

BPW Adelaide's Submission to the South Australian Royal Commission into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence

Who we are at BPW Adelaide:

- BPW Adelaide is affiliated with BPW Australia, a member-based NGO that's affiliated with the influential global organisation, BPW International. BPW International works for global gender equality in power and decision-making through our advocacy and UN participation.
- BPW Australia is a non-profit organisation for women, with voluntary membership and leadership. Our procedures are democratic and inclusive of all members, and our actions honour our history and protect our reputation.
- We make real differences in women's lives by creating awareness, leading debate and driving change.
- One of BPW's key advocacy areas is the Family and Domestic Violence.
- BPW develops the business, professional and leadership potential of women through its advocacy, mentoring, networking, skill building and economic empowerment programs and projects around the world.

What we do:

- We advocate for all working women, both employers and employees. We have successfully lobbied for Paid Parental Leave, pay equity and transparency, affordable accessible childcare and taxation reviews, and we are a lead agent of Economic Security 4 Women, one of the alliances of women's organisations that advises the federal government about what women want and need.

Our stance:

BPW Adelaide firmly believes that gender-based violence (which inherently includes violence towards children) is the most urgent societal issue that requires serious attention. While there are instances of violence perpetrated by women and by those within the transgender community, it is overwhelmingly women who are the most impacted by gender-based violence. Addressing family, domestic, and sexual violence must fundamentally incorporate an understanding of gender and the unequal power structures that enable and perpetuate such violence.

BPW Adelaide was the instigator of both the Adelaide White Ribbon Breakfast and the Pay Our Respects Campaign, and we continue to deliver these events each year.

BPW strongly supports the statement made by Assistant Minister for Women for Prevention of Family Violence Justine Elliot:

"You see Mr Speaker; the life of a woman is different.

We've had to see, think and act differently throughout our entire lives - out of fear of violence.

Fear of violence should not be a normal nor accepted part of womanhood."

(House of Representatives, 2024)



1) **Prevention:** How South Australia can facilitate widespread change in the underlying drivers of family, domestic and sexual violence.

BPW's core belief is that the most pressing and essential current issue to address is the disrespect towards women. As an organisation, we are concerned that efforts to be inclusive may result in the critical issue of gender-based violence being diminished. Any response by the Royal Commission (RC) must be grounded in verifiable data, facts, and figures that clearly demonstrate how women are disproportionately impacted.

BPW Adelaide asserts the report from this Royal Commission should produce clear, unambiguous statements about what the data show - that, in the vast majority of cases, men are the perpetrators and women the victims. We advocate for statements such as:

*“While it is not MOST men who are violent towards women,
it is MOSTLY men who are violent towards women.”*

Evidence demonstrates that the perpetrators of physical violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence against women are overwhelmingly men (ABS 2023), and that when women are violent, it is often in response to violence against them and /or while protecting children.

Our perspective is that education is critical and fundamental to the success of any DFV prevention strategy, and must start at primary school and continue through high school for both boys and girls. We therefore advocate for the following measures:

- **Comprehensive, Evidence-Based Education Programs:** These should be integrated throughout all formal years of education and cover essential topics such as gaslighting, coercive control, power dynamics in relationships, and the stages of violence development within relationships.
- **Teacher and Educator Training:** Current teacher education programs often overlook these critical issues. Thus, there is an urgent need for specialised training and development for educators. Without proper training, presenters may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes of perpetrators and validate their common justifications, allowing them to evade responsibility for their actions.
- **Evidence-Based, Data-Centric Curriculum:** Anti-violence education programs must be grounded in robust research and regularly reviewed to reflect the evolving understanding of gender-based violence. This ensures the curriculum remains relevant and practical.
- **Integration into the Curriculum:** Anti-violence education should be embedded within the core curriculum rather than treated as an extracurricular activity, particularly at the secondary level. An integrated approach ensures depth, rigour, and the perception that this education is central to the school's mission.
- **Empowerment of Young Men:** Educational programs must avoid inducing feelings of shame and blame among participants. Boys and young men today have a unique opportunity to redefine masculinity in more socially and emotionally aware ways. Our organisation is optimistic that this generation will grow up to be proud men who find violence against women and children abhorrent. We strongly believe this is critical to a safer future for men and women.
- **Media and advertisement:** Advertising campaigns that question the traditional view of a “real man” and his views, beliefs, and attitudes, particularly towards women, need to be instituted. It

needs to become every man's issue, as highlighted by the following quotation by Professor Flood: “Most men think violence against women and domestic violence is an issue, but it’s not my issue”; he goes on to say that “the standard you walk past is the standard you accept” (ABC News 2022).

