

2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' attitudes towards violence against women

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) is a program of research funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Service (DSS) and led by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The Social Research Centre and The University of Melbourne are research partners. An advisory group comprising experts from across Australia provides technical advice and support to the program.

Introduction

Violence against women is widely recognised as a global issue. It is an often invisible but common form of violence, and a violation of human rights. It has serious impacts on the health and wellbeing of those affected and exacts significant economic costs on communities and nations (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009a,b). This violence occurs across all groups in Australian society, with one in three women over the age of 18 years reporting that they have experienced violence at the hands of a man since the age of 15 (ABS 2013a).

Together, Australian state and territory governments have developed the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022 (COAG 2010; referred to in this summary as the National Plan). The NCAS is being used to monitor whether there are positive changes in attitudes. The Personal Safety Survey monitors the experience of violence. It is conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2013a).

There is growing international consensus that violence against women can be prevented, and changing attitudes is one important step. Attitudes that condone or tolerate violence are recognised as playing a central role in shaping the way individuals, communities and organisations respond to violence (VicHealth 2014). Measuring community attitudes and learning more about what influences these attitudes tells us how we are progressing towards a violence-free society for all women. It also reveals the extent of the work that lies ahead, where to focus our efforts, and the messages and approaches likely to be effective.

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About this summary

This is a summary of key findings of the 2013 NCAS as they pertain to people identifying as of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) descent or origin. The summary also draws on research conducted by others to better understand the findings.

The strengths and limitations of the research are outlined on p12 and should be taken into account when considering the findings. Detailed information about how the survey was done and why particular questions were asked can be found at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/ncas.

The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to refer to a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and who is accepted as such by the community with which the person associates (ABS 2004). It has the same meaning as 'Indigenous Australian' (ABS 2004) and both terms are used interchangeably in this summary. The acronym ATSI is used in preference to the term in full to maximise clarity of expression.

About the NCAS

NCAS is a 20-minute telephone survey of more than 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over about their:

- knowledge of violence against women
- attitudes towards violence against women
- attitudes to gender roles and relationships
- intended responses to witnessing violence and knowledge of resources.

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results 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 private life’ (UN 1993). NCAS has a particular focus on four forms of violence against women: partner violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment.

Violence against ATSI women

Reducing violence against women from ATSI backgrounds has been identified as a priority in the National Plan. This is because ATSI women experience:

- a higher rate of violence (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence 1999; Al-Yaman et al. 2006; Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2006; Cripps et al. 2009; Lievore 2003; McGlade 2012; Taylor & Putt 2007)
- more severe violence (Al-Yaman et al. 2006)
- greater barriers to securing safety (Nixon & Cripps 2013).

Like all women (ABS 2013a), women from ATSI backgrounds face the highest risk of violence from a known person. This is most likely to be a current or former partner (ABS 2013b).

Violence may be perpetrated against Indigenous women by Indigenous or non-Indigenous men. Likewise, not all violence perpetrated by Indigenous men is against Indigenous women. There is no known data exploring the backgrounds of the perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women, or of the female victims of Indigenous perpetrators. However, qualitative research and consultation with Indigenous communities suggests that both violence against women within Indigenous communities and towards Indigenous women by non-Indigenous men are of concern (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence 1999; Al-Yaman et al. 2006; Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force 2003).

The need to address violence against Indigenous women by Indigenous men has been recognised by many leaders in ATSI communities and was declared a collective concern of ATSI men in the Inteyerrkwe Statement (2008) made at the Aboriginal male health summit in the Northern Territory in 2008.

The plight of Australian ATSI women is shared by other indigenous women across the globe and is recognised as a key human rights issue (UN 1993).

Partner violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment within Indigenous communities are commonly seen as part of a broader picture of family violence, defined as:

a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force 2003, p. 123)

This reflects the significance of extended family and kinship relationships in Indigenous communities, resulting in both a broader understanding of ‘family’ and a view that the consequences of violence affect all those involved. The broader definition also reflects the interrelationships between violence occurring within Indigenous communities and that which has been perpetrated against them (Atkinson 1994).

OVERALL FINDINGS

- Overall, respondents in the ATSI sample have a good knowledge of violence against women, are willing to respond to assist a woman affected by violence and are aware of support services.
- There are only small differences between ATSI and non-ATSI respondents in knowledge of violence against women and awareness of sources of assistance. In some areas ATSI respondents are more knowledgeable.
- ATSI respondents are slightly more likely than non-ATSI respondents to have a high level of understanding that violence comprises emotional, social and financial forms of abuse, not just physical violence and forced sex. They are also more likely to recognise that violence against women is common.
- Mostly, attitudes in the ATSI sample follow a similar pattern to the non-ATSI sample, and ATSI respondents reject many attitudes supportive of violence against women. The main differences are that both men and women in the ATSI sample are more likely to justify and excuse violence against women.
- When gender and socio-economic disadvantage are taken into account, only disadvantaged ATSI men are more likely to hold attitudes supportive of violence against women than non-indigenous men experiencing a comparable level of disadvantage.¹
- ATSI women are more likely to support gender equality and are less likely to hold attitudes supportive of violence than ATSI men. These gender differences are larger than in the non-ATSI sample.
- The strongest influences on attitudes towards violence against women in the ATSI sample are understanding of the nature of violence and attitudes towards gender equality. However, a person's socioeconomic status (e.g. measured by the level of education and occupation) has a greater influence on attitudes in the ATSI than the non-ATSI sample.
- The NCAS findings, along with other research, indicate that strengthening attitudes and reducing violence among ATSI communities will require a multi-pronged approach involving supporting equal and respectful gender relations, promoting non-violent norms and practices, addressing the impacts of past exposure to violence and supporting the equal social and economic participation of ATSI men and women.

