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YOUNG PEOPLE HOLD THE KEY TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A national survey launched today finds that one in four people still believe that women falsify or exaggerate claims of rape and domestic violence.

One in five people think that violence can be excused if the violent person later genuinely regrets what they have done.

On the other hand, most people know that domestic and sexual violence is prevalent, serious and against the law.

Todd Harper, CEO VicHealth, said the survey showed that despite a wide range of conflicting views about violence against women, Australian attitudes were changing for the better.

“It is concerning that people, particularly young men and women are not clear about what constitutes sexual and domestic violence, if and when it can be excused, and who is most likely to be a victim of it.”

“Working with young people to build a new generation of healthy relationships, where respect and equity are valued, will be key to creating communities and environments free from inequity and violence against women.”

Changing Cultures Changing Attitudes *A National Survey on Community Attitudes To Violence against Women* was launched today by the Hon Tanya Plibersek, MP, Federal Minister for the Status of Women, at Zinc, Federation Square.

The research, undertaken by VicHealth for the Commonwealth Government, delivers the first national report card on the status of community attitudes to violence against women since 1995.

Mr Harper said the research showed that efforts made by those active in the community and by governments to improve the safety of women and change community attitudes are starting to pay off.

“However the sheer numbers of women affected by violence, mostly committed by the men with whom they share their lives, remain horrific, and means we must do everything we can to challenge the kind of attitudes, behaviours and practices that allow violence against women to flourish.”

“We have to use what the evidence says is most effective for trying to reduce the violence women experience – and be under no illusions about what this means for the 900 or so women who each day are violently assaulted across Australia,” Mr Harper added.

Minister Plibersek said the Rudd Government is spending \$42 million on projects to reduce violence against women – including \$17 million on a social marketing campaign to promote respectful relationships among young people.

“The government has a zero tolerance to all violence - whether it occurs in the home, on the street or at the pub,” Ms Plibersek said.

“To prevent violence against women in the future, we need to change attitudes and behaviour, and one of the best ways to achieve that is to educate our young people,” she added.

Jen Allen, Advocate with Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, said she welcomed new initiatives, such as the Respectful Relationships education-based programs that have been supported by the Commonwealth Government, and in Victoria in schools and sport clubs.

"Young people need adult role models who can help them to better recognise, develop and maintain relationships that value equity and respect."

Major findings of the **Changing Cultures Changing Attitudes** report show that:

- Australian attitudes about violence against women are changing for the better.
- The majority of the community recognise that violence against women can take a variety of forms that includes physical, sexual and emotional types of abuse. At least 8 out of 10 people rate the systematic control of a partner through yelling abuse or restricting their contact with family and friends as forms of domestic violence.
- 93% of people agree that forced sex in an intimate relationship is rape and that domestic violence is against the law (98%).
- Very few people believe that 'women who are raped ask for it' – one in twenty in 2009 compared with one in seven people in 1995.
- Eight out of ten people agree they would intervene in some way in a situation of domestic violence.

However, Mr Harper said, "With eight out of ten people finding it difficult to understand why women stay in violent relationships, more attention needs to be given to educating Australians on the issue."

According to Jen Allen, "The simple answer to why women don't leave violent situations is that they are frozen in fear and shame."

"The survey is a very good start to asking what we can do to support women to leave, and how we can work with women to help them break free of their fear and shame."

Other major challenges include:

- 13% of people still agree that women 'often say no when they mean yes' and roughly one in six (16%) agree that a woman 'is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug-affected'.
- 22% believe that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by both men and women compared with 9% in 1995.
- 34% of people still believe that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex'.

"Not only is intimate partner violence one of the greatest human rights abuses that disproportionately affects women, it has a huge economic cost that ultimately affects us all," Mr Harper said.

"Recent VicHealth funded research found that there would be more than one third of a billion dollars in economic benefits with an achievable reduction in violence.

The *National Survey on Community Attitudes To Violence against Women* project was led by VicHealth, with the Social Research Centre and the Australian Institute of Criminology as key research partners.

The survey involved approximately 13,000 men and women from across Australia. It included Indigenous Australians, people from culturally diverse communities and a sample of sixteen and seventeen year old respondents.

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