



**Jesuit  
Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

**the  
men's  
project**


A Jesuit Social Services initiative

# Submission to South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

September 2024

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## Background

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. The prevalence of these distinct but overlapping forms of violence is a serious, nation-wide issue, and we affirm the need for more to be done to prevent and address this crisis, which is primarily a crisis of men's violence against women. Policy, legislative, administrative, funding and structural responses are needed at every level of government, so we commend the South Australian government on its commitment to examining these levers in order to determine what needs to change.

We acknowledge the significant work underway at a federal level seeking to build on Australia's current approaches to preventing, addressing and responding to violence against women and children. In addition to the contents of this submission, we draw the Commission's attention to a paper recently developed by Jesuit Social Services in light of the Federal Government's rapid review of evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence, available on our website: [Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence](#).

Jesuit Social Services' gender justice work is based primarily in Victoria, where a Royal Commission into Family Violence occurred

almost 10 years ago. The progress made since, and the associated lessons learned, inform our submission. Victoria remains at a crucial stage of reform, with significant work still occurring across the state.

Our submission to South Australia's Royal Commission does not seek to provide an exhaustive contribution to what is needed. Instead, we have provided recommendations and reflections informed by our practice work with men and boys, and the lived experience of our participants. While we do not seek to address the South Australian context specifically, we offer insights from our 'Man Box' research that drew on an Australia-wide representative sample of men, and therefore provides insights into the drivers of violence and the harms associated with unhealthy masculinities, including in South Australia.

Our submission does not seek to diagnose the underpinnings of violence and associated structural inequities; nor does it attempt to do justice to all of the complexities and nuances of violence prevention. Further, we do not seek to holistically address the intersectional nature of violence including the disproportionate rates of violence perpetrated against First Nations women, women with disability, LGBTQIA+ people, and others at greater risk of experiencing violence.

# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1:

**Invest in collecting more and better data** on the extent of perpetration of DFSV.

## Recommendation 2:

We recommend the South Australian Government closely consider opportunities to **intervene earlier to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence**. This could include:

- using data to guide decisions about where to concentrate specific early intervention efforts
- investment in targeted early intervention programs, including programs that engage with boys and young men who have already used violence in the home, and programs that engage boys and young men in environments where they are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence.
- exploring place-based and community-led approaches, such as the 'saturation' model being trialled in Ballarat, Victoria.

## Recommendation 3:

We recommend the South Australian Government **publicly release a 'stocktake' of prevention and early intervention work taking place across the state, and report annually on progress** against the stocktake every year. This should map specific initiatives, target participants, existing data on violence perpetration, outcomes sought, and evidence where it exists. The stocktake should be used to promote more specific discussions regarding merits of practice approaches and ultimately ensure investment in prevention and early intervention is genuinely connected to the scale and nature of the problem of violence.

*Note: We have made a similar recommendation to the Federal Government, and we highlight that a national data set developed in partnership with all states and territories would support a national approach.*

## Recommendation 4:

We recommend the South Australian Government consider opportunities to **strengthen the capacity of key workforces to engage boys and men in prevention work across a range of settings**. This should build on the South Australian Government's recent investments in innovative and holistic supports for people who have experienced or perpetrated violence, including for First Nations families and communities. It should view a range of work as prevention, and consider opportunities to work with people of all genders who can influence men and boys. This could include investment in training that builds capability to prevent and respond to gendered violence, tailored to workforces including residential settings for young people exposed to risk factors.

## Recommendation 5a:

We recommend the South Australian Government **fund organisations that specialise in work with people who use violence and the prevention of violence** to partner with technology and social media platforms to develop and implement an evidence-based online deterrence/early intervention campaign to prevent violence against women and children. This work should draw on international evidence and best practice in deterrence, including in the area of child sexual abuse prevention.

## Recommendation 5b:

We recommend the South Australian Government **invest in digital tools to support the capacity of critical workforces e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches and parents** to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences. The tools should be developed with the input of appropriately qualified organisations and based on evidence. They should be open source and widely disseminated. This approach acknowledges that in-person facilitated workshops to counter negative influences can never achieve the reach and scale required.

## Recommendation 6:

Notwithstanding the complexities and challenges of providing an effective therapeutic response to men in prison for gender-based violence offences, in-prison behaviour change approaches warrant further investigation.

New approaches should be trialled, drawing on existing evidence and with adequate funding and further evaluation, noting that such trials would need to be supported by concomitant changes in prison conditions and culture. Important considerations will include the holistic needs of individual participants as well as the environment of hyper-masculinity, fear and isolation that characterises most prisons.



## About Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. Our perspectives on domestic, family and sexual violence are informed by a unique combination of practice expertise, research and lived experience. We have been working with boys and men for 47 years, delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish. Our work spans Victoria, the Northern Territory and New South Wales.

Jesuit Social Services works with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and wellbeing; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; ecological justice; and preventing and addressing gender-based violence. Our work has involved engaging with boys and men in contact with the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; and establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems.

Our violence prevention work is motivated by our desire to keep people of all genders safe. We know the importance of engaging with boys and men, of recognising their specific needs, and looking beyond the criminal behaviour to the person who perpetrated it - while nevertheless holding them to account for their behaviour. We know the importance of creating respectful spaces where boys and men can take responsibility for their actions, explore alternatives to dominant understandings of masculinities, and find ways to address the use of violence in their own lives and the broader community.

Drawing from our experience, Jesuit Social Services established The Men's Project in 2017 to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men to keep families and communities safe and to improve their wellbeing (see further detail in call out box).

### The Men's Project

The vision of The Men's Project is for good men, respectful relationships and safe communities. We seek to achieve this by:

- undertaking research to understand the behaviours and underlying attitudes of men and boys including related to violence, child sexual abuse and the wellbeing of men and boys themselves
- promoting positive change around gender norms related to what it means to be a man in the 21st century as well as building skills to intervene to prevent violence
- developing innovative ways to stop cycles of violence and harmful behaviour among boys and men.

Current priorities for The Men's Project include:

- drawing on our Man Box research and child sexual abuse prevalence study, building

a greater understanding of perpetration including opportunities for prevention and early intervention

- supporting people who work with men and boys every day (e.g. teachers, sports coaches, social workers) to prevent violence and improve the wellbeing of men and boys
- developing new early intervention approaches with adolescents at-risk of using violence
- strengthening early intervention responses for adults and young people to prevent child sexual abuse
- drawing on our grounded practice experience, advocating for systemic changes that seek to prevent violence and child sexual abuse.



