

Australian Women Against Violence (AWAVA)

Submission to the NCE on the National Research Agenda

1 WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES, AREAS OR TOPICS, YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE AS A FOCUS FOR RESEARCH?

A strong research base is fundamental to the understanding of all elements described in order to inform policy responses to family, domestic and sexual violence. Research further informs best practice principles to support victims and rehabilitate perpetrators.

– Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013

Research questions must include the things that practitioners and the women they work with want to know. Funding agencies and academic institutions play a critical role in redefining the questions and facilitating these relationships, and there need to be incentives for establishing ongoing partnership with community-based organizations. The rewards will be a more relevant body of literature, more conclusions that can be applied to practice, and a more protective environment for women in dangerous relationships and vulnerable situations.

- Beth. E. Richie (2004) *Research on Violence Against Women and Family Violence: The Challenges and the Promise*

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) welcomes the opportunity to submit to the NCE on the National Research Agenda. AWAVA is one of six national women's alliances funded by the Commonwealth Government and comprises of 19 National, State and Territory Peak organisations and networks from the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector. AWAVA has previously submitted to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on "[Defining the Data Challenge for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)" (cat. no. 4529.0) and the draft paper "Bridging the Data Gaps for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence".

AWAVA has previously submitted to the ABS on the continuing importance of **strengthening the data and research infrastructure** in understanding and responding to violence against women, especially the need for more robust and disaggregated data to further determine the nature, cause, prevalence, consequences and impacts of violence on women and their children. We submit this as an on-going ask from the Alliance. AWAVA concurs with the United States Expert Panel on Research on Violence Against Women who have noted that the "[k]ey areas for improving research infrastructure are coordination and leadership at the federal level and improving research capacity and strengthening ties between researchers and practitioners¹".

¹ Crowell, N.A., and Burgess, A.W., eds. (1996). *Understanding Violence Against Women*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (p.150)

AWAVA submits to the NCE to have a strong and robust focus on **improving data and data integrity on all aspects of violence against women and their children**. Australia has an exciting opportunity with *the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* to be a global leader and to really drive the long-term social change needed to address violence against women and girls. However, the endemic nature of violence against women and their children presents a pressing need for consistent, comparable, data on a range of issues, from a variety of sources and sourced from an inter-disciplinary research perspective to meaningfully inform evidence-based policy and practice.

AWAVA recognises that the experience and impact of violence against women is not evenly distributed and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, immigrant and refugee women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities, women who identify as bi-sexual, lesbian, same sex attracted, queer, transgender or intersex are subjected to interpersonal and public violence at greater than average rates, and that such violence is compounded by experiences of marginalisation. Additional factors such as women's location, age and access to income and resources also affect their experience of violence and its impact. AWAVA recognises that violence against women needs to be understood in the intersectional context of sex, sexism, racism, colonialism, classism, homophobia, age-ism, and able body-ism. Currently, **insufficient data** exist about specific sub-populations of women and how they are impacted disproportionately by forms of violence. This limitation is an exceedingly important issue as particular groups of marginalised women do not appear in the national datasets because of sampling methods and techniques used and/or the formulation of research questions. Therefore women who, for a variety of reasons, do not report to Police or Justice agencies or who cannot respond to English-language surveys, do not have a telephone or computer, live in parts of rural, regional, and remote Australia or do not reside at a permanent address remain underrepresented in datasets and within data collection processes. It is also important to highlight that the data collection tool for Specialist Homelessness Services which includes women's refuges, shelters and domestic violence outreach services only picks up very general information. As a result, conclusive knowledge on how violence affects specific sub-populations of women and impacts on their lives remains a challenge for the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector.

AWAVA member organisations submit the following as key areas that they envisage will be a strong focus for the NCE:

- ✦ AWAVA member organisation and lead agency Women's Services Network (WESNET) submits that it is important not to leave the specialist preventing and responding to violence against women Sector out of primary prevention research as they have been delivering key messages to the community and undertaking community awareness, education and development over the last three decades;
- ✦ AWAVA member organisation National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV) submits that macro and meta evaluation of existing knowledge and data needs to be a priority;
- ✦ AWAVA member organisation Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) submits to the NCE to have a focus on applied violence against women research in addition to 'pure' research topics. This is so that the NCE continues to follow the lead of what the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC) has hitherto achieved with their long-term focus on translating 'research to practice';

