

**Submission to the
Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria)
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About the authors

Susan Geraghty

For the last 25 years Susan has worked across government, the community and education sectors and in private practice, to address violence against women and children. Significant achievements include establishing the innovative Men's Referral Service in Victoria in 1993, developing the Statewide Framework for Men's Behaviour Change programs for the Victorian Government in 2001, co-developing and facilitating the nationally accredited Graduate Certificate in Social Science (Male Family Violence) in 2002 and most recently establishing the Men's Behaviour Change Network in New South Wales in 2013.

Susan has extensive experience in developing government and agency policy frameworks, and in developing and facilitating training and professional development programs to support community and family violence workers.

Susan has recently returned to Victoria from New South Wales where she was the Centre Manager for BaptistCare NSW & ACT, in Bankstown. Susan managed a team of counsellors supporting individuals, couples and families and worked in partnership with a range of local, regional and statewide services to provide an integrated and whole of family response to families experiencing family violence. Susan is also the Founding Chair of the Men's Behaviour Change Network, NSW.

Danny Blay

For eleven years Danny was the Chief Executive Officer of No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association (NTV) Inc. where his key achievements included the development of innovative training on family violence prevention for the community sector, establishing high quality telephone counselling services and fostering formal working relationships with other aligned organisations and stakeholders. Danny has made significant contributions to the development of improved and innovative ways in which family violence is addressed in Victoria. Danny is a leading male speaker and analyst of the patriarchal roots of men's use of family violence towards women. He provides a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of male family violence, reflected in many publications and primary prevention and training work. This has involved developing and delivering training for workers and the broader community about societal attitudes concerning violence against women, anti-sexism bystander intervention, identifying gender inequities and working towards gender equity in a range of settings, and identifying practical ways that men can identify and transform male entitlement and privilege and to evolve more flexible models of masculinity. Danny's work has also involved a focus on assisting practitioners to identify and transform their own use of male entitlement and privilege in working with female colleagues, and in their prevention and response work more generally.

Danny is currently a member of the National Technical Advisory Group for the Development of a National Framework for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and the Children convened by Our Watch (formerly the National

Foundation for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children), ANROWS and VicHealth and has recently worked with the Municipal Association of Victoria, the City of Yarra, Victoria Legal Aid and the Judicial College of Victoria in developing policies and practice in the response to men's violence against women and children.

Relevant projects

Susan and Danny have worked in partnership for over 10 years to ensure that Government agencies' and community services' responses by to men who use violence are accountable to women and children's experiences. They share a common aim - to prevent and reduce violence against women and children. Susan and Danny were instrumental in the development and delivery of the No To Violence Conference on Responses to Men's Domestic and Family Violence: Experience, Innovations and Emerging Directions in 2013. Our working history includes:

- Development and facilitation of the unique nationally accredited Graduate Certificate in Social Science (Male Family Violence).
- Development and facilitation of training for parole officers and managers from Corrections Victoria.
- Development and facilitation of practice forums and professional development for community and family violence workers
- Facilitation of Men's Behaviour Change Programs
- Collaborating to develop the Victorian Women's Safety Strategy and statewide family violence framework through the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence
- Development and facilitation of community workshops addressing male privilege for local councils and submission writing for local community health services

Preventing family violence

VicHealth reported in 2010 that, at an individual level, the most consistent predictor of the use of violence among men is their agreement with sexist, patriarchal, and/or sexually hostile attitudes.¹ The report is supported by numerous international studies that closely link men's attitudes, beliefs and values regarding gender, women and relationships and men's use of family violence and family violence.