## The Man Box

The Man Box is the first Australian study to explore the association between attitudes to masculine stereotypes and men's behaviour. The research is conducted using a nationally representative sample, and to date, the study's findings have been published in 2018, 2020 and 2024.

The studies have found a strong link between adherence to strict and outdated gender norms and the perpetration of violence, worse mental health outcomes, problem gambling, and alcohol or other drug use.

Our Man Box 2024 study, undertaken in partnership with Respect Victoria, sought to update the findings of previous reports and to explore the impact of a prescribed set of masculine gender norms (the 'Man Box') on men's attitudes and behaviours. The study found that living up to the pressures of being a 'real man' causes harm to young men and those

around them, particularly women. For example, the men who most strongly agreed with the Man Box rules were:

- 31 times more likely to believe domestic violence should be handled privately
- 17 times more likely to have hit their partner
- nine times more likely to blame a woman for making a man hit her
- eight times more likely to have thoughts of suicide nearly every day
- six times more likely to have forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating
- six times more likely to exhibit signs of problem gambling (in fact, more than half of the men who most strongly agreed with Man Box rules met the criteria for problem gambling)
- twice as likely to binge drink.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. Pp. 58-108. ([Weblink](#))

# 1. Deepening our understanding of the perpetration of domestic, family and sexual violence

The rate of gender-based homicides across Australia has been rightly acknowledged as a national crisis. In 2022–23, 16 per cent of the 232 homicide incidents in Australia were intimate partner homicides and 89 per cent of these were perpetrated against a female victim aged 18 years or over.<sup>2</sup> However, men’s violence against women and children is far more pervasive when we consider violence that isn’t homicidal.

Our Man Box 2024 study explored the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms and various forms of violence. In the study, a representative sample of 3,500 survey respondents were asked whether they had ever committed any of eight forms of sexual or physical violence against a current or former intimate partner (for example, kicking, dragging or beating up). Almost a third of Australian men (28 per cent) reported that they had perpetrated at least one of the eight forms.<sup>3</sup> These results are likely to be under-reported due to the response options being ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘prefer not to say’. They are consistent with victimisation rates reported in the 2021–22 Australian Personal Safety Survey, which found that 27 per cent of women in Australia had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 15.<sup>4</sup>

The most common form of intimate violence that Man Box respondents reported perpetrating was ‘pushed or shoved a partner’ (11 per cent of respondents), followed by ‘had sexual intercourse with a partner when they were afraid of what you might do’ (10 per cent), and ‘forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating’ (10 per cent).<sup>5</sup> It is important to consider that these rates would likely be higher if they included other forms of violence and abuse, including emotional abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, and coercive control.

Further, a 2024 report by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) examined the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in a community sample among young adults. Based on a survey of more than 5,000 Australians aged 18 to 45, it found almost a quarter of respondents (22.1 per cent) had perpetrated sexual violence since turning 18, while one in 14 had perpetrated sexual violence in the past 12 months.<sup>6</sup>

These shockingly high figures suggest the need for much more research into the dynamics of perpetration. Over the past decade we have learned more about modes of abuse, types of violence, and about the social context in which violence against women occurs. Yet we know too little about the men who perpetrate abuse and what motivates them; about the gradient and severity of violence; and about where violent tendencies have their roots. What proportion of the 28 per cent of younger men reporting intimate partner violence perpetration will go on to commit violence that is fatal, or potentially fatal? What can we learn from the many children who have witnessed or experienced violence as children and have not used violence as adults? An understanding of the real nature and prevalence of violence is needed to inform practical interventions that actually work.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1** highlights that, despite a recent increase in efforts to understand the perpetration of violence against women and children, significant gaps remain in our understanding of gradients and pathways. We have data on the number of women killed by men each year in Australia; and we know from our own Man Box research that almost a third of Australian males aged 18–30 have perpetrated some form of physical or sexual violence against a current or former intimate partner.

<sup>2</sup> Miles, H., & Bricknell, S. (2024). AIC Reports: Statistical Report 46. Homicide in Australia 2022–23. Australia Government: Australian Institute of Criminology. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>3</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood, M. (2024), pp. 60–65. ([Weblink](#))

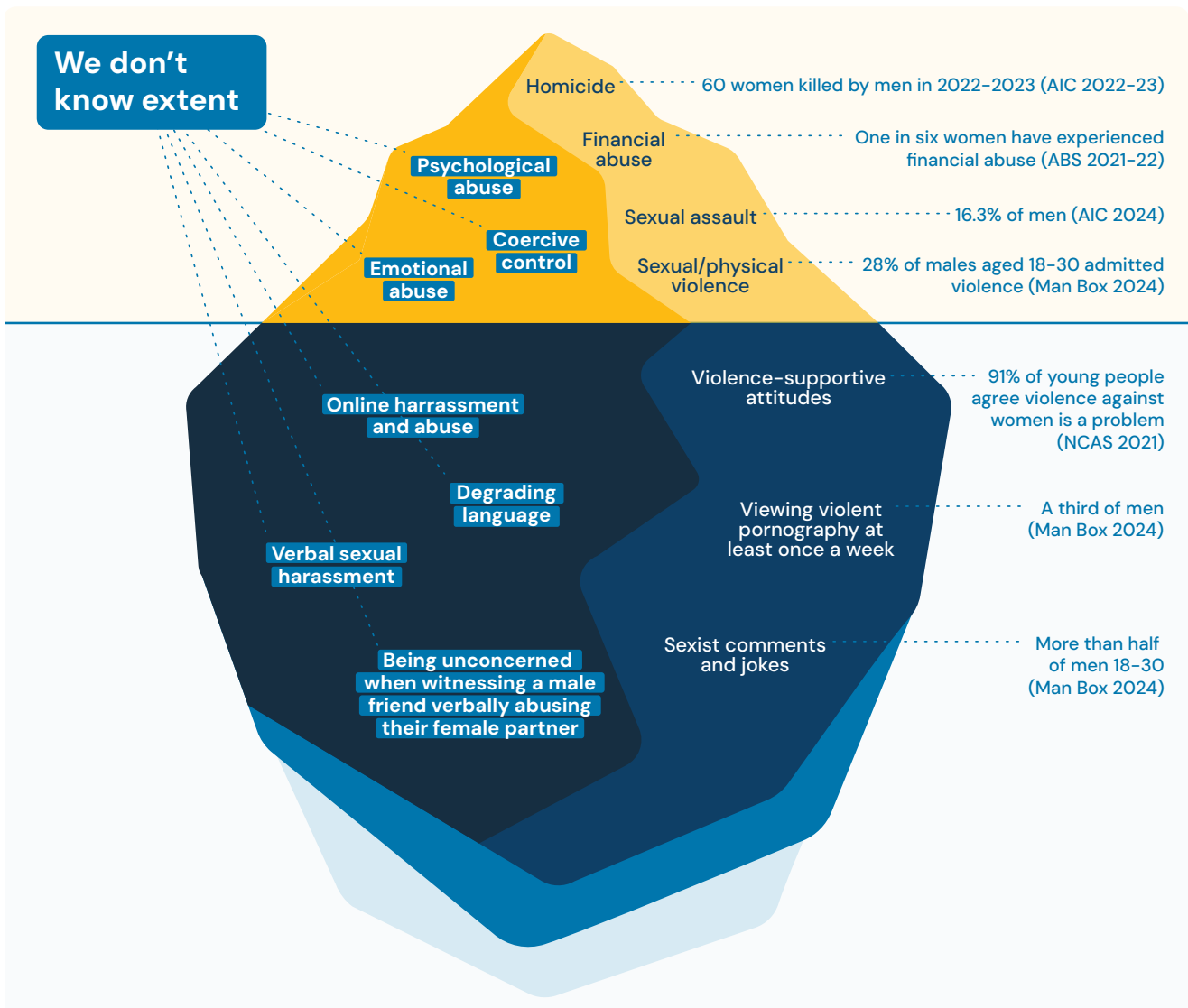
<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). Personal Safety, Australia: financial year 2021–2022. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>5</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood (2024), pp. 62–65