- ✦ AWAVA member organisation Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA) submits that research is required into the social and economic cost effectiveness of early intervention support and services, particularly where mothers have experienced domestic violence, or where trauma, social exclusion and poverty are the causes of child protection concerns. There are evidence and practice based models in international jurisdictions but further research and studies are required in the Australian context. WLSA submits that factors to consider in research studies include: addressing intergenerational trauma; holistic community based models that include social work/support services, parent advocates (including peer mentoring of parents) and early intervention legal services to support parents and children; ‘strengths based’ framework; ways to support parents to be protective parents (including services supporting victims of domestic and family violence by providing evidence to support an application for protective family law orders); addressing barriers to engaging with support services; adequate training and support of case workers;
- ✦ AWAVA member organisation Queensland Domestic Violence Service Network (QDVSN) submits that there must be a strong focus on consistency of data across the sector, a focus on what the Sector is trying to gather in research, what type of information the Sector needs and closer engagement with Sector on all aspects of research;
- ✦ AWAVA member organisation Australian Women’s Health Network (AWHN) submits that long term data and research priorities need to be embedded in the NCE’s work plans;
- ✦ AWAVA submits that the NCE should substantively address issues of dealing with cross jurisdiction challenges in data gathering and capturing. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics has noted, definitions of what constitutes, for example, family violence are “inherently likely” to differ across the legal sector, researchers and service providers. These definitions “do not always necessarily align” with the various understandings (i.e. survivor/victim, community etc.) of what constitutes family violence²;
- ✦ AWAVA also submits that research does not “jeopardize[s] the safety of participants”. AWAVA recognises the risks in participating in research for survivors/victims, including the risks that upon disclosure, may increase further when studies are being conducted by agencies and individuals who “traditionally have not dealt with measuring sensitive subjects and who may not (yet) be fully aware of those risks”. Furthermore, “**if not done rigorously and with great sensitivity**, surveys tend to result in misleadingly low rates of disclosure and produce findings that have extremely limited value for advocacy, program development and monitoring “³.

2 WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE PRIORITY ISSUES/TOPICS FOR RESEARCH?

2.1 SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY OF THE PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SECTOR

With the current trend of jurisdictions seeking to have less contracts with NGOs resulting in fewer contracts with larger agencies, along with a trend for multinational for-profit and not-for-profit organisations moving into specialist areas, Australia is at risk of rapidly losing three decades of specialist

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) *Conceptual Framework for Family and Domestic Violence*

³ UNFPA (2013) *The Role of Data in Addressing Violence against Women and Girls*, available at http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2013/finalUNFPA_CSW_Book_201302_21_Data.pdf

knowledge and experience from the specialist women's sector. This includes women's refuges, women's shelters, Aboriginal women's services, women's legal services, women's health services, women's sexual assault services, migrant women's services and women's disability services. It has never been researched what this loss would mean to the capacity for Australia to respond effectively to the prevention and response to women and children experiencing violence. AWAVA submits that to enhance the capacity of the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector in delivering vital services to women and children in need, sustained research is needed on the Sector including a focus on sustainability and stability. Sustainability is both an indicator and measure of service providers' ability to serve their clients and various stakeholders over time. For the Sector, improved sustainability means broader sources of funding and an enhanced ability to deliver specialist services to women and their children.

The implications of a global change in funding environments for the women's sector are startling. In 2011, the UK Government Equalities Office commissioned and published independent research in order to improve understanding of the stability and sustainability of the violence against women voluntary sector services. This research highlighted the current challenges faced by the Sector in the UK. For example, an online survey by Rape Crisis England and Wales of its members to gather data gives greater detail of potential problems being in the UK sexual violence sub-sector⁴. A total of 29 of the 38 affiliated centres responded and results indicate that almost a quarter of responding organisations (24.1%) stated that they faced closure in that financial year. Almost two-fifths (39.3%) stated that they feared closure in 2009/2010 because of a lack of funding and the vast majority (89.7%, n=26) identify **a lack of sustainable funding as their biggest challenge**⁵. UK research has also demonstrated that less grant based funding and more funding going through commissioning arrangements⁶ has profound and long term impacts on specialist services.

- ✚ AWAVA submits to the NCE, in a global environment of rapid changes to the community services sector including moves to scale up, to research the loss of expertise, the impact on continuity, the sustainability of service provision that would be a result of this;
- ✚ AWAVA submits to the NCE to research issues of specialist small services v. BINGOs (Big international NGOs) including issues of suitability, efficiency, cost, effectiveness, value-adding etc. A specific concern of AWAVA is the stability of small scale specialist services given the current need to compete with larger non-specialist organisations and mainstream organisations for Commonwealth, State and Territory contracts. AWAVA member organisation and National Women's Alliance National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) note that while BINGOs may have the administrative ability and operational capacity, they do not possess the cultural safety to provide community services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;

⁴ UK Government Equalities Office (2011) *Understanding the stability and sustainability of the violence against women voluntary sector*, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85548/violence-against-women.pdf

⁵ UK Government Equalities Office, 2011: p. 31 and Coy, M. and Kelly, L. *et al.* (2009). *Map of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain*. End Violence Against Women.(p.31)

⁶ UK Government Equalities Office, 2011 and Kane, D., Clark, J. *et al.* (2009). *The UK Civil Society Almanac 2009*. NCVO.

