

Submission to the National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

Proposals for research areas, research topics and research issues for inclusion in the National Research Agenda.

White Ribbon Australia
September 2013

Introduction: Our Context - Violence against Women and Children in Australia

Rates of violence against women and children in Australia are at epidemic levels. (As referenced in [Appendix 1: About White Ribbon Australia September 2013](#)). While this violence is often silenced and hidden from view, there has been an increase in the reporting of such violence, where we are only now beginning to witness the realities of this issue, its impact, and its epidemic proportions.

Violence against women and children is assumed to affect only the direct victims of violence, however, this violence is an issue for every Australian, and its effects touch families, communities, workplaces and schools-the entire nation. At the 2013 White Ribbon Australia Conference, Ms Liz Forsyth (National Leader for KPMG's Health and Human Services Practice) asserted that "the cost of this violence is roughly 1.1% of Australia's GDP or for every man woman and child - \$6500 USD per person."

Please see [Appendix 2: The Cost of Violence in Australia](#).

What does White Ribbon Australia do to Prevent Violence against Women and Children?

White Ribbon Australia is centrally concerned with addressing, educating and facilitating men's leadership in our community to prevent the most prolific form of violence against women, that perpetrated by men. White Ribbon Australia is the only national, male-led violence prevention organisation in the country. We work to examine the root causes of gender-based violence, challenge behaviours and create a cultural shift that leads us to a future without men's violence against women. Through education, awareness-raising, preventative programs, partnerships and creative campaigns, we are highlighting the positive role men play in preventing men's violence against women and inspiring them to be part of this social change.

For further details of White Ribbon Australia's mission, leadership and education programs please see [Appendix 1](#).

Australia's campaign to
stop violence against women

White Ribbon



White Ribbon Australia makes the following response to the consultation questions:

1. What are the key issues, areas or topics, you would like to see as a focus for research?

White Ribbon Australia is a **primary prevention** organisation delivering a national education and awareness campaign, as well as tailored support programs for schools and workplaces. White Ribbon Australia undertakes research to consolidate, expand and refine its national awareness campaign to develop effective, engaging and impactful communication strategies and strengthen public engagement to foster behavioural and attitudinal change to reduce violence against women and their children.

White Ribbon Australia emphasises the importance of **male leadership** in preventing violence against women and children. We are keen to continue the research currently initiated by White Ribbon Australia to identify effective and targeted communication strategies to progress understanding of the causes of male violence against women, and how men can be a significant part of a solution to this national crisis.

White Ribbon Australia's primary prevention campaign to effect normative change is founded on a health promotion model. Other health promotion campaigns such as the National Tobacco Campaign (NTC) are now well established in the public consciousness, and have had significant successes with their national communication strategies, both in terms of awareness-raising and changing behaviours to reduce smoking rates. In 2012, the Campaign launched a series of four television advertisements. The Australian National Prevention Agency (ANPHA) Evaluation Report of the Q2 2012 National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health Tobacco Social Marketing Campaign showed that the campaign's impact meant "47% of smokers and 62% of quitters claimed to have taken some action as a result of seeing the NTC" and notes "a higher incidence of quit attempts" during the NTC evaluation period (2012: vi – vii).

This is not to conflate smoking with violence against women (VAW). Rather, this is to demonstrate that VAW is a public health issue that requires similar investment, public visibility and engagement via a national campaign that is founded on a strong evidence base of best practice communication strategies subjected to ongoing evaluation to measure campaign impact on normative behavioural change in Australia. A rigorously researched and responsive national campaign is vital to serve as a cultural touchstone to promote discussion, awareness and action regarding violence against women and their children.

In 2013, White Ribbon Australia marks its 10th anniversary working for cultural change to end men's violence against women and their children. White Ribbon Australia's work has contributed to the important public dialogue about violence against women and their children. However, White Ribbon seeks to expand, diversify, strengthen and consolidate its national campaign to increase its reach and impact in Australian society.

Two key areas of research are:

- (i) Communications research to better determine the best approaches to enhance public visibility and engagement critical to advance this primary prevention work.**
- (ii) Evaluation of the primary prevention strategies and programs underway.**

2. Why are these areas, topics or issues important and of national relevance?

As noted above, violence against women and children is at epidemic levels in Australia. The importance of preventing this violence has been captured in the *National Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children* (The Plan) and is increasingly the focus of state, territory and local governments.

White Ribbon Australia works with government at all levels as well as the Prevention of Violence against Women (PVAW) sector. We demonstrate commitment to capacity for developing strategies and working in partnership with the PVAW sector and the community to effect normative and attitudinal change. White Ribbon Australia is a leader in normative behaviour change, and like the National Centre for Excellence, is dedicated to national efforts to enhance the research base in the areas of domestic [and family] violence and sexual assault across research, education and service delivery. In other words, White Ribbon Australia is investing in the continuum of action, from prevention to service delivery, where the scope and efficacy of its work is dependent on research to identify evidence-based best practice in education, community awareness and behavioural change strategies.

