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The Ethics Secretariat
The University of New South Wales
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18 March 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Young People's Attitudes Towards Domestic and Family Violence

UNSW Ethics Approval Number HC13363

We wish to make a formal complaint regarding this project. There are 3 major areas of concern that will be addressed in detail below.

Firstly the survey questions are poorly formulated and gender biased. Secondly a stated aim is for this survey is to be directly comparable to previous research¹ yet the methodology used in the current survey is considered so dissimilar to the original as to make legitimate comparison severely problematic. Finally the promotional material associated with the survey contains false or misleading information, selective citation and may not comply with accepted research guidelines.

1. The survey questions are poorly formulated and gender biased.

Examples of poorly formulated questions include the use of "double barrel" questions only allowing a single response.

E.g. "Guys should never hit girls but it's OK for girls to hit guys or girls."

And "It's wrong for a guy to hit a girl but it's not that bad if a girl hits a guy."

¹ National Crime Prevention (2001). Young people and domestic violence: National research on young people's attitudes to and experiences of domestic violence. Barton: Attorney-General's Dept.

Gender bias is evident in that many questions seek to identify stereotypes and sexist attitudes toward females but few if any address stereotypes or sexist attitudes towards males.

Examples include

- "Girls like guys who are in charge of the relationship"
- "Men are not able to control their temper"
- "Men are usually better at more things than women"
- "Women should be responsible for raising children and doing the housework"
- "Men are supposed to be the head of the household and take control of the relationship"
- "Disrespectful attitudes towards women"
- "A belief that men should be in control in society and the family"
- "It's OK for a guy to force a girl to have sex with him if she flirted with him or led him on".

This is in sharp distinction to *The National Crime Prevention Survey (2001)* that undertook a detailed and equitable examination of the role of gender as is evident in some of its key findings that are summarised below.

The survey found that while some young people held unacceptable attitudes to violence against women and girls, many more held unacceptable attitudes to violence against men and boys. Young people were more likely to say a woman is right to, or has good reason to, respond to a situation by hitting (68%), than a man in the same situation (49%) (page 79).

While males hitting females was seen, by virtually all young people surveyed, to be unacceptable, it appeared to be quite acceptable for a girl to hit a boy (page 29). Twenty five per cent of young people agreed with the statement "When girl hits a guy, it's really not a big deal". Female to male violence was not only viewed light-heartedly, it was also seen as (virtually) acceptable. On reflection, both genders agreed that this constituted a double standard, and that it was not acceptable really.

But there was no censure, and a good deal of hilarity generated by discussion of the topic in the female groups. In the male groups, acceptability was implied through their beliefs that there was no need to retaliate to female violence in any way (page 36). "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.”

“Acts by females of slapping, pushing or kicking their boyfriends were widespread. However, this was not described or seen as ‘violence’ by the majority of male or female participants.” With dating violence, ‘punching’ or ‘slapping’ your boyfriend to ‘get him in order’ was not seen as constituting violence. The key factor behind the use of ‘violence’ by 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’ or ‘to stop him behaving badly’. Neither males nor females indicated that males were likely to retaliate, suggesting that both groups viewed this kind of ‘violence’ as a bit of a joke. It was not something to be taken seriously.

“Guys deserve it”. Both sexes supported this point of view, which was based on the idea that ‘guys stuff up’, ‘guys can be majorly stupid’, ‘guys don’t listen so you have to get their attention’. Males appeared to agree with the perceived wisdom of society (and certainly of females) that they are ‘not as good at relationships’ as the females.

It was also found that while 41% of young people thought that “The man wanting to prove he’s boss/in control” was a common cause of domestic violence, 25% thought that “The woman wanting to prove she’s boss/ in control” was also a common cause.

As is apparent from the above the new survey has chosen to focus only on one side of the question of gender – a clear source of bias and the antithesis of the principle of gender equality that was upheld in the Crime Prevention Survey.

As the survey topic is domestic and family violence / intimate partner violence (DFV/IPV) and *not* violence against women, if the survey is going to include gendered questions, they should be asked equally of both genders, or gender should be removed entirely. Otherwise the study may unearth ‘evidence’ of “poor attitudes to violence against women” simply because it doesn't ask about attitudes to violence against men (or attitudes to violence in general)! The study may create the bias that it seeks to study.

While purporting to “better understand what young people think domestic and family violence is and in what types of relationships it occurs”, the new study then goes on to lead the respondent by defining domestic violence in question 20.

2. Survey Methodology

The Crime Prevention Survey 2001 was a nationally representative survey with a randomly selected sample group with participant’s aged 12 – 20; it used a paper-based questionnaire and undertook qualitative focus group sessions in addition to the survey.

