

Reducing violence against women and their children

Research informing the
development of a
national campaign

November 2015
Commissioned by Australian Government
Department of Social Services

**Australians express a strong desire for change.
But, do we recognise the heart of the issue?**

TNS

Table of Contents

	Page No.
Executive summary	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Informing a national campaign.....	6
2.1 Awareness and knowledge.....	6
2.2 Violence-supportive attitudes among young people.....	7
2.3 Community readiness	8
2.4 The national campaign – the need for a primary prevention approach.....	8
3. Research purpose and method	9
4. An influencer strategy	11
4.1 The role of a primary prevention influencer strategy	11
4.2 The layers of influence.....	14
4.3 Specific influencers.....	18
4.4 The discomfort of conversations.....	26
5. The challenges of engaging influencers – recognising heuristics.....	27
5.1 The strength of impeding heuristics.....	27
5.2 The impact of heuristics.....	31
6. The challenges of engaging influencers – reconciling costs	32
6.1 The perceived personal costs for parents	32
6.2 The perceived personal costs for young females – losing identity	35
6.3 The perceived personal benefits for young males – gaining identity	36
6.4 Changing the cost-benefit equation	38
7. The challenges of engaging influencers – reconciling perpetuation of norms	39
7.1 The inequity of norms	39
7.2 The norms of acceptable behaviours	39
7.3 The perpetuation of norms.....	40
8. The challenges of engaging influencers – efficacy.....	41
8.1 Low self-efficacy / confidence.....	41
8.2 Low response-efficacy.....	43
9. Additional CALD focus - intervention	44
10. Additional Indigenous focus - intervention.....	46
11. Conclusions.....	49

Executive summary

There is strong community support for the cessation of extreme violence against women.

A significant barrier to achieving this change, however, is low recognition of the heart of the issue and where it begins. There is a clear link between violence towards women, and attitudes of disrespect and gender inequality. These attitudes are unconscious, yet firmly entrenched, among many Australian adults and children. And as adults we are allowing young people to develop these attitudes from an early age. Often unknowingly, we are perpetuating the problem.

Before community change can be achieved, therefore, people will first need to [recognise](#) the problem, and our personal role. There are **three dominant heuristics** which will need to be recognised for the communications to be effective:

1. **Victim blaming:** When presented with a hypothetical scenario of disrespectful behaviour, there are consistently high levels of automatic victim blaming. As a result, many young males externalise the behaviour by blaming others, and many young females internalise the experience by blaming themselves.
2. **Minimisation:** Many actions that signify inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour are considered by adults as social misdemeanours rather than behaviours that should be corrected and modified.
3. **Empathy with male:** There is a strong desire to avoid blaming males, and a sense that participating in these behaviours is a rite of passage that should be understood rather than addressed. There is little empathy towards the female experience.

Because of the unconscious nature of engrained heuristics, many Australians fail to [reconcile](#) their role in perpetuating the situation, and easily deflect ownership. This is a result of **perceived high costs** of being influential, which include a desire to avoid:

- jeopardising one's relationship with their child – because of a desire *not* to be perceived as a punisher
- conflict and escalation with other parents or young people. This translates to high threat appraisal (concern for personal safety) among female influencers
- exposure as a hypocrite, if there is uncertainty whether the adult has exhibited similar behaviour in the past
- creating embarrassment, or fear, for young because getting involved may elevate the situation
- reflection of bad parenting, by acknowledging your child has undertaken a negative behaviour
- social exclusion, by being in a minority for attempting to be positively influential.



As a result, many quickly accept *not* getting involved when it comes to disrespectful behaviour between young males and females. There is a widespread **norm** to consider the experience an important part of youth development. For young males, it is considered an important part of growing up and a way to learn right from wrong. For young females, it is considered an important way to build resilience and coping mechanisms for an experience that is a potentially inevitable part of life moving forwards.

Influencers need to feel a greater sense of confidence / self-efficacy to **respond**. Many describe low self-efficacy in both intervention and prevention conversations with young people. Any communication will need to provide influencers with a clear, personal resolution / solution.

While a primary prevention campaign targeting influencers will have some benefit among **CALD** and **Indigenous** audiences, intervention via policy and programs will also be required in order to address the scale of the issue among these communities.

1. Introduction

The context in Australia

The most comprehensive Australian data source on prevalence of violence is the Australian Bureau of Statistics via the Personal Safety Survey (PSS)¹. This study was last conducted in 2012 and included 17,050 men and women aged 18 years and over. It explores the experience of violence since the age of 15, and within the 12 months prior to the survey.

The 2012 PSS data highlights the **pervasiveness of this issue** in Australia:

Close to half (44.8%) of all Australians have experienced violence since the age of 15.

Gender	% experiencing violence since the age of 15
Men	49.0%
Women	40.8%

While the proportion of men experiencing violence in the last 12 months has reduced significantly over time, the proportion of women experiencing violence has not.

Gender	2005	2012
Men	10.8%	8.7%
Women	5.8%	5.3%

% experiencing violence in last 12 months

There are clear **differences in the way violence is experienced by gender**.

1. The **type of violence** encountered is different.

Men are more likely than women to **experience physical violence** and, the majority of men experience physical violence **from another man** (46.4% of men experience violence from a male perpetrator).



Women are four times more likely than men to have experienced **sexual violence**. One in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.



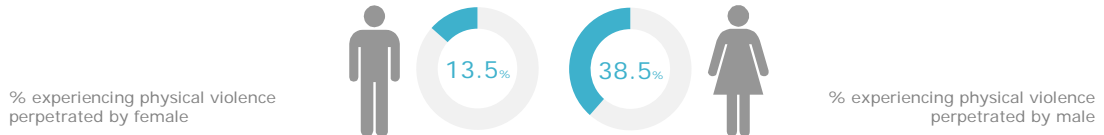
Women are significantly more likely than men to have experienced **emotional abuse** - one in four Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a partner since the age of 15.



¹ Cat 4906.0 - Personal Safety Survey Australia, 2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Additionally, the **relationship to the perpetrator** is different.

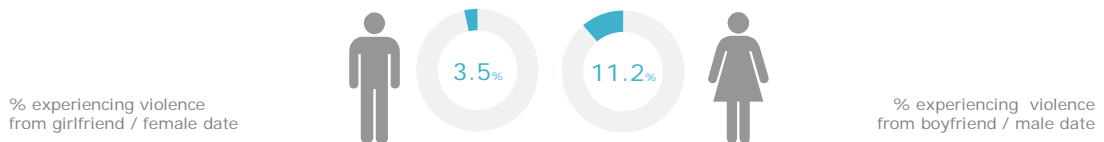
Women are significantly more likely to **experience violence perpetrated by a male**, than men are to experience violence perpetrated by a female. Two in five Australian women have experienced violence perpetrated by a male since the age of 15.



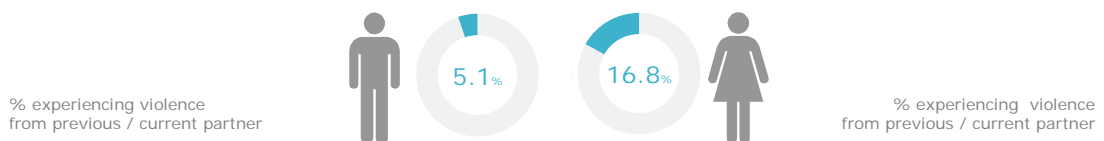
Women are significantly more likely than men to **experience violence by someone that is known** to them. One third of Australian women have experienced violence by someone that is known to them since the age of 15.



Women are significantly more likely to **experience violence from a boyfriend / date**, than men are to experience violence from a girlfriend / date. One in nine Australian women have experienced violence from a boyfriend / male date since the age of 15.



Women are significantly more likely to **experience violence from a partner**, than are men. One in six Australian women have experienced violence from a current or previous partner since the age of 15.



The Australian Institute of Criminology has reported that between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2012, 83 women were killed by a current or former partner².

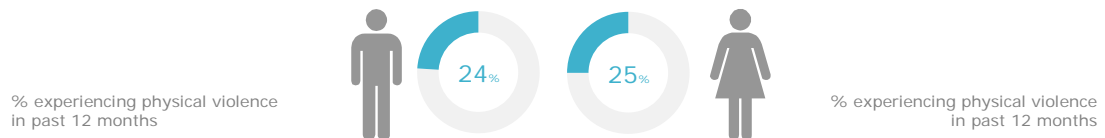
The same report indicated that **on average, one Australian woman is killed by their current or former partner each week**. However, media reports put this figure closer to two each week.

² AIC 2015.

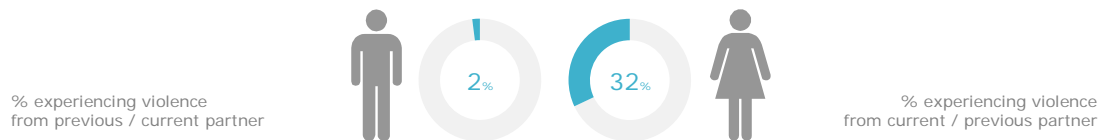
Violence against women among Indigenous Australians

Among Indigenous men and women, the issue of violence against women and children is more pronounced. There is data to suggest that:

Indigenous men are three times more likely than non-Indigenous men to experience physical violence in the last 12 months. Indigenous women are **five times more likely than non-Indigenous women** to experience **physical violence**³.



One third of Indigenous women have experienced physical violence **from a partner**⁴. This is twice the level recorded among non-Indigenous women.



In addition:

- Indigenous women in remote and regional areas experience rates of family violence up to 45 times higher and sexual assault 16 to 25 times higher than other women⁵.
- Indigenous women and girls are between **25 and 33 times more likely to be hospitalised** due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women and girls⁶.

Violence against women among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians

According to the ABS, there are around 275 cultural and ethnic groups recognised in Australia. There is limited information and no uncontested national data available on the prevalence of violence against women in CALD communities.

It is, however, widely hypothesised that prevalence is much higher. High levels of non-disclosure can be influenced by cultural, religious and language factors, a difference of interpretation about what constitutes domestic and family violence, and a fear of deportation.

³ Cat 4714.0 - Personal Safety Survey Australia, 2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics

⁴ Cat 4714.0 - Personal Safety Survey Australia, 2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics

⁵ Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2014, Productivity Commission

⁶ Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2014, Productivity Commission

Women with disability

Women with disability are a further high-risk group.

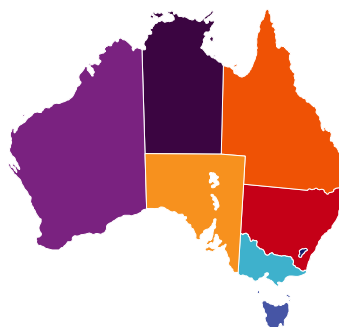
- The University of New South Wales survey (2013) of 367 **women and girls with disability** found that one in five (22%) had been affected by violence in the previous year.⁷
- 90 per cent of **women with an intellectual disability** have been subjected to sexual abuse⁸.
- Over two-thirds of women with disability (68%) reported being sexually abused before they turned 18 years old (VicHealth 2011).
- Overseas studies show women with disabilities are 40 per cent more likely to experience intimate partner violence than women without disabilities, and the violence is often more severe (Brownridge 2006, cited in VicHealth 2011).

