

Women's Safety is a Men's Issue: Men's attitudes to violence against women and what that means for men

White Ribbon Research Series

Dr Kristin Diemer

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The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest global male-led movement to stop men's violence against women. It engages and enables men and boys to lead this social change. White Ribbon Australia is an organisation that works to prevent violence by changing attitudes and behaviours. The prevention work is driven through social marketing, Ambassadors and initiatives with communities, schools, universities, sporting codes and workplaces.

The White Ribbon Policy Research Series is intended to:

- Present contemporary evidence on violence against women and its prevention;
- Investigate and report on new developments in prevention locally, nationally and internationally;
- Identify policy and programming issues; and
- Provide options for improved prevention strategies and services.

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Title: Women's Safety is a Men's Issue: Men's attitudes to violence against women and what that means for men.

Author: Dr Kristin Diemer

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Biographies

Dr Kristin Diemer is a sociologist with twenty years of research experience designing, implementing and managing both large and small scale projects. Her applied social research skills are particularly aimed toward research design, methodology and data analysis (mixed methods). Her focus has been in the area of family and domestic violence applied research.

Recent projects include mixed-methods data collection and analysis across both small case files and large hospital and governmental department databases recording family violence, sexual assault, homicide and child abuse incidents. Most recently, she was a key researcher on the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey with VicHealth.

Women's Safety is a Men's Issue: Men's attitudes to violence against women and what that means for men

Introduction

Community attitudes are an essential factor in the understanding of men's violence against women. Attitudes influence social and cultural norms, and are an indicator of the way in which we think about and engage with issues of violence. Attitudes influence early detection; inform responses to men's violence against women; determine whether violence is recognised; influence how victims are supported and whether perpetrators are held to account.¹ Because the majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men, men's attitudes are pivotal to accountability and responsibility for that violence.

Encouragingly, attitudes are not fixed. They can be reshaped by exposure to new perspectives through peer groups, organisations and social institutions such as education² and media. Legislating to eliminate men's violence against women is another way to influence attitudes while simultaneously guiding action and behaviour.³

The National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence Against Women 2013 (NCAS) is one tool for taking stock on attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and understanding about men's violence against women.⁴ The survey works as a barometer of social norms and identifies misinformation, myths and stereotypes.

This paper examines some key findings from the NCAS, specifically focusing on men's attitudes.

Findings from NCAS: what's changed?

Since the survey was first conducted in 1995 responses for many questions have remained stable. On one hand, this is a positive result indicating a sustained and clear recognition about some behaviours which make up men's violence against women including physical and sexual violence and some forms of emotional and psychological abuse.⁵

On the other hand, despite national efforts to increase awareness about men's use of violence against women, men have become somewhat less informed. Evidence is clear that violence against women is common and gendered (Table 1). However, decreasing proportions of men understand that it is mainly men perpetrating violence against women. In addition, the 'monster myth' remains with a decrease in men recognising that women are more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know (Figure 1). Finally, men increasingly believe that both men and women commit acts of violence equally.

1 Newby-Clark, McGregor, and Zanna (2002, p. 101); Flood and Pease (2007)

2 For example, the White Ribbon *Breaking the Silence Schools Program* and the White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program.

3 Flood and Pease (2007)

4 The NCAS survey uses the general term 'violence against women' (VAW). It is well established that only about 10% of violence against women is perpetrated by other women and therefore this paper will reference 'men's violence against women'. See Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Personal Safety Survey Australia*. (Cat. No. 4906.0). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