For example, in a meta-analysis undertaken by Murnen et al. that drew on 39 studies using 11 measures of masculine ideology, the strongest attitudinal predictors of sexual aggression were attitudes based on hostile forms of masculinity or patriarchal ideology.² Similarly, two earlier meta-analyses by Sugarman and Frankel reported strong relationships between the perpetration of violence and traditional attitudes about women's gender roles and Schumacher et al found distinct prevalence of attitudes that condone male partner aggression.³

Stith, Smith et al. examined the combined results of 94 studies of risk factors for intimate partner physical aggression, drawing on studies of violence in marital and cohabiting relationships, and found a strong correlate of intimate partner violence at the individual level was having attitudes condoning violence, while another risk factor was traditional gender-role beliefs and values.⁴

Other studies demonstrate the role of patriarchal attitudes in men's perpetration of violence against women, including examinations among adult men in South Africa (Abrahams et al.), among boys and young men in the US (Anderson et al.), and for particular forms of violence such as sexual coercion of college women (Adams-Curtis & Forbes).⁵ As Dr Michael Flood notes:

These quantitative investigations are corroborated by qualitative studies which document for example that men who have used violence against their female partners excuse and justify their violence with reference to discourses of uncontrollable male aggression, female provocation and weakness, and male privilege and 'rights' (Anderson and Umberson).⁶

In the context of understanding the motivators or predictors of men's violence against women it has become clear that to prevent family violence sophisticated programs and processes must be developed and implemented to challenge standard beliefs and values about men and women's status and masculinity from a very early age.

However, this, perhaps unsurprisingly, is not new news. The Murnen et al. study was published in 2002. The two meta-analyses reporting strong relationships between the perpetration of violence and traditional attitudes about women's gender roles by Sugarman and Frankel was published in 1996. Schumacher's study was in 2001, and Stith and Smith's work on risk factors for intimate partner physical aggression was in 2004.

Anderson and Umberson's work finding that men who have used violence against their female partners excuse and justify their violence with reference to discourses of

¹ <http://dvvic.org.au/index.php/understanding-family-violence/key-statistics.html>

² Murnen, S.K., C. Wright, and G. Kaluzny (2002) If 'boys will be boys,' then girls will be victims? A meta-analytic review of the research that relates masculine ideology to sexual aggression. *Sex Roles*, June, 46(11-12), pp. 359-375.

³ Flood, M. (2007). Background document for Preventing Violence Before It Occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

⁴ Stith, S.M., D.B. Smith, C.E. Penn, D.B. Ward, and D. Tritt. (2004). Intimate partner physical abuse perpetration and victimization risk factors: A meta-analytic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10(1): 65-98.

⁵ Flood, M. (2007). Background document for Preventing Violence Before It Occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

⁶ Ibid.

uncontrollable male aggression, female provocation and weakness, and male privilege and 'rights' was undertaken in 2001.

More recently, the *American Journal of Public Health* recently reported that that the nature of men's conversations with their friends could encourage or discourage instances of sexual aggression toward women. Male perpetrators of sexual aggression were also more likely to have friends who used objectifying statements about women during conversation and were more likely to feel uncomfortable when presented with egalitarian statements about women and dating.⁷

There not only is a broad understanding of the clear links between many men's inappropriate or dangerous beliefs about gender, women and relationships, and their use of violence against women, but, importantly this understanding is not new.

The importance of gender role beliefs and values cannot be overestimated. Ridgeway (2014) makes the observation that despite changes in structural inequality in society, which have improved women's socio-economic and public sphere status or absolute status, their position as inferior in terms of social status has remained constant. As Wall (2014)⁸ states, this is an important observation. According to Wall, Ridgeway's theory is that social status beliefs are a motivator of human behaviour and beliefs about competence are perpetuated throughout social encounters and organisations that distribute power and resources, intrinsically directing higher status groups towards privileges. This type of thinking emphasises the importance of community attitude information being incorporated into measures of equality as much as socio-economic, political and other "hard" measurement data. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) concluded that although changing women's economic disadvantage and making changes at the personal and community levels do modify cultural beliefs about gender, the core hierarchy of these beliefs is more difficult to break down and needs to be persistently challenged at all levels.

Indeed, as noted by UNIFEM, "(a)s gender equality improves, the prevalence of violence against women is lower. Data available shows the inverse relationship between gender equality and violence by an intimate partner. This is borne out for both physical and sexual forms of abuse," and that "countries with greater equality between women and men tend to have lower levels of violence against women, based on the leading global indices for gender equality."⁹

Nevertheless, it seems these ideas and the evidence base have not significantly influenced policies and programs aimed at preventing family violence and violence against women. In the context of primary prevention, the bulk of activities and policies have focussed on social marketing strategies that aim to disseminate messages to declare a universal aberration of family violence and violence against women, such as the 2004 Australian 'Violence Against Women – Australia Says No'¹⁰ campaign. Other campaigns and activities have focused on raising awareness and making general statements about rejecting family violence and violence against women. This has also been the focus of a number of White Ribbon strategies.