<sup>6</sup> Doherty, L. & Dowling, C. (2024). Statistical Bulletin 45: Perpetration of sexual violence in a community sample of adult Australians. Australian Government: Australian Institute of Criminology, p. 15. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>7</sup> Flood, M., Brown, C., Dembele, L., and Mills, K. (2022). Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The State of Knowledge Report on Violence Perpetration. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology. ([Weblink](#))

Figure 1: Despite a recent increase in efforts to understand the perpetration of violence against women and children, significant gaps remain



We don't know the extent of sexist comments and jokes, or of degrading language or bullying – insights that could prove valuable given the assumption that specific forms of violence are not isolated or siloed. We need to mature our understanding of the relationship between

forms of violence – for example, to what extent and in what circumstances does violence escalate? And, what is the relationship between participation in harmful cultures of masculinity or use of sexist jokes and language, and behaviour that is widely recognised as violent?

**Recommendation 1:**

Invest in collecting more and better data on the extent of perpetration of DFSV.



## 2. Investing in early intervention with those at risk of using DFSV

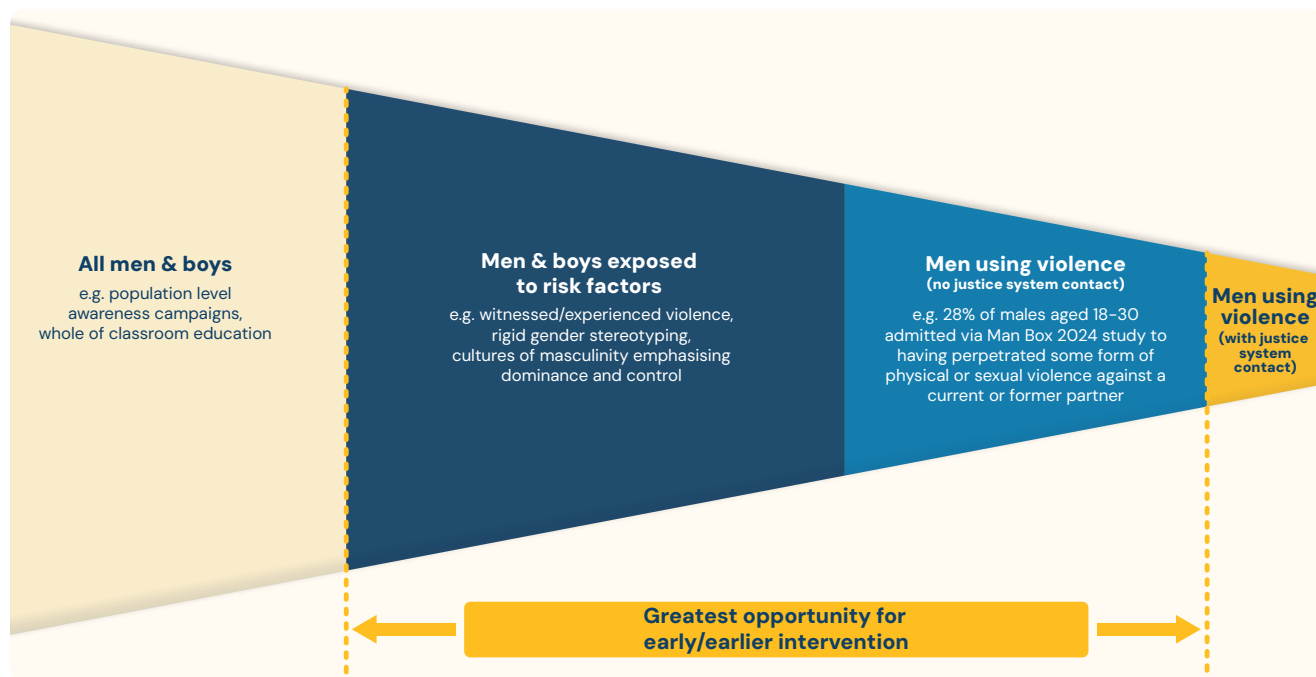
Significant, albeit still insufficient, funding in Australia is directed towards broad-based primary prevention initiatives. This is outstripped by the enormous costs associated with the relatively small number of perpetrators who have contact with police and the courts, or who progress to charges and custody.

We need better ways to target those men using violence who haven't come to the attention of

police, and those who may not be perpetrating violence but who are using sexist language, making online threats of violence, or being swept into the influence of the 'manosphere'. We have a limited understanding of this group of men and boys – who and where they are – but a greater understanding could better identify cohorts and settings where early intervention work could be most effective.

**Figure 2: There are significant opportunities to better target early intervention**

Figure 2 depicts the disconnect between the prevalence of perpetration of violence against women and children and our greatest areas of focus in addressing it.



