



**MEDIA RELEASE – THU 3RD SEPT 2009 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Call to stop demonising men and boys**

The NSW Government has confirmed making substantial errors in its current *Discussion paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategy*. In [errata](#) published on the Office for Women's Policy webpage, the Government admits errors that clearly over-inflate the female victimisation rate from partner assault by at least 65 per cent while downplaying the prevalence of violence against men by their former partners.

Greg Andresen, spokesman for Men's Health Australia (MHA), said "it concerns us greatly that the Government's paper also demonised young boys by inferring that only boys who are exposed to domestic and family violence are more likely to perpetrate it as adults. When you read the research, it shows that *all* children exposed to violence risk suffering mental health, behavioural and learning difficulties in the short term, and perpetrating violence as adults in the long term."

MHA is supportive of all efforts to reduce interpersonal violence in the community but is concerned that the regular use of incorrect or misleading 'statistics' by Governments unfairly stigmatises men and boys as violent and abusive, while simultaneously denying services to male victims of violence. In fact, MHA has [alerted](#) the NSW Government to another eleven serious errors in the document, which remain uncorrected. Other recent state and federal Government examples of misleading violence statistics cited by MHA include:

- Unwarranted claims in the [report](#) *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* that:
  - many men belong to 'sexist peer cultures' (actually, the vast majority of men believe in gender equality<sup>1</sup>)
  - domestic and family violence is a common cause of relationship breakdown (actually, only 7% of breakdowns are caused by violence or abuse: 'communication problems' are the main cause<sup>2</sup>)
  - 63 per cent of child killers are fathers (actually, less than a quarter are fathers, and over half are mothers<sup>3</sup>)
  - only Australian women and their children have a right to protection from violence (actually, international human rights conventions apply equally to all people<sup>4</sup>)
  - only denigrating representations of women in the media should be addressed (actually, negative portrayals of men are far more prevalent and just as damaging<sup>5</sup>).
- The Prime Minister's [claim](#) that "in any year, nearly half a million Australian women experience physical or sexual assault by a current or former partner" (the actual figure is some 80 per cent less than this<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> National Crime Prevention (2001) *Young People & Domestic Violence: National research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence*. Canberra: Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

<sup>2</sup> Wolcott, I, and Hughes, J (1999) *Towards understanding the reasons for divorce*, Working Paper No.20. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>3</sup> Dearden, J (2009) *Homicide in Australia: 2006-07 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report*, email to Greg Andresen (approved for public circulation) 22 January 2009. See [http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=556&Itemid=79](http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=556&Itemid=79)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (1966) *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

<sup>5</sup> Nathanson, P and Young, K R (2001), *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. Also Macnamara, J R (2006) *Media And Male Identity: The Making And Remaking Of Men*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) *Personal Safety Survey*, ABS Cat. No. 4906.0, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

- The Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner’s [claim](#) that “one in three women will live in an intimate relationship characterised by violence over her lifetime” (actually one in fifty women will do so, and so will many men<sup>7</sup>)
- Claims by the [NSW](#) and [federal](#) shadow ministers for women that “so many young men believe it’s acceptable to hit your girlfriend” and “1 in 3 teenage boys think it’s no big deal to hit a girl” (actually, research found that while males hitting females was seen, by virtually all young people surveyed, to be unacceptable, it appeared to be quite acceptable for a girl to hit a boy<sup>8</sup>).

“All victims of violence deserve policies based upon up-to-date accurate data, and the tax-paying public doesn’t deserve to be misled. Flawed data such as this can only lead to flawed policies and actions, and many children continue to be exposed to violence because of these myths. Over-inflating statistics on violence risks generating an unwarranted climate of fear in the community, especially amongst women,” said Mr Andresen. “We all know that the vast majority of men and boys are non-violent, loving and respectful of women and girls. These government ‘errors’ are so widespread, one would be forgiven for thinking that they are a deliberate and misguided attempt to make the public believe otherwise.”

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) Personal Safety Survey, ABS Cat. No. 4906.0, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>8</sup> National Crime Prevention (2001) Young People & Domestic Violence: National research on young people’s attitudes and experiences of domestic violence. Canberra: Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney- General’s Department.