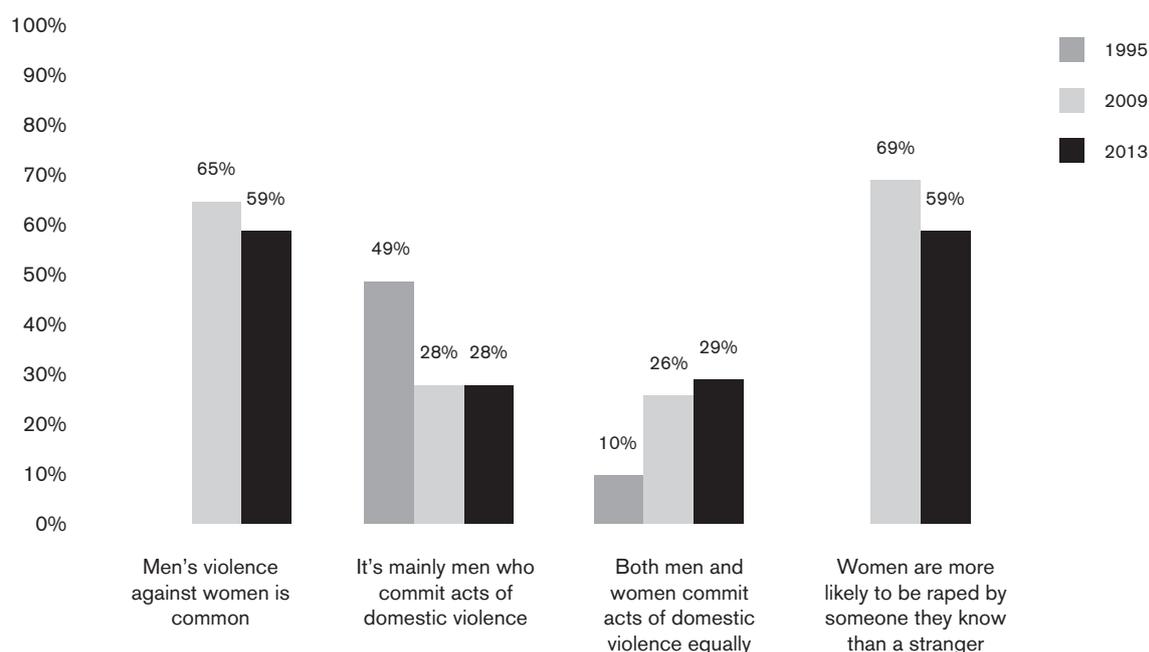
5 Webster et al. (2014)

Table 1: ABS Personal Safety Survey 2012: experience of violence in lifetime by gender or survey respondent (since the age of 15)

ABS Personal Safety Survey data item ¹	Women	Men
Lifetime experience of violence (physical or sexual assault) from the opposite gender (since the age of 15)	39%	14%
Lifetime experience of violence (physical or sexual assault) from an opposite gender <u>partner</u> in their lifetime (since the age of 15)	17%	5%
Experience sexual violence from a known person	16%	3%
Experience sexual violence from an unknown person	5%	2%

Note: Figures cannot be added together and results do not equal 100% as they are taken from different tables from the ABS Personal Safety Survey.

Figure 1: Men’s knowledge about violence against women and change over time (% agree)⁶



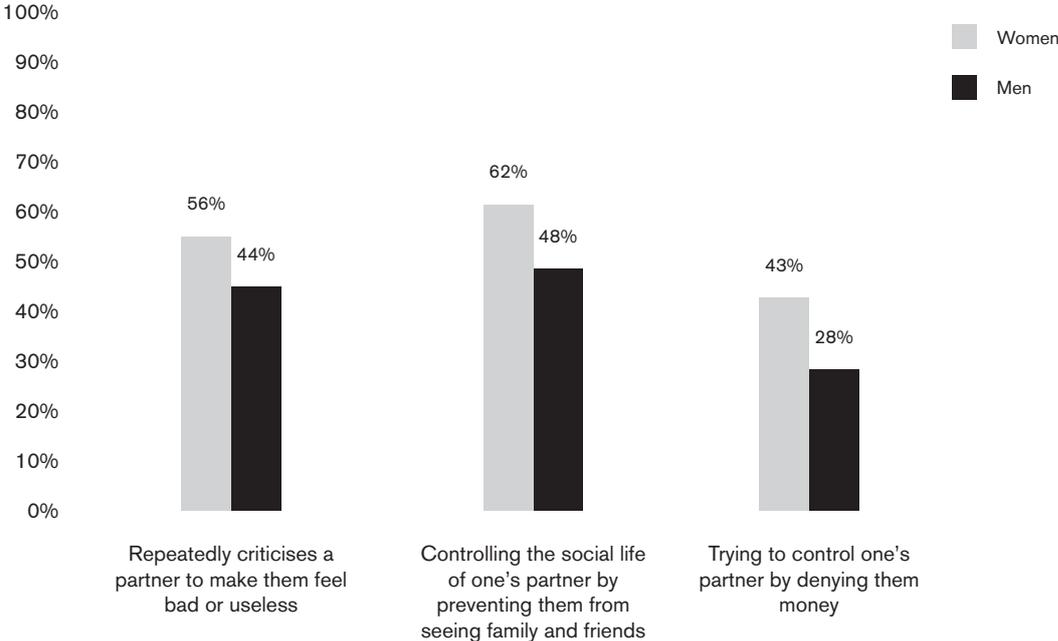
⁶ McGregor (2009, pp. 45, 47 & 68); Webster et al. (2014, pp. 28, 30 & 32)

Findings from NCAS: the key differences between women and men's attitudes

Understanding of women's experience of violence

Throughout the survey, men scored consistently lower than women in terms of knowledge and understanding of men's violence against women. There were particularly greater differences between the two in recognising forms of emotional and psychological violence, or actions which manifest as power and control (Figure 2).