Furthermore, the bulk of state-sanctioned 'prevention' activities and responses have focussed on criminal justice responses such as civil intervention orders, and sometimes, custodial sentences. None of these approaches address men's attitudes, beliefs, values or indeed behaviours.

⁷ <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/291170.php>

⁸ <http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/researchsummary/ressum7/02.html>

⁹ http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/UNIFEM/EVAWkit_01_InvestingInGenderEquality_en.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/06/06/1086460165051.html>

Other responses to men who have used violence towards women and family members – namely Victoria’s Men’s Behaviour Change Programs – go to great lengths to engage men in conversations and reflections about their own sense of masculinity and entitlement as the foundations of their use of violence. However most programs only get to work with such men and their (former) partners for a relatively short period of time (the minimum standard being twelve sessions). Furthermore, the vast bulk of such men have demonstrated some willingness to change, as opposed to those who maintain significantly entrenched positions of power, justification, denial and entitlement. Additionally, programs successfully engage with a minute proportion of men who have come to the attention of services and/or the criminal justice system, let alone the much larger group of men who use violence towards women and family members who elude detection.

To date there has been a decided lack of public discourse or consideration of the impacts of standard forms of masculinity and its inherent beliefs, values and descriptions on supporting some men’s violent and coercive behaviours towards family members. There remains a distinct and vocal belief that men who use violence towards family members are not ‘normal’. Such men are perceived to be ‘sick’, or ‘criminals’, or ‘drunk’, or ‘stoned’, and responses to family violence focus on these and other myths and excuses about men’s violence against women. Indeed, many if not all of these myths – extending to culture, upbringing or biological or genetic determinants – are believed to be *causes* of men’s violence towards women, rather than convenient excuses. As male family violence workers will note, the vast majority of men who come to the attention of family violence services and perhaps the criminal justice system are not the sort of men widely portrayed in the media as out-of-control and/or drug- and alcohol-affected psychopaths. Instead, they are largely functional, socially engaged, employed and educated men who do not display violent or abusive behaviours elsewhere – unless perhaps the power dynamic is in their favour and the consequences are minimal.

Furthermore, while the Victorian government has actively attempted to provide a whole-of-government response to family violence since the initial efforts of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence from 2002, significant sections of government and the helping community have been absent. Additionally, the foci of activities have largely been on secondary and tertiary prevention while consideration of addressing gender inequality and standard forms of masculinity have not been addressed. It could be argued that the bulk of helping professionals are not skilled, or even provided the mandate, to provide accurate preliminary assessments and responses to women and children who have experienced violence, or men who use violence towards family members.

Men and masculinity

Any attempts to define or categorise typical masculine behaviour is fraught with conjecture and often informed by beliefs regarding ‘normality’. The notion that ‘boys will be boys’ often permeates the ways in which people interact at personal, social and professional levels. Generic forms of masculinity and femininity are often attributed to being ‘hard wired’ from conception, and that many behaviours exhibited by people are due to predispositions based on their gender, rather than choice.

However, it is noted that if this were the case, *all* boys and men, and *all* girls and women, would behave in rigidly standardised forms. Evidence and experience suggests that this is not the case. There are wide variants to behaviours, characteristics and interests that do not necessarily adhere to supposedly inflexible gender descriptors or roles. While there may be some comfort to apportion a reasoning for someone’s particular behaviour based on their gender, in reality our

behaviour, beliefs, values and attitudes are formed through socialisation from the day we are born.

And yet, if we consider that much – if not all – of our behaviours, beliefs and attitudes are formed through our learned experience, gender is not often considered as a focus of inquiry when it comes to analysing or even responding to social concerns. While discussions in Men's Behaviour Change Programs, for example, aim to challenge ingrained beliefs about what it means to be a male, a similar lens is not applied in other circumstances when, like family violence, there is a significant gender divide regarding responsibility for behaviour and risk. For example, when considering social concerns such as road trauma or crime, gender is rarely acknowledged.

