

# Violence Against Women: Critical Issues – International Perspectives and Promising Strategies

Dr Michael Flood

University of Wollongong

[mflood@uow.edu.au](mailto:mflood@uow.edu.au)

# Overview

- Part 1:
  - Trends in scholarship on violence against women
- Part 2:
  - Prevention: An international review

# Part 1

- Trends in scholarship regarding men's violence against women
  - Debates over gender and violence
  - Types of violence
  - Other trends

# Trends in scholarship

- Debates over the definition and measurement of violence in relationships and families
- Debates over the patterns and prevalence of violence

# Defining and measuring domestic violence

- Narrow approaches:
  - Focus on physically aggressive acts
- Broad approaches
  - Include a greater range of physical and sexual behaviours which cause harm
  - And non-physical behaviours (verbal, psychological, emotional abuse)
  - And controlling and coercive strategies
  - Comprising a systematic pattern of power and control

# Domestic violence

- A pattern of behaviours, linked by power and control
- Physical violence typically is accompanied by other forms of abusive and oppressive behaviour. Such as;
  - Threats of violence, intimidation, sexual assault, coercion, emotional abuse, financial control, insults and mind-games, control and isolation.
  - And minimising or denying the violence, refusing to accept responsibility, and blaming the victim.

# Coercive Controlling Violence



# The 'Conflict Tactics Scale'

- The source of most claims to gender symmetry in DV (and the source of claims about "1 in 3").
- An acts-focused approach.
- Focuses on 'counting the blows':
  - "Have you or your spouse, in the last year, ever committed... [a range of acts]."
- Other data finds strong gender asymmetries.



# Methodological problems with the CTS

- Asks only about acts, and ignores their impact, meaning, and history (who initiated it, who got hurt, what has happened before, etc.)
- Leaves out sexual abuse, etc.
- Relies only on one partner's reports, despite poor interspousal reliability
- Uses samples shaped by high rates of refusal particularly among individuals perpetrating or suffering severe DV
- Draws only on married and intact couples and excludes violence after separation

# Contrasts in women's and men's experience of domestic violence

- Women are far more likely than men to
  - Be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence
  - Be sexually assaulted
  - Sustain injuries
  - Fear for their lives
  - Experience a range of controlling tactics
  - Experience violence after separation.

# Gender contrasts: experience

- Frequency:
  - Women are more likely than men to experience repeated, and frequent, incidents of violence, whether from current or former partners.
- Sexual violence:
  - Women are more likely than men to be sexually assaulted by a partner.
  - A greater proportion of the intimate partner violence women than men experience involves sexual violence.

# Gender contrasts: impact

- Perceptions of the violence:
  - Women subjected to violence by their male partners feel frightened, helpless, trapped, etc.
  - Men are 'not bothered', see it as insignificant or ludicrous or even admirable, and see its impact as largely inconsequential
- Women show higher levels of fear than men of their partners' violence
  - Not because of greater fragility, but because the violence is worse.

# Gender contrasts: Perpetration

- Women's perpetration of violence is much more often than men's in self-defence.
- Women are more likely to perpetrate partner violence out of emotional expression, self-defence, or retaliation. Men are more likely to perpetrate... for instrumental reasons.
  - Although women also may use violence to gain or maintain power.

# Gender contrasts: Reporting

- Both men and women contribute to:
  - the underestimation of men's violence against women; and
  - the overestimation of women's violence against men.
- Interspousal agreement on domestic violence is low to moderate.
- Men are less likely than women to report their own perpetration of violence.

# Gender contrasts: reporting *cont'd*

- There is mixed evidence regarding whether male victims of domestic violence are less likely than female victims to report their experience.
  - There is some evidence that males are *more* likely than females to report.
- Lower proportions of men may report physical aggression by partners because they do not see it as serious or threatening.

# So...

- Domestic violence (coercive controlling violence / intimate terrorism) is less common than we have claimed.
- Domestic violence is largely a problem of men's violence against women.
- If we do not pay attention to both women's and men's experiences of victimisation and perpetration, we will commit errors of fact, of theory, and of intervention.



# Trends in scholarship *cont'd*

- Recognition of diversity, in:
  - Patterns of violence or perpetration
  - Perpetrators
- I.e., there are different types of domestic violence, with differing causes, dynamics, and impacts.

