

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

25 May 2012

### **REPORT SHOWS BYSTANDERS HESITANT TO ACT ON SEXISM**

***Media are invited to conduct interviews today at:***

**Event:** Launch of the *More than ready* report  
**Location:** VicHealth, 15-31 Pelham Street, Carlton  
**Time:** 10.30am today, Friday 25 May

**Available for interview/photo:** Dr Anastasia Powell, Renee Imbesi, Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Tim Cartwright, of Victoria Police, a survivor of sexual assault and a survivor of family violence.

One in three Victorians have witnessed sexism and discrimination against women during the past year, but less than half said or did something to stop it, a new VicHealth research report shows.

A further one in 10 also said they wanted to intervene, but didn't say or do anything to show they disagree with sexist attitudes.

The *More than ready* report involved a survey by the Social Research Centre of 600 Victorians about their willingness to speak up against certain situations of sexism, harassment and discrimination of women. It will be launched by VicHealth and Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Tim Cartwright in Melbourne today.

It looked at whether people were more or less likely to step in at work, on the job or at their sports club.

Lead author Doctor Anastasia Powell, lecturer in Sociology at Latrobe University, says the research is a reflection of the serious issue and prevalence of gender inequality in our community.

"Sexist, derogatory and discriminatory behaviour is upsetting for the person who experiences it, but it also impacts the people who witness it, particularly when they feel powerless to act," Dr Powell said.

"But the reality is that if we stay quiet, then what we are saying without words is that we agree with that behaviour.

"We like to believe we live in an equal society, but the truth is that women are still treated unfairly. If we feel someone is being treated differently on the basis of their gender, we should be able to say enough is enough."

Manager of VicHealth's Preventing Violence Against Women Program Renee Imbesi said the research sends a strong message to employers and community leaders to act when sexism occurs.

"This world-first research shows us people take notice when women are being treated unfairly, but not enough of them are taking action," Ms Imbesi said.

"Every day there are thousands of bystanders who could stand up for respect and equality in the community. It only takes one person to speak up to make someone else think twice about their attitude.

"We really want to send a message to those people who feel uncomfortable, or want to step in but feel powerless to do anything, that it's OK to say enough is enough – particularly men and young people who disagree with their mates."

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Jane Gardner 03 9667 1319 / 0435 761 732 (VicHealth Senior Media Officer)

Ms Imbesi added that 98 per cent of the people surveyed said employers had a responsibility to ensure women were not harassed at work and 94 per cent agreed that employers should take a leadership role to promote equality on the job.

"The Victorian community is ready for its leaders to stand up and take action for the health of all Victorian women. Research shows very strong links between creating a culture of respectful attitudes towards women and preventing violence against women before it occurs."

Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Tim Cartwright said everyone had a role to play in ending this violence.

"At Victoria Police, we engage ambassadors across our organisation to be active bystanders. These are people who are prepared to challenge what this report highlights - the comments, attitudes, sexist jokes and discrimination against women.

"This research tells us that the willingness to challenge others is there, and we can help encourage this. We need to teach other people that their attitudes and sexist behaviours contributes to the violence that we as police see every day when responding to family violence and sexual assault.

"We commend this work and look forward to the learnings being applied into workforces such as ours which are traditionally male dominated, and where we can actively contribute to mobilising bystanders."

### **Key findings:**

- One in three Victorians have witnessed sexism in the past 12 months at work, in a sports club or among friends and family.
- Two in five Victorians think sexist jokes in social situations are always or sometimes acceptable.
- One in five think using sexist slang to describe a woman is sometimes or always acceptable.
- Around 13 per cent of respondents were uncomfortable when witnessing sexist or discriminatory behaviour or attitudes but chose not to take bystander action.
- Almost half (47.6%) who had seen sexism or discrimination reported either saying or doing something in response.
- Bystanders are most likely to act in a situation of harassment in the workplace and least likely to act when a sexist joke is being told outside of work.
- Women, university graduates and people aged between 35 and 54 years were most likely to report having taken bystander action in response to sexual harassment or sexism.
- While young people aged 18 to 34 years were the most likely to have witnessed sexism in the last 12 months, they were least likely to have taken bystander action.

### **ENDS**

*Note: this report does not measure bystander behaviour in situations of physical violence. VicHealth does not recommend personal intervention in these situations where the safety of the bystander could be at risk. In emergency situations, call the Victoria Police on **000**. If a woman's safety is at risk, call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service on **1800 015 188** or The Centre Against Sexual Assault on **1800 806 292**.*