## Targeting victims of violence and adolescents who are at risk of using violence

The Men's Project's At-Risk Youth Program is designed for 12- to 25-year-olds showing early signs of violence or who are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence. Currently, we target this work by applying it in settings where these boys and young men are more likely to be, such as in flexible learning centres and sporting clubs in lower socio-economic locations – although this approach is highly imperfect. We believe there are significant opportunities to better target early intervention work through strengthened collection and application of data on where harm happens (including the contexts) and the risks young people face in communities where violence is used to solve problems. This research and data should inform more and better targeting of adolescents who are at risk; and exploration of place-based approaches.

### At-Risk Youth Program

The At-Risk Youth Program (ARYP) is an early intervention pilot designed by The Men's Project to reduce the use of violence. It draws on a number of rigorously evaluated programs in other jurisdictions. The program targets at-risk young people aged 12–25 who are showing early signs of violence or are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence. Program content includes emotional literacy and regulation, non-violent problem solving, gender roles and inequality, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention. We also engage with staff who work with young people every day including highlighting the links between behaviour and attachment style. With support from the Victorian Government, the pilot is being delivered and evaluated between 2023 and 2026.



## Targeting victims of violence and adolescents who have used violence in the home

Jesuit Social Services has been working with men and boys for nearly five decades, including people who have committed serious violent and sex offences. Too often, these same men and boys have been victims of violence and child sexual abuse. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that two in five Australian children have experienced exposure to domestic violence between a parent/caregiver and their partner, with 32 per cent of these reporting more than 50 incidents.<sup>9</sup> As many victim-survivors have pointed out, services and systems must engage with these children as victim-survivors of violence in their own right.

Research shows that adolescents who use violence at home – in many cases against their mother or a sibling – are more likely to have been victims of violence. These young people are significantly more likely to go on to use intimate partner violence against an adult.<sup>10</sup> To be clear, childhood trauma does not inevitably lead to subsequent offending, nor are we excusing the use of violence. Yet failing to acknowledge the links between victimisation and perpetration means we are missing crucial opportunities to intervene earlier.

### RESTORE

RESTORE was piloted in the Melbourne's Children's Court between September 2018 and November 2022 and trialled restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence. It offered a Family Group Conference to help the young person and their family develop practical solutions to keep people safe and prevent further violence occurring at home after an intervention order (IVO) has been lodged.

By engaging the family in a restorative conferencing intervention at this point, RESTORE aimed to reduce the risk of the young person being criminalised for breaching their IVO. The program sought to address the ensuing harm caused by the violence and prevent future harm from occurring.

The RESTORE program responded directly to Victoria's 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, which recommended:

*The Victorian Government trial and evaluate a model of linking Youth Justice Group*

*Conferencing with an Adolescent Family Violence Program to provide an individual and family therapeutic intervention for young people who are using violence in the home and are at risk of entering the youth justice system.*<sup>8</sup>

The University of Melbourne conducted an evaluation of the RESTORE program in 2023. The evaluation found that RESTORE filled a significant service gap and provided a way to rebuild relationships, skills, strategies, and a sense of hope. Noting the program has been funded using philanthropic sources to date, the evaluation recommended continued investment in options for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including early intervention options. It also asserted that, given the positive outcomes reported by families who participated in RESTORE, there is merit in continuing funding for RESTORE to be able to further test its integrated therapeutic intervention in matters of serious harm associated with adolescent family violence.

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Government (2017) Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations. Rec 128. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>9</sup> Haslam, D., Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Scott, J.G., Finkelhor, D., Higgins, D.J., Meinck, F., Erskine, H.E., Thomas, H.J., Lawrence, D., & Malacova, E. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology. P. 3. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>10</sup> Boxall H, Pooley K & Lawler S 2021. Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 641. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. ([Weblink](#))



Putting aside the tremendous human toll of adolescents using violence, there are significant associated costs that include the justice system, health system, housing and homelessness, and child protection. Given these young people are also more likely to use violence as adults, the case for early intervention is strong with the explicit goal of healing and recovery as well as decreasing subsequent perpetration.

Rather than prescribe program models that are inadequately resourced in light of the needs of these young people, we call on the South Australian Government to seek the views of organisations engaging with these young people in relation to work required to have a long-term impact on violence prevention.

## Place-based or community-led approaches

We welcome the trialling of a ‘saturation model’ in Ballarat, Victoria, partly in response to a series of horrific violent crimes against women in that community. The model will support both new and existing programs and activities to ‘saturate’ Ballarat with initiatives that seek to change the attitudes and behaviours that drive violence. The model is targeting a range of settings including workplaces and businesses, schools and higher education spaces, community spaces and health services. It is also testing and trialling innovations, including in the online space, recognising the role and influence of digital environments including social media.<sup>11</sup> If rigorously evaluated, the model presents significant opportunities for learning.

There is much more that needs to be researched and understood to build a picture of the demand for prevention, and how it should be targeted.

We also recognise the important place-based and community-led work that is already underway in South Australia.<sup>12</sup> This includes recently funded initiatives to be co-designed by the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network and the Department of Correctional Services, to provide culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal victims of crime, and programs for Aboriginal people in prison and under community supervision. This recognises the complex and compounding impacts of intergenerational trauma, disadvantage, discrimination and victimisation, and the importance of self-determination in breaking the cycle of violence.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, J. M.P. (2024). World-Leading Action In Ballarat To Prevent Family Violence. Media Release. Victorian Government, Premier of Victoria. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>12</sup> National Indigenous Times, Funding boost for South Australian Aboriginal community initiatives, 11 July 2023 ([Weblink](#))

## **Recommendation 2:**

We recommend the South Australian Government closely consider opportunities to intervene earlier to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. This could include:

- using data to guide decisions about where to concentrate specific early intervention efforts
- investment in targeted early intervention programs, including programs that engage with boys and young men who have already used violence in the home, and programs that engage boys and young men in environments where they are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence
- exploring and expanding place-based and community-led approaches, such as the 'saturation' model being trialled in Ballarat, Victoria, and community-led and co-designed initiatives underway in South Australia.

### 3. Improving articulation, documentation and co-ordination of practice approaches

We believe organisations working at the frontline of prevention and early intervention have more work to do to articulate, document and continue to test our practice approaches. Jesuit Social Services has been working to move past generic phrases like ‘healthy masculinities’ and ‘engaging men and boys’ and instead be specific about exactly what different programs in different settings are seeking to achieve. Theories of change and associated practice approaches need to be documented and shared to stimulate discussion about what is needed to strengthen claims that link practice approaches to specific outcomes.