The current sample group is self-selected not randomised, targets participants in

the 16-26+ year age range (not 12 -20), and recruitment is via “violence against women” advocacy networks, which is likely to see individuals of similar views overrepresented.

The current survey questionnaire is online and there is no way to confirm individuals completing it are actually in the demographic targeted. Whilst the Survey Monkey platform used for the survey has some basic optional security features such as preventing multiple responses from a single IP address, this measure may prevent some who wish to respond from doing so, or is easily circumvented by use of a proxy service by persons wishing to make multiple responses with intent to taint the data.

As already detailed in 1 above, the original survey has been severely truncated and modified introducing gender bias not evident in the original. Subtle rewording of individual questions can significantly change the meaning and make comparison with the original invalid. One example of rewording is the change of the statement

“It’s okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on” to

“It’s OK for a guy to force a girl to have sex with him if she flirted with him or led him on.”

Further unlike the original, the current survey addresses only attitudes and specifically excludes personal experiences or witnessing of family and domestic violence. Yet the role of intergenerational exposure to violence in increasing the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator is well recognised.

3. Survey Promotion

The 2 page promotional flyer (copy attached) contains significant factual errors, misrepresentations and selective citations.

A graphic on the flyer stats that “childhood exposure to intimate partner violence increased the likelihood of intergeneration violence particularly amongst boys” and attributes the source to F.E. Markowitz (2000)². The “particularly amongst boys” statement is false and is not found in the Markowitz study. This US study actually found that “results suggest that men and women in the sample are equally likely to hit their spouses and children.”

Another graphic selectively quotes from Crime Prevention Survey (2001): “One in four young people have witnessed domestic violence against their mother or step mother,” completely ignoring the reported experience of young male respondents.

² Markowitz, F.E. (2001). Attitudes and family violence: Linking intergenerational and cultural theories. *Journal of Family Violence* 16 (2), 205-218.

The survey actually found that whilst 23% of young people were aware of domestic violence against their mothers or stepmothers by their fathers or stepfathers, an almost identical proportion (22%) of young people were aware of domestic violence against their fathers or stepfathers by their mothers or stepmothers.

Much more common and damaging than either male-to-female or female-to-male unilateral violence was mutual (or reciprocal) couple violence with the authors concluding “the most severe disruption on all available indicators occurred in households where couple violence was reported.”

“Witnessing was also the strongest predictor of subsequent perpetration by young people. The best predictor of *perpetration* was witnessing certain types of *female to male* violence, whilst the best predictor of *victimisation* in personal relationships was having witnessed *male to female* violence.”

Yet another graphic states that “young women are 3 – 4 times more likely to experience violence than women overall” citing the source as Young Boyles and Dobson (2000), yet contemporary data from the 2012 ABS Personal Safety Survey³ demonstrates that young women aged 18 to 24 years are 2.4 times more likely to have experienced violence during the last 12 months than women overall, and that young men from the same age group are 2.8 times more likely to have experienced violence during the last 12 months than men overall.

What is clear from the selective citation of violence statistics in the flyer is that the researchers are not interested in a comprehensive examination of young people’s current attitudes towards the entire spectrum of DFV/IPV but rather approach the problem from the gender-biased “violence against women” paradigm.

Finally, although minor details, the following indicate a lack of attention to detail and compliance. The promotional flyer states the survey is likely to take 10 minutes to complete, yet the survey itself states 20 minutes, and the participant information sheet (only available on the White Ribbon web page) states 30 minutes is required. This possibly entices those who would be prepared to only to complete a short survey to complete a longer one. Neither the flyer nor survey give a convenient telephone number, fax number and e-mail address for the HREC or a local intermediary, should a participant wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the research project. Rather the survey directs only to the White Ribbon website where the relevant details would not be easily accessible to individuals without good IT/ Search skills.

In conclusion we see the current survey as significantly flawed and exhibiting strong gender bias whereas the original research was groundbreaking in its inclusiveness of both genders and openness to a variety of theoretical models of causation of DFV/IPV. The purported similarity of the two for comparison purposes is considered insulting to the researchers involved in the Crime Prevention Study

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). Personal Safety, Australia, 2012. Canberra: ABS.

2001 and demonstrates a preference for ideological belief over scientific rigor.

The problem of teen and dating violence is significant and a focus of intense academic interest worldwide. We owe it to our young people that research aiming to inform our approach and policies to deal with this issue is grounded in well designed inclusive and bias-free empirical research. We hope you will take these concerns seriously and consider withdrawal of approval for this project in its current form.

Yours sincerely,

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National Survey



on Young People's Attitudes towards Domestic and Family Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

The 2014 National Survey on Young People's Attitudes towards Domestic and Family Violence and Intimate Partner Violence (DFV/IPV) is an online research project led by Youth Action NSW and White Ribbon Australia, designed to develop an understanding of young people's (16-25 years) awareness of and attitudes towards DFV/IPV in 2014.

