

Australia's campaign to
stop violence against women

White Ribbon

PO Box 840
Broadway NSW 2007
Telephone +612 9045 8444
Facsimile +612 9045 8448
admin@whiteribbon.org.au
www.whiteribbon.org.au
abn 57 126 739 544



White Ribbon Response to

Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws Discussion Paper

September 2011

**The Executive Director
Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws Issues Paper
Australian Law reform Commission
GPO Box 3708
Sydney NSW 2001**

White Ribbon appreciates the opportunity to respond (in brief) to this inquiry and this written submission follows the discussion held between Professor Croucher and Amanda Alford from the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and White Ribbon Staff in late September 2011. White Ribbon has reviewed some of the many submissions such as that made by Women’s Health Victoria and acknowledges the depth of response. We appreciate the level of expertise and informed comment captured within these submissions.

This submission makes response to certain sections only of the Discussion Paper

Introductory Information – About White Ribbon

The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest global male-led movement to stop violence against women.

The White Ribbon Campaign is the first male-led violence prevention campaign in Australia.

The White Ribbon Campaign is working to prevent the most common and pervasive form of male violence – that towards women.

As a first step, White Ribbon encourages Australian men to swear an Oath ***never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women***. The White Ribbon Oath is not just a “feel good” statement, it is an active commitment which guides positive attitudes towards women and drives signatories to, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, *be the change you want to see in the world*. This change takes time, but action begins across the community, each and every day.

The White Ribbon Campaign in Australia is led by thousands of male Ambassadors who, through living the White Ribbon Oath, act as positive role models in their communities. These men have taken up the challenge to help bring about attitudinal and behavioural change that allows violence to occur and be accepted. The campaign is run by the White Ribbon Foundation which was established in 2007 to provide the campaign with a sustainable structure to take the campaign forward; and in recognition that achieving attitudinal and behavioural change towards violence requires a long term and high profile commitment to working within communities across Australia. The Foundation is a not for profit company that provides the governance structure for the national campaign and capacity to raise funds to support community awareness activities and programs.

Women also support and expand the Campaign through their communities and networks as White Ribbon Champions.

White Ribbon works to change the attitudes and behaviours which lead to violence against women through awareness raising campaigns, community events, and initiatives in schools, universities, workplaces, and sporting codes. Support for this activity comes through a mixture of community fundraising, and corporate and government funding.

White Ribbon also gives expression to prevention strategies that are critical to deliver the objectives identified under the Council of Australian Governments’ ratified *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022*.

Contact Details

Libby Davies

CEO

White Ribbon Foundation

In response to Family Violence-Commonwealth Laws Discussion Paper:

Chapter 3: Common Interpretative Framework

White Ribbon commends the development of a common interpretative framework for family violence which captures the context in which the behaviour takes place as well as a shared common understanding of the types of conduct that fall within the definition of family violence.

It is critical that all forms of violence are recognised. White Ribbon as a primary prevention strategy works to stop men's violence against women. The White Ribbon movement recognises that men's violence against women is the most pervasive and destructive. For example:

Incidences of violence against women by men

- Nearly two-thirds (57%) of Australian women report experiencing at least one incident of physical violence or sexual violence by a man over their lifetime, with 48% having experienced physical violence and 34% experiencing sexual violence.¹
- At state level - intimate partner violence is the leading contributor of death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44.²

Increased incidence reporting

- In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the incidence of reporting by women of violent acts against them. In 2005: 36% of women who experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator reported it to the police, compared to 19% in 1996; 19% of women who experienced sexual assault by a male perpetrator reported it to the police compared to 15% in 1996.³

There are three key reasons identified for men's violence against women which guide the strategy of White Ribbon:

Gender roles and gender relations – constructions of masculinity

- Gender and gendered patterns of behaviour are socially constructed and therefore fluid and transformable.⁴ Entrenched patterns of "normalised" behaviour that allow violence to occur can be challenged and changed.

¹ J. Mouzos, and T. Makkai, *Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, Research and Public Policy Series, No. 56, 2004.

² VicHealth, *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 2004.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Personal Safety Survey Australia*, Cat. 4906.0, Canberra, 2006, p. 8.

⁴ S. Dyson, *Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women: Good practice standards*, Breaking the Silence Workshop Presentation, 2011, slide 14.