Figure 2: NCAS: Forms of emotional & psychological violence⁷ (% agree yes, always a form of violence)



Emotional abuse generally consists of a range of behaviours to generate fear, win arguments, or insert dominance. These behaviours occur over extended periods of time and are not as often documented and recorded as compared with single incidents of physical or sexual violence.⁸

The actual experience of emotional violence may offer insight to help explain different levels of understanding. Men are less likely than women to experience these forms of partner violence (14% for men and 25% for women)⁹ and report associated anxiety or fear (72% of women compared with 35% of men)¹⁰. Subsequently, they may be also less likely to understand these forms of abuse.

7 Webster et al. (2014, pp. 16, 18, 20)
 8 Stark (2007); Caldwell and Swan (2012)
 9 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) Cat. No. 4906.0, Tables 32 & 33
 10 ABS Personal Safety Survey customised report cited in Webster et al. (2014, p. 101)

The myths about women's experience of violence

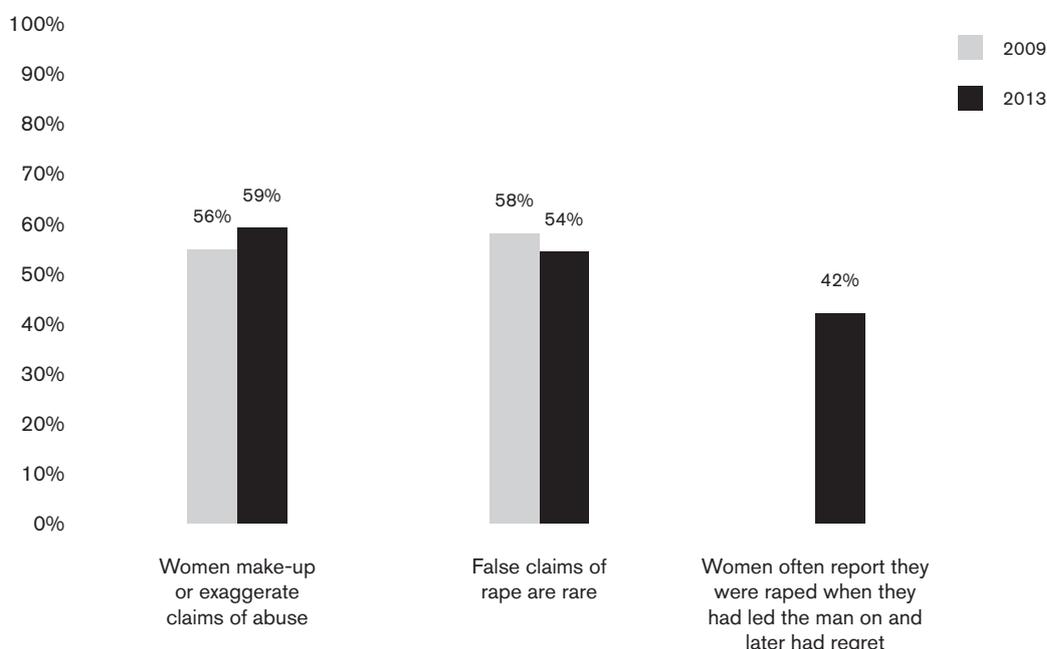
In addition to decreased understanding of experience and forms of abuse, men were more likely than women to reinforce myths and stereotypes of violence, as well as minimise, trivialise and deny the impact of violence.

