

Discussion Paper

Recommendation 180

Victims Support Agency

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Introduction

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Commission) heard that many victims of family violence have difficulty accessing appropriate and comprehensive services in a timely manner. It also commented on the lack of information on services for male victims and that male victims tend to seek support for issues that result from family violence, rather than family violence itself.

The Commission has confirmed that the Victims Support Agency (VSA) is, and should be, the lead agency for receiving and coordinating the service response for male family violence victims and recommends that the Victorian Government's response to these victims should build on such existing capacities.

Recommendation 180 states: *The Victorian Government publicise and promote the Victims Support Agency in any information campaign relating to family violence as the primary source of assistance for male victims.*

The VSA should also provide appropriate online resources for male victims [within 12 months].

Document purpose

This paper is seeking sector and community views on key areas for consideration in the development of an online resource for male, intersex and gender diverse victims of family violence. The government is seeking feedback on:

- Addressing assumptions and misperceptions
- Service and resource type
- Content
- Delivery

This discussion paper and the consultation process are informed by the Commission report, and a desktop review of the current status of online resources for male and other victims of family violence.

Scope

The project includes the following:

- Culturally appropriate online resources for male victims of family violence, including:
 - Specific cohorts, such as older men, gay and trans men and adolescents
 - Intersex and gender diverse people
- Forms of violence in addition to than intimate partner violence, e.g. elder abuse, parent-adult child, sibling abuse, carer abuse
- Resources that are accessible to people in rural, regional and remote communities and for people with disabilities

The project excludes the following:

- Female victims
- Perpetrator-specific supports

Definitions

Male

This refers to heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and transgender men.

Trans (Transgender)

This refers to a person whose gender identity, gender expression or behaviour does not align with their sex assigned at birth. A person classified as female at birth who identifies as a man may use the label trans, transman or man.

Intersex

This refers to the diversity of physical characteristics between the stereotypical male and female characteristics. Intersex people have reproductive organs, chromosomes or other physical sex characteristics that are neither wholly female nor wholly male. Intersex is a description of biological diversity and may or may not be the identity used by an intersex person.

Gender diverse and non-binary

This refers to people who do not identify as a woman or a man. In the same way that sexual orientation is not binary, gender identity is not binary either. It is important to challenge our thinking beyond the binary constructs of male and female.

Intersectionality

This refers to the interconnected nature of social identities. That is, the vulnerabilities and risks a person experiences are increased and made more complex where they experience multiple factors such as gender, race, class, culture, disability, sexual and gender identity. It is therefore critical to consider both the experience of individual identities and the potential intersectionality of a person's multiple identities when developing responses to family violence¹.

¹ Frawley, Patsie , Sue Dyson, Sally Robinson, and Jen Dixon. 2015. "What does it take? Developing informed and effective tertiary responses to violence and abuse of women and girls with disabilities in Australia." ANROWS Landscapes

1 Men as victims of family violence

The data assessed by the Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Commission) indicates that whilst men are more likely to be the perpetrators of family violence in intimate partner relationships, one in four victims of heterosexual intimate partner violence is male.

However men can be victims of violence as children or as older people, and violence can be used against them by adolescent or adult children, siblings and other family members. In family incidents recorded by police in 2013-14 52% of male affected family members (victim) were either a child, parent or other family member to the other party (perpetrator), and 33% were a current partner².

The Commission found that in order to address the highest risks to men (including homicide), responses should focus on the risk posed by parents, siblings and other family members, rather than female intimate partners³.

1.1 Addressing assumptions and misperceptions

The Commission acknowledged that *'like all victims, male victims should have their experiences acknowledged and their needs taken into account and addressed.'* In order to do so, it is important to have a clear understanding of victim's experiences and to dispel any assumptions and misperceptions.

As a gendered issue, assumptions can sometimes be made about both victims and perpetrators of family violence. These assumptions may lead to a failure to identify victims, increasing risks for them and any children involved. Further, these assumptions and misperceptions can make it challenging for some victims, including male, transgender and gender diverse people, to report their experiences and access appropriate support services.

Developing an online resource provides an opportunity to address assumptions and misperceptions about male, intersex and gender diverse victims of family violence, and to provide an environment in which they feel confident to report their experiences and seek support.

