

# Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality

Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)



ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

In partnership with:



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## Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge.

## Acknowledgement of lived experiences of violence

It is also important to acknowledge the lives and experiences of the women and children affected by domestic violence and sexual assault.

Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing.

Recommended support services include  
1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732 and Lifeline – 13 11 14.

## With support from



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# About this report

This report presents key findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey focusing on results for young Australians aged 16-24. It also presents the reflections of young people on the findings. These were sought through a workshop held in Logan, Queensland, in 2018 involving five youth ambassadors from a diverse range of backgrounds. The ambassadors were associated with [R4Respect](#) (run by YFS), an education and prevention strategy led by young people in Logan and surrounds to promote the values, skills and knowledge needed for respectful relationships.

Key themes that were raised by participants in the workshop are represented in quote boxes throughout the report.

Findings for the community as a whole, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are explored in dedicated reports. These, along with further detailed findings and methodological information, can be found on the ANROWS website [www.ncas.anrows.org.au](http://www.ncas.anrows.org.au).

# 1 Executive summary

## Violence against young women

Intimate partner violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking are prevalent problems with serious consequences for women, their children and wider society (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 2014; Webster, 2016). This violence affects women across the life cycle, but is more prevalent among, and has a particular and far-reaching impact upon, young women (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017a; Brown et al., 2009; Cox, 2015; Dillon, Hussain, & Loxton, 2015; Hooker, Theobald, Anderson, Billet, & Baron, 2017).

- Young women in the 18-24 year age group are the most likely to have experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the 2016 Personal Safety Survey (PSS), which measures experiences of violence (ABS, 2017b).
- The number of young women (18-24) who experienced sexual violence in the year previous to the 2013 PSS was twice the national average (Cox, 2015).
- An estimated 38 percent of women aged 18-24 years experienced sexual harassment in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS, compared to 16 percent of men aged 18-24 and 15 percent of women aged 45-54 (ABS, 2017b).

Young women are also particularly affected by sexual harassment taking place on the streets and in other public places (Johnson & Bennett, 2015; Plan International Australia, 2018), through technology and social media (Henry, Powell, & Flynn, 2017), and in schools and universities (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2017). In addition, young people may be exposed to domestic violence perpetrated against their mothers (Heinze, Stoddard, Aiyer, Eisman, & Zimmerman, 2017). Perpetration of violence is understood to be more likely when men are young (Fulu, Jewkes, Roselli, & Garcia-Moreno, 2013).

Many factors contribute to this violence and arise at the individual, relationship, community, organisational and societal levels. Gender inequality and the disrespect of women increase the likelihood of this violence occurring (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2011; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). There is evidence that violence against women can be prevented before it occurs by addressing the underlying factors that cause the problem. Prevention action complements, but is separate from, responses after violence has occurred. However, both forms of action are required to reduce the prevalence of violence over time.

Young people have been identified as a particular focus in both *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (the National Plan)* (COAG, 2011) and *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia (Change the story)* (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015). Further, there has been increased government effort to establish respectful relationships curriculum in all schools across the country, as well as heightened attention at universities (AHRC, 2017). This is due in part to the higher prevalence and particular impact of violence on young women as discussed above. More positively, since adolescence and young adulthood are life cycle stages when gender identities, roles and relationships are being formed, supporting young men and women to establish positive gender expressions and relationship practices has many benefits. It can help to reduce the risk of violence and abuse in the present, prevent future harm and maximise the prospects of a violence-free environment for future generations.

Attitudes towards gender inequality and violence against women are among the many factors that contribute to this violence. Indirectly, they can influence the responses of service providers, as well as those of family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues of those affected. Attitudes can also influence perpetrators and women subject to violence. Since attitudes reflect the world around us, measuring these over time is one way to monitor progress towards addressing the problem.

## The NCAS

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) is a periodic telephone survey (mobile and landline) of a representative sample. In 2017 more than 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over were surveyed about their:

- knowledge of violence against women;
- attitudes towards this violence and gender equality; and
- intentions if they were to witness abuse or disrespect towards women.

The NCAS is one of the main mechanisms for measuring progress against the six National Outcomes outlined in the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011), another is the PSS (ABS, 2017b). Previous waves of the NCAS were conducted in 1995, 2009 and 2013.

## The 2017 NCAS

Although as many questions as possible from the 2013 questionnaire were retained, a substantial redevelopment was undertaken for the 2017 NCAS, with key outcomes being:

- the capacity to measure and understand the ways Australians think about violence against women and gender equality, recognising that attitudinal support for these concepts can take many different forms;
- the use of composite measures (made up of groups of questions) to gauge understanding, attitudes and people's intention to act as overall concepts;
- new measures used to increase understanding of factors shaping knowledge, attitudes and intention to act, including measures of (a) the gender composition of a person's social network, (b) prejudice on the basis of disability, sexuality, ethnicity, and Aboriginality, and (c) attitudes towards violence in general; and
- better alignment with the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011) and *Change the story* (Our Watch et al., 2015).



## Box 1-1: Overall findings for young Australians

Most young Australians (those aged 16-24 years) have a good knowledge of key aspects of violence against women, support gender equality, reject attitudes supportive of violence against women, and say they would act or like to act if they witnessed abuse or disrespect of women. However, responses to some of the questions suggest that areas of concern remain.

The survey includes four overall measures (referred to as composite measures). These gauge the overall level of:

- understanding that violence against women can involve non-physical forms of violence and coercion (not just physical violence and forced sex);<sup>1</sup>
- endorsement of gender equality;
- attitudinal support for violence against women; and
- intention to act if witnessing abuse or disrespect of women.

### Changes in knowledge and attitudes over time

Between 2013 and 2017, there has been an improvement among young people on the three overall measures of understanding, attitudes to gender equality and attitudes to violence against women (Figure 4-1).<sup>2</sup>

I think things have gotten better because the issue of violence against women is being spoken about more, there's more education, it's not as taboo to talk about, and you see it more on the news and on TV.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

There has been an improvement among young people in 20 of the 36 questions asked in both the 2013 and 2017 surveys (Tables 4-1, 4-2 and 4-3). Although attitudes are generally shifting towards improvement over time, responses

among young people to some questions indicate some areas of poor knowledge, relatively high endorsement of violence-supportive views and a low level of support for gender equality.

### Specific areas of concern

In the NCAS sample as whole, there has been a decline since 1995 in the proportion of people recognising that domestic violence is more likely to be perpetrated by men, and that women are more likely to experience physical harm and fear from this violence. In 2017 this trend continued and was more marked among young people than was the case in the sample as a whole (Figure 4-2).

As shown in Box 4-2, one in three young people say they would not know where to secure help about a domestic violence matter. Additionally, a substantial minority of young people hold concerning views in other specific areas. For example:

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of young people disagree that violence against women is common.
- One in seven (14%) believe that women often make false allegations of sexual assault.
- One in eight are not aware that non-consensual sex in marriage is a criminal offence.

- More than a third (36%) either disagree that 'Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than by a stranger' or said they do not know.

Young people were asked about their attitudes to gender equality in five themes. Their attitudes were least favourable in the themes of 'Denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'Women's independence and decision-making in private life'.

Young people are less likely to support gender equality in private life (i.e. in household, family and relationship matters) than in public life (e.g. in the workplace or politics) (Figure 4-3 and 4-4 and Box 4-4).

I think there needs to be a focus on healthy relationships based on an equal power structure rather than a hierarchy.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

Attitudes towards violence against women were measured across four themes. Young people's attitudes are least favourable in the theme of 'Mistrusting women's reports of violence' (Figure 4-6 and Box 4-8).

Young men and women differed on a number of questions and on the composite measures. Overall, young men had a lower level of understanding and held less favourable attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality than young women.

### Differences between the younger and older cohorts

There are few differences between those aged 16-24 when compared to those aged 25-64 on individual questions. However, on the composite measures, young people are more likely to be classified as having a low level of understanding of violence against women. They are also less likely to be classified as having a high level of intention to take action in response to witnessing abuse or disrespect of women. However, there are no differences (that meet the thresholds of statistical significance and effect size used in this report) between young people and people aged 25-64 on the composite measures of support for gender equality and endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women.

### Predictors of attitudes among young people

The strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women among young people are shown in Figure 4-12a and include:

- having attitudes that endorse gender inequality;
- having a low level of understanding of violence against women;
- holding prejudicial attitudes towards others on the basis of their disability, ethnicity, Aboriginality or sexual orientation; and
- endorsing violence as a practice.

Demographic factors, for example parent's occupation or where a young person lives, are much weaker predictors.

1 This composite measure gauges one aspect of knowledge of violence against women, being understanding that this violence extends beyond physical violence and forced sex to also include psychological, social, emotional and financial forms of abuse designed to intimidate and control. Questions ask about other aspects of knowledge. However, this is the only composite measure in the knowledge component of the questionnaire.

2 The Intention to Act Construct (ITAC) is new for the current 2017 NCAS, so data on change over time are not available.

## Implications for policy and practice

The positive changes in the overall measures of understanding of violence against women and attitudes to this violence and gender equality found among young people were also found in the population as whole. They suggest that Australia is 'on track' to achieve positive changes in factors contributing to violence against women. Nevertheless, a sizeable minority of young Australians hold attitudes that may contribute to violence against women. Contrary to the predictions of some theorists, young people do not hold more positive attitudes towards violence and gender equality than people aged 25-64 years. Further, as there has yet to be a reduction in this violence itself (ABS, 2017b), continued effort is needed.

A range of factors influence violence against women, not just attitudes. Further, attitudes themselves are shaped by influences in people's day-to-day environments (Pease & Flood, 2008). Recognising that action to address these influences is needed, expert bodies propose an approach that incorporates multiple strategies, implemented across different sectors and settings and targeted to individuals and families as well as communities, organisations and society-wide institutions (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Heise, 1998; Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015; Our Watch et al., 2015; VicHealth, 2007; 2011; 2017b; UN Women, 2015; World Health Organization (WHO), 2002). Plans to implement such an approach and support primary prevention of violence against women can be found in the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011) and its successive Action Plans (Australian Department of Social Services, 2014; 2016) and in the *Change the story* framework (Our Watch et al., 2015).

Preventing violence perpetrated or experienced by young people requires a two-fold approach. As well as addressing norms and practices among young people themselves, attention needs to be given to norms, structures and practices in the wider community and environments, as these also influence young people's experiences, attitudes and behaviours.

It is also important that efforts to prevent violence against women among young people are framed with their particular social experiences in mind. Young people prefer less 'top-down passive learning' and more action-based, interactive and peer-to-peer learning (Noonan & Charles, 2009; Weisz & Black, 2010; Wyn & White, 2013). Benefits are likely through:

- educational settings, especially schools (Flood, Fergus, & Heenan, 2009; Gleeson, Kearney, Leung, & Brislane, 2015);
- sports and active recreation settings (Flood & Dyson, 2007);
- media and popular culture (Keith, 2013; Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous, & Carter, 2006), in particular social media (American Psychological Association (APA), 2010; Crabbe & Corlett, 2011; Draper, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010; Phippen, 2009);
- the family (APA, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2010); and
- peer contexts.

In prioritising efforts to strengthen knowledge, attitudes and bystander intentions<sup>3</sup> among young people, there would be benefits in:

- addressing the gaps in knowledge of violence against women, particularly information about help seeking, the gendered nature and dynamic of partner violence, and the greater risk of violence by a known person than a stranger;

I think the gender analysis has been erased from our understanding of domestic violence. It's either you commit domestic violence or you don't, but it ignores that men have been socialised to exercise power and control in relationships.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

- addressing all aspects of gender inequality, with a focus on challenging rigid gender roles and identities and the idea that gender inequality is no longer a problem;
- a greater emphasis on achieving gender equality in the private sphere, such as in intimate relationships, the sexual double standard and the division of household labour;
- promoting attitudes that foster a mutually respectful approach to gender relations and challenge the idea that women lie about violence or use violence as a way to gain tactical advantage over men; and
- addressing barriers to bystander action by informing young people that they are likely to be supported by more of their friends than they might think, by strengthening their knowledge and attitudes, and by focusing on young people who would like to act but say that they would not know how.

When you see sexism or disrespect it can be difficult to act but I think if you're able to – go for it – because if no one else is going to do it then you may as well just make that first step.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

3 Noting the scope, strengths and limitations of bystander approaches as discussed in 'Bystander action' in Chapter 4.



The strongest predictors of young people holding attitudes supportive of violence against women are (in order of influence):

- having a low level of support for gender equality;
- having a low level of understanding of violence against women;
- holding prejudicial attitudes towards people on the basis of other attributes; and
- having a high level of support for the use of violence in general.

This suggests that these attitudes, and the norms, structures and practices supporting them, should have greater emphasis in prevention than demographic factors such as a person's age or gender.

The influence of attitudes to gender equality on attitudes to violence against women supports recommendations that a gender transformative approach – which promotes equal and respectful relationships between men and women as key to reducing violence against women – is needed (WHO, 2013). There are likely to be benefits in integrating means to address other forms of prejudice and discrimination in prevention efforts, as well as challenging the use of violence as a practice.

There were relatively small differences between young people based on their demographic characteristics. This suggests the need for prevention strategies that reach the whole population. However, the survey suggests some grounds for targeting:

- young men and boys;
- young people in male-dominated social contexts; and
- young people experiencing disadvantage.

The NCAS findings provide some cause for optimism, although certainly not for complacency. Although the composite measures show that understanding and attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among young people are tracking in the direction of positive change overall, some areas investigated in the NCAS raise cause for concern. The findings in this report will be useful to identify and address these areas with the aim of building cultures of safety, respect and equality for all Australians.

There's not enough messaging about how men can contribute to changing how we conceptualise gender equality.

– R4Respect youth ambassador



## 2 Introduction

### About the NCAS

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) tells us:

- about people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence against women;
- about their attitudes towards gender equality;
- what influences their attitudes;
- if there has been a change over time in knowledge or attitudes; and
- whether people are prepared to intervene when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women.

The 2017 NCAS collected information through mobile and landline telephone interviews with a representative sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over.

The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) funds the NCAS as part of *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the *National Plan*) (COAG, 2011).

The 2017 NCAS is closely aligned with *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (*Change the story*) (Our Watch et al., 2015), which was developed to support achievement of the *National Plan* goals. The NCAS also complements the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey (PSS), which asks people about their experiences of violence.

The NCAS is the world's longest-running survey of community attitudes towards violence against women. It was initially developed on behalf of the Australian Government in 1995, drawing on an earlier 1987 survey. The past two national surveys took place in 2009 and 2013 (led by VicHealth). Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) is proud to lead the 2017 NCAS in collaboration with our research partners.

The NCAS is a resource for anyone wanting to understand and prevent violence against women. It can be used, for example, by educators, policymakers, program planners, researchers, journalists and students.



#### Box 2-1: Note on terminology

##### Domestic violence, partner violence and violence against women

The terminology used to describe violence against women has been the subject of debate in the community and among service providers and researchers. Some people have argued that gender neutral terminology (e.g. domestic violence) should be avoided in favour of terms like 'violence against women' and 'woman abuse', which more accurately describe and 'name' the gendered nature of the problem (see, for example, DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

Many of the questions in the survey use the term 'domestic violence' because this is the term used when the questions were first asked nationally in 1995. The term was retained in the questions in which it was used in 2013 to enable the 2017 results to be compared with previous NCAS waves. For accuracy, this term is used in this report when referring to the questions or findings.

The terms 'intimate partner violence' and 'family violence' are now commonly used in policy and research. 'Intimate partner violence' is used to distinguish violence occurring between people in an intimate relationship. 'Family violence' encompasses violence between intimate partners, but also includes violence involving other family members (e.g. violence between siblings). The term 'intimate partner violence' is used in this report except when referring to NCAS questions and findings that use the terminology of domestic violence.

The NCAS encompasses four forms of violence: intimate partner violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking. These are all forms of 'violence against women', so this terminology is used when referring to two or more of these forms of violence.

### Violence against young women – nature, prevalence and impacts

Violence against women is a prevalent problem with significant health, social and economic costs for women and their children, as well as society as a whole (VicHealth, 2014; Webster, 2016). Gender inequality and disrespect of women increases the likelihood of this violence occurring (COAG, 2011; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015).<sup>4</sup>

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations (1993) as:

*any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*

Although this violence can take many forms, the NCAS focuses on four forms: sexual assault, partner violence, sexual harassment and stalking. This is because they are the most prevalent forms of violence against women in Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Exploration of the complex range of factors contributing to violence against women is beyond the scope of this report. A number of reviews of the international evidence have been conducted. For a list and synthesis of these and factors to consider in drawing on the evidence base, see Webster & Flood, 2015.

Australian governments have made significant efforts to reduce violence against women and promote gender equality and respect. However, approximately one in four Australian women over the age of 18 have experienced intimate partner violence<sup>5</sup> since the age of 15, and one in five have experienced sexual violence (Cox, 2015; ABS, 2017). Also, one in six Australian women have experienced stalking and more than half have experienced sexual harassment (ABS, 2017b; AHRC, 2017; 2018).

