

Do we ignore violence against men?

A call for fairness and accuracy in media reporting during *White Ribbon Day* and *16 Days of Activism to Stop Violence Against Women*, 25 Nov to 10 Dec 2007

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This Sunday is *White Ribbon Day (WRD)* and the start of the *Sixteen Days of Activism to Stop Violence Against Women (SDA)*. This annual spotlight on violence against women, while extremely worthy, is ineffective at reducing violence because it emphasises gender as the primary explanation for violence while ignoring or downplaying a significant body of evidence indicating that other factors are most likely involved. Violence is most prevalent amongst young people, and is causally linked to social disadvantage, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and inadequate conflict management and affect regulation skills.

These campaigns also tend to suggest that women are the major victims of violence in our communities when in fact males are far more likely than females to be victims of formalised violence (including war and human trafficking); street, pub and sporting violence; and are a significant proportion of victims of forms of violence usually associated with female victims, including sexual assault, stalking, harassment and domestic violence. The most recent comprehensive survey of violence in Australia¹ revealed that, in the past 12 months:

- 808,300 men were victims of violence overall (almost two thirds of all victims)
- 485,400 men were victims of physical assault (two thirds of all victims)
- 392,800 men were victims of physical threat (71 per cent of all victims)
- 42,300 men were victims of sexual assault (almost one third of all victims)
- 27,900 men were victims of violence at the hands of their current or previous partner (one in five victims overall, however other studies² have found that up to one in three such victims are male)
- 864,300 men were victims of harassment (over one-third of all victims)
- 110,700 men were victims of stalking (over one-third of all victims)
- the risk of physical violence in the workplace was about equal for men and women
- men were almost as likely as women to suffer physical violence within the home³ (half from females, half from males)
- the rate of physical assault in public places was much higher for men than women
- men and women experienced physical violence from perpetrators who were known to them at exactly the same rate⁴.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2005). Personal Safety Australia ([http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument))

² Peoples, J. (2005). "Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults", in Contemporary Issues in Crime & Justice, No 89, October, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research ([http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.pdf/\\$file/cjb89.pdf](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.pdf/$file/cjb89.pdf)); Dal Grande et al. (1999). Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Survey (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/46925/20050111-0000/150.101.16.49/pehs/PROS/interpersonal-violence-survey.pdf>)

³ Women experienced violence within the home at a rate of 19.5 per 1000 women, and men at a rate of 16.2 per 1000 men

⁴ Men and women experienced violence from perpetrators who were known to them at a rate of 28 per 1000 men/women

Other Australian data shows that males make up a substantial proportion of victims of domestic violence: 26% of intimate partner homicide victims are male⁵ and 29% of victims of domestic violence notified to police are male⁶. This is very likely an under-estimate, as men who are physically assaulted by women are less likely to report it to the police than are women assaulted by men⁷. The relative silence of the *WRD* and *SDA* campaigns in acknowledging that males make up a significant proportion of victims of sexual crime and domestic violence raises the question of whether they are more concerned with demonising males than with preventing violence. Surely all victims of violence are entitled to support and assistance whatever their gender.

A further misleading use of data by the *WRD* campaign is the implication that in all instances of violence against women the perpetrator is male. While the *WRD* quotes the Personal Safety Australia 2005 survey to note the numbers of women who have experienced some form of violence, they neglect to mention that in one-quarter of physical assaults on women (66,500), the perpetrator was another woman⁸.

The central premise of the *WRD* campaign is that Australian culture somehow approves of violence against women. However, many would disagree with this assertion, but would acknowledge that it is in fact violence against males that our culture seems quite willing to accept. Violence against males by females (but not the reverse) is quite acceptable amongst young people. The authors of a 2001 national survey of 5,000 young people aged 12-20⁹ noted that:

- *“males hitting females was seen, virtually by everyone, to be unacceptable... however; it appeared to be quite acceptable for a girl to hit a boy”*
- *“there was no spontaneous recognition that verbal abuse or a female hitting her boyfriend could also constitute dating violence... However... these were among the prevalent forms of ‘violence’ occurring”*
- *“the key factor behind the use of violence for females towards males was, primarily, one of an expression of frustration or anger: hence, reacting to being ‘out of control’ and needing to ‘get his attention’, ‘to make him listen,’ ... ‘guys deserve it’”.*

Quantitative data, while useful in illustrating the widespread nature of interpersonal violence, doesn't tell us much about the actual experiences of the victims themselves. Qualitative research into male victims of domestic violence reveals that their experience is much the same as female victims'. *“In most cases, the wife's intent to control and dominate the husband entailed efforts to induce fear in him relating to his personal safety as well as the fate of the children and property in general. She would often threaten to burn the house down, hurt the children or animals, or kill herself, him or the children.”*¹⁰

