

## Leading Issues Journal November 2011

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CLW devotes this issue to the White Ribbon Campaign in Australia. The unacceptable reality that in Australia, one in three women has experienced physical violence at some stage in her life since the age of 15 necessitates that men and women do not remain silent, that we do not allow certain behaviours and attitudes to go unchallenged. Join the White Ribbon Campaign in Australia on 25 November 2011. Men are being encouraged to swear: "I swear never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women. This is my oath."

<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/>



### Interview with Libby Davies, CEO of White Ribbon

#### **How successful has the White Ribbon Campaign been in Australia?**

Part of White Ribbon's success can be measured by the amount of activity and awareness generated by the Campaign. In 2010:

- White Ribbon supporters around the country hosted over 200 events.
- White Ribbon received more than 2000 media mentions.
- White Ribbon Australia trended second globally on Twitter on White Ribbon Day, 25 November.
- The White Ribbon Facebook "fan page" grew to more than 10,000 fans.
- The campaign led to a 16% increase in awareness to 70% over pre-campaign awareness levels.

- There was a 58% increase in the number of My Oath swears.

The 2010 Campaign's success in engaging the community is also reflected in brand polling results compiled by Review Partners.

These results showed that in addition to a significant increase in awareness of the issue and White Ribbon, the proportion of people who would become involved in the campaign continued to rise again in 2010 to 67% (to two out of three people). Both men and women were prepared to support the cause after the campaign, but the campaign had a proportionately greater influence on men than women.

It is also encouraging to note that the majority of people surveyed (64%) believe that, over the past few years, men have become more inclined to try and prevent violence against women.

White Ribbon's task is to ensure that this level of awareness and understanding is strengthened, and that this in turn leads to a change in behaviours and attitudes towards women.

In addition to awareness-raising, White Ribbon has successfully piloted a program with schools in the Sydney region. The White Ribbon Breaking the Silence in Schools Program works to inspire principals to strengthen the culture of respect in their schools that is age-appropriate for their students and engages all parts of the school community. To-date 60 schools have participated in the Program and it has been so successful that White Ribbon is now working to expand the Program nationally.

### **What are some of the impediments to this Campaign's success that you would like to overcome?**

White Ribbon, like most social awareness, normative change campaigns, faces some specific impediments which the Campaign is working to overcome.

1. Access to resources: as a not-for-profit organisation, White Ribbon relies on a mixture of government, corporate and community support to sustain the Campaign.
2. Engagement: the issue of men's violence against women is one which is still considered by some as a social taboo not to be discussed in public. White Ribbon's challenge is to break the silence around this insidious issue and to engage the whole community in the prevention of men's violence against women.
3. Measuring change: Metrics to measure behaviour and attitudinal change are challenging and take many years to document. In addition, as awareness of the issue increases, so too does reports of violence. This is because there is a greater understanding amongst the community that violence is not to be tolerated and that there are ways out of domestic and family violence situations.

## **What specific actions is the Campaign advocating to lead social change in the prevention of violence against women?**

The White Ribbon Campaign is unique in that it works to engage men as part of the solution in the prevention of men's violence against women. The White Ribbon Campaign calls on men to take a leadership role around this issue, to act as role models for other men in their community and to create a culture which does not accept men's violence against women.

## **Beyond raising awareness, what strategies are in place to connect with those who are violent against women?**

The White Ribbon Campaign works with Ambassadors to connect with all sectors of the community. White Ribbon Ambassadors are tasked with setting the right example for other men, for standing up to their mates when they are committing acts of violence against women and to create a culture which does not accept men's violence against women. When individual men take action in their daily lives to reduce or prevent men's violence against women, this makes a difference. White Ribbon asks individual men to create positive change by:

- Putting your own house in order
  - o Not using violence
  - o building respectful and non-violent relationships
  - o boycotting sexist and violence-supportive culture
  - o informing themselves of the realities of men's violence against women.
- Being a positive bystander
  - o Intervening (safely) in violent incidents
  - o challenging perpetrators and potential perpetrators
  - o supporting survivors
  - o being an egalitarian role model
  - o challenging the social norms and inequalities which sustain men's violence against women

## **Has the White Ribbon organisation considered running workshops for men to change violent behaviours towards women?**

White Ribbon is a primary prevention campaign and as such does not work in the service delivery space. White Ribbon does, however, refer the public to behaviour change programs and White Ribbon's research papers reflect on the type of interventions that bring about normative change.

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## **Background Information for White Ribbon**

### **History**

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, with a white ribbon as its iconic symbol.

White Ribbon began in Australia in 2003 as part of UNIFEM (now UN Women). It formally became a Foundation in 2007. White Ribbon is Australia's only national male-led violence prevention campaign.

The White Ribbon Campaign is now the largest global male-led movement to stop men's violence against women. White Ribbon believes in the capacity of the individual to change and to encourage change in others. It believes that our generation can and must work towards stopping violence against women.

