

ANROWS

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

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Committee Secretary
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: family.violence.reps@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

Dear Chair

ANROWS would like to thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs for the invitation to assist this Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, and through it, help to shape Australia's next plan for reducing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is an independent, not-for-profit company established as an initiative under Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). Our primary function is to provide an accessible evidence base for developments in policy and practice design for prevention and response to violence against women, nationally. Every aspect of our work is motivated by the right of women and their children to live free from violence and in safe communities. We recognise, respect and respond to diversity among women and their children, and we are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

ANROWS's primary (core) funding is jointly provided by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia, which are the members of the company. ANROWS is also, from time to time, directly commissioned to undertake work for an individual jurisdiction, and successfully tenders for research and evaluation work. ANROWS is registered as a harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient, governed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC).

Our response to the Terms of Reference applies relevant research evidence. We would be very pleased to assist the Committee further, as required.

Yours sincerely



Dr Heather Nancarrow
Chief Executive Officer

14 August 2020

Summary of recommendations

a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality

RECOMMENDATION 1: The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), implemented by ANROWS, is a key mechanism for monitoring progress and informing strategies to reduce violence against women and their children. The NCAS found successful measures need to address Australians' mistrust of women's reports of sexual violence, and improve young people's understandings of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships, but this population survey is not currently funded beyond 2022. Funding for the NCAS beyond 2022 is recommended to enable continued tracking against National Plan goals, and to facilitate continued improvement in policy and programs aiming to reduce and prevent violence against women and their children.

b) Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention and response that could be considered in an Australian context

RECOMMENDATION 2: Informed by the national and international evidence, ANROWS's "What Works" framework will provide tools to assist with assessing the value of family, domestic and sexual violence initiatives. It should be used to select best practice interventions for the Australian context.

c) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest in service systems' capacity and capability to overcome the challenges of integration and barriers to collaboration. Funding bodies, policymakers, managers and practitioners can facilitate strong cross-sector collaboration by enabling the development of infrastructure which supports integration, and building the capacity of services to coordinate responses across sectors and between services. For specific recommendations on how this should occur, see *Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence* (ANROWS, in press). Ensure a nationally coordinated response to key issues affecting all women experiencing violence to help address gaps and barriers to receiving support. Measurable goals and clearly defined roles will increase accountability for all states and territories, and shape the success of coordinated approaches to reduce and prevent violence against women and their children.

d) The way that health, housing, access to services, including legal services, and women's economic independence impact on the ability of women to escape domestic violence

RECOMMENDATION 4: ANROWS research has consistently shown that enabling women to escape domestic violence requires supports and policies that promote secure housing, financial stability, and access to health and other services. For specific recommendations on these areas, see the ANROWS syntheses *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness* (2nd ed.; ANROWS, 2019f) and *Violence against women and mental health* (ANROWS, 2020d), and the issues paper *Researching the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence* (ANROWS, 2019b).

e) All forms of violence against women, including but not limited to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse

RECOMMENDATION 5: ANROWS research has identified that Australians have a poorer understanding of non-physical tactics of violence against women, as compared to physical tactics. Ensure the next National Plan covers under-addressed tactics and forms of violence, including coercive control, systems abuse, financial abuse, repeated violence, exposure to violence in childhood, and sexual violence. ANROWS research demonstrates that inequalities related to gender, race, class, disability and sexuality, for example, underpin vulnerability to domestic and family violence and sexual abuse, and the capacity to be free of it. Therefore, addressing each of these tactics and forms of violence must be done with an understanding of those inequalities.

f) The adequacy of the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely qualitative and quantitative data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing

RECOMMENDATION 6: As Australia's only national research organisation dedicated to women's safety, ANROWS has a key role in identifying and addressing research gaps and guiding priority focus for research and data collection. The ANROWS-developed *Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (ANRA) will be used to identify existing gaps and guide priority focus for research and data collection. The process for developing ANRA revealed there is an urgent need for better evaluation data to assess the effectiveness of current service responses and prevention activities. That is, all program funding must include a standard evaluation component to enable future systematic reviews to identify "what works". The ANRA also shows the need for more robust national data, including longitudinal data, to demonstrate the experiences and impacts of violence against women across the lifespan. To achieve this, funding longer-term research that goes beyond the length of the next National Plan is essential.

g) The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour

RECOMMENDATION 7: Perpetrator interventions are a very important part of the overall response to violence against women and their children. ANROWS research demonstrates there are emerging areas of good practice in perpetrator interventions, but recommends further research in this area. Perpetrator interventions should be tailored to include effective evaluation mechanisms. Evaluation mechanisms must stem beyond simply measuring recidivism, to utilising partner contact to assess how well the intervention prioritises the safety of women and children. For specific recommendations, see Chung, Anderson, Green, and Vlasis (2020), ANROWS's summary of Chung, Upton-Davis, and colleagues (ANROWS, 2020f), the full report (Chung, Upton-Davis, et al., 2020) and ANROWS's forthcoming synthesis on its Perpetrator Intervention Research Stream, available in late 2020.

h) The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTIQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas

RECOMMENDATION 8: ANROWS research suggests that particular support is still needed for historically vulnerable populations who experience multiple and simultaneous forms of disadvantage,

including culturally and linguistically diverse women, migrant women, geographically isolated women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability and sex and gender diverse women. Our evidence suggests that addressing this inequality requires a system-wide, whole-of-government approach across all policy areas, which recognises the wide-ranging impacts of violence on women and their children (e.g. housing, income support, health, education). While policy and responses specific to violence against women are needed, these efforts may be thwarted by a lack of coordinated response across services, and a lack of attention to the specific supports required for women from historically vulnerable populations.

i) The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services

RECOMMENDATION 9: We recommend specific measures to address the impact of COVID-19 and related restrictions:

- i. Increased access to alternatives to phone calls for support, such as webchat, which must be accessible for women with disability, or groups that need in-language service provision.
- ii. Consideration of maintaining and expanding the COVID-19 court lists, and incorporating them into an integrated response to parents in court where there are, or have been, experiences of domestic, family or sexual violence.
- iii. Expanding the number of Telehealth bulk billing sessions for sexual/reproductive health and mental health care.
- iv. A Commonwealth-led gender-responsive national housing strategy.

j) The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time

RECOMMENDATION 10: Responding to the specific impact of COVID-19 and related restrictions is imperative. However, the next National Plan should balance these crisis responses with longer term prevention and response measures that incorporate the voices of frontline services and research evidence, work to improve the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and develop effective evaluation mechanisms. This balance will ensure agile responses to immediate needs while still laying strong foundations for ongoing and sustainable change.

l) Any other related matters

RECOMMENDATION 11: Co-design the next National Plan in consultation with ANROWS and other organisations with relevant expertise (see Our Watch submission). Ensure ANROWS is resourced properly for the life of the National Plan, to ensure national leadership on the development of evidence to support policy and practice design for prevention of and response to violence against women and their children. Invest in contemporary policy needs identified through *Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (ANRA) and the "What Works" framework.

Response to terms of reference

Introduction

Established under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan), ANROWS has been in operation since July 2013 (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2019). It is jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments. The Commonwealth Government contributes half of ANROWS’s core funding, with the cost share for each state or territory calculated on a per capita basis, making up the other half. We have recently entered into a third Core Grant Agreement tied to the life of the current National Plan: that is, the current Funding Agreement is for the two-year period 1 July 2020–30 June 2022, providing \$3.4 million per annum.

In addition, ANROWS is leading two Australian Government Department of Social Services-funded research programs: the 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (\$4.3 million) that measures changes over time in Australians’ attitudes towards violence against women, and the Fourth Action Plan (4AP) Research Program (\$5.6 million). The purpose of the 4AP program of research is to continue to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice to address violence against women and their children.

As part of this dedicated research stream, ANROWS will focus on providing an evidence base for “What Works” when responding to family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) within policy and practice settings. This will involve the production of a “What Works” framework that will support assessment of the overall value of FDSV initiatives by capturing assessments of both the cost of an intervention, and the impact it has on reducing FDSV. This framework will assist in informing future reviews of existing research, and help to shape decisions about what research needs to be commissioned to ensure that practitioners and policymakers have evidence-based information that balances cost and inputs with outcomes. This work is expected to be completed in June 2022, and will provide a strong evidence base for policy and practice from the commencement of the new National Plan.

Drawing from our prior core research, the 2017 NCAS, and the work of others, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), ANROWS holds the evidence from which to build a new National Plan. To assist the Committee’s work we have addressed each of the terms of reference with a brief precis of relevant research, planned future research with an indication of when the research will be completed, and a broad recommendation that we would be happy to expand upon as required.

a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality

ANROWS is uniquely placed to provide information and recommendations on attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality through its implementation of the NCAS. The NCAS is a

population survey conducted approximately every four years to monitor the Australian community's understanding of violence against women, their attitudes to gender equality and violence against women, and the factors underlying community knowledge and attitudes. The NCAS is a key mechanism for monitoring progress against the National Plan, and hence, a key means of informing programs to prevent violence and to improve gender equality. Past results of this survey orientate us to key concerns where efforts can be focused in the future, as outlined below. Future waves of the NCAS will continue to chart progress, but also highlight the areas where our continued efforts need to be focused.

The NCAS is a large-scale survey conducted via telephone, and is the world's longest running population survey of community knowledge and attitudes regarding violence against women. The multi-wave nature of the survey allows time-series comparisons to be made going back as far as 1995 for some survey items. The most recent NCAS was conducted in 2017. Preparation is underway for the next NCAS to go into the field in 2021, with the main report due for publication in late 2022.

The 2021 NCAS will report on results for both the Australian population as a whole, and three demographic groups of interest:

- young people (aged 16 to 24 years)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people born in non-main English speaking countries (N-MESC).

These demographic groups were also a focus of detailed reports in 2017.

The NCAS reports on the following:

- individual survey items which have been included in the NCAS over multiple waves
- psychometric scales or groups of items measuring key concepts. These scales were developed in 2017 and provide overall scores for individuals on the following concepts:
 - Understanding Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS)
 - Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS)
 - Community Attitudes Supportive of Violence against Women Scale (CASVAWS)
- psychometric sub-scales or themes. The above scales have also been split into sub-scales which measure key themes within each scale (using confirmatory factor analysis). The themes group certain items together and provide a more detailed understanding of the knowledge and attitudes of respondents
- other factors and attitudes that may be relevant (e.g. attitudes on general violence, prejudice and bystander interventions)
- key demographic groups, allowing a deeper understanding of individual factors related to knowledge and attitudes and whether these vary across the population
- changes over time on the scales and other items to assess whether knowledge and attitudes are improving.