# Different kinds of violence?

- *Intimate terrorism / Coercive controlling violence*
  - More severe violence, used by one partner (i.e., asymmetrical), plus other controlling tactics, to assert or restore power and authority (i.e., instrumental). Tends to escalate, and injuries are more likely.
- *Situational couple violence*
  - Minor violence, by both partners, which is expressive (emotional) rather than instrumental. Does not escalate over time, and injuries are rare.

# Concerns regarding such typologies

- How coercive control is measured
- Emphasis on physical forms of violence
- Practice concerns
  - Who makes the assessment?
  - How to translate to practice
  - Risk of making the wrong assessment

# Trends in scholarship *cont'd*

- Emphasis on dynamics of coercive control
  - Violence against women as fundamentally a political or ethical issue...
- Emphasis on links between different forms of violence.
  - E.g., the intersections of domestic violence and sexual violence

# Trends in scholarship *cont'd*

- Examination of particular forms of or dimensions to violence
  - In particular populations
  - In particular contexts
  - System responses
  - Victim-survivors' strategies of management and resistance
  - Trajectories or pathways

# Trends in scholarship *cont'd*

- Debates over the social and structural foundations of violence
  - Vs psychological theories.
  - Men's use of coercive control against female partners is enabled by persistent gender inequalities (Evan Stark).
- Intersectionality:
  - Forms of social difference such as class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability
  - Local, national, and global contexts

# Trends in scholarship *cont'd*

- Growing visibility of verbal, psychological, and other forms of abuse
- Shifts in the theorisations of attitudes
  - E.g., distinction between 'hostile' and 'benevolent' sexism
- Increased attention to evaluation
- Methodological sophistication

# Shifts in men's violence against women itself

- Shifts in the contexts for men's violence against women
  - The pornographication of popular culture
  - Positive and negative shifts in community attitudes
- New mediums for abuse
  - New forms of abuse, such as non-consensual sexting
  - New media for old forms of abuse such as stalking.



# Further shifts

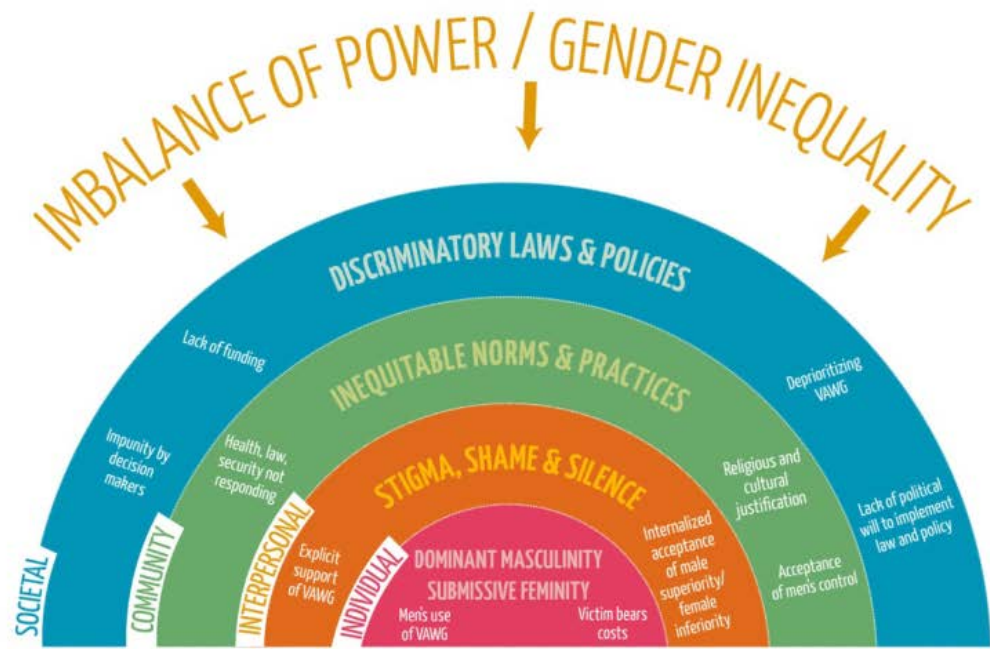
- Shifts in family law: children's increased contact with violent fathers
- Shifting patterns of poverty and economic and social inequality

