



## Men and Family Violence Background Paper

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### Introduction

This paper provides background information on the topic of men's violence in families in the Australian context, with particular focus on NSW and Victoria. The fundamental importance of the safety of women and children, and the dignity and empowerment of women in particular is acknowledged at the outset, as is the priority that should be given to services for victims of violence. Part of the solution, however, lies in the education of boys and young men, particularly those at risk of perpetrating violence.

The paper has been written to guide Esther's Voice in the development of a research project that will be effective in reducing men's violence in families, given the significant involvement of its auspicing agencies in work with young offenders and with youths who have already witnessed domestic breakdown. The paper provides at this stage a general overview, without attention being given to specific communities.

Tania Plibersek, formerly a policy officer in the area of domestic violence, is currently the Federal Minister for the Status of Women as well as the Minister for Housing. On the ABC radio program *Life Matters* on Monday 9 March 2009 she observed that in Australia a lot has been done to raise awareness of domestic violence, but we have not yet been able to reduce the incidence of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> This paper aims to help set a direction for Esther's Voice to contribute to reducing the incidence of domestic violence.

It should be noted at the outset, however, that wide-ranging policy developments are currently under way at state and federal levels (see section

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<sup>1</sup> Jointly auspiced by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, Jesuit Social Services, and MacKillop Family Services, *Esther's Voice* has been created as a site for the collaborative work of reflection, enquiry and action based on a commitment to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

<sup>2</sup> As responses to family violence improve, reports also increase. It is therefore difficult to know whether incidence is actually going up or down. We do know that high numbers of women do not report family violence: see section 1 below.

6 below) and that there is a considerable amount of research currently being undertaken and reported. For example, the Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse provides a central directory of over five hundred items on domestic and family violence produced in Australia from 2000 onwards.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, understanding the various factors involved in family violence is complicated by the fact that inevitably many areas of government are involved: typically police and justice, women's affairs, health, housing, education, and community services. The most valuable papers for understanding the current situation in Australia are the 2008 Discussion Paper on the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework,<sup>4</sup> the 2002 Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse briefing paper written by Lesley Laing, 'Responding to Men who perpetrate Domestic Violence',<sup>5</sup> the Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library's 2006 e-brief, 'Domestic Violence in Australia – an Overview of the Issues',<sup>6</sup> and the Western Australian Family & Domestic Violence Unit's various publications.<sup>7</sup>

The paper reports on current research, and covers the following areas:

- 1 Family violence: incidence and prevalence
- 2 Causes
- 3 Effects
- 4 Service responses
- 5 Effectiveness of responses
- 6 Policy developments
- 7 Possible project directions.

Key findings are:

- Family Violence is widely prevalent across Australia, especially in Indigenous communities, and almost always the victims are women and children and the perpetrators are male
- Most responses have operated as crisis interventions, but a great deal of energy has been recently put into integrating services, providing longer-term care, and putting preventative strategies into place
- Young men who have been in care, who have been in the justice system, and who are poorly educated and unemployed are very likely to perpetrate family violence
- While many service models have been developed, there is limited evidence to their effectiveness
- Cultural and social attitudes are significant factors in the misuse of male power.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/research.html>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion_paper.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues\\_paper\\_7.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues_paper_7.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/library/INTGUIDE/SP/Dom\\_violence.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/INTGUIDE/SP/Dom_violence.htm)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/NR/exeres/A8B722B5-2863-450B-8610-90FBB68CAF8A.htm>

## 1. Family violence: incidence and prevalence

The NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework *Discussion Paper* canvases several definitions of domestic and family violence and concludes that

Most definitions throughout Australian literature reflect a contemporary recognition that violence, whether defined as domestic or family, includes a range of violent behaviours: physical violence, sexual violence, verbal, psychological and emotional abuse, stalking and intimidation, as well as social isolation and economic or financial abuse.<sup>8</sup>

The Federal Office for Women's 'Reducing Violence' initiative reports that

Around one-in-three Australian women experience physical violence and almost one-in-five experience sexual violence over their lifetime. In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report higher levels of physical violence during their lifetime than do non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander Australian women, and are much more likely to experience sexual violence and to sustain injury. Similarly, women with a disability are more likely to experience partner or sexual violence, more severely and over a longer period of time, than women without a disability.<sup>9</sup>

Information on the incidence of family violence in Australia is always moderated by the caveat that such violence is under-reported. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 *Personal Safety Survey*, in 1996 only 19% of women who experienced violence from a male reported this to the police; in 2005 this figure had risen to 36% of women.<sup>10</sup>

Data is also fluid, since it can be obtained in various ways: from crime statistics, from help lines, and from surveys. The Victorian Family Violence Database *Seven Year Report* thus includes data from Victoria Police family violence incident reports, Victorian Magistrates' and Children's Court finalised intervention order applications, the Victorian Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), data from Victorian Public Hospital Emergency Departments, initial snapshot data from the Department of Justice Victims of Crime Helpline and the Department of Human Services Integrated Reporting and Information System (IRIS).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion_paper.pdf), *Discussion Paper*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/reducing\\_violence/index.htm](http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/reducing_violence/index.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Personal Safety Survey* (2006). See summary at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/F9E5031D932C2908CA2571C500784266?OpenDocument>

<sup>11</sup> This large report is available at

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/Home/Crime/Research+and+Statistics/JUSTICE+-+Victorian+Family+Violence+Database+-+Seven+Year+Report+-+PDF>