⁵ Mouzos, J. (1999). Femicide: An Overview of Major Findings (<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/ti124.pdf>)

⁶ Peoples, J. (2005). “Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults”, in Contemporary Issues in Crime & Justice, No 89, October, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research ([http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.pdf/\\$file/cjb89.pdf](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.pdf/$file/cjb89.pdf))

⁷ 24% of men versus 36% of women reported their assaults. Reference: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2005). Personal Safety Australia ([http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument))

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2005). Personal Safety Australia ([http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument))

⁹ National Crime Prevention. (2001). Young People & Domestic Violence: National research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence (<http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/WWW/ncphome.nsf/Page/Publications>)

¹⁰ Lewis, A., and Sarantakos, S. (2001). “Domestic Violence and the Male Victim” in Nuance No 3, December (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/13076/20021019/www.nuancejournal.com.au/documents/three/saran.pdf>)

International data supports this Australian research. The US Centers for Disease Control found almost a quarter of relationships had violence, about half of which was reciprocal, and “*in nonreciprocally violent relationships, women were the perpetrators in more than 70 percent of the cases,*” and men incurred significant injuries¹¹. They also report that each year “*men are the victims of about 2.9 million intimate partner related physical assaults*”¹². A 32-nation study found women commit half of all partner violence and are just as controlling as men¹³. Two major US universities recently found women are more likely than men to “stalk, attack and abuse” their partners¹⁴. US researchers have also found that “*while severe assaults by wives remained fairly steady, the rate of severe abuse perpetrated by husbands decreased between 1985 and 1992 by almost 37%. In overall comparison to the constant rate of husband abuse, the combination of such significant decreases in wifebeating represented a 50% drop between 1975 and 1992*”¹⁵.

Men are less likely to report being victims of violence, which distorts crime data on domestic violence. But international large population-based research shows women initiate domestic violence as often as men, use weapons more than men, that men suffer one-third of injuries, and that self-defence explains only a small portion of domestic violence by either sex¹⁶.

Experts have expressed concern that male victims have been ignored by anti-violence campaigns and that this contributes to the intergenerational cycle of domestic violence. When male victims are ignored or just “take it,” their children suffer long-term damage by the exposure and are themselves more likely to commit the violence as adults.

Even if we accept the proposition that a minority of domestic violence victims are male, there are few services available for these men. Across Australia there is a critical lack of emergency housing for men and their children; programs for their violent female partners; free para-legals to assist men with AVOs; and training for social workers or counsellors to help men who have been victims of violence.

The media campaigns conducted by *WRD* and the *SDA* present a distorted view of the nature of domestic violence by frequently referring to “violence against women and children”, implying that men are more likely than women to assault or abuse children. However, research reveals that women are the perpetrators of up to 50% of physical assaults of children; 50% of recorded

¹¹ Arehart-Treichel, J. (2007). “Men Shouldn't Be Overlooked as Victims of Partner Violence”, in *Psychiatry News*, Vol 42, No 15, August, American Psychiatric Association (<http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/42/15/31-a>); Whitaker, D.J. et al. (2007). “Differences in Frequency of Violence and Reported Injury Between Relationships With Reciprocal and Nonreciprocal Intimate Partner Violence”, in *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 97, No 5, May, American Public Health Association (<http://www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/97/5/941>)

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). Understanding Intimate Partner Violence Fact Sheet (http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/ipv_factsheet.pdf)

¹³ Straus, M. (2006). Men Are More Likely Than Women To Be Victims In Dating Violence, Unh Expert Says (http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2006/may/em_060519male.cfm?type=n); Straus, M. (2006) Dominance and Symmetry in Partner Violence by Male and Female University Students in 32 Nations (<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/ID41E2.pdf>).

¹⁴ Keen, C. (2006). “Women more likely to be perpetrators of abuse as well as victims” in *University of Florida News* (<http://news.ufl.edu/2006/07/13/women-attackers/>); University of Washington (2007). “Teenage Violence Linked To Later Domestic Violence” in *ScienceDaily* (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/06/070625111433.htm>).

¹⁵ Kelly, L. (2003). “Disabusing the Definition of Domestic Abuse: How Women Batter Men & the Role of the Feminist State” in *Florida State University Law Review*, Vol 30 (<http://www.fact.on.ca/Info/dom/kelly03.pdf>)

¹⁶ Professor Martin Fiebert of California State University summarizes this data in an online bibliography at (<http://www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm>).

infanticides, and up to 7% of sexual assaults on children¹⁷. Women are also responsible for the majority of instances of emotional abuse and neglect of children¹⁸. In the United States, mothers acting alone are responsible for 38.8% of cases of abuse, and fathers for 18.3% of cases. In child fatalities, mothers acting by themselves are responsible for 31.3% of cases, and fathers for 14.4%¹⁹.