Table 2: NCAS: Trivialising, denial, myths and stereotypes

Men, as compared with women, more often²
Rate all forms of violence as less serious
Deny the barriers women face to leaving an abusive relationship
Believe that domestic violence is a private matter which should be sorted out within the family
Hold the view that claims of abuse are false or exaggerated (Figure 3)

Minimising, denying and trivialising women's experience of violence is common and has shattering implications on the likelihood that women will seek assistance for abuse or be able to leave a violent relationship.¹¹ The myth of false allegations produces a legal and justice system which fails to support women and children subjected to violence.¹² In reality, false allegations of rape¹³ or domestic violence in the course of family law proceedings are uncommon¹⁴ and a review of the literature shows that mothers are more likely to have unsubstantiated allegations made against them and fathers are more likely than mothers to make unsubstantiated allegations.¹⁵

Figure 3: NCAS 2013: Men's belief that violence against women is exaggerated¹⁶



11 Flood and Pease (2007); Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks, and Bala (2008); Kelly (2011)

12 Felson and Paré (2005); Gondolf (2002); Haselschwerdt, Hardesty, and Hans (2011); Lievore (2005)

13 Kelly (2010)

14 Brown (2003)

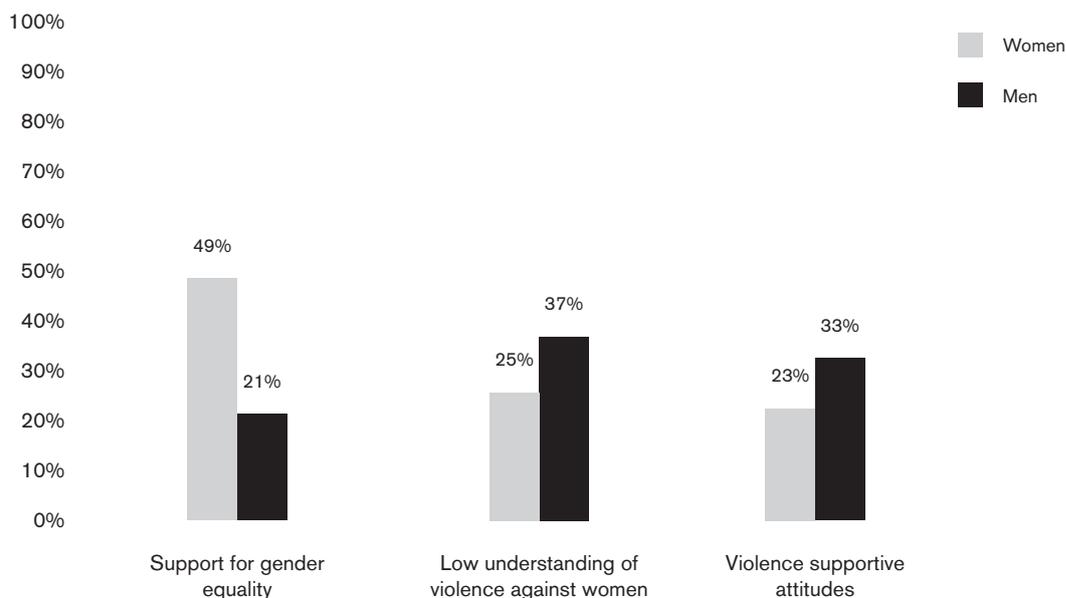
15 Webster et al. (2014, p. 121)

16 McGregor (2009, p. 65 & 68); Webster et al. (2014, pp. 108, 110 & 102)

Violence supportive attitudes

Much of what has been discussed in this paper has been interrogated and combined to form constructs of understanding of violence against women and violence supportive attitudes (Figure 4). Violence supportive attitudes do not openly endorse violence, but serve to support men's violence against women through views which justify, excuse, trivialise, deny and minimise violence.

Figure 4: NCAS 2013: Overarching construct of violence supportive attitudes¹⁷



One of the strongest 'take home' messages is that knowledge and understanding of violence against women, as well as views on gender equality, have the greatest impact on violence supportive attitudes. That is, holding violence supportive attitudes is more likely to occur among:

- people with less understanding of violence against women,
- people who endorse gender inequality (that is, the belief that women and men are not equal).

It is when these items combine that we see a significant impact on men's attitudes toward men's violence against women. Individual traits such as age, gender, socio-economic factors, cultural background and where people live, are not in and of themselves consistently associated with violence supportive attitudes. However, some groups are more likely to score low on all of these scales. This is the case for men.

While simply being a man does not automatically mean that a person will hold violence supportive attitudes, men with less knowledge about violence against women, less understanding of the dynamics of violence as well as less support for equality between women and men, are also more likely to hold violence supportive attitudes.

The results therefore provide a guide for areas where effort can be placed to increase men's knowledge and understanding.

¹⁷ McGregor (2009, p. 65 & 68); Webster et al. (2014, p. 130)

Men challenging violence supportive attitudes and gender inequality

Overall, the results from NCAS demonstrate a disappointing backwards step in attitudes that minimise violence against women, displace blame onto victims and excuse perpetrators. Yet there are many and varied examples of constructive ways that men can and do take action to challenge problematic attitudes, whether as leaders in the community or in their organisations, among their male peers, or in their families.

