

- **Normative:** Social norms are rules of conduct and models of behaviour expected by a society. Social norms theory proposes that behaviour is influenced less by a person's own beliefs than by what they believe is expected of them or what they believe influential others would do in a similar circumstance (VicHealth 2014). This makes the dominant social norms in any given context extremely powerful, and in contemporary Australian society these are based on rigid gender roles, identities and stereotypes. They include for example, widely held ideas about men and women, such as the assumption that men make better leaders than women, and assumptions more specific to violence, such as the view that violence is a means of asserting male dominance and defining masculinity
- **Practices:** The way in which gender inequality is manifested in everyday practices at individual, organisational/institutional or social levels, such as child-rearing or employment practices.

These domains or processes of gender inequality are interrelated and mutually reinforcing – a structural power imbalance such as a lack of women in cabinet reinforces the normative notion that men make better leaders than women, and the normative assumption that women's role is to look after children can reinforce discriminatory workplace practices such as pregnancy discrimination. Further, the norms, structural power imbalances and practices that support gender inequality are reflected in other forms of discrimination and inequality (such as on the basis of Aboriginality, (dis)ability, age, ethnicity, or sexuality). They are also communicated both informally (e.g via community attitudes) and formally (in social structures, laws and institutions) (VicHealth 2014).

The multiple levels at which gender inequality – as the key driver of violence against women – is manifested

The socio-ecological model is now established and well-accepted as a means of explaining the complex phenomenon of gender inequality, and the way in which it is manifested (in norms, structures and practices) at multiple, interrelated levels – from the individual and relationship level, to the community, organisational, institutional and societal levels. The importance of this model in relation to the prevention of violence against women is also now emphasised by literature that points to the way it counters a strong tendency in the community to attribute violence only to individual level factors (Webster et al 2014).

Some criticisms of the ecological model suggest that it fails to incorporate a coherent theory of causation in relation to violence against women (Pease 2015) and is thus merely descriptive rather than explanatory (Salter 2014). As a result, it is argued, it can be used in ways that are antithetical to the notion that violence against women is rooted in gender inequality, by suggesting that it is rather the result of a 'grab-bag' of factors at the different levels of the social ecology (Pease 2015).

However, the socio-ecological model is not best understood as a theory of causation in itself (beyond the assumption that individual behaviours are the product of interrelated levels of influence). Rather it is best treated as a scaffold to be populated using a process guided by theory and other forms of evidence.

On this view, the model is compatible with a theory of causation that highlights gender inequality as the key driver, in that it provides a useful map across which the different dimensions (norms, structures and practices) of gender inequality can be plotted. Furthermore it can help demonstrate how these dimensions interact with each other in complex and mutually reinforcing ways by making clear the ways in which they are manifested at multiple levels of the social ecology.

As Michau et al (2014) suggest, there are mechanisms that sustain violence against women and girls at each level of the social ecology, and these 'manifest within the overarching frame of gender inequality and imbalance of gender-power relations'. Thus, while violence may be associated with unequal power relations at the interpersonal level, these in turn stem from and are rooted in unequal power relations that characterise systemic structures at the broader community, institutional and societal levels.

This approach builds on and goes beyond the established public health framing of the socio-ecological model, incorporating Salter's (2014: 17) argument that what is needed is

- a **sociological** approach that recognises violence as a social practice that is a product of, but also produces, gendered norms and gendered inequalities; and
- a **political economy** perspective to understand how gender norms are grounded in the maldistribution of economic and political power to men at the expense of women.

Conceptualised and enhanced in this way the ecological approach is particularly useful in helping to build a theoretically coherent model to explain violence against women, for two reasons. First, most theories locating violence against women in unequal gender relations assert that the factors contributing to both gender inequality and violence against women are reproduced across multiple levels of society, from the psyches of individuals through to cultural institutions and the state (See Pease 2015; Connell & Pearse 2015 for reviews). Second, the interconnectedness of influences at each of these levels is emphasised. In particular, most feminist-informed theoretical accounts of gender inequality note the mutually reinforcing relationship existing between the private and the public domains (see Connell & Pearse 2015; Walby 1990) – that is, the relationship between what happens in families and relationships and the public world of work, cultural institutions and the state.

The model also has the potential to counteract the tendency in some research to focus on individual risk factors and pay relatively less attention to the impact of macro-level factors, that is, those social, economic and political characteristics of nation-states that are statistically associated with increased incidence of violence against women. Research that does consider this question indicates that structural violence (that is, systemic inequality embedded in economic, political and social systems) is an important driver of gendered violence (Salter 2014: 13, True 2012).

