INQUIRY INTO CAPTURING DATA ON FAMILY VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS IN VICTORIA

Respect Victoria submission

Attention	Legal and Social Issues Committee
Response to	Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria
Closing date	Friday 12 July 2024
Contact	Laura Vines, Manager Prevention Policy and Influence Laura.Vines@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au

RESPECT VICTORIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal peoples of Victoria as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we rely. We proudly acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal communities in Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside Aboriginal communities to effect change. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

RESPECT VICTORIA

Respect Victoria is the dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women in Victoria. Our vision is a Victorian community where all people are safe, equal, and respected, and live free from family violence and violence against women. We lead and support evidence-informed primary prevention and act as a catalyst for transformational social change. Primary prevention seeks to stop violence from occurring in the first place, by changing the underlying social conditions that drive it. We drive coordination and effectiveness of the prevention system. We build and promote primary prevention knowledge and evidence. We keep prevention on the public and policy agenda. We guide effective and impactful prevention, wherever Victorians live, work, learn and play. We raise awareness that violence against women is preventable and influence community conversations to fuel social change. We are an independent voice, with functions, powers and duties enshrined in Victorian legislation.

CONTENTS

ABOUT OUR SUBMISSION

Respect Victoria welcomes the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

Victoria has a strong history of nation-leading family violence reform across the prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing spectrum. An important element of this reform has been bringing people who use violence into focus: to acknowledge the gendered nature of family violence, as the target of prevention efforts, and to ensure better accountability through response systems. These themes were highlighted in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), and in the ensuing years as a priority for survivor advocates and researchers.

Respect Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the opportunities and risks associated with collecting data about people who use violence. Our submission addresses the mechanisms for capturing data on the characteristics and volume of perpetration of family, domestic and sexual violence, including:

- what data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in Victoria.

- how the current data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is used in Victoria.

- what additional data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators should be collected in Victoria specifically:

  - how it will help to achieve a full understanding of this cohort.

  - what the barriers are to collecting it and how these can be overcome.

  - what data cannot be collected.

Respect Victoria's submission focuses on perpetration data as it relates to primary prevention. We explore the type of data that would be most useful to guiding prevention efforts, and the relative opportunities and risks of different approaches to collecting and analysing perpetration data.

Our submission highlights the need for a nationally-representative, population-based survey that focuses on perpetration as a behaviour (rather than profiling perpetrators as an identity), the drivers of gender-based violence, and the presence of reinforcing risk factors. This data would deepen our understanding of pathways to perpetration, and potential intervention points for both population-wide and cohort-specific prevention and early intervention efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the establishment of a regular, nationally representative, population-based survey of the perpetration of gender-based violence. The study should:

a. Include all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic, family and sexual violence.
b. Over-sample men, to ensure a deep and broad understanding of the experiences of the cohort statistically most likely to perpetrate domestic, family and sexual violence.
c. Be designed in consultation with community-based/controlled organisations to ensure that the questions sensitively capture other types of violence that intersect with and compound gender-based violence, including ableism, racism, and homophobia.
d. Be capable of capturing patterns of abuse including those that are difficult to measure through incident-based reporting, such as economic abuse, tech-facilitated abuse, and coercive control.
e. Investigate violence trajectories and patterns, rather than focusing on single or most recent incidents.
f. Include questions that pertain not only to the violent behaviour but also to its intent, impact, severity, repetition, and context.
g. Investigate the drivers of violence present, with a focus on the gendered drivers of violence, through assessment of attitudes and peer group dynamics.
h. Capture reinforcing factors such as alcohol and other drugs, mental illness, gambling, climate disaster, pornography use and previous experience of violence, particularly in childhood.
i. Be capable of mapping respondents' journeys into and out of violence.
j. Build on existing research to ensure the survey uses valid, sensitive and relevant data collection approaches, in order to build an accurate picture of violence perpetration.
k. Be designed in consultation with First Nations organisations such as the Lowitja Institute and Djirra.
l. Align with and build on existing surveys, through consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) teams.
m. Be implemented alongside increased response capability, in recognition of the increase in help-seeking likely to occur following the roll-out of the survey.
n. Use a large enough sample to enable state-based analysis across all jurisdictions.