For example, of all alleged Australian offenders in 2013-14, 177,215 were male while 42,109 were female.¹¹ There were 3,531 male alleged offenders in Victoria processed for 'Behave in a riotous indecent offensive or insulting manner' or 'Use profane, indecent or obscene language or insulting words' in 2013 as compared to 379 females.¹² In 2014 there were 31,200 males in Australian prisons compared to 2,591 females.¹³ Male drivers are four to five times more likely to die on our roads than females.¹⁴ Of the 284 drowning deaths that occurred in Australian waterways in 2011-12, 232 (82 per cent) were male and 52 (18 per cent) were female.¹⁵

Are we to suppose, then, that males are much more predisposed to offend than women, or are there other influences that permit, condone or even celebrate men's behaviour that translate to offending?

Such evidence suggests that many more boys and men are choosing to engage in behaviours that are inherently risky. Quite apart from the risk taking, dangerous behaviours and higher levels of general offending, many boys and men feel a sense of entitlement to use particular behaviours that is based on their own beliefs, attitudes and opinions about masculinity: that, as boys and men, they are entitled to behave in certain ways regardless of the potential consequences.

Similarly, family violence is almost exclusively perpetrated by men, as noted in the Issues Paper provided by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. In recent times, in Victoria, the consideration of and responses to family violence has rightly noted the distinct gender bias in the use and experience of violence within relationships and family settings. However, such responses to date have largely been within a tertiary prevention context. That is, responses set in motion after the violence has occurred. They aim to reduce the consequences and impacts of violence and prevent recurrence. It may be argued that there are primary prevention activities that aim specifically to prevent men's violence against women and children. However it can be argued that none of these activities have addressed basic and general perceptions that many men have about masculinity and themselves. As the evidence shows, their sense of 'normal' masculinity informs, justifies, condones and sometimes even celebrates violent and abusive behaviour. And this is based on many men's inherent personal and social privilege.

The evidence regarding how to prevent men's use of family violence and violence against women is clear. Allowing the perpetuation and even celebration of the male stereotype that leads to a justification of dangerous and violent behaviours need to be directly addressed and challenged. At the same time it is necessary to redefine the

¹¹ Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2013-14, https://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=782

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4517.0>

¹⁴ *Road Deaths Australia Statistical Summary 2008*, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

¹⁵ *National Drowning Report 2012*, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

stereotypical role and status of women. This will provide greater capacity for both men and women to live a life without the constraints of societal expectations and limitations. This sounds simple, but there are myriad reasons why we, as a society, do not address the factors that support men's use of violence:

- Most men – including law and policy makers – see the issue of violence against women as the responsibility of 'those other men', the monsters, the psychopaths
- Most men see their daily interactions as normal, appropriate and with negligible impacts
- It works for men – men directly benefit. Why should men actively consider it, let alone change it?
- Most men are blind to how their own male privilege impacts directly on their daily interactions that can be contributing to the very gender inequality that research tells us can lead to violence against women
- As a society, men and women generally accept the status quo and even when obvious flaws are identified and change is required, the system reasserts itself.
- Violence against women and particularly family violence has been seen as individual acts, rather than reflecting a culture and pattern of perception and behaviour
- When there are voices of dissent it is often women, who are then vilified, ridiculed, identified as man haters and marginalised. The issue is not owned by those who have the status and power.

Conclusion

We know the factors that increase the risk for of violence for women and girls.¹⁶

A variety of factors at the individual, relationship, community and society (including the institutional/ state) levels intersect to increase the risk of violence for women and girls. These factors, represented in the ecological model¹⁷, include:

- witnessing or experiencing abuse as a child (associated with future perpetration of violence for boys and experiencing violence for girls);
- women's membership in marginalized or excluded groups;
- conflict and tension within an intimate partner relationship or marriage;
- women's insecure access to and control over property and land rights;
- male control over decision-making and assets;
- substance (including alcohol) abuse (associated with increased incidences of violence);
- low levels of education (for boys associated with perpetrating violence in the future and for girls, experiencing violence);
- limited economic opportunities (an aggravating factor for unemployed or underemployed men associated with perpetrating violence; and as a risk