Factors that can be understood as particularly significant drivers of violence against women at each of the levels of the model include:

- **Individual:** The ways in which gender roles and identities are embedded in individual psyches (Pease 2015) and played out in the behaviours of individuals

Distinguish between the prevention of violence against women and their children, and the broader child protection agenda

Preventing violence against women has the effect not only of preventing women themselves from experiencing violence, but of protecting children in their care from exposure to such violence, particularly intimate partner violence against their mothers or other female caregivers.

In conceptualising an agenda to prevent violence against women *and their children*, Our Watch acknowledges the serious impact of violence against women on children in their care. However, in making this connection, we do not intend to include the prevention of *all* violence against children within the scope of our work to prevent violence against women.

We suggest it is similarly important for state-based approaches to both acknowledge the overlap between this agenda and existing child protection agendas, and yet draw a clear distinction between the two, as they involve overlapping yet significantly different sets of drivers.

However, there are a number of areas of complexity that need to be carefully considered given that:

- The impact of direct childhood experience of violence is a potential contributor to future perpetration or victimisation,
- Childhood is recognised as an important stage in prevention programming, and
- Some girls whose age makes them legally ‘children’ experience forms of violence that are best understood as gender-based rather than as forms of child abuse.

The implications of these considerations for a prevention agenda are as follows:

1. Strategies to prevent violence against women should clearly define the primary prevention of direct child abuse and neglect as out of scope, but should nevertheless demonstrate support for, or solidarity with child protection agendas (as per the analysis above). Linking with, informing and strengthening the work of those aiming to prevent child abuse (especially through capacity building on the gendered drivers of such violence) should be considered within scope.
2. The prevention of violence against women should focus on whole-population initiatives that include a life-course approach to ensure all children and young people:
 - Grow up in positive, equitable and non-violent family environments (e.g. parenting programs),
 - Participate in education and care environments that promote equality, build respectful relationships skills, and respond effectively to those at risk or experiencing violence (e.g. whole-school programs building relationship skills and promoting respect and equality).
 - Are involved in creating a non-violent and equitable futures for themselves and their society (i.e. they participate actively in the development of prevention programs).

Joint Statement 'building block'

Options and recommendations for implementation

1. Develop a long term, bipartisan, whole of government and whole of community plan

Our Watch commends the Victorian Government's identification, in its own submission to the Commission, of a whole of government family violence prevention framework, with a focus on gender equity, as an opportunity for reform.

Elements of the prevention plan/framework

The Royal Commission should recommend that this plan/framework:

- 1.1. Seeks to prevent all 'violence against women' – especially intimate partner and sexual violence – in line with national policy and the international evidence that there are common drivers across the spectrum of such violence. There is no comparable evidence base for shared drivers of different forms of 'family violence' as defined in Victorian legislation, and different prevention strategies will be required to address, for example, elder abuse or adolescent violence against parents;
- 1.2. Aims to address – in its universal and systemic elements – the *structural, normative and practice-based* gender inequalities (see explanation on p.7) that drive violence against women, and monitors a 'narrowing of the gap' across all three areas (more detail in recommendations 2 and 3);
- 1.3. Does not, within a limited 'budget envelope', place disproportionate emphasis on, or investment into, addressing the 'contributing' factors such as alcohol and drug abuse, socio-economic disadvantage or mental illness. Such areas already receive distinct policy attention and funding, and only become relevant as contributing factors to violence against women when interacting with gendered and violence-supportive norms, practices and power imbalances. Rather the framework should seek to link with, strengthen and support existing policy and programming in these areas through bringing a gendered and violence-informed analysis, while retaining its focus and investment on addressing the recognised drivers of violence against women.

Joint Statement 'building block'

8 Build a skilled prevention workforce, within existing sectors, and as specialists

Options and recommendations for implementation

The Royal Commission should recommend:

- 8.1 Investment in development of a skilled workforce that is capable of designing, delivering and monitoring effective and safe prevention interventions. This should:
- Cater for different levels of expertise and roles in prevention,
 - Be adaptable/modular for different settings and sectors,
 - Include pre-service (university/TAFE) training for key professionals (such as early childhood educators and teachers, health promotion workers, human resources professionals, journalists and communication specialists and urban planners), and
 - Include specialist prevention practitioners, reflecting the diversity of the Victorian community, who can provide leadership, technical assistance, program development and policy support within organisations and institutions.

There are several options for the development and delivery of such training and professional development:

- 8.1.1 Accredited training programs could be developed by Our Watch, in partnership with VicHealth and training providers, as part of the implementation strategy of the National Framework and its associated settings-based Implementation Guides. An initial training program based on the Framework itself is likely to be developed and trialled by mid 2016, with settings-based training modules staggered over 2016 to end 2017. Our Watch might seek to partner with higher education institutions for inclusion of profession/setting specific modules in pre-service curricula, and would likely seek to accredit in-service/professional development programs, potentially licencing providers for its delivery. The Safety and Equality Commission might seek to deliver or coordinate delivery of such training statewide and across settings in Victoria.