It’s not enough to say that this work is about ‘meeting men and boys where they are at’. This may be part of what is needed to facilitate engagement, but it says nothing about how that engagement is being used to prevent violence. Documenting practice approaches will enable exploration of fundamental questions such as: are (and should) programs seeking to change attitudes akin to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, or instead are programs seeking to decrease attachment to attitudes that underpin

the use of violence (including stereotypical constructions of masculinities and identities), akin to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy? This question has been spurred, in part, by recent research that finds links between threatened-masculinity shame (when men fail to live up to masculine gender role expectations) and physical aggression.<sup>13</sup> We need a greater understanding of what we know and what we don’t know, instilling a rigorous curiosity about practice approaches.

We also call for the strengthening of prevention and early intervention efforts by ensuring they are underpinned by clear standards of evidence. Our focus here is on measuring the effectiveness of violence prevention programs/interventions rather than seeking to explain the causes of violence (noting this is of course crucial to informing program/intervention development). A shared evidence framework for prevention and early intervention, including standards of evidence, could help us work towards agreement about what we do and don’t know to inform a robust theory of change.

#### Recommendation 3:

We recommend the South Australian Government publicly release a ‘stocktake’ of prevention and early intervention work taking place across the state, and report annually on progress against the stocktake every year. This should map specific initiatives, target participants, existing data on violence perpetration, outcomes sought and evidence where it exists. The stocktake should be used to promote more specific discussions regarding merits of practice approaches and ultimately ensure investment in prevention and early intervention is genuinely connected to the scale and nature of the problem of violence.

*Note: We have made a similar recommendation to the Federal Government, and we highlight that a national data set developed in partnership with all states and territories would support a national approach.*

<sup>13</sup> Gehhard, K. T. et al (2018) Threatened-Masculinity Shame-Related Responses Among Straight Men: Measurement and Relationship to Aggression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 20(3), September doi10.1037/men0000177

## Man Box in Schools

Our 'Man Box in Schools' approach is a strengths-based, healthier masculinities (or identities) education model designed to support young people to be their best selves. With each school, subject to funding, our approach takes a four phased strategy, including:

- Baseline – Understand attitudes and behaviours including by using our Adolescent Man Box survey
- Plan – Map current initiatives and co-design approach
- Act – Enable delivery of program/ curriculum
- Assess – Measure impact and consider next steps

To drive this work, we have designed a series of 'Unpacking the Man Box' workshops. The sessions encourage conversations among students, teaching staff, and their wider school communities about the negative consequences associated with gender stereotypes and the tools and resources to foster healthier forms of masculinities (or identities), respectful relationships, and positive wellbeing. Our work is aligned with the Victorian Government's Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum. We commend the Victorian Government on the progress they have made implementing this curriculum in schools.

We have also adapted these sessions to other contexts including workplaces, early childhood education, justice, and maternal and child health settings. We deliver the workshops to a range of participants, namely social workers, wellbeing staff, teachers, students, faith leaders and parents.

Evaluation of 'Unpacking the Man Box' workshops found participants reported a number of beneficial outcomes including:

- understanding that some behaviour among men and boys is driven by the Man Box rules and society's promotion of these rules
- understanding the importance of adopting healthier ways of being a male
- increased level of knowledge and confidence in getting out of the Man Box
- increased insights into strategies/activities that will bring about change in the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys
- the importance of role modelling in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys
- wanting to know more about how to work with men and boys to assist them in their development.

## Modelling Respect and Equality

Research and practice expertise suggest that role models – both male and female – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial to prevention efforts. Jesuit Social Services has developed the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women.

The MoRE program supports participants to develop greater awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces, and leaders in faith communities.

This intensive program comprises two-day training, followed by coaching workshops where role models are supported to develop action

plans to make changes across the whole of their organisation or school environment (around healthier masculinities and gender equity).

In 2024, MoRE was funded by the Victorian Government to expand from 100 to 240 schools over the next four years.

[Evaluation of MoRE](#) found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys that the participants worked with. For example, 72 per cent of participants agreed that the coaching workshops deepened their understanding of the link between supporting healthier masculinities (and identities) and preventing of violence against women. There is further work needed to establish the impact of MoRE on changes in behaviour of the men and boys who the role models are engaging with.



## 4. Building workforce capability

A variety of skilled workforces are needed to effectively prevent, intervene and respond to gender-based violence. While interconnected and concurrent, each part of the prevention-response continuum sets out to achieve different things, meaning distinct sets of skills and capability need to be built across workforces. Further, there are opportunities being missed to prevent violence when working with men who have used, or are at risk of using, violence as part of delivering programs that are not violence-specific (e.g. residential programs post-release from prison; substance use; school disengagement).

Workforce capability should view a range of work as prevention including:

- work with people who have the ability to positively influence men and boys in universal community settings (e.g. sport, school, workplaces in particularly male dominated industries, places of worship)
- engagement at critical and higher risk points in men's lives (e.g. relationship breakdown, birth of a child)

- delivery of non-specialist family violence programs to men and boys who are at-risk of using violence
- healing and recovery work with both victim-survivors and people who use violence.

In order to achieve these aspirations, there is a need to strengthen workforce capacity and reform funding models to allow more time to focus on violence prevention, for example either through lower caseloads or additional staff/time with participants. Prevention of violence requires a set of capabilities that are related although distinct from other social services work, for example working with and being aware of male entitlement/privilege and understanding the risks of collusion. However, even if these skills are built, the approach will not work if an emphasis on prevention of violence is 'another thing' on top of an already stretched workforce. Funding for a substance use program, for example, should account for and resource opportunities to prevent violence.

## Relaxing hard lines between prevention/early intervention and recovery/response

While prevention is often associated with broad awareness-raising campaigns and universal initiatives, our experience shows that programs engaging men and boys who are at risk of using violence (beyond specialist family violence programs) present opportunities for prevention.

For example, Jesuit Social Services runs two residential-based living skills programs for justice system-involved young people. 'Perry House' works with justice system-involved young people of all genders who have an intellectual disability. 'Dillon House' works with justice system-involved young men who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness. Some of the young men in these settings have committed violent crimes against women or girls.