Recommendation 2

The Victorian Government explore the benefits of a boosted sample of Victorians in any national perpetration survey, to enable state- and region-based analysis that could track prevention impacts and support Early Intervention Investment Framework evaluation.

Recommendation 3

Following the roll out of a nationally representative perpetration survey, support detailed modelling to explore the links between the gendered drivers of violence, reinforcing factors (such as alcohol or pornography), and violent behaviours – noting this is work that Respect Victoria can do.

Recommendation 4

The Victorian Government advocates for an intersectional analysis of Personal Safety Survey data, to better understand how violence impacts people differently based on their identities and characteristics.

Recommendation 5

Victoria invests in ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation activities at a state-based level focused on violence perpetration and drivers, to complement a national data set. This may include service data use, with the understanding that these datasets are not representative of violence use within the population.

THE ROLE OF PERPETRATOR DATA IN PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Evidence-informed practice

As Victoria's dedicated agency for the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women, Respect Victoria is committed to evidence-informed practice. This includes the provision of policy advice informed by data, practice wisdom and lived expertise; developing evidence-informed prevention practice standards, guidance and leading and supporting system coordination to drive uptake across key settings; guiding the monitoring and evaluation of state-wide prevention to better understand what works; and driving research that builds the evidence base needed to effectively drive down rates of violence.

Evidence – whether from data analysis, research, sectoral engagement, or the expertise of survivor advocates – is critical to helping us understand what family, domestic and sexual violence looks like, what drives it, who it impacts and in what ways, and how to effectively prevent it from happening in the first place. Quality and timely evidence also supports early intervention and response services, by guiding program and service design, resourcing, and workforce development.

The primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria, particularly family, domestic and sexual violence, is guided by Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework. The framework, based on decades of research evidence, articulates the gender-based drivers of violence against women:

- condoning gender-based violence,
- men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence,
- rigid gender stereotypes and dominant forms of masculinity, and
- male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and controls.

Change the Story also articulates reinforcing factors, which can increase the prevalence and severity of violence in the context of the gendered drivers. These are: condoning violence in general, exposure to violence, factors that weaken pro-social behaviour (such as alcohol or climate disasters), and backlash and resistance. A critical part of *Change the Story* is recognition that the drivers of violence against women are societal and structural: they are pervasive, just like domestic, family and sexual violence, and not contained to any particular cohort or community (Our Watch 2021). Therefore, when we undertake research to understand the presence of drivers, it must consider all parts of our social ecology: the way that gendered drivers are encoded in our social norms, policies, organisations, communities, and relationships. Collecting data on drivers at the individual level is only part of the picture, and will not, on its own, tell the story of what is driving violence at such high rates across Victoria and Australia.

Current practices

Service data collection and use

Data relating to instances, users, and victims of family violence are collected in a number of ways in Victoria, however most people who use or are impacted by violence are not linked into the domestic, family and sexual violence service system (Flood, et al. 2022).The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's *Legislative review of family violence information sharing and risk management* provides a comprehensive overview of current practices (FVRIM 2023). Central Information Point (CIP) is an information sharing service that brings risk relevant information about a perpetrator or alleged perpetrator that is held by government systems and databases together into a single report. This

information is used by frontline practitioners to support family violence risk assessment and management. The consolidated report provides critical information about a perpetrator's history and pattern of behaviour. However, as the majority of people who use violence are not reported to the police (Flood, et al. 2022), the data does not give us a comprehensive understanding of everyone who is using violence and how they are using violence. For example, less than 1 in 4 sexual assaults in Australia are reported to police (ABS 2022), and an estimated less than 2 per cent of people who perpetrate sexual assault plead or are found guilty (Quadara 2014). Data relating to people engaged with police speaks more to the type of person who feels confident reporting, and where the police feel confident to intervene, than who is using and experiencing violence at a population level.