Although this violence affects women across the life cycle, it is more prevalent among, and has a particular impact upon, young women (ABS, 2017a; Brown et al., 2009; Cox, 2015; Dillon et al., 2015; Hooker et al., 2017).

- Young women in the 18-24 year age group are the most likely to have experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS (ABS, 2017b).
- The number of young women (18-24) who had experienced sexual violence in the year previous to the 2012 PSS was twice the national average (Cox, 2015).
- An estimated 38 percent of women aged 18-24 years had experienced sexual harassment in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS, compared to 16 percent of men aged 18-24 and 15 percent of women aged 45-54 (ABS, 2017b).

Recent research has also highlighted the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment among young women. Sexual harassment occurs on the streets and in other public places (Johnson & Bennett, 2015; Plan International Australia, 2018), through technology and social media (Henry, Powell, & Flynn, 2017), and in schools and universities (AHRC, 2017). In addition, young people may also be exposed to domestic violence perpetrated against their mothers (Heinze et al., 2017).

Although violence against women happens across the social spectrum, it is either more prevalent and/or more severe and prolonged among women with disabilities and women with limited access to resources such as education, housing, income and employment, as well as among women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and regional, and some culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

Although less is known about the characteristics of the perpetrators of violence against women in Australia, international evidence suggests that young women are especially vulnerable to violence in dating relationships (Kann et al., 2016). Meanwhile, a cross-country study concerned with factors associated with perpetration of sexual violence found that among adult men who have engaged in behaviours constituting sexual violence (relationship unspecified), half did so for the first time before reaching the age of 20 (Fulu et al., 2013).

Partner violence and sexual assault have serious consequences for all women (Ayre, Lum On, Webster, Gourley, & Moon, 2016), and these can be especially serious for young women (Decker et al., 2014; Hooker et al., 2017). This is because this violence occurs at a life cycle stage when young women are developing their identities and establishing themselves in relationships, education and careers. Adverse experiences at this stage can have far-reaching impacts on women's health, in particular their mental health (Ayre et al, 2016; Choi, Weston, & Temple, 2017), and for their progression in education and paid employment (Banyard, Potter, & Turner, 2011; McDonald & Flood, 2012). These are impacts that may persist into their adult lives (Adam et al., 2011). Young women subjected to violence have a higher risk of being victimised again in adulthood (Jouriles, Choi, Rancher, & Temple, 2017).

The impacts of violence are not confined to young women directly exposed to it. Studies show that a large proportion of women fear this violence, and it curtails their activities as a consequence (ABS, 2017a; Vera-Gray, 2016). This in turn impacts upon their participation in social, civic and economic activity, ultimately compromising the achievement of gender equality.

### Attitudes that are violence supportive and undermine gender equality

Many factors contribute to violence against women, including the characteristics of individuals and the dynamics of their relationships, as well as norms, structures and practices in communities, organisations and society-wide institutions such as the media. Gender inequality and disrespect of women have been identified as particular factors increasing the likelihood of this violence occurring (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015).

Attitudes are shaped by the world around us, including through our families and friends, communities and institutions (Flood & Pease, 2009; Pease & Flood, 2008). As a reflection of this world, attitudes may serve as a barometer. They are one way of telling us whether progress is being made and where we may need to focus future effort. For this reason, attitudes are important to monitor. Attitudes that endorse violence and disrespect towards women and gender inequality are also among the many factors associated with violence against women. Indirectly, they can influence the responses of service providers, as well as those of family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues of those affected. Attitudes can also influence perpetrators and women subject to violence. The evidence for this is discussed in the report of the national sample on the ANROWS website. Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality are discussed in greater detail in Box 2-2.

<sup>5</sup> Includes current and former co-habiting partners and girlfriend/boyfriend in dating relationships.



## What are attitudes supportive of violence against women?

These are attitudes that:



**Excuse the perpetrator and hold women responsible** by shifting responsibility for violence from the perpetrator to the victim by holding women responsible for the violence occurring, or for not preventing it. Attitudes excusing the perpetrator suggest that there are factors that make some men unable to control their behaviour, and that these make the violence excusable.



**Disregard the need to gain consent** by denying the requirement for sexual relations to be based on the presence and ongoing negotiation of consent. These attitudes rationalise men's failure to actively gain consent as a 'natural' aspect of masculinity (e.g. men's uncontrollable sexual drive), or are based on stereotypes of female sexuality (e.g. that women are passive or submissive in sexual matters).



**Minimise violence against women** by denying its seriousness, downplaying the impact on the victim or making the violence and its consequences seem less significant or complex than they really are.



**Mistrust women's reports of violence** by suggesting women lie about or exaggerate reports of violence in order to 'get back at' men or gain tactical advantage in their relationships with men. Such attitudes have been referred to as part of a 'backlash'.

Individuals who hold such attitudes are not necessarily violence prone or would openly condone violence against women. However, when such attitudes are expressed by influential individuals or are held by a large number of people, they can contribute to a culture in which violence is at best not clearly condemned, or at worst, is actively condoned or encouraged.

Attitudes that support violence against women (themes)



## What are attitudes that undermine gender equality?

These are attitudes that:



**Undermine women's independence and decision-making in public life** by suggesting men make better leaders, decision-makers or are more suited to holding positions of power and responsibility.



**Undermine women's independence and decision-making in private life** by agreeing that men should have greater authority to make decisions and control in the private realm of intimate relationships, family life and household affairs.



**Promote rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions** by reflecting the idea that men and women are naturally suited to different tasks and responsibilities, and have naturally distinctive – often oppositional – personal characteristics (e.g. 'women are emotional and are therefore better childcarers', while 'men are rational and are therefore better politicians').



**Condone male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women** by accepting it as normal or harmless for men to encourage negative aspects of masculinity among one another (e.g. aggression and not showing one's feelings) and to talk about women in ways that are sexist and disrespectful (e.g. 'locker room talk').



**Deny gender inequality is a problem** through denial that gender inequality, sexism or discrimination against women continue to be problems in society. These attitudes often reflect hostility towards women and are sometimes referred to as reflecting a 'backlash' towards women's advancement.

Attitudes that undermine gender equality (themes)

## Why a focus on young people's attitudes to violence against women and gender equality?

Young people have been identified as a particular focus in both the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011) and *Change the story* (Our Watch et al., 2015), and there has been increased government effort to establish respectful relationships curriculum in all schools across the country, as well as heightened attention at universities (AHRC, 2017). This is due in part to the higher prevalence and particular impact of violence on young women as discussed earlier. More positively, since adolescence and young adulthood are life cycle stages when gender identities, roles and relationships are being formed, supporting young men and women to establish positive gender expressions and relationship practices has many benefits. It can help to reduce the risk of violence and abuse in the present, prevent future harm and maximise the prospects of a violence-free environment for future generations.

Addressing violence among young people will involve addressing norms, practices and structures in the wider community and society that contribute to violence, since these influence young women's risk of violence and contribute to the attitudes and practices of young people. These are documented in other NCAS reports (VicHealth, 2014; Webster et al. 2018a). In summary, there are three interrelated clusters of influences, including those associated with:

- gender, and the way we understand gender roles, relationships and identities (i.e. what it means to be a man or a woman);
- the use of violence as a practice (e.g. the adequacy of legal sanctions against violence, how violence is represented in the media. At an individual level people who have a history of exposure to violence as witness, victim or perpetrator are more likely to hold attitudes supporting violence against women); and
- other conditions that intersect or interact with factors related to gender and violence to shape or magnify their influence (e.g. entrenched social and economic inequality, prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of other attributes or particular cultural influences).

The attitudes of the community as a whole have been documented in the NCAS report of findings for the national sample available on the ANROWS website. This report complements this data by exploring knowledge and attitudes among young people as a sub-population.

Attitudes are understood to be particularly influenced by social conditions to which people are exposed in their formative years (Martinez & Khalil, 2013). From the 1960s, there was a progressive liberalising of attitudes towards gender and sexuality in high-income countries (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011; van Egmond, Baxter, Buchler, & Western, 2010). Such attitudes have also been shown to become more liberal in low and middle-income countries, largely correlated with increasing economic and human development (Martinez & Khalil, 2013). Drawing on this evidence, some theorists predict that young people are more likely than older cohorts to hold liberal values towards gender and sexuality. This is based on the assumption that with increasing development and modernisation, most

societies have become increasingly more progressive in their approaches to gender relations.

In contrast, other experts argue that young people are exposed to many of the same factors that influence attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women as people in other age groups but that these may have a particular impact on young people owing to their age and stage of development. It is predicted that this may increase the likelihood of young people holding troubling attitudes towards gender relations and violence against women. Among these are that:

- Young people are at a life stage when their values and gender expressions (i.e. what it means to be masculine or feminine) are being formed. Values of respect, equality and non-violence and a more flexible understanding of gender roles, relationships and identities are important foundations for forming respectful, non-violent relationships both in the present and later in life (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Exposure to cultures supporting violence against women and gender inequality may work against these foundations being built (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Values and gender identities formed at this stage can persist and influence experiences into the life-course (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017; Flood & Fergus, 2008).
- Moral and psychological development takes place gradually. Young people are dealing with complex issues involved in gender and sexual identities that they may not necessarily have the moral and psychological capacities to deal with (Somerville, 2016). This is a particular issue for young men who generally mature somewhat later than young women (Reniers, Murphy, Lin, Bartolome, & Wood, 2016).
- Young people have limited personal experience to draw on to navigate gender roles, identities and relationships. Being closely bound to family and peers, they may have access to fewer countervailing influences. As a result, young people may be especially vulnerable to adopting heavily gendered scripts promoted through peer and popular cultures (Seabrook, Ward, Cortina, Giaccardi, & Lippman, 2017).
- Many of the factors implicated in the formation of attitudes to gender equality and violence against women relate to consumption and leisure, which have particular significance in the lives of young people (Connolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2010). The media has been identified as playing a role in shaping attitudes towards violence against women (Flood & Pease, 2009). Much media targeted to young people reflects and reinforces especially stereotyped views of gender relations (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014).
- The contemporary context (discussed below) is often the only world known to young people, who have less prior life experience to call upon than their older counterparts.

## The contemporary context for young Australians

As discussed above, some theorists maintain that as societies develop and modernise, they tend towards more egalitarian gender relations and this in turn is reflected in more liberal attitudes, especially among the young because their formative years are more heavily influenced by modernisation. In contrast, other researchers suggest that there have been signs of a levelling in attitudes towards gender and sexuality since the 1990s in post-industrial societies. They propose that this may reflect a stalling of the revolution in gender relations (Cotter et al., 2011; van Egmond et al., 2010). Still other research suggests the possibility of a mixed picture, with a number of contemporary trends that may influence, both negatively and positively, the attitudes of young Australians towards gender and sexuality.

Among these trends is the growing sense among young people that gender equality has been achieved and that feminism was a movement required by generations past (Baker, 2008; Calder-Dawe & Davey, 2016; Scharff, 2012). This in turn can result in contradictions whereby young people may be both more likely to support public markers of equality (such as women in leadership and equal pay), while remaining less aware of inequalities in more subtle forms such as in interpersonal relationships (Baker, 2008; Chung, Zufferey, & Powell, 2012; Harris, Honey, Webster, Diemer, & Politoff, 2015). Further, while many experts in promoting gender equality argue the need to address women's particular experiences and the historical and contemporary factors contributing to inequality, evidence shows that young people prefer language and interventions that privilege 'equality for all' (Calder-Dawe & Davey, 2016), rather than those that focus specifically on women.

A differential in attitudes between gender inequality in the public sphere and inequality in the private sphere of intimate relationships, the family and the household is emerging in survey research in Europe and the United States. Attitudes towards gender equality in the public sphere show a continuous liberalising trend, whereas attitudes towards gender equality in private life have either plateaued or rebounded (Donnelly et al., 2016; Pepin & Cotter, 2018). Some caution is warranted in applying international research to the Australian context (Perales, Philipp, & Baxter, 2017). However, it is possible that this pattern may also be the case among young people in Australia.

The current generation of young people has been positioned in public discourse as the 'gender fluid' generation (Marsh, 2016); that is, a generation for whom gender identities, expressions and sexualities are expressed in increasingly diverse ways (Bragg, Renold, Ringrose, & Jackson, 2018; McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017). Indeed, this shift has been characterised by some observers as a 'gender revolution' (National Geographic, 2017). This growing awareness and appreciation of gender diversity may signal increasing commitment from young people towards achieving social outcomes such as gender equality (Bragg et al., 2018). However, some experts have argued it may also be happening in ways that reinforce traditional gender binaries and power relations (Bragg et al., 2018; Markowitz & Puchner, 2016; McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Scrine, 2017).

Smartphones, social media and other digital media are accessible to young people, unlike in previous generations. These technologies have many benefits, with young people using online platforms to share and document experiences of sexual harassment and violence (Keller, Mendes & Ringrose, 2018; Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016). This has been most evident during movements such as #metoo, which have provided a space for a diverse range of women to participate in and respond to public debate (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller,

2018). Similarly, young people are using social media sites to seek out relationships, and information on sexuality and sexual identity otherwise lacking in formal learning institutions (deRidder & Van Bauwel, 2015). However, these technologies may also have negative impacts on young people's attitudes and practices. For example, studies show that women and gender relations are often portrayed in highly stereotyped ways in contemporary online platforms and content, including pornography, dating apps, social media and gaming culture (Fox & Tang, 2017; Shaw, 2015). Social media platforms may also serve as sites for gender-based violence, harassment and bullying (Powell & Henry, 2017).

Dating practices for young people differ markedly from previous generations, and social media and dating apps such as Tinder are being used by up to 90 percent of young people aged 18-30 (Newett, Churchill, & Robards, 2017). Some research suggests that the proliferation of dating applications has in turn contributed to a 'hook-up' culture of casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, without emotional bonding or long-term commitment (Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber, 2017). This is a contested and emerging area of research (Newett et al., 2017). Some researchers suggest such changes in intimacy allow for greater flexibility of gender and sexual identity (Byron & Albury, 2018), while others highlight continuing sexual violence and harassment commonly experienced via these platforms (Hess & Flores, 2018; Thompson, 2018).

In recent decades there has also been a dramatic increase in exposure to pornography among children and young people, especially young men (Horvath, Alys, Massey, Pina, Scally, & Adler, 2013). Young people are accessing pornography at a younger age and more frequently than in the past (Lim, Agius, Carrotte, Vella, & Hellard, 2017). In addition, much contemporary pornography has been found to contain violent imagery and to represent gendered sexual scripts, which are evident in wider societal cultures, in particularly extreme forms (Bridges et al., 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015). Although sexualised imagery and gendered scripts have long been represented in mainstream media and other artistic and cultural forms, they have become increasingly more ubiquitous and extreme, especially in media forms commonly accessed by young people (Horvath et al., 2013). The extent to which pornography is harmful is contested (see, for example, Horvath et al., 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). However, a growing body of evidence suggests that pornography – in particular, violent pornography – is linked to negative attitudes towards gender relations and relationship practices and the proclivity for violence (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016; Marston & Lewis, 2014; Wright, Tokunga, & Kraus, 2015). Some studies also suggest a link with an increased risk of perpetrating or being a victim of violence (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

The 2013 NCAS found, using composite measures, that young people had poorer understanding and attitudes towards violence against women than an older cohort (people aged 35-64 years). However, there were no overall differences between the cohorts in attitudes towards gender equality. There had been no change on any of the three measures between 2009 and 2013 overall. However, attitudes towards violence against women had improved among young men (Harris et al, 2015).



# 3 Methodology

## About the NCAS young people sample

To form the NCAS sample as a whole, people aged 16 years and over were randomly selected from across Australia and invited to participate in a 20-minute telephone interview. The consent of a parent or guardian was sought for respondents aged under 18 years. Forty percent of the interviews were conducted with people on landline telephones and 60 percent with people on their mobile phones. Interviewing on both landlines and mobile phones enables participation from a broader range of people than landline interviewing only.

This report focuses on knowledge and attitudes among young people. This is defined as people aged 16-24 years. This age range is widely recognised as defining the parameters of young people. There were 1561 people in this age group in the randomly selected telephone sample. However, the number of interviews achieved with people aged 16-17 years was lower than anticipated. Accordingly, a booster sample of an additional 200 people aged 16-17 years was formed. These 200 young people were approached through families registered with an existing panel established to engage people in research. The young people in the booster sample completed a survey with the same questions as the telephone survey. However, they completed it online. The online survey was conducted over two weeks in January and February 2018. Data from the online booster sample were put together with data from the telephone interviews with young people. Weighting adjustments were made to minimise any effects the two different ways of collecting data may have had on the representativeness of the sample.