## Part 2: Prevention

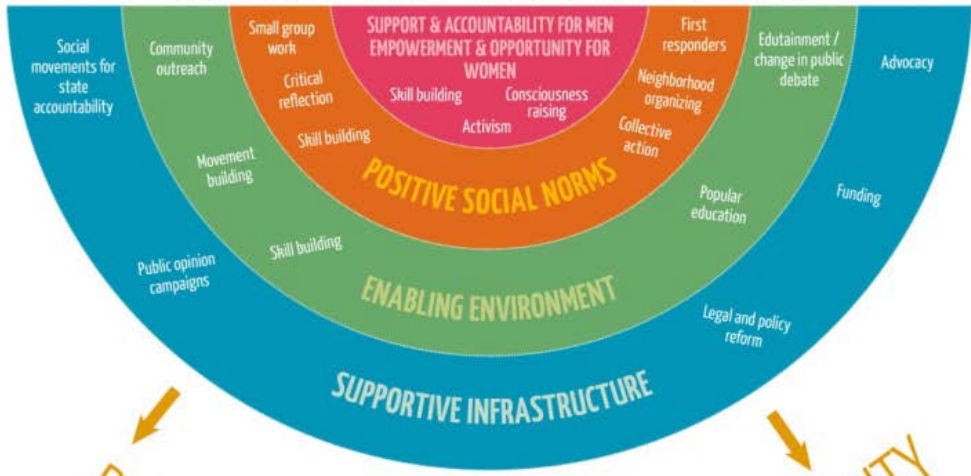
- Most prevention programs do not work across individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels.
- Many do not address the core driver of VAW, gender inequality.

# The importance of programming across the ecological model

- Gender inequalities are fundamental to men's violence against women.
- Gender inequalities are present, and maintained, at multiple levels of society.
- Transforming gender inequality to prevent VAWG...