The 2004 Australian component of the International Violence against Women Survey, *Women's Experience of Male Violence*, found that 34% of women who had ever had an intimate partner reported experiencing at least one form of violence during their lifetime with that partner.<sup>12</sup> In a single year, however, the statistics are somewhat different. The ABS 2006 *Personal Safety Survey*, for example, found that, in the twelve months leading up to the 2005 survey, 94.2% of women reported that they had not experienced violence in that year (in NSW 95.5% of women reported not experiencing violence). Nonetheless, 5.8% of all women (around half a million women across Australia) had experienced violence in the preceding 12 months. The majority of assaults against women were perpetrated by either a current or former partner. Of the people who had experienced violence from a previous partner, 61% reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship and 36% said that these children had witnessed violence.

The NSW DoCS Brighter Futures briefing paper on family violence notes that family violence often starts or escalates during pregnancy or soon after birth: 42% of respondents to the Australian Women's Safety survey reported that they had experienced violence during pregnancy.<sup>13</sup>

The NSW *Discussion Paper* includes the following information:

- In 2005 the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reported that the recorded rate of domestic assault increased more than 50% across the State, though there is no upward trend in the willingness of female victims to report the offence to the police;
- In the 2006-07 year the NSW police recorded 27,521 domestic assaults, representing 35% of all reported assaults.<sup>14</sup>

The Parliamentary Library e-brief paper adds that, according to the 2006 ABS Personal Safety survey:

- 5.8 per cent of women had experienced violence in the 12 month period preceding the survey in 2005 compared with 7.1 per cent in 1996.
- A Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (BTRE) publication, *About Australia's Regions*, 2006, reported that domestic violence rates were highest in very remote Australia, followed by remote and outer regional localities. By contrast, major cities had the lowest rates of domestic violence.
- The *Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)* published in 2004, show that the rate of family violence victimisation for Indigenous women may be 40 times

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/56/RPP56.pdf>, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in 'Domestic and Family Violence Vulnerability', p. 2, at [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures\\_dv.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures_dv.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion_paper.pdf), *Discussion Paper*, pp. 3-5.

the rate for non-Indigenous women (though data is limited and may not be accurate).<sup>15</sup>

The findings of the *Victorian Family Violence Database Seven Year Report*<sup>16</sup> include:

- a dramatic increase of 45% in family violence incidents recorded by Victoria Police between 1999 and 2003, with the number leveling off to around 28,500 reports per year between 2003 and 2007 [the increase is at least partly attributable to positive changes to how family violence was policed];
- over the seven years children were present in two thirds of all family violence incidents reported to police.

Data on the percentage of men involved in family violence is difficult to find. However Kilmartin and Allison report research that suggests that around 9% of men (in the USA) have acknowledged committing sexual assault.<sup>17</sup> As shall be discussed below, however, the causes of family violence are arguably due to social/cultural/political factors rather than to individual pathologies.

## 2. Causes

While there have been many attempts to identify the causes of men's violence,<sup>18</sup> the consensus is that there are two major clusters of factors:

- social/cultural/political factors
- individual/pathological/psychological factors.

Each of these clusters may include a number of sub-factors (for example, there is some [contested] evidence that men suffering post traumatic stress disorder are more likely to be disposed to sexual assault<sup>19</sup>). Both clusters need to be taken into account to understand and to address the causes of men's violence. However, this does not mean that any individual's chosen abusive behaviour should be pathologised and therefore excused.

### 2.1 Social/cultural/political factors

Laing explores the perspective, developed by feminists involved in the establishment of women's refuges, that socio-political factors relating to

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/library/INTGUIDE/SP/Dom\\_violence.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/INTGUIDE/SP/Dom_violence.htm)

<sup>16</sup> See reference at n.10 above.

<sup>17</sup> Quoting Mary Koss, in C. Kilmartin and J. Allison, (eds.), *Men's Violence against Women: theory, research and activism* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 40. Available on line at [http://books.google.com/books?id=-dLSj-G0aOEC&dq=Kilmartin+and+Allison+%2B+Men's+Violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=6vyVF1dSpE&sig=r4uPRobKYKY5dOUh2kljmChZ96I&hl=en&ei=p2zJSfn1C4GBkQWBp6XVAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=1&ct=result](http://books.google.com/books?id=-dLSj-G0aOEC&dq=Kilmartin+and+Allison+%2B+Men's+Violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=6vyVF1dSpE&sig=r4uPRobKYKY5dOUh2kljmChZ96I&hl=en&ei=p2zJSfn1C4GBkQWBp6XVAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result)

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent survey see Kilmartin and Allison. See also Lesley Laing's paper on 'Responding to men who perpetrate domestic violence'.