While they don't necessarily align to traditional prevention frameworks, Perry House and Dillon House provide an opportunity for healing and recovery, which can itself be central to prevention. They offer the support and stability residents need in order to address the issues that contributed to their offending, and to build a new and flourishing life. This includes:

- addressing their mental and physical health issues
- supporting engagement with education, training and employment
- connecting with pro-social activities within the community
- managing risk-taking or criminal behaviour
- finding suitable long-term housing in the community.

Staff are present 24 hours a day because of the intensity of the support provided. Because work is being done with young people in their home, there is the capacity for staff to have meaningful and transformative conversations that can contribute to behaviour change.

Therefore, there are opportunities to better equip the workforces in such settings (together with additional resourcing) with an understanding of the drivers of violence, including the gendered drivers, and to support them to engage participants in ways that can genuinely break the cycle of violence.

### Recommendation 4:

We recommend the South Australian Government consider opportunities to strengthen the capacity of key workforces to engage boys and men in prevention work across a range of settings. This should build on the South Australian Government's recent investments<sup>14</sup> in innovative and holistic supports for people who have experienced or perpetrated violence, including for First Nations families and communities.<sup>15</sup> It should view a range of work as prevention, and consider opportunities to work with people of all genders who can influence men and boys. This could include investment in training that builds capability to prevent and respond to gendered violence, tailored to workforces including residential settings for young people exposed to risk factors.

<sup>14</sup> The 2024/25 South Australian budget committed \$3.3 million in 2024-25 to ensure the continuation of a number of innovative domestic violence pilot programs, including holistic support to Aboriginal families, earlier and trauma-informed assistance for survivors, wellbeing and recovery services for survivors, as well as preventative education and behaviour programs for perpetrators. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>15</sup> Programs include 'Don't become that man' Early intervention for men concerned about coercive and controlling behaviour (general support) and Aboriginal Domestic Violence Youth Worker Program, delivered by KWY Aboriginal Corporation in metropolitan Adelaide ([Weblink](#))

## 5. Using digital approaches is critical for reach and scale

A well-informed prevention approach needs to consider the seminal role that technology and media play in most people's lives, including in the construction of violence-supportive attitudes. We argue there are two critical areas where digital approaches to prevention and early intervention should be considered in order to achieve impact, reach and scale in violence prevention:

- i. online tools that interrupt problematic or illegal online engagement and that offer access to help
- ii. digital tools that can be widely disseminated to build the capability of people who are well positioned to engage with men and boys, to help them confidently foster discussions that prevent violence.

### Online places that provide opportunity for intervention

While there is clearly value in targeting individuals who are at high risk of perpetrating abuse, there are challenges identifying those individuals if they have not come to the attention of law enforcement or other relevant professionals. Yet online places can effectively reach individuals accessing online content across a spectrum, whether it's engaging with misogynistic influencers, or consuming content that shows, promotes or instructs people to engage in violent acts. The online world has extensive reach, which offers a critical advantage in addressing a problem that is so widespread it can never be adequately addressed by in-person facilitators working with 30 people at a time. Further, online spaces can be anonymous, helping to overcome the stigma that may otherwise prevent help seeking.

The rapid development of technology provides new opportunities to influence people's

behaviour. This includes the use of strategically placed pop-up warnings and interactive chat bots. An online early intervention service/deterrence campaign could be codesigned with technology companies and experts in the field of violence prevention. It could seek to reach people who, based on their online activity, are displaying risk factors related to the use of violence but may not have yet offended or come to the attention of the justice system. It could then promote help-seeking by referring or redirecting them to proven support channels. Such a service would also present a significant opportunity to gather new data about perpetration and early intervention, and ultimately has potential to reduce burden on the criminal justice system.

Lessons can be drawn from promising work underway to deter child sexual abuse. Results of the University of Tasmania's evaluation of a child sexual abuse deterrence trial showed the approach working in two ways: for some people, instructing them that what they are doing might be illegal is enough to get them to change their behaviour, while others need more in-depth support from trained advisors or through online self-help.<sup>16</sup>

While work to address the likely pathways to perpetration of violence against women presents a different set of legal and moral conundrums from work to stop child sexual abuse (for example it is not necessarily illegal to espouse misogynistic ideas or engage with such content), opportunities to intervene digitally should be seriously examined as a way to intervene at the earliest stage to get people to stop violence against women and children, or not to start in the first place.

<sup>16</sup> University of Tasmania (2024) Pioneering chatbot reduces searches for child sexual abuse material. Media release 4 March ([Weblink](#))

## Worried about Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP)

WASAPP is an action research collaboration between Jesuit Social Services and the University of Melbourne that commenced in 2018 and aims to work with young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours.

Although there are a range of well-established services that respond to harmful sexual behaviour, there are currently no national secondary prevention services in Australia that work with children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. Some progress has recently been made internationally, such as in the UK (Shore) and the US (Help Wanted). This gap in early intervention services was highlighted by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017).

WASAPP aims to address this service gap by establishing and refining an early intervention service for children and young people who have engaged in or are at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours. WASAPP aims to synthesise current evidence and generate new evidence about intervening early in problematic or harmful sexual behaviour, and to apply that evidence to the codesign of an online early intervention service for children

and young people worried about their sexual behaviours. This includes:

- exploring pathways to onset of harmful sexual behaviour
- designing an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including pornography use
- implementing and refining an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including pornography use.

We have published research with children, young people, professionals and experts in the field to help inform the service. Currently, we are interviewing children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours to listen to their voices on the kinds of early intervention resources they would find helpful and engaging. These findings are being collated into a scoping study that will guide our development and implementation of a secondary prevention service for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours. Without funding and investment, the options, scale and sustainability of this service will be significantly limited.

## Using digital tools to support the capacity of those working with men and boys

The proliferation of online content reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes far surpasses the reach of an approach which relies on in-person program delivery (no matter how effective) to counter this influence. Furthermore, levels of funding to achieve the required reach through programs alone (e.g. workshops with teachers, sports coaches, social workers; curriculum delivered specifically to adolescents) are unlikely to be obtained. We simply cannot reach everyone who needs to be reached without the use of digital materials targeted at people who are well positioned to foster discussions with men and boys that can prevent violence.

Digital tools to build and support the capacity of workforces and parents should be preceded by rigorous trialling and evaluation of teaching and learning approaches. That is, once we know what works, we can embed it in digital materials, then regularly update it with the ongoing input of leaders in the field of prevention education and informed by the latest research. Engaging content can be tailored to specific age groups and cohorts, and tools can be accompanied by advice and strategies for parents, teachers and other professionals who feel less confident with the material/with conversations about gender norms and violence prevention, or who are concerned about pushback from students. Ultimately such tools can be disseminated across the country including to remote or difficult to reach areas.

