



# ONE IN THREE VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IS MALE



**An analysis of the Position Paper by the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) responding to the *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men* research report; commissioned by the Men's Advisory Network and conducted by Edith Cowan University, Perth WA 2010.**

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## Background to the Women's Council Position Paper

In 2006 the WA Family and Domestic Violence Unit of the Department for Community Development published *The Men's Project: Exploring Responses to Men Who Are Victims or Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence* (Family and Domestic Violence Unit 2006). As a response to the recommendations of this report, the Men's Advisory Network (MAN) decided to conduct a study into male victims of intimate partner violence.

MAN initially worked with the Family and Domestic Violence Unit to establish a steering committee for the project. The steering committee prepared a funding application to Lotterywest, developed the study brief, selected the Psychology Department at Edith Cowan University (ECU) as the research partner, and provided advice to the researchers and input to the final report.

Mrs Emily Tilbrook, Professor Alfred Allan and Dr Greg Dear from ECU conducted the research. The final report, *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men*, was launched on 26th May 2010 in Perth (Tilbrook et al 2010). MAN also conducted a workshop for service providers in Perth on 16th June titled *Abused Men: What are the implications for service provision of the report on intimate partner abuse of men?*

In August 2010, the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) published their Position Paper in response to the *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men* research report (Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) 2010). This article will analyse in detail the claims made in the Women's Council Position Paper.

N.B. In this document, [blue text](#) is taken directly from the Women's Council Position Paper, while black text is our analysis.

## Analysis of the Women's Council Position Paper

### Introduction

[Gender based violence is one of the most serious issues facing women and girls in Australia today.](#)

There is no doubt that many women and girls are affected by violence. The Personal Safety Survey (PSS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) found that 443,800 (5.8%) of Australian women experienced violence during the last 12 months (about a quarter of physical assaults were from other women). It is also the case that many men and boys are affected by violence. 808,300 (10.8%) of Australian men experienced violence during the last 12 months.

[It continues to be the most common form of violence experienced by women.](#)

It is not clear what the Women's Council means when it talks about "gender based violence", but we assume that it means intimate partner violence, as this is the type of violence examined by the MAN study. The two largest Australian studies of violence against women conducted in the past decade, the ABS PSS and the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) (Mouzos & Makkai 2004), found that the majority of violence against women was perpetrated by persons other than intimate partners.

[Violence in all situations is unacceptable and the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services \(WCDFVS\) would like to acknowledge the work of the Men's Advisory Network in undertaking this research into the experiences of Men as victims of Intimate Partner Abuse. We would however like to publicly acknowledge the limitations of such research.](#)

Domestic and Family Violence is an ultimate abuse of power within an intimate or family relationship/s through a range of on-going forms of violence, and is used to control and cause the victim to live in fear.

While there is no doubt that many situations of domestic and family violence do involve the use of a range of ongoing forms of violence causing victims to live in fear, the MAN study brought to light a wide range of male victimisation experiences involving the abuse of power and control within intimate relationships that involved a variety of other emotions besides fear, but which were nevertheless still damaging to the victim's health and wellbeing.

This is not a new phenomena, gender oppression is experienced by millions of women at the hands of violent men at an institutional and intimate partner level and is supported within patriarchy.

While there is no doubt that millions of women around the world are indeed oppressed by men who use intimate partner violence, the evidence suggests that a similar number of men are oppressed by women who use intimate partner violence (Fiebert 2010).

As far as institutionalised violence goes, the World Health Organisation (2002) reports that many men are also victims of such violence. Half of all deaths from violence are suicides, of which three-quarters are males. One-third of all deaths from violence are homicides, of which two-thirds are males. The remaining one-fifth of all deaths from violence are war-related, of which three-quarters are males. The worldwide health burden from violence in DALYs in 2004 was as follows (World Health Organisation 2008):

**Table 1. World Health Organisation. Global Burden of Disease: 2004 Update. GBD 2004 Summary Tables. DALYs by age, sex and cause for the year 2004: World. Intentional injuries.**

Cause of injury	Males	Females
Self-inflicted injuries	11,686,260	7,879,677
Violence	17,891,802	3,809,627
War and civil conflict	6,319,629	1,063,442
Other intentional injuries	338,099	61,856

The claim that gender oppression of women by the use of violence by men is supported within patriarchy is not borne out by any evidence. In Australia, representative community surveys show that most people in the community have a broad understanding of domestic and sexual violence and its impacts, and do not condone it (VicHealth 2010). The majority of respondents also consider violence against women to be a serious issue. It is true that a small minority of people in the community hold attitudes supportive of violence against women, but a similar minority also hold attitudes supportive of violence against men (VicHealth 2010, National Crime Prevention 2001).

While we still have such high levels of violence against women on a global level, we cannot confess to having, or achieving gender equality.

While the high levels of violence against women on a global level are unacceptable and abhorrent, it is not clear how they reflect upon gender equality, when men also suffer high levels of violence against them.

Acknowledgement of and research into men's experiences of violence contributes greatly to the understanding and knowledge of violence generally. However this research started from a very limited base, only looking at male victims of intimate partner violence, promoting a specific 'men's rights' agenda.

