Gender Equity and Violence against Women

Questions and Answers

Below is a list of common questions that Councils and other organisations receive about 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 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 priorities of the Whitehorse Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021.

Suicide rates vary significantly by age and gender. In Australia, consistently over the past 10 years, the number of suicide deaths was approximately 3 times higher in males than females. While females are more likely to deliberately injure themselves than males, in 2015, 75.6% of people who died by suicide were male.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, Catalogue 3303.0 Cause of Death Australia, 2015 released in September 2016 and the [ABS Catalogue 3309.0 Suicides, Australia, 2010](http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3309.0/)  (statistical summary of deaths due to suicide registered in Australia between 2001 and 2010) released in July 2012

In 2019 over 150 men and the people who care about them participated in Council activities to promote men’s mental health and wellbeing as part of Men’s Health Week 2019. Council hosted expert seminars focusing on anxiety and stress management, depression and suicide for men, and a workshop to facilitate men exploring the way they relate to and support one another. Participants reported an increased knowledge and confidence to speak with others about their concerns.

In addition, in 2019 Council partnered with the Australian Mental Health Foundation to deliver the Let’s Talk Mental Health Forum, attended by 67 people.

Intimate partner violence contributes more to the burden of disease (the impact of illness, disability and premature death) of adult women in their reproductive age (18-44 years) than any other risk factor, and is the leading factor in women’s mental health – mainly anxiety and depression.

Source: 2011 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Burden of Disease Study (Ayre et al. 2016; Webster, 2016)

***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 perpetrate 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*](https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/campaigns) 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.

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 of 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. More information: [**http://mrs.org.au/**](http://mrs.org.au/)

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. More information: [**http://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/home/the+crime/get+help/**](http://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/home/the+crime/get+help/)

***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. In Whitehorse for example:

* 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.

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| Whitehorse | | Victoria | |
| $498  female median weekly income | $798  male median  weekly income | $516  female median weekly income | $815  male median  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 following information from the Australian Human Rights Commission: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quickguide/12099>