Family Violence: Issues for Local Government

Summary

The Nature of Family Violence

Family violence includes any actions which threaten, harm, intimidate, control or victimise a person within a family relationship or household. Such violent, abusive or controlling behaviour may include physical or sexual assault, as well as verbal, emotional and other forms of abuse. These actions may cause injury, as well as reducing freedom, sense of personal control, pride and identity. Family violence tends to be committed by people in positions of relative power within a relationship, against more vulnerable individuals, with the consequence that women, children, older adults and disabled people are disproportionately at risk of such abuse. Males are generally the perpetrators of family violence, while women account for the majority of victims.

Effects of Family Violence

Family violence may cause fear, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem; isolation, loneliness and lack of social support; helplessness and suicidal thoughts; guilt and sense of failure in the marriage; as well as injury or death. Children are usually affected by family violence, either as witnesses to such behaviour or as victims of violence themselves. Effects upon children may include depression and low self-esteem; aggressive and bullying behaviour; sleeplessness or bedwetting; loss of interests or friends; poor school performance; drug-related problems; and suicidal or antisocial behaviour. Ominously, some children later model their own adult and family relationships upon the violence and abuse witnessed at home during childhood.

The Prevalence of Family Violence

Though family violence is a hidden issue - often concealed behind more conspicuous social problems such as delinquency, homelessness, alcohol and drug problems, gambling issues, depression and suicidal behaviour - its prevalence in the community is substantial. The 2016 Personal Safety Survey found that two-fifths of women had experienced violence in their lifetimes – just over one-fifth at the hands of a current or former partner. Of physical assaults against women in the previous 12 months, nine-tenths involved a person known to them – largely current or previous partners. Circumstances such as divorce or separation, reliance upon government benefits, younger age, the experience of abuse in childhood, disability, lower socioeconomic status and financial dependency are associated with an elevated risk of family violence.

Services and Support

A diverse range of services respond to domestic violence in Victoria, including police, family violence services, refuges and other housing agencies, medical and legal services, Centrelink, counsellors, Neighbourhood Houses and community groups. Despite recent reforms to family violence support services, and the fact that two-thirds of violence is unreported, many services still lack sufficient resources to match even existing demand, resulting in long waiting lists and limited assistance.

Federal and State Policy

In 2009, the Federal Government received the report, 'Time for Action: the National Council's Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009-2021', which recommends:

- campaigns though the mass media, as well as schools, sports clubs, faith and cultural institutions and other settings, to change attitudes to family violence,
• efforts to improve the economic independence of women,
• an increase in funding for services to assist victims of violence, and
• a strengthening of the legal response to family violence

In its initial response to the report, the Federal Government announced funding for a media campaign about family violence, a respectful relationship program for schools, a 24-hour hotline for victims of family violence and research into perpetrator programs.

In 2012, the State Government released its Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children. Prevention is a key part of this plan, along with support for women and children affected by violence, early identification of those at risk, more strenuous efforts to bring offenders to justice. A number of specific activities have been sustained or commenced at a local government and community level, under its program. Among them:

• local measures though the Preventing Violence Against Women in Our Community Pilot Projects and the Reducing Violence Against women and Children Grants;
• the provision of resources and training to increase the capacity of local government to prevent violence against women;
• workplace toolkits and training to help workplaces foster conditions which are safe, respectful and inclusive for women;
• the bystander program; and
• programs to respond to violence against indigenous women and those with disabilities.

Legal Reforms

In 2008, the Family Violence Protection Act was legislated, to provide more swift and thorough protection to victims of family violence, help them remain in their homes, obtain fairer treatment in the courts, and hold perpetrators of such crimes accountable for their actions.

The roles and responsibilities of Victoria Police, when investigating family violence, are set out in the 2004 ‘Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence’. The more recent, ‘Victoria Police Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2009-2014’, released in 2009, seeks an improved response to family violence within indigenous and diverse communities, provision of a “social leadership role” in this field, and closer collaboration with community services.

Family Violence and the Indigenous Community

The prevalence of violence is markedly higher among indigenous Australians than in the general community. In response, the 2008 State Government document, ‘Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families’, a ten-year plan, emphasizes the importance of extended families and indigenous approaches to preventing family violence, including efforts to increase awareness and understanding of family violence, strengthen community capacity, develop indigenous responses, ensure culturally competent mainstream services and improve the safety of women.

A Role for Local Government

As a level of government which is closely attuned to the aspirations and activities of the community, local government has an important part to play in contributing to the wider community response to family violence. Support for a major role for Councils is also found at Federal and State levels, the 2009 National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women affirming that local government “…has a key leadership role” in responding to family violence, and the state policy ‘Right to Respect’ urging that local government “play a key role in driving and co-ordinating initiatives tailored to their local communities”. Broadly, the activities of local governments in Victoria to date have been focused upon the fields of advocacy, public education, community development and organisational change.

The accomplishments of numerous councils in these fields, have served to illustrate the breadth of the possibilities in this field which are available to resourceful and committed local governments.
Family Violence - Issues for Local Government

The Nature of Family Violence

The term ‘family violence’ encompasses any actions which threaten, harm, intimidate, control or victimise a person within a family relationship or household (Carrington and Phillips, 2003; Victoria Government, 2010). Violent, abusive or controlling behaviour may include a variety of actions. Among them are:

- assault – such as murder, physical injury, inflicting pain, sexual assault,
- threats and intimidation – including property damage and injury to a pet,
- verbal abuse – such as criticism intended to humiliate or demean in private or public,
- social abuse – including isolation from family and friends, moving to a new location, denial of transport or other means to travel independently, control of all social activity, and creation of dependency,
- economic abuse – including control of all income and assets, and denial of the means to use money at own discretion, or
- emotional abuse – including withdrawal of interest, blame for relationship and other problems, and other efforts to reduce pride and self-respect and erode personal identity.


Such actions may cause injury, as well as reducing freedom, sense of personal control, pride and identity. Family violence is inflicted by people in positions of relative power within a relationship, against more vulnerable individuals, placing women, children, older adults and disabled people at greater risk of such abuse, than others.

Males are the perpetrators in most instances of family violence. The 2012 Australian Personal Safety Survey found that, among women and men who had experienced violence since the age of 15 at the hands of a current or former partner, boy or girlfriend, or date, males were the perpetrators in 77% of instances overall, including all of the violence against women.

Women as Victims of Family Violence

While violence within families, households and relationships may be committed by, and upon, both men and women, violence committed by males within such settings is more prevalent and generally results in more severe and protracted physical and psychological harm than that perpetrated by women.

Each year in Australia, approximately 70 to 80 intimate partner homicides occur – with women victims in 84% of cases, and three-quarters of them involving men killing women. In addition, 25 children are killed each year, two-thirds of them by their fathers (Lloyd et al, 2009). Similarly, an Australian study of homicides in the period 1981-2002, conducted by Mouzos and Rushforth, concluded that, among killings between couples, women accounted for 75% of the victims, while men represented the majority of the killers (Carrington and Phillips, 2003).

Among recorded assaults in Australia in 2008, males accounted for 13% of the victims of physical assault by current or former partners, and females for 87%. Females represented almost all the reported cases of sexual assault by a current or former partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Data collected by a range of agencies, echoes these trends. In 2007/8 within Victoria, women accounted for 78% of aggrieved family members in applications for family violence intervention orders, 79% of aggrieved family members in police callouts, and 82% of Supported...
Accommodation Assistance Program clients. And in 2005/6, women represented 69% of emergency patients treated for the effects of family violence and 95% of callers to the Victims of Crime Assistance Helpline (Victorian Department of Justice, 2010; Victoria Police, 2010).

Within Greater Dandenong, women accounted for 68% of aggrieved family members in Intervention Order applications by residents in 2007/8, 80% of aggrieved family members in police callouts, and 76% of people presenting to emergency departments with human intent injuries.

Similar patterns are seen in the findings of overseas research. A Canadian study, widely cited among the literature, found that women were three times more likely than men to experience intimate partner violence, five times more likely to require medical treatment, and five times as likely to report fearing for their lives (Victorian Government, 2009a, 2009b, 2009e). A further survey, conducted in Western Australia, concluded that approximately nine-tenths of people experiencing family violence were women (Bagshaw and Chang, 2000).

Findings of the Australian Personal Safety Survey 2005, reiterate these trends. When the proportion of male and female respondents who stated that they had been assaulted in the previous year, and the proportion of those assaults which were perpetrated by current or former partners are taken into consideration, women account for approximately 83% of physical assaults by partners recorded in this survey, and for virtually all sexual assaults by partners.

Further research has documented differences between women and men, in the intensity or effects of their experiences of family violence. An Australian study by National Crime Prevention found that the women had been more often frightened and hurt than men by the physical aggression they had experienced from an intimate partner, with 24% of women reporting these consequences, compared with 5% of males (Flood and Fergus, undated).

Indeed, population surveys reveal that women are also more likely than men to hold concerns about their personal safety in a variety of settings (Victorian Government, 2005; Social Research Centre, 2007).

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While family violence affects both women and men, women account for most of its victims, and men for the majority of perpetrators. A focus upon violence inflicted upon women – as some reports, such as the National Council Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, have adopted – therefore allows efforts to address attitudes to women's rights, status and roles; notions about masculinity; economic dependency among women, and other conditions which contribute to violence against women.

On the other hand, some commentators argue that, despite the preponderance of female victims, violence by both men and women against either sex should be taken into consideration, the Victorian Government asserting that "Preventative work has to make clear that violence in any relationship, perpetrated by either sex, is unacceptable" (2009e: 21). There appears to be some merit in this proposition, for if indeed violence against women tends to flourish in environments where violence in general is sanctioned – as evidence reviewed elsewhere suggests – then efforts to address violence against women may not be wholly separated from the challenge of reducing violence in general.

Effects of Family Violence

As it has been observed, family violence makes a significant contribution to death and injury, as well as to depression and anxiety, isolation and loneliness, guilt and helplessness. The United Nations recognises violence against women as the single most widespread violation of
human rights in the world, claiming more victims than warfare, political imprisonment or human trafficking.

**Death and Ill-health**
Evidence shows that family violence is certainly among the major causes of female homicide. In addition, research conducted by VicHealth found that, compared with other risk factors such as drugs, alcohol, physical inactivity, obesity, blood pressure and tobacco, intimate partner violence accounted for 9% of preventable disease among women aged 15-44 years in Australia, making it the top-ranking cause of illness and death among women of that age - including anxiety and depression, which accounted for 63% of the burden of disease and death (Heenan et al, 2004). In other words, family and relationship violence against women exceeds the effects of obesity, smoking and drink-driving in its contribution to death, disability and illness for women in the prime of their lives.

**Pregnancy**
During pregnancy – a time of higher-than-average risk of family violence – physical abuse may lead to miscarriages, neonatal death, late trimester bleeding, infection, prematurity, rupture of the uterus, liver or spleen, foetal fractures and haemorrhage after the birth.

**Homelessness**
Family violence is the primary cause of homelessness among women, children and young people in Australia, with a third of people seeking crisis accommodation in Australia in 2003/4 being women escaping family violence (Victorian Department of Justice 2008b).

**Psychological Harm**
Family violence and abuse includes not only physical or sexual assault, but threats of assault, as well as verbal, emotional, economic, social and other kinds of abuse. Persistent criticism, disparagement, and humiliation may cause victims to feel a sense of worthlessness, and even guilt or responsibility for the violence or abuse within their family. Therefore, aside from death and physical injury, harmful effects of family violence and abuse may also include fear for self and children; depression, anxiety and low self-esteem; isolation, loneliness and lack of social support; helplessness and suicidal thoughts; as well as guilt and sense of failure in the marriage.

Such consequences may contribute to a loss of personal identity, as a dominating, controlling partner assumes control and makes all decisions. The destructive consequences of family violence and abuse are therefore wide-ranging and often lasting in their consequences. For many victims, the non-physical forms of violence and abuse have the most enduring adverse effects (Government of Canada, 2010; Clark County Prosecutor, 2010; National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges, 2010; Domestic Violence Resource centre, 2010).

**Family Violence and Children**
Children are usually affected where violence or abuse occurs within the family, either by witnessing such behaviour or its aftermath, becoming enmeshed in its destructive effects upon the family, or as victims of violence themselves.

Most children either witness, or are aware of, such violence. A 2001 Australian survey of 5,000 12 to 29 year-olds, by National Crime Prevention, found that nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents had witnessed an act of violence against their mother by their father or stepfather – such as hitting, using a knife or gun, or threats of these acts (Flood and Fergus, undated). The 2005 Women’s Safety Survey found that 61% of women who had experienced violence from their partner at some time had children in their care, two-thirds of these children having witnessed the violence to their certain knowledge. Similarly, children were present in about two-thirds of family violence incidents.
attended by police in Victoria between 1999 and 2006 (Victorian Government, 2009e) and in nearly half of family violence incidents to which police were called, in the ACT. (Taylor, 2006).