**PREVENTING VAWG / TRANSFORMING POWER**



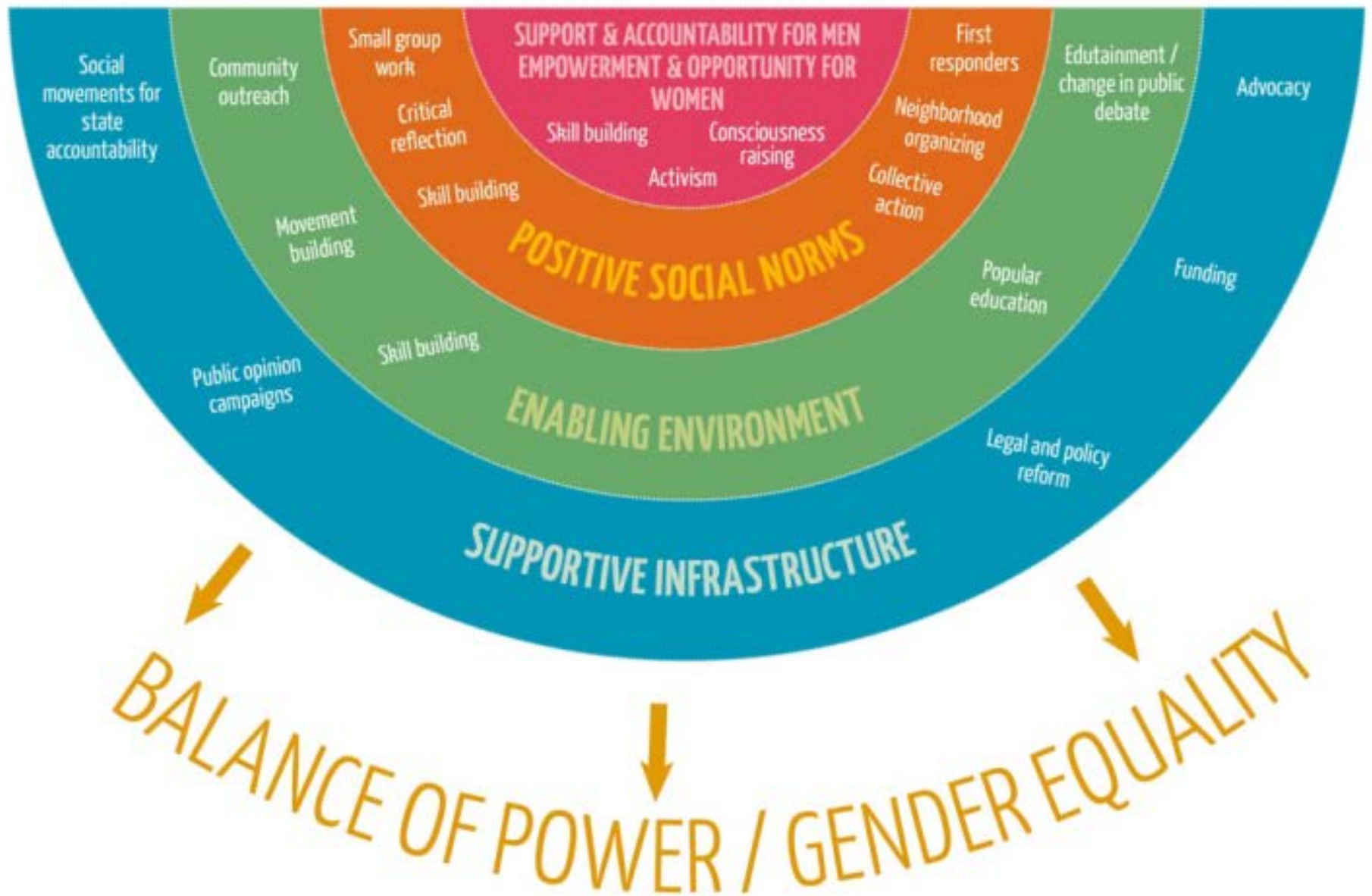
**BALANCE OF POWER / GENDER EQUALITY**

# IMBALANCE OF POWER / GENDER INEQUALITY

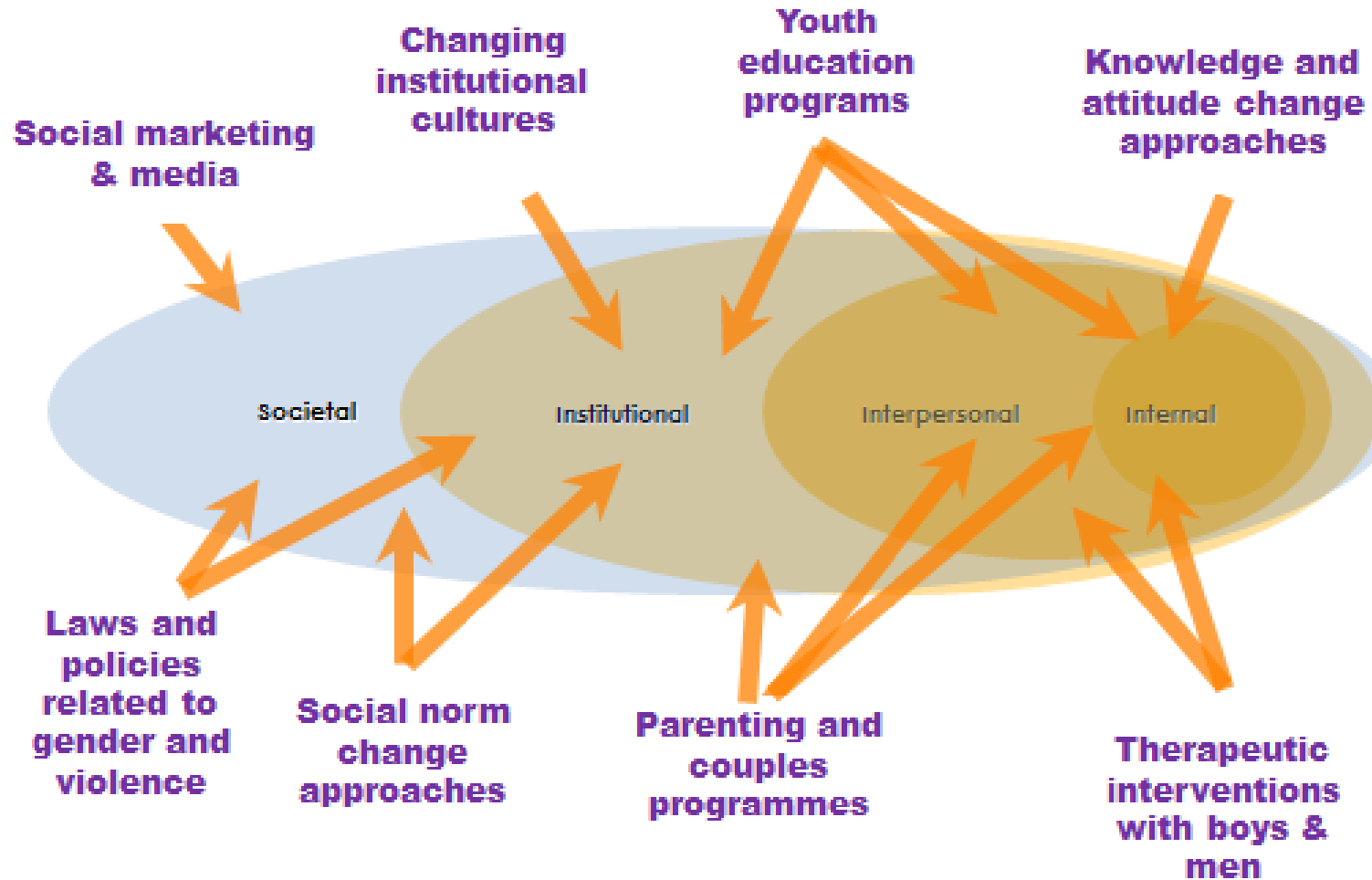




# PREVENTING VAWG / TRANSFORMING POWER



# Transforming masculinities through combined changes across the social ecology



# Societal level: From discriminatory laws and policies to supportive infrastructure

- Laws and policies...
  - The most important influence on positive government action is women's movements' advocacy.
- The criminal justice system shapes community perceptions of VAW.
- Law and policy are vital for establishing prevention strategies.



# Societal level: From discriminatory laws and policies to supportive infrastructure

- Prevention also requires societal-level transformation in the health, education, security and justice sectors.
  - Example: Investing in Prevention: *Australia's National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*
- Funding for VAW is associated with reductions in assault.

# Community level: From inequitable norms and practices to an enabling environment

- Work closely at the local community level, with key stakeholders and/or prominent figures
- Intervene in particular communities.
- Understand local risk and protective factors.
- Support survivors of violence, and men who are trying to be non-violent.
- Program Example: Puntos de Encuentro (Nicaragua)

# Interpersonal level: From stigma, shame and silence to positive social norms

- Address friends, parents, siblings and neighbors.
  - Using e.g. small group discussion.
- School-based interventions
- Program examples: Safe Dates; Healthy Relationships
  - Program duration matters...
- Program example: Yaari Dosti (India)
  - Produced declines in men's perpetration

# Interpersonal level: From stigma, shame and silence to positive social norms

- 'Gender-synchronised' approaches (working with both women and men)
  - Program example: Stepping Stones (South Africa)
- Combine community education with outreach and mobilisation.
  - Program example: SASA! (South Africa)
  - Program example: Tostan (Senegal, and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa)

# Individual level: From dominant masculinity and passive femininity to support and accountability for men and opportunities and empowerment for women

- Each individual must be seen and supported to be a potential agent of change.