## ClickView partnership with The Men's Project

A partnership between The Men's Project and ClickView offers a small proof of concept for a potentially broader approach to digital education tools that can challenge and address violence supportive ideas and behaviours. The design of this approach is premised on the understanding that face-to-face facilitated sessions are severely limited in their reach.

ClickView hosts a wide range of classroom friendly content aligned to the Victorian Curriculum (Foundation to Year 10). Based on a subscription model, it provides teachers with resources and features to help facilitate engagement and customise teaching and learning.<sup>17</sup> In 2023, ClickView identified the need for educational support to engage students in conversations about stereotypical ideas and behaviours around masculinity. The Men's Project was approached to partner in the development of these resources.

Philanthropic funding enabled a prevention educator from The Men's Project to support and oversee development of content, which includes short narrative clips, interviews with

young men about their personal views and experiences, and teaching resources. These recently released clips are based on the four Man Box pillars for adolescents: constant effort to be manly, emotional restriction, heterosexism, and social teasing. They sit alongside resources that support teachers to unpack and discuss the clips, with a focus on supporting safe conversations that foster critical reflection and provide alternatives to harmful norms. This includes:

- language about masculinity
- how to navigate resistance to the ideas if it arises
- links to VicHealth's Encountering Resistance guide and the Man Box report
- guidance on how to manage online influencers.

The series will soon be accessible through the ClickView online portal for schools to use. The Men's Project will seek data analytics on uptake and use of the resources in schools via ClickView.

## Recommendation 5a:

We recommend the South Australian Government fund organisations that specialise in work with people who use violence and the prevention of violence to partner with technology and social media platforms to develop and implement an evidence-based online deterrence/early intervention campaign to prevent violence against women and children. This work should draw on international evidence and best practice in deterrence, including in the area of child sexual abuse prevention.

## Recommendation 5b:

We recommend the South Australian Government invest in digital tools to support the capacity of critical workforces (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches) and parents to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences. The tools should be developed with the input of appropriately qualified organisations and based on evidence. They should be open source and widely disseminated. This approach acknowledges that in-person facilitated workshops to counter negative influences can never achieve the reach and scale required.

<sup>17</sup> ClickView (n.d.). ClickView: Reach every student through video. ([Weblink](#))



## 6. Re-imagining prisons

Jesuit Social Services believes there is value in trialling approaches to working with people convicted of gender-based violence offences during their incarceration, with the goal to prevent re-offending. Our perspectives bring together:

- some limited international evidence
- our experience supporting people with justice system involvement
- our work in gender justice
- our belief that supporting people recovering from violence and its effects can itself be preventative.

### The fundamental challenge of the prison environment

The prison system has been described as a 'hypermasculine and hostile environment that creates an atmosphere of fear and isolation and presents considerable challenges for therapeutic efforts that aim to address the antecedents and risk factors associated with sexual offending.'<sup>18</sup> According to Sir Martin Narey, former head of the Prison Service in England and Wales, 'investment in the mass delivery of rehabilitation [in prisons] yielded poor returns, and the money would have been better directed to simply making prisons better, more decent and more moral places.'<sup>19</sup>

Add to this context:

- the large proportion of incarcerated people who are themselves victims of crime, including violence, sexual abuse and other trauma
- people in prison are often homeless, isolated and facing challenges related to mental health, alcohol and other drugs, or an acquired brain injury
- they may face barriers to inclusion in employment or education; and may have disability.

A holistic examination of participants' existing needs is clearly a prerequisite to the success of any targeted program, as when these factors go unaddressed, and are compounded by the challenges of the prison environment, they increase the likelihood of a person reoffending. The greater challenge, however, is an examination of the culture and conditions in which people are incarcerated. A realistic consideration of the ways in which the prison environment hinders the chances of success of any intervention should precede and inform any examination of the effectiveness of specific prison-based behaviour change approaches. Current prison conditions and culture constitute a major hindrance to the success of therapeutic interventions.

<sup>18</sup> Ware, J., & Galouzis, J. (2019). 'Impact of prison climate on individuals with sexual convictions: Desistance and rehabilitation,' in N. Blagden, B. Winder, K. Hocken, R. Livesley, P. Banyard and H. Elliott (Eds.), *Sexual Crime and the Experience of Imprisonment* (pp. 35–60). London, UK: Palgrave McMillan. Cited in Day, A. 'At a crossroads? Offender rehabilitation in Australian prisons,' *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 2020, Vol. 27, No. 6, 939–949, ([Weblink](#)), p. 942.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p. 939.

## Evidence

There is limited evidence regarding programs within prisons targeting people convicted of family or sexual violence offences. This is in part explained by a scarcity of rigorous evaluation of programs.<sup>20</sup> However, where evaluations have occurred, they often show disappointing results or are subject to significant limitations.

University of Melbourne criminologist Professor Andrew Day argues that rates of recidivism in Australia could suggest that the current system of rehabilitation in the criminal justice system has a 'negligible' impact:

*[It is] surprisingly hard to locate evidence that current offending behaviour programs are resulting in lowered rates of re-offending, with recent reviews of both sexual offender rehabilitation treatment and violent offender rehabilitation failing to identify any studies conducted in Australian correctional settings that meet widely accepted criteria for inclusion.*<sup>21</sup>

A 2013 literature review of programs worldwide for domestic violence and sex offender interventions (both in and out of prisons) found mixed results. It also showed that, where program types had relatively greater demonstrated success, this may have been due to a greater number of evaluations of that type of program – specifically, programs utilising Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, there are programs that have demonstrated some success, elements of which could inform future trials. For example, a program targeting 'domestic violence perpetrators' that employed varying levels of intensity according

to participant characteristics showed that recidivism was substantially lower among those who completed the program.<sup>23</sup> While it should be noted that perpetrator programs overall are contested, and may not constitute best practice,<sup>24</sup> varying intensity and tailored approaches appear to influence success.

Sexual offender intervention programs that adhere to the 'risk, need and responsivity' principles (RNR) have been found to be more effective in reducing recidivism.<sup>25</sup> These principles guide the need to:

- match the intensity of treatment with the risk level of the offender
- match treatment programs to elements of the offender's psychological, social and emotional functioning linked to their criminal behaviour
- match the therapy (stipulated as CBT) to the offender's learning style, cognitive capacity, motivations, personality and cultural background.