WRD and the *SDA* are not the only large campaigns to take up the issue of violence against women. The Body Shop, Amnesty International, the Federal Office for Women's "Violence Against Women, Australia Says No" campaign, as well as various government "Women's Safety Strategies", all draw attention to female victims of violence, leaving the vast majority of victims of violence (males) without a campaign that speaks for them. Unfortunately many of these campaigns have also made substantial exaggerations when reporting statistics. Such errors not only present an inaccurate and misleading picture of violence to the general public, but are actually counterproductive by raising the community's fear of violence without good reason. For example:

- Access Economics claimed in "The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy" (commissioned by the Office for the Status of Women) that 98% of domestic violence perpetrators were male. This was demonstrably untrue and not backed by any research so, belatedly, Access Economics published a corrigendum.
- Amnesty International, an otherwise esteemed organisation, erroneously claimed that "in some countries up to 69% of women have been physically abused by their male partners" and that "domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women aged 16 to 44 and accounts for more death and ill-health than cancer or traffic accidents." They have since quietly stopped using these misleading statistics.
- The *WRD*'s Andrew O'Keefe claimed on the ABC's "7:30 Report" in 1996 that "the leading cause of death for women between 18 and 45 is not breast cancer but violence" - which again is not supported by data.
- The White Ribbon Day 2007 'Fact Sheet 5' claims that "men are much less likely than women to be subject to violent incidents in the home", despite the *Personal Safety Australia 2005* survey's finding that men are as almost as likely as women to suffer violence at home.

The fatal flaw that seems to tie these discrepancies together is the campaigns' attempt to offer "gender" - in the form of a "patriarchal desire for control" - as the primary explanation for domestic violence. However, the data presented in this paper, along with hundreds of other research studies, indicates that gender is less important than many other factors in explaining domestic violence - women use violence against men, and against other women. The vast majority of males do not and have not committed any form of violence against women. Most women will never experience any serious form of violence, such as physical assault, from their partners. And women who are most likely to be victims of violence are those living in areas where all forms of violence occur at higher rates.

¹⁷ Fitzroy, L. (2003). The violence of women: Making sense of child abuse perpetrated by mothers, Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, February (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrc8/fitzroy-ab.pdf>)

¹⁸ Tomison, A. (1996). "Protecting Children: Updating The National Picture" in Child Abuse and Neglect Australia 1994-1995, Child Welfare Series No 16, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/newsletters/nl1996/nl1996.html#protecting>)

¹⁹ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). Child Maltreatment 2004 (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm04/index.htm>)

There is a large and growing body of evidence that highlights factors strongly associated with violence against women which are downplayed by gender-based campaigns such as *WRD* and the *SDA*, and by doing so, effective action to reduce levels of violence is prevented. Violence is far more prevalent amongst young people, in areas that are measurably disadvantaged; in couples with histories of alcohol and drug abuse and/or mental health problems; and in couples with inadequate conflict management and affect regulation skills.

Reducing violence requires recognising the primacy of these contextual factors. Approaches to prevention and treatment – as with child and elder abuse – should operate at multiple levels, addressing those contextual and personal factors that research consistently identifies as being implicated. The subordination of such a comprehensive approach to a “gendered” explanation means we are not effective in offering services to women - or men - who are at risk of violence.

The media has a responsibility to report fairly and accurately over the next fortnight. Violence is a community problem: labelling it a gender problem does not help to reduce it. We call on all Australians to set aside the next 16 days to consider *all* victims of violence, no matter what their gender, age, ethnicity or sexuality. We also seek the involvement of the entire community, including government, NGOs, and men’s and women’s groups, in the establishment of a new national broad anti-violence campaign.

