

Media release: Violence against women: Two steps forward, one step back

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Overall, the Victorian community's attitude to violence against women continues to improve, but it is still a case of two steps forward, one step back, according to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) CEO, Dr Rob Moodie.

Dr Moodie says a report to be released later today shows that 97 percent of Victorians now agree that domestic violence is a crime, compared to 93 percent in a 1995 national survey. And 93 percent in the current survey also understand that forced sex in a relationship is a crime.

"The vast majority don't condone violence against women, but there is still a distressingly high number who will excuse it and who believe some of the myths around it, particularly among men and those born overseas," he says.

Disturbingly, nearly two in five Victorians still believe the myth that men who rape do so because they can't control their sexual urges, while nearly one in four believe that domestic violence can be excused if it results from people temporarily losing control or if the perpetrator genuinely regrets what they have done afterwards.

Dr Moodie says the research shows that the efforts made by community and government to improve the safety of women and change community attitudes are starting to pay off.

However, violence against women is too serious and too prevalent, and there are still significant challenges for us in changing beliefs and attitudes that are associated with it. We need to invest in initiatives to prevent violence before it occurs."

Other major findings of the Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project, undertaken by VicHealth, include:

- Many Victorians still underestimate the impact of emotional, social and financial abuse on women, with 23% still not believing that yelling abuse at your partner is serious, while 17% do not believe that repeatedly criticising your partner to make them feel bad and useless is serious.
- One in six do not believe that controlling your partner's social life by preventing contact with family and friends is violence, and almost one in three do not believe that denying your partner money is violence, despite evidence showing that domestic violence is often characterised by a pattern of physical and other controlling behaviours.
- Almost one in four Victorians still believe that women make up complaints of rape, and 15% believe that women often say "no" to sex when they mean "yes" – examples of how too many people still excuse such violence.
- Almost half believe that women going through custody battles will make up claims of domestic violence to improve their case, although there are no studies showing this to be true.

The Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project is to be launched today by VicHealth's CEO, Dr Rob Moodie, and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Christine Nixon, at the Malthouse Theatre in South Melbourne at 10.30am.

"This project is showing the areas that need more attention, and points to how we can set about dealing with them," says Dr Moodie.

Commissioner Nixon says Victoria Police has fundamentally changed the way it handles family violence, since the introduction of a new code of practice in 2004. "There is now safety and support for victims and children, early intervention, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences and we aim to prevent family violence in the community."

She urges people to call the police when confronted by a domestic violence situation, rather than trying to deal with it themselves, so that appropriate action and follow-up occurs.

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Content.aspx?topicID=387>