Much research into sexual violence and family/domestic violence has looked only at female victims – the 2009 National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women (VicHealth 2010), the IVAWS study (Mouzos & Makkai 2004) and the ABS Women's Safety Survey (McLennan 1996) are just three significant studies of this kind. It is not clear how only looking at male victims of intimate partner violence (or any other population group) is problematic.

The MAN/ECU research project was not undertaken from a "men's rights" perspective. The MAN position paper distributed at the workshop held on 16 June 2010 states:

*"The MAN and Lotterywest Boards are to be congratulated on being prepared to tackle the issue of male victims, which some people consider to be controversial. The easy course of action would have been to do nothing. However, to ignore the plight of male victims would be in breach of the principles of social justice and human rights."*

All human beings – regardless of gender – are covered by the International Declaration of Human Rights. Some might claim that research into female victims of violence comes from a ‘women’s rights’ agenda. Likewise others might perceive that the MAN study comes from a ‘men’s rights’ agenda. Much of the good work of organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund and the RSPCA comes from an ‘animal rights’ agenda. It is unclear why agendas that promote the legitimate rights of different groups are seen as problematic.

Research would be better placed looking at men’s experiences of violence as both perpetrators and victims and men’s experiences of violence in society and community in general. This would provide a sound basis on which to act to eliminate violence.

It is true that much research on violence has focused on the victims of violence, and more research needs to be done on the perpetrators of violence if we are serious about reducing the levels of violence in the community. However, if we are to look at men’s experiences of violence as both perpetrators and victims, we should surely do the same for women. In fact, an examination of women’s perpetration of violence can give valuable insights into reducing violence against women. The National Crime Prevention survey (2001) found that witnessing certain types of *female to male* parental domestic violence was the strongest predictor of subsequent perpetration of violence by young people.

We would also gain much from further examinations of men’s experiences of violence in society and community in general, but once again this should surely be done for women too.

Aiming to reduce violence by just one gender will do little to provide a sound basis on which to act to eliminate all violence in the community.

### Men as both Perpetrators and Victims

We also have concerns that the initial stage of the research into *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men* failed to take into account the possibility of participants being both victims and also perpetrators of violence. This was acknowledged by service providers in stage two who said the following:

*“Often they have been abusive too so this can be an issue. They may have experienced abuse but still be quite powerful and be abusive also. Several other men finally acknowledged that the abuse they experienced was actually relatively minor in relation to the abuse they had inflicted but they needed to stay in denial about this for some time before they got to this point, for a long time saying the abuse was only one way.”*

*“The men I work with are violent themselves, and have been court referred for their violence. They will often say their partners are abusive towards them to justify their own abusive actions, or to minimise their responsibility. We explain to them that, while we agree their partner’s behaviours may be abusive, the difference between a man hitting a woman and a woman hitting a man is the level of fear involved. A woman is more likely to be afraid for her life. A man may be humiliated, or angered by his female partners violence, but seldom will he be physically afraid of her.”*

No initial screening of participants was conducted and the questions did not discuss any violence they had perpetrated. In depth interviews in the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey with 22 men who had disclosed experiences of threats or force by a partner showed that in some cases, the men’s depictions of themselves as victims of domestic violence were not compatible with details of the abuse that they had described. The researchers reported that: *“... our suspicion was that at least half of the partners of the men who had experienced some form of abuse or threat would also have been able to offer accounts of repeat domestic violence perpetrated against themselves...Differentiating perpetrators from victims in these cases is an irreconcilably contentious task”*.

It is true that the initial stage of MAN research may have failed to take into account the possibility of participants being both victims and also perpetrators of violence. However, it is standard practice in such research to focus upon victims of violence without also asking about violence perpetration. Most research into female victims of violence follows the same methodology. One of the reasons such methodology is used is that both men and women often find it difficult to disclose their victimisation. Inferring that they are ‘really the perpetrator’ does little to help facilitate such disclosure. Other research has shown that men and women initiate intimate partner violence (both minor and severe) at around the same rates and women are equally likely or more likely to perpetrate violence against a non-violent partner (Dutton 2010, Dutton & Nicholls 2005, Straus 1993), so there would be little reason to question men, but not women, about their perpetration.

### Limited Scope of the Research

The ability of this research, having only interviewed 28 participants in its initial stage, to make broad statements of the need for male specific services is limited due to its qualitative nature. Interviews with male victims were confined to white, anglo Australian, heterosexual, men aged 33 or older which is not a representative sample of the male population.

A lack of data from male members of minority groups (gay men, Indigenous men, CALD men, etc) may well have been due to the sense of shame, relative isolation, and/or reduced means of communication experienced by these men compared to mainstream male victims. The research team can not be blamed for this - in fact they actively targeted male members of minority groups during their research.