The sample used for this report comes from these combined sources and has 1,761 people aged 16-24 years, including 794 young women and 964 young men.<sup>6</sup>

## Approach to analysing data

In most analyses, results are given for young men and young women, as well as for the sample of young people as a whole.

Findings for young people were compared with an older cohort in most analyses. For this comparison, consideration was initially given to forming a cohort or cohorts distinguished by the different social experiences of people from different eras. However, no apparent consensus could be found in the literature on which to make this distinction. An initial review of the data showed that the age group most likely to vary from other ages was people aged 65 years and older. This was also found in the analyses of the national NCAS sample (see Webster et al., 2018a). Accordingly, the sample was divided into three cohorts:

- young people aged 16-24 years;
- people aged 25-64 years; and
- people aged 65 years and older.

People aged 65 years and older varied in a similar way from both other cohorts, so, for simplicity, when reporting findings for individual questions, young people are compared only with people aged 25-64 years. As very few differences were found between people aged 16-24 years and those 25-64 years for individual questions, when they are found they are reported in the text only (rather than comparisons between the two age cohorts being routinely presented in the tables). Differences were found between the three age cohorts for some composite or 'overall' measures, and these are shown in the relevant tables and figures.

All the differences between groups (e.g. men and women, young people and older people) noted in this report:

- Have been tested for statistical significance at the  $p \leq 0.01$  level. Significance testing makes sure that any differences are not occurring due to chance.<sup>7</sup>
- Have been assessed to make sure that only differences that are both statistically significant and notable in size are reported. This is because a difference between groups can be statistically significant but trivial in size. This was achieved using the Cohen's test of effect size. A Cohen's threshold of 0.2 has been applied. Difference between variables that are both significant and notable in size are denoted in tables and figures using symbols.
- Are based on a base size of at least 30. Results based on base sizes smaller than this are not reported. This is because findings from small numbers have a higher probability of being due to chance. Findings from sample sizes greater than 30 but less than 100 are noted with the <sup>Δ</sup> symbol when given in either the text or a table and should be treated with caution.<sup>8</sup>

Where there are no differences that meet the thresholds for significance and effect presented above, but a trend is apparent in the data, this may be noted.

The exception to the above are data exploring change over time at the overall level (measured using the composite measures). Here, significance testing at the  $p \leq 0.05$  level is used and the Cohen's threshold is not applied. This is because attitudes change slowly, such that even small changes between surveys are important. These same tests and thresholds are used in all the other NCAS reports.

6 The difference between the sum of men and women and the total is accounted for by people who did not identify a gender or who did not respond to the question on gender.

7 A threshold for statistical significance of  $p \leq 0.05$  is commonly used in social science research. The level  $p \leq 0.01$  used in this report is a more stringent threshold (i.e. one providing a higher level of certainty that results are not due to chance) and is particularly helpful with large samples where small changes can be significant but not necessarily meaningful.

8 To maximise the number of questions asked in the 2017 NCAS, selected questions were asked of only one half or one quarter of the sample. These were mainly in the 'knowledge' and 'bystander' components. This was not a barrier to analysis for the national sample as a whole, given the overall sample size. However, a disadvantage is that sample sizes were insufficient for some questions for some of the smaller groups within the sample, including the sample of people aged 16-24 years.

## The 2017 NCAS questionnaire

The questionnaire from the 2013 survey was redeveloped for 2017, retaining as many questions as possible to measure changes over time. More detail on survey design and construction of the measures used in analysis in this report can be found in the NCAS methodology report (Webster et al., 2018b) on the ANROWS website. The NCAS Questionnaire Framework (Figure 3-1) provides an overview of the questionnaire.

The core of the 2017 survey (represented in the centre cells in Figure 3-1) involves four **components**.<sup>9</sup> The first is made up of questions designed to find out about people's knowledge of violence against women (25 questions). The second is concerned with attitudes towards gender equality (19 questions), the third with attitudes towards violence against women (35 questions and two scenarios), and the fourth with intentions if witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women (two scenarios).

Each component is further divided into **themes**. These themes reflect different aspects of knowledge and different ways attitudinal support for gender equality and violence against women can be expressed. The themes can be seen in Figure 3-1 and are described in greater detail in Box 2-2. The themes in the 'Bystander action' component reflect the conditions that are known to increase the chances that bystanders will take positive action to abuse and disrespect.<sup>10</sup>

As well as measuring people's responses to individual questions, overall concepts are gauged using 15 **composite measures** (these may be referred to as scales or constructs). These comprise selected questions using statistical methods (Rasch and factor analysis) to ensure they measure the concept accurately.<sup>11</sup>

The first component in the NCAS Questionnaire Framework, the knowledge component ('Knowledge of violence against women') has one composite measure that gauges people's overall understanding that violence against women extends beyond physical violence and forced sex to also include psychological, social and financial means of control and intimidation.<sup>12</sup> There are composite measures to gauge attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women overall, as well as the themes in each of these components. Drawing on questions from the bystander component ('Bystander action'), there is a composite measure of people's overall intention to take positive action if they witness abuse or disrespect towards women.<sup>13</sup>

Many factors influence knowledge and attitudes. Increasing understanding of these factors is an aim of the NCAS. The factors included in the 2017 NCAS are shown in the far left cells in Figure 3-1. Information is collected from survey participants to measure each factor. This is then used in the analysis of their responses to the questions in the four core survey components. This includes questions about the people, such as their age, occupation, education and whether they have a disability. Among the new factors measured in the 2017 NCAS are:

- people's levels of prejudice on the basis of other attributes (sexual orientation, Aboriginality, ethnicity and disability);
- their support for violence in general; and
- the gender composition of their friendship networks and workplaces.

Composite measures are used to measure prejudice and support for violence in general.



### Box 3-1: How are composite measures used in NCAS?

The strength of a composite measure is that it can measure a complex overall topic or concept (such as support for gender equality) that would be difficult to measure with a single question or even several questions considered separately. They are used in the NCAS to:

- ensure overall understanding and attitudinal support measures are as valid as possible;
- measure change in overall concepts over time;
- find out how widely supported particular attitudinal concepts are held, so that greater focus can be placed on more troubling concepts in prevention work;

- explore factors that are related to knowledge, attitudes and action (e.g. whether a person's age influences whether they are more likely to endorse gender equality overall); and
- explore relationships between concepts (e.g. to find out whether some aspects of attitudes towards gender equality are more strongly related to attitudinal support for violence against women than others).

9 The fifth component listed in the NCAS Questionnaire Framework, 'Social norms', was not measured in the 2017 NCAS. Measurement of social norms is subject to future development in the NCAS.

10 For reasons outlined in Chapter 4, the NCAS focuses on bystander responses to precursors to/risk factors for physical violence, rather than physical violence itself.

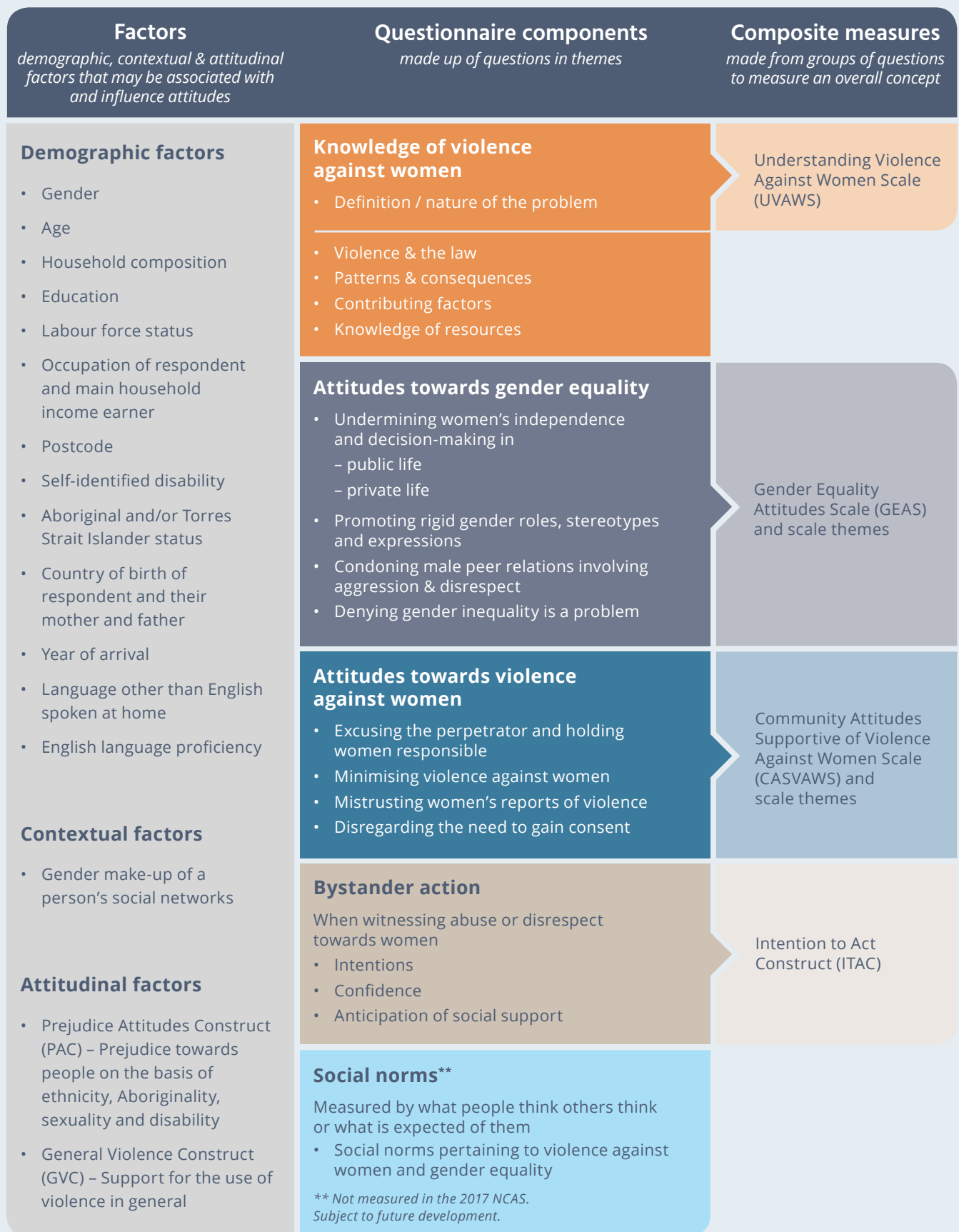
11 Further information on the methodology used can be found in the NCAS methodology report (Webster et al., 2018b).

12 Note that although there are five themes in the knowledge component of the questionnaire, a composite measure has been made for just one of these, as shown in Figure 3-1. It was not possible to develop a measure for all the themes in the knowledge component within the bounds of the questionnaire due to the number of questions that would be required.

13 There are strengths and limitations of approaches to improve the responses of bystanders. These are discussed in 'Bystander action' in Chapter 4.



Figure 3-1: NCAS Questionnaire Framework



## 4 Findings

As discussed in Chapter 3, respondents were asked to respond to a number of individual statements or questions in four components ('Knowledge of violence against women'; 'Attitudes towards gender equality'; 'Attitudes towards violence against women'; 'Bystander action'). Responses to these questions show that the majority of young Australians have a good knowledge of violence against women, support gender equality, reject attitudes supportive of violence against women, and say they would act, or would like to act, when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women. There was an improvement between 2013 and 2017 on 20 of the 36 questions asked in both survey waves. These results are reported in detail in this chapter.

Answers to the individual statements and questions were also used to measure the concepts in each of the four components overall (referred to as composite measures). To measure change over time at an overall level, statistical modelling was used to account for the fact that not every question was asked in every survey wave. Using the composite measures, each respondent was given a score based on their answers to questions in the measures. An average for young people was then calculated. Scores range from one to 100. In the case of the measures of understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality, a higher score indicates a greater level of understanding and more favourable attitudes towards gender equality. In contrast, for the measure of attitudes towards violence against women, a higher score indicates less favourable attitudes.

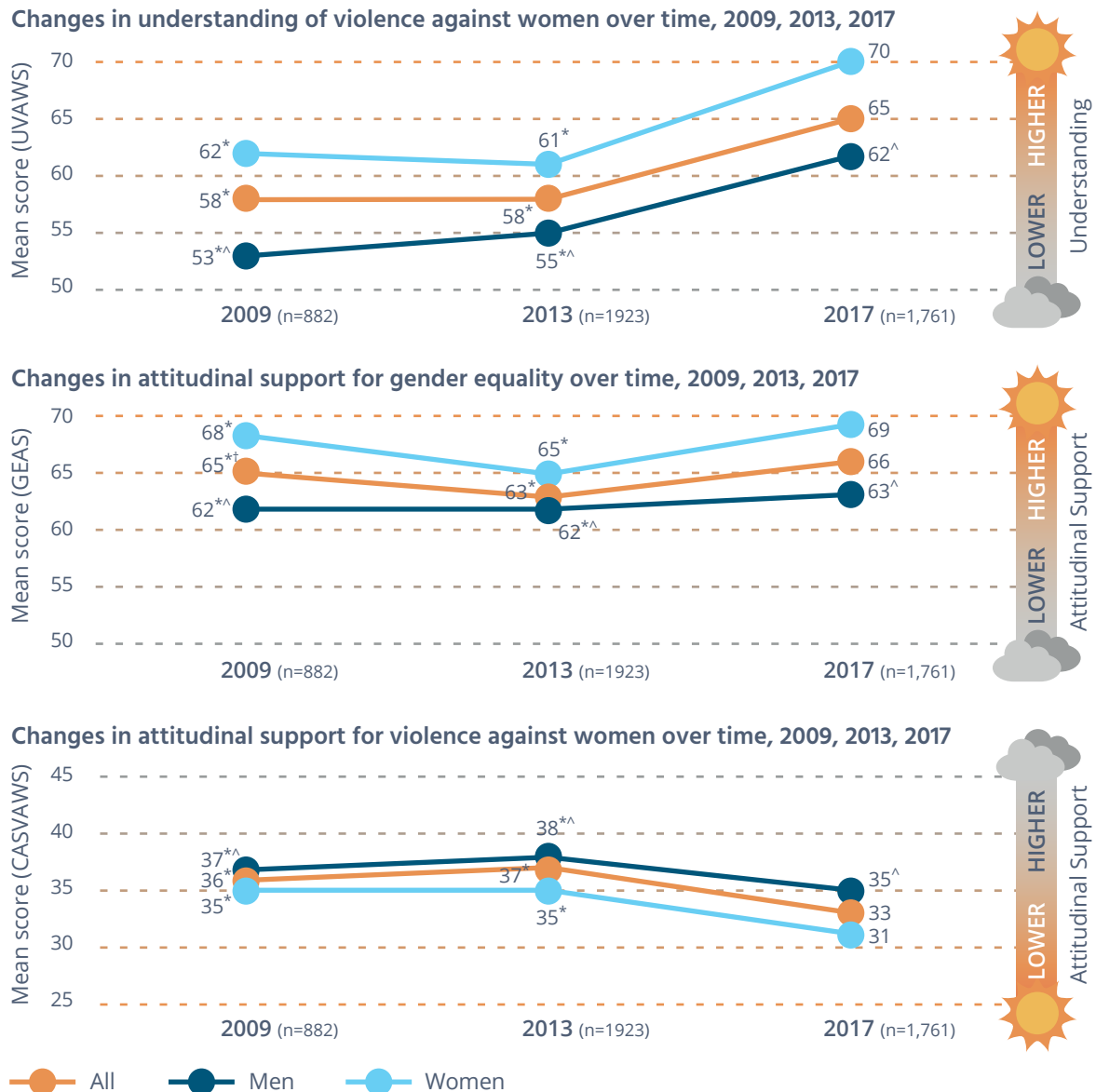
It is important to note that mean scores are not the same as percentages. The approach is used to compare findings (in this case, findings between survey waves) relative to one another, rather than to measure concepts of concern in an absolute sense.

### Change in young people's knowledge and attitudes over time

The report of the 2013 NCAS showed that between 2009 and 2013 there was no change among young people on the overall measures of understanding of violence against women, and attitudes to gender equality. There was a small improvement in attitudes to violence against women among young men (Harris et al., 2015).



**Figure 4-1: Changes in understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality and violence against women over time (means)**



Note: The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.  
 \* Difference between survey year and 2017 is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.05$ .  
 † Difference between 2009 and 2013 is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.05$ .  
 ^ Difference between men and women is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Box 4-1: Key findings**  
**Changes over time in understanding and attitudes among young people**

In contrast to the 2013 wave of NCAS, there was positive change on all three measures between 2013 and 2017.<sup>14</sup>

- The average score for young Australians on the measure of understanding of violence against women increased from 58 to 65 (ranging from 1 to 100, with 100 indicating the highest level of understanding).
- The average score for attitudinal support for gender equality increased from 63 to 66 (with 100 indicating the highest level of support for gender equality).
- On the measure of attitudinal support for violence against women, the average score fell from 37 to 33 (this is a positive result, with 1 representing the lowest level of endorsement of violence-supportive attitudes).