- **Community education:** In addition to school-based education, we recognise the importance of community education. Recent societal changes signal the beginning of a shift in attitudes, but continuous community education is essential to sustain this momentum. We also advocate for increased initiatives for perpetrators who seek to change their attitudes and behaviours. There is a significant lack of such programs, and the needs of this group are often unmet.

Recent research (Flood 2024) indicates that in a recent study, “The Man Box” survey undertaken in Victoria, the majority of young adult men (ages between 18 and 30) reject what are traditionally considered male views of the world. It appears that views that embrace aggression, being homophobic, positionally inexpressive and hostile to femininity are passe. Young men also indicate less pressure than “men of past seasons” to conform to traditional self-sufficient and stoic qualities. Flood argues that the field of “healthy masculinity” is taking off in Australia; BPW contends that South Australia could easily be a leader in this field.

- **Reporting:** BPW Adelaide also believes prevention activities and outcomes must be tracked, measured and reported. Although actual cases of such violence must be reported, fostering changes in awareness, attitudes and behaviours is also critical (APO 2024). An increased general community understanding of prevention and all its facets would improve community views about violence against women. It is interesting to note that the research detailed in the Our Watch Report Card (2024) indicates there has been a decrease in the acceptance of violence against women since 2013; however, this attitude change plateaued between 2017 and 2021.



2) Early Intervention: How South Australia can improve effective interventions through the identification and support of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence.

Firstly, BPW Adelaide argues that the concept of early intervention currently implemented in South Australia is somewhat misleading. The existing systems and structures for early intervention appear fragmented and lack coherence, involving disparate and unconnected agencies. These organisations operate with minimal integration with formal government departments, including SAPOL and often rely on precarious funding arrangements.

- **Introduction of coordinated and strategic approach across all departments and providers**

For South Australia to effectively combat the scourge of gender-based violence, a more comprehensive, coordinated, and strategic approach is required. Further, all providers of services and support for potential victims and perpetrators must be included. As an organisation, we are deeply concerned that victims are frequently turned away from these organisations due to capacity and resource constraints, which severely limit their ability to respond adequately.

- **Introducing centralised approach and coordination between all providers (Public sector and non-for-profit organisations)**

A case-management system that incorporates support from a range of providers would be more efficient and effective, akin to processes applied in community services and the NDIS. These could extend from counselling and prevention to safety and support and, when required, to court cases. Funding systems must be geared to supporting such coordinated services.

- **Identification of the at-risk groups and early-education for men (First Nations, migrants, refugee)**

Investment in the needs of First Nations women and in First Nations-led initiatives and appropriate services for migrant and refugee groups must also be prioritised (Longbottom, et al, 2024). Both these groups are overrepresented as victims of gendered violence.

Prevention requires early intervention to be effective, including programs for men at risk of harming women.

These initiatives must be adequately staffed, funded, and delivered free of charge by qualified, experienced professionals. Early intervention, particularly within the perpetrator space, requires significant focus, support and investment.

- **Legislation - review of the Bail Act 1985 and compulsory programs for the perpetrators**

Media reports suggest that bail is frequently granted to DFV perpetrators. We believe this issue requires urgent attention. We express concern that research (Australian Government 2024) indicates that a large

number of perpetrators of homicide already have criminal records – the actual percentages differ, however there is little doubt these individuals appear to have “form”.

We advocate for increased initiatives for perpetrators who seek to change their attitudes and behaviours. There is a significant lack of such programs, and the needs of this group are often unmet.

Police who issue Intervention Orders (including domestic violence orders) and courts hearing family and domestic violence cases should be strongly encouraged to refer men at risk to perpetrator programs, possibly as an alternative to punitive options, on the proviso that if they do not satisfactorily complete the program, the punitive options will activate automatically.