<sup>19</sup> As noted in Kilmartin and Allison, p. 77.

gender and power are key elements in understanding men's violence against women.<sup>20</sup> 'Men as a social group have greater power than women and violence is an important way by which men maintain their dominant position.' Further, quoting Dobash et al,

Men are violent to their women partners in a wider context of family, friends, and the general cultural and institutional settings in which such behaviour and accompanying attitudes are more or less condemned or condoned.... Sanctions for the use of violence are often weak or nonexistent and men incur few if any costs for its use.<sup>21</sup>

More recent research has explored how societies and cultures construct 'masculinity'. Kilmartin and Allison thus write about 'toxic masculinity'

Toxic masculinity provides justifications and rationalisations for men's subordination of women, and this set of cultural beliefs is both created and maintained by individuals, groups, institutions, and the society at large. Within these cultural conditions, violence-prone men feel entitled to wield that power irresponsibly, and social systems often fail to hold them accountable for their violence.<sup>22</sup>

Also, as an important background social element in the continuing cycle of domestic violence, researchers have identified a syndrome of 'learned helplessness' among victims of men's violence, in which inequities in the power structure between men and women undermine women's resourcefulness and creativity and result in the use of coping strategies that may lead to them thinking there is nothing they can do to change the situation, rather than being empowered to challenge abusive behaviours.<sup>23</sup>

Social/political/cultural factors not only create the environment that might foster men's violence, they also combine with individual/pathological/psychological factors to explain why some men are 'violence-prone'. For example, social conditioning can give rise to 'hypermasculinity' at a micro-social level, where sexes are kept apart and do very little together, where men have nothing to do with 'women's work' like child care, or where men-only groupings exist (e.g. football teams).<sup>24</sup>

The National Plan of Action reports:

Evidence shows that communities increase the risk of violence against women when they allow norms that support men's controlling attitudes and behaviour over women, or attitudes that support the notion of male privilege. These norms include:

- "macho" constructions of masculinity;

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<sup>20</sup> This thesis is argued by Suellen Murray in her *More than a Refuge: Changing Responses to Domestic Violence* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Laing, 'Responding to men who perpetrate domestic violence', p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kilmartin and Allison, pp. 61-62.

<sup>23</sup> See discussion in Kilmartin and Allison, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Kilmartin and Allison, pp.60-61, referring to research by Peggy Sanday.

- ideas that “a woman’s place is in the home”;
- notions that men should “wear the pants” as heads of the household and wage-earners;
- standards that segregate male drinking and encourage excessive or binge drinking;
- standards that create peer pressure to conform to these ideas of masculinity and male behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 individual/pathological/psychological factors

Even in such toxic societies, however, and despite their passive complicity in the power structures of such societies, the majority of men are not actively violent. As Kilmartin and Allison put it, ‘most violence...by definition reflects a disturbance in the psyche of the person who undertakes it.’<sup>26</sup>

This brings us to consider the cluster of individual/pathological/psychological factors. Why are some individuals violent? A comprehensive review has concluded that

maritally violent men show more psychological distress, personality disorders, attachment/dependency problems, anger/hostility and alcohol problems than do violent men.... They may lack resources or feel powerless...[They] are also more likely to have experienced violence in their family of origin.<sup>27</sup>

Note that these elements are more likely to be contributing factors in a cultural context, rather than causes in themselves. Kilmartin and Allison have similarly observed that men engaged in domestic violence often witnessed violence between their parents and have survived childhood abuse. Interestingly, while sexual offenders have varied attitudes to their mother, they invariably are bitter toward and disappointed with their fathers.<sup>28</sup>

A major international study found that key factors linked to a man’s risk of physically assaulting a female partner include young age, low income, low academic achievement, and involvement in aggressive or delinquent behaviour as an adolescent.<sup>29</sup> These factors may not be causes, however, so much as indicators.

The Victorian government has recently published *Family Violence Risk Management Framework*, which identifies several variables consistently emerge in terms of ongoing family violence, including:

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<sup>25</sup> *Time for Action*, p. 25. At the time of writing the National Council’s Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021, *Time for Action*, was in preparation. This report is now available at [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np\\_time\\_for\\_action/national\\_plan/Documents/The\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np_time_for_action/national_plan/Documents/The_Plan.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Kilmartin and Allison, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Laing, pp. 5-6, referring to research by Holtzworth-Munroe et al. (1997)

<sup>28</sup> Kilmartin and Allison, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Krug et al. (2002) quoted in NSW Discussion Paper, p. 6.

- the perpetrator's age
- the severity and duration of prior violence
- the perpetrator's history of arrest and incarceration
- violence in the perpetrator's family of origin
- the perpetrator's drug and alcohol abuse
- the perpetrator's hostility levels, and
- unemployment.

Most risk indicator lists include the following:

- perpetrator history of violent behaviour both within and outside of the household
- perpetrator history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse toward intimate partners
- perpetrator access to lethal weapons
- presence of behaviours in perpetrators that are disruptive of normal standards of social behaviour and affiliation with peers with similar behaviours
- relationship instability, especially recent separation or divorce
- presence of other life stressors for perpetrator such as unemployment or recent loss
- perpetrator history of witnessing or being the victim of family violence as a child
- evidence of mental health problems or personality disorder in perpetrator
- perpetrator resistance to change and lack of motivation for treatment, and
- attitude of perpetrator that supports violence towards women.<sup>30</sup>

Once again, these elements may not necessarily be causes so much as indicators. It seems, however, that disorders of psyche or heart or soul, both within and about the perpetrator, are significant factors in men's violence in families.

