

Make NSW a safe state for young people

Young people should have every opportunity to be safe, and to have secure and healthy relationships. Right now, prevalence of violence against women is highest for young women. Services are not funded to give support to young people and as a result, young people are falling through the gap. Negative attitudes about relationships and gender are linked to domestic violence, and young people provide the one of the best opportunities to break the cycle and effect large scale change, but investment in this area is lacking.

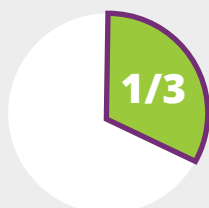
45% female sexual assault survivors (that were reported to NSW police) were under the age of 18.¹



Young women aged 15-19 years are **seven times more likely** to be sexually assaulted.²



Approximately **one third** of adolescents experience some type of violence from an intimate partner.³



THE NSW GOVERNMENT CAN (AS RECOMMENDED BY A SAFE STATE):

- Commit \$32 million over four years to embed a specialist worker to provide child and young people-centred, trauma-informed support for children and young people in every refuge, NSW Health sexual assault service, domestic and family violence service and 'Staying Home Leaving Violence' program location in NSW.
- Commit \$14.7 million over four years to implement a long-term, coordinated, best practice whole school respectful relationships program for students, staff, parents and community members in 100 secondary schools.

Many young people 'witness' domestic and family violence taking place in their own families, and many also experience it in their own intimate and domestic relationships. Research shows that the prevalence of violence against women is highest for young women.⁴ Young women are at a higher risk of intimate partner violence than older women, with those aged 18–24 twice as likely to experience sexual assault, with some estimates that those aged 15–19 are four times as likely. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey identified that 13% of young women (aged–24) experienced at least one incidence of violence in the 12 months prior, a rate higher than for any other age group surveyed.

Despite this, young people are being left out of the conversation and, consequentially, violence is perpetuated for young people in NSW.

Young people have a very different experience from adults and children of domestic violence. They are new to relationships and unaware of what is acceptable behaviour. They live in a heavily gendered context. This makes it more difficult to spot domestic violence in their own relationships or in others'.

Research indicates that factors driving domestic and family violence for young people are unique and different to the experience of adults. Factors such as stronger peer group norms, inexperience and misinterpretation of jealousy, for example, as a sign of love, patterns of age differences in relationships, lack of access to services, and a tendency towards passivity in help seeking for self or peers, all contribute to greater vulnerability.⁵

The negative impacts of domestic violence on young people is distinct, due to age and developmental factors.⁶

As was highlighted in the Victorian Royal Commission, and as is true for NSW, there are massive service gaps. Young people experiencing DFV either receive no response by the child protection system or are too

young to access domestic and family violence services. Young people who experience sexual, domestic and family violence should be recognised as individual clients in their own right.

THE NSW GOVERNMENT CAN (AS RECOMMENDATION BY A SAFE STATE):

- Commit \$32 million over four years to embed a specialist worker to provide child and young people-centred, trauma-informed support for children and young people in every refuge, NSW Health sexual assault service, domestic and family violence service and 'Staying Home Leaving Violence' program location in NSW.

There is ample research showing that negative attitudes about relationships and gender are closely correlated with domestic violence. But policies on this issue have failed to grasp that age has one of the most significant impacts on such attitudes.⁷

Youth Action's research, conducted in partnership with White Ribbon and UNSW, found that young men were more likely to agree with statements such as 'Girls like guys who are in charge of the relationship' or 'Men are supposed to be the head of the household and take control of the relationship.'⁸

This highlights the very real gaps between how young men and women conceive of 'normal' in relationships. This attitude gap is dangerous. It is also clear that gender inequality increases girls and young women's risk of violence.⁹ Moreover, attitudes shape behaviours, and violence in domestic settings is most common in communities where violence-supportive attitudes are prevalent.¹⁰ There is therefore a need to take action to address attitudes in communities.

Whole school respectful relationships education programs help students, staff, parents and community members to understand the drivers of gender-based violence and how they can change their attitudes and

behaviours to prevent violence. It involves working with schools as an educational institution and workplace to address the drivers of gender-based violence across the school curriculum and through the school's policies, practices and activities.

The evaluation of a whole school respectful relationships program in 19 Victorian schools found that it improved the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of students and school staff.¹¹ The World Health Organisation (WHO) has found that school-based programs that address gender norms have prevented domestic and family violence in the United States of America (USA) and Canada.¹²

Currently, community and health workers deliver respectful relationships programs in NSW schools on an ad hoc basis. A long-term, coordinated, best practice whole school respectful relationships program is needed across NSW schools so that we can end gender-based violence within this generation.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2018, 'Victims: Age and gender of victims of domestic violence related offences recorded by the NSW Police Force', *Domestic Violence Excel Table*, July 2017 to June 2018 accessed via: <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx>
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, *Reports of sexual assault reach six-year high*, media release, ABS, Canberra, 13 July 2016 accessed via: <[http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4510.0~2015~Media%20Release~Reports%20of%20sexual%20assault%20reach%20six-year%20high%20\(Media%20Release\)~19](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4510.0~2015~Media%20Release~Reports%20of%20sexual%20assault%20reach%20six-year%20high%20(Media%20Release)~19)>
- 3 Halpern C et al., 2000, 'Partner Violence Among Adolescents in Opposite-Sex Romantic Relationships: Findings from the national longitudinal study of adolescent health', *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 91, No. 10, p. 1682.
- 4 A Harris et al., 2015, *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16–24 years*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation', Melbourne, p. 11
- 5 Flood M & Fergus L, 2008, *An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships*, White Ribbon Foundation, Sydney, accessible via: <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/An_assault_on_our_future_FULL_Flood_Fergus_2010.pdf>, p. 26.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 21.
- 7 See, for example, European Commission, 2010, *Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence: A multi-level interactive model*; World Health Organisation, 2010, *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence*; UN Partners for Prevention, 2013, *Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific*; VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*.
- 8 Cale J & Breckenridge J, 2015, *Gender, Age and the Perceived Causes, Nature and Extent of Domestic and Dating Violence in Australian Society*, Gendered Violence Research Network, UNSW Australia, accessed via: <<http://www.youthaction.org.au/dv-attitudes-2015>>
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 Flood M & Pease B, 'Factors influencing attitudes to violence against women', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2009, p. 125.
- 11 Our Watch, 2016, *Respectful Relationships, Education in Schools: The Beginnings of Change - Final Evaluation Report*, prepared for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Department of Education and Training, Victoria, accessed via: <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/ourwatchrespectfulrelationships.pdf>>
- 12 World Health Organisation, 2009, *Violence prevention, the evidence: Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women*, WHO, accessed via: <http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf>