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Domestic violence: issues and policy challenges

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Executive summary

- Domestic violence is a serious issue affecting millions around the world.
- The most pervasive form of violence experienced by women in Australia is violence perpetrated by a male intimate partner, commonly referred to as domestic violence. However, it is important to acknowledge that men and same sex relationships partners can also experience this form of violence.
- The underlying causes of domestic violence are complex with the result that there is a great deal of confusion and misinformation reflected in the public debate. However, there is general agreement that gender inequality, power imbalances and controlling behaviours within relationships are key determinants.
- Community attitudes towards gender roles, sexuality, domestic violence and sexual assault can strongly influence both the prevalence of domestic violence and disclosure/reporting rates. The language commonly used around this form of violence in the community can also trivialise or minimise the seriousness of the experience. Surveys have found that demographic factors such as age, country of birth and socio-economic status have only a limited influence on attitudes, but that those with low levels of support for gender equality are the strongest predictors for holding violence-supporting attitudes.
- Reasons for non-reporting incidents of domestic violence are complex but may include fear of the perpetrator, fear of not being believed or of being blamed, feelings of confusion, shame and embarrassment, fear of psychologically reliving the incident, or a reluctance to acknowledge the incident ever occurred.
- While most do not report incidences of domestic violence to the authorities, many seek advice or support from family members, friends or community services. Given that psychological responses to domestic violence can be complex, experts argue that proactive support services focusing on therapeutic emotional and psychological interventions may be more effective in encouraging disclosure and providing assistance than the criminal justice system in many instances.
- A wide variety of strategies have been employed to tackle domestic violence in Australia and internationally. Although many of the strategies to prevent domestic violence have now been ongoing for some decades, there is still a lack of reliable evidence as to what works. However, there is some evidence in the US that an integrated approach supported by sustained government funding may be effective in addressing the issues.
- Australia and comparable countries have much lower rates of domestic violence than many countries with higher levels of gender inequality. A WHO international review on the prevalence of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence notes that the global variation in the prevalence of violence against women highlights that this form of violence is not inevitable and can be prevented or reduced.
- The Council of Australian Government's central initiative designed to address domestic violence is the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*. The National Plan has been received

very positively by most stakeholders and commentators, but some argue that ongoing, integrated resourcing and funding across all jurisdictions is crucial in order to effect long-term change.

- Most are in agreement that this is a difficult problem requiring complex and coordinated responses, not one-off, sporadic initiatives and funding commitments. It is generally argued by most stakeholders and commentators that integrating responses and initiatives across the community, all jurisdictions and all levels of government is the best way to promote equality and reduce this form of violence.

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a serious issue affecting millions around the world. In 2013 the World Health Organisation (WHO) published the first systematic international review on the prevalence of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.¹ The review found that 35 per cent of women globally have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence, constituting a violation of human rights for more than one-third of the world's women. The review also estimated that 38 per cent of all murders of women worldwide and 6 per cent of all murders of men worldwide are committed by intimate partners.²

The prevalence and underlying causes of domestic violence are complex with the result that there is a great deal of confusion and misinformation reflected in the public debate. While there are no easy answers, this paper provides information in a simplified format on issues surrounding domestic violence drawing from key research (the paper focuses on Australia, but some international research is cited where relevant).

The paper includes an overview of the prevalence of this form of violence and some research findings on the underlying causes and the significance of prevailing community attitudes, providing an insight into the policy challenges facing any government that aims to reduce the levels of domestic violence. An overview of current policy approaches (including some international initiatives) and a brief overview of government policy responses to date are also included.

This paper complements a Parliamentary Library research paper that provides more detail on the levels of this form of violence in Australia—J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#) (2014).

What is domestic violence?

In its *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010–2022* (National Plan), the Council of Australian Governments targets domestic, family and sexual violence and provides definitions of these three terms:

- *domestic violence* refers to acts of violence between people who are in, or have been involved in, an intimate relationship. The violence may include physical, sexual, financial, emotional or psychological abuse. Emotional or psychological abuse may include a range of controlling behaviours such as the use of verbal threats, enforced isolation from family and friends, restrictions on finances and public or private humiliation
- *family violence* is a broader term referring to violence within families as well as between intimate partners. It is the term most commonly used to identify violence experienced in Indigenous communities as it includes a broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur within these families and
- *sexual violence* is an act of a sexual nature carried out against someone's will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion. It can refer to a broad range of behaviours that may include sexual threats, assault with an object, enforced prostitution or enforced sexual activity with a perpetrator or their acquaintances. Perpetrators may be an intimate partner, an acquaintance or a stranger, but those who experience sexual assault (both men and women) are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know.³

These forms of violence occur in all Australian communities and across all socio-economic groups. However, they are described by the National Plan as gendered crimes as they are more commonly experienced by women:

While a small proportion of men are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, the majority of people who experience this form of violence are women—in a home, at the hands of men they know.⁴

The most pervasive form of violence experienced by women in Australia is violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, commonly referred to as domestic violence—the focus of this paper.⁵ However, it is important to acknowledge that men and same sex relationships partners can also experience this form of violence.⁶

1. World Health Organisation (WHO), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and South African Medical Research Council, [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence](#) and [Executive summary](#), WHO, Geneva, 2013.

2. Ibid., pp. 2, 26 and 31.

3. Council of Australian Governments (COAG), [National plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010–2022](#), Department of Social Services (DSS), website, p. 2.

4. Ibid., p. 1.

What is the extent of the problem?

Most incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence go unreported with the result that it is not possible to measure the true extent of the problem. However, surveys on the prevalence of these forms of violence indicate that it is widespread across all cultures, ages and socio-economic groups.⁷

The 2012 Personal Safety Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides the most up-to-date prevalence estimates in Australia.⁸ The survey found that:

- 49 per cent of men aged 18 years and over and 41 per cent of women aged 18 years and over had experienced some form of violence since the age of 15. However, men are more likely to experience physical violence at the hands of a stranger while the majority of women who experience physical violence do so from someone known to them—usually an intimate partner
- women are more likely than men to experience physical assault by a male in their home—62 per cent of women compared to 8 per cent of men experienced their most recent incident of physical assault by a male in their home (i.e. most men who experience violence do so outside the home at the hands of another male) and
- both men and women who experience physical assault are reluctant to report it. In 2012 the ABS found that similar proportions of women and men (67 and 68 per cent respectively) had not been in contact with the police after their most recent incident of physical assault by a male.⁹

The Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) provides a concise summary of the Personal Safety Survey results, highlighting that since the age of 15:

- 1 in 6 Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner
- 1 in 19 Australian men had experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner
- 1 in 4 women had experienced emotional abuse from a current or former partner and
- 1 in 7 men had experienced emotional abuse from a current or former partner.¹⁰

While most women's experiences of violence occur in domestic settings perpetrated by someone known to them, it is important to note that the majority of women are also concerned for their safety outside of the home. For example, a recent Australian survey of 1,426 Australians found that nine in ten women had experienced street harassment and modified their behaviour to protect their personal safety in response:

- 87 per cent of Australian women had experienced at least one form of verbal or physical street harassment
- 40 per cent of Australian women do not feel safe when walking alone at night in the area where they currently live, compared to 17 per cent of men and
- 87 per cent of Australian women have changed their behaviour in at least one way to ensure their own personal safety in the last 12 months.¹¹

It would appear that many women (and some men) are at risk of violence in their homes and the majority of women are fearful of their safety and wellbeing outside the home.

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5. For more detail on domestic, family and sexual violence, including references to the levels of violence experienced by men, see J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#), Research paper series, 2014–15, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2014; A Dunkley and J Phillips, [Domestic violence in Australia: a quick guide to the issues](#), Research paper series, 2014–15, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 26 March 2015.
 6. See J Mulrone and C Chan, [Men as victims of domestic violence](#), Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse, 2005; C Chan, [Domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships](#), Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2005.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Personal safety survey Australia 2012](#), cat. no. 4906.0, ABS, Canberra, 2013.
 9. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), [Violence against women: key statistics](#), ANROWS website; and J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#), op. cit. Note: the ABS Personal Safety Survey results are often interpreted and analysed very differently by stakeholders with varying viewpoints. See for example, J Gilmore, 'The 'one in three' claim about male domestic violence victims is a myth', *Daily Life* (Canberra Times online) 30 April 2015.
 10. A Dunkley and J Phillips, [Domestic violence in Australia: a quick guide to the issues](#), op. cit.; and ANROWS, [Violence against women: key statistics](#), op. cit.
 11. M Johnson and E Bennett, [Everyday sexism: Australian women's experiences of street harassment](#), Briefing note, The Australia Institute, March 2015. Note: in other online surveys women have reported that unwanted harassment can start as young as eight years old. See K Edwards, 'The Reddit question no one should ignore', *Daily Life* (Canberra Times online), 13 April 2015.

What are the underlying causes?

While some individuals are more at risk than others, domestic violence occurs in most communities and across all socio-economic groups.¹² It is possible to identify both social (structural) and individual causes.

The underlying *social causes* are complex and not fully understood, but there is general agreement that gender inequality is a key determinant, particularly where there is social acceptance of narrowly constructed concepts of masculinity and an emphasis on traditional gender roles.¹³

Such power imbalances may be more pronounced in certain societies than others and levels of violence against women in certain regions are often correspondingly higher than others. The WHO international review identifies some of these regions and notes that there is growing evidence to show that global variation in the prevalence of violence is almost certainly related to socio-cultural factors, particularly where there are cultural views that support male authority and control over women or that foster a culture of violence more generally.¹⁴

However, even in those countries with lower rates of domestic violence and where women's status in the workplace and other public spheres may be relatively high, women still often do not enjoy equal social status in the private domain. In Australia, community attitude surveys outlined in the following section demonstrate that gender equality is often viewed very differently in the home than it is in the workplace. It is argued that such entrenched social inequality in the home, in combination with an acceptance of the use of violence by some individuals, can be a volatile or even lethal combination anywhere in the world, including Australia.¹⁵

Some are prepared to go further and argue that gender inequality may pose a broader threat at the international level. Sweden's foreign minister, Margot Wallstrom, recently argued that women are specifically targeted in every war or conflict around the globe and yet are often marginalised during the peace negotiation process and during the development of national policy. She argues that defining gender equality as a peace and national security issue should be taken into account as a matter of course when forming foreign policy.¹⁶

However, domestic violence cannot simply be a product of gender inequality since not all men are perpetrators of domestic violence—even in the most violent of cultures. Rather, domestic violence is also strongly associated with *individual behaviours*. The Australian Government's National Plan points out that 'a central element of domestic violence is that of an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling one's partner through fear'.¹⁷ Such power imbalances within a relationship may be perpetrated by both men and women through a range of controlling behaviours, including emotional or psychological abuse. This central element of control is well recognised by experts in the field and many intervention programs focus on assisting perpetrators to recognise the need to let go of these controlling behaviours. As one program coordinator and author explains, the problem is not 'that you lose control of yourself; it's that you take control of your partner. In order to change, you don't need to gain control over yourself, you need to let go of control'.¹⁸

More research is required on the causal factors of domestic violence, but in summary, key research to date points to both an imbalance of power and accompanying unequal rights and opportunities in society; together with controlling behavioural patterns on the part of the perpetrator as being the major contributors to the problem.¹⁹

12. See J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#), op. cit.

13. L Wall, [Gender equality and violence against women: what's the connection?](#), Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), ACSSA research summary, June 2014. See also A Powell, 'Rape culture: why our community attitudes to sexual violence matter', *The Conversation*, 17 September 2014; J Oberin and T Mitra-Kahn, 'Stopping violence before it occurs: responding to the pathways into gendered homelessness', *Parity*, 26(7), 2013.

14. WHO, [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence](#) and [Executive summary](#), op. cit.

15. L Wall, [Gender equality and violence against women: what's the connection?](#), op. cit.

16. L Tung, 'No offence meant: Sweden's feminist foreign policy', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 2015.

17. See National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children, [The National Council's plan for Australia to reduce violence against women and their children, 2009–2012, Background paper to Time for Action](#), Attachment A, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, March 2009, p. 13.

18. L Bancroft, *Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*, New York, 2002; cited in C Ford, 'Australian men are still using this defence to justify violence', *Daily Life* (Canberra Times online), 3 June 2015.

19. Ibid.

Why are community attitudes so important?

Community attitudes towards gender roles, sexuality, domestic violence and sexual assault can strongly influence both the prevalence of domestic violence and disclosure/reporting rates.²⁰ A lack of understanding on why partners stay in violent relationships continues to be common and a significant number of people believe that domestic violence is excusable in certain circumstances. For example, some believe that domestic violence is excusable if the perpetrator ‘truly regrets’ what they have done.²¹ The language commonly used around this form of violence in the community can also trivialise or minimise the seriousness of the experience—‘it was only a slap’.²² Such views pose significant barriers for those seeking support or understanding of their experiences.

In 2013 the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, the Social Research Centre and the University of Melbourne embarked on an update of the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) and in September 2014 the findings of the third survey were released. The report found that understanding of, and attitudes towards, domestic violence had not changed significantly since the previous survey was conducted in 2009 (although there had been a decrease in knowledge of where to turn to for help). Many still believed violence can sometimes be excused; there had been an increase in the number of Australians believing that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex; nearly eight in ten had no understanding of why someone might not feel able to leave a violent relationship; and more than half believed that women often fabricate cases of domestic violence.²³

The NCAS found that demographic factors such as age, country of birth and socio-economic status had only a limited influence on attitudes, but an important finding was that those with low levels of support for gender equality were the strongest predictors for holding violence-supporting attitudes.²⁴

Interestingly, the NCAS found that while there were high levels of support for gender equality in the workplace in Australia, almost 30 per cent of those surveyed were supportive of male dominance in private relationships.²⁵ One Australian survey exploring attitudes towards domestic violence by 16 to 25 year olds also found that one in five young men believed that men should take charge of their relationships with women.²⁶ Other surveys have found disparities in the attitudes men hold towards individual women within a family depending on the relationship. For example, one recent US survey (the Shriver Report) found that the majority of men surveyed wanted their daughters to be ‘independent’ and ‘strong’, but far fewer wanted their wives or partners to be independent (34 per cent) or strong (28 per cent).²⁷

Despite a series of gender equality and anti-violence programs and initiatives in Australia and other comparable countries, it would appear that many continue to support different standards in the home and there remains a significant lack of understanding in the community of the issues faced by those who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. Many argue that these entrenched attitudes and lack of understanding are the most significant contributing factors discouraging the reporting of incidences of violence, particularly when there may be great uncertainty on how family, friends and others will respond.²⁸ Certainly, the results of the ABS Personal Safety Survey in 2012 demonstrate a continuing reluctance by both men and women to formally report incidences of intimate partner violence to the relevant authorities.²⁹

20. J Cale et. al., [Gender, age and the perceived causes, nature and extent of domestic and dating violence in Australian society](#), UNSW, prepared for White Ribbon Australia, March 2015; K Diemer, [Women’s safety is a men’s issue: men’s attitudes to violence against women and what that means for men](#), White Ribbon Research Series, December 2014.

21. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, the Social Research Centre and the University of Melbourne, [National Community Attitudes Survey](#), 2014, VicHealth website. For follow-up analysis see [Many young people ready to attribute blame to victims and think tracking a partner is acceptable](#), media release, 24 September 2015, VicHealth website.

22. S Fisher, [From violence to coercive control: renaming men’s abuse of women](#), White Ribbon Research series, 2011.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. White Ribbon Australia, [Australian young people deem domestic violence as commonplace in Australian society today](#), media release, 24 March 2015; and J Cale et al, [Gender, age and the perceived causes, nature and extent of domestic and dating violence in Australian society](#), op. cit.

27. K Edwards, ‘[Men want their daughters to be independent and strong](#)’, *Daily Life* (Canberra Times online), 28 April 2015; [The Shriver report snapshot: an insight into the 21st century man](#), A Women’s Nation website.

28. A Powell, ‘[Rape culture: why our community attitudes to sexual violence matter](#)’, *The Conversation*, 17 September 2014.

29. J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#), op. cit.

Why are reporting rates so low?

There are numerous reasons why a person who experiences domestic or sexual violence might be reluctant to formally report such incidences.³⁰ Reasons may include fear of the perpetrator, fear of not being believed or of being blamed, fear of approaching the police or medical profession, feelings of confusion, shame and embarrassment, fear of psychologically reliving the incident, or a reluctance to acknowledge the incident ever occurred, particularly if sexual assault was involved.³¹ Some may be discouraged from formally reporting the incident due to a lack of appropriate support. Others may feel that the incident is too trivial to report and will try and deal with it privately.³²

If sexual assault is involved, those affected commonly experience a range of behavioural and psychological responses (lasting months or even years) that are unique to this form of violence, discouraging disclosure.³³ Some US research has found that sexual assaults are less likely to be reported than other physical assaults in many circumstances—unless force has been used when those affected are more likely to classify the assault as a ‘real rape’.³⁴ However, in domestic violence settings both physical and sexual assaults, even those perpetrated with force, are less likely to be reported than assaults that occur outside of the home.³⁵

As mentioned previously, the National Plan points out that ‘a central element of domestic violence is that of an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling one’s partner through fear’.³⁶ As a result, those who experience this form of violence often report feelings of powerlessness and a sense of loss of control over their bodies and personal safety. They also commonly report feelings of emotional numbness, denial, guilt, self-blame, shame, isolation and loss of confidence.³⁷ Across the board those affected often report that the worst aspect of domestic violence is the emotional and psychological and verbal abuse and not necessarily the physical abuse.³⁸

Such complex and varied emotional responses all contribute to reluctance by the majority to formally report domestic violence. The ABS Personal Safety Survey 2012 estimated that 80 per cent of women and 95 per cent of men had never reported an incident of violence by a current partner to police and 58 per cent of women and 80 per cent of men who experienced violence committed by a previous partner had never reported it to the police.³⁹ In 2013 the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) published a study examining this issue, finding that the most common reasons for not reporting domestic violence to the police were fear of further violence from the perpetrator, shame or embarrassment, and a belief that the incident was not serious enough to report. Some said that they were reluctant to approach the police, but would have if they had felt that police would be more understanding.⁴⁰

While most do not report incidences of domestic violence to the authorities, many seek advice or support from family members, friends or community services.⁴¹ According to the ABS survey, 74 per cent of women had confided in someone about violence experienced at the hands of a current partner while only 20 per cent had reported it to the police. In the case of violence committed by a former partner, 93 per cent of women had told

30. For example, see D Lievore, [Non-reporting and hidden recording of sexual assault: an international literature review](#), Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra, June 2003; J Mouzos and T Makkai, [Women’s experience of male violence: findings from the Australian component of the International Violence against Women Survey \(IVAWS\)](#), AIC, Canberra, 2011.

31. D Lievore, [Recidivism of sexual assault offenders: rates, risk factors and treatment efficacy](#), AIC, Canberra, May 2004; and A Lizotte, ‘[The uniqueness of rape: reporting assaultive violence to the police](#)’, *Crime and Delinquency*, 31(2), 1985.

32. J Mouzos and T Makkai, op. cit.

33. A Lizotte, op. cit.

34. Y Chen and A Ullman, ‘[Women’s reporting of sexual and physical assaults to police in the National Violence against Women Survey](#)’, *Violence Against Women*, 16(3), March 2010; K Wolitzky-Taylor et al, ‘[Is reporting of rape on the rise? A comparison of women with reported versus unreported rape experiences in the national women’s study replication](#)’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(4), 2011.

35. Y Chen and A Ullman, op. cit.

36. See [The National Council’s plan for Australia to reduce violence against women and their children, 2009–2012, Background paper to Time for Action](#), Attachment A, March 2009, p. 13.

37. [The National Council’s plan for Australia to reduce violence against women and their children, 2009–2012, Background paper to Time for Action](#), op. cit.

38. J Howard and M Wright, [Listening to what matters: a report on the partner contact component of a men’s behaviour change program](#), 2008, pp. 20 and 31; J Hill, [A cycle of violence](#), Background briefing, ABC website, 3 May 2015.

39. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Personal safety survey Australia 2012, ‘Actions taken in response to partner violence’](#), cat. no. 4906.0, ABS, Canberra, 2013.

40. E Birdsey and L Snowball, [Reporting violence to police: a survey of victims attending domestic violence services](#), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) website, October 2013.

41. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Personal safety survey Australia 2012](#), op. cit.

someone about it.⁴² Although men were less likely to have ever told anyone about violence experienced by a current partner (46 per cent), 79 per cent of men reported telling someone about violence committed by a previous partner.⁴³

Given that the majority are often prepared to discuss domestic violence in an informal or community setting, experts in the field suggest that it is unsurprising that those affected often prefer to seek support, not from the criminal justice system, but from elsewhere in the community where their experiences will be understood and validated by a friend or a community services professional who understands the complexities of domestic violence.⁴⁴ One Australian social commentator specifically discussing why women do not report sexual assault argues that the safety of women cannot be addressed exclusively in terms of law and order due to the adversarial system that often treats such personal assaults that violate intimate physical and psychological boundaries no differently from other types of crime.⁴⁵ It could be argued that these comments are just as applicable to those affected by domestic violence more generally and many assert that more community-based interventions or services focusing on the individual may be a better way to encourage disclosure and provide support.⁴⁶

There are many different approaches that take such sensitivities into account, including services based around ‘narrative therapy’ which acknowledges the importance of telling your story in your own way in a supportive setting.⁴⁷ Other approaches can include ‘restorative justice conferencing’ or ‘family group conferencing’ where all parties, including the perpetrator, receive counselling together in a supportive setting where the importance of ‘ownership’ of the narratives and processes is acknowledged and respected.⁴⁸ Even in the highly sensitive area of sexual assault, such approaches have been found to be an effective way to respond to violence outside of the formal criminal justice system in some instances.⁴⁹ Similarly, ‘transformative justice’ is an approach that focuses on dignity, respect and healing for those affected and accountability and transformation for perpetrators and not retribution or punishment.⁵⁰ Many often report a desire for their partners to receive such ‘transformative’ assistance within the community services environment in order to help them change their behaviour and stop the violence—they are not necessarily focused on a punitive, criminal justice response.⁵¹

In summary, domestic violence reporting rates to the authorities are very low, but the majority of those affected eventually discuss the violence or the controlling behaviour with someone in the community. Given that psychological responses to domestic violence can be complex, experts in the field argue that proactive support services focusing on therapeutic emotional and psychological interventions may be more effective in encouraging disclosure and providing assistance than the criminal justice system that focuses on an incident and the appropriate punishment.⁵² Certainly many of those who access such services generally speak very highly of the community-based support sector which treated them with respect and provided non-judgemental support.⁵³

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. J Howard and M Wright, op. cit., p. 23.

45. F Measham, [Adrian Bailey, recidivism and structural responses to sexual violence against women](#), ‘This is complicated’ blog, 27 March 2015. Fatima Measham is a Melbourne-based writer who also contributes to online magazine, [Eureka Street](#) and [opinion pieces](#) on the ABC news blog.

46. M Kim, [‘Alternative interventions to violence: creative interventions’](#), *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 4, 2006.

47. For example; Victorian Department of Human Services, [Practice guidelines: women’s and children’s family violence counselling and support programs. Safety, dignity, empowerment and human rights](#), Victorian Department of Human Services website, 2008; K Muller, [‘Journeys of freedoms: responding to the effects of domestic violence’](#), *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3/4, 2005; S Broderick and P Bazeley, [‘Outcomes of explicit affective practice: an evaluation of the counselling practice of the Goulburn family support service’](#), *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 35, Winter 2013; A Burton, [‘From Restorative justice to an explicit affective practice’](#), *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 15, Autumn 2006; H Clark and A Quadara, [Insights into sexual assault perpetration: giving voice to victims/survivors knowledge](#), Research report 18, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), December 2010.

48. S Broderick and P Bazeley, op. cit.; A Burton, op. cit.

49. [‘I just wanted him to hear me: sexual violence and the possibilities of restorative justice’](#), *Journal of Law and Society*, 39(2), 8 May 2012; Dr L Huntsman, [Family group conferencing in a child welfare context](#), Literature review research report, NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS), July 2006.

50. A Nocella, [‘An overview of the history and theory of transformative justice’](#), *Peace and Conflict Review*, 6(1), 2011.

51. H Douglas and T Stark, [Stories from survivors: domestic violence and criminal justice interventions](#), T C Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland, 2010, p. 89. See also [‘Changing men’](#), *Four Corners*, ABC, 25 February 2008.

52. A Burton, [‘From restorative justice to an explicit affective practice’](#), op. cit.

53. H Douglas and T Stark, [Stories from survivors: domestic violence and criminal justice interventions](#), op. cit., pp. 39–41.

Although a criminal justice response may be necessary or preferable in many cases, perhaps better coordination and integration between community support and police services, together with a radical change in focus from punitive to non-judgemental, transformative responses and interventions more generally, might encourage higher reporting rates. It is argued that this is important since a lack of reporting results in a lack of consequences for offenders.⁵⁴ However, as the following sections illustrate, there is still limited research to support the effectiveness of community-based and other interventions and more analysis is required in order to inform policy makers searching for lasting solutions.

What is being done about it?

A wide variety of strategies have been employed to tackle domestic violence in Australia and internationally. These include:

- primary prevention programs
- integrated intervention programs
- mass-screening programs
- programs for violence perpetrators
- programs for women who have been subject to domestic violence and
- legislative approaches.

The evidence for the effectiveness of any one class of programs is mixed, partly at least due to methodological difficulties with measuring effectiveness. None of these strategies alone has been definitively demonstrated to be the most effective way to stop domestic violence, and it seems likely that some combination of all of these approaches is necessary to make a difference.

Primary prevention and community attitude campaigns

A public health approach to preventing domestic violence classifies preventative strategies into primary, secondary and tertiary strategy, although the differences between the levels are not always clear-cut. Primary prevention strategies aim to prevent domestic violence before it begins, whereas secondary prevention is focused on at-risk populations and tertiary prevention aims to prevent reoccurrence of violence after it has occurred.⁵⁵

Primary prevention can encompass a range of approaches, a number of which are listed as part of the ‘spectrum of prevention’—a tool used for developing comprehensive prevention strategies in relation to sexual violence. These are:

- strengthening individual knowledge and skills
- promoting community education
- educating providers
- fostering coalitions and networks
- changing organisational practices and
- influencing policies and legislation.⁵⁶

Perhaps the highest profile community attitude campaign operating in Australia targeting domestic violence is the White Ribbon campaign. White Ribbon describes itself as ‘Australia’s only national, male led Campaign to end men’s violence against women.’⁵⁷ White Ribbon is a primary prevention campaign that ‘seeks to change the

54. F Measham, op. cit.

55. I Walden and L Wall, [Reflecting on primary prevention of violence against women: the public health approach](#), ACSSA Issues, 19, 2014; L Chamberlain and JA Rivers-Cochran, [A prevention primer for domestic violence: terminology, tools, and the public health approach](#), National Resource Centre on Violence Against Women website, 2011.

56. R David, LF Parks and L Cohen, [Sexual violence and the spectrum of prevention: towards a community solution](#), National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2006.

57. White Ribbon Australia, [‘What is White Ribbon?’](#), 2014, White Ribbon website.

attitudes and behaviours that lead to and perpetuate men's violence against women, by engaging boys and men to lead social change.⁵⁸

A researcher provides a concise explanation of the logic behind domestic violence primary prevention strategies targeting men:

We will only make progress in preventing violence against women if we can change the attitudes, identities, and relations among some men, which sustain violence. To stop the physical and sexual assault of women and girls, we must erode the cultural and collective supports for violence found among many men and boys and replace them with norms of consent, sexual respect, and gender equality, and we must foster just and respectful gender relations in relationships, families, and communities. While some men are part of the problem, all men are part of the solution.⁵⁹

There appears to be little in the way of independent evaluation of the success of the White Ribbon campaign in reducing levels of domestic violence; however this tends to be true of primary prevention programs targeting violence generally.⁶⁰ For example, independent analysis of a 2006 campaign White Ribbon ran in Australia featuring self-harm suggested this particular campaign was not effective at conveying the intended messages.⁶¹ Some components of the program, such as the schools program, have had more targeted evaluations, which found educators who 'focused on respectful behaviours and promoting a culture of respect in their school communities had greater success with their programs'.⁶²

Respectful relationships education

One common approach taken for is to target programs at young people, particularly school students. The primary prevention of domestic violence programs targeted at students typically adopt a feminist-based approach and emphasise the role of power and control and gender norms in domestic violence. The programs aim to prevent domestic violence through education and changing attitudes towards domestic violence, for example through 'respectful relationships' programs.⁶³

Since 2010 the Australian Government has funded The Line, which is an evidence-based social marketing campaign that 'encourages healthy, equal and respectful relationships by challenging and changing attitudes and behaviours that support violence against women'.⁶⁴ The campaign is targeted towards people aged 12 to 20, and also provides information for parents and teachers. In addition, in 2015 the Australian Government announced \$5 million funding to expand the Safer Schools website to include resources on respectful relationships and 'change the attitudes of young people to violence'.⁶⁵

Evaluations of the effectiveness of school-based respectful relationships programs are often equivocal. A systematic review by US-based researchers published in 2006 examined 11 studies of primary prevention programs for domestic violence targeting school students. The researchers found that there were some promising results; however the studies were generally of poor quality with short follow-up periods and lack of assessments of relevant behaviour. Even where the evaluations were more thorough, there remained questions about why the programs worked or whether the results were likely to also apply to other similar programs.⁶⁶ A

58. White Ribbon Australia, 'FAQ', 2014, White Ribbon website.

59. M Flood, 'Involving men in efforts to end violence against women', *Men and masculinities*, 14(3), 2011, pp. 358–377, p. 372.

60. Ibid., pp. 358–377.

61. RJ Donovan, G Jalleh, L Fielder and R Ouschan, 'Ethical issues in pro-social advertising: the Australian 2006 White Ribbon Day campaign', *Journal of Public Affairs*, 9, 2009, pp. 5–19.

62. S Dyson, C Barrett and M Platt, *The school's a calmer place: Promoting cultures of respect in schools (White Ribbon Foundation: 2009 primary prevention training program for principals – an evaluation)*, 2011.

63. For more detail see the Governments' *Our Watch* website which highlights the [respectful relationships programs](#) in [Victoria](#) in particular.

64. Australian Government, 'The Line webpage', National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children website.

65. M Turnbull (Prime Minister), M Cash (Minister for Women, Minister for Employment, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service), G Brandis (Attorney-General), S Ley (Minister for Health), C Porter (Minister for Social Services), N Scullion (Minister for Indigenous Affairs), M Field (Minister for Communications) and S Birmingham (Minister for Education), 'Women's Safety Package to Stop the Violence', media release, 24 September 2015.

66. DJ Whitaker, S Morrison, C Lindquist, SR Hawkins, JA O'Neil, AM Nesius, A Matthew and L Reese, 'A critical review of interventions for the primary prevention of perpetration of partner violence, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 11, 2006, pp. 151–166.

more recent review found two programs that appeared to be effective in reducing intimate partner violence, but conceded that generally evidence for the effectiveness of school-based programs was not encouraging.⁶⁷

The effectiveness of relationships education programs in Australia has also been uneven. In 2015 the advocacy organisation 'Our Watch' argued that, in Australia, 'less-than-ideal practice remains the norm, and factors such as constraints on school time and limited resources of both schools and support organisations mean that many schools struggle to implement good-practice programs'.⁶⁸ Our Watch further cautions that substandard relationships education programs can be 'ineffective and in some cases even harmful'.⁶⁹ However, it also notes that 'nationally, there are several well-evaluated examples of such good-practice schools-based programs'.⁷⁰ Current research into best practice delivery of relationships education in schools promotes the 'whole-school' approach. This involves the 'engagement of school leadership, parents and community organisations, as well as classroom-based learning across curriculum subjects, teacher training and supportive school policies'.⁷¹

There has been an increased focus on respectful relationship programs in the last five years in Australia. Between 2009 and 2014, the Australian Government invested in 32 one-off Respectful Relationships projects across three funding rounds in school and non-school settings.⁷² Following this, relationships education in schools has been funded by state and territory governments. Respectful relationships education is included in the Australian curriculum Health and Physical Education (F–10) area, and a 2014 review found 'quite a lot of support' for its inclusion, though recommended schools should be given greater flexibility to determine the level where the topic was introduced and how education was delivered'.⁷³

Only some states and territories currently teach this aspect of the Australian Curriculum, so while all state and territory government school curricula currently include some level of relationship education, there continues to be variation.⁷⁴ In 2015, New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria announced the addition of new respectful relationships education components to their school curricula, which will address domestic and gender-based violence.⁷⁵ The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) also announced funding for respectful relationships.⁷⁶

These announcements illustrate a desire to improve community attitudes on violence against women. As outlined above, recent Australian surveys on attitudes towards violence against women have found that the majority of Australians do not endorse attitudes supportive of violence against women. Half of the respondents, however, believed that women fabricate cases of domestic violence to assist them in family law cases, and that young people, and particularly young men, were more likely to endorse attitudes supportive of violence.⁷⁷ This suggests that there is still an important role to play for effective programs targeting community attitudes, however these primary prevention campaigns are not designed to help those already affected by domestic violence and they do not replace programs aimed at perpetrators or women who have been abused.

67. M Ellsberg, DJ Arango, M Morton, F Gennari, S Kiplesund, M Contreras and C Watts, 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?', *The Lancet*, 21 November 2014, pp. 1–12.

68. Our Watch, [Working with children and young people](#), Policy brief 5, May 2015, pp. 6–9.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

72. Senate Community Affairs Committee, Answers to Question on Notice, Social Services Portfolio, Budget Estimates 2015–16, 15 July 2015, [Question No: SQ15-000575](#).

73. Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), '[News: Sexuality in the Australian Curriculum webpage](#)', Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority website, 22 July 2014; Department of Education and Training, [Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final Report](#), Australian Government, October 2014, p. 205.

74. A Mitchell, K Patrick, W Heywood, P Blackman and M Pitts, [National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013](#), Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, April 2014, pp. 67–69.

75. P Goward (NSW Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Medical Research, Assistant Minister for Health, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault) and A Piccoli (Minister for Education), '[NSW Syllabus Stronger on Domestic Violence Prevention](#)', media release, 3 July 2015; A Palaszczuk (Queensland Premier and Minister for the Arts) and S Fentiman (Queensland Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs), '[Palaszczuk Government says Not Now, Not Ever](#)', media release, 18 August 2015; J Rockliff (Tasmanian Minister for Education and Training), '[Family Violence Action Plan: Education](#)', media release, 13 August 2015; J Merlino (Victorian Minister for Education) and F Richardson (Victorian Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence), '[New Curriculum Supports Students to Build Healthy Relationships and Understanding](#)', media release, 21 August 2015.

76. Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government, '[Budget 2015–2016: Domestic Violence Statement](#)', Treasury website.

77. C Angus, '[Domestic and family violence](#)', *Briefing paper no 5/2015, NSW Parliamentary Research Service*, May 2015.

Perpetrator programs

There are two main approaches to intervention programs (which usually take the form of group programs) that target perpetrators:

- psychoeducational programs—the most common approach, and usually employing a feminist perspective of domestic violence that places the responsibility for the violence with the perpetrator and highlights the contribution of patriarchal gender relations in contributing to domestic violence by explicitly and implicitly sanctioning men's use of power and control over women. The Duluth approach, discussed below under Integrated Intervention Programs, typically employs a feminist psychoeducational approach and
- cognitive behavioural groups—a more traditionally psychological approach, these groups focus on violence as a learned behaviour. The groups teach participants how to recognise the antecedents of their own use of violence and how to substitute violent with non-violent strategies. This approach is also commonly used to treat other forms of behaviour such as sexual offending.⁷⁸

In recent years there have been a number of literature reviews and meta-analyses (studies that collate large numbers of similar studies to increase the statistical power of the analysis) of domestic violence perpetrator programs. The evaluation of these programs is complicated by the variety of different program approaches and the lack of high quality research. In general, the research has found that there is little difference between the effectiveness of psychoeducational and cognitive behavioural interventions.⁷⁹

Most of the research on these programs has been undertaken in the United States, and there is little work on how applicable the results of the research might be to the effectiveness of similar programs run in an Australian context. A review of evaluations of Australian sex offender treatment programs, which share many features with cognitive behavioural approaches to domestic violence, found small reductions in re-offending in most of the programs. However, most evaluations did not use control groups (groups of offenders who did not receive the treatment for the purposes of comparison), and were therefore unable to demonstrate that it was the program that caused the reduction in offending.⁸⁰

While evaluations tend to find that men who complete interventions programs often have lower levels of recidivism, drop-out rates are very high. Systematic evaluations have found few rigorous studies of perpetrator programs that reported significant positive results. Overseas studies that have looked at perpetrator programs combined with other interventions such as substance abuse programs or couples therapy have been inconclusive.⁸¹

Studies have tended to find that, in terms of effectiveness, men who were older, more educated, and more likely to be employed are more likely to complete programs. Men who are younger and have a history of alcohol or substance abuse are most likely to re-offend.⁸² There is increasing evidence that it is important to match programs to offender characteristics, highlighting the need for accurate screening and assessment tools, which are discussed in more detail below.⁸³

While perpetrator programs play an obvious role in preventing domestic violence, they only address one aspect of the broader issue of domestic violence. Questions arise as to how best to ensure that the men who need these programs get referred to them, and that the women who are abused by these men have access to appropriate services. This has led to the development of integrated approaches, which encompass the responses of police, courts and social services to preventing and stopping domestic violence.

Integrated intervention programs

One of the recommendations from the joint Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and New South Wales Law Reform Commission (NSWLRC) report into family violence was the development of an integrated response:

78. JC Babcock, CE Green and C Robie, '[Does batterers' treatment work? A meta-analytic review of domestic violence treatment](#)', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23, 2004, pp. 1023–1053.

79. Ibid.

80. Urbis, [Literature review on domestic violence perpetrators](#), Department of Social Services (DSS) website.

81. M Ellsberg, DJ Arango, M Morton, F Gennari, S Kiplesund, M Contreras and C Watts, op. cit., pp. 1–12.

82. R Jewkes, '[What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence review of the effectiveness of response mechanisms in preventing violence against women and girls](#)', June 2014.

83. Urbis, op. cit.

Integrated responses offer clear benefits for service delivery to victims, including—importantly for this Inquiry—improving the experience of victims involved in multiple proceedings across different legal frameworks. For example, co-location of services facilitates victims' access to a range of options and referrals. Another benefit is that such responses enable networks to be formed across services and government departments at a local level, fostering collaboration and communication between key players in different legal frameworks, and providing ongoing improvements to practice and understanding.⁸⁴

The prime model for integrated intervention programs is a program originally established in Duluth in Minnesota in the United States, commonly referred to as the 'Duluth program':

The model, developed in Minnesota, is based on a strong interagency approach closely linked to the judicial system, whereby the ongoing safety of victims is given paramount importance. It takes account of research demonstrating that women may continue in relationships with abusive partners because of a lack of economic resources, social support networks, and low self-efficacy (amongst other factors).... The focus of the Duluth model is thus much broader than just intervention with offenders. It is a system response to domestic violence forging an intersectoral approach with formal protocols and responsibilities that are not centered or reliant on offender rehabilitation.⁸⁵

The Duluth approach includes a high level of integration with the criminal justice system, particularly in terms of referrals of perpetrators to programs by police and the courts, and may feature mandatory arrest policies for police encountering domestic violence.⁸⁶ The intervention involves group counselling for perpetrators using a feminist-informed psychoeducational approach which places the primary cause of domestic violence as patriarchal ideology and conceptualises violence as being the exercise of power and control over women.⁸⁷ While having an integrated approach is seen as important, research has determined that the group intervention component of the Duluth approach appears to have at best a very small effect on recidivism.⁸⁸

Many Australian intervention programs have been heavily influenced by the Duluth Model, offering a wide variety of integrated responses and programs.⁸⁹ Some of the Australian evaluation notes that physical safety, housing stability and emotional wellbeing can greatly improve under the integrated model approach, but that more needs to be done in terms of integrating increased perpetrator responsibility to ensure ongoing safety and wellbeing of those affected by domestic violence.⁹⁰

There have been some recent moves to adopt integrated responses more widely in Australia, and the 2010 ALRC/NSWLRC report noted that the most comprehensive integrated responses operated in the ACT and Tasmania. While most other Australian states and territories had some form of integrated program, and many had whole of government strategies or policy documents, in most cases the programs were only in operation in a small number of local areas. Well developed, well established state-wide programs, as opposed to isolated trial sites, appear to be much more the exception than the rule.⁹¹

Both the ACT and Tasmanian integrated responses include both policy and operational elements. The ACT Family Violence Intervention Project (FVIP) has a policy, rather than legislative basis, and involves policing, prosecutions, the courts, corrective services, youth and family services, and victims of crime organisations. The efforts are coordinated by a committee and chaired by the Victims of Crime Coordinator and it operates with a Duluth-style approach including pro-arrest policies, victim support, and perpetrator programs as a sentencing option. Tasmania has adopted a whole-of-government approach, with the Department of Justice responsible for implementation. Components include a 24 hour Family Violence Response and Referral Line, specialist domestic

84. Australian Law Reform Commission and NSW Law Reform Commission, *Family Violence – A National Legal Response (Summary Report)*, ALRC Final Report Summary 114/NSWLRC Final Report Summary 128, October 2010, p. 38.

85. A Day, D Chung, P O'Leary and E Carson, 'Programs for men who perpetrate domestic violence: an examination of the issues underlying the effectiveness of intervention programs', *Journal of Family Violence*, 24, 2009, pp. 203–212.

86. RM Sartin, DJ Hansen, MT Huss, 'Domestic violence treatment response and recidivism: a review and implications for the study of family violence', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11(5), September–October 2006, pp. 425–440.

87. JC Babcock, CE Green, C Robie, 'Does batterers' treatment work? A meta-analytic review of domestic violence treatment', op. cit.

88. A Day, D Chung, P O'Leary and E Carson, op. cit.

89. A Day et. al., *Integrated responses to domestic violence: legally mandated intervention programs for male perpetrators*, Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice no. 404, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra, December 2010.

90. S Meyer, *Victims experiences of short-term and long-term safety and wellbeing: findings from an examination of an integrated response to domestic violence*, Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice no. 478, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra, June 2014.

91. Australian Law Reform Commission and NSW Law Reform Commission, *Family Violence – A National Legal Response (Final Report)*, Volume 1, ALRC Report 114/NSWLRC Report 128, October 2010.

violence police teams and police prosecutors, and weekly case coordination meetings attended by relevant agencies concerning all active cases in each policing district. In general, both the ACT and Tasmanian approaches are characterised by a high level of organisation and coordination between agencies, tied together by a wide-ranging policy approach.⁹²

As a recent example of an integrated approach to domestic violence, the NSW government has introduced a scheme called *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway*, which is 'a shared commitment to improving the response to domestic and family violence through collaborative, integrated service provision and improved information sharing'—initially introduced at two sites for the first nine months, the program will eventually be in operation at 28 sites across NSW by 2019.⁹³ Prior to the development of this program the integrated approaches used in NSW tended to be small and localised.⁹⁴

The ongoing evaluation of this program also highlights the extent to which the issue of domestic violence crosses social groups in Australia. Rather than being an issue constrained to women in lower socioeconomic groups, reporting on referral rates at the two trial sites of Waverley and Orange demonstrates that women in more affluent areas are still at substantial risk from domestic violence:

The figures... reveal that 1205 eastern suburbs women were referred by police to the Safer Pathways pilot site at Waverley Local Court between September and February. Of the eight women referred every day for being at serious risk of violence, two are at immediate risk of being killed....

In Orange, 694 women were referred between September and February. One-third were at risk of being killed, a much higher proportion than at Waverley.⁹⁵

One of the interesting features of the NSW scheme is the integration of a risk assessment tool, the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT). The tool is used to identify the level of threat to the victim, allowing resources to be prioritised for victims for whom the threat is most serious. The tool must be used by police responding to all instances of domestic violence.⁹⁶ Generally, these tools have not received thorough evaluation in terms of effectiveness.⁹⁷

While integrated programs seem obvious from a public policy perspective, coordinating the many services that may be involved, potentially across local, state and the federal governments, has considerable challenges, possibly explaining the tentative moves towards integrated approaches in many states and territories.

Screening programs

An important component of any intervention into domestic violence is to identify when violence is occurring. While the integrated responses discussed above generally deal with domestic violence that has come to the attention of the police or criminal justice system, a large amount of domestic violence goes unreported. One way of identifying some of this unreported violence is through other services used by those at high risk.

The Australian Clinical Practice Guidelines for Antenatal Care (Australian Guidelines) state that domestic violence is relatively common during pregnancy and that '[a]ntenatal care provides an opportunity to ask women about exposure to violence especially at home or in their family.' The Australian Guidelines note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may not disclose domestic violence to health professionals, and that any responses to these women need to be appropriate to the woman and her community.⁹⁸

The Australian Guidelines do not recommend a particular screening tool, however a recent review looked at screening tools for domestic violence that were designed for large-scale community screening programs in

92. Ibid.

93. New South Wales, Department of Justice, [It stops here: safer pathways overview](#), September 2014.

94. Australian Law Reform Commission and NSW Law Reform Commission, [Family Violence – A National Legal Response \(Final Report\)](#), op. cit. Note: however, some other NSW programs such as the 'Going Home Staying Home' have not been received favourably with stakeholders arguing that the tender process has forced some of the oldest women's refuges in Australia to close in favour of larger faith-based organisations offering mainly generalist services. See J Hill, 'Home truths: the cost and causes of domestic violence', *Monthly*, 1 March 2015; and A Summers, 'Opinion: Fresh struggle to save women's services', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 2015.

95. R Olding, 'Domestic abuse exposed in the eastern suburbs', *Sun Herald*, 15 March 2015, p. 9.

96. NSW Government, [Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool](#), August 2014.

97. Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'Family violence: Towards a holistic approach to screening and risk assessment in family support services', *AFRC Briefing No. 17*, September 2010.

98. Department of Health, 'Domestic Violence', Clinical Practice Guidelines Antenatal Care – Module 1, 23 April 2013.

healthcare settings. The review examined four tools, all of which ranged from three to eight questions. Two instruments were designed to be administered by family doctors, one was designed for emergency departments, and one designed to be used with pregnant women. The review concluded that good evidence showing the effectiveness of these screening tools was currently lacking. While many of the current screening tools are promising, more research with diverse populations is needed before they should be relied upon for screening programs.⁹⁹ There appears to be little evidence, beyond the NSW screening program discussed below, as to the extent or effectiveness of screening for domestic violence in Australia.

As an example of the otherwise undetected domestic violence that is identified by screening programs, the NSW Area Health Services have been undertaking routine screening of female clients for domestic violence from 2001, and the Local Health Districts from 2011. Screening is undertaken with all women who attend antenatal and early childhood health services and women aged 16 and over who attend alcohol and other drug and mental health services. The screening instrument is a relatively straightforward four questions asking the woman if they have been hit, slapped or hurt in other ways by their partner, if they are afraid of their partner, whether they are safe to go home, and whether they would like some assistance.

The snapshot data for November 2011 revealed that 68 per cent of the approximately 22,000 women who attended a participating service were screened. Just under 1,000 (6.1 per cent of screened women) had experienced domestic violence in the past 12 months, and just over 1,000 resulted in a referral or a notification (to police, community services, etc.).¹⁰⁰

In a discussion about domestic violence risk assessment tools, a report prepared for the Department of Justice in Canada states that they have strengths and limitations. The strengths include providing a common language among professionals, ensuring that services are allocated on the basis of need, removing the reliance on professional judgement, and allowing transparency and accountability for decision makers and the criminal justice system. The limitations include the lack of professional standards for the application of the instruments, the lack of empirical research on the reliability, validity and accuracy of the scales, and the risk of false positives or false negatives, unnecessarily adding to fear of the offender, or underestimating the risk of violence.¹⁰¹

Support programs

Those affected by domestic violence require a wide range of support services, including assistance to remove themselves and their children from a violent partner and maintain their safety in some instances. Many are at particular risk of violence, including lethal violence, when they attempt to leave a violent partner, so the availability of appropriate support services may literally be a matter of life and death.¹⁰²

There is little in the way of systematic reviews of support services for those affected by domestic violence and what research does exist tends to be from the United States. One of the reasons for the lack of evaluation is that support services are often not funded to undertake evaluations as well as service provision, and that the transient nature and safety concerns of the clients make evaluation challenging.¹⁰³

Even less research has been conducted on the appropriate support programs that should be provided specifically for same sex partners or men affected by domestic violence. Given that men are often reluctant to access community services more generally, it is likely that there are very specific challenges in this category.¹⁰⁴

A recent literature review on coordinated community responses to domestic violence, including shelters, advocacy and legal protection found a notable lack of research on the topic, and that there was little in the way of theory to guide the programs.¹⁰⁵ While studies of support programs have found some evidence for positive

99. R F Rabin, J M Jennings, J C Campbell and M H Bair-Merritt, '[Intimate partner violence screening tools](#)', *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 36(5), May 2009, pp. 439–445.

100. New South Wales, Ministry of Health, [Domestic Violence Routine Screening Program, Snapshot Report 9, November 2011](#), Violence Prevention and Response Unit, NSW Kids and Families, 2012.

101. M Northcott, [Intimate partner violence risk assessment tools: a review](#), Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada.

102. I Barrett Meyering, '[Staying/leaving: barriers to ending violent relationships](#)', *Fast facts 7*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, July 2012.

103. CM Sullivan, '[Evaluating domestic violence support service programs: Waste of time, necessary evil, or opportunity for growth?](#)', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 16(4), July–August 2011, pp. 354–360.