These programs must be properly staffed, funded and delivered free of charge by qualified, experienced professionals. Improvements in early intervention, in particular for perpetrators, should be an urgent focus. Specifically:

- The Bail Act 1985, in SA states that presumption of bail may not apply if there are instances of:
 - Choking, suffocation or strangulation in a domestic context;
 - A breach of a condition of bail imposed for the protection of a victim;
 - A breach of an intervention order;
 - An aggravated offence of physical violence committed in breach of an intervention order;

Yet, reporting of cases in the media suggests that frequently bail is given to perpetrators who demonstrate these behaviours. This discrepancy should be urgently addressed.

- **Awareness training - Education among young girls and women to increase early-stage reporting**

As both an early intervention and prevention strategy, SA must provide more education and awareness training about male violence against women and girls to young women and girls. The community needs such education to become more aware and more confident to recognise the abuse and identify appropriate support avenues.



3) Response: How South Australia can ensure best practice response to domestic, family and sexual violence through the provision of services and supports

- **Effective information sharing**

It is noteworthy that research conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Australian Government 2024) reveals a significant gap in the development of programs explicitly targeting domestic violence-related homicide, despite considerable concern from law enforcement and community agencies about this matter. Furthermore, the research emphasises the critical importance of enhanced information and intelligence sharing across organisations. The Australian Institute of Criminology (2024) highlights that pertinent organisations rarely possess comprehensive knowledge about individuals as they progress towards violent behaviour.

- **Long-term support based on at risk rate (community or cultural background)**

Increased, longer-term support for victims and survivors needs to be in place. Victims are not a homogenous group. Indeed, the data is clear: it identifies specific groups who are more likely to experience domestic violence. Aboriginal women are 32 times more likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of partner-generated violence and eight times more likely to be victims of homicide (The Conversation 2024). Unsurprisingly, the incidence of gendered-based violence is high in migrant and refugee communities where traditional views of masculinity may be embraced, a known antecedent to violence towards women. The services provided need to address cultural and disadvantage issues.

- **Children of FDV victims should be treated as separate victim-survivors**

Even where there is support for victims, there is often a lack of tailored support for their kids. Research (McGowan et. Al. 2024) based on findings from a men's behaviour change program (MBCP) highlights the need to engage more with children and young people in these interventions.

- **Expanding the Multi Agency Protection Service (MAPS)**

The program brings together partner agencies, including SAPOL, the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD), the Department for Child Protection (DCP), the Department for Correctional Services (DCS), the Department for Human Services – SAHA (DHS), SA Health, and WSSSA as non-government sector representatives.

The Multi Agencies Protection Services (MAPS) program led by SAPOL in SA should be expanded to support not only the most severely at-risk women and families but also those at medium to high risk of harm.

By broadening MAPS inclusion criteria, the program could provide earlier intervention and help prevent the escalation of violence at earlier stages. Expanded services suggested above could minimise the risk for victims to come back to the perpetrator or this would allow victims to feel safer and more empowered, reducing their dependence on abusive relationships and preventing further harm.



BPW Adelaide

Affiliated with BPW Australia and BPW International
adelaide@bpw.com.au
www.bpw.com.au
www.bpw-international.org

Adequate resourcing across these sectors is crucial to meet the complex needs of families. A collaborative, well-resourced approach will ensure that more families receive timely support and protection.



4) Recovery and healing: How South Australia can embed an approach that supports recovery and health through reducing the risk of re-traumatisation and supporting victim-survivors to be safe and healthy.

- **Long-term measures and follow ups**

BPW Adelaide firmly believes that victims must be fully informed about the stages of the legal process concerning the perpetrator, including being promptly notified when the perpetrator is released from incarceration. While considerable attention is given to domestic, family, and sexual violence before and during the period of imprisonment, there appears to be a significant lack of long-term follow-up measures to ensure that victims are not at risk of re-traumatisation and are supported when experiencing PTSD.

- **Breaking the cycle of abuse**

Moreover, there is insufficient consideration of the potential for victims to transmit the psychological effects and thought patterns resulting from their trauma to children and other close family members. Research undertaken by Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon (2024) highlights that few DV-related homicides occur without the perpetrator having experienced violence as children.

US-based research talks about Adverse Childhood Experience and its long-term impact on their health and wellbeing like substance abuse, not having enough food, experiencing homelessness or discrimination (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024 & Shonkoff et. al., 2021).

- **Sharing information with the interstate law reinforcement services and service providers**

Additionally, she states that different parts of the DV response systems (e.g., police and service providers) are usually aware of the individuals and the risk they raise, but this information is rarely shared.