The ATSI sample and approach to analysis

ATSI respondents in the NCAS sample are those self-identifying as of Indigenous descent or origin. There were 341 such respondents in the 2013 survey. This includes a cross-section of men and women of different ages and walks of life and from all Australian states and territories. However, people from ATSI backgrounds in very remote areas were under-represented.

As in almost all surveys, the number of people in various groups does not match exactly their proportions in the population. There is a risk that this will result in a bias toward the views of a particular group. To make sure that appropriate weight was given to the views of all groups (e.g. men and women, young people and old people, Indigenous people in different states), a procedure called weighting was applied to the sample before the analysis was undertaken.

Researchers from ATSI backgrounds were involved in the study and prior work by ATSI researchers and community leaders was also used in the analysis.

Data is analysed in two ways. In the first, percentages for responses to each of the questions in the survey are given for both the ATSI and non-ATSI samples. Such data helps to identify:

- whether the ATSI sample differs from the non-ATSI sample in level of knowledge or attitudes towards violence and gender equality. This is important for determining if there is a need to prioritise people from ATSI backgrounds in future prevention work
- what particular areas of knowledge or types of attitude require attention in prevention work with ATSI communities.

Selected analyses are also undertaken for particular subgroups within the ATSI sample (e.g. men v. women)

The second approach to analysis involves gauging the influence of a range of factors (e.g. age, gender) after taking into account the influence of other factors. This analysis is designed to strengthen understanding of the factors shaping or driving attitudes.

¹ Socioeconomic disadvantage was assessed using six indicators identified in other research (Price-Robertson 2011; Vinson 2007) for which data was available in the survey. These included low educational attainment, living in a remote or disadvantaged area, being unemployed or unable to work, residing in a sole-parent or sole-person household and having a self-assessed disability.

Key findings

Knowledge

A good understanding of the causes, dynamics, patterns and prevalence of violence against women is important to ensure appropriate responses by and towards those affected by violence (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). A well-informed community is better able to help prevent the problem (Carlson & Worden 2005; McMahon & Baker 2011; O'Neil & Morgan 2010).

Research has shown that knowledge influences the formation of attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein 2005; Chaiken & Trope 1999; Fazio 1990). Wide understanding that violence is against the law can help to set non-violent social norms which in turn can help to prevent violent behaviour (Salazar et al. 2003).

Defining violence against women

Table 1: Knowledge of definitions of violence against women

Certain behaviours are a form of partner violence/violence against women	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Slaps/pushes to cause harm and fear	98	97
Forces partner to have sex	96	96
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt others	97	97
Throws/smashes objects to frighten/threaten	98	96
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad/useless	90	86
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends	87	85
Tries to control by denying partner money	75	70
Stalks by repeatedly following/watching at home or work	94*	88
Harasses by repeated phone calls	91*	87
Harasses by repeated emails/text messages	91*	85

* Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$.

ATSI respondents have a strong understanding that violence involves more than physical assault and forced sex, and also includes psychological, social and financial means of control, abuse and intimidation. They are more likely than non-ATSI respondents to recognise stalking and harassment by phone and email as forms of violence against women.²

Like those in the non-ATSI sample, respondents in the ATSI sample are less likely to recognise non-physical behaviours as violence against women than they are to recognise physical violence and forced sex.

When results from the questions are used to classify respondents as having high, medium or low levels of understanding, ATSI respondents are more likely to be classified as having a high understanding (25% v. 19%; data not shown).²

² Significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 2: Knowledge of prevalence and nature of violence, the law and causes

Knowledge	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Prevalence of violence against women		
Violence against women is common	87**	68
Women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence	40	41
Understanding of the law		
Domestic violence is a criminal offence	97	96
A woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a relationship with	15*	9
Patterns and consequences of violence		
Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than by a stranger	70	64
Men mainly or more often commit acts of domestic violence	65*	71
Women are more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence	81*	87
Level of fear from domestic violence is worse for women	47	52
Perceived main cause		
Some men being unable to manage their anger	58	64
The belief that men should be in charge of the relationship	27**	18
Some men being under financial stress	12	13

* Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$. ** Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$

Prevalence

A large proportion of ATSI respondents agree that violence against women is common, which is higher than for the non-ATSI sample (87% v. 68%).

Understanding of the law

Similar to the non-ATSI sample, ATSI respondents have a high level of recognition that both partner violence and sexual assault are against the law,³ although Indigenous respondents are more likely to agree with the idea that a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a relationship with (15% v. 9%).⁴

Patterns and consequences of violence

Women are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted by a known person than a stranger (ABS 2013a). Seventy per cent of ATSI respondents agree with this. This is not significantly different from the non-ATSI sample. However, ATSI respondents are more likely to 'strongly agree' with this statement (45% v. 33%; data not shown).

A majority in the ATSI sample recognise that men are more likely than women to perpetrate violence against their partners (65%) and that women are more likely to suffer physical harm from this violence (81%). However, they were a little less likely to do so than non-ATSI respondents (71% and 87%).⁴ ATSI respondents are more likely than non-ATSI respondents to agree that men and women are equally likely to commit acts of domestic violence (31% v. 24%; data not shown) and that men and women are equally likely to suffer physical harm as a result (14% v. 9%; data not shown).⁴

Similar to the non-ATSI sample, only 47% of ATSI respondents agree that women are more likely to experience fear as a result of partner violence.

Perceived main cause

Other research shows that most people in the community believe that violence against women is due to problems with individual men who use violence, such as their misuse of alcohol or their inability to manage their anger (European Commission 2010; Harris/Decima 2009; O'Neill & Morgan 2010).

In contrast, many experts look to factors in people's environments. A particular focus has been on the way in which inequalities between men and women, both in families and in public life, contribute to violence (VicHealth 2007; WHO & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2010).