In addition, children in such households are often victims of violence themselves, with the abuse of children as much as fifteen times more likely to occur in families where intimate partner violence is occurring, than in non-violent households (VicHealth, 2008; McKay 1994, cited in Flood and Fergus, undated). Overseas research indicates that child abuse occurs in between 30 and 60% of households where family violence occurs (Maikovichl et al, 2009; Margolin and Gordis, 2000; Edieson, 1999). Indeed, evidence suggests many of the adverse effects upon children associated with family violence are a result of the co-occurrence of child abuse (Yarborough, 2006: 1).

The response of children to family violence and abuse may vary, with some confused and frightened into silence by the abuse they witness; many imagining that they are somehow to blame for the violence; and others still, feeling guilty of loving a parent who commits such abuse. For children in such households, a variety of harmful emotional and developmental problems may result, often leading to problems of personal and social adjustment in adolescence and adulthood. The consequences of family violence for the development of children may include:

- depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, restlessness, and withdrawal,
- tantrums, aggressive and bullying behaviour, cruelty to animals,
- sleeplessness, bedwetting, health problems of a psychological nature,
- few interests or friends, rejection by peers,
- poor school performance, impaired language development,
- running away from home, drug-related problems, suicidal or antisocial behaviour. (Carrington and Phillips, 2003; Flood and Fergus, undated; Victorian Government, 2005)

It is reported that children’s minds absorb and learn to reproduce even complex patterns of behaviour which they witness, with the result that those who grow up in the presence of violence are 30 times more likely to exhibit violence in their own behaviour – and sometimes over 100 times more so – than others (Slutke, 2014). Many children later model their own adult and family relationships upon the violence and abuse witnessed at home during childhood, thereby perpetuating the abusive pattern of behaviour to the next generation. According to research conducted by the National Crime Prevention Survey, having witnessed family violence in their home as children was the most reliable predictor of violence by young men in their adult relationships (Flood and Fergus, undated).

Why People May Remain in Violent Family Circumstances

The reasons why many people remain within violent relationships provide an insight into the emotional conflict and confusion which operates in such circumstances. These include:

- fear for their own safety or that of their children, especially if they leave, or attempt to leave, the relationship,
- concerns about how they will meet their financial and accommodation needs,
- lack of available support, social isolation, concerns that they may be rejected by family members, and in rural areas, lack of public transport,
- a desire to persist in the marriage in the hope that the violence will cease,
- the belief that remaining in the marriage will best serve the interests of their children,
- concerns that others may not be able to help, as well as ignorance of available services or supports, disappointing experiences of support services in the past, or fear that services may oblige them to follow a course of action which they do not desire,
• depression, stress, reduced personal identity and other emotional effects of abuse, which may leave some women with a sense of worthlessness and without the psychological resilience to take independent and resolute action,
• a sense of shame, embarrassment or responsibility for the violence, or the apprehension that they may be blamed or not believed,
• limited understanding of the physical, emotional, social, verbal and other abuse which are often part of family violence, or uncertainty about whether such behaviour is normal.

Such conditions show that for most women, remaining in a violent home or family situation is not a reflection of free choice, but a consequence of circumstances that are imposed upon them.

Family Violence and Immigrant and Refugee Women
Mention may be made of some of the particular difficulties which face those women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds who experience such violence.

Prevalence of Family Violence among Immigrant Women
An accumulation of local and overseas evidence indicates that the prevalence of the experience of family violence may be higher among immigrant women than others. Canadian research by Brownridge and Halli (2002) found that immigrant women from developing nations reported a higher prevalence of family violence than either those from developed nations, or those born in Canada. Among women from developing countries, the prevalence of family violence was higher among those with a higher level of formal education than their partner and those with children. Vaughn et al. (2015) report that investigators from the Netherlands, Sweden the US and elsewhere report that immigrant women experience higher rates of family violence than others. Among those cited among this research are Lee and Hadeed (2009), who concluded that the lifetime prevalence of family violence among Asian-born women in the US was as high as 60%, and Bui and Morash (2008), who documented a lifetime prevalence of either physical, sexual or verbal violence among Vietnamese women in the US of 75%.

Understanding of Family Violence among Immigrant Women
Many immigrant women do not view verbal or physical abuse, sexual assault or rape within marriage as family violence, with Fisher (2013) reporting that many African women in Australia saw many instances of assault by a partner as ‘discipline, which was in some instances construed as a husband’s legitimate duty. Other studies though, have found that some samples of immigrant women, particularly those who have been in contact with specialist family violence agencies, perceive verbal, financial and other forms of abuse as violence. Accordingly, Vaughan et al (2015) conclude that a variety of factors, including exposure to welfare agencies, familiarity with Australian norms and culture, educational levels, age, adherence to patriarchal beliefs and others, influence immigrant women’s understanding of family violence.

Conditions which may Increase the Risk of Family Violence
The risk of family violence to immigrant women may be aggravated by a range of circumstances, including experiences prior to, and after, settlement.

Some research points to instances where trauma experienced by men – associated with imprisonment, torture or experiences in war – may predispose them to violence. However, Rees and Pease (2007) observe that, since not all men with such experiences commit violence against their partners, the interaction between these experiences and other conditions such as predisposition to violence and patriarchal values most likely contributes to the propensity toward such violence among some immigrant men.
Acculturation may generate increased strain within families, resulting in a rise in conditions that predispose to family violence, including increased alcohol consumption, loss of personal and family support networks, and changes in gender roles which may contribute to stress within relationships.

In addition, elements of Australian immigration policy may contribute inadvertently to the difficulties that some immigrant and refugee women face in seeking relief from family violence. Among those cited by Vaughan et al. (2015) are lack of English fluency, which impedes women’s access to, and ability to negotiate, welfare services and the legal system; and limited knowledge and understanding of their rights and sources of assistance, failure to document and curtail the actions of men who sponsor, then abuse, a succession of immigrant women. In addition, they note that visa dependency and the period of waiting for permanent residency may present obstacles to women seeking legal redress, income support or employment. In addition, investigators point to instances of women being coerced into submitting to abusive relationships by partners who threaten them with the prospect of deportation or who prevent them from obtaining access to information about the legal rights and available avenues of support.

Many women also face financial barriers to an independent existence, arising from lack of employment due to limited formal education, English fluency and other factors. Research has found that without an independent income or housing options many immigrant women perceive no other option but to remain in a violent relationship.

Others women too, experience social isolation, owing to their limited English fluency; lack of social networks; restrictions placed upon their movements out of the home, learning English and visiting friends; and other conditions. Local and overseas research affirms that such conditions accentuate the risk of immigrant women experiencing family violence and deprive many of access to sources of personal and professional support.

Many overseas cultures hold women responsible for sustaining a marriage and family, blaming them for family dissolution, and sanctioning male violence within families. As a result, some immigrant women who report family violence or separate from an abusive partner may be ostracised by their wider family or community network, while the violence of their partner is excused. As a consequence, Vaughan et al (2015: 25) maintain, women are “…reluctant to alienate themselves from family or community networks” and “…may be persuaded that they are responsible for making their husbands angry and that they must work harder to avoid such situations”. By way of illustration, they cite research by Guruge et al (2010) in which members of a Canadian Sri Lankan community acknowledged a widely-held belief that men were entitled to ‘discipline’ their wives for asking for money, arguing, not completing housework to their husbands’ satisfaction and other actions.

Religion may offer little support with many religious customs precluding divorce, while faith leaders often endorse such patriarchal notions, holding women responsible for family separation or for reporting family violence, and endorsing or condoning violent behaviour in men. Vaughan et al (2015) cite a US investigation which found immigrant women who were most deeply enmeshed with formal religious institutions were also those most likely to experience family violence.

For some immigrant women, rigid gender roles, which consign them to the role of homemaker and child-carer, coupled with disruption of such arrangements after migration - in which women may find wider employment and other opportunities while the role and prestige of their partners declines – may contribute to stress within the family and the family violence which often transpires. At the same time however, Vaughan et al (2015) contend that for other women, the advent of more western gender roles and clearer perceptions of the rights and entitlements of women, may help protect them against violence.
Women with children are more likely than others, to remain within violent relationships, due to considerations such as fear of compromising their immigration arrangements, and concerns about their ability to support their family independently.

**Formal Assistance and Immigrant Women**

Research conducted in the US and other western nations demonstrates that lack of familiarity with available assistance, limited English fluency, lack of support from friends or community, fear of retribution by their husband or concerns for the welfare of their partners may inhibit immigrant women from seeking professional assistance in response to family violence.

Moreover, even among those who do seek support from professionals, Vaughan et al (2015) remark that their objective of removing them from the abusive relationship altogether may conflict with the desire of some women to preserve their family structure. Other occasional limitations of services include the absence of efficient referral mechanisms between immigration support services and those specialised in responding to family violence, fears among immigrant women that seeking formal assistance will spell the destruction of their families, failure to engage interpreter services, and racist or culturally infelicitous responses by service providers. Vaughan et al (2015) write of the ‘revolving door’ experience of some immigrant women, who are repeatedly exposed to a service system that fails to meet their needs, ultimately eroding their trust in such services. One UK study by Anitha (2008) – cited in Vaughan et al (2015) – found that among a group of immigrants, women experiencing violence made an average of eleven contacts with agencies before securing assistance which achieved the outcome they desired.

By contrast, some of the favourable attributes of such services include the provision of support coupled with an explanation of options and engagement of the women themselves in crafting solutions; and bilingual and culturally competent agency staff who are sensitive to cultural considerations.

On some occasions though, culturally-specific services exhibit scant understanding of family violence, offering little support to women in such circumstances. In addition, research the US, UK and Australia has found that many immigrant women feel uncomfortable in refuges, due to their isolation from women of the same language and cultural background, favouring instead, appropriate culturally-specific refuges.

**Prevention of Violence against Immigrant and Refugee Women**

Vaughan et al (2015) maintain that general programs designed to inform the public about family violence, and change male attitudes and behaviour, do not reach immigrant women in substantial numbers. In addition, they add, only a few programs in Australia are designed to prevent violence against immigrant women, most of them modest in scale, geographic reach and duration.

Vaughan et al recommend that immigrant and refugee women be engaged as participants and preferably leaders in the planning and conduct of programs to reach women of their own background. As an illustration of such practice, they cite with endorsement, a Sydney program directed to south-Asian and Chinese women, which involved those women from the outset, in planning and directing the program. In the result, the program “…reduced isolation, strengthened community connections, enhanced knowledge of family violence and services …and strengthened personal support and community capacity” (2015: 41). Similarly, a 2011 report published by the Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health proposed that responses include “immigrant women at the forefront of violence prevention efforts; regular community consultation; specifically-tailored messages for each individual community; messages reinforced by different mediums…” urging that “respected, well-settled refugee women and men be trained to assume leadership in their communities… to promote respectful gender relations” to recent settlers (Poljski and Murdolo, 2011: 21).
In addition, guided by the findings of other Australian research, they propose that efforts to foster an understanding of family violence may be presented to people from immigrant communities in terms of ‘family harmony’ or ‘relationships’ – an approach they characterise as a ‘soft entry’ into discussion about family violence (2015: 41).

Noting that no substantial body of practise and research in the subject of men’s involvement in preventative campaigns directed toward immigrant communities, exists in Australia, they cite Flood (2013) and others, who maintain that involvement of male representatives of immigrant communities has proven essential to the efficacy and durability of such programs.

**Prevalence of Family Violence**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that family violence is an insistent issue in every community, though often concealed behind more conspicuous social problems such as delinquent behaviour, homelessness, alcohol and other drug problems, gambling issues, depression and suicidal behaviour.

Most efforts to determine the actual prevalence of family violence in the community are directed towards physical and sexual assault, or threats of assault, as such incidents are relatively easy to define and count. By contrast, abuse of an economic, emotional, verbal and social kind, varies so widely in its intensity and form, that it is difficult to measure in a consistent and reliable fashion.

Broadly, measurements of the prevalence of family violence are of two kinds: counts of the number of instances reaching the attention of institutions such as hospitals, the police and courts; and population surveys.

These measurements have generated a variety of results, depending upon the way the information was collected, the segments of the community under investigation, and the types of incidents being measured. Taken as a whole, their findings appear more kaleidoscopic than illuminating. However, as these kinds of data are so widely cited in the literature, it is worth reviewing the research findings here.

**Instances Reaching the Attention of Institutions**

Measures of the number of incidents recorded by police, courts, hospitals and other institutions indicate that numerous incidents occur each year in every community.

The Australian Institute of Criminology found that 27% of homicides in Australia in the period 1986-1996 were largely a consequence of family violence (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2003), and reported that 51% of the 98 murders of women in Australia in 2002/3 (representing a third of all homicides) were a result of ‘domestic altercations’. Within Victoria, ‘domestic altercations’ accounted for 36% of murders of women (Carrington and Phillips, 2003).

A further suggestion of the prevalence of family violence is provided by the number of family incidents to which the police are called each year. In 2014/15, police attended more than 71,000 such incidents across Victoria. Among these were 2,123 in Greater Dandenong – the sixth highest rate in Melbourne, and 34% more than the metropolitan rate (Victoria Police, 2015).

Though these numbers inform us of the extent to which family violence reaches the attention of hospitals, courts, police and other agencies, they provide little suggestion of the true extent of family violence. This is largely due to a reluctance to report violence to police, hospitals and others. Furthermore, many non-physical forms of family violence - such as excessive control, intimidation and coercion – fall beyond the scope of the services provided by these institutions.