Why measuring attitudes is fundamental to preventing violence against women and improving gender equality

Research has found that high levels of gender inequality create environments that increase the likelihood and acceptance of violence against women both occurring and continuing (World Health

Organization, 2010). Violence against women is no longer understood as being solely the result of an individual's characteristics or pre-disposition to violence. Rather, approaches to understanding violence and the development of prevention models are focused on recognising that violence against women is a result of an interplay between individual, community and organisational influences as well as broader social influences such as media, laws, social norms and beliefs (Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015). Attitudes play a crucial role not just in understanding why people may engage in violence, but also in understanding the social environments where violence against women is accepted and excused. The NCAS allows us to measure and benchmark community attitudes.

Understanding and benchmarking attitudes held in the community about gender equality and violence against women assists with targeting education and prevention programs. The 2017 NCAS results show that although knowledge and attitudes are positive overall and improving, there are still some key areas of concern.

What past research tells us about attitudes towards gender equality: The 2017 NCAS

Attitudes towards gender equality were measured via 17 items. These were split into five themes measuring different aspects of gender equality:

1. rejecting male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women
2. rejecting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions
3. promoting women's independence and decision-making in public life
4. promoting women's independence and decision-making in private life
5. recognising gender inequality is a problem.

Looking at mean scores for each theme, the Australian community had similar and quite high levels of attitudinal support for the first three themes: rejecting aggression and disrespect (79%), rejecting rigid gender roles (79%) and promoting women's independence in public life (75%). Scores were lower for the last two themes: promoting women's independence in private life (74%) and recognising gender inequality is a problem (58%). The NCAS results therefore pinpoint particular areas where community attitudes towards gender equality could be improved.

What past research tells us about attitudes towards violence against women: The 2017 NCAS

Attitudes towards violence against women were measured via 35 items. These were split into four themes measuring different aspects of violence against women:

1. mistrusting women's reports of violence
2. disregarding the need to gain consent
3. minimising violence against women
4. excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible.

On the CASVAWS, higher scores were associated with attitudes that endorsed violence against women. The theme with the highest mean score (i.e. highest levels of endorsement) was theme one:

mistrusting women's reports of violence (35%). This high level of mistrust is incongruous with the evidence that women rarely make false reports of experiencing sexual assault: the rate of false allegations of sexual assault is around 5 percent (Australian Institute of Family Studies & Victoria Police, 2017). Thus, the NCAS highlights the potential usefulness of education programs to address this community mistrust.

The three other themes measured by the CASVAWS had somewhat lower levels of endorsement: disregarding need for consent (26%), minimising violence against women (25%) and excusing the perpetrator (22%). Nonetheless, the NCAS indicates that there is still room for improvement in these community attitudes.

Deepening our understanding of concerning NCAS results to inform policy and program development

In addition to the 2021 NCAS population survey, ANROWS is undertaking two qualitative research studies with the aim of improving in-depth understanding of the nature of the concerning results revealed in the 2017 survey, and further informing continued policy and program development towards the prevention of violence against women. These two qualitative research studies are due to be published in 2021 and will investigate the following:

- Australians' mistrust of women's reports of sexual violence.
- Young people's understandings of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships.

Both studies will involve focus groups with members of the Australian community (60–80 participants each) and are further described below.

Investigating Australians' mistrust of women's reports of sexual violence

The 2017 NCAS revealed high levels of mistrust of women's reports of sexual assault in some contexts. The proportion of respondents mistrusting women's reports of violence varied considerably depending on the wording and context provided in the question, from 6 to 42 percent (Webster et al., 2018). To investigate these findings, this study will use qualitative methods to explore the reasoning behind people's mistrust of women's reports of sexual violence. The study will explore the influence of three key factors on levels of trust:

- the perceived motives of the woman making the report
- knowing the accused or being able to relate to the accused
- positive reports about the accused.

Community and individual attitudes that express mistrust in women's reports of sexual assault victimisation are fairly common, but are out of step with research that indicates that a very small number of such allegations are untrue. These attitudes can adversely affect whether women report this violence and seek help, as well as their treatment through the criminal justice system. The fear of not being believed by police, friends and/or family is a key factor in women's decisions about whether to report violence to authorities or seek the support of human services (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010). An understanding of what drives attitudes of mistrust is crucial in debunking myths about sexual assault and broader rape myths.

“Investigating Australians’ mistrust of women’s reports of sexual violence” will provide a greater understanding of the attitudes and factors that shape understandings and responses to women’s reports of sexual violence. The findings from this research will assist with targeting the content of community education campaigns to promote greater trust of women’s reports (in line with the evidence). It will also assist in identifying and removing barriers faced by women in deciding to report sexual assault. The research will assist in meeting the outcomes contained within the National Plan (COAG, 2011).

Young people’s understandings of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships

The 2017 NCAS revealed key areas of concern around young people’s knowledge and attitudes regarding violence in intimate relationships, particularly when compared to respondents aged 25–64 years. The levels of understanding among young males also tended to be even lower than those of young females, highlighting an additional area of concern. In particular, young people’s understanding of both the non-physical forms of violence against women (e.g. control, harassment) and their knowledge of the prevalence of violence against women in Australia was lower than that of 25–64 year olds (Politoff et al., 2019, p. 19; c.f. unpublished NCAS data). Additionally, young people’s knowledge of the gendered pattern of intimate partner violence was also lower than that of 25–64 year olds. That is, young people were less likely to recognise both that men are more likely to commit domestic violence and that women experience greater physical and psychological harm from such violence (Politoff et al., 2019, p. 21; c.f. unpublished NCAS data).

“Young people’s understanding of violence in intimate partner relationships” aims to identify any relationship norms held by young people that may enable violence against women and reinforce gender inequality. The study aims to inform policy and education programs to promote respectful intimate relationships and prevent violence. More specifically, the study will explore three questions:

1. How do young people conceptualise “unhealthy” and “abusive” relationship behaviours? For example, do young people consider some abusive behaviours to be part of “normal” relationships and conflict?
2. Why do many young people—especially young men—disagree that violence against women is common in the community, in contradiction to the evidence?
3. Why do many young people believe that women and men are equally likely to perpetrate domestic violence and equally likely to experience its effects, in contradiction to the evidence?

Young people (aged 16–24 years) are a particular focus under the National Plan and the *Change the Story* framework (Our Watch, ANROWS, & VicHealth, 2015). Adolescence is a key period for young people’s development, particularly as young people begin entering into intimate relationships and start to adopt, enact and rework socially and culturally accepted gender and relationship behaviours.

In light of this, young people are a key target population for primary prevention and early intervention strategies that aim to prevent future risk of harm and shift attitudes that condone violence against women. School-based respectful relationship programs (such as LoveBites, Respectful Relationships and R4Respect) have been shown to be effective in shifting some violence-supportive attitudes and in increasing knowledge about domestic violence among young people (ANROWS,

2019a; Flood, Fergus, & Heenan, 2009, pp. 3, 34–49; Struthers, Parmenter, & Tilbury, 2019). However, evaluations of these programs highlight that further work is needed to develop effective strategies that shift students' attitudes around gender relations and increase understanding of various actions that constitute domestic violence (Flood et al., 2009, pp. 4–5; Flood & Kendrick, 2012, p. 5). Through speaking with young people aged 16–18, there is opportunity for the present study to further inform broad-based prevention programs for this age group within schools (ANROWS, 2019a; Flood et al., 2009). In addition, there is evidence that gendered and violence-supportive attitudes are acquired at a particularly young age (e.g. Xenos & Smith, 2001), which further underscores the importance of investigating the factors contributing to these attitudes in the younger cohort and targeting education programs at the earliest opportunities.

Summary and recommendation

The NCAS is a key mechanism for:

- tracking improvements in the Australian population's understanding of and attitudes regarding violence against women and gender equality
- monitoring progress against the National Plan
- informing education and primary prevention strategies to further reduce violence against women and their children.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), implemented by ANROWS, is a key mechanism for monitoring progress and informing strategies to reduce violence against women and their children. The NCAS found successful measures need to address Australians' mistrust of women's reports of sexual violence, and improve young people's understandings of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships, but this population survey is not currently funded beyond 2022. Funding for the NCAS beyond 2022 is recommended to enable continued tracking against National Plan goals, and to facilitate continued improvement in policy and programs aiming to reduce and prevent violence against women and their children.

b) Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention and response that could be considered in an Australian context

As Australia's research authority on violence against women and their children, ANROWS is in a unique position to provide information about what constitutes best practice and lessons learnt from international experiences for the Australian setting. To this end, ANROWS is currently developing the "What Works" framework, designed to provide an overview of the existing domestic and international evidence in relation to what works to prevent and respond to violence against women. The framework will support policy and program staff in government and throughout the FDSV service sector to assess the evidence and effectiveness of different interventions, programs and strategies and make decisions in relation to research design, priorities and evidence gaps.

Specifically, this project will develop:

- a framework, guidance and tools to support an assessment of the value of FDSV initiatives and support researchers and funders to determine research priorities and study design
- an accessible overview of the existing evidence base of what works to reduce and respond to violence against women disseminated through a webpage as well as a series of “What Works” publications.

This project will conclude in June 2022.

Summary and recommendation

ANROWS’s “What Works” framework will provide an overview of the existing domestic and international evidence base and tools to assist with assessing the value of FDSV initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Informed by the national and international evidence, ANROWS’s “What Works” framework will provide tools to assist with assessing the value of family, domestic and sexual violence initiatives. It should be used to select best practice interventions for the Australian context.

c) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business

Outcome four of the current National Plan is that services should meet the needs of their clients (COAG, 2011). ANROWS has funded 30 projects to address this outcome. The findings of these past projects highlight that integration, collaboration and coordination, and variation between state and territory responses, are key issues affecting women experiencing violence. Coordination across different jurisdictions would be enhanced by increased accountability and measurable goals for all states and territories in the forthcoming National Plan.

Integration, collaboration and coordination remain essential: What existing ANROWS research tells us

For coordinated approaches to be successful, further investment is required in specialist responses to provide infrastructure, expertise, pathways and practices, as well as to develop workforce capability and capacity at the local level (Wendt, Chung, Elder, Hendrick, & Hartwig, 2017). In a forthcoming paper, *Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence* (ANROWS, in press), we will provide a full synthesis of the key findings from this body of research. This paper will outline the benefits and challenges of integrating services across sectors from all parts of the service system to better address the needs of women and their children experiencing violence. It provides evidence for the ways in which:

- Integrated approaches depend on collaborative work, which requires workers to understand how all the different parts of the service system function, and to build trust with other services and sectors over time.
- Collaborative practice can be enhanced by:
 - co-location of services; face-to-face meetings; secondments between services
 - cross-training (where services provide training to each other about their respective areas of expertise)
 - developing a common understanding of domestic and family violence and risk
 - training in a common framework (for example, the Safe & Together model).