People in the survey were given three options and asked to say what they believed was the main cause of violence against women (Table 2). The pattern of responses for both the ATSI and non-ATSI samples was very similar: both groups of respondents were most likely to select 'some men not being able to manage their anger (58% and 64%); and were least likely to identify 'some men being under financial stress (12% and 13%). However, ATSI respondents were a little more likely than the non-ATSI sample to appreciate that male dominance in relationships is a main contributor to violence against women (27% v. 18%).

³ Not all behaviours canvassed in the NCAS are crimes and there is some variation in the definitions of partner violence between Australian jurisdictions and between civil and criminal law.

⁴ Significant at the 95% confidence level.

Attitudes

Attitudes contribute to violence against women because they influence expectations of what is acceptable behaviour. Our understanding of these expectations has a strong influence on our behaviour (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). Community attitudes influence how people respond to violence, from victims and their friends and family to law enforcement professionals, employers and policy-makers. This means that attitudes are an important barometer of how we fare generally as a society in relation to violence and gender relations.

Our attitudes are often shaped by the world around us – for instance, through how we see gender roles and relationships in families and organisations, and how women and men are portrayed in the media and popular culture (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). As a result, preventing violence against women is not simply a matter of changing attitudes, but will also involve challenging the social factors that shape those beliefs (Pease & Flood 2008).

Questions were analysed within five themes (see box).

WHAT ARE VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES?

Five key categories of violence-supportive attitudes have been identified by researchers. These are attitudes that:

- **justify** violence against women, based on the notion that it is legitimate for a man to use violence, particularly against a woman with whom he is in an intimate relationship, in certain circumstances (e.g. the idea that partner violence is justified if a woman has sex with another man)
- **excuse** violence by attributing it to external factors (e.g. stress) or proposing that men cannot be held fully responsible for violent behaviour (e.g. ‘rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex’)
- **trivialise** the impact of violence, based on the view that the impacts of violence are not serious or are not sufficiently serious to warrant action by women themselves, the community or public agencies (e.g. ‘women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it’)
- **minimise** violence by denying its seriousness, denying that it occurs or denying that certain behaviours are indeed violence at all (e.g. the idea that it’s only rape if the woman physically resisted)
- shift **blame** for the violence from the perpetrator to the victim or hold women at least partially responsible for their victimisation or for preventing victimisation (e.g. the idea that women ask for rape).

This does not mean that people who hold violence-supportive attitudes would necessarily use or condone violence themselves. However, such views expressed by influential individuals or held by a substantial number of people can create a culture where violence is not clearly condemned and may even be subtly condoned or encouraged.

Attitudes justifying violence

Only a minority of the ATSI sample agree that violence can be justified (between 11% and 16% depending on the scenario). However, this is higher than the percentages in the non-ATSI sample (between 4% to 6% believe that violence could be justified depending on the scenario).

Table 3: Attitudes justifying and excusing violence

Attitude	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Circumstances in which violence towards a current/former partner can be justified		
Partner admits to having sex with another man	16**	6
Partner makes him look stupid or insults him in front of his friends	11**	4
Partner ends or tries to end the relationship	14**	4
Against ex-partner to get access to children	15**	4
If ex-partner is unreasonable about property settlement and financial issues	14**	4
Attitudes excusing violence		
Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex	49	43
A man is less responsible for rape if drunk/affected by drugs at the time	16*	9
Domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry they lose control	37**	21
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person genuinely regrets it	25	21
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was abused as a child	16	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is under a lot of stress	23**	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is affected by alcohol	21**	8

* Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$. ** Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$

Attitudes excusing violence

Between 16% and 49% (depending on the scenario) are prepared to excuse partner violence and sexual assault. For a number of the scenarios presented, the percentage of ATSI Australians prepared to excuse violence is higher than for the non-ATSI sample. For example, in regards to partner violence, ATSI respondents are:

- nearly twice as likely to agree that such violence can be excused if a person is under stress
- 1.8 times as likely to agree that it can be excused if the person gets so angry they lose control
- more than twice as likely to excuse partner violence if the violent person is affected by alcohol.

When considering sexual assault, ATSI respondents are 1.7 times more likely than non-ATSI respondents to agree that a man is less responsible for rape if drunk or affected by drugs at the time.

Similar to the non-ATSI sample:

- nearly half of ATSI respondents believe that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex
- one-quarter believe that violence can be excused if genuinely regretted afterward
- 16% agree that violence can be excused if the violent person was themselves abused as a child.

Attitudes trivialising violence

Table 4: Attitudes trivialising violence

Attitude	% agree	
	N-MESC	Australian-born
Where one partner is violent it is reasonable for them to be made to leave the family home	94	89
It's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships	84	78
Most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to	63*	51
Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves	16	12
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family	24	17
It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together	13	9

* Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$.

ATSI respondents are similar to non-ATSI respondents in their attitudes trivialising violence. Most ATSI respondents support the principle underlying current laws pertaining to partner violence – that the perpetrator and not the woman and her children should be made to leave the family home (94%). Sizeable minorities believe that women who are sexually harassed should be left to sort things out themselves (16%); that domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family (24%) or that women should stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together (13%).

Similar to the non-ATSI sample, ATSI respondents have a relatively poor understanding of the barriers to women securing safety from violence. Eighty-four percent agree with the notion that it's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships and 63% that 'most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to' (the latter being greater than the 51% for non-ATSI respondents).⁵

Attitudes minimising violence

Table 5: Attitudes minimising violence

Attitude	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Violence against women is a serious issue	97	95
Certain behaviours are serious		
Slaps/pushes to cause harm and fear	90	92
Forces partner to have sex	96	96
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt others	94	97
Throws/smashes objects to frighten/threaten	91	93
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad/useless	86	85
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends	86	87
Tries to control by denying partner money	74	74
Stalks by repeatedly following/watching at home or work	97	94
Harasses by repeated phone calls	90	89
Harasses by repeated emails/text messages	88	86
Seriousness/acceptability of tracking female partner by electronic means without consent		
Serious	83	85
Never acceptable	63	61
Attitudes towards false allegations of partner violence and rape		
Women going through custody battles make up or exaggerate domestic violence in order to improve their case	67**	52
Women rarely make false claims of rape	63	59
A lot of times women who say they were raped led the man on and later had regrets	39	38
If a woman does not physically resist, even if protesting verbally, then it isn't really rape	14	10

** Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$.

⁵ Significant at the 95% confidence level.

