

KEY TERMS
IN THE PREVENTION
OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN

ABOUT DVRCV

The Domestic Violence Resource Centre (DVRCV) is one of the state's most expert sources of information and training on family violence and the prevention of violence against women. We are a not-for-profit incorporated association and registered training organisation that operates across Victoria and is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services with additional income from other government departments, grants and donations.



DVRCV acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and we pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. DVRCV acknowledges that sovereignty of this land was never ceded and we are committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our work.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

People working to prevent violence against women use a range of specific phrases, acronyms and terms. Many of these terms are similar, have overlapping meanings and are often used interchangeably, depending on the context.

The Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) developed this guide to help people understand and distinguish between some of these key terms. The definitions outlined in this resource should not replace academic definitions, but are intended to help clarify the use of these terms in the Victorian prevention of violence against women sector.

We acknowledge that preventing violence against women is an evolving practice, and the key terms outlined here are not exhaustive. We welcome your suggestions of any terms or phrasing that may be useful to add to this guide. Please email prevention@dvrcv.org.au with your ideas.

Please note, words and phrases highlighted in bold indicate terms that are defined elsewhere in this guide.

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BYSTANDER

A **bystander** is anybody who is not directly involved as a victim or perpetrator in an incident, but who observes or learns about an act of violence, discrimination or other problematic behaviour. In the context of preventing violence against women a **bystander** is anybody who observes or learns about attitudes, behaviors, norms, policies and structures that contribute to or perpetuate **violence against women** (the **gendered drivers**).

An active bystander takes action to challenge sexist, violence or discriminatory behaviours and attitudes, whilst a passive bystander does not act or intervene.¹

BYSTANDER ACTION

Bystander action refers to the action taken by a **bystander**, to identify, speak out about or engage others in responding to incidences of violence, **sexism**, harassment or discrimination and/or attitudes, behaviours, **norms**, policies and **structures** that contribute to or perpetuate **violence against women**². In the primary prevention context, when we talk about bystander action we are not talking about physically intervening in response to an observed incident. Examples of bystander actions include calling out disrespectful language or behaviour, changing the topic, eye rolling, enlisting support, referring to organisational policies, or changing discriminatory workplace policies and practices. These actions can be taken in the moment or after the moment.



CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse refers to certain behaviour by an adult or adolescent that is likely to cause physical or emotional harm to a child or young person. This behaviour can be intentional or unintentional and includes neglect, as well as physical or emotional abuse, sexual abuse and exposure to **family violence**³.

The term child abuse is sometimes used interchangeably with 'child maltreatment' and 'child abuse and neglect'. The term **family violence** is not generally used to describe child abuse, in the Victorian context.



DISCLOSURE

A **disclosure** is when someone tells another person about violence that they have experienced, perpetrated or witnessed.

Undertaking **prevention of violence against women** activities can often lead to an increase in disclosures. This is because effective **primary prevention** initiatives raise awareness about harmful attitudes and behaviours and create a safe space for people to discuss their experiences.

Visit DVRCV's [the Lookout](#) and [Partners in Prevention](#) websites for more information on how to respond to a disclosure.



EARLY INTERVENTION/SECONDARY PREVENTION

Early intervention, sometimes called **secondary prevention**, involves working with individuals or groups identified as being at a higher than average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. Early intervention aims to stop the early signs of violence escalating and prevent the reoccurrence of violence to reduce harm in the longer term⁴.

EVIDENCE/EVIDENCE-BASED

The term **evidence-based** is often used in policy and programming and refers to approaches and practices found to be effective according to the evidence base. **Evidence**, refers to published information, including academic research as well as organisational reports, program evaluations, policy papers and submissions.

There is a strong evidence base for the **prevention of violence against women** in Victoria, and this continues to emerge and evolve. As our understanding of what drives **violence against women** in different population groups and settings increases, the evidence base will continue to grow.



FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence involves patterns of coercive, controlling and abusive behaviours by the **perpetrator** and makes the **victim survivor** fear for their own or someone else's safety and wellbeing.

Family violence can take many forms, none of which are mutually exclusive. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual violence, and financial/economic abuse and control. It can also include exposing a child to the effects of family violence, such as through hearing, witnessing or otherwise living with violence at home.

