

Finance and Public Administration References Committee

Inquiry into Domestic violence in Australia

Public Hearing – Wednesday 5 November 2014

Questions Taken on Notice – No To Violence

1. HANSARD, Page 16

Senator MOORE: Could I quickly put a question on notice? Yesterday, we had evidence from an organisation called One in Three that made comment about male perpetrators and the approach. The *Hansard* of that evidence should be available within a couple of days. If you have the time, and I know you are both very busy, it would be useful if you could look at what was said there in that exchange about male perpetrators.

Thank you Senator Moore and to the Committee for the opportunity to respond to this question on notice.

I note that our response below is not in collaboration with Violence Free Families. We do not want to assume their position on this matter.

I have read the draft *Hansard* online that you refer to Senator Moore, thank you for providing this context for the Committee's question. I assume that this question pertains to our thoughts on the position of the One in Three campaign in relation to male victims of domestic violence.

There is no doubt that some men experience domestic violence as victims. The proportion of men who are or have been victims of domestic violence is significantly less than what the One in Three campaign purports, as I will outline at a later point in this response. However, few would argue that there are no male victims of domestic violence, or that male victimisation is so rare as to be inconsequential. A focus on male victims – though not of the approach taken by the One in Three campaign – is justified.

There are six key considerations which I'd like to outline to help shape what we would consider to be a more appropriate focus and response to male victims than that proposed by the One in Three campaign.

Men as victims in the context of other population groups of victims

First, the issue of men as victims of domestic violence needs to be put into context in terms of other population groups experiencing domestic violence. No To Violence genuinely and sincerely does not want to downplay or belittle the experiences of men who have been or are victims of domestic violence. We do not want the following points to discount these real experiences of some men, and the impact that domestic violence has on their lives as victims. We want these men to receive the support and assistance that they need. At the same time, it is important to place men's victimisation in context.

- In terms of all forms of family violence – including but not limited to intimate partner violence (IPV) – women are at least 3-4 times more likely to be victims than men. I refer the Committee to

these findings from the most comprehensive statistical study of family violence in Australia, focusing on a range of police, court and health service system data.¹

- In terms of IPV – violence by a current or former intimate partner – women are at least six times more likely than men to be the victim of IPV physical assaults, and 24 times more likely than men to be driven into homelessness due to experiencing IPV.² Furthermore, women’s experience of IPV, relative to men’s, is *in general* associated with substantial more fear and severity.³

Beyond comparisons between women and men as victims, there are other population groups that require a significantly greater focus in family violence public policy, and service system responses, than what is currently the case. These include women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from CALD backgrounds including new and emerging communities, LGBTIQ communities, and women from rural areas. Men as a population sub-group require a focus too in terms of domestic violence victimisation, but given what the research demonstrates, and the particular marginalisation and vulnerability of the above-mentioned groups, No To Violence would not suggest that men as victims be a high priority target group for domestic violence public policy or service system response.

Again, we are not arguing that there should be no policy work or service system response to men as victims. However, this work needs to be placed in context. Furthermore, the focus of this work needs to be as much, if not more, about men as victims from the violence of other male family members, as from females (to be explained later in this response).

Men and the shame of reporting

No To Violence accepts that a significant proportion of male victims of domestic violence are unlikely to report or seek help due to the perceived shame of doing so. We also accept that there is a particular aspect of this shame that might be unique to some men’s experiences, of perceived weakness in relation to dominant narratives of masculinity in terms of what it might mean to feel afraid of a woman. We further acknowledge that these dominant notions of masculinity can serve as barriers to men’s help-seeking behaviour more generally, including for domestic violence.

However, it does not necessarily follow that in general men are relatively more hesitant to report or seek help for their experiences of domestic violence than women. There are significant barriers limiting women’s reporting of domestic violence, some of which are similar to the barriers facing men, and others which are unique to how women are viewed and to their perceived position in society. There are a range of sexist and demeaning attitudes towards women still prevalent in our society that form unique barriers to women reporting. Furthermore, many women hesitate or decide not to report due to the feared consequences of doing so, including retaliation from her (ex)partner.