Seriousness of violence against women

The overwhelming majority of ATSI respondents agree that violence against women is a serious issue (97%) and that the range of behaviours involved in such violence are serious (between 74% and 97% depending on the behaviour considered). They are more likely to recognise physical violence and forced sex than psychological, social and financial means of control.

These patterns are similar to the non-ATSI sample, with the exception that ATSI respondents are more likely to identify certain non-physical behaviours as 'very serious' rather than 'quite serious', including:

- repeatedly criticising one's partner to make them feel bad and useless (61% ATSI v. 41% in the non-ATSI sample)
- phone harassment (59% v. 47%)
- email harassment (54% v. 44%) (data not shown)

Tracking a partner by electronic means

Sixty-three percent of ATSI respondents agree that tracking a partner by electronic means is unacceptable and the great majority (83%) agree that this is serious behaviour (comparable to the non-ATSI sample).

False allegations of sexual assault and partner violence

Few ATSI respondents (14%) agree with the opinion that if a woman doesn't physically resist then it isn't really rape, suggesting that the attitudes of most ATSI Australians towards consent to sexual relations are in keeping with contemporary legal approaches (comparable to the non-ATSI sample). However, as is the case in the non-ATSI sample, attitudinal support for the notion that women make false allegations of sexual assault and partner violence remains: among a sizeable percentage of ATSI respondents:

- only 63% agree that false allegations of rape are rare
- 39% agree that 'a lot of times women who say they were raped led the man on and later had regrets'

- 67% agree with the opinion that women often fabricate or exaggerate domestic violence to improve their prospects in cases concerning where children will live after separation or divorce (compared with 52% among non-ATSI respondents).

Attitudes shifting blame from perpetrator to victim

Similar to the non-ATSI sample, sizeable proportions of ATSI Australians (between 12% and 25% depending on the scenario) are prepared to attribute at least some of the responsibility for violence to the victim (Table 6).

ATSI respondents are 2.5 times more likely to believe that partner violence can be excused where a victim of partner violence is affected by alcohol (25% ATSI v. 10% in the non-ATSI sample).

Attitudes to gender roles and relationships

The NCAS also gauges attitudes to gender equality, gender roles and relationships. These attitudes are important because they influence the formation of attitudes that support violence against women (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). People with weak support for gender equality tend to be more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009).

Respondents were classified as having high, medium or low support for equality in gender roles and relationships based on their responses to a series of eight questions. There were no statistically significant differences between ATSI respondents and the non-ATSI sample in attitudes to gender equality (although as discussed below there are gender differences in both samples).

Table 6: Attitudes shifting blame from perpetrator to victim

Attitude	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
If a woman is raped while drink/affected by drugs, she is at least partly responsible	18	19
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	16	16
If a woman goes into a room alone with a man at a party, it is her fault if she is raped	12	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	25**	10

** Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p < 0.01$.

Responses to violence against women/ knowledge of sources of assistance

Interest in how people intend to respond when they witness violence and its precursors is increasing. This recognises that the rate of reporting violence to the police and other authorities is low and that much violence takes place beyond the view of those responsible for enforcing the law or organisational regulations. Further, studies show that social sanctions (i.e. disapproval of one's peers or the positive expectations of respected others) are among the strongest influences to prevent violence (Bohner et al. 2006; Brown & Messman-Moore 2009; Powell 2011, 2012) (Table 7).

The overwhelming majority of ATSI respondents report that they would take some form of action if a woman they knew was being assaulted by her partner (97%). The proportion was slightly less if the woman was unknown to them (93%). These findings are similar for the non-ATSI sample, although ATSI respondents are slightly more likely to say they would

physically intervene to assist an unknown woman (36% v. 28%), rather than say or do something else to try to help (data not shown). Whether or not children were present made no difference to intentions when the victim was a known person. However, ATSI respondents were slightly more likely than non-ATSI respondents to say they would intervene to assist a stranger when children were present (95% v. 92%; data not shown) (Table 8).

Studies show that capacity to intervene and confidence that intervention will make a difference influence whether people take action (Powell 2011, 2012). ATSI respondents were more likely than the non-ATSI sample to say they would know where to get help about a partner violence problem (71% v. 57%). They were also more likely than their non-ATSI counterparts to agree that police response times had improved (54% v. 44%).⁶

Table 7: Preparedness to intervene

Preparedness to intervene	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
If a known woman is being assaulted by her partner	97	98
If an unknown woman is being assaulted	93	93

Table 8: Knowledge of sources of assistance

Knowledge	% agree	
	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Would know where to go to get help regarding a domestic violence problem	71**	57
Police response times have improved	54*	44
Women with disabilities are less likely to be believed when reporting sexual assault	45	42

* Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$. ** Difference between ATSI/non-ATSI is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$.

Patterns within the ATSI sample by gender and age⁷

ATSI women are less likely than ATSI men to endorse attitudes supportive of violence and are more likely to endorse attitudes supporting equality in gender roles and relationships. However, in contrast to the non-ATSI sample, there are no significant differences between ATSI men and women in their understanding of violence against women. ATSI men are less likely than non-ATSI men to have a low level of understanding (26% v. 37%).

Although the pattern for attitudes towards violence and gender equality is similar to the non-ATSI sample, the gender differences are larger in the ATSI sample.