This survey will be the first national, comprehensive measurement of young people's understanding of and attitudes towards DFV/IPV since 1999. **The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and is entirely anonymous.** It is anticipated to be launched on 10 March 2014, with a closing date of 28 April 2014. **The survey and its distribution is confidential information prior to launch.**

Why is this research important?

In 1999, the Crime Research Centre produced a national survey of young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence, titled *Young People & Domestic Violence: National research on young people's attitudes to and experiences of domestic violence*. This survey found that young people had alarmingly low levels of understanding of DFV/IPV.

Since this report 15 years ago, there has not been any significant national research specifically targeting the attitudes of young people towards DFV/IPV. During this time, Australian society has undergone many societal changes and there has been significant work undertaken to prevent violence against women and address its causes.

The 2014 National Survey on Young People's Attitudes towards DFV/IPV seeks to provide an updated version of the survey conducted in 1999, in order to ascertain young people's current attitudes towards DFV/IPV, what young people understand DFV/IPV to be and what they believe the causes of this violence are.

Critically, the age group targeted for this survey, between 16 and 25 years are a completely new generation of young people whose personal attitudes towards the issue of DFV/IPV have developed during this 15 year period. As such, the data gathered from the survey will also provide a comparison with the data collected in the 1999 survey to provide an insight as to whether young people's attitudes towards violence have changed in the period between the two surveys and the progress being made in changing attitudes and behaviours to prevent violence. This research, used in conjunction with the 1999 survey, will provide a robust comparison through which longitudinal attitudinal change can be measured.

Improving an institutional understanding of young people's attitudes towards DVF/IPV will enable organisations, including Youth Action NSW and White Ribbon Australia, to more effectively address this violence by informing and developing current and future programs to address the specific needs amongst young people and prevent violence-supportive attitudes amongst this peer group, as indicated by the survey data.

What does the research involve?

The research involved is one online survey for young people aged 16-25 years. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and is entirely anonymous. The survey collects participants demographic information and asks a range of questions regarding their understanding of, and opinions and attitudes towards gender roles, domestic and family violence and relationships between young people. The questions in this survey only measure attitudes, and care has been taken to ensure questions do not seek disclosure of experiences of DFV/IPV.

How can you help?

In order to ensure a sound evidence base, the survey requires a large response base across young people from a diverse range of backgrounds including ethnicity, geography, age and religion. To achieve this, we are asking our partners and supporters to share this survey and encourage as many young people to respond to the survey as possible.

Research Ethics

The research survey has received ethics approval by the University of New South Wales. The survey has been carefully designed to ensure that ethical standards are upheld.

What will happen to this research?

The data from the survey will be compiled to produce the first comprehensive report on young people's understanding of and attitudes towards domestic and family violence in Australia since 1999.

In addition, survey data will:

- Measure changes in attitudes amongst young people between 1999 and 2014;
- Provide a research and evidence base for advocacy, campaigns and primary prevention programs targeting young people and DFV/IPV; and
- Be used in broader academic research conducted by Youth Action NSW, White Ribbon Australia, or other research partners.

What are the survey time frames?

The survey will be conducted in the first half of 2014. It is anticipated to be launched on 10 March, with a closing date of 28 April. Analysis of survey data and outcomes will be undertaken and reported on in the second half of 2014. Reports will be published on the websites of Youth Action NSW (www.youthaction.org.au) and White Ribbon Australia (www.whiteribbon.org.au).

Why focus on DFV/IPV?



One in three Australian women report having experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of fifteen and at least one woman is killed every week by a current or former partner^[i]. Intimate partner violence remains the leading contributor to death, disability and ill-health in Australian women aged 15-44 and is one of the greatest predictors of high prevalence mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety^[ii]. Research demonstrates that young people are already being exposed to, and influenced by, domestic violence and that young people are already being subjected to, and perpetrating, violence themselves^[iii]. These risk factors correlate with poor developmental, educational and vocational outcomes more broadly.

Further information

Further information about the issue of men's violence against women and its prevention can be found through the websites of Youth Action and White Ribbon Australia, provided below.

Information on the work of Youth Action can be found at www.youthaction.org.au.

Information on the work of White Ribbon Australia can be found at www.whiteribbon.org.au.

For more information on this survey, please contact admin@whiteribbon.org.au.

This survey will be conducted in collaboration with:



References

[i] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Virueda & Payne, 2010.

[ii] (United Nations, 2006; VicHealth, 2008)

[iii] Michael Flood and Lara Fergus, 2008, An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships.