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Fact Sheet 5: The Perpetrators of Family Violence & Community Attitudes

PERPETRATORS

Not all men use violence with their current or former partners or towards their families, however men's use of violence against a female intimate partner is the most common and pervasive form of violence against women. A contributing factor is gender inequality between men and women, including deeply held beliefs about masculinity, resulting in high rate of violence by men towards women in relationships[1].

There is no such thing as a 'typical' perpetrator of family violence, however there are tactics that all perpetrators display:

- constant monitoring and regulation of her everyday activities such as phone calls, social interactions and dress
- evaluating her every move against an unpredictable, ever-changing and unknowable 'rule book'
- constant put downs about anything and everything she does
- having no control or say about the household finances
- criticism of her parenting skills
- disrespectful behaviour towards her in front of their children and others
- threats and actual physical violence against her, their children and pets
- being blamed for the violence
- surveillance using smartphones and other technology[2]
- use violence and emotional abuse to control their families
- believe that they have the right to behave in whatever way they choose while in their own home
- hold certain beliefs about masculinity, including that a 'real' man should be tough, powerful and the head of the household. They may believe that they should make most of the decisions, including about how money is spent
- believe that men are entitled to sex from their partners
- don't take responsibility for their behaviour and prefer to think that loved ones or circumstances provoked their behaviour
- make excuses for their violence – for example, they will blame alcohol or stress
- report 'losing control' when angry around their families, but can control their anger around other people. They don't tend to use violence in other situations, for example, around friends, bosses, work colleagues or the police
- try to minimise, blame others for, justify or deny their use of violence, or the impact of their violence on family members[3]

It's important to note that all the above list of perpetrators tactics, how the perpetrator uses these tactics and the impacts it has on the victim survivor is unique to each case, the only common lining factors is the use of coercion.

References:

- [184] Better Health: Family Violence explained <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/family-violence-explained>
 [2] Presentations of family violence in different relationships and communities: How perpetrators use family violence behaviours across the community <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-foundation-knowledge-guide/presentations-family-violence-different>
 [3] Better Health: Family Violence explained <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/family-violence-explained>
 [5] Vic Health 2017, Violence Against Women in Australia: An Overview of research and approaches to primary prevention.pdf

RESISTANCE TO SEEKING AND GETTING HELP FOR VIOLENCE [4]

Support for perpetrators is available in the form of counselling that focuses on examining and addressing deeply held beliefs about violence, masculinity, control of others, the impact of their use of violence towards others, self-control and responsibility for one's actions. Most men however do not seek help because:

- Acceptance of violence – a man who thinks that he is entitled to dominate family members, and that it is okay to solve problems with violence, may not believe that he needs help. He may blame the victim for 'provoking' his behaviour
- Notions of masculinity – for many men, the idea of what it means to be a man includes silence and strength. A man may avoid seeking help because he doesn't want to look 'weak' or feminine
- Fear – feelings of shame can prevent many men from seeking help
- Blame – believes it other people, alcohol or circumstances for their violent outbursts
- Denial – justify or deny their use of violence or the impact of their violence

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES AND PERPETUATING MYTHS [5]

Community as a whole, plays a role in perpetuating violence against women, through its beliefs and responses to violence. Community beliefs can provide a culture of support for violence by justifying or excusing it, trivialising or minimising the problem, or shifting the responsibility for violent behaviour from perpetrators to victims. These beliefs and attitude reflect broader social norms and cultures, such as:

- 51% of Australians think most women would leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to
- 22% think that domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry they lose control

Further attitudes:

- Compared with physical violence and forced sex, Australians are inclined to see non-physical forms of control, intimidation and harassment as less 'serious'
- One in five Australians thinks men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household
- Over one in four Australians thinks women prefer a man to be in charge

Studies conducted with Young people aged 16–24 indicated:

- Had a more violence-supportive attitudes than others, especially compared with their parents' generation
- Young men in particular were more likely to have a poor knowledge about violence and were less likely to support gender equality
- Majority disagreed with gender stereotypes and attitudes supportive of violence
- Males were more likely to agree with gender stereotypes than females,
- Younger respondents were more likely to agree with attitudes supportive of violence than older respondents

Similarly, survey research commissioned by Our Watch with young people aged 12–24 found that:

- one in three young people don't think that exerting control over someone else is a form of violence
- one in four young people don't think it's serious when guys insult or verbally harass girls in the street
- one in four young people thinks it's pretty normal for guys to pressure girls into sex
- 15 per cent of young people think it's ok for a guy to pressure a girl for sex if they're both drunk

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