

Chapter 4

Committee view

4.1 The committee notes that during the 44th Parliament the question of domestic violence was referred to the committee for inquiry. The terms of that inquiry were broad, and allowed the examination of a wide range of issues associated with domestic and family violence. The report from that inquiry *Domestic violence in Australia* was tabled in the Senate on 20 August 2015. It contained 25 recommendations. The government has not yet provided a response.

4.2 The terms of the present inquiry are considerably narrower, and refer the committee to a subset of questions regarding gender inequality, principally those associated with entertainment, toys and education.

4.3 The committee commends the report from the previous inquiry, noting that its broader terms of reference enabled a more thorough discussion of the complex relationship between gender inequality and violence than that possible with the present inquiry's terms of reference.

4.4 Notwithstanding this, having considered the evidence, the committee is of the following views.

4.5 The committee is encouraged by work undertaken to date to change gender roles and stereotypes. However, there is clearly more work to be done as evidenced by Australia's decline on the global index measuring gender equality from 15th in 2006 to 24th in 2014.¹

4.6 The committee can see areas of progress in the results of the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey with most Australians supporting gender equality in the public arena such as workplaces and most acknowledging that women still experience inequality in the workplace.

4.7 However, the committee is concerned that more than a quarter of Australians still endorse attitudes supportive of male dominance of decision-making in relationships which is identified as a risk factor for partner violence.

4.8 It is clear that work needs to start early and working with young people is important to embed long term societal change and establish healthy relationships. As in the committee's previous report, it continues to support programs which improve the ability of young people to form and maintain positive and respectful relationships.

4.9 The committee recognises the ways in which gender inequality can manifest itself more broadly in our society. In particular, the committee notes the continued underrepresentation of women in senior management roles in the private sector and the public service and on government and non-government boards. It commends work

1 Note: In 2015 Australia was ranked 36th out 145 countries. See <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/rankings/> (accessed 7 November 2016)

being undertaken to increase workforce participation for women and policies to increase female representation on boards.

4.10 The committee strongly supports access to flexible working arrangements such as part-time work and flexible working hours. Ensuring and expanding access to flexible working arrangements and changing the gendered expectations and culture of work are key elements to achieving workplace equality.

4.11 Wider access to affordable childcare and better sharing of unpaid caring and domestic work will promote women's workforce participation as well as reducing the rigidity of gender stereotypes.

4.12 The committee considers that the media and entertainment industry play an important role in shaping and changing community attitudes, standards and behaviours, especially for young people. The committee supports the National Media Engagement Project, an initiative under the National Plan which engages the media to build awareness of the impacts of gender stereotyping and inequality. The committee commends the steps taken by the toy industry to address community concerns regarding toys and gender.

4.13 The committee recognises that the achievement of gender equality in Australia in the areas touched on in this report is a long term challenge, a fact recognised in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. The National Plan includes key actions to advance gender equality: improve women's economic participation and independence; improve the participation of women in leadership positions; build and support legal literacy among migrants and refugees on Australian law and gender equality principles; and develop workplace measures to support women experiencing and escaping from domestic violence. The committee is of the view that support for the National Plan should continue.

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Chair