**Population Surveys**

In contrast to institutional records, random or representative surveys of the general population, offer a more sound method for measuring the prevalence of the experience of violence, including family or intimate partner violence.
One of the most important of these surveys in recent times was the Personal Safety Survey, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1996, and repeated in 2005, 2012 and 2016/7. The 2016/7 survey featured interviews with 21,000 Australian adults from randomly-selected households. Inquiries were made about their experiences of physical and sexual violence – including assault and threats of assault - as well as the nature and extent of that violence and steps taken after experiencing violence. Violence was defined as “any incidents including the occurrence, attempt or threat of physical or sexual assault experienced by a person since the age of 15”. Respondents were also asked about their experiences of child abuse, stalking and harassment. The findings of this survey provide an important glimpse of the extent and nature of violence experienced by women and men in the Australian community, as well as their responses to, and perceptions of, violence.

The Personal Safety Survey was conducted among 21,000 Australian adult women and men in 2016 and 2017, with participants asked about their experience of physical or sexual assault and violence (assault or threats of assault) since the age of 15 and in the past 12 months. The findings of this survey provide an important glimpse of the extent and nature of violence experienced by women and men in the Australian community.

**Incidents during a Person’s Lifetime**

**Incidents during a Person’s Lifetime**

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**Violence**

Approximately two-fifths (39%) of Australian adults – including 37% of women and 42% of men – had experienced violence since the age of 15.

While a third of both women and men had experienced physical violence, women predominated among those who had experienced sexual violence since age 15.

Per cent of persons who had experienced violence in their lifetimes, by gender of victim and type of violence

Males were the main perpetrators of violence, with 36% of adults reporting that they had experienced violence from a male and 11% by a female.

Per cent of persons who had experienced violence in their lifetimes, by gender of victim and perpetrator
Assault
Turning to the more specific issue of assault, the survey found that approximately a third of Australian adults, including 34% of women and 36% of men, had been assaulted since the age of 15.

Approximately one quarter (27%) of women and a third (34%) of men, had been physically assaulted since age 15. Males predominate among the perpetrators of assault against both women and men, as the accompanying diagram illustrates.

![Per cent of persons who had experienced physical assault during their lifetimes, by gender of victim and perpetrator](image)

One in six women (16.5%) and one in twenty-five men (4.3%) had been sexually assaulted since age 15. Here too, males formed the majority of perpetrators.

![Per cent of persons who had experienced sexual assault during their lifetimes, by gender of victim and perpetrator](image)

Stalking and Sexual Harassment
The survey also explored the experience of sexual harassment and stalking, finding that approximately half of women and a quarter of men had been sexually harassed since age 15, while stalking has been experienced by 17% of women and 7% of men.

Males account for 87% of the perpetrators of stalking against women and 93% of those who have sexually harassed women.

![Per cent of persons who had experienced sexual harassment or stalking in their lifetimes, by gender of victim](image)
Assault in the Previous Year
3.7% of women and 4% of men had been assaulted in the previous year.

The proportion of women who experienced sexual or physical assault, sexual harassment or stalking during the previous year, was decisively higher than for men.

Men, on the other hand, predominated among those who had been physically assaulted in the past 12 months.

Trends in Incidence of Assault
The proportion of women and men who had been physically assaulted in the previous year has nearly halved during the past 15-20 years. However, few changes are evident in the percentage of women who had been sexually assaulted, assaulted by a partner, or been victims of stalking.

Per cent of women who had experienced assault, partner violence or stalking during the previous year: 1996 to 2016, and per cent of men assaulted during the previous year: 2005 to 2016 *

** Men were not included in the 1996 survey

Most Recent Incidents of Assault
Further survey questions explored the relationship between victims of assault and their perpetrators, the location of the assault, involvement of alcohol and notification of police. These questions generally focused upon the most recent incident during the past ten years.
Relationship to Perpetrator
For most women, the most recent assault by a male was committed by a person known to them. By contrast, two-thirds of physical assault by males experienced by men was perpetrated by a stranger.

Per cent of persons who had experienced violence since 15 by a male perpetrator, by type of assault, gender of victim and relationship to perpetrator

Location of Assault
Forty per cent of women stated that the most recent experience of assault was in their home – accounting for 40% of the most recent sexual assaults involving a male perpetrator (with a further 30% in another person’s home), and 65% of the most recent physical assaults by a male.

Among men who had been physically assaulted by another male, 11% of the most recent assaults occurred in the home and 58% in places of entertainment or public places, such as park, parking lots, streets and laneways. However, 56% of the most recent physical assaults against men, by a woman, occurred within their home.

Alcohol Involvement
Alcohol consumption was involved in nearly two-thirds of the most recent incidents of physical assault against men by males, approximately half of the most recent incidents of physical or sexual assault against women by males (diagram below).

Per cent of most recent incidents of assault by males, where alcohol contributed to the incident, by type of assault and gender of victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol involved</th>
<th>Female victims</th>
<th>Male victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sexual assault</td>
<td>physical assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female victims</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male victims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the lesser proportion of assaults involving female perpetrators, alcohol was also implicated in approximately half of all instances.

Police Involvement
Police were notified in 13% of the most recent incidents of sexual assault experienced by women and perpetrated by men. In relation to physical assaults against both women and men, police were contacted in relation to about third of those perpetrated by men and a quarter of those by women.

Per cent of most recent incidents of assault where police were involved, by type of assault and gender of victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of victim</th>
<th>Assault Type – Perpetrator</th>
<th>Notified police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female victim</td>
<td>Sexual assault – male perpetrator</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical assault – male perpetrator</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical assault – female perpetrator</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male victim</td>
<td>Physical assault – male perpetrator</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical assault – female perpetrator</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intimate Partner Assault
Intimate partner violence was the subject of a further section of the survey.

Since age 15
Approximately 22% of women and 7% of men were assaulted by a partner since the age of 15.

Per cent of persons who been assaulted by an intimate partner since aged 15, by gender of victim and type of assault

Women are about three times as likely to have been physically assaulted by a partner as men, and nearly eight times more likely to have been sexually assaulted (diagram, right).

Past Year
Two per cent of women and 1.1% of men had been assaulted by an intimate partner in the previous year – almost all by perpetrators of the opposite sex. Among women, 0.7% had been assaulted sexually and 1.4% physically. The proportion of women who had been assaulted during the past year declined from 10% among those aged 18 to 24 years, to 0.8% among those over 65. Further inquiries related to violence (assault or threats of assault) by a current partner, since age 15.

Violence by a Current Partner

Help-seeking
Just over half (54%) of the women who experienced violence from a current partner sought assistance, largely from friends or family, GPs or other health professionals, and counsellors.

Per cent of women who sought assistance in relation to the most recent experience of current partner violence, by source of assistance

Involvement of Children and Pregnancy
Where women had children in their care when violence occurred, at some time since the age of 15, 31% of those who experienced violence from a former partner, and 23% of those who experienced violence from a current partner, stated that the children had seen or heard the violence.
Eighteen per cent of women who had experienced violence from a current partner since the age of 15, and were pregnant at some time during the relationship, were pregnant when the violence...
occurred - 5% of them stating that this was their first experience of such violence from their partner.

**Police and Court Involvement**

Police became involved in 17% of the most recent incidents of violence by a current partner among women, and in 4% instances of current partner violence against men. Police were contacted in a higher proportion of instances of violence involving a previous partner (table below).

Per cent of most recent instances of partner violence where police were involved, by category of partner and gender of victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current partner violence</th>
<th>Previous partner violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among females, the proportion of the most recent instances of assault by a male perpetrator which resulted in charges being heard in a court, was 3% for sexual assault and 12% of physical assaults. Among men, 8% of the most recent assaults by another male resulted in a court appearance.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of women who experienced violence from a previous partner obtained a restraining order, with half (51%) of these women reporting that further instances of violence occurred after the order was obtained.

**Childhood Exposure to Violence**

**Child Abuse**

Approximately one in six (16%) females and one in ten (11%) males were abused before the age of 15. Among women, 11% had been physically abused and 10% sexually abused. By contrast, 5% of men had been sexually abused in childhood and 8% physically abused.

![Bar chart showing per cent of adults abused in childhood, by gender of victim and type of abuse](image)

**Children as Witnesses to Partner Violence**

More than one in ten (11%) Australian adults had witnessed violence inflicted upon their mother by a partner before the age of 18, and one in twenty-five (4.5%) had experienced violence by their mother toward her partner.
Per cent of persons who had witnessed violence between their parents during childhood, by gender of person and category of violence

Notably, those adults who had witnessed partner violence before the age of 15 were over twice as likely to have experienced partner violence in adulthood (26%) as those who had not witnessed such violence (12%).

Further Information

A further investigation – the International Violence Against Women Survey, Australian component – was conducted in 2002 and 2003 among 6,700 women aged 15-69 years. Over half (57%) of those women surveyed reported that had experienced violence during their lifetime (including 6% who had been strangled, suffocated or burned and 8% who had been shot, stabbed or threatened with a knife or gun), and approximately a third (34%) had experienced violence from a current or former partner (Mousos and Makkei, 2004).

In the previous year, 10% of women had experienced violence: 8% recounting the experience of physical violence, and 4% sexual violence. It may be mentioned that the findings reported here concern violence – including threats of assault – whereas those reported from the 2005 ABS survey concern only incidents of physical or sexual assault. 2

Similar results have been recorded by other local and overseas population surveys (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009; Spencer et al, 2007; Mogensen, 2006) though variations in methodology, time frame, segments of the community under investigation and types of incidents being counted, contribute to differences in their findings.

However, in this report, deliberate emphasis has been laid upon the findings of the Personal Safety Survey, as a relatively contemporary Australian survey, and one which achieved a 78% response rate - compared with 34% in the International Violence Against Women Survey - thereby minimising the response bias which may otherwise have compromised its findings.

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2 In addition to national surveys, some commentators urge that the prevalence and nature of family violence within municipalities be monitored in order to better understand local conditions and to assist in the evaluation of local initiatives (National Crime Prevention, 2001). Whitzman (2007) for instance, proposes a: "local diagnosis of the prevalence and character of the family violence problem". As we have seen, information about the number of incidents of family violence reaching the attention of local agencies provides no more than an intimation of the extent of family violence in the wider community. On the other hand, while sample surveys of the general population may provide a realistic glimpse of the true extent of family violence in the community, the cost of conducting a rigorous random prevalence survey within a local community would likely exceed its benefits. On the other hand, national data provides a reasonable indication of the probable prevalence of family violence within any local community, and as Whitzman (undated b) notes, an approximation may be sufficient to bringing the public to a more lucid awareness of the extent of this issue.

Local data is also sometimes sought as a means for monitoring or evaluating the effects of local initiatives. However, even if reliable local data about the prevalence of family violence were available, other conditions aside from the effects of local family violence programs may influence such measurements, with the result that, as Whitzman observes: "...the diffuse nature of the intervention, and trends outside the study area..." (undated e: 3) may all obscure the effect of local programs on measurable conditions.
Further evidence affirms that younger women are most at risk of violence. The 2006 Personal Safety Survey found that 12% of women aged 18 to 24 had experienced violence in the previous year, compared with 6.5% of those aged 35 to 44, and 1.7% of women aged 55 years or more. Further research disclosed that 30% of sexually active females in year 10 and 27% of those in year 12 had ever experienced unwanted sex (Smith et al, 2003) An earlier Australian investigation concluded that 14% of females aged 12 to 20 had experienced rape or sexual assault at some time in their lives (National Crime Prevention ©, 2011).

While people with disabilities are not mentioned in the findings of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey, other research indicates that the experience of violence is more prevalent among disabled people than others (Victorian Government, 2009e). Inquiring about violence in general, the 2002 General Social Survey found that 14% of people with disabilities had experienced violence in the past year, compared with 9% of the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). Intimate partner violence was the subject of a 2006 Canadian survey of a representative sample of approximately 7,000 women living with partners, which found that people with disabilities were 44% more likely to have experienced violence from their partner in the past five years, than those without disabilities (Brownridge, 2006).

Violence within Homosexual Relationships
While the emphasis of this report is upon violence against women, mention should be made of intimate partner violence within same-sex relationships. Studies reveal that such violence may be as prevalent as violence against women in opposite-sex relationships. A US study of a sample of gay and lesbian adults inquired about the experience of intimate same-sex partner violence, with 48% of the lesbians and 30% of the gay survey respondents stating that they had experienced such violence. (Waldren-Haugrud et al, 1997). A further investigation, in this case, of adolescents, found that approximately 10% had experienced violence within those relationships (Halpern et al, 2004).

Risk Factors and Family Violence
Numerous circumstances, some related to personal factors and others stemming from broader social conditions, are associated with an elevated risk of family violence. Among them are divorce or separation, reliance upon government benefits, the experience of abuse in childhood, lower socioeconomic status and economic dependency.

Separation and Divorce
A number of researchers observe that the probability of family violence increases at the time of separation or divorce, (VicHealth, undated e), the Women's Safety Survey 1995 finding that the experience of sexual violence in the last 12 months was four times as likely among separated women and three times as probable among divorced women, as among those who were married. The Victorian Community Council Against Violence (2002) reported that in Australia, approximately one-third of women murdered by a male partner were killed after separation. The higher prospect of violence after separation has been attributed to a dominating partner's perceived lack of control over his spouse (Bagshaw et al, 1999).