### 3. Effects

The Victorian ENOUGH campaign reported at the end of 2008 on the devastating effect that family violence has on those involved as well as on the broader community. It notes that family violence

- affects one in five Victorian women, with Indigenous women significantly more likely to be victims of violence than the general

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<sup>30</sup> *Family Violence Risk Management Framework*, 'Risk assessment in family violence', pp. 14-15, available at <http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/owpmain.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/family+violencerisk+factors+and+family+violence>  
See also the roll out of the Common Risk Assessment Framework for Family Violence Services in Victoria at [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/17175/risk\\_assessment\\_newsletter\\_no\\_2.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/17175/risk_assessment_newsletter_no_2.pdf)

- population
- is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44
- is responsible for more disease burden than high blood pressure, smoking and obesity
- is a factor in 52 percent of substantiated child protection cases
- affects all communities, with the cycle of violence often continuing from one generation to the next
- particularly affects pregnant women, with 36 per cent of women experiencing family violence while pregnant and 17 per cent of those women being pregnant when the violence started
- costs the Victorian economy around \$2 billion annually.

Family violence has harmful immediate and long-term effects on children. Even when children are not directly involved, simply witnessing an incident or having to clean up after an incident can have a great impact on them.<sup>31</sup>

Tragically, it should also be noted that some domestic violence ends up with murder and/or suicide. In Australia, 21% of all homicides are domestic.<sup>32</sup>

Professor Cathy Humphreys has recently observed that in Victoria children were present in 48% of incidents attended by police.<sup>33</sup> In another place, she reports that 63% of children 'witnessing' domestic violence do worse than those who do not witness domestic violence.<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, she reviews the 'contentious area' of the impact of children's experiences of witnessing domestic violence: some children are not so affected by violence that they should be placed in child protection.<sup>35</sup>

In NSW, the 2008 Wood Commission into child protection found that domestic violence is the most commonly reported issue in child protection reports in

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.familyviolence.vic.gov.au/QuestionsandAnswers#Whoiseaffected?>

<sup>32</sup> See Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearing House submission at <http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Submission%20final%20CVAW%20National%20Plan%20of%20Action24708.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> See Cathy Humphreys, 'Responding to children affected by family violence' at [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/70604/ifv\\_cathy\\_humphreys\\_3107.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/70604/ifv_cathy_humphreys_3107.pdf)  
See also Cathy Humphreys and Nicky Stanley (eds.), *Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Directions for Good Practice* (Jessica Kinsley: London, 2006) at [http://books.google.com/books?id=4I1JZ4Y9tRcC&dq=humphreys+%2B+domestic+violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=sgzuTkFaec&sig=bTxOkB2fTXEsIm9Is1O8XQpyzjM&hl=en&ei=1mLJScjsJpim6wOD87S5Ag&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=6&ct=result#PPA1,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=4I1JZ4Y9tRcC&dq=humphreys+%2B+domestic+violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=sgzuTkFaec&sig=bTxOkB2fTXEsIm9Is1O8XQpyzjM&hl=en&ei=1mLJScjsJpim6wOD87S5Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=6&ct=result#PPA1,M1)

<sup>34</sup> CAFWAA Keynote address, 'Exploring the Interface between Family Violence and Child Protection'. [www.cafwaa.org.au/Papers2007/Humphreys\\_keynote.ppt](http://www.cafwaa.org.au/Papers2007/Humphreys_keynote.ppt)  
See also Cathy Humphreys, 'Problems in the system of mandatory reporting of children living with domestic violence', *Journal of Family Studies* 14:2-3 (2008)

<sup>35</sup> Cathy Humphreys, 'Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Challenging directions for practice', Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, Issues Paper 13 (2007), at p. 11. [http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper\\_13.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper_13.pdf)

NSW.<sup>36</sup> As noted above, police report that more than 30% of domestic violence assaults in NSW are witnessed by children.

The Parliamentary Library e-brief notes also both the economic costs –

In 2004, Access Economics, commissioned by the Office for the Status of Women, released *The cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy*. This key report estimated that the total annual cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy in 2002–03 was \$8.1 billion. The largest contributor was pain, suffering and premature mortality at \$3.5 billion. The remaining costs totalled \$4.6 billion. The largest part was consumption costs, of which the largest component was lost household economies of scale. The next largest categories were production and administration at \$484 million and \$480 million respectively.

– and the health costs:

In an article in the Medical Journal of Australia, 'Domestic Violence in Australia: Definition, Prevalence and Nature of Presentation in Clinical Practice' (2000), the authors found domestic violence to be a major public health problem, common in women attending clinical practice.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, one can imagine that the social costs involved in the breaking down of hope and trust and respect among families would be catastrophic to the human spirit. This is not explicitly mentioned in current research.

#### 4. Service responses

Service responses start with crisis interventions which provide support and refuges for victims and ensure the immediate safety of children. Follow up measures include provision of housing, criminal prosecution, empowering victims, providing support for children. Preventative measures include changing the social/political/cultural conditions that underwrite male violence, making perpetrators accountable, providing long-term resources for victims, and setting up treatment for perpetrators. Recent policy developments focus on local and regional integration and coordination of responses.<sup>38</sup>

A study of responses to men's violence in families in the Nordic and English contexts<sup>39</sup> has highlights five important steps:

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<sup>36</sup> *Report of the Special Commission into Child Protection Services in NSW*, p. 697.

<sup>37</sup> See also VicHealth, *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease caused by Intimate partner Violence* (2004).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the Victorian Government's *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children* of 2006 and *Practice Guidelines: Women and children's family violence counselling and support programs* of 2008 at [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/238550/practice-guidelines-women-and-children-fv-counsell-support.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/238550/practice-guidelines-women-and-children-fv-counsell-support.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Maria Eriksson et al. (eds.), *Tackling Men's Violence in Families* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2005), see p 181.

