



MEDIA RELEASE – For immediate release – Friday 20th February 2009

Government gets figures wrong on violence

The NSW Government's *Discussion Paper on the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework* has been criticised by a leading men's health organisation for overinflating statistics on domestic violence prevalence for female victims while at the same time understating the prevalence of male victimisation.

In a letter to the Violence Prevention Coordination Unit, Greg Andresen from Men's Health Australia writes that "Violence is an important issue impacting upon the health and wellbeing of our communities, and every effort should be made to reduce its incidence and impact. We believe that any approach to reducing violence must be developed through robust debate based upon accurate representation of the best data available to us." He then details a number of serious and misleading errors within the Discussion Paper. The Government's errors include:

- Falsely claiming that the *majority* of assaults experienced by women are perpetrated by intimate male partners (the actual figure is 30 per cent)
- Falsely claiming that women who report violence in intimate relationships are significantly more likely than men to experience repeated acts of violence (actually women and men reporting violence by previous partners in intimate relationships experience repeated acts of violence at similar rates)
- Falsely claiming that males do not have prior experiences of violent relationships (actually 6 per cent of males and 17 per cent of females have prior experiences of violent relationships)
- Falsely claiming that males rarely experience post separation violence (actually 367,300 Australian men have experienced previous partner violence since the age of 15)
- Falsely claiming that, compared with male victims of domestic violence, Canadian women are three times more likely to be injured as a result of violence (actually similar percentages of female and male victims sustain injuries)
- Falsely claiming that, compared with male victims of domestic violence, Canadian women are five times more likely to require medical attention or hospitalisation (actually male victims of spousal violence are almost twice as likely as female victims of spousal violence to suffer major assault)
- Falsely claiming that women are over five times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men (women are less than twice as likely to be killed by an intimate partner as men are).

Men's Health Australia is calling upon the NSW Government to use the correct, readily available facts when addressing domestic violence. "We are surprised and disappointed that the main government department dealing with domestic violence could be so misinformed about the reality of domestic violence, and could mislead the public so profoundly," said Mr Andresen.

"These misleading statistics could easily impact upon the funding and provision of services to male domestic violence victims across NSW. Don't all victims of violence deserve assistance whether they are female or male? Domestic violence is a community issue, and community solutions are unlikely to be effective if they are based on the Government's inaccuracies. Inflated and misleading statistics only serve to create an unwarranted level of fear and alarm within the community."

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CC: Premier of NSW, The Hon. Nathan Rees MP
NSW Leader of the Opposition, Mr Barry O'Farrell, MP
NSW Minister for Women, The Hon. Verity Firth MP
NSW Shadow Minister for Women, Ms Pru Goward MP
NSW Minister for Health, The Hon. John Della Bosca MLC
NSW Shadow Minister for Health, Mrs Jillian Skinner MP
NSW Attorney-General, The Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
NSW Shadow Attorney-General, Mr Greg Smith MP
All other NSW State Upper and Lower House MPs
Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Elizabeth Broderick
President of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian AM
NSW Commissioner of Police, Commissioner Andrew Scipione APM
Federal Minister for Health, The Hon Nicola Roxon MP
Federal Shadow Minister for Health, The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Federal Minister for the Status of Women, The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Federal Shadow Minister for the Status of Women, Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Federal Attorney-General, The Hon Robert McClelland MP
Federal Shadow Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis SC
Tony Piccolo MP, Member for Light, SA

Date: 5 February 2009

URGENT – Serious statistical errors contained within the *Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework*

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to commend the NSW Government for releasing the *Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework*. It provides an excellent overview of the current state of affairs in NSW and a timely opportunity to improve the system in order to assist victims of violence.

I represent Men's Health Australia, a non-government alliance committed to the betterment of the health of men and boys in our communities. We believe that violence is an important issue impacting upon the health and wellbeing of our communities, and that every effort should be made to reduce its incidence and impact. We also believe that any approach to reducing violence must be developed through robust debate amongst both our community and its leaders, and that such debate must be based upon accurate representation of the best data available to us.

I am sure that you will agree that this is vital, and when using statistics it is particularly important to ensure such accuracy. As such I would like to draw your attention to a number of serious statistical errors contained within the Discussion Paper that I have noted down in an attached document.

Men's Health Australia is aware that these errors may be merely oversights, and as such we would seek clarification on the issue, a printed retraction of any errors, or a reissue of the Discussion Paper with the correct data acknowledged. We would urge that this be done as a matter of urgency as you will be aware the due date for submissions is 27th March 2009. We are concerned that these errors appear to weaken what is an otherwise excellent document.

Once again, Men's Health Australia would like to thank you for releasing such an important and timely review of anti-violence strategies and services in NSW, and I would emphasise that our agenda is not to quieten the debate, but to make sure that it is based upon accurate representation of the best data available to us.

Thank you for your consideration on this issue and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Andresen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Greg" being more prominent.

Greg Andresen
Research and Media Liaison
Men's Health Australia

**List of statistical errors contained within the *Discussion Paper on
NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework***

Page 3

Extract from Discussion Paper:

As numerous studies show, the majority of violence that women experience is perpetrated by an intimate male partner. The most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey found that most women assaulted in the last 12 months were assaulted by either a current or previous partner.

Correction:

The most recent Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) found that 30 per cent of women assaulted in the last 12 months were assaulted by either a current or previous partner (pp 30, 33)¹.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Only a very small proportion of assaults against men were perpetrated by a former or current female intimate partner (4.3%).