White Ribbon, as part of the White Ribbon Campaign, invites men to make a difference by swearing an Oath never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women. This Oath is not just a 'feel good' statement. It is an active commitment which promotes positive attitudes and behaviours towards women and drives signatories to, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, 'be the change you want to see in the world'.

When the White Ribbon Campaign culminates each year on 25 November men and women across Australia are encouraged to wear a white ribbon as a symbol of this Oath. By swearing the Oath and wearing a white ribbon these men and women are openly showing their commitment to challenging and changing the attitudes and behaviours which contribute to violence against women.

### **"If I were a woman" – by Michael O'Connell**

*If I were a woman in Australia, even just for a day, I'd roll out of bed in the morning knowing the chances are one in three that the guy next to me will later say 'I luv you babe' after he's slapped and kicked me, and likely I'd stay with him because there was nothing better for me.*



Michael O'Connell

*At the United Against Domestic Violence - Engaging All Men in Prevention Conference in Mount Gambier, South Australia, White Ribbon Ambassador and*

Commissioner for Victims' Rights in South Australia, Michael O'Connell, read the above poem to bring light to the issue of violence against women and men's role in not remaining silent about the issue.

## **The Data**

National data on violence against women in Australia comes from two major surveys:

The ***Personal Safety Survey***, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (a national survey of 16,400 adults in Australia aged 18 and over) (ABS 2006).

The Australian component of the ***International Violence Against Women Survey***, conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (a national survey of 6,677 women in Australia aged 18-69) (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

## **Australian women's lifetime experience of violence**

The *Personal Safety Survey* provides data on Australian women's lifetime experiences of violence (since the age of 15). In Australia:

- Close to half of all women (40%) have experienced violence since the age of 15;
- Just under one third of women (29%) have experienced *physical assault*;
- Nearly one in five women (17%) have experienced *sexual assault*;
- Nearly one in six women (16%) have experienced violence by a current or previous partner in their lifetime;
- Since the age of 15, one third of women (33%) have experienced inappropriate comments about their body or sex life, one quarter (25%) have experienced unwanted sexual touching, and one in five (19%) have been stalked (ABS 2006).

## **Young women**

Young women are at greater risk of violence than older women:

- 12% of women aged 18–24 years experienced at least one incident of violence, compared to 6.5% of women aged 35–44 years and 1.7% of women aged 55 years and over (ABS 2006: 6).
- 30.2% of sexually active Year 10 females and 26.6% of sexually active Year 12 females have ever experienced unwanted sex (Smith *et al.* 2003).
- One in seven girls and young women aged 12 to 20 (14 per cent) have experienced rape or sexual assault (National Crime Prevention 2001).

Significantly, the survey found that women who have been sexually or physically abused as children are approximately twice as likely to experience partner violence later in life.

## **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience higher rates of violence than other women:

- There are substantially higher rates of interpersonal violence in general, and violence against women in particular, in Indigenous communities (Memmott *et al.* 2001);
- The Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* finds that:
  - 20% of indigenous women experienced physical violence in the last 12 months, compared to 7% of non-Indigenous women.
  - Three times as many Indigenous women as non-Indigenous women experienced an incident of sexual violence in the last 12 months (12% versus 4%) (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).
  - Despite representing just over 2% of the total Australian population, Indigenous women accounted for 15% of homicide victims in Australia in 2002-03 (Mouzos & Segrave 2004).
- Various state-based studies find that Aboriginal women experience rates of domestic violence between 5 and 45 times higher, and rates of sexual assault 16 to 25 times higher, than among non-Aboriginal women (Lievore 2003).

(Source: Violence against women: Facts and figures Compiled by Dr Michael Flood, Research Fellow, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Health Sciences Faculty, La Trobe University August 2008)

## International Evidence



### Did You Know?

- Up to 70 percent of women and girls will be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in their lifetime.
- Rape and domestic violence are a higher risk for women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, traffic accidents or malaria.
- Violence against women has become a weapon of war. In Rwanda, up to half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide.
- 140 million women and girls alive today have undergone female genital mutilation.

- It is estimated that 5,000 women are victims of so-called “honour killings” every year.
- The economic costs of violence against women are considerable. In the United States, the costs of medical care and productivity loss due to intimate partner violence exceed US\$5.8 billion per year.

Countries have made some progress in addressing violence against women and girls. According to the UN Secretary-General’s 2006 In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women ([http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/61/122/Add.1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/61/122/Add.1)), 89 countries had some legislation on domestic violence, and a growing number of countries had instituted national plans of action. Marital rape is a prosecutable offence in at least 104 States, and 90 countries have laws on sexual harassment. However, in too many countries gaps remain.

In 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched his campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women* to draw international attention at the highest level to the issue. **Say NO – UNiTE** is designed to support social mobilization to drive actions and accountability, in contribution to the *UNiTE* campaign.