Government Income Support
The Women's Safety Survey also found that women on government benefits were nearly twice as likely to have experienced physical violence as those not in receipt of benefits – a conclusion that echoes the results of research adduced below, relating to the association between social disadvantage and the prevalence of violence.

Abuse in Childhood
Local and overseas research indicates that women who have been physically or sexually abused in childhood are more likely to experience violence or family violence in later years (Hegarty et al, 2000). The 1996 Women’s Safety Survey results found that respondents were up to five times more likely to have experienced violence from a partner if they had been abused during their childhood.

Prevalence of Lifetime Experience of Violence, by whether Abused in Childhood: Australia, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of those who…</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Sexual</th>
<th>All violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced sexual abuse in childhood</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not experience sexual abuse in childhood</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced physical abuse in childhood</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not experience physical abuse in childhood</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey also concluded that women who had been abused in childhood were more likely than others to have experienced family violence during their adult lives. Several mechanisms for the transmission of abusive behaviour have been suggested in the literature, including observation and learning of violent behaviour by boys; abuse of boys leading to delinquency in adolescence, causing them to be exposed to a violent street culture; and the traumatic effect of violence and abuse upon both male and female children (VicHealth, undated e).

The 2016 Personal Safety Survey found that adults who had witnessed partner violence before the age of 15 were over twice as likely to have experienced partner violence in adulthood (26%) as those who had not witnessed such violence (12%).

Pregnancy

Family violence is also reported to be prevalent during pregnancy and immediately after birth. A widely-cited study of 400 pregnant women attending the Austin Hospital, found that 20% of the research participants had experienced violence during their pregnancy. For 6% of them, the level of violence increased during the pregnancy (Walsh, 2008) – a finding which suggests that for most of these women the violence they experienced in pregnancy was part of an ongoing trend, rather than the reflection of an increased risk during pregnancy. Indeed, VicHealth (undated e) cites research by Cambell et al (1994) who concluded that the relatively high level of family violence among pregnant women is due to the fact that most fall within an age range where the prevalence of such violence is relatively high.

The 2016 national Personal Safety Survey found that, among women who had children in their care when violence occurred, at some time since the age of 15, 31% of those who experienced violence from a former partner, and 23% of those who experienced violence from a current partner, stated that the children had seen or heard the violence.

Eighteen per cent of women who had experienced violence from a current partner since the age of 15, and were pregnant during the relationship, were pregnant when the violence occurred - 5% of them stating that this was their first experience of such violence from their partner.

Alcohol

Inquiries into the relationship between alcohol and family violence have produced varying, and at times conflicting, results. VicHealth notes that some research indicates the presence of a moderate association between alcohol intake and the prevalence of family violence, while other studies have concluded that, when other considerations such as dominating behaviour are taken into account, the apparent effect of alcohol subsides (undated e). The authors of this report add that other
circumstances, such as marital conflict and aspects of personality such as anger, hostility and lack of empathy may also contribute to family violence.

The White Ribbon Foundation (2012) notes that approximately equal numbers of drunken and sober males exhibit violence, and that research shows that more drinkers display violence towards their partners, approximately 80% of heavy or binge drinking males do not assault or abuse their wives.

Respondents to the 2016 Personal Safety Survey stated that alcohol consumption was involved in nearly two-thirds of the most recent incidents of physical assault against men by males, approximately half of the most recent incidents of physical or sexual assault against women by males (diagram below), and a similar proportion of assaults against women and men by female perpetrators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol involved</th>
<th>Female victims</th>
<th>Male victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sexual assault</td>
<td>physical assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Socio-economic Status**

A number of investigations have explored the relationship between the prevalence of family violence or violence in general and socio-economic conditions such as income, educational attainment or labour force status.

The Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey found little association between socio-economic status and the prevalence of the experience of violence, with 7% of women with incomplete secondary schooling, and 8% of those with university-level education, stating that they had experienced physical violence in the previous 12 months (Mousos and Makkei, 2004). The survey also identified no statistically significant differences in the experience of violence among women of varying incomes or employment status.

The balance of evidence, though, favours the conclusion that family violence is linked to socio-economic conditions, with a range of local and overseas evidence indicating that the level of exposure to violence in general is greater among women and men from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Marchardo, 2007; Evans, 2005).

A US analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households in 1987 and 1992, for instance, found that higher rates of family violence were reported by people on lower incomes and with lesser education levels (Rodrequez et al, 2001). Such findings are consistent with the conclusions of a 2001 study by the Australian Institute of Criminology which disclosed that young people from lower-income families were 1.5 times more likely to witness violence against their mother than those of higher incomes (Carrington and Phillips, 2003). In relation to violence in general, the US National Crime Victimisation Survey revealed that people in the lowest income bracket reported 10.8 physical assaults per 1,000 residents, compared with 2.7 among the highest income levels (Catalano, 2004).

The 2016 Personal Safety Survey documented a moderate association between income levels and the proportion of people who had experienced violence in the past.

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3 Further verification of the link between violence and socio-economic status is provided by rates of callouts for family violence among metropolitan municipalities in 2008/09. Examination of these data reveals a strong association between the rate of family violence callouts and the ABS SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (correlation 0.68), the proportion of persons educated to year 10 or less (0.74), youth disengagement (0.79). The same analysis, incidentally, revealed a marked negative association between the rate of family violence callouts and the proportion of adults who feel a part of their community (-0.52).
The proportion of women who had been assaulted during the past year declined with increasing income, while among men, this proportion was greater among those on higher incomes.

The quintiles referred to in the accompanying diagram denote ranges of income, from the lowest fifth of income earners to the upper fifth.

Social Conditions
Aside from characteristics of the individual, social conditions, such as popular conceptions of masculinity; widely held notions about the rights, roles and status of women; and disparities in the economic and educational opportunities afforded to women and men, may predispose to violence against women within families or relationships. As such, these broader ‘structural’ circumstances may be considered further risk factors for family violence.

Economic Costs of Family Violence
In addition to investigations of the destructive effects of family violence upon health, wellbeing and relationships, inquiries have been made about the economic or monetary costs of family violence. In its 2004 report, 'The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy', Access Economics estimated that the annual cost of violence against women in 2002/3 – including pain, suffering, death, as well as welfare, health and income support – was $8.1 billion. Half of this expense represented an estimation of the monetary value of pain and suffering, though the authors of the report concede that such estimates are largely ‘speculative’ (Access Economics, 2004). The findings of this report have been widely, and uncritically cited, forming the basis of other projections and estimates, such as an assertion by Victorian Department of Justice (2009) that the annual cost of family violence in Victoria is approximately $3.4 billion – equivalent to $100 million in a city the size of Greater Dandenong in 2010 dollars - and forecasts that the cost of family violence may double by 2012, to $16 billion (Lloyd et al, 2009; Phillips, 2006; Fergus, 2006; Bzaasinski, undated).

An earlier study, conducted in 1996 in Tasmania and Northern Territory, focused upon the direct costs of family violence (omitting pain and suffering – which, some hold, cannot be accurately or meaningfully measured in financial terms, in any case) and concluded that these expenses totalled about $10,000 per annum for each person who experienced family violence. The authors of the study then estimated the cost to the population of the relevant state, based on the apparent prevalence of family violence among women. Provision of income support and accommodation accounted for most of these direct expenses (cited in Laing and Bibic, 2002).

At all events, such measures tend to vary, depending upon whether they encompass intangible expenses such as pain, suffering and death, or the cost of the support which is provided to victims.
of family violence⁴, and also on the estimated prevalence of family violence used to extrapolate the cost ascribed to each individual, to the entire community.

However, it should be remembered that, regardless of the monetary costs which may be attributed to family violence, the primary motivation for responding to this issue is not financial in origin, but reflects a widely accepted moral duty to ensure that as members of a community all people should share equally in the opportunity to experience a life of health and well-being, dignity and personal security, and to freely make the daily decisions about matters that affect their wellbeing.

Service Delivery

A diverse range of services respond to domestic violence in Victoria, including:

- Police,
- Integrated family violence services
- Women's refuges and the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service - the point of entry into refuges in Victoria,
- Housing: crisis accommodation, bridging or brokerage funds, longer-term accommodation,
- Family support agencies - Counselling and support for people experiencing family violence or abuse Eg: Windermere, Connections, Relationships Australia, Centacare,
- Centres Against Sexual Assault,
- Centrelink – for income support,
- Medical services: GPs, health centres, hospitals,
- Community legal centres – eg: Springvale Monash Legal Centre,
- Child Protection, Department of Human Services,
- Men's Referral Service – information and referral to Men's Behaviour Change programs for those who want to change their behaviour,
- Phone help lines - victim support, domestic violence outreach, legal, children's and others
- Counsellors and family therapists,
- Neighbourhood Houses, community groups for social support and connection.

In 2002, the Victorian Government established the ‘State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence’ which prepared a report, ‘Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria’, outlining proposed improvements to family violence services throughout the State. The reforms detailed in the report included the use of an enhanced common risk assessment process, adoption of a consistent approach to case management and co-ordination by support services, augmented medium- and long-term support and accommodation for victims of violence, and 24-hour phone support (Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, undated).

Despite these reforms, and although most cases of family violence are unreported, many services – such as counselling, children's support, refuges and long-term accommodation – still lack sufficient resources to match even existing needs, resulting in long waiting lists and limited assistance. A wider range of available women's and children's support services, further long-term housing, improved income and legal support, and longer-term assistance after separation, are among other services which are currently required to meet the needs of women and children escaping violent relationships (Lloyd et al, 2009).

Without these services, women frequently face enormous difficulties after separation due to poverty; loneliness; violence from their former partner; lack of personal, financial or practical support; difficulty obtaining secure accommodation; the expense and stress associated with legal issues; and others. Many remain in violent or abusive homes – in part because of such financial and material considerations. The report, ‘Time for Action’, received by the Federal Government in

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⁴ With the perverse consequence, that the estimated cost of family violence would decline if services offered to victims were reduced.
2009, cautions that the gulf between service levels and the needs of people experiencing family violence may widen as the level of awareness and reporting of violence rises (Lloyd et al, 2009) – an observation echoed by former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Prue Goward (Turtle, 2009).

A further issue relating to services for victims of family violence is the degree of understanding of patterns of service usage and need, Lloyd et al (2009) contending that information about the services sought and used is very limited and should be the subject of further investigation.

At a local level, the involvement of councils in service delivery, as an ingredient of family violence initiatives, has included efforts to provide information to the public, and training to service providers. In Darebin for example, practice issues forums have been conducted for service providers, and information about local services has been distributed to local service providers, including family violence resource cards for women and men, in English and selected community languages.

**The Treatment of Perpetrators**

Most services which respond to family violence are intended to provide support to victims of violence and their children. There are however, some agencies which are designed to induce men to cease their violent behaviour toward other members of their families. These services, called 'Men's Behaviour Change Programs', include individual counselling, group work and other activities. According to Danny Blay, manager of 'No to Violence' - the Victorian peak body for men's behaviour change programs - the key to the effectiveness of these programs is the group format where, for the male program participants, non-violent attitudes and behaviour are modelled and reinforced by their peers (Ferguson, 2006). Such behaviour change programs are considered an important component in the response to family violence, since criminal charges may not effectively deter violence, and in any event, many women simply ask for violence to cease, preferring not to leave their partners or impose legal sanctions.

The ‘Time for Action’ report (Lloyd et al, 2009) stresses that such programs need to ensure the safety of women and their children, stop the violence of perpetrators, and hold them accountable for their behaviour. However, its authors also raise questions about the manner in which such programs are conducted and their efficacy in achieving these ends, concluding that such programs lack consequences for non-compliance, fail to provide ongoing assessment of victims safety, and have not been properly evaluated for their effectiveness. The report adds that the efficacy of such programs is uncertain and that little is known about effective interventions for women perpetrators. The report concludes by urging a more thorough evaluation of perpetrator programs. Perhaps reflecting similar misgivings, the 2009 Federal Government announced $3 million for research on perpetrator treatment in response to the recommendations of the ‘Time for Action’ Report.

**Attitudes to Family Violence**

VicHealth maintains that among the primary challenges of preventing violence is to "...increase individual, generational and community capacity to take action on violence against women" (undated e: 37). An important part of this effort is to change attitudes towards violence in particular, and the status and rights of women in general.⁵

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⁵ The relationship between attitudes and violence may not be straightforward, however. For while the literature is replete with examples of research that confirm a link between the perpetration of family violence and beliefs in male dominance, opposition to equity between women and men, and controlling behaviour by males within relationships (VicHealth, undated b, undated e), other commentators note that it has not been determined with certainty whether attitudes guide and justify the use of violence in the minds of
Whether attitudes are the basis of violent behaviour in themselves, or merely reflect deeper, underlying causes, evidence affirms that an appreciable proportion of the population – and especially young males – hold attitudes which support or condone violence to women.

