

Australia's campaign to
stop violence against women

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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
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Dear Committee

**Response to Terms of Reference for Finance and Public Administration References Committee
Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality**

Please find enclosed White Ribbon Australia's submission to the aforementioned Inquiry. Attached please find a copy of our 2014/15 Annual Report and the White Ribbon Australia Strategic Framework 2016-2019.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference. Please contact us should you wish us to elaborate on the information contained in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Libby Davies
CEO

Response to Terms of Reference for Finance and Public Administration References Committee Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality

Introduction

White Ribbon Australia (White Ribbon) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this Senate Inquiry into domestic violence and gender inequality.

Here, we address the terms of reference with a particular emphasis on:

- Male engagement in challenging gender inequality and preventing men's violence against women
- The need for long-term approaches to challenging gender stereotypes as a key driver of domestic violence
- Whole-of-government approaches to addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence
- Investment in established and proven violence prevention programs and campaigns
- The need for further research into the impact of access and exposure to pornography by young people and children on domestic violence and gender inequality

A) The role of gender inequality in all spheres of life in contributing to the prevalence of domestic violence

The recently-released *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (hereafter *Change the Story*) makes a commendable effort to explicate the link between gender inequality and violence against women by bringing together the latest research and practitioner experience. We refer the Committee to *Change the Story* for an explication of the role of gender inequality in all spheres of life and the prevalence of domestic violence.

White Ribbon was among the 400 stakeholder groups involved in development of *Change the Story*. We believe it can make a valuable contribution to unifying primary prevention work in Australia.

As *Change the Story* states, addressing gender inequality is key to addressing violence against women. An understanding of this underpins the primary prevention work White Ribbon does through our Campaign and Programs that engage men and boys. We acknowledge the hugely important role women play in the White Ribbon Campaign and Programs and in the prevention of men's violence against women. In this response to the Senate Inquiry, we build on the analysis in *Change the Story* and explore the role men and boys play in challenging gender inequality and preventing men's violence against women through the White Ribbon Australia Campaign and Programs.

White Ribbon is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end men's violence against women and girls, promote gender equality, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity. White Ribbon Australia, as part of this global movement, aims to create an Australian society in which all women can live in safety, free from violence and abuse.

White Ribbon works through a primary prevention approach understanding that men are central to achieving the social change necessary to prevent men’s violence against women. We engage men to stand up, speak out and act to influence the actions of some men and demand change. White Ribbon is dedicated to ensuring men are active advocates for changing the social norms, attitudes and behaviours that are at the root of men’s abuse of women.

Through education, awareness-raising and creative campaigns, preventative programs and partnerships, we are highlighting the positive role men play in preventing men’s violence against women and enabling them to be part of this social change. This approach is supported by an evidence-base identifying the need to, and advantages of, engaging men and boys in violence prevention¹.

White Ribbon is a platform for men to speak out against violence against women, and to safely challenge the attitudes and behaviours of a minority of men who use or condone violence against women. Table 1 below gives an overview of engagement in the White Ribbon Campaign and Programs.

Table 1: Overview of engagement in the White Ribbon Campaign and Programs.

Breaking the Silence: an award-winning professional development program that works with school leadership to embed models of respectful relationships in school culture and classroom activities and based on National Standards for Sexual Assault Prevention Education.

→ Since 2009, we have reached approximately 220,000 students in over 340 schools

Workplace Accreditation Program: an award-winning, world first accreditation program that supports workplaces to prevent and respond to violence against women.

→ Over 400,000 employees reached from 2012-2015

→ 45 accredited organisations

→ 120 undergoing accreditation.

Ambassadors & Friends of White Ribbon: representatives and supporters of White Ribbon from across Australia.

→ 2500 Ambassadors (note this figure will soon be revised down due to the Ambassador recommitment process currently underway).

Community, awareness raising, marketing and engagement initiatives:

→ 75% of people can accurately identify what White Ribbon stands for

→ 70% of elearning participants between January and May 2015 were male.