When data *is* collected from people who use violence through contact with police or social services (for example through L17 police referrals or completion of a risk assessment through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework), it is with the purpose of managing immediate risk and delivering services. Information collection and sharing scheme reform in Victoria (including establishment of the FVISS, CISS and CIP)[1] that followed the Royal Commission into Family Violence delivered many positive impacts. However, issues related to consistent practice remain, resulting in incomplete referrals and thus data collection. While family, domestic and sexual violence services collect detailed information, due to the nature of their services, this data relates to the victim survivor rather than the person who used violence against them. We propose dedicated consultation with Family Safety Victoria, No to Violence, Safe and Equal, and frontline services to explore data opportunities and challenges more fully.

Population data collection and use

Flood et al.'s review (2022) of international research evidence *Who uses domestic, family and sexual violence, how, and why?* demonstrated that a significant minority of men use violence towards women, driven by a range of societal (norms and attitudes), institutional, community, and relational factors. The review identified that while a variety of research studies have investigated family violence perpetration internationally, Australian research remains limited, and largely focused on the experience of family violence from a victim-survivor's perspective. Within this victim-survivor focused research, there is little scope to understand the character, dynamics, pathways, intent, and context for violence (Flood, et al. 2022).

The Personal Safety Survey (PSS) collects information about people's experiences of violence, including physical and sexual violence, emotional and economic abuse, sexual harassment, stalking and childhood abuse (ABS 2023). The data is mostly incident-focused, although data is collected on experiences of physical and sexual violence, economic and emotional abuse by a singular partner, enabling some analysis of the complexity of partner violence. This data includes how often the violence or abuse occurred, characteristics of the violence or abuse, whether it occurred during pregnancy, whether children witnessed the violence, whether police or other services were involved, anxiety and fear experienced as a result of the violence, and incidence and feelings towards leaving/returning to the partner. However, data is not currently collected on patterns of coercive control due to the complexity of measuring this form of violence (AIHW 2024). As information about the person using violence is limited to sex and relationship to victim, and as there is no additional identifying or historical information collected, the PSS is not able to tell us whether the person is a repeat offender between relationships, whether the type or severity of violence has changed over time, and the intent or impact of the violence (ABS 2023).

---

[1] Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, Child Information Sharing Scheme, and Central Information Point

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) is a nationally representative survey of community attitudes towards gender equality and gender-based violence, providing useful data on several gendered drivers of violence, such as people's support for gender equality (ANROWS 2023). Respect Victoria is currently leading a secondary analysis of Victorian NCAS data, modelling the relationship between attitudes towards gender inequality, understanding of violence against women, and attitudes towards violence against women.

The NCAS is not designed to collect data on self-reported use of or experience of violence, or on the presence of reinforcing factors, such as alcohol or pornography use. By contrast, a nationally representative perpetrator study presents an opportunity to examine the relationship between the drivers (at the individual and relationship level) and men's use of violence, as well as where there might be opportunities to intervene to prevent men from using, or continuing to use, violence.

ANROWS' analysis of domestic homicide inquests identified patterns in the personal histories and behaviour of people who use fatal violence against their partners (H Boxall 2022). This research identified three trajectories, or patterns of behaviour, that typically led to fatal violence:

1. 'persistent and disorderly', characterised by consistent violence, high service interaction, and personal histories of trauma (40%)
2. 'fixed threat', characterised by highly coercive and controlling behaviour within the relationship, but well-functioning outwardly and unlikely to be engaged with services (33%), and
3. 'deterioration/acute stressor' characterised by single instances of fatal violence that occur in otherwise non-violent relationships, usually following a crisis (11%).

This research is valuable in demonstrating that domestic homicide is most likely to occur in the context of persistent violence. However, most family violence does not result in homicide (ABS 2023) (H Boxall 2022). Therefore, the research is only reflective of people whose violence has had the most severe outcome. Research that is broader in scope and includes people whose violence that varies along the spectrum of severity and consistency would enable us to make better links between attitudes, behaviours and contextual factors, and violence use, escalation, and desistance. This would in turn contribute to design and delivery of more targeted and impactful prevention, early intervention and response initiatives.

