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SUBMISSION TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER ON NSW DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

About Men's Health Australia

Men's Health Australia is a non-government alliance committed to the betterment of the health of men and boys in our communities. We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework. We believe that violence is an important issue impacting upon the health and wellbeing of our communities, and that every effort should be made to reduce its incidence and impact. We also believe that any approach to reducing violence must be developed through robust debate amongst both our community and its leaders, and that such debate must be based upon accurate representation of the best data available to us.

Recommendations

The Discussion Paper provides an excellent overview of the current state of affairs in NSW and is a timely opportunity to improve the system in order to assist victims of violence. However, it is based upon a lengthy series of serious statistical errors, biases and cherry-picking of statistics designed to sustain a largely discredited thirty-year-old paradigm. This paradigm is that "domestic and family violence is predominately a crime committed by males on females," and that its occurrence can be understood purely in terms of gender and power. We outline a sample of these statistical errors alongside the correct data below. When one examines the correct data it becomes clear that there is little evidence to support the Discussion Paper's frequent and exclusive use of the term "women and children" instead of the correct term "victims of domestic and family violence" (of all ages and genders).

While men probably make up a minority of victims, they are very large minority indeed, and to exclude them completely from any discussion of domestic violence, as this Discussion Paper does, is clearly unjust and inequitable. And of course it is not just these men who are ignored by the Discussion Paper, but also their children, who are harmed by witnessing violence against their fathers and step-fathers.

Our recommendation is simple and straightforward: that the Strategic Framework be guided by a comprehensive evidence base drawn from objective, methodologically sound studies into the nature of domestic violence. We ask the NSW Government to take an objective, rational approach to the issue of domestic violence, free of ideology and political agendas – one that is based upon accurate representations of the best data available to us. The safety of the women, children and men of NSW depend on it.

The NSW Premier tells us in the Discussion Paper that "The NSW Government believes that every woman has the right to feel safe and be safe wherever she is." We sincerely hope that the Government believes the same about men.

Greg Andresen
Research & Media Liaison
Men's Health Australia
27th March 2009

**List of statistical errors and biases contained within the
Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework**

Page 3

Extract from Discussion Paper:

As numerous studies show, the majority of violence that women experience is perpetrated by an intimate male partner. The most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey found that most women assaulted in the last 12 months were assaulted by either a current or previous partner.

Correction:

The most recent Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) found that 30 per cent of women assaulted in the last 12 months were assaulted by either a current or previous partner (pp 30, 33)¹.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Only a very small proportion of assaults against men were perpetrated by a former or current female intimate partner (4.3%).

Correction:

The most recent Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) found that males make up 20% of victims of violence by former or current partners (p15)².

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Three quarters of intimate partner homicides involve men killing their female partners.

Correction:

The latest *Homicide in Australia: 2006–07 National Homicide Monitoring Program* annual report (Australian Institute of Criminology 2008) found that less than two thirds (64.6%) of intimate partner homicides involve men killing their female partners (pp 2, 57)³.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Data from the Personal Safety Survey also indicates that women reporting violence in intimate relationships are significantly more likely than men to experience repeated acts of violence.

Correction:

Data from the Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) indicates that women reporting violence by *current partners* in intimate relationships are significantly more likely than men to experience repeated acts of violence. However, women and men reporting violence by *previous partners* in intimate relationships experience repeated acts of violence at similar rates (p37)⁴.

¹ 73,800 women were physically assaulted by an intimate partner (either current or previous). 242,000 women experienced physical assault in total (from all perpetrators). 7,800 women experienced sexual assault from a current partner, while 21,500 women experienced sexual assault from a former partner, making a total of 29,300 women sexually assaulted by an intimate partner. 101,600 women experienced sexual assault in total (from all perpetrators).

² 27,900 males and 114,600 females were victims of violence by current or previous partners during the last 12 months.

³ 44 males and 21 females perpetrated intimate partner homicide in 2006-07 while 23 males and 42 females were victims (2 male victims were killed by their male partners).

⁴ 60.1 per cent of males and 67.6 per cent of females experienced more than one incident of violence from a previous partner since the age of 15.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Males did not have prior experiences of violent relationships.

Correction:

The Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) shows that 6% of males and 17% of females have prior experiences of violent relationships (i.e. they have experienced current or previous partner violence since the age of 15) (p16).

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Males rarely experienced post separation violence.

Correction:

The Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) shows that 5% of males (n = 367,300) and 15% of females (n = 1,135,500) have experienced previous partner violence since the age of 15 (p16). Research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Wolcott and Hughes 1999) made the following observations about post-separation violence (p9):

- Fairly similar proportions of men (55 per cent) and women (62 per cent) reported experiencing physical violence including threats by their former spouse
- Emotional abuse was reported by 84 per cent of women and 75 per cent of men.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Canadian data indicate that compared with male victims of domestic violence, women are:

- three times more likely to be injured as a result of violence;
- five times more likely to require medical attention or hospitalisation

Correction:

These statistics are from an out-of-date Canadian survey (Statistics Canada 2003). The latest survey, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile" (Statistics Canada 2008), found that:

- Similar percentages of female and male victims sustained injuries." (p14).
- Male victims of spousal violence are 1.8 times as likely as female victims of spousal violence to suffer major assault (p20)⁵.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

In addition, a study in the United States comparing the mental health impacts of domestic violence for men and women found that women were markedly more likely to suffer impacts than men.

Correction:

While the referenced study of 502 university students (Romito and Grassi 2007) did find that the mental health impacts of *domestic violence* on women were markedly greater than on men, it also found that "for experienced and witnessed *family violence*, the health impact was similar for males and females" (p1222).

A further study of 573 university students (Prospero 2007) found that "reporting higher number of mental health symptoms was significantly related to experiencing higher levels of IPV victimization but not to gender (female or male)".