White Ribbon Australia drives a national primary prevention campaign dedicated to ending men's violence against women, launching education and leadership programs across schools, workplaces and men's role modelling, as well as driving national awareness through community and organisation events, and a widespread communications strategy encompassing television commercials (TVCs) and other forms of advertising including social media.

White Ribbon Australia's national campaign clearly supports the National Plan, through a concerted and determined focus on education and awareness-raising, with a clear call to action to change behaviours and attitudes that support violence. This call to action is also demonstrated in its suite of primary prevention education programs (focusing on schools, workplaces and male leadership), its diverse partnerships across the community and corporate sectors, and White Ribbon Australia's public communication strategies.

(For further detail about these aspects of the White Ribbon Australia national campaign, please see Appendix 1, an extract from which is below.)

Programs: White Ribbon Australia has developed targeted education programs for schools and workplaces, as well as male leadership and community engagement. These programs demonstrate White Ribbon's responsiveness to a range of key social sites and contexts that are best-placed to facilitate change in attitudes that support violence against women and children (e.g., schools and workplaces). White Ribbon Australia's suite of programs are founded on a primary prevention model where issues around violence against women and their children are critically discussed, and the assumptions that underpin them challenged.

Partnerships: White Ribbon Australia works with numerous partners across the corporate, community and education sectors to raise the profile of the mission of ending violence against women and children, and make it visible and accessible across all parts of our community. These diverse partnerships demonstrate the commitment across Australian corporations, workplaces, service providers and communities to eradicate this violence.

The success of increasing understanding and visibility of the issue is being evidenced, for example there is a clear correlation between the work of the White Ribbon Campaign and increased reporting as indicated by Dr Don Weatherburn, Director, Bureau Crime Statistics and Research ('Domestic Violence Up in Hunter', *Newcastle Herald*, 13/09/2013).

However, we note the difficulty in providing a clear and accurate picture of violence against women and their children, with statistics not always demonstrating the full extent of the issue. For example, police and crime statistics are often used to discuss violence against women, however:

"one of the shortcomings of this information is that the majority of MVAW is not reported to police, health or support services. Therefore, agency statistics show how many people report violence or seek help, rather than providing information about the total number of women who have experienced male violence" (Appendix 4, Chung 2013: 4).

One of the key reasons that violence against women and children is a silent epidemic in Australia is because it is dominantly imagined as a 'private issue' that should not be discussed in public.

In addressing the silence around violence against women and children, White Ribbon Australia's campaign emphasises visibility and discussion. (*Please see Appendix 3 for details*). The public engagement campaign is a year-round undertaking, involving a researched marketing and public relations strategy inclusive of a creative concept that pitches through a variety of mediums including TVCs, and supported with White Ribbon Australia's online and social media presence and engagement.

To develop more effective and wide-ranging public engagement strategies, White Ribbon Australia seeks support to enable more comprehensive research and development work with third party communication specialists to devise strategies and messaging that best address and engage people across a range of Australian social contexts. Focus groups have been run throughout White Ribbon Australia's campaign in Australia supported from within White Ribbon's own resources, but more in-depth and rigorous work needs to be conducted in order to continue to produce (with the help of communication specialists) the most effective and impactful messaging strategies for the White Ribbon campaign in Australia.

White Ribbon Australia is seeking support from the National Centre for Excellence to:

- (i) progress ongoing communications and marketing research to facilitate the most effective, visible, and targeted national awareness campaign to promote national understanding of and action to reduce violence against women and their children; and**
- (ii) Support the ongoing evaluation of the strategies and tools in place to drive normative change.**

3. How would the results of the research contribute (a) to knowledge and understanding (b) improved services, programs or practice and/or (c) changes in policy?

Moving forward, we envisage our campaign as being a cultural touchstone for discussion, awareness and driving normative behavioural change. Our campaign will continue to be informed by best practice in terms of responsiveness to prevention, to the issues around violence against women and children across a range of social contexts, and to the diverse range of engagements that will drive behavioural change. This responsiveness will be gleaned through ongoing research to consolidate and build on an evidence base we are compiling and refresh each year to work for best practice engagement with the Australian public. Effective engagement promotes a higher level of awareness, which is central to sustaining and increasing the impact of White Ribbon Australia's campaign. We will build on our work with third party communications researchers to better identify and shape the campaign, with the following key guidelines in place:

- **Audience:** We seek to appeal to men who are not perpetrators of violence against women and children, but who are called upon to influence attitudes and behaviours.
- **Aim:** Our campaign reinforces why men should care about this issue and 'speak up'.
- **Prevalence:** We focus on the prevalence of this issue to support its importance.
- **Support:** Show practical and situational intervention options where possible, while keeping the core message strong.
- **Action:** The campaign provides concrete strategies/actions for people to take, supported by how White Ribbon will use the personal commitment of individuals to achieve change.
- **Evaluation:** The Campaign has embedded within each of the elements evaluation tools to measure social impact.