The impact of violence against women

The impacts of domestic and family violence are complex and varied. The impacts on women and, in many cases, their children, can extend past physical and psychological harm, to social isolation, unemployment, homelessness and financial destitution.

In 2008-2009, violence against women cost the Australian economy \$13.6 billion⁹.

This is estimated to increase to \$15.6 billion by 2021-22 without effective action¹⁰.



Government response – the National Plan to Reduce Violence against women and their children

All governments agree reducing violence against women and their children is a **national public health priority**. In 2010 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan). The National Plan envisages that Australian women and their children will live free from violence in safe communities. It targets two main types of violence against women: domestic and family violence and, sexual assault.

In early 2011, all Australian governments released the *First Action Plan 2010-2013: Building a Strong Foundation*. This was followed by the release of the *Second Action Plan 2013-2016: Moving Ahead in 2014*.

On January 2015, the Prime Minister **elevated the issue of violence against women** and their children to a national level at COAG, and announced the establishment of the COAG Advisory Panel to Reduce Violence against Women.

⁷ *Stop the Violence: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia*, University of New South Wales, 2013

⁸ Australian Law Reform Commission (2010); Salthouse & Frohmader 2004, cited in VicHealth 2011

⁹ The cost of violence against women and their children, KPMG, 2009

¹⁰ The cost of violence against women and their children, KPMG, 2009

Definitions

For the purpose of this document:

- *Domestic violence* refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.
- *Family violence* is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for domestic violence. The term family violence is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of Indigenous people, because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur.
- *Sexual assault* can be by either a family member, intimate partner, someone known or a stranger.

The purpose of this document

On 17 April 2015, COAG endorsed a \$30 million commitment to a national campaign to reduce violence against women and their children, which is jointly funded with the states and territories.

This campaign will focus on **primary prevention**, specifically addressing the precursory attitudes of young people around respectful relationships and gender equality.

Primary prevention seeks to reduce the prevalence of violence against women by intervening before any violence occurs. That is, positively influencing attitudes *before* they become entrenched and allow the behaviours to occur.

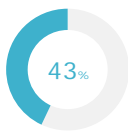
This document, and the research included, was designed to inform the development of the national campaign, as part of the Australian Government's commitment, and COAG agreement, to reduce the violence against women and their children. This is jointly funded with the states and territories.

2. Informing a national campaign

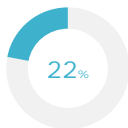
2.1 Awareness and knowledge

Awareness that violence against women is wrong is already high. The 2013 National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) indicates that almost all Australians (96%) agree violence against women is a criminal offence¹¹.

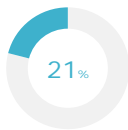
However, the same data suggests **there are sizeable proportions who believe there are circumstances in which violence can be excused.** For example:



Two in five agree that *rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex*. And, the proportions agreeing with this has increased significantly since 2009 (from 35%).



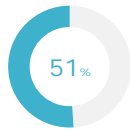
One in five agree *domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry they lose control*.



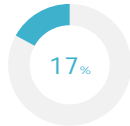
One in five agree *domestic violence can be excused if the violent person regrets it*.

¹¹ National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey, 2013

Additionally, the NCAS data highlights that:



Half agree *most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to.*



One in six agree *domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family.*



One in ten agree *it's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together.*

2.2 Violence-supportive attitudes among young people

Within NCAS, **young people** were highlighted as an area of concern. Young people were described as having somewhat more violence-supportive attitudes than others, particularly in relation to non-physical forms of violence. For example:



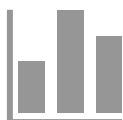
Economic abuse: Half (47%) of youth males and one third (34%) of youth females do not agree that 'trying to control by denying your partner money' is a form of partner violence / violence against women. This result among young people is significantly higher than that recorded among those aged 35-64 years (27%).



Control of social life: One quarter (24%) of youth males and one in eight (13%) youth females do not agree that 'controlling social life by preventing your partner seeing family and friends' is a form of partner violence / violence against women. This result among young people is significantly higher than that recorded among those aged 35-64 years (14%). This difference is driven solely by the result among youth males.



Repeated criticism: One in five (21%) youth males and one in seven (14%) youth females do not agree that 'repeatedly criticising to make partner feel bad / useless' is a form of partner violence / violence against women. This result among young people is significantly higher than that recorded among those aged 35-64 years (14%). This difference is driven solely by the result among youth males.



Prevalence: Three in five (60%) youth agree that 'violence against women is common'. This is significantly lower than agreement among those aged 35-64 years (71% agree).

2.3 Community readiness

There have been many recent (2014 / 2015) community-led actions which indicate readiness to engage and be influential in reducing domestic violence against women and their children. Some examples of this include, #takedownjulienblanc; #putyourdressout; over half a million people attended the Facebook event for the *Red My Lips* campaign; many candle vigils and peaceful marches at various locations across Australia etc.

In the lead-up to this research, there was a significant amount of media coverage on domestic and family violence and sexual assault. In the 181 days between 5 November 2014 and 4 May 2015, there were 3,977 items of media coverage.

2.4 The national campaign – the need for a primary prevention approach

Primary prevention seeks to reduce the prevalence of violence against women by intervening before any violence occurs. That is, positively influencing attitudes *before* they become entrenched and allow the behaviours to occur. An example that is often used to illustrate the difference between, and importance of, intervention and primary prevention by the World Health Organisation is as follows:

Some people are fishing on the riverbank. Suddenly they see a person swept by in the current, half-drowned and struggling to stay afloat and swim to shore. They wade into the water and grab hold of the person, who continues on her way by land once she has caught her breath and dried off a bit. Just as they get her to shore they see another person in trouble or hear a cry for help. All afternoon they continue saving people from drowning by pulling them out of the river, until someone decides to walk upstream to find out what is causing people to be swept away in the river in the first place¹².

A primary prevention approach considers the complex interplay between an individual, their relationships, community and societal factors. Because of this, it is essential that positive attitudes and behaviours are modelled and reinforced by adults, families, relatives, friends, setting-based influencers (for example, schools and sporting clubs) in the broader Australian community.

A primary prevention campaign will be an integrated element of other primary, secondary and tertiary approaches to reducing violence against women that are being implemented by all governments, non-government organisations and community groups.

¹² Primary prevention of intimate-partner violence and sexual violence: Background paper for WHO expert meeting; Harvey, A; Garcia-Moreno, C; Butchart, A (2007)

3. Research purpose and method

TNS was commissioned to undertake research to inform the development of the national campaign to:

- Provide a clearer view of the attitudes and beliefs of young people (10-17 year olds) around gender equality and respectful relationships, and how these factors may sow the seeds for the perpetration of violence against women.
- Identify adult influencers of young people, as a primary target of the campaign.
- Inform an understanding of how to empower influencers of young people to engage in the topic, and mobilise their interaction.

Summary of research method

The research was multi-modal, comprising both traditional and innovative qualitative techniques, in addition to a small quantitative component. Qualitatively, approximately 255 people were included in this research. Across these 255 people, there was around 400 hours of discussion between moderators and participants. In summary, the methodology included:

1. Desk research

2. Qualitative research with:

- Mainstream audiences
- Indigenous audiences
- CALD audiences.

3. Quantitative: A seven minute nationally representative survey administered online to understand young people's perceptions of their perceived influencers. This included 1000 mainstream, CALD and Indigenous Australians (n=300 10-14 year olds, n=300 15-17 year olds, n=400 18-25 year olds).

4. At risk audiences: Individual interviews among service providers, refugees and counsellors as proxy interviews for those who had experienced violence as either a victim or a perpetrator.

5. Brand workshop: A workshop was conducted with seven key marketers from large private sector companies from the following sectors - retail, fast moving consumer goods, fast food, insurance, technology.

Locations

The qualitative research was conducted nationally and inclusive of all states and territories. In each state and territory, a metropolitan and regional location was included. One remote location was included.

Qualitative moderation

All qualitative sessions were moderated by experienced TNS researchers. Moderators were matched by gender to the individual participant. Two of the CALD sessions were moderated in-language by a cultural specialist. Two of the Indigenous sessions were conducted by an specialist Indigenous researcher.

Ethics

All moderators undertook training at commencement of the study to ensure they were able to recognise and detect signs of discomfort or distress and respond accordingly.

On conclusion of each session, participants were provided contact details for a variety of agencies providing help in this area, in addition to contact details for the researcher him/herself in the event they wished to discuss anything further.

All research participants were provided a comprehensive understanding of the nature and intent of the research prior to agreeing to be involved. For participants aged under 18 years, the discussion was first held with the parent.

Active consent was gained from all parents of those aged 10-17 years who participated in the qualitative and quantitative research.

In Indigenous communities, community elders were contacted first and permission sought to contract a range of organisations on the ground and community contacts in order to invite individual participants to the research.

Fieldwork dates

All qualitative and quantitative fieldwork was undertaken in August 2015.

4. An influencer strategy

4.1 The role of a primary prevention influencer strategy

The basis for primary prevention

The attitudes of Australian young people (aged 12 to 24 years) towards violence against women are an area of concern. In particular there:

- is **low knowledge** of specific behaviours that violate another individual, including controlling behaviours (social contact, mobile phone use), physical violence and gender inequality
- are high levels of **minimisation**, with high occurrence of dismissive excuses for violent behaviours and instances of gender inequality
- are high levels of **acceptance** of many specific behaviours that violate another individual although they may not be physically violent, and acts which signify gender inequality.

Primary research confirms the need for a primary prevention attitudinal and behavioural change strategy.

Service provider endorsement of a primary prevention influencer strategy

Throughout this research, the concept of an influencer strategy as the mechanism for primary prevention among younger Australians, received **consistently strong endorsement from service providers**.

Among **service providers** included in this research, the need for - and value of - primary prevention targeting younger audiences was strongly agreed. It was described as an important facilitator by which protective attitudes and healthy behaviours could be learned from influential others throughout childhood.

Fundamentally, service providers recognise the benefit of an influencer strategy in engaging the broader community. This is important because service providers considered violence against women a community issue that extends beyond **physical violence** and also relates to **disrespectful relationships** and **gender inequality** –

“There’s still some pretty horrible community attitudes. We’ve got it to a point so that ok it’s being talked about, but it’s still this sense that it’s just physical violence, and it’s not ...community attitude wise we have a long way to go.” (service provider)

When discussing an influencer strategy, service providers note how an influencer strategy can assist in achieving both **depth** and **breadth** of influence (summarised in the following table).

Depth	Breadth
<p>The power of individual personal relationships</p> <p>Based on their professional experiences, service providers note the power of personal relationships in achieving positive influence. This is because the extent to which a personal relationship was able to be established with an individual, the greater the potential impact of counselling was felt to be. An influencer strategy was believed to maximise the depth of existing personal relationships between adult influencers and young people, thereby increasing the potential for sustained attitudinal and behavioural change.</p>	<p>The need for consistency</p> <p>Service providers also agree on the benefit of consistency and multiple voices to achieve the necessary breadth of influence that is commensurate with the enormity of the challenge. An influencer strategy was believed to maximise the potential breadth of personal networks and relationships in order deliver consistency of message and influence for young people.</p>

Young people’s openness to an influencer strategy

The potential for an influencer strategy to be effective in reaching young people was observed across two levels.