QUESTIONS

- What are some of the assumptions and misperceptions about male, intersex and gender diverse victims of family violence that you feel need to be addressed?
- In your experience, what forms of violence (other than intimate partner violence) are prevalent amongst male, intersex and gender diverse victims?
- How does intersectionality impact on the experiences of family violence for male, intersex and gender diverse victims⁴?

1.2 Services for Male Victims

The Commission provided the following outline of the VSA and male victims of family violence:

'The VSA is the primary provider of services for male victims of family violence. VSA operates the Victims of Crime Helpline (the Helpline), a telephone contact service funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR), which acts as the 'gateway' to services.

Most male victims who come into contact with the Helpline have been referred by police following police attendance at a family violence incident.

The Helpline conducts initial assessments and determines eligibility for referral to the DJR funded state-wide Victims Assistance Program (VAP) and other appropriate services. The referral pathway outward from the Helpline depends on a victim's needs and eligibility for services.

The VAP is a case management service that helps victims to gain access to information, therapeutic interventions and counselling; and to navigate the criminal justice system. Short-term counselling can be provided through in-house counsellors and private providers. The VAP also offers assistance with security and finding accommodation⁵.

² Royal Commission into Family Violence Report Volume VII, pg 19

³ Reproduced from Royal Commission into Family Violence Report Volume V, Chapter 32

⁴ A definition of intersectionality is available on page 3 of the discussion paper

⁵ Royal Commission into Family Violence Report Volume VII, pg 19

⁵ Reproduced from Royal Commission into Family Violence Report Volume V, Chapter 32

In addition, the program receives brokerage funding that can be used to provide practical support or therapeutic interventions (including paying for counselling)⁶.

The Commission noted the following challenges faced by services offering support for male victims:

- lack of services for men affected by family violence, and services' limited awareness of the problems experienced by male victims
- male victims' lack of knowledge of available support
- lack of online resources for male victims
- lack of services for male victims of family violence who have children

QUESTIONS

- What are the barriers to accessing services for male, intersex and gender diverse victims?
- What are the current gaps in services?
- Are there any online resources for male, intersex and gender diverse victims that you believe are useful?

1.3 Online content

A desktop review undertaken by the DJR found that websites for female victims and their children often provide cohort-specific publications, data, stories and advice.

Other features of these websites include:

- an overview of family violence, including the different types of violence and relationships
- identifying the signs that you are a victim of family violence
- what a victim can do
- what a friend, family member or employer can do
- advice about personal safety
- links to helpful resources and organisations.

The benefit of providing online resources and links to external supports is that victims are able to research and contact services in a way in which they feel comfortable. However, self-navigation does run the risk that victims are not linking into centralised triage services, and as a result they may not receive appropriate risk assessment, referral, case management or care planning.

QUESTIONS

- Do you think it is reasonable to link victims to external resources, programs and support services, or is it best that they are directed to contact VSA and enter into a case management setting?
- What kind of online content do you believe is most useful?
- Would an educational component of an online resource assist people in identifying their experience as family violence, and in turn help victims to identify the types of services available to them?
- Are there specific services you are aware of that would be beneficial to promote on the VSA website?
- Do certain types of family violence experiences require specific online resources?
- Are there particular or unique online resource needs for victims from diverse or intersectional groups?

1.4 Service Delivery

The Commission noted that one of the purposes of any family violence information strategy should be to improve people's understanding of where suitable support can be found.

As previously outlined, the Helpline acts as a 'gateway' to services for male victims of family violence, however the majority of those who come into contact with the Helpline have been referred by the police.

⁶ Reproduced from the Commission report chapter 32
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In addition, the drop off rate for those men who are referred by police through L17s is high, with many simply not answering the Helpline's calls or text messages.

In order to improve service delivery and meet the needs of male victims it is important to raise awareness about the VSA's services and communicate with victims in a way that is meaningful to them.

QUESTIONS

- Which cohorts of family violence victims do you work with and which communication channels do they respond well to?
 - How do different cohorts prefer to seek help?
 - What format is most practical for delivering the information needed for specific cohorts (if any)?
 - How can the Helpline publicise and promote its services and improved online resources so that male, intersex and gender diverse victims are more likely to utilise their services?
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