The Man Box 2024 study, undertaken by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with Respect Victoria, explored how Australian men perceive messages about 'what it means to be a "real man"', and the link between these attitudes and a range of outcomes, including use of violence against an intimate partner (The Men's Project 2024). The study suggests that the more that men agree with hegemonic masculine 'rules', the more likely they are to express violence-supportive views and to report having used violence against an intimate partner. The Man Box 2024 study is unique amongst Australian research in linking what we know to be the primary drivers of men's violence towards women – which represents the vast majority of family violence cases – with self-reported violence. However, there are opportunities to collect further data to better understand people's interaction with a wider range of the gendered drivers of violence against women, and their use of a broader range of violent behaviours, as well as the pattern, severity, frequency, recidivism and desistance.

IMPROVING PERPETRATION DATA

What's needed and why

Shifting focus from victimisation to perpetration

Collecting and analysing perpetration data offers many benefits for the primary prevention of family violence. First and foremost, it keeps perpetrators 'in the picture'. Family violence, which is disproportionately used against women and children, is not 'a woman's problem': we cannot prevent violence from happening by only working with the people experiencing it. We must work with people using violence, and with those who perpetuate attitudes, behaviours and social norms that drive violence, whilst also understanding the contextual factors that reinforce this violence (e.g. alcohol, pornography, histories of abuse).

Australia has, for some time, collected data on victimisation of domestic, family and sexual violence through the PSS (ABS 2023). A regular, nationally representative, population-based survey on the use of domestic, family and sexual violence would complement this dataset, and support the framing of family violence as a 'perpetrator's problem'. Consistent data collection over time would enable between-year comparisons of patterns of family violence within the community. In prevention, this dataset would support both evidence-based program design, and monitoring impact through measuring the prevalence of drivers and use of violence.

While this inquiry is predominately focusing on perpetrators of family violence, it makes sense to consider family, domestic and sexual violence in any population-based survey, including insidious and dynamic forms of abuse such as tech-facilitated abuse, economic abuse, and coercive control. This is due to the overlap and co-occurrence of perpetration of different 'types' of violence (Flood, et al. 2022). Expanding the focus would also support a more intersectional analysis of violence perpetration, as different types of violence impact people with different identities and histories at different rates and in different ways. To complement this intersectional analysis of perpetration data, deeper intersectional analysis of data about the characteristics of victims of violence (such as disability, migrant status, and so on) available through the PSS is required.

Recommendation 1

The Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the establishment of a regular, nationally representative, population-based survey of the perpetration of gender-based violence.

a. Include all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic, family and sexual violence.

b. Over-sample men, to ensure a deep and broad understanding of the experiences of the cohort statistically most likely to perpetrate domestic, family and sexual violence.

c. Be designed in consultation with community-based/controlled organisations to ensure that the questions sensitively capture other types of violence that intersect with and compound gender-based violence, including ableism, racism, and homophobia.

d. Be capable of capturing patterns of abuse including those that are difficult to measure through incident-based reporting, such as economic abuse, tech-facilitated abuse, and coercive control.

e. Investigate violence trajectories and patterns, rather than focusing on single or most recent incidents.

f. Include questions that pertain not only to the violent behaviour but also to its intent, impact, severity, repetition, and context.

g. Investigate the drivers of violence present, with a focus on the gendered drivers of violence, through assessment of attitudes and peer group dynamics.

h. Capture reinforcing factors such as alcohol and other drugs, mental illness, gambling, climate disaster, pornography use and previous experience of violence, particularly in childhood.

i. Be capable of mapping respondents' journeys into and out of violence.

j. Build on existing research to ensure the survey uses valid, sensitive and relevant data collection approaches, in order to build an accurate picture of violence perpetration.

k. Be designed in consultation with First Nations organisations such as the Lowitja Institute and Djirra.

l. Align with and build on existing surveys, through consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) teams.

m. Be implemented alongside increased response capability, in recognition of the increase in help-seeking likely to occur following the roll-out of the survey.

n. Use a large enough sample to enable state-based analysis across all jurisdictions.

Focusing on the drivers

The gendered drivers of violence need prominence in data collection related to the cause and use of violence. A fuller understanding of how these drivers relate to violent behaviour would result in more effective, and more targeted, prevention and early intervention efforts. The combination of data related to attitudes towards and understanding of the gendered drivers of violence and family violence dynamics (such as data currently available through the NCAS) and additional data about violence use, would also help us draw a line of sight from prevention efforts through to violent behaviour (or desistance).