Family violence can happen within all types of family and family-like relationships, including:

- Intimate partners (current or former): married or de facto couples, girlfriends and boyfriends, dating relationships
- Other family members; including siblings, step-parents, extended kinship connections
- Adolescent or adult children and their parents
- Older people and their children, relatives or carers; known as elder abuse
- People with disabilities and their carers, even when their carers are not related to them

The severity and frequency of violence often escalates over time.

The terms domestic violence and family violence are sometimes used interchangeably. Victorian legislation and policy documentation use the term family violence as it is understood to be more inclusive of diverse family units and kinship networks. In the Victorian context family violence is generally understood to encompass both domestic violence and **intimate partner violence**, as well as other forms of violence within a family.



GENDER AUDIT/GENDER ASSESSMENT

A **gender audit** (also known as a **gender assessment**) is a process which assesses the extent to which **gender inequality** is institutionalised in organisational processes, **practices**, policies and **structures**. It supports organisations to assess their current activity, to identify critical gaps and capacity for change around creating a more gender equitable organisation. It can also be used as a guide for planning and prioritising actions and establishing a baseline which enables organisations to measure changes over time.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Gender based violence is violence used against someone because of their gender. It describes violence rooted in gender based power inequalities and gender based discrimination. While people of all genders can experience gender based violence, the term is most often used to describe **violence against women** and girls. In the context of preventing violence against women, the term gender based violence is sometimes used interchangeably with **violence against women**.

GENDERED DRIVERS/DRIVERS

There is no single cause of **violence against women**, but there are specific social conditions which predict, or 'drive', higher levels of this violence. The **evidence base** identifies four key **gendered drivers**:

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
3. Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women⁵.

These expressions of **gender inequality** arise from discriminatory institutional, social and economic **structures**, social and cultural **norms**, and organisational, community, family and relationship **practices** that together influence individuals' attitudes, behaviours and, ultimately, their choices about using violence.

The term **drivers** is deliberately used instead of the term 'causes', to emphasise that while these factors are closely associated with the prevalence of violence at a population level, the relationship is more complex than cause and effect.

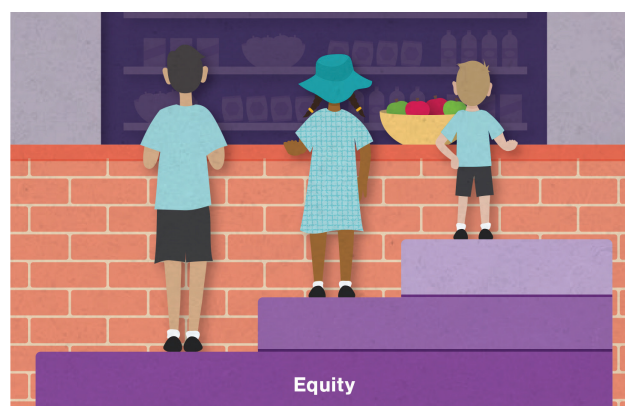
GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is the outcome reached through addressing gender inequities. It is the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all people regardless of their gender or sex. Gender equality does not mean erasing gender differences, but that people's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are not dependent on their gender⁶.

GENDER EQUITY

Gender equity refers to fairly and justly distributing rights, responsibilities and resources between people of all genders according to their needs. The concept recognises that people have different needs and access to power based on their gender, and that these differences should be identified and addressed⁷.

A program or policy that is not *equally* accessible to all genders is still considered gender equitable, if its outcome is increased **gender equality**. For example, initiatives that increase women's participation in male-dominated industries.



GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities between men, women, trans, gender diverse and intersex people.

Gender inequality results from a range of things, including laws and policies which constrain people of different genders rights and opportunities, and is reinforced through more informal **norms, practices and structures**.