1. **The desire for influence rather than information:** Young people consistently indicated a strong desire for engagement and influence rather than information provision. This was consistent among mainstream, disability, CALD and Indigenous participants.

“I don’t want a lecture” (female, 15-17 years).

2. **The importance of consistency:** Additionally, young people recognise the importance of consistency of messaging and the value an influencer strategy would have in ultimately achieving this. This was consistent among mainstream, disability, CALD and Indigenous participants.

“It has to be consistent ...if I hear one thing, but everyone else is doing something else, it means nothing” (male, 18-25 years).

The observation of influence throughout the research process

Throughout this research, the potential power of ‘influence’ was frequently evident, from the observation of active learning throughout qualitative discussions, to the openness of young people to be positively influenced.

In particular, evidence of this was demonstrated via an extended group session. This was intentionally structured to be disruptive (to encourage active, cognitive processing), and to facilitate the observation of interactions between young people and adult influencers. On commencement of the session, individuals were asked to write a letter to themselves regarding their thoughts and expectations for the session. This exercise was repeated on conclusion of the session.

Some examples of these letters are provided in the following table, to highlight the extent to which active learning occurred as a result of the discussions between influencers and young people during the session. The letters have been anonymised to ensure privacy. These letters are provided verbatim and have not been grammatically corrected:

Opening letters	Closing letters
Teenage male	
<p>Dear xxx, I am feeling alright a tad nervous not too much. Not sure what to expect. Should be interesting. Keen for a feed.</p>	<p>Dear xxx, After this session I have learnt so much by far out of my expectations. It was a really good night and I changed my opinion on the topic and taught me that fighting fire with fire is never right and there is much better option and sexism is evident even without being recognised and just seen as everyday life and how much an affect we can have on the future generations.</p>
Teenage female	
<p>Dear xxx, Well I'm here, I'm not really sure what to expect but I guess I'll find out soon enough. By the end of this you'll probably be wrecked but I hope you got an insight of what domestic violence really is. Talk soon, from 4 hours earlier ☺</p>	<p>Dear xxx, I can't begin to explain the insight I have had tonight. I loved hearing how we all interpreted information differently. Now I want you to take a pledge that you will do anything you can to stop violence because it is not worth the heartache people experience. You never know what peoples' home lives are like and also do everything and anything you can to stop violence forever. I'm grateful to have been given this opportunity. It's time for change. xxx</p>
Male influencer	
<p>Dear xxx, Feeling open minded, and keen to be involved. . Hoping at the end of the session, I understand the creativity mind sets of each person as an individual and as a group. Also hoping to see how my mind mapping process compared to others, as it plays a huge part in my business. Most importantly having an impact on the groups goal in helping the research group on the topic involved.</p>	<p>Dear xxx, How do you feel? I feel I have contributed to a very important night. I have seen how different people, young and old from various background see things from their perspective. It has given me even more energy to keep on doing what I'm doing. However, I need to beat my demons and teach myself what I preach. Had a very interesting and worthwhile night.</p>

4.2 The layers of influence

There are three layers of potential influence that were consistent among mainstream, disability, CALD and Indigenous participants in this research:

Close influencers	Setting influencers	Consistent / Reinforcers
<p>Focussed on highly personal relationships.</p> 	<p>Focussed on settings to deliver consistency.</p> 	<p>Achieves amplification, breadth and consistency.</p> 

The discussion below synthesises data from both the quantitative and qualitative research. In the quantitative research, the data reflects responses to the following question *“Some things and/or people have a pretty big influence on our opinions ...and, other things / people don’t really influence us that much. For each of the things / people below, tell us whether you’d care about their opinions ...assuming they were sharing something on a topic that was important to them.”*

The role of close others – parents, family networks and peers

There was strong qualitative and quantitative evidence of the important and influential role of parents, and broader family networks and peers as close others. It is noted that in general, close **female influencers** were more frequently described as having a strongest influence on young people on the topic of violence against women. This was because for young males and females alike, there was a perception that other females (be it mothers, sisters, female friends) may also have personally experienced gender inequality, aggressive or disrespectful behaviour. It was this perceived high likelihood to have experienced it firsthand which appeared to give females greater relevance and potential influence. It is noted, however, that males were also highly influential.

As shown in Table 4.2a:

- There is both qualitative and quantitative evidence that **mothers** were the most important influencer for the majority of young people – males and females, all age groups, CALD and Indigenous. Three quarters (77%) of the total target audience described mothers as pretty important in shaping their opinions (the highest rating).
 - Notably, while mothers were the most influential close other among **CALD** young people, they are significantly less so than that recorded among Indigenous and mainstream young people. Additionally, there is comparatively little difference between the influence of mothers (72%) and fathers (67%) among CALD young people.
- **Fathers** were also highly influential (66%) – second only to mothers. This was particularly true among Indigenous participants.
 - As referenced in relation to mothers, fathers are noted as particularly influential among **CALD** young people because of their comparatively equal perceived level of

influence as mothers (whereas among mainstream and Indigenous, mothers were more likely to be considered influential than fathers).

- **Older siblings**, in particular **older sisters** (51%, older brothers 43%), appear highly influential because of their proximity in age and perceived ability to more easily relate and role model positive behaviours.
- **Grandparents** are also influential and at similar levels to older siblings (49% grandmother, 46% grandfather).
- **Younger siblings** were considered less influential when compared to other family members, but are still potentially influential (37% younger sisters, 34% younger brothers).
- Close **peers** were frequently described as influential and are an important group and are as influential as older siblings. The influence of peers increases with age.
 - Among **Indigenous** participants, **girlfriends** were significantly less likely to be considered influential than among mainstream and CALD young people. There was some evidence of this throughout the qualitative research, whereby younger male Indigenous participants were less likely to cite a girlfriend as someone they would not want to witness them undertaking disrespectful or aggressive behaviour. Comparatively, mainstream younger males frequently indicated girlfriends as someone they definitely would not want to be an observer of such a situation.

Table 4.2a:
The layers of influence –
‘close’ others

	Total	Males	Females	10-14 years	15-17 years	18-25 years	CALD	Indigenous	Non CALD/Indigenous
Base	1000	509	487	300	300	400	235	19	746
Close others	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family									
Mothers	77	71	83	87	81	70	72	96	78
Fathers	66	64	69	77	68	60	67	81	66
Older sister	51	48	55	55	50	50	60	0	48
Grandmother	49	48	51	61	51	42	46	52	51
Grandfather	46	47	45	55	50	39	45	47	47
Older brother	43	42	45	43	38	46	57	0	38
Younger sister	37	32	42	27	28	45	39	31	36
Younger brother	34	33	35	37	30	33	47	51	28
Other relative (older)	27	28	26	39	32	17	35	29	24
Other relative (younger / same age)	21	21	21	30	23	15	27	31	18
Peers									
Close female friends	47	36	60	48	48	47	39	52	50
Close male friends	42	50	34	41	46	41	38	58	43
Girlfriends	36	40	32	29	38	40	32	17	38
Boyfriends	34	19	51	22	28	44	36	10	35
Friends of friends	9	14	5	12	8	9	18	20	6
Facebook friends	8	11	5	10	11	6	13	13	7

Source question: "Some things and/or people have a pretty big influence on our opinions ...and, other things / people don't really influence us that much. For each of the things / people below, tell us whether you'd care about their opinions ...assuming they were sharing something on a topic that was important to them." Data shown reflects top scale point: "What they say is pretty important to me".
Green highlighted text denotes significantly higher compared to other sub-groups.
Red highlighted text denotes significantly lower compared to other sub-groups.

The role of distant others – settings

Settings are important, and will need to be included in an influencer strategy. The breadth for which settings will be able to reach young people will be dependent on their membership / participation levels. That is, the qualitative and quantitative data strongly suggests that when a young person is a member of a particular setting, that setting becomes highly influential on their attitudinal and behavioural development.

As shown in Table 4.2b, in general, all settings appear **more influential on those aged 10-14 years**, declining in terms of both participation and influence with age:

- **Teachers** (school / TAFE / university) have the highest level of potential influence, primarily as a function of their ability to reach young people. They are most influential, however, among those aged 10-14 years, with influence declining steadily with age.
- **Sporting coaches** and sport as a setting will be important to include in an influencer strategy.
 - This is particularly true for **males** and **Indigenous** young people for which there are high stated levels of both influence and participation
- **Music / dance / drama teachers** are equally as influential as sporting coaches among young females.
- Leaders at **places of worship** will be particularly important reaching those who are **CALD**.

Table 4.2b:
The layers of influence –
close and distant others

	Total	Males	Females	10-14 years	15-17 years	18-25 years	CALD	Indigenous	Non CALD/ Indigenous
Base	1000	509	487	300	300	400	235	19	746
Distant others – settings (as a proportion of total)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Teachers	27	38	42	64	47	21	49	40	36
Proportion with a teacher	84	84	84	100	100	69	94	88	80
Sporting coaches	19	24	14	37	26	7	23	35	17
Proportion with a sporting coach	40	48	32	61	47	24	47	51	37
Leader at place of worship	12	11	12	19	12	7	19	3	9
Proportion attending place of worship	22	19	26	30	23	17	39	8	17
Music / dance / drama teacher	11	8	16	23	12	4	16	20	10
Proportion with music / dance / drama teacher	19	14	24	32	23	10	29	30	15
Youth group volunteer	5	6	4	9	5	3	8	8	4
Proportion with youth group volunteer leader	11	12	9	17	9	7	18	16	8
Club volunteers	4	4	3	7	2	2	5	9	3
Proportion with club volunteer leader	8	9	6	10	9	6	13	28	5
Distant others – settings (as a proportion of those who participate)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Teachers	47	45	50	64	47	30	52	45	45
Sporting coaches	48	51	43	61	55	30	49	66	46
Leader at place of worship	52	58	48	62	52	42	48	55	56
Music / dance / drama teacher	60	53	65	71	55	44	57	67	62
Youth group volunteer	48	48	48	52	50	42	45	44	50
Club volunteers	47	44	52	68	28	28	42	30	52

Source question: "Some things and/or people have a pretty big influence on our opinions ...and, other things / people don't really influence us that much. For each of the things / people below, tell us whether you'd care about their opinions ...assuming they were sharing something on a topic that was important to them." Data shown reflects top scale point: "What they say is pretty important to me".

Green highlighted text denotes significantly higher compared to other sub-groups.

Red highlighted text denotes significantly lower compared to other sub-groups.

The role of consistency / reinforcers

Table 4.2c highlights the contribution those outside of close and distant others will bring to the influencer strategy:

- **Community leaders** are influential across all younger Australians, but are particularly important for those who are **Indigenous**.
- **Sports people, musicians and actors** are also influential, particularly among 10-14 year olds.
- There is a considerable amplification role for **social media**, with one in ten (9%) of young people stating the opinions of people they follow on social media are important.
- Additionally, one in ten (9%) indicate the opinions of **brands** they follow on social media are important.