- the elimination of violence to the mother and/or child
- supporting the mother to be a well-functioning residential parent
- a child centred focus that ensures recovery and treatment or 'talking to someone'
- integrating the fragmentation of policies in supporting victims, child protection, and criminal prosecutions.

In 2008 Amnesty International published *Setting the Standard; International Good Practice to inform and Australian National Plan of Action to eliminate violence against women*. While this study had its focus mainly on policing and legal matters, it noted that ancillary services – health services, counselling services, advocacy services, training and employment assistance, housing services, and child care – should empower and protect victims.<sup>40</sup>

An immediate consideration has to do with point of entry into the service system. There are many possible pathways. The Victorian paper aimed at integrating service reform notes the following variety of pathways:

- Family Violence Services
- Police and Courts
- Child Protection Services
- Housing Services
- Health services
- The Support Services (including sexual assault services, victim support services, drug and alcohol services).

The NSW Discussion Paper also notes the complex range of service providers and services. Clearly, local integrated referral pathways will be essential to the provision of good services.

Debate continues about whether the response to perpetrators should be therapeutic treatment to remedy a pathology on the one hand, or punishment and re-education to prevent criminal behaviour on the other. Debate also continues on whether the focus should be on the individual or the social context, and whether scarce resources should be shifted from supporting victims to healing perpetrators.<sup>41</sup>

There is increasing discussion of the engagement of men in preventing men's violence, but with an awareness of the risks involved: Bob Pease notes, 'we have to be careful that, in involving men in men's violence prevention, we do not replicate the same structures and processes that reproduce the violence

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[http://books.google.com/books?id=sjxKadkPuocC&dq=Eriksson+%2B+tackling+men's+violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=uyQu9Xe6PR&sig=KmozgsYYqP4Nz15EzQt64KzkYdY&hl=en&ei=JJfJSZqTLo6CkQXw7IzmAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=1&ct=result](http://books.google.com/books?id=sjxKadkPuocC&dq=Eriksson+%2B+tackling+men's+violence&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=uyQu9Xe6PR&sig=KmozgsYYqP4Nz15EzQt64KzkYdY&hl=en&ei=JJfJSZqTLo6CkQXw7IzmAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result)

<sup>40</sup> Available at [http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/svaw/NPOA\\_report\\_-\\_Master\\_13June\\_opt\\_rfs.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/svaw/NPOA_report_-_Master_13June_opt_rfs.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> See Laing's summary on p. 8 of her paper on 'Responding to Men's Violence'.

we are challenging.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, men need to be more engaged in challenging other men about their violence.

Currently, most resources are focussed on the crisis end of the spectrum.<sup>43</sup> The National Plan of Action offers a broader view, including the development of safer communities, the promotion of positive male behaviours and preventative measures for perpetrators.<sup>44</sup>

The following sections offer a discussion of three clusters of services:

- 4.1 Services for victims
- 4.2 Services for perpetrators
- 4.3 Preventative services.

#### 4.1 Services for victims

Services for victims include:

- Crisis response, including Refuges, Child Protection, Accommodation and material aid services
- Family Support Services
- Health programs (e.g. as part of rape crisis referral)
- Advocacy services
- New court processes like the Domestic Violence Intervention Court Model.

These services still leave many gaps and needs.<sup>45</sup> Attempts are variously underway to integrate and coordinate these services and pathways into services. The new National Council' *Time for Action* lists a comprehensive set of strategies and actions to both prevent family violence and to support victims of family violence.

#### 4.2 Services for perpetrators

Lesley Laing notes that there is no consensus on the most appropriate service response to violent men. She analyses two sets of responses: those shaped by a social-political perspective, and those shaped by individual/psychological perspectives. However, she insists that any work done with individual men

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<sup>42</sup> See Bob Pease, 'Engaging Men in Men's Violence Prevention', Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, Issues Paper 17 (2008) p. 17, at [http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues%20Paper\\_17.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues%20Paper_17.pdf)  
Note also the White Ribbon Campaign, men's engagement with challenging violence against women: <http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au/About-WRD-34.aspx>

<sup>43</sup> NSW Discussion Paper, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> See *Time for Action*, pp. 15ff.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in 2009 Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service published Lucy Healy's *Researching the Gaps: The Needs of Women who have experienced Long-Term Domestic Violence*, which finds that there is a major gap in policy in the integrated family violence service system relating to the acknowledgement that some women and their children are at high risk of experiencing ongoing consequences of family violence and thus require longer term support than is currently sustainable within the current crisis-focussed system.

'must address as its core the social context of gendered inequality'.<sup>46</sup>

She also notes that Australia in the past had not adopted US mandatory arrest policies and hence there has been consequent lack of impetus to develop specialised perpetrator programs.<sup>47</sup> Australian programs had developed in an ad hoc manner. More recently, however, various states have established perpetrator programs linked to the criminal justice system. Much of the work is gender-based cognitive behavioural group work, aimed at educating men about gender inequality, their tactics of power and control, and thus stopping violent behaviour (as opposed to looking at an individual pathology like poor self-esteem and a therapeutic approach). Significant among these programs is the work of NTV (No To Violence), the peak body for men's programs in Victoria.<sup>48</sup> These groups are seen as one part of a system, aimed primarily at the safety of women and children, accountable to women, with limited confidentiality so as to include information for partners. This approach makes men accountable for their actions and teaches them alternative ways of acting.<sup>49</sup>