⁶ Significant at the 95% confidence level.

⁷ All differences referred to in this section are at the 95% confidence level.

Table 9: Level of understanding and attitudes towards violence and gender equality by sex and sample

Knowledge	ATSI (%)		Non-ATSI (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Understanding of violence against women				
High	20	30 ^c	15	23 ^c
Moderate	54	51	48	52 ^c
Low	26	19	37 ^f	25
Attitudinal support for violence against women				
High	48 ^a	27	33 ^g	23
Moderate	36	45	51 ^e	49 ^e
Low	16	28 ^d	16	27 ^d
Attitudinal support for gender equality				
High	16	39 ^e	21	39 ^c
Moderate	49	42	46 ^g	42
Low	35 ^b	19	34 ^g	19

Superscripts indicate statistically significant data ($p \leq 0.05$) as follows: ^a compared to ATSI females and all non-ATSI respondents; ^b compared to ATSI females; ^c compared to non-ATSI males; ^d compared to ATSI and non-ATSI males; ^e compared to ATSI males; ^f compared to all ATSI respondents and non-ATSI females; ^g compared to non-ATSI females.

When socioeconomic disadvantage and gender are taken into account, only disadvantaged ATSI men are more likely to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence against women than non-ATSI men who are similarly disadvantaged. That is, there are no significant differences between:

- ATSI and non-ATSI women with comparable levels of disadvantage
- ATSI and non-ATSI men who are not disadvantaged (data not shown).

The exceptions to this general pattern are questions in the themes of justifying and excusing violence, where both ATSI women and ATSI men are more likely than their non-ATSI counterparts to agree that violence can be excused or justified (see Table 3).

Differences on the basis of age are not statistically significant, but follow a pattern similar to the NCAS sample as a whole in that older and younger respondents tended to be more likely to be classified as having a high level of attitudinal support for violence. The fact that these differences are not statistically significant is most likely to be due to the sample size not being large enough to show differences between smaller subgroups in the ATSI sample.

Factors influencing attitudes in ATSI communities

As was the case for the non-ATSI sample, the main factors influencing attitudes to violence against women are an understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality. That is, ATSI Australians are less likely to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence if they:

- have a high level of understanding that violence against women involves more than physical violence and forced sex and/or
- a high level of attitudinal support for gender equality.

Demographic factors are less predictive than understanding and attitudes to gender equality. The top three demographic factors influencing attitudes to violence against women in the ATSI sample were the socioeconomic status indicators of:

- occupation
- level of disadvantage of the respondent's postcode area
- employment status.

In this regard, the ATSI sample differs from the main sample, in which age and gender are more influential than socioeconomic status.

Area remoteness has minimal influence on attitudes and understanding in the ATSI sample (as is also the case in the non-ATSI sample).

It is important to note that the factors included in NCAS do not explain all of the influence on attitudes and understanding. This means that other factors, not measured in the survey, are also influential (VicHealth 2014 and Webster et al. 2014 for further discussion).

Strengths and limitations of the research

The NCAS ATSI sample represented a broad cross-section of the ATSI population and was large enough to support analysis at the population level. Including both landline and mobile interviews meant that a broader range of people were included than would have been the case if only landline interviewing had been used. In particular, this approach increased the likelihood of participation of people from ATSI backgrounds, since this is a group less likely to have a landline (Pennay & Vickers 2013).

However, some of the subgroup analyses (for example attitudes by age) involved relatively small numbers and should be interpreted with caution.

It is important to note that NCAS is a sample selected from the Australian population. It does not measure attitudes in particular ATSI communities. There is considerable diversity between Indigenous communities. Accordingly, attitudes in particular communities may be different from those reported here. In this regard, the NCAS ATSI findings need to be considered in conjunction with existing qualitative research conducted with specific communities, or be supplemented with local-level consultation with ATSI groups.

As with all surveys, response bias, the potential distortion of results due to a particular profile of people choosing to partake in the survey, may have affected the survey findings. Because information about the people refusing to participate is unavailable, the impact of response bias cannot be quantified. The response rates for this survey were low (26.9%); however, the rate is comparable to other similar surveys (Kohut et al. 2012).

In 2009, the survey was reviewed by a specialist research organisation to maximise its relevance to ATSI communities. The results of this review were incorporated into the administration of the survey in 2013. However, a range of factors may influence findings when researchers and participants do not share a common cultural heritage. As a result, findings may be an artefact of cultural and language differences (Survey Research Centre 2011). Attitudes surveys may be subject to social desirability bias: respondents giving answers they believe to be socially acceptable, rather than what they actually believe. Such a bias requires a relatively nuanced understanding of the cultural and institutional context in which the research is being undertaken. Accordingly, it is less likely to be exercised by respondents who do not share the culture of the researcher. This may apply particularly to some ATSI respondents. However, again it is not possible to quantify the extent to which this influenced findings for the ATSI and non-ATSI samples and the differences between them.

Explaining the results

The NCAS asks people what views they hold, but not why they hold them. It cannot on its own explain the results. However, when considered alongside other research, some possible explanations can be considered.

Knowledge, understanding and awareness of violence

ATSI respondents might have a higher level of knowledge, understanding and awareness because:

- Indigenous communities have been targeted by programs designed to respond to violence, which may have had a positive impact on knowledge
- extensive media coverage about violence in Indigenous communities may have resulted in this message being taken on by Indigenous people themselves
- violence is more likely to be part of the lived experience of people from Indigenous backgrounds – both violence within communities and violence towards people from Indigenous backgrounds. This may give people from Indigenous backgrounds a greater appreciation that violence is a problem, a better understanding of its nature and make them more familiar with support services and police responses.