**Survey Results**

Lloyd et al, 2009 note that one in seven 12 to 20 year-olds believe that it is acceptable to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on and one in three believed that most violence against women occurs because the woman provoked it. Similarly National Crime Prevention (2001b) cites the findings of a Victorian study by Xenon and Smith (1998) which documented callous attitudes about rape held by a sizable proportion of a secondary student population. The same research found that tertiary students held less objectionable attitudes, a finding which, the authors of the report opined, may reflect a difference in age or socioeconomic status.

Phone surveys commissioned by Vic Health – to 2,800 Victorians in 2006, and another conducted among 10,000 Australians in 2009 – explored public attitudes towards violence against women in some depth. One of the more favourable findings was that 98% of respondents to the 2006 survey, acknowledged that violent acts included slapping and pushing to cause fear, forcing a partner to have sex, throwing objects to frighten or injure, and threatening to hurt family members (VicHealth, 2006). Women were more likely to regard such acts as serious: only 3% of women regarded slapping and pushing to cause fear as not serious, compared with 12% of males.

Other results revealed that a significant proportion of respondents tend to favour or excuse violence, 13% of respondents in the 2009 survey stating that they believed that "women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes' " (VicHealth, 2009), while nearly one in five of the 2006 survey respondents agreed that "rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex" (VicHealth, 2006). In addition, 18% of respondents to the 2009 survey agreed that offenders could be excused if they became so angry that they lost control, and 22% accepted that offenders may be exonerated if they 'truly regret' what they had done. Among findings of the 2006 survey, 8% of respondents endorsed the proposition that an offender could be excused if either the victim or offender were heavily affected by alcohol, and 8% agreed with, or were uncertain about, the statement that "most women who are raped ask for it".

However, these surveys also documented favourable changes in attitudes, over time. Among the 2006 Victorian survey results, the proportion of respondents who believed, or expressed uncertainty about, the proposition that most women who are raped ask for it, had declined from 17% in 1995, to 8% in 2006. The proportion of respondents who disagreed or were unsure if family violence was a criminal offence fell from 7% to 3% in the same period. Similarly, the percentage of respondents to the Australian surveys who believed that women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes', declined from 18% in 1995 to 13% by 2009.

More recently, in 2013, VicHealth commissioned a phone survey of a randomly-selected sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 and over. The survey explored attitudes towards violence against women. Its principal findings are briefly recounted here.

Some respondents identified the following circumstances as possible causes of violence against women:

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6 In early 2010, the Federal Government, in collaboration with VicHealth, the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Social Research Centre, will conduct a random phone survey of Australian residents to investigate attitudes to violence (Commonwealth Government, 2010).
Domestic violence was considered excusable or justified by some respondents, under various conditions. A selection of these circumstances is presented at right.

Some respondents held that women may be partly to blame for rape, agreeing with the following statements (diagram at left).

78% of respondents agreed it is hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships.

Just over one-half (51%) asserted that most would leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to, while one in six (17%) held that domestic violence should be handled by the family.

Overall, 9% of respondents held that it is a women’s duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together. The proportion of survey participants who concurred with this sentiment varied with age and birthplace, as illustrated in the accompanying chart.

Seventeen per cent of respondents maintained that domestic violence is a private matter, to be handled by the family. The proportion endorsing this sentiment varied with age and birthplace, as illustrated in the accompanying chart.

- Men being unable to manage their anger (64%).
- The belief that men should be in charge of the relationship (18%).
- Men being under financial stress (13%).
- Rape resulting from men being unable to control a need for sex (43%).
ranged from 14% among women to 31% among people of non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Attitudes toward the respective roles of women and men were also explored in the survey, as they form a foundation of attitudes that excuse or support violence against women.

Some respondents agreed with the following statements about the respective roles of women and men.

Finally, the authors of the report documented an association between support for gender equality and opposition to family violence.

Pronounced attitudinal support for violence against women was exhibited by 58% of respondents with low support for gender equity, compared with just 7% of those with high support for gender equity.

The findings of these surveys show that, despite consistent and favourable shifts in public attitudes towards family violence and violence against women, a sizable proportion of the population still harbour attitudes which tolerate or condone violence.

Other research concludes that violence, or support for the use of violence against women and other family members, is more prevalent in communities which sanction the use of violence as a means to settle conflict, in families where the male partner is dominant, and among peer groups where the use of violence against women is widely accepted (VicHealth, undated e).

**Public Education**

In light of the importance of attitudes, commentators propose that efforts be made through the mass media, schools, sporting clubs, churches and other settings, to educate the public about family violence and healthy relationships in order to change their attitudes and behaviour (Victorian Government, 2010; National Crime Prevention, 2001b; Hayde, 2008; Whitzman, 2007; Hoban, 2006; VicHealth, undated e; O'Keefe, 2009). The 2009 report, ‘Time for Action’, called for media campaigns, education programs and other efforts to reach people through sporting clubs and other community settings, encouraging men and boys to reject ideas of masculinity which endorse violence, to foster a sense of bystander responsibility, to prevent violence, and to reinforce the notion of women as "equal and partners in intimate relationships and public life" (Lloyd et al, 2009: [source])
The report's authors assert that campaigns conducted at every level of the community are most likely to be effective. They also urge that mass media standards be refined to eliminate the glorification of violence and the portrayal of women in demeaning ways. Among the actions recommended in the 2009 National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women, and funded by the Federal Government, is a $17 million program to change public attitudes to family violence (Commonwealth Government, 2009a).

In addition to media campaigns, it is suggested that, in everyday community life, men can play a significant role in modelling appropriate behaviour to boys and other males, and speaking up against family violence and in support of respectful, equal relationships between women and men (O'Keefe, 2009). Such an approach forms the foundation for White Ribbon Day initiatives - supported by the Federal and State Governments (Victorian Government, 2009e) - which enlist men as role models within their communities to advance efforts to prevent violence against women (White Ribbon Foundation, 2010).

Local government has played a role in such campaigns, with White Ribbon Day activities organised annually in a variety of councils, such as Maribyrnong, Darebin, Frankston and others. Other local programs seek to inform the public about family violence and healthy relationships. For instance, in Nillumbik, the VicHealth-funded 'Say No to Violence: a community responsibility project' featured presentations and dissemination of information by newsletter to organisations such as the CFA, sports clubs, church groups and others. Similarly, the 'Melton Says No' project, included the distribution of information about family violence at public events (WLK Consulting, 2009).

**Respectful Relationships**

A number of recent commentaries and reports have urged that, in order to alter attitudes and behaviour, efforts be made to instruct young people about family violence and respectful relationships, within schools, sports clubs and other settings.

Several writers suggest that young people be given an opportunity, through school programs and other means, to acquire the understanding and personal skills required to participate in respectful, equal relationships (Hoban, 2006; Carrington and Phillips, 2003; VicHealth, undated e). In 2009, the 'Time for Action' report proposed that respectful relationship training be provided to school-aged young people. This was followed by the announcement by the Federal Government, of $9 million in funding for such programs. (Commonwealth Government, 2009a).

Through its 2009 ‘Right to Respect’ policy, the Victorian Government has announced its support for school initiatives with its ‘Respectful Relationships in Schools’ initiative and further programs in non-school settings - a policy which as also been enunciated in 'A Fairer Victoria 2009' (Victorian Government, 2009c) and 'Victoria's Plan to Promote Respect: 2008’ (Victorian Government, 2008). In 2010, the program, developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and CASA House, will be trialled in schools as part of the regular teaching program (Victorian Government, 2010b).

A 2009 report, published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, concluded that elements of good practice include a whole-of-school approach; suitable duration and intensity of the course; efforts to address sexist notions, inequitable power relations and notions of masculinity which endorse violence; and the teaching of skills in "consensual sex and non-violent relationships" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: 40). Flood (2006), cited in VicHealth (undated e) concurs, declaring that such school-based programs are most effective if sustained, relatively intensive and involve all aspects of schooling.
Others add that such programs should seek to engage young people not only with facts, but though "emotion and through victims' stories and role plays" (Mogensen, 2006: 20), by encouraging young people to learn about alternative ways to behave within relationships (National Crime Prevention, 2001b), and in the engagement of males as partners in such efforts, rather than as potential perpetrators (Lloyd et al, 2009). However, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009) concluded that, in practice, most programs fail to engage the whole of the school, are too brief, and not evaluated thoroughly.

Experience shows that attitudes which tend to emphasise male dominance and disparage women are more prevalent in sporting clubs and the military, among other settings (VicHealth, undated b, undated e). Accordingly, it has been suggested that programs founded upon respectful relationships be directed to young men in sporting clubs (Victorian Government, 2009e; VicHealth, undated a) as well as other environments where violence may be widespread, including the corrections system and among homeless young people (Lloyd et al, 2009).

At a local level, councils such as Maribyrnong and Wyndham have conducted school and community-based programs about healthy relationships, which included arts activities and public events with bands, speeches and T-shirts. Melton Council sponsored workshops with community groups along the same theme. In Greater Bendigo, the local Family Violence Prevention Group collaborated with the local football league to promote awareness of family violence and support for respectful relationships (WLK Consulting, 2009).

To reach young people in its community, Yarra Council released the 'Sexual Violence Taskforce Report and Action Plan' in 2006 which included steps to disseminate information to sports clubs, nightclubs, schools, public housing estates and to young people in other settings. One element of this plan, the VicHealth-funded 'Welcome to Yarra Sports' project, was designed to raise female participation in sport and make sports clubs more welcoming, congenial and safe environments for women. The project plan included the provision of information about the benefits of women's participation in sport, respectful relationships and safe environments for women, and assistance in developing policies to achieve those ends. However, only one sports club participated in a 12-month period.

The Role of Men

A 2011 publication, 'Men Speak Up", prepared by Dr Flood for the White Ribbon Foundation, outlined a range of practical steps to assist men in helping to prevent violence, foster respectful relationships and promote gender equality, in their day-to-day relationships. These measures, which relate to men’s relationships with their families, friends, colleagues and the wider community, are summarised here.

Relationships within one's own family:
Giving thought to, and seeking to change, any abusive or controlling behaviour of one's own.
Setting an example within one’s personal life, showing respect, seeking compromise, finding solutions to disputes which benefit all, sharing domestic responsibilities with a female partner, and behaving in a fair and respectful way towards women.
Teaching children and young people about healthy relationships, including equal and respectful dating relationships.

Responding to incidents of violence:
Where appropriate, calling police, serving as a witness and discouraging abusive behaviour among friends and acquaintances.
Supporting victims, listening and believing in them, demonstrating respect, accepting their reactions, and supporting the choices they make.
Among friends and colleagues

Speaking out against attitudes which countenance violence and promote sexism. Among the strategies suggested include making one’s feelings plain, questioning assumptions, personalizing such issues – as for instance: “what if it was your daughter?”, reminding people of their better selves, and fostering group pressure.

In the wider community

Within community groups - such as social and sports clubs, or religious groups - speaking up against violence within relationships and in support of gender equality, and setting an example by the way one speaks about, and treats, women.

Choosing media which endorse gender equality and non-violence.

Supporting local projects or campaigns with oppose violence and support its victims, and voting for politicians who show a commitment to gender equality.

Early Childhood and Family Violence Prevention

Inadequate parenting and child abuse contribute to personality characteristics in adulthood, such as lack of empathy, which in turn, are associated with a propensity to commit violence within relationships (VicHealth, undated e). A 2006 phone survey of a representative sample of 4,000 12-17 year olds and their parents, conducted as part of the US National Survey of Adolescents, found that, after taking age, sex, race and income into account, physically abusive punishment was associated with an elevated probability of delinquency. The authors of the report urged that prevention begin in childhood: “Programs aimed at new parents that offer parenting skills, child care opportunities, and support services can be effective in improving parenting and thus reduce the likelihood of abuse. Early intervention or prevention of abuse is the key” (Yarborough, 2006).

Accordingly, VicHealth notes that programs designed to instil parenting skills in males have at least some prospective merit as a means for preventing family violence (undated e). Other commentators, similarly, recommend efforts directed towards early childhood intervention, aimed at parents, and designed to prevent violence and abuse within families and relationships (Whitzman, undated c, 2007).

To this end, a first parent program conducted by Maribyrnong Council featured a 'Dad's Night' where fathers were encouraged to attend with their partners. At this evening, parents were invited to attend a relationships program at a later time.

Workplace Programs

A further strategy suggested for reducing family violence, is the reform of organisational cultures and practises to produce respectful, safe and non-violent environments for women (VicHealth, undated e). Such programs are supported by the 2009 State Policy ‘Right to Respect’ (Victorian Government, 2009e).

The effects of family violence or workplace abuse upon women’s performance in the workplace are substantial, while violence and intimidation directed against women within the workplace itself, is also widespread.

In relation to abuse at the workplace, research commissioned by the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Violence Against Women in the Workplace revealed that 61% of women had experienced violence or intimidation at their workplace in the previous five years, with 98% of them reporting that this had occurred on more than one occasion (Victorian Government, 2005).

The 2002 report, 'The Economic Costs of Domestic Violence', found that 69% of a sample of women who were experiencing family violence were too physically or psychologically exhausted to work, for periods ranging from months to years (cited in Carrington and Phillips, 2003). The 2011
National Domestic Violence and the workplace survey found that 30% of respondents had experienced family violence or abuse during their lifetimes, one-half reporting that it had impeded their ability to attend work and one fifth stating that they had experienced the abuse at their workplace – as for instance, though abusive phone calls, emails or visits by the perpetrator (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011).