ANROWS research also shows that there are variations in the responses women experiencing violence receive in different state and territory jurisdictions. While acknowledging the work that has been done under the current National Plan to coordinate action across jurisdictions, need remains to strengthen coordination going forward. Some areas for improvement highlighted by the current body of ANROWS research include the following:

- Making improvements to how we address trauma: for women and children who have experienced trauma, “strengthening communication and integration is fundamental” (Hegarty et al., 2017, p. 48). Service systems and agencies can place unrealistic expectations on women with experiences of complex trauma to understand and navigate the (formal and informal) rules governing each service system (Salter et al., 2020). Salter and colleagues (2020) recommend making a whole-of-government commitment to the implementation and coordination of trauma-informed practice across sectors.
- Developing and implementing common risk assessments and agreements to manage risk between jurisdictions: most jurisdictions in Australia have undertaken reforms to ensure that integrated approaches are implemented in responding to high risk of domestic and family violence (DFV). For example, Victoria has implemented the [Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management \(MARAM\)](#) framework, while the Northern Territory uses the [Family Safety Framework](#). Perpetrators and victims/survivors, however, often move between jurisdictions in Australia. By developing and implementing common risk assessments and agreements regarding risk management in all jurisdictions (Humphreys & Healey, 2017) we would improve safety for all Australian women and their children.
- Implementing nationally consistent healthcare practices for DFV screening in all Australian antenatal settings: this should include developing and implementing a validated DFV screening and audit tool for Australian antenatal settings, which addresses the broad range of types of abuse women experience, including controlling behaviours by partners and other family members (Hegarty et al., 2020).

Increased accountability, measurable goals: Looking to the future

Coordination across states and territories would be enhanced by the forthcoming National Plan having a clear focus on accountability for each jurisdiction, and measurable goals that allow us to gauge success.

Summary and recommendation

Support to overcome the challenges of integration and the barriers to collaboration is recommended and would represent an investment in service systems’ capacity and capability. Taking a nationally

coordinated approach would be beneficial in key areas that can affect all women experiencing violence, including trauma, risk management between jurisdictions, and antenatal DFV screening. A key part of this approach is an emphasis on jurisdictional responsibility and measurable goals in the next National Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest in service systems' capacity and capability to overcome the challenges of integration and barriers to collaboration. Funding bodies, policymakers, managers and practitioners can facilitate strong cross-sector collaboration by enabling the development of infrastructure which supports integration, and building the capacity of services to coordinate responses across sectors and between services. For specific recommendations on how this should occur, see *Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence* (ANROWS, in press). Ensure a nationally coordinated response to key issues affecting all women experiencing violence to help address gaps and barriers to receiving support. Measurable goals and clearly defined roles will increase accountability for all states and territories, and shape the success of coordinated approaches to reduce and prevent violence against women and their children.

d) The way that health, housing, access to services, including legal services, and women's economic independence impact on the ability of women to escape domestic violence

For a woman to be able to escape domestic violence, she needs to know that she has somewhere to go, that she will have enough money to live on, that she will be safe and, if she has children, that they will also be safe. Previous ANROWS research, outlined below, shows that there are many barriers to women being able to access the services and resources that may help them escape. In addition, future ANROWS research will investigate women's experiences of abuse to make recommendations to improve service and system responses.

The below focuses on barriers to accessing services or leaving relationships. However, ANROWS also notes that for women who do leave, barriers to safety—or even to permanently leaving a partner—do not disappear. About half of women who are no longer in a relationship with their violent partner reported that they separated from the violent partner several times prior to the final separation (Cox, 2016). Additionally, leaving a violent partner does not necessarily mean an end to violence: two out of five women experienced violence while temporarily separated from their violent male former cohabiting partner, and six out of ten women who experienced violence while temporarily separated reported an increase in violence during the separation (Cox, 2016). Further, a quarter of women who were no longer in a relationship with their violent partner reported that the violence increased after their final separation (Cox, 2016).

Health: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Mental health—in particular, symptoms and effects of trauma—is intimately connected to DFV: experiences of DFV can cause trauma, and experiences of trauma are linked to higher risk of DFV (Cox, 2016). However, mental health is not a risk factor for violence against women. An ANROWS research synthesis (2020d) describes the ways in which mental ill health can be a compounding factor,

a barrier, an outcome, and a tool used by perpetrators of violence against women. This means that mental health can be a significant barrier to seeking help or leaving in a number of ways.

One barrier to seeking help is created by the way in which diagnoses and treatment for women experiencing violence are complicated by the overlapping of mental health problems, trauma, complex trauma and disability. For example, the medicalisation of women's trauma can lead to an overreliance on pharmacological treatment (Ussher, 2010). Medical diagnoses often fail to highlight women's agency and resilience in coping with violence, which can be a big part of recovering from debilitating trauma (Salter et al., 2020; Ussher et al., 2020), and thus can impact capacity to leave.

Women with experiences of complex trauma may be discouraged from seeking help due to stigmatisation of distressed women as "hysterical" or "mad" (Ussher, 2011). Behaviours that can be associated with complex trauma, from self-harm to suicidality to problematic substance use, are stigmatised in service settings, and can attract punitive and dehumanising responses from professionals (Salter et al., 2020). Mental ill health can also affect how seriously a woman and her allegations of violence are taken by professionals. This is not lost on perpetrators of violence, as one study participant explained:

I've got schizophrenia; he uses that against me a lot . . . the people I did talk to about it, they wouldn't believe me because then when they would go speak to him about it he'd be like no, she's just had another episode or—so that's, it was always then put back onto me and my fault. (Quoted in Day, Casey, Gerace, Oster, & O'Kane, 2018, p. 55)

A further barrier is the complexity of accessing service systems. Women with experiences of complex trauma typically have multiple needs, however the majority of services are funded to address a particular issue or concern. As a result, women with experiences of complex trauma typically need to navigate multiple services and agencies in order to have their needs meet. As noted above, service systems and agencies can place unrealistic expectations on women with experiences of complex trauma to understand and navigate different parts of the service system, often simultaneously, while they are in crisis (Salter et al., 2020).

Access to justice and legal services can be impacted by mental health as well. In criminal cases or protective order cases, trauma or mental ill health can be a barrier, as explained by a service manager:

I guess it's tricky because for someone with what you would think of as a complex post-traumatic stress presentation, they're not a "good witness", if I can use that term, because their presentation doesn't typically look like someone who's got it together and who's reliable, so that can be really tricky and may in fact impact on your ability to seek justice if that is what you're seeking. (Quoted in Salter et al., 2020, p. 102)

Similarly, mental health can be weaponised by perpetrators in Family Court matters. Recent Australian research into family law cases shows that parental alienation, a phenomenon which has been widely discredited, continues to be raised by fathers as a defence to child sexual abuse allegations (Death, Ferguson, & Burgess, 2019). As a result, mothers are constructed as "manipulative, mentally unwell, suffering from delusions, and ultimately harming their children with the intent of punishing

the other parent” (Death et al., 2019, p. 2). Beyond parental alienation, raising mental health in Family Court more generally has significant consequences for women. Recent research found that it was the cited reason for limiting child contact with mothers in 30 percent of parenting matters, but only in 2 percent of cases limiting fathers, which does not align with general mental health prevalence (McInnes as cited in Death et al., 2019, p. 7). This results in a process whereby instead of investigating women’s allegations of violence, the family law system sometimes accepts perpetrator-generated narratives of mental illness to explain them.

Housing: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Housing stress is a huge barrier to safety or to permanently leaving a violent partner. Breckenridge, Rees, valentine, and Murray (2016) found that women were more likely to return to their partner if they had difficulty maintaining independent accommodation. According to the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (2017), around one in five women returned to violent partners because they had no financial support, or nowhere else to go. Insecure housing has many flow-on effects: it can affect child protection issues, custody issues, the ability to retain possessions, the ability to get and keep a job, and the ability to maintain social connections (Cortis & Bullen, 2016).

An ANROWS study, *Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs*, found that nearly 60 percent of women who had separated from their partners reported experiencing housing stress post-separation (Kaspiew et al., 2017). Many women who leave their homes following domestic and family violence struggle to find suitable accommodation: over 90 percent of first requests by domestic and family violence clients to specialist homelessness services for long-term accommodation were unable to be met (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2016). And despite policy reforms that prioritise victims/survivors remaining in their homes, many women are still forced to leave because of mortgage stress, rental unaffordability and lack of support due to social isolation (ANROWS, 2019f).

Diverse communities face additional hurdles to accessing safe and appropriate accommodation, for example those in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, women and children on temporary visas (Vaughan et al., 2016), women in remote areas (Wendt et al., 2017), women with disability (Maher et al., 2018), and women who have been incarcerated (ANROWS, 2020e; Bevis, Atkinson, McCarthy, & Sweet, 2020; Day et al., 2018). A recent ANROWS study, *Kungas’ trauma experiences and effects on behaviour in Central Australia* (Bevis et al., 2020), reviewed case histories of Aboriginal women who had been involved in a prison support program, the Kunga Stopping Violence Program (KSVP). The client file audit showed that the majority of the women and their children were living in overcrowded homes of extended family, and over 60 percent of the women were not officially listed on a lease. Not being listed on the lease is significant: if a woman is at risk of family violence and is included on a Territory Housing lease, then she has the ability to be transferred to safe housing. If a woman is not on the lease, then this is not an option for her.

Access to services: What existing ANROWS research tells us

A substantial proportion of women do not seek help because there are barriers at different levels: individual (e.g. fear, intimidation, sexual orientation), socio-cultural (e.g. family, socialisation, role expectations, race, ethnicity, culture) and structural (e.g. social isolation, perceived effectiveness of law

enforcement and medical services; Day et al., 2018). For diverse communities, barriers to leaving and/or safety are even more complex.

Involvement of the criminal legal system (for example, calling the police) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is complicated, because the criminal justice system is viewed by many as a direct source of harm to themselves and their families (Nancarrow as cited in Day et al., 2018). Research suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often seek interventions that allow them to remain in their communities (Blagg, Bluett-Boyd, & Williams, 2015), which is not commonly supported by current interventions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women also face a real fear and risk of child removal when seeking help for violence. In a recent ANROWS study, Aboriginal participants expressed a belief that government policies on family violence seem designed to “break up” Aboriginal families, rather than strengthen them, and are not tailored to address the types of conflict experienced in Aboriginal communities. For many Aboriginal women, leaving permanently is not an option, or cannot occur without considerable long-term support (Blagg et al., 2020).