Attitudes towards violence

As indicated earlier, understanding of an issue influences attitudes. This is confirmed in this study, with understanding that violence comprises a continuum of behaviours being the strongest influence on attitudes measured in the survey.

Other research shows that attitudes towards violence against women are shaped by three interrelated clusters of factors (VicHealth 2014):

- gender, and the way we understand gender roles, relationships and identities (i.e. what it means to be a man or a woman)
- whether we support violence generally, and whether or not we have been exposed to other forms of violence, such as child abuse or violence in the community
- conditions that intersect or interact with factors related to gender and violence to shape or magnify their influence, for example entrenched social and economic inequality or particular cultural influences.

The ATSI sample findings confirm the finding of many other studies that gender influences attitudes (Grubb & Turner 2012; Suarez & Gadalla 2010). Women are more likely than men to have a:

- high level of understanding of violence against women
- low level of attitudinal support for violence
- higher level of support for gender equality.

Similarly, as in many other studies (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009), the findings show that support for gender equality is a strong influence on attitudes to violence. It is second only to people's understanding of violence.

In this and many other respects, patterns in the ATSI and non-ATSI samples are very similar, suggesting that many of the factors influencing attitudes in ATSI communities are likely to be similar to those discussed in the main NCAS reports (VicHealth 2014; Webster et al. 2014).

Nevertheless, there are notable differences in the ATSI sample, including that:

- the gender differences are larger
- socioeconomic-status has a greater influence on attitudes than gender. This is in contrast to the non-ATSI sample, where socioeconomic status ranked after gender
- both ATSI men and women are more likely to support justifications and excuses for violence, suggesting a higher level of normative support for violence against women.

‘Culture’ and violence against women

Other research has shown that both violence and violence-supportive norms are more prevalent among ATSI Australians (Wundersitz 2010). Some researchers claim that this is because violence against women was part of the ‘culture’ practised by ATSI people long before European settlement (Jarrett 2013; Kimm 2004; Nowra 2007). Others have claimed that violence occurred in pre-colonial societies (as in other societies of the era), but that it was strictly regulated and controlled (see, for example, Atkinson & Woods 2008; Langton 2008; Lucashenko 1996; McGlade 2012). They assert that violence and disrespect towards women have no place in contemporary ATSI culture (Dodson 2003), and that elevated rates of such violence are primarily due to influences following European settlement (Atkinson 1990a; Atkinson & Woods 2008; Cripps & Adams 2014; Lucashenko 1996; McGlade 2003). These include:

- Indigenous peoples’ exposure to violence in the community (ABS 2013b) and in institutions, such as prisons (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2006; Human Rights Commission 2011; Johnston 1991)
- experiences associated with the higher levels of social and economic disadvantage among ATSI Australians (e.g. unemployment). Persistent disadvantage, deprivation and neglect may lead to the breakdown of social controls against violence (Atkinson 1990b; Button 2008; Langton 2008). Also, such disadvantage may increase material and psychological stress that on their own may not be the cause of violence, but collectively can create a ‘tipping point’ for violence (Weatherburn 2011)
- unique influences involved in being colonised people in Australia. These include both inter-generational influences (e.g. frontier violence) as well as more recent factors. Among both the historical and contemporary influences are state intervention in, and control of, Indigenous family, social and economic life (including forced child removal, restrictions on peoples’ movements and withdrawal and management of income); the undermining of traditional gender roles; racism and high rates of incarceration of Indigenous women and men) (Cripps & Adams 2014; Human Rights Commission 2011; Johnston 1991).

There is similar debate in regard to gender relations. Some researchers argue that Indigenous societies prior to European contact involved marked subordination of women, whereas others maintain that there is very little evidence to suggest that they were any more inequitable than most other societies of the era (Atkinson & Woods 2008; Jarrett 2013; Kimm 2004; Lucashenko 1996).

The survey results cannot resolve these differences of opinion. However, the patterns found do provide some clues. Overall, Indigenous respondents’ attitudes were not substantially different from the attitudes of the non-ATSI sample. This suggests that cultural norms regarding violence against women and gender inequality – at least insofar as they are measured in NCAS – are very similar in both the ATSI and wider communities. The exceptions to this general rule are attitudes justifying and excusing violence (more likely to be held by both ATSI men and women) and attitudes held by disadvantaged Indigenous men. It is possible that Indigenous people who are less influenced by European contact are also more likely to be disadvantaged and hence that the results are a legacy of deep-rooted norms. However, such an explanation presupposes that pre-contact Indigenous society was more violent or gender-inequitable than other societies of the era, a claim many Indigenous scholars reject (see above). Further, if this were the case, the differences found between disadvantaged men in the two samples would also be expected to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. International research shows that in many developing communities (i.e. those that would be expected to have lower levels of contact with broader global cultural influences), women are more likely than men to hold violence-supportive and gender inequitable attitudes (Waltermaurer 2012). In the NCAS, the opposite was the case, and the gender differences were greater in the ATSI sample than in the non-ATSI sample.

A more likely explanation is the influence of the historical and contemporary stressors to which Indigenous communities are exposed, discussed above. This is particularly the case given that culture is not fixed, but rather changes in response to changing social circumstances (Spencer-Oatey 2012; US Department of Health and Human Services 2001). For this reason it is questionable whether patterns of violence against women in the present can be explained primarily in terms of deep-rooted cultural practices of a minority ethnic group. This is especially so given the passage of time since first contact and the sheer force of social and economic change associated with European settlement.

A problem with viewing attitudes supportive of violence against women as ‘cultural’ is that it may lead to certain attitudes, and possibly behaviours, being excused as part of protecting a group’s ‘culture’. However, cultural norms can have different meanings. For example, a norm that promotes the importance of putting the welfare of one’s extended family and community ahead of individual welfare has been identified as a risk for violence against women. This is because it can be used as a justification for remaining silent when violence is occurring. At the same time, this norm can also be taken to mean that it is important to take action in response to behaviour that undermines the welfare of the group or to help people when they are in trouble. When used in this way it can help to protect women against violence. This suggests that particular norms do not inevitably increase the risk of violence. Rather they have the potential to do so when they are used as part of a ‘script’ for justifying or excusing its use (Mederos 2012).