US research reveals that between one half and three-quarters of employed women who experience family or relationship violence are abused by their partners while at their workplace (McFerran and Braaf, 2007), though stalking, harassment and phone calls; undermining the victim’s work; disruption of childminding arrangements; preventing the victim from going to work, and other means. Common consequences include stress, reduced concentration and sleep deprivation, absenteeism, increased staff turnover and compromised workplace safety. In 2004, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, determined that such violence incurred a direct cost of $1.9 billion to Australian businesses (adjusted to 2012 dollars).

While employment extends to victims of family violence an opportunity to attain financial security, personal confidence and independence, workplace initiatives also afford benefits to employers by improving productivity, reducing absenteeism, and helping to retain valuable staff – thereby allaying expenses associated with recruitment and training.

Accordingly, the Australian Law Reform Commission urges that “In light of the enormous social and economic costs of family violence, and the high proportion of victims of family violence who are employed...” those experiencing family violence should be afforded appropriate support and protection in the workplace.

To address such workplace issues, VicHealth conducted a project in collaboration with LinFox, to create and implement practices to foster respectful relationships between women and men in the workplace and to document the process so that it could be replicated in other work environments (VicHealth, undated c). The program, called ‘Stand Up, domestic violence is everyone’s business’ shows participants how to respond when they become aware of family violence and was being piloted in eight workplaces in 2010 (Victorian Government, 2010d).

In 2011, the White Ribbon Foundation conducted a workplace accreditation pilot project to recognise workplaces that were taking steps to promote awareness of violence against women, set in place protocols and policies in relation to violence against women, and provide relevant leadership within their industry. Local governments played a lead role in the pilot with several either participating or conducting their own workplace initiatives along similar lines.

One report, examined a variety of workplace-based programs which respond to family violence (Murray and Powell, 2008). Common elements of these programs included:

- **Policies** on workplace response to family violence. Including:
  - flexible leave provisions and shifts
  - increased security measures
  - prohibition of the use of company time and resources to commit abuse
  - support and referral of staff facing family violence problems

Unions often encourage employers to adopt such policies and support employees.

- **Statements** from management or external agencies to staff, informing them about the nature of family violence and sources of assistance, though newsletters, payslips, email, brochures and intranet sites.

- **Training** those staff likely to encounter such issues in the workplace, including human resources, managers and employee assistance contractors.

- **Relationships** with family violence agencies may facilitate such efforts, though:
philanthropy – fund raising efforts to support family violence services, sometimes in exchange for training of staff in responding got family violence, awareness raising or assistance in developing policies.

Partnerships – in which family violence specialist may visit the workplace to provide information and resources such as posters and brochures, about family violence, perhaps as part of a broader workplace health promotion program.

Among local efforts to respond to family violence in the workplace, or to address workplace violence itself, is the 'Preventing Violence in Moreland is Everybody's Business' project, conducted by Moreland Council to improve awareness of family violence issues among employers and make workplaces safer and more welcoming for women, However, only one business eventually agreed to participate in this program – which entailed a workshop for employees. An information kit was created for businesses as well.

At Maribyrnong, efforts were focused upon addressing family violence within Council, with procedures developed for supporting Council employees who were experiencing family violence, and selected staff being trained in techniques for offering support and referrals (Mangan, 2010).

Community Empowerment

It is widely held that the goal of preventing family violence should include the whole community (VicHealth, undated A, undated e) – a perception endorsed by the State Government in its policy 'Right to Respect' (Victorian Government, 2009e) and in the Federal report 'Time for Action' (Lloyd et al, 2009). VicHealth (undated e: 44) notes that programs can support communities to take action “…to address violence against women and the norms which make it possible”, and respond to wider community conditions, such as economic dependency among women and violent peer cultures.

Commentators emphasise that women should be consulted in the development of such initiatives and given the means to assume leadership roles in violence prevention and among the community in general (VicHealth, undated e; Kwok, 2008; Hayde, 2008; Victorian Government, 2009e).

Recent experience features numerous examples of efforts to mobilize local community involvement in the prevention of violence – many of them engaging women in prominent roles. In Maribyrnong, a category of community grants has been created for women's leadership. In the Liverpool ‘Safe Women's Project’, a phone-in was conducted to seek the views and experiences of women, with the Council then seeking to implement selected recommendations. Western Region Health Centre (2009) describes a project in Western Melbourne, sponsored by the local health centre and other agencies, in which members of selected African communities received training about family violence and local services, so that they could act as mediators in family conflict among members of their communities. In Nillumbik, a women's network was established, and a family violence initiative conducted by this group which featured presentations to community groups by women from the network. In Darebin, a Council 'Gender Equity Working Group', established to consider gender issues in Council service development, founded the 'Darebin Women's Advisory Committee’ with membership of women from the community, to explore relevant community issues.

While such efforts are laudable, a long-term goal may be to bring about social changes that ensure that women from all segments of the community are routinely heard and involved in decision-making, without depending upon such initiatives.

Faith Communities and the Prevention of Family Violence

Among the settings where violence prevention efforts have been undertaken are churches and other faith communities. Lloyd et al remark that "faith and cultural institutions have been identified as important avenues for transmitting beliefs... that either support violence or protect against it"
and recommend efforts to address family violence in these environments (2009: 63). Among local examples of such initiatives are the ‘Northern Interfaith Respectful Relationships Project’, and the ‘Promoting Peace in Families’ project in Casey.

The VicHealth-funded ‘Northern Interfaith Respectful Relationships Project’ has seen Darebin Council, and others in the region, work together to provide training to faith leaders about family violence and effectively responding to disclosures, and to encourage them to discuss family violence and healthy relationships in their sermons and other conversations with their congregations. The project included a formal declaration against violence, signed at public ceremony on White Ribbon Day, 2008 (Nagal, 2010; Kwok, 2008; WLK Consulting, 2009).

In the period 2007-9, Casey Council conducted the 'Promoting Peace in Families Project' with funding from the National Crime and Violence Prevention Program and support from Melbourne University. Conducted as a partnership between Casey Council, Cardinia-Casey Health Service and the Casey Pastors Network, the project was designed to work with faith communities to detect, respond to, and prevent family violence. Church leaders and others in responsible positions were provided with training about family violence, appropriate responses to disclosures, and in making effective referrals, and were encouraged to discuss violence in sermons and upon other occasions. In the initial phase, four churches participated, while a further twelve were subsequently involved, with lessons from the first phase being applied to the second. To conduct the project, Casey Council employed staff with an understanding of church culture – a step which proved essential to the success of the project (City of Casey, 2010; Rodoni, 2010).

In the result, women survivors reported feeling well-treated and able to speak about and seek support in relation to their experiences of violence; male perpetrators came forward, requesting advice and assistance to change their behaviour; and others approached church leaders seeking a role in responding to family violence. A notable deficiency though, was that participants were not given sufficient support to change their behaviour or influence that of others, the author of the evaluation recommending that further content on how to create peaceful relationships be included in the future (Colla et al, 2009; WLK Consulting, 2009).

**Economic Opportunity for Women**

In addition to programs which focus upon family violence or respectful relationships, other steps to prevent violence may be directed at broader social conditions which predispose to violence against women, such as economic dependency.

The Victorian Government’s ‘Right to Respect’ policy draws attention to the unequal distribution of power and economic resources as among the primary conditions which underlie family violence (Victorian Government, 2009e), the UN Urban management Program noting that the "Legal, economic and social dependency of women has "...made them especially vulnerable to male aggression" (cited in Hayde, 2008: 12).

Across Victoria, women have lower incomes, education attainments and employment levels than their male counterparts. In 2011, individual weekly gross incomes stood at $439 among women aged 15+ years - 60% of the corresponding male income of $734.

In the same year, 64% of Victorian women aged 20-64 were in paid employment, compared with 77% of males. Within Greater Dandenong the disparity was wider, with 50% of women of this age range in employment, compared with 68% of males.

In relation to education, the Census found that within Victoria, 30% of women and 27% of men had left school before completing year 11. Within Greater Dandenong the corresponding figures were 38% for females and 36% for males.
Accordingly, commentators urge that efforts be made to improve the educational attainments and economic independence of women (VicHealth, undated e; Hoban, 2006), both to prevent family violence in the first place and to assist survivors of family violence through its provision of economic independence, which confers "support and connectedness, escape from isolation, improved self-esteem and self-worth" (Victorian Government, 2009e: 43). Former Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Prue Goward is like-minded, urging that more be done to enhance educational and employment opportunities of women to ensure their economic independence (Hoban, 2006). Accordingly, the Victorian Women's Policy Framework endorses the objective of improved educational outcomes and workforce participation for women, declaring that education is "a foundation of women and girls' equality" (DPCD, 2008: 11).

**Evaluation of Initiatives**

It is one thing to propose a social program to remedy an evident deficiency, but quite another to demonstrate the efficacy of the program in achieving such ends.

Mention was made earlier of doubts raised about the effectiveness of men’s behaviour change programs, and of apprehensions voiced by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development about the benefits and the evaluation of schools-based relationship initiatives. However, misgivings about the effectiveness of programs are more widespread, with Vic Health observing that there have been few sound evaluations of the effectiveness of programs to reduce violence against women (VicHealth, undated e). Similarly, Lloyd et al (2009) caution that most evaluations are poorly designed and measure process rather than outcomes, and urge that prevention programs be properly evaluated.

As efforts get underway to influence the social conditions which contribute to family violence, one challenge will be to evaluate these activities with sufficient rigour to conclusively identify those which actually produce their desired outcomes.

**Federal Policy**

In March, 2009, the Federal Government received the report, 'Time for Action: the National Council's Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009-2021', which focuses upon altering community attitudes towards violence against women, providing support and justice to victims, dealing with perpetrators, and encouraging governments to collaborate in achieving these objectives. Among other steps, the report recommends:

- efforts to improve the economic independence of women,
- campaigns though the mass media, as well as schools, sports clubs, faith and cultural institutions and other settings, to change attitudes to family violence and promote respectful, healthy relationships between women and men,
- an increase in funding for services to assist victims of violence,
- a strengthening of the legal response to family violence - including increased access to exclusion orders to remove perpetrators from the home, and
- establishment of a National Centre for Excellence in the Prevention of Violence Against Women, to monitor programs, provide resources and promote best practise.

In its initial response to the report, the Federal Government announced funding for a media campaign about family violence, a respectful relationship program for schools, a 24 hour hotline for victims of family violence and research into perpetrator programs, and affirmed that it would work with State Governments to develop a National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women in 2010 (Commonwealth Government, 2009a, 2009b). In 2011, the Federal Government launched its National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women. With prevention as its central focus, the plan
acknowledged the importance of preventing violence the first place, alongside support for victims of family violence, justice initiatives and health responses.

State Policy and Initiatives

In 2009, the Victorian Government released 'Right to Respect, the State Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women, 2010-2020'. Considerations which will guide the implementation of the policy include the notion that the whole of the community should be involved, with diverse groups accorded an opportunity to participate; that women should be assisted in assuming leadership roles; that non-violent men should play a role in modelling non-violent behaviour; and that efforts should be made to promote respectful relationships (Victorian Government, 2009e).

In three phases, and within settings such as local government, educational institutions, community services, sport and recreation and workplaces, the State Government's programme will seek to strengthen community leadership, encourage organizational change, undertake media campaigns to promote non-violent attitudes, and develop programs to promote respectful relationships.

Among the particular steps the government has specified at this early stage are:

- support for White Ribbon Day initiatives,
- a conference for local government;
- development of an initiative to promote respectful relationships in schools, coupled with similar activities in non-school settings,
- implementation of programs to address family violence in sporting clubs,
- promotion of strategies to achieve organizational change in the workplace, and
- a social marketing campaign to address family violence, including White Ribbon Day initiatives, and promotion of women of diverse backgrounds to leadership positions (Victorian Government, 2009e).

In May 2010 the document ‘A Right to Safety and Justice: strategic framework to guide continuing family violence reform in Victoria 2010-2020’ was released, reiterating many of the themes and initiatives recounted above.

The directions and measures outlined in the 'Right to Respect' policy are reflected in earlier State Government policy documents, such as the 2002 ‘Women’s Safety Strategy Policy Framework’, which affirmed the importance of improved legal remedies, accommodation options and service delivery, as well as public education and community involvement (Victorian Government, 2002). In addition, the more recent ‘Victorian Women’s Policy Framework 2008-11’, emphasized improved safety and justice, public education, economic independence, and community strengthening (DPCD, 2008). The Victorian Government Respect Strategy, and Fairer Victoria 2009, both offer support for programs to promote respectful relationships among young people in school and other settings (Victorian Government, 2009c, 2009e). ‘Future Directions’ the State Government’s current youth policy, emphasises improved service delivery and early intervention for young males (Victorian Government, 2006). The Victorian Government Justice Strategy, ‘Protecting Rights’ recounts a range of initiatives to improve the quality of the police and judicial response to family violence and sexual assault (Victorian Department of Justice, 2008a); and ‘All of Us’, the 2008 Victorian multicultural policy, describes efforts to address family and sexual violence against women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds (Victorian Government, 2009d).

