

Media Release

RESEARCH FINDS INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE CAUSES THE MOST DAMAGE TO WOMEN'S HEALTH

16 June, 2004

Disturbing research released today indicates that intimate partner violence constitutes almost nine per cent of the total disease burden in women up to the age of 45 years.

"This is a ground breaking study and the results are shocking," Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), Dr Rob Moodie said.

The study, *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease Caused by Intimate Partner Violence*, found that this form of violence is responsible for more ill-health and premature death among Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other well known risk factors including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.

Dr Moodie said intimate partner violence is very common, has severe and persistent effects on women's physical and mental health and carries with it an enormous cost in terms of premature death and disability.

"Direct health consequences for women exposed to violence include depression, anxiety and phobias, suicide attempts, chronic pain syndromes, psychosomatic disorders, physical injury, gastrointestinal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome and a variety of reproductive consequences," Dr Moodie said.

Associate Professor Theo Vos, who undertook the research said the data also suggests that intimate partner violence is associated with drug use and risky levels of smoking and alcohol use.

"Sixty per cent of the health problems associated with intimate partner violence are mental disorders and another 15% is due to greater abuse of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs," Associate Professor Vos said.

The study is the first in the world to estimate the health consequences of intimate partner violence using the 'burden of disease' methodology developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The WHO itself released a World Report on Violence and Health in 2002, which aimed 'to challenge the secrecy, taboos and feelings of inevitability that surround violent behaviour, and to encourage debate that will increase our understanding of this hugely complex phenomenon'.

The report found that intimate partner violence contributes more than twice the disease burden of illicit drugs which is the next highest risk factor affecting the health of women aged between 15 and 44.

"This report not only gives us an insight into the effects of violence on women's lives – it prompts the hard questions about how we inform, educate and change the behaviour that leads to partner violence," Dr Moodie said.

Acting Premier John Thwaites, who attended the launch of the report said the Victorian Government has been actively involved in combating violence against women and this is articulated in the Women's Safety Strategy.

The Minister for Health Bronwyn Pike said the burden of disease associated with this violence must be understood as a significant public health issue.

"The results of this study show the whole community needs to be involved in the effort to prevent domestic violence", Ms Pike said.

Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon said police see the enormous impact of domestic violence on women, children, men, families and communities and they were committed to helping develop better support systems.

"Victoria Police is working with government and other agencies to offer better access to services, help and support to people before tragedy strikes. Police members have also undergone education and training on how to deal with incidents of family violence and we have appointed Family Violence Officers."

Dr Moodie said support for those affected is crucial, but the scale of the problem demands that there needs to be more focus on addressing the root causes.

"We need community education campaigns, improved economic opportunities for women and strategies to foster greater respect between men and women," he said.

Who: VicHealth CEO, Dr Rob Moodie in conjunction with the Acting Premier, John Thwaites, Minister for Health, Bronwyn Pike and the Police Commissioner, Christine Nixon

When: 11am, Wednesday, 16 June 2004

Where: The BMW Edge, Federation Square, Cnr Flinders and Swanston Streets, Melbourne

N.B. Burden of disease methodology is an internationally accepted approach to estimating impacts of health problems across a population, taking into account illness, disability and premature death. Burden of disease measures are used extensively by governments, researchers, health planners and health advocates worldwide to: make a health problem visible; compare health problems for the purposes of setting priorities; and compare the health impact of various problems between groups of populations.

For more information, please contact:

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