Others have emphasised the need for the intervention to be matched to the person's stage of readiness for change.<sup>26</sup>

A US study of the Custody-Based Intensive Treatment (CUBIT) and CUBIT Outreach (CORE) found that rates of recidivism were lower than expected for sexual and violent offences. This program is also based in CBT.<sup>27</sup> An evaluation of the CUBIT and CORE Outreach program delivered in NSW also showed decreased recidivism among those who completed the program.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Day, op. cit, p.941.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pp.940–941.

<sup>22</sup> Literature Review on Domestic Violence Perpetrators, URBIS, 2013. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>23</sup> Coulter, M., & VandeWeerd, C. (2009). Reducing domestic violence and other criminal recidivism: effectiveness of a multilevel batterers intervention program. *Violence and Victims*, 24(2), 139–152.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the United Kingdom National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's public health guideline on Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working, 2014, p.40. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>25</sup> Murphy, W. D., & McGrath, R. (2008). Best Practices in Sex Offender Treatment. *Prison Service Journal*, 178, 3–9; and Olver, M. E., Stockdale, K. C., & Wormith, J. S. (2011). A Meta-Analysis of Predictors of Offender Treatment Attrition and Its Relationship to Recidivism. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 79(1), 6–21. Cited in URBIS, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Casey, S., Day, A., & Howells, K. (2005). The application of the transtheoretical model to offender populations: Some critical issues. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 10, 1–15. Cited in URBIS, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Gelb, K. (2007). Recidivism of sex offenders : research paper. Melbourne: Sentencing Advisory Council; and Woodrow, A. C., & Bright, D. A. (2011). Effectiveness of a Sex Offender Treatment Programme: A Risk Band Analysis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 55(1), 43–55. Cited in URBIS, pp. 15–16.

<sup>28</sup> Hoy, A. & Bright, D. A. (2008) Effectiveness of a Sex Offender Treatment Programme: A Risk Band Analysis (unpublished). Cited in Macgregor, S. (2008). Sex offender treatment programs: effectiveness of prison and community based programs in Australia and New Zealand. *Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse Research Brief*, pp. 2–3. ([Weblink](#))

The NSW program began in 1999 and is offered to male inmates who have committed a proven sex offence. It is targeted at offenders who present a moderate to high risk of recidivism or high treatment needs and is delivered over 6–12 months, during which participants live in self-contained therapeutic communities. Therapy sessions are delivered in groups by psychologists, with up to 10 participants per group. However, doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of this program.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, elements that appear to make an in-prison behaviour change program more successful are:

- a rigorous and holistic initial assessment of each participant
- an approach that can be tailored to the participant's risk level, needs and characteristics, including comorbidities, socioeconomic and employment status, family status, cultural background, criminal history, and motivation for change

- the ability to address additional challenges, such as mental health or addiction, concurrently
- supporting and regularly informing the participant's partner where relevant.

The bottom line, however, is that an in-prison program seeking to address gender-based violence is likely to have limited success unless prisons are radically transformed to be more home-like. Moreover, interventions should continue to offer support through the person's transition back into the community and in their life post-release.

### **Mellow Dads Parenting Program delivered in prison**

The Mellow Dads Parenting Program<sup>30</sup> is a 14-week evidence-based course, designed to enhance parent-child relationships through increasing participants' understanding of themselves and their fathering role.

Delivery of the program to incarcerated fathers was trialled at Her Majesty's Prison Oakwood, in the United Kingdom, facilitated by trained staff from Walsall Council Family Interventions Team and a prison officer. While not specifically targeted to men with a history of gender-based violence, the trial is of interest in that it is underpinned by an acknowledgment that families can be a source of strength for prisoners, and can be central to reducing reoffending rates. Yet prison policies generally do little to support such a position.

During the program, children and their mothers were transported to the prison while the

fathers undertook morning sessions, but over lunch the fathers had sole responsibility for their children. After lunch, the children returned home with their mothers while the fathers reflected on their own and each other's parent-child interactions.

A mixed-method study of the trial found that the Mellow Dads Parenting Program is effective in assisting participants to reconsider their parenting styles and acquire more positive parenting behaviours, which contributed to changes to the parent-child relationship. Most significant was the program's effectiveness in legitimising the fathering role.

Of concern, however, was the contrast reported between the reflective and nurturing culture promoted through the program, and the negative and critical environment within the prison, raising doubts about how changes reported within the study would be maintained on completion of the program.

<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/he-just-told-them-what-they-wanted-to-hear-doubts-over-success-of-program-for-highrisk-sex-offenders-20170818-gxzOap.html>

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/family-potential/invisible-fathers-jessica-langston.pdf>

### **Me and My Family: An early example of a program focussed on incarcerated men**

'Me and My Family'<sup>31</sup> was funded by the Department of Family and Community Services through the Men and Family Relationships Initiative from 1997 to 2003. Jesuit Social Services conducted a small trial program within prisons in Victoria with objectives that included:

- engaging marginalised or difficult to engage men
- assisting the men engaged in understanding the benefits of improved family relationships
- assisting these men in dealing with personal obstacles to enhancing their family relationships, for example their attitudes and behaviours
- assisting these men in understanding how to seek and access family relationship services.

While not specifically targeted at men convicted for family violence offences, the program successfully engaged with men in prison who had identified that they experienced difficulty in maintaining non-conflictual family relationships.

The program worked with a small number of men over a short timeframe but showed promise in engaging a hard-to-reach group of men. It was particularly successful in reducing the anxiety of the participants about discussing their family relationships in a group setting, and in helping them realise that they could develop solutions to their own relationship difficulties. The trial has implications for how a therapeutic approach for people who use family violence who are in prison might best be designed.

### **Recommendation 7:**

Notwithstanding the complexities and challenges of providing an effective therapeutic response to men in prison for gender-based violence offences, in-prison behaviour change approaches warrant further investigation. New approaches should be trialled, drawing on existing evidence and with adequate funding and further evaluation, noting that such trials would need to be supported by concomitant changes in prison conditions and culture. Important considerations will include the holistic needs of individual participants as well as the environment of hyper-masculinity, fear and isolation that characterises most prisons.

<sup>31</sup> Men and Family Relationship Project, Parenting Australia, A program of Jesuit Social Services. Final Report 2002. A National Project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services through the Men and Family Relationships Initiative.