2012 Policy

In 2012, the State Government released its Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children. Along with support for women and children affected by violence, early identification of
those at risk, more strenuous efforts to bring offenders to justice, prevention is a key part of this plan.

Preventative initiatives include media campaigns and the promotion of a positive media portrayal of women; anti-bullying and respectful relationships activities within schools; public awareness raising; and efforts to strengthen and widen the role local government, community groups and everyday people in violence prevention.

The State Government plan placed communities at the centre of its efforts to prevent family violence. A number of specific activities have been sustained or commenced at a local government and community level, under its program. Among them:

- local preventative and early intervention measures, though the Preventing Violence Against Women in Our Community Pilot Projects and the Reducing Violence Against women and Children Grants;
- the provision of resources and training to increase the capacity of local government to prevent violence against women;
- workplace toolkits and training to help workplaces foster conditions which are safe, respectful and inclusive for women;
- the bystander program, which aims to inform the public about their range of options for responding if someone they know is experiencing, or committing, violence within a relationship or family [Bystander programs have been widely adopted in US high schools and colleges and are founded upon the premise that men’s silence in the face of the abuse of women gives implicit consent to such behaviour; and
- specific programs to respond to violence against indigenous women and those with disabilities.


The 2016 State Government Plan, ‘Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change’ followed the Royal Commission into family violence, which had delivered 27 recommendations. The Victorian Government pledged to implement all of them, including the development of this plan.

Aims and key elements of the plan

Aims: Eliminate tolerance of family violence and gender inequality
- Support and protect victims
- Hold perpetrators to account
- Sustained and systemic prevention and response to family violence

Prevention Initiatives
- Primary Prevention Strategy (due 2017) to address beliefs and behaviours that contribute to family violence, including collaboration with councils, community organisations, schools and sporting groups.
- Prevention Agency to co-ordinate and monitor prevention, commission research and fund ‘Coordinated Prevention Alliances’.
- Gender Equality Strategy.
- Respectful Relations, school program rollout to prep to year 12 in schools across the State, after its successful pilot test.

Support and Safety Hubs – to co-ordinate support for victims of family violence, including:
- Initial contact, assessment, specialist assistance, access to legal, housing court, police, early childhood, health and other services.
- Located throughout state; supplemented with out-posted workers at health, education, legal and community agencies; satellite locations in rural areas; and accessible by phone
- Service Navigators – experts, to co-ordinate support for victims
- Incorporating Child FIRST
- Working in partnership with local communities
Co-ordination Agency – To establish and monitor Support and Safety Hubs, and co-ordinate family violence services across government

Addressing Cultural Diversity
Expansion of In-Touch – multicultural women’s family violence service
Funding for specialist services for culturally diverse communities, coupled with strengthening of mainstream response to cultural diversity
Guided by Diversity and Intersectionality Framework

Centre for Workforce Excellence – To cultivate family violence expertise

Housing – Increased social housing, crisis accommodation, refuges & homeless services

Courts & Safety – Expansion of specialist family violence courts
Risk Assessment Panels – for women at greatest risk

Training - Enhanced training for police, magistrates and hospital staff

Improved quality and access to information – including records from police, family violence services, risk assessments and information about perpetrators

The plan was to be succeeded by:
- Ten-year plan and rolling action plan, due March 2017
- Primary Prevention Strategy, due 2017

Legal and Court Reforms

Lloyd et al (2009) note that all Australian states have family violence laws which include a civil protection order and a criminal offence for a breach of the order. In addition, criminal law can be applied when there is evidence that a criminal offence has been committed.

Intervention orders were introduced in Victoria in 1987, and are of two kinds: Family Violence Intervention Orders, issued under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, where family members are experiencing violence or property damage or threats of these from other family members; and Stalking Orders, issued under the Crimes Act 1958. The standard of proof for the issuance of orders is the balance of probability, which makes it easier to secure an order than it is to achieve a criminal conviction. Applications for an order are a civil procedure, with no criminal record resulting when an order is made (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2008). Breach of an intervention order though, is a criminal offence.

In 2008, the Family Violence Protection Act was legislated, to take effect in late 2009. Aside from replacing the Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987 as the basis for intervention orders, this new Act was intended to provide more swift and thorough protection to victims of family violence, help them remain in their homes, obtain fairer treatment in the courts, and hold perpetrators of such crimes accountable for their actions. Among the changes which this Act entails:

- Definition of ‘family’ includes married, defacto, civil union, intimate non-sexual relationships, carers and recipients living in family-like situation, and indigenous conceptions of family (S. 8).
- ‘Family violence’ encompasses physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence, as well as abuse, threats, coercion, controlling behaviour, and the protection of children affected by such behaviour (S. 5).
- Introduction of ‘Safety Notices’ – orders issued by police after hours, in response to an immediate risk to the victim, her children or property. The order may, for instance, instruct perpetrators to leave the home, or not to approach or communicate with the victim (S. 24).
- Increased police search and surrender powers (S. 16).
- Courts obliged to consider excluding the perpetrator from the home (S. 82).
- Perpetrators forbidden to cross-examine a victim in court, unless the victim agrees (S. 70).
Further relevant legal reforms include changes in the structure and function of the Magistrates Court. In June 2005, the Family Violence Division of the Magistrates Court was established in Heidelberg and Ballarat to provide improved assistance to victims, increase their safety, and impose a greater measure of accountability upon perpetrators. The Specialist Family Violence Service, also designed to provide increased support for victims of family violence, commenced in 2006, in the Magistrates Court in Melbourne, Sunshine and Frankston (Victorian Department of Justice, 2008a). In addition, eight family violence lawyers have been added to community legal centres (Victorian Government, 2005; Victoria Government, 2009c; Victorian Department of Justice, 2008a).

**Reforms to Policing**

Victims of family violence generally do not report the matter to the police, more often seeking support from family, friends, colleagues, general practitioners, counsellors, church representatives and others. (Hegarty et al, 2000).

The 2005 Personal Safety Survey found that only 36% of women who had been physically assaulted by a male, and 19% of those who had been sexually assaulted, reported the matter to police. Equivalent information about the sexual assault of men is not available, due to the lesser number of respondents involved.

| Proportion of Victims of Violence in Past 12 Months, who Reported the Incident to the Police, by Gender of Victim and Type of Assault: Australia, 2005 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Males Females Females: 1996 |
| physical assault by male perpetrator | 35 | 36 | 19 |
| sexual assault by male perpetrator | - | 19 | 15 |
| stalking | 35 | 34 | - |

The International Violence Against Women Survey, Australian Component, found that just 14% of women who were assaulted by a partner, and 16% who experienced violence from anyone else, reported the incident to police. Indeed, a quarter of the women who had experienced intimate partner violence had not reported the matter to anyone else (Mousos and Makkai, 2004).

In light of the under-reporting of violence, commentators have urged that police initiatives be carried out to encourage an increase in the reporting of such incidents and their resolution (Whitzman, 2007). Recent years have witnessed a number of reforms in the way in which Victoria Police respond to family violence. The year 2002, saw the commencement of the ‘Way Forward in Violence Against Women Strategy’ a police initiative to improve responses to family violence and sexual assault (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, 2008). The ‘Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence’, released in 2004, defines the roles and responsibility of police when investigating family violence, strengthens the police response, and promotes collaboration with specialist support agencies (DPCD, 2008; Victorian Department of Justice 2008b). The more recent, ‘Victoria Police Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2009-2014’, published in 2009, seeks an improved police response to family violence within indigenous and diverse communities, provision of a “social leadership role” in this field, closer collaboration with community services, and an effective discharge of responsibilities under the new Family Violence Protection Act 2008, among other objectives (Victoria Police, 2009b).

A selection of staff within Victoria Police has been assigned particular responsibilities for monitoring the police response to family violence. The Family Violence Unit designs strategies to
help Victoria Police respond to family violence, trains community-based workers, and fosters community awareness. Family Violence Advisors (including one at Endeavour Hills) ensure that Police are aware of their responsibilities; monitor regional trends and liaise with local agencies. Further, Family Violence Liaison Officers based at each 24-hour police station – including Dandenong - supervise the station’s response to family violence (Victoria Police, 2009a).

Due in part to increased reporting of incidents of family violence to police, and by them to other agencies (including applications for intervention orders), recent years have witnessed a steady rise in the number of police callouts to family incidents, charges laid as a result of family violence and intervention orders sought.

The rate of police callouts (per 100,000 persons) to family violence incidents rose 53% across Victoria from 1999 to 2009, and by 79% in Greater Dandenong. In a similar period (1999/2000 to 2007/8) the number of court orders increased 87% across the State and 44% in Greater Dandenong (Victorian Department of Justice, 2009, Victorian Department of Justice 2008b), while the number of charges in family violence incidents has surged by 178% since 2005/6, and referrals by 37% (DPCD, 2008; Victoria Police, 2009b).

Indigenous People, Family Violence and Government Policy

At the time of the 2011 Census, 38,000 people in Victoria, accounting for 0.7% of the population, were identified as indigenous residents.

The prevalence of violence is markedly higher among indigenous Australians than among the general community. National Crime Prevention (2001a) notes that, by all available measures including homicide, the level of violence within the indigenous community is up to ten times greater than among the general community. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey found that 20% of indigenous women had experienced physical violence in the previous year – nearly three times the corresponding proportion of non-indigenous women (7%) (Mouzos and Makkei, 2004). The National Crime Prevention Survey found that indigenous young people were twice as likely to have witnessed violence against their mother, than average (42% compared with 24%) (Flood and Fergus, undated).

The State Government 2008 document, ‘Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families’, a ten-year plan, emphasizes the importance of extended families and indigenous approaches to preventing family violence of all kinds, including efforts to increase awareness and understanding of family violence, strengthen community capacity, develop indigenous responses, ensure culturally-competent mainstream services and improve the safety of women. As an example of community-based initiatives within indigenous communities, the report cites the ‘Yarning Circle’ in Drouin Victoria, where indigenous women meet to discuss and resolve their concerns about community and family issues (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (2008).

At a regional level, the implementation of the policy may be assisted by Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers and Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups (which includes one in the Southern Region), constituted of representatives of the local indigenous community and service providers.

Aging and Family Violence

While this review concerns itself chiefly with violence within relationships, families and households, and particularly with violence against women in these contexts, mention should be made of elder abuse – a type of violence which often occurs within homes and in close family-like relationships between elders and carers.
The Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse defines elder abuse as “…any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to the older person. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, or neglect” (ANPEA, 1999, cited in Bagshaw et al, 2008: 1). Investigations of elder abuse in Australia have generated estimates of its prevalence among people aged 65 or more in the range of 3 to 5.4% (Kurrie and Naughtin, 2008; McCallum, 1994, Sadler, 1994 and NSW Task Force on Abuse of Older People, 1992, cited in James, 1994).

Abuse or violence is most common among those with:
- poorer health, including those with dementia
- women, after the death of a partner,
- little contact with friends, relatives, or professionals;
- limited English skills,
- little knowledge of services, supports or their rights

…and among carers who were either:
- under stress or experiencing mental illness, or who had
- little understanding of available services

Perpetrators were often family members - accounting for half of all perpetrators; men – in 80% of instances of interpersonal abuse - whereas women and men were equally represented among those who commit financial abuse.

Many victims are unable to report abuse due to dependency, a desire to protect the perpetrator, fear of reprisals, lack of knowledge about their rights or available services, misunderstanding about what constitutes abuse, languages and cultural barriers, and other factors. Notably, a number of workers from welfare agencies attending the seminar raised concerns about the level and range of supports and options available to a person who may be found to be experiencing abuse, in any case.

The State Government sought to address this issue with the release of the 1995 publication ‘With Respect to Age’ which resulted in the development of guidelines for responding to elder abuse. But in 2003, the Office of the Public Advocate expressed the view that insufficient efforts were being made to address elder abuse, and in its report, ‘Elder Abuse: a hidden problem’, urged that a whole-of-government approach be taken to the issue (Office of the Public Advocate, 2003). In response, a further report, ‘Strengthening Victoria’s Response to Elder Abuse’ was released in 2006, with funding provided under the Elder Abuse Implementation Strategy to support service responses and the development of a specialist legal service for older people.

A more recent report ‘With respect to age: Victorian Government practice guidelines for health services and community agencies’, released in 2009, seeks to improve detection and responses to elder abuse by professionals involved in the care of older people (Victorian Department of Health, 2009). The current Victorian Government ‘Elder Abuse Strategy’ includes efforts to increase understanding of elder abuse, rights and available supports, among the community and professionals; the development of protocols to guide professionals in responding to evidence of such abuse; and the establishment of ‘Senior Rights Victoria’ to provide advice, support, referral and community education about this issue (Victorian Government, 2011).

The Role of Local Government

The work of helping prevent family violence and abuse is a challenge for the whole community, in which family members, relatives, friends, and colleagues, and community organizations may participate. As a level of government which is closely attuned to the aspirations and activities of the
community, local government has an important role to play in contributing to the wider community response to family violence.