ATSI leaders have observed that violence against women contributes to the destruction of ATSI culture and society and note that it is the failure to take action that ultimately risks

the survival of Australian Indigenous culture (Dodson 2003; Langton 2008). They have called on both Indigenous men and women to work together and with others to address the problem of violence against ATSI women and children (Dodson 2003).

Intersecting influences of gender and historical and contemporary oppression and inequality

The patterns in the NCAS sample cannot be explained by the influences of historical oppression and inequality alone. This is because both Indigenous men and Indigenous women are exposed to them, yet Indigenous women are no more likely to endorse violence-supportive attitudes than their non-Indigenous counterparts. For example:

- Indigenous men and women experience comparable rates of physical violence (ABS 2013b)
- the proportion of the female prison population that is Indigenous is higher than the proportion of the male prison population that is Indigenous and has increased markedly in recent years (Bartels 2010)
- Indigenous women are just as likely as Indigenous men to be classified as disadvantaged (Webster et al. 2014).

There are different views about the impacts of colonisation on ATSI men and women. One view is that colonisation has had particular impacts for ATSI men because it has undermined their traditional roles and denied them alternative means of identity. In this context, it is thought that violence may be used and supported as a means to reassert power over women (Day et al. 2012).

An alternative view is that colonisation has had negative impacts on the roles and identities of both men and women. Indeed, it has been pointed out that women have experienced powerlessness resulting from both racism and gender inequality, the latter in both Indigenous and the wider communities (Davis 2007; McGlade 2012). People holding this alternative view believe that attributing violence against women to men's experience of colonisation risks excusing the use of violence by some Indigenous men and places an unfair burden on Indigenous women (McGlade 2012).

While NCAS cannot fully explain these patterns, the survey findings provide support for attitudes among Indigenous men being likely to be due to the intersection of the influences of gender, disadvantage and the unique status of Indigenous Australians as colonised people. This is evident in the findings that:

- Indigenous men are more likely than Indigenous women to hold violence-supportive attitudes, a relationship that holds when levels of disadvantage are taken into account. This suggests that gender plays a part
- both ATSI and non-ATSI men and women who are disadvantaged are more likely than their non-disadvantaged counterparts to hold violence-supportive attitudes, indicating that factors associated with disadvantage are also likely to be relevant
- disadvantaged ATSI men are more likely than non-ATSI men experiencing a comparable level of disadvantage to hold violence-supportive attitudes. This suggests that some unique experiences associated with ATSI status contribute to men's greater likelihood of holding violence-supportive attitudes.

Greater support for justifications and excuses

The questions in NCAS are framed to ask about the perpetration of violence in general. They do not explore whether respondents have a particular group in mind or whether the racial background of the perpetrator has any influence on their responses. The following discussion assumes that Indigenous respondents have Indigenous men and women in mind, or at least that their attitudes in general are influenced by experiences of violence and gender relations within Indigenous communities. However, the possibility that respondents may have relationships in general in mind cannot be excluded.

Studies with other communities experiencing high levels of inequality and racism have similarly found an inclination to justify and excuse violence against women perpetrated by men in those communities (Nash 2005). There are three possible and related reasons for this.

First, members of such communities may seek to protect their community from stigma and prejudice by attributing violence to external causes or to causes that lie beyond the control of individual men (Langton 2008; Lucashenko 1996).

Second, in the community as a whole, there has been an emphasis on holding men accountable when they use violence, and increasing women's protection under the law. Such an approach may be hard for Indigenous women and non-violent Indigenous men when the perpetrator is Indigenous. This is because it requires them to engage with a criminal justice system in which Indigenous people have been badly treated (Atkinson 2002). Indigenous women may fear that their children will be removed if they report violence to the police (Cripps 2012; McGlade 2012; Nixon & Cripps 2013). Also taking action against an Indigenous man who uses violence may be seen by other community members as threatening the solidarity of already fragile communities (Nancarrow 2006; Nixon & Cripps 2013).

Justifying or excusing violence may be a way of resolving the conflict between these tensions. On one hand, Indigenous respondents are clearly aware that violence is a serious problem. On the other, they may be concerned that acting on that understanding by holding Indigenous men who use violence accountable could have serious negative impacts for relationships, families and communities.

A third possibility is the negative influence of entrenched racism and oppression on the ways in which Indigenous men and women see themselves and each other. Research has found that this may result in people internalising negative views about themselves and other members of their group and can result on people turning upon one another (Lipsky 1987; Pyke 2010). Further, it can lead to individuals lowering expectations of themselves and of the ways they will be treated by others (Lipsky 1987; Pyke 2010), in turn increasing vulnerability to violence. This form of violence is sometimes referred to as 'lateral violence'. Indigenous leaders have identified internalisation of negative attitudes and lateral violence as problems affecting ATSI communities (Human Rights Commission 2011; Langton 2008).

Implications of the findings

People from ATSI backgrounds are exposed to many of the same influences on their attitudes as the population as a whole, and attitudes in both the ATSI sample and the non-ATSI sample are very similar. This suggests that many of the implications discussed in reports for NCAS also apply to ATSI Australians (VicHealth 2014; Webster et al. 2014).

Further, as discussed in the earlier sections on justifications and excuses, other research suggests that the responses of the wider community towards ATSI communities may contribute to shaping attitudes, violence and responses within ATSI communities. For example, international research shows that women from minority ethnic and racial groups who are exposed to violence are viewed less sympathetically and are taken less seriously than are women from majority groups (Esqueda & Harrison 2005). Racism has also been found to influence the responses of criminal justice and health professionals to Indigenous women in Australia (McGlade 2003). This suggests there is a need to develop prevention activity to strengthen the wider community's knowledge about and attitudes towards violence affecting Indigenous communities.