- Men who do not hold patriarchal and hostile gender norms are less likely than other men to use violence against an intimate partner.⁵ Men can lead the way to change violent behaviours by speaking out on the inappropriateness of such behaviours.
- Inequitable gender relations are normalised through everyday discourse and practices to the point where they become accepted as normal behaviours.⁶ Men can challenge these behaviours that condone violence.
- Gender relations are underpinned by asymmetrical relations of power – males embodying extreme version of masculinity dominate other males as well as females.⁷
- Constructions of masculinity and gender inequality play a crucial role in shaping violence against women.⁸

Social norms and practices relating to violence

- Children (especially boys) who witness or are subjected to violence are more likely as adults to have violence-supportive attitudes and to perpetrate violence.⁹

Access to resources and systems of support

- Where these are at a disadvantage there is a heightened risk of violence. Rates of reported domestic violence are higher in areas of economic and social disadvantage.¹⁰ Factors such as homelessness, financial stress, conflict and unemployment increase the risk of abuse.

⁵ M. Flood and B. Pease, *The Factors Influencing Community Attitudes in Relation to Violence against Women: A Critical Review of the Literature*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 2006.

⁶ Dyson, op. cit., slide 14.

⁷ *ibid.*, slide 14.

⁸ M, Flood, *Where Men Stand: Men's roles in ending violence against women*, A White Ribbon Prevention Research Series, No. 2., Sydney, 2010, p. 8.

⁹ M. Flood and Pease, B., op. cit.

¹⁰ M. Flood and L. Fergus, *An Assault of Our Future*, White Ribbon Prevention Research Series No. 1, Sydney, 2009, p. 27-28.

Chapter 4: Screening Information Sharing and Privacy

White Ribbon appreciates the intent of this chapter and also encourages the inclusion of educating about the primary prevention campaigns that need to bring about normative change – changes to attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to occur.

Proposal 4-6

Training provided to Child Support Agency and Family Assistance Staff, and Centrelink customer service advisers, social workers, Indigenous Service Officers and Multicultural Service Officers should include information about gender based violence and prevention strategies aimed at preventing gender based violence. Understanding family violence also involves understanding the cause and how we can better respond as a community through effective prevention strategies.

Proposal 4-8

In relation to this proposal White Ribbon suggests considering the way in which the Child Support agency, Family Assistance Office Staff and Centrelink Customer Service advisers, social workers, Indigenous Service Officers and Multicultural Service Officers, are informed of the prevention strategies and frameworks and become agents of change in that prevention themselves. For example all agencies of government should become part of the White Ribbon Campaign embracing the Ambassador Program, becoming a White Ribbon workplace and participating in White Ribbon Day. Behavioural and attitudinal change required to prevent family violence needs a whole of community, whole of government approach. White Ribbon encourages inclusion of prevention and prevention strategies in all government material related to the issue of family violence.

Part E – Employment

Chapter 14 and Chapter 15

White Ribbon, and in particular the White Ribbon Workplace Program, is part of the ongoing continuum of work in relation to the response of workplaces to the issue of violence. White Ribbon appreciated the detailed information already received by the ALRC about the many initiatives occurring in relation to the response of workplaces.

The White Ribbon Workplace Program has been initiated this year and funded through the Australian Government Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The ALRC has received an information brief in relation to the Program. This program will deliver a White Ribbon Accreditation Program to workplaces.

As determined by the first Reference Group meeting held in August:

Program Aim

The White Ribbon Workplace Program aims to address and prevent violence against women by creating attitudinal and behavioural changes in workplace culture, safety and relationships with the goal of stopping violence against women.

Desired outcomes of the Program

Changes that prevent and stop violence that is within or impacting women in the workplace, including:

- Greater respect in the workplace
- Greater awareness about violence against women
- Women being supported to be safe
- Men speaking out – staff educated and able to address violence when they see it
- Organisations taking a leadership role on the difficult workplace issues surrounding violence against women

This program should be captured as part of the national education and awareness campaign around family violence in the employment context. Consideration should also be given job service providers being accredited as White Ribbon workplaces further demonstrating their understanding of violence.

White Ribbon supports the work in relation to inclusion of minimum statutory requirements under the Fair Work Act. We recognise the support and developmental work associated with this by, for example, The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and Vic Health. These organisations are represented on the White Ribbon Workplace Program Reference Group.