Responses shaped by an individual/psychological perspective are based on research into the personality types of domestically violent men. For example, adult attachment style and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder have both attracted attention. Researchers then typically explore how different types respond to different treatments. However, reviews of all this research suggest that men who are violent in families are generally neither highly pathological nor borderline personalities, but rather narcissistic and anti-social, with a sense of dominance and entitlement. The gender-based cognitive behavioural programs are therefore appropriate for most perpetrators.<sup>50</sup>

The National Council' *Time for Action* notes: "Up to the present, our knowledge of successful approaches to this problem [male violence] has been weak, so it is essential that we persevere in building a strong body of knowledge about the most successful methods of intervention and remediation."<sup>51</sup>

### 4.3 Preventative services

In Victoria and NSW a number of family support programs have been developed to support families at risk of breakdown and to improve the well being of young children. For example, the Victorian Best Start program has a particular focus on ensuring that vulnerable young children and their families are able to participate in universal services. However, this program was not

<sup>46</sup> Laing, 'Responding to Men's Violence', p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> The most referenced American approach is the 'Duluth Model': see Ellen Pence and Michael Paymer, *The Duluth Model* (New York: Springer, 1993), available at [http://books.google.com/books?id=tJ189FTdO38C&dq=pence+%2B+duluth+model&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=9s9ONulMan&sig=foJnwF3yT7rD3Cxl\\_pOGXD9aNjI&hl=en&ei=laXaSc\\_QEsKHkAWa2fXKCA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1](http://books.google.com/books?id=tJ189FTdO38C&dq=pence+%2B+duluth+model&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=9s9ONulMan&sig=foJnwF3yT7rD3Cxl_pOGXD9aNjI&hl=en&ei=laXaSc_QEsKHkAWa2fXKCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1)

<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.ntv.org.au/>

<sup>49</sup> See Laing, 'Responding to Men's Violence', pp. 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Laing, 'Responding to Men's Violence', p. 7-8, quoting Gondoilf.

<sup>51</sup> *Time for Action*, p. 19.

specifically aimed at preventing family violence, and makes little or no specific mention of family violence. On the other hand, the NSW Brighter Futures early intervention program, while similarly aimed at developing family relationships and promoting healthy child development among vulnerable families, makes specific mention of dealing with family violence.

Steps are also being taken to ensure the accountability of perpetrators before the law. For example, in the past an AVO (Apprehended Violence Order) was neither a criminal charge, nor resulted in a criminal conviction (though the breach of an AVO is a criminal offence). In recent years, in both Victoria and NSW, changes have been made to legislation, police powers (and attitudes) and court processes, to reduce the imposition on victims and to increase the accountability of perpetrators.

Public education campaigns to raise awareness of domestic violence have been promoted by state and federal governments. Among Australian social/political responses, Laing notes the various public education campaigns, campaigns that target young men via their interest in sport, and campaigns in schools aimed at developing egalitarian and non-abusive relationships.

The National Council' *Time for Action* notes:

Currently there is no coherent national policy to address violence prevention education nor is there a national funding body to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of prevention education. The primary delivery of violence prevention education is by sexual assault or domestic and family violence prevention services that frequently only receive short-term project funding for their programs. This approach limits the potential for research and practice evidence on program effectiveness to inform future policy, program development and investment decisions.<sup>52</sup>

There is clearly much to be done in this area. In conclusion, it comes as no surprise that the Federal, NSW and Victorian governments are all engaged in consultations to seek to integrate service responses so that they can provide better services and reduce violence in families. Similarly, they are all engaged in public education campaigns to try to address the social/political/cultural factors that permit continued violence. And yet, partly because of community attitudes,<sup>53</sup> the details of the way forward are far from clear, or far from being settled.

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<sup>52</sup> *Time for Action*, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> See VicHealth (2006), *Two steps forward, one step back: Community attitudes to violence against women. Progress and challenges in creating safe and healthy environments for Victorian women. A summary of findings* is available at [http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/MentalHealthandWellBeing/DiscriminationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/CAS-Longer\\_summary.ashx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/MentalHealthandWellBeing/DiscriminationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/CAS-Longer_summary.ashx)

## 5. Effectiveness of responses

This section offers an overview of evidence for the effectiveness of services for victims, services for perpetrators, and public awareness campaigns. Not all the evidence is in, however, and thus far findings are tentative. An important site to watch is the Victorian Family Violence Reform Research Program, which aims to:

to gain an understanding of how the *Victorian family violence reforms* are impacting on the safety and wellbeing of women and children and the accountability and responsibility of men who use violence. The program will undertake statewide and site-specific research under two main streams:

1. Exploration of the perspectives and experiences of women, children and men; and
2. Identification of the **governance, pathways and collaborative processes** in place to reduce the effects of family violence in Victoria and how they are working.<sup>54</sup>

### 5.1 Services to Victims

There is not a lot of reporting on the effectiveness of services for victims in Australia. The NSW Discussion Paper, however, gathers evidence from evaluations on a number of current services for victims,<sup>55</sup> and its findings are summarised below.

The Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) program, in partnership with police and courts, removes the violent partner from the home and provides case-work support and brokerage resources to victim families. The evaluation found that over 60-63% of families were able to stay in their own homes and report positive outcomes, but better agreements with police need to be developed, and more community housing options need to be created.