Additional issues applying specifically to the ATSI sample are addressed in the following sections.

Building leadership and focusing on men and young people

Although differences between ATSI and non-ATSI respondents are not large, there are some concerning results in both samples and some specific patterns of concern in the ATSI sample. The high rate of violence affecting ATSI women indicated in other research suggests the importance of working with ATSI communities to prevent violence against women.

The substantial gender differences found in the survey support the emphasis in the National Plan (COAG 2010) on building ATSI women's leadership to address family violence.

There has been increasing recognition among those working to prevent violence against women that efforts must focus upon and involve men (Fabiano et al. 2003; Flood 2010). This reflects the facts that most violence is perpetrated by men (ABS 2013a) and that male socialisation is a key factor contributing to violence (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). Importantly it also recognises that the majority of men neither perpetrate nor support violence against women and hence are potential prevention partners. Other research shows that engaging men in this way is vital because peer censure is among the most powerful influences on violent and violence-supportive behaviour (Abbey et al. 2006, 2007; Bohner et al. 2006; Brown & Messman-Moore 2010; Fabiano et al. 2003). The NCAS findings suggest that it will be especially important to reach ATSI men who are disadvantaged.

There would also be benefits in targeting efforts to Indigenous young people and the organisational and community contexts that shape their values (e.g. schools). The reasons for this are discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming paper on the NCAS youth sample (Harris et al). In summary these include that:

- adolescence and early adulthood are a time when values and relationship practices are being formed. Hence prospects for prevention are particularly strong (Flood & Fergus 2008).
- early adulthood is a life stage involving particular vulnerability to violence for both young men and women (see also ABS 2013a). International research shows that nearly half of all men who disclose having perpetrated sexual assault did so for the first time before the age of 20 years (Fulu et al. 2013)
- violence has particularly serious consequences for young women given that exposure occurs at a critical life stage. Research shows that adverse experiences in adolescence have the potential to impact negatively on health, especially mental health, well into adulthood.

In the NCAS sample as a whole, young people were found to have a higher level of attitudinal support for violence. While the size of the ATSI sample works against drawing definitive conclusions, the data suggests a similar pattern among ATSI respondents.

Improving knowledge and understanding

The finding that ATSI respondents have a high level of understanding of violence against women both in absolute terms and relative to non-ATSI respondents indicates that raising awareness in Indigenous communities is a lower priority than addressing attitudes.

Nevertheless, as is the case for the non-ATSI sample, there would be benefits in strengthening understanding of the nature and dynamics of violence against women, in particular that:

- violence disproportionately impacts upon women
- violence is more commonly perpetrated by known men
- inequalities and disrespect in gender roles and relations are contributing factors.

Shifting attitudes

As is the case in the non-ATSI sample, strengthening understanding and attitudes to gender equality is likely to improve attitudes towards violence against women. This is because attitudes towards equality and respect in relationships influence attitudes to violence and violent behaviour (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009).

Although being very similar to the non-ATSI sample on most measures, the main themes on which ATSI respondents (both men and women) vary from non-ATSI respondents are justifications and excuses. Given the likely reasons for this suggested in other research (see above), it will be important to take a multi-pronged approach involving:

- steps to ensure that men remain accountable for their use of violence through both informal social sanctions (i.e. expectations from the community) and formal sanctions (i.e. by reducing barriers to reporting and applying the law). Establishing the social norm that violence cannot be justified or excused is an effective way of reducing violence against women (Bohner et al. 2006; Brown & Messman-Moore 2009)

- addressing underlying inequalities affecting ATSI communities, with the aim of empowering Indigenous women and men
- taking steps to address the impacts of past exposure to violence, both the intergenerational impacts of violence such as forced child removal (Nixon & Cripps 2013), as well as violence that may have occurred as part of the current life histories of Indigenous men and women (e.g. childhood witnessing of parental violence, child abuse, community violence and violence in institutions such as prisons). This is important because these experiences can influence people's attitudes and behaviour (Button 2008; Flood & Pease 2006, 2009; Speizer 2010)

ATSI respondents are more likely than the non-ATSI sample to endorse violence-supportive attitudes in scenarios involving alcohol. This suggests there would be particular benefits in strategies countering the notion that being affected by alcohol excuses violence or reduces perpetrator accountability for violent behaviour.

Strengthening community responses

ATSI respondents demonstrate a high level of willingness to assist a woman affected by violence. As is the case in the general community, the challenge is to identify and promote ways of doing this that do not involve physical confrontation, which has the potential to inflame a situation.

Similarly, there may also be some potential in ATSI communities to strengthen willingness and skills to respond to precursors to violence, such as controlling behaviours and disrespect of women. As already discussed, this can help to build strong community norms against violence.

Conclusions

The ATSI sample was very similar to the non-ATSI sample in many ways. This indicates that many of the same strategies for reducing violence recommended in other NCAS reports for the Australian population are also likely to be relevant to ATSI communities. In particular there is a need to strengthen equitable and respectful gender relations.

The research on which NCAS draws indicates that violence, discrimination and disadvantage experienced by ATSI men and women provide an important context for understanding attitudes and the use of violence against women. Many of these conditions have involved adversity for the perpetrators of violence and it is critical that they are addressed. However, freedom from violence is a basic human right and it is important that the human rights of one group (women and children) are not compromised in a bid to observe the human rights of another (men). Prevention strategies need to be mindful of everyone's rights (Goonsekere 1998). Violence against ATSI women and girls is too prevalent and serious to be justified, excused, trivialised, minimised or attributed to the behaviour of women.

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