¹⁶ UN Women, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/300-causes-protective-and-risk-factors-.html?next=301>

¹⁷ UN Women, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/310-operating-within-the-ecological-model-.html>

factor for women and girls, including of domestic abuse, child and forced marriage, and sexual exploitation and trafficking);

- the presence of economic, educational and employment disparities between men and women in an intimate relationship;
- attitudes and practices that reinforce female subordination and tolerate male violence (e.g. dowry, bride price, child marriage);
- lack of safe spaces for women and girls, which can be physical or virtual meeting spaces that allow free expression and communication; a place to develop friendships and social networks, engage with mentors and seek advice from a supportive environment.
- normalised use of violence within the family or society to address conflict;
- a limited legislative and policy framework for preventing and responding to violence;
- lack of punishment (impunity) for perpetrators of violence; and,
- low levels of awareness among service providers, law enforcement and judicial actors.¹⁸

Additional risk factors related to intimate partner violence that have been identified in the context of the United States include: young age; poor mental health levels related to low self-esteem, anger, depression, emotional insecurity or dependence, antisocial or borderline personality traits and social isolation; history of physical discipline as a child; marital instability and separation or divorce; history of perpetrating psychological abuse; unhealthy family relationships; poverty-related issues such as overcrowding or economic stress; and low levels of community intervention or sanctions against domestic violence.¹⁹

Protective Factors

On the other hand, UN Women have described protective factors that can reduce women and girls' risk of violence, including:

- completion of secondary education for girls (and boys);
- women's economic autonomy and access to skills training, credit and employment;
- quality response services (judicial, security / protection, social and medical) staffed with knowledgeable, skilled and trained personnel;
- availability of safe spaces or shelters; and,
- access to support groups.

An important factor furthermore described by UN Women is addressing social norms that promote gender equality. Notably, this factor is much less tangible and requires significant cultural change – processes for which are not explained or identified.

¹⁸ Bott, et al., 2005

¹⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008

Recommendations

Governmental and organisational policies and procedures directed at increasing gender equality are essential. Parallel to this, large-scale student education promoting gender equality is required at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. For gender equality to become a reality, the issue needs to be addressed in broad policy and education but also requires a nuanced and sophisticated understanding regarding the subtleties of gender inequality in our everyday interactions and conversations. Generally, people agree that everyone should be equal and everyone has the right to be treated with respect. However, it seems that many people remain unaware of the complexities of the issue, have not had to evaluate their own attitudes, beliefs and values regarding genuine gender equality, and remain unaware about how they may be playing a role in the perpetuation of gender inequality in our community. This is especially true for those who engage with young people and adults in the context of either fostering healthy relationships or responding to what often is described as relationship dysfunction, rather than abusive behaviour.

For example, some work has been undertaken in engaging magistrates, court registrars, police officers, corrections officers and social work and welfare students in gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of gender relationships, including violence against women and family violence. However, presentations and training has been provided in relatively uncoordinated and inconsistent ways by some family violence workers, including this submission's authors. Ordinarily it could be assumed that such workers should already have a sophisticated understanding of gender relationships and men's violence against women, given their regular interface with those using or experiencing violence, however this is not the case.

It is therefore recommended Victoria requires:

1. A whole of government agreement and approach to gender equality including the development of policies and procedures to embed and promote gender equality across government above and beyond current arrangements. This would include sections of Government departments not currently engaged in a coordinated response to family violence and violence against women, including (but not limited to):
 - a. all areas of primary health
 - b. corrections
 - c. the legal sector and judiciary (beyond the Magistrates Court)
 - d. education, including primary, secondary and tertiary levels.
2. Embedded professional gender auditing processes in all organisations.
3. Research, to determine the attitudes, beliefs and values regarding gender, of men who have used violence against women to learn about the journey/continuum from non-violent gender inequity to violence. This would be useful to compare with analyses of 'control groups' values and attitudes to determine similarities of men across society and to then develop and deliver more targeted prevention activities.
4. A review of current school-based activities such as respectful relationships programs to determine if and how students are invited to consider and discuss issues relating to gender and equality.
5. Embedding gender studies as an integral component of training professionals in areas such as primary health, psychology, social work, welfare studies, counselling, community development and teaching.