



Gender Equity and Violence against Women

Questions and Answers

Below is a list of common questions that relate to gender equity and family violence initiatives that are happening in the community. Some information is provided in response. If you have other queries, contact Council's Community Development Department on 9262 6334.

What are the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence?

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence originated from a petition that was circulated during the 1991 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights. This petition called on the conference committee to comprehensively address women's human rights and recognise gender-based violence as a human rights issue. Today the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is a widely recognised global campaign that calls for action towards ending violence against women and girls around the world.

The 16 Days of Activism begins on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) and ends on International Human Rights Day (10 December). The dates for the campaign were chosen to link violence against women and human rights. During this time, International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) is held on 3 December each year, a day aimed at increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability. Women with a disability experience higher rates of family violence than other women.

Respect Victoria's [Respect Women: Call It Out](#) (Respect Is) campaign seeks to align with the timing of 16 Days of Activism as recognition that this is an important period of the year to be actively focusing on violence against women.

How do the 16 Days of Activism and the Victorian Respect Women campaign fit with Council's role?

In 2019 Whitehorse City Council recognised its role in the prevention of family violence through the public statement: *Whitehorse City Council says no to violence. Council is committed to working together with the community to model and promote equal and respectful relationships. We want a community where everyone is valued and safe.*¹

Family violence affects people from all backgrounds and walks of life. As a community we all pay the human, financial and social costs. In preparing a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) every four years, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* requires Council MPHWP's to 'Specify measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims of family violence in the local community'.

Family violence occurs when a perpetrator exercises power and control over another person. It involves coercive and abusive behaviours resulting in fear and insecurity. It covers a wide spectrum of conduct that involves an escalating spiral of violence – physical, sexual psychological, emotional, cultural, spiritual and financial. Family violence affects people across the community regardless of social status, occupation, sexuality, age or cultural background.

Intimate partner violence is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years, with the greatest burden due to the wide-ranging and persistent effects on women's health and increased risk of anxiety and depression.ⁱ In Whitehorse 23.6 per cent of females experience anxiety or depression.ⁱⁱ

Intimate partner violence, which may involve sexual assault, is the most common and pervasive type of family violence perpetrated by men against women.

Men can be victims of family violence, but research shows that men are mostly the perpetrators of intimate partner violence and family violence. Violence against women is now accepted across the world as one of the most serious issues we face. Its impacts are damaging and far reaching.

Family violence is no longer considered a private matter and is being addressed as a serious public health and criminal justice issue. If you know of someone who is being abused, express your concern, and encourage them to seek help.

Safe Steps is Victoria's 24/7 family violence support service.

Safe Steps (1800 015 188) safesteps.org.au

¹ Whitehorse Council Statement on Prevention of Family Violence and Violence against Women and Children, 2019

What is Council doing to support men in the community? Male suicide is increasing every year.

Both men's and women's mental health and wellbeing are a priority of the Whitehorse Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025.

In Australia in 2018 76% of suicides were by males. The suicide rate for males is approximately three times that of females. In all age groups the number of deaths by suicide was markedly higher for males than females in 2018.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). Suicide and intentional self-harm. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/suicide-and-intentional-self-harm>

Every year Council hosts events to promote mental health and wellbeing as part of Men's Health Week in June. In the past four years we have hosted expert seminars focusing on anxiety and stress management, depression and suicide for men, a workshop to facilitate men exploring the way they relate to and support one another, a webinar featuring a retired AFL player with lived experience, and a presentation by renowned health expert Dr Michael Mosely about the link between a Healthy Gut and a Healthy Mind.

Council has partnered with the Australian Mental Health Foundation to deliver the Let's Talk Mental Health Forum, which was attended by men and women. In addition Council funded places in an on-line learning program about Suicide Prevention free for members of the community.

Why are men being portrayed as aggressors in our community? Only some men are violent.

Yes, most men are not violent; however both women and men are more likely to experience violence at the hands of men, with around 95% of all victims of violence in Australia reporting a male perpetrator.

Source: Diemer, K. 2015. ABS Personal Safety Survey: Additional analysis on relationship and sex of perpetrator. Documents and working papers. Research on violence against women and children, University of Melbourne.

Men are more likely to experience violence outside the home in the public sphere, while women are more likely to experience violence from a current or former partner. And while only a minority of men actually perpetrates violence against women, many people in the community remain silent in the face of violence, sexual assault or attitudes which excuse or minimise violence and control in relationships.

In recognition that it can be hard to challenge behaviours and attitudes that have an impact on violence, programs such as the Victorian Government's *Respect Women: Call it Out* campaign have been developed to help us all know how to take safe and constructive actions in our everyday lives.