Additionally, there is evidence that Aboriginal organisations have been increasingly stripped of resources that have been reinvested in a mix of religious or affiliated organisations (Blagg et al., 2020). These organisations have no roots in communities and little knowledge of Aboriginal Law and Culture. Community members in a recent study noted that the programs run by such organisations are not culturally safe (Blagg et al., 2020). Communication can also be a barrier for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women accessing services, including legal services. In the KSVP, the majority of the women spoke a local Aboriginal language as their first language, however, communication with police, legal services, service providers and corrective services is dominated by the use of English. The women from the KSVP shared stories of the way shame also contributed to communication disconnect, in that it prevented them from seeking assistance or of providing full stories to law enforcement officers. Further, even when trying to communicate their experiences and distress, the women were often dismissed or disbelieved (Bevis et al., 2020).

Barriers to support, leaving and/or safety for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities can include, for example, lack of access to information about personal rights, economic dependence, lack of familial support or social isolation, limited proficiency in English, immigration regimes that promote dependence, previous adverse experiences with police, fear of deportation, and concerns about discrimination (Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah; Lee; Raj & Silverman, all as cited in Day et al., 2018; Mitra-Kahn, Newbigin, & Hardefeldt, 2016; Vaughan et al., 2016).

For women with disabilities or activity limitations, barriers to leaving or seeking support and safety can include physically, procedurally or attitudinally inaccessible services; inaccessibility of public materials; lack of accessible alternative accommodation; social stereotypes; poor understanding of disability (Dyson, Frawley, & Robinson, 2017; Maher et al., 2018; Thiara, Hague, Bashall, Ellis, & Mullender as cited in Day et al., 2018); and poor recognition of the forms of violence that are specific to women with disability as violence (Shah, Tsitsou, & Woodin as cited in Day et al., 2018; see also Dyson et al., 2017; Maher et al., 2018; Mitra-Kahn et al., 2016). A recent ANROWS report found that families with disability have to make significant efforts to get the services they need and to which they are entitled (Robinson, valentine, Newton, Smyth, & Parmenter, 2020). Importantly, that same study found that while there were some skilled practitioners confident in working with women and children with disability, there were many who expressed a lack of confidence, knowledge and awareness about

how to speak with women about disability in the context of DFV, particularly those women with intellectual disability. This can again act as a barrier to accessing services that may be able to support a woman to leave a violent relationship (Robinson et al., 2020).

Women in remote areas, too, have compounded barriers. They may struggle with the issue that the people to whom they could report the abuse might be known either to them or the perpetrator (Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel; Lichtenstein & Johnson, all as cited in Day et al., 2018; Wendt et al., 2017). This makes it at the very least difficult, and at worst dangerous, to report violence.

Women in the LGBTIQ community face compounded barriers to seeking help and/or leaving. For example, they may not have a “safe” person to tell about the abuse; may have a belief that service providers would not take violence between women seriously (Turell & Herrmann as cited in Day et al., 2018); may be alert to the recentness of the criminality of same-sex relationships (Mitra-Kahn et al., 2016); or may be in a relationship and/or living arrangement that follows a non-heteronormative model (and may fear that being misunderstood; Gray et al., 2020). Recent ANROWS research focused on experiences of sexual violence by trans women of colour found that some of the women described negative experiences associated with seeking support from healthcare professionals following sexual violence, with individuals and services being described as transphobic or disrespectful (Ussher et al., 2020). Evidence also shows that people in same sex relationships may have experienced or be fearful of police discrimination or brutality (Grant et al. as cited in Day et al., 2018; see also Mitra-Kahn et al., 2016). Negative experiences with police and the legal system were also experienced by many of the participants in the recent ANROWS study, who reported feelings of judgement, blame, mistrust and a lack of acknowledgment that sexual violence had occurred. Experiences of violence from police were reported by some of the participants, including physical violence and sexual harassment (Ussher et al., 2020).

Women who experience both victimisation and incarceration face compounded barriers to help-seeking, including services being ill-equipped to respond to the specific intersections of issues (for example, trauma, drug use or homelessness), or services being unavailable due to a woman’s criminal history (ANROWS, 2020e). For women who have been criminalised, that imposed status acts as a barrier. Concerns about, or experiences of, not being believed due to a dual status as both victim and “offender” can drive reluctance to seek help (Bevis et al., 2020; Day et al., 2018). *Kungas’ trauma experiences and effects on behaviour in Central Australia* found that criminal legal interventions can leave Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women at higher risk of, and from, abuse. Women leave prison with conditions placed upon them as part of parole, conditional release or as a suspended sentence. As a result, they become “legally compromised”: women from the KSVP spoke of reluctance to access service providers, hospitals and police when in need of help, in case this resulted in a breach of their conditions (Bevis et al., 2020). Fear of police was also common among the women in the ANROWS report *The forgotten victims: Prisoner experience of victimisation and engagement with the criminal justice system*: “There was no way in hell I was going to the cops, I was on parole. At the end of the day, I was the one with the criminal record, not him” (quoted in Day et al., 2018, p. 27). In relation to seeking legal help, the women in the KSVP spoke of multiple layers of discrimination and judgement across all sectors of law enforcement systems: police, courts and prisons. The women felt judged for defending themselves, and keenly felt that they were not heard or believed by police, lawyers or the court.

Due to these barriers, it is unsurprising that there are low numbers reported across most studies of help-seeking by women experiencing violence. However, significantly, even those that show higher

disclosure rates report that when women did seek help, many still found that nobody assisted them (Fanslow & Robinson as cited in Day et al., 2018). Research has shown that those who reach out and have a negative experience feel deserted, silenced, and blamed for their victimisation (Moe as cited in Day et al., 2018). In Day et al.'s (2018) research, women spoke about having to go through complex procedures in order to access support services. At least one participant who talked about having to jump through hoops to access support felt that “I would sooner rather cop a beating every day of my life from my partner than go back to one of them”; and another talked about the responses being “useless” (Day et al., 2018, p. 58). So even when women do reach out for help, there still may not be viable avenues out of an abusive situation, and reaching out could result in worsening abuse or exacerbating feelings of being trapped.

Other avenues of help-seeking can be similarly negative. Day and colleagues’ research revealed studies that showed that disclosure to a health professional does not usually result in victims being connected to relevant services or resources (Baccus et al.; Mertin, Moyle, & Veremeenko, all as cited in Day et al., 2018). It also found that even when women reported incidents to the police,¹ there continued to be significant barriers to their safety, such as the abuser not being arrested; the victim being arrested for defending herself; the victim feeling they were not listened to or their experience was being trivialised; abuser manipulation of the police; stereotyping of race, socio-economic status and/or sexuality by police; and language barriers (Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic as cited in Day et al., 2018). Additionally, women with children also face concerns that child protection services may become involved; those that do seek help from child protection report that the burden is shifted to them—the endangering factor is seen to be the woman remaining in the relationship, rather than the abusive partner’s actions (Meyer as cited in Day et al., 2018).

Legal services

We have seen an agile response to COVID-19 from the Family and Federal Circuit Courts of Australia, with the introduction of a COVID-19 court list and electronic provisions for filing and hearing cases. This has been done to provide for the safety of staff and applicants/respondents during COVID-19, but it has the potential to assist to moving to safer and more efficient, cost-effective and accessible methods for dealing with cases. Over a four-week period in March and April, urgent applications increased by 39% in the Family Court and 23% in the Federal Circuit Court (Family Court of Australia, 2020). Applications involving risk and family violence have been triaged, assessed and referred to a judge within 72 hours of assessment by a dedicated registrar. This has been recognised as an emerging good practice by practitioners (for example, by Women’s Legal Services Queensland at a virtual COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Summit on 6 May 2020).

Research and former reforms that have sought to improve legal responses to victims/survivors of domestic and family violence indicate multiple benefits for the above approach (ANROWS, in press; Breckenridge et al., 2016; Hegarty et al., 2017; Humphreys & Healey, 2017). These benefits include safety and security for victim/survivors; increased access in remote/regional areas; potential to expand

¹ The number who report to the police is low. For example, of women who have experienced violence by a former partner since the age of 15, 65 percent had never contacted the police, and this rises to 82 percent when it is violence by a current partner (ABS as cited in ANROWS, 2018).

access to domestic and family violence specialisation in courts; increased efficiency for lawyers; and potential to lessen the burden of the practical impacts of attending many court dates (for example, travel, time off work, child care).

An integrated response would involve implementing reforms to the family law system which prioritise the safety of women and their children, informed by the Women's Legal Services Australia's (2019) [*Safety First in Family Law Plan*](#).

Economic independence: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Financial stress is a significant but under-addressed barrier to safety for women experiencing domestic and family violence. Financial stress can be produced through financial abuse (attempting to prevent or control someone's ability to acquire, use, or maintain resources; Cortis & Bullen, 2015). In Australia, financial abuse has been estimated to occur among 80–90 percent of women who seek support for domestic and family violence (Evans; Macdonald, both as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2016).

However, even when overt financial abuse is absent, domestic and family violence has enduring economic effects due to, for example, difficulties in sustaining education, job searches, or employment (McFerran; Staggs & Riger, all as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2015).² Employment is an important pathway for women leaving violent relationships (ANROWS, 2019f).

Violence can also undermine compliance with welfare and employment services, entrenching economic dependence on the violent partner (Brush as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2015); women may hold debt or bad credit due to violence (Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2015), and violence can also act as a barrier to accessing child support (Fehlberg & Millward as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2015).³ In interviews with service providers, Cortis and Bullen (2016) found that they identified financial issues as a major factor in a woman's decision to stay in or leave a violent relationship. Recent ANROWS research also showed that women were being denied welfare due to misunderstandings about DFV (Sleep, 2019).

Focus on voices of women to improve service responses: Future ANROWS research

“Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services” is a large-scale, national study which will be carried out under the 4AP by ANROWS and the Safer Families Centre for Research Excellence at the University of Melbourne. It

² These difficulties may have been driven by issues with, for example, childcare, housing, poor mental and/or physical health, or lack of skills or employment history resulting from domestic and family violence (Braaf & Meyering as cited in Cortis & Bullen, 2015).

³ In an ANROWS study of women experiencing disadvantage (Cortis & Bullen, 2016), women who had experienced violence experienced worse outcomes than women who had not in relation to secure housing, going without food, not being able to socialise due to associated costs, and not being able to pay bills, and they also reported greater difficulties accessing support services. These poorer outcomes still persisted years later. Domestic and family violence generally raises the risk of poverty: there are costs associated with escaping abuse (such as moving), employment income loss and legal costs (Cortis & Bullen, 2015).

will provide population-wide information on women's experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence (SV).

The study will involve large community surveys and interviews with more than 1000 women who have experienced IPV and SV and perpetrators of IPV and SV against women. It will gather data on the various ways that women and their children experience different types and patterns of abuse. In addition, an online survey with service providers and academics across health, justice and specialist FDSV services will provide recommendations for service and system improvement to better respond to women, children, and perpetrators. This project will conclude in June 2022 and is expected to result in a number of research reports for policymakers and practitioners.