The limitations of the qualitative nature of the research were addressed by the MAN study authors in their report, and have also been clarified by Professor Rob Donovan of Curtin University (Donovan 2010) who explains:

*“Qualitative research is about identifying and understanding ‘points of view’ / ‘world views’ / meanings/constructs, etc. Quantitative research is about determining what proportions hold those ‘points of view’. Hence in qualitative research we try to ensure that we select respondents that represent all the possible ‘points of view’ out there (regardless of their proportions in the population). In quantitative research we need to ensure that all the different demographic, etc, groups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population.*

*“In this qualitative research, saturation may have been reached after 15 interviews because the sample was homogeneous with respect to characteristics related to those points of view. The self-selection nature, age and ‘mainstream’ nature of the sample indicates that that might have been the case. As the researchers acknowledge, CALD, Indigenous, gay men and younger men were not represented – and they may have additional points of view not covered in the existing interviews. Similarly, men reluctant to volunteer may have additional points of view. That has been acknowledged [by the researchers]. At the same time, given the internal logic of the themes that emerged – and the commonality with themes from female victims – the data appear very useful as indicative of the points of view of male victims (at least for older, mainstream male victims).”*

The 198 service providers surveyed for stage two were asked questions about their client's experiences of violence, these are third party representations only and care should be taken when using information gathered in this stage.

Professor Donovan explains once again:

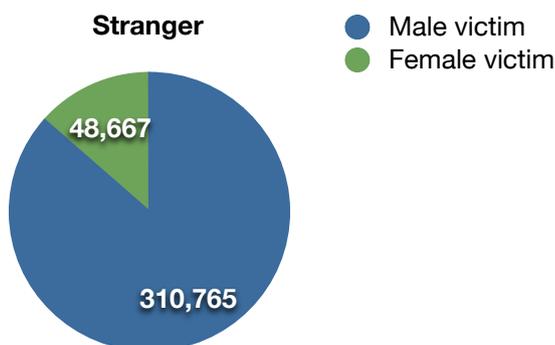
*“With respect to the quantitative sample – it is indeed a large proportion of service providers. However, we should not overstate the extent to which those data generalise to all service providers. However, what we can emphasise is that a large proportion of service providers were interested enough to respond (because the topic was relevant to them) and then frame the results as relevant to ‘service providers with an interest in/who are relevant to’ providing services to males experiencing violence. In that sense the results with respect to efficacy etc have even more import because these are self-selected, interested providers.”*

### Experiences of Violence Generally

Men and women are victims of violence in a number of different spheres of society. Research has however shown that men are far more likely to be physically assaulted by a stranger in the open or on licensed premises, whilst women are much more likely to experience violence at the hands of a current and/or previous partner.

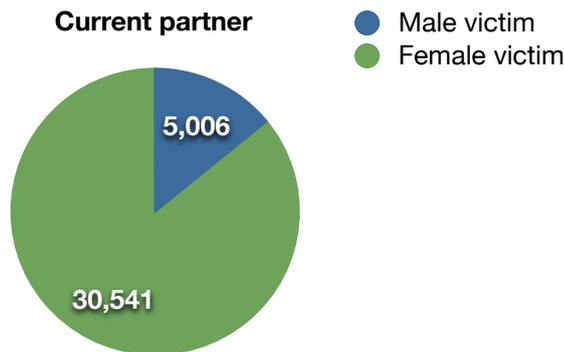
When it comes to the relationship of the perpetrator of violence to the victim, it is true that men are more likely than women to be physically assaulted by a stranger. However, a significant minority of women are also physically assaulted by strangers (more women in total than are physically assaulted by either current or former partners).

**Graph 1. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007). Experience of physical assault in last twelve months by relationship of perpetrator: stranger.**

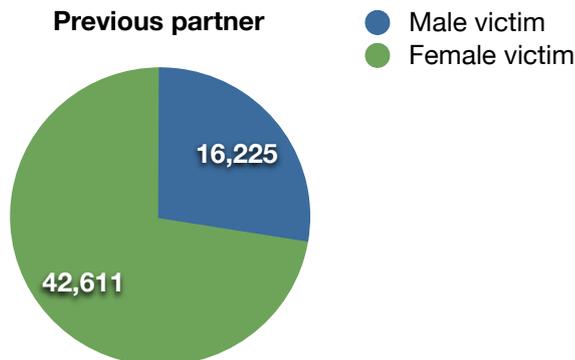


It is also true that women are more likely than men to experience violence at the hands of a current and/or previous partner. However, a significant minority of men also experience violence at the hands of a current and/or previous partner (in the case of previous partners, almost one in three victims are male).

**Graph 2. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007).  
Experience of physical assault in last twelve months by relationship of perpetrator: current partner.**

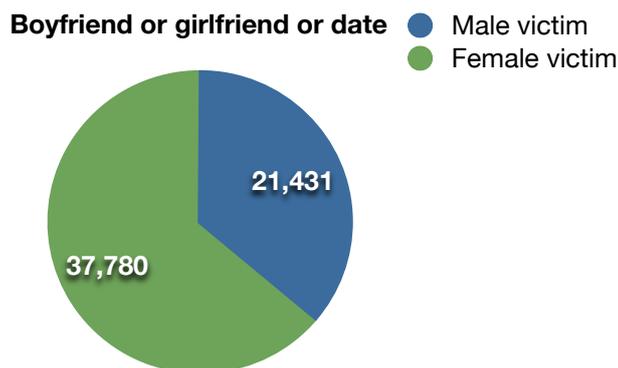


**Graph 3. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007).  
Experience of physical assault in last twelve months by relationship of perpetrator: previous partner.**



When we look at other forms of intimate partner violence we see that, while women are more likely than men to experience violence at the hands of their boyfriend or girlfriend or date, a significant minority of men also experience violence of this type (more than one in three victims are male).