104. J Mulroney and C Chan, [Men as victims of domestic violence](#), op. cit.

105. RC Shorey, V Tirone and GL Stuart, '[Coordinated community response components for victims of intimate partner violence: A review of the literature](#)', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 19(4), July–August 2014, pp. 363–371.

outcomes such as reductions in depression and decreased usage of health care, few demonstrated significant decreases in violence re-victimisation.¹⁰⁶

Shelters for abused women are one of the key support services. In addition to crisis accommodation, they often also provide telephone help lines, programs for children, transition housing services and outreach programs for abused women who are not staying at the shelter. A study of shelters in Ontario, Canada, found that shelters often offered these other services because no other service providers did, particularly in rural and remote areas. Funders and policy makers often had a poor grasp of the range of services that shelters provided, resulting in services being underfunded.¹⁰⁷

A 2013 review of the NSW Domestic Violence Pro-Active Support Service (DVPASS), a program through which NSW police refer domestic violence victims to specialist support services, examined the effectiveness of a number of similar domestic violence support programs across Australia, New Zealand, the US, and the United Kingdom. The evaluations found that the programs tended to raise public awareness of the issues, but that more support and training for police was necessary to maximise the effectiveness of the programs. Factors such as joint training between police and domestic violence workers, the need to gain the consent of the victim before involving other services, and having a range of services available to victims were considered to be important. However the review concluded that there was no clear evidence as to which of the various models generated the best outcomes for women.¹⁰⁸

A recent Australian study looked at the experiences of victims of domestic violence supported through a 24 month police-led integrated domestic violence pilot program in Queensland. During the program's intensive six week support period the women reported improvements in their safety and wellbeing. However in follow-up interviews three months after the program the women reported substantial issues with securing accommodation for themselves and their children. Several women also reported ongoing abuse from their former partner, including stalking, physical and verbal abuse. The study highlights the importance, and difficulty, of these programs providing safe and sustainable housing arrangements, and the importance of these arrangements for their ongoing safety.¹⁰⁹

The intersection of domestic violence support services and homelessness services was highlighted by recent reforms to homelessness services in NSW. The reforms were criticised for reducing the number of domestic violence shelters for women due to a greater emphasis on early intervention services. Both Labor and the Greens made commitments at the 2015 NSW election to restore funding to specialist services, and the re-elected Baird government restored \$8.6 million in funding to a number of inner-city shelters.¹¹⁰

Legislation

As noted previously, conduct constituting domestic violence can encompass varying degrees of severity and take many forms—physical abuse, sexual abuse, damage to property, emotional abuse, social abuse, economic abuse, psychological abuse, and spiritual abuse. Whatever forms the violence takes, a central feature is that it involves a person exercising control and power by inducing fear, for example by using threatening behaviour. Definitions of domestic violence usually recognise that violence can constitute more than single 'incidents'. It can involve 'a continuum of controlling behaviour and violence, which can occur over a number of years'.¹¹¹

However, the definitions of domestic violence used in the various domestic and family violence statutes across Australian jurisdictions are not uniform and there is a great deal of overlap and confusion between state/federal legislators over which avenue should or could be pursued by the relevant decision makers.

Some offences are covered by specific domestic or family violence laws, while other offences are covered by the relevant crimes legislation. The specific state and territory laws currently are:

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106. M Ellsberg, DJ Arango, M Morton, F Gennari, S Kiplesund, M Contreras and C Watts, 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?', op. cit.; R Constantino, Y Kim, and PA Crane, '[Effects of social support interventions on health outcomes in residents of a domestic violence shelter: A pilot study](#)', *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 26, pp. 575–590.
 107. CN Wathen, RM Harris, M Ford-Gilbor and M Hansen, '[What counts? A mixed-methods study to inform evaluations of shelters for abused women](#)', *Violence Against Women*, 21(1), 2015, pp. 125–146.
 108. Urbis, '[Evaluation of the State-wide Domestic Violence Pro Active Support Service \(Final Report\)](#)', February 2013.
 109. S Meyer, '[Victims' experiences of short- and long-term safety and wellbeing: Findings from an examination of an integrated response to domestic violence](#)', *Current Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 478, June 2014.
 110. C Angus, '[Domestic and family violence](#)', op. cit.
 111. Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and NSW Law Reform Commission (NSWLRC), '[Family Violence—A National Response](#)', ALRC Report 114, October 2010, p. 189.

- [Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008 \(ACT\)](#)
- [Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007 \(NT\)](#)
- [Crimes \(Domestic and Personal Violence\) Act 2007 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Intervention Orders \(Prevention of Abuse\) Act 2009 \(SA\)](#)
- [Family Violence Act 2004 \(Tas.\)](#)
- [Family Violence Protection Act 2008 \(Vic.\)](#)
- [Restraining Orders Act 1997 \(WA\)](#)

There are also a number of federal offences within the Commonwealth *Criminal Code Act 1995* which could potentially give rise to a protection order in the context of domestic violence. For example, threatening behaviour or harassment that can form the basis for a protection order can also fall within the ambit of the federal offences which relate to using carriage services, such as mobile phones or computers, or postal services.¹¹²

Another area of potential overlap is in relation to conduct constituting economic abuse. For example, coercing a family member to claim a social security payment is recognised as economic abuse amounting to domestic or family violence in some jurisdictions. Such behaviour could also constitute offences under social security legislation as well as the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth) relating to fraudulent conduct—such as obtaining a financial advantage by deception or making false or misleading statements in applications.¹¹³

The interaction and linkages between domestic or family violence legislation and the criminal law was considered by the ALRC/NSWLRC report into family violence in 2010.¹¹⁴ A perpetrator may be subject to a protection order or to criminal prosecution—or to both. However, in practice, decision makers (such as police) may choose to pursue one avenue over another. The ALRC/NSWLRC report noted that ‘federal offences committed in a family violence context should also be more widely recognised and understood amongst lawyers, police, prosecutors and the judiciary. Arguably, they should also be more widely prosecuted, assuming the criteria for instituting federal prosecutions are met’.¹¹⁵

Criminal justice responses

Protection Orders

Across all Australian jurisdictions protection orders (enforceable court orders) are designed to provide a better, more responsive approach to domestic violence than is provided by the criminal law.¹¹⁶ They are relatively easy to obtain, address a range of behaviours beyond physical violence, look beyond incidents to the pattern of behaviour, and can be ‘tailor-made’ to fit the needs of the victim. However, breaches have long been seen as one of the weakest links in the effectiveness of protection orders. When a breach is not acted on appropriately, either by the police or the legal system, it undermines the effectiveness of the order, not only for that victim, but the system as a whole.¹¹⁷ Each jurisdiction has its own laws providing for protection orders.¹¹⁸ While there is much that is common among these laws, there are also key differences meaning that it can be difficult to compare statistics on orders sought and any breaches of those orders, or to evaluate their effectiveness.¹¹⁹

Role of the police

As stated in the ALRC/NSWLRC report, the police play a key role in responding to domestic violence, and are often the first point of contact for many. Police are responsible for recording incidents, interviewing victims and collecting evidence to support charges and applying for protection orders in the civil system. It is well recognised that initial positive police response is vital not only to the safety of those affected, but also to whether they

112. [Criminal Code Act 1995](#) (Cth), sections 474.15, 474.17, 471.11, 471.12.

113. ALRC and NSWLRC, *Family violence—a national legal response*, op. cit., p. 195.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid., p. 350.

116. Protection orders may also be referred to as domestic violence orders (DVO), apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVO), intervention orders and family violence orders (FVO).

117. J Wangmann, ‘[Domestic violence orders need stronger enforcement](#)’, *The Conversation*, 8 August 2014.

118. *Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008* (ACT); *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* (NT); *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* (NSW); *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989* (Qld); *Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009* (SA); *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas.); *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic.); *Restraining Orders Act 1997* (WA).

119. K Wilcox, ‘[Recent innovations in Australian protection order law—a comparative discussion](#)’, Topic paper, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2010.

report any further victimisation, or seek engagement with the legal system more generally.¹²⁰ In most jurisdictions in Australia, there are specialised police units in the areas of domestic or family violence, sexual assault and child protection.¹²¹

In responding to domestic violence and in obtaining civil protection orders, police may use powers and procedures mainly designed to enforce criminal laws—powers of entry, search, seizure, arrest, direction and detention.¹²² In all jurisdictions the police have powers to issue protection orders, police safety notices or domestic violence safety notice directly at an incident, without the approval of a judicial officer. These orders are issued to people who have used violence, however the duration and conditions attached to these orders can vary across the jurisdictions.¹²³

Recent data indicates that across Australia police are dealing with an estimated 657 domestic violence matters on average every day of the year.¹²⁴

Specialised family violence courts

Currently specialised family violence courts (family violence is the term commonly used by the courts) operate in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT.¹²⁵ All these are part of the local or magistrate court in the relevant jurisdiction. These specialised family violence courts provide, to various extents, specialised personnel; procedures; support services; special arrangements for victim safety; offender programs and broader problem-solving approaches.

Although all state and territory local or magistrates courts have broad jurisdiction over a range of matters—including criminal matters, family violence protection orders, and family law (to the extent that this is conferred)—the full extent of this jurisdiction is not necessarily exercised in specialised family violence courts. The extent to which jurisdiction is exercised in these specialised courts depends largely on the practical and administrative arrangements of the court. For example, many local and magistrates courts in Australia operate a specialised list for protection orders, where matters are listed and heard on a particular day. Family violence courts in NSW, Western Australia and the ACT follow the ‘criminal model’, in that these lists deal exclusively with criminal matters related to family violence. The South Australian specialised family violence court deals with both criminal matters and applications for protection orders. Only the Family Violence Court Division (FVCD) of the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria exercises jurisdiction over protection orders; summary criminal proceedings; committals for indictable offences; civil personal injury claims; compensation and restitution; and (to the extent conferred upon the Magistrates’ Court) jurisdiction over family law and child support.¹²⁶

Judicial training

Currently, Victoria is the only jurisdiction to provide family violence training for *all* magistrates. The other jurisdictions provide this training for judicial officers that are working in this area.

The Australian Government has recently announced that it will commence work on a National Family Violence Bench Book. The Bench Book will be a comprehensive online tool for judges across Australia, covering civil and criminal laws in federal, state and territory jurisdictions. It will promote consistency in judicial decision making in cases involving family violence. This work is due to be completed by June 2017.¹²⁷

Recent reforms at the Commonwealth, state and territory level

At the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) meeting in April 2015, various efforts to reduce violence against women were discussed, including the progress of the National Domestic Violence Order (DVO) scheme and an information sharing system. This national scheme will allow DVOs to be automatically recognised and enforceable in any state or territory of Australia.¹²⁸

120. ALRC and NSWLRC, *Family violence—a national legal response*, op. cit., p. 1514.

121. Ibid., p. 1515.

122. Ibid., p. 367.

123. Ibid., pp. 368–371. For a discussion of the different types of orders available to the police.

124. C Blumer, ‘[Australian police deal with a domestic violence matter every two minutes](#)’, ABC News, website, 29 May 2015.

125. ALRC and NSWLRC, *Family violence—a national legal response*, op. cit., pp. 1488–1489.

126. Ibid., p. 1494.

127. G Brandis (Attorney-General) and M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [National family violence bench book](#), media release, 9 June 2015.

128. Council of Australian Governments (COAG), [Communique](#), 17 April 2015.

At present, only once a DVO is registered in another state is it recognised and can be enforced as if it had been made there. The onus is on the victim to register their DVO in their new state or a border state. This application is then listed before a court to ensure that it complies with the law in that new location and can be enforced.¹²⁹

A national information system that will enable courts and police in different states and territories to share information on active DVOs is also due to be implemented through a trial program involving NSW, Queensland and Tasmania.¹³⁰

In May 2015, the NSW Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault announced the NSW Government would pilot a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) enabling people to find out whether their partner has a history of domestic violence offending.¹³¹ A discussion paper issued on the DVDS notes that this initiative is based on a UK model known as Clare's Law.¹³²

The ACT Government recently announced amendments to interim domestic violence orders and changes to the definition of family violence to ensure victims receive greater support. The new class of interim domestic violence order will apply when a respondent has current criminal charges, and the applicant for the DVO is the victim of those charges. The extended interim DVO will help prevent further abuse that may be perpetrated on victims when they apply for repeat DVOs while criminal charges are being dealt with.¹³³ The ACT Government also established the position of Coordinator-General for Domestic and Family Violence.¹³⁴

How has the Australian Government responded?

The Australian Government is responsible for the over-arching government programs designed to reduce domestic violence. Through its national initiatives, the Commonwealth sponsors state and territory government cooperation in the development and implementation of models for addressing and preventing this form of violence. However, the state and territory governments, not the Commonwealth Government, have the law enforcement responsibilities in relation to policing and prosecuting instances of domestic violence.¹³⁵

Although there are Australian Government funded programs operating in the states and territories, for example supported accommodation, each jurisdiction funds and administers its own programs and services aimed at preventing domestic violence and supporting those affected through their community service/human services and health departments together with police and other agencies.¹³⁶

Inter-government liaison on domestic violence and violence against women more broadly is coordinated through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and its Select Council on Women's Issues. The Council on Women's Issues is a ministerial forum that reports to COAG and works collaboratively at all levels of government. Commonwealth, state and territory ministers with the responsibility for women's issues make up the membership of this forum.¹³⁷

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children

The Australian Government's central initiative designed to address domestic violence is the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*—endorsed by COAG in February 2011.¹³⁸ The federal Department of Social Services (DSS) works together with the Office for Women (OfW) within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to implement the National Plan in partnership with the state and territory governments.