- ✦ AWAVA submits to the NCE to research broader moves to decommissioning and competitive tendering- how does this impact on the Sector’s stability and sustainability? Constrictions to an already narrow funding base within a decommissioning environment affects the ability of service providers to maintain services for women and their children who are affected by domestic/family violence and/or sexual assault. This is most acutely felt by specialist services who are heavily reliant on government funding;
- ✦ AWAVA submits to the NCE to research the impact of recent Commonwealth, State and Territory Government policies on the stability and sustainability of the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC) notes that definitions of family, domestic and sexual violence are underscored by the context of enquiry and informed by the perspective and understandings of researchers or organisations such as the particular legal, policy, service provision, or research view being taken⁷. These can include a gender-based understanding of violence, an ecological framework model, or a social norms based approach amongst others. Similarly, the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) notes the effect that definitions of sexual assault and abuse can have on data and understandings of sexual violence⁸. The ADFVC highlights- “Feminist and family conflict researchers differ in how they conceptualise violence in relationships. Feminist researchers emphasise the wider dynamics of domestic violence: why it occurs, how it manifests and victim outcomes. Family conflict researchers define violence more narrowly, being primarily concerned with measuring incidents of violence between partners”⁹.

In 2006, the UN Secretary General’s In-Depth Study on All Forms of VAW (2006) stressed the need to create a set of international indicators on violence against women using comparable methods to first **define** and subsequently measure violence¹⁰. Whilst the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector agree that gender inequality “is both a consequence of and a reinforcer of the power disparity between genders”¹¹, there are differences and similarities between causal frameworks, risk factors, and intervention and prevention philosophies within the Sector, this is in particular between the domestic/family violence sector and the sexual assault sector. To this end, AWAVA submits that a conceptual framework on gender-based violence should be a key priority for the NCE. The formulation of such a **shared interpretative framework** should clearly spell out issues of differences and similarities between domestic, family, and sexual violence and their links with issues of youth bullying and violence. A conceptual framework for domestic, family, and sexual violence needs to also encompass the cross-jurisdictional differences in the relevant State and Territory legislation.

⁷ Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, ADFVC (2013) The gender debate in domestic violence: The role of data, available at http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper_25.pdf

⁸ Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), 2012, *The nature and extent of sexual assault and abuse in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Melbourne.

⁹ ADFVC (2013) *op.cit* (p.1)

¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly. 2006. “In-Depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women: Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-sgstudy.htm>

¹¹ CASA House (2008) *Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools (SAPPSS) Report*, CASA House and The Royal Women’s Hospital, Australia (p. 7)

2.3 EMBEDDING LONG TERM RESEARCH PRIORITIES INCLUDING

- ✚ Research on Law/Legal Reform
- ✚ Research on Child Protection
- ✚ Research on Early Intervention
- ✚ Research on Perpetrator Interventions and Programs
- ✚ Research on Prevention Education in Schools

3 WHY ARE THESE AREAS, TOPICS OR ISSUES IMPORTANT AND OF NATIONAL RELEVANCE?

The results of the research topic AWAVA has highlighted would contribute (a) to improved knowledge and understanding of violence against women and their children (b) to improved services, programs and practice, (c) to the mitigation of potential risk of losing three decades of substantial specialist knowledge and experience in the field.

3.1 SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY

- ✚ Research on the tracking and monitoring trends in the preventing and responding to violence against women Sector can support those designing and implementing programs to evaluate the impact of their services and programs thereby assisting with long-term sustainability issues. Among other uses, this research can then inform the Sector's advocacy for sustained, long term funding and adequate resourcing of programs and projects.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ✚ A conceptual framework on gender-based violence would ensure that more substantive knowledge regarding precursors to and causal analysis of violence are progressed;
- ✚ A conceptual framework on gender-based violence would deepen what is currently known about the range and diversity of women's experiences of violence;
- ✚ A conceptual framework on gender-based violence which broadens the definition of violence would safeguard against excessively narrow definitions of violence which cause problematic gaps in protection for survivors/victims.

4 ENDORSEMENTS

This submission has been endorsed in full/in part by the following member organisations:

1. Association of Women Educators (AWE)
2. National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV)
3. Women's Services Network (WESNET)
4. Australasian Council of Women and Policing (ACWAP)
5. Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN)
6. Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services of South Australia
7. Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic)
8. National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence, Australian Capital Territory
9. National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence, Northern Territory
10. National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence, Tasmania
11. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance
12. Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women Australia

13. NSW Women's Refuge Movement
14. National Union of Students Women's Officer
15. Queensland Domestic Violence Service Network (QDVSN)
16. Women's Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services WA
17. Women's Essential Service Providers Tasmania
18. Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA)
19. Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)