⁵ Table 1.5 shows that 13 per cent of female victims of spousal violence and 23 per cent of male victims of spousal violence were victims of major assault (levels 2 & 3). Major assault is defined as follows: "Major assault includes assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault, is defined as assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim (level 3)."

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Compared to men, women comprise the majority of domestic and family violence victims brought to the attention of criminal justice agencies. An analysis of reported incidents of domestic assault in NSW between 1997 and 2004 indicated that 71% of domestic assault incidents reported to the police involved a female victim, and that 80% of the offenders were male. By these figures, 29% of victims were male, not an insignificant proportion. A possible explanation for this is given by Flood. On his analysis, the data relied upon may be categorised as being drawn from “acts based instruments”. Flood argues that such instruments have value as surveillance instruments in the general population but they are inadequate for capturing the substance, impact or dynamics of intimate partner violence, and particularly the more serious forms of this violence, which women experience at far greater rates than men. In this regard, whilst the figures show a not insignificant proportion of men experiencing domestic violence, they do not capture the seriousness of that violence.

Correction:

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data (People 2005) showing that 29% of domestic assault victims are male is *crime data* (based upon reports to police) and therefore does not rely whatsoever upon the ‘acts based instruments’ used to obtain *survey data*. However, the statistics quoted on page 3 of the discussion paper from the Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) and the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos and Makkai 2004) rely exclusively upon ‘acts based instruments’. Dr Flood’s critique can therefore be applied only to data from these surveys, and is not a valid or relevant critique of the NSW crime data.

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Extract from Discussion Paper:

Exposure to domestic and family violence increases... and, in the case of boys particularly, may lead to them perpetrating violence as adults.

Correction:

The referenced paper “Young Australians and Domestic Violence” (Indemauro 2001) says nothing whatsoever about boys being more likely than girls to perpetrate violence as adults if exposed to domestic and family violence as children. It instead talks generically of “young people”.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Domestic and family violence can be lethal. In Australia from 1989 to 1998, 57% of female deaths resulting from homicide or violence were perpetrated by an intimate partner, with women being over five times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men.

Correction:

The latest Homicide in Australia: 2006–07 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report (Australian Institute of Criminology 2008) found that:

- 52% of female homicides were perpetrated by an intimate partner (p2)⁶.
- women were 1.8 times as likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men (p2)⁷.

⁶ There were 42 female intimate partner homicide victims out of 81 female homicide victims in total

⁷ There were 23 male and 42 female intimate partner homicide victims.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

According to national data, women who experience domestic and family violence do not report it to police. Approximately 14% of women who experienced violence from an intimate partner reported the most recent incident to police.

Correction:

While it is indisputable that many women who experience domestic and family violence do not report it to police, the Discussion Paper fails to acknowledge that men who experience such violence are even less likely than women to report it to the authorities. The comprehensive South Australian Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Survey (Dal Grande et al 1999) found that 22% of female victims but only 7.5% of male victims reported their domestic violence incidents to the police (p138).

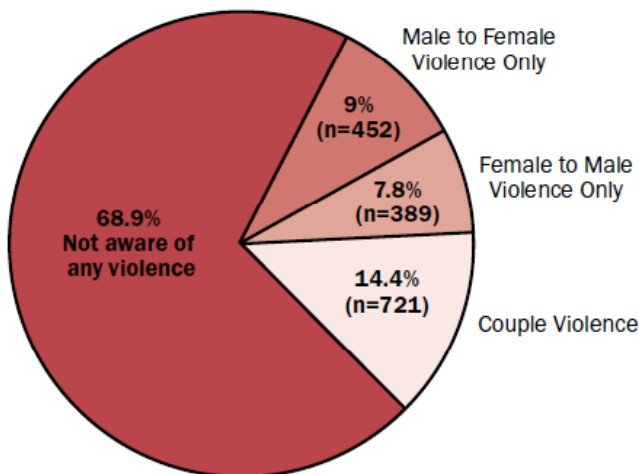
Extract from Discussion Paper:

One in four 12-20 year old Australians surveyed was aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers.

Correction:

This statistic is taken from the source study “Young people and domestic violence – national research on young people’s attitudes to and experiences of domestic violence” (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). This study found that while 23% of young people were aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers, an almost identical proportion (22%) of young people were aware of domestic violence against their fathers or step-fathers by their mothers or step-mothers (p98). Even more importantly, while similar proportions of young people were aware of exclusive violence by their mother/step-mother or father/step-father, a much greater proportion of young people experienced couple violence between their parents/step-parents, as illustrated in the following figure from page 106:

Young people's experiences of physical domestic violence



The study was quite unequivocal when reporting on the effects of young people witnessing domestic violence, finding that “the most severe disruption on all available indicators occurred in households where couple violence was reported” (p131). This finding challenges the simplistic “perpetrator-victim” paradigm relied upon by the Discussion Paper, and indicates that a more nuanced approach to analysing domestic violence is required in order to reduce its damaging effects upon young people.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Family and domestic violence is a common cause of marital breakdown - 60% of couples cite family violence as a contributing factor in the breakdown of marriages and 30% describe it as a major reason why their relationship ended.

Correction:

The Discussion Paper cites as the source for this statistic, Impact of the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (Cth) (NSW Parliament 2006). This document in turn cites a submission to the Inquiry by the National Abuse Free Contact Campaign (Hume 2006). This submission refers to source research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Wolcott and Hughes 1999). When one looks at the source AIFS research, it actually found the following (p9),

- 6 per cent of respondents reported that physical violence was the main reason for marriage breakdown
- Verbal and emotional abuse was cited as a main reason by only 2 per cent of respondents.

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