The National Plan has established an ambitious 'framework for social change' and sets out six national outcomes to be delivered over a 12-year period: communities are safe and free from violence; relationships are respectful; Indigenous communities are strengthened; services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing

129. J Wangmann, [Australia's 'urgent' action on family violence has fallen years behind](#), *The Conversation*, 22 April 2015.

130. Ibid.

131. ['NSW Government pushes ahead with proposed domestic violence disclosure scheme'](#), ABC News, website, 21 May 2015.

132. NSW Government, [NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme: Discussion paper](#), May 2015.

133. S Corbell, (Attorney-General, ACT), [Interim Domestic Violence Order to better protect victims](#), media release, 12 May 2015.

134. S Corbell (Attorney-General, ACT), [New appointment to focus on domestic and family violence](#), media release, 1 June 2015.

135. J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, [Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues](#), op. cit., p. 20.

136. Ibid.

137. Australian Government, [Progress Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010–2012](#), DSS website, May 2013, p. 21.

138. Australian Government, [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children](#), DSS website.

violence; justice responses are effective; and perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.¹³⁹ The National Plan is to be driven by a series of four three-year action plans over the 12 years—so far two action plans have been produced.

The *First Action Plan 2010–2013—building a strong foundation*, published in 2012, outlined ‘how all Australian governments and the community will work together to lay the groundwork for the future and sets the scene for the life of the National Plan’. It focused on ‘primary prevention, attitudinal change and building a solid evidence base’. The first action plan had four priorities: building the evidence base; building primary prevention capacity; enhancing service delivery; and strengthening justice responses.¹⁴⁰ The first in a series of planned progress reports, *Progress Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010–2012* (published in May 2013), detailed some of the progress made by the first action plan such as the establishment of a National Plan Implementation Panel in April 2012; an agreement to establish a National Centre of Excellence in 2013; the development of respectful relationships education projects across the country; and many other initiatives and intervention programs in the states and territories.¹⁴¹ The *Progress review of the first action plan* (May 2014), acknowledged further progress made through the establishment of the National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence (now ANROWS—see below); the foundation work to develop a National Data Collection and Reporting Framework; the completion of the ABS Personal Safety Survey 2012 (released in December 2013) and progress made on a new National Survey of Community Attitudes to Violence against Women (NCAS).¹⁴²

The *Second Action Plan 2013–2016: moving ahead* was released in June 2014 and reported on progress to date—such as the establishment of the Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS), the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and Children and *The Line* social marketing campaign that aims to encourage young people to challenge gender stereotypes and break the cycle of violence.¹⁴³ However, the second action plan expressly aims to build on this progress by increasing community involvement, intensifying the focus on diverse communities and improving perpetrator-based responses and programs. Accordingly, the second action plan includes five ‘national priorities’: driving whole of community action to prevent violence; understanding diverse experiences of violence; supporting innovative services and integrated systems; improving perpetrator interventions and continuing to build the evidence base.¹⁴⁴ The second action plan also notes progress and consultation processes to date such as the expected completion of the National Survey on Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women and Children; the completion of the ABS Personal Safety Survey 2012 and an impending update in 2016; progress made in building the National Data Collection and Reporting Framework in partnership with the ABS; and impending annual national round tables of key experts and national conferences to be held in 2015 and 2016. A National Domestic Violence Summit was subsequently held on 8 December 2014 and the 2013 National Survey of Community Attitudes to Violence against Women (NCAS) was launched in September 2014.¹⁴⁵

Also released in June 2014 was an independent *Evaluation Plan for the National Plan*, produced by healthcare consultancy Health Outcomes International.¹⁴⁶ This report sets out how the plan will be evaluated over its 12 year lifespan. Under the evaluation plan there will be three-yearly reviews of the action plans; annual progress reporting; evaluation of key national activities under the plan; and analysis of available data. Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for reducing domestic violence will oversee the evaluation process supported by government officials in collaboration with key stakeholders. An independent expert was also to be engaged at each evaluation phase to conduct reviews, collate evaluation reporting and conduct reviews of consultations.

139. Ibid., pp. 14–31.

140. Australian Government, *First Action Plan 2010–2013—building a strong foundation*, DSS website, 2012.

141. Australian Government, *Progress Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010–2012*, op. cit.

142. Australian Government, *Progress review of the first action plan*, DSS website, May 2014.

143. M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), *Addressing violence against women and their children*, media release, 27 June 2014; Australian Government, *Second action plan 2013–2016—moving ahead—of the National Plan to reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, DSS website; *The Line* website.

144. Australian Government, *Second action plan 2013–2016—moving ahead—of the National Plan to reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, June 2014, DSS website. DSS also produced a comprehensive summary of the Second Action Plan—*Second Action Plan 2013–2016: moving ahead—in brief*, 2014, DSS website.

145. M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), *National Domestic Violence Summit*, media release, 8 December 2014; *What Australians think about violence against women*, media release, 17 September 2014.

146. Health Outcomes International, *Evaluation Plan for the National Plan, developed by Health Outcomes International*, June 2014, DSS website.

Other progress and initiatives since June 2014 include:

- the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children, chaired by Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja, launched the anti-violence campaign 'Our Watch' on 5 September 2014.¹⁴⁷
- the ANROWS research program 2014–16 is launched to 'build the knowledge base' around domestic violence in October 2014.¹⁴⁸
- New Zealand and Australian police commissioners gather at a 'Stand Together' event against violence in Parliament House on 24 November 2014.¹⁴⁹
- an advisory panel on violence against women is announced in January 2015. Founding members are to be retiring Victorian Police Commissioner, Ken Lay, and 2015 Australian of the Year and anti-domestic violence campaigner, Rosie Batty. In addition a national Domestic Violence Order (DVO) scheme is to be established.¹⁵⁰ The DVO scheme was subsequently agreed to at the COAG meeting in April 2015.¹⁵¹ The full membership of the Advisory Panel to reduce violence against women was provided in May 2015.¹⁵²
- a National Awareness Campaign to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children is announced with a commitment of \$30.0 million to be funded jointly with the states and territories over three years.¹⁵³ The 2015–16 Budget papers outline that the states and territories will contribute \$15.0 million towards the total of \$30 million for the National Awareness Campaign to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (subsequently agreed to at the COAG meeting in April 2015).¹⁵⁴ The Australian Government will provide the remaining \$15.0 million, together with a further \$1.7 million for administration costs.¹⁵⁵ It is envisaged that the campaign will 'drive nation-wide change in the culture, attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence against women and their children'.¹⁵⁶
- an increase of \$4 million in funding for the 1800RESPECT hotline is announced in May 2015.¹⁵⁷
- 'Our Watch' awards to recognise excellence in media coverage of violence against women.¹⁵⁸
- an annual progress report (2014–15) of the Second Action Plan was released by the Government (29 June 2015).¹⁵⁹ The report acknowledged that 'there is still a long way to go', but outlined further progress, including consultations with leaders from indigenous, disability and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- in August 2015, the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee released Australia's first parliamentary report on domestic violence in Australia.¹⁶⁰ The Committee made 25 recommendations, including the need to provide sufficient resources for increased demand for services.

147. H Grant, [New initiative to end violence against Australian women and their children on Our Watch](#), media release, Our Watch website, 5 September 2014.

148. M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [New family and domestic violence research](#), media release, 31 October 2014.

149. M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [Standing together to tackle violence against women and children](#), media release, 24 November 2014.

150. M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [COAG agenda to address ending violence against women](#), media release, 28 January 2015.

151. COAG, [Communique](#), 17 April 2015, op. cit.

152. T Abbott (Prime Minister), [Advisory panel announced to reduce violence against women](#), media release, 15 May 2015.

153. T Abbott (Prime Minister) and M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [National awareness campaign to reduce violence against women and children](#), media release, 4 March 2015.

154. COAG, [Communique](#), 17 April 2015, op. cit.

155. Australian Government, [Budget measures: budget paper no. 2: 2015–16](#), p. 163.

156. Ibid. For further detail see M Thomas and A Dunkley, 'Domestic violence', *Budget Review 2015–16*, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, May 2015.

157. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services) and M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [Abbott Government delivers funding boost for 1800RESPECT](#), media release, 17 May 2015.

158. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services) and M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [Nominations called for national media awards to reduce domestic violence](#), media release, 3 June 2015.

159. Australian Government, [2014–15 Annual progress report](#), Second Action Plan: 2013–16, June 2015, DSS website.

160. Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, [Domestic violence in Australia](#), Final report, The Senate, Canberra, August 2015.

- in September 2015, Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced a Women's Safety Package.¹⁶¹ The package includes \$100 million in funding for measures such as:
 - \$12 million for innovative technologies, for example GPS trackers for perpetrators
 - \$5 million for safer technologies including safe phones for women
 - \$17 million for programs like the Safer in the Home to install CCTV etc
 - \$5 million to expand 1800RESPECT online phone line and counselling
 - \$2 million for Mensline to support perpetrators to not re-offend
 - \$3.6 million for cross border sharing of intelligence between agencies
 - \$5 million to expand Safer Schools and respectful relationships resources and funding specifically to support Indigenous women and women from CALD backgrounds.¹⁶²
- in November 2015, Our Watch, VicHealth and ANROWS released *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, an initiative under the National Plan.¹⁶³

Funding

Reducing violence against women has been a priority for the Commonwealth Government since the 1980s—the Commonwealth's role in addressing domestic violence commenced formally with the National Agenda for Women consultations in 1986.¹⁶⁴

However, funding for anti-violence initiatives is not usually identified in the Budget (only a total figure for women's funding is provided). Funding for the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children is not specifically identified either, only a total for 'National Initiatives' is provided.¹⁶⁵ Other relevant Commonwealth funding is provided for individual community service providers as outlined below.

National Plan

Funding for the National Plan is provided under the National Initiatives program component of the Social Services portfolio. In the 2015–16 Budget a total of \$119.5 million over four years was allocated to National Initiatives (in the previous 2014–15 Budget \$117.9 million was allocated to National Initiatives for 2014–15 to 2017–18).¹⁶⁶

It would appear that the bulk of this funding goes to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.¹⁶⁷ In the 2015–16 Budget approximately \$100.0 million of the \$119.5 million allocated to National Initiatives was designated for the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.¹⁶⁸

As mentioned previously, in September 2015 Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced a Women's Safety Package that included an additional \$100 million in funding for a variety of measures, such as \$12 million for innovative technologies to assist in the prevention of domestic violence and funding specifically to support Indigenous women and women from CALD backgrounds.¹⁶⁹

161. M Turnbull (Prime Minister), [Women's safety package to stop the violence](#), op. cit.

162. Ibid.

163. ANROWS, Our Watch and VicHealth, [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia](#), November 2015.

164. J Phillips and P Vandenbroek, op. cit.

165. For more detail on the national initiatives see DSS, [National initiatives](#), DSS website.

166. Australian Government, [Portfolio budgets statements 2015–16: budget related paper no. 1.15A: Social Services Portfolio](#), p. 92; and M Thomas and A Dunkley, 'Domestic violence', op. cit.

167. An answer to a question on notice (QON) asked in Senate Estimates in May 2014 noted that a total of \$104.0 million (from 2014–15 to 2017–18) had been allocated to the National Plan—the remainder of the \$117.9 million was allocated to support trafficking victims and the National Framework to Protect Australia's Children. Senate Community Affairs Committee, Answers to Questions on Notice, Social Services Portfolio, Budget Estimates 2014–15, May 2014, [Question 116](#).

168. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services) and M Cash (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women), [Abbott Government delivers funding boost for 1800RESPECT](#), op. cit.