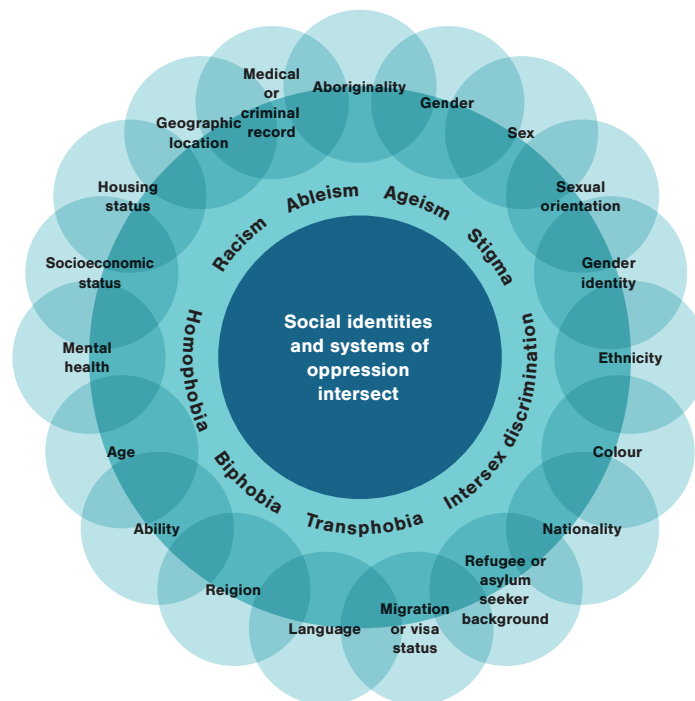
GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes are simplistic assumptions and generalisations about the attributes, skills, behaviours, preferences and roles that people should have or demonstrate based on their gender. These attributes are often perceived as natural or innate, but are actually the result of people of different genders being socialised in different ways. Gender stereotypes are not necessarily negative assumptions or generalisations.



INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality describes the complex ways that different identities overlap and intersect with structures and systems of power and oppression. Different kinds of structural inequality – for example, as a result of racism, ageism, colonisation and dispossession, ableism, on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity – are experienced differently when put together. Intersectionality offers an important critique of systems and structures of power and how these interact with identity.⁸



[Adapted from Family Safety Victoria](#)

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

An **intersectional approach** to preventing violence against women – which addresses the **gendered drivers** of this violence – recognises that there is no common experience of gender, femaleness or femininity. Women’s experience of gender cannot be separated from their experience of other aspects of their identity or their access to resources, power and privilege.

In the context of addressing **violence against women**, an intersectional approach recognises that the way women experience gender and inequality can be different based on a range of other cultural, individual, historical, environmental or structural factors including (but not limited to) race, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, ability or class. This approach also recognises that the **drivers**, dynamics and impacts of violence women experience can be compounded and magnified by their experience of other forms of oppression and inequality, resulting in some groups of women experiencing higher rates and/or more severe forms of violence, or facing barriers to support and safety that other women do not experience.⁹

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence is any behaviour by someone in an intimate relationship (including current or past marriages, domestic partnerships or dating relationships) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to those in the relationship. Intimate partner violence by men against women is the most common form of **family violence** and the most common form of violence that women experience¹⁰.



PARTNERS IN PREVENTION/PIP

Partners in Prevention (PiP) is a state-wide **prevention** program run by DVRCV, which provides support, creates resources, hosts events and distributes information to connect **prevention practitioners** with each other and improve their practice capabilities.

Prevention practitioners can join the free PiP network to receive regular email bulletins and invitations to networking and capability building events.

PERPETRATOR

Perpetrator is the term most commonly used in Victoria to describe people – mainly men – who use **family violence**, or commit **sexual violence** against women. This term is used regardless of whether the person has ever been arrested, charged with a crime, or had an intervention order issued against them.

The terms 'offender' or 'sexual violence offender' are also used to describe perpetrators of violence, usually in clinical or legal contexts. The term 'child sexual offender' is used to describe people who commit child sexual abuse.

The term 'men who use violence' is sometimes used instead of perpetrator, usually in clinical or therapeutic work focused on accountability and behaviour change. This is also always the preferred term when referring to young men who use violence as labelling a young person a perpetrator isn't helpful for their change pathway.

PREVENTION/PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN/PVAW

In **prevention of violence against women (PVAW)** work, the terms **prevention**, **primary prevention**, **violence prevention** and **PVAW** are often used interchangeably. While they each have slightly different definitions, in this context all of these terms are generally understood to mean the *primary* prevention of violence against women.

These terms are also understood to include the prevention of **family violence**. While there is an established evidence base around the **drivers of violence against women**, our understanding of what drives other forms of **family violence** is still emerging.

