



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

(Reg. No. A0020272M)

Affiliated with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS)
and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), London, UK

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Royal Commission into Family Violence
PO Box 535
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ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

SUBMISSION FROM THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

The Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV) is a secular organisation whose members foster an ethical, rational and responsible approach to life. HSV supports human rights, democratic processes, and a just and inclusive governance.

HSV seeks to alleviate suffering, to promote well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational and charitable activities.

The views that follow have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all HSV members are invited. Further supportive evidence has been obtained from print publications, the Internet, the mass media and from individuals with relevant experience.

The President, Vice-President and Submissions Conveners of the HSV are authorised to present these views.

The Humanist Society of Victoria appreciates the opportunity to make a submission.

Victorian Humanists have supported recent calls for a Royal Commission into this escalating family problem. We are gratified that it has been established in Victoria and hope that its findings will inform authorities nationwide.

We regard family violence as a particularly abhorrent crime that carries serious and long-term consequences.

Victorian Humanists submit the following points for your consideration:

1. In 1985, the Women's Policy Unit in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet produced a discussion paper entitled, 'Criminal Assault in the Home'. The definition adopted in this paper included psychological, emotional, social, economic and sexual abuse as well as physical assault. We assert that the term, 'criminal assault' sends a more direct and accurate message about this unacceptable behaviour than does the phrase, 'domestic or family assault'. We ask that, 'criminal assault' be adopted as the preferred terminology.
2. In the National Plan (2012 – 2022) to reduce violence against women and children, Victoria's preventative measures were based upon comprehensive research which indicated that key contributing factors to assault included unequal power relations between men and women, and adherence to rigid gender stereotypes. We acknowledge a consensus among social researchers that a profound cultural change is needed on gender equality and the criminal nature of assault.
3. A 2013 survey by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, regarding attitudes to assaults at home, found that sizeable proportions of people, mostly young, still justify, trivialise or excuse assaults; or shift blame from perpetrators to victim. We note that social media and other community forums provide potential opportunities to cultivate socially responsible attitudes regarding assault.
4. In what can be perceived as a social epidemic, some 65,393 incidents of assault in the family were reportedly attended by the police in 2014. Deaths of women and children are reportedly on the increase. Yet since 2013, the Federal Government has cut some \$300 million from services which assist women in fleeing abusive relationships. Accommodation and legal services are now unable to cope with the demand for support services. Victorian Humanists stress the need to accord a higher funding priority to deal with this social scourge.
5. We support calls to implement a broad and intensive educational campaign involving schools and universities, sports clubs, media and entertainment outlets, social media and community organisations, and political and religious spheres of influence.
6. This educational campaign should address community needs:
 - i. to inculcate understandings of causes and solutions of failures within relationships;
 - ii. to emphasise violence as criminal behaviour;
 - iii. to counteract traditional gender stereotypes and social norms which excuse violence;
 - iv. to create opportunities for practical support structures and networks for those at risk;
 - v. to educate for autonomous, economic and social independence for women in need;
 - vi. to provide pre-emptive educational programs on relationships counselling; anger management; understandings of the diversities of violence; and solutions to non-gender/age specific family problems.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Yours faithfully,



Halina Strnad
Co-Convenor, Submissions Committee
Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.