169. M Turnbull (Prime Minister), [Women's safety package to stop the violence](#), op. cit.

Community services

The Commonwealth Government has provided funding to individual specialist family violence services through its community grants programs for some years.¹⁷⁰

In the 2014–15 Budget it was announced that existing community grants programs would be streamlined and reduced from 18 to seven—it was argued that these new arrangements would remove duplication and reduce red tape.¹⁷¹ It was intended that the reforms were to achieve savings of \$240.0 million over four years.¹⁷² In July 2014, the new streamlined grants programs were introduced, comprising aged care; families and communities; housing and homelessness; and disability, mental health and carers streams.¹⁷³ In December 2014, many community services providers were advised that their applications for funding under the new arrangements had been unsuccessful.¹⁷⁴

According to an answer to a Question on Notice (QON) in February 2015 Senate Estimates, 395 organisations, including 27 specialist family violence services, were instead offered bridging funding of four months duration.¹⁷⁵ This bridging funding, announced by the Minister for Social Services in January 2015, was provided for critical community services (including specialist family violence service providers) to ‘ensure continuity of front line community services ... as we transition to new arrangements’.¹⁷⁶

In April 2015, the Minister for Social Services announced that the Government would allocate \$15 million over two years towards the delivery of 27 Specialist Family Violence services provided by 23 organisations and eight (Kids in Focus) family early intervention alcohol and drug services.¹⁷⁷ At the time it was not clear what the future funding arrangements would be for other organisations considered to be critical community services some of which may provide projects related to reducing domestic violence such as healthy relationships education programs.¹⁷⁸

The 2015–16 Budget allocated \$55.6 million over three years from 2014–15 to ‘ensure continuity of front line community services as funding arrangements transition to the *New Way of Working for Grants* framework’.¹⁷⁹ However, it was not clear how much of this funding would go towards specialist family violence service providers.¹⁸⁰ Presumably it includes the \$15 million over two years towards the delivery of 27 Specialist Family Violence services and eight family early intervention alcohol and drug services announced in April 2015 as outlined above.

Legal assistance

The National Plan aims to improve access to justice for those experiencing domestic violence.¹⁸¹ The Commonwealth Government provides funding to the states and territories for legal assistance services through the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services. This assistance includes services provided by legal aid commissions, community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and family violence prevention legal services.¹⁸²

170. DSS, [Grants report](#), DSS website.

171. K Andrews (Minister for Social Services), [Budget 2014: Long-term certainty and less red tape for social service providers](#), media release, 13 May 2014.

172. Australian Government, [Part 2: expense measures](#), *Budget measures: budget paper no. 2: 2014–15*, p. 197.

173. See DSS, [Grant programs](#), DSS website.

174. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services), [Department of Social Services grant funding offers](#), media release, 24 December 2015.

175. Senate Estimates, Community Affairs Committee, Additional Estimates, answer to QON [SQ15-000003](#), February 2015. Note: a more detailed list of organisations provided with bridging funding was also provided in Senate Estimates, Community Affairs Committee, Additional Estimates, answer to QON [SQ15-000295](#), February 2015.

176. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services), [Morrison to fill critical front line service gaps in Social Service grants](#), media release, 30 January 2015; and DSS, [2014 grant rounds—outcomes and funding offers faq](#), DSS website.

177. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services), [Coalition Government boosts funding support for vulnerable children and their families](#), media release, 17 April 2015.

178. DSS, [2014 grant rounds—outcomes and funding offers faq](#), DSS website.

179. M Thomas and A Dunkley, [‘Domestic violence’](#), op. cit.; and [Budget measures: budget paper no. 2: 2015–16](#), op. cit., p. 166.

180. M Thomas and A Dunkley, [‘Domestic violence’](#), op. cit.; and [Portfolio budget statements 2015–16: budget related paper no. 1.15A: Social Services Portfolio](#), p. 33.

181. COAG, [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children](#), op. cit., p. 26.

182. J Murphy, [‘Legal aid and legal assistance services’](#), *Budget Review 2015–16*, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, May 2015.

The *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Year Outlook 2013–14* included \$43.1 million in savings over four years by removing funding support for policy reform and advocacy for four legal assistance programs, although what this meant in practice was not specified.¹⁸³

In March 2015 the Attorney-General announced that proposed changes due to take effect on 1 July 2015 would not proceed and that the Government would restore \$25.5 million in legal support funding over two years.¹⁸⁴ The 2015–16 Budget included \$12.0 million in funding for community legal centres and \$11.5 million for Indigenous Legal Assistance, including domestic violence-related legal assistance.¹⁸⁵

The Australian Government's Women's Safety package announced in September 2015 included \$15 million for specialist domestic violence legal support.¹⁸⁶ The funding would establish 12 new specialist domestic violence units located in areas with high reported rates of domestic violence and build four new health justice partnerships. Through these health partnerships legal professionals would provide onsite legal assistance and train medical professionals to better identify and respond to domestic violence.

Homelessness services

Women and children fleeing violent domestic situations are heavy users of homelessness services and are particularly vulnerable to shortages in crisis accommodation. The 2014–15 Budget provided \$115.0 million to extend the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) for 2014–15.¹⁸⁷ This measure was announced previously by Social Services Minister, Kevin Andrews, in March 2014.¹⁸⁸ The one year extension represented a drop in funding of \$44.0 million from the \$159 million allocated the previous year. Providers of homelessness services were concerned that there could be a crisis in service delivery should ongoing NPAH funding beyond June 2014 not eventuate.¹⁸⁹ The Government also discontinued funding rounds for homelessness research and peak bodies on 22 December 2014.¹⁹⁰

In April 2015 the Minister for Social Services announced that the Government would allocate \$230 million towards extending the NPAH over two years.¹⁹¹ Accordingly this funding was allocated in the 2015–16 Budget.¹⁹²

How are international governments responding?

Domestic violence occurs almost everywhere around the globe, including in those countries with higher levels of gender equality than others. In response, international bodies such as UN Women encourage governments to develop dedicated action plans to prevent and address this form of violence.¹⁹³ Many governments recognise that domestic violence is a significant issue that needs to be addressed and some are developing action plans as the Australian Government has done.¹⁹⁴

In the UK for example, the Government has produced a series of action plans, including *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan 2014*.¹⁹⁵ The central themes of the plans are prevention, provision of good quality services, improved partnerships, better justice outcomes and risk reduction. Supporting documentation include a series of 'What works' guidance notes for policy makers and practitioners.¹⁹⁶

183. J Hockey (Treasurer) and M Cormann (Minister for Finance), [Mid-year economic and fiscal year outlook 2013–14, Appendix A](#), Expense measures, December 2013, p. 119.

184. G Brandis (Attorney-General), [Legal aid funding assured to support the most vulnerable in our community](#), media release, 26 March 2015.

185. M Thomas and A Dunkley, 'Domestic violence', op. cit.

186. G Brandis (Attorney-General), [\\$15 million for specialist domestic violence legal support](#), media release, 24 September 2015.

187. Australian Government, [2014–15 Budget Paper no. 2](#), p. 205.

188. K Andrews (Minister for Social Services), [Coalition government to renew homelessness funding](#), media release, 30 March 2014.

189. M Thomas, [Housing and homelessness](#), Budget review, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, May 2014.

190. DSS, [Housing and homelessness—research; peak bodies; innovative projects; emerging Australian Government priorities](#), DSS website.

191. S Morrison (Minister for Social Services), [Coalition Government boosts funding support for vulnerable children and their families](#), media release, 17 April 2015.

192. [Budget Measures: budget paper no. 2: 2015–16](#), op. cit., p. 165. For more detail of these issues across the last two budgets see the analysis provided by the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW), [Budget 2014–15: a gender lens](#), May 2014; [Budget 2015–16: a gender lens](#), May 2015.

193. UN Women, [Ending violence against women](#); and [Handbook for national action plans on violence against women](#), New York, 2012, UN Women website.

194. J Ransley and C Bond, 'Cancel the inquiries: we don't need more reports on domestic violence', *The Conversation*, 12 March 2015.

195. UK Government, [Ending violence against women and girls: action plans](#), Home Office website.

196. UK Government, [Violence against women and girls guidance notes](#), UK Government website.

In Europe, many countries are stepping up their responses in an attempt to further curb domestic violence, particularly since the release in 2014 of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) major survey on violence which found one in three women in Europe had experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15.¹⁹⁷ Even in Eastern Europe where resources are often scarcer, several countries have introduced practices in recent years that aim to reduce domestic violence, such as ‘partnering with men’ programs.¹⁹⁸

One US community response model mentioned previously that is often cited as ‘best-practice’ is the ‘Duluth Model of Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence’. In the 1980s, the city of Duluth in Minnesota pioneered a partnership between relevant agencies, including domestic violence intervention community organisations and criminal justice agencies. The model revolves around the provision of courses for perpetrators aimed at encouraging behavioural change and the premise that male violence is an expression of men’s power and control over women and focuses on modifying and changing these violent patterns of behaviour.¹⁹⁹

The Duluth model has inspired many similar domestic violence program responses around the world, and there is a substantial body of literature discussing the effectiveness of these programs. Some are critical, claiming that the model is ineffective and even unethical given that some perpetrators are required to attend courses in lieu of custodial sentences.²⁰⁰ Others argue that much of this criticism is based on flawed research, and point to other studies which have found Duluth model programs to be effective in reducing male offending against women. They also argue that many of the criticisms are based on evaluation of programs which do not strictly adhere to Duluth principles—where the Duluth model is followed exactly, they argue, it is very effective.²⁰¹ The Duluth model is essentially the only therapeutic intervention approach which has been replicated across communities and countries, making it an obvious candidate for cross-national comparisons, but also a focal point for criticism.

What works?

Although attempts such as those outlined above to prevent and stop domestic violence have now been ongoing for some decades, there is still a lack of reliable evidence as to what works and for whom. It should be noted that this does not mean that nothing works and all interventions are bound to be ineffective, however it does make it difficult to either recommend specific approaches over others, or suggest how to make particular interventions more effective, as evidence-based policy. It is also noted that the effectiveness of some types of interventions at actually preventing or reducing violence, such as large-scale public awareness campaigns and screening programs, is inherently hard to measure.

Research into perpetrator programs is plagued by methodological issues, including accounting for changes in behaviour of men who drop out of the program. The major issue is that the research is unable to demonstrate whether men who complete programs come out less violent, or whether men who are likely to desist in their violence are more likely to complete perpetrator programs. That is, are the programs doing anything more than identifying to men that their abusive behaviour is unacceptable, particularly non-physical forms of abusive behaviour, which in itself might lead some men to cease the behaviour. A recent analysis of a domestic violence program illustrated how one outcome of the programs is providing perpetrators with a greater insight into what behaviour is abusive:

At a local men’s behaviour change program, Nick and the other men in the group were astonished to learn that in the eyes of the law, verbal, emotional, psychological and even financial abuse count as domestic violence.²⁰²

Despite the inevitable methodological issues and questions of effectiveness, some have argued that it is worth pursuing these efforts, particularly if the alternative is to not do anything. For example, a recent report by the

197. For example see Norway Mission to the EU, [Violence against women—our response](#), Norway Mission to the EU website. See also the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), [Violence against women: an EU wide survey results at a glance](#), FRA website, 2014.

198. For example see United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), [Partnering with men to end gender-based violence](#), UNFPA website, 2009.

199. See the [Duluth Model](#) website for more detail.

200. K Corvo, D Dutton and W Chen, ‘Do Duluth Model interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence violate mental health professional ethics?’, *Ethics and Behaviour*, 2009; M Labriola, M Rempel and R Davis, [Testing the effectiveness of Batterer Programs and Judicial Monitoring](#), Final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, November 2005; P Cluss and A Boadea, [The effectiveness of batter intervention programs: a literature review and recommendations for next steps](#), University of Pittsburgh, 2011.

201. M Paymar and G Barnes, [Countering confusion about the Duluth Model](#), Battered Women’s Justice Project, Minnesota.