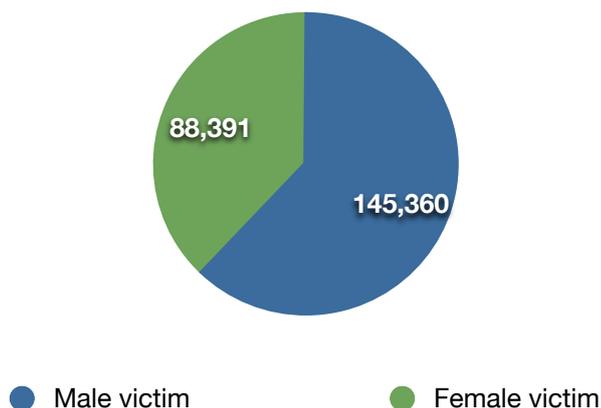
**Graph 4. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007).  
Experience of physical assault in last 12 months by relationship of perpetrator: boyfriend, girlfriend or date.**



And when we examine violence perpetrated by other people who are known to the victim, such as family violence, we see that men easily make up the majority of victims (almost two in three).

Graph 4. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007). Experience of physical assault in last twelve months by relationship of perpetrator: any other known person.

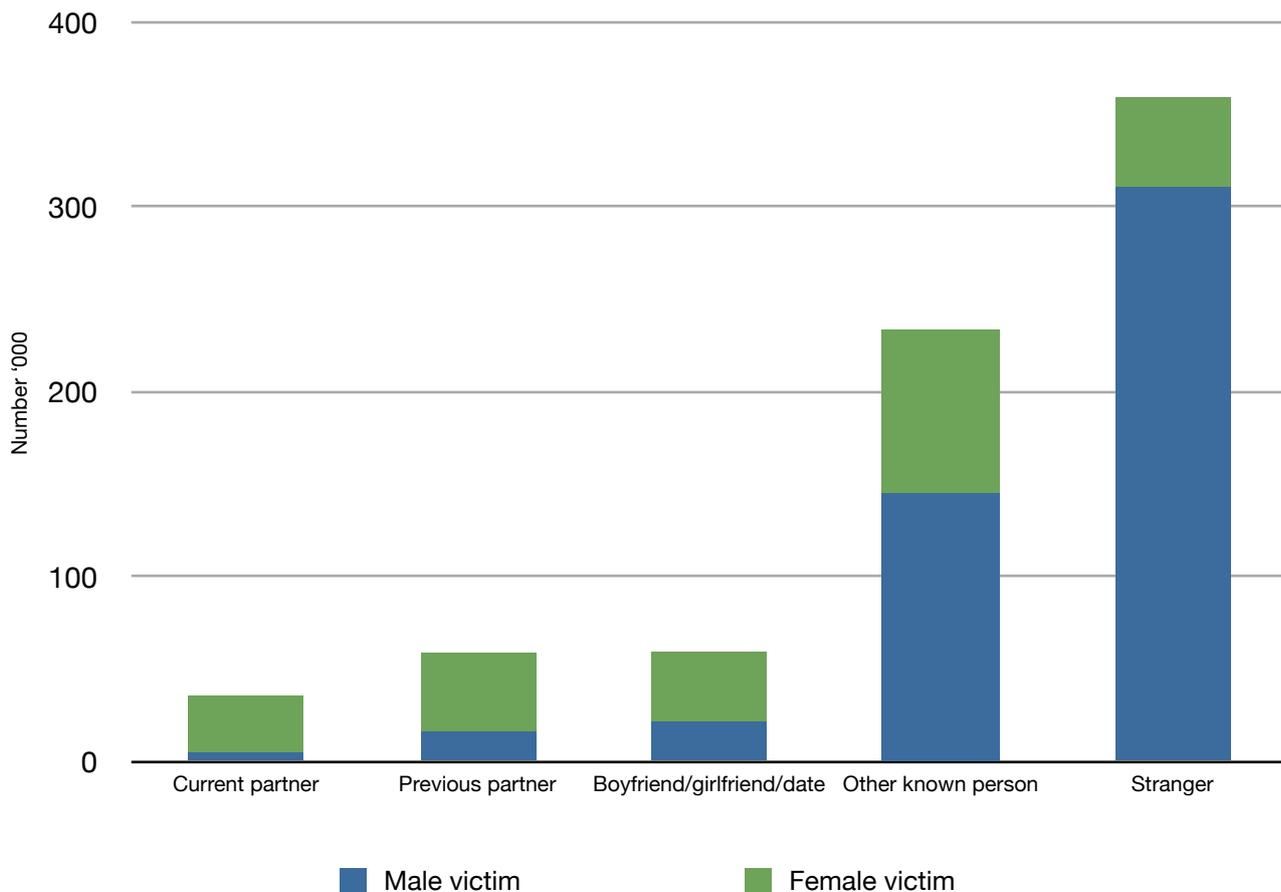
Any other known person (includes family and friends)



The more prevalent the type of violence by relationship of perpetrator, the more likely it is that males are likely to be victims. Graph 5 illustrates this phenomenon. Strangely enough, the *less* prevalent the type of violence, the more attention is paid to this type of violence by governments and NGOs. Most attention is given to current partner violence (the least prevalent form of violence in the community by perpetrator type), and least attention is paid to violence by other known persons and by strangers (by far the most prevalent forms).