Reinforcing factors such as alcohol and other drugs, gambling, financial stress, mental illness and pornography use are important for understanding the context in which violence occurs. Alcohol and other drug use, gambling addiction, financial stress and mental illness are identified as evidence-based risk factors under MARAM, to identify risk of harm. Pornography is included as a risk factor when it has been shown to children. These reinforcing factors interact with the gendered drivers to influence the frequency, severity, and sometimes the onset of violence, but they are not the primary cause (Our Watch 2021). For example, ANROWS research during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that experiences of economic insecurity were significantly associated with sexual, physical, and non-physical abuse (Morgan A 2022). Financial stress increased the risk of experiencing physical or sexual violence, or emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviours for the first time. Women who had lost work or taken a pay cut were more likely to experience physical or sexual violence from their partner for the first time. A partner's loss of work or income was also associated with increased risk of first-time violence, and escalation in frequency and severity of existing physical violence, and emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours. Reinforcing this link, when women's financial situation had improved compared to 12 months ago, they were more likely to see a de-escalation in violence. However, while both women and men experienced financial stress during the pandemic, the gendered nature of violence remained: men were more likely to use violence and women were more likely to experience it. Income and financial security is inherently linked to gendered norms of inequality, based on the presumption that men should be providing for the family and exerting financial control. In other words, economic stress may result in violence *in the context of the gendered drivers.*

Similarly, it is important to understand the links between mental illness and violence through the prism of the gendered drivers of violence. All genders experience mental ill-health (AIHW 2024), but they do not use domestic, family and sexual violence at similar rates (AIHW 2024). Mental illness may result in people having intense feelings, such as shame, anger, and fear. Boys are socialised to use violence and aggression as a means of processing difficult emotions and conflict, often meaning that they do not develop the tools to resolve these issues and feelings in healthier or safer ways (Randell, et al. 2016). Violence is a learnt coping mechanism that may result in boys and men being more likely to use violence in the context of psychological distress than other genders (Sharma 2023). It is important to note that while mental illness or psychological distress may make it more likely that someone uses violence (Paulino A 2023), most people with mental illness are not violent (Van Dorn R 2012).

By focusing on the gendered drivers of violence, and how they play out through reinforcing factors, a perpetration survey would deliver not only better understanding of why and how violence is used, but it would also act as a mechanism to monitor our progress in primary prevention and early intervention. The NCAS as it currently stands, while providing rich and useful analysis, is insufficient to measure primary prevention progress, due to its focus on attitudes alone without also capturing data on behaviour. A perpetration survey that analyses both, and the relationship between them, would provide stronger evaluation evidence.

To function effectively as a tool for monitoring and evaluation, a perpetration survey would need to collect data from a representative sample of a large enough size to enable analysis at a state and ideally regional level. The different policy, systems, environmental and community contexts existing between

states and regions may result in different attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, risk factors and this difference is important to analyse in terms of understanding which approaches are working best to prevent violence. In Victoria, a regional analysis would enable deeper understanding of the impact of different funding and programmatic approaches, and enable better alignment of primary prevention and early intervention of gender-based violence initiatives with the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF), which requires evaluation of both shorter- and longer-term impacts.

Recommendation 2

The Victorian Government fund a boosted sample of Victorians in a national perpetration survey, to enable state- and region-based analysis that could track prevention impacts and support Early Intervention Investment Framework evaluation.

Perpetration as a behaviour, not an identity

A nationally representative survey should seek to emphasise understanding *perpetration* rather than *perpetrators.* While a call to understand more about people who use violence is understandable amongst escalating reports, the prevalence is so great that we need to acknowledge that it's not one 'type of person' using violence: it's people we know, love, and work with. People who use violence are everywhere, and they are part of our families, friendship groups, workplaces, sports clubs, and even our parliaments.

