both sex and age category.

**Table 14: Gender equity score, by sex (column percentages)**

	Male	Female	Total
Low Gender Equity score	32	14	22
Med Gender Equity score	46	44	45
High Gender Equity score	22	43	33
(N)	(4930)	(5174)	(10,105)

**Table 15: Gender equity score, by age category (column percentages)**

	16-17	18-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+
Low Gender Equity score	15	18	21	16	17	20	30	47
Med Gender Equity score	50	40	45	46	44	47	46	41
High Gender Equity score	35	42	35	38	39	33	24	11
(N)	(299)	(545)	(1507)	(2112)	(1814)	(1492)	(1302)	(978)

For detailed overview of the calculation of scale items and scale reliabilities, see Project Technical Report.

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## Endnotes

- 1 *The National Council's Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women* has been taken to Council Of Australian Governments, which will establish state/territory agreements around identifying and activating areas of shared responsibility for implementation. The Government's *Immediate Government Actions – April 2009* highlights 20 major actions for commencement in 2009–2010. Other national policy platforms that could be explored for relevant synergies for violence against women include: The National Prevention Taskforce and its future work; the development of the new National Women's Health Policy; and the National Indigenous Health Policy.
- 2 Only a very small proportion of assaults against men were perpetrated by a former or current female intimate partner (4.3 percent). See Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b, *Personal Safety Survey, Australia*, cat no 4906.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 3 Data on family violence and sexual assault has a number of limitations associated with varied definitions, the method of data collection and variability in the population surveyed and the variability in actual reporting of violence both in survey data and the way it is reported to authorities. For instance, survey data are unlikely to include many of the high risk groups such as women in refuges and remote Indigenous communities.
- 4 The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey indicates that the family violence victimisation rate may be 40 times the rate for non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women accounted for 15% of homicide victims in 2002-03. See Dr Kerry Carrington and Janet Phillips/ Parliamentary Library, *Domestic Violence in Australia*, September 2006. Current information on the incidence of family violence against Indigenous women is limited but estimated to be significantly higher than the general population (Bagshaw et al. 2000). See Cox et al. 2009.
- 5 A summary of the changes made to the 2009 survey tool can be found in the Project Technical Report.
- 6 Participants were asked three questions about prevalence: 1) whether they believed that women with *intellectual* disabilities were more likely to experience domestic violence than other women; 2) whether they believed that women with *physical* disabilities were more likely to experience domestic violence than other women; and 3) whether they agreed that most people were poorly informed about the rate of *rape and sexual assault experienced by women with disabilities*. VicHealth researchers consulted with the Sex and Age Discrimination Unit at the Australian Human Rights Commission and representatives from Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) in relation to the content of these questions. The questions were pilot tested to ensure the validity of responses.
- 7 There was some evidence that respondents may not have adequately understood the questions relating to women with disabilities or understood them in varying ways, which was not evident during the pilot testing of the survey. As a result, the findings regarding attitudes towards violence against women with disabilities should be interpreted with caution.
- 8 Logistical regression was used to identify key predictors of a range of attitudes. Logistical regression is a multivariate statistical method which allows an examination of the effect that a number of individual independent variables have in predicting a dependent variable (for example whether a particular form of domestic violence is considered 'very serious'). The effects of the independent variables are isolated, so the effects of other variables are controlled for.
- 9 In order to conduct the statistical analysis here regarding age, a dichotomous variable was constructed for those either under or over 44 years of age. However, the survey findings also show that members of the oldest age categories have violence-supportive attitudes at similar levels to those in the youngest categories.
- 10 The campaign is run by the White Ribbon Foundation of Australia and aims to eliminate violence against women by promoting culture change around the issue. The campaign strategies include: national media campaign, education, and male leadership programs targeting men and boys. White Ribbon day is marked each year on 25th November, designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW).
- 11 See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.





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