Market and academic research indicated a need to further target our prevention programs to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse men and boys. In July 2014 we launched a program to help achieve this, funded for four years by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. This has led to a 17% increase in Ambassadors

¹ See, for example, VicHealth (2007) p.15, 50; Flood (2015); Stathopoulos (2013).

identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and over 160 men to date from across Australia having attended culturally appropriate training in the prevention of men's violence against women.

As Flood (2015: 172) posits, male engagement in the prevention of men's violence against women is based on 1) a recognition of violence against women as an issue men are primarily responsible for and 2) an understanding of the need for men to work with women to address the issue. We acknowledge the criticisms that can be made about working with men to end violence against women². We present these figures to give the Committee a quantitative insight into how men and boys are actively challenging gender inequality and helping prevent men's violence against women through the White Ribbon Campaign and Programs.

B) The role of gender stereotypes in contributing to cultural conditions which support domestic violence

Research points out the role of gender stereotypes in contributing to cultural conditions supporting domestic violence³. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that initiatives to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence can struggle to effectively translate this research into successful campaigns and programs that reach the broad cross-section of the community. In this respect, demonstrating the link between gender stereotypes and domestic violence is a long-term endeavour when working with some individuals and communities⁴. This underpins the cultural change strategy of White Ribbon Australia.

Violence prevention initiatives in educational settings are key to breaking the cycle of men's violence against women. Starting discussions about the relationship between gender stereotypes and violence against women is an important part of this. White Ribbon Australia's *Breaking the Silence* schools program works with school leadership to embed models of respectful relationships in school culture and classroom activities. Since 2009, more than 340 Australian schools have participated in *Breaking the Silence*, reaching 220,000 students, including over 120,000 boys. Through an eLearning package and workshop content, the program positions gender inequality as the root cause of men's violence against women and identifies gender stereotypes as a key driver of men's violence against women.

Importantly, *Breaking the Silence* gives participants an opportunity to share their experiences and resources used to challenge gender stereotypes and promoting respectful relationships. Participants have reported successfully using a number of resources to get fellow teachers and young people

² For an overview of the main criticisms, see Flood, M. (2015) 'Work with men to end violence against women: a critical stocktake' *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17:sup2,159-176.

³ See, for example the research cited in World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2010) *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence*. Geneva, World Health Organization pps.25-26 and Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia p.25.

⁴ This is also demonstrated in the political, media and public response to calls by Larissa Waters for adults to consider the gender-based marketing of toys to children.

thinking about the relationship between gender stereotypes and men’s violence against women, including ‘Act-Like-A-Man Box’⁵ and the #LikeAGirl⁶ resources.

At the organisational and workplace levels, the White Ribbon world-first *Workplace Accreditation Program* recognises workplaces taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women, including challenging gender stereotypes. The *Workplace Accreditation Program* supports workplaces to adapt organisational culture, practices and procedures so that they promote safe workplaces for women and respectful relationships. Part of the accreditation process includes training in the implications of gender stereotypes and conscious and unconscious discrimination against women. The *Workplace Accreditation Program* is a powerful platform for achieving far reaching culture change; since 2012, over 160 organisations have participated in the program, reaching over 400,000 employees. Employees absorb the training provided through the accreditation process, the standards set by their employer and take the conversation about violence against women to their families and the wider community.

As identified in the Terms of Reference, gender stereotyping occurs in multiple interrelated settings and impacts men and women at all stages of life. To prevent men’s violence against women, gender stereotypes must be challenged in a variety of contexts and through numerous activities, such as the programs White Ribbon runs in schools and workplaces. Resistance to the message about the relationship between gender stereotypes and men’s violence against women will be an ongoing challenge, and in our experience requires innovative approaches in environments where people feel safe to explore the issue.

C) The role of government initiatives at every level in addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence

Our response to the 2014 inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia addressed this issue as it related to the Federal Government. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (the National Plan) is a clear commitment to long-term efforts to reduce violence against women and children. We again acknowledge the progress made under the First Action Plan and the ongoing efforts under the Second Action Plan, including an enhanced focus on prevention and awareness-raising efforts. This has been complemented by policy responses and commitments at the state and territory levels.

This progress has not translated into greater investment in primary responses to violence against women. Addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence requires a long-term whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to reducing violence against women that includes a strong focus on prevention. *Change the Story* goes some way in addressing this by offering a framework for primary prevention. However, responses to domestic violence at the government and service levels would benefit from greater coordination and increased investment.