Table 4.2c:
The layers of influence –
consistent influencers /
reinforcers

	Total	Males	Females	10-14 years	15-17 years	18-25 years	CALD	Indigenous	Non CALD/Indigenous
Base	1000	509	487	300	300	400	235	19	746
Community	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Community leaders	22	24	19	29	24	17	26	40	20
Sports people	17	21	13	27	20	9	19	31	15
Musicians	15	17	14	21	17	11	16	27	15
Actors	14	17	11	21	12	11	18	20	12
TV personalities	11	13	9	17	11	8	15	25	9
News / media personalities	9	10	8	14	9	6	14	17	7
Politicians	7	10	4	8	7	7	15	20	4
Social media / media	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Things on news	13	14	12	16	14	11	18	18	12
People followed on social media (famous)	9	12	7	14	10	7	14	13	8
Brands followed on social media	9	10	7	14	10	5	13	17	7
People followed on social media (not famous)	7	9	5	9	9	6	12	27	5
Interest groups on social media	7	9	5	8	7	7	15	8	5
Sponsored posts	6	9	3	6	4	6	16	8	2
Advertising	6	8	3	8	5	4	13	18	3

Source question: "Some things and/or people have a pretty big influence on our opinions ...and, other things / people don't really influence us that much. For each of the things / people below, tell us whether you'd care about their opinions ...assuming they were sharing something on a topic that was important to them." Data shown reflects top scale point: "What they say is pretty important to me".

Green highlighted text denotes significantly higher compared to other sub-groups.

Red highlighted text denotes significantly lower compared to other sub-groups.

4.3 Specific influencers

The discussion that follows provides more detailed insights across core influencer groups to further understand their likely degree of influence, the reason for their influence, potential interactions between influencers and young people, and young people's perceptions of these influencers.

It is noted that considerable detail on the challenges and barriers to engaging these influencers is contained separately within Sections 6 onwards.

Mothers as influencers

Degree of influence	Mothers were the most frequently cited influencer (qualitatively and quantitatively) regardless of the young person’s gender, age or cultural background. Mothers are a strong influencer and are essential to include in the strategy.
Differences by sub-group	While mothers are the strongest influencer across all sub-groups, they are particularly strong among young females, those aged 10-14 years and those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.
Driver of influence	Mothers were considered influential because of their potential proximity to the topic – as a female who may have personally experienced gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour from a male. This personal experience was felt to increase the relevance of mothers.
Perspectives of young people	When asked how they would feel about their mother being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described anticipating feeling embarrassment, shame, and a sense of being disrespectful towards their mother.
Perspective of mothers	Mothers often described a potential conversation with their child as being one that would be emotional and somewhat uncomfortable. The reasons for this are discussed further in Section 3 onwards.
Reactions of mothers	<p>Depending on the relationship with, and perceived personality of, their mother there were three described reactions of mothers and these were consistent between young people and mothers themselves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The emotive reactor: Some mothers were described as having a strong emotional response, which was felt to be potentially limiting and an impediment to the effectiveness of discussions with young people. It is noted, however, that this description was proffered in relation to a discussion that occurred following the observation of a disrespectful or aggressive incident between young people and was not necessarily in relation to an earlier preventative discussion. The lecturer: Some mothers were described as having strong intentions, however, the delivery of their conversation would be easily dismissed by young people as a ‘lecture’. This was often because the conversation was not considered participatory. These one-way conversations do not embrace counselling methods of questioning which encourage young people to internalise and process the situation and, because of this, are described as ‘lectures’. The moral compass: While mothers were often described as having emotional reactions and one-directional discussions (which impede their ability to influence), they were nonetheless described as being a strong ‘moral compass’ to young people. If the self-efficacy of mothers can be increased, this is a powerful influencer to harness and will be essential to engage in an influencer strategy. The most influential territory for mothers is as the ‘moral compass’.

Fathers as influencers

Degree of influence	As stated previously, fathers were second only to mothers in their perceived degree of influence (qualitatively and quantitatively). Fathers are a strong influencer and are essential to include.
Differences by sub-group	Fathers will be particularly influential on those aged 10-14 years but are still influential on those aged 15-17 and 18-25 years.
Driver of influence	A father's potential experience or observation of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour towards females as a younger male (in the past) was felt to increase the relevance of fathers for many. It was, however, felt to decrease their relevance if the father had been observed conducting similar behaviour themselves in the present.
Perspectives of young people	When asked how they would feel about their father being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described anticipating feeling embarrassment and shame. This was frequently driven by the perception they were trying to prove their independence, maturity and resilience (for females) to their fathers. For some, there was an overriding sense of fear should their father be aware of such an occurrence because of the fear of potential punishment / negative consequences.
Perspective of fathers	Fathers described a potential conversation with their child as being one that would be uncomfortable. The reasons for this are discussed further in Section 3 onwards.
Reactions of fathers	Depending on the relationship with, and perceived personality of, their father there were three described reactions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The punisher: Some believed the initial reaction of fathers would be punitive. Importantly, while there was a desire to avoid punishment, punishment was not considered particularly influential for challenging and changing attitudes and behaviours of young people. This was because punishment was considered easy to dismiss. 2. The aggressor: Some perceived fathers as potentially aggressive in their response and their reactions to the observation of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour (that is, aggressive towards the individual or the other child). Such reactions were considered limiting to their perceived influence as many young people (particularly young females) indicated strong avoidance to engage fathers in a discussion about the topic because of the fear they would capitulate rather than ease the situation. 3. The protector: Some fathers were described as protectors. When fathers were described in this way, it was clear they were not describing physical protection – but, rather, emotional and mental protection. This involved calm discussions, and these were considered highly influential by young people.

Older siblings as influencers

Degree of influence	Older siblings are considered influential by young people and the level of potential influence is particularly strong for older sisters. Older siblings are an important influencer to include in the strategy.
Differences by sub-group	Older siblings remain consistent in their level of influence by age. That is, while parents decline in their potential influence by the age of 18-25, the degree of influence among older siblings remains strong.
Driver of influence	The driver of influence for older siblings is their perceived proximity to the experience of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour, and their perceived ability to help younger people deal with a situation or provide influence in a manner that does not remove the locus of control from the young person.
Perspectives of young people	When asked how they would feel about their older siblings being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described anticipating feeling embarrassment and shame. For young males, there was also the sense of losing trust and respect, and the potential imposition of physical punishment (if they had been the aggressor).
Perspective of siblings	Older siblings described a conversation with their brothers or sisters as being potentially uncomfortable, but necessary. In general, older siblings recognised their strong potential influence.
Reactions of siblings	Depending on the relationship with, and perceived personality of, their older sibling there were three described reactions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sister as reprimander: Some young males believed their sister would verbally reprimand and evoke guilt for negative behaviours or exhibition of gender inequality towards females. 2. The sister as sounding board: Young females felt their older sister would serve as a 'sounding board' to discuss situations, the experience of gender inequality, and potential actions. 3. The brother as punisher: Some perceived older brothers as potentially aggressive in their response or reactions to the observation of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour (that is, aggressive towards the individual or the other child). Such reactions were considered limiting to their perceived influence as they were felt to capitulate rather than ease the situation. 4. The brother as role model: Some older brothers were described as worthy role models, and that a considered judgement passed from an older brother would be taken seriously and highly influential.

Peers as influencers

Degree of influence	Close peers, boyfriends / girlfriends, work mates and team mates are considered highly influential by young people. Peers are an important influencer to include in the strategy.
Differences by sub-group	Peers retain their level of influence regardless of age, and are as influential among 10-14s as they are 15-17s and 18-25s. It is noted that while peers generally are considered influential among Indigenous young people, boyfriends / girlfriends are considered less influential among this group.
Driver of influence	The driver of influence for peers is the strong desire for social approval and acceptance. Thus, there is a strong desire to avoid behaviours that are perceived to potentially reduce their social status.
Perspectives of young people	When asked how they would feel about their peers being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described anticipating feeling embarrassment and shame. For females, these emotions were consistently described. For males, these negative emotions were only present if peers did not condone and support their behaviour.
Perspective of peers	Conversations between peers were described as potentially uncomfortable. There is currently a strong level of avoidance of conversations between peers – both as the initiator, and participator. This was present among both males and females and the driver of this relates primarily to their desire to avoid potentially negative social consequences. Fundamentally, there is a strong perception that an individual who initiates a conversation will stand out for doing so – that is, they will be doing so without the support of other peers, thus evoking potentially negative social consequences on themselves by initiating a conversation or taking a stand.
Reactions of peers	This desire for avoidance was consistently noted, and results in peers frequently being described as the avoider . There were very few instances throughout the research where peers were described as actively engaging in a discussion regarding disrespectful or aggressive behaviour. Thus, while peers are potentially highly influential, they will need to be strongly encouraged and empowered to engage and be influential.

Teachers as influencers

Degree of influence	Teachers are of high influence because of the setting in which they engage with young people, and the number of young people they have the potential to influence. Teachers should be considered an important influencer, or consolidator of both positive and negative behaviours, in this regard.
Differences by sub-group	Teachers are of highest influence among 10-14 year olds, declining with age as fewer 15-17s and 18-25s engage actively with teachers. Additionally, the strength of relationship with the teacher is perceived as strongest during earlier schooling years, where there is greater likelihood there will be closer relationships between teachers and students. Throughout secondary school, TAFE and University, there is a perception that relationships become more transactional in nature, with teachers holding weaker relationships with a higher number of students.
Driver of influence	In many cases, the driver of influence for teachers is the extent to which their involvement is considered a necessity of their role and employment. However, this is not always the case with some teachers - who are particularly passionate about their influence over young people – believing their influence extends considerably further than the mandate of their role.
Perspectives of young people	When asked how they would feel about their teachers being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described the primary feeling as one that was a desire to avoid punishment. There was a perception that teachers would punish as a part of their role (via, for example, imposing detention on the child). Often, young people felt the teacher’s involvement and influence would stop at this point, with few describing the potential for ongoing conversations or learning experiences on the topic to occur.
Perspective of teachers	Teachers generally perceived a strong moral imperative to positively influence young people as a part of their role. Depending on the level of passion of the teacher, their desire to be a positive influence on young people’s lives included their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. The teacher’s sphere of influence was not limited to the academic performance of a child.
Reactions of teachers	For many young people, teachers were perceived as an important but relatively passive influencer , and this was driven by the perception teachers would act and influence out of necessity attached to their role, rather than out of desire. It is noted this a perception of young people, and is not necessarily the perception of teachers.