Say No Unite to end violence against women at <http://saynotoviolence.org/about-say-no>

## Ten Common Myths and Misconceptions

### **Myth 1 Violence against women is an issue that only concerns women.**

Violence against women is an issue for everyone. It is a human rights violation. *“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace”* Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

One in three girls world-wide will, in her lifetime, suffer violence directed at her simply because she is female. “Violence against women has become as much a pandemic as HIV/AIDS or malaria. But is generally downplayed by the public at large and by policy makers who fail to create and fund programs to eradicate it.”(Not A Minute More Ending Violence Against Women (2003) UNIFEM NY p.6).

Violence against women is also a “men’s issue” in particular. It is men’s wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends whose lives are limited by violence and abuse. It’s a men’s issue because some men’s violence gives all men a bad name. It’s a men’s issue because, as community leaders and decision-makers, men can play a key role in helping stop violence against women. It’s a men’s issue because men can

speak out and step in when male friends and relatives insult or attack women. And it's a men's issue because a minority of men treat women and girls with contempt and violence, and it is up to the majority of men to help create a culture in which this is unacceptable (Flood, M. (2004) Men's Roles in the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Asia-Pacific Region. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation Of the Beijing Platform for Action, and its Regional and Global Outcomes. Bangkok, Thailand, 7-10 September.)

### **Myth 2 There is nothing we can do to stop violence against women**

Some people think that rape and domestic violence are inevitable – because men are just „born that way“ and violence against women is the product of biology or genetics. Or, because those people who use violence are „psychotic“ or „crazy“ and cannot change. Instead, the research shows that violence against women is the product of learned attitudes and norms, and social inequalities. Just as violence-supportive attitudes can be learned, they can be unlearned. Likewise, communities and governments can change the social conditions that feed violence, replacing them with social conditions that encourage respect and non-violence. Our communities can no longer excuse the abuse. Our children, our sisters, our mothers and our grandmothers have a right to live a life free from abuse. Much has been achieved to date, but the “change needed requires coordinated and sustained effort on many levels... and requires awareness raising, legal changes, national plans of action, and research... Gender-based violence has been identified as a product of a learned behaviour... as such it can be changed, particularly through education targeted at young children, youth of both sexes, and women themselves”( Not A Minute More Ending Violence Against Women (2003) UNIFEM NY p.13). By providing a clear message that men will not tolerate violence against women, the White Ribbon Campaign starts the ball rolling in removing this form of human rights abuse from our community.

### **Myth 3 Women should just remove themselves from abusive relationships**

There are many reasons women stay in abusive relationships. They include fear that the violence will escalate, financial dependence, social stigma, lack of self-confidence, isolation, religious and moral values, love and commitment and concern for children, family pressures and lack of community support, including affordable accommodation. A man who is using violence against his female partner typically uses a range of strategies to encourage her compliance and dependence, such as monitoring her movements, destroying her self-esteem, and encouraging her to blame herself for the abuse. These dynamics too make it hard to leave abusive relationships.

### **Myth 4 Some people deserve to be beaten by provoking the violence.**

Responsibility for violence must rest solely with the abuser. Most abused people try to do everything they can to please their partner and avoid further violent episodes.



### **Myth 5 Violence against women only occurs in specific groups**

Violence against women occurs across all religious beliefs, level of education, sexual orientation, occupation, community position, or cultural/ethnic background.

### **Myth 6 Violent people are mentally ill or have psychopathic personalities**

Clinical studies do not support this view. The vast majority of violent men are not suffering from mental illness and could not be described as psychopaths. Most abusers would appear to be respectable men who are very much in control. They are represented in all occupations and social classes and the violence is usually manifest only within their relationship with their partner and children.

### **Myth 7 Some people need the violence, enjoy it or are addicted to it.**

The use of violence is a choice: those who use violence choose where and when they do the violence; and, how they use the violence. Far from loving the violence, victims find that violence destroys the relationship, and many people in violent situations eventually leave.

### **Myth 8 Violence against women is caused by drugs and/or alcohol**

Almost even numbers of sober and drunken people are violent. Where studies do show more drinkers are violent to their partners, the studies are not able to explain why many drunken men (80% of heavy and binge drinkers) did not abuse their wives. Alcohol and other addictive substances are used by abusers to give themselves permission to be violent.

### **Myth 9 Violence only happens to a certain sort of woman**

Research has repeatedly shown that violence crosses all boundaries and can happen to women from all social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and family situations.

### **Myth 10 Violence only affects a small number of Australian women**

According to the VicHealth report (2004): *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, violence is the biggest cause of injury or death for women between 18 and 45. One in three Australian women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.

The Vic Health report also found that, among women under 45, intimate partner violence contributes more to their poor health, disability, and death than any other risk factor, including obesity and smoking (VicHealth (2004) *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*. Melbourne: VicHealth).

Source: White Ribbon Foundation [www.whiteribbonday.org.au](http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au)