Graph 5. Analysis of the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (Henstridge et al 2007). Experience of physical assault in last twelve months by relationship of perpetrator.

Experience of physical assault in last 12 months by relationship of perpetrator



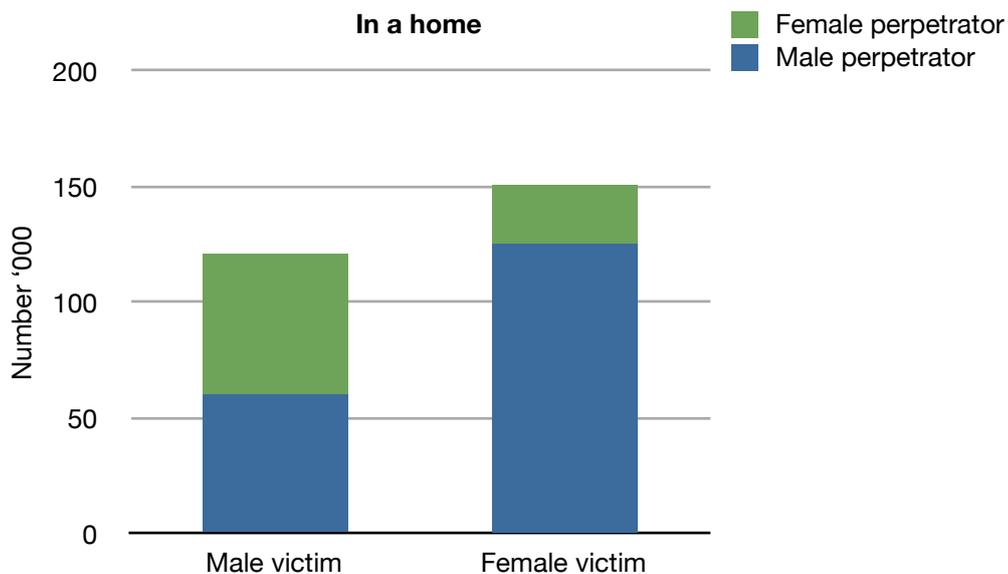
Looking at the location of violence, it is true that men are more likely than women to be assaulted in the open or at licensed premises. However, a significant minority of women are also assaulted in these locations.

Graph 6. Personal Safety Survey Australia: 2005 Reissue. Experience of physical assault. Characteristics of most recent incident during the last 12 months. Location of incident in the open and at licensed premises.



Just because men are more likely than women to be assaulted in the open or on licensed premises, this does *not* mean that they are significantly *less* likely than women to be assaulted in a home. In fact, both males and females experience significant amounts of violence in the home.

Graph 7. Personal Safety Survey Australia: 2005 Reissue. Experience of physical assault. Characteristics of most recent incident during the last 12 months. Location of incident in a home.



Having looked in more detail at the typology of violence in the Australian community by relationship to perpetrator and location, we can see that the picture painted by the Women's Council Position Paper omits a significant amount of data on male victimisation: in the home; by intimate partners, and by family members. It also underplays the prevalence of violence against women by strangers.

This strategy of skewing the picture of violence in Australian society by omitting data about violence against men is quite a common one. The South Australian Ombudsman recently found that the SA Office for Women had misled the public by the use of incorrect and/or misleading statistics such as these on their *Don't Cross the Line* website (Bingham 2010). Likewise the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research recently determined that the NSW Office for Women's Policy had used a number of incorrect 'statistics' in their *Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework* (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2010).

Professor Marianne Hester, Chair, for the Centre for Gender and Violence Research School for Policy Studies at the Bristol University of Gender Studies compared 96 cases where men, women or both were recorded by the police as domestic violence perpetrators. Analysis of the police and interview data indicated differences by gender, including the nature of incidents, levels of repeat perpetrator, arrests and conviction. There were also some differences between cases involving sole perpetrators and where both men and women were recorded as dual perpetrators.

It is unclear what relevance Hester's study of *perpetrators* of domestic violence has to the MAN study which focused on male *victims* of intimate partner violence. Even if male perpetrators of violence differ from female perpetrators in a number of respects, the MAN study found that male victims appear to suffer from the same types of abuse as do female victims, clearly indicating the need for services and support.

It should also be noted that because Hester's study is a crime study based on police figures, it is not representative of the broader community. Men in Scotland (McLeod et al 2009), Canada (Statistics Canada 2009) and Australia (Dal Grande et al 2001) are significantly less likely than women to report being a victim of domestic violence to the police. Hence police figures are likely to be skewed toward female victims.

[There is a long history of male perpetrators of intimate partner violence presenting themselves as 'victims' of violence and placing blame on their partner.](#)

While there is no doubt that some male perpetrators of intimate partner violence present themselves as victims and place blame on their partner, there is no evidence to suggest that it is only men who do this. In fact, the same results are obtained regarding the relative frequency of men's and women's violence regardless of whether men or women are the ones being questioned (Dutton 2005).