Coaches and group leaders as influencers

<p>Degree of influence</p>	<p>Coaches and group leaders are of potentially high influence among those that are engaged in sporting or recreational activities (for example, music, dance, drama, places of worship, youth clubs, and other clubs). While highly important, they will be insufficient to have the necessary breadth of influence independently because they will be limited by the number of young people who are engaged with these activities.</p>
<p>Differences by sub-group</p>	<p>Sporting coaches are of higher potential influence among males, 10-14s, Indigenous young people. Music, dance and drama teachers are of higher potential influence among young females. In general, coaches and group leaders are of higher potential influence among 10-14s because of higher participation levels in sport and recreational activities among this age group.</p>
<p>Driver of influence</p>	<p>In many cases, the driver of influence for coaches and group leaders is considered one that is grounded in desire to interact with young people and be a positive influence. In this regard, the perceived driver of their influence is frequently described positively by young people.</p>
<p>Perspectives of young people</p>	<p>When asked how they would feel about their coaches or group leaders being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described the primary feeling as one of considerable embarrassment, shame and fear of impact or punishment. This was experienced on a number of levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The nature of participation in a team environment evoked an innate desire to please the coach or group leader (to win, to perform etc). Thus, any sense that their behaviour had caused displeasure was described as one that would be ideally avoided. ▪ There was also a perception that a negative response from a coach or group leader would be observed by other team mates or participants. In turn, the perceived extent to which this would reflect badly upon the individual in front of their peers was also noted as highly undesirable.
<p>Perspective of coaches / group leaders</p>	<p>Coaches and group leaders generally described a high desire to be a positive influence on young people. Many described relatively strong relationships with individual young people that assisted in this.</p>
<p>Reactions of coaches / group leaders</p>	<p>For many young people, coaches and group leaders were perceived as an important influencer who had the potential to mediate real punishment, either in the form of participation exclusion (for example, being excluded from playing in a game or competition), or social exclusion (by highlighting and disciplining negative behaviour in front of team mates or peers). Young people recognise coaches and group leaders as being influential from a position of desire to be involved and influence, rather than need. This was a consistent distinguishing factor when comparing coaches and group leaders to teachers.</p>

Managers as influencers

Degree of influence	Managers are of potentially high influence among those participating in employment. Managers and workplaces should be considered an important setting for inclusion.
Differences by sub-group	The influence of managers increases as the age of the young person (and, therefore likelihood to be employed) increases.
Driver of influence	In many cases, the driver of influence for managers was described as one that was grounded in need to influence as a part of their role. However, the reality that young people in many regards choose to be employed, and their employer (as opposed to, for example, choosing to be in school) elevated the potential influence of managers. Additionally, many young people considered managers to be relatively close in age thus, assumed greater proximity to the issue.
Perspectives of young people	<p>When asked how they would feel about their manager being aware of an occurrence of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour in which they had been involved (as either perpetrator or the person experiencing the behaviour), many described the primary feeling as one of considerable embarrassment, shame and fear of impact on their employment status (for example, number of hours, shifts etc). This was experienced on a number of levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The nature of participation in a work environment evoked an innate desire to please the manager in order to receive hours or shifts and – ultimately – financial compensation. Thus, the potential that negative behaviour may have a direct and negative financial impact was considered one that was desirable to avoid. ▪ As with coaches and group leaders, there was also a perception that a negative response from a manager would be observed by other work mates. In turn, the perceived extent to which this would reflect badly upon the individual in front of their work peers was considered highly undesirable.
Perspective of managers	Managers generally described a high desire to be a positive influence on young people, recognising that aggressive and disrespectful behaviour in the workplace could be detrimental to productivity and workplace culture.
Reactions of managers	For many young people, managers were perceived as an important influencer who had the potential to mediate real punishment in their employment (for example, reduced hours or termination of employment). Additionally, younger managers were described as potential mentors because of their proximity in age and experience to young people.

4.4 The discomfort of conversations

Throughout the research there was a consistent theme that conversations between young people and potential influencers on the topic of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour would be typified by discomfort resulting in a strong desire for avoidance. This was present from both angles – by young people and influencers alike.

Fundamentally, this signifies that:

- For **young people**, the level of discomfort and high avoidance to have these conversations indicates **high likelihood to influence** if they are able to be conducted in an influential manner. Thus, the extent to which influencers are engaged meaningfully to be a positive influence is of highest importance.
- For **influencers**, this indicates **strong avoidance** and **low self-efficacy** that will need to be addressed in order to achieve meaningful engagements with young people. This is explored in further detail in Section 6.

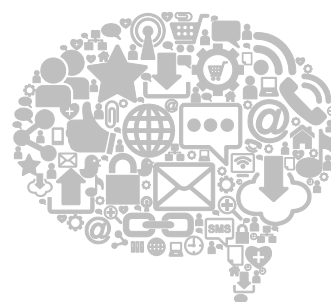
5. The challenges of engaging influencers – *recognising* heuristics

5.1 The strength of impeding heuristics

While 96% of Australians condemn domestic violence, the **automatic defences (heuristics – the automatic assumptions we make, without necessarily recognising them) which impede our likelihood to influence, and be influenced, are powerful**. These heuristics are consistent between young males, young females and influencers, those with disability, CALD, and Indigenous peoples. They are related to the tendency to automatically:

- blame the victim
- minimise the behaviour of males
- empathise with, and protect, males.

This research suggests that before influencers will be influential on young people, these strong heuristics will need to be addressed as they currently impede the likelihood to engage. **Because of the unconscious nature of heuristics, addressing this is considered a difficult but essential part of an influencer strategy. It is noted that these heuristics are apparent when discussing scenarios of gender inequality, disrespectful behaviour and aggressive behaviour from males towards females.**



High levels of automatic victim blaming

High levels of victim blaming were present across all influencer groups, young males and young females. This is an impediment to influencers engaging in the topic because this heuristic serves as a viable reason or defence not to be involved. Importantly, victim blaming occurs **automatically and seemingly unknowingly**, it is not based on rational processing of information regarding specific situational variables. This means that while victim blaming occurs frequently, many are not aware of the extent to which they undertake this.

- **Influencers:** Throughout the research, the extent of automatic victim blaming among influencers (male and female) was explored through the use of vignettes. In these vignettes, participants were provided details of hypothetical scenarios in which disrespectful behaviour occurred that exhibited gender inequality, verbal aggression and aggression. It was established from the outset that the male and female characters were unknown to each other in each scenario. Despite this, when asked their perception on why the behaviour had occurred, the response from the majority of influencers (male and female) was to automatically question the role of the female before rebuking the behaviour described:

“It takes two to tango” (father)

“His daughter must have done something wrong” (father)

“What did the girl do?” (mother)

“...like to hope it wasn't entirely her son's fault” (mother)

- **Young males:** Perhaps not surprisingly, given the strength of this heuristic among adult influencers, young males are fast to **externalise the behaviour by blaming others, particularly the female** when read a similar vignette. This indicates the heuristic of victim blaming is already present among males as young as 10 years old. This heuristic was present among CALD, Indigenous and mainstream young males.

"She said something that he didn't like ...the girls were being mean" (10-14, male)

"The girls were there and he didn't want them to be there" (10-14, male)

"Perhaps the girl is not giving him attention" (15-17, male)

- **Young females:** By comparison, young females are consistently fast to **internalise, or blame themselves** when presented the identical scenarios, rather than immediately question the behaviour of the young male. This heuristic was present among CALD, Indigenous and mainstream young females.

"She thinks she has done something wrong" (15-17, female)

"She wouldn't tell anyone...it's her fault..."

would stay quiet, doesn't want to make it worse" (15-17, female)

"What did I do to start this?" (15-17, female)

"She'd probably think it's her fault, and not say anything at all" (18-25, female)

"She might have done something wrong to him in the past ...she might have got him into trouble or something" (15-17, female, CALD)

- **Disability:** Among those participants who had a lived experience of disability, the perception of victim blaming was evident at a comparable level as among those classified as mainstream, with the individual with disability exhibiting a sense of responsibility during an experience of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour.

"She was worried if she had done something to upset the boy" (10-14, disability)

High levels of automatic minimisation

There are also high levels of minimisation of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours towards females across influencers and young people. This impedes the ability of influencers to accurately identify when there is a need to be influential because the frame of reference regarding what is acceptable versus unacceptable is blurred.

- **Influencers:** Influencers consistently minimise scenarios of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour towards females, and this is a considerable impediment to their likelihood to engage because many negative behaviours are not considered worthy of correcting – deemed as mistakes or misdemeanours.

"It's a mistake, he will try to reason with his conscience..."

trying to justify his son's behaviour" (father)

"Can understand why he did it ...this is not such a huge deal" (mother)

- **Young males:** Young males also minimise gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours, providing plausible excuses; for the behaviour and rationalising the behaviour as acceptable depending on circumstances.

"He is just trying to be heard" (10-14, male)

"He is generally a nice, caring person but he doesn't know when he takes things too far and doesn't know when to stop" (15-17, male)

"He might feel bad, but would try to justify it and play it down" (18-25, male, CALD)

- **Young females:** As a result, young females also consistently minimise the experience of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour from males to females, and seek to provide rational justifications and motivations for the behaviours, even when physical harm may be evident.

"It wasn't that bad... it's not like he punched her... if there was an injury, then it would be bad" (10-14, female)

"He's just a hormonal guy" (15-17, female)

"It's normal it happens to other girls as well... it's become cool for guys to do these things" (15-17, female)

"He's probably just trying to get attention, boys will do anything for a bit of attention" (18-25, female)

- It is noted that the automation of minimisation as a defence is even stronger among **CALD** female participants and this was often more prevalent if there was no physical evidence of the experience.

"...more likely to put up with mental hurt [yelling] because no one else can see it. However, when it's physical, people are able to see the scars and bruises on her body. This would make her feel like she needs to do something about it" (15-17, female, CALD).

- The same was evident among **Indigenous** female participants, who frequently used minimisation as a mechanism to avoid disclosure and externalisation of the issue.

"[she] wants to let it go ...telling people makes that harder" (15-17, female, Indigenous).

High levels of empathy with, and protection of, male

In addition to the high levels of victim blaming and minimisation of behaviour, there is also evidence of high empathy with the male – rather than with the female – in situations involving disrespectful and aggressive behaviour perpetrated by a young male.

- **Influencers:** Influencers frequently empathise with the young male. There is a relatively strong desire to avoid attribution of blame which stems in order to protect males against being labelled as aggressive or to stigmatise them. Fundamentally, there is a strong sense that disrespectful and aggressive behaviour among young males towards young females is a rite of passage that should be understood rather than unfairly judged.

"He could possibly empathise with his son to some degree" (father)

"Boys will be boys" (father)

"He feels empathy with his son... it's tough being a kid" (father)

"It's just a thing teenage boys do" (mother)

"You feel conflicted as a mother of boys ...you don't want them to be labelled" (female influencer)

"She can understand why he did it and why he probably felt the pressure to do it" (mother)

- **Young males:** Young males indicate a high level of empathy with other males who may be exhibiting disrespectful or aggressive behaviour, as a mechanism to abdicate the need for involvement and as a rationale for excusing such behaviours.

"He's not really thinking about it... he didn't think he was doing anything wrong...

he doesn't know" (15-17, male)

"You sometimes don't realise something's wrong" (18-25, male, Indigenous)

- **Young females:** Young females also express some empathy with the male's behaviour by attempting to identify potential drivers and acceptable reasons for the behaviour.

"He had a bad day, and he was just jealous 'cause she had a good day" (10-14, female)

"He's just having a bad day" (15-17, female)

It is noted that the automation of empathy as a defence appeared even stronger among **CALD** and **Indigenous** participants. The additional factor in this was the perceived engrained social norm of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, for example -

- **CALD:** Many CALD females indicated the perception their family would exhibit empathy towards the male if they had experienced gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour.