Hence, police, court, health service system and other quantitative indicators of domestic violence might not necessarily under-estimate the society-wide proportion of men who are victims, nor the proportion of victims who are men. They might equally be a true reflection, or under-estimate the proportion of victims who are women.

¹ Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven Year Trend Analysis 1999-2010. See www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/utility/for+professionals/research+reports/victorian+family+violence+databas e+volume+5+eleven-year+trend+analysis+1999-2010

² Gender and Intimate Partner Violence, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Fast Facts No. 9. See www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/fast_facts.htm.

³ Hester, M. (2009). *Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators*. University of Bristol.

Gender blindness

Our second contextual consideration focuses on the stance taken by the One in Three campaign, similar to other networks and groups with a men's rights perspective, that takes an openly aggressive and hostile stance towards feminist-based services and the Duluth approach. Reading through the *Hansard* of their appearance at the Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia, this hostility becomes increasingly transparent as the transcript progresses. A core claim, made on several occasions in the transcript, is that feminist, and women's domestic violence services in general, have deliberately excluded men from their services. It is clear that the One in Three campaign, if I can refer to the campaign as an entity, feels quite aggrieved regarding this.

From our perspective, the belief by the One in Three campaign that women's domestic violence services should be available and accessible to men comes from a space of male entitlement-based expectations, and male righteousness, that the One in Three campaign does not appear to be aware of or understand. I am not writing this to criticise the individuals involved in the One in Three campaign. Indeed, all men, including myself, are conditioned by male privilege and entitlement, and are susceptible to making entitlement-based expectations of women and women's services. I am sincerely not blaming them as individuals.

The One in Three campaign appears to have little or no understanding of why women-only spaces, and services exclusively for women, are required. The campaign expresses no understanding of domestic violence as a gendered issue, and of the underlying issues of gender inequities and sexism in our society. The blindness of the One in Three campaign to male privilege and entitlement is reflected in how their expectations, assumptions and views of feminism and women's domestic violence services is shaped by this very privilege. Indeed, the language that the campaign uses to describe feminism and women's domestic violence services appears to come from a space of righteous anger, and from what could be described as a 'victim stance'.

Again, I am sincerely not wanting to make any statements about the individuals representing the One in Three campaign – of those who appeared at the Inquiry or any other advocates of the campaign. Rather, I am emphasising that the campaign's very blindness to (and apparent dismissal of) male privilege, entitlement and gender-based power, of the everyday and multiple forms of hostile and 'benevolent' sexism that women experience in so many spheres of their lives, greatly colours the perspectives that the campaign has on men as victims and women as perpetrators.

Indeed, this indirect and direct hostility to feminist analyses makes it more difficult for any organisation, including ourselves, to focus more directly on men as victims. The direct service arm of No To Violence – the Men's Referral Service – can and does offer advice and referrals for men as victims.

However, because the men-as-victims debate can so easily be dominated by proponents of the One in Three campaign, and by other efforts clearly linked to anti-feminist men's rights agendas, we are limited in terms of the amount of work we can directly do in this space – we do not want to become associated with the particular philosophies and views of the One in Three campaign. In this sense, the One in Three campaign and other anti-feminist men's rights networks paradoxically narrow the space available for organisations to focus directly on men as victims, due to the perception they create that an anti-feminist stance is required to work in this space.

Pathways of men as victims

A third contextual consideration concerns the pathways through which men become victims of domestic violence. The eleven-year Victorian Family Violence Database research which I referred to earlier showed that a higher proportion of male victims of family violence – compared to female victims – were associated with a non-intimate family member as the perpetrator (for example, an

adolescent or adult child). Whereas over 90% of female adult victims of family violence were associated with a male perpetrator, only 60% of male adult victims experienced violence from a female perpetrator.

This research demonstrates that adult men experience family violence from a wide range of family members, with violence from a heterosexual intimate partner being a much less dominant pathway than for adult women experiencing family violence. It raises the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of these different pathways, as a pre-requisite to public policy formation in terms of addressing men as victims of family and domestic violence.