Domestic, family and sexual violence is pervasive and impacts people from all walks of life. Gendered violence being understood as a societal issue driven by problematic attitudes and norms, is critical to the success of primary prevention: if the problem of violence belongs to the whole community, then there is community will, momentum and mobilisation to address it. While it is important to collect demographic information as a part of any survey to ensure it is representative, any attempt to create a perpetrator profile that is based on identity characteristics rather than attitudes, behaviours and previous experiences risks creating a taxonomy that people can use to remove themselves from culpability, thinking that because they do not fit a particular profile, they do not need to be concerned about their behaviour. Profiling also risks compounding existing issues of over policing, stereotyping and discrimination. The purpose of collecting demographic and personal history information should be related to the pervasiveness of violence across our population, and identifying opportunities to intervene early and effectively.

Understanding the pathway to perpetration

A consistent, nationally representative survey on domestic, family and sexual violence perpetration should include data collection that enables a wider and deeper analysis of the pathways, dynamics, patterns, drivers, and characteristics of perpetration. By collecting data not just about instances of violence, but also contextual factors, patterns, and the presence of gendered drivers and reinforcing factors, we would get a better picture of how to reduce the risk of violence. If we understand perpetration trajectories, we better understand where to intervene in order to prevent violence from occurring, and from reoccurring. Long-term, cross-sectional data collection would enable us to see changes unfold over time, and better understand perpetration trajectories or pathways – and in turn opportunities for intervention and prevention.

Getting a better sense of the impact, intent and context of violence also helps us understand the gendered dynamics more clearly. Reviews by Flood et al. (2022) and Respect Victoria (Salter M 2023)

found that men typically used violence repeatedly, to control, and in a way that caused fear in their partner. However, women who used violence tended to do so in a reactionary or defensive way, that did not cause prolonged fear or submission in their partner. The PSS (ABS 2023) collects data about anxiety and fear that results from violence, which is more reliably reported from victim-survivors than people who perpetrate violence, as they may not have that insight into the state of mind of the person they are harming. A perpetration survey should consider dimensions of violence such as motivation, frequency, severity, context, and whether it was in the presence of coercive and controlling behaviours. Questions designed to elucidate patterns of abuse, both within a single relationship and by one perpetrator towards multiple partners/family members, rather than information about individual instances, will provide a richer picture to identify opportunities for targeted prevention and early intervention opportunities.

A better understanding of how the drivers of violence influence violent behaviour would enable better targeting of both whole-of-population and cohort-specific impactful primary prevention efforts. It would also enable better targeting of early intervention initiatives towards people who are most likely to use, continue, or escalate violent behaviours. In particular, the information could strengthen men's behaviour change programs, peer support programs, and initiatives designed to support help-seeking behaviour in men at risk of using violence.

Exploring contextual factors may also support a better intersectional analysis of domestic, family and sexual violence use in Australia. Understanding the role of racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, and other forms of discrimination in the lives of people who use and experience violence would enable stronger risk reduction efforts within marginalised communities. Through this analysis it is critical to keep the 'why' as well as the 'what' in view: in other words, it is not a person's social identity that creates the risk, it is the discrimination they face. This concept has been well-established in both mental health and domestic, family and sexual violence research focusing on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people (Green, Price and Dorison 2021) (Flood, et al. 2022). For example, internalised homophobia can act as a risk factor for intimate partner violence in queer relationships, and disrupting this link will be critical to driving down rates of violence in LGBTQIA+ relationships (Flood, et al. 2022).

Recommendation 3

Following the roll out of a nationally representative perpetration survey, support detailed modelling to explore the links between the gendered drivers of violence, reinforcing factors (such as alcohol or pornography), and violent behaviours – noting this is work that Respect Victoria can do.

Recommendation 4

The Victorian Government advocates for an intersectional analysis of Personal Safety Survey data, to better understand how violence impacts people differently based on their identities and characteristics.

Identifying potential intervention points

In a population survey that interrogates both attitudes and behaviours, it may be possible to investigate the feelings of people who use violence towards their own behaviour. For example, do people who use violence identify that they have done anything wrong, do they feel ashamed, do they feel justified? Peer-to-peer and bystander behaviours could likewise be investigated through questions about whether someone intervened or spoke to a person using violence about their behaviour. These questions would support stronger prevention and early intervention through understanding how social norms are playing out in Australian communities. Flood et al. noted that men are more likely to self-report that they would assault a woman if they thought there would be no consequences. While more research is needed, Flood et al.'s analysis suggests that if gender-based violence – particularly sexual violence – is not addressed when it first emerges, usually in adolescence, offending is likely to continue into adulthood, and potentially escalate. There are opportunities for accountability outside of the criminal justice system, in social settings. These opportunities are important in addressing behaviour both before it reaches the threshold of criminality, and also because of the very low rates of reporting and conviction for domestic, family and sexual violence offenses. Therefore, survey questions about responses to a person's use of violence could give us a sense of to what degree people are holding each other accountable, and the impact that is having on violent behaviours.