Summary and recommendation

Past ANROWS research has shown that for women to be able to escape domestic violence, policies and strategies addressing health, housing, access to services and women's economic independence are imperative. This is particularly important for women from diverse backgrounds. Future ANROWS research will also highlight how experiences of violence affect access to services and make recommendations for service and system improvements.

RECOMMENDATION 4: ANROWS research has consistently shown that enabling women to escape domestic violence requires supports and policies that promote secure housing, financial stability, and access to health and other services. For specific recommendations on these areas, see the ANROWS syntheses *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness* (2nd ed.; ANROWS, 2019f) and *Violence against women and mental health* (ANROWS, 2020d), and the issues paper *Researching the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence* (ANROWS, 2019b).

e) All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse

The forthcoming National Plan should address hidden forms of violence, including the pervasiveness of coercive control and the impact it has on women's health, housing and financial stability. Summaries of existing ANROWS research on under-addressed tactics of violence are outlined below; in addition, an overview of current community understandings of forms of violence against women in Australia shows that understanding of non-physical tactics of violence is not as strong as that of physical tactics of violence. Future ANROWS projects will address gaps in knowledge and evidence on forms of violence as highlighted in our existing research. It is important to consider each issue outlined below with an understanding that inequalities related to gender, race, class, disability and sexuality, for example, underpin vulnerability to domestic and family violence and sexual abuse, and the capacity to be free of it.

Coercive control: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Coercive control is central to IPV. This centrality has led to numerous international attempts to criminalise non-physical abuse in countries including England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. As coercive control is uniquely tailored to the victim/survivor, and incorporates tactics that are developed by the aggressor over time through trial and error, it can be hard to render visible in justice settings (Tarrant, Tolmie, & Guidice, 2019). The Australian experience of trying to articulate coercive control

in civil law matters has resulted in scepticism about the utility of a criminal law offence. In Tasmania, where legislation prohibiting psychologically and economically abusive behaviour has been in place since 2004, there have only been eight convictions for emotional abuse in the decade since the *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas) came into effect (McMahon & McGorrery, 2017). Understanding the differences between coercive control and violent resistance is critically important for women who fight back and aren't the "typical" or "ideal victim" (a group disproportionately made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women).⁴

ANROWS research proposes that a better way of addressing patterns of harmful behaviour is through the use of a social entrapment framework (Tarrant et al., 2019). A social entrapment analysis of intimate partner violence involves analysis at three levels:

1. documenting the full suite of coercive and controlling behaviours
2. examining the responses of family, community and agencies
3. examining structural inequities.

A social entrapment framework can help to integrate different evidence of disadvantage and barriers to help-seeking to better understand the actions of a person experiencing coercive control (Tarrant et al., 2019).⁵

Systems abuse: What existing ANROWS research tells us

A common theme in ANROWS research is a concern that perpetrators are able to inflict further harm on victims/survivors by manipulating systems, termed "systems abuse". This concern has been expressed by both victims/survivors themselves (Kaspiew et al., 2017) and by the service providers working with them (Cortis & Bullen, 2016). Kaspiew and colleagues (2017) highlight the significant concerns raised by systems abuse in ANROWS research entitled *Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs*. Of the women interviewed for this study who were separated from their partner, a substantial number reported perpetrator tactics of systems abuse including one or more of the following:

- exploiting the intersections between family law, child protection, and criminal legal systems to their advantage
- raising counter-allegations and unjustifiable applications in family law or personal protection orders
- manipulative engagement with family law services
- non-compliance with court orders
- exhausting women's legal and financial resources
- using civil law processes to cross-examine women as self-represented litigants (Kaspiew et al., 2017).

⁴ For more on this issue see Douglas & Fitzgerald (2018) and Nancarrow (2019).

⁵ For a brief summary of the social entrapment framework proposed by Tarrant and colleagues (2019), see ANROWS (2019c).

Early identification of, and response to, DFV would assist in curtailing systems abuse through litigation (Connolly, Healey, & Humphreys, 2017).

Financial abuse: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Financial abuse is insidious and not well understood by the public, or often even by victims of DFV, despite it being formally recognised in definitions of family violence in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory (Cortis & Bullen, 2015). As an act of family violence, economic/financial abuse involves a perpetrator restricting their victim's access to economic resources, to apply control and hinder their victim's independence (Cortis & Bullen, 2015). Financial abuse can take place pre-separation, throughout legal processes, and post-separation. For example, perpetrators can use the cost of dealing with the family law system to create a financial strain on their victims (Cortis & Bullen, 2016).

Economic/financial abuse can relate to the provision of truthful and complete evidence in Family Court matters concerning the allocation of assets following separation and child support. Perpetrators of DFV can mask or minimise their income (for example, using cash-in-hand work, listing income under a business name, changing assets into other peoples' names, or not declaring their full income) to reduce the amount they have to pay in child support. They can also enact financial abuse by paying child support late or irregularly, paying less than the assessment, or not paying at all (Macdonald et al., 2012). To address non-compliance, ANROWS research has proposed that "the Commonwealth could become responsible for claiming child support and could carry the burden of non-payment of child support, so that women affected by economic abuse of non-payment are not unfairly penalised" (Cortis & Bullen, 2016, p. 74).

In the United States there are screening tools (Adams as cited in University of New South Wales, 2019) designed to detect economic/financial abuse which, if successfully adapted to and tested within the Australian context, could assist to detect instances or risks of financial/economic abuse in family law matters. Such tools could monitor prevalence and be used by practitioners to help determine the influence this abuse has had on women's financial wellbeing, guide conversations with women about financial matters, and mobilise resources to address barriers (ANROWS, 2019d). When designing a screening tool or process to detect financial abuse, intersections with other forms of marginalisation—race, gender, sexuality, class, disability—should be carefully considered. For example, dowry abuse can be a form of financial abuse levelled at migrant women in Australia.⁶

Repeated violence: What existing ANROWS research tells us

A majority of women who report IPV experience repeated violence (Webster et al., 2018). Women who have experienced one type of gendered violence often experience other types of gendered violence in their lifetime. In Australia, one quarter of women subjected to gendered violence report at least three different forms of interpersonal victimisation in their lifetime, including child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking (Cox, 2016; Rees et al., 2011). Exposure to multiple, repeated forms of interpersonal victimisation, along with the resulting traumatic health problems and

⁶ For recommendations on addressing dowry abuse see *Practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia* (Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2019).

psychosocial challenges, is called complex trauma (Salter et al., 2020). Complex trauma is not well addressed by a fragmented, single-issue service system (Salter et al., 2020).

Salter and colleagues (2020) highlight the way that the needs of women with experiences of multi-perpetrator abuse by family members and others have been documented all around the world, but are yet to be effectively addressed by policymakers. They suggest that investing in preventing and reducing the intergenerational impact of childhood trauma could reduce some instances of future complex trauma (Salter et al., 2020). Salter and colleagues (2020) recommend that this could occur via pre- and post-natal screening for abuse and violence (see also Hegarty et al., 2020), trauma-informed parental and family support programs (see also Healey, Humphreys, Tsantefski, Heward-Belle, & Mandel, 2018), and early intervention for children exposed to DFV (see also Campbell, Richter, Howard, & Cockburn, 2020).

Exposure to violence in childhood: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Children who live with domestic and family violence are more likely to have a range of health, developmental and social problems. They are also at higher risk of perpetrating or becoming a victim of violence, which perpetuates intergenerational cycles of violence (Campo, Kaspiew, Moore, & Tayton; Flood & Fergus; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan; Humphreys, Houghton, & Ellis; Kaspiew et al.; Richards; Stith et al. all as cited in Webster et al., 2018). Addressing the mental health impacts of living with violence for children can be difficult. Mothers can encounter a lack of services and response when seeking therapeutic assistance, particularly for older teenagers or young adults with mental health problems linked to exposure to violent and abusive behaviour (Kaspiew et al., 2017). Sourcing appropriate services can be even more difficult when adolescents exposed to childhood trauma themselves begin to use violence, as the report *The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home* points out (Campbell et al., 2020). Evidence from ANROWS research indicates that treating children as victims/survivors of DFV in their own right would help render their needs more visible (ANROWS, 2020b). Specific solutions would be needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that consider the impact of racism and intergenerational trauma stemming from the Stolen Generations.

Sexual violence: What existing ANROWS research tells us

Intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) is a tactic of domestic violence. In *Intimate partner sexual violence: Research synthesis* (ANROWS, 2019e) we have brought together key findings from across the body of ANROWS research. They include that:

- IPSV is a high risk indicator of escalating DV.
- IPSV has serious and long-lasting effects.
- IPSV usually co-occurs alongside other tactics of DV.
- Community attitudes toward issues of sexual activity and consent show that sexual violence, and in particular IPSV, is not understood well, or taken seriously.
- IPSV is difficult to name and recognise.
- There are many barriers to reporting IPSV.
- Incidents of IPSV are underreported and hard to prosecute.
- Responses to and services for IPSV need further resourcing and development.
- Education and prevention programs do not sufficiently address IPSV.

- Current research on IPSV faces limitations with small population groups and definitional issues (ANROWS, 2019e).

This synthesis contains a range of recommendations for addressing IPSV, from initiatives directed at primary prevention to reducing barriers in identifying, reporting and responding to IPSV (ANROWS, 2019e).

Australian’s knowledge of all forms of violence against women: The 2017 NCAS

The NCAS can assist in telling us how well the Australian community understands what constitutes violence against women, and can point to tactics of violence that are not well understood. Knowledge of community understanding can help to develop prevention and response strategies.

Overall, the Australian community has a good understanding of what constitutes violence against women. This is particularly the case for using or threatening to use physical forms of violence, where close to all respondents recognised that the following behaviours are domestic violence:

- tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt others (98%)
- slaps/pushes to cause harm or fear (97%)
- forces partner to have sex (97%)
- throws/smashes objects to frighten/threaten (96%).

Knowledge of what constitutes violence is less well understood for non-physical and coercive forms of violence. Recognition of the following behaviours as violent ranged from 92 percent down to 81 percent:

- repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad or useless (92%)
- stalking by repeatedly following/watching at home/work (92%)
- controls social life by preventing partner seeing family and friends (91%)
- harassment by repeated emails, text messages (90%)
- repeatedly keeps track of location/calls/activities through mobile phone/devices without consent (84%)
- tries to control by denying partner money (81%).

Although non-physical forms of violence are less well understood among respondents compared to physical forms of violence (or threatened physical violence), there is a small but significant positive trend over time, with knowledge increasing over each wave of the survey.

The 2017 NCAS also revealed that young people’s knowledge of the nature of violence against women lagged behind that of most other age groups and had also declined since 2013.