"Her dad might tell her to toughen up...I know my dad would... it would depend on her culture.... In some cultures it's more normal (for men to treat women that way) than others.... I'm half Moroccan and in Morocco it happens all the time, it's very sad but it's just normal and you just live with it" (18-25, female, CALD)

- **Indigenous:** Indigenous males also indicated empathy towards males that was linked to perceptions of role modelling and the social norm for gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour.

"Maybe disrespectful to girls like some girls are. 'Cause some guys just walk up to girls and start calling them sluts. Probably picked it up off their dad's the way they treat their mums" (15-17, male, Indigenous).

5.2 The impact of heuristics

The result of these heuristics is the **unknowing wide perpetuation of a pattern of disrespectful and aggressive behaviour** that can be a precursor to gender inequality, and domestic violence in adult years. Additionally, these heuristics abdicate the necessity (for influencers, young males and young females) to challenge gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours as they validate and propel a powerful norm of acceptance.

- **Influencers:** These heuristics currently enable influencers to avoid getting involved and, therefore, limit the likelihood they will be a positive influence on young people.
- **Young males:** The heuristics among young males mean that some disrespectful and aggressive behaviours are currently undertaken relatively unchallenged. Additionally, when these behaviours are undertaken, their role in the situation is almost entirely externalised.
- **Young females:** Young females are currently internalising the experience of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, accepting the behaviour and forming an early norm for tolerance and acceptance.

6. The challenges of engaging influencers – reconciling costs

Many influencers are unable to reconcile the perceived personal costs of engaging and influencing young people on the topic of gender inequality, and disrespectful and aggressive behaviour. This is one of the central reasons for the strength of heuristics – in that they are our automatic defences that help us avoid experiencing the perceived personal costs of involvement, and thereby help us to reconcile our lack of influence.

6.1 The perceived personal costs for parents

There are many hidden beliefs around the cost of personal influence among parents.

Perceived costs for fathers

For fathers, the perceived personal costs of involvement were consistent across mainstream, CALD and Indigenous and relate to:

- **Jeopardised relationship with child:** Fathers express the perceived potential that a conversation regarding gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour (with a son, or a daughter) may impede the strength of their relationship with their child. Many fathers describe themselves as actively avoiding the role of punisher where possible (particularly for instances which are considered minor in nature / those that are minimised), instead preferring to defer this role to mothers. Fundamentally, this is a desire to avoid conflict with their children, and is driven by the perception that a conversation about this topic would be potentially tense.

*“He doesn’t want to break the relationship with his son” (father)
“A fear that his boy would be outcast, lose friends,
if everyone comes to know what his son has done” (father, CALD)*

- **Exposure as hypocrite:** Some fathers are concerned their attempt to influence may be considered hypocritical by observers, and by their child, because their own behaviour may not always be considered respectful towards females. This is a very real concern for many fathers and applies to their interactions with both their sons and daughters.

“May find it difficult as it exposes his own hypocrisy” (father)

- **Conflict avoidance with other parents:** Many fathers express a desire to avoid engaging in the topic because of the perceived potential for conflict with parents. Fundamentally, this is driven by two elements – the perception there are currently divergent opinions on the topic among parents which may generate conflict; and, the perception that the topic can currently be highly emotionally charged.

“Some parents are too reactive and protective to hear what you may be trying to convey” (father)

“He is concerned that it may go further – maybe the girl will complain and then how that reflects on his son” (CALD, father)

- **Risk of escalation:** Linked to the desire to avoid conflict, there is a perception that getting involved in this topic may risk escalation of the situation, where one’s own behavioural response may be challenged or questioned.

“I’m not a fighter ...doesn’t want to escalate the situation” (father)

Perceived costs for mothers

Mothers express similar perceived personal costs of involvement and influence. These were consistent between mainstream, CALD and Indigenous mothers.

- **Threat appraisal:** While fathers consider a potential risk of escalation and are concerned with their own behavioural response to that situation, mothers fear escalation and are concerned about the potential threat this poses to their personal safety should they get involved – that is, the potential behaviour of others often outweighs their strong desire to be involved / influential.

“You want to be the lioness, but you have to protect yourself” (mother)

“Some of those 15 year old boys are pretty big ...you never know what they’re gonna do ...they might throw a rock at you” (mother, Indigenous)

- **Embarrassment:** Some mothers are concerned their involvement may break social protocol, risking embarrassment to both their child and their self.

“...you don’t want to humiliate yourself by stepping in ...you have to be mindful of the playground rules” (mother)

- **Elevating fear among daughters:** Some mothers indicate the perception that getting involved in discussions regarding disrespectful and aggressive behaviour may elevate fear of their daughter, when they are trying to build their confidence, independence and resiliency. This links firmly to the previously stated heuristic, and social norm, that many disrespectful and aggressive behaviours are acceptable.

“...you don’t want to scare your daughter” (mother)

- **Reflection of parenting:** A further personal cost articulated by mothers is the potential for getting involved in a situation or discussion being considered a reflection of bad parenting that the behaviour occurred in the first place. Many mothers perceived negative behaviours of their children a reflection of failed parenting and, therefore, minimising these behaviours and considering them acceptable is a mechanism for protection against reconciling this.

"She has failed as a parent ...embarrassed at what her friends may think of her" (mother)

"If someone asked her why he'd done it, she'd say 'none of your business' ...be defensive ...it's an embarrassment thing ...deal with it when you get home" (mother, Indigenous)

- **Social exclusion:** Mothers also describe social exclusion as a potential cost of involvement and influence. This is because currently, many mothers perceive involvement to be minimal among other parents. Thus, getting involved at this point in time would be considered out of the ordinary and potentially undesirable that would risk being negatively labelled within social networks and by peers.

"Didn't want to be known as a trouble-maker and talked about by school parents" (mother)

6.2 The perceived personal costs for young females – losing identity

While young females frequently minimise the experience of gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour, the perceived costs of experiencing disrespectful or aggressive behaviour are nonetheless **high, universal, and immediate**. That is, the extent of minimisation that occurs among young females is **not** because the experience is one that has low negative impact. Rather, it is a result of the prevalence of conditioning across society. Fundamentally, these costs relate to:

- **Loss of control:** Females consistently describe a distinct absence of control during situations where gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is experienced, with the locus of power and control being owned by the male and the situation itself. For many, this loss of control results in fear of escalation to physical violence. An influencer strategy which seeks to shift this locus of control is considered important.

“She feels hopeless” (15-17, female)

“She feels intimidated and scared of what he might do” (18-25, female)

- **Loss of esteem:** Many young females lose considerable self-esteem as a result of experiencing gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour.

“If she was cool or confident, he wouldn’t have done that” (10-14, female)

“She’s humiliated and ashamed” (15-17, female)

“You just want to go back into awkward turtle mode” (18-25, female)

- **Loss of respect and independence:** Females in the target age group are seeking to establish and assert independence – to themselves, their peers, their families and other adult influencers. An experience of gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is felt to discredit this independence and risk a loss of respect from influencers. This perceived cost is a strong motivator to minimise behaviour and conceal the experience from others.

“They’re (boys) watching me react ...am I playing it cool?” (18-25, female)

“You’re embarrassed ‘cause you want your parents to think you’re independent” (18-25, female)

- **Loss of friendship:** Some young females fear the loss of friendship / peers as a result of experiencing gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour, and this is a strong motivator to minimise the behaviour and conceal the experience. It points to a distinct lack of perceived peer support among young females.

“They (friends) would laugh too because he was popular and they wouldn’t want a bad word said about them” (10-14, female)

“She doesn’t want her friends to know ...they might make fun of her” (10-14, female)

“She doesn’t want her friends to know ...might make them not want to be friends anymore” (15-17, female)

As a result of these perceived personal costs, for young females, **the experience** becomes one that is dominated by:

- **Avoidance at the time:** Young females frequently indicate an intentional avoidance of admitting the personal impact of the experience.

“She never shows anyone that she’s upset” (10-14, female)

- **Avoidance after the time:** Additionally, there is a high level of avoidance to admit the personal impact and discuss the experience *after* it has occurred. This is a considerable barrier for an influencer strategy, because young females have potentially high likelihood to avoid conversations. Additionally, it is indicative of a distinct lack of empowerment to influence the situation.

“Tries to forget it as it wasn’t something pleasant and she doesn’t want to remember” (10-14, female)

“She should try to forget about it ...what else are you gonna do?” (18-25, female)

- **Shame:** As a result of high victim blaming, minimisation and empathy with young males, females experience a sense of shame for the experience.

“She’s ashamed to tell anyone that she’s the person who gets bullied” (10-14, female)

“They [influencer] won’t be able to help her, or they’ll judge her” (18-25, female)

- **Regret:** There is, however, a sense of regret among many young females that there was not a higher sense of empowerment to act and be personally influential in the moment which indicates the potential for an influencer strategy to have a positive impact on young females.

“She wishes she could have been braver and more outspoken” (15-17, female)

“...knows she should stand up for herself and her friends, but it’s difficult at the time” (15-17, female)

“She’s annoyed at herself for not sticking up for herself” (18-25, female)

The extent to which these costs are experienced by young females highlights the need, and potential power, of a primary prevention strategy targeting influencers.

6.3 The perceived personal benefits for young males – gaining identity

In contrast, young males indicate several perceived benefits of exhibiting aggressive or disrespectful behaviour, which among this target age group appear to relate primarily to gaining identity.

- **Popularity – affective benefit:** There is a consistent perception among young males that exhibiting disrespectful or aggressive behaviour towards young females is a path to

gaining, or maintaining, friendship and popularity among peers. Often cases, the motive for achieving popularity was considered an appropriate driver of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour.

"Popular people don't get ignored" (15-17, male)

"Showing off as an excuse to make friends" (18-25, Indigenous)

"He doesn't have anything to lose ...it gets him the attention he craves" (18-25, Indigenous)

- **Power – affective benefit:** Some young males also described the benefit of achieving power over one's peers – that is, elevated social status among peer groups – by exhibiting disrespectful or aggressive behaviour. Similar to the achievement of popularity, this was also often considered an acceptable reason for negative behaviour.

"He knows some of the other guys know that he isn't the brightest out there, and he feels like it is something to show them that 'they'll be next'" (15-17, male)

"He's doing something and it's placing him at a higher social rank ...pits him as the leader" (18-25, male)

"He felt like if he put others down it would put him above everyone else" (15-17, male)

- **Release – active aggression:** Young males also describe the potential benefit of escaping from other stressors (among peers, within family) through disrespectful or aggressive behaviour.

"He wants to beat them to punch and not feel vulnerable again" (18-25, male)

"He's sick of what others are doing to him, persistent ignoring and isolation ...so he is unleashing" (15-17, male)

"He is angry and frustrated from his parents and he needed to forget about it" (15-17, male)

- **Emotional reward:** Often, regardless of the fundamental benefit (popularity, power, release), there was also a strong emotional reward attached to disrespectful or aggressive behaviour. This reward was experienced both in the moment as well as in reflection and is linked to the perceived achievement of popularity, power or release. In some cases, the perceived emotional reward was mirrored by peers. This highlights a consistent lack of personal costs currently experienced by young males.