Men can publically challenge harmful misconceptions of violence against women in the broader community. One particularly prominent illustration is the example set by Irish-Australian man Tom Meagher whose wife Jill was assaulted and murdered by a stranger in Melbourne on 22 September, 2012. Tom bravely appeared in the media to remind audiences that “We must not forget that most violence against women is perpetrated not by a stranger, but by men they know” thereby helping to dispel the ‘anonymous monster myth’.¹⁸ Tom has since become involved as an ambassador with White Ribbon Ireland and continues to work with the media to raise awareness about men’s violence against women. Indeed, news media reporting on violence against women is itself an opportunity where men, who are often over-represented in positions of decision-making and management, can take the lead in influencing responsible media coverage of domestic and sexual violence.¹⁹

There are many other examples where male leaders, whether holding positions of public office or corporate leadership all the way to coaching the local football team, can harness their influence to challenge violence and promote respectful relationships. A recent prominent example is the advocacy of Wellington Shire Deputy Mayor Patrick McIvor to challenge the use of council operated spaces for events that were contrary to the values of an inclusive and respectful community. McIvor publicly challenged his fellow councillors to stop a proposed men’s only stripper night that was to take place in a community hall. After generating much media coverage he was successful in having the event cancelled. The action has gone further to embed gender equality into future community hall agreements as they are renewed. Council will be adding general statements of principle including that they must be safe, accessible, welcoming and promote respectful relationships, which will prevent situations like this occurring again.

Other examples include Will Irving, Group Managing Director of *Telstra Business*. Irving has championed Telstra’s involvement and accreditation as a White Ribbon Workplace; leading action to respond to and ultimately prevent violence against women. Tod Stokes meanwhile, a men’s worker with *Kornar Winmil Yunti* (a not-for-profit organisation that supports Aboriginal men and families in South Australia), uses his community connections, particularly those through Australian Rules Football, for the prevention of men’s violence against women in indigenous communities. Finally, Mick Doleman, Deputy National Secretary of the *Maritime Union Australia* and 2011 White Ribbon Ambassador of the Year, recently led 1400 members of the International Transport Workers Congress in taking the White Ribbon Oath.²⁰

Through the ambassadors’ and workplace accreditation programs White Ribbon Australia supports male leaders to take a public stance against men’s violence and to be instigators of change in both their own organisations and the broader community.²¹ But this is not a top-down movement, White Ribbon invites all men to take an oath never to commit, condone or remain silent about men’s violence against women. There are many practical ways that all men can help

18 For a copy of Tom Meagher’s article, visit:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-18/meagher-the-danger-of-the-monster-myth/5399108>

19 For useful information and reporting guidelines, visit: [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media-\(1\)/Reporting-Guidelines](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media-(1)/Reporting-Guidelines)

20 A video of the event can be found here: http://www.mua.org.au/itf_congress_take_oath_to_end_violence_against_women

21 For a full list of White Ribbon Australia Ambassadors, visit <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/find-ambassadors>

end violence against women in our community: listen to women and learn about their experiences of violence; challenge the problematic attitudes and behaviours of men around you; take action in your workplace, community and family; and get involved with men's movements to end violence against women such as White Ribbon.²²

The key findings of NCAS and the 'take home' messages for men

As a community Australians have come a long way from violence against women being seen as a 'women's issue' or a 'private matter' in the home, and men's increasing participation in movements to address and prevent violence is evidence of this shift. Nonetheless, despite active awareness-raising at local and national levels, the actual lifetime prevalence of men's violence against women has not changed significantly in almost 20 years of the ABS Personal Safety Survey.²³ What is encouraging in the results of the NCAS is that most Australian men have good knowledge about the explicit forms of violence against women (such as rape, punching and hitting) and consciously do not support them.

However, men's awareness and understanding of the more subtle and nuanced forms of men's violence against women have, on many measures, gone backwards. Increasing numbers of men deny and trivialise men's use of violence against women as well as reinforce myths and stereotypes: attitudes which lead to reduced accountability for perpetration of, and responsibility for eliminating violence against women. It is in recognising and challenging these subtle yet deeply held violence supportive attitudes in our community where the difficult work now needs to happen.

22 For more information about what men can do to prevent violence against women, visit: http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/updated_factsheets_Nov_13/Factsheet_4_what_can_men_do.pdf

23 Formerly the *Women's Safety Survey* (ABS, 1996).

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