- Both young men and young women have improved on all three measures since 2013.
- There are gender differences on the three measures. Compared with young women, young men have a lower level of understanding of violence against women, a lower level of support for gender equality, and a higher level of attitudinal support for violence against women.

Changing attitudes and improving knowledge takes time. The current results show that young Australians' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, violence against women and gender equality are gradually improving. In spite of this progress, responses to some of the questions, as shown in this chapter, indicate that areas of concern remain.

14 The Intention to Act Construct (ITAC) is new for the current NCAS, so data on change over time are not available.

## Young Australians' knowledge of violence against women

Knowledge of violence against women is among the factors influencing attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004; Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Fazio, 1990) and is an important resource for both affected individuals and those around them to identify and respond constructively to the problem (Carlson & Worden, 2005; Powell, 2011). Knowledge of the law is important in encouraging individuals to report violence when it occurs and can play a role in shaping positive social norms that

take violence seriously (Salazar, Baker, Price, & Carlin, 2003). Providing access to knowledge at an early age can help to provide a sound foundation for young people to develop positive attitudes and relationship practices.

Table 4-1 compares 2013 and 2017 survey findings for each question of knowledge of violence against women for respondents aged 16-24 years.

**Table 4-1: Knowledge of violence against women by survey year and gender, respondents aged 16-24 years**

	2013	2017		
	Total n=1,918	Total n=1,761	Men n=964	Women n=794
<b>Understanding that certain behaviours are a form of domestic violence/violence against women (% always, usually or sometimes violence)</b>				
<b>Physical forms of violence</b>				
Slaps or pushes to cause harm or fear	97	98	97	99
Forces the other partner to have sex**	97	95	95	96
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt other family members**	98	99	98	100
Throws or smashes objects to frighten or threaten**	97	96	96	97
<b>Non-physical forms of violence</b>				
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad or useless#	82	90 <sup>†</sup>	88	93
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends#	82	91 <sup>†</sup>	86 <sup>^</sup>	96
Controls the other partner by denying them money	59	76 <sup>†</sup>	70 <sup>^</sup>	83
Repeatedly keeps track of location, calls or activities through mobile phone or other devices without consent**	-	86	79 <sup>^</sup>	93
Stalking by repeatedly following/watching at home/work	87	90	87 <sup>^</sup>	94
Harassment by repeated emails, text messages#	82	89 <sup>†</sup>	84 <sup>^</sup>	94
<b>Knowledge of the prevalence of violence against women (% agree)</b>				
Violence against women is common**	60	67	57 <sup>^</sup>	78
<b>Understanding of sexual violence (% agree)</b>				
If a woman doesn't physically resist – even if protesting verbally – then it isn't really rape**	9	5	5	4
Many allegations of sexual assault made by women are false**	-	14	18 <sup>^</sup>	10
It is a criminal offense for a man to have sex with his wife without her consent**	-	88	87	90
Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than by a stranger**	57	63	60	66
<b>Knowledge of resources (% agree)</b>				
If I needed to get outside advice or support for someone about a domestic violence issue, I would know where to go**	54	60	62	58

\*\* Asked of a quarter of the sample in 2017.

# Asked of half the sample in 2017.

<sup>^</sup> Difference between men and women is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$  and reaches the 0.2 Cohen's threshold.

<sup>†</sup> Difference between 2013 and 2017 is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

- Question not asked in 2013.



## Box 4-2: Key findings

### Young people's knowledge of violence against women

Overall, young Australians have a high level of understanding that domestic violence involves physical and non-physical forms of violence, and more young Australians in 2017 than in 2013 recognise non-physical behaviours as constituting violence against women (Table 4-1). For example, there has been a 17 percentage point increase since the 2013 NCAS in the number of young people who recognise that denying a partner access to their money is a form of domestic violence (59% in 2013; 76% in 2017).

Young men are significantly less likely than young women to recognise all the non-physical forms of violence and abuse

as domestic violence, except for repeatedly criticising a partner. The percentage of young men recognising the remaining behaviours ranged from 70 percent (denying a partner access to money)

to 87 percent (stalking), whereas among young women the range was 83 percent (denying a partner access to money) to 96 percent (controlling a partner's social life).

Nearly one in four young people (24%) *disagree* that violence against women is common (data not shown). Young women (78%) are more likely than young men (57%) to recognise that violence against women is common.

A substantial minority of young Australians continue to hold particularly concerning attitudes towards sexual violence. Although many young people are aware that false allegations of sexual assault are rare, one in seven (14%) believe that many allegations by women are false, contrary to research suggesting otherwise (Kelly, 2010). Young men are more likely than young women to hold this belief (18% men; 10% women).

The majority (88%) of young people are aware that it is a criminal offence for a man to have sex with his wife without her consent; however, nearly one in eight (12%) either do not agree with this statement or do not know whether or not it is accurate (data not shown).

Women are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know than by a stranger (ABS, 2017b). Although 63 percent of the sample agree with this, nearly one in five are not aware (19%), and a further 11 percent do not know (data not shown).

Law reform in recent years has begun to explicitly reflect the idea that consent to sexual relations must be freely and voluntarily given (Burgin, 2019; Crowe & Sveinsson, 2017; Fileborn, 2011; Larcombe, 2011). Most young people appear to understand this, with (90%) *disagreeing* with the statement, 'If a woman doesn't physically resist – even if protesting verbally – then it isn't really rape' (data not shown); however, 8 percent of young people either agreed with the statement (5%) or did not know the answer (3%) (data not shown).

Over one in three (36%) young Australians would not know where to get outside help for a domestic violence issue (data not shown).

### Gender and age cohort differences

Table 4-1 shows that there are differences between **young men and young women** on most of the questions measuring knowledge of violence against women. Differences that meet the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size (see 'Approach to analysing data' in Chapter 3) are noted in the table. In all cases young women are more likely than are young men to give responses that are consistent with the evidence. Although not reaching thresholds for statistical significance and effect size, this pattern is also indicated in all but one of the remaining questions.

There are differences between **young people and people aged 25-64** on most of the questions. On most of the questions on which there was a difference, the proportion of people in the 25-64 age group giving a response that is consistent with the research evidence was higher than the proportion of young people. However, only two questions met the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size used in this report. If people agreed that the behaviours put to them in the survey were domestic violence or violence against women, they were then asked whether they thought this was always, usually or just sometimes the case:

- The older cohort (53%) are more likely than young people (38%) to agree that it is always domestic violence if one partner in a domestic relationship tries to control the other partner by denying them money (data not shown for either cohort).
- Older respondents (68%) are more likely than young people (57%) to say that stalking is always a form of violence against women (data not shown for either cohort).

I feel like young people still don't know or see control and that as a form of violence. They might see it's bad but they don't know that it's domestic violence.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

### Young Australians' knowledge of the gendered pattern of partner violence




An awareness of the gendered patterns of partner violence is important because it reflects knowledge of the nature, severity and dynamics of violence itself. The response to intimate partner violence from someone who believes this form of violence tends to be mutual violence between two people with equal power is likely to be very different to someone who understands that a large proportion of

partner violence involves unequal, gendered power dynamics. As well as impacting individuals' responses to partner violence, this understanding may influence the level of policy attention and resourcing given to address partner violence affecting women relative to that affecting men. Respondents to the NCAS were asked about their knowledge of the gendered pattern of partner violence (Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-2: Young Australian's knowledge of the gendered pattern of intimate partner violence

## Who is more likely to commit domestic violence?

### THE EVIDENCE

-  **Men** are more likely than women to perpetrate partner violence, and are more likely to use frequent, prolonged and extreme violence.<sup>i</sup>
-  **Men** are more likely than women to sexually assault their partner.<sup>ii</sup> Men are more likely than women to subject their partner to controlling and coercive behaviours.<sup>iii</sup>
-  **Women** are more likely than men to use violence against their partner in self-defence or in response to a loss of control or dignity from ongoing violence or control by their partner.<sup>iv</sup>





### WHAT YOUNG AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE (n=428)

While many young people (60%) recognise that mainly men, or men more often commit acts of domestic violence, the number of young people that recognise this has **dropped 11 percentage points** since the 2013 NCAS (71%). This decline has been occurring since 2009, when 75% of young people recognised this fact. Young women (67%) are more likely than men (52%) to be aware. The number of young people suggesting that men and women are equally likely to perpetrate domestic violence has increased from 23% in 2009 to 36% in 2017.

## Who is more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence?

### THE EVIDENCE

-  **Women** are more likely than men to suffer physical harm, including injuries requiring medical treatment, time off from work and days in bed.<sup>v</sup>
-  **Women** are more likely than men to be the victims of domestic homicide.<sup>vi</sup>




### WHAT YOUNG AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE (n=428)

While most young Australians (75%) recognise that women are more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence, the number of young people who recognise this has **dropped 12 percentage points** since the 2013 NCAS (87%). This decline has been occurring since 2009, when 90% of young people recognised this fact. The number of young people suggesting that this harm is experienced equally by men and women has increased from 6% in 2009 to 19% in 2017.

## Who is more likely to experience fear from domestic violence?

### THE EVIDENCE

-  **Women** are more likely than men to report experiencing fear as a result of violence.<sup>vii</sup>



### WHAT YOUNG AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE (n=428)

Less than half (40%) of all young Australians recognise that levels of fear from domestic violence are worse for women, and this number has **declined by 10 percentage points since 2013**. This decline has been occurring since 2009, when 54% of young people recognised this fact. The number of young people suggesting fear from domestic violence is experienced equally by men and women has increased from 45% in 2009 to 56% in 2017.

i Cox, 2015; Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn, & Wadham, 2000; Belknap & Melton, 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005; Kimmel, 2012.  
 ii Swan, Gambone, Van Horn, Snow, & Sullivan, 2012.  
 iii Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012.  
 iv Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005; Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2004; Larance & Miller, 2016; Mennicke & Kulkarni, 2016; Velonis, 2016.  
 v Belknap & Melton, 2005; Myhill, 2015.  
 vi Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, 2018; Chan & Payne, 2013.  
 vii Bagshaw et al., 2000; Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012; Heady, Scott, & De Vaus, 1999; National Crime Prevention, 2001.

## Young Australians' attitudes to gender equality

Promoting gender equality is pivotal to reducing violence against women. Gender inequality and attitudes supporting gender inequality provide the social conditions in which violence against women is more likely to occur (for a review see Webster & Flood, 2015). This is a position supported by many expert bodies (Michau et al., 2015; UN Women, 2015; WHO, 2010) and which underpins both the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011) and *Change the story* (Our Watch et al., 2015). Monitoring changes in attitudes to gender equality over time is an important way of tracking the conditions that increase the likelihood of violence against women.

Achieving gender equality is also important for other reasons, including its link to the wellbeing of women, men and families, the protection and promotion of human rights, and benefits for the wider society, including improved productivity, creativity and economic development (VicHealth, 2017a; 2017b). The aspects of gender inequality found to be linked to violence against women have been identified in research compiled for *Change the story*. Table 4-2 shows 2013 and 2017 results for the questions asked in the NCAS to measure these attitudes, which were adapted from existing studies.

**Table 4-2: Attitudes to gender equality by survey year and gender, respondents aged 16-24 years**

	2013	2017		
	Total n=1,918	Total n=1,761	Men n=964	Women n=794
<b>Promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions (% agree)</b>				
If a woman earns more than her male partner, it is not good for the relationship <sup>#</sup>	-	5	5	6
A man should never admit when others have hurt his feelings	-	4	5	4
When a couple start dating, the woman should not be the one to initiate sex <sup>#</sup>	-	7	9	5
I think it is embarrassing for a man to have a job that is usually filled by a woman <sup>#</sup>	-	5	6	3
A woman has to have children to be fulfilled <sup>#</sup>	7	6	8	4
<b>Undermining women's independence and decision-making in public life (% agree)</b>				
In the workplace, men generally make more capable bosses than women <sup>#</sup>	-	13	17 <sup>^</sup>	8
Men, rather than women, should hold positions of responsibility in the community <sup>#</sup>	-	11	14	8
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women	24	13 <sup>†</sup>	16	10
Women are less capable than men of thinking logically	-	6	8	4
<b>Undermining women's independence and decision-making in private life (% agree)</b>				
Men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household	22	17 <sup>†</sup>	22 <sup>^</sup>	12
Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship	35	31	36 <sup>^</sup>	26
<b>Condoning male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women (% agree)</b>				
I think there's no harm in men making sexist jokes about women when they are among their male friends <sup>#</sup>	-	22	30 <sup>^</sup>	14
I think it's okay for men to joke with their male friends about being violent towards women	-	4	5	2
I think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends <sup>#</sup>	-	43	43	43
<b>Denying gender inequality is a problem (% agree)</b>				
Many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia <sup>#</sup>	-	45	52 <sup>^</sup>	37
Many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist <sup>#</sup>	-	49	57 <sup>^</sup>	41
Many women fail to fully appreciate all that men do for them <sup>#</sup>	-	29	33	25
Women often flirt with men just to be hurtful	-	15	20 <sup>^</sup>	11
Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Australia	14	11 <sup>†</sup>	15 <sup>^</sup>	6

<sup>#</sup> Asked of half the sample.

<sup>†</sup> Difference between 2013 and 2017 is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>^</sup> Difference between men and women is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$  and reaches the 0.2 Cohen's threshold.

- Question not asked in 2013.





### Box 4-3: Key findings Young people's attitudes to gender equality

Very few young people support **rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions**, with 7 percent or fewer young people agreeing with any of the statements in this theme.

Young people have a high level of **support for women's independence and decision-making in public life**.

- However, one in eight young people (13%) believe that men make better political leaders and more capable bosses than women. Young men (17%) are more likely than young women (8%) to endorse the idea that men make more capable bosses than women.
- The proportion of young people agreeing that men make better political leaders than women has declined 11 percentage points, with 24 percent agreeing in 2013 compared to 13 percent in 2017 (a pattern similar to the NCAS sample as a whole).

Compared with their support for women's independence in decision-making in public life, young people are considerably less likely to hold attitudes **supporting women's independence and decision-making in private life**.

- Almost one in three young people (31%) believe that women prefer a man to be in charge of a relationship, with young men (36%) more likely to support this statement than young women (26%).
- Young men are more likely to endorse men's control over decision-making in *private* life than young women, with young men (22%) almost twice as likely as young women (12%) to agree that men should take control in relationships. The proportion of young people who agree with this statement in 2017 (17%) has decreased by 5 percentage points since 2013 (22%).

In the theme of **condoning male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women**:

- More than two in five young Australians (43%) support the statement, 'I think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends'.
- More than one in five young people (22%) believe there is no harm in making sexist jokes about women when among their male friends, and young men (30%) are more than two times more likely than young women to agree with this statement (14%). However, few young people (4%) agree that it's okay for men to joke about being violent towards women.

A large proportion of young people support attitudes that **deny gender inequality is a problem**. Young men are substantially more likely to express these attitudes than young women across all questions in this theme.

- Almost half (45%) of young people believe that many women exaggerate gender inequality in Australia, with young men (52%) more likely to hold this belief than young women (37%).
- Nearly half (49%) of young people believe that many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. Nearly three in five young men (57%) agree with this statement, compared to two in five young women (41%).
- More than one in seven young people (15%) support the statement, 'Women often flirt with men just to be hurtful', with young men (20%) almost twice as likely to agree than young women (11%).
- More than one in ten young people (11%) support the statement, 'Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Australia', although this has decreased since 2013 (14%). Young men (15%) are more likely than young women to agree with this statement (6%).

### Gender and age cohort differences

There are differences between **young men and young women** on most of the questions in the gender equality component. This difference meets the thresholds for statistical significance and effect described in 'Approach to analysing data' in Chapter 3 for a number of questions. These differences show that young women are more likely than are young men to give responses indicating support for gender equality. Although not reaching relevant thresholds, this pattern is also indicated in all but one of the remaining questions.

There were only two measures on which differences between **young people and people aged 25-64** met the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size used in this report (data not shown). Specifically, young people are:

- less likely than the older cohort to *disagree* with the statement, 'Women prefer a man to be in charge of a relationship' (59% compared with 70%); and
- more likely to support the statement, 'I think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends' than Australians aged 25-64 years (43% compared with 31%).