White Ribbon Australia's national campaign will continue to become a touchstone for knowledge and understanding across a range of social contexts. In addition, White Ribbon Australia is committed to working in partnership with secondary and tertiary service providers in the VAW sector to better understand ways to communicate effective messaging for behavioural and attitudinal change. The collaborative approach enables a diverse and informed set of perspectives to shape White Ribbon Australia's national campaign, and to enable best practice in public engagement and impact. In this way, White Ribbon Australia's rigorously researched and refined national campaign will represent a VAW sector and community collaboration that will work to improve practices around public engagement and cultural change (see Figure 1 below).

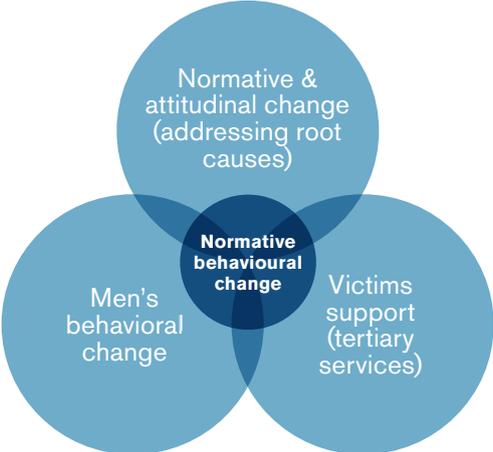


Figure 1: Key interventions and support in work for culture change

White Ribbon Australia is committed to ongoing evaluation and improvements of all its campaigns, strategies and programs. However, the primary prevention space poses some issues for the measurements of impact and behavioural change. We are working for behavioural change that will move in generational cycles, and therefore, the results of White Ribbon Australia's work may not be evident in a 12 month period, but more likely over a decade.

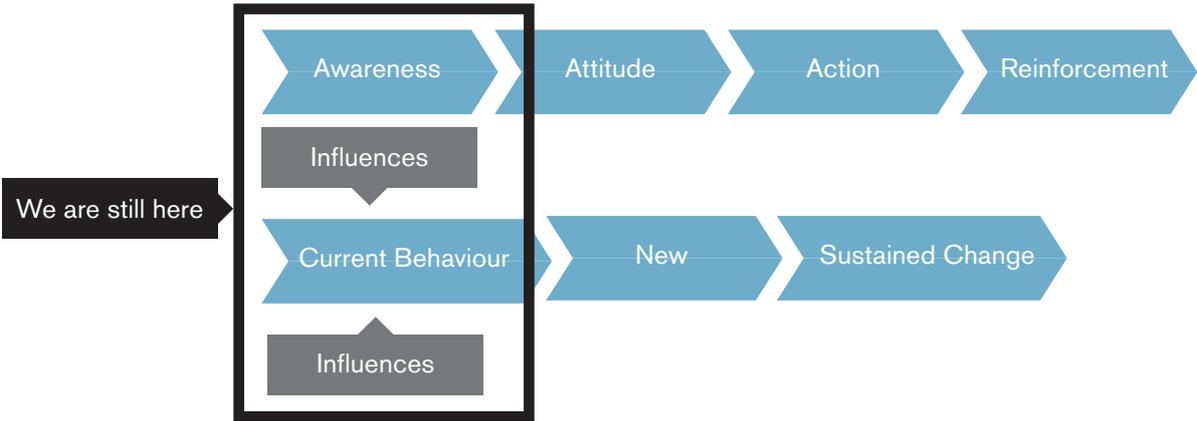


Figure 2: The challenges of measuring long-term behavioural change

As such, we are committed to working in ongoing partnership with the Australian public and the VAW sector in developing the campaign, and in reflecting on and assessing its impact as we continue to consolidate the campaign's contribution to productive debates and the longer term project of behavioural change to reduce violence against women and their children. As Figure 1 above demonstrates, after 10 years, White Ribbon Australia is still working to effect sustained change by illuminating the causes and influences on behaviours and attitudes that support violence. As a primary prevention organisation, we are driving a long-term public discussion about gender, power and relationships to address the underlying causes of violent behaviours against women and their children in order to effect cultural change. This is a long-term project, where we are working for future generations to enjoy a society free from violence against women and children. These changes cannot be tracked or measured over the short-term, for example, in yearly, or even three-yearly cycles. Normative behavioural change is a gradual process that requires sustained engagement and action, and sustained change is likely to be evident over a generational cycle of up to 25 years. It therefore requires sustained investment in evaluation strategies.

4. What are your top three priority issues/topics for research?

As noted in the responses above, White Ribbon Australia has three top priority areas of research:

- **Marketing/communication research** for best practice in public engagement, with respect to effective and impactful communication strategies, founded on a public health model of prevention (for normative change);
- **Understanding and expanding the role of male leadership** as an active by-stander in driving behavioural change in peer networks and wider community engagement.
- **Evaluative strategies and tools** best able to measure sustained social impact of primary prevention.

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