PREVENTION CONTRIBUTOR

Prevention contributors are people whose work may involve contributing to or participating in **prevention** activities and practice, but this is not the primary focus of their role. For example, teachers, local government staff, health sector staff, sports administrators, human resources staff, evaluators, workforce trainers and communications personnel¹¹.

PREVENTION PRACTITIONER

People who work in jobs focused on **preventing violence against women** are called **prevention practitioners**. Prevention practitioners are also sometimes referred to as **PVAW** practitioners.

Prevention practitioners can have a range of different job titles and work in different kinds of organisations including; local government, community health and women's health organisations, as well as dedicated **primary prevention** and **gender equality** organisations.

Prevention practitioners specialise in designing, implementing and monitoring **primary prevention** initiatives and policy, within and across various **settings**. They often work to build the skills and capabilities of other people, in diverse sectors and **settings**, to enable those people – sometimes referred to as **prevention contributors** – to embed **gender equality** and **prevention** into their existing work and the core business of their organisations¹².

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Primary prevention is a public health approach that is about addressing the drivers of a problem to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Just like other major social and health issues, such as smoking and drink driving, **violence against women** can be prevented by working across the whole population, using different strategies to address the key **drivers** and stop violence before it starts¹³.



REINFORCING FACTORS

A number of **reinforcing factors** can interact with the **gendered drivers** to increase the probability, frequency and severity of **violence against women**. The **evidence base** identifies five key reinforcing factors:

1. Condoning of violence in general
2. Experience of, and exposure to, violence
3. Weakening of pro-social behaviour, especially harmful use of alcohol
4. Socio-economic inequality and discrimination
5. **Backlash** factors (when male dominance, power or status is challenged)¹⁴.

None of these factors, on their own, predict or drive violence; they become more significant in the context of the **gendered drivers**. Most people impacted by these factors do not use violence. For

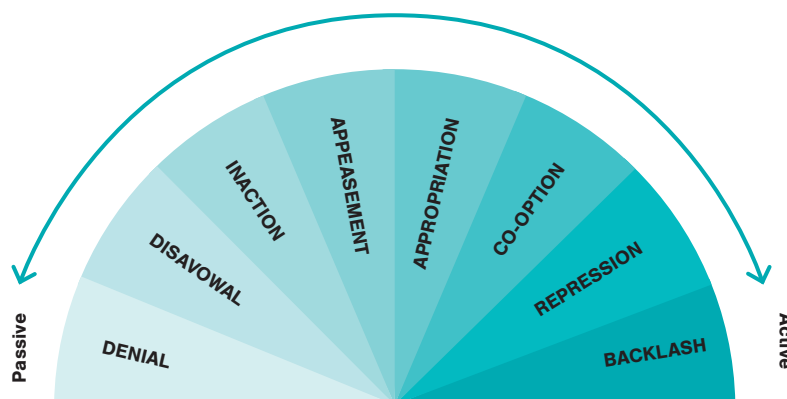
example, most people who have experienced violence do not go on to perpetrate it. Similarly, these factors are not *necessarily* present when someone chooses to use violence.

RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH

There are people who disagree with, deny, challenge or undermine work to promote **gender equality** and prevent **violence against women**. While **resistance** occurs in every **setting**, and can come from people of all genders, individually or collectively, it is more likely to come from people who benefit from existing imbalances¹⁵. From a feminist perspective, resistance can be understood as an inevitable response to challenges to male dominance, power, status or **social norms** and is often considered to be a sign that attitudinal, behavioural and cultural change are effective¹⁶.

Resistance can range from denial and passive attempts to maintain the existing state of affairs, to strategies that minimise or co-opt change efforts, to **backlash**¹⁷. Resistance can occur across all levels of the **socio-ecological model**.

The terms backlash and resistance are often used interchangeably. However, in the context of preventing violence against women, backlash is commonly used to describe the more extreme, aggressive or organised form of resistance¹⁸. Backlash is also a **reinforcing factor** that can interact with the **gendered drivers** to increase the probability, frequency and severity of **violence against women**.



Adapted from VicHealth (2018).

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

Respectful relationships education is **primary prevention** work undertaken in education and care settings to address the **drivers** of **violence against women**.

