

**NSW Women's Alliance
Men and Domestic and Family Violence
Position Paper
June 2013**

About the NSW Women's Alliance

The NSW Women's Alliance has been established by a number of NSW peak organisations and state-wide service providers working within the sexual violence and domestic and family violence fields. The NSW Women's Alliance brings together a range of agencies with a variety of expertise, knowledge and experience in both responding to and working to prevent violence against women.

Background to this position statement

This position statement has been developed in response to the ongoing statements from a small number of commentators that men account "for at least one in three victims of family violence is male (perhaps as many as one in two)"¹.

The NSW Women's Alliance is concerned that these deliberately misleading arguments will undermine ongoing efforts in the prevention of domestic violence and coordinated responses to it. Studies that indicate men and women assault each other in equal rates have been criticised for their methodologies, including failing to investigate assaults post-separation, which is a critical period for assaults against women and does not differentiate initiating acts of violence from acts of self-defence². Furthermore these studies focus on discrete incidents of violence rather than on patterns of violence and typically do not consider motivation, numerous forms of violent, coercive and controlling acts and behaviour (for example sexual violence, financial abuse, threats to kill). These studies also frequently exclude homicide (as they only consider violence in current relationships³).

The little research that does exist, in relation to domestic and family violence towards men indicates that men's experience of domestic violence, in heterosexual relationships, differs significantly from that of women's. Most notably, men rarely live in a state of ongoing fear of their female partners who are perpetrators of domestic and family violence, are less likely to have previous experiences of family violence, and are less likely to experience violence post-separation. Further, many men who identify as victims of domestic violence are often also perpetrators⁴. In contrast, "Women are far more likely than men to be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence, to sustain injuries, to fear for their lives, and to be sexually assaulted"⁵. Further, a recent study in NSW which investigated 78 cross-applications for Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders found differences in the forms of abuse alleged in domestic violence relationships with it being found that men were more likely to suffer injuries from acts more likely to be defensive rather than offensive while women were more likely to allege being choked or strangled. In addition, it was only women that alleged they 'had been spat at, had their hair pulled, were burnt, dragged or pulled along the ground, had their arms twisted, and had been pinned against a wall or door.'⁶

¹ 1 in 3, submission to the NSW parliamentary Inquiry: DV Trends and Issues, p.6

² Mulroney, J., Chan, K., Men as Victims of domestic violence, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, p.5

³ Braaf, R., Mayering., I, 2013, 'The Gender debate in Domestic Violence: The Role of Data', *Australian Domestic and family Violence Clearinghouse Issues* paper 25

⁴ Mulroney, J., Chan, K., Men as Victims of domestic violence, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, p.5

⁵ Flood, Michael (2006) The Debate Over Men's Versus Women's Family Violence. *AJIA (Australian Institute of Judicial Administration) Family Violence Conference*, Adelaide, 23-24 February, p.4

⁶ Jane Wangman (2010) 'Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: A Case Study From NSW', *UNSW Law Journal*, 33(3), 945, 959.

Evidence Base

To build a strong evidence base of DFV trends in NSW/Australia we must look at its pattern, risk factors and its social and structural causes in order to develop and deliver targeted responses and ultimately to prevent this violence.

However, as noted by the NSW Parliament Social Issues Committee “the data on domestic violence, in New South Wales, nationally and internationally, clearly shows that men comprise the majority of offenders and women the majority of victims” and further “we are comfortable with the orthodoxy that domestic violence is, generally speaking, a gendered crime”⁷.

The NSW Government DFV reforms follow three major strands: prevention, support and justice strategies. All of these require an accurate evidence base to be built using cross-methodological analysis to continue to develop evidenced based responses. It must be flexible enough to capture the range of behaviours reflected in the gendered analysis and across diverse communities and relationships but also be empirically sound.

NSW Women’s Alliance Position

Domestic and family violence can be experienced by any member of our community. Women and children are overwhelmingly those who experience the violence and perpetrators are overwhelmingly male. Sexual violence, domestic and family violence are gendered crimes, an abuse of power and a product of patriarchy.