Micheal Woods & Greg Andresen
Wednesday, 21st November 2007

International coalition of professionals and academics who are signatories to this media release

PROFESSIONALS AND ACADEMICS:

1. David Adair, Post-graduate Criminology Student, University of Tasmania, TAS
2. Greg Andresen, Media Liaison, menshealthaustralia.net, NSW
3. Dr John Ashfield, Executive Member, South Australian Men's Health Alliance, SA
4. Luke Bain, Men's Health Coordinator, SA
5. Matilda Bawden, Manager, I CARE Human Service, SA
6. Steve Biddulph, Author, "Manhood" & "Raising Boys", TAS
7. Tony Bowring, Vice President, Tasmanian Men's Health & Wellbeing Association / Relationship Counsellor, TAS
8. Peter Burford, Social Worker, SA
9. Peter Campbell, Counsellor (Men's Issues & Health), ACT
10. Adam Cashmore-Brooke, Mentor, Playwrite, Men's Group Facilitator & Creative Director, Better Man Projects
11. Philip Chapman, Male House, NZ
12. Harry Crouch, Director, California Men's Centers & President, National Coalition of Free Men, USA
13. Keryn Eden, Clinical Nurse Specialist, SA
14. Joel Edson, Occupational Therapist, SA
15. Gordon E. Finley, Ph.D., Prof of Psychology, Florida International University, USA
16. Thomas Golden, Author, "Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing", USA
17. Phil Gouldson, President, Men's Health & Wellbeing Association, ACT
18. Jim Herbert, Men's Health Program Mgr, SA
19. David Hughes, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Men's Health, NSW
20. Kylie Innocente, CNWL Addictions Directorate, UK
21. Lindsay Jackel, Moderator, Nuance Exchange, VIC
22. Roger Kleinig, President, South Australian Men's Health Alliance, SA
23. Julian Krieg, Chairperson, Men's Advisory Network, WA
24. Warwick Marsh, Director, Fatherhood Foundation, NSW
25. George Mason, Fathers-4-Justice-US, Families-4-Justice, USA
26. Peter Maule, Coordinator, HuMANifest, USA
27. Tony Miller, Director/Founder, Dads In Distress Inc, NSW
28. Greg Millan, Men's Health Consultant, NSW
29. Sue Price, Director, Men's Rights Agency, QLD
30. Ian Purdie, Presenter, Dads on the Air, 2GLF FM, NSW
31. Rick Welsh, Aboriginal Men's Health Project Officer, AHMRC, NSW
32. Peter van de Voorde, Presenter & Researcher, Dads on the Air, 2GLF FM, NSW
33. Ian Wilson, National Coordinator, Australian Men's Party
34. Micheal Woods, Senior Lecturer, University of Western Sydney, NSW

The following ORGANISATIONS also support this media release:

35. California Men's Centers, USA
36. Dads in Distress Inc, Australia
37. Dads on the Air, Australia
38. Fathers4Equality Australia
39. The Freda Briggs Centre Inc, Australia
40. Men's Rights Agency, Australia
41. National Coalition of Free Men (NCFM), USA
42. RADAR – Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Abuse Reporting, USA
43. The Richard Hillman Foundation Inc, Australia
44. Shared Parenting Council of Australia
45. South Australian Men's Health Alliance
46. Washington Civil Rights Council, USA

The following concerned citizens have requested that their names be added to this media release:

47. Tony Burt, Business Owner, VIC
48. Stephen Caleo, SA
49. Ron de Mouilpied, QLD
50. Chris Dempsey, Manager, Coal Technology, Burton Coal, QLD
51. Michael Dawe, Teacher, QLD
52. Terry Dolling, Child Carer, Health Education Officer, NSW
53. Phillip Emery, Educational Consultant, NSW
54. Phil Ferrier, Data Comms Technician, TAS
55. Marco Giaroli, Architect, Aquatonic, QLD
56. Aaron Hope, Collections Consultant, Dun & Bradstreet, VIC
57. Paul Hodgkinson, Sales & Service Manager, Kelair Pumps, QLD
58. Jeremy Horton, Chief Technical Architect, AiE Technology Pty Ltd, NSW
59. Michael Lynch, NZ
60. Jose Madrid, Union Organiser, Finance Sector Union, NSW
61. Vincent Mateescu, Pennsylvania, USA
62. Mark McCosker, Senior Administration Officer, Education Department, QLD
63. Richard Millicer, VIC
64. Anne Morgan, QLD
65. Peter Morgan, QLD
66. Steven Morgan, QLD
67. Mark Muirhead, Director, Wordfit, NSW
68. Jim Murdoch, Teacher, Education Dept, QLD
69. Sian Murray, QLD
70. Geoff Ogden, School Teacher, WA
71. Gabriel Owen, Treasurer, Freda Briggs Centre, SA
72. Roy Price, NT
73. George Roth, VIC
74. Paul Smith, Programmer, Dept of Primary Industries and Water, TAS
75. Rajiv Samson Solomon, QLD
76. Shaun Tiernan, National Software Helpdesk Team Leader, Leading Solutions, VIC
77. Robert Vanderkruk, Committee Member, Lone Fathers Association, SA
78. Peter Zazlan, QLD