Given the significant proportion of male victims of domestic violence who experience violence from other males, it is notable that historically and currently, the major focus of the One in Three campaign has been on men experiencing violence from women. While male-to-male family violence is definitely mentioned by the campaign, it is not given the proportionate focus that the research suggests that it should. This aligns with the positioning of the One in Three campaign being anti-feminist and consistent with a men's rights agenda.

Determining the real aggressor

A fourth and particularly vital contextual consideration is that a significant proportion of men who claim to be victims of domestic violence, or are assessed by police to be victims, are actually the perpetrator and not the victim. The vast majority of domestic violence perpetrators deny and minimise their use of violence (to themselves and to others), pathologies and blame the victim, and paradoxically attempt to convince themselves and others that they are the true victim. Perpetrators use these violence-supporting narratives, or stories and beliefs about their (ex)partner and their own behaviour, to avoid taking responsibility for their violence, and to give themselves permission to continue using violence by feeling justified due to making themselves out to be the victim. Furthermore, many perpetrators can be quite eloquent and persuasive in convincing others that they are the victim.

There is significant research supporting the need to be cautious in automatically assuming that a man assessed by police or another referring agent as a victim of domestic violence truly is the victim. Some of this research is described in a No To Violence practice resource *Determining Who is Doing What to Whom in Family Violence Referrals*.⁴ This includes UK research finding that approximately one in nine men who phoned a telephone counselling service established for men as victims admitted by the end of the call that they were the perpetrator and not the victim of violence, and furthermore, that in approximately one-third of calls overall the telephone counsellor assessed that the caller, despite self-reporting as the victim, was actually most likely to be the perpetrator of violence.

In a recent and critical study of approximately 100 New South Wales cases of women who were defendants of an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order, fewer than 40% of the cases resulted in a finalised order being made by the Court. This finding coincided with the reports of over two-thirds of these women that they were the victims of violence in their relationships.⁵

There are several reasons explaining why women can be inaccurately assessed by police as the perpetrator, and men as the victims, in a family violence situation. These include:

- Women's distress, fear and trauma as a result of the male perpetrator's use of violence can sometimes be mis-explained by the perpetrator to police and others in pathologising ways ("she's so out of control, and hits me at the drop of a hat"), supported by sexist stereotypes of "irrational women".

⁴ This can be downloaded from <http://ntv.org.au/resources/> - see 'Determining the primary aggressor'.

⁵ Women Defendants of AVOs: What is their Experience of the Justice System? Women's Legal Service NSW, 2014.

- Women might have indeed engaged in an isolated act of violence out of self-defence – with the male having used a wide range of coercive controlling tactics over many years (emotional, social, financial, etc. in addition to physical and sexual). She is charged by police with an incident of assault, yet he is the one who has been engaging in systematic forms and patterns of violence against her.

Services for men as victims

Men who are genuinely victims of domestic violence, and who genuinely live in fear and have their lives controlled by the perpetrator (female or otherwise) definitely deserve support services. As referred to previously, the Men's Referral Service, which we operate, receives some calls from men who report to be victims of domestic violence, some of whom are genuinely victims, and some of whom are actually the sole or predominant perpetrator of the violence.

Despite the One in Three campaign's gender-blind belief that women's domestic and family violence services should work with male victims, doing so would be very problematic on a number of levels. By forcing women's domestic violence outreach and refuge services to work with men as victims, the gendered understanding that is a crucial pillar of the family and domestic violence service system as a whole can be undermined.

Based on an awareness of the vital importance of a gendered understanding of domestic violence, the key nation-wide referral service for male victims of domestic violence in the United Kingdom – the Men's Advice Line – is operated by a pro-feminist organisation, UK Respect. I refer the Committee to <http://respect.uk.net/> for further information.

UK Respect conducted the research I referred to earlier focusing on men who contacted the Men's Advice Line self-reporting experiences of being a victim of domestic violence. UK Respect were aware that a significant proportion of these callers were likely to be perpetrators, and embarked on this research to help skill their telephone counsellors in being able to make as accurate assessments as possible. They were aware that reinforcing the victim story that a man presents, when he is actually the perpetrator, can strengthen the justifications he uses to inflict harm on his family, and contribute towards his dangerousness.