Joint Statement 'building block'

Build a skilled prevention workforce, within existing sectors, and as specialists (continued)

Options and recommendations for implementation

- 8.1.2 Alternatively, the Safety and Equality Commission might develop and deliver (or licence delivery of) its own training program, with similar pre- and in-service modules for specialists and settings-based practitioners.
- 8.1.3 Another option is that workforce development for the prevention sector build on existing gender equality or prevention or violence against women training programs held by women's health organisations or, for example, the Domestic Violence Resource Centre.
- 8.2 Peak agencies support their member organisations to build capacity to promote gender equality and prevent violence and discrimination, for example VECCI and VEOHRC, to develop prevention of violence against women training modules for inclusion in their curricula, and WorkSafe to examine possibilities of strengthening prevention work through existing occupational health and safety and anti-bullying strategies.
- 8.3 Capacity building for Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups, organisations and Indigenous community groups to implement local community-driven prevention programs.
- 8.4 Strategies to increase Indigenous people's access to prevention training and train-the-trainer programs through formal and professional courses.
- 8.5 Ongoing capacity building of mainstream services and organisations in cultural competency.
- 8.6 Work with specialist community organisations to build the capacity and skills of women from marginalised groups to take a leadership role in prevention.

Joint Statement 'building block'

Options and recommendations for implementation

9 Undertake an intersectional gender analysis of all government policy, legislative development and budgeting

The Royal Commission should recommend:

- 9.1 All government policy, legislative development and budgeting require a gender impact statement, ideally as part of a broader Human Rights Impact Assessment Statement, that identifies the differential impacts the law/policy/budgetary measure might have on men's and women's lives and details how it aims to 'narrow the gender gap'. The procedural requirements of the gender impact statement might include:
- An initial audit, at the start of policy and law-making processes, that considers the potential impact of the policy/law on structural power differences between men and women (economic, political, social, etc), on normative assumptions about the roles of men and women, and on institutional, organisational or social practices that might reinforce or challenge structural and normative inequalities;
 - Consultation with women representing the diversity of the Victorian population to consider the audit in the light of the different forms of discrimination or disadvantage experienced by women from different groups; and
 - The identification of provisions or resources specifically designed to address existing gender inequalities and empower women.
- 9.2 The whole of government plan/framework is linked to the obligation to promote human rights contained in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, and includes actions that link with areas of policy, regulation and legislation designed to address broader discrimination, disadvantage and abuse and promote inclusive and diverse communities.
- 9.3 Potential amendments to legislation that might support efforts to reduce gender inequality, such as broadening the scope of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* to capture sex discrimination in media and advertising.

Joint Statement 'building block'

10 Support ongoing research and evaluation for knowledge building and innovation

Options and recommendations for implementation

The Royal Commission should recommend:

- 10.1 All new prevention activity take an 'action research' approach, learning from implementation and building capacity among practitioners and organisations for ongoing evaluation. Evaluation of pilots or 'innovation programs' should be set at 20 percent of program budgets.
- 10.2 Evaluation frameworks for all initiatives should be aligned with the monitoring and accountability framework in recommendation 3 above, and should include meaningful, context-specific measures and indicators.
- 10.3 Future research is planned to address gaps on prevention of violence against women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage, and highlight good practice in prevention for addressing this in prevention activity.
- 10.4 Investment in Australia's first longitudinal study of Respectful Relationships Education in schools. While international evaluations have proven the effectiveness of schools-based prevention programs in reducing future perpetration of violence, no such data exists for Australian programs, and making it difficult to convince schools and governments nationally of the value of the work. Victoria is currently implementing one of the most comprehensive good practice respectful relationships programs in the country, yet current evaluation will not extend beyond measuring immediate impacts on student attitudes and school cultures. While such measures are important, further research is necessary to categorically demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach on reducing future rates of perpetration and victimisation. Such an evaluation would provide data on:

Joint Statement 'building block'

Support ongoing research and evaluation for knowledge building and innovation (continued)

Options and recommendations for implementation

- The elements of the RREiS program that have the most 'traction' with students;
- Short and longer term changes to attitudes over time to assessing issues of 'rebound' or 'relapse';
- Subsequent changes in behaviour, such as reduced risk of perpetration or victimisation as a result of participation in the program;
- The effects of individual participant characteristics (such as exposure to other protective or risk factors) on the effectiveness of the RREiS program; and
- Particular attitudes or beliefs that are most associated with future perpetration or victimisation amongst young people.

This would provide policy makers with a definitive study of respectful relationships education in schools in the Australian context and the longer term return on investment that this program can have for young people in their future relationships.

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