

MEDIA RELEASE

17 September 2014

AUSTRALIANS' VIEWS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN STILL POOR IN 2014

An alarming number of Australians are ready to excuse rapists and men who control, intimidate, bash and kill women and many apportion blame to the victim, a new report reveals.

One in five Australians agree that a woman is partly responsible for rape if she is intoxicated. And one in six support the deplorable notion that women say 'no' when they mean 'yes'.

These findings are contained in VicHealth's national survey of 17,500 Australians about their views on violence against women and gender equality, which will be launched in Melbourne today.*

The [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women 2013](#) survey has been undertaken periodically since 1995 to track whether views on violence and gender roles are shifting. This is the third survey. Participants, aged over 16, took part in a 20-minute phone survey.

However, there is some good news. Most people surveyed understood that domestic violence was a crime and that women were far more likely to be victims. Almost all (98%) people surveyed said they'd intervene if a woman they knew was the target of violence.

And a very low proportion of survey respondents (between 4-6%) say that violence is justified in certain situations, for example, if a partner tries to leave the relationship or denies an ex-partner access to children.

But a high number of Australians still believe that violence and rape can be excused. And a proportion of Australians hold conservative views on gender roles, with one in four saying that men make better political leaders and one in five think men should be the head of the household.

There were no significant differences between states and territories or between high, middle and low income earners. Younger people aged 16 to 25 generally had poorer attitudes about sexual assault, although they are gradually improving, whereas older people (aged 65 and above) were less likely to support gender equality and had stricter views on a woman's role in a relationship.

Importantly, the report concludes that above all else, the main influence on people's attitudes to violence against women was their understanding of the issue and how supportive they were of gender equality. Therefore, the more they subscribe to conservative stereotypes about men and women, the more likely they were to excuse, trivialise or justify violent behaviour.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said on the whole, attitudes have remained stable since the survey was first conducted in 1995 and again in 2009. There are some areas that are improving, while others are declining.

"What we're seeing is more people who now understand that violence is more than a bruised eye or broken bones," Ms Rechter said.

"We are really concerned about the number of people – men and women – who still believe that rape and physical violence are justifiable, and that women are often partly to blame. A culture that excuses rape and violence is one that allows it to happen.

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“Perhaps most worrying for VicHealth, which has been working to prevent violence against women for almost a decade, is that nearly two-thirds (64%) say that violence is caused by men being unable to control their anger.

“And nearly half (43%) believe men rape because they can’t control their need for sex. These beliefs demonstrate just how far we have to go before our society understands the nature of violence. Allow me to make it very clear. Violence is a choice, not an instinct. And it is never excusable. It’s always a crime. And no woman ever invites or deserves it.”

Ms Rechter added that the most important finding from the report was the link between old-fashioned views on gender roles and support for violence.

“VicHealth believes we need to focus our efforts on the younger generation to teach them how to nurture equal, caring, respectful partnerships throughout their lives. All women deserve to be respected as men’s equals and to be safe, but sadly this is not the case for so many in Australia right now.”

Report co-author Dr Anastasia Powell, of RMIT University, said the research was extremely important.

“Taking stock of the community's attitudes is important, since we know that these attitudes play a key role in shaping the way that individuals, organisations and communities respond when they see violence and disrespect towards women,” she said.

“Make no mistake to address, and ultimately prevent, violence against women in our community we also have to challenge the sexism, stereotypes and discrimination that women experience every day. To prevent violence we must work together to reject inequality and build a culture of respect.”

VicHealth was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services in 2012 to undertake the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey. VicHealth led the project in collaboration with the Social Research Centre and The University of Melbourne as research partners.

ENDS

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Media please include the following information in all reports: If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800RESPECT.org.au. In an emergency, call 000.

REPORT LAUNCH DETAILS

This report will be formally launched at **10.30am 17 September, at The Cube, ACMI, Federation Square, Melbourne** (enter via Flinders Street entrance)

Media are strongly encouraged to attend and facilities for AV are available.

Available for interview at the launch: Victoria Police Chief Commissioner **Ken Lay**, VicHealth CEO **Jerril Rechter**, **The Hon. Michaelia Cash**, former AFL player and women’s rights advocate **Luke Ablett**, contributing report authors **Dr Michael Flood** and **Anastasia Powell**, **Lara Fergus** from Our Watch – and **three women who have experienced sexual assault and violence.**

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KEY FINDINGS: NATIONAL COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 2014

Attitudes excusing violence (% agree)			
	1995	2009	2013
Rape results from men not able to control their need for sex	n/a	35	43
A man is less responsible for rape if drunk/affected by drugs at the time	n/a	8	9
Domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry they lose control	n/a	20	22
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person regrets it	n/a	25	21
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was abused as a child	n/a	n/a	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is under a lot of stress	n/a	n/a	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the offender is affected by alcohol	n/a	8	9
Attitudes trivialising violence (% agree)			
	1995	2009	2013
Where one partner is violent it's reasonable for them to be made to leave the family home	n/a	90	89
It's hard to understand why women stay	77	82	78
Most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to	n/a	54	51
Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves	20	13	12
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family	18	14	17
It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together	n/a	8	9
Attitudes shifting blame from perpetrator to victim (% agree)			
	1995	2009	2013
If a woman is raped while drunk/affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible	n/a	18	19
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	18	14	16
If a woman goes to a room alone with a man at a party, it is her fault if she is raped	n/a	n/a	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	n/a	9	11
Attitudes towards gender roles in public and private life (% agree)			
	2009	2013	
Men make better political leaders	23	27	
When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women	11	12	
University education is more important for a boy	4	5	
A woman has to have children to be fulfilled	11	12	
It's okay for a woman to have a child as a single parent and not want a stable relationship with a man	60	66	

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