Creating a representative dataset

As advocated for by Michael Flood, Lula Dembele and others, a regular, nationally representative, population-based survey on the use of domestic, family and sexual violence is the most promising mechanism for collecting and analysing data of the scale, depth and breadth needed to truly understand perpetration. Much like the PSS over-samples women due to the gendered nature of victimisation, a perpetration survey should over-sample men due to the gendered nature of violence use. In 2016, the PSS sample included approximately 30,000 women and 7,000 men to get a more detailed picture of the experiences of victim-survivors: to replicate this approach, a perpetration survey might sample 30,000 men and 7,000 women.

While analysis of service data may offer qualitative insights, it cannot be considered representative of the full scale and spectrum of people who use violence. Due to well-documented issues within Australia about over-policing and surveillance of particular communities (such as First Nations communities, and people living in social housing), and people from a range of communities not feeling safe to report violence (including LGBTQIA+ and First Nations people) there is the potential for service data to significantly misrepresent who is using violence, who is impacted, and reinforce stereotyping and bias. However, when complemented by a representative dataset, service data *would* tell us who is currently not engaged with services or 'in view' of the criminal justice system, and where there are gaps.

Recommendation 5

Victoria invests in ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation activities at a state-based level focused on violence perpetration and drivers, to complement a national data set. This may include service data use, with the understanding that these datasets are not representative of violence use within the population.

Methodological considerations

The willingness of people to disclose violent behaviour in a survey, and reliability of the data generated, has been the subject of significant research over recent decades. There are a range of ways these risks can be mitigated through careful survey design, expert analysis and communication strategies.

Flood et al.'s review (2022) built on previous research (Anderson, et al. 2019) to show that *how* we ask people about their violent behaviours has a considerable impact on both what they report, and our ability to analyse the data effectively. Some people do not recognise their behaviour as abuse or assault, and are less likely to self-report if behaviour is framed in that way. More nuanced descriptions of situations and behaviours is likely to elicit more honest reporting. There are also examples of how online survey mechanisms can mitigate social acceptability bias and give more accurate prevalence estimates, such as the Man Box project (The Men's Project 2024), and research into child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes in Australian men (Salter, M et al. 2023) – both of which found high rates of self-reported violence by Australian men.

We also see between research studies that if research takes an incident-based approach, a lot of detail is missed that would give us a better understanding of the impact of violence within a relationship. For example, in studies that ask about specific incidents of violence without asking about the severity, intention, or impact of the violence, roughly equal numbers of men and women are reported to use physical and emotional intimate partner violence. However, in studies that delve deeper into the context of the violence, we see that men are far more likely to use violence that is repeated, escalating, designed to control, and that causes fear, distress and compliance in their partner (Salter M 2023). Women, however, are more likely to use violence in a defensive way, in single incidents with less likelihood of causing harm, and without causing fear and compliance in their partner (Flood, et al. 2022).

Implications for prevention

A regular, nationally representative, population-based survey of the perpetration of gender-based violence offers a number of benefits to primary prevention and early intervention, including:

- A deeper understanding of who is using domestic, family and sexual violence, how, and in what context.
- The opportunity to analyse the links between gendered drivers, reinforcing factors, and perpetration of domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Identification of leverage points for population-wide and cohort-specific primary prevention and early intervention efforts.
- Enhancing our capacity to evaluate progress in addressing the gendered drivers and reinforcing factors of domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Providing us additional detail about patterns of violence use, including entry into and exit from violence perpetration to inform the design and delivery of prevention, early intervention and response services.

REFERENCES

ABS. 2022. *Crime Victimisation, Australia 2020-21.* 12 October.
https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/crime-victimisation/2020-21.