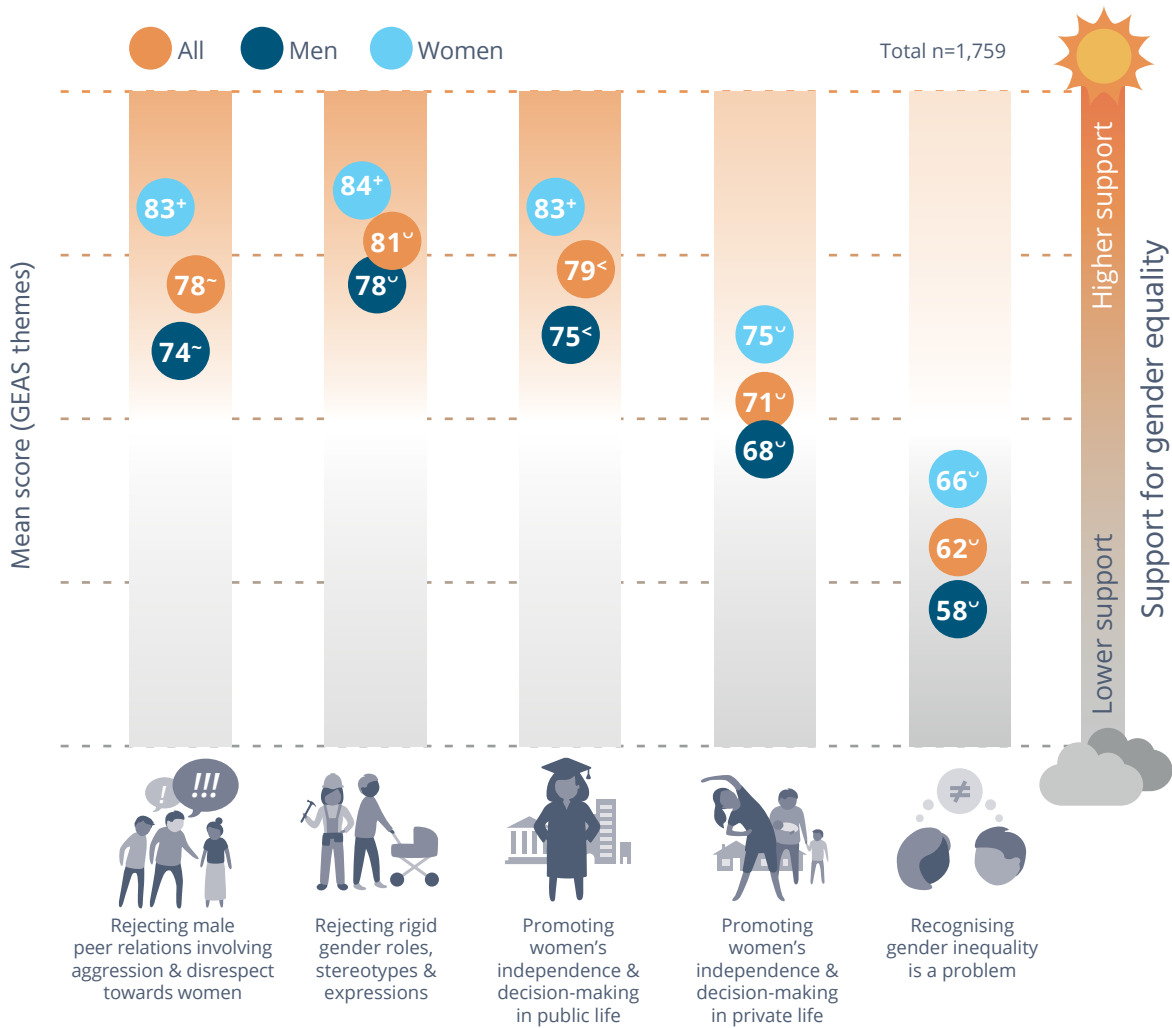
On most of the remaining questions, the proportion in the older cohort giving responses supportive of gender equality was the same as the proportion among young people or slightly higher (although not meeting thresholds for statistical significance and effect size).

## Which aspects of gender equality are most widely supported by young Australians?

To find out which aspects of gender equality are more or less likely to be supported by young Australians overall, each respondent was given a score based on their answers to questions in each theme. An average for all young people was then calculated and the results are shown in Figure 4-3.

Scores range from 1 to 100, with 1 signifying the lowest level of support for gender equality (a very poor result). This information is useful because it tells us which aspects of attitudes to gender equality most need to be addressed in prevention programs and interventions.

**Figure 4-3: Relative attitudinal support for gender equality among respondents aged 16-24 years, by themes<sup>^</sup> (means)**



Note: The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.

- <sup>^</sup> All differences between men and women are statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .
- <sup>~</sup> Difference between this theme and all other themes in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .
- <sup>~</sup> Difference between this theme and all other themes in this sample, with the exception of 'Promoting women's independence & decision-making in public life', is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .
- <sup>+</sup> Difference between this theme and 'Promoting women's independence & decision-making in private life' and 'Recognising gender inequality is a problem' in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .
- <sup><</sup> Difference between this theme and all other themes in this sample, with the exception of 'Rejecting male peer relations involving aggression & disrespect towards women', is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .



### Box 4-4: Key findings

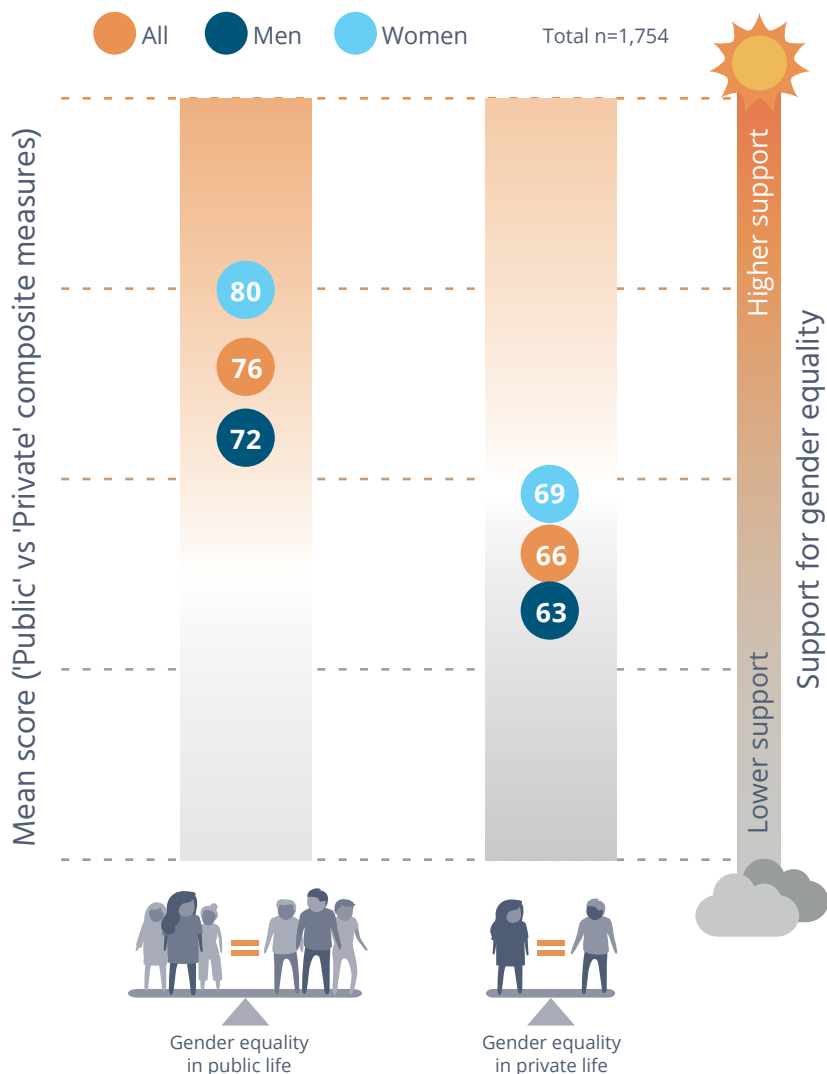
#### Relative levels of attitudinal support among young people for gender equality by themes

- Among the five themes, young Australians are least likely to support the idea that gender inequality is a problem.
- Young women have a higher level of support for gender equality across all five themes than young men.
- Young people have a greater level of support for women's independence and decision-making in public life than in private life.
- These patterns are similar to those found in the NCAS sample as a whole.

Given the higher level of support for women's decision-making in public life compared with decision-making in private life, this distinction was further explored by creating two new themes using *all* the questions measuring attitudinal support for gender equality (rather than just those looking at decision-making). Questions were divided into those concerned with public life

and those concerned with private life. The distinction between young people's attitudes towards gender equality in public life and gender equality in private life was confirmed (Figure 4-4). That is, young people were found to have higher levels of attitudinal support for gender equality in public life overall than for gender equality in private life.

**Figure 4-4: Relative levels of support for gender equality among respondents aged 16-24 years, in public and private<sup>Ω</sup> life<sup>^</sup> (means)**



I think there's been such a push for public gender equality – equality in the workplace, being paid the same amount – but there's not so much of a push in private life. I think for some men they're like, "equality in the workplace? Yeah whatever, I'm all for it"; but in the private areas they're like "it's a bit too close to home, no thank you." Like now it's affecting me personally, I don't agree with it.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

Note: The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.

<sup>Ω</sup> Difference between public and private in each sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>^</sup> Difference between men and women is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

## Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women

As explained above, attitudes can be used to monitor progress. Attitudes may also contribute to violence against women indirectly because they influence social norms or expectations of what is acceptable behaviour. These expectations in turn influence behaviour itself (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004). In this way, community attitudes can influence how professionals respond to violence against women, as well as the responses of neighbours, friends, family members and work colleagues. Holding violence-supportive attitudes can influence whether women experiencing violence seek help. Such attitudes may be adopted by men who use violence to excuse their behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

The four themes in this component were formed by synthesising hundreds of prior studies on attitudes towards violence against women, selecting groups of questions that reflect them, and then confirming through the NCAS that these themes are similar to the way the Australian public thinks about violence against women (Table 4-3).<sup>16</sup>

When we go into schools we talk to young people about, "Is it okay to have your partner's Facebook password in this case or in this case?" and they always say, "It's more okay if you know that person has cheated in the past" or things like that. People use those as excuses to control women.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

**Table 4-3: Attitudinal support for violence against women by survey year and gender, respondents aged 16-24 years**

	2013	2017		
	Total n=1,918	Total n=1,761	Men n=964	Women n=794
<b>Excusing the perpetrator and hold women responsible (% agree)</b>				
<b>Attitudes excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible for abuse or managing its consequences</b>				
A lot of what is called domestic violence is really just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	-	16	20 <sup>^</sup>	11
Domestic violence can be excused if it results from people getting so angry that they temporarily lose control	24	11 <sup>†</sup>	13	10
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was themselves abused as a child	14	8 <sup>†</sup>	10	6
Domestic violence can be excused if, afterwards, the violent person genuinely regrets what they have done	26	19 <sup>†</sup>	23 <sup>^</sup>	15
Sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn't mean to	-	20	22	17
Women who flirt all the time are somewhat to blame if their partner gets jealous and hits them	-	11	14	9
<b>Attitudes concerning the family and partner violence</b>				
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family	22	16 <sup>†</sup>	20 <sup>^</sup>	12
It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together	9	4 <sup>†</sup>	5	3
<b>The role of alcohol in excusing the perpetrator or holding women responsible</b>				
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	9	5 <sup>†</sup>	6	4
Domestic violence can be excused if the offender is heavily affected by alcohol	10	6 <sup>†</sup>	7	5
A man is less responsible for rape if he is drunk or affected by drugs at the time**	10	8	9	6
If a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible	18	13 <sup>†</sup>	15	11

Table 4-3 continued on next page

<sup>15</sup> See the NCAS main report (Webster et al., 2018a) on the ANROWS website for a more detailed discussion of the influence of attitudes supportive of violence against women, and relevant evidence.

<sup>16</sup> This was achieved using Rasch and factor analysis, described in greater detail in the NCAS methodology report (Webster et al., 2018b) and in summary in the main report (Webster et al., 2018a). Both documents are available on the ANROWS website. As a result of these analyses there are some differences between the reporting themes used in 2013 and those in 2017.

Table 4-3 continued from previous page

	2013	2017		
	Total n=1,918	Total n=1,761	Men n=964	Women n=794
<b>Minimising violence against women (% agree)</b>				
<b>Minimising the impacts and consequences of recurring partner violence</b>				
A female victim who does not leave an abusive partner is partly responsible for the abuse continuing	-	34	39 <sup>^</sup>	28
I don't believe it's as hard as people say it is for women to leave an abusive relationship	-	14	19 <sup>^</sup>	10
If a woman keeps going back to her abusive partner then the violence can't be very serious	-	13	17 <sup>^</sup>	9
It's acceptable for police to give lower priority to domestic violence cases they've attended many times before	-	10	13	8
Women who stay in abusive relationships should be entitled to less help from counselling and support services than women who end the relationship	-	12	14	9
In domestic situations where one partner is physically violent towards the other it is entirely reasonable for the violent person to be made to leave the family home**	89	86	83	88
<b>Minimising sexual violence by claiming that women lie</b>				
If a woman claims to have been sexually assaulted but has no other physical injuries she probably shouldn't be taken too seriously	-	5	6	5
Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual harassment are probably lying**	-	7	11 <sup>^</sup>	3
Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual assault are probably lying	-	9	13 <sup>^</sup>	5
<b>Minimising violence against women by placing it beyond the law</b>				
Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it**	10	4 <sup>†</sup>	5	3
In my opinion, if a woman reports abuse by her partner to outsiders it is shameful for her family	-	9	12	6
It is a serious problem when a man tries to control his partner by refusing her access to their money**	-	79	78	80
<b>Mistrusting women's reports of violence (% agree)</b>				
Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence	-	24	31 <sup>^</sup>	18
Women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case**	52	37 <sup>†</sup>	49 <sup>^</sup>	26
A lot of times, women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets	39	25 <sup>†</sup>	32 <sup>^</sup>	18
It is common for sexual assault accusations to be used, as a way of getting back at men	-	37	45 <sup>^</sup>	29
<b>Disregard women's right to consent (% agree)</b>				
Women find it flattering to be persistently pursued, even if they are not interested**	-	18	24 <sup>^</sup>	13
If a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission**	-	28	30	26
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	20	12 <sup>†</sup>	14	11
Since some women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without permission	-	17	18	16
When a man is very sexually aroused, he may not even realize that the woman doesn't want to have sex	-	28	30	27
If a woman is drunk and starts having sex with a man, but then falls asleep, it is understandable if he continues having sex with her anyway	-	7	8	6
Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex**	40	28 <sup>†</sup>	29	28

\*\* Asked of quarter of the sample.

† Difference between 2013 and 2017 is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

^ Difference between men and women is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$  and reaches the 0.2 Cohen's threshold.

- Question not asked in 2013.



### Box 4-5: Key findings

## Young people's attitudes to violence against women

There has been a statistically significant improvement in all but two questions that were asked in both 2013 and 2017.

Overall, relatively few young Australians are prepared to **excuse violence against women**. However, the statements in this theme that are most likely to be supported by young people are:

- 'Sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn't mean to' (20%);
- 'Domestic violence can be excused if, afterwards, the violent person genuinely regrets what they have done' (19%) – young men (23%) were more likely to agree to this statement than women (15%); and
- 'A lot of what is called domestic violence is really just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration' – one in six (16%) young people agree with this statement, with young men (20%) more likely to do so than young women (11%).

Only 8 percent of young people agree that 'Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was themselves abused as a child'.

A relatively small and declining proportion of young Australians agree that domestic violence is a private, family matter.

- Four percent of young people support the statement, 'It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together', compared to 9 percent in 2013.
- One in six (16%) young people believe that domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family; this number has decreased since 2013 (22%). Young men (20%) are more likely to hold this view than young women (12%).

A modest and declining proportion of young Australians believe that violence against women can be excused if alcohol is involved.

However, a notable proportion of young Australians continue to **minimise violence against women**.

- One in three (34%) young people agree that a female victim who does not leave an abusive partner is partly responsible for the abuse continuing, with young men (39%) more likely to support this statement than young women (28%).
- More than one in seven (14%) young people agree with the statement, 'I don't believe it's as hard as people say it is to leave an abusive relationship', while more than one in eight agree that 'If a woman keeps going back to her abusive partner then the violence can't be very serious' (13%). Young men are more likely to agree to both of these statements than young women.

A minority of young people hold attitudes that challenge the credibility of women's reports of violence, with 7 percent agreeing that 'Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual harassment are probably lying' and 9 percent agreeing that this is also the case with claims of sexual assault. Young men are more likely to agree to both these statements than young women.

There has been a 6 percentage point improvement since 2013 in the belief that women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it (down from 10% in 2013 to 4% in 2017).

Attitudes that **mistrust women's reports of violence** are widely held by young people, though are improving. There was a higher level of support for attitudes in this theme than in all the other themes concerned with attitudes towards violence against women (reported in Table 4-3).