"Later ...the laughter dies off, but the satisfaction remains" (15-17, male)

"It makes him feel good" (18-25, male)

"Everyone is praising him so he feels great" (15-17, male)

"He'd feel great about his friends seeing" (15-17, male)

"He feels exhilarated when he's doing it" (10-14, male)

"Nothing could bring him down, he was so happy" (15-17, male)

"Giddiness at the start" (15-17, male)

"Energised by the thought of overpowering her" (15-17, male)

When explicitly asked the potential costs of displaying aggressive or disrespectful behaviour, some young males post rationalise this on two levels. However, generally the perceived benefits of the behaviour far outweigh the potential costs.

- **Impact on self:** Some males fear potential social exclusion (the opposite of social popularity and power) as a result of negative behaviours. However, because of the widely accepted norms attached to disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, this is not always noted. Additionally, the perceived potential among young males for this to occur was often considered low.
- **Impact on others:** Some males note a potential impact on females. However, this appears somewhat superficial and is often outweighed by the potential benefits experienced.

“A while afterwards ...he might start to think about it more and how it looked it in front of the girls and regret it. However, while the friends are laughing he is feeling happy and in the moment” (18-25, male, Indigenous)

6.4 Changing the cost-benefit equation

Challenging the cost-benefit equation will require establishing a stronger link of gender inequality, disrespectful behaviour and aggressive behaviour to the problem of domestic violence against women and children. In doing so, the costs of not engaging or not positively influencing the situation should enter the appraisal of influencers, and start to shift the equation.

7. The challenges of engaging influencers – reconciling perpetuation of norms

7.1 The inequity of norms

Many influencers fail to reconcile their perpetuation of the social norm that accepts gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour from young males. Across all influencer groups included in the research, there were consistently strong social norms that assert inequities, including those related to:

- **Provocation:** Aggression (from young males) was rarely described as the true issue. In contrast, **provocation** (from females) was regularly the true issue. Thus, the heart of the issue is **consistently normalised as provocation** rather than aggression.
- **Externalisation:** Males were frequently given the benefit of the doubt, where females were given the **burden of proof** to establish no provocation had occurred. Thus, there is a consistent norm for **externalisation away from males**.
- **Rite of passage:** For males, the experience is considered an opportunity learn right from wrong and part of growing up. For females, the experience is considered an opportunity build resilience and coping mechanisms. There is a consistent norm that gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour is a **part of childhood, a rite of passage**.
- **Defence mechanism:** For males, it was considered appropriate to defend against female provocation. For females it was considered inappropriate to defend against male provocation.
- **Minimisation:** For males, it was considered appropriate to minimise aggressive or disrespectful behaviour. For females, it was considered appropriate to ignore and avoid such behaviour. There is a consistent social norm that **these behaviours should be ignored**.

7.2 The norms of acceptable behaviours

These social norms enable the perpetuation of gender inequality, aggressive and disrespectful behaviours from males to females. Additionally, it results in specific distinctions that appear to underpin acceptance of behaviours. In fact, it was not uncommon for any reason for disrespectful or aggressive behaviour by young males to be considered sufficient to reduce morality. The following table provides a summary of consistent distinctions made.

Acceptable	Unacceptable
Retaliation	Initiation
A reason why (getting attention / having fun / problem deflection)	
Offence is low / short lived	Long term impact
Nice motive – if you like the girl / he likes you	
Yelling to be heard	Yelling for no reason
Behaviours that don't include yelling	Physical harm / assault
Generalised (eg. "all girls are whores")	Personalised / targeted (eg. "you are a whore")
Isolated / one off (can include physical)	Repeated / persistent
Private	Public

7.3 The perpetuation of norms

These norms around acceptable behaviours are perpetuated among both peers and adult influencers because of the high level of acceptance. For example:

"His friends are used to his behaviour" (15-17, male)

"He's always been a bad guy and his friends would have just gone with it for his whole life" (15-17, male)

"It's quite normal for boys sometimes to buckle under peer pressure" (father)

"it's just teenage boys getting their kicks, it's just a thing teenage boys do" (mother)

This highlights that influencers will need to **first reconcile their role in perpetuating the problem before they can be influential**. Influencers will need to understand the value in participating in their own rescue, **to inoculate aggressive and disrespectful behaviour, rather than moralise it**.

To achieve this, it should be noted that influencers may need to understand that stopping some behaviours (for example, attitudes that inadvertently condone and perpetuate gender inequality, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour) can also be a valuable behavioural response and positive influence on young people.

8. The challenges of engaging influencers – efficacy

8.1 Low self-efficacy / confidence

Before they respond, low-self efficacy of influencers will need to be addressed such that they are able to feel increased control over the problem. *Self-efficacy is ones' confidence in their capability to perform the desired behaviour.*

Self-efficacy of parents

Parents, in particular, describe a sense of low self-efficacy and confidence to be influential, frequently stating they feel helpless and ill-equipped to get involved in a specific situation (intervention), as well as to be involved in preventative discussions.

"He feels ill-equipped" (father), "She felt a bit helpless" (mother)

There are several reasons for this.

- **Problem identification / acknowledgement:** Parents frequently acknowledge difficulty in identify and acknowledging the root cause of the problem, and raising this among themselves and with their children. In part, this stems from the desire to protect their child (as described previously), as well as to avoid the potential personal costs of getting involved.

"The hardest option is to sit down calmly and discuss ...easy option is to blame the girl's actions" (father)

"The hardest thing to do would be to acknowledge what her son has done is wrong" (mother)

Solutions identification / actions: Assuming the problem has been acknowledged, parents also cite difficulty in identifying potential solutions which could be undertaken in order to help resolve or prevent the problem.

"Hardest is to work out strategies to deal with this type of behaviour in the future" (father)

"Easy to just give her a hug ...harder to sit down and listen to the whole story and then go and sort it out" (mother)

Engaging with other parents: There is also low self-efficacy of parents to engage with other parents in developing a mutual resolution to the problem.

"A slightly awkward situation ...he wouldn't know what to expect from them" (father)

"It's always difficult having a conversation with another child's parents... they might tell her to mind her own business" (mother)

Low authority: Mothers also cite low self-efficacy because of a perceived low authority to be influential, which highlights their current lack of empowerment. As a result, mothers seek the influence of others (for example, the school; the sporting coach), and deflect their role.

"You have no authority ...the school should do something" (mother)

Self-efficacy of peers

Male peers frequently cite an avid avoidance and low confidence to get involved. This stems from the perception that while the behaviour may be disrespectful or aggressive, it has minimal cost to the female. Thus, the cost of being influential on their self (described as potential social exclusion) is considered too high.

"It would be rare for one of his friends to stop and give him a lecture about his actions" (18-25, male)

"If someone I knew was in trouble I would probably make sure they are really in trouble first and not just jump to conclusions" (15-17, female CALD)

Self-efficacy of coaches, group leaders, teachers, managers

Coaches, group leaders, teachers and managers have slightly higher levels of self-efficacy when compared to parents, though this does not equate to high self-efficacy. There are, nonetheless, two factors which drive higher levels of efficacy among these influencers:

- **Protocol, processes and role:** These influencers note the ability to refer to set protocols and processes (for assistance if intervention is required), as well as training to provide confidence in more preventative conversations with young people. These protocols, processes and training were felt to provide a valuable frame of reference and instil some confidence to engage and be influential.

"You have set protocols and processes to follow and you've been trained in them ...it's your job" (group leader)

"You have a responsibility to act ...check you're acting in accordance with employer requirements" (manager)

In contrast, it is noted that parents were unable to easily identify sources of training or help to increase their self-efficacy.

- **Internal support networks:** Many of these influencers also indicated the presence of established internal networks in their workplace gave a greater sense of self-efficacy and support in engaging and being influential.

"Would talk to colleagues, Deputy and Principal ...learn on the job" (teacher)

In contrast, it is noted that parents often indicate they will attempt to resolve the situation independently, without consultation of others (and, in fact, active avoidance of consultation with others). Some mothers even indicate they would actively avoid engaging the child's father until a resolution had been achieved.

There are also several factors which detract from the self-efficacy of coaches, group leaders, teachers and managers:

- **Female to male interactions:** Female influencers described considerably lower self-efficacy if their role required them to engage in an intervention conversation about disrespectful or aggressive behaviour with a young male:

"Talking to boys would be difficult ...personally intimidated ...coping, but shaking on the inside" (group leader)

- **Limits of influence:** Influencers believe their role is potentially limited because of their inability to know the full picture (for example, the drivers of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour; the desired outcome; and the extent of their involvement).

"He's a bit tentative going any further until he understood the full issue ...doesn't want to get caught up in it" (sport coach)

"You are asking yourself what is appropriate ...from an outcome point of view" (manager)

"Hard to define how far your role goes" (manager)

8.2 Low response-efficacy

Compounding this, parents, other influencers and young females express low response-efficacy of getting involved in the situation and in promoting gender equality.

Response efficacy is ones' perceptions of whether the suggested behaviour or action will actually work. This is a significant barrier to influence and disclosure.

- **Parents:** Some parents question the benefit of their involvement, and the likely outcome it will deliver, in that it may reduce the resiliency of their daughter or weaken their son.

"If I step in, am I weakening my daughter?" (mother)

"You don't want to wrap them up in cotton wool, you want them to see what is right and wrong" (mother)

- **Other influencers:** Other influencers also question whether their involvement will be beneficial to you people.

"Am I helping or hindering by getting involved?" (teacher, father)

- **Young females:** Young females question the ability of influencers to positively influence the situation. In fact, many young females believe that influencer involvement will be detrimental to the outcome. In some cases, this is primarily related to perceptions that adult involvement will exacerbate tensions. This is particularly the case if the adult responses are emotionally charged. It is also, however, related to the drive of young females to be considered independent and resilient as they grow older, and the perception that adult involvement may tarnish them as dependent and vulnerable.

"You want your parents to think you're independent... you don't want them to see you at your most vulnerable" (18-25, female)

9. Additional CALD focus - intervention

This research highlights there will be benefits to CALD communities from an influencer strategy, however, this primarily relates to those who align with the mainstream findings. The prevalence and engrained nature of the problem in some CALD communities will require additional focus in order to achieve positive outcomes.

That is, **the topic of 'violence against women and their children' is unlikely to be fully addressed solely via a primary prevention strategy targeting influencers** and focussing on communications relating to gender equality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour. Rather, intervention strategies for influencers are also likely to be required in order to inspire positive influence on younger males and females. These interventions are related to policy and programs.

There are four primary reasons for this.

1. Elevated cultural sensitivity of the issue

Although violence against women is a sensitive topic regardless of the audience, when discussing the topic of disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, and violence against women within many of the CALD interviews, the extent to which the topic is explicitly considered 'hidden' was clear.

"I've worked with [specific cultural group referenced] ...a [cultural group] family came over, and in their culture when a woman has a baby she has to spend a certain amount of time inside, but under our laws she has to go out to Centrelink to sign the forms, so she got bashed by her partner" (cultural community leader).

CALD females echoed this strong desire to conceal the experience of any disrespectful or aggressive act at much higher levels than mainstream audiences.

