

National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey 2009

Summary of findings

Background

In February 2009, the Australian Government commissioned the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to undertake a National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey. Research partners included the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Social Research Centre.

Understanding community attitudes is important for shaping and influencing future initiatives to prevent violence against women. The survey establishes a benchmark against which changes in attitudes can be more closely monitored over time. The results will guide the development and targeting of interventions that can build cultures of non-violence and value equal and respectful relationships between men and women.

How was the survey conducted?

- Telephone interviews were held with over 10,000 people across Australia about their attitudes towards violence against women, with a minimum of 1,000 interviews conducted in each state/territory. The 2009 survey included 16 and 17-year-old respondents where a parent consented.
- Telephone interviews were held with an additional 2,500 first and second-generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities (known as the 'selected culturally and linguistically diverse' or 'SCALD').
- Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 400 Indigenous Australians in nine metropolitan and regional locations across Australia.
- The results are compared with an equivalent national survey conducted in 1995 to examine changes in attitudes over time.

What are the main findings?

- Most people in the community have a broad understanding of domestic and sexual violence and its impacts, and do not condone it.
- Since 1995, there have been some significant and positive shifts in the general community's attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women.
- This overall trend is encouraging and provides the impetus for continuing to improve preventive programs that will contribute to the elimination of violence against women.
- Despite improvements, attitudes that condone, justify or excuse violence against women persist.

Some progress has been made:

- The vast majority of the community agrees that physical and sexual assault, and threats, are domestic violence (between 97% and 98% compared with between 91% and 97% in 1995).
- The community is more likely in 2009 to recognise the spectrum of domestic violence behaviours as 'very serious' than they were in 1995.
- 98% of people today say that domestic violence is a crime, compared with 93% in 1995.
- 93% of people agree that forced sex in an intimate relationship is a crime.
- Very few people believe that 'women who are raped ask for it' – one in twenty people believe this in 2009 compared with one in seven people in 1995.
- The majority of the community (85%) disagrees that violence and harassment against women should be dealt with privately.
- Eight in ten people agree they would intervene in some way in a situation of domestic violence.

Challenges ahead:

- Fewer people in 2009 believe that slapping and pushing a partner to cause harm or fear is a 'very serious' form of violence than in 1995 (from 64% in 1995 to 53% in 2009).
- 22% of people in 2009 believe that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by both men and women compared with 9% in 1995.
- 34% believe that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex'.
- One in four people (26%) disagrees that 'women rarely make false claims of being raped'.
- 13% of people still agree that women 'often say no when they mean yes' and roughly one in six (16%) agrees that a woman 'is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug-affected'.
- One in five people (22%) believes that domestic violence can be excused if later the perpetrator regrets what they have done.
- Eight in ten people in the general community say it is hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships and more than half believe a woman could leave a violent relationship if she really wanted to.

The way forward

- The Australian Government is taking the lead in the implementation of strategies that will challenge these violence-supporting attitudes and in eliminating violence against women in Australia.
- In May 2008, the Government established an 11-member National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children to advise on the development of an evidence-based plan of action.
- On 29 April 2009, the Government welcomed and publicly released the National Council's report *Time for Action*. The Council's extensive report gives all governments and the community clear directions to help Australian women live free of violence, within respectful relationships, and in safe communities, and can be viewed at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/Pages/default.aspx>.
- The Australian Government has referred *Time for Action* to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and is working with State and Territory Governments to develop the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women for release in 2010 and has established a Violence Against Women Advisory Group to advise on the National Plan.
- \$9 million has been allocated to improve the quality and uptake of Respectful Relationships programs. Work on this initiative has already progressed. Programs will be implemented in school and non-school settings and will target young students, young people with an intellectual disability, young people who have left school, and young people living in remote communities.
- The Government has also funded an independent evaluation of the leading South Australian program, *Keeping Safe*. The evaluation will form the basis of further work to develop best practice in the violence prevention education sector.
- \$17 million has been provided for social marketing focused on changing the social norms, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence.
- \$12.5 million has been allocated for a new national domestic violence and sexual assault telephone and online crisis service.