- Almost two in five (37%) young Australians agree that women make up or exaggerate claims of violence to secure advantage in custody battles, with young men (49%) nearly twice as likely to agree than young women (26%). The proportion agreeing with this statement has dropped by 15 percentage points since 2013 (52%).
- Nearly two in five (37%) young Australians support the statement, 'It is common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men', with young men (45%) more likely to agree than young women (29%).
- One in four (24%) agree with the statement, 'Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence', with young men (31%) more likely to support this statement than young women (18%).
- The proportion of young Australians agreeing with the statement, 'A lot of times, women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets', has declined 14 percentage points between 2013 (39%) and 2017 (25%). Young men (32%) are more likely to support this statement than young women (18%).

A lot of young people don't know it's not easy for women to leave relationships, especially if there's no support from society, also considering she'll be judged, if there's children involved or he was the financial provider.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

There's no real discussion with young people about alcohol and consent and drugs and that kind of thing, how they all interact and how to act in that space. There needs to be a lot more discussion or resources developed to help young people navigate that because it's such a grey area and it's such a big part of a young person's life.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

- Very few young people (5%) supported the statement, 'Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol' and this proportion has decreased since 2013 (9%).
- One in eight (13%) young people support the statement, 'If a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible', and the proportion agreeing with this statement has declined since 2013 (18%).

Eighty-six percent of young people believe it is appropriate for the violent person to be made to leave the family home, suggesting that there is majority support for the laws applying in most Australian jurisdictions that enable the removal of the violent person from the home.



Someone might say, 'he wore me down' and it's seen as an okay thing to say, that you didn't actually want it, it was just that he'd harassed you to the point where you said 'yes' because it was easier than saying 'no'.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

There is also a high level of support among young people for attitudes suggesting a **disregard for the need to gain consent** in sexual matters.

- Almost one in five (18%) young Australians support the statement, 'Women find it flattering to be persistently pursued, even if they are not interested', with young men (24%) nearly twice as likely to agree than young women (13%).
- One in eight (12%) young people agree that 'Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes''. The proportion agreeing to this statement has decreased 8 percentage points since 2013, when it was 20 percent.
- A notable proportion of young Australians believe that if women exercise agency in sexual matters, they must take some responsibility should men respond with aggression or abuse. More than one in four (28%) young people believe that 'If a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission', and one in six (17%) agrees that 'Since some women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without permission'.
- Many young Australians hold attitudes suggesting that sexual aggression can be attributed in part to men's 'natural' or 'innate' sexual drive. More than one in four (28%) young people agree with the statements, 'When a man is very sexually aroused, he may not even realise that the woman doesn't want to have sex' and 'Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex'. The latter statement has seen a 12 percentage point improvement since 2013, when 40 percent of young people agreed.

## Gender and age cohort differences

There are differences between **young men and young women** on most of the questions measuring attitudinal support for violence against women. As noted above, this difference is statistically significant and substantial in size for a number of questions and shows that young women are more likely than young men to give responses rejecting attitudinal support for violence against women. Although not always reaching the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size used in this report (see 'Approach to analysing data' in Chapter 3), this pattern is the same for all questions in this component.

There was only one difference between the two age cohorts that met the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size. Young people (19%) are more likely than those aged 25-64 (11%) to believe that domestic violence can be excused if the violent person regrets what they have done. In a small number of the remaining questions, the proportion of people aged **16-24 years** who indicated attitudinal support for violence against women was marginally lower

than that for people aged **25-64 years**. However, in a majority of the statements the proportion in both age groups was either the same or marginally higher among people aged **16-24 years**.

When it comes to sexting, attitudes suggesting that if you take the photo you're to blame is victim shaming. It's a paternalistic way of dealing with it rather than addressing the actual problem.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

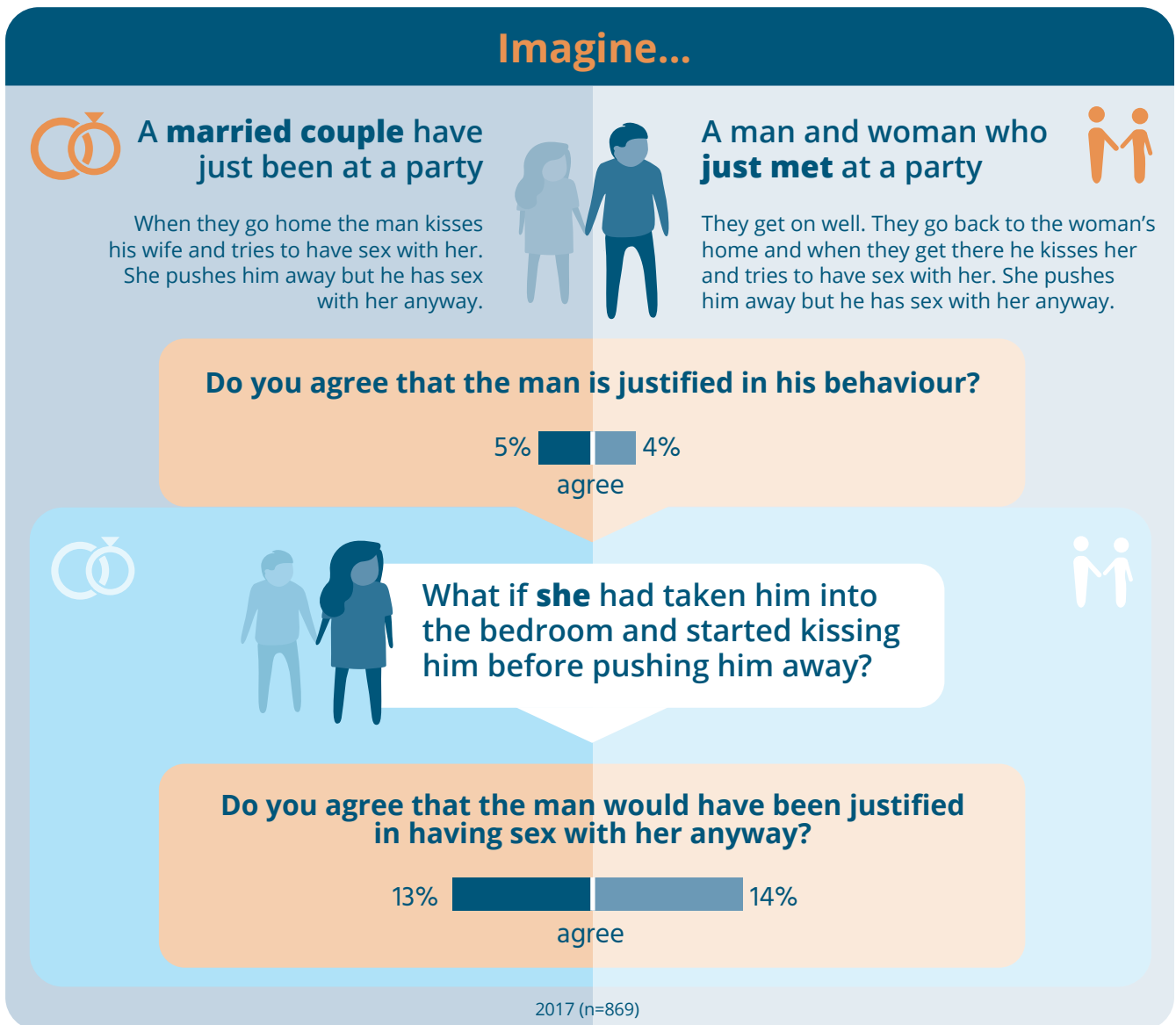


## Circumstances in which young people justify non-consensual sex

In the 2017 NCAS two scenarios were introduced to investigate whether or not Australians would justify non-consensual sex in different circumstances. Scenarios were used to test two questions:

1. Are Australians more likely to justify non-consensual sex among a married couple (a context in which people sometimes believe women forgo their sexual autonomy), as opposed to people that had just met?
2. Are Australians more likely to justify non-consensual sex in a circumstance where a woman had initiated intimacy as opposed to when she did not? This tests the belief that once a woman consents to one element of sexual expression, she is automatically consenting to further sexual activity.

**Figure 4-5: Impact of situational factors on attitudes towards consent among respondents aged 16-24 years, 2017**



Both scenarios describe criminal offences. These findings are significant because they indicate that a concerning proportion of young Australians are unclear about what constitutes consent, and the line between consensual sex and coercion (Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, & Peterson, 2016; Warren, Swan, & Allen, 2015).

Non-consensual sex can range from rape or coerced sex to non-consensual acts within an initially consensual sexual encounter. Gendered power dynamics, expectations and stereotypes related to sexuality influence how consent is understood and negotiated (e.g. men are seen as sexually

aggressive, or 'in control', while women are often portrayed as passive or submissive in sexual matters) (Hust, Rodgers, & Bayly, 2017). These dynamics and expectations can contribute to some people failing to see the need to gain consent or to assuming that if a person consents to one thing, they are consenting to any sexual contact, rather than recognising that consent must always be an ongoing and respectful process of negotiation. Ensuring ongoing positive consent is important because people have the right to change their minds, or the situation may change to one where they are no longer comfortable.



#### Box 4-6: Key findings

### Young people's responses to two scenarios related to non-consensual sex

- Very few young Australians (4-5%) are prepared to justify non-consensual sex, regardless of whether the couple are married or had just met.
- However, approximately one in seven young Australians believe a man *would* be justified to force sex if the women initiated the intimacy, but then changed her mind and pushed him away.
- There are no differences between young men and young women or between people aged 16-24 years and 25-64 years in these questions.



#### Box 4-7: What does consent mean and why is it important?

Many attitudes about sex reinforce the idea that men should want and actively pursue sex, while women should be passive and not show an active desire for sex (e.g. the attitude that 'the woman should not be the one to initiate sex'). Such attitudes reinforce gender stereotypes where women, in particular, are judged as 'sluts' if they show too much sexual interest. This is often described as a 'sexual double standard' that permits sexual freedom and promiscuity for men but not for women (Tharp et al., 2013). Such attitudes position heterosexual encounters as adversarial (with men's and women's interests in conflict with one another) and have been linked to increased risk for men's perpetration of sexual violence (Tharp et al., 2013).

When men are seen as the 'natural' or the more socially acceptable pursuers of sexual encounters, it can mean that women's assertion of desire is less socially acceptable (Allen, 2005; Powell, 2010; Tolman, 2009).

Given that young women experience higher rates of sexual violence than older women, and men are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence when they are young, (see Chapter 2) the findings related to **rigid gender roles**

(in the gender equality component of the survey) and **consent** are of particular relevance for young people. They suggest that sexual violence prevention education should encourage young people to challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes when it comes to sexual desire and the negotiation of their intimate encounters.

Indeed, sexuality education internationally has increasingly moved away from a 'no means no' model of teaching about sex and consent towards an 'active and continuing consent model' (see Carmody, 2015; Coy, Kelly, Vera-Gray, Garner, & Kanyeredzi, 2016). Such sexuality education is more in line with legislation in many Australian states and territories, in which it is the absence of active consent that defines sexual assault, and increasingly there is a legal responsibility for individuals to take active steps to ascertain consent (Burgin, 2019; Lacombe, Fileborn, Powell, Hanley, & Henry, 2016).

In short, we need to be making clear to all people that anything short of active consent for sex by a partner means that a person should stop and check-in about consent before going any further.

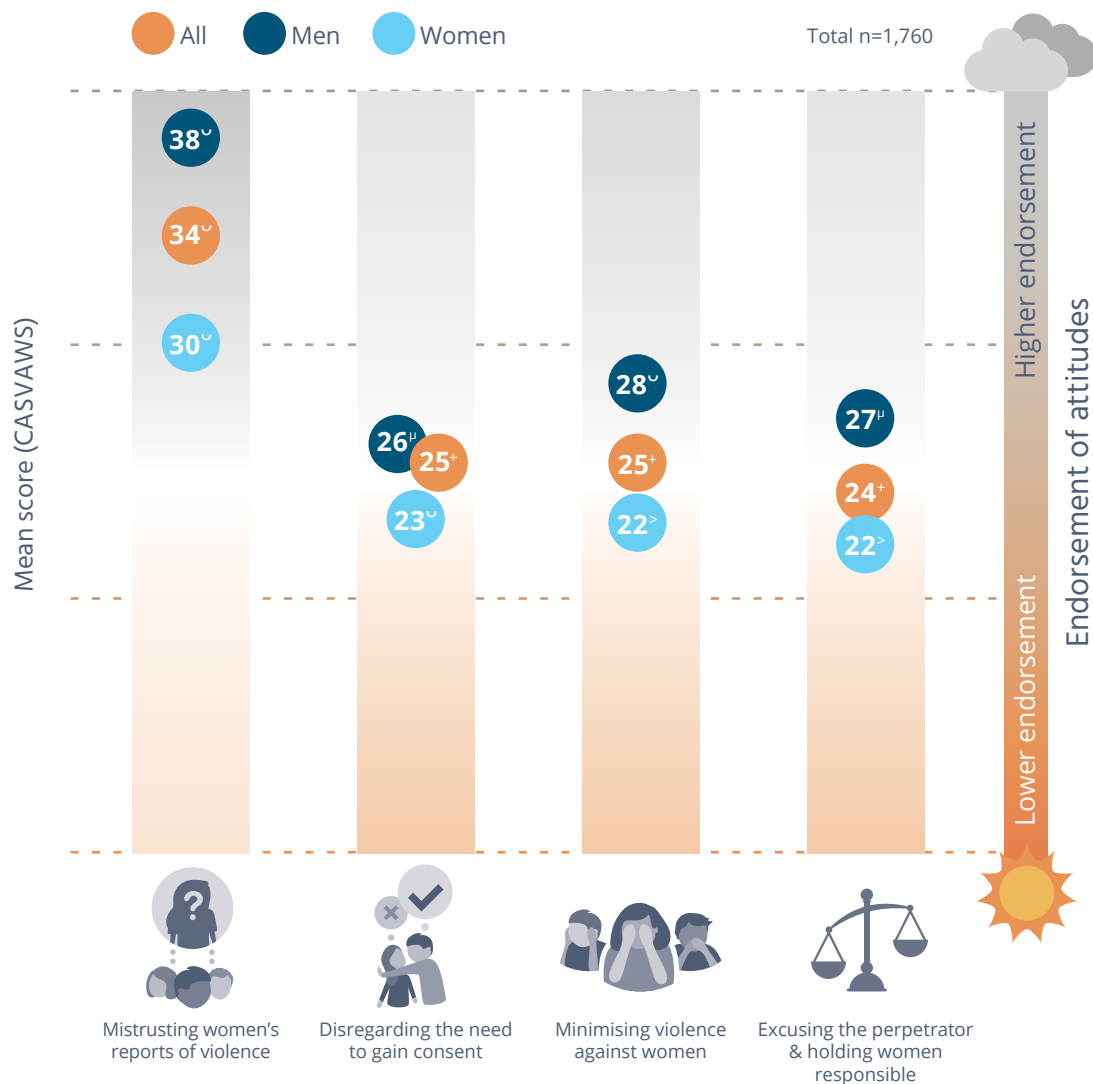
### Which aspects of attitudinal support for violence against women are most widely supported by young Australians?

To investigate which aspects of attitudinal support for violence against women are more or less likely to be supported by the community overall, an average score for the Australian population was developed for each theme using the same approach as described above for the gender equality themes.

Scores range from 1 to 100, with 1 signifying the lowest level of endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women (a positive result). This information is useful because it tells us which aspects of violence-supportive attitudes most need to be addressed in prevention programs and interventions.



**Figure 4-6: Relative endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women among respondents aged 16-24 years, by themes,<sup>^</sup> 2017 (means)**



Note: The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.

<sup>^</sup> All differences between men and women are statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>∨</sup> Difference between this theme and all other themes in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>+</sup> Difference between this theme and 'Mistrusting women's reports of violence' in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>μ</sup> Difference between this theme and 'Mistrusting women's reports of violence' and 'Minimising violence against women' in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>></sup> Difference between this theme and 'Mistrusting women's reports of violence' and 'Disregarding the need to gain consent' in this sample is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

**Box 4-8: Key findings**  
**Relative levels of attitudinal support among young people for violence against women by theme**

- Of the four themes, young people are most likely to support the idea that women's reports of violence cannot be trusted.
- Of the four themes, young people are least likely to support ideas that excuse or minimise violence against women.
- Young women have a lower level of support for attitudes that endorse violence against women across all four themes than young men.
- These patterns are similar to those found in the sample as a whole.

## Bystander action

There are limitations to the role the community can play in addressing physical violence against women once this violence is occurring. There are two reasons for this:

- Much of this violence occurs in private, beyond the gaze of the public, family and friends.
- There may be risks for all involved in intervening in physical violence.