The Domestic Violence Intervention Court Model (DVICM) aims to ensure victims feel safer and perpetrators are held accountable. It does this through better policing and prosecution, better court support, and requiring participation in perpetrator programs. It was found to be a generally effective short term crisis response, particularly through the services of the Victim's Advocate, but still suffered from time delays and the need to strengthen offender programs.

A number of Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services operate in NSW. These are generally interagency arrangements with a focus on better service delivery. The evaluation finds them to be moderately resourced, effective, consistent with good practice, and resulting in a high level of satisfaction to victims.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://research.cwav.asn.au/AFRP/FamilyViolence/SAFER/default.aspx>

<sup>55</sup> See NSW Discussion paper, pp. 47ff.

## 5.2 Services for perpetrators

A comprehensive 278-page study of programs for perpetrators was undertaken by the National Crime Prevention Body in 1999 and published in 2001.<sup>56</sup>

There is a good body of evidence about the effectiveness of services for perpetrators, given the debate over their importance, but reviews of the results 'have led to varying conclusions by different researchers'.<sup>57</sup> The National Crime Prevention Report, for example, notes Carden's view that we have only the most primitive notions of what works and why it works.<sup>58</sup>

Laing reports on Gondolf's comprehensive research into the effectiveness of programs for men who are 'batterers', which finds that ultimately it is the overall system that makes a difference, rather than any one particular action. For example, no batterer rehabilitation program is effective if there is not also an effective criminal process.

Laing also reviews the effectiveness of programs aimed at increasing the safety of women and children. While the findings are inconclusive, it appears that few women partners of men in perpetrator programs accessed assistance for themselves, but the programs do provide a chance for women to leave a relationship safely.<sup>59</sup>

Laing concludes her paper by noting her agreement with Dobish et al. in their proposal for a transformative approach, aimed at changing those who use violence, changing those who are victims of violence, and changing the institutions, society and culture that tolerate such violence. All three parts must be present in any project to end men's violence in families.

The Western Australian Domestic and Family Violence Unit also has an excellent 2008 survey of responses to men's violence, with similar conclusions.<sup>60</sup>

## 5.3 Preventative measures

The 2006 Victorian evaluation of Best Start<sup>61</sup> has only one mention of family violence and does not offer any light on the effectiveness of these programs in relation to family violence.

The 2008 Interim Report on the evaluation of the Brighter Futures program

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<sup>56</sup> *Ending Domestic Violence: Programs for Perpetrators*, available at [http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/E20A0A3E00553208CA256B43000065C9/\\$file/no5\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/E20A0A3E00553208CA256B43000065C9/$file/no5_fullreport.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Laing, p. 11. See references to Gondolf's many publications in her bibliography.

<sup>58</sup> *Ending Domestic Violence*, p. 75, quoting Carden.

<sup>59</sup> Laing, pp. 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> *The Men's Project* at <http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/281BE8DE-A378-43B0-B70E-667C6280CE28/0/MensProjectReport.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> *State Evaluation of Best Start* (2006), available at [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/beststart/docs/2007/bs\\_eval\\_report\\_Sept2006.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/beststart/docs/2007/bs_eval_report_Sept2006.pdf)

notes that:

The main vulnerability of the families in the Program was lack of social support followed by parental mental health issues and domestic violence [51 per cent, 47 per cent and 46 per cent respectively].... For families in the Brighter Futures program, the most frequent primary reported issues [to DoCS Helpline] were domestic violence (30 per cent), disability of care (15 per cent), and risk of physical, psychological or sexual harm/injury (13 per cent)<sup>62</sup>

The Interim report, however, offers no information on the effectiveness of the Brighter Futures program in reducing family violence.

Finally, the Western Australian *Review of the Regional Family and Domestic Violence Committee Model* (2006)<sup>63</sup> finds that local service integration is effective, allowing for flexibility and local integration, particularly following legislation reforms in that state.

## 6. Policy Developments

Major policy initiatives are currently underway in Australia. These include:

- The National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children, which began with the Federal Government's May 2008 appointment of an 11 member panel commissioned to draft a national plan;<sup>64</sup>
- The comprehensive NSW December 2008 Discussion Paper on the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework, which is the first step in the development of a state-wide strategic plan;<sup>65</sup>
- In its 2008-09 Budget papers the Victorian government announced an intention to develop 'a comprehensive State Prevention Plan to prevent violence against women'.<sup>66</sup> Victoria developed an integrated family service system strategy in 2006, the *Family Violence Protection ACT 2008* came into effect in December 2008, and a major public awareness campaign, 'ENOUGH' was then established to raise awareness of the implications of the new law.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Social Policy Research Centre, *Brighter Futures Early Intervention Program, Interim Report* (2008), pp. 1, 10, 11, available at [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/brighter\\_futures\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/brighter_futures_evaluation.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/NR/ronlyres/D7C4F3A6-42DD-4AB1-BFAB-4059BF1FD0AD/0/ReviewoftheRDVCMoelFinalReportMay2006.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> [http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/reducing\\_violence/national\\_plan/index.htm](http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/reducing_violence/national_plan/index.htm)

[see reference to their subsequent report at n.25 above].