Thus, the NCAS demonstrates that there are still areas where the community’s knowledge about the nature of violence and abuse against women could be improved via targeted education programs.

Addressing hidden tactics of violence: Future ANROWS research

ANROWS research under both core funding and 4AP will produce new evidence and summarise the available evidence on addressing all forms of violence against women. The “Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services”

project will provide population-wide information on women's experiences of IPV and SV. As outlined above, it will gather data on the various ways that women and their children experience different types and patterns of abuse.

Another research project funded under 4AP is "Technology-facilitated abuse: Extent, nature and responses in the Australian community". This project will be carried out by researchers from Monash and RMIT University and will:

- establish reliable national prevalence rates for the adult victimisation by and perpetration of key forms of technology-facilitated abuse, including online sexual harassment, stalking, partner violence and image-based sexual abuse
- provide an understanding of the lived experiences and help-seeking patterns of women victims/survivors of technology-facilitated abuse, and identify any currently available (or needed) help-seeking remedies
- understand the nature and characteristics of perpetration of technology-facilitated abuse
- provide an evidence base that could inform practice innovation and further development of prevention and responses to technology-facilitated abuse
- identify how can we more effectively disrupt, prevent and respond to technology-facilitated abuse.

This project is expected to conclude in June 2022.

The 4AP project "Compliance with and enforcement of family law parenting orders" will help to deepen understanding of a potential form of systems abuse: non-compliance with parenting orders. This project will create a clearer evidence base to understand why people fail to comply with parenting orders. Part of the research will involve exploring the extent to which penalties are effective at reducing non-compliance and whether, where there are ongoing concerns about family violence, they deter contraventions or inhibit parties in seeking court protection. The project is expected to conclude in May 2022.

"A life course approach to determining the prevalence and impact of sexual violence in Australia: The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health" is a 4AP project that will deepen understanding about the prevalence of sexual violence across the life course, including sexual abuse experienced in childhood and adulthood. This project will help us understand the socio-economic impact of sexual violence over time, looking at measures like education, paid employment and financial stress. It also aims to measure the use of health and other services in relation to sexual violence. This project is due to release its findings in July 2022.

Funded under ANROWS's core grant, the research project "Misidentification of domestic and family violence aggrieved/respondents in Australia" will shed more light on systems abuse and coercive control by looking at the misidentification of the aggrieved and respondent in cases of domestic and family violence. The project will conduct a national desktop review of relevant policies and quantitative data on the use of protection orders and DFV-related charges where there are mutual allegations of violence. This project is expected to conclude in November 2020.

Summary and recommendation

Evidence from ANROWS research shows that coercive control, financial abuse, systems abuse, repeated violence and sexual violence are tactics and forms of violence that are serious yet under-addressed. Existing research shows that improvements to these areas should include:

- the use of a social entrapment framework to better understand the actions of a person experiencing coercive control
- a continued focus on the early identification of, and response to, DFV in justice settings to curtail systems abuse through litigation
- adapting, testing and implementing a screening tool to detect instances or risk of financial abuse in the Australian family law system
- addressing the needs of women with experiences of multi-perpetrator abuse by family members and others
- investing in preventing and reducing the intergenerational impact of childhood trauma
- improvements to primary prevention, early intervention and crisis responses to IPSV and other forms of sexual violence.

Additionally, the NCAS tells us that Australians have a poorer understanding of non-physical tactics of violence as compared to physical tactics. Future ANROWS research on experiences of violence, technology-facilitated abuse, non-compliance with parenting orders and sexual violence will help build the evidence base on these poorly understood forms of abuse.

RECOMMENDATION 5: ANROWS research has identified that Australians have a poorer understanding of non-physical tactics of violence against women, as compared to physical tactics. Ensure the next National Plan covers under-addressed tactics and forms of violence, including coercive control, systems abuse, financial abuse, repeated violence, exposure to violence in childhood, and sexual violence. ANROWS research demonstrates that inequalities related to gender, race, class, disability and sexuality, for example, underpin vulnerability to domestic and family violence and sexual abuse, and the capacity to be free of it. Therefore, addressing each of these tactics and forms of violence must be done with an understanding of those inequalities.

f) The adequacy of the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely qualitative and quantitative data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing

Existing ANROWS research has exposed a number of data gaps in the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of DFV. In research directed specifically at identifying the key gaps in data as they relate to diverse groups of women, Mitra-Kahn and colleagues (2016) highlighted five key gaps within the Australian research landscape. They were design and methodological gaps in data sources; definitional complexities within data sources; gaps in the quality of existing data sources; gaps in recording and reporting of data; and gaps in the leveraging of existing data for the creation of new statistical information (Mitra-Kahn et al., 2016).

This research made 36 specific recommendations for improving these data gaps, broadly centred on five themes:

1. augment and enhance existing surveys and administrative data
2. address definitional complexities in data and the specificity of the diverse experiences of violence
3. address data quality and accessibility
4. provide a consolidated and coordinated approach to data collection
5. facilitate the better use of existing data for the creation of new statistical information. (Mitra-Kahn et al., 2016, p. 7)

These same themes recur throughout the wider body of ANROWS research, particularly research centred upon diversity. This includes research about CALD women; women with disability; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Under-reporting in diverse groups, along with pregnant women and women experiencing homelessness, is explicitly acknowledged in the 2016 Personal Safety Survey data produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (KPMG, 2016).

Vaughan and colleagues (2016) point out that research to establish the prevalence of family violence in Australia needs to involve collection of sufficient data from immigrants and refugees to generate robust estimates of prevalence in this particular population. Expanded bilingual/bicultural capacity across both services and future research would improve data collection for migrant, refugee and CALD people experiencing DFV (Hegarty et al., 2020; Ussher et al., 2020; Vaughan et al., 2020).

Robinson and colleagues (2020) highlight that prevalence of violence perpetrated against women and girls with disability is significantly higher than the broad Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) figure of one in six women without disability who have experienced physical or sexual violence. For the most accurate figure, these researchers looked to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey (2019) that "estimates 2.5 percent of women with disability experienced partner violence from a current or previous partner, compared to 1.3 percent of the wider population of women" (Robinson et al., 2020, p. 15). The researchers note that even this self-reported figure is likely to underestimate prevalence because some women and girls are unable to independently report violence and abuse, others rely on the perpetrator for daily support, and because having disability can be a barrier to being believed (Cox, 2015, 2016; Robinson et al., 2020). Dyson and colleagues (2017) also highlight under-reporting and inadequate data collection processes. This is further reflected in research by Dowse, Soldatic, Didi, van Toorn, & Frohmader (2013) who point out that DFV services rarely uniformly and systematically collect data on disability, while disability services do not uniformly and systematically collect data on experiences or risks of violence.

Similarly, Gray and colleagues (2020) suggest augmenting and enhancing administrative data to ensure sexuality and gender indicators are consistently collected at intake into DFV services, and data on IPV and DFV is recorded by LGBTIQ sector organisations. This would address the knowledge gap relating to the prevalence of LGBTIQ people experiencing or perpetrating DFV in Australia. Ussher and colleagues (2020), whose research examined the lived experiences of trans women of colour from CALD backgrounds in Australia, recommend reviewing intake and other forms to ensure they are inclusive of gender, sexuality and race.

Forthcoming ANROWS research led by Professor Marcia Langton has found that rates of violence perpetrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are difficult to determine (ANROWS, 2020a). Indicative findings suggest that more innovative, rigorous and comprehensive data collection and reporting is key to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are no longer exposed to the extraordinarily high levels of violence they are currently experiencing (ANROWS, 2020a).

Coordinated data collection in the antenatal space was raised by Hegarty and colleagues (2020), since this is a life period for women where healthcare contact is frequent and domestic violence risk is heightened. This research highlighted the absence of universally accepted guidelines for or consistent approaches to healthcare provider practices for DFV screening across Australia (O'Reilly & Peters as cited in Hegarty et al., 2020). Implementing a comprehensive systems approach to antenatal domestic violence screening would require attention to and resourcing for systems to ensure ongoing and updated data collection across states and territories (Hegarty et al., 2020).

Future research: Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

ANROWS is developing ANRA to provide strategic directions for domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) research in Australia. The purpose of ANRA is to ensure that research funding is directed towards building evidence to assist contemporary policy and practice design. ANRA will inform the ANROWS Research Program as well as provide a framework for, and guidance on, priority areas of research and research themes for academics, researchers, organisations and governments across Australia.

Along with sector-wide consultation with experts in the field, ANRA will be informed by a systematised literature review to identify research gaps. This review will take in Australian research reports on DFSV and peer-reviewed and grey literature on violence against women in high-income countries published between 2015 and 2020.

Summary and recommendation

Existing ANROWS research shows a need for a more consolidated and coordinated approach to data collection, including by enhancing existing data collection mechanisms. It also highlights the need for better evaluation data to assess the effectiveness of current service responses and prevention activities, and more robust longitudinal data on the lifetime experiences and impacts of violence against women. Short funding cycles make the latter difficult to achieve.

Data collection on experiences and prevalence for diverse groups of women requires particular attention. ANROWS's ANRA will provide strategic direction and priority areas for future research.

RECOMMENDATION 6: As Australia's only national research organisation dedicated to women's safety, ANROWS has a key role in identifying and addressing research gaps and guiding priority focus for research and data collection. The ANROWS-developed *Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (ANRA) will be used to identify existing gaps and guide priority focus for research and data collection. The process for developing ANRA revealed there is an urgent need for better evaluation data to assess the effectiveness of current service responses and prevention activities. That is, all program funding must include a standard evaluation

component to enable future systematic reviews to identify “what works”. The ANRA also shows the need for more robust national data, including longitudinal data, to demonstrate the experiences and impacts of violence against women across the lifespan. To achieve this, funding longer-term research that goes beyond the length of the next National Plan is essential.

g) The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour

ANROWS funded 13 projects under the [Perpetrator Interventions Research Stream \(PIRS\)](#). The last of these publications was recently finalised, and knowledge translation and exchange activities are underway. The foundation of this research program is to secure the safety of women and children: to work towards this goal, it has explored avenues to improve effectiveness in the community sector and in the civil, criminal, child protection and family law systems. The findings of the projects in the PIRS also highlight the diversity of perpetrators, and the ways in which this diversity requires tailored responses. Future ANROWS research will seek input from perpetrators; develop a “What Works” framework; and deliver a PIRS synthesis paper, which will pull together key findings from across this research stream.