Correction:

The most recent Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) found that males make up 20% of victims of violence by former or current partners (p15)².

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Three quarters of intimate partner homicides involve men killing their female partners.

Correction:

The latest *Homicide in Australia: 2006–07 National Homicide Monitoring Program* annual report (Australian Institute of Criminology 2008) found that less than two thirds (64.6%) of intimate partner homicides involve men killing their female partners (pp 2, 57)³.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Data from the Personal Safety Survey also indicates that women reporting violence in intimate relationships are significantly more likely than men to experience repeated acts of violence.

Correction:

Data from the Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) indicates that women reporting violence by *current partners* in intimate relationships are significantly more likely than men to experience repeated acts of violence. However, women and men reporting violence by *previous partners* in intimate relationships experience repeated acts of violence at similar rates (p37)⁴.

¹ 73,800 women were physically assaulted by an intimate partner (either current or previous). 242,000 women experienced physical assault in total (from all perpetrators). 7,800 women experienced sexual assault from a current partner, while 21,500 women experienced sexual assault from a former partner, making a total of 29,300 women sexually assaulted by an intimate partner. 101,600 women experienced sexual assault in total (from all perpetrators).
² 27,900 males and 114,600 females were victims of violence by current or previous partners during the last 12 months.
³ 44 males and 21 females perpetrated intimate partner homicide in 2006-07 while 23 males and 42 females were victims (2 male victims were killed by their male partners).
⁴ 60.1 per cent of males and 67.6 per cent of females experienced more than one incident of violence from a previous partner since the age of 15.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Males did not have prior experiences of violent relationships.

Correction:

The Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) shows that 6% of males and 17% of females have prior experiences of violent relationships (i.e. they have experienced current or previous partner violence since the age of 15) (p16).

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Males rarely experienced post separation violence.

Correction:

The Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) shows that 5% of males (n = 367,300) and 15% of females (n = 1,135,500) have experienced previous partner violence since the age of 15 (p16).

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Canadian data indicate that compared with male victims of domestic violence, women are:

- three times more likely to be injured as a result of violence;
- five times more likely to require medical attention or hospitalisation

Correction:

These statistics are from an out-of-date Canadian survey (Statistics Canada 2003). The latest survey, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile" (Statistics Canada 2008), found that:

- Similar percentages of female and male victims sustained injuries." (p14).
- Male victims of spousal violence are 1.8 times as likely as female victims of spousal violence to suffer major assault (p20)⁵.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

In addition, a study in the United States comparing the mental health impacts of domestic violence for men and women found that women were markedly more likely to suffer impacts than men.

Correction:

While the referenced study of 502 university students (Romito and Grassi 2007) did find that the mental health impacts of *domestic violence* on women were markedly greater than on men, it also found that "for experienced and witnessed *family violence*, the health impact was similar for males and females" (p1222).

A further study of 573 university students (Prospero 2007) found that "reporting higher number of mental health symptoms was significantly related to experiencing higher levels of IPV victimization but not to gender (female or male)".

⁵ Table 1.5 shows that 13 per cent of female victims of spousal violence and 23 per cent of male victims of spousal violence were victims of major assault (levels 2 & 3). Major assault is defined as follows: "Major assault includes assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault, is defined as assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim (level 3)."

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Compared to men, women comprise the majority of domestic and family violence victims brought to the attention of criminal justice agencies. An analysis of reported incidents of domestic assault in NSW between 1997 and 2004 indicated that 71% of domestic assault incidents reported to the police involved a female victim, and that 80% of the offenders were male. By these figures, 29% of victims were male, not an insignificant proportion. A possible explanation for this is given by Flood. On his analysis, the data relied upon may be categorised as being drawn from “acts based instruments”. Flood argues that such instruments have value as surveillance instruments in the general population but they are inadequate for capturing the substance, impact or dynamics of intimate partner violence, and particularly the more serious forms of this violence, which women experience at far greater rates than men. In this regard, whilst the figures show a not insignificant proportion of men experiencing domestic violence, they do not capture the seriousness of that violence.

Correction:

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data (People 2005) showing that 29% of domestic assault victims are male is *crime data* (based upon reports to police) and therefore does not rely whatsoever upon the ‘acts based instruments’ used to obtain *survey data*. However, the statistics quoted on page 3 of the discussion paper from the Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) and the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos and Makkai 2004) rely exclusively upon ‘acts based instruments’. Dr Flood's critique can therefore be applied only to data from these surveys, and is not a valid or relevant critique of the NSW crime data.

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Extract from Discussion Paper:

Exposure to domestic and family violence increases... and, in the case of boys particularly, may lead to them perpetrating violence as adults.

Correction:

The referenced paper “Young Australians and Domestic Violence” (Indemauro 2001) says nothing whatsoever about boys being more likely than girls to perpetrate violence as adults if exposed to domestic and family violence as children. It instead talks generically of “young people”.

Extract from Discussion Paper:

Domestic and family violence can be lethal. In Australia from 1989 to 1998, 57% of female deaths resulting from homicide or violence were perpetrated by an intimate partner, with women being over five times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men.

Correction:

The latest Homicide in Australia: 2006–07 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report (Australian Institute of Criminology 2008) found that:

- 52% of female homicides were perpetrated by an intimate partner (p2)⁶.
- women were 1.8 times as likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men (p2)⁷.

⁶ There were 42 female intimate partner homicide victims out of 81 female homicide victims in total

⁷ There were 23 male and 42 female intimate partner homicide victims.

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