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/discussion_paper.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> [http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+Sheet+-+2009-2009+Budget+Family+Violence+Reform++/\\$file/2008-09+budget+FV+Fact+Sheet+6May08.pdf](http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+Sheet+-+2009-2009+Budget+Family+Violence+Reform++/$file/2008-09+budget+FV+Fact+Sheet+6May08.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.familyviolence.vic.gov.au/>

Budget commitments are a good indicator of policy commitments. In Victoria, for example, in addition to the introduction of the new *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, the Government has committed over \$75 million since 2005 to address family violence, including:

- more immediate assistance to support victims 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- more resources and special training for police to better respond to family violence situations
- greater choice of housing options, with more support to help victims stay in their own homes
- police and courts taking a stronger approach towards perpetrators who use violence
- dedicated family violence specialists in several Magistrates' Courts to provide more support to victims
- more emergency housing options for perpetrators removed from the family home and additional behaviour-change programs available to them
- a common risk assessment framework to gauge danger to women and children
- increased support for Indigenous family violence prevention programs
- establishment of Indigenous Healing and Time Out Centres.

More information on what the Victorian Government is doing to prevent family violence is available on the Department of Planning and Community Development website.<sup>68</sup>

In NSW, by contrast, the 2008-09 budget claims to provide \$16.8m for family and domestic violence programs (but invested over four years), plus another \$2.9m for domestic violence services transferred from NSW Health.<sup>69</sup> Further funds are also provided elsewhere, for example in police and justice budgets (\$2.1m annually over four years).

The 2008-09 Federal Initiatives, highlighted as a National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, are in fact relatively small:

Delivering on its election commitment, the Government is implementing a National Plan and is setting up a National Council. The immediate actions to be delivered through the Plan include:

- Developing respectful relationship resources for Australian high school students to educate young Australians, particularly boys, about the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault;
- \$1 million over four years to support White Ribbon Day education activities in rural and regional communities to promote

<sup>68</sup> For reports on these and developments in policing, and court processes, see <http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/owpMain.nsf/allDocs/RWPEB0AE56A49A8902BCA2573DA0003E9B1?OpenDocument>

<sup>69</sup> [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/budget08.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/budget08.pdf)

- culture-change that will reduce violence against women;
- toughening and harmonising state and territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws;
- \$200,000 for new research into international best practice models for working with perpetrators of violence; and
- \$500,000 million to boost the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program to inform future interventions to protect women and children from violence.<sup>70</sup>

In summary, family and Domestic Violence is clearly on the political agenda, and clearly in a state of reform, with a focus on developing better legislation, better coordination, and effective services. While many initiatives have been undertaken at state levels, we are currently in another period of consultation prior to the establishment of more integrated models.

## 7. Possible project directions

Because of the prevalence and dire consequences of family violence, and because the organisations that auspice Esther's Voice work in high risk areas with people who are at high risk of being abused or of offending, family violence is clearly an important concern and clearly demands a response. What can we do help reduce the prevalence and effects of family violence?

There are many ways of responding. There are three main potential areas of response, each of which would require further background study. These three main areas are:

1. research
2. service development
3. advocacy and community education.

In the sections below I will consider each of these in turn.

### 7.1 Research

Given the amount and level of research being undertaken in the community and by governments, one major contribution Esther's Voice could make would be through a partnership with an academic institution with a focus on the rates and types of domestic violence witnessed by the children and young people

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<sup>70</sup> [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/budget/budget2008-08\\_women\\_safety.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/budget/budget2008-08_women_safety.htm) States have most responsibilities for protection and prevention, but the Federal Government is responsible for family law and income support, which are both contested areas in relation to family violence.

engaged in our services and the effects of this experience.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, if possible and ethical, a study could be undertaken of the offending rates of men who are or were engaged in the auspicing organisation's programs, either as young offenders or because of placement in out of home care. There is also room for research into linking early intervention services for families with family violence services, and looking at the effectiveness of mentoring good behaviour as opposed to the effects of bullying behaviour.

### 7.2 Service development

There is a need for services that provide counselling and support for children after witnessing family violence, and for services that provide an alternative to child protection for some children who witness family violence. There is room for developing a stronger family violence response component to family services, particularly for women during and after pregnancy, and for specific groups within the community (Indigenous, CALD, and those suffering disability). There is room for developing an education and mentoring service for young men identified as being at risk of perpetrating family violence in the future. Finally, the development of educational and preventative services for men, meaning perpetrators and potential perpetrators should be considered.

### 7.3 Advocacy and community education

Advocacy can take many forms: one form has to do with advocacy for victims with court, housing and health services; another form has to do with advocacy to governments and funding bodies; a third form has to do with public education. It seems to me that Esther's Voice could make a contribution in the first place by developing education packages about family violence which could be offered to staff and volunteers and partnering schools. Finally, we could encourage greater participation and leadership in public campaigns, like Enough, the White Ribbon campaign, or the successor to the Australia Says No campaign.<sup>72</sup>

Given the amount of work done by Good Shepherd, Jesuit Social Services and MacKillop Family Services with high risk adolescents, many of whom have come from family violence situations, their stories of resilience, hope and compassion would also be worth reporting to inform a process of hopeful possibilities.

In conclusion, having said that there are three different kinds of responses, there is also a general response that is needed, which has to do with a social/cultural/political stance, a re-ordering of our individual and collective psyches.

## 8. Acknowledgments

I thank Michael Gourlay, Suellen Murray, Lea Campbell and Chris Laming for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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<sup>71</sup> See David Indermaur 'Young Australians and domestic violence', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, Australian Institute of Criminology*, 195 (2001):1-6 at <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi195.html>

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.australiasaysno.gov.au/>