A number of commentators maintain that local government can provide leadership and co-ordination of community-based initiatives, offer champions such as mayors and councillors, and supply infrastructure for delivering services to the local community. As Hayde states, local government can “become a central point for representing the priority of eradicating violence against women” (2008: 69), “facilitating the co-ordination of local initiatives, supporting community initiatives and taking a whole-of-government approach to violence prevention” (2008: 6).

Support for a key role for councils is found at Federal and State levels, the 2009 National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women affirming that local government “…has a key leadership role in ensuring that their communities have the best possible resources and that these are delivered efficiently”, noting its intention to work with local government in reducing violence against women (Lloyd et al, 2009: 27), and urging that the Federal, State and local government, collaborate to develop polices and responses to family violence (2009: 156).

The State Government has long advocated that local governments play a role in the response to family violence. In 2001, the Office of Women’s Policy stated in its publication ‘Key Directions in Women’s Safety’ that “local government has a significant role to play in promoting safety ” (Office of Women’s Policy, 2002: 43) adding that “areas aligned with municipal boundaries are a useful starting point when thinking about community action and co-ordination”. The Victorian Government’s most recent policy 'Right to Respect' (2009e), urges that local government “play a key role in driving and co-ordinating these settings-based initiatives tailored to their local communities“ (Victorian Government, 2009e: 17) adding that it will encourage local government to incorporate prevention of family violence into its policies and support a conference to examine approaches to the prevention of family violence.

In relation to the current role of local government, Hayde points to a conspicuous gap in routine practices in the field of crime prevention, observing that those council programs which address safety and crime tend to overlook family violence, focusing instead on “…traditional forms of street crime…” (2008: 11).

State-wide Programs to Support Local Government Responses to Family Violence

Reflecting its endorsement of local governments’ role in leading a community-based response to family violence, are a range of VicHealth-funded violence prevention projects conducted by local governments such as Maribyrnong, Nillumbik, Bendigo, Wyndham, Melton and others (Whitzman, 2007).

Efforts to address family violence at a local level were also promoted by the 2-year ‘Local Government Network and Capacity Building Project’, which commenced in 2009 with the support of the Victorian Government, VicHealth, Darebin Council, peak local government organisations and others. The project, which sought to encourage local government efforts to prevent violence against women, resulted in the development of a website to share resources and information among local governments, the conduct of a state-wide conference about local responses to prevent violence against women and promote gender equity, the establishment an active state-wide network of interested local government and community sector staff, and informed local governments about strategies and specific activities for achieving these ends.

At its conclusion in 2011, the project was succeeded by the ‘Local Government Partnerships Program – Preventing Violence against Women’, sponsored by the Municipal Association of Victoria, which maintained the efforts of its predecessor to assist local government in its response to violence against women.
In the same year, the Victorian Government provided grants totalling $1.26m. to three groups of councils, under its ‘Preventing Violence in Our Community’ initiative, widely referred to as the ‘Local Government Clusters Project’. This 4-year project is intended to promote non-violence, respectful relationships and gender equality, within community settings such as schools, workplaces and sporting clubs, incorporating the use of the local media. The three regional groups of local governments funded were:

- Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Wyndham Councils
- Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges
- Macedon Ranges, Greater Bendigo and Mount Alexander

By 2017, a survey conducted by the Municipal Association of Victoria found that nearly all (98%) of the 59 responding councils had staff engaged in activities relating to gender equality and the prevention of family violence, and over two-thirds had a plan or strategy to address violence against women, or were planning to develop one.

The survey identified a wide range of initiatives, in a variety of fields, being conducted by local governments which responded to the survey. Among them:

**Aged Services**
- Training and education around elder abuse
- Promotion of World Elder Abuse Day
- Common Risk Assessment Framework training

**Arts and Culture**
- Gender audits of artists
- Participation in the One Million Stars to End Violence project and exhibition

**Childcare and Kindergarten**
- Training for all staff in identifying and responding to family violence
- Gender audit of toys and equipment
- Referral information and help cards available at all centres

**Communications**
- Media campaigns run over the 16 Days of Activism
- Consideration to language, gender, and diversity in council communications
- Training for communications staff

**Community Grants**
- Gender equality and prevention of violence against women inclusion as a category, and part of criteria
- Sex-disaggregated data used in grant applications and assessment

**Community Safety**
- Prevention of violence against women and women’s safety referenced in council Community Safety Plans

**Disability Services**
- Violence against women and disability training
- Common Risk Assessment Framework training

**Emergency Management**
- Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies Action Plan
- The impact of family violence in emergencies reflected in Council Emergency Management Plan
- Family violence after natural disaster workshops
• Help cards available at recovery centres

Facility Design
• Gender neutral and accessible change rooms and toilets
• Female friendly sporting facilities
• Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design utilised

Festivals and Events
• Councils held and participated in International Women's Day events, and White Ribbon events

HR/Staff Induction
• Policies and professional development documents reviewed for gender bias
• Gender pay analysis
• Gender audit of job advertisements
• E-learning module to be introduced

Library Services
• Audit of book collection
• Booklist focused on gender equity developed and distributed, with books purchased for library branches
• Family violence referral resources available in libraries

Local Laws
• Allocation of parking permits to women escaping family violence
• Training around pets and processes for housing pets in family violence situations
• Common Risk Assessment Framework training

Maternal Child Health
• Delivery of Baby Makes 3
• Nurses undertake CRAF training
• Referral pathways in place

Multicultural Services
• Interfaith networks advocate for PVAW and gender equity initiatives
• Family violence resources translated into different languages
• Legal rights training for newly arrived communities, with a focus on education around men’s legal obligations and women’s legal rights

Procurement
• Contractors are required to sign up to council’s code of conduct with prevention
• Gender Equality Statement included in procurement documents

Professional Development
• Councils undertaking Act@Work program
• Training provided to staff around prevention of violence against women, understanding family violence, bystander intervention, male privilege and gender inequality, gender analysis and unconscious bias
• Tracking women in leadership development programs

Sport and Leisure Services
• Programs to increase female participation in sport
• Identified in Strategic Recreation Plan
• Focus on female friendly facilities
The Example of a Specific Local Government Initiatives

An example of the accomplishments of a local government which has been actively engaged in efforts to promote gender equity and address family violence for a number of years, is the Maribyrnong Council, which has conducted a wide-ranging project titled, ‘Respect and Equity’.

The Maribyrnong Respect and Equity Project implemented the 'Maribyrnong Preventing Violence Against Women Action Plan', which aimed to increase violence prevention efforts within Maribyrnong, raise the capacity of community groups to respond to violence, and encourage other local governments to explore the possibility of a role in this field.

The project was initiated by the regional organization, Women’s Health in the West, which urged the Council to play a role, citing anecdotal evidence of a rise in levels of family violence and drawing attention to the fact that the community included large numbers of people whose circumstances place them at risk of family violence: homeless people, those experiencing alcohol and other drug problems, and culturally diverse communities. The female CEO and female Councillors were particularly supportive of the effort.

Participation in the GLOVE project – an international programme, lead by Melbourne University and involving other Councils such as Casey, Loddon and Bendigo – lend further impetus to the project within Maribyrnong Council.

The Council saw its role as one of primary prevention, encompassing activities such as social awareness, advocacy, facilitation of community initiatives, service delivery, organizational change, planning, monitoring and mentoring. The principal activities carried out to date, in each of these fields, are recounted here.

Social Awareness:

- Educating the public through press releases, newsletter, brochures. Press releases have been produced in response to issues raised in the local paper, as well as special occasions such as White Ribbon Day, and announcements of Council initiatives,
- Efforts are getting underway to develop a strategy for communicating about family violence to various cultural groups,
- Conduct of an annual event on White Ribbon Day,
- Bookmarks with White Ribbon Day logo and slogan given out with each book borrowed in November,
- A banner stating 'Maribyrnong Council says No to Family Violence' displayed at the town hall.
- Council cars display ‘Not violent Not silent’ White Ribbon Day stickers,
- Youth team works with secondary schools conducting workshops about healthy relationships, with the FreeZa committee holding an event with bands and speeches, and t-shirts, for White Ribbon Day,
- A forum for sporting clubs was convened in collaboration with the recreation and leisure business unit - with existing links with clubs. The draw-card was an AFL footballer who attended to talk about AFL policy,
- Employers are to be approached through the council business development unit, which has well-established links with local businesses.

Advocacy

- Participation in a working group concerned with the role of local government in family violence prevention, for the development of the State Government plan.

Facilitation of Community Initiatives - Working with local agencies on family violence issues, hosting discussions about family violence.
• Council participation in a Regional Council Group on family violence.
• A “Prevention of violence against women” category has been incorporated into the Council grants system, resulting in grants for self-defence classes, yoga for women and social outings.
• Civic awards now feature a category for female leadership

Service delivery – advice to women of their rights, support for women experiencing family violence
• The Maternal and Child Health ‘First Parent Program’ featured a ‘Dad’s night’, where fathers were encouraged to attend, and on that night, both parents were invited to attend a program about relationships.

Organizational Change
• Incorporation of considerations of women’s rights and family violence into relevant policies such as Early Years, Municipal Public Health Plan, Social Planning and Elder Abuse policy.
• An annual staff survey about awareness and understanding of family violence – now conducted every three years - elevates the prominence of the issue.
• Council has a policy about supporting employees in response to family violence, which includes training for managers, team leaders and selected female staff, about identifying effects of family violence, as well as providing suitable support and referrals. It is intended that, aside from the direct benefits of this program, it serve as a demonstration of Council’s support for victims of family violence.

Planning
• A consultant was hired to consider family violence and gender issues in planning and building design, then conduct an audit of safety and develop a tool to assist in conducting future audits. These design changes have resulted in adjustments to Maternal and Child Health buildings to improve lighting, and alarms to summon assistance in emergencies.

Monitoring
• Obtaining information about family violence, including collection of data to gauge its true extent of in the community, through the incorporation of questions similar to those featured in recent VicHealth surveys, into the Annual Council Survey.

Mentoring
• Disseminating lessons learned from their experience, to other councils and agencies, though forums and networks.

A range of factors have contributed to the success of these efforts. These include sound research, coupled with support from local agencies and Council departments at all levels. There is also a strategy of starting small, with tangible, sustainable projects, and seeking opportunities across Council to incorporate considerations of family violence and healthy relationships into plans and policies. In addition, funding from VicHealth lent legitimacy and status to the project, thereby helping it to garner support in its initial stages (Mangan, 2010; Maribyrnong Council, undated, undated a, undated b, undated c, undated e).

The accomplishments of Maribyrnong Council and others which have pursued such objectives with similar dedication, serve to illustrate the breadth of the initiatives in this field which are available to a resourceful and committed local government.
RELEVANT WEBSITES

RESOURCES
Local Government Networking & Capacity Building Project to Prevent Violence Against Women - lgpvaw.net.au/Home.aspx
This website forms part of a pilot project managed by Darebin City Council and VicHealth to support local government in preventing violence against women. Provides a library of resources, e-bulletins and other support to community and local government.

Provides pamphlets, newsletters and a library, as well a training course for professional in this field, and advocacy for policy and law reform.

Articles and reports, news, current events in relation to family violence.

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault - www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/

peak advocacy organisation committed to the rights of women and children and consisting of women's family/domestic violence services operating across the state of Victoria.

Information about White Ribbon Day events and how to participate in this annual campaign.

KEY RESEARCH

International Violence Against Women Survey – Australian Component 2002/3

Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women Survey. VicHealth, 2009

VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

Domestic Violence Victoria: peak body for domestic violence services in Victoria

In Touch: Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (1800 755 988) - culturally sensitive risk assessment, information, support, advocacy and referral to women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in situations of domestic violence.
Victims of Crime Helpline - information, advice and referrals to assist victims to manage and recover from the effects of crime

Kids Helpline (1800 551 800) – national 24 hour service.

MEN’S SERVICES
Men’s Referral Service – information and referral to Men’s Behaviour change programs for those who want to change their behaviour
www.mrs.org.au/

POLICE and COURTS
Victoria Police Family Violence Unit

LEGAL ASSISTANCE
Victoria Legal Aid - information and advice about family violence. Ph 1800 677 402 or (03) 9269 0120.

Women’s Legal Service Victoria - legal information, advice, representation and referral to women in Victoria, specialising in relationship breakdown and family violence. Ph 1800 133 302 or (03) 9642 0877.
http://womenslegal.org.au/

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service - legal aid and assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ph 1800 064 865 or (03) 9419 3888 (24 hours)
www.vals.org.au/

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service: The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria) was established in October 2002 to provide assistance to victims of family violence and sexual assault and to work with families and communities affected by violence. Ph 1800 105 303 or (03) 9654 3111 (Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm)
www.fvpls.org/

ACTS
Family Violence Protection Act (2008)
www.austlii.edu.au/legis/vic/consol_act/fvpa2008283/

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
Federal Minister for Women

Workplace Gender Equity Agency.


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Maribyrnong Council (undated c). Maribyrnong Respect and Equity Project: Preventing violence against women Project Plan 2008-2011. Maribyrnong Council, Melbourne

Maribyrnong Council (undated d). Maribyrnong Respect and equity: preventing violence against women project Staff Survey. Maribyrnong Council, Melbourne

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