- This requires critical reflection about their own and wider societal values and behaviour.
- Program example: Bell Bajao! (India)
  - Calls on men and boys to challenge violence against women with bystander intervention in intimate partner violence

## Individual level *cont'd*

- Work with victims / survivors
  - 22 studies: Show positive outcomes for both women and their children, e.g. decreased depression, lower stress, greater knowledge and increased use of services.
  - But few studies report decreases in actual victimisation.
- Work with perpetrators / batterers
  - Little evidence of effectiveness.
  - 18 studies: Only 2 reported significantly positive results
  - Methodological weaknesses: high dropout rates

## Individual level *cont'd*

- Economic empowerment
  - Program example: IMAGE (South Africa, Tanzania, Peru): Combines microfinance with 10 participatory training and skills-building sessions

# So...

- There is growing experience and evidence.
- One-off activities and broad awareness campaigns, by themselves, are insufficient to create real and substantial change.
- There is no one template or magic bullet.
- But, there are lessons...



# Principles of Effective VAWG Prevention Programming

Less effective	More effective
Stand alone programming	Integrated programming
One-off activities/trainings/events	Sustained community engagement
General awareness raising/sensitization	Theory-driven communication campaigns
Legal reform as strategy for deterrence	Legal reform as strategy to support social norm change
Ad hoc, sporadic efforts	Systematic, coordinated, sustained programming
Messaging	Inspiring critical thinking and reflection
Lack of local and contextual knowledge	Understanding context and culture
Punitive, shame and blame interventions	Benefits-based interventions
Technical quick fixes	Sustained efforts with a gender-power perspective
Considering VAWG as an event	Considering VAWG within a broader context
Working in sector or population silos	Multi-sectoral efforts that engage both women and men

# Final thoughts

- Multi-faceted, longer-term programming makes more change.
  - Involving strategic partnerships with a shared feminist analysis.
- Feminist and women's movements must be engaged. And resourced.
- Preventing VAW requires transformation in gender power inequalities.

# Contacts

Contact: [mflood@uow.edu.au](mailto:mflood@uow.edu.au)

Dr Michael Flood's publications:

<http://www.xyonline.net/category/authors/michael-flood>