[This culture of blame shifting and manipulation amongst perpetrators of violence has led to a situation whereby primary aggressor tools should be used to enable service providers and police to determine the true victims of violence.](#)

Undoubtedly police should be given all the tools necessary to determine whether perpetrators of violence (male or female) are engaging in blame-shifting, in order to determine the true victims of violence. However, the use of primary aggressor tools should not rule out giving police the power to charge both parties when it is clear that the violence is mutual/reciprocal. Studies show that mutual/reciprocal domestic violence is not only significantly more prevalent than is one-sided ('victim – perpetrator') violence by either sex (Dutton 2005, Whitaker et al 2007, Straus 2008, National Crime Prevention 2001), but its impact upon children is much more severe (National Crime Prevention 2001) and it is the most injurious to women (Dutton 2010).

### **Recommendations of the Intimate Partner Abuse of Men Report**

[The Intimate Partner Abuse of Men Report made four recommendations centring on public awareness campaigns, funded services for male victims, integrating male and female victim services, and training for workers. The WCDFVS feels that the majority of these recommendations do not parallel the data collected and are almost outside of the report. Further research would need to show a substantial number of men experiencing Intimate Partner Violence before any consideration of a publicly funded awareness campaign that would obviously undermine the existing work being done around the gendered nature of domestic violence.](#)

There is already a large body of research indicating that a substantial number of men experience domestic and family violence and abuse:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2006) is the largest and most recent survey of violence in Australia. It found that:

- 29.8% (almost one in three) victims of current partner violence since the age of 15 were male
- 24.4% (almost one in four) victims of previous partner violence since the age of 15 were male.

The SA Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Survey (Dal Grande et al 1999) found that 32.3% (almost one in three) victims of reported domestic violence by a current or ex-partner (including both physical and emotional violence and abuse) were male.

The National Crime Prevention Survey (2001) surveyed young people aged 12 to 20 and found that:

- while 23% of young people were aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers, an almost identical proportion (22%) of young people were aware of domestic violence against their fathers or step-fathers by their mothers or step-mothers

- an almost identical proportion of young females (16%) and young males (15%) answered “yes” to the statement “I’ve experienced domestic violence”
- an almost identical proportion of young females (6%) and young males (5%) answered “yes” to the statement “my boyfriend/girlfriend physically forced me to have sex”.

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (People 2005) found that 28.9% (almost one in three) victims of domestic assault were male.

The Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission (2005) found that 32.6% (almost one in three) victims of family violence reported to police were male.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (Dearden & Jones 2008) found that 48.7% (almost one in two) adult victims of family homicide and 35.4% (over one in three) victims of intimate partner homicide in 2006-07 were male.

The Victorian Victims Support Agency (2008) found that 31% (almost one in three) persons admitted to Victorian Public Hospitals for family violence injuries were male.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (Wolcott & Hughes 1999) observed that, post-separation, fairly similar proportions of men (55%) and women (62%) reported experiencing physical violence including threats by their former spouse. Emotional abuse was reported by 84% of women and 75% of men.

A University of Melbourne / La Trobe University study (Headey et al 1999) found that men were just as likely to report being physically assaulted by their partners as women. Further, women and men were about equally likely to admit being violent themselves. Men and women also reported experiencing about the same levels of pain and need for medical attention resulting from domestic violence.

An extensive study of dominance and symmetry in partner violence by male and female university students in 32 nations by Murray Straus (2008) found that, in Australia, 14% of physical violence between dating partners during the previous 12 months was perpetrated by males only, 21% by females only and 64.9% was mutual violence (where both partners used violence against each other).

The Queensland Government Department of Communities (2009) reported that 40% of domestic and family violence protection orders issued by the Magistrate Court were issued to protect males.

A study of risk factors for recent domestic physical assault in patients presenting to the emergency department of Adelaide hospitals (Stuart 2004) found that 7% of male patients and 10% of female patients had experienced domestic physical assault. This finding shows that over one in three victims were male (39.7%).

The Australian Institute of Family Studies’ evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms (Kaspiew et al 2009) found that 39% (more than one in three) victims of physical hurt before separation were male; and 48% (almost one in two) victims of emotional abuse before or during separation were male.

Why the development of publicly funded awareness campaigns about male victims of domestic violence would necessarily undermine the existing work being done around the gendered nature of domestic violence is uncertain. Indeed the authors of the MAN/ECU report went out of their way to recommend that “Such campaigns need to be very carefully designed so as to complement campaigns about family violence against women and children and not to damage the effectiveness of those campaigns.”

The disparity between men’s and women’s experiences of violence has not been taken into account within this report and training around ‘dismantling the barriers to men disclosing intimate partner violence’ also has the ability to erode the great strides taken in promoting women and children’s experiences of violence and would give room for perpetrators, primarily men, to manipulate the system and undermine strategies that currently enable women and children to remain safe and escape violence.

The MAN/ECU report found that male victims of intimate partner violence appeared to experience similar types of violence to female victims. In this sense the report found that, *qualitatively*, there appears to be little difference between men’s and women’s experience of violence. There may well be *quantitative* differences between men’s and women’s experiences of violence, but these differences were beyond the scope of the MAN study, as was noted by the authors.