—. 2023. *Personal Safety, Australia.* 15 March. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release.

AIHW. 2024. *Family, domestic and sexual violence.* 12 April. https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/coercive-control#:~:text=Given%20the%20complex%20nature%20of,to%20measure%20the%20prevalence%20precisely.

—. 2024. *FDSV summary.* 6 April. https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/fdsv-summary#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20of,family%20member%20(ABS%202023c).

—. 2024. *Prevalence and impact of mental illness.* 30 April. https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness#:~:text=The%20total%20proportion%20has%20risen,from%203%25%20to%205%25.

Anderson, RE, KE Silver, AM Ciampaglia, AM Vitale, and DL Delahunty. 2019. "The frequency of sexual perpetration in college men: A systematic review of reported prevalence rates from 2000 to 2017." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 22 (3). https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524838019860619.

ANROWS. 2023. *Attitudes matter: The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey.* https://www.ncas.au/.

Flood, M, C Brown, L Dembele, and K Mills. 2022. *Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The state of knowledge report on violence perpetration.* Brisbane, Australia: Queensland University of Technology. https://research.qut.edu.au/centre-for-justice/wp-content/uploads/sites/304/2023/01/Who-uses-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-how-and-why-The-State-of-Knowledge-Report-on-Violence-Perpetration-2023.pdf.

FVRIM. 2023. *Legislative review of family violence information sharing and risk management: Reviewing the effectiveless of Parts 5A and 11 of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic).* Melbourne, Australia: State of Victoria. https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/Legislative-review-of-family-violence-information-sharing-and-risk-management-2023.PDF.

Green, A, M Price, and S Dorison. 2021. "Cumulative minority stress and suicide risk among LGBTQ youth." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 69 (1-2): 157-168. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ajcp.12553.

H Boxall, L Doherty, S Lawler, C Franks, S Bricknell. 2022. *The "Pathways to intimate partner homicide" project: Key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicie in Australia.* Canberra, Australia: ANROWS. https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/the-pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide-project-key-stages-and-events-in-male-perpetrated-intimate-partner-homicide-in-australia.

Morgan A, Boxall H. 2022. *Economic insecurity and intimate partner violence in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic.* Australia: ANROWS. https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Economic-insecurity-and-IPV-during-the-C19-RR2.pdf.

Our Watch. 2021. *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.).* Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/18101814/Change-the-s.

Paulino A, Kuja-Halkola R, Fazel S, Sariaslan A, Du Rietz E, Lichtenstein P, et al. 2023. "Post-traumatic stress disorder and the risk of violence crime conviction in Sweden: a nationwide, register-based cohort study." *The Lancet Public Health* 8 (6). https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00075-0/fulltext.

Quadara, A. 2014. "The Everydayness of Rape." In *Preventing Sexual Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Overcoming a Rape Culture*, by N Henry and A Powell, 41-63. Palgrave Macmillan.

Randell, Eva, Lars Jerden, Ann Ohman, Starrin Bengt, and Renee Flacking. 2016. "Tough sensitive and sincere: How adolescent boys manage masculinities and emotions." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 21 (4): 486-498. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673843.2015.1106414.

Salter M, Woodlock D. 2023. *Intimate partner violence perpetrated by women against men.* Melbourne, Australia: Respect Victoria. https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202312/Summarising%20the%20Evidence_WIPV_research%20summary.pdf.

Salter, M et al. 2023. *Identifying an understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men.* UNSW Human Rights Institute. https://www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/Identifying%20and%20understanding%20child%20sexual%20offending%20behaviour%20and%20attitudes%20among%20Australian%20men.pdf.

Sharma, J. 2023. "Coping mechanisms in boys and girls and the consequences of domestic violence witnessed by children." *University of Minnesota, Morris.* https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=capstone.

The Men's Project, Flood M. 2024. *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia.* Melbourne, Australia: Jesuit Social Services. https://jss.org.au/programs/research/the-man-box/.

Van Dorn R, Volavka J, Johnson N. 2012. "Mental disorder and violence: is there a relationship beyond substance use?" *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47: 487-503. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00127-011-0356-x.