It involves taking a holistic, whole school approach which sees schools as both education institutions and workplaces, to create a future free from **gender based violence**.

While respectful relationships education usually takes place in schools and early childhood services, it can also take place in sporting clubs, youth groups and other community settings where children and young people learn, live and play.

Respectful relationships education is sometimes referred to as respectful relationships or abbreviated to RRE or RR.

RESPONSE/TERTIARY PREVENTION

Response is the term most commonly used to describe work that addresses violence once it has happened. This work is usually undertaken by **specialist family violence** or **sexual assault services** to support **victim survivors** and/or hold **perpetrators** to account. It is also sometimes called **tertiary prevention**, as it aims to prevent violence from recurring or escalating.



SETTINGS

Settings are the environments where people live, work, learn, socialise and play, where **prevention** activities can take place¹⁹.

The **evidence base** identifies a number of settings where **prevention** efforts can have significant impact. They include:

- Education and care settings for children and young people, such as schools and early childhood services
- Universities, TAFEs and other tertiary education institutions
- Workplaces, corporations and employee organisations
- Sports, recreation, social and leisure spaces
- The arts
- Health, family and community services
- Faith-based contexts
- Media
- Popular culture, advertising and entertainment
- Public spaces, transport, infrastructure and facilities
- Legal, justice and corrections contexts

SEXISM

Sexism refers to the language, attitudes, behaviours and conditions that create, support or reinforce **gender inequality**. Sexism can take many forms, such as jokes or comments, **sexual harassment** or **sex discrimination** and can be something that is perpetrated by individuals or operates within an institution or organisational **structures**. In some cases, sexism (such as **sex discrimination**) can be against the law.

SEX AND/OR GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Sex and/or gender discrimination is the term used to describe when a person is not given the same opportunities, or is treated less favourably than another in a similar situation due to their sex and/or gender. Sex and gender identity are protected attributes and in Victoria discrimination on the basis of sex and/or gender is against the law. Within Victorian legislation there is a positive duty on organisations to actively prevent sex and gender discrimination²⁰.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault refers to a broad range of behaviour of a sexual nature that make a person feel uncomfortable, frightened, intimidated or threatened. It is sexual behaviour to which a person does not consent.

Examples of sexual assault include:

- Unwanted touching
- Being made to look at or participate in pornography
- Indecent exposure
- Stalking
- Rape
- Incest
- Offensive written material for example dirty notes or text messages
- Sex-related insults

Some of these are serious indictable crimes.²¹

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Under the [Equal Opportunity Act 2010](#), **sexual harassment** is a form of **sex discrimination**, and is against the law. It refers to any unwelcome sexual behaviour that occurs in an area of public life, which could be expected to make a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment can be physical, verbal or written.

Examples of sexual harassment include: comments about a person's private life or the way they look, sexually suggestive behaviour, comments or jokes, sexually explicit written communication, repeated requests to go out, sexual coercion, requests for sex, distribution or display of sexual or sexually suggestive images. Some sexual harassment may also be considered **sexual assault** – such as unwanted sexual touching.²²

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence describes a range of sexual behaviours that make a person feel threatened, intimidated, frightened or uncomfortable. Sexual violence is often used as an umbrella term and can include all forms of **sexual assault**, **sexual harassment**, and sexual abuse.