It is not clear how training around dismantling the barriers to men disclosing intimate partner violence would in any way affect women and children. Surely we should be encouraging all victims of violence, regardless of gender, to disclose their experiences so that they and their children can get the help that they need.

It is also unclear how training around dismantling the barriers to men disclosing intimate partner violence would give room for perpetrators to manipulate the system and undermine strategies that keep women and children safe. It is essential that all training given to service providers must be both sensitive to the needs of all victims of violence regardless of gender, yet also able to detect perpetrators (both male and female) who seek to manipulate the system by claiming to be victims.

Any moves to provide support to men as victims of intimate partner violence will need to be undertaken with a great amount of care and consideration. Clear and comprehensive primary aggressor tools should be used at all stages of contact with these 'victims' and the issue of dual perpetration, and retaliation to years of abuse would need to be discussed at length.

If such tools are to be used, and issues are to be discussed, surely they should be used with all 'victims' of violence, regardless of gender. To assume one's guilt or innocence based solely upon one's gender is a clear breach of Australia's international human rights obligations.

Barriers to disclosure of abuse are not limited to men and are experienced by women to an equal or greater degree, possibly due to a lack of economic independence.

To the contrary, all the data both in Australia and internationally shows that men are significantly less likely to disclose abuse than are women (McLeod et al 2009, Statistics Canada 2009, Dal Grande et al 2001).

## Conclusion

The WCDFVS agrees with the exploration into men's experiences of violence however we feel that this research is exceedingly narrow in this regard. It is being used to justify a male agenda that does not take account of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence and the gender inequalities that privilege men over women in our society to this day.

The ECU researchers are acutely aware of the gender issues at play within domestic and family violence. They state in the report, "As with other forms of family violence, gender is an important issue in men's victimisation. Regardless of what research eventually determines to be the similarities and the differences between men's and women's experiences as victims of IPA (not only in terms of prevalence and severity, but also support services and other responses to the violence and effective prevention of IPA), it is clear that gender issues need to be comprehensively examined."

They go on to say, "The issues for male victims seem, on the surface, to be very similar to those that operate for female victims, but the critical differences might be prevalence, level of fear and intimidation, and the degree to which male victims feel trapped in their circumstances in the same ways that female victims often are."

The claim that men are privileged over women in Australian society is a relic from decades past that is not supported by any current data. Anyone making such a claim would have to account for the underperformance of boys across the education system; the number of good fathers denied access to their own children; the lack of family-friendly workplace provisions for men; the high rates of male suicide; the high rates of male mortality and morbidity; the low life expectancy for males; the low rates of funding for male-specific health research; the lack of legal protection against genital mutilation for boys; the high rates of violence victimisation in males; the high rates of male street homelessness and imprisonment; the lack of male reproductive rights; the fact that over two-thirds of household income is spent by women; and the high rates of work-related death, injury and illness in men, to name just a handful of issues.

The authors of the MAN/ECU report identified that, in the area of intimate partner violence, it appears not to be male victims who are privileged, but female victims: "Our data suggest that some of the perceived gender-biases that prevent men from disclosing their abuse (e.g., that he will be seen to have failed as a man if not blamed for his situation) do operate within some of the generalist health and welfare services that constitute the main avenues for professional help for male victims. Moreover, some of those gender-biases might have operated within the field in ways that have prevented the development of services for male victims or of family violence services that are designed to serve both male and female victims."

Touting legal and administrative abuse fails to take into account the recent reviews of the Family Law Courts that found that women and children were being let down in situations of domestic and family violence by the Family Law Court on an almost daily basis and that the Shared Care Legislation failed to take into account the best interests of the children in cases of Domestic and Family Violence whereby unsafe practices of granting contact and residency orders to perpetrators where women have already taken out Violence Restraining Orders and there is a high risk of children being exposed to further violence and abuse.

The ECU researchers' finding that some male victims suffered from legal and administrative abuse was not a claim that female victims do not suffer from similar abuse, merely that it was not a theme that could be identified in the existing literature on typologies of intimate partner violence.

The recent reviews of the 2006 Amendments to the Family Law Act have indeed found that there are some areas that could be improved upon in terms of protecting victims of violence (both male and female) and their children who are going through the family law system from perpetrators of violence (both male and female).

Indeed Richard Chisholm in his report went so far as to say,

*"The literature reveals remarkably different findings about the extent to which family violence involves violence by men against women. Although the ABS figures, above, and the AIFS literature review suggests that most family violence is committed by men against women, some studies suggest that women engage as often as men in at least some forms of violence. Opinions differ greatly about these matters, and about whether violence by women against men tends to be qualitatively different to violence by men against women."*

*"The family law system needs to respond appropriately to each particular case, and deal fairly with the allegations and evidence. It would be wrong for the system as a whole, or for individuals working in the system, to approach the problem with preconceptions about the matter. Even if family violence, and especially the more serious forms of family violence, involves men being violent to women more than women being violent to men, it would be a mistake to assume that women's violence against men does not exist, or cannot be a serious matter. Any individual who makes allegations, and any individual who defends them, requires a fair hearing and fair treatment, regardless of gender. And it is important that all litigants understand that the system makes no pre-judgment about whether violence has or has not happened in a particular case, or how serious it might be."*

Likewise the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Kaspiew et al 2009), in their evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms found that 39% (more than one in three) victims of physical hurt before separation were male; and 48% (almost one in two) victims of emotional abuse before or during separation were male.