Research conducted for the purpose of the report done by Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Campbell et. al. 2024 p. 12), also indicates and suggests establishing the centralised database.

Conclusion:

BPW Adelaide agrees with Professor Helen Keleher and Emily Macguire, the authors of “Is preventing violence against women really that complex? Sadly, it is.” (2 August, 2024), as shared on X by Professor Michael Flood:

“Violence against women is the largest and most complex society-wide public health issue of our time. To know how to prevent it, we need to understand what causes it, and to understand the factors that put some people more at risk than others... We deeply feel the frustration in the community that change isn’t happening fast enough and agree that there are not enough resources poured into addressing this issue – we need more significant and coordinated investment across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery if we are going to keep all women and children safe, enable men to change their behaviour and create organisations, institutions and communities where violence doesn’t exist... So much more adequately resourced and evidence-based collective effort is necessary if we are going to achieve the sort of significant change we need.”

BPW Adelaide agrees with Sally Spicer, who said in 2023: *“Every few months enough women die in quick succession that the Nation stops and looks – and then nothing changes. How do we turn outrage into action?”*

For the change South Australia needs to happen, we must make this our time to make a difference, to do ‘something different’, to be ready to innovate and continually comprehensively evaluate and, if indicated, adapt programs to changing circumstances and evidence.

We have the opportunity **now** in South Australia to all work together, as individuals and groups, as organisations from within the Domestic Family, and Sexual Violence sector and outside, as advocacy organisations, as public services and businesses and all levels of Government to more comprehensively address domestic, family and sexual violence in all its forms.

Reference List

- ABC News (2022). Men have a ‘powerful role’ in stopping violence against women and it starts with ‘calling out their mates’. Available at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-29/stopping-violence-against-women-how-men-can-make-a-difference/101551370?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=mail&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web (Accessed: 04 September 2024).
- Campbell, E. Fernando, T. Gassner, L. Hill, J. Seidler, Z. and Summers, A. (2024), ‘Unlocking the prevention potential: accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence’. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia), 23 August 2024, Available at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2024-08/apo-nid328073.pdf> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). ‘About Adverse Childhood Experiences’, U.S. Centers for disease control and prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- Fitz-Gibbons, K. (2024) ‘New study: we are missing opportunities to engage male perpetrators of violence against women’. *Monash University*, <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/new-study-we-are-missing-opportunities-to-engage-male-perpetrators-of-violence-against-women> (Accessed: 23 August 2024).
- House of Representatives (2024), ‘Statement on a significant matter: ending gender-based violence’, Australian Government, 21 August 2024, Available at: <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/speeches/15701> (Accessed: 23 August 2024).
- Keleher, H. and Macguire, E. (2024) ‘Is violence against women *really* that complex? Sadly, it is.’ X Professor Michael Flood August 2024
- Long, C. and Vallance, S., (2024) ‘First update on plan to end violence against women handed to parliament’, *ABC News*, 22 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/australia/first-update-on-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-handed-to-parliament/ar-AA1p98HO?ocid=BingNewsSerp> (Accessed 23 August 2024).
- Longbottom, M. McGlade, H., and Cripps, K. (2024) ‘Indigenous women are most affected by domestic violence but have struggled to be heard. It’s about time we listened’ *The Conversation* 2024, May 11, 2024, Available at: <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-women-are-most-affected-by-domestic-violence-but-have-struggled-to-be-heard-its-time-we-listened-229720> (Accessed: 21 August 2024).
- McGowan, J. Helps, N. and Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2024) ‘The role of perpetrator interventions in acknowledging children as victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in their own right’,

Current Issues in Criminal Justice, pp. 1–13. doi: 10.1080/10345329.2024.2341909 (Accessed: 21 August 2024).

- Our Watch, (2024) *Report care: tracking progress in the primary prevention of violence against women*. Available at: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/tracking-progress-in-prevention> (Accessed: 21 August 2024).
- Shonkoff, J.P., Slopten, N., Williams, D.R. (2021) 'Experiencing discrimination: Early Childhood Adversity, Toxic Stress, and the Impacts of Racism on the Foundations of Health', *Annual Review of Public Health*, vol. 42, April 2021. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-101940> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- Spicer, S., (2023) "What happens after we're finished counting the women killed by men?" *Future Women.com*. Available at: <https://www.futurewomen.com/culture-2/counting-male-violence-against-women/> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).