202. J Hill, ‘[A cycle of violence](#)’, *Background briefing*, Radio National, 3 May 2015.

Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University argues that the lack of hard experimental evidence that these programs may not reduce recidivism does not mean they should be abandoned:

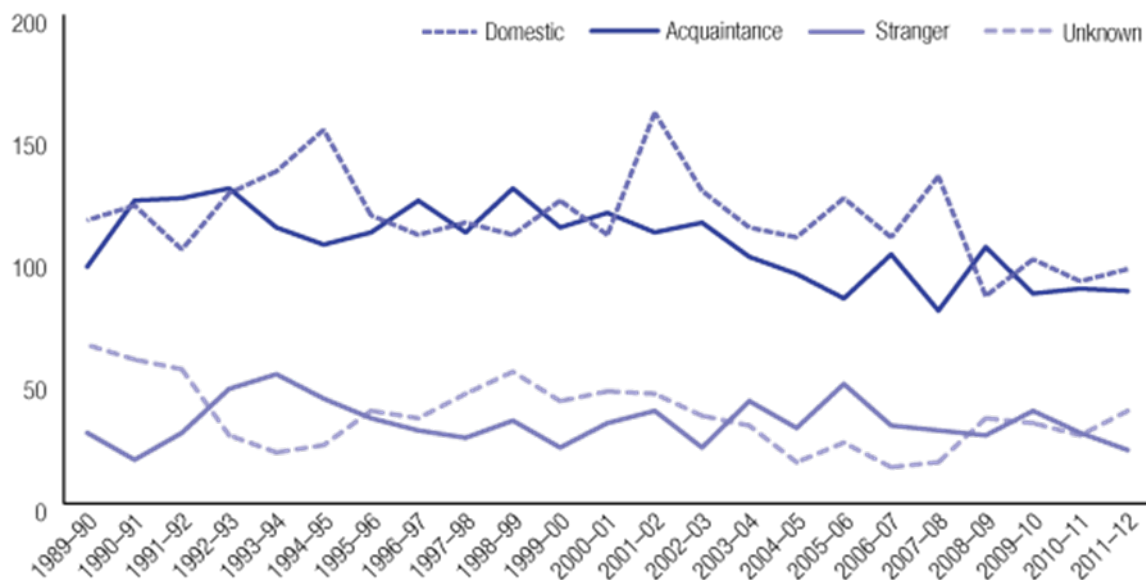
It is important to note, however, that the elusive nature of ‘proof’ that [Men’s Behaviour Change Programs] work should not detract from many studies which indicate that these programs do have a significant positive impact.²⁰³

In particular, they note that measured decreases in the incidences of violence (recidivism) is only one way in which the effectiveness of programs can be measured, and that more qualitative assessments reveal that such programs can still play a role in improving peoples’ lives. This is particularly important given that measuring recidivism is so difficult. Research from the UK has indicated that apart from reducing violence, women who are partners of men involved in domestic violence behaviour change programs considered the following issues important for measuring program success:

- respectful/improved relationships
- expanded space for action
- support/decreased isolation
- enhanced parenting and
- perpetrators understanding the impact of domestic violence.²⁰⁴

The rates of women being killed by their male intimate partners, the form of domestic violence that is least subject to reporting biases, has decreased in recent years. However it has decreased at roughly the same rate of all other forms of homicide (see Figure 1), and is therefore difficult to associate with increased awareness or integrated responses.²⁰⁵ Changes in the more hidden forms of domestic violence are even more difficult to tie to any particular intervention.

Figure 1: Homicide type by year, 1989–90 to 2011–12 (n)



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology²⁰⁶

This uncertainty is a strong argument for increased evaluation and research into program effectiveness. However there is inevitably a finite amount of resourcing available to combat social problems such as domestic violence, and robust evaluation can be expensive. Debates persist about whether perpetrator programs divert

203. Centre for Innovative Justice, [Opportunities for early intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view](#), RMIT, Melbourne, March 2015.

204. N Westmarland, L Kelly and J Chadler-Mills, [Domestic violence perpetrator programs: What counts as success?](#), Briefing note 1, Respect, London, August 2010.

205. T Cussen and W Bryant, [‘Domestic/family homicide in Australia’](#), *Research in Practice* no 38, AIC, Canberra, May 2015.

206. W Bryant and T Cussen, [Homicide in Australia: 2010–11 to 2011–12: National Homicide Monitoring Project Report](#), Monitoring report no. 23, AIC, Canberra, February 2015.

resources that could be better spent supporting those who have suffered domestic violence through community support services or criminal justice responses.²⁰⁷

The exact mix of interventions and who they target is more a political question than one that can easily be answered with research—it is certainly a significant policy challenge for governments everywhere. Policy responses can be framed in terms of law and order, through increased policing resources and mandatory sentencing, as a health issue, focusing on ameliorating the harm done to victims, as a social justice issue, highlighting a largely hidden crime with vulnerable victims, or even as an economic issue, with consequences for productivity. Domestic violence is not inevitably an issue tied to a particular political outlook, but how it is tackled can be consistent with certain overarching political agendas.

What still needs to be done?

The WHO international review on the prevalence of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence points out that the high prevalence of domestic violence around the globe illustrates why there is a need for governments to focus more on prevention strategies and not only provide support services for those affected.²⁰⁸

However, the report also notes that the global variation in the prevalence of violence against women highlights that this form of violence is not inevitable and can be prevented or reduced. The study recommends several key prevention interventions and states that ‘it is time for the world to take action’:

Interventions for prevention include: challenging social norms that support male authority and control over women and that condone violence against women; reducing levels of childhood exposure to violence; reforming discriminatory family law; strengthening women’s economic rights; eliminating gender inequalities in access to formal wage employment and secondary education; and, at an individual level, addressing harmful use of alcohol. Growing evidence from surveys of men asking about perpetration of rape/sexual assault against non-partners and physical and sexual violence against partners also points to the need to address social and cultural norms around masculinity, gender power relationships and violence...it is time for the world to take action: a life free of violence is a basic human rights, one that every women, man and child deserves.²⁰⁹

A major series in the *Lancet* on the prevention of violence against women and girls argued that this form of violence is preventable, noting that ‘research shows that several multi-component interventions achieve substantial reductions’ in levels of violence in low and middle income countries, although a similar result is yet to be demonstrated in high income countries. The series noted that political leadership and governmental investment are essential to reducing violence and recommend that governments ‘take leadership in promoting change and supporting a coordinated, national response’.²¹⁰ Many other experts in the field agree, arguing that integrating responses and initiatives across the community, all jurisdictions and all levels of government is the best way to promote equality and reduce violence:

Violence against women is both a consequence and cause of gender inequality interacting in complex ways with other social inequalities in all sectors of society and so it must be addressed by promoting women’s equality and empowerment. Equality and empowerment can only be promoted by the mainstreaming of primary prevention philosophies, practices, principles and programs within all anti-violence initiatives, across jurisdictions and all aspects of society.²¹¹

Most stakeholders acknowledge that this is a difficult problem requiring complex and coordinated responses not one-off, sporadic responses and argue that lasting change is possible requiring:

- ongoing national frameworks to reduce domestic violence in cooperation with all relevant jurisdictions and ongoing resourcing and funding to implement and evaluate the frameworks
- ongoing, integrated support service provision across jurisdictions
- ongoing resourcing and funding to implement and evaluate services

207. Centre for Innovative Justice, [Opportunities for early intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view](#), March 2015.

208. WHO, [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence](#), op. cit., p. 36.

209. Ibid., p. 36

210. M Moore, [Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?](#), Lancet series on violence against women and girls, *The Lancet* online, 26 November 2014.

211. J Oberin and T Mitra-Kahn, op. cit., p. 17.

- ongoing 'big picture' education initiatives designed to change community attitudes (not sporadic campaigns) and ongoing resourcing and funding to implement and evaluate the initiatives
- coordinated, 'best-practice' perpetrator programs across all jurisdictions and
- improved legal and police responses across all jurisdictions that are sensitive to the needs of those affected.²¹²

Certainly it would appear that ongoing funding to support and implement services may be a crucial component in reducing the levels of domestic violence. Many of the US initiatives targeting domestic violence were funded under the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Originally authorising US\$1.6 billion in funding over five years, it has since been reauthorised three more times. Many experts believe this may have directly contributed to the decline in domestic violence in the US of 53 per cent and domestic homicides of women by 26 per cent between 1993 and 2008, with evidence that the US jurisdictions that received VAWA funding saw significantly greater decreases in sexual and aggravated assaults than those that did not.²¹³ The success of VAWA in similarly reducing sexual violence has, however, been questioned.²¹⁴

In a 2012 interview the Director of the United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women discussed the wide-ranging impact of the VAWA:

As a result of this comprehensive legislative package aimed at eradicating violence against women, we have witnessed a paradigm shift in how the issue of violence against women is addressed in the United States, and countless lives have been positively impacted. VAWA has led to significant improvements in the criminal and civil justice systems, encouraging victims to file complaints, improving evidence collection, and increasing access to protection orders. Victims now can reach out for help, call the police, find 24-hour emergency services, and take steps to leave abusive relationships. Domestic violence is no longer considered a private family matter, and is being addressed as a serious public health and criminal justice issue. Stalking is recognized as a dangerous crime, not just something that happens to celebrities. Schools are developing policies to respond to teen dating violence. The prevalence and devastation of sexual assault is finally being recognized. Thousands of women, men, and children have received life-saving services from rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters.²¹⁵

Improved data collection is another crucial element and the National Plan includes a focus on building the evidence base. The Victorian government has also recently announced the development of a 'domestic violence index', in recognition of the fact that reporting rates underestimate the true rate of domestic violence. The index will include factors such as community attitudes about violence towards women, conviction rates, police data and hospital presentations. It is hoped that the index will allow more detailed measurement of the effectiveness of difference responses to domestic violence.²¹⁶

It is clear that domestic violence is a complex social problem that affects the perpetrator, the abused person, any children that might be present, and the wider social environment of those affected. Addressing the many aspects of the problem requires a number of different approaches that cater to the differing needs of different communities, including Indigenous and CALD women. Funding to establish, evaluate, and continue effective or promising programs across the criminal justice and community sectors will inevitably be an important contributor to the solution.

The interim report from Australia's first parliamentary inquiry into domestic violence acknowledged that 'addressing domestic violence is an issue that requires long-term commitment from governments, stakeholders and the broader community'. The interim report welcomed 'the current momentum and significant effort occurring to address domestic violence' and notes that the provision of adequate resources will be key to achieving real progress.²¹⁷ The Committee's final report recognised 'the long term effort required to address domestic and family violence and recommends that the current Commonwealth short-term funding

212. See J Ransley and C Bond, op. cit.

213. M Ellsberg, DJ Arango, M Morton, F Gennari, S Kiplesund, M Contreras and C Watts, 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?', *The Lancet*, 21 November 2014, pp. 1–12.

214. KJ Roe, *The Violence Against Women Act and Its Impact on Sexual Violence Public Policy: Looking Back and Looking Forward*, September 2004.

215. R Kanani, *DOJ Director on Violence Against Women in the United States*, *Forbes*, 3 August 2012.

216. AAP, 'Victoria to introduce world-first domestic violence index', *The Age*, 17 May 2015; S Anderson, 'Domestic violence: Victorian Government launches family violence index to track scale of crisis', *ABC News*, 18 May 2015.

217. Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, *Domestic violence in Australia*, Interim report, The Senate, Canberra, March 2015, pp. 3 and 13.

arrangements should be extended to a multi-year approach to reduce the level of uncertainty for services and to allow for adequate future planning in the sector.²¹⁸

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a serious issue affecting millions around the world and international governments continue to employ a variety of strategies to try and reduce the levels of this form of violence. Although many of these strategies have been ongoing for some decades, there is still a lack of reliable evidence as to what works.

However, it is argued that the global variation in the prevalence of violence against women highlights that this form of violence is not inevitable and can be prevented or reduced, particularly with the support of integrated cross-jurisdictional responses and sustained government funding.

While many of the more innovative measures and programs discussed in this paper may appear to be the way forward from a public policy perspective in tackling and reducing the levels of domestic violence, the practicalities of coordinating and resourcing the many services that may be involved pose considerable and complex policy challenges across all jurisdictions.

The Australian Government has acknowledged the seriousness of the problem and the Prime Minister has stated that 'We must elevate this issue to our national consciousness and make it clear that domestic, family or sexual violence is unacceptable in any circumstances'.²¹⁹ The Opposition is also committed to reducing domestic violence and recently announced that a future Labor Government would provide funding of \$70 million over three years, targeting investments for legal services; Safe at Home grants; perpetrator interaction mapping; and funding for a National Crisis Summit.²²⁰

However, while most commentary on efforts to reduce this form of violence, including the National Plan, is largely positive, many stakeholders and commentators argue that ongoing, integrated resourcing and funding across all jurisdictions is crucial in order to effect long-term change.²²¹ It is argued that Commonwealth/state/territory funding arrangements are often ad-hoc or inadequate, negatively affecting service provision at the community level.²²² In addition, uncertainty around ongoing funding for Commonwealth/state and territory partnership agreements (such as the homelessness agreement) can also affect certain domestic violence support services.

It is acknowledged by most stakeholders that this is a difficult policy challenge requiring complex and coordinated responses. However, most are in agreement that more effectively funding and integrating responses and initiatives across the community, all jurisdictions and all levels of government would be a positive step in the right direction in order to reduce the levels of this form of violence.

218. Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, [Domestic violence in Australia](#), Final report, op. cit., p. xii.

219. M Turnbull (Prime Minister), [Women's safety package to stop the violence](#), op. cit.

220. Australian Labor Party (ALP), [Our initial investment to address family violence](#); and [National crisis summit on family violence](#), ALP policy documents, June 2015. See also B Shorten (Leader of the Opposition), [Speech to the local government NGA](#), Canberra, 16 June 2015.

221. J Ransley and C Bond, op. cit.; ACOSS, [Funding uncertainty hurting Australia's community sector](#), fact sheet, ACOSS website, December 2014.

222. For example, J Hill, [Home truths: the cost and causes of domestic violence](#), *Monthly*, 1 March 2015.

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