

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS NEVER OK**

On **White Ribbon Day** it would have been encouraging to hear news that the level of violence against women had been reduced. However, the unfortunate truth is that statistics in WA and other states say the opposite.

Police figures show that last year they recorded 13,183 domestic violence incidents compared to just over 8,000 in 2009-10 financial year. This escalation may be due to the fact that people are increasingly willing to call police to such incidents but it still paints a very worrying picture of the level of violence perpetrated primarily towards women. Last year 29 people were killed in family violence in Victoria. These deaths were caused by family members including partners and ex-partners.

A 2009 FaHCSIA report showed that 750,000 women would experience violence in the period 2021-22 if the then trends continued. The same report believed that the cost to the Australian economy of violence towards women and children was at that time \$13.6 billion.

This enormous financial cost was due to absenteeism and the associated loss in production, impact on health and other services, welfare dependency, costs related to children and housing etc. Avoiding these financial costs are reason enough for us to do something about domestic violence but there is another more compelling reason and that is the physical and emotional trauma that both the women and children suffer. And the reality is that as a society we suffer with them.

The traumatic impact of domestic violence is both short and long term. The emotional scars left on individuals are substantial. We see them often in our counselling and group rooms. The women are often emotionally depleted by the experience to the point of feeling frightened, worthless and inert. Moving from this void is not easy and it takes a great deal of determination and courage for a woman to take the first steps towards safety and recovery. Without support many women fail to fully recover from the devastating experience that domestic violence often is.

Children are equally impacted if not more so. They experience violent situations over which they have little control and that threaten to destroy the people they love as well as their own safety and security. There is enough research evidence to show that children who are exposed to high levels of domestic violence are deeply impacted by the experience. It can contribute to their own future violent behaviours as well as significant emotional difficulties. Unless they receive assistance they often struggle to form positive, intimate relationships.

As a society we also bear this emotional burden. The presence of aggression in our homes necessarily impacts on the wider community. The violence perpetrated sullies our collective soul. It raises the spectre of communal shame as we realise the extent of the violence that is imposed mainly on our women and children. It diminishes who we are for it detracts from our ability to be a supportive and life enhancing society in which all can flourish.

Domestic violence is primarily a male problem. It is men who are by far the aggressors in family violence. Such men perpetrate violence on women and by extension also on their children. The reasons why some men engage in such a demeaning and punitive behaviour are not easy to untangle as they are often complex and elusive. Irrespective of the reasons, men need to be helped to understand that there is no justification for violence against their partners. It is essential that men no longer believe in the illusion that violence can be an effective tool for the resolution of conflict or a way of dealing with personal anxieties and insecurities. Each man has the responsibility not only to avoid domestic violence in his life but also to help perpetrators expunge it in theirs.



The men that have the courage to attend counselling and other supports to deal with their aggression are still very few. Those who willingly participate in such programs often gain the insights and skills that helps them stop the abuse.

Domestic violence is never ok. Its costs are too great both to individuals and to our society as a whole. Men need to stop the violence and accept that care and understanding and not aggression is the solution to domestic conflict.

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