Responding to diverse perpetrators and improving effectiveness: What existing ANROWS research tells us

The PIRS projects identify ways to improve responsiveness to the diversity of perpetrators:

- Campbell and colleagues (2020) showed that addressing adolescents who use violence in the home using responses designed to address adult IPV is unlikely to be useful. The key finding of this research was the need to intervene earlier in the lives of children experiencing family violence (Campbell et al., 2020). Other ANROWS research also recommends improving early intervention into childhood trauma as this would also have benefits in preventing complex trauma, and reduce the impact that high-frequency healthcare users with experiences of complex trauma have on the system (Salter et al., 2020).
- Gray and colleagues (2020) suggest that an effective response to DFV in LGBTIQ relationships requires reforming mainstream perpetrator interventions to cater for the presence of LGBTIQ clients, as well as developing specialist interventions with and for LGBTIQ people.
- Research into the way policy and legal frameworks can either support or impede Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perpetrators to engage with available support services, including men’s group interventions, is in the final stages of publication (ANROWS, 2020a).
- Blagg and colleagues (2020) showed the utility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Law and Culture in promoting on-country, healing-based approaches to addressing family violence. Their research provides an evidence base for the decentring of the criminal legal system in responses to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Fisher, Martin, Wood, Lang, and Pearman (2020) build upon *Australia’s National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions* (NOSPI; Department of Social Services, 2015). They point out that while the NOSPI were designed to guide programs and support consistent measurement of their effectiveness, they do not specifically address working with people from

refugee backgrounds. For effective interventions with refugee perpetrators, this research suggests greater engagement with refugee communities in program development; stronger connections between refugee services and DFV services, including joint delivery of perpetrator programs; and the exploration of interventions that prioritise keeping the family together (Fisher et al., 2020).

This research stream (PIRS) has also focused heavily upon what works, investigating different techniques for working with men who use violence. These include:

- All-of-family approaches to working with fathers who use violence were investigated by Healey and colleagues (2018). The efficacy of these techniques, including pivoting to the perpetrator and partnering with the non-offending partner, is being examined in terms of improved outcomes for children in forthcoming ANROWS research led by Professor Cathy Humphreys (ANROWS, 2020b).
- Improving partner contact practices, which were explored by Chung and colleagues (2020c). For partner contact to be successful, practical bridges between those working with women and those engaging with men must be built. A [practice guide](#), developed as part of the project, suggests that the establishment of communities of practice across agencies and even across jurisdictions could commence immediately (ANROWS, 2020c). Indeed, responding to the global pandemic has already made this into a reality: [No To Violence](#), who work with men who use violence, is currently engaged in setting up regular communities of practice for women and children's advocates, clinical supervisors, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, in addition to their ongoing [New South Wales Men's Behaviour Change Network](#).
- Invitational narrative ways of working successfully to engage men who use violence and enable behavioural and attitudinal change were the impetus behind research by Wendt, Seymour, Buchanan, Dolman, and Greenland (2019). This research also suggested partnering with women to measure the efficacy of these approaches in generating change (Wendt et al., 2019).

Effective ways of measuring the effectiveness of interventions is key to reducing DFV re-offending. This was explored by McLaren, Fischer, and Zannettino (2020), who suggest that measures of partners' and ex-partners' quality of life should be included in evaluations of perpetrator interventions. This is a step away from measures that solely rely on recidivism, which should not be the only goal for men's behaviour change programs. Findings from "[Project Mirabal](#)" in the United Kingdom have suggested alternative ways of capturing violations and reducing reoffending, including comprehensive reporting from the victim's perspective, perpetrator and practitioner reports of behavioural change, and use of court/police sources to triangulate this information (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). Crucially, men's behaviour change programs cannot, alone, be expected to hold men who use violence accountable. They should be considered within the broader context of available tools and systems, and as part of a holistic approach to increasing the safety of women and children.

PIRS synthesis, perpetrator experiences and “What Works”: Future ANROWS research

ANROWS will provide a full synthesis of our recently completed body of research into perpetrator interventions by the end of 2020. When released, the PIRS synthesis will have recommendations for policy and practice which will be drawn from evidence across the entire stream.

ANROWS and University of Melbourne’s research project, *Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services*, will include a national online community survey of male and female perpetrators who use or have used IPV/SV against Australian women and a survey of service providers and experts in the DFSV sector. These surveys will gather data on what works from the perspective of perpetrators, victims/survivors, service providers and experts for service responses to perpetrators.

As part of the “What Works” project, ANROWS is reviewing perpetrator intervention programs. This review will provide an overview of the evidence base and the overall impact of interventions to allow researchers, policymakers and practitioners to assess the evidence and effectiveness of different programs and interventions (including cost effectiveness) and make decisions in relation to research design, priorities and gaps.

Summary and recommendation

Existing ANROWS research points to the need for tailored responses and effective mechanisms for evaluation in perpetrator interventions. How we measure success is important – evaluation mechanisms based solely on recidivism miss the importance of measuring how well perpetrator interventions prioritise the safety of women and their children. ANROWS projects currently underway aim to expand the evidence on IPV/SV and hone in on what works to reduce prevalence, drawing together the Australian and global evidence bases for effective programs and interventions to better identify research design, priorities and gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Perpetrator interventions are a very important part of the overall response to violence against women and their children. ANROWS research demonstrates there are emerging areas of good practice in perpetrator interventions, but recommends further research in this area. Perpetrator interventions should be tailored to include effective evaluation mechanisms. Evaluation mechanisms must stem beyond simply measuring recidivism, to utilising partner contact to assess how well the intervention prioritises the safety of women and children. For specific recommendations, see Chung, Anderson, Green, and Vlasis (2020), ANROWS’s summary of Chung, Upton-Davis, and colleagues (ANROWS, 2020f), the full report (Chung, Upton-Davis, et al., 2020) and ANROWS’s forthcoming synthesis on its Perpetrator Intervention Research Stream, available in late 2020.

h) The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTIQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas

ANROWS research emphasises the impact of intersectional inequity, meaning the larger the number and extent of inequities a particular victim/survivor experiences, the more scope a predominant

aggressor has to control and coerce her, and the less likely she is to be able to access help and safety. Intersectional inequity also impacts the social and institutional responses that the victim/survivor will receive in response to her help-seeking (Tarrant et al., 2019). Women with histories of victimisation from multiple abusers who may also be dealing with compromised mental health or physical or intellectual disability alongside other structural inequities can be more vulnerable to the perpetrator's coercive control (Tarrant et al., 2019). This includes women with immigration issues, women experiencing poverty, people who are sexuality or gender diverse, geographically isolated women, women experiencing racism and/or women with cultural values that support a male partner's right to use violence and discourage help-seeking.

If there were a single theme to draw from the existing body of ANROWS research into diverse groups of women, it is that addressing violence perpetrated against them requires the provision of additional supports. This provision is twofold: firstly, there must be support to overcome the barriers to help-seeking behaviours by diverse groups of victims/survivors (as outlined above); and secondly, there must be improvements to the way support and justice services respond to the diversity of victims/survivors. For example:

- In *Crossing the line: Lived experience of sexual violence among trans women of colour from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia*, Professor Jane Ussher and colleagues (2020) investigated lived experiences of sexual violence for trans women of colour. No trans women interviewed in their study reported receiving support from police or justice agencies after experiencing violence. This research recommended improving service provider knowledge about the implications of the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and other categories of difference (such as age, social class and religion). It also highlights the importance of providing additional support to trans women of colour who have experienced sexual violence to report incidents of sexual violence to the police, and to navigate court processes (Ussher et al., 2020).
- In *Developing LGBTQ programs for perpetrators and victims/survivors of domestic and family violence*, Dr Rebecca Gray and colleagues (2020) recommended improving awareness of DFV/IPV in LGBTQ communities to enhance help-seeking behaviour. The research also suggested an audit to ensure all points on the pathways for reporting and preventing DFV/IPV are LGBTQ inclusive, and aware of LGBTQ DFV/IPV specificities (Gray et al., 2020).
- In *Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia: The ASPIRE Project*, Vaughan and colleagues (2016) investigated the development of responsive and accessible community-based interventions for refugee and migrant women. They suggested bolstering help-seeking by training and resourcing all services that come into contact with migrant and refugee women to understand and respond to DFV and facilitate referral pathways to specialist support. This would include English language programs, settlement services, cultural associations and healthcare programs. In terms of developing better responses, the research recommended ongoing training for all parts of the family violence system about the additional risk factors, immigration issues and support needs of immigrant and refugee women and their children (Vaughan et al., 2016).
- The *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Projects with Action Research (CALD PAR)* initiative involved 26 projects across Australia aimed at preventing violence against women

and creating safer pathways to crisis and support services that respond to family violence in CALD communities. CALD PAR demonstrated that an intersectional and culturally safe approach to prevention and safer pathways work empowers CALD groups and individuals—that is, it reduces barriers and improves help-seeking. It works by centring their voices and brings together communities and services to reduce violence (Koleth, Serova, & Trojanowska, 2020).

ANROWS research also makes clear that additional supports should be designed in conjunction with affected communities. For example, Blagg and colleagues (2018) show that addressing DFV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires a commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous community structures. Investigating LGBTQ DFV, Gray and colleagues (2020) propose that increasing workforce confidence in engaging with LGBTQ people experiencing or perpetrating DFV/IPV should be done using LGBTQ inclusivity training that is co-developed with affected communities. The CALD PAR initiative recommends investing time in building culturally safe and trusting relationships with diverse groups and leaders in CALD communities (Koleth et al., 2020).

Voices from diverse communities: Future ANROWS research:

One of the projects funded under the 4AP, led by a research team from Macquarie University, is “An exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs that respond to domestic and family violence and sexual assault”. The effects of intergenerational trauma have led to an awareness of the need for “trauma-informed care” and the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs and initiatives. These programs view a person’s health and wellbeing from a perspective that understands the impact of trauma, taking into consideration what has “happened” to that person, rather than what is “wrong” with that person.

This project aims to create a better understanding of how healing programs deliver domestic and family violence and sexual assault (DFVSA) outcomes, and how trauma-aware, healing-informed practice intersects with the theoretical frameworks driving practice by DFVSA services and offers valuable evidence to inform policy development. The project will consist of 13 case studies that will each include yarning circles with service staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women including trans women, LBGTIQA+ women and women with disabilities.

In addition, the “Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services” study will provide key data on the experiences of women from different backgrounds, including CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and socio-economically disadvantaged women. The large community surveys and interviews with women who have experienced IPV and SV will provide insight into the help-seeking and service experiences of women and their children across different socio-demographic groups. Results from the online survey with service providers and academics will also provide information on the service needs of diverse cohorts and inform recommendations for service improvement.

Summary and recommendation

Existing ANROWS research shows that initiatives to respond to diversity need to address barriers to help-seeking from diverse groups, as well as the responses diverse people receive from the service and justice systems. It also points out that improvements to systems need to be co-designed with affected communities. Future ANROWS research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs

and initiatives, and IPV and sexual violence for diverse groups of women, will help build the evidence base on diverse populations' experiences and impacts of violence.