"She puts a mask on every morning to cover up her feelings inside... she wants to be invisible... but she feels sorry for the guy" (15-17, CALD, female).

In this regard, it was frequently considered culturally inappropriate for a communication strategy alone to attempt to influence attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Rather, **specifically tailored programs** were considered **equally essential** to facilitation discussion and intervention within specific community groups to change culturally engrained norms.

2. Extremity of acceptable behaviour

While the delineation of acceptable and not acceptable behaviour was not consistently understood throughout the research (regardless of cultural background of the participant), across the qualitative research with CALD participants, it was clear that the boundaries of acceptable behaviour towards females are different to that articulated among mainstream participants.

One example of this was in response to the *What colour is the dress?* campaign. When shown this stimulus, there was some discussion regarding the communication intent – and whether it

was to discourage gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, or whether it was to destigmatise the experience for females.

“it’s not the normal image of a woman who’s experienced domestic violence... needs to look like she’s been affected by life... looks very healthy and looks after her appearance, she looks like she’s a model, but looks like she’s been hit... asking people not to judge her because she’s been slapped in the face” (female influencer, CALD).

This perception was also articulated by young CALD females, who often delineated cultural differences when gauging potential responses.

“It [the response to observing gender disrespectful or aggressive behaviour] depends on the dad, if he was a westerner dad then he might say ‘don’t talk to my daughter I’ll punch you in the face’... it depends... other dads might say ‘it’s ok, he’s just mucking around, he’s a young idiot’” (female, 15-17, CALD).

Given the higher acceptability of physical violence, it is perhaps not surprising that discussions regarding verbal altercations (between males and females; males and males; females and females) in some CALD communities were also not considered unusual, problematic, nor indicative of heightened risk or danger for either males or females. This results in a somewhat different benchmark for what is readily accepted as normal and was particularly strong among CALD males (compared to females).

I get angry at times and I have an awful personality when my mood is up and down or things frustrate me. This does not make me a bad person. We go through different stages in our life. This is normal.” (18-25, male, CALD)

3. Acceptance of concealed behaviour

While the desire to minimise and conceal experiences of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour were consistent regardless of cultural background throughout the research, many CALD participants described concealment as an accepted norm which strongly influenced their behaviour in terms of personal help-seeking, and in being influential themselves. This level of acceptance was generally stronger than that evident in mainstream audiences.

“If someone I knew was in trouble I would probably make sure they are really in trouble first and not just jump to conclusions” (female, 15-17, CALD).

4. Prevalence of violence against women

There was a higher level of disclosure of experiencing or witnessing gender inequality and violent behaviour towards women among CALD participants in the research when compared to mainstream participants. This is consistent with national statistics which indicate higher rates of prevalence of domestic violence in CALD communities.

Because of the higher prevalence of violence, many females indicated a stronger desire for communication, programs or interventions which facilitated help-seeking behaviour. From this perspective, social marketing campaigns such as *Tinderbeater*, *Secret Anti–Abuse Message That Only Kids Can See* billboard received higher positive responses.

10. Additional Indigenous focus - intervention

This research highlights there will be benefits to Indigenous communities from an influencer strategy, however, this primarily relates to those who align with the mainstream findings. The prevalence and engrained nature of the problem in some Indigenous communities – particularly those in regional and remote locations - will require additional focus in order to achieve positive outcomes.

That is, **the topic of ‘violence against women and their children’ is unlikely to be fully addressed solely via a primary prevention strategy targeting influencers** and focussing on communication relating to gender equality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour. Rather, intervention strategies for influencers are also likely to be required in order to inspire positive influence on younger males and females. These interventions are related to policy and programs.

There are four primary reasons for this.

1. Elevated cultural sensitivity of the issue

Although violence against women is a sensitive topic regardless of the audience, when discussing the topic of disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, and violence against women with Indigenous community influencers, the extent to which the topic is explicitly considered hidden was clear.

“When you look at [location], the population keeps growing but there’s no such thing as sexual abuse or domestic violence. It’s not talked about, especially when it’s the norm for cousins and families to inter-breed. That’s a sensitive cultural issue, especially when we’re talking remote areas.” (Indigenous community leader)

Indigenous females echoed this strong desire to conceal the experience of any disrespectful or aggressive act at much higher levels than mainstream audiences. Often, this was linked to fear of further retribution.

“it [disrespectful behaviour] is very normal ...he’s trying to shame her ...wouldn’t tell or trust anyone ...they could go tell the person anything you say and spread rumours ...” (15-17, female, Indigenous).

In this regard, it was frequently considered culturally inappropriate for a communications strategy alone to attempt to influence attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Rather, **specifically tailored programs** were considered **equally essential** to facilitate discussions and intervention within Indigenous communities to change culturally engrained norms.

2. Extremity of acceptable behaviour

While the delineation of acceptable and not acceptable behaviour was not consistently understood throughout the research (regardless of cultural background of the participant), across the qualitative research with Indigenous participants, it was clear that the boundaries of

acceptable behaviour towards females are different to that articulated among mainstream participants.

One example to highlight this is the discussion that followed after introducing the *What colour is the dress?* campaign (where a woman is featured with bruises over her body) to 18-25 year old Indigenous male participants. When shown this stimulus, there was very little shock value, with the extent of bruising considered quite normal and insufficiently graphic to prompt a reaction. In fact, in some cases, the response is to challenge why the bruises had not been concealed, rather than question the actions that had resulted in bruising.

*"If she was wearin' jeans you wouldn't even know" (18-25, male, Indigenous); "She really fu**ed up her make-up!" (18-25, male, Indigenous), "this picture just looks like she fell over something" (10-14, male, Indigenous)*

A further example which was highlighted through discussions regarding the *Slap Her* video, in which young Indigenous females often wondered why the video targeted younger children and not adults. This highlighted a desire for intervention among adults, rather than a perceived focus on children.

"those kids knew that it was wrong to slap girls ...don't understand why there is no older person in there" (15-17, female, Indigenous)

Additionally, some younger Indigenous males indicate considerably lower levels of potential influence by adults in both their close environment (family and peers) as well as from within specific settings. For example, when describing how a young Indigenous male may feel if observed committing an act of disrespectful or aggressive behaviour, some indicated they believed they would have little issue with this, as it was assumed they were *"always like that at school"* (10-14, male, Indigenous).

Given the higher acceptability of physical violence, it is perhaps not surprising that discussions regarding verbal altercations (between males and females; males and males; females and females) in some Indigenous communities were also not considered unusual, problematic, nor indicative of heightened risk or danger for either males or females. In fact, the lack of physical abuse (and focus on verbal aggression or other emotional displays of gender inequality) were even described as positive behaviours when compared to physically violent behaviours. Many of these participants had witnessed multiple occurrences of physical violence (between adults and younger people), and often described verbal aggression as jokes.

"might be gammin'?" (15-17, male, Indigenous); "pretendin' to be a big man" (10-14, male, Indigenous).

3. Acceptance of concealed behaviour

Throughout the research, many Indigenous participants disclosed having experienced or witnessed violent behaviour towards women. A consistent theme in these disclosures was the frequent absence of help-seeking behaviour. Additionally, there is also far greater acceptance that if violent behaviour is concealed it is more likely to be considered acceptable.

"I'd be mad 'cause it happened out in public ...that brings shame to the family" (mother, Indigenous).

The level of shame attached to acknowledging, reporting and disclosing violence in many Indigenous communities is very strong. This leads to a strong cultural norm for concealment and this results in a strong desire not to engage in conversations about the topic.

4. Prevalence of violence against women

There was a higher level of disclosure of experiencing or witnessing gender inequality and violent behaviour towards women among Indigenous participants in the research when compared to mainstream participants. This is consistent with national statistics which indicate higher rates of prevalence of domestic violence in Indigenous communities. Often, the responses to the stimulus used in this research which showed domestic violence (for example *What colour is the dress?*) were ones of considerable minimisation because their experiences with violence and domestic violence were considered far more extreme.

Because of the higher prevalence of violence, many females indicated a stronger desire for communications, programs or interventions which facilitated help-seeking behaviour. From this perspective, social marketing campaigns such as *Tinderbeater*, *Secret Anti-Abuse Message That Only Kids Can See* billboard received higher positive responses. These campaigns are social marketing interventions rather than primary prevention strategies.

It is, however, noted that an influencer strategy focussed on gender equality was responded to positively – as evidenced throughout the preceding sections of this report. However, reliance on this alone would be unlikely to sufficiently address the issue in Indigenous communities – particularly those in regional and remote locations.

11. Conclusions

The **heart of the communications challenge**

Recognise: Australians express a desire for change and there is strong community support for the cessation of extreme violence against women (particularly that resulting in significant physical harm and death).

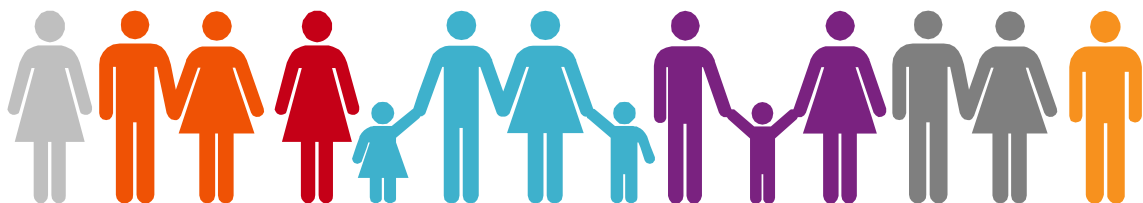
A significant barrier to achieving this change, however, is low recognition and cognition of the heart of the issue and where it begins. This research suggests that attitudes and beliefs which inadvertently perpetuate the problem (of gender inequality, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour) are prevalent, and firmly entrenched among many Australian adults and children. Importantly, this research has consistently affirmed these attitudes and beliefs as largely unconscious – being dominated by heuristics and seemingly widely accepted social norms. These heuristics and social norms are evident among both adults and young people.

Before community change can be achieved, therefore, many influencers will need to first recognise the true problem, and the often close proximity of their personal role to the heart of the issue. The unconscious and engrained nature of these perpetuating attitudes and beliefs means that achieving this will be a very significant undertaking.

Reconcile: Because of the unconscious nature of engrained heuristics, many potentially influential Australians fail to reconcile their role in perpetuating the situation, and easily deflect ownership.

Respond: Low self-efficacy in getting involved or being influential further prohibits community change. People will need to feel more uncomfortable about not influencing than they do about influencing.

Reinforce: The enormity of the challenge means that multiple voices are required to deliver breadth and sustainability of the issue.





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About the Department of Social Services

DSS aspires to be Australia's pre-eminent social policy agency. Its mission is to improve the lifetime wellbeing of people and families in Australia. DSS has a number of responsibilities including families and children; housing support; seniors; communities and vulnerable people; disability and carers; women's safety; mental health; settlement and multicultural affairs; and review of Australia's welfare system.

DSS helps contribute to a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children in Australia, through the implementation of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) in partnership with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders.

DSS also works with the Office for Women and other portfolios across government to advance gender equality and improve the status and wellbeing of women in Australia.

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