However, there may be promise in encouraging the community to take action if witnessing abuse and disrespect towards women.<sup>17</sup> There are three main reasons for this. First, these may be precursors to, or risk factors for, physical violence. Second, many of the precursors to violence are not in themselves officially able to be sanctioned (e.g. through laws or regulations), and, third, disapproval shown by those around

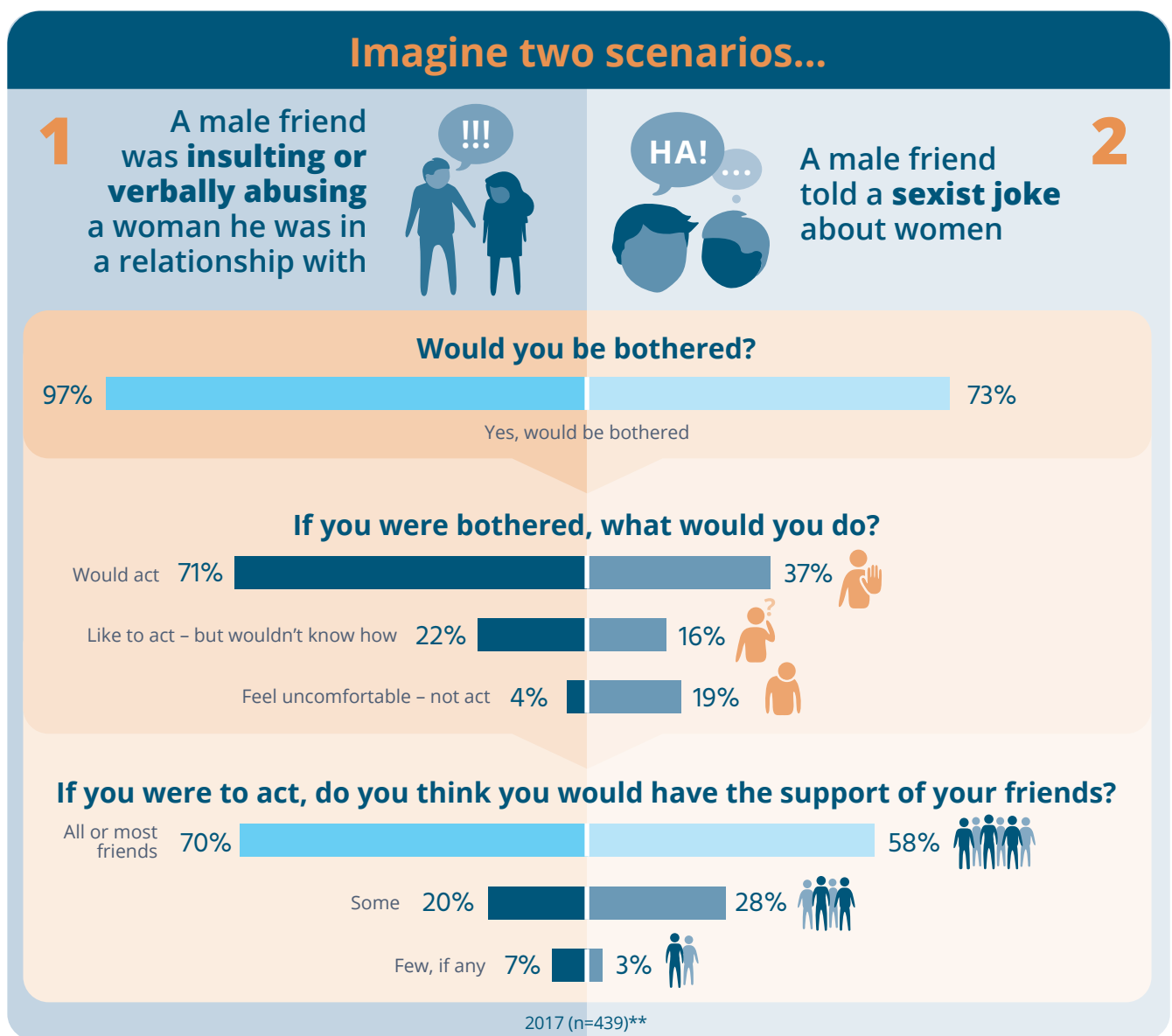
us has been found to be one of the most effective forces to prevent abuse and disrespect, and thereby violence, against women (Powell, 2011). Interventions to increase bystander interventions are especially indicated among men, for whom peer influences have been found to be particularly influential (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

The 2017 NCAS included questions on respondents' anticipated responses should they witness two scenarios in a social setting: a male friend telling a sexist joke and a male friend verbally abusing his partner.

I've been in situations where you're just waiting for someone to stand up and push, and you're like, if someone stands up I'm going to stand up with them, but then everyone's too scared.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

**Figure 4-7: Reactions among respondents aged 16-24 years to scenarios involving the telling of a sexist joke and the verbal abuse of a partner in a social setting, 2017**



Note: Percentages may vary from totals due to rounding and do not add to 100% due to a small proportion of respondents that did not respond to the question.

\*\* Asked of a quarter of the sample.

17 The term 'promising' is used in this context because more research and evaluation are required to explore whether positive change achieved through bystander programs in the short term are sustained. There has also been some debate in the literature about the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary bystander programs. For further discussion, see DeKeseredy (2018) and contributions to the December 2018 issue of *Violence Against Women* (Volume 24, Issue 15).



#### Box 4-9: Key findings Bystander intentions

- Most young people say they would act or like to act when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women.
- Nearly all young people (97%) would be bothered if they heard a male friend insulting or verbally abusing his partner.
- Young men (36%) are three times more likely than young women (12%) to *not* be bothered if a male friend told a sexist joke (data not shown).
- Young men (76%) are more likely than young women (64%) to believe that they would have the support of all or most of their friends to act when witnessing verbal abuse (data not shown).
- Young women (49%) are nearly twice as likely as young men (26%) to say they would act if they heard a male friend telling a sexist joke (data not shown).
- Young people appear to underestimate the support they are likely to receive from their friends (i.e. more people said they would be bothered than those who felt they would have the support of all or most of their friends if they acted to express disapproval).

There's this culture where you're trying to get the likes, the attention and recognition from people, so if you speak up and say something there's that risk that you will be isolated or people will say things behind your back.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

### Are there differences between young Australians and older Australians?

In the sections above, any differences between people aged 16-24 years and people aged 25-64 years and over were noted for *each individual question*. There are no significant differences between the cohorts in each of the individual questions gauging bystander intentions, and only a small number of differences between the cohorts in questions gauging knowledge and attitudes meet the thresholds for significance and effect used in this report. However, where these occurred, they indicated that young people had a lower level of understanding, a lower level of support for gender equality and a higher level of support for violence against women than people aged 25-64 years.

Differences between these two age cohorts, as well as people aged 65 years and over, were explored at the composite level (Figure 4-8 to 4-11). This is done by comparing the proportion of people in each age cohort in the higher and lower categories of understanding, attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality and intention to act as a bystander. It was found that:

- Young people are more likely to have a low understanding of violence against women compared to those aged 25-64 years and 65 years plus.
- Young people are more likely than those aged 65 years plus to support gender equality, and have a similar level of support to those aged 25-64 years.
- Young people are less likely than those aged 65 years plus to endorse attitudes supportive of violence against women. They have a similar level of support to those aged 25-64 years.
- Young people are less likely than people aged 25-64 years to have a high intention to act as a bystander.



Figure 4-8: Understanding attitudes towards violence against women by age cohort (UVAWS), 2017 (%)

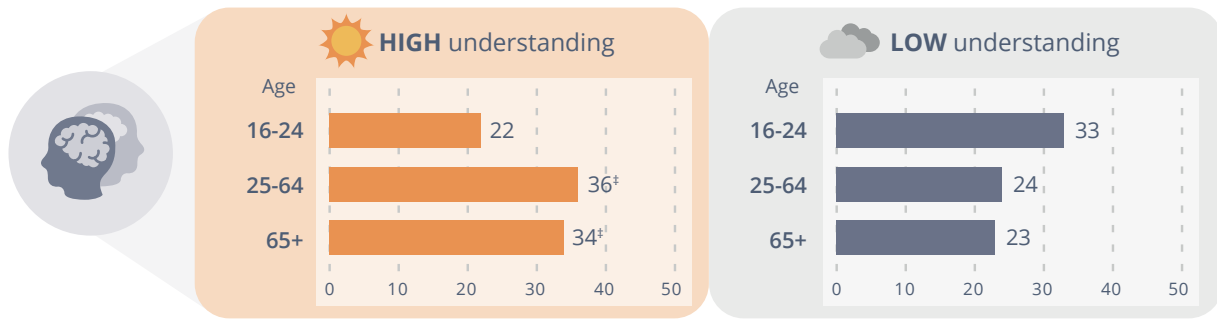


Figure 4-9: Support for gender equality by age cohort (GEAS), 2017 (%)

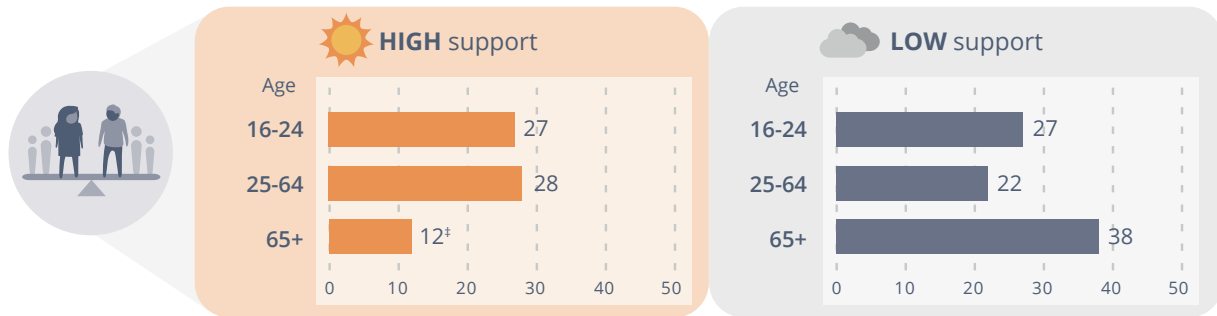


Figure 4-10: Endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women by age cohort (CASVAWS), 2017 (%)

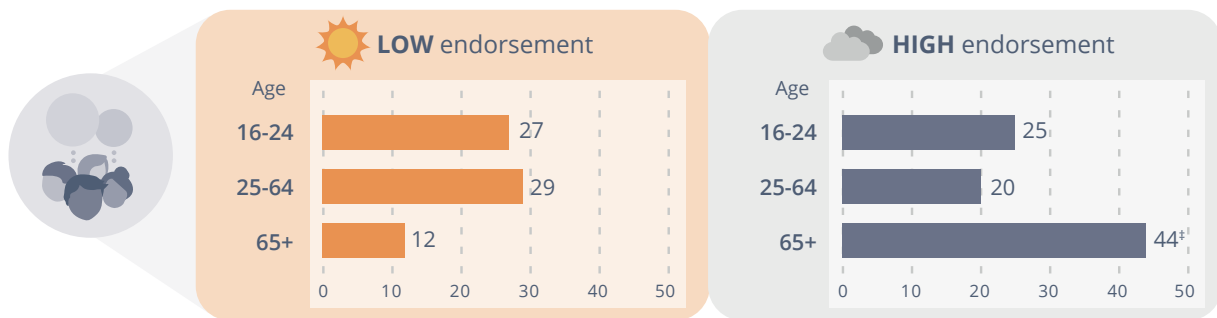
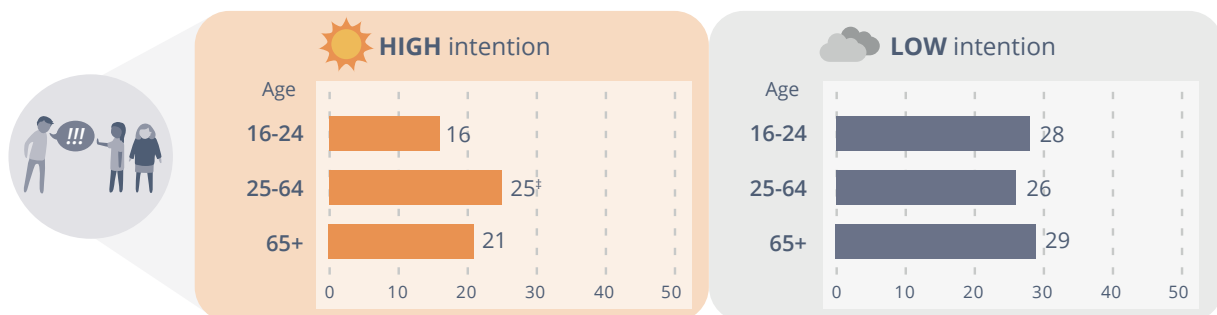


Figure 4-11: Intention to act by age cohort\*\* (ITA), 2017 (%)



16-24 years (n=1,761) 25-64 years (n=10,810) 65+ years (n=5,162)

‡ Difference between this age group and those aged 16-24 years is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$  and reaches the 0.2 Cohen's threshold.

\*\* Asked of a quarter of the sample.

## Demographic factors influencing young people's understanding and attitudes

The previous sections of this chapter explore knowledge and attitudes among young people, along with differences between young men and young women and between young people and people aged 25-64 years. This section examines differences between young people in particular groups and contexts. This is done by comparing the proportion of young people with different demographic characteristics in the higher and lower categories of understanding, attitudinal support for violence and gender equality, and intention to act as a bystander. This information is useful because it can help to assess whether efforts to prevent violence against women need to be targeted to particular groups.

Differences are reported for factors listed in the NCAS Questionnaire Framework that are relevant to young people and where sample sizes were sufficient to do so (i.e. sufficient to enable base sizes of 30 or more for each variable being compared).

This included comparing respondents aged 16-24 years by:

- age (in three categories, 16-17 years, 18-20 years, 21-24 years). This was included to investigate the extent of change in attitudes with age *among* young people;
- occupation of the main income earner in their household, as an indicator of socio-economic status;
- whether they are employed or unemployed;
- whether they live in a capital city or elsewhere;
- the gender composition of their social network – this measure was included on the basis of prior research showing that attitudes supportive of violence against women and gender equality are more likely to be found in male-dominated social networks (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013);
- the type of household they live in – whether they live in a group household or with a partner or others or whether they live alone; and
- area disadvantage.<sup>18</sup>



### Box 4-10: Key findings

#### Demographic factors influencing young people

There are no differences between young people on the basis of whether they live in a capital city or elsewhere and whether they are unemployed. On the remaining measures, demographic differences in knowledge and attitudes were generally modest and varied across the composite measures.

**Age:** young people aged 21-24 years were more likely than those aged 18-20 years to have a low level of endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women.

**Occupation of the main income earner in the household:** there is some variability by occupation, but the overall pattern suggests a difference on the basis of both skill and gender composition, with favourable findings more likely among young people in households in which the main income earner is in a high-skilled and/or female-dominated occupation.<sup>19</sup>

Specifically, young people in households in which the main income earner is in a:

- technical or trade occupation are more likely to have low understanding of violence against women than those in clerical and administrative<sup>Δ</sup> occupations;
- labouring<sup>Δ</sup> or technical or trade occupation are more likely to have a lower level of support for gender equality than those in households in which the main income earner is in a professional occupation;
- clerical occupation<sup>Δ</sup> are less likely to have a low level of support for gender equality than young people in households in which the main income earner is a labourer,<sup>Δ</sup> while those in households in which the main income earner is a sales worker<sup>Δ</sup> are more likely to be classified as having a high level of support for gender equality than those in households in which the main income earner is a technical or trades worker;
- clerical and administrative,<sup>Δ</sup> sales<sup>Δ</sup> or professional occupation are more likely to have lower endorsement

of attitudes supportive of violence against women than those where the main income earner was working in a technical, trade or labouring<sup>Δ</sup> occupation;

- professional occupation are more likely to have a low level of endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women than those in households in which the main income earner is a community services worker,<sup>Δ</sup> and
- labouring<sup>Δ</sup> occupation are more likely to be classified as having a high level of endorsement of attitudes supporting violence against women than those in households in which the main income earner is in a managerial,<sup>Δ</sup> professional, or clerical<sup>Δ</sup> occupation.

**Gender composition of social network:** young women with mainly or totally<sup>Δ</sup> male friends are more likely to have a low understanding of violence against women compared to young women with gender equal peer networks, or those with mainly or totally female friends.

Both young men and young women<sup>Δ</sup> with mainly or totally male friends are more likely to have a low level of support for gender equality compared to young women with mainly or totally female friends.

Young men and young women<sup>Δ</sup> with gender equal social networks are more likely to have a high intention to act than men with mainly male friends.<sup>Δ</sup>

**Household type:** young people living alone are more likely to be classified as having low support for gender equality and a high level of endorsement of attitudes supporting violence against women than those living with others.

**Area disadvantage:** compared with young people in the most advantaged areas, young people in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to be classified as having a high level of support for violence against women and a low level of support for gender equality.

<sup>Δ</sup> Results to be treated with caution because they are based on a small number of responses (i.e. between 30 and 100). See 'Approach to analysis' for further explanation.