What about men? They are just as likely to be victims; it's just that they don't report it.

Violence towards any person is unacceptable and more action is needed to ensure everyone is safe from violence.

Women and men are at greater risk of different types of violence, so we need different strategies for each. This doesn't mean one is more important than another.

There are policy, laws and programs that redress violence against men, such as 'coward punches' and other street-violence initiatives.

Women and men both experience intimate-partner violence. However, the prevalence, severity and impacts are greater for women than for men.

Data comes from sources such as the Crime Statistics Agency, the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform, and the Personal Safety Survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics consistently shows that women are more likely than men to: be sexually assaulted; fear for their lives due to enacted violence or the threat of violence; experience ongoing violence; sustain physical injuries; experience psychological harm, including mental health problems; experience post separation violence from their former partner; require medical attention or hospitalisation; experience repeated violence in intimate relationships; and/or be murdered by their partner or former partner.

Australia has a strong victim-blaming culture that makes it hard for people to report intimate-partner violence and sexual assault.

Evidence suggests that men face some of the same, as well as different, barriers to reporting family violence, but these barriers are no greater than those faced by women. For example, assumptions about masculinity that depict men who need help as weak, and ideas about femininity that say women should be submissive and not cause trouble, make reporting violence difficult for both women and men.

Shame and fear of not being believed can prevent both women and men from seeking help. However, research shows that women face the additional barriers of fear of retaliation and escalating violence from their partner or former partner, which is a significantly higher risk for women than men.

What about support services for men? Everything seems to be just for women.

It is important that there are services for all people who have experienced family violence, and there are currently a range of services available for men, women and children who have, or are currently experiencing, intimate-partner violence, including sexual assault and family violence services.

[Men's Referral Service](#) is a men's-specific service. It offers support for men who use violent and controlling behaviour, as well as providing support to men who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, family violence.

The [Victims of Crime Helpline](#) is provided by the State Government, and provide a range of services to victims of crime, including men who have experienced family violence.

If gender is about everyone, why are so many gender equity initiatives for women? Aren't women-specific initiatives discriminatory against men?

Australian men as a group have greater access to power and resources. Gender equity initiatives therefore often focus on women in order to achieve equal outcomes for all.

Treating women and men the same will often exacerbate existing inequalities, as women and men are not on a level playing field to begin with in many areas of life.

Women-specific initiatives are equity measures that recognise the specific barriers faced by women that do not exist for men. The intent of such initiatives is to be fair, so that equality can be achieved.

Initiatives that do not target a specific group or are labelled 'gender neutral' tend to favour the dominant group by default.

There are more women's gender equity initiatives, as while women make up 50 per cent of the Australian population, as a group they do not have 50 per cent of the power and/or resources. For example, in Whitehorse at the 2016 ABS Census:

- We have a higher percentage of females with higher education and working as professionals than men, yet women are much less likely to be holding managerial positions.
- As for the whole of Melbourne, women do the bulk of unpaid domestic work, and are more likely to care for children and for others. This responsibility limits women's participation in public life and leadership roles, as well as earning capacity.
- There are more women working part time and with lower weekly incomes than men. This has implications for women's savings and superannuation, for example, placing older women who rent at risk of poverty and homelessness.

Whitehorse		Victoria	
\$498	\$798	\$516	\$815
female median	male median	female median	male median
weekly income	weekly income	weekly income	weekly income

Male-focused gender equity initiatives also exist. For example, ensuring men have access to workplace flexibility policies.

Initiatives to foster greater equality often involve supporting groups of people who face entrenched discrimination, so that they can have similar access to opportunities as others in the community. These initiatives are sometimes referred to as ‘special measures’, ‘positive discrimination’ or ‘affirmative action’, and are allowed under federal anti-discrimination laws.

For more information about ‘special measures’, including gender equality measures, refer to the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

Sexist jokes aren’t really hurting anyone - speaking disrespectfully does not mean the man is abusive

Speaking disrespectfully does not necessarily mean someone is abusive, but people who are abusive often speak disrespectfully. The evidence tells us that the most consistent predictor for support of violence against women by men is their agreement with sexist and disrespectful attitudes towards women. Sexist jokes reflect and reinforce sexist attitudes.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ VicHealth (2004). The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

ⁱⁱ Victorian Government (2019). Victorian Population Health Survey, 2017. <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey>

ⁱⁱⁱ Domestic Violence Victoria and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2021) Respect Women: ‘Call It Out’ 16 Days toolkit, Respect Victoria.