The NSW Women’s Alliance Position does not seek to undermine the need to support all victims of domestic and family violence, however our view is that policy and service system responses need to be developed within the framework of understanding that DFV is indeed a gendered crime and that there is an overwhelmingly large evidence base to support this. This framework is vital to preventing domestic and family violence and improving the safety and long term wellbeing of victims of domestic and family violence.

NSW DFV Reforms

The NSW Women’s Alliance supports the ongoing acknowledgement in the NSW DFV reforms that DFV is gendered, with the overwhelming majority of victims of intimate partner violence being heterosexual women and perpetrators being heterosexual male partners or ex-partners.

Therefore, dedicated services for women who have experienced DFV and their families are an entirely appropriate evidence based response.

Importantly while DFV occurs in all types of relationships regardless of gender, sex, sexuality, race, culture and class and exists in all communities, there is significant evidence suggesting that some communities may be more vulnerable because they are less likely to seek help, identify DFV in their relationships or have a perception that their needs might not be met by mainstream services or dealt with sensitively and in confidence.

⁷ New South Wales. Parliament, Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2012, *Domestic violence trends and issues in NSW Inquiry Report*, p.31

Specifically DFV responses need to acknowledge

- Some communities do not like to report to Police or other authorities and this is often due to an historical mistrust and ongoing discrimination (overt and covert) which needs to be methodically and structurally addressed in the long term (ie. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTIQ, CALD communities).
- Recognition that diverse family structures may also impact on dynamics of DFV and are impacted by DFV. LGBTIQ families are constructed differently and this produces a number of issues relating to support and service provision. The Alliance is concerned that needs of gay men and men in same sex relationships who are victims of DFV are not acknowledged and are rendered invisible by simplistically misrepresenting male victims of domestic and family violence as the result of female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships.
- There may be a reticence to go outside family/community structures for assistance (pressure from wider family, lack of community recognition, fear that naming DFV will result in all of the community being stigmatised, fear that support services will not believe them etc).

Quick Statistics

- In 2010 84.8% of victims of assaults between heterosexual partners were females⁸
- Nationally 87% of partner assault victims were women⁹
- Nationally, hospitalisations due to domestic violence mainly comprised female patients 83.6%¹⁰
- The ABS Personal Safety Survey estimated that of 1 293 100 women experienced sexual assault since the age of 15, of whom 23.3% reported being assaulted by their current or ex-partner. Of the 362 400 men who experienced sexual assault none reported being assaulted by their current partner and 5.7% reported being assaulted by their ex-partner¹¹
- Of the 122 intimate partner homicides between July 2008 and June 2010 women comprised 73% of victims.¹²
- Domestic and family violence is major risk factor for homelessness in Australia, with 77178 people in 2011/12 escaping domestic and family violence seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), accounting for 34% of all SHS clients. People escaping domestic and family violence (including children) were predominantly female (78%). Of the clients escaping domestic and family violence 63% were women between the ages of 18 and 44, children under the age of 10 accounted for 21%, a further 7% were children between the ages of 10- 14%. Of the remaining 9%, women over the age of 45 accounted for a large proportion¹³.

⁸ Grech & Burgess (2011) cited in Barrett, I., Braaf., R., 2013, *Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Fast Facts 9* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

⁹ ABS Crime Victimization Survey cited in Barrett, I., Braaf., R., 2013, *Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Fast Facts 9* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

¹⁰ Kreisfeld & Harrison (2010), Barrett, I., Braaf., R., 2013, *Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Fast Facts 9* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

¹¹ ABS Personal Safety Survey, Barrett, I., Braaf., R., 2013, *Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Fast Facts 9* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

¹² Chan & Payne (2013), Barrett, I., Braaf., R., 2013, *Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Fast Facts 9* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012. *Specialist Homelessness Services, 2011–12* Cat. no. HOU 267, pp.56-58, Canberra