RECOMMENDATION 8: ANROWS research suggests that particular support is still needed for historically vulnerable populations who experience multiple and simultaneous forms of disadvantage, including culturally and linguistically diverse women, migrant women, geographically isolated women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability and sex and gender diverse women. Our evidence suggests that addressing this inequality requires a system-wide, whole-of-government approach across all policy areas, which recognises the wide-ranging impacts of violence on women and their children (e.g. housing, income support, health, education). While policy and responses specific to violence against women are needed, these efforts may be thwarted by a lack of coordinated response across services, and a lack of attention to the specific supports required for women from historically vulnerable populations.

i) The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services

International and national evidence about the impact of natural disasters and health pandemics suggests that violence against women increases during these periods (Peterman et al., 2020; van Gelder et al., 2020). While research on the impact of COVID-19 on the prevalence rates and incidence of violence against women is still emerging, it is a reasonable expectation that the COVID-19 pandemic will see similar trends to other disasters such as bushfires and cyclones or epidemics like Ebola and Zika (Fraser, 2020). Unlike in these epidemics and disasters however, COVID-19 lockdowns, restrictions and social distancing measures that confine people to homes pose additional threats to women's safety (Mazza, Marano, Lai, Janiri, & Sani, 2020). Further, while stress-related factors present during the pandemic, such as increased financial pressures, do not in themselves drive violence against women, they can compound or exacerbate the underlying gender and other inequalities that lead to coercive controlling violence against women, and increase the severity and frequency of violence.

In Australia, reporting of violence against women during the pandemic has varied across the country (Payne, Morgan, & Piquero, 2020). For example, there was no increase in police-recorded incidents of DFV in New South Wales in April 2020 when compared to April 2019 (Freeman, 2020), but some hospitals have recorded a significant increase in emergency department presentations related to DFV in the first quarter of 2020 compared to 2019 (Clayton, 2020).

However, reporting numbers are influenced by many factors and do not necessarily provide a reliable picture of prevalence. For example, reports to police are most likely to concern physical violence, as this is the tactic most commonly reported to police, hospitals and other agencies. However, it is just one of many tactics of abuse of women—use of physical violence may increase or decrease according to the degree of overall control the perpetrator has over the life of the woman (Our Watch et al., 2015). Rates of reporting, therefore, may be affected by changes in tactics: in home isolation, an abuser may decrease physical violence but increase non-physical coercive control (Payne et al., 2020).

A recently released bulletin from the Australian Institute of Criminology (Boxall, Morgan, & Brown, 2020) provides the strongest evidence available about the prevalence of domestic violence experienced by Australian women during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study surveyed 15,000 women aged 18 years and over about their experience of domestic violence between March–May 2020. While the survey does not allow cause–effect relationships to be established, it appears likely that the conditions and consequences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to an increase in domestic violence:

- 4.6 percent of all women who responded to the survey experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former cohabiting partner.
- Almost six percent (5.8%) of all women who responded to the survey experienced coercive control, meaning they experienced three or more forms of emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours in the three months prior to the survey.
- 11.6 percent of all women who responded to the survey reported experiencing at least one form of emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour (Boxall et al., 2020).

Women who reported experiencing physical or sexual violence, or coercive control, reported that the violence began or escalated in the three months prior to May 2020 (65.4% and 54.8% respectively) (Boxall et al., 2020). Multiple and complex forms of abuse were also commonly reported (68.3% of women who reported experiencing physical or sexual violence reported multiple forms of violence during this period; Boxall et al., 2020). Women who experienced both physical or sexual violence and coercive control reported more frequent and severe forms of physical and non-physical abuse. Importantly, many women, particularly those experiencing more serious or complex forms of violence and abuse, reported that safety concerns were a barrier to help-seeking:

- Over half (58.1%) of the women who experienced *both* physical or sexual violence and coercive control from a current or former cohabiting partner in the three months prior to the survey said that on at least one occasion they did not seek help due to safety concerns.
- Police were notified in less than half of the most recent incidents of physical or sexual violence: two in five (42.1%) women who experienced physical or sexual violence in the three months prior to the survey reported that the police had been notified after the most recent incident of physical or sexual violence (Boxall et al., 2020).

Evidence would suggest then, that the health, economic and social crises that have followed COVID-19 have exacerbated pre-existing violence and led to the intensification of certain tactics of violence (Usher, Bhullar, Durkin, Gyamfi, & Jackson, 2020). Social isolation has further created an environment conducive to coercive control (e.g. use of containment, fear and threat of contagion). There are fewer opportunities for victims/survivors to leave the home or access support networks of friends and family (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2020); reduced social contact makes DFV less visible, and children unable to attend school are at greater risk of exposure to DFV.

Impact of COVID-19: Future ANROWS research:

The 4AP project “Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services” will provide population-wide insights into the impact that COVID-19 pandemic isolation is having on help-seeking experiences for victims/survivors of IPV and SV to enable ways of most effectively responding individually to all family members during movement

restrictions. The impact of COVID-19 will be one of the areas explored in online surveys and interviews with women who have experienced IPV and SV and perpetrators of IPV and SV against women, and an online survey with service providers and academics in the sector.

Summary and recommendation

The emerging data suggest that victims/survivors may be experiencing increased frequency and/or severity of DFV, but may currently feel less safe contacting police and other agencies. ANROWS's 4AP project will help to expand the evidence base on the impact of COVID-19 on help-seeking.

RECOMMENDATION 9: We recommend specific measures to address the impact of COVID-19 and related restrictions:

- i. Increased access to alternatives to phone calls for support, such as webchat, which must be accessible for women with disability, or groups that need in-language service provision.
- ii. Consideration of maintaining and expanding the COVID-19 court lists, and incorporating them into an integrated response to parents in court where there are, or have been, experiences of domestic, family or sexual violence.
- iii. Expanding the number of Telehealth bulk billing sessions for sexual/reproductive health and mental health care.
- iv. A Commonwealth-led gender-responsive national housing strategy.

j) The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time

While we continue to gather evidence about the impacts of COVID-19 on DFSV in Australia, one trend has emerged clearly: since the beginning of the pandemic, more men have been seeking help in changing their behaviour towards their partners and children. MensLine has reported a 34 percent increase in callers who reported family violence concerns, and the Men's Referral Service reportedly saw a similar jump of 37 percent in the last week of April, compared to 2019 calls (see Ruston, 2020).

Simultaneously, 1800 RESPECT registered a slight decrease in phone calls and a sharp increase on their chat line in the early days of home isolation. This evidence suggests that victims/survivors may feel less safe contacting services over the phone due to the constant presence of their perpetrator. As COVID-19 related restrictions are easing, this pattern is shifting and contacts are now increasing via both methods.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some services are experiencing a reduced capacity to respond, for example because of restrictions on face-to-face services or closed state and territory borders (Usher et al., 2020). Demand for services may therefore outstrip capacity of service providers to respond.

Effective responses include ensuring that a wide range of services are resourced to provide the support that is needed, including through non-verbal methods of reporting and communicating. These alternative facilities should also be accessible to women with disability or groups that need in-language service provision.

Views of frontline services: Future ANROWS research

The 4AP research project “Transforming responses to intimate partner and sexual violence: Listening to the voices of victims, perpetrators and services” will also provide service provider insights into abuse during COVID-19. This project will seek input from service providers and academics across sectors (health, justice and specialist FDSV services).

RECOMMENDATION 10: Responding to the specific impact of COVID-19 and related restrictions is imperative. However, the next National Plan should balance these crisis responses with longer term prevention and response measures that incorporate the voices of frontline services and research evidence, work to improve the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and develop effective evaluation mechanisms. This balance will ensure agile responses to immediate needs while still laying strong foundations for ongoing and sustainable change.

I) Any other related matters

ANROWS is the national organisation established under the first National Plan to lead and deliver relevant and translatable research evidence which drives policy and practice leading to a reduction in the levels of violence against women and their children. To this end, we have a key role to play in identifying what is required to progress evidence-based policy and practice under the second National Plan.

To enable the ongoing work of ANROWS and to enhance our organisation’s ability to support the second National Plan, we also recommend the following:

- Develop and implement the next National Plan in collaboration with ANROWS. As the national research organisation tasked with building the evidence base for policy and practice design decisions regarding domestic violence, family violence and sexual violence, ANROWS has a key role to play in the development and implementation of the next National Plan.
- Provide continuing funding for ANROWS for the life of the National Plan to ensure robust and effective research and evidence-building. Currently ANROWS is required to acquit its core grant at the end of a grant period, meaning that all activities have to cease at the end of grant period and new activities commence at the beginning of a new grant period. This stop/start approach is inefficient management of public funds and negatively impacts on building evidence because it drives the scope and methodology of research. A more efficient and effective funding model would be continuity of funding, subject to meeting key performance indicators.
- Expand investment in ANROWS as the National Plan infrastructure to build evidence on prevention of and response to violence against women. Moving forward, based on our experience and achievements to date, ANROWS is investing its limited resources more intensely in evidence-based resources and dissemination strategies tailored for policy and practice design decision-makers—our primary stakeholders. We have developed the Impact Analysis System (IAS), a framework to improve monitoring uptake of our research evidence with policymakers and practice designers. A wide range of stakeholders will continue to have access to the evidence base through the ANROWS website, our fortnightly newsletter (“Notepad”), public webinars and other resources. ANROWS’s next phase will be driven by the renewed ANRA focus, which will be updated on a rolling basis as new policy/evidence

needs emerge, and will guide ANROWS's focus on strategic, high-impact research projects. Implementation of this strategic direction is already underway with the development of the "What Works" framework under 4AP. Investment in support of these contemporary policy needs will be needed.

- Emphasise timeliness in decision-making. The impacts of COVID-19 have further reinforced that the new National Plan needs to emphasise the importance of timeliness, striking a balance between ensuring effective consultation with policy owners to ensure policy-relevant research and timeliness in decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Co-design the next National Plan in consultation with ANROWS and other organisations with relevant expertise (see Our Watch submission). Ensure ANROWS is resourced properly for the life of the National Plan, to ensure national leadership on evidence-based developments in policy and practice design for prevention of and response to violence against women and their children. Invest in contemporary policy needs identified through *Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (ANRA) and the "What Works" framework.

While ANROWS leads the development of the evidence base to inform policy and practice, our partner organisation, Our Watch, is also essential infrastructure under the current and next National Plan. It is vital that we continue the planned approach to short, medium and long-term strategies to address the immediate risk factors and the structural change required to significantly reduce violence against women and its impacts on their children. We commend the Our Watch submission to the Committee, in addition to our own, and endorse its recommendations.

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