Given that this work to determine the primary aggressor is highly specialised and complex, like the UK approach, No To Violence recommends that this work be done by specialist male (and not women's) family violence services that are not hostile to a feminist approach. The risk of inaccurate assessments to the safety of women, children and men is too high for generalist helpline services or male advocacy networks to be doing this work.

A summary of relevant research

This response is not an exhaustive review of research pertaining to the gendered nature of family violence. However, I will cite some research particularly relevant to the arguments put forward by the One in Three campaign in their appearance at the Senate Inquiry, commencing with research into family violence homicides.

The first report of the Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths⁶ reports that 79% of family violence related homicides conducted by a single perpetrator between 2000 and 2010 were perpetrated by males. The finding that 48% of all 288 family violence homicide victims during this

⁶ C Walsh, S-J McIntyre, L Brodie, L Bugeja & S Hauge, 2012, Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths – First Report, Coroners Court of Victoria
www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/find/publications/victorian+systemic+review+of+family+violence+deaths+ +first+report

period were male supports the need to include a focus on males as victims of family violence. However, only 24% of these men were killed by an intimate partner, compared to 69% of women homicide victims.

More recent statistics from 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2014 provided by the Coroners Court of Victoria through their 2013-14 annual report⁷, found that 75% of family violence homicides involving the death of either a parent or a child were committed by males. Of the 24 sons or fathers killed during this period through family violence homicides, 20 were killed by males.

These family violence homicide statistics suggests that for the One in Three campaign to be genuinely and sincerely focused on advocating for men as victims, it would recognise that to prevent the deaths of men through family violence, it should prioritise the risk posed by other male family members – not females.

Finally, Michael Flood has provided possibly the most detailed and exhaustive review of studies focusing on gender issues in domestic violence.⁸ His paper can be downloaded from <http://www.xyonline.net/content/he-hits-she-hits-assessing-debates-regarding-men%E2%80%99s-and-women%E2%80%99s-experiences-domestic-violence>, but a brief summary of his points are as follows:

- Flood demonstrates that while there are large-scale surveys purporting to show that a significant proportion of violence is experienced by males, these studies – such as the Australian Personal Safety Survey⁹ and studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale – don't actually measure domestic violence as a systematic and multi-pronged pattern focusing on a range of tactics (physical, sexual, emotional, social, financial, spiritual, etc.) used over a period of years to coercively control a partner. Rather, these large-scale surveys generally ask questions pertaining only to isolated incidences of physical acts of violence. Studies that employ methodologies to measure domestic violence in its true meaning – coercive control as a pattern over time and across a range of violent and controlling behaviours and tactics – generally find that women are the victims in 90-95% of situations. Hence, while the One in Three campaign purports to define domestic violence as an issue of power and control, they draw upon research measuring isolated acts of physical violence as distinct from the multiple tactics and patterned nature of domestic violence as experienced over months and years. Furthermore, Flood draws upon numerous studies showing that women are far more likely than men to experience “frequent, prolonged and extreme” forms of IPV, and to experience far greater levels of fear.
- Rates of intimate partner sexual violence perpetrated by a female to a current or former male partner were so low that they were not reported by the 2005 ABS Personal Safety Survey.
- Women are much more likely to experience violence after relationship separation than men, and on average have far less financial and social independence to rebuild their lives.

Once again, thank you to the Committee for providing me with this opportunity to respond to this question on notice.

Rodney Vlasis
Acting Chief Executive Officer
No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association Inc.

⁷ See www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/find/publications/coroners+court+of+victoria+annual+report+2013-14

⁸ Flood, M. (2012). He Hits, She Hits: Assessing debates regarding men's and women's experiences of domestic violence. Seminar, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, November 6.

⁹ Note that the Personal Safety Survey is improving across iterations in its ability to detect non-physical forms of violence.