<sup>18</sup> This was measured using the Socioeconomic Index for Areas score developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This index summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, including both relative advantage and disadvantage measures. Quintiles have been used, with a low score indicating most disadvantaged and a high score indicating most advantaged. This index takes into account area-based factors such as occupational status, educational attainment, home ownership, employment status, jobless households, disability status and the proportion of lone parent households.

<sup>19</sup> See Section 12 of the NCAS main report (Webster et al., 2018a) on the ANROWS website for further discussion and data on the gender composition of Australian occupations.



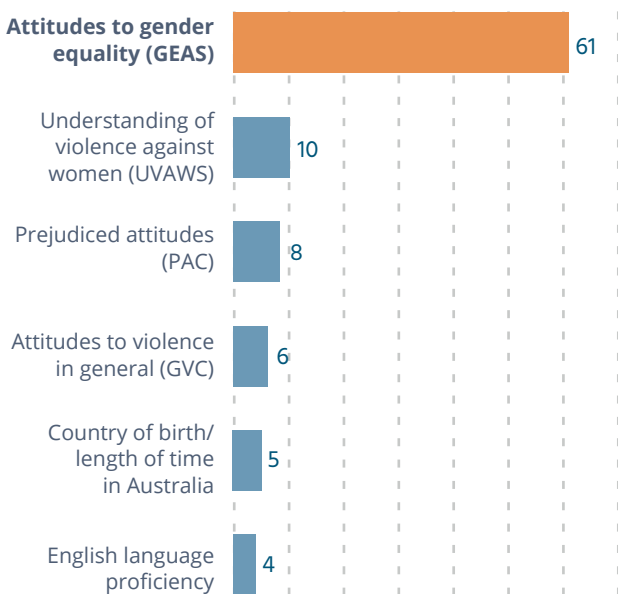
## Predictors of attitudinal support for violence against women

A statistical technique (multiple linear regression analysis) was used to assess which factors measured in the 2017 NCAS are the strongest predictors of attitudinal support for violence against women among young people. This technique measures the strength of influence of each factor after the influence of other factors has been taken into account. All the demographic, contextual and attitudinal factors in the survey were included in the analysis.

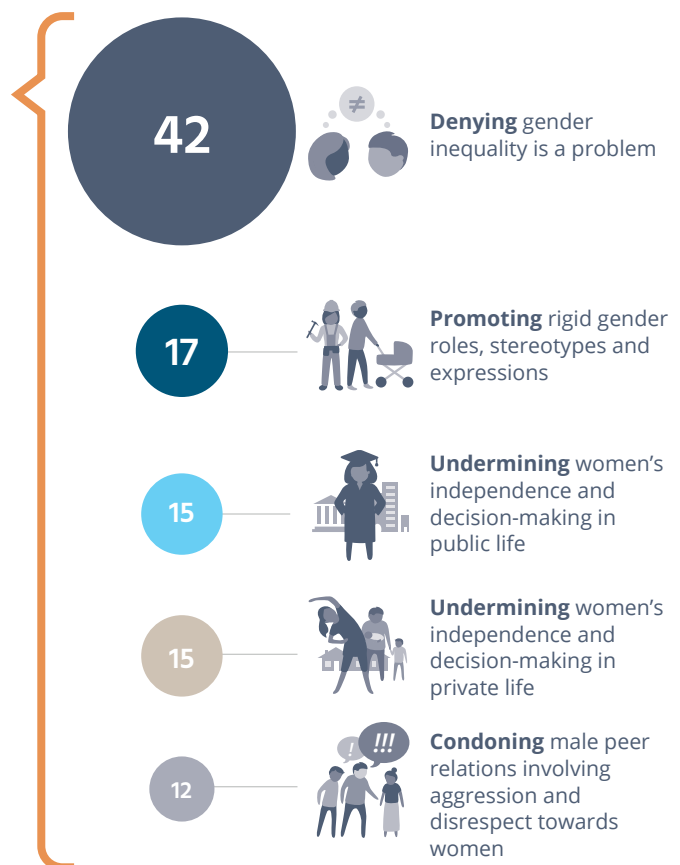
Figure 4-12a shows the six strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women among young people. Having a low level of support for gender equality is the strongest predictor of attitudinal support for violence, followed by having a low level of understanding of violence against women, holding prejudicial attitudes towards people based on other attributes, and having a high level of support for violence in general. Demographic factors are relatively weaker predictors of attitudes towards violence against women among young people. However, of the demographic factors, country of birth/length of time in Australia and English language proficiency are the two strongest demographic predictors of attitudes towards violence against women.<sup>20</sup>

The analysis also investigated the extent to which attitudes in each of the gender equality themes predict whether young people hold attitudes supportive of violence against women. Attitudes 'Denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'Promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions' have the first- and second-strongest influence on attitudes towards violence against women, after the influence of the other themes was taken into account (Figure 4-12b).

**Figure 4-12a: Top 6 predictors of attitudinal support for violence among respondents aged 16-24 years, 2017<sup>§</sup>**



**Figure 4-12b: Influence of gender equality themes in predicting attitudinal support for violence<sup>¶</sup>**



<sup>§</sup> These figures are expressed as a percentage of the variance explained by the model. The percentage of variance explained by the model overall is 59%. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>¶</sup> These figures are expressed as a percentage of the variance explained by the model. The percentage of variance explained by the model overall is 54%. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>20</sup> Attitudes among people from non-English speaking backgrounds are explored in a separate report: *Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among people from non-English speaking countries: Findings from the 2017 NCAS* (Webster et al., 2019).

# 5 Conclusion

## The findings: Factors to keep in mind

The 2017 NCAS was developed, implemented and analysed using rigorous, well-accepted methods and procedures. It has a large sample size and includes both mobile and landline interviewing. This helps ensure the sample is as diverse and representative as possible. As a periodic survey, the NCAS is able to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes over time. However, as is the case with all research, the NCAS has some limitations, as follows:

- Well-established statistical modelling was used to investigate some of the more complex questions. As with any statistical modelling, some assumptions were made (e.g. in measuring change over time at the overall level as described in the introduction to Chapter 4).
- Although cognitive testing of the questions was undertaken to be sure they were well understood, responses to surveys on complex social issues can be influenced by language proficiency or cultural differences. Some people may give an answer based on what they believe is socially acceptable, rather than what they really think.
- When a relationship is found between two variables (e.g. attitudes and education), it is important to be aware that this does not necessarily mean that one causes the other. The relationship could be the other way around, the factors may influence each other, or there may be a third factor that is common to both but not included in the study.
- A range of factors can distort results when survey researchers and participants do not share a common social experience.

It is not possible to reach everyone contacted by the randomly generated telephone numbers. Approximately half (49%) of those reached agreed to participate. The technical term for this is the 'cooperation rate'. The response rate is a more exacting standard and takes into account all randomly generated numbers that were called and could have resulted in an interview.<sup>21</sup> That is, it includes all numbers that were never answered, not just those where someone answered. The response rate for the NCAS was 17 percent. This is comparable, if not better than, other similar surveys across the world (Dutwin & Lavrakas, 2016; Keeter, Hatley, Kennedy, & Lau, 2017; Kohut, Keeter, Doherty, Dimock, & Christian, 2012; Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005; Shih & Fan, 2008). Response rates are challenging to interpret in a rapidly changing telecommunications era where many people screen unknown phone numbers and never answer the calls made. Sample weighting was used to correct the impact of any known imbalances in the sample.

A further consideration is the high threshold used in all NCAS reports to identify results that are statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). The high threshold is likely to have had minimal impact on comparisons between the two age cohorts, where the differences were very small and the sample sizes were sufficient. However, a high threshold has a particular impact when sample sizes are small. Many of the differences evident in the tables and figures may be statistically significant at lower threshold of  $p \leq 0.05$ , which is generally used in social science reporting.

As noted above, the findings in 2017 are similar to those in 2013, although in contrast to the 2013 study, no variation was found between the younger and older cohort in the composite measure of attitudes towards violence against women. Direct comparisons cannot be made between these findings because:

- The older cohort used in 2017 (25-64 years) was different from that used in 2013 reporting (35-64 years). This was for reasons described on page 14.
- In 2017 a more stringent approach was used to report differences between groups across all NCAS reports. In 2013 results were reported if they were statistically significant, whereas in 2017 only results that were significant and substantial in size (measured via Cohen's test of effect size) were reported. In 2017 the difference between the younger and older cohorts in the proportion with low support for gender equality and high endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women were statistically significant. However, since they did not meet the effect size threshold (i.e. the test showed that the difference was negligible) they are not reported as findings.

More information and methodological details can be found in the NCAS methodology report (Webster et al., 2018b) on the ANROWS website.

<sup>21</sup> The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR, 2016) holds the industry standard for calculating response rates and is the formula used for this study. There are four possible AAPOR response rates that can be used to measure the performance of a project. The AAPOR3 calculation is used in the NCAS, consistent with previous years.

## Implications for policy and practice

Attitudes are one way to measure progress in addressing the factors leading to violence against women. Results for the community as a whole reported elsewhere (ANROWS, 2018; Webster et al., 2018a) show positive changes in people's understanding of violence against women, attitudes to gender equality and attitudes to violence against women. The findings in this report show that this is also the case for young Australians. This suggests that Australia is 'on track' to achieving positive changes in factors contributing to violence against women. Nevertheless, a sizeable minority of young Australians hold attitudes that contribute to violence against women. Further, as there has yet to be a reduction in this violence itself (ABS, 2017b), continued effort is needed.

Although some theorists predict that younger people will have more liberal attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality than those in the older cohort (people aged 25-64), this was not found to be the case. Indeed, no differences between the two age cohorts on either the measure of attitudes to gender equality or of attitudes towards violence against women met the thresholds for statistical significance and effect size used in this report. When significant differences were found between the two age cohorts for individual questions, in all instances young people were more likely than those in the cohort of people aged 25-64 years to give less favourable responses.

### A multi-level, multi-strategy approach

A range of factors influence violence against women, not just attitudes (for a review of these factors, see Webster & Flood, 2015). Further, attitudes themselves are shaped by influences in people's day-to-day environments (Pease & Flood, 2009). Action to address these influences will be needed to change attitudes and behaviours. Recognising this, expert bodies propose an approach that incorporates multiple strategies, implemented across different sectors and settings and targeted to individuals and families, as well as communities, organisations and society-wide institutions (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Heise, 1998; Michau et al., 2015; Our Watch, ANROWS, & VicHealth, 2015; VicHealth, 2007; 2011; 2017b; UN Women, 2015; WHO, 2002). Plans for implementing such an approach and supporting primary prevention of violence against women can be found in the *National Plan* (COAG, 2011) and its successive Action Plans (Australian Department of Social Services, 2014; 2016) and in the *Change the story* framework (Our Watch et al., 2015).

Young people's attitudes and experiences are shaped by the world they encounter in their families, communities and institutions such as schools and universities. This means that preventing violence perpetrated or experienced by young people requires a two-fold approach. As well as addressing norms and practices among young people themselves, attention needs to be given to norms, structures and practices in the wider community and environments that influence young people's attitudes and experiences.

You can't be tackling sexism and disrespect from one angle, it has to come from the media, from other people, from different avenues.

I could be in the locker room with a friend and say I don't agree with something. I have a sit down, talk to them and say, "Hey, this is how I feel". But then we could go out into the field and our own coach is saying, "Stop playing like a freaking girl..." and then it's just like "man I had a work in progress dude and you're ruining it!"

– R4Respect youth ambassador

### The context for young people

The NCAS can tell us what attitudes people hold, but not why they hold them or why they are changing. However, it does provide some clues. Overall, the findings for young Australians are very similar to those found among Australians of other ages. This suggests that many of the factors influencing attitudes in the community as a whole also influence those of young Australians. For this reason, many of the implications discussed in the report of the NCAS findings for the community as a whole (Webster et al., 2018a) are also likely to be relevant to young people.

Nevertheless, a particular focus on young people and environments influencing their attitudes towards, and experiences of, violence is warranted, given:

- overall, that young people have a lower level of understanding of violence against women;
- that young people's attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality are not more positive than people older than them, as would be expected based on some theories;
- the prevalence of violence among young women relative to other age groups;
- the likelihood (based on international research) that the risk of men perpetrating violence against women is higher when men are young (Fulu et al., 2013);
- the far-reaching implications of traumatic experiences occurring in adolescence and early adulthood;
- the potential to support young people to establish positive gender expressions and safe and respectful relationships that will have enduring benefits into adulthood; and
- That there are a number of factors influencing attitudes that may particularly affect young people (e.g. young people's high level of media exposure).

It is important that efforts to prevent violence against women among young people are framed with their particular social experiences in mind. Research indicates that young people prefer strategies that are less 'top-down passive learning' and more action-based, interactive and peer-to-peer (Noonan & Charles, 2009; Weisz & Black, 2013; Wyn & White, 2013). Benefits are likely to be achieved through a focus on particular settings influencing young people's attitudes and practices, including:

- educational settings, especially schools (Flood et al., 2009; Gleeson et al., 2015);
- sports and active recreation settings (Dyson & Flood, 2007);
- media and popular culture (Keith, 2013; Squires et al., 2006), in particular social media (APA, 2010; Crabbe & Corlett, 2011; Draper, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010; Phippen, 2009);
- the family (APA, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2010); and
- peer contexts.

## Priority issues

In prioritising effort to strengthen knowledge, attitudes and bystander intentions<sup>22</sup> among young people, there would be benefits in:

- Addressing the gaps in knowledge of violence against women, particularly in relation to help seeking, the gendered nature and dynamic of partner violence, and the greater risk of violence by a known person than a stranger. As indicated above, the survey cannot tell us why people hold certain attitudes. More research would be required. One possible reason for the decline in knowledge of the greater impact that partner violence has on women than men (see Figure 4-2) is people believing that improvements in gender equality mean that men and women are now equal. This may lead to the mistaken belief that men and women are now equally likely to be victims of domestic violence, and that the impacts of this violence are the same for both men and women.
- Addressing all aspects of gender equality, with a focus on challenging rigid gender roles and identities and the idea that gender equality is no longer a problem. The latter is especially important because, among the five gender inequality themes, it was the strongest predictor of attitudes towards violence against women. Further, attitudes in this theme are also the most widely held among young people.
- Placing greater emphasis on achieving gender equality in the

It's a lot easier to say we see women and men as equal – that we'll tick a quota box – but then in those other private aspects it's much harder. I feel like the private things are hard to change.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

private sphere, such as in intimate relationships, the sexual double standard and the division of household labour.

- Promoting attitudes that foster a mutually respectful approach to gender relations and challenge the idea that women lie about violence or use violence as a way to gain tactical advantage over men.
- Addressing barriers to bystander action by informing young people that they are likely to be supported by more of their friends than they might think, by strengthening their knowledge and attitudes, and by focusing on young people who would like to act but say that they would not know how.

## Strengthening support for gender equality

As discussed in the introduction to this report, many factors influence attitudes towards violence against women and these fall into three clusters, including factors associated with gender, the use of violence as a practice, and other conditions that intersect or interact with gender and violence to shape or magnify their influence. Strengthening attitudes among young people will involve attending to this range of influences.

Among the influences explored in this study, the strongest predictors of young people holding attitudes supportive of violence against women, in order of influence, are having a low level of support for gender equality, having a low level of understanding of violence against women, holding prejudicial attitudes towards people on the basis of other attributes and having a high level of support for the use of violence in general. This suggests that these attitudes, and the norms, structures and practices supporting them, should have greater emphasis in prevention than demographic factors such as a person's age or gender.

The influence of attitudes to gender equality on attitudes to violence against women supports the recommendation of expert bodies that a gender transformative approach is needed (WHO, 2013). This approach is one that promotes equal and respectful relationships between men and women as key to reducing this violence. There are likely to be benefits in integrating means to address other forms of prejudice and discrimination in prevention efforts, as well as challenging the use of violence as a practice. Given evidence from other research – that people who witness or experience interpersonal violence are more likely to hold attitudes supportive of violence against women – there is also a need for strategies to reduce children and young people's exposure to interpersonal violence.

## A whole of community approach and targeting

The fact that there are relatively small differences between young people based on their demographic characteristics suggests the need for prevention strategies that reach all young people. However, the survey suggests some grounds for targeting:

- young men and boys;
- young people in male-dominated social contexts; and
- young people experiencing disadvantage, including those living alone.

The NCAS findings provide some cause for optimism, although certainly not for complacency. Although the composite measures show that understanding and attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among young people are tracking in the direction of positive change overall, areas investigated in the NCAS raise cause for concern. The findings in this report will be useful to identify and address these areas with the aim of building cultures of safety, respect and equality for all Australians.

There is a large group of guys out there I think who feel like women do owe them, so they really victim blame a lot. I think it's pretty normal.

– R4Respect youth ambassador

22 Noting the scope, strengths and limitations of bystander approaches as discussed in 'Bystander action' in Chapter 4.





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