[It is vital that we have a long-term coordinated strategy across Government to reduce and prevent violence. As outlined within the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children there is a greater need for a range of strategies and programs to be provided to women and children as the primary victims of domestic and family violence.](#)

While there may be a greater need for strategies and programs to be provided to women and children, there is no reason why programs could not, and should not, also be provided to male victims of family violence and abuse. The Australian Government has not stopped providing services to female victims of heart disease or to females who need occupational health and safety programs just because the vast majority of heart disease and workplace illness, injuries and deaths are male. Likewise suicide prevention programs target all vulnerable Australians, not just the men who make up the vast majority of deaths from suicide. So why ignore male victims of family violence and abuse just because they might be in the minority?

It is important to note that the use of the phrase "women and their children" conceals the fact that much violence against children is perpetrated by women. The main perpetrators of child abuse, neglect and homicide are not fathers, but mothers. The most recent data from the WA Department for Child Protection showed that the number of mothers believed responsible for "substantiated maltreatment" during the period 2005-6 to 2007-8 rose from 312 to 427 (Ward 2008). In the same period the number of fathers reported for child abuse dropped from 165 to 155. Compared with fathers, mothers were responsible for 95% of neglect cases, 68% of emotional/psychological abuse cases, 53% of physical abuse cases and 13% of sexual abuse cases. The latest national child homicide statistics from the Australian Institute of Criminology show that in 2006-07, 11 homicide perpetrators were mothers, 5 were mothers' partners and 5 were fathers (Dearden & Jones 2008).

[There are also a number of services for victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence regardless of gender.](#)

The WA legislation is non-gendered and some service specifications are non-gendered. However, the only services we are aware of that are targeted at both genders are respectful relationship campaigns for young people such as *The Line*, and a number of small privately-run services and individual counsellors who accept both male and female victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. In practice the overwhelming majority of services for victims are 'women only' and the overwhelming majority of services for perpetrators are 'men only'. This is despite the claim by Community Services Minister Robyn McSweeney in May 2010 that support services offered to domestic violence victims "are not gender specific and can therefore be accessed by anyone presenting as a victim or perpetrator of family and domestic violence" (Mayes 2010).

The WCDFVS would support the expansion of services that are currently available to provide assistance to both men and women who experience domestic and family violence. The WCDFVS believes that progressive men's groups and organisations have a key role in contributing to the development and delivery of men's behaviour change policies and programs that support men who are ready to commit to making positive changes in their lives.

It is unclear how "contributing to the development and delivery of men's behaviour change policies" (*perpetrator* programs) will assist male *victims* of domestic and family violence. Of course, such programs are desperately needed (as are programs for female perpetrators).

We welcome the opportunity to work in collaboration with a range of agencies whose aims are to reduce and prevent domestic/family violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours that support gender based violence against women and children.

It is disappointing that the Women's Council appear to only welcome the opportunity to collaborate with agencies that share their gender-based ideological perspective on domestic and family violence. It would appear that the Women's Council might be more interested in sustaining various ideological positions than in actually reducing violence in the community. Perhaps a more constructive perspective might be to welcome the opportunity to work with all agencies, no matter what their ideological position, in order to work towards the reduction of domestic and family violence as the number one priority.

### Conclusion

Most of the claims made in the Women's Council Position Paper are not supported by evidence. They appear to have been made in an attempt to maintain the status quo that has existed for many years in Australia whereby male victims of domestic and family violence are downplayed or ignored; hence few services if any are provided to assist them and their children.

Throughout their paper the Women's Council refers to the 'gendered nature' of domestic and family violence. By this we assume they mean that men are perpetrators and women are victims in the vast majority of cases. The MAN/ ECU study and the evidence we have cited in this document clearly shows that this concept is without strong evidential support. However, it is the basis upon which legislation, policy and programs have been developed and continue to operate. It may well be the case that the majority of victims are female and the majority of perpetrators male, however the male victims and female perpetrators who make up a significant proportion of domestic and family violence cases also deserve services and support.

Some of the Women's Council's claims are particularly worrying, because they infer that providing support to one group of victims of domestic and family violence (men) would negatively impact upon other groups (women and children). There is no reason to expect that such negative impacts would occur. MAN and the ECU researchers have been at pains to point out that any negative impacts of their research upon women and children are to be avoided at all costs.

Equally worrying are the claims that many male victims of domestic and family violence are likely to actually be perpetrators of violence who are using techniques of blame shifting and manipulation to present themselves as victims. There is no evidence that men are more likely than women to use such strategies, and any such claims appear to be founded more in prejudice than in evidence.

We are concerned that members of government, the bureaucracy and service providers who read the Women's Council Position Paper will be persuaded by its rhetoric, especially if they already hold similar perspectives on the issues. We hope this article, with its evidence-based approach, will provide an alternative perspective.

All victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence, regardless of gender, deserve services and support. It is only by addressing the problem of family violence comprehensively that we have any chance of reducing its incidence and impacts.

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