Here we focus on two areas that could benefit from government support: 1) investment in established and proven prevention programs and 2) a whole-of-government approach to preventing men’s violence against women.

⁵ Developed by Paul Kivel and the Oakland Men’s Project, and adapted by Michael Kaufman. For more information, see: <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/pdfs/exercise1.pdf>.

⁶ See <http://always.com/en-us/about-us/our-epic-battle-like-a-girl>

1) Investment in established and proven prevention programs

Primary prevention efforts must involve a variety of activities in a number environments. The White Ribbon Campaign and Programs operate across a spectrum of activities and locations through funding that largely comes from the broader community; only 9% of funding to support this work comes from Government.

White Ribbon Programs are based on best practice and research. They are continuously evaluated and are evidencing the positive social impact of early intervention. Some key indicators include:

- **White Ribbon Campaign:** 70% of men can accurately identify what White Ribbon stands for, an increase of 12% on 2013 figures
- **Community events:** 1400 White Ribbon community events held in 2015
- **Workplace Accreditation Program:** Increase in the percentage of employees suggesting that sexist language is 'never acceptable' from 59% to 67% over a 14 month period
- **Breaking the Silence Schools Program:** Increase in awareness regarding the prevalence of violence.
- **Elearning training:** On average, elearning participants felt more confident and comfortable to engage in strategies to help prevent violence against women once they had completed the training⁷.

We work alongside many other organisations working to end men's violence against women. The sector needs government investment in programs and campaigns that are working alongside investment in innovative initiatives. This investment will support achievement of the National Plan and the key and supportive actions identified in *Change the Story*.

2) A whole-of-government approach

In our response to the 2014 inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia, we called for a whole-of-government approach to reducing violence against women for the goals of the National Plan to be achieved⁸. As well as various levels of government working together, this approach includes governments working across portfolios. This recognises the complexity of violence against women and to realise the significant social benefits of making Australian homes, workplaces and communities safe for women.

For the purposes of this inquiry, a whole-of-government approach remains vital to addressing the underlying causes of men's violence against women and achieving long-term social change.

⁷ Data collected from 479 elearning participants from January-May 2015.

⁸ This submission is available at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Submissions

D) Any other related matters

Multiple stakeholders have contacted us concerned about the exposure of children and young people to pornography and the impact this has on the development of respectful relationships between young men and women.

Pornographic material often objectifies and degrades women, presents distorted images of male and female bodies and does not portray healthy and equal relationships. There is concern that young people are not developmentally capable of integrating the sexual information contained in pornography (Bryant 2009). Young men and boys may be at greater risk given they are more likely to access pornography and access it more frequently than young women and girls (Bryant 2009: 6; Horvath et al. 2013: 7).

A report into the effects of access and exposure to pornography on children and young people found that pornography is linked to:

‘unrealistic attitudes about sex; maladaptive attitudes about relationships; more sexually permissive attitudes; greater acceptance of casual sex; beliefs that women are sex objects; more frequent thoughts about sex; sexual uncertainty (e.g. the extent to which children and young people are unclear about their sexual beliefs and values); and less progressive gender role attitudes (e.g. male dominance and female submission)’ (Horvath et al. 2013: 7).

Certain geographic populations require a specific focus; consultations undertaken as part of the White Ribbon Diversity Program have revealed the emerging impact of pornography on children and young people in remote communities that have only recently been connected to the Internet. Older people in these communities are struggling to keep abreast of the challenges that accompany this new technology.

Additional research is required to understand the relationship, if any, between access and exposure to pornography and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours in children and young people (Bryant 2009: 6; Horvath et al. 2007: 9). We encourage a policy focus on this issue and support additional investment into research and action to address it.

Finally, we would like to reiterate the importance of governments at all levels supporting and helping coordinate successful and independently evaluated prevention programs that address gender inequality and violence against women. Governments should avoid strategies, practices and policies that duplicate existing initiatives and instead build on the success of established models that are invariably short on funds. More efficient use of resources will go a long way in helping address the issue of men’s violence against women.

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