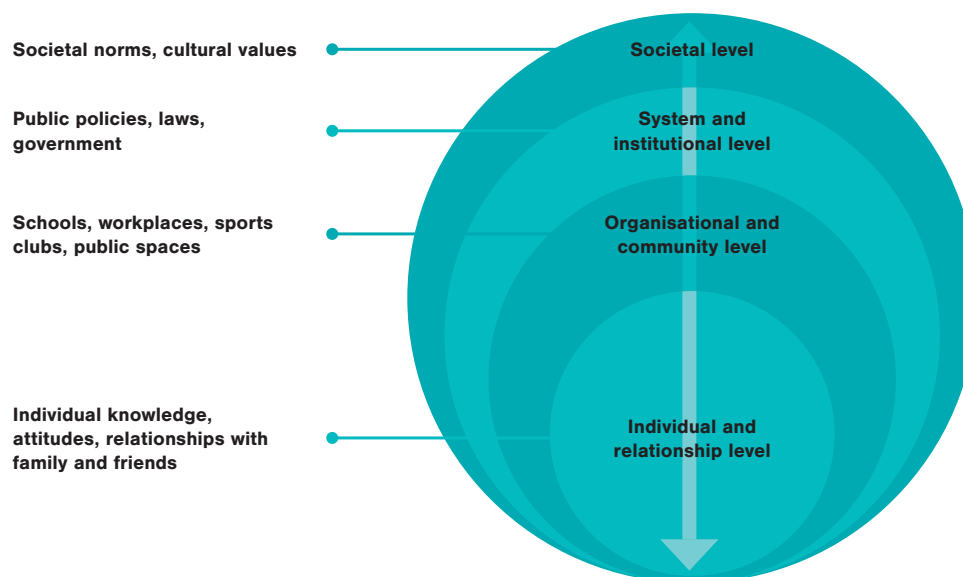
In the context of **prevention**, we often refer to data and statistics about the nature and prevalence of sexual violence. One of the key sources of this data is the Personal Safety Survey, which uses the term sexual violence to refer to 'the occurrence, attempt or threat of **sexual assault**'.

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

The **socio-ecological model** comes from the public health field and is used to help explain how violence is a product of multiple, interacting factors at the individual, organisational, systemic and societal levels.

The four **gendered drivers** exist at all of these levels and are the social conditions which predict, or 'drive', higher levels of **violence against women**.

Reinforcing factors interact with the **gendered drivers** at the individual and relationship level to increase the probability, frequency and severity of this violence.



Adapted from Our Watch (2015)

SOCIAL NORMS, PRACTICES, AND STRUCTURES

Social norms are the socially accepted and expected rules of conduct and models of behaviour. For example, the belief that women should be the primary carers of children. **Practices** are the specific behaviours or actions that reinforce these social norms such as women in a heterosexual relationship undertaking the majority of unpaid caring work. Finally, **structures** are the laws and systems that organise society and shape norms and practices in particular ways. For example, parental leave policies/schemes and pay differences between male and female dominated professions.

Gender inequality is reinforced through gender norms, practices and structures that occur or operate across different levels of the **social ecology**.

SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE/SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE

Specialist family violence services, including refuges and regional outreach services, provide direct support – either crisis support or case management – to women and children experiencing **family violence**.

Specialist sexual assault services provide crisis responses and ongoing counselling and advocacy to women and children who have experienced **sexual assault**.

Women can contact specialist services directly, or they may be referred by police, GPs, or other services such as schools and early childhood services. Visit DVRCV's [the Lookout](#) for a directory of specialist services in your region.

SPECIALIST PREVENTION ORGANISATIONS

Specialist prevention organisations are organisations with significant experience and expertise in the **primary prevention of violence against women**. These are also sometimes referred to as prevention services or prevention agencies.



VICTIM SURVIVOR

Victim survivor is the term most commonly used in Victoria to describe people, including children and young people, who have experienced **family violence** or **gender-based violence**. This term is understood to acknowledge the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced, or are currently living with, violence²³.

People who have experienced violence have different preferences about how they would like to be identified and may choose to use victim or survivor separately, or another term altogether.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is any act of **gender-based violence** that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.* This includes threats of harm or coercion and can occur in public or in private life. While violence against women often occurs in a family or relationship context, violence against women is broader than what is covered by the term **family violence** as it includes, for example, harassment at work or **sexual assault** by a stranger, neighbour, colleague or acquaintance.

* DVRCV considers and affirms anyone who identifies as a woman to be a woman. We recognise that people of other genders – including non-binary people and trans men – can also experience or have experienced oppression and violence ‘as women’ (for example, if they have identified as or been perceived by others to be women), and we include these experiences in our understanding of violence against women.



WHOLE OF SETTING

A **whole of setting** approach/initiative includes changes or action across all areas of a particular setting, from its formal and informal processes, **practices**, policies and **structures** to the physical and social environment and culture, as well as the setting's 'core business'.

For example, the whole school approach to **respectful relationships education** is a whole of setting approach because it encompasses systemic changes to school culture and operations, including staffing, environment, leadership, teaching practice, curriculum and community relations, to effectively embed **gender equality** and prevent **violence against women**.

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